70-12,959

HALPERIN, Richard, 1943-
THE FINAL VISION OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

The City University of New York, Ph.D., 1969
Language and Literature, general

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE FINAL VISION OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

by

RICHARD HALPERIN

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in English Literature
of the City University of New York
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

1969

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

July 28, 1969
date

Sears Jayne
Chairman of Examining Committee

4 August 1969
date

Frank Brady
Executive Officer

Thomas McFarland

Sears Jayne
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

PREFATORY NOTE

My book may be technically called an interpretive study of the four last plays of Shakespeare--*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*--with a study also of selected plays which precede the four--*Love's Labour's Lost*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *King Lear*--as well as a complement- or contrast-study of most of the comedies and tragedies surrounding these five, though I feel, and have felt all through the writing of this book, that "interpretation" is an inexact word for the thing I have tried to do: which is simply to present the plays of Shakespeare as clearly as the miracles they are. If cleaning the Sistine Chapel ceiling is correctly called making an "interpretive study" of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, then this book is such a study. However, I prefer to think of the book in Sistine Chapel terms alone, in terms of clearing and cleansing and revealing what has been there all the time, using only scaffolding and brushes and thousands of cubits of clear water with as few extra daubings or additions of my own as possible. And if such a conception of my effort involves me necessarily in *hubris*, the backache I got on that scaffolding which will last me gratefully a lifetime, is punishment enough.

My way of viewing and treating the four last plays and all the plays before them is entirely my own. I have deliberately developed the whole of my conception independent of previous studies of Shakespeare's works. I am not conscious of any specific debts to previous Shakespearean criticism in what I have said. I realize of course that many, conceivably most, of my individual insights have been anticipated by this or that reader or theater-spectator over the centuries, but these insights have never before formed the particular living whole which exists in these pages, and I have thought it more important to keep that whole as living as it is, rather than perform a mere autopsy upon it by searching for and identifying each anticipation of its individual parts--a manner of dissection all the more grotesque for its prevalence today, since most of the patients performed upon are not dead at all while so many of the doctors apparently are. The deliberateness with which I did avoid previous commentaries upon Shakespeare, of course, does not imply any lack of respect for those Coleridges whose insights about the playwright are so worthy of respect, or those Keatses whose insights are beyond respect. The avoidance of others' commentaries was nothing negative to me but rather was simply the most natural positive way of directly experi-

encing the words, tones, weights, balances and nuances of the plays themselves as they spoke to me and indeed as they speak to every spectator, be he Keats or Cloten, who meets them on their own terms. My method of writing, in fact, took inspiration and shape from no book but rather from the conducting method--or, more accurately, instinct--of Arturo Toscanini, an instinct for discovery perhaps best illustrated by his reply to another conductor who ran up to him bursting with the news that he, this overjoyed man, had just been told by an old teacher of Brahms who had gotten the information decades ago from someone who knew Beethoven personally, just how a certain passage in the Eroica should be played. "Vergogna!" Toscanini erupted at the conductor. "Shame! Here are the notes in the score. Beethoven tells me!"

I have used as my text for Shakespeare the Arden editions of King Lear, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, and the Yale edition for the rest. In various places throughout my chapters, I have changed a word or phrase or punctuation mark as given in these editions to a preferred usage, usually taken from the Old Cambridge. From time to time, I wished to change the punctuation to something not found in any of the standard editions or in the folios and quartos--most temptingly

in the instance of Prospero's words to Ariel "How now? moody?" which should almost surely read "How now, moody?"--but the passages in which these temptations occurred somehow escaped being used in this book.)

There are two places in the book where I alter two historical assumptions about the plays of Shakespeare, one involving the authorship of Pericles, the other involving the author of the plays themselves. I believe Pericles to be entirely Shakespeare's; any consideration of gaps or breaks in time-sequence, diction or mood seems to me indicative of nothing more than the gaps and breaks in other Shakespeare dramas. One can take nothing for granted about a poet of genius except his power always to surprise.

As to the order of the plays, I treat it as follows:

Henry VI, Part II
Henry VI, Part III
Henry VI, Part I
Richard III
The Comedy of Errors
Titus Andronicus
The Taming of the Shrew
The Two Gentlemen of Verona
Love's Labour's Lost
Romeo and Juliet
Richard II
A Midsummer Night's Dream
King John
The Merchant of Venice
Henry IV, Part I
Henry IV, Part II
Henry V
Much Ado About Nothing
Julius Caesar
As You Like It
Twelfth Night

Hamlet
The Merry Wives of Windsor
Troilus and Cressida
All's Well That Ends Well
Measure for Measure
Othello
Macbeth
King Lear
Antony and Cleopatra
Coriolanus
Timon of Athens
Pericles
Cymbeline
The Winter's Tale
The Tempest

Naturally this order of the plays, like all other various play-orders, is at several points arbitrary. It is, of course, historically unfortunate that there must be so many points of arbitrariness in the determining of the order of the plays, but it seemed to me, during the writing of this book which is in no way biographical but which rather is the following of a playwright's artistic consciousness, almost as unfortunate to be distressed by this necessity for arbitrariness, when one can so easily see in the face of necessity an illumination of the idiosyncracy of the artistic process: when one can so easily see that there is not only uncertainty but whimsey too in the fact that conceivably Macbeth may have come after Lear, or Titus Andronicus after Romeo and Juliet, or All's Well That Ends Well after Coriolanus, or Cymbeline or The Winter's Tale after The Tempest, or Henry VIII after them all. One deals with artistic consciousness, whether one's

own or another's, only after the fact, only after the white heat of creativity has passed and one has leisure and distance enough to examine the results and to see in that creation all the lineal patterns and tendencies and developments of thought which may have come to the artist slowly or in an instant, now here, now there, now this idea, now that idea, now five ideas simultaneously--just as one sometimes writes a sonnet after thinking of the last line first; just as an embryo or any naturally growing thing sometimes leaps to maturity in one part while in another part a member has not yet begun to form, even as the eyes of a child are fully grown and large at nine or ten, though the rest of the body must wait.

Perhaps a note should be added on the language the book is written in. Language is, at its most essential, the medium by which the thought and emotion of the writer may be conveyed as accurately as possible to the reader, nuance for nuance, instinct for instinct, discovery for discovery, and I can conceive of no other language as flexible, as precise and evocative, and as alive for this purpose as our own English was for me. Every turn of phrase, colon and semi-colon, position of adverb and verb, infinitive whole or split (as though indeed each infinitive in English, as opposed to a language like Latin with its "amares," were not split already by the fact that it is

two words to begin with and that "to more greatly love" may mean something subtly different in the context of a sentence from "more greatly to love"), every flow of sentence- or paragraph-length in this book is fully intentional and exists where it exists as the most accurate possible conveyor of my ideas as I thought them and as I wished to express them, not in any stream-of-consciousness fragments of impression--though impressionism is there, as it is there in any given three or four square inches of a Titian painting or a Shakespeare or Milton narrative, all the fragments assuming shape in the context of the whole--but rather in the most living and precise units of form which I could devise to suit the action to the word, the word to the action. If the action is lyric, the word is lyric; if the action is somber, the word is somber; if the action is apocalyptic--and after all I do deal with the four last plays of Shakespeare, which are, separately and together, sustained apocalypse--the word is apocalyptic. This book is not written in informal poetry but in formal prose, and prose is, I consider, a glorious thing--a facet of the poetry of life's truth which is as valid a medium for the conveying of that truth as is any verse or rhyme or meter--glorious especially when one is dealing with a subject like Shakespeare: when one can feel the language with which one wants to write waking and stretching to the

breadth and length of its being till it has broken the last of the two-penny strings and pegs which have bound it to the ground for so long; till it is at last able to get up, stand on its own two feet and, unafraid, fully face its subject--whether that subject be Shakespeare or Dante or Milton, or Plato or Copernicus or Einstein or Jung--forthrightly advancing to shake that subject by the hand. And if a Shakespeare refuses to take the handshake, he may perhaps at least be put into a happier frame of mind by the openness of the attempt, and be more willing to grasp the hand of some other, worthier writer who will, hopefully, try next.

As a final note, I would like to make these acknowledgements:

The shape of the book as a whole, with its emphasis on the development of Shakespeare's artistic consciousness, from lyric comedy to the constrictions of tragedy through to the last plays, I owe to Harry Blair.

The suggestion of the prefix "meta-" in "meta-comedic," to convey the concept more clearly to the reader than my own un-prefixed "comedic" could quite have done, I received from Bonnie Schein.

The beautiful concept of the wastefulness of tragedy, which is found in the closing passages of my Winter's Tale

chapter, as well as much of the concept of choice and consequence which occurs from the point of the Lear chapter on, I owe to Irene Samuel.

Table of Contents

Introduction		1
Part I		
Chapter I	*Love's Labour's Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing*	9
Chapter II	*All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*	52
Part II		
Chapter III	*King Lear*	136
Part III		
Chapter IV	*Pericles*	209
Chapter V	*Cymbeline*	272
Chapter VI	*The Winter's Tale*	338
Chapter VII	*The Tempest*	415
Afterword		492

INTRODUCTION

> Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
> Towards Phoebus' lodging: such a waggoner
> As Phaeton would whip you to the west,
> And bring in cloudy night immediately.
> Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
> That runaways' eyes may wink, and Romeo
> Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen!
> Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
> By their own beauties; or, if love be blind,
> It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
> Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
> And learn me how to lose a winning match,
> Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods:
> Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
> With thy black mantle; till strange love, grown bold,
> Think true love acted simple modesty.
> Come, night! come, Romeo! come, thou day in night!
> For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night,
> Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.
> Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-brow'd night,
> Give me my Romeo: and, when he shall die,
> Take him and cut him out in little stars,
> And he will make the face of heaven so fine
> That all the world will be in love with night,
> And pay no worship to the garish sun.
> O! I have bought the mansion of a love,
> But not possess'd it, and, though I am sold,
> Not yet enjoy'd. So tedious is this day
> As is the night before some festival
> To an impatient child that hath new robes
> And may not wear them. O! here comes my nurse,
> And she brings news; and every tongue that speaks
> But Romeo's name speaks heavenly eloquence (III.ii.1-33).

To read, from the first line to the thirty-third, Juliet's words of longing and invitation to the night and to her absent lover is to experience the familiar miracle of Shakespeare: the phenomenon of images and sounds thrown off at the highest pitch and speed of imagination, not burning themselves out in a few phrases or sentences but growing in strength and sureness till the whole course of what is in reality a long

and complex speech assumes the shape of a single thought. No examination of the separate facets of night and sun and stars, nor of their uses in earlier authors' works, nor even of their uses here as Shakespeare interweaves them in his own special language can ever touch the quick of the beauty of the speech or its perennial freshness or force. Yet Juliet's words are perhaps the best introduction to a study of Shakespeare's art, for in these words a peculiar characteristic of that art is most plainly displayed. To read the speech is not so much to be made aware of night or sun or even of freshness or beauty as it is to be made aware of the immediate reality of Juliet: of her sense of beauty and of her amorousness and of her youth-fresh impatience at just that point in her life that she stands speaking. Beneath the poignancy of the speech lies a technique which plays a character's thought againt his action till the interplay of the two creates a human being of infinite shadow and substance.

It is the very accuracy of the poetry which precludes this speech--or indeed this play or any of the plays--from ever being completely analyzed or interpreted, for Shakespeare gives us glimpses of the inarticulate mystery of human experience lying behind the words a character speaks or the actions he performs, so that, as in life, he is more than just his words or actions. "So tedious is this day/As is the night before some festival/To an impatient child that

hath new robes/And may not wear them," Juliet cries--and what a wellspring of life experience she touches in her audience, for who has not known a similar childhood sensation? It is hardly possible to hear her words without feeling that they are being uttered not by a character but by a young girl with the weight of a lived life behind her, because the words have a double function of referring to her present state of mind at the same time as they refer to and draw upon a wealth of human experience common to all who draw breath. The way in which she refers to this experience is what makes Juliet Juliet--calling night "love-performing," "civil," and "black-brow'd," for example, and with every adjective telling us more about her own expectant emotions than about the night--but the constant implication that there <u>is</u> such a common experience, such a bond between character and audience, is Shakespeare's alone. From an offstage living world come the references to matrons, losing and winning matches, mansions, suddenly caught up and transformed into poetry of extraordinary beauty; but more than even the beauty is the sense conveyed of these everyday objects, which we have all seen, having been seen also by this girl who lives before us. Nothing could be further removed from life than "such a waggoner as Phaeton," yet the whole impetuous nature of a young girl on her wedding night is caught in "would whip you to the west," making

even the god himself accessible--though, as must be in drama, he is more accessible to the speaker than to the audience because it is the speaker who initiates the thought.

It is impossible to interpret or analyze this speech completely because it is written not so much in poetry as in the almost physical presence of the girl and her universe, just as, in a sense, the audience of a theater may be said to be written in the people who are gathered in it. What we are faced with in a play of Shakespeare's is the phenomenon of an author exploiting to the fullest the illusion inherent in the genre of the drama: that drama is written not in poetry or prose but in human beings--and making that illusion seem less illusion than reality, and as ultimately inexplicable as reality. In Shakespeare, the author's medium is no longer words but man.

Just as in reading a Shakespearean speech from beginning to end one begins to sense behind a character an inarticulate reality more than his sum of words or actions, which grows throughout the play till a point is reached where that reality becomes so palpable that one can, without looking at any name on the page, pick out a passage and say: this is Romeo, or this is Mercutio, or this is Tybalt, and no one else--so in reading all the plays in sequence one begins to sense behind all the characters and their universe the inarticulate

reality of Shakespeare. This reality I call the author's vision: that presence which is everywhere implied and nowhere made explicit, which shapes the world of each play, and which changes and grows from play to play, with the occasional regressions of growth, as surely as the course of Juliet's speech changes from initial fire to light.

And indeed it is in the last plays that this sense of the author's shaping power becomes almost visible as growth yields to constancy, and as certain techniques of characterization, plot, language and atmosphere are increasingly chosen over others to embody his dramatic purpose, each choice indicating something of the nature of the chooser; and as certain themes emerge from the abundance of human experience of earlier plays to be increasingly brought forward as the most essential until they stand complete and alone, beyond the coming to light which is comedy and tragedy, in the permanence of light which is Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest.

Ferdinand: Wherefore weep you?

Miranda: At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer
What I desire to give; and much less take
What I shall die to want. But this is trifling;
All the more it seeks to hide itself,
The bigger bulk it shows. Hence, bashful cunning!
And prompt me, plain and holy innocence!
I am your wife, if you will marry me;
If not, I'll die your maid: to be your fellow
You may deny me; but I'll be your servant,
Whether you will or no (III.i.76-86)--

and though we hear again a young girl's fresh encountering of the mystery of love, the lines are not shaped so much by a sense of the wonder of beauty as they are by the sureness of beauty, for the new breadth of Romeo and Juliet has become the assured infinity of The Tempest. This sense, this language of plainness and holiness are so changelessly present in the four last plays that the four seem, more than separate configurations of beings in a universe, to be one statement, uttered over and over again, of the permanent truths that went to shape that universe and which hold it together--as if every element of character and language and atmosphere were a direct projection of the author's desire to present his most essential themes, come to fruition after a lifetime of drama-writing, in what has become for him the most essential way. It becomes difficult in reading these four last plays not to believe that they are, as much as even embodiments of human experience, the very landscape of Shakespeare's mind at once more revealed and more hidden, as the mystery and wonder behind Miranda's love is all the greater for the plainness with which it is expressed.

It is tempting to begin a study of Shakespeare's vision immediately with a study of these four last works, for looking backwards from them the whole chiaroscuro of the body of the plays is thrown into a clear light, as, for example, though Juliet is entirely Juliet and Miranda Miranda, one has only

to read the later heroine's words to find conveyed with an unblinking clarity motivations similar to those which lay half-expressed in the shadows of the balcony of Verona, where "losing a winning match" was, at its most simple level, "what I shall die to want." Yet it is perhaps more appropriate, in tracing the development of such a tenuous phenomenon as a vision, to start where themes and atmosphere and motivation first begin most strongly to recur and to grow heavy with the sense of an author at work, who does not yet know of a Tempest or even of a Hamlet, but who only knows, when he begins to write "Come, civil night," that the rest of the page is a blank.

PART I

CHAPTER I

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST AND MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

There are certain of the plays of Shakespeare--Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It and Twelfth Night come most immediately to mind--which have about them a beauty, an inner balance and a sense of harmony that imbue them with a peculiar quality of perfection: as if at every point their author has been able to create and interrelate an amazing variety of characters in a world shaped and rounded by a kind of spacious grace which seems easily to allow for the countless little exceptions to that perfection. And yet in two other plays, one immediately preceding this group and one at its center, one can sense a movement away from such lyric balance of presentation, as if the playwright could only strive to widen the boundaries of his vision through the intrusion of pain so unexpected and harsh that the fabric of harmony must be left rent to portray it with accuracy. To follow the course of Love's Labour's Lost and Much Ado About Nothing, then, is to follow the first stirrings of an authorial unrest emerging from the very midst of sustained artistic achievement, pointing up that achievement all the more sharply as it begins to leave it behind.

***

> Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
> Live register'd upon our brazen tombs,
> And then grace us in the disgrace of death;
> When, spite of cormorant-devouring Time,
> Th' endeavour of this present breath may buy
> That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge,
> And make us heirs of all eternity.

Beautiful, restless, elegiac reminiscent of the night scenes of Verona, and Orsino's initial reverie, and Theseus' opening lines describing the waning moon, Navarre's first words in Love's Labour's Lost strike the familiar melancholy notes that echo and re-echo through the most lyric romantic plays of Shakespeare's middle period. In the Italian tragedy such melancholy may be left unquestioned as a natural quality of the beauty of the speeches of lovers so darkly touched by fate; but in the comedies the same quality of melancholy is equally present, and the fact that here the dark phenomenon seems just as natural takes us far into an understanding of the kind of dramatic world Shakespeare consistently created at this period of his artistic development.

Death, age, change, all flicker through and shade and partially shape these spring-like comedies almost as if their author would make his world of light more pure through the subtle use of shadow--and in Love's Labour's Lost the shadow falls most tellingly and most often, till, at the entrance of Death in the fifth act, it momentarily darkens the stage completely. Such a shadow seems strangest of all in this play, which is a very universe of quicksilver wit

and grace, a more consistently fantastic world than even the Athenian forest or Arden or Illyria, in which even the smallest speech is figured and the smallest movement choreographed. And yet perhaps it is upon this very discrepancy between the lightest fancies of life and its darkest realities that Shakespeare has built his drama.

The restlessness that plays over Navarre's first words does not have the amorous impetus of Orsino's or Theseus's, and perhaps that is why, in the context of the whole speech, the melancholy tone takes on an impersonal, and therefore slightly more ominous quality, one that separates it slightly from the more harmonious vision shaping the surrounding comedies. Similar speeches in Shakespeare bring out to some extent an infertile, unnatural quality that lies at the roots of melancholy ("falls into abatement and low price, even in a minute," echoing the "sicken and so die"; "this old moon wanes ... long withering out a young man's revenues"), bring out that at the very center of melancholy are the seeds of death--but if the sadness is amorous, we know that it will, in the world of romantic comedy, be met with and dispelled by an experience of fulfilled love. Here in Navarre's speech we feel no such guarantee, for his initial restlessness is not caused by love and therefore might not be able to be dispelled by it. More than that we feel--and more than feel, know, through Berowne's comments--that there

is an additional source of uneasiness in the king's words. For though, like Orsino and Theseus and the Arden inhabitants (and Romeo in Act I), he is more playing with melancholy than living with it, the antidote that he is playing with as remedy is as infertile and inward-turning as the mood he is, with graceful dispatch, dispelling: "Our court shall be a little academe,/Still and contemplative in living art" (I.i.13-14).

That the accent of this antidote-sentence should fall on "little" and away from "living" is confirmed immediately by the swift words of Longaville and Dumain who pick up the infertile, introverted qualities behind the king's thought and assent to them: "The mind shall banquet, though the body pine"; "To love, to wealth, to pomp, I pine and die;/With all those living in philosophy." Berowne immediately senses the root-nature of this counter-measure to death and sad change as having the same essential nature--"O, these are barren tasks"--as the danger that is supposedly being averted; but, as it is the others' roles to play with melancholy, so it is his to play with the others in their playing, and he signs their pledge--after, it must be noted, Navarre and the other two have already assented through "necessity" to break the oath to receive the French visitors: "I am forsworn 'on mere necessity.'/ So to the laws at large I [now] write my name."

"What consummate grace and wit!" we exclaim at Berowne's simultaneous loss and preservation of integrity, and indeed of the whole scene in which it was played out. Yet as the play progresses, Shakespeare makes increasingly apparent that this wit, in the hands of the Academe and especially of Berowne, is not, as we might suspect from Berowne's initial use of it, enogh to justify the hollowness at the Academe's center, for though it is charming and lively, it it not life-giving or life-enriching.

To watch Shakespeare as he enlarges the scope of his play to introduce the new elements of Costard and the French ladies and the fantastical Don Armado is over and over again to be made aware that we are following an author who creates characters and situations so complete in themselves that they seem to bear no traces of authorial judgment, and who yet is everywhere present underscoring the significance of those situations--so that, for example, while no one character is ever the author's spokesman, the specific way in which all the characters are interrelated to each other and to their world everywhere indicates those particular facets of human experience that he wishes to emphasize. All the playfulness that dances around Navarre's decree to Costard toward the end of the first act, so typical of the four nobles' dealings with the un-Academic elements of life, has glinting out from the center of its

brilliance the barest glimmering of melancholy, which makes that brilliance, by contrast, all the more delightful. "I will pronounce your sentence," intones Navarre to Costard, in the peculiarly half-playful, half-serious tone that is his alone: "You shall fast a week with bran and water." "I had rather," says Costard, with a fool-like bluntness especially welcome in the filigree of wit which this play threatens so often to become, "pray a month with mutton and porridge" (1.300). At once we find ourselves not only smiling at this comedy, but freely laughing, for Costard's reply releases the force that is at the very core of the comic spirit, which Sidney described in his "Apology for Poetrie" almost as if he had Shakespeare in mind: "the force trueth hath in nature." At once we are made to realize--as naturally as if the very structure of the encounter between the two men did not make the conclusion inescapable--that there need be no dichotomy between spiritual fulfillment and the green earth's pleasures, a dichotomy that suddenly is revealed lurking in even the most dazzling statements of the Academe, including Berowne's earlier and at first exhilarating, "Why, all delights are vain." How incongruous his exclamations seem now, how truly funny, as seen against Costard's values, or against our own, of which he reminds us with that sense of "common bond" that links, by an image as offstage-ordinary as food, the audience to him at this

moment ... or against the values of the arriving ladies.

The comedy of the ladies' second act entrance can only be fully appreciated when we realize that none of the things the Academe attacked in the first act as harmful could defend itself directly: food only justifying its goodness through the reply of the appropriately named Costard; a good night's sleep, female companionship, sunshine, only defending themselves through the half-playful apologies of Berowne--but now here are the ladies in person, to answer back directly!

And answer back they do, speaking the same aristocratic language as the Academe--wit:

> Berowne: Lady, I will commend you to mine own heart.
>
> Rosaline: Pray you, do my commendations; I would be glad to see it.
>
> Berowne: I would you heard it groan.
>
> Rosaline: Is the fool sick?
>
> Berowne: Sick at the heart.
>
> Rosaline: Alack! let it blood (II.i.178-84).

But the ladies' wit, though allied to the Academe's in charm and brilliance and quickness, is allied to Costard's in content--for their wit, though it has a peculiarly female unpredictibility and sharpness ("You are too hard for me," Boyet tells them as he closes the second act), has not the barren center that is so noticeable in the men's bran-and-water playfulness (or even, in the above exchange, in

Berowne's only half-joking "Sick at the heart"). The ladies' wit is not introspected or rueful-charming but is outward-going and, ultimately, healing, replenishing. After Rosaline's "Alack! let it blood," which leaves us with sufficient proof, if we needed any, of just how cutting a woman's wit can be, Berowne gamely offers a comeback, which is just as quickly countered:

Berowne: Would that do it good?

Rosaline: My physic says, 'ay'--

and his reply bridges the gulf between the dispassionately female and the gratifyingly feminine, revealing as it does in its remarkable interplay of teasing and truthfulness that her remarks are not aimed at calling attention to incongruity and preserving it in a witty comment forever, but rather at calling attention to incongruity and curing it.

This fertile quality of woman's wit is soon after reemphasized a hundredfold when, after the four lovers leave, the ladies momentarily turn their wit on the decidedly un-Academic Boyet. The Princess suddenly catches them up short:

> Good wits will be jangling; but gentles, agree.
> This civil war of wits were much better us'd
> On Navarre and his book-men, for here 'tis abus'd--

and whether the "here" refers to the kingdom of Navarre or to the abruptly stopped wit-play with Boyet, the point is the same: wit for wit's sake, just as study for study's sake, though it is deliciously tempting to refined tempera-

ments, leads to nothing. How natural, then, that the course of the play is increasingly shaped by the ladies' attempts to apply their healing wit to the peculiarly melancholy-tinged, fame-seeking, irresistible male Academe.

The predominant mood of the play is, of course, far from melancholy, and Rosaline's comment before the first parry with the lovers that she has never met "a merrier man, within the limit of becoming mirth" than Berowne is really only necessary for someone, like the Princess, who is as yet a stranger to the atmosphere of the kingdom of Navarre--as is Maria's affirmation that Longaville is a "merry mocking lord." But, using only the interaction of his characters, Shakespeare brings out again, momentarily, the darker glints that underlie his play, for both the ladies' comments are quickly amended. The Princess counters Maria's description with the equally delightful, "such short-liv'd wits do wither as they grow," a graceful reminder of the infertility at the center of the four lovers' special kind of wit-play. And Rosaline's quicksilver sketch of Berowne hints that his merriment does exceed, though in a most captivating way, "the limit of becoming mirth": "His eye begets occasion for his wit;/For every object that the one doth catch/The other turns to a mirth-moving jest." Even in the dazzling, light-drenched world of romantic comedy where thoughts of motivation should vanish as quickly as momentary sun-spots,

there is something intriguing, if not disturbing, about a personality that sees every object as mirth-moving, knowing, as we do already, that in this world can exist, as Berowne himself has in Act I described him, the Princess's "decrepit, sick, and bed-rid father." And in Act III we see more closely suggestions of why, though most gaily, Berowne has fled with open eyes to the Academe, as Shakespeare plays out the counterpoint of melancholy in a more major key.

"Sing, boy," Don Armado told Moth in the first act:. "my spirit grows heavy in love." "And that's a great marvel," Moth winked at the audience, "loving a light wench"--merrily dismissing any tragical implications of heaviness apparent not only in his master's tone, but in his attitudes, poses, figures of speech, and labored revelations of his outrageously morbid state of mind (I.i.231-34: "So it is, besieged with sable-coloured melancholy, I did commend the black-oppressing humour to the wholesome physic of thy health-giving air"). But the melancholia that the lovers so rightly laughed at in Armado because it nourished such overripe fruits of sadness, they find in the third and fourth acts beginning to blossom darkly in themselves, because its seeds have been within them all along, from the first felt musings on the disgrace of death. Initially they thought to counter this with the barren antidote of study, but what kept the four so captivating and the play so delightful was

that study, no matter what they theorized it consisted of, seemed to consist primarily of wit, in the broad Renaissance sense of play of intellect (less in the sense of Navarre's "still and contemplative in living art" than in Longaville's "the mind shall banquet"). And now the four are countering a far more imminent source of melancholy, love's sweet sadness, so evocative of Romeo and Theseus and Orlando and Orsino, with an infinitely more subtle, complex and more deeply felt intellectual play--seen at its most exhilaratingly self-conscious in Berowne, who uses his wit as a fine sword, parrying with love and, while parrying, momentarily distancing himself from its too real proximity:

> Well, set thee down, sorrow! for so they say the fool said, and so say I, and I the fool: well proved, wit! By the Lord, this love is as mad as Ajax: it kills sheep: it kills me, I a sheep: well proved again o' my side (IV.iii.4-8)!

Of course wit demands self-consciousness and, since Armado has none at all or far too serious-much, his melancholy is never toyed with or played with, but lived with as stolidly as if it were a real, black-biled humor, which it probably is. It is this heavy physicality, in fact, which not only makes him seem scandalously funny seen among the high quick intellects of the four nobles, but also binds him to the four--for his tendency to brood and to hide the love that he, too, feels is melancholy at the root is theirs too. It is almost as if Armado were the body to the four's high-

soaring spirit: they spiritually flirt with melancholia, he quite physiologically may be a melancholiac; they deride love as a vain delight and then proceed to fall in love, he calls love unworthy and then embodies this conception by falling in love with a girl who is unworthy (I.ii.61-63: "I will hereupon confess I am in love; and as it is base for a soldier to love, so am I in love with a base wench"); they try to hide their amorous feelings (in Act IV from one another and in Act V, through spirited disguises, from their loves), he quite physically tries to hide his inamorata herself somewhere offstage. Armado is an outsized outlandish source of mirth to the four swains, but there is a far gentler, far subtler trace of an authorial smile that plays over all five of them together, hinting that perhaps, just perhaps, Armado is not quite as out of place in the company of the lovers as one might at first suspect.

> Nor shines the silver moon one half so bright
> Through the transparent bosom of the deep,
> As doth thy face through tears of mine give light
> (IV.iii.31-33),

muses the king, and in the dark lyric beauty of the lines can be heard the sweet-sad harmony of the night music of Illyria or Verona or Oberon's bank of wild thyme. "If love make me forsworn, how shall I swear to love," sighs Berowne in his own love lyric--or does he, like Oberon and

Orsino and the Arden inhabitants, half-smile too? "On a day, alack, the day!--" begins Dumain in his seven-syllabled reverie. But something in the spirit of this play brings out, along with the shadows of sadness that play about the first formal statements of the Academe's admissions of love, that still infertile tinge that here dichotomizes bodily and spiritual happiness; and only one, Longaville's (though curiously dichotomized too, in the traditional fashion: "My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love"), contains a glimmer of a recognition of that infertility along with a recognition that the right kind of fulfillment can heal it: "Thy grace being gain'd cures all disgrace in me," though echoing fitfully the disgrace of death. But this tentative step in the right direction is quickly lost among the lords' brilliant successive revelations to each other that they are each in love; followed by Berowne's magnificent encomium of that love (which, though it, like the previous love lyrics, admits that women are " the books, the arts, the academes,/ That show, contain, and nourish all the world," still cannot help toying with the idea of melancholy in the beautiful "Never durst poet touch a pen to write/Until his ink were temper'd with Love's sighs;/O! then his lines would ravish savage ears,/And plant in tyrants mild humility"); followed by their elaborate preparations to not naturally but artificially reveal their loves to the ladies while disguised as

if from Moscow--fittingly, the coldest city in Europe.

Cold and dry, melancholy's properties, linger over Katherine's remark which opens the Muscovy scene, that Cupid killed, whether in amorous banter or in fact, her sister (V.ii.14: "He made her melancholy, sad, and heavy;/And so she died")--and then dances over the ice-hard charade of pledges and counter-pledges which follows, ushered in by Boyet's, "O, I am stabb'd with laughter!" and ending with Berowne's, "By heaven, all dry-beated with pure scoff!" and the Princess's, "Twenty adieus, my frozen Muscovits." Of course the melancholy only forms the lightest of traceries around this mistaken identities scene whose chief delight is that magical atmosphere peculiar to Shakespeare's most lyrical comedies and reaching its most palpable state in A Midsummer Night's Dream, of there being so much romance in the air that being in love is for one timeless moment more important than having a specific object for that love. However though the tracery is only a tracery, that does not make it any the less there.

At the very point in the action when this play seems most romantically at one with Theseus' world or Orlando's or Orsino's and all that remains is for the last dark shadows of melancholy to be dissolved in the healing light of the ladies' love and for male and female to end their happy war with happier truce, Marcade enters, and at the

same moment that we see the perfect shape the play might have had, we see that shape irredeemably and consciously subverted:

> Marcade: I'm sorry, madam; for the news I bring is heavy in my tongue. The king your father--
>
> Princess: Dead, for my life (V.ii.724-26)!--

and it is almost less important to realize that he is dead than it is to realize that she knew at once.

This should not imply, of course, that Marcade's entrance comes as anything less in the play than a full, dramatic shock, one that countless re-readings and re-seeings of Love's Labour's Lost never lessens--for though it is easy enough to see the curious, dark strain which runs lightly from the king's opening lines up to the coming of Death, one can never say that this strain has necessarily to culminate in Death's entrance, any more than one can say that evil premonitions in life have to prefigure tragedy; only after the tragic event itself, in retrospect, do we see those dark strains for what they were: anticipations of that which has so shockingly befallen. But the characters in this play--as in life--live continuously in the present tense, not knowing when or where disaster will strike. And when we do in retrospect find prefigurings in the Academe's continuous playing with melancholy in study and in love, we can only remark on how much Shakespeare made even his most ornate of dramatic landscapes mirror the real world--where tragedy

can always be seen, after the fact, to have been heralded by prefigurings as unnoticed as Berowne's and Dumain's jesting, during the hilarity of the "Pageant of the Nine Worthies" which Marcade interrupts, about how much Holofernes looks like "a death's face in a ring," "the carved-bone face on a flask." All this is seen, however, only if we look, and without the disaster we never would have looked--just as we never follow, in retrospect, the dark strains in A Midsummer Night's Dream or As You Like It or Twelfth Night, though they are there, ready to throw the perfect balance of the plays off at any time the author chooses, because there is no need to follow them.

Now, at the entrance of Death, which Shakespeare makes--as in life--the moment of truth, what a difference between the lords' fascination with melancholy and real inescapable sorrow. The infertility that has been at the center of the lords' studying and wooing wit now bears barren fruit in the face of nature itself, who will not be parried with or played with and who cannot be avoided. That the melancholy which was at the heart of the king was less feigned and more felt than the others'--which was apparent all along in the dark beauty that brooded beneath all of his turns of wit--is nowhere more apparent than at this moment when he briefly, simply offers his love: "To wail friends lost/Is not by much so wholesome-profitable/As to rejoice at friends but

newly found." But even his melancholy had too much play in it to give him a true understanding of sorrow, for anyone not living in the ornate world of Navarre would know that the death of a girl's beloved father is not the time for a marriage proposal. "I understand you not," says the Princess; "my griefs are double." And Berowne, who of the four toyed with melancholy most lightly because it amused him so delightfully, does far worse. As the most self-concious of the four, he grips at once the simple truth of the tragedy, and acknowledges the paucity of relief that the wit that he so revelled in can provide. "Honest plain words best pierce the ear of grief," he begins; but he is incorrigible, and after that first simple sentence, he delivers one of the most elaborate, figured speeches in the play, ending with a bit of quicksilver schoolboy logic that Shakespeare hadn't let a character perpetrate since Adriana in The Comedy of Errors (II.ii.116-33):

> Therefore, ladies,
> Our love being yours, the error that love makes
> Is likewise yours: we to ourselves prove false,
> By being once false forever to be true
> To those that make us both,--fair ladies, you:
> And even that falsehood, in itself a sin,
> Thus purifies itself and turns to grace (ll.778-84).

Yet all his quick wit cannot quickly amend his fault.

It is with this entrance of Death that the play separates itself from plays like Romeo and Juliet or A Midsummer Night's Dream or Twelfth Night, defining their special beauty at the

same time as it defines its own accomplishment. While in the latter plays love is inextricably mingled with melancholy, making the experience of love all the more precious for the sad spot at its center (regardless of whether that spot yields in tragedy to death or in comedy to a delightful teasing of the whole phenomenon of melancholy)--in Love's Labour's Lost love, like death, is at once pulled sharply asunder from melancholy to become no longer a lightly pervasive atmosphere but rather a stark backdrop to human experience which no amount of lyric sadness can change or even touch. Once the four are made aware of the backdrops to life of love and death, they begin to realize that not only melancholy but wit for wit's sake is an insufficient language with which to confront either one. This the ladies knew beneath all their play (as Costard in his prayer-and-mutton way knew also), and never imagined that anyone would propose to them to enter into love in such an artificial manner as the lords are doing. "I understand you not," the Princess says:

Princess: ...and therefore met your loves
In their own fashion, like a merriment.

Dumain: Our letters, madam, show'd much more than jest.

Longaville: So did our looks.

Princess: We did not quote them so.

At once the lords are brought face to face with the most disconcerting of truths about love: that, like death, it lives apart from wit and melancholy as permanent truth

lives apart from the ways men devise for accomodating that truth to themselves (though the ladies have known this all along). Other, more lyric plays may have left the men room to always accomodate themselves gracefully to whatever truth they must--as in Romeo's sweetly painful yielding to his bride's death and his own, with a kiss; or Orsino's yielding to Viola's love, folded in the wit-sad happy charm of "And since you call'd me master for so long,/Here is my hand: you shall from this time be/Your master's mistress" (V.i.336-38). Here, however, faced with a dead king and his grief-struck wards, the characters are allowed no room for gracefulness. The lords' confession of love must be fitted to the starkness of the hour; and in the king their spokesman's words, it is:

> Now, at the latest minute of the hour,
> Grant us your loves.

And none of the men's wit, which dances on after this as it begins separating itself from its infertile melancholy center to try to face the hurt it wrought, can make this one moment any the less earnest or bare or real.

In the face of the sundering realities of death and of the ladies' love, the lords' played-with melancholy becomes real sorrow, just as their toyed-with amorous inclinations become marriage-real, and their lightly-held first act abstaining penances become hospital-visiting, positive, corporal acts of mercy (bran-and-water transformed into mutton-

and-prayer)--and the greater reality in this play, which is, after all, a comedy, is love, in all its female healing power (counter-pointed, as usual, by Armado, who gets his base wench with child). "To weed this wormwood from your fruitful brain," Rosaline tells the lovers, is in back of the ladies' purpose--reminding us that healing and fertility has been the ladies' motif all through the play, just as melancholy has been the lords', though both were played out in the language of wit.

And perhaps that is why, in this play of such strange balances, neither the ladies nor the lords, but nature, the unpredictable balance of fecundity and barrenness, summer and winter, closes the play, in which the fertility of spring contains the mocking melancholy note of cuckoldry, and the coldness of winter is warmed by female fire:

Spring: When daisies pied and violets blue
And lady-smocks all silver-white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo;
Cuckoo, cuckoo: O word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!

.....

Winter: When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipp'd, and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu-whit;
Tu-who, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

For though love and death, laughter and tears, have in one Marcade-moment split too far apart for the players to go on blithely intermingling them, such intermingling may be--and is--continued by the whole living and dying world itself, which alone has room and humor enough to house amicably even the starkest of dichotomies, and which need explain its inconsistencies to no one--though indeed it seems unlikely that any of the five pairs of lovers on stage, arrested as they are still in their sad and happy daze, would even think to ask.

***

To follow the course of the romantic plays of Shakespeare after Love's Labour's Lost through Twelfth Night (and by "romantic" I mean nothing more than simply plays dealing with love and romance), and then to find in their midst Much Ado About Nothing, is to find, among sustained evocation of a teasing-gentle world of lady smocks and melancholy cuckoo's notes, one spot, closer to Navarre than to Athens or Arden or Illyria, where winter holds equal sway with spring--indeed, in this later, stranger play, where it seems to hold more than equal sway:

> Benedick: O God, sir, here's a dish I love not: I cannot endure my Lady Tongue [Exit.]
>
> Don Pedro: Come, lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.

Beatrice: Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile; and I gave him use for it, a double heart for a single one: marry, once before he won it of me with false dice, therefore your Grace may well say I have lost it.

Don Pedro: You have put him down, lady, you have put him down.

Beatrice: So I would not he should do me, my lord, lest I should prove the mother of fools (II.i.285-97)--

and any suggestion of fertility implied in Beatrice's last remark is thoroughly overpowered by the far greater emphasis she gives to the sexual double-entendre which produces it and to the exclusively comic fruit which it yields. The lyric qualities of melancholy and wit, so delicately intermingled in the world of Navarre (except in the last act where the two were sundered and juxtaposed as separate ways of attempting to deal with the realities of love and death) and of Verona and Athens and Arden and Illryia , are here sundered from the first, to the untempering of both: melancholy without wit becoming the darker, more harmful jealousy of the Claudio-Hero subplot, and wit without a "sad spot" becoming the hard, not to say rough ("So would I not he should do me") phenomenon of the main plot in which blood is nipped and ways be foul, to the tune of a relentlessly merry note:

Orlando: A man that had a wife with such a wit, he might say "Wit, whither wilt?"

Rosalind: Nay, you might keep that check for it till you met your wive's wit going to your neighbor's bed.

> Orlando: And what wit could wit have to excuse that?
>
> Rosalind: Marry, to say she came to seek you there. You shall never take her without her answer unless you take her without her tongue. O, that woman that cannot make her fault her husband's occasion, let her never nurse her child herself, for she will breed it like a fool (IV.i.163-74).

Rosalind's last remark, if taken out of the context of As You Like It and placed next to Beatrice's perhaps might make the two indistinguishable, but, even so, perhaps not, for even in the bare passage itself, there is a delicacy to the common concept of the breeding of fools ("never nurse her child") that is conspicuously absent from Beatrice's. And when the passage is taken in context (which is, as always, where shakespeare shapes its most human significance), the delicacy with which Rosalind disguised and Ganymede disguised as Rosalind is teasing Orlando--and herself--out of the melancholy fears of love is everywhere apparent. We do not even need her description of wit which immediately precedes this passage ("Make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement; shut that, and 'twill out at the keyhole; stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney") to see that amidst all of wit's quickness and playfulness, as it is used in the world of Arden--and Athens and Illyria and most of Navarre, where similar cuckoldry passages abound--there is a touch of sad smoke. It is only in Beatrice's world of Messina that we begin to see a

strange change in the author's handling of such passages, through which the smoke begins to be tinged, at first ever so lightly, with smut.

When Beatrice early in the first act is told about Benedick's companionship with Claudio, she cries out in comic horror, "O Lord, he will hang about him like a disease: he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio! if he hath caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere 'a be cured"--and she speaks more truth than she is aware of. Everywhere one looks for wit in this play, one sees it sharp and dazzling, and too dangerous in its infertile, cutting power to be used by anyone less than a master, sundered, as it has been, from the melancholy that gave it its compelling softness in the hands of the men of Navarre and from the healing power that gave it warmth in the hands of the ladies, and seeming to exist here only for the sake of separating the sexes from each other by poking fun at either and at the physical act which must in time unite them both. We seem to be in a world one step removed from that moment in the last act of Love's Labour's Lost where wit was suddenly seen to be ultimately separate from the stark reality of love--for here wit is seen from the first as a force coursing forward on its own, revelling in its own cold integrity and in its language no longer of delicate teasing but of the hard,

usually sexual, mock:

> Don Pedro: I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love.
>
> Benedick: With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord; not with love: prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking, pick out mine eyes with a ballad-maker's pen, and hang me up at the door of a brothel-house for the sign of blind Cupid (I.i.257-64).

If this, then, is the wit, "the Benedick," of Much Ado About Nothing, one might begin to wish, with Beatrice who is herself at least an equal perpetrator, that Claudio indeed has not caught it.

Disease does, in fact, seem to hang imperceptibly in the air of Messina--not so much in the brothel-dark references of occasional lines, as in the profusion of references to love's infertile or wounding qualities to which almost all of the characters give utterance, almost as if they were not themselves initiating the words as much as plucking them out of the very atmosphere--so that even the common social exchange of an introduction cannot escape being given (even by so gracious a character as Leonato) its own strange turn:

> Don Pedro: I think this is your daughter.
>
> Leonato: Her mother hath many times told me so.
>
> Benedick: Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?
>
> Leonato: Signior Benedick, no; for then you were a child (I.i.107-13).

The spirit behind this exchange, and behind so many, many similar exchanges in this play, seems very close to that of which Rosaline would cure Berowne in Navarre: that dangerous spirit which sees <u>every</u> object as the subject of jest. Here, however, the only woman who is articulate enough to point out the danger of laughing at love and not with it, herself <u>will</u> not see the danger and outdoes even the men at upholding, starkly and ominously, the unnatural banner of wit: "No, uncle, I'll none [of men]: Adam's sons are my brethren; and truly, I hold it a sin to match in my kindred" (II.i.67-69).

But if the use of wit is stark in this play, so too is the backdrop of love familiar from that one moment in Navarre when the two qualities were suddenly sundered from one another. Claudio sees Hero and in an instant is plainly, unthinkingly, thoroughly in love. He does not have, nor does he even seek, the room given to Orlando or Orsino or, at times, even to Berowne or Benedick to accommodate himself to love, or to define his own awareness by graceful interaction with the other characters. His feeling is too sudden for grace:

> Claudio: Is she [Hero] not a modest young lady?
>
> Benedick: 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?

Claudio: No; I pray thee speak in sober judgment (I.i.172-78).

Against the easy self-consciousness of Benedick, a new kind of character in the Shakespearean world of romantic comedy comes forward, one who would seem curious in a neighboring play but who seems at home in this strange new world, so similar in spirit to the last act of Love's Labour's Lost. Claudio is drawn from a new dichotomy that seems to enter the author's technique of shaping his world at the death of the French king: the dichotomy between honesty and wit. To say of Rosalind's "'twill fly with the smoke out of the chimney" or of Viola's haunting "Make me a willow cabin at your gate ...", "That is not honest language; say what you mean" would be at once to destroy the gentle-playful truth the words convey and to miss the point of a whole created universe whose very breadth of grace and ease allows its inhabitants the leisure to approach the reality of love, for a while at least, on their own terms. Here, however, such a character as Claudio--not a Fool and not of a lower social order--whose honesty is mainly drawn from the fact that he is not in the least witty or self-conscious, does not seem at all out of place; rather it seems welcome in this world where the reality of love is from the first present as a backdrop so stark that Beatrice and Benedick initially come off a shade less sympathetically than they should, for mocking it so sharply, and where Claudio,

who is in love, can only state that love with absolute plainness ("In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on"), by that plainness attaining an eloquence not yet reached by his more dazzling companions. And yet, there is strangeness even here, for save at the moment of truth of his confession of love, Claudio's language is more blunt than simple, even to asking about the girl's financial expectations--"Hath Leonato any son, my lord?"--suggesting a lack of inner eloquence and implying that he might be eschewing wit not from choice but from inability. As for Hero herself, she is nearly the mutest heroine in Shakespeare.

"I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace," says Don John of his brother Don Pedro (I.iii.28-29). The presence of a villainous nature in a romantic Shakespearean comedy is not unusual (one only has to think of Duke Frederick or Malvolio), but again in this play one can sense a movement away from villainous portrayals in surrounding plays which seems strangely appropriate to the world of Messina. As the language of the witty characters has grown more mocking and more sexually rough and as the language of the "honest" characters has grown more silent or blunt, so here, it is somehow not surprising to find the familiar figure of the plotting brother speaking language that refers explicitly to the blight and disease of the world

of the play that is affecting all of the characters, as if melancholy, driven out of the hard language of wit as too dangerous a subject, has festered in the play's very atmosphere to the taint of all. The new dangerousness of this atmosphere is brought out first most clearly when Don John, in the scene of masked mistaken-identities that follows, suggests to Claudio that Hero loves another. Claudio believes it at once, not merely because such instantaneous belief furthers Shakespeare's plot but because deceit and distrust, as is love, seem in the very air as a backdrop to life-experience which all in the play refer to. It appears, then, somehow only natural that Claudio catch the contagion at once: "For beauty is a witch," he cries, "Against whose charms faith melteth into blood" (II.i.188-89). And it is well worth noting, too, that the mask-scene itself, so similar in structure to the "Moscow" scene in Love's Labour's Lost, contains no melancholy tracery whatever, and yet has dancing about its series of mocks the lightest of all possible taints which nonetheless the French ladies would have thought too dark to dare utter:

Margaret: God match me with a good dancer!

Balthasar: Amen.

Margaret: And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is done!

.....

> Beatrice: I am sure he [Benedick] is in the fleet. I would he had boarded me!
>
> Benedick: When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say (II.i.112-15;150-53).

In such a merry atmosphere, Don John's presence is a jarring note, but it is not, as Malvolio's presence is in the festivities of the Twelfth Night, as incongruous as it first might appear.

Of course, none of the little edges of infertility or infection which dart through the speeches of the wit-wielding characters in the play detracts for more than a fraction of a second from the bright aura those characters create about themselves, and it is unlikely that such edges would disturb or even be noticed by an audience, unless that audience had just come from a performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream or As You Like It where joy is tempered by sadness rather than by sickness. After all, joy--or, more properly, merriment--is the keynote to Much Ado About Nothing, and little does any sadness or sickness detract from the play's main miracle: that in the interchanges between Beatrice and Benedick, their twin brightnesses do not cancel each other out but rather, despite the wit of either, reveal beneath the surfaces of the words the bantering spirit of born lovers. And if the pair sparkles so brightly because neither of them, for the most part, will see pain, there is something in that willfulness so spirited and so cheerful that

its very persistence in the face of dark fact renders the two perhaps more appealing than they deserve to be, as is Beatrice, for example, when she is told that she must have been born in a happy hour: "No, sure, my lord, my mother cried; but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born" (II.i.350-53).

Still, those unhealthy glints are there, and seem to reflect on the part of an author who does not taint at all similar situations in neighboring plays, a subtle change of direction, if not a deliberate choice. "She speaks poniards," says Benedick of Beatrice, "and every word stabs: if her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there would be no living near her; she would infect to the north-star" (II.i. 257-60). An audience new-come from Arden might wish that Benedick had stopped before coming to "infect," just as they might wish that Margaret had not responded so to Balthasar's "Amen" but had left her "dance," in its faint tracery of double-entendre, a mutual sexual joy and not an object of her own amusement, or had at least tempered her gay reply with a sad note of love--as Rosalind did when she rounded off her merry physical speculations about the absent Orlando (initiated by Celia, who caught up her cousin's entreaty to "take the cork out of thy mouth that I may drink thy tidings" with "So you may put a man in your belly") by an earnest: "Nay, but the devil take mocking. Speak sad brow

and true maid" (III.ii.205-218). But such an audience-wish, if it even arose, would soon dissolve itself in the play's predominantly comic light.

The great scenes in the second and third acts between Beatrice and Benedick in which each is tricked into falling in love with the other (or, perhaps more accurately, in which each is tricked into self-admitting the love which has existed all along) are cradled by Shakespeare in the immediately preceding reconciliation between Claudio and Hero, during which wit is again dichotomized with truth. "Silence is the perfectest herald of joy," says Claudio, as--with the starkness so characteristic of this play--he immediately re-falls in love. As for Hero, she cannot even formulate an utterance for her silence. "Speak, cousin," Beatrice tells her, "or if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss, and let him speak neither" (II.i.319-25). Again the author reminds us, just before he lets his two wordiest characters dominate the stage completely, that the most important truths of human experience in the world he is now shaping dwell separate and apart from mere vocabulary. And again the author subtly makes us conscious of the slight contagion in the air of Navarre as he has Claudio describe the time period in which these scenes take place--that period between his reconciliation with Hero and his wedding to her--in language which shows only too clearly in its attempt at wit

that the speaker has, despite his re-immersion into love, caught "the Benedick" without catching the self-conscious grace necessary to use it unharmed: "Time goes on crutches till love have all his rites."

As the two love-revelation scenes occur (and, fittingly enough, considering the author's dichotomy between the fertility of love and the barrenness of wit, they are almost the only scenes in the play which take place within the Orchard), it is perhaps not as important to realize that the identical trick is used, once for Benedick, once for Beatrice, for provoking each into a self-admission of love, as it is to realize that the trick itself--an overhearing by each, of their friends discussing the absent one's secret passion for the listener--only really works when one overhears how melancholy the other is reported to have become. "This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne," cries Benedick, after hearing such descriptions of Beatrice as Claudio's "Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses" (II.iii.162-64)--and the clean effect in this scene of his new rush of love is only momentarily tainted by Claudio's private comment to his collaborators and to the audience: "He hath ta'en the infection." Similarly, Beatrice in her scene overhears that Benedick, unrequited, must continue to "like cover'd fire,/Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly"--and it is to

this kind of revelation that she gives assent: "For others say thou dost deserve, and I/Believe it better than reportedly" (III.i.115-16), confirming Hero's success in her appointed task of picturing Benedick as "sick in love." In the harsher light of this play, where love cannot be dealt with at all by wit and where melancholy loses its lyricism as it attains more and more the reality of a disease which, too, cannot be dealt with by wit, Benedick and Beatrice are dumb-struck at the pain the other reportedly feels, and are forced to admit the existence of that pain and that love each in themselves, in two of the awkwardest, clumsiest speeches in the play, as if each has the right words for everything but the shock of reality:

> Benedick: Love me! why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive the love come from her; they say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I never did think to marry: I must not seem proud: happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending (II.iii.243-50).
>
> .....
>
> Beatrice: What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true? Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much? Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu! No glory lives behind the back of such. (III.i.107-10).

Yet it is not the clumsiness and blunt honesty of the language here that alone is indicative of a new starkness in the author's envisioning of the reality of love, nor is it alone the suddenness with which that reality overpowers the

characters. After all, the lovers of Verona and Athens and Arden and Illyria are overcome as suddenly, though they do have time to adapt themselves gracefully to being overcome. Rather, what seems most clearly to define the sheer impact of love here from its more lyric portrayals elsewhere is the new and dangerous atmosphere of the world of Messina (far more dangerous even than the atmosphere, in the fifth act, of Navarre, to which it is so similar) in which love must drop its graces for the greater urgency of maintaining itself against those forces of love-mocking wit and malignant death that would otherwise destroy it. It is because Beatrice and Benedick, as was Berowne, are, in their own wittiness, such threats to love, that their self-admissions of love break through to the surface with the suddenness of forces narrowly escaping destruction--just as the quickness with which Claudio's first love for Hero could succumb to malign slander makes the sudden re-instatement of that love, immediately preceding these scenes, seem all the more abrupt and unpredictable. And it is this atmosphere--in which love and all the senseless pain that would kill love ominously co-exist--that hangs palpable over the scene of Hero's wedding.

"Would you not swear,/ All you that see her, that she were a maid,/By those exterior shows? But she is none:/ She knows the heat of a luxurious bed;/Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty" (IV.1.38-42), Claudio cries of

his prospective bride. For the second time in the play he has fallen out of love with Hero from the evil plottings of Don John, as for the second--and climactic--time, the malignancy present from the beginning in the very air of Messina comes to a head. In the clearer atmosphere of neighboring plays, the threats of the darker characters, when those threats deal with love, are aimed straightforwardly at killing the figure of the lover, as seen, for example, in the actions of Tybalt or Oliver. Here, however, the threats have a subtler, more disquieting aim: not to kill the man, but to kill the love within him--not so much quickly from without (by Don John's dark accusation, which was the bare plot of Shakespeare's source-story), as from a festering within which the accusation at once produces. "And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang," says Claudio at the end of his revilings, "To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm,/ And never shall it be more gracious." And though one cannot say that the lightness with which all the characters in this play are wont to mock the sexual act leads in any causal way to the harsh sexual nature of the slander any more than one could say that the melancholy tinge to the Navarre lords' language anticipated the death of the French king, the idea of a non-causal connection by contagion cannot be dismissed here as easily as it could in the earlier play.

It is somehow not surprising to find that as the real ugliness of slander blackens the stage totally--as real death blackened it totally for a moment in Navarre--there is again no room for witty or even for graceful words by those who might use them:

Benedick: I know not what to say.

Beatrice: O! on my soul, my cousin is belied!

Nor is it surprising that against this blackness Shakespeare unfolds the plot-complication of Hero's supposed death, for why should not one senseless shock be followed by another? Yet the author is not finished with his juxtapositions of pain and love and death, for Much Ado About Nothing is Beatrice and Benedick's play and a comedy in the bargain, and to them is entrusted the happy task of illustrating that the discovery of love still can be--more than even death or pain--the greatest shock of all.

Earlier in the play, Shakespeare used a trick of comedy to produce Beatrice and Benedick's abrupt self-admissions of love. Now he uses Don John's more powerful trick of tragedy to push the wavering pair beyond their last pride of wit, forcing them each to make what must be the far more difficult admission to each other of that love. Now, after a few half-hearted passes of banter, their confrontation comes to this simplicity:

Benedick: I protest I love thee.

Beatrice: Why then, God forgive me!

Benedick: For what offense, sweet Beatrice?

Beatrice: You have stayed me in a happy hour! I was about to protest I loved you.

Benedick: And do it with all thy heart.

Beatrice: I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest (11.285-92).

And the freshness of the truth which so suddenly floods the stage reveals not only the human beings beneath the relentlessly sparkling surfaces of the two characters, but also, in the exchange which immediately follows the confession, an essential difference, even when their relationship is most intense, between man and woman:

Benedick: Come, bid me do anything for thee.

Beatrice: Kill Claudio.

All the comic incongruity of Beatrice's answer is only surpassed by the realization--ours and Benedick's--that she is dead serious. In this play, as in Love's Labour's Lost where we saw it in the ladies' insistence upon the lords' penance and in indeed every Shakespeare play before and after, there is always implied--although never made as explicit as at this one moment--the existence of a deep-seated mystery or, perhaps from her viewpoint, clarity, which lies at the center of the soul of woman and which remains ultimately incomprehensible to man. Here, all the

subsequent comedy of Beatrice's sputtering impatience for her lover to carry out her request does not obscure the earnestness of that request or its woman's power, almost despite the character of the speaker, to begin to anticipate, even in the very midst of the passion of love, the force of that love in the scope of the world beyond the present moment.

Nor does the comedy obscure the taint which the new Benedick must face, as, now love-whole, he confronts in the world an apparition partially of his own making: the new Claudio, who has caught all of the love- and woman-mockingness of "the Benedick" without any of the self-consciousness necessary to wield it with grace or even with accuracy, meeting Benedick's challenge of a duel with:

> Claudio: I' faith, I thank him; he hath bid me to a calf's head and a capon, the which if I do not carve most curiously, say my knife's naught. Shall I not find a woodcock too?
>
> Benedick: Sir, your wit ambles well; it goes easily (V.i.158-63).

Yet Shakespeare does not permit either Benedick or Beatrice to resolve the wrongs of the world of Messina by the plan of revenge-by-duel that is so characteristic of them both. He puts the matter in other, more capable hands.

It is not accidental, in this play where words can kill (though Hero's death is but a trick of her priest-protector's) when wielded by the malignant intelligence of a Don John,

that these words' effect and their sophisticated malignancy should be vanquished at once by the broad, funny malaprop-phrases of simple Constable Dogberry, for in the world of Much Ado About Nothing, where the ears of the adults seem by nature attuned only to style, it is the children who must uphold the greater value of content, in language whose every syllable is a little triumph of meaning over a perfect shambles of form:

> [Presenting to the assembly Don John's cohorts:] Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanderers; sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust things; and to conclude, they are lying knaves.
>
> [And on leaving the assembly:] God keep your worship! I wish your worship well; God restore you to health! I humbly give you leave to depart, and if a merry meeting may be wished, God prohibit it (V.1.224-29;339-43)!

Nor is it accidental in this play where pain and death and love are more juxtaposed than intermingled, that plot-motivation should reflect this abruptness and that, just as Beatrice and Benedick are tricked into self-admitting their love and then in the wake of Hero's wedding tricked into admitting that love to each other, and just as Claudio is tricked by Don John into believing Hero slandered and then deceived in the wake of that trick into believing her dead--so now Claudio is deceived into promising to marry a girl who, lo and behold, is his "dead" betrothed. It would be missing, among the dark or sharp radiances of each of these

plot-turns, the strangely lit backdrop of the world of Messina to view these turns merely as comic devices, when each one of them occurs with a shock to the characters so great that language is blunted to allow the force of their inmost emotion to escape almost despite themselves. "Another Hero!" Claudio cries as he sees his prospective bride. "Nothing certainer," she replies (V.iv.62-63).

Yet as all the tricks are revealed--as it is in the nature of tricks in comedy to be--the truth brought to light seems not so much to be gracefully accepted by the characters (as, for example, in Orsino's "You shall be from this time/ Your master's mistress") as to be at once taken in whole in a comic jolt, as when Beatrice and Benedick discover how their friends deceived them each into thinking the other was mad with love:

> Benedick: Come, I will have thee; but, by this light, I take thee for pity.
>
> Beatrice: I would not deny you; but, by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption.
>
> Benedick: Peace! I will stop your mouth [Kissing her],

as if for the author silence is again the perfectest herald of joy.

However, it is indicative of the new and peculiar nature of this play that when the main characters have all felt the paucity of mocking wit to deal either with painful

or with happy truth--as the lords of Navarre felt, too, at the end of their play--they blithely resume the same infertile sexual banter that they were wont to use in the beginning, as if everything and everyone were the same now as in Act I but the lover Claudio, who, partially countering the effect of the exposed Don John, now makes <u>his</u> (characteristically clumsy) little cuckoldry jokes as a matter of course, though as usual he is outdone by Benedick in roughness of content and smoothness of style:

> Claudio: I had well hoped thou wouldst have denied Beatrice, that I might have cudgelled thee out of thy single life, to make thee a double-dealer; which, out of question, thou wilt be, if my cousin do not look exceeding narrowly to thee.
>
> Benedick: Come, come, we are friends. Let's have a dance ere we are married, that we may lighten our own hearts and our wives' heels,

almost as if not only Benedick but "the Benedick" must be given the last word.

It would be as foolish to suggest there is anything ominous in the ending of this comedy in which lovers are united and music is playing as it would be to suggest that Benedick's use of "dance" and "heels" is given the full force of a double entendre rather than just the faintest trace of a play on the words. Looking back from later, harsher plays which seem to take their direction from this one--or even looking back from Benedick's following this

exchange with "Get thee [Leonato] a wife, get thee a wife: there is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn"--one might tend to over-emphasize the roughness of such a double-meaning. However, there is as yet no need.

After all, the play does end quite literally with a dance, and a merry one at that, and if the music played is not as harmonious as that heard in Athens or Arden or Illyria, that is because we are in a world unlike Athens or Arden or Illyrium. Disquieting ideas concerning the author's new sense of direction only occur if we stop to realize--as indeed we should not while the music is playing--that a mocking tinge still lingers in the air to the last despite the fact that such a tinge has been thoroughly dichotomized from the real experience of love, and that this tinge is not removed because we are in a world which is beginning, strangely, to be unlike even Navarre.

CHAPTER II

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL AND MEASURE FOR MEASURE

There is perhaps no more curious sensation in Shakespearean comedy than watching the author as he plays with those elements of characterization, plot, language and atmosphere--his Olivers and Malvolios, his Puckish mix-ups and misunderstandings, his Oberon- and Orsino-like streaks of melancholy--which seem most to endanger the happy outcome of his drama; unless it be the sensation of watching him play with those elements which seem to endanger not only dramatic outcome, but, more ominously, the very spirit of comedy itself: his cankered Don Johns, his "mix-ups" of ugly slander or death, his Navarre- or Messina-like strains of infertility and sickness and sudden disease--for none of these elements are in themselves a source of amusement (as, after all, even Malvolio is) and are in fact presented as so inherently unfunny that all laughter of characters and audience must abruptly cease at their intrusion, to resume later in the drama all the more welcome for the contrast. Yet there is another sensation to be found in Shakespearean comedy at least equally as curious: the sense one gets in viewing or reading plays like All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure that the author is no longer merely playing with elements dangerous to the comic spirit but is

deliberately bringing these elements to the fore with greater and greater frequency and intensity, no longer as stark minor contrasts to the general amusement but as full-fledged opponents to amusement's very existence. Indeed each time the laughter in these two plays comes to a complete stop in the face of one of the strange and dark shocks that occur with ever-increasing strength, one feels less and less confidence in the power--or, perhaps more accurately, the desire--of the author to let that laughter return.

And yet as one notices in these plays the strange ascendancy of a laughter that dies in the throat, one cannot help but notice what seems to give this ascendancy its sharpest impetus--for to go from the world of Much Ado About Nothing where disease and dismay and death are only permitted to enter by the back door, as it were, to the world of All's Well That Ends Well where they grip the stage at once as the black-clad court of Rousillon opens the play by discussing a dead count and an infected dying king, one has to pass through, as the author himself passed through, the kingdom of Denmark, where that author could allow all of his strains of mockery and sick melancholy to mushroom unimpaired in the more congenial atmosphere of tragedy. It is perhaps, then, the dark precedence of Hamlet which gives Shakespeare the necessary audacity to move the shock of death in his comedy-plots up from the end, as in Navarre, and from the

climax, as in Messina, to the very beginning, as here in Rousillon, as if he now takes the existence of such shocks so much for granted in his portrayals of human experience that he expects his audience to be as prepared for them at the start of the proceedings as at any other time, as they had to be prepared for Bernardo's "Who's there?" on the battlements of Elsinore. And if the plot that follows such a shock is to portray happiness rather than tragedy, that only renders the play all the more interesting, for in the universe that the author seems now most easily to envision, it is tragedy which sets itself up as the norm and comedy which must, dramatically, prove itself. What we are confronted with in Rousillon and in Measure for Measure's Vienna is no longer merely the disturbing phenomenon of an author pacing his comedy by occasional periods of time going on crutches. Time is here, from the very first, seen by the playwright as consistently, familiarly, out of joint; and in the face of such an unholy spectacle, laughter is, at best, an uncertain means of repair.

***

"In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband," says the Countess of Rousillon, as she opens All's Well That Ends Well in a new language strange to the world of Shakespearean comedy. Does the Countess mean, simply, that she has lost her second husband and is now sending her son

Bertram away to the court of the dying French king, or, rather, that her pain at parting from Bertram is so acute that she feels widowed by him as much as by the one husband she just saw die? That this latter, odder reading separates itself off from the first to become the more dominant is confirmed by the reply of the old courtier Lafeu, whose language, too, is a shifting suspension of family relationships, as he addresses himself to mother and son: "You shall find of the kind a husband, madam; you, sir, a father. He that so generally is at all times good must of necessity hold his virtue to you, whose worthiness would stir it up where it wanted, rather than lack it where there is such abundance."

Yet the fascination of both these speeches--one so brief, one so characteristically verbose and typical of a Shakespearean elder statesman's--lies not so much in their almost careless playing with such bold generic concepts as fatherhood, wifeliness, sonship or virtue, as in their splendid disregard for whether such a language of ideas may be grasped by the audience at once or not. And in the Countess's partial reply to Lafeu, the motivation behind such disregard becomes apparent:

> This young gentlewoman [Helena] had a father,--O, that 'had!' how sad a passage 'tis!--whose skill was almost as great as his honesty; had it stretched so far, would have made nature immortal, and death should have play for lack of work.

Her every word confirms the impression already created of a stageful of characters somehow so close to the realities of life and death (only think of the Countess's coupling the two in her use of "delivering" and "bury") that they can refer to and play with these realities directly by their essential names--worthiness, honesty, nature, disease--relating them to one another immediately, almost exclusive of the people in whom these realities are lodged. As we hear the Countess's words we do not so much see Helena's physician-father as a skillful and honest man, as we see the qualities of skill and honesty in themselves, related obliquely and almost accidentally to the man; just as we see in Bertram not so much a son and husband to his mother (which is certainly not what Shakespeare intended) as we see him a man to whom the concepts of son and husband have been brought into temporary relationship. And, similarly, as we hear the Countess conclude her speech with "Would, for the king's sake, he [the physician] were living! I think it would be the death of the king's disease," her very expression of the words points up again a new clarity of vision which consistently chooses to separate human beings from the stark forces which affect them, as if those forces--of disease or death or whatever--were seen now so distinctly that they can be ordered and interrelated as abstract independent entities.

It is one thing to have a character, at a random point in a drama, begin to play with personifying his emotions, as if for a moment they stood apart from him, as Berowne does in his taunting of love as if it were a separate opponent, or as Beatrice does when she speaks of "the Benedick" as if she could see it, or as Viola does, most beautifully, in her conjuring up of "Patience on a monument,/Smiling at grief" (II.iv.116-17), relating her resignation and sadness to one another as if they were two people. It is a strange universe indeed, however, when such language and such conjuring is constant, and when one begins to realize that each character is no longer toying with personifying occasional ideas or emotions, but really sees them as somehow separate from himself and refers to them continually in this abstract state even when making so casual a statement as an introduction: "She derives her honesty and achieves her goodness," says the Countess of Helena as she presents the heroine to the other characters--and such force do the naked ideas have (clothed not even in the physical beauty of a "monument"-like image) that Helena is moved at once to tears, for she, as do all the other characters on stage, seems to see such entities as honesty and goodness as so real and immediate and tangible that the mere mention of them is enough to make her understand their full content of human drama at once, without further image or explanation, just as everyone understood at

once the Countess's reference to death's having play for lack of work. It is as if death and goodness and honesty and all other forces in the universe of human action have somehow become dislodged from that universe to hang exposed and bare in all their significance as a stark backdrop to which all the characters can now refer with familiarity. And then one remembers that shock to the Shakespearean universe which marks the difference between such a backdrop-perspective being temporary, as in those shock-moments of death and love in Navarre and Messina when the characters seemed almost to be able to touch the presence of their grief or joy, and being permanent as it is in Rousillon: the successive tragic concussions of Hamlet, which brought its hero so inescapably face to face with his own motivations that a permanent wedge was driven between the two, distancing him from those motivations for his clearer vision of them so sharply and so painfully that it would seem a human being could never again avoid seeing, and playing with, if he chose, the bare forces shaping his existence: "If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,/And when he's not himself does harm Laertes,/Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it./ Who does it then? His madness" (V.ii.238-41).

This separation of a character from his world of thought and action for his naked confrontation of that world, a phenomenon peculiarly suited to tragedy, would perhaps

never have been used as effectively by Shakespeare as it is in Hamlet without the knowledge of the effectiveness of such separations in Navarre and Messina. Such stark moments of truth as the death of the French king and the slander-death of Hero had about them, more than anything else, the quality of brute shock, throwing all on stage into a harsh confrontation of what death, in itself and oblivious to human feelings, is, and allowing no room, as for example Richard II and Romeo have, for stylistic accommodation to that shock. It would be fair, in fact, to say that the measure of tragic growth betweeen the writing of Richard II and Romeo and Juliet and the writing of Hamlet is the introduction into the author's pity- or grief-moving universe, of jolting moments--and successions of moments--of pure terror, leaving the Danish protagonist no time, as Navarre and Beatrice and Benedick had no time, for all their wit, to incorporate the shock of unexplainable love or hate or death into lyrically beautiful language. Hamlet has not the leisure, as Richard does, to make of his thoughts a "little world,/In humours like the people of this world" (V.v.9-10) or prepare, in moon-stained purity of verse, for his own demise, as Romeo does. "O fie! Hold, hold, my heart!" Hamlet cries as his father, as death itself, drops out of the hidden universe into full vision before him, "And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,/But bear me

stiffly up" (I.v.92-95). It is no wonder, then, that by the end of the play, as shock follows upon shock, the hero can face his madness, or the feigning of his madness, or face truth or deception or disease or death as if he could see them, in his mind's eye, as clearly as he could see that first soul-shaking apparition which called itself his father.

In Rousillon all the characters take this facing of--and mentioning of--the bare essences of life for granted from the first, as if those essences, whether of madness or honesty or disease or death or whatever, had been dislodged so completely from the immediate context of human action by some tragic terror-shock still so sharply remembered that each abstract word seems to convey for all on stage a full content of human experience first concentrated into abstraction through pain. No flat, generalizing character says, "Death should have play for lack of work," but rather a mourning woman for whom the word "death" essentializes the impact of a husband forever lost, and against the apparent malignancy of which loss the word "goodness" takes on a poignancy which moves Helena to tears and an audience to dumb wonder. Nor is it a philosopher who puts the court of Rousillon's grief into such concentrated words, but a playwright fresh from Elsinore, who realizes and takes for granted from the start that the exposed starknesses

of human experience make a more dramatic landscape for his characters to act against than any academe or forest or black-draped throne room.

As the stage is cleared and Helena stands alone, we come into direct contact with a Shakespearean heroine quite different from the Rosalines and Rosalinds and Violas of previous comedies, with their delicate verbal minglings of fertility and merry repartee: one who takes her place beside Hero in a new universe where wit begins to take on a Don John-like harshness which makes its users seem chosen enemies to love and where even a Beatrice must abandon her language of teasing mocks--if only for a moment--or seem no more a woman. In Messina, where the playwright first juxtaposed the intermingled Rosaline-like qualities of wit and womanliness in the opposition of two distinct heroines, the wit-wielding one could still, of the two, dominate the action and somehow tease her way out of many of love's difficulties much as her sisters in Arden or Illyria were able to do, only dropping her banter at times of climactic shock to unite in spirit with her more feminine cousin. But here in Rousillon there is almost no room at all for such banter in the person of the woman who is to be heroine, for love is in danger not just at moments but constantly--indeed Bertram has just been sundered as suddenly from Helena as from his mother by his mission to the dying French king--and in

a world of such danger, a woman's power to assuage and replenish is far more important than any agility she has with words. It is not surprising, then, as we hear Helena's first speech of hesitant meditation, to discover that Shakespeare has here abandoned any Beatrice-ish elements in his central female figure for those elements of fertility and healing power which Hero had no opportunity to actively display but which now find voice in the poetically appropriate figure of a physician's daughter:

> I think not on my father,
> And these great [court] tears grace his remembrance more
> Than those I shed for him. What was he like?
> I have forgot him: my imagination
> Carries no favour in't but Bertram's.
> I am undone: there is no living, none,
> If Bertram be away (I.i.91-97).

Though she does not here use any of the "essential" words which she did earlier when asked if she merely affected the concept of sorrow ("I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too"), her language has a bareness of expression reminiscent of the court's tragedy-induced economy of words, and the blunt, child-like rhyme of "done" and "one" only emphasizes the naked simplicity of values held by the speaker: that a present lover is more important than an absent father. "But what talk we of fathers when there is such a man as Orlando?" cried Rosalind in Arden in an exclamation shot through with grace and joy (III.iv.37-38), speaking from the center of a smiling spacious world

in which, despite all threats of lionesses and green and gilded snakes, she knows that her father is absent only through her own wish to disguise herself and that her lover is hers in an instant if she but beckons. How different here are Helena's words, coming as they do out of the narrow corner of isolation into which tragedy and sorrow (which she indeed "has") has forced her, for in the uncertain world of All's Well That Ends Well an absent father is one ripped away by death and a lover is one whose affections are his own concern and out of the control of any who seek his love. No wonder, then, that Helena is forced to state plainly the hierarchy of her preference--lover over father--which Rosalind only gently implies. When one must confront known loss and rampant uncertainty in a manner which throws one back solely upon oneself (not unlike Hamlet's confronting of "this distracted globe"), truth becomes more important than beauty. The only beauty which does enter Helena's speech, in fact--and it is great--is the beauty which certainty has as it rises alone from a background of shifting darknesses:

> 'Twere all one
> That I should love a bright particular star
> And think to wed it, he is so above me.

Rosalind and Viola and Beatrice could have their stars dance, in the manner in which wit-born images do dance, with a quick movement implying infinite space for laughter.

Helena's image, however, is as steady as her actions must be, for unlike her more carelessly graceful sisters, she is in a world which allows her no room for risking one false step.

"Are you meditating on virginity?" asks Parolles as he interrupts the girl--and all at once another danger to love besides death or indifference enters the atmosphere of Rousillon, perhaps the greatest danger of all: wit. To watch, rising amidst the love-teasing language of Athens or Arden or Illyria, the love-mocking sharper exchanges of Navarre and Messina is an uneasy pastime at best, but it is not till one reaches a play like All's Well That Ends Well and a character like Parolles that the reason behind one's ill-ease emerges at last into the open. Parolles reminds us that it was not only love that was so delicately teased in Shakespeare's lyric romantic plays, but women as vessels of that love (only think of Rosalind's playful remark about her own sex's inconstancy, "You shall never take her without her answer, unless you can take her without her tongue"); and that it was this connection between women and love which was increasingly emphasized in Messina and mocked by almost everyone, with every mock harshly sexual and aimed at woman's notorious accessibility (as in Beatrice's "I would he had boarded me"). With Parolles all the harshness and misogyny of love-mocking wit comes to a complete head,

no longer tempered by the melancholy of the Navarre lords nor the natural amorousness of Claudio or Beatrice or Benedick, for Shakespeare's earlier tendency to sunder wit from sadness for the starkening of both is now in its climactic stage, and as sadness on its own has festered into Claudio-like jealousy and sickness and death, so wit-for-wit's sake has now become so chillingly inimical to love and women that only a fop can handle it. "Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly," says Helena in the play's characteristic essentializing language, immediately before Parolles makes his opening taunt at her virginity; and her words are, in fact, the bare definition of the kind of wit with which the author began to play in the infertile strains of his earlier-created Academe and in his parryings at the court of Don Pedro and Don John, now come so much into the open that his heroine can pinpoint that wit's very nature as matter of factly as if she could see it in front of her.

> To speak on the part of virginity is to accuse your mothers, which is most infallible disobedience. He that hangs himself is a virgin: virginity murders itself, and should be buried in highways, out of all sanctified limit, as a desperate offendress against nature,

says the fop, taking the very core of Helena's maidenliness and ridiculing it in his own language of personification and definition. For the first time in this play, language seems abstract in the pejorative sense, because Parolles' detaching of the quality of virginity from the living

woman before him has a coldness of approach which suggests that for him such virginity is only an object or thing, one which can be discussed as casually as one discusses a commodity, thus making his description of motherhood--the fertilest of human experiences--as barren as death: as if a mother to the speaker is no more than simply a woman who has necessarily, negatively, lost her maidenhead. Compared to the maliced detachment of such a description, Beatrice's sharp remark that she "should prove the mother of fools" seems curiously harmless and human, and Rosalind's notion that an honest woman should "never nurse her child herself, for she will breed it like a fool" echoes like laughter from some lost and sunlit Eden. And our sense of malice, and more than malice, increases as Parolles finishes his statement, his words taking on the familiar festering imagery which we have come to recognize as a sign of the rampant danger to life and love let loose ever now more frequently in the atmosphere of a Shakespearean play, whether it be found in the malignancy of the fistula or abscess gradually killing the French king, or here in a mentality no less diseased: "Virginity breeds mites, much like a cheese, consumes itself to the very paring, and so dies with feeding his own stomach." It is as if the mute presence of the "canker in a hedge" in the atmosphere of Messina and the ominous tragedy-augmented "vicious mole of nature" in

Denmark were grown so insistent that here, at last, it finds a voice.

Only a heroine whose very business--like her late father's--is health can survive in such an atmosphere, and only one whose sense of hope is so touchingly foolish in the face of darkness that that is where the author's humor perhaps most gently lies can expect to prevail. Yet this hope is Helena's, and it alone is where Shakespeare focuses our attention as he closes what is, amazingly for the scope and depth of the world presented, only the first scene of his first act, as if to suggest that it is upon his heroine's young shoulders that he rests the weight of his drama, thereby giving it the attractiveness, if not the merriment, of comedy: "The king's disease--my project may deceive me," she begins, with her characteristically bold and blunt musicality, "But my intents are fix'd, and will not leave me."

The somber tone set by the Countess at the play's opening is caught up again in the figure of the dying King of France, as his eyes, staring at the deepest and most inescapable reality that can befall a man--stark death--seem to see and to order his life and the lives of those on stage in a clear perspective. "Since I nor wax nor honey can bring home," he muses, "I quickly were dissolved from my hive,/To give some labourers room" (I.ii.65-68),

finishing his adieu to thoughts of his lost youth and maturity to beckon, with who knows how much inner sadness and wonder, to a new generation to take over a world he will never see. Again the perspective is one of tragedy, for, like the Countess, he is brought face to face with a truth he cannot escape, and must see those naked forces shaping his life which those in a more easy, spacious atmosphere may leave half-hidden, as Jaques in Arden does in his "Seven Ages" reverie which applies so well to everyone that he need not specifically apply it to himself. Here we find again the melancholy which so darkly bloomed in Navarre now present from the beginning, enveloping the stage no longer at the whims of the characters but at the whims of death itself whose sense of humor can be noted by all on stage but not shared. "Nature and sickness/Debate it at their leisure," says the King of his moment of expiration: they are the main characters in this drama, and the wise are the ones, like the King, who can see this at once and who attempt graciously to accept the comedy of the frailty of their own continued existence. So, too, the Countess, speaking in a separate scene of Helena's bitter love-pain for Bertram, sets that pain, as the king does his own, in the greater framework of acceptance and in that framework has room to bittersweetly laugh at her own similar youthful anguish, in words which are her--and her author's--immortal genuflection to the passing of time:

> Even so it was with me when I was young:
> If ever we are nature's, these are ours; this thorn
> Doth to our rose of youth rightly belong;
> Our blood to us, this to our blood is born:
> It is the show and seal of nature's truth,
> Where love's strong passion is impress'd in youth:
> By our remembrances of days foregone,
> Such were our faults, or then we thought them none
> (I.iii.123-30).

And perhaps it is because we see the King adopt Bertram as a son (I.ii.75-76: "Welcome, count;/My son's no dearer") and the Countess adopt Helena as her daughter (I.iii.150-52: "I say I am your mother;/And put you in the catalogue of those/ That were enwombed mine"), that the drama of the youthful pair which follows seems played out in the deep-humored shadows of an autumnal perspective the full dimensions of which the young hero and heroine, semi-absurdly, are not yet aware of.

As the old king is beset by a disease of the body, so the young count is beset by a disease of the soul, for Bertram has caught the infertile infection of woman-mocking wit from his companion Parolles, and perhaps the most profound irony of the play is that while Helena can instantaneously cure the king from death itself, she cannot quickly cure the man she loves from his contagion of mind. "I love your son," Helena has told the Countess. "My friends were poor, but honest; so's my love" (I.iii.202-03), a strange coupling, it would seem, even for such an awkward heroine to make, for what connection should one's friends have

with the way in which one loves? Only when we see Parolles insidiously attach himself to Bertram does Shakespeare make that connection clear, for, like Helena, Bertram is inexperienced in life, but instead of being encouraged in honesty as Helena is--"Speak truly," the Countess urged her countless times in their one short interview--he is persuaded to forsake blunt truthfulness for a witty, verbally artful insincerity. "Use a more spacious ceremony to the noble lords," the fop advises; "You have restrained yourself within the list of too cold an adieu: be more expressive to them ..." (II.i.51-54). And by the time that the King offers Helena to Bertram in marriage, in keeping with that monarch's promise that should she affect a cure she should have anything his power of majesty can give, the young count has caught--far worse than merely "the Benedick"--"the Parolles." "I cannot love her," at first he tells the King, in language that at least is honest in its infertility. But upon second thought--and the monarch's admonition--even the honesty vanishes, and his words take on the verbal assiduity and mocking edge that make him, for a moment, as politic and as tainted as his teacher:

> Pardon, my gracious lord; for I submit
> My fancy to your eyes. When I consider
> What great creation and what dole of honour
> Flies where you bid it, I find that she, which late
> Was in my noblest thoughts most base, is now
> The praised of the king (II.iii.174-79).

That Helena is still in the Count's nobler thoughts most base Shakespeare underscores almost at once, having him run to Parolles with the declaration that he will never bed his bride but will abandon her forthwith to go off to war. Bertram's declaration does not receive major emphasis in the scene, however, but rather Parolles' instantaneous taking up of that declaration with a characteristically witty affirmation: "A young man married is a man that's marr'd," re-establishing such an atmosphere of mortal danger to love that the stage now seems even more infected than it did in the king's sickroom. It was bad enough in Messina to see a figure like Claudio have his faith in love stained by the women-mocking wit of his companions, but at least those companions, even to the evil Don John, could not affect his initial capacity to love. This, however, Parolles does to Bertram, who is never even allowed to suspect that women are anything more than instruments of sex, and whose distaste for Helena seems occasioned by, more than merely her low birth (which was the emphasis of Shakespeare's source-story), the idea of coupling with such an instrument for life. "He wears his honour in a box, unseen,/That hugs his kicky-wicky here at home,/Spending his manly marrow in her arms,/Which should sustain the bound and high curvet/Of Mars's fiery steed" (11.296-300), Parolles says, in perfect agreement with the sentiments which partially lay hidden

behind Bertram's horror of Helena and the young man's initial lament, "O my Parolles, they have married me!" When infertility is this rampant, and men cut themselves off from women by war and wit, one cannot help feeling that the barren strains which Shakespeare first introduced into his universe in the Academe now hold the stage of that universe almost unchallenged, and that if the ladies are to correct and replenish such a world, they will need a more powerful means of doing so than Rosaline's sharply graceful comments to the men about "weeding this wormwood from your fruitful brains." Yet the great revelation of just how fertile Helena's means of reclaiming her husband from "the Parolles" will be, Shakespeare holds for the moment in dramatic abeyance.

"Such is the simplicity of man to hearken after the flesh," says Costard in Act I of Love's Labour's Lost (i.217-18), as Shakespeare first indroduces the figure of the fool into his world of romantic comedy--and indeed, since part of the humor in such plays derives from the amorous lords who lose sight, albeit self-consciously, of the earthy value of love amid strains of sweet melancholy, the presence of such a prayer-and-mutton character is a welcome corrective to whatever fancies are being momentarily upheld by the Navarres and Orlandos and Orsinos holding center stage. Such a fool-figure, in fact, seems even as welcome an influence

for the ladies, for while the Rosalinds and Olivias and Violas know all along that love is too earthly-real to be the subject of merely beautiful imaginings, they, too, at times succumb, with eyes open, to the half-dreaming atmospheres of their plays and seem themselves to need a corrective. This the fool always provides, revelling in his honored role in society to say anything, no matter how blunt or outrageous, to anybody, no matter how high or low--so long as it be the truth. Nor is it accidental that in Navarre or Arden or Illyria, the language of the fool is often sexually explicit, since in a world where love is so frequently transfigured to wonder by poetry almost too beautiful to be true ("Alas, poor shepherd!" says Rosalind to Silvius, "searching of thy wound,/I have by hard adventure found mine own"), the function of an inherent speaker of the truth must concern itself primarily with reminding all on stage in inescapable prose of love's physicality. (II.iv.46-50: "And I mine," Touchstone replies. "I remember when I was in love, I broke my sword upon a stone and bid him take that for coming a-night to Jane Smile. And I remember the kissing of her batler and the cow's dugs that her pretty chopt hands had milked"). Yet, though all of the fools and clowns in these romantic plays emphasize again and again man's (and woman's) hearkening after the flesh, from greasy Joan's keeling her pot to Feste's closing of

his Twelfth Night with "But when I came, alas! to wive,/ With hey, ho, the wind and the rain;/By swaggering could I never thrive," none of these upholders of the blunt can quite prepare us for the Clown of Rousillon:

> Clown: I am out o' friends, madam, and I hope to have friends for my wife's sake.
>
> Countess: Such friends are thine enemies, knave.
>
> Clown: Y'are shallow, madam, in great friends; for the knaves come to do that for me which I am aweary of. He that ears my land spares my team, and gives me leave to in the crop: if I be his cuckold, he's my drudge....
>
> Countess: Wilt thou ever be a foul-mouthed and calumnious knave (I.iii.43-62)?

Not so much the coarseness of the Clown's sexual reference separates him from Costard or Touchstone or Feste (for all these men are, from time to time, as imagistically graphic), nor even the strange weariness with which he refers to physical pleasure in his "drudge"-comment, so characteristic of the dark atmosphere of this play--but rather his repetition, at almost every opportunity, of similar sexual references, as if for him clown-coarseness only need concern itself with sex, as the <u>only</u> human foible worth any notice or comment. Almost every verbal opening his court-masters give him, he fills with a blunt "foul-mouthed and calumnious" reply, the number and consistency of which seem, in contrast to his less frequently foul-spoken brothers in earlier plays, to point out a preoccupation with the

physical mechanics of love bordering on obsession. Such a preoccupation, in fact, reminds us of no one else but Parolles, whose similar verbal concentration on women as instruments of pleasure and on the drudge-like indifference of that pleasure is even more frequent, far more coarse, and perhaps literally obsessive. It is almost as if Shakespeare, in this drama of an almost-dying king and a widowed countess and a tainted hero and an isolated heroine, is making the one character in romantic comedy--the fool--whom the audience could always rely upon for a breath of fresh air when the atmosphere became too heady with melancholy, a figure whom it is difficult, if not impossible, to look to with any degree of comfort or assurance.

And yet the differences between this professionally outrageous court figure and the figure of Parolles are everywhere apparent, suggesting almost that the playwright has made the language of the two characters outwardly alike only to point up more forcibly the entirely different drives of each, which motivate that language. The Clown, it is true, does emphasize and re-emphasize the theme of woman as a purely sexual object, but then that <u>was</u> one of his functions in Arden and Illyria, and if Shakespeare now has him concentrate on that one theme <u>to</u> the point of obsession, that is because the very idea of romance in this play is in mortal threat of destruction. The fool must uphold, in

the physical language that is his by right, the fact of the existence of love, and must uphold it in nothing more than its sexual merits and liabilities alone, because those who would impair romance would do so not by vague melancholy innuendo aimed at teasing amorous fancyings but by cold mock aimed at killing love at the very quick of its sexual root. If the Clown's language is more drudge-darkened and coarse than one might expect, that is because in the tragedy-cramped atmosphere of his court his masters all know, too, of the threat to sexual love, and openly admit, without fool-prompting, their own hearkening after the flesh (only think of the Countess's "Our blood to us, this to our blood is born"), forcing the Clown who must vie with this frankness to go beyond it to grating, slightly misdirected bluntness. "I am driven on by the flesh," he says, with far more urgency than that of Costard's similar admission; "and he needs must go that the devil drives" (I.iii.31-33).

Yet over all of the Clown's words, no matter how graphic or frequent or urgent, plays the earthy fool-humor of truth, and if his concern for the sexual act is concentrated down to bare physical mechanics--as everyone's concern for everything in this play is pared down to essentials, whether physical or spiritual--that concern is, in each context, positive, for, unlike Parolles, he does not mock women as sexual instruments to ridicule them into ill-

esteem, but simply to mention them as bluntly as the fop does, without ever using any of the fop's malice, calling attention to his own impudence all the while as a man whose profession it is to simply describe any natural function in itself at an appropriately unexpected moment. And it is all part of the joke that when he goes too far in a Parolles-direction and taints his wit with evil innuendo, any of the play's characters can appeal directly to the smiling man behind the mocks, as the Countess does after the Clown has made his reference to the devil-driving wickedness of his urge for Isbel. "Thy marriage, sooner than thy wickedness," she says.

No one would think of making such an appeal to Parolles, because he mocks not for the general amusement and certainly not for the exposing of truth but rather for his own private ends and for the general undermining of all. As Helena and Bertram are seen largely in the shadowed perspective of the Countess and the King, so we see Parolles to a great extent through the appropriately less profound figure of Lafeu who, nevertheless, has enough of a sense of right-value to set Parolles at once in the place he belongs: "The soul of this man is his clothes," Lafeu says, after one of their numerous encounters (II.v.49), and the description is perfection. There is no man in Parolles to appeal to behind his elaborate and tainted words because, unlike a

professional fool who also relies upon the shock-effect of speech, this character is his mocks (as his name, after all, is "Parolles"), directed from within by nothing at all except perhaps a general malevolence. It is almost as if Parolles had elected to take to himself all the negative features of a fool--coarse, occasionally vile language, abrupt mocking bluntness, and a dependence upon others to support his activities--without any of those saving graces of self-consciousness and good intention that make a fool an object of admiration rather than scorn. To serve society as a clown is one thing; to act like a clown without so much as a suspicion of the fact is another. "A very tainted fellow," says the Countess, upon discovering that he has persuaded her son to run away from his wife, "and full of wickedness./My son corrupts a well-derived nature/With his inducement" (III.ii.89-91). But then only a tainted fool would have described the coupling of a man and woman in the bluntness of "spending his manly marrow in her arms" without adding, as the Clown--a pure fool--does, the equally blunt but necessarily positive corrective, "That's the loss of men, though it be the getting of children" (III.ii.44-45). And the turning point of the play is that as Parolles' negative description of the essential sexual experience is picked up by Bertram, so the Clown's replenishing description is caught up whole by Helena: the

innately fertile and healing function of the Shakespearean woman joining with the innately corrective humanizing function of the Shakespearean fool to save a man from taking his own male integrity so seriously that it, and its entire universe, can do nothing but fester and feed on itself.

In Shakespeare's source-story, when the Bertram-figure tells his wife as he abandons her that he shall never claim her till she, impossibly, bear his child, she substitues herself in the dark for the maid he is wooing, and so conceives--and in All's Well That Ends Well Helena practices this deception to the letter. But it is another spirit than mere situation comedy which plays over her trick, as Helena later characterizes Bertram's action in the night scene as "lust [which] doth play with what it loathes" (IV.iv.24-25). She does not so much seem to be reclaiming her place as a wife by her conception-deception as much as reclaiming for Bertram the coldly neglected role of husband. "Titled goddess," he begins, as he woos the maid Diana in words which, in an earlier Shakespearean comedy, would seem the very spirit of moving male amorousness; but as his speech unfolds we hear in it the voice of Parolles, though couched in an elegance of which the man who told Helena that "to speak on the part of virginity is to accuse your own mothers" is incapable: "... for you are cold and stern;/And now you should be as your mother was/

When your sweet self was got." And by the time he gets to saying to the girl, "Stand no more off,/But give thyself unto my sick desires,/Who then recovers" (IV.ii.33-36), the ugliness of the context marks the difference between the sense of melancholy that "sick" had in the hands of Berowne or Orsino, and the almost literal meaning that the word has here in the hands of a man willing to corrupt that which he despises for the purpose of his own amusement. Only the sense of Helena's wifely womanly purpose which is in the air before this scene is played out gives the exchange the dark humor it has, and only when Helena acknowledges the day after the tryst that in the very midst of Bertram's sterilely selfish act of love she has, despite him, made him fruitful does a bright ray of laughter burst unobstructed through the play's danger-thick air, for what can be merrier than the irrepressibility of health as it rises out of the husk of old sickness?

> Diana: Let death and honesty
> Go with your impositions, I am yours,
> Upon your will to suffer.
>
> Helena: Yet, I pray you:
> But with the word the time will bring on summer,
> When briers shall have leaves as well as thorns,
> And be as sweet as sharp. We must away;
> Our wagon is prepar'd, and time revives us.

In an instant, the tragedy-perspective of the play seen so clearly in the King and Countess's (and even Diana's) acceptance of life as but prologue to death and Bertram's

acceptance of innocence as but prologue to evil receives happy reversal, as Helena, ripening as is the earth around her, establishes a new, or rather rediscovered perspective: "All's well that ends well!" she cries (IV.iv.28-35), reminding her audience, and herself, that it is equally valid to see death not as finality but as prologue to new life--as winter can be seen as ending well in spring. And it is the special marvel of this play that Shakespeare makes the triumphant replenishing moment when Helena cures her husband's physical infertility almost simultaneous with that moment when the source of Bertram's spiritual infertility, Parolles, is rooted out of him forever.

It seems more than merely coincidence that Shakespeare immediately precedes Helena and Bertram's night scene with the scene of Bertram witnessing the unmasking of Parolles' corrupt nature, as a group of fellow-soldiers trick the fop in Bertram's presence into giving a scandalous opinion of his young master's true worth, the only accurate part of which falls perhaps sharper on his listener's ears than the fop's subsequent tissue of slanders: "a foolish idle boy, but for all that very ruttish" (IV.iii.242-43). "A pox upon him!" cries the Count, eyes partially opened at last, applying to his old companion an appropriately diseased expression. This is the scene, deriving its harsh laughter from the violence "trueth" can have in nature when there is falsehood

to be exposed, which clears the air for Helena's otherwise questionable triumph and cry of "All's well!"--making, as it does, Bertram's inadvertent fathering of a child seem less an accident on his part than a confirmation, however unaware, of a "well-derived nature" emerging from a plaguey cloud to reap the first fruits of well-being.

> I am not a day of season,
> For thou mayst see a sunshine and a hail
> In me at once; but to the brightest beams
> Distracted clouds give way: so stand thou forth;
> The time is fair again (V.iii.32-36),

and in the somber slow beauty of the lines we recognize the autumnal voice of the King of France, delighting in his own remembered rescue from disease and Bertram's recent rescue from months of war, at the same time as he mourns the supposed death of Helena who, as did Hero, allows herself to be presumed perished to emphasize the bitter seriousness of the injustices done her. Again the King establishes the skeletal perspective of the starknesses of "sickness and nature" and death and health against which the characters play out their lives; and, as Helena did, emphasizes the burgeoning of future hope and rebirth in the scheme of things over the deadnesses of the past. But, unlike Helena, the King is evening-old, and while upholding the great cycle of seasons of light and dark and light again, he cannot help but note the frailty of man amid the grandness of that cycle:

All is whole;
Not one word more of the consumed time.
Let's take the instant by the forward top,
For we are old, and on our quick'st decrees
Th'inaudible and noiseless foot of time
Steals ere we can effect them.

Yet though the lives of the characters in the Rousillon palace chamber are still as frail and as potentially endangered as in the play's first scene, light and rebirth are now in the ascendancy, for Helena, at the climactic moment of the drama, was speaking for the whole universe of Rousillon when she said, "Time revives us."

The presence in this play of two characters, the King and the Countess, who each seem to have the grand perspective of good and evil and life and death and the pities and terrors of human experience somehow ordered in their minds and in their majestic dark language, seems in the last scene of the drama to set the previous action more strongly even than before in the half-playful shadows of their sadly earned wisdom--perhaps because for the only time in the play the two rulers are on stage together. Just as the King brightens amid his meditations to see the presumably penitent Bertram and pardons the young man, the abrupt arrival of the maid Diana brings the last traces of bitterness in Bertram to a head: "Certain it is I lik'd her," he says, "And boarded her i' the wanton way of youth./ She knew her distance and did angle for me ...,/And I had

that which any inferior might/At market-price have bought" (11.212-21)--and the King, for whom such language only confirms new suspicions that Helena perished by foul play hides again his brightest beams and broods over the Count, now put into custody, as if he spoke for the whole new-darkened universe of Rousillon when, upon the first shock of suspicion of Bertram, he said, "I am wrapp'd in dismal thinkings." "Now, justice on the doers!" says the Countess, even if the justice be the destruction of her own son, even if the pain of the destruction be hers to feel the most. Again we see a world plunged into sudden infection and uncertainty, even at the moment when we know that brightness is, in the person of Helena, about to come forth into dominance--but this time, the darkness and strange bitternesses of such a world are focused partially in the persons of those two majestic twilit figures who have the power to pardon or to punish, to assuage or to terrify, with a grand abruptness somehow indicative of ultimate purpose; and therefore this time the darkness has not quite the quality of utter out-of-joint chaos that it had at the play's beginning. "Take her away," the King suddenly says of Diana; "I do not like her now." But instead of regarding this new reversal as a mechanical trick of comedy, as in Messina, or a hidden trick of tragedy for which there is, sickeningly, no explanation to be sought, as in Elsinore,

we look to the throne, the visible center of gravity from which the trick issued, and regard the reversal as neither more nor less than another whim of the King's--just as, if we stop to remember, the order to Bertram to marry Helena in the first place issued from the person of the King, and was unquestioningly accepted by the Countess and old Lafeu.

There is a slight but evident movement through the play of the King's gathering unto himself a corner of the abrupt inscrutable characteristics of the very universe of Rousillon--taking unto himself a small portion of the strange mixture of sunshine and hail which life is and which only the old know cannot be changed to suit one's personal convenience--and, in his function as focus of authority for all his subjects, of his trying to mirror the unknowable justice of that universe in commands allowing for no disobedience or escape. Yet part of the perpetual attractiveness of the King and the Countess and even Lafeu is that, in the very midst of their assumption of a fragment of nature's authority over human conduct, they are each incorrigibly human, and when faced with the shambles of events which no amount of their own authority can order, they lose their equilibriums and get--as Lafeu does at Parolles and the Countess at the Clown and, now, the King at Bertram--sometimes engagingly, sometimes sputteringly mad, abandoning the mantle of grand dispassionate anger for

the more familiar joys of a real fit of pique. "I think thee now some common customer," the monarch hurls at Diana in exasperation at his own lack of apprehension of the events in which she played a part, thus setting himself up in all his fallibility for the truthful impudence of the girl's reply: "By Jove, if ever I knew man, 'twas you."

It is at that point in the drama when these King-initiated shock-commands and reversals come most quickly--at that point when age and experience have tried to imitate nature by ordering the disorders of the play to whatever extent they are able--that Helena appears from offstage like a fresh young current with a shock of her own initiating: her return, great with child, to life--making that return to rebirth and order which the King and Countess could only desire but not effect, happy actuality. Just as the King's attempted mirroring of nature's unpredictability made those plot-devices which he initiated seem not so much comedy-contrived as somehow that which was to be expected in an inscrutable universe, so Helena's mirroring of nature's cycle of fertility following cold deadness seems to make her re-emergence into life far more natural than was Hero's, for she has allied herself with Time, which has indeed revived her royally. At the same moment that the King absorbs, for the whole universe of Rousillon, as it were, the glad repercussions of her re-appearance, the

last scales of barrenness fall from Bertram's eyes, as he sees--and accepts, in words of blunt unfigured simplicity--his wife's fruitfulness and his own:

King: Is there no exorcist
Beguiles the true office of mine eyes?
Is't real that I see?

Helena: No, my good lord;
'Tis but a shadow of a wife you see;
The name and not the thing.

Bertram: Both, both. O pardon!

As for the Countess, as freshly struck by the jolt of seeing rebirth as ever at the beginning she was struck by seeing death, she--most dramatically for one so accustomed to put even the most soul-shaking events into essential verbal perspective--remains, during this reunion and to the play's very end, mute.

Only Lafeu, talkative as ever, remains to set in ordered vision the one discordant note in the scene: the infected Parolles, source of most of the play's spiritual malignancy. It is part of the peculiar justice of this play in which nature cracks all kernels of deadness open through a king's commands or a girl's healing surge of power, or, greater, simply through its own burgeoning whim to make "the time fair again"--that the man most vulgarly fool-like, who revelled in masking his bluntness beneath an insidious filigree of wit, must now, exposed as he his before all in all his corruption, <u>be</u> a fool if he is to

survive. This the fop realized at the moment of his initial exposure before Bertram (IV.iii.377-79: "And Parolles, live/Safest in shame!" he cried to himself, "being fool'd, by foolery thrive!"), and this Lafeu reminds him of now with the play almost at its close, as the old statesman takes on the fop as he would a hired clown, complete with clown's name: "Good Tom Drum, lend me a handkercher: so, I thank thee. Wait on me home, I'll make sport with thee" (ll.326-28), for, after all, in Rousillon it is bluntness and stark truth that all the characters are urgently interested in, and even a Parolles can serve them in this way, if he but leave his convoluted stylishness aside. "Let thy courtesies alone," says Lafeu in afterthought, almost as if he were thinking beyond Parolles to all the harm done by wit in Navarre and Messina, though milder, as well, "they are scurvy ones."

This final glimpse of Parolles, sad and distasteful, reminds us that the strains of sickness and disease and mockery and death in this play are too harsh to be dismissed by the author merely to meet the exigencies of a happy comic ending, as Malvolio, for example, could be dismissed as someone more misguided than festeringly corrupt--and Shakespeare does not here attempt such a dismissal. Husband and wife (and unborn child) are reunited under the aegis of the majestic pair who are their father and mother

in a world burgeoning with new life, as spring burgeons after dead winter; but there is too much of winter in the play to be quickly forgotten, far more even than there was among the blood-nipping ways of Messina, and no one on stage behaves as if he has forgotten.

In the scene's last lines--fittingly given to the King as somehow the holder of the clearest perspective in Rousillon of the backdrop to life of pain and joy and love and death--the dark monarch can only refer to present laughter in terms of past anguish, both experiences having been felt too elementally by everyone to, ever, be spoken of separately again:

> All seems well; and if it end so meet,
> The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet.

And if the company's laughter does not ring out as freely as it has at the end of previous comedies, it is a laughter valued by all on stage as accordingly all the more precious--as perhaps any gift in life is all the more precious which is but tenuously held ("All seems well; and if it end so meet") and yet is, for all its tenuousness, somehow, amazingly, won.

***

It is usually as unnecessary to question what it is that makes a play a comedy as it is to question what makes the sun rise, for whatever rules we may eventually find

dissolve as strange impertinences before the bright face of the phenomenon itself, which no amount of analysis can make seem one whit less irrepressible or miraculous than it first appears to be. However, when faced with plays like All's Well That Ends Well and, especially, Measure for Measure, the need for such questioning becomes urgent, because in these works, though almost every dramatic element of characterization and plot and scene seems to prepare us for brightness, brightness seldom, if ever, comes--and when confronted with such a void, thinking back on and analyzing the characteristics of that which should have filled it becomes our only contact with the happy phenomenon that has been lost. Then if we get the sense in Measure for Measure that the playwright has placed us in a dark world filled with sounds of morning only that he might deliberately wake us there to find no dawn, that should make us all the more curious to find out what was so characteristic of the light we expected, that makes us miss it so.

When we see the opening mourning scene of All's Well That Ends Well or, as here, the opening of Measure for Measure, in which the Duke and Angelo stand poised to spin out the drama between their two strange polarities, it is not so much the absence of ready laughter in the lines that marks the play's distance from familiar comedy, for many were such sober passages in Much Ado About Nothing; nor

the darkness of the setting, which is, after all, not altogether dissimilar from the nocturnal Athenian forest or the shadows of the Twelfth Night; nor the apparent austerity of the characters themselves, reminiscent, as it possibly is, of the remoteness of a figure like Theseus; nor even the initial uncertainty that we might anticipate of the possibility of a happy ending, for though Jack had not his Jill at the end of Love's Labour's Lost, the mixed emotions of the last scene could not outweigh the greater merriment of the play as a whole. Rather, what we feel in the opening of Measure for Measure is the absence of the comic spirit itself, the spirit which in earlier plays lay behind any separate and unamusing facets of the drama and tempered their strangeness with delight, and which now at last we may begin to define by the negative space it leaves.

Perhaps the one quality essential to Shakespearean comedy, and missing here, is the sense the author usually conveys to his audience of the assurance of the power of comedy: that, more than any presence or absence of happy remarks or landscapes or characters or even happy outcomes, his portrayal of the scope of human experience is being guided by the fact that--for the precious duration of this one play, at least--the characters' capacity for laughter, whether it is called upon or not, is strong enough to unite

whatever elements of life are disparate and painful, and to fuse those elements into a whole so delightful that even pain, however great, seems to have a place which neither characters nor audience nor author would do without, if it were to change the magic of the play's all-over shape. "No night is now with hymn nor carol blest," says Titania of the dark confusion into which her world has been plunged:

> Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
> Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
> That rheumatic diseases do abound:
> And thorough this distemperature we see
> The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
> Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
> And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
> An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
> Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
> The childing autumn, angry winter, change
> Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
> By their increase, now knows not which is which.
> And this same progeny of evils comes
> From our debate, from our dissension:
> We are their parents and original (II.i.102-17).

"Do you amend it then," Oberon replies; "it lies in you"--and in his reply is caught whole, like some unwary butterfly, the quick spirit of Shakespearean comedy. There is in all such plays some tenuous control over landscapes and language and elements of plot which the author seems to place magically, absurdly, in the hands of the characters themselves to shape as they will, so that while certain of the dark atmospheres or personages or events in their dramas may prove too much for them--as, for example, his shipwreck threatens to become too much for Sebastian, or the

machinations of Duke Frederick too much for Orlando--those characters still seem somehow to be more the initiators and beneficiaries of the action than the victims of it: no one even is so shocking or painful that one or another of the leading figures cannot leap gracefully on its pain and turn it by good humor to his or her own purposes, as Viola does when she hopes that her own shipwreck will have "made my own occasion mellow" (I.ii.41). Seldom in these plays does the author allow any dangerous action to have evil consequences of an irrevocable nature, as in tragedy. Rather, he subdues the force, if not the existence, of the evil elements of life so that his characters may appear to have the power of playing with danger in their actions without that danger ever catching them permanently in its coils. By giving his characters the illusion of perfect freedom and ease of movement, in fact, he makes them seem masters of their fate by nothing more than the power of their own good spirits alone--making dramatic comedy at its most essential seem nothing more, after all, than the sustained illusion that the process of life exists to enhance the characters rather than, as in tragedy, to impair them.

Only in events such as the death of the French king in Love's Labour's Lost and the slander-death of Hero in Much Ado About Nothing and the many diseases and greater slander-death in All's Well That Ends Well, and in the

language and landscapes that grow in infection throughout these plays, are the characters faced with shocks against which their capacity for laughter (or indeed their capacity to even act) counts as nothing. Then perhaps that is why their laughter, and ours, ceases at those shock-moments, rather than for any lack of merry lines or amusing plot: because at each of these moments, these people are confronted with an event of such magnitude--whether of disease or death or even love, in the abrupt new way the author increasingly chooses to portray it--that the event takes the action out of their hands and makes them painfully bend to its own decree, as the Academe lords have to bend to death because they cannot change it, or as Beatrice has to bend to her love for Benedick despite herself, or as Helena has to bend to the rampant disease threatening her lover or choose, as she does, to fight it with an urgency which abandons the graces of comedy.

Yet in the earlier two of the plays the emergence of such inescapable consequences of human life as disease or death is still an occurrence infrequent enough to give the characters a sense of their own ability to turn hail into sunshine (as in Beatrice's cry of "Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!" which made her succumbing to terrifying love seem a matter of her own blithe initiative) and to give the audience a sense of life as a proud merriment.

But in the Denmark-charged atmosphere of Rousillon, every action each character performs seems to have implied in it the danger that, once performed, its consequences are beyond the doer's control and fully capable of coming back at him with independent intensity, as when the King wonders when his disease will kill him, or when the Countess wonders how much her son's ill-activities will corrupt his nature, or when Helena wonders, not semi-self-consciously as in Arden or Illyria, but stark-genuinely, whether her pursuit of Bertram will lead to her own destruction. In every case, the danger to the characters is <u>real</u> and out of their reach to rectify, as the play's chain of events becomes more and more like ominous fetters linking those characters to their universe and making them face fully the good or evil consequences of what they are doing, so that Bertram, for example, cannot take part in the seduction that is his "comedy"-task to perform without having to confront later the taint in himself that led to his participation--though Demetrius in Athens can dismiss his willful pursuit of the wrong woman with a merry laugh, and correct it by happy accident. Then when, in <u>Measure for Measure</u>'s opening scene, we see a strange Duke make all of the characters in his play pawns in some unexplained moral test, we are in a world where none of the characters, the Duke himself perhaps included, can apparently take one false step without

coming face to face with a universe which hems them in on all sides, holding them somehow responsible, as in tragedy, for everything which they intentionally or unintentionally do (I.i.73: "The heavens give safety to your purposes!" Angelo says to the Duke)--a lowering universe from which no capacity for laughter can distance them nor put their audience, even for a Helena-like moment of bright hope, at ease.

"Heaven doth with us as we with torches do," says the Duke in his opening comments, "Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues/Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike/As if we had them not," as from the first he speaks as casually of the shaping forces of the universe as he would of an old acquaintance familiar to all on stage who are listening. That there is no mourning throne room, whether of Elsinore or Rousillon, and no shock of disease or death reverberating through the atmosphere makes his essentializing words of light and heaven and virtue seem all the more curiously dramatic in their implication that the speaker and listeners are so close to the stark backdrops to their world of good and evil and life and death that their most ordinary passages of conversation may contain extraordinary revelations of the very nature of existence, not spoken as if produced by the goading impetus of tragedy (as in Hamlet's "Who does it then? His madness"), but simply as everyday truths which everyone now takes for

granted, produced apparently by nothing more than the situation of the moment. And while his words perhaps first remind us of old Lafeu's "holding of his virtue to you, whose worthiness would stir it up," they are still more strongly reminiscent, in their slow beauty of phrase and occasional flame-like imagery, of the utterances of the King and Countess, both of whom not only assumed the weighty mantle of such language, but seemed to smile at the audacity of the assumption.

Shakespeare focuses our attention on the Duke at his first appearance far more strongly than he did on the mature Rousillon figures at theirs, for he seems to place, in an unprecedented manner, the main strands of the drama in this dark figure's hands--almost as if he were, by doing so, trying to make up for the fact that all the other characters in Vienna, as were Helena and Bertram and Parolles and Diana in their play, are far more constricted by their actions than they are the confident initiators of them. Shakespeare here seems to be preserving the illusion of comedy only for and through the Duke, who does act with freedom and large ease in his environment, while all the other characters, as in some anguished form of high drama, have to fend for themselves in a world of whose purposes they can never be certain. But though the Duke's ease in his environment might be a source of amusement to himself, it is less so

to the audience, for he seems less an ordinary being in whose freedom in an unpredictable world they may rejoice and, through a common human bond, take pride, than he seems an extraordinary projection of that world itself, not taking on, as did the King and Countess, a small corner of its dark authority, but rather the whole scope of its capacity for terror and pity, or, as he puts it at one point, "morality and mercy."

> We have with special soul
> Elected him our absence to supply,
> Lent him our terror, dress'd him with our love,
> And given his deputation all the organs
> Of our own power,

says the Duke of Angelo--and though the speech is directed at the young man at his initial entrance, its main emphasis seems to fall on the forces of terror and love themselves, which are apparently the Duke's alone, to give and to take away. Then when this dark figure, appropriately disguised as a hooded monk, absents himself to blend into the background of his universe, where, indistinguishable from it, his presence can be felt shaping and guiding and spinning out the scheme of action, it is impossible not to feel that he leaves behind a stageful of characters who at every turn are left to the mercies of their own vulnerable humanity in a world of whose dangers they can be no more sure than Hamlet could be sure how much the actions he was performing were killing his soul. It is impossible not to feel, in

the Duke's absence, that this play, with all of its potentially comic characters--a stick of male virtue, a beautiful maiden, an over-impetuous lover and his pregnant fiancée--and with all of its potentially comic situations of false accusations and bedroom substitutions and hairsbreadth escapes from beheadings, is being shaped against its grain by a spirit not unlike that of tragedy, with the playwright allowing neither characters nor audience to forget, no matter how close a situation is to possible laughter, how very much closer it is to real ugliness and probable disaster:

> Lucio: Why, how now, Claudio? Whence comes this restraint?
>
> Claudio: From too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty (I.ii.127-28)--

and in this brief exchange the world of Vienna is caught whole: characteristically off-balance, as it remains for several acts in the wake and reverberations of the Duke's absence. Claudio is arrested for fornication at the insistence of Angelo, who is prepared to punish the offense by a legal death penalty which the Duke never enforced. Yet though the scene may be played lightly on stage, there is something in the very nature of the words and atmosphere surrounding it that makes any laughter resulting from such playing nervous at best, and filtered through with uncertainty. Not so much the situation of Claudio's crime

throws the stage into darkness, for the fornication is described in a manner which most underplays its undoubted seriousness ("She [Julietta] is fast my wife,/Save that we do the denunciation lack/Of outward order"), as if the author were still leaving maximum room for free audience amusement from events in his source story; and the death penalty itself is so absurd in its severity that its very incongruity could be a potential source of mirth. Rather, it is the naturalness this unnatural situation seems to have in the unnatural city of Vienna--whose brothel-keepers and procurers and clientele fill the stage like a Parolles multiplied--which blunts much of the potential ridiculousness of the scene, and makes the events described and the actions portrayed seem not incongruous at all but only the direct and bitter fruit of that city's tainted atmosphere.

Just as we are on the verge of settling into the comedy of the situation and allying our sympathies with whatever stout distress or gentle bewilderment the young man might understandably display, Claudio follows his "too much liberty" with "Our natures do pursue/Like rats that ravin down their proper bane,/A thirsty evil, and when we drink we die"--a description of the act of love which even Hero's Claudio, at his moments of sharpest doubts of romance, would have never thought to utter, leaving such diseased vilifications to Don John, as even, after all, Bertram left

statements of this peculiar degree of darkness to Parolles. To hear such words, spoken seemingly with no conscious malice, from the lips of no villain but rather a romantic hero is to realize how deeply disease is now saturated into the playwright's world of what is potentially love-comedy--so deeply, in fact, that almost at every point in the drama where laughter could or does arise, we find ourselves not caught up in its free momentum but instead stopped dead by the contagioned atmosphere from which it springs, as if the author meant us to question just what in the characters makes them prone to that peculiar color of humor and what dark forces in ourselves might make us respond to it accordingly.

Anyone who would pause even an instant after Titania's speech on "the mazed world"--as her husband certainly does not--to dwell on the contagion it contained would be missing the point of a play and a universe where contagion only exists mischievously to amaze the world and be all the more blithely dispelled by the inhabitants for its trouble. Yet in Vienna even more than in Rousillon, such pausing--as unfair to the spirit of comedy as stopping after Viola's shipwreck to exclaim, "But the girl almost got killed!"--is what the author constantly seems to be forcing us to do, everywhere emphasizing in his drama its distance from Athens and Illyria and its proximity to Navarre and Messina

and, ominously, Elsinore, as if he has seen too far into the nature of contagion and disease ever to deal lightly with these phenomena again. When chaos and death enter his drama now, even from their most casual mention in whatever comic source-story he uses, they enter with the full power of forces which are seen to have too much of a dark integrity of their own to yield to any purpose as frail as that of a character's whim or an audience's desire for general amusement. They may yield only, in fact, to a character such as the Duke, who perhaps has the universe-power to control them, and by their yielding provide the occasional breadth of space necessary for all others on stage to laugh <u>because</u> of life rather than, as in tragedy, despite it. But the Duke is singularly absent from this Claudio-Lucio encounter, and when we look in this scene, as apparently the playwright intends us to, for some comic relief, we find ourselves stopped and stopped again line after line by some clot of life-darkness over which laughter <u>will</u> not easily flow.

"Thou art always figuring diseases in me," says one of those First Gentlemen so ubiquitous to the world of Shakespearean drama (I.ii.53-54), concluding an elaborate wit-skirmish with Lucio which contained, among other things, ample accusations of foppery. Such accusations, lightly put as they are here, might move any audience to mirth, especially when the playwright seems to counter their pos-

sible harmfulness with the stout "how now" concern of Lucio for Claudio. However, Shakespeare apparently disperses Lucio's taint only to concentrate it more forcibly again at the one point where it would do the most damage to any bright atmosphere at all inherent in the man's light-hearted remarks to his apprehended friend, as Lucio follows his genuine commiseration for the prisoner with an equally genuine commiseration not on the young man's punishment but on the singular imprudence of getting caught. "I had as lief have the foppery of freedom as the morality of imprisonment," he cries, holding up and counterpoising in one brief sentence two alternatives neither one of which may strike his listeners as particularly appealing. He succeeds in appearing, in fact, in this one short scene, as if he would fill the place of Parolles or at least not be accused for want of trying, despite the possible clownish goodness of his heart. One of the few clear distinctions in the miasma-like atmosphere of Rousillon, at least, was that Parolles and the Clown were set opposite one another, to separate two quite different sources of tainted humor. But here foul-mouthed fop and fool seem to be uneasily, albeit at times amusingly, mixed in one outrageous personality, privately festering diseases and then publicly revelling in them with such good-natured delight that one never knows whether the man is acting out of ignorance or sheer

blatancy. And by the time, two scenes later, that he urges Isabella to save her brother Claudio, the inconsistencies of his character are maintained so unchangingly that the audience must begin to face the knowledge that this figure of comic relief--in itself a strange necessity for a play which is supposedly comic to have--is, like his whole brothel-world, so inherently chaotic that he will never provide, in the midst of all his raucous good humor, one moment's peace for easy, free laughter.

One of the most curious features of Much Ado About Nothing was the polarizing of the feminine qualities of wit and tenderness in two romantic heroines, each of whom tempered the other, and one of the most disquieting features of All's Well That Ends Well was the emergence of one painfully plain-spoken heroine alone, who was so threatened by the disease which wit had become that her tenderness and power to heal were all she had with which to face her world. But curiousness and ill-ease count as nothing when we meet the central female figure of Measure for Measure, for so constricting is the universe of her play--threatening her with a brother's death from an excess of fertility, and bringing her the news through a messenger whose very language is sick with sexual mock ("Hail, virgin, if you be," says the irrepressible Lucio, "as those cheek-roses/Proclaim you are no less!")--that she can use neither wit nor fertile warmth

without the greatest risk, for both seem mortally tainted. No wonder, then, that Isabella here and throughout most of the drama is hesitant, even to the painful point of appearing incapable, of relying upon either quality to confront her considerable difficulties. "O, let him marry her!" she exclaims, with a pure simplicity all the more poignant for its uselessness in the situation, when she is told of Claudio and Julietta. But when she discovers that Angelo's Vienna allows no room for such simplicity, as Helena discovered that a king's command was not alone enough to win her husband's love, any conviction she may have had in her own replenishing power vanishes as nothing. Her sky has not even a bright particular star for her to seek, seeming, as it does, to be part of an Elsinore-like universe where, in the Duke's absence, the blind rules the blind, and where belief in hope is a comedy in which she refuses to partake:

> Isabella: Alas! What poor ability's in me
> To do him good?
>
> Lucio: Assay the power you have.
>
> Isabella: My power? Alas, I doubt (I.iv.75-78)--

But participate she does when, after Lucio tells her there is an Angelo whom she can successfully seek, she at once capitulates to confidence ("Commend me to my brother. Soon at night/I'll send him certain word of my success"), never realizing that the deputy's name could be one of the

cruellest jokes her universe could play on her.

"There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain," Viola tells her gallant rescuer from shipwreck; "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.45-49), toying as lightly with the possibility of corruption as would a child with the possibility of old age. Yet the process of following the gallant romantic figures of Navarre and Messina and, especially, Rousillon is a process of watching dark possibility become black reality, as the inner strain of the Academe-lords' infertility becomes in Benedick contagious mockery and in Hero's Claudio sick distrust, till, in the person of Bertram, no well-made exterior of warmth or wit can make up for the force-to-emergence of a deep-seated character flaw which calls the whole concept of a romantic hero into question. Yet not until we come to a world like Vienna and a character like Angelo do we discover just how far the playwright can go in bringing out those forces inimical to romance's very existence, as we see Shakespeare portray the young deputy, in the great scenes with Isabella, as a well of pollution too deep to be healed or even approached by the woman he loves--so deep indeed that no impetuous Rosaline or Beatrice or Helena (least of all, the remote maiden the author gives us here) can make this

lover's mind even begin to suit. It is not surprising, then, to discover that in these scenes Shakespeare moves the interactions of Angelo and Isabella beyond the dimension of love-drama, since love alone is no longer enough to face the growing malignancy of the world effectively. The universe itself must step in--or at least as much of the universe as the Duke can take unto himself--and begin to rescue love when lovers themselves are powerless to do so.

Perhaps the subtlest miracle in Shakespeare's creation in his plays of pair after pair of lovers occurs at that first moment when hero and heroine see one another and the audience realizes, if the pair themselves do not, that their author made them in a thousand little ways perfect complements of one another, so that standing or speaking or listening or acting together, the two are one person. That poetic device by which Romeo and Juliet's first verbal interchange formed one sonnet which was, in its wholeness, greater in wonder than the male and female quatrains in themselves were able to be was carried through on all levels of the couple's relationship, even seeming somehow to linger on after the death of each--as it is carried through in the sunnier worlds of Arden or Illyria where Rosalind's banter finds rest in Orlando's speaking silences, and Orsino's rich revelling in his own melancholy cannot exist apart from the sweet-sad simplicity of Viola; and in the more

prose-like worlds of Messina and Rousillon, where Beatrice's thrusts only exist to meet Benedick's parries, and Helena's fertility only attains being in touching Bertram's barrenness: the right note of one lover always tempering the dissonance of the other, to the greater harmony of the whole. But in the world of Vienna this phenomenon, so inextricably bound up with Shakespeare's portrayal of the natural magic of the male-female relationship, does not even begin to occur when Isabella and Angelo encounter one another. "You are too cold," Lucio tells her, at the start of her plea to the deputy for her brother's life (II.ii.56). And then one remembers that she is dealing with a man "whose blood," the same Lucio earlier said, "is very snow-broth."

It is not their apparent coldness alone, however, that makes this pair so similar, but also their way of approaching the world in which they live, for of all the characters the Duke leaves to their own devices, these two are most keenly aware of the challenges life now presents to all who would live it with integrity, and they are the only two who do not think these challenges and constrictions great enough. "Now, good my lord,/Let there be some more test made of my mettle," Angelo demanded of the Duke before that monarch's departure, anticipating Isabella's reply to a nun's description of the privileges of her order: "I

speak not as desiring more,/But rather wishing a more strict restraint ..." (I.i.48;iv.3-4). The spectacle of these two people coming together to play out a dramatic scene is as difficult a phenomenon for a playwright to portray as can be imagined, because neither party is constituted to take the initiative in the encounter, and their very similarity of outer personality precludes any dramatic--let alone romantic--current being built up between them, as effectively as if they were a pair of magnets, positive sides facing.

Shakespeare, however, circumvents this problem by introducing into the midst of these two models of reserve a character who has none at all: the indefatigable Lucio, who acts as a goad to Isabella, spurring her on by cries of "To him, I say!" and "Ay, touch him," and "Ay, well said," sparking the dead silences which occur each time the girl stops speaking until she, finally, generates enough momentum within herself to leave behind utterances like her first halting "There is a vice .../For which I would not plead, but that I must," for the full crackling splendor of:

> Could great men thunder
> As Jove himself does, Jove would nere be quiet,
> For every pelting, petty officer
> Would use his heaven for thunder,
> Nothing but thunder!

Yet the most extraordinary feature of this speech, as it continues to unfold, is not so much the way in which

Isabella masses behind it all the anger of a human being realizing for the first time just how powerless her own goodness is to change or better her world, as it is the way in which she simultaneously thinks to mass behind her, in an inspiration as happy for her poetry as for her actions, the full power and scope of the very universe which is, at this moment, most painfully hemming her in--forced by sheer desperation to reach for a measure of that ease of vision which was the Duke's of his very nature:

> Merciful heaven!
> Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
> Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
> Than the soft myrtle; but man, proud man,
> Dress'd in a little brief authority,
> Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
> His glassy essense, like an angry ape,
> Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
> As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
> Would all themselves laugh mortal (ll.112-24).

At once petitioner and deputy (and raucous referee) are pushed beyond the confines of their own close situation and placed against the backdrop of a universe so immediate that Isabella can not only address it directly, as in stark tragedy, but can do so with a sense of real relief that something is there <u>to</u> address. At the same time that her frustration reaches its apex in Vienna, her words point up the ridiculousness of that frustration, and of Vienna itself, to those who can only look--if only for an instant--down <u>at</u> the mayhem, rather than up from it. And though this change

of perspective does last only for a moment, its Duke-like breadth of vision is so strongly evoked and so perfectly placed at the scene's most unbearable point of tension that no matter what force of anguish precedes or follows it, no audience can quite forget--even though all the characters may--that in the sunshine-and-hail world of Measure for Measure, no constricting force is ever so great that it cannot be viewed as part of the human comedy, and be dispersed in an instant by one cosmic clap of thunder.

It is perhaps not as important to realize, as the scene concludes, how superfluous and offensive Lucio's goading comments become as they continue long after Isabella has no need of them ("O, to him, wench!"), as the playwright again brings out how this character simply does not know when to stop; nor even to realize how the female in Isabella, once freed from her reticence by her "clap of thunder," instinctively hits upon the one way to get to the male in Angelo ("Go to your bosom," she tells him: "Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know/That's like my brother's fault"); as it is to be aware of how astonishingly rapid the transformation of the deputy is, once he has been struck by his own maleness. No amount of rapidity of transformation of the deputy-figure in Shakespeare's source-story can even begin to account for the concussive value it has now, as the author, with the figures of Berowne and Benedick and

Hero's Claudio and Bertram perhaps not far from mind, portrays the change within his hero with a force far out of proportion to any Athens-like flaw of human frailty which might have produced it. Rather, he makes it seem here as if, at the very center of a man, pollution exists, full-grown and waiting to be discovered--and discovered in the abrupt and halting language which seems the hallmark, from the death of the French king in Navarre on, of a character's inescapable confrontation with an unleashed universe-shock:

> What's this? What's this? Is this her fault or mine?
> The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?
> Ha!
> Not she; nor doth she tempt. But it is I
> That, lying by the violet in the sun,
> Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,
> Corrupt with virtuous season (ll.163-69),

Angelo cries, as he and his audience watch the unspeakable spectacle of a human being caught in the force of an instinct which will no longer come and go at his own bidding. Once again we are made to feel the stark backdrops to life of love and disease, and once again we are made to feel the curious naturalness of their existing side by side, Shakespeare placing one life-terror against its equal opposite only to emphasize the more the uncertainty of a universe in which one force may emerge as easily as another, neither necessarily cancelling the other out. As the Countess, in her first speech, set the curious keynote

of her play by mentioning birth and death almost interchangably, so here, if we remember, the playwright preceded the abrupt revelations of the Isabella-Angelo scene by setting it in the reverberations of the twin announcement that "Claudio shall die tomorrow," and that "groaning Juliet [is]... very near her hour"--a process of juxtaposition which make not entirely surprising the fact that Angelo's capacity to corrupt is presented as arising simultaneously with his capacity to love.

Yet far from playing down the disturbing influence such use of juxtaposition might have on an audience come to see a comedy, Shakespeare seems to delight in it, as he sets the second, climactic Isabella-Angelo confrontation in the context of a short interposed scene in which the nearness of birth to death, good to evil, is again conveyed by the fate which has overtaken Julietta and her Claudio--the nearness rendered even more dramatic this time by the presence of the imprisoned young girl herself, who concludes her little encounter with the Duke with a striking evocation of the chaos of paradoxes she, and all the characters, have to face: "O injurious love," she cries out, "That respites me a life, whose very comfort/Is still a dying horror (II.iii.40-42)! And though we remember from this brief scene the grating incongruity of a pregnant girl more conscious of death than of birth, we take away with us, too,

the reassuring knowledge that in Vienna, at least, incongruity has a master: the hooded figure of the Duke, whom the playwright seems to introduce at this particular point to remind us, just as Isabella and Angelo are about to be locked isolated in a second clash of light and dark almost tragic in its intensity, that the two are not as alone as they might think, for when we later hear Isabella, confronted by even greater love-death, mercy-justice contradictions than was Julietta, fear for her universe so much that she cries, "Help heaven!" it is difficult to resist recollecting that somewhere just offstage as much of heaven as man can imitate is bustling around in monk's robes, not only needing no help to resolve paradox, but willing to do so in a wink, for those who would only ask.

Perhaps in a gentler, gracefuller play, the sight of Angelo at once beginning this second encounter with Isabella in full villainy, if one considers the purity of his beginning of the first, would overstretch one's willing suspension of disbelief, for the author here offers none of those subtle touches of motivation that were part of previous character-transformations in the lyric comedies of his middle period--taking the edge off the incredible change in Duke Frederick from malice to kindness, for example, by attributing the reversal in part to the ameliorating influence of Arden (V.iv.160: "And to the skirts

of this wild wood he came ...") in a manner unprecedented in its nuance of causality for an English Renaissance audience used to the quick turnabouts of a Comedy of Errors or a Taming of the Shrew. Now Shakespeare seems to revel in the sheer illogic of change itself, no longer as a device of early slapstick or as an anti-device to subtlety of character-development, but as a plunge into characterization unparalleled in its implication that the corruption at the center of a man needs no other reason to emerge than its own dark whim to do so: "Heaven is in my mouth," the deputy cries, "As if I did but only chew his name,/And in my heart the strong and swelling evil/Of my conception (II.iv.4-7)--a transformation reminiscent of Bertram in Rousillon, who needed nothing more than the mere sight, in the last act, of his swelling bride to bring forth the fertility that was inexplicably within him already. More and more, in these harsher plays, the author seems to abandon the gradually unfolding motivation which was perhaps his most precious achievement in his more vernal love-comedies for one moment of character-change so sudden that it defies causal reasoning, just as he abandons gradual change in portraying his romantic universe for separate stark moments of disease and love and pain and death, a dramatic technique in which human beings increasingly seem to contain within themselves the same capacity for abrupt unpredicta-

bility as their world does, characters and plot both disregarding explanations of inner continuity for the greater value of shock.

The harsh momentum of this shock is just what Shakespeare seems here to use to portray the second encounter between deputy and petitioner, for as the total villainy of the one hardens its owner into a monolith of evil and as the threat to her purity transforms the already unsubtle personality of the other into a very allegory of virtue, there can be, especially with no Lucio to bridge the gap between them, no mutual interminglings of thought or emotion, but rather only a continual series of abrupt juxtapositions, in which the mismatched pair first speak at cross-purposes because they entirely misunderstand one another ("Nay, but hear me," Angelo says at one point. "Your sense pursues not mine"), and then speak at cross-purposes because, in one grating instant, they understand each other too well:

Angelo: And that there were
No earthly mean to save him, but that either
You must lay down the treasures of your body
To this supposed [deputy], or else to let him suffer,
What would you do?

Isabella: As much for my poor brother as myself:
That is, were I under the terms of death,
Th' impression of keen whips I'ld wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame.

Angelo: Then must your brother die (11.94-104).

The only similarity which the two maintain, in fact, among their shock-like oppositions to one another, is that like remoteness which kept them apart even from the first moment they shared the stage together, here all the more striking in contrast to the outer heat of their speeches, as every outburst reveals the peculiar distance of the speaker from life: the coldness of Isabella's "ruby" image indicating that the girl knows as little about the nature of physical pain as Angelo, with his metallic use of "treasures of the body," knows about physical love. Both are as sealed off from experience, let alone from each other, as they were in their first scene. And though Angelo is forced to take the initiative now, as Isabella was forced to take it then, the result is still not so much a dialogue, much less a conversation, as it is a phenonenon of twin monologues, one directed at the other from opposite and suddenly fixed positions, both either missing each other entirely or colliding with full impact in mid-stage, as Angelo can only repeat over and over again his black request and Isabella can only intensify her refusals.

No considerations of the girl's remoteness, however, can take away from the fact that each instance of the collision of her purity with Angelo's unyielding corruption is as anguished for her as was any French princess's facing of a universe of death or any Hero or Helena's

facing of a universe of slander--more so, for the corruption here is not aimed at all human beings, or even at all women, as much as it is aimed directly at herself, as if all of the unpredictable evil in the world were placed at the center of one human being, and pointed at her. When, at scene's end, she feels herself driven into so tight a corner that she is forced to state, to save herself from succumbing to the utter chaos of her surroundings, her hierarchy of moral preference, we can only feel again the terror of a world so aggressively dangerous that its inhabitants have to choose one happy value over another (as Helena had to choose, bluntly, lover over father) because they have not room nor time enough to uphold them both. "More than our brother is our chastity," Isabella finally exclaims (1.185)--a statement whose harsh explicitness is only countered by the tragic pressure of circumstances which drove its speaker to formulate it. Then while perhaps her exclamation is not the most welcome conclusion to the fierce confrontation of man and woman we have witnessed, it is one which, in its proclamation in the uncertain world of Vienna of an integrity of purity equal to Angelo's integrity of corruption, is nonetheless curiously assuring to hear.

It is perhaps less important to note how very close the two Angelo-Isabella scenes come to bare tragedy in the

confined atmosphere they convey and the brutal unleashing of shocks they direct at characters and audience as it is to note that they are the last two major scenes in the play from which the Duke is absent. It is difficult indeed not to think , as we see the Duke re-emerge into the very thick of the action for the first time since his appearance at the play's opening scene, that in watching Measure for Measure we are watching the awesome spectacle of a drama falling into two great halves, dropped by the author like a dark cloak around the shoulders of this one central figure. As in the play's beginning we observed the Duke blending into the background of his universe to leave man on his own in the dangerous world which Shakespearean drama has now become, only to see him stand by as man on his own makes of that world such a sick confusion that not even woman can begin to offer repair; so now we have the peculiar compensation of watching the Duke once again take up the initiative and, with a confidence in his own power which an audience must see someone have if it is to laugh at all with ease, begin to put his house in order. More than a mere haphazard wonder of Shakespearean stagecraft, then, places our attention on the Duke at the beginning of the third act, and keeps it there for line after extraordinary line of his great speech to the imprisoned Claudio, for in the wide magnitude of his words he catches up all

the contradictions that were more and more painfully dislodged from the universe in the play's first half--from the "how now" surprise of Claudio's arrest to the twin concussions of the Angelo-Isabella scenes--and begins not to refute them or make their individual shocks one whit less harsh, but to catch them up in a breadth of vision in whose wholeness all may eventually take delight.

"Be absolute for death," the Duke begins, as he instructs Claudio on his impending fate. In the bold declaration of oneness implied in his opening phrase, and in the measured grace with which he unfolds to the doomed man the nature of dissolution, we are made conscious, if Claudio himself is not, of the grand certainty of that dissolution in the scheme of things, encompassing the countless pluralities and paradoxes of existence ("Thou art not thyself,/For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains/ That issue out of dust") in a final resolution which, as he puts it, "makes these odds all even" (III.1.5-41). So effortless seem the rhythm and beauty of the phrasing, in fact, that we may tend to forget that what this dark figure is doing from the moment of his first re-appearance into the drama is taking the greatest force for chaos in the universe--annihilation--and, with sure verbal power, somehow slowly ordering it. And so strong is the spell exerted by his words that not until Isabella makes her

abrupt entrance at their end do we realize that the Duke has magnificently usurped the girl's own intention, at the end of the cataclysmic preceding act, to "fit his [Claudio's] mind to death"--a usurpation which not only binds the two acts together but also points up the difference between them, as Isabella begins to deliver her death-advice to her brother with characteristic harshness ("Lord Angelo, having affairs to heaven,/Intends you for his swift ambassador..../Therefore your best appointment make with speed;/Tomorrow you set on"), without being aware, as the audience is, that anything she says or does, here and to the end of the play, no matter how grating or tragic it might seem, is now cradled in the re-established precedence of the Duke.

Just how vital the tempering presence of this dark figure is to Vienna is nowhere made more evident than in the turmoil that results when he temporarily withdraws to leave brother and sister alone. In an instant, as he watches from offstage, the pair seize upon those very character-traits in one another which render them most unalike--one's weakness for the world, the other's disdain of it--and proceed in argument to push those traits, which in a less pressured environment might have been allowed to remain charming idiosyncracies, to their most unpleasant extremes. And, as in the most tragic of conflicts,

neither party wins, Claudio's final, if voluptuous, soldier's paean to life ("If I must die,/I will encounter darkness as a bride,/And hug it in mine arms") becoming the flimsiest sophistries by which he might retain mere animal breath, Isabella's initial picturing of the nobility of death becoming the unsisterly bluntness of "Tis best that thou diest quickly" (III.i.151).

Only with the re-entrance of the Duke, or such glimpses as we have caught of him hovering in the background during the sibling-shambles, do the edges of the fierce contradictions of love and pain, mercy and justice, within and between these two characters begin to dissolve in the pervasiveness of a cosmic laughter. By the indescribable tact with which he intrudes upon the scene, with an apology that would disarm anguish itself--"Vouchsafe a word, young sister, but one word"--we are reminded again, at the moment of greatest pitch of the brother-sister confrontation, of an order beyond chaos, whose very entrance makes any character's succumbing to sharp extremity seem at once the saddest and drollest of incongruities. And when we hear Isabella cry out to him, "I have no superfluous leisure: my stay must be stolen out of other affairs ...," it is no longer possible to ignore the fact that at the same time she is putting into words that sense of temporal and spatial constriction which all the other characters in

Vienna seem to feel, she is addressing the one character in the play who moves beyond such constrictions with the grand disregard of which true comedy is made.

> Why I desire thee
> To give me secret harbour hath a purpose
> More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends
> Of burning youth,

said the Duke earlier in the play (I.iii.3-5), as he sought the concealment of a monastery--but as we see him now, as upon his active return he begins to initiate the chaotic plot-events of the substitution of Mariana for Isabella to appease the lusts of the deputy and the apparent beheading of Angelo, it is difficult to tell whether his purpose is wrinkled from troubled ponderings or, far more ominously, from an inscrutable laughter. All that there can be no doubt of is the reality of the shocks which his dark machinations now let loose upon the already pain-rent world of Vienna, as if the Duke would even the contradictory odds of his city by unleashing the greatest odds himself.

One by one, the characters are struck to the root by a life-damage beyond their power to repair, as one by one, they must adjust themselves to that most tragic of events which a universe can inflict: the terrible irrevocable. No subsequent ability to act, let alone to laugh, which she possesses can restore to Mariana the virginity she illicitly lost, nor can any ability in Angelo refute the accomplished

triumph of impulses which he now bitterly wishes had never reached fruition (IV.iv.35-37: "Would yet he [Claudio] had liv'd!/Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,/Nothing goes right: we would, and we would not"), nor can Isabella bring back the life of her brother or her own nun-fresh faith in brotherly love: "Unhappy Claudio!" she cries, in the by now all too familiar language of Shakespearean concussion, as she learns of her brother's "beheading." "Wretched Isabel! / Injurious world! Most damned Angelo!" (IV.iii.124-25)!

As we hear broken phrase after broken phrase mounting in intensity through the final course of the play till it reaches its highest pitch in Isabella's fifth act "Justice, justice, justice, justice!" we begin to sense what is perhaps the strangest phenomenon to be found in this strangest of all comedies: the introduction by the author into his drama of what can only be called retrospective laughter. As each character now confronts a reality of pain or disease or death from whose full impact there is not the slightest margin for escape, we cannot help but realize that such a margin did exist in all the similar confrontations of the play's first half, allowing us room, because worse has not yet come to worst, for possible mirth at the vehemence with which figures like an Angelo or an Isabella could throw their full fury of purpose at a black fate

that, ridiculously, might vanish in a comic trice and leave them all the more absurd for their intensity. Only with the flat desperation of the protagonists now, as that fate rears itself fully actualized on stage, with Mariana ravished and Claudio "dead," do these earlier scenes seem lighter than they perhaps were, because we no longer have room at all to imagine that the characters' pain is any less justified than it appears to be. Justified it is--almost as if the author were compensating for our increasing delight and confidence in the Duke by taking away from everyone else whatever qualities to amuse they ever possessed.

Even the presence of Constable Elbow, whose Dogberry-like simplicity of goodness relieved delightfully some of the more unbearable tensions of the earlier part of the play (II.i.46-50: "If it please your honour, I am the poor Duke's constable, and my name is Elbow. I do lean upon justice, sir, and do bring in here before your good honour two notorius benefactors") is taken away by the author in the third act never to return, all too apparently to emphasize a truth which any onlooker would want to overlook: that in the certainty which the protagonists now have of life's permanent horror, any well-meaning intrusion by such a simpleton can only be regarded as, in the cruelest sense of the word, laughable. Pain in Messina still had a

playful enough quality to allow itself to be undermined by the most bumbling of child-like creatures. In Vienna, however, no such an attempt at undermining is made for long; there is no place for an Elbow in a world where, when pain plays, it plays for keeps.

Only the Duke now holds the power to move characters and audience alike to mirth, just as he, and no haphazard constable, holds alone the power to help all those now caught in the wake of what can only be called pure anguish. And the climax of the play's really perfect structuring of these twin strains of tragedy and comedy, now completely separated from one another, comes in the last act at the moment when Isabella, in the undisguised agony of her--and her world's--shard-like cries for "Justice!" intercepts the Duke, in the undisguised assuaging power of his full robes of state, who brings that which she cries for with him.

"What's open made to justice,/That justice seizes" (II.i.21-22), the deputy said earlier, in what is perhaps the most essential phrase possible to describe the pities and terrors or Vienna, where every action which a character commits is somehow seen and remembered by his universe, and held in abeyance to confront him, inescapably, later--as the Academe lords had to account for every one of their over-merry witticisms at play's end, and as Hero's Claudio

had to account for each of his doubts of Hero when their potential harmfulness was made actual at her wedding, and as Bertram had to face the consequences of his light use of women with the double arrival of Diana and Helena at the last act. Yet even more curious than that ever-increasing taint of the romantic heroes, seeming as it did to mirror the ever-increasing darkening of their plays' atmospheres, from woman-mockery to woman-slander to woman-hatred, was the increasingly severe shocks by which these men were called to account: from the death of the father of the lady to the "death" of the lady herself to the "death" and pregnancy of the lady--as if the universe which could produce such shocks at will were being goaded by man's sorry behavior into coming more and more out of itself to correct the fault. Then when we see the Duke re-emerge into the thick of the play's action at mid-point to reveal himself ultimately in full power of state, it is difficult to resist seeing him as anything less than a direct projection of a universe no longer content merely to correct an environment's taint by such cruel concussions of love and death as the seduction of a Mariana or the "beheading" of a Claudio, but one eager to do so <u>visibly</u>, in the person of a figure of suitably high authority, so that audience and characters may at last have the assurance of feeling that those corrective shocks issue not from such

haphazardries as a distant royal death, or a priest-protector's inspiration and a constable's intrusion, or a girl's quirk of desire to have her husband think her dead, but from one purpose of will or whim, whose dark unleashing of these shocks makes them seem less mere flukes of situation comedy than the result of a cosmos concerned enough at last to take the initiative.

As curious, too, in Shakespearean comedy as is the gradually dimming lustre of its gallant heroes and the gradually emerging visible power-to-shock of its universe is the way in which the plays are increasingly built around the interaction of the two phenomena, so that indefinably, unmistakably, romantic drama begins to take on the shape of the education of the young lover. More and more, in these increasingly harsh plays, Shakespeare moves such impacts up in his drama: from the end of the action, as in Navarre; to mid-point, as in the third and fourth act love- and death-revelation scenes at Messina; to the beginning, as in Rousillon, with the King's second act command to Bertram to marry--a process of movement which faces the young men earlier and earlier with an immovable shock whose power to dislodge an inner character-taint they must either accept, as Benedick does, or reject, as does Hero's Claudio or Bertram; and which leaves the remainder of the drama, larger with each play, to be shaped by the consequences

of their choice.

It is not surprising, then, to discover in Vienna, where the power of the universe to confront corruption has fallen into specific hands, that that universe should take upon itself to face the figure of the lover with a challenge from the very first, to determine the extent, if any, of his taint, ultimately to expunge it. Angelo knows at once that "Nature never lends/The smallest scruple of her excellence,/But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines/Herself the glory of a creditor,/Both thanks and use," for, in ducal tones, he has been told (I.i.36-40), a revelation which makes the entire course of the play which follows take the form of what can only be called a test, with every shock inflicted somehow a necessary part of the healing process. Nor is it surprising to find that in the last act the whole drama turns into what is more or less a specific trial of the lover, complete with dark judge and grim jury, as there was an implied trial of the Academe lords in their last act at the ladies' stating of the penances, and a more explicit trial of Hero's Claudio at the end of his last act with the appearance of a veiled bride, and an even more explicit trial of Bertram with the last act reappearance of Diana and Helena--for the author of Measure for Measure makes clear from the beginning to characters and audience alike that the Duke's Vienna,

with its capacity for reversal after harsh reversal, is one vast tribunal, and Angelo the chief object of the proceedings.

Perhaps most characteristic of the shock-upon-shock revelations of this final scene is that Lucio, with his brothel-world's mixture of slapstick and smut, should be present all through it, running in between the close-following concussions to deliver yet another irrepressible remark, like a creature in his natural element, and running out again, never standing still, until, finally, and--typically--accidentally, he himself unleashes the greatest shock of all:

> Lucio: Come, sir; come, sir; come, sir. Foh, sir! Why, you bald-pated, lying rascal, you must be hooded, must you? Show your knave's visage, with a pox to you! Show your sheep-biting face, and be hang'd an hour! Will't not off (V.i.354-60)?
> [Pulls off the friar's hood and discovers the Duke.]

--as, at the suddenness of the long-awaited revelation, and the fop's spectacular discomfiture, the theater explodes at last into a real moment of hilarity. It seems not so much mere chance which brings these two figure into proximity again after their frequent clashes during the course of the play as it does the author's specific desire to show the two locked in one last isolated moment of confrontation so that the audience may now see, if it has not seen all

along, the foolishness of the fop's laughter-for-laughter's sake when it is placed against the larger disclosure of the Duke's laughter-for-life's sake, as the one man in the play who is merry because existence has no meaning collapses like straw before the greater amusement of the one man in the play who is merry because--for no apparent reason at all--somehow, it does.

Yet as the Duke stands now, no longer shadowed or disguised, but open for all to see and approach and discover the relationship which their actions have had to them all along (as Angelo does when he exclaims, "I should be guiltier than my guiltiness/To think I can be undiscernible,/ When I perceive your Grace, like power divine,/Hath look'd upon my passes"), though he continues to order the chaos of the play to the end by initiating such further shocks as the re-appearances of Mariana and the "dead" Claudio and the sentence to death of Lucio followed by a countering sentence to marry, he seems, in his very gaining of accessibility, somehow to have lost a part of the identification he has had with the cosmos from the first--as if, in putting off his monk's hood, he has put off, too, a measure of his inscrutability. If there is no fallibility evidenced in him by his outrageously mistaken opinion that the most satisfactory solution to the Mariana-Angelo situation would be the execution of the deputy immediately

following the wedding, but only the appearance of fallibility so that Isabella's capacity for mercy may be tested--which it is, dramatically, when, after not a word betraying the outcome of her inner struggle, she sinks to the ground to plead for the life of the man whom she still believes killed her brother--that mere appearance is disquieting enough to an audience. It is hard, upon hearing his imperfect projection of a solution, to avoid remembering those few odd moments earlier in the play when he would pause in the midst of dark machinations whose very mysteriousness seemed somehow to place them beyond morality, and begin to give an explanation which, hooded monk or no hooded monk, had the familiar false ring to it of an all too human excuse, as when he told Mariana, after dissolving the distastefulness of his seduction-plan for Angelo in the strange melody which floated over her moated grange ("Though music oft hath such a charm/To make bad good, and good provoke to harm"): "He is your husband on a precontract./To bring you thus together, 'tis no sin" (IV.i. 66-67). It is difficult, as we now see his authority waver before the feminine unpredictability of Isabella's kneeling--much as the King of France's wavered into astonishment at the unpredictability of Helena's pregnant reentrance--to avoid seeing this love- and terror-figure as an all too human being, who can be surprised after all.

Yet--in the happiest comic touch in the play--if it is painful for audience and characters to see the Duke as frail and fallible and vulnerable, it is delightful for the man himself, who, at the very moment he restores Claudio to Isabella as he would reunite two children lost beneath the cloak of his cosmic paternity, gratefully abandons the awesome role of a father for the more immediate joys of a husband:

> [To Isabella:] If he [Claudio] be like your brother, for his sake
> Is he pardon'd, and, for your lovely sake--
> Give me your hand ... (ll.492-94).

The peculiar wonder of Measure for Measure, however, is that the Duke's proposal, as it stands, is as yet unfinished, though by his offer of a hand he seems almost to lift the girl--and with her, her companions--out of the constricted circle of tragedy to that ease of perspective which he has enjoyed all along; and finish it he does. Perhaps remembering that the title of his play should, in justice, apply to himself as well as to the others, he reminds Isabella, in words of fathomless tenderness, that his life is now joined to hers as much as her own is to his:

> He is my brother too,

he says to her of Claudio.

It is as if, in the very utterance of the words, he takes upon himself all the human anguish which he, and his audience, have witnessed from first glimpse of this darkest

of all cities yet found among the shadows of what was once a comic landscape, and, as must be done, accepts it. For anguish has worked its way into the very fiber of that landscape, forever to stay, and all that a human being can do--even the mightiest--is <u>to</u> accept it. It will not go away.

PART II

CHAPTER III

KING LEAR

One of the most basic conventions of the drama, and indeed of all literature, is the convention of selection: that among the superabundant riches of human activity with which life confronts us, real or imagined, past or present, plain or mysterious, an author is able to select but the smallest fragment--these particular people and no others, this particular situation, these particular words and silences--choosing to bring to light, from the dark tangle of infinite possibility open to him, only those elements of experience which he wants most urgently to convey to his fellows, and, by his very choosing, leaving behind the world of life itself for a far more essential world which is, in what it includes and excludes, heightens or obscures, an interpretation of life. One of the astonishments of Shakespeare's dramas, however, is the way in which he takes up this convention as if it were less convention than an impulse of his own fancy, and shapes it, in play after play, into perfect cohesion with his own dramatic purpose. Of course the inhabitants of Athens or Arden or Illyria do not act as people do in real life but rather, through the miracle of art, say and do exactly the right thing at exactly the right time, so that their lives

can unfold and interact with one another to the rhythm of rising action, climax, falling action and denouement and the numberless variations of that rhythm, each word and gesture having a significance above and beyond itself as it anticipates or, dramatically, does not anticipate the word and gesture which must follow it if the action is to proceed in a manner at all coherent to an audience. Yet it would be missing part of the atmosphere of melancholy and ease which seems breathed into the very texture of these romantic comedies to overlook the fact that part of their peculiar beauty derives from the author's not obscuring but rather pointing up, in a thousand little ways, the nature of the illusion he is creating that his world is reality. Over and over again we are reminded that we are watching not life itself but a capturing and ordering of life only, which assumes, in the space of two or three short hours, the special poignancy given only to the briefly lived. "Happy is your Grace,/That can translate the stubbornness of fortune/Into so quiet and sweet a style," says Amiens to his Duke in Arden (II.i.18-20), and he seems to be speaking for all the Oberons and Orlandos and Orsinos whose plays have so much about them of a sense of life as a harmonious and gracefully linked chain of events that no audience can watch for long without being made to realize just how far the offstage world, in all its stubborn

contradiction of daily experience which will not easily order itself, falls from the eloquence of human action shaped by the playwright--an eloquence which all the characters, in the wonder of their perfect interaction with one another, seem to suggest is no mere fanciful construct of art but a tantalizing evocation of just how harmonious life can be if we, like the Duke, but had eyes to see the order that is there all along.

However, as the events depicted in the plays become increasingly abrupt and unpredictable, from Navarre to Messina and Rousillon and Vienna, so that there is at last little ease and no grace at all in the ways that personalities and turns of plot and language clash in on one another, one is confronted with a strange shift in the playwright's use of the convention of selection. Though the characters still say and do only those particular things which propel the action of their plays confrontation by confrontation forward to their conclusion, Shakespeare increasingly makes the phenomenon of this selection--the fact that in a small scope of stage a small scope of people interact only in ways which shape and bring out the relevance of their lives--reflect no longer the disparity between the stage world and the audience world, but rather the terrifying similarity, if not actual identity, of both worlds.

When we hear Feste's merry "Why, 'some are born great,

some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown upon them,'" catching up the last bit of confusion unleashed earlier in his play and relating it to the closing incidents of the Twelfth Night, we cannot but marvel at the symmetry of the total action presented, as each concluding speech serves to remind us of the characters' awareness, and our own, that they are living in a special world where, as Orsino puts it, "golden time convents," as it plays out and orders the lives of all on stage to its precious measure, leaving the audience behind to note and wonder.(V.i.394). But when we hear the French king utter his "The time is fair again," as the Parolles-confusions that took up so much of his play are taken up, clarified and made relevant to Bertram's present penitent situation through a chain of events no less linked to one another by the playwright than in Illyria, every element in the drama makes us feel that this "time" is not a product of the author's golden evocation but rather is "real" time, sometimes bright, sometimes dismal, never predictable; and that Bertram's life is meshing with his fellows' and his world in an almost visible pattern--not because such meshing is necessary for the structuring of a drama, or is delightful as characteristic of a world smilingly harmonious to those who would so view it, but rather because, on stage or off, whether man wills or no, the events of a

man's life as seen against the backdrop of his universe do mesh together with a terrible coherence which no drama can ever underscore enough. "All is whole," the French king concludes, and in the context of his play, his words take on an ominous import: for not just Bertram but all the characters, himself included, are forced to the knowledge that every word and gesture they perform, no matter how small or apparently insignificant, forms a part of the intricate pattern of their lives, cutting off certain possibilities in the past and giving the present a certain turn or direction which it did not have before and for which the performers may be held responsible, as Bertram is now before the King responsible for each of his previous slights of women--as if selection were not only the principle of drama-writing but of life itself, each movement which a character enacts seeming to hold an awful relevance for the shape of his own life and the lives of those whom he moves among and affects, each act potentially the one on which his whole fate, or theirs, may turn. "Our rash faults," the King concludes, "Make trivial price of serious things we have,/Not knowing them until we know their grave" (V.iii.60-62), a statement terrifying, as seen in the context of Rousillon and, later, Vienna, in the dark implication it conveys: not just that until a man knows the completed pattern of his life he cannot say

which actions he performs are trivial, which are not; but that perhaps, just perhaps, no action is trivial, for its consequences may be waiting in abeyance for the doer later, as they are for Bertram and Parolles and Angelo and Lucio, ready to give shape to the design of a life that the protagonist might well wish had remained formless.

Yet whether the coherent patterning of a man's actions is a mere convention of the drama or, perhaps to a Shakespeare, a characteristic of life itself, there can be no doubt that the emphasizing of the joy such patterning can bring to the participants involved as event triggers event to the delight of all is the mark of a comic vision, and that the emphasizing of the terror of such patterning as the participants move among its intricacies uncertain and alone is the mark of a vision turned toward nothing but tragedy. "All the world's a stage,/And all the men and women merely players," sighs Jaques in Arden, toying with an analogy as familiar as a cradle song to himself and to his audience. But as the events of later, more dangerous plays coil ever tighter around their protagonists, constricting their movements with every new-reared consequence of their past actions so that every action they ever made does have significance and the entire universe begins to seem like a great drama whose ultimate design is being withheld from the participants until too late,

the time for toying is over, and the reign of the terror of the author's emphasizing what it is like to be merely a player has begun.

Narrower and narrower become the limits of the player's space for toying with the concept of his world as a stage, as inexorably from Navarre to Messina and Rousillon and Vienna, it becomes a stage with or without his consent, revealing to the audience, if not always to himself, the inscrutable patterning which has been present all along in his exits and entrances, freely though he may have chosen to make each one of them, proudly though he may have clung to the belief that he could control choice and consequence. "Let mine own judgment pattern out my death," cries Angelo in the second act of his play (i.30-31), "and nothing come in partial," not yet realizing that his present judgments will shape his future whether he assents to this shaping or not, nor that though he may forget later that he ever uttered such a statement, his world will not, and will make him finish acting out in the final trial scene the saintly role which he began, though that role be then to him a living hell.

But of course Angelo's death never comes, and his horror, if not his guilt, is lifted finally from him by the re-entrance of the Duke, as, too, Bertram's sense of being trapped by his own past deeds is lifted from him by

the re-entrance of the pregnant Helena who gives those deeds a happy turn that they in themselves do not seem to really deserve, by her action breaking quite gratuitously the tragic pattern so long given to the line of the young man's life. It is not strange, then, that Shakespeare in the midst of so many plays which come so close to full tragedy, should, in Hamlet, and later in Othello, Macbeth and Lear, make the cross-over to that which he was so many times so near and not introduce any Helena- or Duke-like elements which would interfere with a protagonist's course to destruction, but rather let that course overtake him with the inevitability of an initial design completed. Yet slight though this cross-over may be from Rousillon to Elsinore or Vienna to Venice, no possible smoothness of transition is sufficient preparation for the total change of universe involved, as if the last of the thin line of comedy that ran through the author's previous portrayals of love and pain and death and gave the turns of plot new changes of direction as delightful and unexpected as Lucio's unhooding of the Duke, had at last snapped, so that nothing as miraculous as laughter could ever again interfere with the spectacle of men and women playing out unaided the roles they chose in life to the last fearful consequence. Nor can the pain of the King of France's "Our rash faults make trivial price of serious things we

have ..." be in any way compared to the uninterrupted momentum of anguish which produces Hamlet's similar "Rashly,/And praised be rashness for it, let us know,/Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well/When our deep faults do pall" (V.ii.6-9), because the one is uttered by one man moving among many, acting and reacting in measure much as the others on stage act and react, and the other by the man around whose confrontations, actions and reactions the whole play is built, as the author draws out the terror of human beings increasingly constricted by the consequences of their deeds into a new and isolate dimension: focusing this terror through the awful spectacle of one man alone, following relentlessly his maze-like course among the vaster pattern of his fellows', concentrating for us the shocks of that course through one pair of eyes, one mind, one most vulnerable body. It is not, after all, Bertram but All's Well That Ends Well; not Angelo but Measure for Measure--and the pain we feel for Hamlet in Hamlet is intensified accordingly, as, without obscuring the pain of the other characters, every element in the drama is brought to bear in drawing out the anguish of this one particular figure, caught as he is in the inescapable relevance of his slightest past actions as they are linked each to each around him with the organic logic of a drama vaster than his own creating. "And that should learn us,"

the half-smiling Dane concludes, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,/Rough-hew them how we will."

And the most precious element in the fierce crown of Shakespearean tragedy is that the author does not so much focus his drama from the point of view of the divinity as he does from the point of view of the human being whose soul is torn, act by act, in two by the growing consciousness of that shaping: by the realization that, simply because he is born a man, he is an actor on a stage whose inscrutable rules take up every action he commits as somehow far more significant than he himself could ever dare imagine. "What would he do," cries Hamlet of a hired mime, "Had he the motive and the cue for passion/That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,/And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,/Make mad the guilty and appal the free,/Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed/The very faculties of eyes and ears" (II.ii.563-69).

It seems, in fact, as the madness and appallingness, terrors and pities of Elsinore are embedded as deeply into the roots of Venice and Scotland, that the playwright has not only abandoned himself entirely to the landscape and pattern of tragedy but that he is even more committed than before, if possible, to the potentiality of the genre to etch out a protagonist's confrontation with the intractable stage-nature of life in terms of pure pain, for Othello

and Macbeth are, in a sense, soldier's tragedies, and build themselves each around branding the subtle and profound vision of life as an all too coherent drama into the consciousness of the very type of man who, unlike any brooding melancholiac, would be least able to accept his actor's status without the most slow, stubborn agony of resistance--so that even at the end, when the man has been driven to the narrowest corner of his life-pattern by a multitude of deeds all of which, horribly, were relevant, he is seared by the consummate pain of at last feeling the constricting drama-like shape of his life without still, in his soldier's way, being able to see the coherence of it all, howling from the very lip of the stage, "Where should Othello go?" or dismissing everything that has happened to him as senseless: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more. It is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing" (V.ii.271;v.v.24-28).

Yet the author's emphasizing of the pain of a universe-stage where nothing is superfluous except a man's efferts to escape the logic of the deeds he has done is nowhere brought out more finally--as if, in this one play, he were portraying the phenomenon once, for all--than in Lear, where every element of the drama is built around the

protagonist's excruciating discovery that he, too, is merely a player, when the deepest-rooted conviction of his being is not, as with Othello and Macbeth, that there is no drama, or, as with Hamlet, that he is less than a player, but, most grotesquely, that he himself is the author.

###

"Men are not gods," says Desdemona, speaking from the center of a universe whose every facet relentlessly emphasizes the truth of her statement (III.iv.146), as all characters, male and female alike, are made to suffer for their most slight falls from grace, each of which take on a grim blood relevance: Cassio's light penchant for drink and whoring triggering his immediate loss of reputation and gory last act near-loss of leg; Emilia's innocuous theft of the handkerchief for her husband laying in part the grounds for his eventual killing of her; and even Desdemona's small lie ("It [the hankerchief] is not lost") in a sense ultimately causing her own death--as Ophelia is made to suffer in blood for her too great need of affection, Polonius for his not malicious belief in political expediency, Laertes for his vulnerable youthful hot-headness, Macduff for his over-impetuous flight ("He wants the natural touch," his abandoned wife cries), and even the good Banquo for his too eager desire to hear the future, without which Macbeth

would never have thought him a rival. Over and over again it seems that the universe is being not only goaded but dared by the chaos men are unleashing all about them to come more and more out of itself to uphold a standard of the most god-like righteousness of conduct, and is implacably punishing those poor mortals--and that is, everyone--who lapse in the slightest from that standard, by taking up the very smallest of their questionable acts and making them pay in disaster for each one of them. "Who has done this deed?" Emilia asks of Desdemona's murder. "Nobody, I myself," the dying woman replies--and in an all too real sense, she is right.

Only against the background of this universe where every character's flaw, no matter how minor it be, proves significant and tragic for him to the death, can one even attempt to measure the extent of the cataclysmic forces which begin to frame themselves around a principal player who has a truly great character-fault, as the cosmic justice which can crush an Ophelia or a Desdemona in an instant for a lapse of which she is perhaps not even aware, gathers itself against the blatant central defect, whether of indecisiveness or jealousy or ambition, of one character alone, driving through the myriad weaknesses of that defect to cut its owner to the last fiber of his being, meting out his agony in awful proportion to his fall from that god-like

perfection apparently expected of all. But not until we hear Lear's opening words do we realize just how far that fall can be, for Hamlet or Othello or Macbeth amidst the depths of all their imperfections at least never entertained the notion that they could poise themselves on the dizzying standard of righteousness, from thence to dictate justice to their fellows. Yet on that pinnacle does Lear stand poised at his first speech, never realizing--as his audience must realize, especially if it is new-come from Elsinore or Venice or Scotland--that his universe has waited long for him to dare climb there, and that, once arrived, it will wait no longer to drive him pain by pain down a greater distance to annihilation than any human being has ever travelled before.

> Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
> Give me the map there. Know we have divided
> In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
> To shake all cares and business from our age,
> Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
> Unburthen'd crawl toward death,

Lear begins--and in the strange phenomenon of pity and terror suspended that he evokes in his audience, there is perhaps a little more of terror, in the spectacle of this proud old man who does not even suspect that his words unleash a darker purpose than his own upon the stage, one whose universal blackness is massing most spectacularly against no one but himself.

Yet his "darker purpose" is, among all the uniquenesses of the figure he presents, an almost visible link with past figures perhaps as formidable as he, as his words carry with them strange echoes of the elder rulers of Rousillon and Vienna. "Why I desire thee/To give me secret harbour hath a purpose/More grave and wrinkl'd than the aims and ends/Of burning youth," said the Duke at the doors of the monastery which was to hood him from the world, his words catching up the brooding King of France's "I am wrapp'd in dismal thinkings"--and so too, through his own dark utterance, does Lear take on from the very beginning of his play the by-now unsurprising king's identification with the power of his shadowed universe, in an assumption of inscrutability which no amount of audience-familiarity can make any the less awesome.

Not the color of his words alone, however, but their stark content also allies him with the earlier monarchs in the way he chooses to make that inscrutability manifest: a test--beginning his play immediately with the sort of specific trial-scene which even in the tense worlds of Rousillon and Vienna where all the characters seemed to sense that their every action was being weighed and tallied by some barely seen judge, had been saved for the last act. Here, of course, Shakespeare's source-story dictates the old man's immediate posing of a trial-question, but it is

impossible not to feel, upon watching this all-powerful king ask his daughter something as totally arbitrary as he does, that the universe the author now most easily envisions would, source-story or no source-story, brook no delay in driving home to audience and characters alike that as surely as the cosmos has a specific vortex of absolute king-authority, it has the right to judge its subjects at once, by whatever means it pleases:

> Tell me, my daughters,
> Since now we will divest us both of rule,
> Interest of territory, cares of state,
> Which of you shall we say doth love us most?

the question is hurled--and it is almost less important to note its mortal inner flaw of implying that each lady's love is not as important in depth of relation to its paternal object as it is in depth of comparison to its two rivals, than to realize that no one on stage even thinks to challenge the right of the king <u>to</u> measure by arbitrary question, just as no one on stage was amazed that the Duke should have acted as imperiously as he did in testing his city and his deputy by leaving them, or that the French king should have ordered a young man to marry a woman he despised. "... While we/Unburthen'd crawl toward death," Lear began, setting up at once the stark backdrop of dissolution as a fact of life no one may challenge as arbitrary or illogical. Both, that fact may be--but so long

as dissolution, and pain and birth and love, holds sway over men, no one on stage or off may dare take exception to its sheer authority, least of all those subjects who see its life-or-death omnipotence delegated to a man enthroned before them in all the gathered majesty of his dark purposes.

There is only one dimension, in fact, which keeps this trial scene from being simply a more concentrated, more urgently presented counterpart to those in previous plays, but that dimension is everything: the Navarre ladies and Hero's priest-protector and, especially, the French king and the Countess and the Duke all seemed, during their willful tests of their subjects in which so much of pain and death was toyed with and held poised over the prospective victims, somehow to be for a few miraculous moments in control of the universe they represented, allowing the audience to bask in the relief of the illusion that these powerful men and women held the key to the general merriment in their own most human hands as they tapped the healing forces of their world at will. But here, in Lear's Britain, it is the tester himself who is most on trial, though in his all too human short-sightedness, he knows it not; and it is the tester himself who is found most wanting, as that universe sunders itself not just from the bulk of the population, as in Vienna, but from the last

vestige of Duke-like human authority, the monarch--leaving not just all men but the ruler of all men to his own devices, cruelly delegating to that ruler, up to the point of the trial of his daughters, all of its cosmic power of life and death with none of its cosmic knowledge, so that, over-armed, he must fend for himself in the world as blindly as his fellows while being by his kingship ever separated from them. Indeed, at the trial of his daughters, though Lear himself does give up the bulk of the arms and powers of his office, it never occurs to him that only those arms separate him from his subjects, rather feeling his separateness from them by the isolation which is of the very nature of kingship; and that inner kingship he most certainly is not abdicating. "Only we shall retain/ The name and all th'additions to a king," he tells his court" (I.i.135-36)--for it never enters his mind that, by nature a king, he can ever cease to be a king, even as an oak tree willfully denuding itself of its leaves would still keep the <u>name</u> of oak, nor would it ask to do so but rather simply state that it could not do otherwise. Yet the moment his daughter's trial is over--and that trial <u>is</u> but a moment, or, as the French suitor terms it, "this trice of time"--Lear's own trial begins, for his author has done with the testing of the whole scope of the ordinary race of men, from the Bertrams to the Parolleses, from the

Hamlets to the Macbeths, and--through Lear--from the Cordelias to the Regans, and now, most unprecedentedly, he focuses his major attention on the one Duke-like extraordinary man which a human race can produce: a born king--devoting the long, long course of five acts primarily to the testing of him who by nature seems above tests, withdrawing all the extraordinary universe-power this figure has (or rather letting that figure himself abdicate-permit it to withdraw) at just that point when he needs its protection the most.

Again in Shakespeare, context is all, as the one man on stage who holds his own fate and those of all the others entirely in his own hands chooses to place his fate back in the hands of those others, in an act of the fullest potential for comedy--as when the Duke freely placed his fate in Isabella's hands, and, with her, her brethren's. There, the author chose to point up only the total generosity of the abdicator and the gratitude of his world. Here, at the polar opposite to comedy, the author chooses to emphasize only the total vulnerability in which such an abdication leaves the ruler, as his world realizes at once that, once abdicated, it alone may decide whether to show him gratitude or not; and as his own failure to realize that his fate is no longer at his own beck and call, once he has severed the power-tie with his cosmos and returned

again to men, appears so self-destructive in its foolhardiness that it seems almost cruel to call that failure pride, save that it is prized by the man so dearly, and maintained by him so long. And perhaps, after all, the mark of the difference between Cordelia and her two sisters, and the reason why her words are so repellent to him and theirs so pleasing is that, at the very point of his abdication, Cordelia's love is for the father in Lear, Goneril and Regan's for his trappings of omnipotence, all three addressing themselves to him accordingly: the one addressing him in his most human finitude ("Haply, when I shall wed,/ That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry/Half my love with him, half my care and duty"), the other two to him in his habit of the infinite ("Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty,/Beyond what can be valu'd, rich or rare ...", seconded by "I find she names my very deed of love;/Only she comes too short"). For though every member of the audience, and, apparently, the court, knows that the play being enacted is a tragedy, Lear himself does not--and if his position is in fact now most finite and vulnerable, these are the last two qualities he would wish appealed to in himself in the midst of the inscrutable test-drama he believes he is presenting for his own dark pleasure. "Better thou/Hadst not been born than not t'have pleas'd me better," he thunders at Cordelia (11.233-34)

for daring to so shamefully refuse to respond correctly to the cue he gave her, and for providing him, as she does, with the first sign among many that the universe will no longer supply an appropriate dramatic context for his whims, Lear himself not understanding that, for human beings, the context of life is not what one wishes but, simply, what life itself _is_: something which will not change itself to adhere to the shape of even a king's amusement but can only watch as that king grates himself to nothing against its intractable independence. "Thy truth then be thy dower," he cries at the girl, and, in tragedy for him, though in comedy for the more-than-human cosmos looking on, his words are far more accurate than he intends them to be. Laughter there is in _Lear_, but it is always at the protagonist's expense.

"What shall Cordelia speak?" the young princess says. "Love, and be silent"--and in this her first utterance in the play is sunk the very bedrock of the subsequent and abrupt replies she makes to her father's test-question:

Lear: Speak.

Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.

Lear: Nothing!

Cordelia: Nothing.

This then is the last stage, the utter end of possibility, of the Shakespearean heroine begun in Messina with the

Beatrice-Hero dichotomy between woman as a vessel of wit and woman as a vessel of truth, a dichotomy splitting wider and wider apart as the increasingly tainted atmosphere of romantic comedy pollutes wit to such an extent that any honest woman would avoid it to the point of inarticulateness, as there was little of Beatrice's playfulness in Helena's words and none at all in Isabella's, the latter lady especially almost revelling in the hard painful honesty of her every statement, as one who could not phrase without her words betraying the dear effort it cost her to have to phrase when truth had become as stark a need as "Justice, justice, justice, justice!" It is not strange, then, when the taints of such an atmosphere break into black evil under the pressure of tragedy, so that, for example, the woman-hating insinuations of a Parolles become the woman-destroying accusations of an Iago, that woman herself, if she be good, be truthful, over beauty, gracefulness, even kindness, for only in her utter plainspokenness can she hope to defend and perhaps preserve the values of beauty and grace and kindness that are being so subverted; nor that woman, if she be Beatrice-sharp, be, under this pressure, the very vessel of evil itself, using all her power of wit, or, as Cordelia puts it, "that glib and oily art/To speak and purpose not," in a manner which would shame Iago himself, as if, as the

Beatrice-Hero dichotomy reaches its final progression, woman stalks the stage in reality as destructive and pitiless as those beings which all the Don Johns and Parolles and Lucios conjured up in fancy. Nowhere is this polarity in the Shakespearean woman more evident than in the twin tragic configuration of Desdemona and Lady Macbeth, the one basically honest-plain beneath all of her gentle toyings with wit, the other at root as amorphous and murky as the atmosphere of Vienna or Scotland itself under all of her outward matter-of-factness (to Duncan: "All our service/In every point twice done, and then done double,/Were poor and single business, to contend/Against those honours deep and broad/Wherewith your majesty loads our house"), as every element in their drama relentlessly pursues exposing that root to the death-gasp--one wife dying amidst bursts of straight-forwardness that would credit even Helena (V.ii.80: "Kill me tomorrow; let me live tonight!"), the other attempting vainly to deceive her own subconscious, in words almost wit-musical in their hypnotic intricacy of fancy: "The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? ... To bed, to bed, to bed, there's a knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone ... (V.i.44-45; 68-70). And yet with the first scene of the first act of

Lear, the roots of woman's twin potentiality are exposed raw as a split nerve without any preparation whatsoever, in the phenomenon of the total stark-bluntness of Cordelia, whose dower is truth, and the poisoned ambiguities of her demon-siblings, one of whom says of the other, in answer to her father, "I am made of that self metal as my sister"--as if the playwright now takes this polarity not only of honesty and wit but also of woman as healer and woman as destroyer for granted immediately, immediately beginning to structure his drama accordingly, Lear caught in the center and lacerated by both.

> Kent: I cannot conceive you.
>
> Gloucester: Sir, this young fellow's mother could: whereupon she grew round-womb'd, and had indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?--

the earl concludes, in an exchange of light-hearted banter which, even before Lear's initial entrance with his three daughters, seems curiously out of place in the dangerous atmosphere of the play, as we see the bastard Edmund himself standing behind his father to give the old man's playful words a grim counterpoint. Yet despite the implication rampant in the very air of a tragic landscape that if Kent cannot smell a fault, that same cosmos which poised itself over Ophelia's and Cassio's mildest indiscretions certainly can, Gloucester continues in an even merrier

vein:

> But I have, sir, a son by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account: though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged.

But not until we hear Edmund himself speak at length after the abdication (for the whole Lear trial scene is framed in scenes of Gloucester and his two sons) does Shakespeare draw out the full ominousness at the center of the old earl's banter into black explicitness, as the bastard in all his manhood confirms that characteristic of verbal glibness which we perhaps might not have completely accepted after just its use by Goneril and Regan, if we flirted with the idea of dismissing their forked tongues under explanation simply of their femaleness: that wit itself, in the post-Vienna world in which the characters now find themselves abandoned, is exclusively the property of the diseased, and that any good-natured blusterer who attempts to use it lightly, as Hero's Claudio had done, does so only at the most mortal risk to himself. Nothing is wasted in the world of tragedy, and as Gloucester had good sport at Edmund's making, and good sport at remembering Edmund's making, so now, for that light evil and that light wit, he begins to pay in blood, as that son picks up all the evil and wit of his own bastardy to destroy the father

who, tainted but unsuspecting, brought it all into existence: "Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit," he cries: "All's with me meet that I can fashion fit" (I.ii.190-91)--and though by "wit" he primarily means his mental quickness, the word also is singularly appropriate to describe the shifting play of life-values which lies beneath that quickness, one no more important than the other if it help gain him his end.

Even more uneasy than the omnipresent sense of evil, female and male, implied in the parallel between the two word-sophisticated unnatural daughters of Lear and the bastard son of Gloucester is the way in which the muteness of Cordelia finds echo in the dumbstruck straight-forwardness of Edgar who cannot understand, much less begin to deal with, the deceptions of his half-brother, as the playwright begins to confirm with almost unnecessary remorselessness how, amidst the gigantic black machinations which have apparently taken over the universe, goodness itself is driven to utter only those obvious truisms ("Some villain hath done me wrong!") or blank silences formerly given exclusively to hired clowns--as it more and more becomes clear that, in Lear's Britain, the obvious is the only bastion of truth surviving for the worthy to defend. "On whose foolish honesty/My practices ride easy," say Edmund of his father's son--but just how accurate his use of

"foolish" is to describe Edgar, Shakespeare holds in abeyance, in this universe where no character yet realizes how fearfully literal every word he speaks must prove to be.

> Fool: Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.
>
> Kent: Why, fool?
>
> Fool: Why, for taking one's part that's out of favour (I.iv.102-04),

the "one that's out of favour" being, shockingly, Lear himself, that fount of all favour who banished Kent only to be rejoined later by the man, disguised to his monarch in all but loyalty:

> Kent: ... You have that in your countenance which I would fain call master.
>
> Lear: What's that?
>
> Kent: Authority (I.iv.29-32).

In the simplicity of that one last word is the root of the Clown's attempt to cap Kent a fool, for, like Lear and perhaps the Clown himself, Kent never ceases to view the old monarch as anything less than a king, and his every maintenance of his master's innate kingship has in it the familiar fool-ring of the obvious, like saying that, rising or setting, the sun is still the sun. Yet what neither master nor servant realizes is that the world no longer recognizes the authority of light of any kind, having been given the power by light itself to crush down all radiance to ashes: and as we see Lear and his small band of followers

stand poised before Goneril's gate, it is difficult to escape the feeling not just that their world is primed to extinguish them all to nothingness, but that it can scarcely wait to begin.

Nothing essentializes the nature of the enormity of the series of shocks Lear's world unleashes upon him more than Goneril's servant's reply when the old man asks him, "Who am I, sir?" only to be told, "My lady's father"! no amount of encounters with Lear can ever accustom one easily to the titanic rage that begins to well up in the old man from this point in the drama onwards, nor make the shock-waves of wrath that break almost involuntarily from him any the easier to absorb in comfort; but if one begins, even for a moment, to entertain the idea that he is not acting at all out of the madness which the servant immediately posits of him, but rather out of the deepest convictions of his own reality, then the force of that rage assumes an intensity and proportion beyond any possibility of mortal playing--only comparable to the Almighty God Himself asking a subject to tell Him that Name by which He is most entitled to respect, and being told, "My creator." Seen in this light, which is indeed the light that not only Lear but Kent and the Fool as well seem to take for granted, Lear most certainly is not, in the great hierarchy of identification, "Goneril's father"; she is "Lear's daughter,"

and it is by that name alone that she has any claim to worth at all.

> This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses,

says Duncan upon entering the unhingeing jaws of Castle Macbeth, there to be engulfed in the gore within--nor does anyone accuse the monarch of madness for not being able to see that every feature of castle and air is the very opposite to gentle, and pregnant with the dunnest smoke of hell, for Duncan, too, is a born king, and entertains not the slightest doubt that his world is smiling open to receive him; nor even in death does he seem touched by the foul reality of his own murder, but in his mangled person raises that foulness, by the fact of his kingship alone, to a plane of existence separate from his fellow men, "his silver skin," as Macbeth says, "lac'd with his golden blood" (II.iii.115). Yet Duncan is far more fortunate than his English counterpart, perhaps because he "hath borne his faculties so meek," and must only come to grips for a moment, if at all, with the descending dagger that turns his whole king-universe upside-down and treats him, instead of like the highest, like the basest; nor must the audience come to grips with this spectacle at all, occurring, as it does, offstage. But Lear must watch the dagger descend, in full view of all, for five long acts,

his senses seared to the quick of their own perceiving as they must absorb to their limit the knowledge that the whole world can turn completely about and, with the terrible logic of the incredible, place him in a moment at the very bottom who was at the very top, leaving him there to discover the transposition for himself. "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" cries Lear as he closes his first act. "Keep me in temper: I would not be mad," as he pleads with his own soul to keep his massive wrath--so great that it would carry his sanity with it--in check, for he has not yet begun to fully realize, let alone accept, that he has lost whatever kingly power he possessed to enforce that wrath, and that any generous consideration he gives to attempting to curb his rage so that his subjects may be spared is a matter woefully beside the point.

This very space, in fact, between Lear and the knowledge of his absolute dependency on others, is what allows the monarch briefly to retain the specter of a king's magnanimous habit of humor, as he still can feel himself distant enough from the truth which it is his hired fool's function to tell him, to laugh at the incongruity of his own situation:

> Fool: If a man's brains were in's heels, were't not in danger of kibes:
>
> Lear: Ay, boy.
>
> Fool: Then, I prithee, be merry; thy wit shall ne'er go slipshod (I.v.8-11).

But less and less do such moments come for the monarch, as Shakespeare begins to push the urgent need in such a black universe for truth through and past any function that a professional clown has for entertainment, so that the Fool's remarks are more and more given not just the force that truth has in nature but that force directed pitilessly at Lear and pausing only slightly through the sad and frail medium of the jester. "I am a fool, thou art nothing," the antic figure tells his master as Goneril begins to inflict on her father her blasphemous toleration; and the perfect accuracy of his words leaves Lear not only no room to laugh but almost none to breathe, giving him, as they do, no space at all to escape notice of the exact horror of his vulnerable situation, those words coming not--as with the "danger of kibes" remark--after the moment of Lear's most intense Goneril-agony when he can partially shield himself from its memory, but being delivered by the Fool at the very instant she transfixes the old man with her cruellest contempt. Nothing during that part of the play when the old king goes from one daughter to the other to find the same hard deception facing him everywhere, is as shattering to witness as the closing of the distance between Lear and his clown, as this proudest of all men begins not just to listen to his small hireling, but to hang on his every word, as--just as the jesters in Navarre

and Arden and Illyria became more and more concerned with rudeness as their worlds were growing over-refined, and, in Rousillon, more and more turned that rudeness towards sex the more that sex itself was threatened--the figure of the fool here abandons all concern with rudeness and sex and ribaldry and even laughter to uphold essentialized that basic fool-function of truthfulness which was behind all the actions of the Costards and Touchstones and Festes of old, and which is now all that a clown has left to offer a master for whom the world has become one universal falsehood:

> If thou wert my fool, nuncle, I'ld have thee beaten for being old before thy time,

the boy says, and little can equal the poignancy of the urgency of Lear's seizing of this remark, in the midst of his paroxysm of bewilderment as he seeks out Regan, to grasp onto his jester's answer in words less of kingly detachment than of pure need: "How's that?"

> Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.

Then it is that Lear utters his "O let me not be mad"--for in his hour of greatest need he half-turns to his hireling not for humor but for the truth beneath all humor, and to his dismay, he finds it.

"Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain," Kent tells Regan's husband Cornwall (II.ii.93), as he defends his

beating of the self-same servant who previously so insulted Lear--and again it seems true of him, as it is for all the other worthy characters in this play, that plainness is not only his occupation but his obsession, and that even the members of the Goneril-Regan world are increasingly come to recognize (though in their very use of the word they pollute the concept) the owner of that obsession for what he is: a fool. Though Kent puzzled at the king's clown offering him a coxcomb and now rages at the puling Oswald for negatively doing the same ("Smoile you at my speeches as if I were a fool?"), the effect is identical, as Shakespeare makes the pressure-to-truth which is so urgent over all things in the sensitive figures of Cordelia and the Clown break through even the stalwart personage of an English Lord, dislodging the basic honesty that always was at the base of those figures in earlier plays and locales (only think of the worthy Lafeu) and pushing it so far out of the character from which it springs that it seems to exist exposed for its own sake to meet the naked evil that is stalking the stage, on that evil's own terms. "Having more man than wit in me, [I] drew," says Kent of his attack on the servant (II.iv. 42), as even his unpensive soldier's consciousness recognizes the harsh split between honesty and wit which has rent his world in two, and unhesitatingly allies itself with that honesty as the prime, if not the only requisite of manhood;

wit seeming to be, whether in the loose-tongued Oswald or in his most devious masters, the mark of a stark inhumanity which can only be fought by bluntness itself in a battle far more elemental than grace or even intellect can cope with.

> My father as he slept, Had he not resembl'd
> I had done't,

Lady Macbeth murmurs of Duncan, in an undertone so strange and so vulnerable among her dark projections of evil that, unsurprisingly, her audience--and she herself--loses sight of such a hesitation in the turmoil which quickly closes over it (II.ii.14). Yet it is not just idle speculation to surmise that if the lady had been Goneril or Regan, not only would such a paternal situation not have given her pause but would have goaded her on simply <u>because</u> the sleeper resembled her father: for the mark of the difference between the worlds of Elsinore and Scotland and that of Lear's Britain is at its most essential that the sickening ambiguities of evil which so darkened the landscapes of the former plays so that even a Claudius or a Macbeth, let alone their spouses, were never fully aware of how much of weakness or fear was mixing with the malice of their actions, are here brought to a head, and no considerations of human frailty even begin to temper a vision of evil grown stark black. No one can watch, in the scenes in which Lear is driven by

the savage disobedience of his daughters to the extremest doubt of his own senses, the spectacle of an old man being treated--and triumphantly--like a heap of senility, without watching also the author deliberately expose the fact that at the very heart of kingship is a Duncan-like fatherhood and that it is this exposed heart which the two offspring are tearing to the blood, as if to kill not just the king or even the man in Lear but rather that parent-root which gave meaning to both. No wonder, then, that as daughters rather than as subjects Lear howls at the pair, for by the blood-tie even more than by the king-tie is he linked to them and, through them, to whatever father's authority he ever had over the world, and at the blood level is that tie strand by strand being snapped, making him, as the Fool said, "nothing," at that very quick of his being by which he was everything. "I pray you, father, being weak, seem so," says Regan as she is joined by her newly arrived sister, in a remark that would be atrociously funny in its effort to admonish the patriarch for not being as ineffectual in temperament as his world would wish him to be, if it were not for the fact that the mongrel-pair actually have the power--and at his own giving--to make the man as weak in worldly might as they are telling him he is weak in mind, flaunting both weaknesses interchangeably in his face in so expert a concerted effort that as they strip his power

from him--from two daughters to one daughter to none, from one hundred soldiers to fifty to twenty-five to ten to five to one to none--they seem to be stripping him of his very claim to sanity.

"Over whom both sovereign power and father's voice/ I have to use," said the King of France of the Bertrams and Helenas of his court (II.iii.60-61), taking for granted the paternal as well as the royal aspects of monarchy, though when a Bertram-subject disobeys him even slightly, he himself is hurt as a father only in the removed and metaphoric sense. And at the end of the stripping scene of Lear, where the hurt is <u>to</u> the father and the disobedience as mortal as it is intentional, that is the only voice the monarch has left, still proclaiming himself not only king <u>but</u> father, with or without his world, even, most unutterably, with or without his daughters, so essential is the fact of his paternity to his being (and perhaps, too, to the being of his universe, if all the chaotic evil of that universe is so bent upon killing one parent) that all he seems now is that paternity itself, dislodged by pain from all human context and addressing the universe alone:

> You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
> You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
> As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
> If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
> Against their father, fool me not so much
> To bear it tamely,--

with all the fierce terror implied in such an isolate address, and all the pity implied more deeply that the mighty addressee may long ago have ceased to listen:

> touch me with noble anger,
> And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
> Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,
> I will have such revenges on you both
> That all the world shall--I will do such things--
> What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be
> The terrors of the earth.

Yet as the terror of his position is peeled away from him under pressure of his agony, so even is the pity--

> You think I'll weep;
> No, I'll not weep:
> I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
> Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
> Or ere I'll weep--

so that as he stands exposed beyond even the protection of emotion in the upside-down, child-over-parent deception that the world has become, his author seeks for him the only audience made fit enough by truth to witness that agony, and the only place as essentialized in its bluntness and its harshness as that truth, to house truth and agony and all:

> O fool, I shall go mad!

Lear cries at last (II.iv.274-88), as with the Clown and with Kent, he exits for the Heath, to begin what can only be called the passion of the father.

Stranger even in Shakespearean drama than to observe those backdrops to life of pain and madness and love and disease and death emerge stark into the almost independent

existence they begin to assume at the shock-events of Elsinore and Rousillon, is to note the almost visible process by which the landscapes of these plays become increasingly direct projections of those backdrops, so that, for example, the exposed streaks of sexual corruption and hard virtue in the atmosphere of Vienna find body in the brothels and monasteries which the characters move among, and the uneasy sense of chaos in Denmark and Scotland seem lodged through the intenser pressure of tragedy not so much in specific locations as in the land itself, with its vicious moles of nature and its moving woods and strange images of death. Yet not even in those tragedies in which the very landscape of nature is being created by the light and shade of those backdrops as focused through the medium of one central doubt- or pain- or disease-filled character so that a Hamlet's or a Macbeth's turn of guilt can imbue guilt itself into the terrain of their nations is there that absolute identity of personality with place that occurs in the Heath scenes of Lear, where all of those essential life-values of sanity and madness, birth and death which have been rent by pain from the walls of the universe to hang bare over all are focused directly through the figure of the old king with no loss of their original intensities, the landscape shaping itself--perhaps because he was its king--to mirror his every thought and emotion. And it is one of the noblest

manifestations of Lear's innate kingship that he himself is aware of these backdrops and knows know, if he did not know before, that to their arbitrary power (against the specter of which he was already prepared to "unburthen'd crawl toward death") he may now have to yield not just his life but his very being:

> Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!
> Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
> I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness;
> I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
> You owe me no subscription: then let fall
> Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,
> A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man,

he cries, with each cry proclaiming that he <u>is</u> standing, having sought the Heath himself, there to chain its mighty anger to his own, if not to see in its storm a projection of his distraught nature, then to re-kindle his wrath through the universe-tempest whose very vastness of fury seems to affirm the justice of his own, and, through his re-kindling, to throw his fury back into the very face of that universe itself as an accustomed equal:

> But yet I call you servile ministers,
> That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
> Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
> So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul!

Yet the most terrifying revelation of Lear's invocations is not so much that he is directly addressing these super-human backdrop-powers of vengeance and rage and madness <u>as if</u> he could see them, but that, in the visible tumult of rain

and wind and thunder and fire, he <u>can</u> see them face to face, and, in fact, cannot not see them even if he would so choose--for here on the Heath, at last, that universe which was gradually goaded from the time of Navarre on down to take more and more of an active share in whatever increasingly dark drama was being enacted,, and which seemed to repose part of its arbitrary terrors almost anthropomorphically in a royal human delegate such as the King of France or Isabella's Duke or even, for a while, Lear himself, now divorces itself from its last vestige of mortal camouflage to stand revealed before the eyes of all beholders larger and more clearly defined than Kent or Fool or King or all. "Life and death!" Lear exclaimed earlier in the drama (I.iv.304); but the time for mere oaths is over, for the twin universe-forces such an expression implies are now rent from implication, as indeed they are from every human context, and explicitly rule the stage in a thunderous exhibit of their absolute power.

The one most essential tribute to the power of a tragic vision, as its pressure over the depiction of human lives becomes increasingly intense, giving the characters less and less room to avoid confrontation with an intractable universe, is that the closer the confrontation between character and cosmos becomes, the more that one grates against the other, the more the opaque natures of both are rubbed

clear, so that, for example, we cannot watch Hamlet destroy himself against the divinity which is shaping his ends without seeing exposed something of the inner workings of that divinity, in addition to the innermost drives and motivations of the protagonist. More and more is this tragic awareness of some of the workings of the cosmos imbued into the not uncongenial atmosphere of Rousillon and Vienna, as the characters refer with increasing frequency not only to such essentialized terms as goodness and sickness and evil but to the heavens and the gods, from Helena's beautifully pondered "the fated sky/Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull/Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull" (I.i.236-38) to the Duke's "Heaven doth with us as we with torches do ...", playing out their lives to the half-audible Jovian thunder of which Isabella reminds Angelo in her own moment of wrath. Yet as the pressure of tragedy breaks through redoubled and unchecked into the worlds of Venice and Scotland, bringing protagonist and universe into such tight conflict-proximity that both are scraped clean of their outer trappings to the unbearable degree where every last character refers to the cosmos by some distinct name--the main protagonists accepting its life-giving or life-ending shaping power from Othello's "'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death" and Desdemona's "It is my wretched fortune" to Macbeth's "If chance will have me king,

why chance may crown me"; the main antagonists rejecting that shaping power for the pursuance of their own designs, as in Iago's "Virtue! a fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus and thus"; none ignoring that cosmos--nothing can quite prepare us for the landscapes of Lear, in which the gods or chance or fate or the heavens have been invoked or provoked for so long and with such intensity of insistence by the old king that he succeeds in peeling almost as much protective covering away from them as they have peeled from him, until at last they must stand nearly as storm-naked as he, as he attempts to link their visible tumult to his own and, through him, to the landscape of his world and any inhabitant unlucky enough to be caught thereon:

> Let the great gods,
> That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
> Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
> That hast within thee undivulged crimes
> Unwhipp'd of justice,

he cries, as his whole immediate kingdom seems to reflect, fury by fury, the full visible wrath of whatever divinity or demony is shaping his ends, with a fearful explicitness which not even Hamlet in his sharpest cry for cosmic clarity would have wished for.

At the same time that the concept of space in Shakespearean drama becomes essentialized to the direct projection of a protagonist's mind and, through that mind, of that

active cosmos working for or against him, so does the concept of time undergo a similar essentialization. No spectator viewing a Richard III or a Titus Andronicus would question the sharp personality-reversals of the characters involved any more than he would question the similar reversals in The Comedy of Errors or The Taming of the Shrew, for so stylized are the players in their tragic or comic conventions that any considerations of inner content are as beside the point as speculation on what lies behind a stiff and antique mask, whose sheer riot of ornament seems to render the human wearer superfluous; and if there is a discontinuity in a Titus changing one mask for another in an instant or in a Richard, who will not be superfluous, breaking his apart piece by piece to horrify us with the void beneath, then that discontinuity is not time's nor man's but only art's, which revels in the breaking up of life's cohesiveness the better to display the ingenuity of the artist's rearrangement. Yet question we must, and hold in apprehension, those unartistic "real" breaks in continuity which strike and strike again in the midst of those Athens- and Arden- and Illryia-comedies the very roundness and nuance of whose players makes the concept of stylization itself an absurdity with which they all toy (as Rosalind toys, delightfully, with being all hope or all despair): when, in a Navarre or a Rousillon, in a moment of shock, the

Rosalines and Helenas discover that beneath the countless subtleties of their being--and of life--is a capacity for stark transition and stark pain and joy compared to which starkness subtlety itself is a style. But we really do not know what apprehension is till we see discontinuity strike, harder than ever it struck in any romantic comedy, direct in the midst of those later tragedies whose special greatness derives in part from their infinite complexity of motivation and character development, as if only after the author is able to explore the height and breadth and depth of life's gradual unfolding is he able to see, at the innermost center of that unfolding, that chaos which can collapse whole expanding universes of complexity and subtlety and nuance in a second.

In these tragedies, the line of temporality which runs through the fullness of life giving that fullness whatever cohesion it has, is broken into moment after moment of pure change, each moment separate and in no apparent way any more causally dependent on the other than one shock is dependent on another shock, as time itself abandons all pretense of continuity to become a medium of pure terror. If the essence of Iago's conversion of Othello from master to slave is its frightening rapidity (III.iii.444-47: "Look here, Iago;/ All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven./'Tis gone. Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell!"), the sheer

illogic of that rapidity is given voice over and over again in the chaotic upheavals of Scotland where king becomes corpse, killer becomes king in successive disjointed seconds, Macbeth's fragmented projection of the future (I.vii.6-7: "here,/ But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,/We'ld jump the life to come") matched only by his wife's picture of the past: "Nor time nor place/Did then adhere, and yet you would make both" (ll.51-52). But little even in these worlds, where so much of the temporal seems a direct projection of the disorder at the center of human beings and of their cosmos so that none may have even the slightest confidence in anticipating the shape of their next scene or act until that act occurs, is sufficient to make one ready for the ultimate essentialization of time into isolate moments that occurs in Lear, where the protagonist himself initially revels in his king's power of absolute reversal to such an extent that even the loyal Kent thinks him mad to so reward and banish, create and destroy in such a trice of time, and where that protagonist later, in separate and successive instants, finds himself, in his journeys to his daughters, at the extremest heights and depths of hope and despair, wrath and tears, with no space for transition at all save the space he attempts to create within himself to allow for the precious breadth of seconds he needs to adjust his own alternating senses:

Lear [To Kent in the stocks]: What's he that hath
so much thy place mistook
To set thee here?

Kent: It is both he and she,
Your son and daughter.

Lear: No.

Kent: Yes.

Lear: No, I say.

Kent: I say, yea.

Lear: No, no; they would not.

Kent: Yes, they have.

Lear: By Jupiter, I swear, no.

Kent: By juno, I swear, ay (II.iv.12-22).

Yet not until the Heath, when Lear and his animate universe are both equally visible, does Shakespeare at last transfix the two at the same isolate point of time-in-space, as the Heath becomes not just a direct spatial projection of the mind of the player and his greater cosmos, but the direct temporal projection by which player and cosmos by nature manifest themselves: a trice of time--as Lear, and, with him, his universe, go from outer tempest to inner, from total wrath to total grief the instant the Heath reveals through Kent that at the center of its tempest is the eye of all tempest, a hovel as formed for introspection as its surroundings are for stark upheaval, where the terrors of the earth become, in a moment, the pities of the earth:

"My wits begin to turn," says Lear more to himself than to the Fool or Kent, as, poised upon one second, external space gives way to internal:

> Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
> I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?
> The art of our necessities is strange,
> That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.
> Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
> That's sorry yet for thee (III.ii.67-73).

Nor is it strange that the Fool closes the scene by deliberately breaking that one causal temporal bond which an audience might most comfortably take for granted, as, after a song about knights-in-armor as anachronistic as a previous reference to Gloucester's wearing of spectacles in this tale of primeval Britain, he cries, "This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time"--emphasizing with a vengeance that the force of anguish which has cracked every sense the players ever had of time's smooth continuity can crack the audience's similar sense, as that audience is forced to notice the very kind of discrepancy in historical chronology which it is most prepared to overlook--as if not just the stage but the whole theater were poised on a bank and shoal of time so essentialized into a context-less moment of temporality that it were equally logical for player or spectator to be plunged the next second into past, present or future, adjusting himself to the change as best he may.

"I will punish home," says Lear as he stands near the entrance to the hovel (III.iv.16), nor does he yet realize the full import of his words as it is to be meted out to him in terms of undiluted pain, as the emphasis of his thinking changes from outer considerations of wrath and revenge at his daughters'--and his world's--anarchy from him to that fiercer chaos which their anarchy has unleashed within him. Slowly he begins an exploration of his own being's wound, with all those remembrances of his own part in creating its causes which such exploration must bring to mind--"O Regan, Goneril!/Your kind old father, whose frank heart gave you all,--/O, that way madness lies; let me shun that;/No more of that"--but madness or no, agony or no, with a king's awful will to carry out consequences to their fullest even if now those consequences redound only upon himself, he accelerates that exploration, forcing himself to look no longer at the two "children" that put him in his present predicament but at that position itself, dissociating himself from the high source of the Heath-tempest to feel its forces pin him to the earth at his most vulnerable point.

Perhaps the most accurate measure of the distance between the dark worlds of Scotland and Lear's Britain and that of shadowed Elsinore is to be found in the relatively clear environs of Othello, where the author temporarily abandons his exploration of a looming black cosmos to concentrate

more forcibly on the character of the tragic hero himself, making him experience in his own person all of the chaos of a Denmark or Vienna and letting that hero's bright and civilized world stand back in horror as every particle of his being is racked with a pain so purely personal and physical that no landscape can even begin, as in Hamlet, to absorb any of it for him. "Blow me about in winds!" he cries. "Roast me in sulphur!/Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!/O Desdemona! Desdemona! Dead!/Oh! Oh! Oh!"--and his animal howl can be heard re-uttered in the horror of Lady Macbeth's "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!", echoing in pain if not in rage her husband's "Blow, wind! Come, wrack!/ At least we'll die with harness on our back" (V.v.51-52), as it seems that the playwright can never again create a tragic protagonist who does not suffer his tortures as bodily as he does spiritually: as, whether the protagonist's world reflects his being's state or not, he himself must bear within himself the fullest spectrum of total pain which human nature can experience. This spectrum, this totality, is Lear's: for though Lear begins his passion with so great a load of mental and spiritual anguish that his physical person seems as disregarded as Hamlet's--"When the mind's free,/ The body's delicate," the old man cries: "the tempest in my mind/Doth from my senses take all feeling else/Save what

beats there"--that passion quickly becomes, without giving up one whit of its inner turmoil, more purely excruciating than it seems body can take, as he himself shears away those fleshly coverings which mercifully hid the frame of nerve-agony from which an Othello's or a Macbeth's groans seemed to issue, to reveal the very split quick of pain by which that frame is animated:

> Thou art the thing itself: unaccomodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lendings! Come, unbutton here!--

as if Lear is as obsessed to get to the truth of his own body as he is to get to the truth of his own mind and kingdom and cosmos, all of which have apparently played him false and measured their distance from his proud conception of them in terms which only his suffering can now bridge.

"This night will turn us all to fools and madmen," cries the Clown, his own obsession with truth--in a phenomenon almost as strange for him to watch as it is for the audience--beginning to pale beside that of his king and companions, as the author begins to draw a line between the Fool's professional concern with honesty and the concern of his masters, all of whose urgency in speaking and enacting nothing but the truth breaks through from the depths of their beings with an anguish that shames the very concept of a removed professionalism and makes the jester, for all his good intentions, appear the least worthy on stage to have a

place upon the Heath beside the likes of Lear and Kent and the hovel-hidden Edgar and even the newly arrived Gloucester. "True to tell thee,/The grief hath craz'd my wits," rings an exclamation over the Heath; and one of the measures of the degree to which every last one of the worthy characters in this play are left pain by pain with only bluntness to mouth and stark gestures to enact, is that the speaker is the worldly old earl, not, as one might expect, the Fool or Kent or Lear or even Edgar--whose Tom o' Bedlam persona seems less an outer disguise than that most basic part of his nature which suffering has exposed, as that suffering strips from him everything but that dumb honesty which was at his very center, next to which the trappings of "Edgar" in Act I now seem to have been the disguise (II.iii.11-12: "... And with presented nakedness outface/The winds and persecutions of the sky"). There is no more powerful indication of the initially tainted nature of the old noble than that he must qualify his exclamation, as he does, with the preface, "I'll tell thee, friend,/I am almost mad myself," the "almost" in a sense separating him from his fellow sufferers, all of whom have long ago been purged by the Heath from the last traces of anything as articulate as human reason in the face of pain's stark truth; yet, the very fact that this man should break out of the practical conventions of his life--conventions perhaps more constricting,

because more heavy with bastard-fathering self-interest, than Kent's--to come within a fraction of being nothing but the most foolish-mad spokesman of a father's love for his lost child ("I lov'd him, friend,/No father his son dearer") seems the final tribute to the power of the instinct-to-bluntness to which every unmaliced person in the play must yield himself totally, if he is to defend himself against the cosmic deception which life now seems to be, and which, of those on stage, all but the fool defend out of the direst personal necessity. And if, shortly after the scenes on the Heath, in a small farmhouse chamber crowded with Gloucester and Kent and Edgar and Lear, the Fool disappears from the drama never to return, it does not seem so much that he has dropped out of the company of his own volition but rather that all the members of that company, in the sheer intensity of their will-to-truth, have left the little figure far behind them, as a candle is left behind by a bloody sunset.

It is at the furthest remove from the accidental that after the Heath-scenes, Lear should go mad at the same time that Gloucester should go blind, or that the most essential tragedy of both these afflictions--which is, in drama as in life, the obliteration of perception--should strike both men into darkness at that very point in their lives when they would welcome darkness most gratefully as the only surcease from a pain at last grown too white-hot to bear; or that

Lear, with his primeval titan's capacity to command pain or to suffer it, should meet his darkness head-on as though it were the only relief total enough for a soul-seared king to seek, while the less noble Gloucester must be bodily forced into the same oblivion, though he later welcomes that oblivion with a deeper gratitude; or, most tellingly for the man within the king and the worthiness within the earl, that the one pain-sight which neither of them can bear, after both have borne so much, is the knowledge not of the crimes that have been done to them by their evil offspring, nor of their wrath at those crimes, nor of the forked-animal wound which those crimes have wrought within themselves, but rather of those most culpable crimes which both of them have themselves inflicted upon the one good child each fathered--as both of these men who have weathered rage and storm and grief and doubt of their own senses, one of them to a degree almost past mortal comprehension, are finally broken before the one element stronger in pain than anything their cosmos or their world can provide: their own guilt.

Perhaps the kindest thing that the playwright could do for his audience on the Heath and in the farmhouse chamber was to have the small band of Lear's followers cry out that their king was mad, for the thought maintained, even for an instant, that the monarch is not mad but alternately fighting madness and then desperately seeking it that he might

by it be able to bear his unbearable rage and hurt and grief, would imply almost as insupportable an ordeal to witness as it is for Lear to experience. Yet over and over again in these scenes, almost despite the efforts of characters and author, come those few haphazard words or phrases which break involuntarily from the old man to reveal that terrible self-consciousness which he cannot yet root out of his mind and soul and body, of the knowledge of the absolute father that he is by nature and of the consequent enormity of the wrong done to that father--not just in the howl of a Heath-like proclamation "I am a man/More sinn'd against than sinning," but in a chamber-quiet passage between Antic and would-be Antic in the farmhouse:

> Fool: Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?
>
> Lear: A king, a king!

Only at the re-introduction of Cordelia, and the thought of Cordelia in the next scenes does Lear finally receive that pain so unendurable that it overcomes the last of his mighty will to preserve his man's self-awareness, and sends him thankfully and completely into the child-like world of the deranged: for perhaps the essence of his last and mortal hurt is that he has learned so much--all--about the nature of anguish that the slightest remembrance that he himself might have inflicted even a remotely similar anguish upon

this of all daughters would make any thought he entertained too total a hell for rage or tears to alter. "A sovereign shame so elbows him," says Kent of the old man's final succumbing to madness, which, mercifully, takes place offstage: "his own unkindness/That stripp'd her from his benediction, turn'd her/To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights/To his dog-hearted daughters, these things sting/His mind so venemously, that burning shame/Detains him from Cordelia" (IV.iii.44-49). "Poor perdu!" Cordelia cries, as she hears of that madness, instinct as she is to its causes, and responding to it with the pure pity of her person, as her sisters would have responded with the full terror of theirs. At the heart of that pity, simpler in its healing than any terror would be in its destroying, are found the only words which can express that pity for all those characters and spectators who have no right to use them: "Poor perdu!" she says of this old man who is at last as childish as his world has wished him--and there are no more words to say.

It is not irrelevant, in the midst of Lear's oblivion of perception so grateful to the owner and so painful to the witness, that Gloucester after being blinded by Regan should hear the one thing from her despite herself that would make him accept his quenched sight with thanks, that he may at last have physical respite--as his king, fittingly, has spiritual--from seeing the wrong he has done to the one

he loves most. "O my follies!" he cries, when she tells him of Edmund's treachery. "Then Edgar was abus'd./Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him" (III.vii.90-91)!--for his first thought is not of the hurt done to him in his bleeding eye-sockets, but the hurt which he himself has done to his child: that hurt for which any night he receives is a blessing, for by daylight it cannot be borne. Nor is it any wonder that his next and final thought is to blot out into the darkness the rest of his being; nor, when stopped from that suicide by his disguised child in words as cognizant of the black cosmos as they are desperate for its greater light--"Therefore, thou happy father,/Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours/Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee" (IV.vi.72-74)--that he should encounter on this new and quiet heath his wrecked king, who brings his higher blankness of vision next his subject's lower, and by the proximity makes his old nobleman accept at once the mercy of such an obliviating affliction, if not the justice, for fathers such as they, making the man wish, in the barest wisp of a hint of that justice, that his own earlish oblivion affected more than just those outward body-senses in which he formerly took such pride, yearning as he does now for an affliction of those spiritual parts whose power he never before fully valued ("The king is mad: How stiff is my vile sense/That I

stand up, and have ingenious feeling/Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distract:/So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs"); nor that when at last his true son reveals his clown-like identity to him, and begs his forgiveness whose wrong to that son was so great, his guilt and promise of relief from guilt wells up so full that, in the later words of the orphaned Edgar: "his flaw'd heart,/Alack, too weak the conflict to support!/'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,/Burst smilingly," himself darkening out his body where he could not darken out his mind.

More than haphazard, too, at the re-entrance of Cordelia into the drama, is the difference marked between the nature of tragedy for a king's child and an earl's (both titles in the dramatist's hands seeming less mere levels of social rank than capacities for pain and joy and corruption and purity in the hierarchy of the human race), for whereas the hope which the loving Edgar brought his father on the Dover fields was initially the contrived deception of a hope ("Think that the clearest gods ..."), just as the fool he enacted on Lear's Heath was initially the contrived deception of a fool (though in these well-intentioned deceptions he is at times apparently fully caught up), Cordelia brings to her own parent a simple hope of justice and mercy in which she simply believes, and approaches her blank-minded father not in the guise but in the reality of the purest of pure

fools, that the first touchstone he may have with the world may not have in it the slightest complication of falsehood--as in her first words she reminds him of his cosmic, worldly, paternal identity, which was never for her, as it was never for him, a matter of the slightest question, preserving his identity for him in her own soul when he himself could preserve it no longer and now returning it to him untainted, in words so obvious in their truth that not the Fool nor Gloucester nor Kent nor Edgar could ever quite approach the simplicity necessary to utter them:

How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

And natural it is that he replies as he does, for since no one on false earth would treat him as Lear, as himself,--when at last he hears himself paged as he should have always been paged, he would think himself as somehow removed from earth to that very truth-height to which he could only feel that he, the falsest and guiltiest of all men, has now the least right to deserve:

> You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave:
> Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
> Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
> Do scald like molten lead.

How natural, too, that the slow, slow process of Lear's awakening scene as ministered by this lovely angel of pity should be counterpointed by the sleeper with a thousand separate moments of pure soul-terror, for if the last burst of pain which drove him into madness was the post-Heath

knowledge of his wrong to Cordelia, one glimpse of which would be enough to make him forever feel a man more sinning than sinned against, then his present discovery that he is coming to consciousness not in the lowest nether regions of human torment but in a heaven or earth to whose slightest mercies he feels he is not entitled, must be a discovery fraught every second with the fear that those mercies, which he now sees everywhere about him, might vanish as gratuitously as they came, and plunge him at last into the justice of hell--the supreme torment of which would be, as he here thinks is perhaps being inflicted upon him, to give him the hope that he is in a far better place than he dared believe possible:

> Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
> I am mightily abus'd. I should e'en die with pity
> To see another thus. I know not what to say.
> I will not swear these are my hands: let's see;
> I feel this pin prick. Would I were assur'd
> Of my condition!

And that that place proves to be earth, not heaven, and the minister his own daughter, not an angel, is perhaps the most precious of all turns of events possible to fall to this above all protagonists, who began his daughter's trial shrouded in a king's lendings of cosmic majesty and ended his own in a fool's naked knowledge that in the face of that cosmos, majesty, kingship, manhood itself are all merely lendings (IV.vi.102-07: "When the rain came to wet

me once and the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words: they told me I was everything; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof"), and whose most fond wish for a new life, if indeed a new life has been given him, would not be for a second chance at the divine but for a first chance at the human, seeming, as he does now, to be not so much weak and lost to the race by his great age and nobility and suffering but painfully born to the race for the first time, through the careful mid-wifery of his daughter:

> Cordelia: Will't please your highness walk?
>
> You must
>
> Lear: bear with me.
> Pray you now forget and forgive: I am old and foolish (IV.vii.83-85).

So very delicate is the playwright's balancing of the past sufferings of his drama upon the sight of this new-born creature's leaning in his heavy pain and heavy joy upon the slender upright figure of his daughter, that it seems, as the pair leaves the stage, that the old man is clinging not just to Cordelia but to the whole living world, which with her lies open to him to explore in its happy finitude, and without her would fall in an instant into the blackness of chaos. Indeed, still later when the two are imprisoned, that exploration is all Lear can think about,

for the vision of the vastness and visible might of the cosmos which he was made to see on the Heath, and the ridiculousness in the face of that cosmos of trying to be anything more than the most open and mortal of human beings, was branded upon his very seeing to stay; nor can any Gonerils or Regans touch it, or any of their accusations of weakness or senility mar its fool-like obviousness, or any accusation of childishness by friend or foe make childish to him (or to Cordelia) a child-like way of looking at the world which comes at its essence from, simply, an absence of pride--or does it even seem a matter of importance, upon hearing Lear addressing his daughter, that that pride never existed in the listener's soul or that in the speaker's it was burnt out, for the world as seen without pride is too precious a phenomenon to be impaired by a backward glance at causes. Nor does Lear even begin to attempt such a glance, looking as he does only at that being who had said to him, "No cause, no cause":

> No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
> Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out;
> And take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
> In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon (V.iii.8-19).

And if the father now seems child to the daughter, that is perhaps because he feels so much closer to birth than she, and, having met and survived what must have seemed the total blackness of dissolution, so much more distant than she from thoughts of death. So meek, in fact, is his manner towards her that it is difficult to notice, as one notices in retrospect later in the play, that his meekness and child-likeness is only to her, for only she delivered him into life, and only in the replenishing power of her simplicity did his own fool-like understanding take root and ripen into blossoms brighter and less wild than those he wore mad on the Dover fields. From the moment of the awakening scene, the playwright leaves in abeyance Lear's concept of his relationship, whether child-like or no, with the rest of the other characters, for when he is with his daughter, for the old man there are no other characters, no other conceivable relationships.

"She's fram'd as fruitful/As the free elements," said Iago of Desdemona (II.iii.342-3) as he began to weave his complicated designs around her; and the author's emphasis on that fruitfulness is as unsurprising as the emphasis on Lady Macbeth's purposed barrenness as she attempts to unsex herself before the powers of darkness, for from the time of Shakespeare's polarizing of Beatrice and Hero on down, woman's capacity for wit and willful deviousness becomes

almost by nature translated into terms of infertility, and her capacity for plainness and simplicity into greater terms of fecundity and healing and hope, as Othello's wife hopes to the last second of her struggle that she may somehow keep life, and as Macbeth's turns in on herself in a despair which suffocates her more than outside hands could accomplish. When we see, therefore, the young Cordelia in the awakening scene bring her father from his mad upside-down limbo tenderly into the world, we seem to be watching that unspoken and essential womanhood which lay beneath all the worthy heroines of old, restoring not the man who romantically, metaphorically gives her life but the man who quite literally gave her life; healing him, perhaps because of his fatherhood, with a reverence and a gentleness far greater than that with which ever a Hero healed Claudio or a Helena healed Bertram, yet with the same note of the healer's resurrection which marked those taint-curings and gave them their seal of miracle--except that here the resurrection is not a trick of the healer's but a leap of the patient's own fancy ("You are a spirit, I know," Lear tells her before he knows she really has come back to his life, or perhaps even who she is: "when did you die?") and the miracle of relief is to the flaws of the man's body as well as to his mind; weeding out the wormwood from his fruitful brain when that wormwood was not melan-

choly nor jealousy nor ambition but the black despair beneath all these, and doing so not through beauty or grace or even, in the last analysis, through the power of truth, but rather through that woman's power to love in which beauty and grace and truth seem to a man, or to a playright, to be ultimately lodged--with nothing but her mute presence to render all these speaking qualities articulate. We seem to see in Cordelia the primal capacity of a woman to love, and to see it as if the author had revealed it by peeling away a woman's later feelings for lover and husband and children to expose that first intensity of feeling she has for the father, which somehow is far more vulnerable in that sheer firstness than all the feelings to come, and which, in Shakespeare's hands, seems somehow the touchstone to them all. So, too, in Goneril and Regan did we see woman's primal capacity to hate, with all the later Albanys and Cornwalls peeled away, and the father the object of the essential intensity of the emotion, in a tie so strong that the very barrenness of the two females would seem to spring back at the father before it would attack their own offspring, just as Cordelia's fertility would, and perhaps did, rush back to her father before she could even give thought to children of her own, to bring him by that fertility to new life.

"There's husbandry in heaven," Banquo says in Macbeth

in words which penetrate to the very soil of Lear as that husbandry reaps its most bitter harvest, as every word, every gesture a character ever performed is caught up to face them in confrontation as tragic in its utter symmetry of justice as any Duke-like loosening of symmetry was shot through with the comic incongruity of mercy. Even in this play where the most essential bond between human beings is the primary blood-bond between parent and child--more primal than any later greater tie of love or hate because it is, more than just first-felt, literally the link for the extension of the human race, which, if broken, would plunge that race into chaos past remedy--a phenomenon past strangeness is that the particular cosmic justice behind Edmund's death, as articulated by Edgar, should exactly coincide with that behind the death of Edmund's father: "The gods are just, And of our pleasant vices/Make instruments to plague us," a justice breaking at once both ends of a link which was forged outside the authority of any cosmos, and whose very blood-illegitimacy was so revelled in by both parties. But even a greater blackness than Edmund's rejoicing in his bastardy is Goneril and Regan's loathing of their legitimacy, as they look back toward the source of that legitimacy to destroy that which brought them into their hellish existence (III.iv.149-50: "Our flesh and blood is grown so vile, my lord," Gloucester tells Lear of his daughters,

"That it doth hate what gets it"), vying with each other for a relationship with the bastard which would be almost incestuous, loving him as they do because he is nearly sibling to them in his common desire to kill the parent--filths, as Albany calls the two, savoring but themselves. And as the dead or dying three are mounded on stage, as Edmund says, to "marry in an instant," and Albany proclaims visible the economy of this triple-barren harvest--"The judgement of the heavens, that makes us tremble,/Touches us not with pity" (V.iii.231-32)--it seems only a matter of course that in so trying to destroy the blood-roots that gave them all life, the three should themselves have each rotted into less than husks, and been dropped upon the same common heap.

It is less a dramatic revelation than an expectation fulfilled, when Goneril spits at her husband the invective "O vain fool!", capping a sharp series of similar accusations at him, as even the last and least of the worthy characters in the play seems, by the fact of an honesty so firmly rooted that not a whole vicious world can wrest it from him, a slow, if not a stark, clown; nor is it, in the upside-down world of Lear's Britain, a major revelation that this least worthy good character should somehow be the most worldly powerful of the fool-group of Gloucester, Kent, Edgar or Cordelia, all of whom would have used their might so

much more nobly than he. Yet in this drama where now our every conditioning is to anticipate illogic and blackness, the final revelation that even the most mighty Albany cannot any more than Lear stop in time his slain wife's order to execute Cordelia, is a shock for which no amount of blackness is sufficient preparation, as the most outwardly powerful of all men proves as ineffectual before the fact of evil as does that most inwardly powerful of all mortal sufferers.

No following of the husbandry or symmetry of justice can begin to account for the death of this girl who, unlike Ophelia or Desdemona, had committed sleeping or waking not even the slightest lapse from any inscrutable cosmic standard of perfection, whatever that standard was, or, indeed, <u>if</u> that standard was at all. No Gloucester- or Edgar- or Albany-like proclamation of the will of the universe rendered visible on the Heath for all always to see comes forth now from anyone to account for this starkest of all lowerings of the backdrop of death, every ounce of the nature of which, in this final tragedy, is completely unaccountable. If to break the symmetry of justice is the essential quality of cosmic comedy, it is impossible not to feel that the break here is as much in the direction of absolute injustice as ever in Vienna it was in the direction of mercy, and that the laughter at the incongruity of this break is all the

cosmos's, and the cruel object of that laughter the broken players beneath. "Is this the promis'd end?" Kent asks, as Lear bears in the body of his dead child. "No cause, no cause," that child had said to Lear, lifting from him any need to explain his awful behavior to her, as if, for her, no fount of true authority need ever give account of itself to its subjects--herself by the simple miraculousness of her words making him everything again, with no justification necessary. Yet now, by those very words which gratuitously brought him to such bliss, he must face the anti-miracle of an end to all the happiness he so received, as it is wrenched away from him just as it was given: with no cause--though, unlike Cordelia, he cannot be content not to demand from the supreme fount of all authority some--any--cause:

> And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all?

"I am even the natural fool of fortune," cried Lear in post-Heath madness on the Dover fields at the first mention, after his passion, of his daughter's name to him, though the pain of his cry was perhaps weakened by the oblivion-damage to his senses: "I am cut to the brains" (IV.vi.193;95)! And now, as he holds his dear and broken fool in his arms, when it would be most kind on the audience for the author to have the other characters maintain that Lear is mad,

as it was kind for that author to so maintain on the Heath, that kindness comes--Albany's "He knows not what he says," and Kent's revelation of his disguise to Lear as if Lear could not now see the man and the disguise as one--for to witness this scene with nothing to contradict the certainty that Lear is not only not mad but hyper-conscious of his surroundings with the new pride-chastened clarity of feeling he has evidenced from the post-Dover time of his awakening, and thus that he is fully aware of his anguish with every sensitive tendril of perception a human being possesses, would be as intolerable for the spectators offstage as it would be for those standing next him. Yet not even Albany or Kent can keep from themselves the awareness of just how great his grief is to him, as both cry to the man quickly to die so that his pain might cease, the whole spectacle of the scene framed by the "Fall and cease" of the one and the "Break, heart; I prithee break!" of the other--for to be cut to the brains while those brains are Dover-dimmed is piteous, but to be so cut again when those brains are new-born and tender with the million separate awarenesses of wakefulness is past conceiving, let alone beholding.

Yet just this hyper-consciousness of reality is what Lear everywhere displays in this his last scene, as, without the tempering Cordelia, his full king's tempest is once more hurled into the face of the universe--"Howl, howl,

howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:/Had I your tongues and eyes, I'ld use them so/That heaven's vault should crack"--killing the servant that hanged her with a king's half-forgetful flick of power, reviling Albany and his company for forgetting to save the girl, recognizing Kent even through his own tears. Then when that company cannot follow Lear in his perceptions, it is less that those perceptions are unreal than that they are of a keener reality than any on stage can grasp, for in this play where under the pressure of tragedy so many bonds of so many relationships have been stretched past bearing till they cracked--the bond between a king and his cosmos; between a king and his world; between parent and child (or, as Gloucester said, "the bond crack'd between father and son"); on the Heath, between the Fool and true foolishness, between the transition from one instant of time to another, and between one instance of place and another ("Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!" Lear cried at the breaking terrain); in the Fool's "Merlin"-speech, the bond between player and audience; and, in the awakening scene, most gently, the bond between oblivion and consciousness--Lear now alone, by the sheer mightiness of his will to be re-joined to Cordelia, cosmic injustice or no, cosmic mercy or no, himself seems to crack that vault of heaven which separates the temporal from the eternal; and from the bank and shoal of his own mortality seems

actually to be able to see beyond that shoal, before he even leaps off it, to those mortal-severed dwellers whose bank is infinity. Perhaps indeed it is this hyper-sight, wrenched so far out of joint by the pain of tragedy that it could penetrate to the infinite cosmos made visible on the Heath and now may penetrate even past it, to which he refers when he says of the servant whom he believes dead and rotten, before he is told that servant is Kent, "I'll see that straight"; perhaps it is that tentative sight which more and more becomes sure and strong, as when, upon being told that his two un-daughters are dead, he replies, "Ay, so I think," as if he could just make out their forms beyond that veil he is so intensely searing with his vision.

And when he, still prisoned in his mortal lendings, cries at last of Cordelia, "Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,/Look there, look there!", the shadow of a lifetime of "perhapses" seems to dissolve before the certainty that as surely as he does not see the lips of the poor corpse on stage move, as surely he does see the lips move of that girl hidden to company and audience alike behind that vault of heaven which has been cleft by him--and by his author--for five long acts, until it now stands split forever open.

And if after Lear's death, those characters yet left behind on what the old man once called "this great stage of

fools" are too worn out with the effort of the cleaving to see wnat, if anything, lies exposed beyond their riven universe, that does not necessarily imply that there is nothing there to see--but rather only that such a seeing, such a vision, must take place somewhere beyond their constricted world of tragedy, for in that world the price in pain to pay for being a fool is too great to allow anyone who has fought to discover truth the luxury, among the obscuring thickness of his tears, of beholding what he has so dearly won.

PART III

CHAPTER IV

PERICLES

Nothing is more wonderful to observe in the bright succession of Shakespearean dramas than that process whereby the playwright takes up the intricate framework of an established genre and makes it reflect every facet of character or action which he wishes to portray, turning that genre around and around till every corner of it is so filled with the light of his own dramatic purpose that not only does the framework fully illuminate every thought or deed of the players as they are caught up in this or that comic or tragic situation, but is itself lit up from within by those players, who clarify as much of the convention of comedy or tragedy as they are being clarified by it, so that, for example, when a smiling king says to his consort, "Do you amend it then; it lies in you," or when a tormented soldier howls, "Where should Othello go?" not only do we see a man and his world and his cosmos lit up to the last obscuring shadow of motivation, but we also see lit up that happy or fierce drama-pattern through which man, world and cosmos were given existence in the first place, pattern illuminating matter, matter illuminating pattern just as the formal cuts of a jewel bring out the radiance of the light within, the greater the inner radiance, the clearer the logic of the cuts.

Yet nothing is as strange, not to say as terrifying to witness in the progression of these plays--when, as in a Midsummer Night's Dream or an Othello the full potential of the author's genre actualizes and we can see the whole configuration of the very concept of comedy or tragedy made visible, one seeming to allow the characters unlimited space for movement and ease, one constricting them down to the last shred of their finitude--as is the author's driven will to push beyond the confines of his genre no matter how much the inner radiance of his play will be darkened by the turmoil, until at last the back of that genre is pushed out and we are in another world entirely: as when comedy was darkened from Navarre to Messina and Rousillon and Vienna till it burst through to an Elsinore- and Venice-like world that was not comedy at all; and as tragedy darkened from Elsinore to Venice to Scotland to Lear's Britain, where it blackened to such an extent that, at that very point of constriction where blackness was all, it burst through to a world of which the protagonist could only cry, "Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?" And though that daylight may be only a flicker of Lear's fancy as he is awakening to Cordelia and later only a flicker of his eyesight as he is dying towards her, when we are come to the world of Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, author and audience alike can only cry too, "Fair daylight"; not as a

hesitant question, but as a statement whose certainty is apparent to all.

One of the clearest things in Lear's awakening scene is the generic necessity, above all things, of pride for a tragedy--in the sense the word has, not of a man's integrity, but of a man's overconfidence in the power of that integrity to challenge the values of his universe in the face of his own values of indecision or jealousy or ambition or, simply, in the face of that Lear-like love of challenge itself which lay behind them all and which will not easily be given up--or than the post-awakening scene transformation of tragedy into some other stranger dimension in the absence of pride, as the essential flaw in the protagonist which desired conflict with the universe in the first place is burnt out, leaving the conflict, if it does come, one-sided and entirely up to the beneficence or malevolence of the universe itself whose Heath-like presence has been lowered once, for all, as a permanently visible backdrop against which the very concept of man's overconfidence proves too absurd to be any longer maintained. Nor is it anything surprising that in the plays following Lear, Shakespeare should begin to disengage himself from the broken husk of tragedy as from that green and gilded snakeskin he described in the forest of Arden, and, in a process as curious to watch as it must have been for him to accomplish, make his way towards the fair daylight

which flooded into his vision of human drama once the last obstruction of the chaotic pride which first went to form that vision had been, in the simple desire of Lear to be reborn a child, swept away.

More tragedies there are after Lear, but the lesson of Lear has been too much absorbed by the playwright to brook forgetting, and when he again employs the pattern of tragedy it is less with the sense of his slowly discovering that genre's complex and peculiar dimensions than with the sense of looking back on its pattern complete, having passed beyond it. Indeed Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus and Timon all seem the reluctant beneficiaries of a prideless vision shaping them each not from the soul out for a conflict with the cosmos but rather abjuring all thought of their initiating such a conflict, as Shakespeare gives his protagonists every element but that heaven-storming soul-pride which is tragedy's root and which he seems now unwilling to implant at the center of their beings after he has glimpsed, with Lear, whatever fruits of knowledge such double-conflict could possibly yield, further search for which would be pointless. In fact, the greatness of Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus and Timon of Athens derives most from the fascination of the countless different ways the author compensates these protagonists for their essential disinclination to hurl themselves soul forward onto their cosmos, who do not

need to grapple with that cosmos since they see its veiled purposes revealed from the start: as when he lavishes on Antony and Cleopatra such richnesses of self-vanity--which is, after all, pride without any of its cosmic elements--that no spectator has a chance, amid all the players' protestations of the pair's tragic greatness the most voluble of which come from the two themselves, to even begin to notice, let alone care amid the convoluted splendors of language involved, that the lovers are far too wrapped up in one another to think for more than a moment of the visible terrors of the universe, dismissing such terrors from their play in a trice for the more luxuriant pleasures of pity (IV.vi.13-18: Antony: "O thou day o' the world!/Chain my arm'd neck; leap thou, attire and all,/Through proof of harness to my heart, and there/Ride on the pants triumphing." Cleopatra: "Lord of lords!/O infinite virtue! com'st thou smiling from/The world's great snare uncaught?"). And as Antony and Cleopatra are, more than anything else, two great hearts too filled with thoughts of themselves to so much as give the audience space to miss the absence in them of that discovering soul which threw the action of previous tragedies into the million painful shadows of human beings in search of their own flaws and the flaws of their watching cosmos, so Coriolanus and Timon both are great monoliths of mind and will, each, too, seeing at once the pattern of the

cosmos as a great snare without having to go through any Lear-like process of gradual realization, who, rather than grandly disregarding the terrors of such an environment as did the regal lovers, positively revel in those terrors to such an extent that there is no room at all for the pitiful, their language as crystal-hard as the integrity each possesses to maintain himself not in conflict with his visible universe but rather in too-complete subjection to it, the Roman seeing the universe sketch out his death as clearly as ever Lear saw Cordelia and following that sketch to the letter with a wrath of as little soul-modulation as Antony's opulent tears (V.iii.183-89: "Behold! the heavens do ope,/The gods look down, and this unnatural scene/They laugh at..../You have won a happy victory to Rome;/But, for your son, believe it, O believe it,/Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,/If not most mortal to him"); the Greek even as distinctly seeing the broken line of his fortune and thrusting all his mind and will to carrying out the consequences of that break to the last iota, fighting off the men who would tempt him to fight the universe as he burrows into earth itself to give that universe the widest possible berth (V.i.187-89, speaking to all men onstage and off in his farewell: "So I leave you/To the protection of the prosperous gods,/As thieves to keepers").

It is as if, after Lear, the playwright's tragic vision

had split in two, the pain of the whole having become, in one Heath-instant too great to bear--shaping Antony and Cleopatra with all of the human weaknesses and splendors of pride with none of the cosmic ferocity necessary to thrust that pride heavenward to do ultimate battle, their language, without the clarity of such an axis, sinking in on itself in great whorls of earthbound magnificence of which even a Macbeth who was so mortal-heavy in the wrappings of his "multitudinous seas incarnadine" could divest himself in a moment when the time to storm his fate came; and shaping Coriolanus and Timon with the universe-bound thrust of such a pride, but a thrust so clear and so lineally visible, unencumbered as it is by any worldy loving lingerings of vanity at all, that they each see themselves fixed at the earth-point of such a line and abjure all thoughts of the gods, rather venting their wrath on men in language as stark as any Lear's, with none of the vulnerable heat of Lear's human pain to shade the impetus of their words' white light, their landscapes bleached stark accordingly: "Timon has made his everlasting mansion," the man says of himself as he faces his death as if it were a character clearly seen before him, "Upon the beached verge of the salt flood" (V.i.220-21).

And from that last verge of tragedy--so essentialized

against the sea-like backdrop of visible life-or-death that any further thought of conflict with the utter fact of that life-or-death, or with the chance or fate or gods who lie beyond it, is pointless--does Timon articulate the final lesson of tragedy, having attained at the end of his play that vantage point beyond anguish which Lear could only see during his own last lines but not quite reach, and which it is not surprising to discover--since anguish has become synonomous with life, and life with anguish--proves to be that point beyond the last snares of the living, himself now released from those snares and speaking from his own grave-stone:

> Here lie I, Timon; who, alive, all living men did hate:
> Pass by and curse thy fill; but pass and stay not here
> thy gait.

Nor is it curious or strange but only wonderful that Shakespeare did pass, having absorbed all of the knowledge of men and gods that the conflict between the two could reveal, further probing of which could yield nothing more of knowledge nor insight nor wisdom nor pity nor terror nor even conflict itself but only that pain for pain's sake which comes, Timon-like, from the continuance of purgation when purgation is no longer necessary.

Yet it is a phenomenon past wonder that when Shakespeare does not stay his gait, just one step more is sufficient to make him see that the black point of nothingness to which

his exploration of anguish had ultimately led him is the very center of, perhaps the only entrance to, a wide-circumferenced universe, opening and opening around him as if in infinite delight that some mortal had at last discovered that when all the titanic complexities of rage and doubt and pain lead a man to nothing, something as simple as man's laughter at the sheer fact of his own nothingness can lead him to everything ... can lead him from the last act of Timon to the first act of Pericles as instantaneously as Lear goes from the "No, no, no, no!" of his prison-words to Cordelia to the limitless freedom of his "So we'll live,/ And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh/At gilded butterflies ...", in an affirmation of life all the greater because it is made in the face of that pitch blackness which life has proven to be, raising the speaker somehow above life in his very forgiveness of it, showing, as he does, a far greater magnanimity towards life than life has shown towards him. And though it is past wonder, it is not past belief that in Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, life should begin to return man's spontaneous magnanimity in kind.

If the comic vision of man as somehow having the space to control his cosmos just as he pleased gave way to a vision of tragedy wherein that cosmos emerged outraged to display just how little space man has to control anything at

all, cosmos and character locked in a struggle too close for breath, let alone for laughter, then the release of man from that struggle at the hands of the universe--occasioned by nothing at all save perhaps by man's Lear-like acceptance of that universe for what it is, just or unjust, merciful or meaningless, at just that point when he should accept it the least--and the omnidirectional laughter which wells up everywhere at the surprise of that release, the gods perhaps even more surprised at their own magmanimity than man is at his, can only be contained in a vision of such breadth that it may simply be called meta-comedic: a vision of the laughter of the drama of life that can only come after that laughter has, for the players, apparently permanently died, so that at its return it may be viewed by those players less with the habit of a right than with the joy of a gift, and may never not be viewed without remembrance of the black chaos from which such a gift separates them by a boundary as fine as that between Lear's sight of Cordelia's still lips and his sight of the life playing on those lips; a quality of happiness that is as far beyond the happiness of mere comedy as Lear's high mirth at gilded butterflies is beyond Navarre's "cuckoo-buds of yellow hue which paint the meadows with delight," because it is a happiness beyond tragedy, too, as Lear's butterfly hovers over a meadow which has been so blasted by pain that anything coming after that

pain takes on the green quality of miracle; a vision which, because it comes after and beyond comedy, having tragically absorbed all the consequences of comedy's blithe suppositions, attains the breath for its play of joy from the infinite space it sees the cosmos giving to men to act out their lives, not from the finite space which comedy saw men half-apparently fancy they were giving themselves.

And because the cosmos rather than the players takes the initiative for laughter in this, Shakespeare's final vision, this laughter does not waver or sicken or darken in the jewel-like succession of the four last plays nor change the fact of its clear bright light, but rather only changes the facets which that light strikes, whether they be Pericles or Cymbeline or Leontes or Prospero or Marina or Imogen or Perdita or Miranda, to bring out the infinite colors of human experience found at the heart of those child-like old tales which Lear so wished that he could hear, the delight of which tales especially a Lear--or an audience who had followed the playwright in that painful course of vision which led to a Lear--could best appreciate and cherish, the heart-truth of which tales is of such resplendent gladness that any last wall of cage or prison or theater or even earth itself can only dissolve before it as irresistibly as any last shade of darkling pride dissolves before the sun.

###

> To sing a song that old was sung,
> From ashes ancient Gower is come,
> Assuming man's infirmities,
> To glad your ears and please your eyes.

Radiant, sure, unclouded, reminiscent of nothing at all in Shakespeare save Lear's awakening scenes with Cordelia, the first words of Gower at the opening of Pericles, Prince of Tyre touch a new chord of bright music which, once struck, washes the whole stage with its first-water brilliance and cleanses the audience back to childhood that they may find ears to listen. Nor is it so much the use of "old song" which picks up the child-[illegible] father's "old tale," nor the use of "ashes" to set up from the first the note of old pain and Purgation without which new happiness cannot be understood, that reminds us of the fresh-awake King Lear and the world that his undimmed eyes saw, but rather the simple melody of Gower's verse as it peals out line after line, couplet after couplet, in song as light as only eight syllables can be, and as blithe in the face of all sophistication as would be the song of two birds i' the cage, or three birds or four or a dozen or however many the playwright may now choose to shelter in the limitless breadth of his drama:

> It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember-eves and holy-ales;
> And lords and ladies in their lives
> Have read it for restoratives,

Gower continues, in that vein so far beyond even the yellow

cuckoo-buds of Navarre in the restoring, healing power of comedy which his speech everywhere displays that those words do not ring out with just the force truth has in nature but with the impetus which can only come when men themselves have been purged through tragedy to be themselves forces of the most fool-like truth, to find amazed that nature has blossomed into full ripeness to receive the impact, pouring that ripeness back on the players redoubled in reward:

The purchase is to make men glorious.

And as his melody keeps pouring forth and he begins to sing of a phenomenon not seen in the course of a drama since Illyria --a love of word-play and of a lost grace of subtlety and humor whose re-emergence heals up that dichotomy between nuance and truth that had so long rent the Shakespearean world--his words span the distance from those Twelfth Nights of old to his own new day, pointing up the difference all the while, as he abjures any Orsino-like evoking of life's happy illusion for the looking back on that illusion of youth and love and confidence, lit up as it is by the achievement of the present, to announce that life itself is as much a reality as any melancholy or chaos or death lying in wait behind it, himself proclaiming over despair such a spirit of present happiness that its very flame-like endurance throws the surrounding shadows themselves into the transparency of illusion, so that life seems framed less

in darkness than in light at wit's most welcome return:

> If you, born in these latter times,
> When wit's more ripe, accept my rimes,
> And that to hear an old man sing
> May to your wishes pleasure bring,
> I life would wish, and that I might
> Waste it for you like taper-light (I.Prologue.1-16).

Yet even more of a touchstone to the kind of new world in which we find ourselves in Pericles than the mood which Gower sets or the words he says or the music of his singing, is the function in the play which he has regardless of mood or words or music or all: a Chorus. Of all the changes occurring in romantic comedy through its darkening from Navarre to Vienna, perhaps none was as disconcerting to an audience made used to the subtleties of Athens and Arden and Illyrium than was the players' abandoning of the very rudiments of motivation for successive abrupt moments of character-change, as from Isabella fair to Isabella fury or Duke father to Duke husband, each change mirroring the shocks of a lowering universe; nor was anything more disconcerting, amidst Shakespearean tragedy's portrayal of the most graded nuances of human transition from thought to thought and feeling to feeling than the author's increasing revelling in the broken and the motiveless, from Hamlet's ambiguous delays to Othello's needing only a handkerchief to reverse his every concept to Macbeth's needing only the word of a witch or the kiss of a wife, to Lear's needing of nothing at all for the test of his daughters save his own

royal will--each jolt, each lack of cause revealing something of the very nature of the chaos at the center of human nature, not to mention at the center of the cosmos. Yet not until here, not until Pericles where Shakespeare goes beyond the form of comedy and the form of tragedy to simply the form of an old tale, does he hit upon the one genre--if indeed the old tale be a genre and not simply that first-seen child's pattern of human experience--whose momentum of unfolding a plot is not broken up by a thousand different causeless shock-incidents which cut across its grain, but rather whose momentum unfolds only by way of the causeless, so that no one would dream of asking of such a story, "But why is there a wicked king?" or "Why does he give a test?" or "What drove his daughter to be evil?" any more than one would ask, "But when is 'once upon a time'?", because old tales do not concern themselves with nuances of detail either of time or place or character but only with those primary facets of human behavior which are older than any tale and which, in romantic comedy or in tragedy, were always brought out with a sense of being wrenched from the delicate tissue of shaded motivation which was their genre-setting--as when Beatrice told Benedick, "I love you with so much of my heart, that none is left to protest," or when Lear cried out at last, "Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!", the last ambiguities of both their worlds peeling away to reveal those primal

urges beneath, upon which everything later was built, with any questioning of the reasons why love or hate are primal a superfluity which dissolves in a trice before their simple fact.

"What now ensues, to the judgement of your eye/I give, my cause who can best justify," Gower concludes--and whether he means by "cause" "cause" or "case," and whether he means that he himself can best justify or make clear or give reason for the events he will unfold or whether it is the audience itself who must bring to this primary-colored play all the shadings of cause and motivation that the author has no time to be bothered with in his drawing out of the full beauty of the essentials (an ambiguity brought on by the grammatical ellipsis of the passage, just one of those ellipses which are so frequent an occurrence in the four last plays, as if the author has honed down his thought to such pre-language essentials that his poetic diction is often simply the most dazzling conceptual shorthand), the import is the same: that the play's cause or case cannot justify itself, for it is so basic and so essential--wicked father, wicked daughter, good prince, good daughter--that any thought of reason or motive must come later, and (though the Chorus is too polite to say so), if it does come, somehow misses the point. The Chorus alone gives the fact of a change or a motivation, thus concentrating into a couplet a whole scene of slowly developed causes ("With whom the father liking took,/And her to incest did provoke"), for the fact alone, and the quality of that fact, is what the author is now most urgently interseted in. "Bad child, worse father!" Gower concludes

of the pair--and that is all Gloucester or Kent or Edgar or Cordelia or Lear would have been interested in, too, for that fact is what the Heath would have eventually revealed of the two beneath their outer motive-lendings in its paring away of everything except the facets of man and woman, good and evil, love and hate, permanence and change, which facets went to form those oldest tales of all before mankind could even begin to formulate, among the pities and terrors of existence, anything so reassuring as a motive, and which, offstage as well as on, were--and are--to a child or to a fool the very building blocks of human life. That Heath itself now seems branded on Gower's, and Shakespeare's, very mind as, unlike any "Muse of fire" chorus concerned only with transitions of time and event and place, Gower absorbs and announces all those transitions of the players' thought and emotion which went to produce those event-changes, as if he were the principle of change itself for men as well as for their world, allowing those men to start at once from the "love, love, love" or "kill, kill, kill" point which it took Beatrice and Lear so many acts to reach; which, once reached, is so immediate to the players that it matters little to them how they quite got there, and even less to that Muse of white light who withholds all shadow of transition from them so that they may be seen by the audience not in their becoming but in their being. "Bad child, worse father!" is all that Gower says; but in the

essentialized world of Shakespeare's final vision, that badness and that worseness count for everything, because they lie at the very fork of the human animal itself.

"My love shall hear the music of my hounds," says Theseus to his bride-to-be, as the dark confusions of the forest-night are dispersed by morning; and Hippolyta picks up his words with the memory of a ruder morning and a wilder hunt and louder noise: "For, besides the groves,/The skies, the fountains, every region near/Seem'd all one mutual cry. I never heard/So musical a discord, such sweet thunder" (IV.i. 112; 121-24), as the baying and the splashing and the hallooing echo higher and higher in a world big enough to hold them all. Then when that world sickens and cramps and finally cracks into tragedy in Elsinore and Venice, where discord is too immediate to carry with it any thought of tempering sweetness save that of an Ophelia- or Desdemona-like note of melody whose loveliness is only more painful for its uselessness to save the broken singer, and where each part of the cosmos separates to turn on each other part, one great fragment grating against the others to the laceration of the inhabitants within, it is somehow only natural that the whole of creation be increasingly portrayed as one universal dissonance (as in Gloucester's "late eclipses of the sun and moon": "Nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects: love cools, friendship falls off, brothers

divide: in cities, mutinies; in palaces, treason ..."), for harmony more than anything else was what, in the mutually gracious behavior of the inhabitants of Athens and Arden and Illyria , held that universe together, and harmony more than anything else was what, in the final song of Navarre and the final dance of Messina and in the deep-toned speeches of the elders of Rousillon and Vienna, caught and re-held that universe together at just those points where chaos would have rent it apart; and natural it is, too, that in those darkening romantic comedies and in the tragedies the language itself should have lost its music as more and more of that "No, no, no, no, Howl, howl, howl, howl" chaos became rampant till, in Lear, only starkness was left, its only sound the broken-backed sound of bonds splitting and cracking. Yet little in the remembrance of those musical discords and sweet thunders of Hippolyta's distant world, and little even in the simple melody of Gower's statement can prepare us for the full return of harmony in speech which shines forth with the opening of Pericles proper, for just as the universe has become through tragedy absolutely visible in its hierarchy, so the music of the playwright has now become absolutely clear as he plays upon this hierarchy, lit up as the hierarchy is for his playing not only by that sunrise-sense by which the whole world "seem'd all

one mutual cry," but by that certainty of just where to strike and just where to let go which comes only from the seeing of the pared down bonds and strings of his cosmic instrument aligned for him to stay, along the golden axis of high noon:

> See where she comes, apparell'd like the spring,
> Graces her subjects, and her thoughts the king
> Of every virtue gives renown to men!
> Her face the book of praises where is read
> Nothing but curious pleasures, as from thence
> Sorrow were ever raz'd, and testy wrath
> Could never be her mild companion,

cries Pericles at the entrance of Antiochus' daughter, nor do we even need the stage-direction [Music] which heralds her entrance to hear the music in his words, which, as much as any played note, is the bond between the order in her own beauty--thought over graces--and the order in nature, stringing one order to the other by the springtime melody of both; nor do we need a spoken reminder of the clarity of the prideless vision which allows this man to see his place, and his love's, against the hierarchy of nature. But so visible has that hierarchy become that the young prince cannot resist presenting it as explicitly as the playwright presented the [Music]:

> You gods, that made me man and sway in love,
> That have inflam'd desire in my breast
> To taste the fruit of yon celestial tree
> Or die in the adventure, be by helps,
> As I am son and servant to your will,
> To compass such a boundless happiness (I.i.13-25)!--

for so unveiled and so bright have those gods become that only a blind man--or a pride-blinded king--would not joy in

acknowledging his own sonship. This Pericles does now and constantly and, in so doing, constantly re-affirms the free choice open to him to acknowledge or not, by his affirmative choices always taking himself beyond the realm of tragedy, etching that realm out distinctly as he leaves it behind, as his every movement reveals that the gods are always there if man wishes to vie with them. And the mark of the distance from the lesson of Lear is that this play is ordered around the choices of Pericles, not Antiochus, after all.

> Bring in our daughter, clothed like a bride,
> For the embracements even of Jove himself;
> At whose conception, till Lucina reign'd,
> Nature this dowry gave, to glad her presence,
> The senate-house of planets all did sit,
> To knit in her their best perfections,

says Antiochus to Pericles as he opens the actual course of the drama (11.7-12). It is not the sight of yet another king, beginning a play with yet another test, which throws the stage into that cosmic perspective of choice and consequence and economy of action grown so familiar in tragedy, and which reminds us again of the royal arbitrariness of the universe to test or not, as it pleases, as much the sight of all the players' consciousness that they are being watched by their universe, which takes that test out of the hands of tragedy as those players--all except the king--willingly submit to being so watched, nor even begin to offer their watchers conflict. Again the Lear-backdrop of not just

virtue and vice and pain and love and death and sanity and madness but the whole senate-house of the gods is lowered, as the gods, once made visible on the Heath, remain forever visible, no matter what the sad or happy changes on the scene beneath, and are now referred to almost casually by all the characters in language whose drama comes from its very lack of drama in so habitually mentioning those titanic forces which shape their world, just as the language of the Rousillon inhabitants was so astonishing in its taken-for-granted references to those first virtue and vice backdrops which had just been dislodged in Elsinore. So clear, in fact, is the hierarchy of gods above and ruler and men below that there is no place in even the language of the most villainous of characters for any Messina- or Scotland-like taint or infection of ambiguity, but only for that distinct evil which comes from a sharp break in such hierarchy, as when Antiochus, who through the Chorus all the audience knows has clasped his daughter forbiddenly, speaks of his daughter as a bride and of himself--a son of Jove--as Jove embracing her, thus cracking the bond of heavenly order as well as earthly, lifting himself to the level of him who rules above him and lowering himself to be ruled by her who should be his subject, in both instances doing so for no reason other than for his own pleasure.

Yet, as in Lear, the very clarity of the language and

the visibility of the evil committed is what gives that evil a stark impact somehow missing in the miasma-like atmosphere of previous plays, even as the impact of a black deed committed with full perception of the principles rent and the dictums broken is necessarily greater than that of an evil half-hidden through partial weakness or uncertainty of intent. This is the clarity which singles out Antiochus' coupling with his child even more than his attempted coupling with Jove, for, after the awakening scene in Lear, where the mystery of the universe seemed cradled in the mystery of the father-daughter relationship--the turning of a young girl meekly toward her mad father seeming somehow to parallel the whole estranged world's turning, through Lear, meekly, daughter-like, toward the mad fatherhood of the gods, both turnings rendering earthly and heavenly paternities alike butterfly-mild and ready for reconciliation, child tempering mighty parent through that tendril-bond which was always there to unite them both--the most heinous of cosmic sins, the one which at once snaps those tendrils by which the gods are restored to their children-men and men are restored to their children-young, at just that point of mutual love where the higher and the lower most tenderly interweave, the very parody of parent-child harmony, as tenderness is parodied by rape, is incest. The sheer clearness of this parody is what can keep Antiochus' language so strangely graceful and musical, for so distinctly etched out is the cosmic evil of

the act that the playwright need not fear that any verbal beauty he gives the king will disguise the corruption beneath, since in a pridelessly seen world beauty, at its most essential, is that transparency which makes truth visible, even though that truth be a malignancy come clothed as a bride.

"Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face," Lady Capulet told her young daughter in the sad-shadowed world of Verona, "And find delight writ there with beauty's pen;/ Examine every married lineament,/And see how one another lends content"--as from the first in his dramas Shakespeare describes beauty in terms of the harmony of parts married to each other in true proportion. But as the lady continues, a melancholy nocturnal quality begins to define itself around her concept of loveliness which separates it from the re-found loveliness of the last plays: "And what obscur'd in this fair volume lies," she says, "Find written in the margent of his eyes" (I.iii.81-86), anticipating in a peculiar way the book of praises which is the face of the fair child of Antiochus. Yet in the beauty which Pericles describes in the features of that strange princess who moves so unconcernedly beyond the veil of comedy and tragedy, nothing is obscured, nor is there any precious eye-margin of light made all the more poignant by the darkness surrounding it, for here in Antioch light is described only in terms

of more light (as in Pericles' cry of "sorrow were ever raz'd"), and if the young prince does not at first understand the full import of the curious pleasures which he sees playing round her visage, that is not because the curiousness is not fully <u>there</u> and visible to anyone, to draw what conclusions he may. Nor is it any wonder at all that Pericles should guess at once the simple riddle which defines in an outline as black as incest itself the kind of pleasures the girl's person reveals to all beholders who would notice, nor that this riddle be not clearer but only <u>as</u> clear as the girl's loveliness--"Fair glass of light," he exclaims, "I lov'd you, and could still,/Were not this glorious casket stor'd with ill." The only wonder, in fact, is that the other suitors, and indeed Antiochus' ever-present court, had not eyes to see what is so apparent; but then again, in the world of light which this play is, all of the wonder seems transparent in its obviousness, for if truth--whether of springtime or pleasure or incest--is now at all times fully visible, only the unworthiness of the beholders masks them from it, and only Pericles himself brings to the princess's clear mystery no obfuscation of his own but only his own untainted illumination of vision, himself that one spectator unclouded enough to simply <u>see</u> the truth behind beauty, being, as he is, a completely achieved example of that hardest of all characters for an

author to successfully create: a good man. And in the world of the last plays, a good man takes to the atmosphere of truth-made-apparent as naturally and as eagerly as a child taking to the green earth around him, even in the face of the most villainous of grown-ups:

> So I bequeath a happy peace to you
> And all good men, as every prince should do;
> My riches to the earth from whence they came,
> But my unspotted fire of love to you,

he says to the corrupt two as he is about to be given the riddle. Then in the lucidity of that fire of love does he read reality clearer than any Lady Capulet could ever have read the moonlit illusion of young Paris' face, for this later suitor's world is a world which is, literally, an opened book--"Vice repeated is like the wand'ring wing," he tells them, "Blows dust in others' eyes, to spread itself"--and though won to its openness through the price of tragedy, once opened, no price can buy its close: "And yet the end of all is bought thus dear,/The breath is gone, and the sore eyes see clear...." Pericles has only to look through those Lear- and Timon-like eyes to see what their owners were too sore with pain to behold. And look he does, now and throughout his play, though the sight he sees may now mean his fleeing from Antioch to avoid the exposed king's equally exposed plans for revenge, though the sights he sees later may lead to his rejoicing. Look he must, as a good man,

since to a good man the spectacle of truth uncovered for all to see is somehow a gift so great that the consequences of sorrow or joy which may come as a result of his seeing seem almost interchangeable, either one somehow a worthy price to pay for the sight of what is, in effect, in all of its evils and goods and infinite surprises, life itself.

One of the perpetual wonders of Shakespeare's last plays is watching the author as he illuminates more and more of the inner workings of the phenomenon of magnanimity, each new little turn which is lit up of what can happen when men give up their right to attempt to mold the universe into their own image only to have the gods give up their own right to destroy, a new source of delight, revealing one or another of the thousand different ways both parties are recompensed for their generosity at just that point when neither expects recompense at all, as when Pericles, for example, puts himself in the hands of the sea-mad cosmos when he sails from Antioch to Tyre to Tharsus to Pentapolis always in the most freely willed compliance with that cosmos's might, to have the gods leave off their final shipwreck of him for no reason other than their own good will to do so, themselves receiving from the rescued man a gratuitous lightning-like laurel of praise:

> Yet cease your ire, you angry stars of heaven!
> Wind, rain, thunder, remember, earthly man
> Is but a substance that must yield to you;
> And I, as fits my nature, do obey you (II.i.1-4).

Yet perhaps the most special delight of the workings of magnanimity revealed in these plays is the one of which the audience itself is the amazed recipient, as, just at the point when that audience has ceased asking or even looking for the motivations behind this or that action, having given themselves up to that trust in the author so necessary for the viewing of an old tale, that motivation comes, filling the theater with the magic which only a cause can have when its articulation is not mandatory for spectator understanding but rather exists only to be turned round and round by those spectators in the light of their own reason, after they have so well accustomed themselves to the light of their own faith alone. "I sought the purchase of a glorious beauty,/From whence an issue I might propagate," Pericles tells his court subject Helicanus after the flight from Antioch--and only here, in Tyre, do we hear what prompted the prince to submit himself to the dread riddle-test in the first place: not just his desire for a wife but for children as well; and only here do we have, when we neither need nor expect it, a confirmation of the accuracy of the intuition that Pericles indeed is a worthier man than those nameless and numberless suitors who lived and died in the

face of the riddle before the play began, for the Chorus said that what those suitors wanted in the princess was "to seek her as a bed-fellow,/In marriage-pleasures play-fellow," phrases reminiscent of the unworthiness of Bertram in his own first act before he saw, as Pericles sees now from the beginning, the larger value not just of marriage-pleasure but of replenishing the earth, and the dearer value of doing so not just with a play-fellow but with a female made open to her fullest dimensions of womanhood. Only far after the trial scene itself, so powerful in its stark alternatives of life-or-death that it was more than enough in dramatic impact for the audience that the hero simply survived, does that audience have articulated for it a reason <u>why</u> he survived, presented by the author well after the fact as if to reaffirm his visible intention that no reason, no matter how fruitful-clear it may be, then or now should take away one iota of the sheer fact of the survival itself.

It is a measure of the upside-down, old tale, haphazard world of this play that after Pericles attempts to make fertile the land of Antioch only to find land and princess alike locked in the barren throes of incest ("I am no viper, yet I feed/On mother's flesh which did me breed," the riddle says), and attempts to make fertile, after his return to Tyre and Helicanus and his subsequent voyage, the land of

Tharsus only to find it caught in the throes of a famine as unnatural-barren physically as Antioch was morally, the old now devouring the young as fiercely as ever then the young devoured the old (I.iv.42-44: "Those mothers who, to nuzzle up their babes/Thought nought too curious, are ready now/To eat those little darlings whom they lov'd"), he should be washed up on the shores of Pentapolis too much of a tempest-ridden forked animal to attempt to do anything at all--as if the gods with every crashing wave that hits the strand are underscoring the ridiculousness of man trying to make the world conform to his own willful good, and are underscoring it as relentlessly as ever they did the ridiculousness of man trying in tragedy to make the world conform to his own willful evil, themselves reminding Pericles that his fertility can only take root and flourish when the time and place themselves are ripe, neither of which will be hurried by even the best-intentioned of men. Nothing brings out the miracle of the fact of fertility any more powerfully than does the spectacle of this one man made so conscious of his "earthly substance," as he calls it, that he fully yields to the sea's paring away from that substance even the slightest shadow of male pride in replenishing anything, as he seeks that death alone which he believes his world would have him seek only to discover from the accidental source of a few passing fisherman that he has in

so doing found at last the very land and the home of the very princess whom he may bring to ripeness: a discovery of the magnanimity of the cosmos so welcome in its rescue, bringing him in one moment from the verge of nothingness to the brink of a burgeoning world, that not even the generosity of his great beach-prayer which perhaps triggered that magnanimity can ever quite account for it. "I'll tell you," says the First Fisherman to the spent prince, as the sea-clean lines of place and time intersect almost visibly on the strand, "he [the king of the country, Simonides] hath a fair daughter, and to-morrow is her birthday"--a revelation already linking suitor to fair maid in coincidence past marvel, because in a sense, new-come as he is from the very gulf of death, the day is Pericles' birth-day too.

Nothing could be more erroneous than to suppose, while viewing Pericles, that the absence of pride in the hero in any way necessarily demands the absence of drama in the events which befall him and his fellows, nor does the playwright leave the slightest margin for such an error in any of the words or gestures he gives to his characters to perform: for clearer than sight itself is the truth which he everywhere underscores that even if no player were to offer conflict to the cosmos or to each other, even if every one of the players were to come to Pericles' child-like sense of eagerness to explore life rather than despoil it, life itself

would still offer each one of them more than enough conflict for a hundred dramas, each conflict more than enough for a full five act tragedy if the protagonist chose to make that conflict two-sided; and if he does not, then each conflict replaced by another and another and another, always placing him over and over again at that moment of deciding whether to accept life or to spectacularly fight it, in which moment is contained the very heart of all drama--so that the course of a Shakespearean play now unfolds choice by choice, confrontation by confrontation with nothing in between, as at each new choice in the play the protagonist can fall the full gulf to tragedy or choose pridelessly only to be sent by life to the next choice and the next and the next, as from one heartbeat to another. "Thou know'st I have power/To take thy life from thee," Pericles says in full awesomeness of majesty to that servent Helicanus who has just made the Cordelia-like choice, when all the courtiers would dissuade him from it, of not flattering his lord but rather of lovingly correcting him ("They do abuse the king that flatter him,/For flattery is the bellows blows up sin," the old man says, thus concentrating the lesson of the first act of Lear into one couplet), and the stark high drama of the scene is lost if one ignores the fact which Shakespeare takes such pains to make apparent: that Pericles indeed can destroy Helicanus in a trice, and can

do so in full exercise of his royal prerogative of life-or-death, as in fact he himself acknowledged of Antiochus when he said to that monarch, "Kings are earth's gods; in vice their law's their will,/And if Jove stray, who dares say Jove doth ill (I.i.104-05)? It would be missing not only the point of this scene but the point of this whole play, and indeed of all the final plays and of all the tragedies which went before them, not to see, when Pericles puts aside his trappings of thunder for the royal-gentle play of a summer-lightning, how freely he has made his gentle choice and, more than even how terrible the consequences of his thunder-decision would have been, how resplendent the consequences of his prideless decision are now, as Helicanus returns his young lord's generosity with the gift-advice to travel which eventually leads Pericles to his tempest, his beach, and his golden Thaisa. "But in our orbs we'll live so round and safe," Pericles tells the old man at the end of what was essentially a test of both their mettles, "That time of both this truth shall ne'er convince,/Thou showd'st a subject's shine, I a true prince," each man enhanced by the meekness he shows the other. Then somehow it is only right, in the light of this new dramatic universe whose every prize is only won through a protagonist's conscious rejection of the temptation of pride, that the winning of Thaisa herself should be for Pericles put in the context

of a test so stark that in one moment he can lose girl and life and soul and all if he even has within himself the smallest vestige of a tragic willfulness which he values above them.

"To me he seems like diamond to glass," says Thaisa of her new suitor (II.iii.36)--and as her words ring out, they catch up a bright echo of Pericles' couplet to Antiochus in Act I: "For death remember'd should be like a mirror,/Who tells us life's but breath, to trust it error," in whose two simple lines is contained the whole perspective of the world of the last plays, a perspective thrown into focus by the last events of Lear in which the old king could actually see the clarifying barrier of death as plainly as he could see the tragically unclouded mirror which he held up to the lips of his dead daughter, the reflection of which only mocked him with the sight of his own life till he broke through the veil of that reflection to see what lay beyond. Here in Tyre when the characters speak of death, it is as if as much as they are looking forward towards it, they are also somehow looking back at it too, as they would look back upon the very entrance by which they came into life, death's mirror behind them as well as before them so that life itself seems framed at both ends in the million reflections of infinity, as Pericles' "death remember'd" seems to be something in the past as well as something to come.

Then when we hear Thaisa compare Pericles to a diamond, the radiance of her praise seems scarcely able to be caught by her language, for if death is a barrier-mirror to the brief phenomenon of human life, it takes only the perception of a girl in love to see behind the dazzle of that mirror to point out that, for all its infinity of reflection, death is, to the living, after all only a reflection, and that man himself--and, more especially, her own man--is that diamond-like presence which gives that reflection whatever images of reality it has.

Just how real that barrier-mirror is, however, is re-emphasized a hundredfold when, for the second time in the play, Pericles has to enter a life-or-death test for the hand of a girl he seeks for a bride. Though this time that test is a tournament and not a riddle, the very fact of its stark danger is all the more dramatic in this Simonides-kingdom because here the ruler is kind and the daughter is good and the atmosphere fresh and pleasant, and yet even here, nothing is to be obtained of freshness or pleasantness or kindness or even love without being first--at risk to one's most precious mortality--won. "As jewels lose their glory if neglected,/So princes their renowns if not respected," says Simonides in yet another one of those essentially simple, essentially flawless couplets which this play has in such unbroken plenty that it is at first too easy to miss

the marvel of each until one's eyes become accustomed to the light (II.ii,12-13)--and even as he speaks, that vision of human existence as one great test--first seen in tragedy and, once seen, never forgotten--again seems etched into the very air, so that life itself, whether lived proudly or pridelessly, seems itself to be the highest of all possible dramas.

"Thou hast bewitch'd my daughter, and thou art/A villain," Simonides hurls at the prince a short space after the tournament has been won and the threat of destruction momentarily been put aside for the greater rewards of peace of mind, as the old king, now speaking in that majestic tone which seems the very thunder of the universe, with all of the universe's sunshine-and-hail unpredictability, again confronts Pericles with the stark spectacle of choice: not this time, that of mere life-or-death which was the tournament's and the riddle's, but that of pride-or-pridelessness which was what Helicanus as subject and Antiochus and the sea itself as rulers challenged him with before, and which, if chosen wrongly, can plunge the prince straight into the blackest anguish of tragedy. That the prideless alternative is not the weak one but rather the one of infinitely greater strength Shakespeare makes clear at once in Pericles' response: "Even in his throat--unless it be the king--/That calls me traitor, I return the lie" (II.v.55-56)--for his meekness is

not a child's meekness but rather a child-like meekness of the intensity of the purest courage, a courage reminding him at once of his own human integrity and of his precious instinct to preserve that integrity even in the face of all his mocking or threatening fellows, only suspending integrity before the face of the cosmos which gave it to him--along with life and breath--in the first place, or before the face of that Antiochus- or Simonides-like ruler to whom the prerogatives of that cosmos have somehow been delegated ("Kings are earth's gods"). Nor do we have to think back to Cordelia before Lear in her opening test-scene but only to Helicanus before Pericles, to see the purity of that courage of meekness which does speak up to correct a king gone cosmos-mad, even when all the cautious and politic would stop the attempt, and which, once spoken and rendering its owner's subject-integrity articulate, yields itself to the king's inscrutable will, as all men must ultimately yield, whether they want to put themselves through a tragedy first or not, to those Heath-like forces of birth and pain and death which will brook no conflict:

> Pericles: Thou know'st I have power
> To take thy life from thee.
>
> Helicanus: [Kneeling.] I have ground the axe myself;
> Do you but strike the blow (I.ii.57-59)--

for only through courage can one grind one's nature to that finest grain of integrity which fears no mortal threat, and

only through courage can one offer that integrity up to those immortal powers whose threats are beyond questioning, though meekness be the music of both motions. And, in a phenomenon to which no previous number of benign occurrences can accustom one (because the malevolence of the occurrence which killed Cordelia was so absolutely causeless that something similar might just come forth once more), the universe again, with Pericles before Simonides, responds to its subject's fresh evidence of meekness in kind, and does so as suddenly as it ever went from any sunshine to the blackest hail, as Simonides crescendoes his accusations at the young man and, in Lear-like terribleness, at his own daughter too, only to reverse himself entirely in what seems even less than a trice of time, on what is surely one of the most dramatic dash-marks in Shakespeare:

> Therefore, hear you, mistress: either frame
> Your will to mine; and you, sir, hear you:
> Either be ruled by me, or I'll make you--
> Man and wife,

returning the two suppliants even more mildness than they are offering him.

"I'll tame you, I'll bring you in subjection," the old king had hurled at his Thaisa in what would have been, had he followed it through, a misuse of royal power the stain of which misuse five long acts would not have been enough to purge him of. In the light of the clarity of the phenom-

enon which Shakespeare here etches out, it is at last possible to see the very motion or the very miracle--whichever way one wishes to look at it--which lies at the heart of the universe [redacted] the author now permanently envisions: the miracle that the more that men are true to their own fine-ground integrities and the more they are prepared to yield those integrities to that universe which holds sway over man and integrity and all, the less the universe is wont to demand any such yielding, leaving men freer and freer as they more and more come to accept the finitude of their own most mortal natures, the royal gods lessening their demands as lovingly as ever Pericles had said to the self-knelt Helicanus when the old man so well displayed "a subject's shine": "Rise, prithee, rise;/ ... Thou art no flatterer:/I thank thee for't" (I.ii.59-61), mortal freedom allowed to expand and expand within the limitless freedom of immortal freedom. When we see, therefore, Simonides releasing Pericles and Thaisa from the necessity of conflicting their own integrity with that of the cosmos (since theirs should, after all, shape itself as naturally within the heavens' as a petal opening within the greater bud), we are seeing the cosmic delight of what is, in fact, an all-powerful monarch who, like his new son with Helicanus, himself most gloriously passes the test which he himself gave--for his sudden suspending of that test at the moment the

test-subjects make their prideless choice seems the very completion of the mirroring of the motion of the double-magnanimity which binds man to cosmos and cosmos to man, the sheer accuracy of which mirroring seems to make him more than ever a true king, just as Pericles was at the end of his own Helicanus-test revealed to be more than ever "a true prince," for his perfect imitation of that cosmos whose powers to terrify and delight he brings into absolute coincidence with his own.

> When that I was and a little tiny boy,
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
> A foolish thing was but a toy,
> For the rain it raineth every day,

sang Feste as he brought his Twelfth Night to a close--but when, soon after his song and play ended, the rain did rain every day in an ever-darkening tempest which, on the Heath, eventually cracked the very firmament of his world, no character, clowns themselves included, had any longer the time or space to toy with the concept of foolishness at all, since that concept had become the one necessity of vision to possess in order to make one's way clearly through the convoluted terrors of life. And by the time we hear Lear's clown cry:

> He that has and a little tiny wit,
> With a hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
> Must make content with his fortune's fit,
> Though the rain it raineth every day (III.ii.74-77),

the lesson of the value of having a fool's simple wit has

been branded on every worthy player in the drama. From Costard on, all naturals always accepted life for what it was, not for what they would wish or force it to be, and now when such forcing can only lead to utter tragedy, life fighting back with redoubled fury on those who would try to tamper with its justice, all players must see the urgency of making content with fortune's fit or consume themselves in their fighting, for nothing they can ever do will change that fit once it befalls them, nor anticipate love or fertility any earlier than when the time is ripe, nor postpone pain or death by even one second. Then when we see Pericles--who from the first seems to have Lear's awareness seared upon his soul, that he, and indeed every other man, is in his very "earthly substance" the natural fool of fortune--lose his wife and gain his baby daughter in successive disjointed instants in the midst of a sea-mad cosmos as visible in its mighty wrath as was any Heath, we must see, too, that not all the tempest-anguish which the monarch hurls back into the face of that cosmos at its killing of Thaisa can alter one iota the fact of his pain: "O you gods!" he howls, "Why do you make us love your goodly gifts,/And snatch them straight away?" But Pericles is far from a little tiny boy who in some distant past comedy would half-dismiss as toys the meekness of fools for the more grown-up indulgences of conceit (as Berowne did in his "Well, set thee

down, sorrow! for so they say the fool said, and so say I, and I the fool: well-proved wit!"), and farther even in insight than that four-score-and-upwards sounding fool who sang so abruptly of making content with the blows of the world: for the soul of Pericles is larger even than the soul of tragedy, and not only does he, after the instant of his moment of absolute grief, revert the next moment to the mild acceptance of a fool, but does so with no Heath-like harshness of transition but only with a motion as natural and as beautiful as looking from his birth-rent wife to the precious tiny-witted foolishness of his new-born daughter, whose very lack of pride perhaps, as she catches his attention, gentles him to choose new peace rather than old sorrow, in that post-tragic choice that Lear made too late:

> Now, mild be thy life!
> For a more blusterous birth never had babe:
> Quiet and gentle thy conditions! for
> Thou art the rudeliest welcome to this world
> That e'er was prince's child. Happy what follows
> (III.i.27-31)!

Nor in his wish for happiness does he forget his sorrow; only, simply, after absorbing every bit of his absolute pain, he has passed beyond it, himself cutting the seams of pride's constrictions so that he can move once again easily and freely within fortune's cope-like fit. Then as he delivers his daughter to the care of the governor Cleon of Tharsus, and delivers his wife to the depths of the sea in words as beautiful and as simple as the sound of the

water itself ("A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear;/ No light, no fire: th'unfriendly elements/Forgot thee utterly; nor have I time/To give thee hallow'd to thy grave, but straight/Must cast thee, scarcely coffin'd, in the ooze;/Where, for a monument upon thy bones,/And e'er remaining lamps, the belching whale/And humming water must o'erwhelm thy corpse,/Lying with simple shells"), it is as if he is leaving both his joy and his sorrow behind him to explore the more essentially the ceaseless astonishments of the progress of a human life. And perhaps the dearest human loveliness in this scene of the triple parting of what is, though the parties are a prince, a princess and a princess-to-be, after all a family, is that Shakespeare makes the sorrow of the death of the wife, more than any other thought or feeling, linger most longly around the figure of Pericles--"Hie thee, whiles I say/A priestly farewell to her"--in the gentlest of reminders to the audience that this now-quiet man whose speech here reveals nothing, has been, in the bare space of seventy lines, through everything; and that it is the most mortal, most perishable part of that everything--that it is pain and death rather than even new birth and new love and new hope--whose memory will haunt him, silent on his solitary pilgrimage, the most.

In this of all plays, the most natural thing in the world for Pericles to do after such a scene is to leave his infant daughter at Tharsus, for it was barren Tharsus he had saved

from famine on his journey to Pentapolis, and when he places the babe in its now-burgeoning environs it is as if he is placing her back in a womb which he had already lovingly made fertile. Yet still more natural it is that this womb should in time rip her untimely from itself, for, as is not surprising in the truth-clear atmosphere of the last plays, Tharsus' essential nature <u>is</u> that infertility which Pericles first saw in it; and, since in these last plays freedom is all, that infertility alone is what Tharsus chooses to preserve, despite any well-intentioned prince who would offer it fecundity. Then as we see Pericles' now full-grown daughter on the strand of the sea, returning to the waves some of the fruitfulness which they lavished upon her in bringing her to birth, we can only wonder what has taken the famine-loving Cleon and his wife and daughter so long to realize the girl is a threat:

> No, I will rob Tellus of her weed,
> To strew thy green with flowers; the yellows, blues,
> The purple violets, and marigolds,
> Shall as a carpet hang upon thy grave,
> While summer-days doth last,

says the young princess (IV.i.13-17), scattering from her basket blossoms in sufficient number almost to blanket, with their living color, those ocean-hollows which she thinks are her lost mother's grave, by her scattering seeming nearly to touch that grave itself with the quick revival of life; and, with her careless mention of the season, innocently

touching that spring of memory in the audience which brings to mind Pericles' exclamation at the sight of Thaisa in Pentapolis when Simonides asked him if the girl was not indeed fair: "As a fair day in summer, wondrous fair." There is no need to look past Gower's simple motive-explanation that the governor's wife suddenly plotted this second Thaisa's murder out of "the monster envy" for a more complicated reason, any more than one would ask of any old tale, "But why is there a wicked queen?"--for the fact of Dionyza's envy and hatred is all that matters to the maiden whom it is aimed at, since it is the fact and not the reasons surrounding the fact which brings the girl to her moment of life-or-death, and since that fact is itself so primal in its evil that it lies deep below any sophisticated formulation of causes, save only that cause which Albany gave for the blackness of Goneril and Regan, which it itself so essential that it seems less a cause than simple a description of the workings of evil itself: "Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile;/Filths savour but themselves" (IV.ii.38-39). When we see Dionyza encounter Pericles' daughter on the beach, therefore, we do not see the thousand complex coverings of an envious woman but rather--as with Goneril and Regan--envy itself, instantly seeking out that most fruitful power of the sea which brought the young girl to birth and which was, in fact, the reason her father named her Marina

in happy commemoration, and seeing in that fruitfulness no life but only the sick power of death which is the reflection of her own nature: "Come, give me your flowers," she says to Marina, "ere the sea mar it"; and then: "... the air is quick there,/And it pierces and sharpens the stomach"--seeing even in the waves a mirroring of those mothers who, like herself, were ready to eat their little darlings, a sight which is the very essence of the famine-nature of Tharsus as well as of its rulers. No amazement at all is it, then, that Marina should seem as vile as the sea to such a kingdom, nor that Dionyza's attempt to kill her prove to be as unsuccessful as attempting to kill the sea, especially since aimed at that part of the sea which is most infuriating to the barren: that part which <u>will</u> bring things to birth, as incorrigibly as a young girl who <u>will</u> sow blossoms even in the green and gaping jaws of destruction.

> Mistress Overdone: But shall all our houses of resort in the suburbs be pulled down?
>
> Pompey: To the ground, mistress.
>
> Mistress Overdone: Why, here's a change indeed in the commonwealth! What shall become of me?

the old bawd asks, as her means of feeding off the festerings of Vienna are threatened by the pale Angelo (I.ii.104-08); but the answer to her question in the miasma-like atmosphere of her city seems to be that everything shall become of her,

for the evil of the division between the sexes which is her stock in trade, each sex using the other with nothing so awkward as love to get in the way of the use, is far from being dispersed by the new governor but only is driven by him and by his own inhumanity deeper and deeper beneath the surface where it might canker the more, sprouting up even around the edges of those Julietta- and Claudio- and Mariana-characters who should be the sources of fresh love in romantic comedy and sprouting up right through the very core of that Lucio-figure who should be the source of fresh laughter--so that no character's language can play with sexual allusion without that allusion convolving into a dark inner spiral of disease, unless that character, like Isabella, eschews such playing entirely, in words whose every vile reference is offset by the thrust of her nunnish accusation: all in all, a spectacle of sex dichotomized from love which is so stark in Mistress Overdone's and Isabella's words but so smuttily ambiguous in everyone else's that not even the Duke, who watches smilingly over all, is himself free from taint to be smiling so, and whose smile even extends to his final punishment of Lucio, making it seem that the fop's crime is, in his ducal opinion, less serious than perhaps we would wish a ruler to think it to be. Yet, as with the incest of Antiochus, nothing reveals more clearly the now transparent air of the world of Shakespeare's final vision than the

brothel-scenes in which Marina finds herself after her expulsion from Tharsus, for here, as in Antioch, even the blackest of deeds and intents is caught in language whose every syllable places those intents against the visible hierarchy of the universe, so that--even when the blackness is not even incest-cosmic but only brothel-sexual--not a trace of smut plays around the peripheries of the speeches of whoremistress and assistants, but rather all the evil is contained <u>in</u> the words themselves, plain and straightforward and businesslike as they are, leaving the surrounding atmosphere as clean as is the beach on which Dionyza plotted:

> Bawd: Come your ways; follow me.
>
> Marina: If fires be hot, knives sharp, or waters deep,
> Untied I still my virgin knot will keep.
> Diana, aid my purpose!
>
> Bawd: What have we to do with Diana? Pray you, will you go with us (IV.ii.144-47)?--

and the difference in this exchange from any in Vienna is as welcome as it is obvious, for here even the most heedless source of evil itself <u>knows</u> that it is evil, for that source can, as clearly as any Marina, see Diana too, and defines its sharp distance from the goddess accordingly.

> Lysimachus: How now, wholesome iniquity, have you that a man may deal withal, and defy the surgeon?
>
> Bawd: We have one here, sir, if she would--but there never came her like in Mytilene.
>
> Lysimachus: If she'd do the deed of darkness, thou wouldst say (IV.vi.23-29).

Not so much the young governer's dalling his intended sport "wholesome" or his intention to have no disease pollute that sport is what marks the difference between this romantic hero and the Claudios and Bertrams and Angelos of old, but rather his taking up of the bawd's remark where she stopped it at the dash-mark and the finishing of her suggestive line with mention of the explicit fact, for if he does seek such sport he calls that seeking into the open so that no taint of innuendo may touch it, nor any shadow of a smirk play about his smile. It is not strange at all, then, that he should at once see the purity that Marina's transparency of beauty makes visible to all beholders, fairer a glass of light as she is than any daughter of Antiochus, and only happy certainty that in his very seeing he should be reminded of the worthiness within himself that will awake if he but give it touch, for there is no trace in him of self-deception or malice to get in the way of his mirth, nor no Bertram- or Angelo-like dichotomy in him between sex and love so darkly nurtured that it cannot be healed in an instant. "Had I brought hither a corrupted mind,/Thy speech had alter'd it," he tells the girl as he gives her the gold necessary to ransom her way out of the present sty from which she would escape like "the meanest bird/That flies i' the purer air"--but the point is that he did not bring that kind of mind to her at all, for after the festerings of

sex-for-sex's sake which had been brought to a head in the open blackness of the Goneril-Edmund-Regan triangle in which filths uninterruptedly savored but themselves, no romantic hero would ever more toy with even so much as a hint of rapacious sexuality any more than he would toy with a mocking wit, since no such toyer can any longer overlook the fact that it is not so much mockery or lust that he is playing with but rather evil itself. Evil has become too evil and good has become too good in the intensity of the clarity with which the author now envisions them for any character to even dream of trying to intermingle them both; and in this play, which is, by the prideless choices the players make (even to giving up the Bertram-like male vanity of a sexual conquest), beyond tragedy, the atmosphere of the good is the author's natural domain, and neither he nor any of his players lingers for long in that brothel-sty which is blacker in its starkness than a hundred Viennas, for that blackness, like Antioch, is only a small dark corner of the author's new world, and there <u>is</u> fresh air outside.

As we see in the last act Pericles delivered up by the sea to Mytilene to be reunited with his Marina, and watch the two together on stage as the broken relationship between father and daughter is bound and healed by sweeter medicine than physician can offer, we see at last the crystalline

framework of Pericles complete, only to discover, in this play wherein men so perfectly mirror the actions of the cosmos, that they perfectly mirror the structure of the cosmos too--for that physical structure which in the prologue to Act III Gower etched out as "the four opposing coigns/ Which the world together joins" is the very structure of the human drama within, each coign held aloft by a father and a daughter, each of the four defining one of the permanent facets of that father-daughter relationship within whose four corners the whole realm of human possibility is contained: the perspective of that relationship, and of the play, set off by the distant pillars of old Antiochus and old Simonides, whose sheer cosmic badness and goodness respectively are brought forward in time to be carried out in the immediate humanities of Cleon and Pericles, each of whose high persons is aligned with the long-cast shadow of his older, more mythic predecessor.

If nothing is clearer from the awakening scene in Lear onward than the parallel between a father and his created daughter and the gods and their created world--the awful split between cosmos and man only healing up when parent and child whose split sundered the cosmos in the first place freely re-embrace one another, each of the two speaking more meekly than the other till, somehow, the cosmos itself for a precious second seems to grow as fair-daylight mild

towards its children as they are towards it, earth, as meekly as Cordelia, re-embracing heaven and heaven, as meekly as Lear, re-embracing earth--then nothing is more difficult for a father to do, who even realizes only a fraction of the preciousness of his relationship with his offspring, than to freely give that offspring up, as every parent must do as one generation yields to another. This giving up is what Antiochus will not do, grasping his daughter in an embrace so intense, and in turn being as intensely grasped by her, that the whole concept of double-magnanimity is mocked into inversion, his pride of possession vying with hers, neither party even beginning to yield to the concept of a letting go. Yet this letting go is what Simonides, who is at least as powerful and as awful a paternal monarch, accedes to, yielding his will to his daughter's when he grants her wish to be released to go with Pericles, as freely and as mildly as Thaisa herself yields her will to her father's by submitting herself to his judgment, each setting the other free to do whatever terrible thing he chooses only to have the choice be to love the other the more for the freedom. "Yes, if you love me sir," Thaisa replies when her father asks her if his freeing of her has made her happy. "It pleaseth me so well, that I will see you wed," he fondly answers (II.v.87-91).

So, too, in the second generation of fathers, does Cleon consent, though weakly through his wife, to an

incest-jealous love of his daughter which binds that child to him in a web of guilt in whose weaving neither of the two played an active part, just as Pericles consents, though painfully, to the releasing of his daughter from him through death, in a sundering in which neither one of them plays an active part either--fortune presenting each man with the fact of a binding or a release of his child and leaving him only to accept such a binding, as did Antiochus, or reject it, as did Simonides--his acceptance or refusal alone sufficient to determine his fatherly greed or fatherly generosity. It is as if, by the use of this younger pair of fathers, the author is underscoring all the more the truth that it is not just those mythic rulers who can will their own fortune of possessiveness or magnanimity who are responsible for that fortune, but also those more ordinary men in a later, less magical generation, who are, too, responsible for their fortune, merely in the way in which they freely choose to cope with it after the Dionyza- or death-fact which takes that fortune out of their hands--and in this sense, by his giving tacit approval when he could refuse it, Cleon binds his daughter to him as willfully as Pericles frees his own child by his tacit approval of her release when he, too, could have refused to give it: "He bears/A tempest which his mortal vessel tears," says Gower of the prince, "And yet he rides it out" (IV.iv.29-31).

As Antiochus and Cleon both fail to mirror the magnanimity of their cosmos by their possessive desire to bind their children to them (Cleon's less willful, less specific desire perhaps in proportion to his being, after all, a governor and not a king) only to have the cosmos mirror them by constricting these two fathers, who are as is everyone else the children of that cosmos, in a grasp so possessively tight that the men lose all their freedom unto death, the high gods themselves destroying the king (II.iv.13-15: "For though/This king were great, his greatness was no guard/ To bar heaven's shaft, but sin had his reward"), the common people destroying the governor,--so does, in the awakening scene at Mytilene, the cosmos shower back on its child Pericles the magnanimity he himself showered on his own child in his acceptance of her release from him (though the pain of that acceptance drove him into a sackcloth-and-ashes roving of the seas as unhinged in his senses as was Lear in his own flower-bedecked roving of the Dover fields) as that cosmos gives him back his child as causelessly as ever she was taken from him, in a shock of generosity so great that the man can only comprehend its joy in terms of the Heath-tempest he has carried silent within himself at peak intensity for fourteen years:

> O, Helicanus, strike me, honour'd sir!
> Give me a gash, put me to present pain,
> Lest this great sea of joys rushing upon me
> O'erbear the shores of my mortality,
> And drown me with their sweetness--

the world which was split for him at the senseless losing of his daughter becoming whole again at her return, as the paternal gods themselves, who initiated Marina's sundering and madly continued it for so very long, are at last brought back to blessed sanity by the meekness of their child Pericles in motion with Pericles himself being brought back from his own world of madness to new birth by the meekness of his child Marina:

> O, come hither,
> Thou that beget'st him that did thee beget;
> Thou that was born at sea, buried at Tharsus,
> And found at sea again. O Helicanus,
> Down on thy knees! Thank the holy gods as loud
> As thunder threatens us,

his holding off from an embrace of his child, in less sacred circumstances a surprising thing, seeming here to be naturalness itself, as first he blesses her and as first she kneels before him to emphasize with the silent language of benediction that the two see and love in one another not just the goodness one of a daughter and one of a father, but the goodness one of the created and one of the creator, whose two states encompass not just a Marina or a Pericles but their whole cosmos as well, created reverencing creator, creator reverencing created as endlessly and as interchangeably in humilities as ever Lear had said to Cordelia, "When thou dost ask my blessing,/I'll kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness," or as ever Pericles says now to Marina:

> Now blessing on thee! rise; thou art my child--

so that his embrace of his daughter (and of his prospective new son Lysimachus), when it does come, in its healing of an elder earthly generation to a younger in mutual love, is accompanied by that celestial music which comes only when all generations of cosmic creation have healed together too, the uncreated heavens healing with the created earth as audibly as the embrace of father to daughter makes that new healing, that re-newed harmony, visible:

> Pericles: I embrace you.
> Give me my robes; I am wild in my beholding.
> O heavens bless my girl! But hark, what music?
> Tell Helicanus, my Marina, tell him
> O'er point by point, for yet he seems to doubt,
> How sure you are my daughter. [Music.] But
> what music?
>
> Helicanus: My lord, I hear none.
>
> Pericles: None?
> The music of the spheres! List, my Marina
> (V.i.190-99;220-28),

for we are here in a world beyond even Lear, and more than even the wonder of father singing to child and child to father like two birds i' the cage is the wonder that transpires when it is as clear to a Pericles as it is to a Shakespeare, despite the deafness of any Helicanus, that those two birds contain between them all creation itself, at whose reunion the cage itself is set singing.

In the light of the author's seeing of those backdrops to human life of pain and love and madness and death and virtue and vice dislodged from the universe in Elsinore and

of his treating them as if they were visible entities in Rousillon and Vienna to be mentioned almost casually by name in ordinary speech; and then of his seeing through even those backdrops, in Venice and Scotland, to that sheer cosmic wall of chance or fate or fortune or the gods from which those backdrops were hung until, on the Heath of Lear's Britain, that wall itself became visible and no major speech in any later drama was without its almost casual mention of the gods--it is naturalness itself, in the crystalline world of the last plays where the gods are as fully visible from the first as are (in the person of Gower) motivation and change and time and place, that those gods should at last be given voice and face as well as presence and mention. And, in the appearance on the stage of Diana herself, they are:

> Or perform my bidding, or thou liv'st in woe;
> Do't, and happy; by my silver bow!
> Awake, and tell thy dream.

"Celestial Dian, goddess argentine,/I will obey thee," Pericles cries (V.1.245-49). Even more important than to note his wonder at her coming, is to note his utter lack of surprise, for from his first mention in the drama of "You gods that made me man and sway in love," the gods have been full in the range of every character's vision, even to the lowliest bawd's, as the open Heath-tempest was even full in the range of the vision of everyone from the sensitive Edgar to blunt Kent; and it is only the completion of a

whole dramatic universe--players and spectators--that the audience should at last see those clear gods too. And if these gods are to be found also in the author's source-story or in the masque-conventions of any source-play, such sources count as nothing against the way in which Shakespeare uses them here, Gower for Gower, Diana for Diana, to populate that senate-house of the planets which he has seen through to in the agony of Lear, and whose primal gods, it is impossible not to feel, must from that point on come forth to visibly act in the world of his drama, source convention or no--though being, since Elsinore, half visible for so long--for when the vault of heaven is finally cracked, it is only right that the bright inhabitants should come forth to see who has so sought them.

As much a mark, too, of the new, limitless scope of the world of these last plays is that Pericles has room, unlike the Duke of Vienna, for the full dimension of a husband as well as for the full dimension of a father--though it is true that the death-in-childbirth of Thaisa did make it seem that the gift of a daughter in addition to that of a wife was too great for one mortal man to bear, prince though he were, just as, in a world as clouded as this one is bright, there were no offspring to detract from Othello's or Macbeth's dark relationships with their wives and no wife to interfere with Lear's

relationships with his daughters. Father and husband there is room for now, and, as the tragic protagonists through their pride received from their one closest relationship nothing but pain, so here this protagonist receives from both his closest relationships nothing but joy, for he had accepted in Act III, as he later accepted in Act IV with Marina, death's releasing of his beloved from him as meekly as those simple shells he mentioned in his sea's farewell and has accepted with no trace of that bloody grasping on to his spouse so familiar from Venice and Scotland but only with the magnanimity to set her free if she, or fortune, wills it (III.iii.9-12: "We cannot but obey/The powers above us. Could I rage and roar/As doth the sea she lies in, yet the end/Must be as 'tis")--and now again the cosmos, this time visible in Diana, has returned his magnanimity a hundred-fold by bringing him once more to the bride he had so sorrow-fully lost, the goddess herself drawing husband back to wife at that point of chastity which is the temple-center of her royal province, by moving him, as with the outer point of a silver compass, closer and closer through those seas which, as subject of the tide-controlling moon, are the green circumference of that province, till at last husband clings to wife so closely that no sea can ever part them again, nor even the crest of joy which breaks over them both, as Pericles cries, one "this" as if for child, one

as if for wife:

> This, this: no more. You gods, your present kindness
> Makes my past miseries sports. You shall do well,
> That on the touching of her lips I may
> Melt and no more be seen. O come, be buried
> A second time within these arms.

If Ludovico could only call the pride-induced sundering of husband and wife at the end of Othello "more fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea," then, in this new world in which the utter pridelessness of the players has made Diana and her waters ultimately mirror the rewards of such pridelessness wave by wave, the sight of the reunion of this wedded pair can only be called more kindly than that all-magnanimous sea, husband and wife showering more love upon one another than ever even the sea has showered upon them.

And when mother embraces child to the benediction of Pericles' "Flesh of thy flesh, Thaisa," the sight only confirms for him the more the joy of his recent reunion with his daughter, rendering that joy, which was so great he feared it must be transitory, more permanent--for in that embrace it is as if the many-colored blossoms which Marina had scattered in the sea have been brought by the sea next the rich jewels which were Thaisa's burial-companions, the tenderness of their hues caught up and rendered changeless in the absolute forms of the royal gems, as Marina herself perhaps attains even more of a substantial reality in the eyes of her father by her being now seen against the bosom

of the precious royal wife who first patterned the girl and who has remained the same throughout the years as the girl has grown more and more like her, till the two of them now stand, identical in their silver livery of Diana, each enhancing the bright actuality of the other before the man who would otherwise believe their return to be too wonderful not to be a double illusion.

No more miraculous is it that the reunion of Pericles with his daughter precede that with his wife than it is that the creator-part of the cosmos should come together with the created-part to form one whole before either part can be fulfilled on its own level, as Pericles is fulfilled by Thaisa and as Marina is fulfilled by Lysimachus, for if all creation is not first healed into one harmony, how can each part find the melody most natural to itself? No need is there here, then, for a song or dance, as those that ended the comedies of Navarre and Athens and Messina and Arden and Illyria --though here, beyond comedy, this play too ends with marriage, one a betrothal, one a re-betrothal-- for the music of the spheres, which those earlier songs and dances only shadowed and which through tragedy had been untuned so badly that the author had to seek the spheres themselves to see where they were rent, has been in repair since the play's beginning and, once struck into sound in Pericles' awakening scene, has not stopped playing since,

nor does it need an imitation by flute or hautboy to remind us of its presence. Just as in tragedy there was no place for an elegaic evocation of melancholy before the face of real sorrow, here beyond comedy and tragedy there is no place for a song- or dance-like evocation of harmony before the face of real joy. There is, in fact, no evocation at all here, but only presentation: the presentation of harmony itself, as Pericles stands with his Thaisa in conjunction with Marina standing with her Lysimachus, the higher sphere in conjunction with the lower, each sphere now complete within itself, every word which father says to new daughter or daughter says to new mother cutting across those spheres in a song of songs; every movement which son makes toward new mother or father makes toward new son the dance of dances--the music of their words and movements no earthly notes nor celestial minstrelsy, but only the music of pure human joy, simpler than a child's, more permanent than a four-score-and-upwards aged king's.

> So, on your patience evermore attending,
> New joy wait on you! Here our play has ending,

says Gower in the last of his all-encompassing couplets, directing, with utter magnanimity, the happiness on stage to spill out over the audience; and in his delight, it is difficult to know whether he is looking back over his own play or looking ahead to plays to come when he wishes his

"new joy," so glad is ne that the joy is here, that it has come, and that it has come to stay. For he, too, with Shakespeare, appears to have been listening when sad Edgar said near the end of Lear, "Men must endure/Their going hence, even as their coming hither:/Ripeness is all"--and whether future players will endure and not try to fight back that life-or-death which cannot be fought back, it is clearer and fairer than daylight itself that all four now on stage have endured, though each was sorely tempted not to; and that, in fact, this play Pericles in which they have endured is, of that Lear-discovered pridelessness of vision whose ripeness no blast of heath or beach or sea ever can make wither, nor no laughter or tears decay, the first golden fruit.

CHAPTER V

CYMBELINE

Of all of the qualities one can ever discover about the nature of the workings of genius, none touches the heart of the miracle involved more than does the discovery of that which can only be called the quality of surprise: that whether genius be embodied in a piece of music or of science or of architecture or of poetry or even in a play the interactions of whose characters contain music and architecture and poetry and all, just as we feel ourselves about to be swept up in the momentum of the work's numberless profundities of thought and emotion, just as we begin to dissociate the work itself from anything mortal and fallible and look at its unfolding dimensions as being shaped by some divine inevitability, we come across a note or an idea or an angle or a word so unexpected, so everyday, and so impossible to have been predicted by us (let alone thought out in theoretic advance by the artist) that we realize all at once that <u>there</u>, at that jump or jolt or break in profundity, is where the genius lies, because nothing preceding or following it can ever account for its simple existence and absolute rightness at just that point where it occurs, nor can the artist have ever reached that point save by a leap of pure inspiration--as not a thousand

readings of Hamlet's exclamation to his father, "Art thou there, truepenny?" nor of Cordelia's cry for hers, "Poor perdu!" can ever begin to explain what made Shakespeare hit upon these few ordinary words and no others, nor why they should pierce a listener's mind and soul more than those more apparently powerful phrases which might have been chosen by the most conscientious imitator of artistic perfection. Nor, conversely, can anything ever begin to explain what made Shakespeare follow the utter simplicity of Pericles with the rich complexities of Cymbeline at just that point when we would most expect his next old tale to be, after the essentialized four-column structure of his first, nothing but a divine and disembodied dome. And yet when we do come upon this vast, heavy-walled, many-roomed, splendid royal palace of a play, nothing seems more natural or more right than that the author should have created it just as he did, just when he did--for though dramatic theorists might have preferred, once he brought to joy his birds i' the cage and gave each his proper mate, that he should open that cage to set them all free for their inevitable flight into the sun, theory vanishes as nothing before the fact of a dramatic genius who had the inspired audacity to turn his birds to peacocks, to bring them back to earth.

***

"Only I carry winged time/Post on the lame feet of my rime," said Gower in the Prologue to Act IV of his play, in words which now take on the faraway note of things forever vanished, as both their content and their child-like form are altered to meet the splendors of a world far wider than childhood. At the opening of Cymbeline we not only see the Chorus's bright function of essentializing time and place and motivation broken up and divided between a First and Second Gentleman like the spoils of some shattered prism--one Gentleman condensing whole acts of previous dramas by describing Cymbeline's past loss by abduction of his two sons, his present ill-advised marriage to an evil Queen, his daughter's unsanctioned marriage to his orphan-ward Posthumus, Posthumus's banishment by the enraged father-in-law, and the subsequent delight of the Queen's son Cloten, along with personality-sketches of all the characters named; the other Gentleman absorbing it all and leading his companion on to give still more essentials--but also hear the Chorus's simple couplet-melody break up and sink, with all of its "sings" and "brings" and "mights" and "lights," into the deeper resonances of blank verse:

> The king he takes the babe
> To his protection, calls him Posthumus Leonatus,
> Breeds him, and makes him of his bed-chamber,
> Puts to him all the learnings that his time
> Could make him the receiver of, which he took,
> As we do air, fast as 'twas minister'd,
> And in's spring became a harvest (I.i.40-46),

each resonance measuring a distance from Pericles too great for any Gower to close.

There is something in the nature of rhyme which is a very crucible of poetic thought: by its holding the poet to certain patterns of end-line sound, rhyme somehow charms or urges or lures his imagination ever onward to unfold some idea which perhaps never would have occurred to him in the first place if he did not have to meet the demand for one particular terminal note to make a line echo the melody of its predecessor, or which, if already occurred, never would have found so apt an expression without the necessity of forging that idea into the shape of whatever "sing" or "bring" scheme he has set up for himself--and in the plays of Shakespeare especially this special function of rhyme is most apparent, for here, every time there is a great new influx of dramatic inspiration, there is a new influx of highly structured, highly musical verse to contain it. In the playwright's first Love's Labour's Lost- and Romeo and Juliet-excursions into a kind of romantic comedy and tragedy shaded by motivation and characterization far more subtle than English stage or playwright had had experience of, it is only natural that their new breadth of vision be caught in the fragile-tensile intricacy of rhyme, and naturalness itself that this rhyme should gradually fall away in later plays where the author no longer

needed such patternings to crystallize the forming of his thoughts; and more than natural it is, after the rampant blacknesses of Hamlet make impossible a return to the lyrical vision of romantic comedy of old, that rhyme should reappear in All's Well That Ends Well in starts and stops to contain the impact of a new unlyrical romantic vision, Helena's musicality the boldest ("I am undone: there is no living, none"), the King's and Countess's the most oblique ("... By our remembrances of days foregone,/Such were our faults, or then we thought them none"), only to drop away once more in Measure for Measure, when the author, as in Arden and Illyria with comedy and in Elsinore and Venice and Scotland and Lear's Britain with tragedy, becomes so accustomed to his new vision that he begins unfolding it more and more with the limitless freedom of blank verse and, occasionally, the "no, no, no, no" blanker verse beyond. When we see Gower in Pericles, then, and Antiochus and Helicanus and Simonides and Pericles himself speak in couplet after couplet, time after time, any consideration of possible heavy rhyme in the masque convention Shakespeare might be using holds as little weight as any consideration of the heavy rhyme which was a possible convention of early comedy or tragedy, before the fact that here, as in Navarre or Verona or Rousillon, Shakespeare is rapt in the marvel of a vision so new that only in rhyme can he order

the dizzying plentitude of his thought, expanding that thought as it might never have been expanded by the laissez faire of blank verse, ordering that thought as it never might have been ordered without the gentle tyranny of "might" and "light." Then when we hear the unrhymed resonance of speech of every member of the court of Cymbeline, even to those two Chorus-figures who most should have used rhyme if the masque convention had any import at all, our listening only confirms the more the fact that Shakespeare has only needed one rhyme-play to catch the first full burst of heat and light of his final vision, so that in Cymbeline all rhyme can be dropped from the beginning--for the crucible of rhyme which was Pericles has cast that golden vision to stay, and, once cast, its picture of human life can be washed and washed again with the strongest, freest prose or verse and never fear dissolving:

> Titus: What dost thou strike at, Marcus, with thy knife?
>
> Marcus: At that that I have kill'd, my lord,--a fly.
>
> Titus: Out on thee, murderer! thou kill'st my heart;
> Mine eyes are cloy'd with view of tyranny:
> A deed of death, done on the innocent,
> Becomes not Titus' brother. Get thee gone;
> I see thou art not for my company.
>
> Marcus: Alas! my lord, I have but kill'd a fly
> (III.ii.52-59)--

but Marcus has missed the point of the exchange by his second reply, though its very formality of repetition with

his first should have prompted his understanding: that in the ornate and frozen attitudes of Titus Andronicus, his brother needs not the slightest excuse to go from high grief to high rage, and that even a fly is more reason than any spectator might expect to be given for the protagonist's exchanging one pose for another, each pose so thick-encrusted with words that any attempt to penetrate to whatever thought or emotion lies beneath their gildings is as useless as it is distracting. Nothing there is, then, in the whole scope of Shakespearean drama, which measures the playwright's growth from his beginnings more than Cymbeline's resplendent entrance hurling out at his son-in-law and daughter bolt after bolt of denunciation, his first "Thou basest thing, avoid!" flung full from the highest peak of fury, to be matched and matched again by those cries of "O disloyal thing" and "O thou vile one!" and "Thou foolish thing!", each cry of banishment and curse as unaccountable and as rigid as any earlier Roman's--for as Titus's rantings, and the abruptness of them, and the force of them, and the insistent repetition of them were achievements in pure style so great that no former or latter age's art-for-art's sake could ever approach them, so Cymbeline's ravings are achievements of that which almost no man in any age has had the hyper-perception to see to, let alone portray: pure human content--that deepest wellspring of thought and

emotion which at its forked-animal root does exist constantly at full pitch, whether of rage or joy or pain or love, whose intensity is no artistic invention but only that most primal discovery man or playwright can make about his own nature and that of his fellow's after a lifetime spent exploring every subtle, shadowed complexity of human motivation, from Berowne's half-in half-out immersion into romance to Macbeth's half-in half-out immersion into murder, only to find that the deepest realities <u>are</u> abrupt and forceful and insistent, more so even than those Titus-like exaggerations of life with which he so unsuspectingly began. Then if the language of these realities seems at times similar to the rigid rhetoric of the early plays, the benefit of the coincidence is all rhetoric's, for happening to hit upon stiffness as a way of rendering life without realizing how closely stiffness, as the most external of forms, resembles that starkness which is the most internal of matters. "Nay, let her languish/A drop of blood a day," Cymbeline concludes--and we do not even need the memory of Lear's banishment of Cordelia in the words "Here I disclaim all my paternal care,/Propinquity and property of blood" but only the sheer content of human pain Cymbeline puts into the red word to know that the blood he means is deepest heart's blood, the mystery of which links parent to child, the strength of which links

body to soul, the mere one-drop mention of which is so real in terror to listener and speaker that it makes those buckets of gore Titus used in his own similar threats seem so much scarlet paint.

We do not have to look back to the Love's Labour's Losts or Macbeths of old to find that world of shadows and subtlety so splendidly ostracized from Cymbeline's speeches, but only to Lear, for Lear was where all starknesses arose shock by shock to and past the surface not to destroy subtlety but rather to be once, for all, ordered above it, characters and audience at last able to see the essential human good or evil or grief or joy torn free from and rising above passages of the most infinite nuance, like stars ripped above the last opalescences of temporality at the dawn of some primeval creation, to remain, once risen, forever fixed--so that we cannot see, for example, Lear's "Come, let's away to prison" without seeing past each love-word for his daughter through to its center of absolute meekness, each of which gives those words in conjunction the clarity of beauty they have, amidst all the shades and colorations of pain and doubt and fear which surround them. So, too, does an audience only have to look--after Antony and Cleopatra where the characters willfully dismissed everything which was not the most smouldering opalescences, and Coriolanus and Timon where they willfully rejected

everything which was not the hardest fixity--to Pericles to find re-established to stay the Lear-hierarchy of absolutes over nuances, both entities happy in their natural place, one above, one below, like a constellation of truth above a universe of changing beauty. So, too, in Cymbeline itself, does one only have to look, in the scene of the monarch's initial appearance, to Posthumus or Imogen or any other member of the court to see at the center of each a pure content of human thought and emotion played out in infinite varieties of light and shade. Only Cymbeline himself, with a ruler's right, imperiously disbands all trace of shade, to come forth in that unmodulated fierceness of light, pure rage, pure grief, pure love, pure hate, so scorching to watch in a Coriolanus- or Timon-like aristocrat and now so utterly dazzling to watch in a king, that one can see at last why Shakespeare gave even Simonides some little shadings of subtle asides: to hold off a while, till the spectators could become accustomed to those cosmic-royal rays of unmodified human feelings, from creating that absolute king-irradiance which would otherwise, at first entrance, strike the whole theater blind.

> I would have broke mine eye-strings, crack'd them, but
> To look upon him, till the diminution
> Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle:
> Nay, follow'd him, till he had melted from
> The smallness of a gnat, to air: and then
> Have turn'd mine eye, and wept,

says Imogen to the servant Pisanio who describes to her

Posthumus's voyage into banishment (I.iv.17-22), nor is there any speech more characteristic of the light-transfigured world of the last plays than hers at this particular point in her life--for in this world where one has only to look to the heavens to see the gods beyond or look at one's fellows to see the good or evil, wrath or sorrow within, it is only natural that the most primary function of a human being, by which he loves or hates, accepts or rebels, is that of sight, and that the clarity of Imogen's devotion to her husband be co-extensive with the clarity of her ability to see her physical world, and, more, that this clarity, for the daughter of a king so sun-like as Cymbeline, be absolute. "My queen! my mistress!" cried Posthumus in the first of the several declarations of love for his wife that are part of the permanent marvels of this play, if one considers at all that poetry of praise is far more difficult to write believably than poetry of blame; but the most astonishing thing about Posthumus' continuous paeans to Imogen is that for all of their initial sound of hyperbole going beyond even Orlando's or Orsino's '"Thither write, my queen,/And with mine eyes I'll drink the words you send,/ Though ink be made of gall"), just at the point when we are ready to smile out loud at them, as Orlando or Orsino themselves would have done, we realize that beneath all the dazzle of the words, they are all true!--Imogen, quite

literally <u>is</u> his queen, she a blood-royal princess and he a mere soldier; certainly she is his mistress; and, though he not yet know it, the ink Imogen will write in will indeed be made of gall, for she will send her words through Iachimo who will effect the transformation himself, and Posthumus indeed will drink those words to the dregs. The mark of the difference between the poetry of praise and wonder in these final plays and that similar poetry in earlier romantic comedies is simply that here, for Imogen as for Thaisa or Marina, there is something in the nature of the verse itself--as much in "As a fair day in summer, wondrous fair," as in "My queen! my mistress!"--which suggests that the most fanciful sounding exaggeration is, in fact, at center, accuracy itself; a suggestion borne out by all the characters, who do not make their declarations with any Arden-like sly delight at how very much more bright the world can be with the addition of just the right word here and there to touch it up a little, but only with a real earnestness at how bright the world actually is, and with an even earnester sense of disappointment, more delightful for an audience to witness than any charming self-consciousness, that no amount of praise they may ever utter <u>can</u> hyberbolize their world or their lovers as much as they would want to, but only still come out truthful statement. Then when we see Imogen claim for herself those powers of

vision that would follow a line of perspective clear past the horizon, the whole claim bursting to life from the impetuousness of her love for her husband, the love itself so co-extensive with sight that she feels blind without him ("O the gods!" she cried at their parting. "When shall we see again?"), it seems only right that she really could be able to see her husband for as far as she could love him: that is, infinitely; and when she describes how her eye-strings would have cracked, what listener--whether Pisanio or ourselves--can feel laughter at her claim, but rather only relief that she was not at the shore to so look?

There is no happier coincidence between hyperbole and truth in this play than the consistent references to Imogen in terms of jewels and the quite factual happenstance that she is, in her absence from Posthumus, present to him in the di$_a$mond ring she gave him; its own qualities of permanence and clearness mirroring her own, as if <u>it</u> were the lesser physical radiance and she the greater, so that, for example, even the most casual description of her by a Second L$_o$rd ("She shines not upon fools lest the reflection should hurt her") catches the full light of her person and seems not only not a gallant overstatement, but somehow the most minor, albeit well-intended, attempt simply to do her justice. No amazement is it, then, that

Iachimo's lust and interest in the girl is aroused to stay when he sees the ring on her husband's finger--the mere sight of it enough to make him see through it to the fairness of the princess, the mere flawlessness of it enough, in this world where good and evil are so starkly opposed by nature from the first, to make him want to mar it into darkness at once--nor that if he succeed in seducing Imogen the ring be given him too, as a picture or remembrance of the prize he has won. So total, in fact, is the real splendor of the beauty of the girl, so objective and free from the shadow of any playful romantic comedy elusiveness, that when Iachimo makes his journey from Italy to Britain to seduce her, or, more correctly, to pretend to seduce her, at the height of his success as he stands at night beside her sleeping form (where he has crept from concealment in a trunk), his verse separates itself from that of those Don Johns or Parolleses who could smudge any luster by their innuendo, to here yield before beauty which is so strong in its simple fact that it has never admitted of teasing, nor can it now be encroached upon by even the slightest mockery but only turn whatever cheap blacknesses there are in the speaker into the costliest dyes and tints of praise:

> Cytherea,
> How bravely thou becom'st thy bed! fresh lily!
> And whiter than the sheets! That I might touch!
> But kiss, one kiss! Rubies unparagon'd,
> How dearly they do't: 'tis her breathing that
> Perfumes the chamber thus: the flame o' the taper
> Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids,
> To see th'enclosed lights, now canopied
> Under these windows, white and azure lac'd
> With blue of heaven's own tinct (II.ii.14-23).

If Iachimo indeed espies later the tale of the rape of Philomel beside Imogen's bed, it is almost irresistible to surmise that in the dim light he has gotten the subject right but the participants wrong, and that what he really sees is a copy of The Rape of Lucrece, so remarkably does his own poetry resemble the best excerpts of Shakespeare's earliest Titus-like excursions into the richly wrought. Yet in the context of the play, all of his gem-encrusted imagery of the girl takes on an inner truth which he himself leaves out, for we know before the scene even begins that Imogen is an authenic royal treasure, and all Iachimo's words do is to indicate that even he, the most darkened of all men, must accede to the power of this authenticity to the extent that he can perceive it--that is, to the extent of its precious surface appearance--and describe it accordingly, his speech pointing up again and again by its own absence of inner content just how much that content is in Imogen, and just how much his words--and the words of all the Tituses and Tarquins of old--missed it, for all the earnestness of their attempt. "Last night 'twas on

my arm," says the princess the next morning of the jewelled bracelet which Posthumus gave her in exchange for her ring, love for love, and which Iachimo removed from her unknown; "I kiss'd it"--and in that simple, simply told kiss, given from the very soul to a mere sparkling imitation of her husband, is more inner gemmery than a thousand Iachimos could have notion of, one little reference to which gives full substance to the Italian's "rubies" and "azures" and, in retrospect, turns all their paste to pricelessness.

One of the most astonishing tributes to the power of tragedy is how Shakespeare in Othello could build a whole drama around the loss of a handkerchief and, by the depth of his knowledge of the human soul, turn all the apparently nonsensical disproportionateness of the hero's reaction to that loss into pure pity and terror, the sheer flimsiness of the cloth itself seeming to indicate that it takes no more than that to turn every belief a man holds deepest into sinking chaos that carries with it man and belief and all: the greater the innate ridiculousness of the situation (as in Othello's cry--or is it plea?--to Iago, "Villain, be thou sure thou prove my love a whore;/Be sure of it! give me the ocular proof ..."), the greater the scope of the playwright's achievement that we, watching, do not even think to laugh at the monumental incongruities unleashed before us, so indicative are they of life's innatest power

to shock and shock again which can, if the shocks be disasters, leave us more helpless than children and more confused and ignorant than any unthinking barbarian. Laughter alone would give the protagonists and ourselves the space to look down on all these incongruities and render them cohesive by their sheer absurdity, as are the incongruities of Vienna to those angels who, as Isabella says, "with our spleens/Would all themselves laugh mortal"; but in the Moor's constricted world there is no room for any human being to see, let alone share in, even a particle of cosmic laughter, and the chaos remains chaos to the death. Only in the last plays, where that laughter is everywhere, can Shakespeare at last depict a situation of jealousy (or indecision or ambition or pride or whatever) in its fullest tragic dimensions and then go beyond it, to draw out its inconsistencies and absurdities just far enough for us to see, even greater than their pain which is acute and fully felt, their humor. "If you will swear to me you have not done 't [seduce my wife] you lie," Postumus rages at Iachimo, "And I will kill thee if thou dost deny/Thou'st made me cuckold" (II.iv.144-46)--by each word, so similar in content to Othello's, over-extending his own jealousy that extra little distance which fills its arguments full of holes and floods those holes with light more strong and more intense than that which shot through the speeches of

a Hero's Claudio: for in the pre-tragedy world of Messina too many layers of jealousy were too unexplored and ambiguous ever for us to be sure how absurd the emotion really was or how much of the absurdity was only poor Claudio's own addition; here, beyond tragedy, we are sure at once in the episode of the jewelled bracelet--in its way as fitting a representative of the fair and resilient Imogen as the strawberry-cloth was of fruitful Desdemona--that we are seeing in Posthumus not the ridiculousness of a jealous man, which we could easily dismiss as not at all applicable to ourselves, but rather the ridiculousness of jealousy itself, as that jealousy point for point, Iachimo for Iago, suspicion for suspicion, rage for rage, ocular proof for ocular proof, and later intended murder for intended murder, acts itself out through the man in an all too familiar, all too visible pattern, each layer of which was clarified forever in Othello with yet so much molten agony in the slow process of that clarification that not character nor audience nor player could see the absurd shape of the emotion revealed. Here, in Cymbeline, the author's vision has cooled if the characters' has not, and on that shape of purest starkest jealousy ("O, vengeance, vengeance!" Posthumus cries in his great speech of absolute fury matched only by its absolute naivete), Shakespeare builds his greater victory of laughter.

Yet though the broad wings of that laughter flutter and at times positively beat around the figure of the young husband, from the figure of Imogen herself they seem to rise directly, as an extension of her own triumphant humanity: for, unlike a tragedy where if one spouse is tested to the limit of his capacity and found wanting, the other is swept to disaster in his wake, here both husband and wife are each given the chance of a trial, and Imogen's vibrant passing of that trial is enough to counter all the upheavals of her husband's failure. She, too, is tempted by Iachimo with the opportunity to nurture those leanings towards jealousy which, as the fullest of full-blooded women, is as innate in her as love (as comes out ruddy and blooming later when she explodes upon hearing of Posthumus' plan to kill her, "Some jay of Italy,/Whose mother was her painting, hath betray'd him," never even thinking of some darker blacker cause), but rejects such nurturings forthwith: "Revenged! How should I be reveng'd?" she cries to the Italian, then putting all her emphasis on one word which keeps her from falling into the gulf of suspicions opening everywhere about her. "If this be true,--/As I have such a heart that both mine ears/Must not in haste abuse,--if it be true,/How shall I be reveng'd" (I.vii.128-32)?--though greater even than her trust of her husband is her eschewing, trust or no, of that impulse-to-retaliation

which tragedy has revealed to be at the hollow cell center of jealousy, and which is, in its pure hatred of the love-object, even more essential than the jealousy itself. There is no hatred in Imogen at all, but only, and with cause, anger, now at Iachimo ("What ho, Pisanio!" she calls, to have the intruder turned over to the wrath of her terrible father, as befits "a saucy stranger in his court to mart/As in a Romish stew"), later at her husband, as befits not just an absolute princess but, deeper, an absolute woman. "Take it, heart,/But keep it till you woo another wife,/When Imogen is dead," she told Posthumus in their first scene as, in this the first inkling of her thinking of future rivals, she made the identification of herself and her lover as one person, with one bright heart, so that now when we see her pass her own test so gloriously, it is as if Posthumus has passed it too, for she holds him present to herself so much that when we behold him in his "O, vengeance" paroxysm of retribution, the tragedy of his own wrong choice and his misery at that choice seem caught up in the flying colors of his wife's right one, almost absolving him from blame for his tirade and certainly absolving us from any blame in our delight at the spectacle of that tirade. How can we be blamed, knowing as we do that Imogen is by her post-tragic decision in the ascendancy over her world but that she has the resourcefulness

to stay there till she can pull husband and father--and whole kingdom, if needs be--up to her, tirades, attempted murders, banishments and all, by her very pulling lifting all of these real disasters by the exuberance of her spirit up out of the realm of tragedy like a sack of mismatched children's toys. And when she places the whole ragbag assortment on her shoulders to begin her journey to her husband, not even realizing that she is carrying with her his order for her own execution, how can we not, with her, journey past tragedy too, and delight in her travels every mile of the way, for every mile she takes she has chosen to take herself, and though she can, she never does turn back. What we see in Imogen, in fact, is that irresistible combination of femininity and sheer English spunk which Shakespeare mingled so happily in the Rosalinds and Olivias and Violas of his distant, more lyrical days, remingled as lyrically again to stay in the figure of this epic British princess who deals with death in her man as they dealt with conceit: superbly and boldly, with a boldness tempered in a maiden by the charming hesitations of inexperience, and now, in the full ripeness of a wife, tempered by absolutely nothing at all--as when the girl hears her husband would meet her in Wales:

> O, for a horse with wings! Hear'st thou, Pisanio?
> He's at Milford-Haven: read, and tell me
> How far 'tis thither. If one of mean affairs
> May plod it in a week, why may not I
> Glide thither in a day (III.ii.49-53)?

Why not, indeed, when in this world where one's spirit grows freer and freer with each new test that one meets and passes, to pause at all is chafing, and far naturaller than to walk is it to fly.

"Who loses and who wins," said Lear, "who's in, who's out ..."--and we seem to hear his words take weight and shape again in the words of Belarius, as he speaks to those two king's sons whom he abducted from court to raise in the wilds of Wales some twenty years ago: "Cymbeline lov'd me,/And when a soldier was the theme, my name/Was not far off: then was I as a tree/Whose boughs did bend with fruit: but in one night,/A storm or robbery, call it what you will,/Shook down my mellow hangings, nay, my leaves,/And left me bare to weather" (III.iii.58-64). Yet Lear's distant words do not find mere imitation in those of the old woodsman, but rather their essentialization takes on a heavier, more deeply colored significance from the fact that in these final plays, the abrupt upheavals of life-or-death--whether carried out in the relation of a father to a child or of a cosmos to a created world or, here, of a king to a courtier--are caught up and permanently contained in a facet of nature itself, so that, for example, the sea in Pericles or now the forest of Cymbeline is seen at once, and referred to quite casually by all, as the image and body of fate and of the gods. "Thou hast as chiding a

nativity/As fire, air, water, earth, and heaven can make,/ To herald thee from the womb," said Pericles to the new-born Marina, as in his own play the moving, rising, fructifying, murdering, revivifying liquid element was everywhere given emphasis, as if almost to cleanse or smart into clarity the vision of those new, post-tragic characters who from the first could see, as could Lear or Timon, the gods in their cosmos and the truth in their fellows, and whose eyes are now opened to the fullest to see gods and truth and all in no abstract flash of insight or glimpse of Heath or beach but rather imbedded visibly forever in every living part of the natural world. "Till fortune, tir'd with doing bad,/ Threw him ashore to give him glad," Gower says of an earlier shipwreck (III.i.32-34;II.Prologue.37-38)--but no tenuous conceptualization of divinity does the throwing; only the realest, hardest, most bone-splintering slap of an ocean wave which washes Pericles on shore with such a display of absolute power that any thought of mere poetic symbol is smashed to atoms with him before the tangible phenomenon of <u>real</u> life-or-death. Then when we hear Belarius' solidifying the concept of "who's in, who's out" in the picture of a tree, now fruitful, now bare, we hear no evocation of imagery but only see the fact of those trees themselves as they surround him on every side, huge, primeval, now born, now dead, now reborn, next to whose terrifying proximity the old man, like the new-born Marina--like, in fact,

all men, onstage or off--is indeed a "Poor inch of nature!", whose life is only part of the greater drama of the great green earth's, at once a projection of that drama and the most precious part of it, for this is the vision of Shakespeare not of some star-struck metaphysician, and to the playwright the sea is only the sea, the forest is only the forest, the cosmos only the cosmos: but Belarius, bluff, loyal, incorrigibly assertive as he is, is, amidst all these eternals, the real wonder of wonders--for only Belarius is human, after all, and as with Imogen and Posthumus and even Cymbeline himself, there is something in his very frailty so unique that even the mighty backdrops of woods and waves and summer suns must gaze at it and marvel.

> Belarius: Stoop, boys: this gate
> Instructs you how t'adore the heavens, and bows you
> To a holy morning's office: the gates of monarchs
> Are arch'd so high that giants may jet through
> And keep their impious turbans on, without
> Good morrow to the sun. Hail, thou fair heaven!
> We house i' the rock, yet use thee not so hardly
> As proud livers do.
>
> Guiderius: Hail, heaven!
>
> Arviragus: Hail, heaven!

So opens our first glimpse of Cymbeline's two sons and their old tutor with a morning prayer whose rich musicality of sound and sense would set the forest itself to smiling. Yet for all its abundances of beauty, the prayer's greater emphasis is on the truth beneath, for it expresses

in the croaking old voice and new-broken youthful echoes of the sayers the same content of the music of the spheres in Mytilene: the double-magnanimity by which men freely bow to the cosmos (if only in their consent, Pericles-fashion, to having to bow, to the decree of the lowness of their cave door or to the lowering of death which kills a wife and daughter) only to have the cosmos quite gratuitously bow back. How appropriate that bowing seems now, how truly fortuitous, as these two boys who so freely consented to stay in the banishment of Wales, yielding themselves up to the authority of the forest despite their restless-eagerness to break away ("Our cage/We make a quire," says the younger, "as doth the prison'd bird,/And sing our bondage freely") by that forest receive back to themselves, though in disguise, their sister, giving them companionship and adventure at just that point when they are accustoming themselves to neither, opening their cage for them at just that point when they are getting themselves used to its close, to admit another singer whose plumage is as royal, whose language is as filled with talk of wings as theirs. Then if the verse of the three men combined--and indeed the verse of all the inhabitants of this play--is richer and more thick with glisterings than that of the players in Pericles, such thickness is somehow only fitting in this world where the author looks not primarily to the

clearnesses of the sea for his visible reminder of the backdrops to life of union and sundering and reunion, wildness and sanity, but to the dappled, sprawling wilderness of dark earth and light-mottled trees, there to play out his drama of life-or-death in words which do not so much reveal the playwright's truth with the transparency of water but glorify it with leaves and mosses and great sun-splashes and branches and twigs and lumps of color as thatched together as is the forest itself, and as outrageous in its beauty:

> Where then?
> Hath Britain all the sun that shines? Day? Night?
> Are they not but in Britain? I' the world's volume
> Our Britain seems as of it, but not in't:
> In a great pool, a swan's nest (III.iv.136-40),

cries Imogen, as she begins her flight to Wales and to her brothers: Britain and Wales by her words seeming one wide-thrown tangle of a kingdom, each bright scrap of whose patchwork cohesion has in it more sturdiness and more pluck than any surrounding transparency can dislodge.

The emphasis here of the element of earth--whether of trees or forests or winding paths or mountain caves--as the image and body of fate and of the gods not only is evident in the solid and lavish abundance of the style of the drama, but also at the center of its ore-like content, for that ore is Britain itself, the land, the realm, the subject of this play, as if Shakespeare, once his vision of the

backdrops to human life so visible in the natural world became Heath-clear, was at last paying highest tribute to his own beloved country by making it the backdrop of his most royal old tale, making even the backdrop-oceans of Pericles, with all the pities and terrors their stark waters contain, crash up and fall back again from the permanence that is England, the fact of that permanence so obvious that it is on everyone's lips, from Imogen's with her "swan's nest" to Cymbeline's evil queen, whose evil, as Iachimo's, cannot shade or taint her words when their topic is so objective in its truth:

> Remember, sir, my liege,
> The kings your ancestors, together with
> The natural bravery of your isle, which stands
> As Neptune's park, ribb'd and pal'd in
> With rocks unscaleable and roaring waters,
> With sands that will not bear your enemies' boats,
> But suck them up to the topmast (III.i.17-23),

chance and fortune and life-or-death all being somehow bound up with the very bedrock of the nation.

No accident is it at all that the center of this play, from which all the scattered occupants, plots and sub-plots come is the court of Cymbeline and, in fact, the person of Cymbeline himself who is Britain, leaf for leaf, rock for rock. In him is sunk again that center of gravity by which, from the Rousillon king of France to Vienna's Duke to Lear to all the kings of Pericles, the vortex of absolute and arbitrary power of the cosmos is paralleled visibly on earth, gradually

drawing to itself and releasing and drawing back again the lives and the destinies of men in a manner which, by royal right, need explain itself to no one. It is Cymbeline who for no reason at all adopts then banishes Posthumus, imprisons Imogen, marries an evil queen, protects her son, alienated Belarius and now is on the verge of alienating the Roman empire, thus singly initiating, if we look back far enough, almost all the myriad actions of the play; it is Cymbeline who, like the wildernesses of his kingdom itself, himself wields life-or-death, as Simonides did who was so much like his own kingdom of the sea, though both their kingdoms, being as eternal in their waters or their earths as is the cosmos, are far more formidable than any mortal ruler; and it is Cymbeline, therefore, who, in his total fact of mortality and total evocation of immortality, makes Britain live before us as if it were, in its cosmic and forest and human splendor, rages and whims and griefs, one character, whose smallest flick of a gesture encompasses all.

Yet the magnitude of drama Shakespeare is now capable of in these last plays does not stop with his creation of this king whose every word and movement extends from the deepest well of forked-animal content to the furthest reaches of the realm he rules or the universe he partially represents, for though we now see on stage in Cymbeline

that phenomenon of Britain and British monarchy exposed and complete, which lay beneath the surface of so many history plays of old wherein the rulers always attempted to grow to a dimension of worthiness which would make them co-extensive with their burgeoning kingdom (from Richard II's "O that I were as great/As is my grief" to Henry IV's cry to his son "O foolish youth!/Thou seek'st the greatness that will overwhelm thee" to Henry V's achievement of that greatness, which playfully, seriously, is the same for a king as for a peasant, after all: "But a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon"), here the playwright brings the monarch who, from his first entrance, is that royal heart, loving, hating, commanding, expelling in as fierce a fashion as the British lion itself, into full contact with the even vaster, wider-flung permanence of the Roman empire, whose rulers in so many past tragedies increasingly came to represent on earth not the heart but the very mind and crown of the cosmos, as absolute and changeless as the heart is impulsive (from Julius Caesar's "But I am constant as the northern star,/Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality/There is no fellow in the firmament" to Cleopatra's hearing cold Augusus Caesar termed "the universal landlord," to Coriolanus's bare and republican "I am constant"): so that king can interact with caesar, caesar with king, impulse with constancy, constancy with impulse, as if the

author now has the infinite scope to bring on stage together two of the most basic qualities of human, royal and cosmic experience, polarized in the totalities of Britain and Rome, either one of which he can now essentialize at will after a lifetime of portraying the histories of both, the backdrop of English courage brought at last face to face with the backdrop of a classical integrity so abstract and so stark that, as in Julius Caesar or Coriolanus, no deep dyes of seas or forests but only the stars can represent it:

> Cloten: Why tribute? Why should we pay tribute? If Caesar can hide the sun from us with a blanket, or put the moon in his pocket, we will pay him tribute for light; else, sir, no more tribute, pray you now.
>
> Cymbeline: ... Caesar's ambition,
> Which swell'd so much that it did almost stretch
> The sides o' the world, against all colour here
> Did put the yoke upon's; which to shake off
> Becomes a war-like people, whom we reckon
> Ourselves to be (III.1.43-55).

As with the political spectacle of both these giant entities brought at last into proximity with one another, the Roman set above the British as reason is set above will (though will is far the more colorful of the two), so too are the cosmic and human spectacles of the drama played out through Cymbeline, for all three levels run through the hands of Cymbeline and he alone gives the jolt which breaks the equilibrium within each, each break a break in magnanimity--

his not accepting the offer of harmony with Rome, to whom he is perhaps lower, paralleling his not accepting an offer of harmony with his daughter, to whom he is perhaps higher; by these non-acceptances, setting himself against the generosity of caesar and daughter, himself initiating conflict upwards and downwards at once where there was no need of any, and for his trouble unhingeing the whole cosmos from him, which responds to his own un-generosity in kind and at the same moment he sunders himself from his foster-parent Rome ("Caesar knighted me; my youth I spent/ Much under him"), itself sunders him in fact from the daughter he so long ago had sundered in wish. "Her doors lock'd? / Not seen of late? Grant heavens, that which I fear/Prove false!" he cries in the broken Shakespearean phrases of shock; but matters are now--filial as well as political--out of his control by his own doing, as all he can do is vent his royal fury. Nor is it any surprise that that fury, like Pericles' grief at the loss of his own daughter and the fragmentation of the universe which that loss contained, be so great it can only be portrayed offstage, where Cymbeline now rushes. "'Tis certain she's fled," Cloten reports to his mother and to the audience: "Go in and cheer the king: he rages; none/Dare come about him"--and no two words, even when uttered by this buffoon, can have more impact than the pair he chooses: "he rages";

for in that rage, as violent in its forest-shaking, yoke-splitting way as was the tempest of any Heath or sea, is more force than mortal ears can witness, enough to send the whole of Britain's park to trembling to its deepest foundations and wake the titan Neptune himself from slumber. "He rages" is all that Cloten says; but the coruscations of that rage would be too white-intense for any beholders to see and keep their sense or sight--unless, like Cloten, they be purblind already.

In this of all plays where rule or royalty is on the mind and on the lips of every major character--from Cymbeline himself, who, like Britain, is royalty, to Imogen whose every cry for a husband with fidelity or a horse with wings carries with it the ring of a born princess, to Posthumus who chafes under his non-princely birth, to Guiderius and Arviragus who chafe because of the princeliness of theirs to the continual delight of Belarius (from his "How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature!" to his next act's "O noble strain!/O worthiness of nature! breed of greatness!" to his "their blood thinks scorn,/Till it fly out and show them princes born" and on and on with a shameless wordiness till play's end)--Shakespeare's portrayal of Cloten takes on a special burst of welcome, for in addition to setting all of Belarius's speeches on the innate worth of kingly offspring permanently askew, and in

addition to, by his sheer clumsiness, turning a goodly measure of the stark terror of the scenes between Cymbeline and the Queen to laughter, he himself continually being too stupid to be terrified and consequently enthusiastic at all the wrong moments, Cloten is, beneath everything else, the very parody of royalty, as if Shakespeare could no longer resist the temptation but at last dressed up Lucio in the Duke's own clothing to lean back and roar at the prodigy of cheek so stoutly strutting within:

> Cloten: Who is there? What, are you packing, sirrah?
> Come hither: ah, you precious pandar! Villain,
> Where is thy lady? In a word, or else
> Thou art straightway with the fiends.
>
> Pisanio: O, good my lord!
>
> Cloten: Where is thy lady? or, by Jupiter--
> I will not ask again. Close villain,
> I'll have this secret from thy heart, or rip
> Thy heart to find it. Is she with Posthumus?
> From whose so many weights of baseness cannot
> A dram of worth be drawn (III.v.81-89),

the man putting himself, of course, high above every image of weightiness and baseness till his own virtues seem all light as a feather, as indeed they are: plucked from the person of this fantastically outfitted player whose every thought is to pursue the flying Imogen. And if he cannot ever quite leave the ground to make his attempts successful, who could call such a failure ignoble, but rather the very proof of nobility for this the pompousest, most royal dodo that playwright ever created to fill his least perch with?

Yet none of the truths which Shakespeare brings out in this play where so much is made clear of the nature of good and evil and grief and rage and love and hate, is profounder than the truth which, in Cloten, is exposed at the heart of willful stupidity: that even deeper than the laughter which such grossness might provoke is the real pain which it can inflict upon anyone coming into prolonged contact with it, as Imogen does at several disclosed and undisclosed points throughout the drama, the playwright etching out with Cloten's every word the innate brutality of those too ignorant even for wit--the man's reaction to come to blows every time he is crossed only funny up to the point where it becomes apparent that his instinct to murder is absolutely serious, and that unlike a professional fool like Costard or even a scurrilous semi-annoying semi-fool like Lucio, he has, throughout all his most grotesque actions, no sense of self-humor at all, and that the only reason he here attempts jests rather than clubs is that clubs would demand too much courage. "A wooer/More hateful than the foul expulsion is/Of thy dear husband," says a Second Lord of the braggadocio (II.i.61-63), and one only has to call up again Imogen's degree of hurt at that banishment to begin to measure her pain at the encounters with this suitor, concentrated to hottest pitch in her "I am spirited with a fool,/Frighted, and anger'd worse," and to realize

how even greater than her pain and wrath is her titanic overcoming of both by a Pericles- or Thaisa-like acceptance. "By the very truth of it, I care not for you," she hurls at him at last, "And am so near the lack of charity--/To accuse myself--I hate you; which I had rather/You felt than make't my boast"; but though near that lack of charity, she never allows herself to reach it, and charity itself subsumes all her inner turmoils, each one of which would be enough for a dozen separate tragedies, giving her--and her author--the breadth to turn Cloten's attacks into laughter for the audience if not for herself; for an "I hate you" from an Imogen, like her father's "Thou basest thing, avoid!" is the raw and primal root of the emotion itself, and for her to rise above it is, more than even comedy or tragedy, the highest kind of drama for a human being to achieve, and something of which Cymbeline himself is as yet incapable. It is almost impossible to watch, in fact, the scenes in which this infuriating, riotous figure obtrudes himself upon the girl, without thinking that of all the black machinations and inventions of the Queen to bring misery to every worthy character in the play, from her potions to her poisons to her plottings for disaster, the most diabolical invention of all, tempting those players not just with death but with the more mortal stain of succumbing to their own vindictiveness, is her own son; or without

being struck by the revelation that, even so, this young princess whose power to rage is her father's only dowry can look that rage full in the face and, with a frown and a greater laugh, wonderfully overcome it.

No need is there, in the viewing of Shakespeare's exposing an essential cruelty at the center of woman--from Beatrice's overwrought "Kill Claudio" to Isabella's frenzied "O, I will to him and pluck out his eyes!" as she learns of Angelo's "beheading" of her brother, to Goneril's cold deliberate, and consistent, "Pluck out his eyes"--to look ahead from Cymbeline to the remaining last plays to sense that here in the person of the Queen is the last incarnation of the author's portrayal of total female evil, once dislodged in Lear never to return to even partial submergence again. After the parent-child revelations of the Heath-tragedy which seemed to contain within them the mystery of the whole universe, it was not especially surprising that the evil females in Antioch and Tharsus were portrayed not so much as wives as they were daughters or mothers, the author emphasizing these two aspects of womanhood far more than in the portrayal of a Lady Macbeth (who did appear, very briefly, in the light of both aspects in addition to being a full spouse) as if to compound into the realm of the cosmic these ladies' terrible crimes, one suckling her own parent, the other attempting to

devour her own foster-child (IV.iii.46-48: "Thou art like the harpy,/Which, to betray, dost with thine angel's face,/ Seize with thine eagle's talons"). Then when we see Cymbeline's fierce consort, we seem to be seeing this cosmic rapaciousness distilled to its most exquisite, for after all there always did seem to be a greater responsibility for evil in a parent than in a child simply because one was so much longer experienced than the other (as in the Fool's "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise"), and this responsibility now is not only taken up but flaunted by the Queen who adds to her malice as a wife the greater malice of a foster-mother, with no trace in her of daughterliness to detract. "No, be assur'd you shall not find me, daughter,/After the slander of most stepmothers,/Evil-ey'd unto you," are her first words spoken, removing her from the start even from the Regans and Dionyzas before her: here at last is the final, most refined stage of the demon-female, subtler and more detached in her vindictiveness than any male (as Goneril wanted Gloucester's eyes "pluck'd" out, where Cornwall, more brutally, could only grind) to such a degree that she can extend her self-consciousness of what she is and what she is doing to encompass not only its pure evil old-tale quality, but that old-tale prototype which she herself brings alive crueller than any fiction. And if barrenness was before in Shake-

speare always one with female terror, there is no darker instance of that terror than here where the lady does not plot, like Goneril and Regan, to kill her father as she would the roots of the tree which brought her to life, but rather to kill the new blossom which she herself is supposed to nurture, breaking the link of the extension of the race by no backward inversion of murdering the old but by the more straightforward method of cutting down the young, herself daring to take directly into her own hands those maiden-like flowers which Dionyza only coveted to destroy ("The violets, cowslips, and the primroses/Bear to my closet"), to turn all their petals to poison. Nor does it detract from any of her power but only affirm the greater power of good let loose in her world, that the author brings her into opposition to no worthy character who can merely wish for or evoke fruitfulness, but with a physician who catches up within himself as many past portrayals of health as she does of sickness till, upon first entrance, he confronts her destruction with healing itself, against which any purveyor of unnaturalness must wither.

"The nurse that's nature's mother is her tomb," says Friar Laurence of the basket of blossoms he works over in his cell; "What is her burying grave that is her womb ..../ O! mickle is the powerful grace that lies/In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities:/For nought so vile that

on the earth doth live/But to the earth some special good doth give,/Nor aught so good but strain'd from that fair use/ Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse (II.iii.9-10; 15-20)--and in the "womb" and "tomb" polarity which encompasses the love played out in Verona, and indeed the life played out onstage or off, his petals and briars and herbs lie poised between whatever good or evil he wishes to bring out in them, as he chooses. But as Shakespeare over and over again treats the figure of the priest-physician out of the materials of whatever source-stories he decides to use, as he sees more and more into the unfathomable nature of the "womb" or "tomb" he so tenderly evoked in earlier plays, this figure becomes not just a man who plays or toys or tampers with the forces of life or death (and, as with Friar Laurence, sometimes plays disastrously) but rather a man for whom the forces of life and death have grown so independent and so powerful that they seem to spring into existence <u>through</u> the man rather than being tempered by him at all, so that the very function of priest or physician becomes the function of pure miracle--a triggerer of total birth or total destruction--his patients increasingly seeming to be treated not so much by anything mortal but by the cosmos itself, fierce, stark, and rather impatient of the mere doctor- or friar-medium which is all that separates men from their healing or killing universe.

More and more does the physician-priest or priest-physician prevail over the re-births which are so much a part of darkening Shakespearean romantic comedy, increasingly making those events take on a quality of cosmic wonder which raises them far above any mere plot-device--from Hero's Friar Francis with his plan for "resurrecting" the girl with a "For to strange sores strangely they strain the cure"; to the even stranger figure of Helena's dead father whose memory is never far from anyone's mind or lips, least of all our own when that presence seems to mingle with the girl's at the moment of her pregnant rebirth, both healing and medicine tied in Verona-fashion with the nettles and herbs of nature ("... the time will bring on summer,/When briers shall have leaves as well as thorns"); to the stranger still figure of the hooded Duke whose restoration of the "beheaded" Claudio is caught up in the plagues and reliefs of that fate which he seems to doctor at will ("There is so great a fever on goodness," he says at one point, "that the dissolution of it must cure it")--until in tragedy, that healing dimension bursts from a merely implicit connection with the universe to that command of Lear's physician for melody ("Louder the music there!") which connects rebirth on earth, whether of an old king or of the daughter he thinks dead, to the rebirth of the heavens, sphere by sphere: the essential quality of a

healer, seen at last exposed after so many plays, here envisioned as simply the quality of harmonizer, making the re-entry into life which he helps effect for his patient seem less the result of his knowledge of this thorn or that leaf than of his understanding of the most delicate inter-workings of all the levels of creation, thorn and leaf, fever and respite, womb and tomb, all mutually co-existing in audible clarity, if we but have ears to listen and, listening, tune ourselves and our fellows to life. Then when we see the physicians of the last plays with their cowslips and their violets as medicinal for good or for evil as any wicked Queen's, who from the first are harmonizers of creation, all other considerations of this cure or that antidote subsumed beneath, we are seeing men who have freely chosen to heal nature together when they could have as easily, like the Queen, chosen to tear it asunder with a potency which would brook no survivors--awesome, terrible men who yet use their terror meekly though their knowledge of the elements could take each man in pride beyond even Lear ("Immortality attends the former," says the doctor Cerimon who brings Thaisa back to life by fires and flutes and viols, referring here to the "virtue and cunning" of his art, "Making a man a god"); men whose power to take and restore life, as in Cymbeline where Cornelius gives the Queen the potion which will slumber and awake Imogen, sets

them above any Friar Laurence or even any Duke: for their playing with the ingredients of birth and death is no play at all, nor is it subject to happy or unhappy, Juliet- or Claudio-like accident, but is based rather on the clearest looking at and listening to a universe at last grown, from lower sphere to uppermost, as open to human perception as perception can perceive. "But there is/No danger in what show of death it makes," says Cornelius to the audience as he gives the drug over to the Queen, "More than the locking up the spirits a time,/To be more fresh, reviving (I.vi. 39-42)--and in the world of these last plays, we do not, as in Vienna, merely uneasily trust him but believe him implicitly, not so much because it is in the source-plot of an old tale to trust the man but because the hard choice he has made in favor of the good etches out every word he utters--"My conscience bids me ask," he says to the Queen, Helicanus-like, when he brooks her wrath to ask about her purposes--the rightness of his choice putting him into ascendancy over the events which follow, and indeed over the whole play, particularly over the Queen herself for all her royal trappings. For it must be remembered, as indeed we cannot avoid remembering as the scene unfolds before us, that the Queen seeks the physician for help, not the physician the Queen; life <u>is</u> in the ascendancy, and even a sovereign murderess cannot ignore that ascendancy, as Lady

Macbeth could do in her chaotic world in which doctors themselves were only seen in the shadows, but must look up to it clearly, reacting against it later however she may.

As we see more and more of the fair maiden the Queen is trying to destroy, however, it seems less and less likely that the good Cornelius and all his arts need ever protect her, or that she herself fears for more than a moment the total evil the Queen threatens her with, so strong and richly blooming the girl is and so full in love with her husband that any danger of death by poison or sword which is poised over her is as nothing before her resolution to fight off a thousand deaths if they would keep her from Posthumus, and is as less than nothing before the intrepidity with which she--from no Queen's plotting nor no goading of a Cloten--summons death to her as she would summon some born slave to cut her down when she learns of Posthumus's jealous hatred, as if she herself had more resiliency and healing power than a whole kingdomful of cowslips and primroses and would only give up that power to throw it like a florid gauntlet in the face of the man who so wronged her (or, as here, in the face of his nonplussed representative:

> Come, fellow, be thou honest,
> Do thy master's bidding. When thou see'st him,
> A little witness my obedience. Look,
> I draw the sword myself, take it, and hit
> The innocent mansion of my love, my heart:
> Fear not, 'tis empty of all things, but grief:
> Thy master is not there, who was indeed
> The riches of it (III.iv.64-71).

In In her behavior in this scene, in fact, going as she does from disbelief to grief to lamentation to anger to action, Imogen, with who knows how much delight on the part of her author, takes us in her explosions far back in the Shakespearean canon to bring us face to face [illegible] once more with the psychology of farce as it was dealt with by the author of The Comedy of Errors and The Taming of the Shrew. For farce in the hands of that early Shakespeare contained all the truth and experience such plays as he was dealing with could hold; only, rather than unfolding this psychological truth as he begins to do with the Julias of The Two Gentlemen of Verona and the Hippolytas and Rosalinds and Violas of later more lyric plays with one personality trait or tinge unfolding within the other,--in early farce, Shakespeare blocks out these personality traits not interpenetratingly but lineally, one large colorful facet after another, to reflect all the incongruity they can, just as, for example, we are made to see no underlying hint in her first act of Kate's secret wish to be tamed by Petruchio but only her rage, so that in her great "I am ashamed that women are so simple"-speech in the last act we can see all the wish, all the scret motive (even as in the last act we can see at once how Kate and Petruchio, farce-accurate, themselves have been etching out all along the secret will-to-

dominate motives of Bianca and Lucentio, beneath all that subplot couple's playful behavior of courtship), in a turnabout which gives every line in the speech its wonderful double-edge: for this same Kate who fully believes in what she says now, fully believed in what she raged about earlier, leaving it to the audience to put together all the stylized lineal pieces of her character into a unity of depth in which she, for one, takes no interest. Then when we see Imogen in the scene with Pisanio undergo her own temperamental reversal after reversal after reversal, everything she does points up not only how far are her about-faces from the stylizations of farce and how close they are to the pure content-terror of tragedy, but also just how much inner depth she herself has. For so easily does she hold her own during such outbursts of emotion, that, as with those Rosalinds and Violas too whose outbursts never left them less than the natural human beings they were to begin with, we never get the sense of her existing in some Kate-like way only <u>for</u> her anger or her tears but rather of her anger or her tears' existing for her, coming as they do only at her bidding, in a phenomenon happily befitting a character who does not need the exaggerations of caricature to convey her feelings when those feelings are in themselves so naturally large as to make any necessity for exaggeration beside the point.

Of all the colors and sparks of pain and wrath and impatience which dance along the tops of her words like points of fire, none can detract from the soul of humor the playwright implants at their center, that the girl who is so imperiously summoning death is, in her very outbursts, as exhilirating to behold as life itself and as unquenchable; and nothing which that playwright could do to underscore this humor is as fresh in delight as his focusing our attention not just on Imogen but on poor Pisanio who, by reading to her her husband's death-command, brought on these outbursts in the first place and who now tries to keep up with them profusion for profusion only to be caught up short by the girl herself asking him, in the midst of the one lamentation whose beauty and conviction most resembles her own, just what he is being so grandiloquent about:

> Pisanio: Nay, you must
> Forget that rarest treasure of your cheek,
> Exposing it--but, O, the harder heart!
> Alack, no remedy!--to the greedy touch
> Of common-kissing Titan, and forget
> Your laboursome and dainty trims, wherein
> You made great Juno angry.
>
> Imogen: Nay, be brief:
> I see into thy end, and am almost
> A man already--

herself revealing once and for all the difference between the powder and flash of mere verbal pyrotechnics and the display of her own poetic lightning, every ounce of which

display is somehow for her a natural means of expression and the direct outpouring of a soul as large as nature itself, every last bit of which display she can dispense with in a second when the time is come to act: for unlike a Rosalind or Viola, she not only fully means but is capable of realizing every extravagance she utters, and her going from such extravagance to a "Nay, be brief" is no going from playful beauty to truth but from the magnificence of one truth to the simplicity of another with no incongruity at all in the transition. Then when she takes upon herself the boy-disguise Pisanio so gallantly suggests, and does so with no delicate shade of toying but with the straightforward "This attempt/I am soldier to, and will abide it with/A prince's courage," it is as if we were seeing at last that essential dauntlessness of the Shakespearean woman which lay behind so many similar disguises in earlier plays, the disguise itself here seeming the very picture of her boldness of heart, and treated with no attempt to tease the pure truth of that disguise into a deception as charming as Rosalind's "A gallant curtelaxe upon my thigh,/A boar spear in my hand, and--in my heart/ Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will--/We'll have a swashing and a martial outside" (I.iii.116-119), the most charming part of which deception is that Rosalind knows she is fooling no one by her pretending to be at center

afraid of her venture when, in fact, at center she can scarcely wait to begin. No playing at all is there in Imogen, for she <u>is</u> that courage her new clothes portray, and the charm she everywhere conveys to her audience derives simply from the spectators' happy discovery that if this radiant soldier looks like courage, then courage itself must be beautiful.

"O thou goddess,/Thou divine Nature; thou thyself thou blazon'st/In these two princely boys," cries Belarius as he begins yet another of his paeans to the royalty innate in his two charges as the two instinctively declare their love for the disguised Imogen, who so sadly sought their aid and companionship wandering lost among their mountains, to be even greater and more precious than the love they bear their tutor. But his introductory words give his speech a larger dimension than that of a mere foster-father's admiration, since, as he says, he is delineating not just the two boys but the whole forest-backdrop of nature which, as with their father and their sister, is projected directly <u>through</u> them as heirs to Britain itself, so that we cannot see the pair described without seeing that backdrop described also, power for power, trait for trait: "they are as gentle/As zephyrs blowing below the violet,/Not wagging his sweet head; and yet, as rough/ Their royal blood enchaf'd, as the rud'st wind/That by the

top doth take the mountain pine/And make him stoop to the vale" (IV.ii.169-76). Against this backdrop of gentleness and roughness so mighty and so visible in every rock and flower which a mountain wilderness can boast, it is quite literally natural that Imogen and Cloten should separately seek the protection of this earthy magnitude of creation only to separately find, as Thaisa found when she sought the sea, death, which with no cause can level any player to his all-too-mortal size and make any consideration of reasons or instruments, such as swords or drugs or poisons from whatever source-story they were taken, seem somehow unimportant and beside the point. "Will poor folks lie,/That have afflictions on them, knowing 'tis/A punishment or trial?" asked Imogen as she entered the awesome reaches of the woodlands knowing that she, and all her fellows, are vulnerable to absolute pain as suddenly as is any leaf or hare-bell she happens to trod beneath, and recognizing as she more clearly sees nature looming everywhere around her just how much it is in the power of that nature to test and test and test all trespassers upon it with a monarch's careless prerogative. Tested she and Cloten now are, to the blood, he meeting Guiderius' sword-challenge with an outlandish paroxysm of pride ("Thou injurious thief,/Hear but my name, and tremble"); she meeting the challenge of the potion of that physician who is

the very distiller of nature, with a meekness all the more remarkable for her thinking it some restorative cordial, for the pain her husband inflicted upon her makes whatever is overbearing in her spirit long for tragic death and yet she reaches for the pain of more life ("I am sick still, heart-sick; Pisanio,/I'll now taste of thy drug"), yielding to the will of the forest as totally as Cloten fights. As with the sea- or lightning-death of Thaisa or Antiochus, the fact of the death itself does not seem here to matter so much as whether the victims passed through nature's trials worthily or not, since as with Belarius's violet, life is here, life is gone: only one's response to it, whether it be blast or Imogen-breeze, determines its shape or hue or fragrance, cankers or royal purples, the shame or the glory of the bloom making the final withering almost a trifle.

If the force of the achievement of Shakespearean tragedy in Elsinore and Venice and Scotland and Lear's Britain was that each of the four protagonists in his own way fulfilled with a terrible exactitude Richard II's wish that he could be as great as his grief--Hamlet and Othello and Macbeth and Lear each wrestling with a pain as mighty as man or gods could inflict, and wrestling with such intensity that both player and pain were all-too-equally matched, neither yielding an inch until one carried the

other over the side of a chasm where no audience could follow, both locked in a death grip which nothing mortal could break--then the achievement of the last plays of Shakespeare can only be measured by the fact that here the protagonists are all greater than their griefs, though the griefs are as killing. "And yet he rides it out," says Gower of Pericles as that monarch catches the faint note of hope Lear had when he looked upon Cordelia's still lips, turning the note to harmony as he turns himself, so broken by death, towards life. "Ay me! poor maid,/Born in a tempest, when my mother died,/This world to me is like a lasting storm,/Whirring me from my friends," Marina cries from a point of isolation as terrible as any Ophelia's, and yet she scatters her yellows and blues, her purple violets and marigolds into the fructifying sea to take new blossom there, not dropping them into the dead end of a hoar and glassy stream. Yet in all the plays of Shakespeare, even the last four, there is no portrayal of man's capacity to rise above even the greatest sorrows which is more of an everlasting monument to the human spirit than is Act IV, Scene Two of Cymbeline, as it builds and builds like music, setting forth first the intensest powers of Guiderius and Arviragus to hate and to love with the purest colors which that intensity displays in the first-felt experiences of the very young, then following that intensity

with the senseless jolts of the deaths of the objects of both their hate and love--the greater senselessness of Imogen's slaying gently suggesting how sharper the shock of life's cutting down of loveliness is than the shock of the cutting down of any more spectacular brutality--then, beginning with their grief for the girl, moving slowly above it with long dirges and brief laments unfolding each with the dyes and stains of the forest itself ("Thou shalt not lack/The flower that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor/The azur'd harebell, like thy veins: no, nor/The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,/Out-sweeten'd not thy breath: the ruddock would/With charitable bill--O bill, sore-shaming/Those rich-left heirs that let their fathers lie/Without a monument!--bring thee all this;/Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when winter comes,/To winter-ground thy corse") until at last the pair follow their sorrow with a song so far beyond even grief that it is almost as much sung for Cloten as for the girl, in its acceptance of dissolution as a fate encompassing all and in its breadth of magnanimity of letting the forest or the sea or the tempest or the soil itself wreak whatever havoc it may, since those backdrops have given, and will give, gifts as great, though not perhaps as dear, as those which they now take away, those gifts now wrested far from the harm of any wreaking:

Guiderius: Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages,
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust,

as, whether the victim be a royal princess or the most besmudged and now appropriately headless court buffoon, light and darkness, comedy and tragedy seem almost interchangeable to those who have passed beyond both:

Arviragus: Fear no more the frown o' the great,
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke,
Care no more to clothe and eat,
To thee the reed is as the oak:
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust,

the Simonides' and Cymbelines, let alone the Lears, and all the power of their authority and all the scope of their kingdoms even when that authority is Britain itself, here dwarfed by the final authority of a cosmos larger than all:

Guiderius: Fear no more the lightning-flash

Arviragus: Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;

Guiderius: Fear not slander, censure rash;

Arviragus: Thou hast finished joy and moan:

Both: All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign themselves amd come to dust,

the voices of the two brothers suddenly joining and intermingling with a simplicity beyond drama, in a delicate reminder that the largest and hardest acceptance to make in a world where every player, even to an Iachimo or an evil

Queen, can be as verbally beautiful and melodious as he chooses, is the acceptance of the fact that even the most beautiful melody is lovelier when shared: when, whether it be Imogen seeking Posthumus or Rome seeking Britain or the sea crashing up to seek the land, its single line of song reaches to touch with another to become the married miracle of harmony:

Guiderius: No exorcisor harm thee!

Arviragus: Nor no witchcraft charm thee!

Guiderius: Ghost unlaid forbear thee!

Arviragus: Nothing ill come near thee!

Both: Quiet consummation have,
And renowned be thy grave,

no song of joy more happy than this the loveliest song of mourning poet ever wrote.

No wonder it is, then, that after this song, Shakespeare can unleash succession after succession of fragmenting shocks upon his players and his audience--Imogen suddenly restored to life, her first touchstone to her abruptly broken-up world the trunkless body of Cloten with no head in sight, her consciousness itself breaking up at the impact, her old ability to see through all obstacles till she saw the bare essences beneath now fallen to pieces as here she sees only her husband's clothes on Cloten and assumes the corpse is Posthumus, as if her eye-strings finally <u>have</u> cracked with a snap that gives her wild and sad

lament over the trunk the absurd humor it has; Britain and Rome split from one another into two factions each of which is itself fragmented, Imogen somehow fighting for Rome while loyal to Britain, Belarius and his two charges somehow fighting for Britain while their loyalties are alienated from Britain's king, Posthumus, in a very frenzy of disjointedness, now fighting for Rome, now Britain, now Rome again; Cymbeline's Queen dying in the midst of the proceedings as starkly as Imogen came again to life, and with as little reason--the entire play, as the last note of the brothers' chant echoes away, transformed into one gigantic masterpiece of dissonance: for the playwright has cradled all of this dissonance in a harmony and a peace as simple as the two boys could sing, and no subsequent confusions or series of confusions can shake the edifice of harmony he has established even one semi-quaver from its bedrock of permanent truth.

"Fear no more tavern-bills," says the First Gaoler to Posthumus as the young man awaits his death for fighting against the victorious British army which would never have achieved its defeat of Rome if not for the energies of Belarius and Guiderius and Arviragus (and Posthumus himself, though he later resumes his Roman disguise), the words at once catching up the "heat o' the sun" and re-establishing, after the upheavals of the war- and character-mix-ups,

the harmony the sun conveys, while applying, with the appropriate transition of words, its significance to the lowest levels of English society as well as to the equally robust highest (V.iv.160). But his remark, coming when it does and kind as it is in its attempt at comfort when it could as easily torment, is as welcome as it is unnecessary to re-establish any harmony, as it immediately follows the descent into prison of Jupiter himself, who level by level and sphere by sphere re-strikes into tune all the misplaced chords at once, not from the bottom up but, spectacularly, from the top down:

> No more, you petty spirits of region low,
> Offend our hearing: hush! How dare you ghosts
> Accuse the thunderer, whose bolt, you know,
> Sky-planted, batters all rebelling coasts?

One of the most unique things about the infinite separate touches, now here, now there, which Shakespeare gives his dramatic world to bring it to that astonishing roundness and depth which makes it seem less a creation of a playwright than life itself is that even if among these touches certain are brought out and emphasized in this or that pattern of image or idea or action, there are still in the rest of the play a whole wealth of other images and ideas and actions that, as in life, do not quite fit but rather overwhelm us with their sheer plentitude, now telling us far more about any character or event than we

can ever absorb, now not telling us enough, now contradicting some dominant pattern which has been already established--so that, for example, though the tragedies contain one protagonist after another whose sensitivity is opened to that disastrous motion by which a monarch's flaw is projected onto the landscape of his country, it is the insensitive spiritual hack Rosenkrantz who gives this insight its deepest and most beautiful expression ("The cease of majesty/Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw/What's near it with it ..."); and though Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus are portrayed, as is their empire, one as constant as the north star, the other cold as an abstraction, it is the very inconstancy of the first ("How foolish do your fears seem now, Calpurnia! .../Give me my robe, for I will go") and the hot impetuousness of the second when he thinks on his sister ("The trees by the way/Should have borne men; and expectation fainted,/Longing for what it had not ...: but you are come/A market-maid to Rome") that sticks in the mind like a burr long after their plays are over, as if these characters were real men whose countless inconsistencies we can never quite fathom. So, too, when we see the sea made dominant over all other elements as the image and body of fate and the gods in Pericles and see the tide-moving Diana descend to the stage, or here in Cymbeline see the earthy land itself given backdrop-

emphasis as a vast royal wealth of forests and mountains and valleys and see Jupiter descend, himself the incarnation of all royalty, his province the whole variegated terrain of the earth, his name at one time or another, as was Diana's before, on the lips of every major character,--- we cannot but see, too, the plenitude of all the other elements as well, not kept all consistently in the background but looming large, then mixing with the rest again, as from "my unspotted fire of love" to Cerimon's world of "vegetives, metals, stones" to Cleon's new-rich land "fed with your corn" the sea alone does not hold center-stage in Pericles' drama, nor does the earth alone in Cymbeline's, with its ample portrayals of Belarius's mountain streams and the British sea which cracks open ships "like egg-shells" or that most memorable unspotted air and fire of the heat o' the sun--not just Diana's or Jupiter's name on everyone's lips either, but also Apollo's, Juno's, Neptune's, Cupid's, Lucina's, Aesculapius's, Tellus's, Cytherea's, Saturn's, Murcury's, Mars', and Time's and Lady Fortune's and the Destinies' for good measure, the author sacking heaven and earth to heap the riches on us. There is no doubt, however, that Jupiter <u>is</u> brought forward more than the rest in title and in element governed, as much as was Diana in <u>Pericles</u>, and forward he stands now, quite physically, to draw together all the disparate and splendid

fragments of the drama as simply as he is at once the chief god of the Britains and the Romans, and as he is the chief crown of any thought or emotion or action which would call itself royal.

As with Diana at Mytilene, the central wonder of the appearance as a character of one of those dwellers from beyond the backdrops to human existence which, from the Heath on, were so visible to every mortal player on stage, is not so much that Shakespeare has at last given those backdrops a distinct mortal-like form and voice--which is alone an achievement of the highest drama--but that when these gods or goddesses speak, they actually say what the looming cosmos which was present on stage for so many many plays from Navarre through all the tragedies <u>should</u> say if indeed the heavens and the destinies could enunciate: phrases which give with the utmost clarity those reasons behind the gods' seemingly senseless intrusions into human life, themselves articulating the motivations which so long lay hidden beneath so many veils of inscrutability, and uttering them only now, when characters and audience alike have meekly, magnanimously accepted the fact that no mortal has the right to know those reasons any more than Imogen has the right to ask her father (as indeed she does not ask) why he married his wicked Queen. "Perform my bidding, or thou liv'st in woe;/Do't, and

happy; by my silver bow!" said Diana to Pericles, in a dozen words defining the lesson of tragedy: not only of Hamlet's or Othello's or Macbeth's, none of whom would meekly deal with the blows life initially inflicted upon them, but of Lear's and Antiochus' too, who would not only not perform the cosmos' bidding but would give that cosmos a bidding of their own; though of course if Pericles, or if we ourselves, do not apply either past or Antiochus-fresh flames of tragic experience to Diana's crystalline speech, her phrases remain only phrases, mere crystal, and do not catch the full light of significance which transfigures Pericles' acceptance to understanding. So too now does Jupiter speak, and give in fourteen words more perfect and more clear than any sonnet the long-hid cause behind tragedy's causeless pain:

> Be not with mortal accidents oppress;
> No care of yours it is; you know 'tis ours.
> Whom best I love, I cross; to make my gift,
> The more delay'd, delighted,

a statement matched only in terror by its greater love, revealing as it does, despite the awful suspicions of Lear or Gloucester, that there is a larger purpose behind pain than merely pain itself, which, through tragedy, burns and burns each protagonist more and more until, with Pericles, his senses, emotions and whole humanity become as unspotted as Antiochus hears they are--as if the love

with which the gods shower us were a crucible of fire, and as if the shape which that crucible forms at last, though like Lear or Cordelia we may die in the forming, were the gift to us, if we choose to accept it, of a purified human nature.

If we cannot or will not apply our own life-experience to Jove's words to see them fill and light up with truth, there is no doubt that Posthumus does--who himself knows more than a little about tragedy, having bitterly repented the order he thinks has killed his wife--and no doubt that the radiance he sees in those words floods the theater to bursting, as, though he yet does not understand, he does not mock the words but meekly keeps them in semi-trust, using rhyme to hold together their wonder ("But, alas, I swerve:/Many dream not to find, neither deserve,/And yet are steep'd in favours; so am I/That have this golden chance, and know not why"). Only when, reprieved from prison, he sees his beloved Imogen--and with her all the senseless pain he caused her and himself even to his striking her to the ground in her boy's disguise, by that action concentrating five acts of his cruelty into one blow--does his experience catch up with his trust, and does the gold of Jove's words shine through his own with a joy more than making up for the pain of any tardiness. "Hang there like fruit, my soul,/Till the tree die!" he cries as she

embraces him (V.v.263-64), speaking now with a full fertility of language of which he was incapable before his trial (" ... though ink be made of gall"), loving now with a full sense of the value of the prize which, as in tragedy, he too carelessly threw away--though it is a measure of Imogen's unspotted nature, which from the first was beyond the lesson of tragedy, that she herself needed no trial of her own nor no Jupiter to make Posthumus, the more delayed, delightful, nor can she now love or value him other than with the infinity of devotion she has given him all along. And as she cleaves to her husband, she gives in her silence the last human touch to Jove's words, for though by the pain of the crosses borne by her for so long, it would appear that the gods loved her best of all, she seems not flattered by that affection or indeed to even notice it--so much does she care that her husband loves her that it seems of little importance to her whether the cosmos loves her or not.

Yet just at that point when she thinks not even to invite the ardor of the universe, that ardor seeks her out:

> Cymbeline: How now, my flesh, my child?
> What, mak'st thou me a dullard in this act?
> Wilt thou not speak to me?--

for though Jupiter has ascended, his royal authority still rests in the figure of the king, who now, through the

shock of his wife's death and the shock of his child's rebirth has at last the pridelessness to use that authority worthily, reaching out, as he now does most gently, in link to the figure who is not so much his creation or his subject but both these wonders, and more, intermingled beyond loveliness in the human miracle of a daughter, only to see her at once kneel as if she were but awaiting a hint of meekness from him to lavish him with her own--the double-magnanimity of their reunion again played out in a language of benediction which makes the universe itself seem to heal:

> Imogen: [Kneeling.] Your blessing, sir.
>
> Cymbeline: My tears that fall
> Prove holy water on thee,

all of the briar- and mountain-roughnesses of Britain washed mild with the love which now flows from its fount.

To watch the magic of the process of the close of this play is to watch from the point of Cymbeline's tears falling on his daughter onward the expanding concentric ripples of pridelessness extend and extend, though with the bumps and protests of a thousand eddies, until the last outskirts of creation fall back into the harmony which the king himself so willfully and so frequently broke: his new waves of wrath at discovering Cloten's murder as quickly turned to newer tenderness by the shock of

the restoration of Guiderius and Arviragus, broadening the scope of his fatherhood even more than Pericles, as befits the ruler of Britain, by resting his high paternity not just in the mystery of a daughter but in the full ruddy hardiness of sons; the knitting of this second circle of generation then taking place within itself simultaneous with the knitting together within itself of the first, as Imogen and Guiderius and Arviragus rejoin themselves to one another as brethren in motion with their two fathers rejoining themselves in the same kind of blood-tie ("Thou art my brother," says the King to Belarius; "so we'll hold thee ever"); the second circle then extending out to include the once-flawed but penitent Posthumus, who, forgiven by and joined to the circle of the three young siblings, in turn reaches out to touch with forgiveness the worse-flawed but penitent Iachimo, only to be himself forgiven by the onlooking Cymbeline who perhaps at center feels as flawed and as shriven as the Italian he now sees at the farthest periphery of his kingdom; himself then extending that shriving, cutting past all circles, to include everyone ("Nobly doom'd!" the King says of Posthumus. "We'll learn our freeness of a son-in-law;/Pardon's the word to all")--all Britain precariously, finally, now made one lake of concord in which Jove himself would be proud to nest.

Yet nothing measures the breadth of Shakespeare's vision more in Cymbeline than the fact that just at the point when he not only sees but actually portrays the whole scope of the prodigality of the universe's amazements in the spectacle of Britain and her forest-wreathed king, he has the daring to let that king doff his wreath, branches swaying madly, mosses torn awry, before the chaste pre-eminence of the Roman laurel, and to have him do so with no loss of order or greatness but only increase. "The lofty cedar, royal Cymbeline,/Personates thee," a sooth-sayer tells him, explaining a riddle which Jupiter left with Posthumus: "and thy lopp'd branches point/Thy two sons forth: who, by Belarius stol'n,/For many years thought dead, are now reviv'd,/To the majestic cedar join'd" (V.v.454-58)--but the point of the riddle is not the explanation and recapitulation of facts the audience already knows or could guess but rather the emphasis that Britain now is whole, as the whole stage evidences with Cymbeline and Belarius, Guiderius, Arviragus, Imogen and Posthumus fallen or shaken into place as one body of loyalty and love; and, more than whole, has defeated by some fluke of strength the entire empire of Caesar Augustus (or as much of that empire as could be fit into the English battle scenes) thus finding itself in a perfect position to be generous to no one. Yet that position, as Lear learned

too late, is even more perfect to be used to be generous to everyone, and there is no more final resolution of the problem of war and of the conflict between factions and between nations which took up so much of the space of all the previous history plays Shakespeare ever wrote--because there is no solution more absolutely right--than the one he presents here when he has set up for himself the seemingly insoluble dilemma of matching Rome, the very essence of everything noble and just, against Britain, the very essence of everything stalwart and large-hearted: the solution of having both sides win by having the winner give up all his unjust spoils, a resolution which the author takes up from the legends and chronicles he found it in and shapes completely in projection with the double-magnanimity which re-united Imogen with Cymbeline and the whole world with Jupiter, one party, despite all his temporary strength, kneeling to the other stronger party at just that point when he doesn't have to, to be met with an even greater healing than he ever expected--the whole actuality of a tragic conflict dropping away at just that point when its potentiality for disaster is greatest, just as Imogen's temptation not to kneel to her father, if she yielded to it, or Cymbeline's temptation not to nod to Rome, if he yielded to it as he could do even yet, would inevitably lead both refusers to destruction, and leave to the bloody punishers the questionable honor of victor.

"Laud we the gods," says Cymbeline,

> And let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils
> From our blest altars. Publish we this peace
> To all our subjects. Set we forward: let
> A Roman, and a British ensign wave
> Friendly together: so through Lud's town march,
> And in the temple of great Jupiter
> Our peace we'll ratify: seal it with feasts.
> Set on there! Never was a war did cease,
> Ere bloody hands were wash'd, with such a peace,

washing his hands, and his whole world, not just of blood but of tragedy itself, for if Pericles is the flute and viol of a sea-farer's struggle beyond all tragedy, aligning all the other players behind him in his pilgrimage, Cymbeline is that struggle made one great battle-horn--or is it cornucopia?--of quarrels and clashes and brawls and blows all demanding our attention simultaneously, and getting it: yet here, as in the first of Shakespeare's last plays, though the color of the blood be more barbaric, the meekness of the washing and the splendor of the victory is the same.

Indeed we do not have to follow Cymbeline and all of Britain and Rome--with every level and member of family and society they include, from even Iachimo to the basest Gaoler to the Roman general to Posthumus to Belarius to Cornelius to the triple glory of Imogen and her two brothers, all of whom have each won their present triumph by being so willing to give up the force of their own pride--to know what will happen when they all do arrive at Lud's

town and seek the temple of great Jupiter. For at that town and in that temple, though playwright out of consideration for the frailer eyes and ears of his audience does not portray the spectacle, we can be certain with a golden certainty that, once past the temple-portals, the gods will all laud them.

CHAPTER VI

THE WINTER'S TALE

Surely the most precious gift an artist can bestow upon his audience, if his art be true, is the gift of his own special sense of the marvel of life: the gift of letting us retain, once the book is put down or the painting covered or the music silenced or the play forgotten, some fresh sense of those qualities of everyday experience which we have hitherto taken for granted--beauty, ugliness, love, hate, banality, frailty, absurdity, youth, age, change, laughter--which somehow struck the artist with such force that he attempted to present us with them anew in a shape or pattern which would make them stand out proudly, so that we may never again look at the prose of daily life without finding some of the poetry which has been there all along and which would have remained hidden had not some more perceptive mortal than ourselves heard the note or seen the gesture of the special in the familiar and, heightening it, broadening it, catching it in the act, impinged his view of it on our own way of seeing, the work of art itself a medium deepening the way we look at the world not so much by telling us how to look (which is, after all, advice and the gift of the sages) but simply by reminding us that there is something there to see. Yet if in great art we

get the sense that nothing of life is being hidden or left back but rather that the whole world is being coaxed and goaded by the light of the artist's vision to open up before us like some monstrous reluctant flower which has been kept too long in the dark, now opening and opening to such a degree that none of our own dull habits of sight, once we leave the gallery or theater, can ever quite close it completely again--then and only then can we begin to measure the scope of the artist's generosity who has, far from keeping to himself those unique glimpses of human experience which are his alone, pushed and strained and driven himself into embodying those glimpses into some form, some word or phrase or image which we can look through too, as if the words or phrases or images were his very eyes or soul which he was sharing with us to make us brother to his seeing. Only with a Shakespeare, however, does the idea of artistic generosity expand and expand till it mocks the very concept of abundance, as play follows play, now lighting up this part of experience, now that, one world opening up to another, sadder or happier, starker or richer, yet always the same world turned this way and that so many different times to so many different depths in so many different turns of verse, each turn a new clarity of insight, that it would seem that human experience itself must collapse exhausted before it could ever

blossom before the playwright as much as he would wish.

Yet we really do not know what artistic generosity is till, after Pericles--where Shakespeare sees right through to the center of things to order the infinitude of all the experience of every previous play into a vision whose very finality carries with it the certainty that there is, after the triumph of this everything, nothing more to see and surely no more language to see it in--he over-extends himself in Cymbeline from that center in all directions at once, yet somehow managing to encompass them all, every layer and level prodded open full-blown and bright and huge. To discover then that there is another play which follows, let alone what kind of play, is to come face to face with the plainest reason why an artist of genius can be so lavish with his gifts: because just at that point when it would seem that he must garner his talents and hoard them to himself else soon he will have none, if he has the largeness of trust in whatever muse the spirit of genius is to spend all those talents on his audience that they may share the wealth, that spirit may--and perhaps will--at once give him a gift greater than any he just gave his fellows: as, after Cymbeline had brought out the last summer richness of the bloom of Shakespeare's final vision, he somehow could, when the time for bloom had passed, light up and transfigure the very network and

fiber within into one more play, of such clear transparency of formation that it is as if the entire drama came to him as one thought, in one instant, as suddenly as that forgotten vapor above the winter clouds crystallizes into shapes more perfect than any spring or summer can ever quite account for, whirling them down on us pattern after pattern after pattern, now flowers, now circles, now stars, now sharp, now soft, till the air is white with the dazzle. "Mine's beyond beyond," said Imogen almost as if she were, while speaking of her love, looking back to Pericles for a worthy comparison. But in the world of The Winter's Tale we are beyond even that.

***

"I will be flesh and blood," said Leonato in Messina, as he gave vent to a feeling shared by all who have ever felt, rightly, art's utter ridiculousness before the ruddy face of life; "For there was never yet philosopher/That could endure the toothache patiently,/However they have writ the style of gods,/And made a push at chance and sufferance" (V.i.34-38). What a mark it is, then, of the breadth of Shakespeare's final vision as it is caught in these last plays, that this earlier character's admission of the frailty of pale art is not dismissed by the author after Messina--as it would seem to have a perfect right to be dismissed by this man who not only writes drama after

drama in the style of the gods but ever more increasingly in the gods' own content till it would seem he himself must be standing with them at their own vantage point to get such a true perspective of the spectacle of mankind--but rather is delighted in by him more and more just when we would strongest expect the very totality of his artistic achievement to make him revel in abstractions of beauty and poetry and chance and sufferance: as if Shakespeare, after the too-real revelations of the darkening comedies and tragedies, not only did not flee into a world of his own created illusions to heal himself with their loveliness but rather made that world reflect all the more a flesh and blood reality so absolute that no tissue of fantasy seems to hold it together but only that far lovelier, far more delicate sense of the sheer absurdity of fantasy which makes each last play seem less a work of art than a work of life:

> Archidamus: It [Mamillius, Leontes' young son] is a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note.
>
> Camillo: I well agree with you in the hopes of him: it is a gallant child; one that indeed physics the subject, makes old hearts fresh: they that went on crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man.
>
> Archidamus: Would they else be content to die?

> Camillo: Yes; if there were no other excuse why they should desire to live.
>
> Archidamus: If the king has no son, they would desire to live on crutches till he had one (I.1.35-45)--

as all the wonderful images and phrases, ideas and aspirations a playwright can embody are dissolved by Shakespeare in a flick of laughter before the greater truth that realler than any man's desire for beautiful intangibles is his desire simply for the next breath of air that will prolong his life, and the next and the next and the next, man separated by no more than <u>that</u> from an infinity so stark that existence itself seems more rare in its fragility than any fancied art.

Fragile, tenuous as life itself is the opening of <u>The Winter's Tale</u> as the exchanges of Archidamus and Camillo hush us in the midst of the heat of our own thoughts to make us at once hear everywhere the hint, the laughter of life's brevity whispering through all the scenes of the first act of the play like wind through autumn leaves, so that we cannot see any of the entrance of Leontes and Polixenes, for example, without seeing the two men framed in the twilit shadows of the two elder statesmen first on stage nor without thinking of them as also soon to wither; nor hear the discussion which follows of how Polixenes' stay in Sicilia may be prolonged without hearing the echo in it of the old men on crutches who would prolong their

own stay too, if they could; nor feel the touch of the verse of the discussion without feeling move through its crisp and sere figures the transparent fleeting of time, with its "nine changes of the watery star" and "sir, that's to-morrow" and "that may blow/No sneaping winds at home" and "one seven-night longer" and "the borrow of a week" all counted in the mathematics of Polixenes' "therefore, like a cipher,/... I multiply with one 'We thank you,' many thousands moe/That go before it," each phrase that follows shedding the richnesses of the flowers and forests and verdures and plumages of Cymbeline for the greys and browns and silvers of the slipping year, to the ticks and tocks of such unmellifluous words as "debt," "tougher," "drag," "sneap," "thwack," "jar o' the clock," as if beauty were brittling away along with time to reveal the resiliency of the truth beneath. The most awesome physical spectacle of Pericles and Cymbeline was Shakespeare's moving and interrelating his mutable, variable, unpredictable characters against the changeless backdrops of nature, whose seas and forests would survive play and players and playwright and audience alike and whose mere presence set the whole of human drama in the framework of the eternal: no matter did it seem that the waves and the winds were themselves unpredictable and that at any moment they could wield their power of life-or-death; what mattered most was that some constant fact of

nature did the wielding, and this very constancy of backdrop is what the author everywhere emphasized as it always loomed there, behind everything, when any character or plotline or mood or action was in doubt. Then what is the chill which rises up the back of our imagination when we first notice that here in The Winter's Tale Shakespeare creates the phenomenon, unspeakable in its grasp of the cosmos, of playing out his moving, changing characters against a backdrop which is itself always moving: the grand backdrop of the seasons, always in transition so massive that the characters themselves seem less mutable than they really are because the only constant by which we can measure them will not stand still for the contrast, as if the playwright were grown so familiar with the universe that he no longer needs to stop it and hold it in this or that attitude of birth or destruction, wind or wave, but can now portray it as it really is--always alive, always in motion--and can spin out the lives of his players along it as along the circumference of a moving circle, himself at last steady enough of eye not to dizzy himself, or his audience, with the ultimate spectacle of all the changes of mortal existence as seen against all the changes of the immortal, so sure is he of the constancy of human and cosmic truth that he can catch both truths at once even in the act of their unfolding.

Yet when we make out the figure of Leontes for the first time in the play among the lengthening shadows of the dying year, it is difficult to avoid thinking that we are seeing not so much a player in the great cycle of life's transition which is moving so spectacularly before us, but rather, in the midst of it, the dark germ of its terror. From the first appearance in Rousillon of the King of France, the universe of Shakespearean drama seemed caught up in the whirlwind of an increasingly immense phenomenon realigning and clarifying every plot and character to the shocks and jolts of some mighty physics: that all things seek their center and that for all things the one dark center of the mystery of the terror of change is the person of the king. More and more did the inexplicable decrees of chance and fate and cause and effect and power-to-test concentrate themselves in the figure of the Duke of Vienna and in Lear till in Antiochus and Simonides and Pericles and Cymbeline the mere appearance of a king takes unto itself all the inscrutabilities at the center of their kingdoms, so that the atmosphere of these kingdoms, and of their plays, grows clear as light. In The Winter's Tale this clarity is complete, for, after all, the one strain of darkness in life stubborner than any other is the strain of evil, and here at last, with no Cornwalls or Oswalds or Dionyzas or Clotens to distract, the only source of evil in the play,

the one center of sudden change from good to arbitrary blackness, is the king himself--as perhaps, if we think about it, the reason that so terrifying a figure as Cymbeline could be portrayed so dazzlingly was that his queen took to herself all shadow of chaotic evil and so left in brightness all the other arbitrarinesses which were lodged in the king:

> Too hot, too hot!
> To mingle friendships far is mingling bloods.
> I have tremor cordis on me: my heart dances;
> But not for joy--not joy,

Leontes utters in an aside as he sees his wife and his boyhood friend in graceful conference; and indeed, in an instant, there is no joy in him at all but only a flaw of utter blackness which coalesces whatever traces of sadness and shade there are in the pure air of Sicilia and leaves the surrounding atmosphere as clean and as clear as a frosty day for his efforts.

> We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' the sun,
> And bleat the one at th'other: what we chang'd
> Was innocence for innocence: we knew not
> The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
> That any did,

says Polixenes to Hermione, with his words stopping the autumnal passing of time and taking the audience far back from the present to flood the stage with the light of his own recollections, by so doing retracing a familiar pattern of tragedy by which the only means a man can escape from the

nightmare life has become is to open the avenue of the past, as Othello does in his "What sense had I of her stol'n hours of lust?/I saw't not, thought it not, it harm'd not me"--though even when life is not nightmare but only encroaching twilight such avenues are inviting, one's youth seeming perhaps more precious than it really was simply because we have moved so far beyond it that we are safe, amidst all of our nostalgia, from ever having to live it over again. But The Winter's Tale is as far beyond nostalgia as it is beyond tragedy and needs no retrospective light from a dark past corridor to illuminate its reaches, for Hermione, like some white moth, picks up her companion's thoughts from the half-playful shadows in which they were uttered and carries them--as she carries the blackness of her husband's deeds later--far out of the realm of melancholy and night simply by taking it for granted, as if it were the simplest thing in the world, that innocence is not at all co-extensive with ignorance: that innocence, light, beauty, purity need never be lost to men through change as a necessary process of growth but only rather may be brightened by men the more as they increase their experience to include whatever the ripening years bring, even to the gift of wives--"Th' offenses we have made you do we'll answer,/If you first sinn'd with us, and that with us/You did continue fault, and that you slipp'd not/With any but us"--as she with

every word moves freer and freer in the clear universe of the final vision where age and change are seen as nothing detrimental unless one makes the choice to treat them as detrimental, the choice for darkness or light, tragedy or trust, being everything. She--and, with her help, Polixenes, and indeed every other character in the play save Leontes, even to the playwright himself--makes that choice to accept transition and fruition without decrying them as harbingers of guilt; and once we see her choose, and move so immaculately beyond the shadows of these two men, one merely misguided in his mistrust of time, one revelling in it to the point of world chaos, we cannot but follow her beyond twilight, beyond even the oncoming winter night, nor forget for a moment in our following how big she is with unborn child, herself seeming that she is carrying within her the day itself and smiling that men cannot yet see it, so concerned are they with reflections of the past that they do not notice the radiance upon radiance that awaits them if they but look forward with one fraction of the confidence with which they all look back.

There is something of the nature of melancholy in Shakespeare which derives from the nature of change. Indeed perhaps that is why the plays of Navarre and Verona and Illyria and Athens had about them, lurking in the shadows, such a liquid quality of youth, as if playwright and players

could not look at love or beauty or friendship or laughter without seeing them trembling nacreously on the verge of total night, themselves so unfamiliar with that night that their very distance from it makes their fears of it shaded more by their own fancying than by the fact of night itself: "Swift as a shadow, short as any dream," says Lysander in Athens speaking for them all; "Brief as the lightning in the collied night,/That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,/And ere a man hath power to say, 'Behold!'/The jaws of darkness do devour it up:/So quick bright things come to confusion" (I.i.144-49)--the sadness seeming not so much for the death as for the change that leads to death, for the change is what the players are beginning to experience, not the final destruction. If there is no tragedy in these lines or in these plays that is simply because change is not a tragedy but only an anticipation of it, just as melancholy, the dwelling on the nature of change, is not anguish but only the anticipation of it--as indeed the magic of these plays is that the players seem part-unreal, part-dream, because they all live, as does youth itself, in a state of anticipation of they-know-not-what, their thoughts half filled with what not yet is. Only in the last plays, when all there is to see of death has been seen, does melancholy return, not as an atmosphere but concentrated into motes and particles heavy with remembered tragedy and

darker than ever, as the characters not only feel but know how close they all are to death and how quickly time not only can but does bring irredeemable change: "When he was here/He did incline to sadness, and oft-times/Not knowing why," said Imogen of Posthumus, catching up Pericles' meditation of "Why should this change of thoughts,/The sad companion, dull-ey'd melancholy,/Be my so us'd a guest as not an hour,/In the day's so glorious walk, or peaceful night,/The tomb where grief should sleep, can breed me quiet?" (I.vii.61-63;I.ii.2-6)--for whether the change-for-disaster is just behind them in the betrayal of an Antiochus or just ahead of them in the betrayal of an Iachimo, it is there. All the stronger, then, is the author's bringing out that even this grain of sadness, justified as it never was in the earlier plays, is dangerous, as, after the tragedies, he brings out over and over again how much more mighty it is to smile at transition, Archidamus-like, rather than lament it, so clearly has he seen that in back of such lamentation is a non-acceptance of those life-terrors which must be accepted and that in back of the smile is the meekness of all acceptance--all the worthy late-play characters rushing to correct any mourning as forcefully as they would any tragic flaw ("Now, by the gods, I pity his misfortune," says Simonides of Pericles, "And will awake him from his melancholy").

Then when we see Polixenenes in Sicilia half-smilingly admit to a melancholy at his lost youth, praising his son for trying to cheer him ("... And with his varying childness cures in me,/Thoughts that would thick my blood") only to have Leontes immediately second this heaviness in himself, both men's sadness reflected onto the dying season, it only follows from the perfect structure of the vision of this play that Polixenes' sadness immediately be dispersed by Hermione so that all the atmosphere of Sicilia be concentrated in the figure of Sicilia's king, fixing itself even at the center of his pride, so that we can precise at last that indefinable something which was so dangerous in the romantic sadnesses of much earlier plays: that any sadness is dangerous which seeks to stop transition with a sigh, because to stop transition is to interfere with and reject the whole cycle of the seasons itself with all its disasters and joys, and is not only dangerous but tragic in men no longer young who can see, unlike a Lysander or Orlando, the full significance of that cycle. All the pride of this melancholy, all its innate willfulness to see only darkness where there may be light is now lodged deep in the person of the king beneath all the glaring colors of his jealous coler, as he gives way to the full pressure of his suspicion and depression not, as with some Hero's Claudio or some Hamlet, because of his youth or inexperience but because,

if anything, he is too experienced in life and knows that the change of betrayal can happen at any moment even as the most flowering year can turn, as he puts it, to "three crabb'd months [that] had sour'd themselves to death." His unleashing of his darkness on his world, in fact, seems not so much to stem from private malice as from a king's initiative, dancing with the full involuntary willfulness of a tremor cordis, to betray life even before life has had time to betray him, putting his own tragic stamp upon the encroachment of winter without winter ever hinting that, if left alone, it would be a time of tragedy. "The king's will be perform'd," Hermione says as she is led away branded as an adulteress and as the burgeoning she carries within herself even in the midst of the hoary season is refused recognition and legitimacy. Melancholy has always, even from its gentlest hints in Athens or Arden, desired to stop change, to make it cease so that the world would somehow obey the fancy of the dreamer. But here in Sicilia, when melancholy is given the power to do just that, the whole cycle of life grinding to a halt at Leontes' bidding, it seems more than just an accident that that time which Leontes instinctively chooses to stop and make hearken to him is the coldest, driest, blackest time of year he could possibly choose to humor himself with, as if the whole world were frozen into one Academe built of the art of

his own suspicions.

More and more sharply in the scenes which follow Leontes' first denunciations of Hermione does Shakespeare bring out the art, the unreality, the sheer insanity of the king's accusations, underscoring constantly the feeling first found in Navarre that there is something evil in that which will not leave life alone but which, through whatever dissatisfactions of melancholy or whatever, insists on manipulating it, elaborating it, making it other than it is, so that the end product is perforce always unnatural--the playwright at last making visible in Leontes the spot of melancholy at the center of man's very tendency to re-arrange and distort the most basic evidences of a fellow being's capacity to love into a whole winter-frieze of dazzling illusion. And for this basic chaotic impulse now--in this final treatment of slander with all its blacknesses fixed at last in the person of the husband himself who is both Claudio and Don John, Bertram and Parolles, Othello and Iago, Posthumus and Iachimo ("... though he had twinn'd with me, both at a birth," the Moor at one point said of his tormentor, indicating just how much that tormentor was his own alter ego desiring to think the worst)--Shakespeare not only again offers no explanation but again emphasizes with a point beyond horror just how much, after he has revealed at last the restless germ of all evil which makes

men want to re-make life into their own image and likeness, there <u>is</u> no explanation for this impulse but only, the more we look, more chaos:

> Camillo: Swear his thought over
> By each particular star in heaven, and
> By all their influences, you may as well
> Forbid the sea for to obey the moon,
> As or by oath remove or counsel shake
> The fabric of his folly, whose foundation
> Is pil'd upon his faith, and will continue
> The standing of his body.
>
> Polixenes: How should this grow?
>
> Camillo: I know not: but I am sure 'tis safer to
> Avoid what's grown than question how 'tis born
> (I.ii.424-33).

Of course there is no wonder in Leontes' suspecting not only Hermione and Polixenes and Camillo of betrayal but each member of his court down to the last vestige of absurdity (II.iii.81;145), for a king is at the center-point of his world and if he be mad, so used is he to seeing his world as an extension of himself, why then that world must conform to his madness or perish in the resistance, just as the inhabitants of heath or sea or forest must conform to <u>its</u> chaotic madness too, or die. Yet it is not so much the cosmic dimension of Leontes' insanity which gives it its ultimate terror but rather its awful human implication: that the reason this man's suspicions grow and grow till they encompass everything and everybody is not because Leontes is so much a king as because he is, in a trice of

time, all the evil a human being can have at his very center, and that if we could see the evil there at its most naked quick we would see ... a madman.

"A sad tale's best for winter," says Mamillius immediately before his mother's denunciation, fixing the time of the shifting year with a somber exactness as his father puts the print of death on the season with a wrath freezing the world into a barren waste. But that the waste and the death is all Leontes', Shakespeare emphasizes at every point in his portrayal of Hermione whose very presence at her trial is a reminder of the silver-pure beauty of the year's end and a reproach to any brooding king that time itself as the days and weeks and months slip away is neither good nor evil but only what men choose to see it as, she herself seeming the very Queen of Winter ("the Emperor of Russia was my father") as she moves among its fragile ruins as silently as a beam of sunlight, everywhere transfiguring the desolation with the dazzle and shock of her chastity:

> You, my lord, best know,
> Who least will seem to do so, my past life
> Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true,
> As I am now unhappy; which is more
> Than history can pattern, though devis'd
> And play'd to spectators,

she says at her trial (III.ii.32-37), forced to speak from the place of isolation of a defendant, as if her husband is even now making this immaculate being who in each little

gesture displays the season's purity seem as remote from life as an idealist's dream, and the figure of his own accusations the reality. But remote Hermione is not, nor other-worldly, but only that simplest fact of womanhood who can only state over and over again the shapes and shadows of feelings too deep for utterance, how much she loves her husband and how no love can be questioned as impure which blossoms in harmony with nature--though to the court the only blossoms she chooses to evidence are like those which frost patterns on a windowpane, for, as she said at her arrest, she is too much of a woman to make the passion whose heat is for her husband's sharing alone, public:

> Good my lords,
> I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
> Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
> Perchance shall dry your pities: but I have
> That honourable grief lodg'd here which burns
> Worse than tears drown (II.i.107-12).

There is a diamond seal Shakespeare affixes to the heroines of his last plays which, among all their other qualities, somehow marks them off visibly from even the worthiest ladies of earlier dramas: none of the late play heroines but one ever sheds tears before her audience (as even Helena and Isabella and Desdemona and Cordelia did in the face of their plays' calamities); each of them seems to hold in her soul from the very beginning the prize of the knowledge of the tragedies, and hold it not as a

mere instinct but as an imperishable certainty--that one's choices in life for good or for evil are the only places where one can be vulnerable to total inner tragedy, and that the consequences of these choices, even if they be as disastrous as death at sea or imprisonment in a brothel or a knife-bearing Pisanio, are not to be lamented as much as faced with a courage that has neither time nor need for tears, so clearly can these women see the value of their right choice in the hierarchy of the universe that all their sorrow, which is each enough for the starkest drama, is subsumed by them under the greater victory of their choice: "Do not weep, good fools," Hermione tells her ladies; "There is no cause: when you shall be told your mistress/Has deserv'd prison, then abound in tears/As I come out: this action I now go on/Is for my better grace"--and though she meets her grief in a manner as winter-quiet as Imogen's fiery outrage, it is impossible to say which wife's way of distancing herself from tears is more dramatic: vaporizing them into hot nothings, or holding them curiously before her like a frozen useless mask.

The twin configuration of Leontes and Hermione in this section of the play, the one as bleak as any sudden winter can be, the other as beautiful, seems the final depiction of the basic interaction between man and woman that has occupied Shakespeare's attention since first, in the tragedies,

the Navarres and Orlandos and Beatrices and Violas who were all involved in the intricacies of perpetual courtship deepened and starkened into husbands and wives, there being no place among the pressures of tragedy for couples to be other than pain-truthful towards each other in their loves and hates, so that it seemed less because of plot-sources than the natural processes of growth that so many of the disasters of love in Elsinore and Venice and Scotland and Mytilene and Cymbeline's Britain were disasters of marriage too. We cannot see this king and queen on stage together without seeing also--though negatively, through tragedy--that very interworking between husband and wife which makes all disasters between them possible, for so similar in their winter-natures are the pair that they seem two selves of the same person, Leontes' hatred of Hermione seeming but hatred of himself, or rather, hatred of what is best in himself--as perhaps the madness of the jealousy of Othello and of Posthumus, and the reason they both gave in so quickly to their own worst promptings was, deeper than their distrust of their women, their distrust and hatred of that best part of themselves which their women fell in love with and which the men see reflected in their wives' own countenance. "My life stands in the level of your dreams," Hermione tells her husband at her trial in strange comment which receives from him stranger

confirmation through all his irony: "Your actions _are_ my dreams ...", as his broodings and suspicions of his own sexual guilt at the play's opening--in which he, and Polixines as well, were unable to view their own ripe desires as chaste--seem here, through the kind of spiritual osmosis which binds a wedded pair, to make him see in his wife the guilt he thinks he has, actualizing her as a reflection of himself much as Othello does when he strikes Desdemona and calls her "Devil!" Then it is somehow only fitting that this final husband and wife in Shakespeare's universe be first seen as autumnal, then stiffened by grief into figures of winter, for their crystallization turns them before our eyes into _the_ permanent facets of man and woman, broken from one another with such hard clarity that the very edges of the break show us the exact nature of the tragedy that occurs when what should be whole at once fragments.

The phenomenon of language occurring throughout the course of _Love's Labour's Lost_ and _Much Ado About Nothing_ and _All's Well That Ends Well_ and _Measure for Measure_ whereby the more honest the content of the speech, the starker and barer the phrases, is not so much a tendency in the last plays as a surety, as the agonizing process of tragedy through which every last bit of truth was dislodged from the cosmos yields to a world in which it is as easy

for the playwright to make Diana or Jupiter speak plainly as it is to make the First Fisherman or First Gaoler, for the highest realities are now every bit as visible as the lowest, and the simplicity of both makes their expression into words quite literally child's play. Yet the very fact that in the last plays simplicity of phrase is found everywhere in speech after speech of perfect clarity of values, even in the midst of the profusions of declamation in Cymbeline, tends to make us forget, among all the lovely turns of phrase of a Marina or the pristine utterances of a Hermione, the harsh shock which simplicity had in the language of the players of Messina and Rousillon and Vienna and all the fools of Lear, when that simplicity had to fight jagged to the surface to survive. How much greater then, is the force of such shock here in Sicilia when, amidst no darkness but only a whole universe of clarity, we hear the words of the oracle of Apollo which Leontes has sent to confirm his worst suspicions, as those words issue forth in plainness so essentialized and so absolute that even Gower's speeches seem elaborate in comparison:

> Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes a jealous tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten ... (III.ii.132-34)--

as with each word the intensity of the playwright's achievement of a vision increases past tribute: for it is

one thing to have a character Diana say something as accurate as what Diana would say if we could only hear her speak, and one thing to have even a character Jupiter say what the king of all the gods would say if we could but hear him; but here Shakespeare goes beyond even the last construct of deities to portray, and portray with absolute rightness, what truth itself would say if truth were given voice. Nor can the author's perfect grasp of this highest clearest force in the cosmos be dismissed as an accident of source-plot or a fluke of intuition, but rather stands as the most masterful and certain of permanent insights--almost as if Shakespeare's visible sense of clarity guided the hand of that Folio-editor who first divided the drama into the scenes and acts it has. For, if we but notice, the words of the oracle are fixed at the center of the center scene of the center act of this play which is itself the full cosmic cycle, always changing, always moving from autumn to winter to spring to summer to autumn, never resting, never at cease: and at the very center of the circle of this cycle is that changeless axis of truth on which the wonder turns.

Here at the point of the oracle do the two vast circle-figures of the first part of the play begin to coincide, for now we see that just as the king is at the center of his turning changing world, so does the moving cycle of

the seasons have a center too: the fixity of truth--so that at last we can see the visible relationship between king and cosmos which was implied so strongly in Lear: that the king is the one mortal who can fix himself at the center of the universe to make its truth manifest to his fellows, himself coinciding as far as he is able with that changeless fact of the gods--or chance or fate or life-or-death or whatever we choose to call the core of the eternal--around which all transition revolves; and that when the king does bring himself into coincidence with the core of eternal truth then his kingdom or world moves about him in perfect motion with the seasons and the stars and whatever else is moving in great nature. Only when the king, like Lear or Antiochus, begins to act as his own center of truth does he at once distance himself from the true center, parodying it as madness parodies sanity, and plunge his whole world round him from its cosmic axis to the outer extremities of chaos, till the cosmos itself must pull king and world alike back shock by shock to its own axis by every cracking fiber of their mortality; only when the king, like Simonides, does choose meekly to stay aligned with the cosmic axis and act meekly from it does he attain that highest potentiality of manhood which a king in fact is--himself not a god and never a god but simply god-like, "a model which heaven makes like to itself" in Simonides' words.

Then just how a king's--and a man's--pride looks when it goes awry in this visible universe is nowhere seen more simply or more finally than in the absolute tragedy of Leontes who, unlike Lear, wills to act against the truthful words of no Kent or Cordelia in his courtroom scene but against the oracle-plain words of truth itself which he sees exposed before him and, seeing, turns his back to and rejects, the rejection not given even the slightest touch of human blindness to modify the blackness of the act. What made Lear's disastrous behavior in his opening scene so awful for an audience was that the man's fall came as much from his own searching for the truth, which everyone has done and could conceivably do as mistakenly, as from his thinking he possessed it; how much more awful to behold, then, is Leontes' fall, who has the unheard-of opportunity for which all searching men pray--to see truth face to face and be one with it--and who yet still rejects: "There is no truth in the oracle: the sessions shall proceed," with no other explanation to the watchers for the act than that they are seeing in Leontes that pure willfulness <u>to</u> reject which was at the root of all the Macbeths and Lears beneath all their heart-breaking wealth of mitigating circumstances, and which suggests, with a horror almost unthinkable in the implication, that even if a Macbeth or a Lear could see from the beginning the exact

evil of the choice he is about to make, he would still choose that evil and, if only at the moment of choice, revel in it.

Yet the fact that we ourselves, as is the playwright, are watching this scene of Leontes'--and this play and indeed all the last plays--not from the vantage point of the wrong chooser or of the broken circle of his fellows on stage but from the center vantage-point of truth itself, makes us feel not just the disaster of the tragedy, and feel it as fully as in any Lear-throneroom, but feel even more strongly the incongruity of the tragedy in a cosmos where so clearly every step a man makes in his self-centered choice takes him two steps further away from a fixed center of truth which can only watch the ever-increasing absurdity of the situation, as the man careers more and more madly away to the distantest reaches of chaos proclaiming his own freedom all the while--truth only wondering whether to laugh more at the spectacle or to cry. And indeed the brittle laughter of winter extends out in all directions from the oracle, locking every player in this scene and in this entire act into one crystallization whose pattern is flooded with such clear light that all of Leontes' misguided melancholy and evil seem merely like a black speck caught at the edge of a perfect snowflake.

Nothing needs to remind us in these last plays just how clearly fixed in the atmosphere is that truth first seen plainly in Elsinore and Rousillon and Vienna: that when one makes a choice whether for good or for evil, the consequences of that choice are, as in life itself, entirely out of one's hands, even as none of Angelo's regrets could restore Claudio to life nor none of Edmund's stop in time the order to hang Cordelia--making every one of the happy occurrences in the final plays, reminiscent of the Duke of Vienna's "restoration" of Claudio, seem not a fulfilment of the gentle expectation of comedy but rather the shock of pure miracle, as there was no more reason why Marina should not be raped than rescued, nor Thaisa not drowned at sea instead of saved, nor Imogen not poisoned instead of drowsed, the backdrops of life seen too starkly in their power of life-or-death for any human being to even begin to anticipate <u>anything</u>: so clear is this atmosphere, so much like life, that it is beyond all but the last moments of <u>Lear</u>, for nothing in us now tends to expect something tragic any more than something delightful, any shock imaginable being an equal possibility. How much greater, then, is the shock of the death in Mamillius than in any pure tragedy, for not only does nothing at all prepare us for it but nothing at all makes us feel that this boy might not, too, be "restored" at any moment; and when

he is not, we must begin to force ourselves to accept the fact that the gods have decreed that he will never be restored; that, once felled, he will never get up; and that we will never cease feeling stunned that he does not.

Servant: The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear
Of the queen's speed, is gone.

Leontes: How? Gone?

Servant: Is dead.

Nor is it strange that on the news Leontes should cry out "Apollo's angry"; not so much because Apollo <u>is</u> angry, if indeed he is, but because Leontes' very mention of the god whose voice is truth, and the stark respect in the tone of the mention, makes clear to all beholders that through the force of the shock of this death which kills Leontes' first child far more effectively than he can kill his second, death itself acting from the center of the cosmos with a born king's initiative, the true perspective of the universe has at once fallen into place in the king's mind and shown him the distance of his straying, as if death's was the one voice of truth, more than love's or birth's, wife's or daughter's, which a man cannot reject.

Nor is it strange that Hermione sink to the ground to Paulina's cry of "The news is mortal to the queen," for so completely <u>other</u> is the shock of death which issues forth from the real center of the cosmos, and so totally

out of any man's control even if he be king, that there seems no reason why death should stop at killing one beautiful thing without killing another and indeed without killing every trace of beauty on the face of the earth besides, leaving only the flawed behind to curse that they themselves were spared.

Only the sight of Paulina stepping forward to bear up the body of the Queen is a reminder, though too quiet to find a place in the midst of the lady's loud grief, that, nurse as she is (II.iii.36-37: "I/Do come with words as medicinal as true"), she is a voice of Apollo the equal of any death's: a reminder that the reason Apollo is the god not just of truth but of medicine besides is that the function of truth, even if it come in a form as painful as death itself, is to heal--which is perhaps why so many of the guilty <u>are</u> left behind while so many of the innocent are taken: to give the survivors one more chance to begin to extricate themselves from the sick falsehoods of their lives which they might never have seen, if only for a second, except at the shock of their bereftment. Indeed we cannot see the reproaches she now and to the end of the play delivers to the king, without feeling that if Apollo sent a shock of destruction to knock the crusts of error from Leontes' eyes, he has sent too this harsh healing woman to keep the sight of that destruction--dead queen, dead son--always before his eyes,

her every word a stinging cleansing drop of clarity to this unhappy man who, like winter itself, can only see truth when it is frozen into a perspective of death:

> ... therefore betake thee
> To nothing but despair. A thousand knees
> Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
> Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
> In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
> To look that way thou wert,

she hurls at him--though of course the whole crackling grandeur of the speech comes not from its being uttered by any stiff clear nurse of truth but by an outraged woman who can, and does here, go too far, even as all the characters in the play are no mere abstractions of this or that hard facet of truth or winter in nature (one has only to think of Hermione's many banked-then-fiery outbursts at her trial, or Leontes' surprising reminiscences about the spring-like figure he once cut "unbreech'd,/In my green velvet coat") but who are rather so intense in the light of their passions that the reflections are caught up in the arena of great nature to dazzle us there with their significance. Yet so clear is the atmosphere of this play that when Paulina in her fury does go past the bounds of truth, she sees and repents at once, for her bitterness itself, with its "ten thousand years together," would make the freezing that is intrinsic in Leontes' vision of the winter-truth of death as unnatural as the rage earlier

felt by the king, since she now too would bring the seasons to a halt and hold him to a fixity of repentance which would turn mourning to despair. And this unnaturalness she attempts to break through at once, with a "What's gone and what's past help/Should be past grief," as if all mourning should cease so that Leontes may begin to move again beyond joy or sorrow in time with the greater movement of the seasons.

Paulina herself, in fact, seems like the final clarity of Shakespeare's long treatments of those Lafeus and Emilias and Kents so long prevalent in previous dramas, who were all not so much servants as advisors to the heroes and heroines and who always seemed a little stouter and a little older than their masters, speaking as they did in whatever maxims or proverbs or truisms they each had stored up, so that their words were always welcome for the blithe way they ignored the painful searches for truth going on all around them, and for the way they put forth those time-tested sentiments people always substitute for experience when they have no patience for delving into their own. Even from the earliest instances of such an advisor, Shakespeare always played with the question of just how much of practicality there was in the busy phenomenon of common sense, and how much there was of expediency--the pointed impact of Juliet's "Well, thou hast comforted

me marvelous much," and the pause before it as the full import of her nurse's cheerful urgings to marry Paris sank into the air, distancing her, and her audience, forever from that trust in the all-purposefulness of pragmatism which is the mark not of the child-like but of the merely naive. Always in the plays the presence of these advisors was so much taken for granted that no audience had time, among all the ambiguities and sensitivities of the Claudiuses and Countesses and hapless Desdemonas, to think for long about what made the difference between the talkativeness of a Polonius and of a Lefeu, or, if one man was indeed less worthy than the other, then why. But the world of the final vision is too visible in its hierarchy to allow even the faintest shadow of ambiguity to rest in any player, high or next-to-high, and the testing of Helicanus by Pericles merely affirmed the testing of Kent by the wrath of Lear in that one play which forever exposed a cosmos in which all players would be tested to separate their honesty from any darker dregs to see which of the two they chose. From Kent to Helicanus to Pisanio to all such figures in the last plays, every advisor must choose either the absolute bluntness of truth or expediency, for there no longer is a middle ground between, and if the bluntness has the ring of practicality to it, that is only because truth itself is here no fanciful idealism but rather the only practicality

in a world where life is too close to the infinity of death to make the concept of expediency anything more than a clog in the way of the perspective, for how can one fear a Claudius when the only thing deserving of fear is the presence of those gods which can now be seen as plainly as can any Claudius and which the monarch only attempts to represent, who all will brook no falsehood, and who all are plainly watching behind death's thin veil.

"Having more man than wit about me ...," said Kent, and his words are caught up at once by Paulina in her "If I prove honey-mouth'd, let my tongue blister,/And never to my red-look'd anger be/The trumpet any more," as she earlier storms Leontes' throneroom to confront him with his newborn child, her speech having all the color and beauty of image missing in Lear where all wit, good and bad, had to be put aside, which color and beauty, now returned, makes its evil counterpart even more plain as Paulina eschews any convolutions of meaning which would block her statement's truth. Then what gusts of fresh air does she release and what freshnesses of power when, in her storming, she rushes full force not only against the king, who is as plain in his anger as she is in hers, but against her husband Antigonus who is that long-familiar mixture of politicness and good intention who to the end refuses to choose one quality over the other (Leontes: "Thou set'st

on thy wife." Antigonus: "I did not, sir:/These lords, my noble fellows, if they please,/Can clear me on't") in a universe where there is no confusion or ambiguity to obscure the choice, the gods' opinion as visible as any "noble fellows'," nor no scrap of an excuse that makes his lack of choice less than fully culpable. "O Pisanio," Posthumus cried, repenting of his death-order for Imogen, "Every good servant does not all commands:/No bond but to do just ones" (V.i.5-7), articulating as clearly as Jupiter himself the simplicity of hierarchy visible everywhere to everyone. Even as Pisanio refused the unjust command of his master, so does Paulina refuse now and so did Camillo earlier when he was ordered to kill Polixenes, choosing banishment rather than obedience. Nor can we look at Antigonus' apologizing without remembering Camillo, reminded as we are of him by this enraged, honest nurse of a woman who sails more fully and more surely than any nurse of Juliet's above all the laughter of the court at her rantings, for she <u>is</u> the bulk of the honest truth of her counterpart in Verona with none of the clutter of the dross, now triumphing as loudly as she trumpets in a world which allows no one to hold onto any sentiment as time-tested without making him test it full-clearly himself.

The curiousness of Paulina's urging Leontes to

think beyond Hermione's death and to move again with the seasons is that, despite all her expostulations to the contrary, Leontes and indeed his whole world, Paulina included, will not move at all, even as the nurse herself is that contrariest of all women who in telling everyone to forget and pass beyond keeps reminding everyone of what they are passing beyond <u>from</u> , continually fixing herself and everybody with her at that center-point of pain they would otherwise forget. And indeed as we continue to gaze at the great pattern of the cycle of the seasons, Sicilian autumn and winter and spring and summer and autumn all moving about the center of truth, the pattern seems to change as in a dream of grief, as winter-locked Sicilia itself becomes the center, fixing itself at the oracle-grave of Hermione, shunning all heat of the transition revolving around it, as if the entire kingdom were too stricken by pain to want to even be touched by the quickness of the invitation to any more life.

There is a perfect logic in the way in which, at the moment in time in which Shakespeare has frozen the whole world of Sicilia rigid around the life-or-death grave of Leontes wife and dead child, Leontes refixing himself at that truth-center in his desire to be as at one with the pair as possible ("Prithee, bring me/To the dead bodies of my queen and son," he bids Paulina: "One grave shall be

for both"), Shakespeare leads us out of this winter-locked world from the center, through the living child who journeys lineally outward toward that moving periphery where one season follows another. Yet this spectacle of life traveling out from the dead center of grief is given added sharpness by the use of that perspective of juxtaposition which the playwright first discovered in Navarre and Messina and Rousillon and Vienna where its clarity of truth took precedence over the lyric use of the interminglings of Verona and Illyria : for the person to whom the dead grave in Sicilia is entrusted is the vital healthy vessel Paulina, and the vessel to which the living child is entrusted in its journeying is the flawed Antigonus--sickness guarded over by health, health guarded over by sickness; death guarded over by life, life guarded over by death--the opposite elements of creation each seen at their most essential, never joining but nevertheless existing that close to one another. Then when we see Antigonus and the child land far from Sicilia on the shores of "Bohemia. A desert country near the sea," one mortal marked by guilt, the other by innocence, it is only natural that the two travelers be sundered from one another so cleanly but one moment after their arrival, for we have seen to the center of these two players, as we have seen to the center of every other player in the last plays, far past any traces

of outer ambiguity to that root-animal fact of rightness or wrongness which twenty tragedies could not expose more plainly; and the sharpness with which the cosmos now acts only signifies that we can see through nature itself to those like starknesses of its own character which are, in back of all the ambiguities of its action, the essential way in which the universe treats men, bear-ing them to death as easily as bearing them to life: "Look thee, a bearing-cloth for a squire's child," the Old Shepherd exclaims, himself and his young son the final progression of juxtaposition in this clearest of all scenes, for when Antigonus and the baby are sundered by the entrance of the killer-animal, the ageing courtier's end is witnessed by the young boy and the new infant's beginning witnessed by the old man--death encased in life again and life encased in death, with only a line of demarcation between life-or-death as fine as that which separates the last edge of the desert strand from the first edge of the sea, or the last edge of the sea from the first edge of the far horizon ("I am not to say the sea, for it is now the sky," says the Clown: "betwixt the firmament and it you cannot thrust a bodkin's point"), the sundered elements of earth and water and air each so close to one another and yet each so essentially apart that it is an eternal tribute to the author that he himself could see that line of

demarcation and, once seeing, never lose sight of it but trace it out for us in final play after final play with an eyesight of vision as sharp as the sharpest bodkin's point.

"Joy and terror," "good and bad," "make and unfold," juxtaposition after juxtaposition, are the very first words that time speaks after the life-or-death beach scene with which Shakespeare ended his third act, as from the center-point of the cosmos Time looks at the motion of change all about him as it is objectively patterned out with no Sicilia-grief shifted to the center, and sees it in terms of those opposed starknesses which circle the cycle of existence as much as do spring, summer, autumn and winter, Time himself never changing but only that principle of change which first became visible on the Heath when Lear's total wrath turned to total despair around the pivot of one instant, and which first became audible in the person of Gower who was our point of introduction to the world of the last plays. "Now take upon me, in the name of Time,/ To use my wings," he says (V.1.3-4), and on those wings we follow him as, through cycle after cycle of the seasons always progressing and always giving way to one another as one coil of a spiral gives way to the next, he flies up or down its axis, now "sliding," as he says, "o'er sixteen years" to bring us so quickly vertically to this new year

that when we arrive there, the horizontal coils themselves have not had much time to do any turning: and we arrive in this new Bohemia in summer, having just left old Bohemia ("Thou mettest with things dying," said the shepherd to his son, "I with things new-born") as it was just beginning its spring.

Just as the strong and vital players of the opening of The Winter's Tale were first seen framed in the elder figures of Camillo and Archidamus with their still more elderly conversation about the old men on crutches, Leontes and Hermione and Polixenes all marked with the mark of change and inevitable death, so all the Perditas and Florizels and Autolycus's and Mopsas of the play's second half are first seen in an exchange between two elders. Then when we see that the two ageing figures are this time Camillo again, now joined by Polixenes, we can only marvel at how, by this most simple configuration of two human beings, Shakespeare binds his drama together as imperceptibly and as gently as experience itself is bound together, as we feel at once in the sight of Camillo still holding forth on the imminence of death (IV.ii.4-6: "It is fifteen years since I saw my country: though I have, for the most part, been aired abroad, I desire to lay my bones there") the full force of that old-man's-truth that nothing changes, at the same time as we feel at once in the sight

of this now middle-aged Polixenes the force of the truth that everything does--so delighted are we by the juxtaposition of the two truths that we scarcely have time in our smiling to dwell upon the sadness of each.

But with the entrance of Autolycus, we have no time to dwell on anything at all, for all thoughts of future autumns and winters, let alone thoughts of past ones, dissolve in an instant before the sight of the one character in the play who lives entirely for the present, making the fact that the present is now summer strike us with more immediacy of joy and freshness than if it were encumbered by the weight of any thought, however intellectual:

> When daffodils begin to peer,
> With heigh! the doxy over the dale,
> Why then comes in the sweet o' the year,
> For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale.
>
> The white sheet bleaching on the hedge,
> With hey! the sweet birds, O how they sing!
> Doth set my pugging tooth on edge;
> For a quart of ale is a dish for a king.
>
> The lark, that tirra-lirra chants,
> With heigh! with heigh! the thrush and the jay,
> Are summer songs for me and my aunts,
> While we lie tumbling in the hay (IV.iii.1-12)--

the transition from spring to summer that Time glossed over so quickly, here glossed over even quicklier by the yellow jump from these first stanza daffodils, the first flowers of spring, to the sunny hay of the third, time iteself for a moment seeming only determined by the state of

mind of the perceiver, a whole season here passing as rapidly in the eyes of this happy singer as it seemed to stretch out interminably when we are looking at it through the sad eyes of all the players of Sicilia.

That there is not a thought in the head of the riotous Autolycus save what the present will bring him, and that in the head of the Clown he encounters and fleeces there is not a thought at all, not only frames the glories of the remainder of this fourth act in Bohemia in a light as simple as the Camillo-Polixenes one was profound, but also marks the difference between the world these two are disporting themselves in and that which was made so merry by all the Costards and Festes of old. When the Clown of Lear exited at the end of his third act, he never did come back, not just for the remainder of the play but for all the final plays to come, for what need is there of a professional clown to remind the principal characters of the bluntness of truth when all those characters from Pericles to Helicanus to Cymbeline to Imogen have that truth visible and stark before them always, whether they choose to see it or not, and speak in a language whose every element, whatever the splendor of color, is ground from the clearness of simplicity itself? What need is there for a Parolles or a Lucio to spout his ill- or well-intentioned blatancies for comic relief when the mere sight of a Cloten or a

Bawd jars against the hierarchy of the cosmos with a dissonance as loud as any semi-professional interloper's, and releases gales of cosmic laughter at him without his ever having to remind us that there really is a cosmos by his thumbing his nose at it to bring it to our attention? Then when we see the Clown who is the Shepherd's son and the cut-purse antic who is Autolycus we are seeing all those good Costards and Festes and Touchstones and all of those equivocal Lucios without any of their intentional profundities of bluntness, but only with those immediacies of honesty or riotousness that were always at the root of such humor whatever its addition of intention--for in this world beyond all Ardens, Shakespeare's comic figures attain their delight from simply being so born natural, whether to clownishness or to roguery ("My father named me Autolycus; who, being as I am, littered under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles") that their every utterance rings out like a present from nature itself, giving to the delight of that special kind of merry-maker that society can no longer justify creating for itself--as if Shakespeare were removing the last shadow of these figures' moral necessity to their society, to confirm explicitly what we have known all along beneath all the revelations of truth of a Costard or Touchstone: just what a real miracle the simple existence is, of that kind

of person who has only to begin to walk or to talk or to look at us to make us burst out laughing.

Of course the main marvelousness of the Clown and Autolycus is that which catches the full light of the mood of magnanimity of all the last plays: that just when there is no need for these figures to give us any truth whatsoever when the principal players can give us all, that truth comes, as in the rascal's traveling song:

> Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way,
> And merrily hent the stile-a:
> A merry heart goes all the day,
> Your sad tires in a mile-a,

and comes with a wave of delight simply because the new Rosalinds and Orlandos do not have to be told.

No trace is there at all in the bright figures of Perdita and Florizel of that sad heart which tires in a mile-a, for so free are the pair from any tinge of melancholy that they seem in their freshness as if they could go on forever through whatever maturing or mellowing or withering lies ahead of them, and not succumb to sorrow at the change but only accept it as gracefully as they have accepted the bloom they now possess, not a petal of which do they try to hold to themselves but rather scatter among their fellows with an open generosity that only makes the two blossom even more vibrant than before:

Perdita: O Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that frighted thou let'st fall
From Dis's wagon! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phoebus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxslips and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The fleur-de-luce being one! O, these I lack,
To make you garlands of; and my sweet friend,
To strew him o'er and o'er!

Florizel: What, like a corse?

Perdita: No, like a bank for love to lie and play on
(IV.iv.116-30).

Florizel's mention of death, not intermingled with Perdita's lyricism but rather mentioned explicitly in juxtaposition, brings out into the open that fact of darkness so frequently evoked by all the Lysanders and Juliets and Orlandos before, and gives to the gentle tinge of change which shimmers through her words (for all these flowers are spring's, and now in summer are gone) a black point which she can see and, seeing, go beyond, as she does in her reply. No character, no matter how young, seems in these last plays ever as youthfully tentative as did a Lysander or Juliet or Orlando, because no character here, however young, makes his way slowly towards a knowledge of dissolution and decay in the process of the education and speculation which is so much a part of growing up, but rather seems born with a full knowledge of life and death, as if he can

see one as clearly as the other in the cosmos around him, whether that cosmos be the backdrop of the sea or the forest or the whole spectrum of the seasons, so that there is no note of playfulness or anticipatory grief in Florizel's remark as strong or as clear as the note of simple observation. If all characters, the young as well as the old, seem to have in these plays a full maturity from the first, that is not because maturity means here a sense of closeness to old age, as it did in Arden or Illyria , but rather a sense of closeness to death which makes the difference in years between a Florizel and a Camillo superfluous. Then if this sense makes Marina or Arviragus or Perdita or Florizel seem less hesitating and adolescent than Juliet or Orlando, it makes them seem even more vulnerable and heroic and child-like, in their willingness to accept the brevity of the wonders of life so completely when they have as yet tasted them so little. "Not like a corse," Perdita at once continues; "or if, not to be buried,/But quick and in mine arms"; for the fact that she and her lover are <u>not</u> dead, when they so quickly could be, makes every moment of their knowing each other, let alone their love, a miracle too bright to be dimmed by even a second's anticipation of what may happen next. When one has the sun, why spoil even a particle of it by dreaming on the moon; especially when one does not merely suspect but knows for a fact that

soon enough the moon and night will come.

When Polixenes and Camillo do come on the scene of the Shepherd's fair flower field, both appropriately disguised as white-bearded old men as if they want to skip a season as quickly as Autolycus and follow summer not with autumn but with winter, the strange laughter which plays around either figure everywhere points up that they each have about them in reality more of winter than they try to portray in artifice, for the very first words this middle-aged Polixenes spoke in Bohemia--"I pray thee, good Camillo, be no more importunate: 'tis a sickness denying thee anything; a death to grant this"--carried with them a sharp cold nip of mortality which sugggests, even as we see him in the midst of thousands and thousands of blossoms, that he and his companion <u>are</u> in all probability closer to death than are the dancing rings of countryfolk turning and turning all about them. Indeed Polixenes himself seems in remembered grief and present loneliness of age almost another Leontes, even to being continually reminded of his old pain by the well-intentioned Paulina-like goadings of Camillo, to whom he must cry out "Of that fatal country, Sicilia, prithee speak no more; whose very naming punishes me with the remembrance of that penitent, as thou call'st him, and reconciled king, my brother" (IV.ii.20-24).

"My brother," says this sad king--and in this pair of

words all the havoc of the madness of Leontes lives again before us even in this new and bright world, for from the earliest of Shakespeare's plays, the equivalent horror that matched with the fear of betrayal in marriage was the fact of betrayal in friendship, striking at the painfullest root when the friendship was blood-deep. This pain, this horror was what Leontes hurled in suspicion at his boyhood companion, in accusation perhaps even more chaotic to an audience than his accusations of the Queen, dangerously tempting as it does that audience to almost believe all the revilings at Polixenes as true, since in no instance in the Shakespearean world was a wife at all unfaithful to her husband but everywhere in that world was a brother unfaithful to a brother--from Don John and Don Pedro to Duke Frederick and Duke Senior to Oliver and Orlando to Claudius and Old Hamlet to, most starkly, Edmund and Edgar where the betrayal was not only sudden and unexplained but rationalized and revelled in--so that the spectators in Sicilia, calling to mind even a taint of this memory, may have been less outraged at and given more credence to Leontes' slanders than they ought, remembering as they might have the sorry lesson of so many, many dramas: that men are naturally so suspicious of their women that they think themseves betrayed before there is cause, but are so trusting of their brothers, as creatures not in the least <u>other</u>

from themselves, that they never think to suspect betrayal until it is too late (as in all of Othello's cries of "honest Iago"). Yet the fact that Polixenes was as unjustly accused as Hermione is all the more appalling not only because his fidelity does break the betrayal-pattern of so many plays, the man being indeed the truest of friends, but because he must pay in suffering for his very trueness: for we have but to see this man, saddled with the sharp-memoried Camillo among the meadow-greenery, to realize that the injustice done to him is as blood-felt by him as Hermione's was by her, as if he too was in his friendship one with Leontes and was cracked apart from him to be left forever incomplete. Nowhere is his pain more evident than here where he stands in his winter-diguise like some guiltless facet of Leontes himself, but with the same Leontes-tendency to melancholy and distrust, sickness and death, since he now, too, has no sisterly queen nor no brother of his own to guide him. And though he is not at fault for his double-loss, the terrible fact Shakespeare cannot avoid etching slowly out, is that he is as alone as if he were.

It is but naturalness itself that the first words Polixenes utters in his winter-clothes turn into a discussion of art, for we can no longer think of winter without thinking too of the way in which Leontes tried to freeze creation into the image and likeness of his own fancy

till all was stiff and rigid and forced and dead. And as if too correct a too-easily made correspondence between this most inhuman kind of art and this brittlest of all seasons, Shakespeare has this new winter-figure remind us that just as there is no inhumanity in any season, even the coldest, save what men choose to imprint there themselves, so art is not in itself inhuman unless men choose to make it so:

Polixenes: Shepherdess,
A fair one are you, well you fit our ages
With flowers of winter.

Perdita: Sir, the year growing ancient,
Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
Of trembling winter, the fairest flowers o' the season
Are our carnations and streak'd gillyvors,
Which some call nature's bastards: of that kind
Our rustic garden's barren; and I care not
To get slips of them.

Polixenes: Wherefore, gentle maiden,
Do you neglect them?

Perdita: For I have heard it said
There is an art which in their piedness shares
With great creating nature.

Polixenes: Say there be;
Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art
Which you say adds to nature is an art
That nature makes.....

There is always, somewhere in the body of work of an artist of genius, some small phrase or note or image which catches whole the essence of that artist's achievement, some little passage which explains everything that is

his unique accomplishment far better and far more accurately than hundreds of pages of hundreds of thousands of words written in outside essay, as if the very spirit of his particular genius, sometime in the midst of its continuous activity of obediently actualizing every nuance of thought and emotion that he wishes to convey, has paused for a second to identify itself by one quick signature. Here--in the middle of a summer meadow in the middle of the play The Winter's Tale that has so much to do with what is natural and what men choose to make artificial, in the midst of a dialogue about the cross-breeding of flowers which Perdita would see as an unnatural process (for she has, as Paulina observed at her birth, of Leontes "the trick of 's frown") much as her father saw the Hermione-Polixenes friendship as come cross-breeding which grafted onto his wife's affection to love him, another more suspicious kind of affection--that signature comes, and every Shakespeare play from first to last is visible in its stamp:

> You see, sweet maid, we marry
> A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
> And make conceive a bark of baser kind
> By bud of nobler rase: this is an art
> Which does mend nature, change it rather,
> But the art itself is nature--

art mending nature as if nature itself, as we first come upon it, were lying painful and torn and fallen into too vast a state of disrepair ever to be coped with as a

shining whole, till the artist adds and rearranges and ties together and fills in with a thousand balm-like touches which make us better see the cohesion of the living entirety. So too does Shakespeare mend, using only those most accurate qualities of a human being down to the last bud and bark, which go to make up a Berowne or a Dogberry or a Rosalind or an Iago or a Countess or a Kent, and only those most accurate qualities of accident or intention which go to make up the amazement of their world--working always out of the very stuff of nature. Yet in Lear and in the last plays, Polixenes' words expand to their fullest significance (even though, with the omni-directional laughter so typical of Shakespeare, Polixenes himself misses every ounce of that significance, even as he misses the significance of his "gentler to wildest stock"-observation to later explode at his son for wanting to wed with the shepherdess Perdita), for in these plays every element of nature is seen through to its purest state, accepted, and used whole to create characters and world alike, each player and landscape made of the intensest truths of good and evil and love and hate and sea and forest and meadow and sky and of the chance or fate or fortune lying behind, so that even the flower-field in which the king speaks seems, if not real, then as natural as if it were, its every carnation and gillyvor, if changed from nature,

changed only in that each now has a voice to remind us of its intrinsic right to be noticed. So like nature, in fact, is the art of this particular scene that the only note of artifice in it is not Shakespeare's but Polixenes', who disguised himself as winter-old in an act which, Leontes-like, disjoints nature, jumps ahead of it, freezing and rigidifying reality into patterns of his own willful design; but the art Polixenes' describes as nature's--Shakespeare's art--has nothing of freezing in it, but only that fluid acceptance of all the seasons and everything that they bring, to be patterned for an audience only by mirroring whatever pattern is in the seasons--or in country or sea or land or in men themselves--to begin with, adding or changing only what will make an audience see it more clearly. (Indeed that very fluidity of acceptance is perhaps what makes Shakespeare able to create play after play so inexhaustibly: because there is nothing tragic in his method--though his subject may be tragic--nothing of a winterish attempt to stiffen life and break it up to conform to his own private sense of what it should be, and therefore no tragic flaw through which life might rebel and refuse to flow any longer through his pen.) And if we get the sense in these last plays that the author is painting his characters from the very shades and colors of nature, as in Florizel's immortally lovely cry to his intended bride:

> When you speak, sweet,
> I'ld have you do it ever; when you sing,
> I'ld have you buy and sell so, so give alms,
> Pray so; and, for the ordering of your affairs,
> To sing them too; when you do dance, I wish you
> A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
> Nothing but that; move still, still so,
> And own no other function: each your doing,
> So singular in each particular,
> Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,
> That all your acts are queens,

so clearly do we see the players come to life before us with the infinite surprises only human beings can have, that we cannot help suspecting that nature must feel complimented, to see itself so used.

Indeed nature is what we see everywhere reflected in the persons of Florizel and Perdita, both of whom, separately and together, are continual affirmations of Hermione's trust in Act I that the transition from childhood to maturity need bring with it no taint of evil if that transition be made in harmony with the universe. "If that thy bent of love be honourable,/Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow," said Juliet to her lover, though in the dark sweep of moonlight which brushes across the whole balcony scene, the purity of her words quivers against the beauty of the night too quick for an audience to hold whole for more than a moment. Here in the last plays, however, there is visible in the atmosphere from the first such a threat to the very concept of chastity--whether it be the brothel-dangers of Mytilene or the would-be

rapery of a Cloten or the black vilifications of a Leontes--that the young all emphasize the honorableness of their love equally with their bent, in speech as clear and free from all interminglings of darkness as daylight itself, as if they were each as conscious of the fact of evil as they are of the fact of death and, once recognizing it, go beyond it to proclaim their own brightness in terms of brightness alone: "My desires/Run not before mine honour, nor my lusts/Burn hotter than my faith," says Florizel in the full glisterings of the "fire-rob'd god, golden Apollo" to whom he compares himself in ardency, making the fact of chastity seem as natural as the fact of life, and stronger in truth than any evil or death can impinge upon. Nature indeed in this bright noon-scene seems itself the very touchstone to purity, and the dark Leontes-like fears of Polixenes the only unnaturalness or man-made addition. Nor do the young pair, as radiant as ever were any "twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' the sun" though now the lambs are fully grown and male and female, seem any less youthful or ardent or impulsive for their straightforward proclamations of the holiness of their love, but only more natural in the courage of their knowledge of the danger.

Perdita, in fact, in all her honesty and fearlessness and utter femininity, reminds us not only of Hermione's

words about the innate purity of nature but of Hermione herself, as Marina reminded us of Thaisa, the daughter portrayed in the new and tender loveliness of flowers, now scattering them, now blooming more anew; the mother portrayed in terms of jewels, earthly and heavenly ("precious," "treasure," "star," are all applied to Hermione at one point or another in the play, as is her discarded mantle, "her jewel about the neck of it," so similar to Thaisa's)--as if Shakespeare were emphasizing the very changelessness and endurance of beauty in the wife and the fresh surprise of beauty in the child, though, of course, his imagery is only emphasis and not the cut-out pattern of artifice, as it is Thaisa who is bloomingly described as a fair day in summer, and an offspring of Hermione to whom Paulina refers as "jewel of children." It is difficult indeed to look at Perdita without calling the Queen to mind, as the images play over them both, one for mother, one for daughter: winter-spring, snow-water, starlight-sunlight, crystal-floral, bride of the moon (as in Camillo's words on Leontes: "You may as well/Forbid the sea for to obey the moon")-bride of the sun ("... golden Apollo"), as indeed similar polyphonies of images play over all the other relationships in the play--Hermione and Leontes, Leontes and Polixenes, Florizel and Perdita, Leontes and Perdita, Polixenes and Florizel, Hermione and

Paulina, Paulina and Camillo--as if the two players were but different facets of the wholeness of great nature, one now separate from the other for our better vision of each, but both almost capable of fusing back together again into one over-complete whole, like one Imogen who was so much of a wife and so much of a daughter that she seemed more woman than the stage could clearly hold. Then if, as Polixenes said, art mends nature and is all the truer for being all the more accurately like nature even to employing the very colors of the burgeoning world in the process of artistic creation, how can we not look at Perdita and not think that in her sheer existence on stage at the present moment, she is herself the meaning and the completing of the womanhood which was so rent in Hermione--as, in a way, the creation of a living child is the one art man is given by nature to allow him, in hope at least, the chance of repairing the wreckage of a present world which he himself no longer has the vitality or energy or perhaps simply the optimism to cope with as he did before.

Just as the First Gaoler's "Fear no more tavern-bills" caught up the highest glints of the song of the heat o' the sun and fixed them firmly to the lowest level of life's hierarchy, so is Polixenes' revelation of what art should be caught up in the exchange between Mopsa and Autolycus:

Mopsa: I love a ballad in print o' life,
for then we are sure they are true.

Autolycus: Here's one to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burthen, and how she longed to eat adder's heads and toads carbinadoed.

Mopsa: Is it true, think you?

Autolycus: Very true, and but a month old--

the worthy and the unworthy country figure each measuring art by the standard of how true it is to life, just as Polixenes and Perdita did, but with the pithy country definition of truth: literalness--so that Mopsa and all her friends and swains appreciate a ballad because they are told its exaggerations are literally accurate, and Autolycus (whose name, incidentally is one of the most marvellous puns in Shakespeare: not only from the Greekish "auto-lykos" or "self-wolf," this man who preys so on gullible sheep-shepherds; but the gaudy Greek-English patchwork "auto-like," or "self-loving"; and, best of all, "ought-to-like-us," which <u>is</u> the man's irrepressible effrontery of spirit) mocks and dismisses the ballad because he knows its exaggerations are literally falsehoods, Autolycus' error even funnier because he is so sure the artist is as big a confidence man as he andbecause he is so highly pleased at thinking himself able to blow the whistle on the whole poetics operation any time he chooses.

It is not just an accident in this final universe

of Shakespeare's that Autolycus be a ballad-singer and that the rest of the rustics be dancers and singers, for the playwright constantly underscores, through all the stock-figureness of a singing rogue and through all the stage-convention allowing for festive dances of shepherds or satyrs, that the capacity for harmony here is at the center of each player even in the lowest level of the world's hierarchy, even at the center of the rogue himself (11.712-13: "Though I am not naturally honest, I am so sometimes by chance"). In the more lyrical comedies of old, players like the Athenian rude mechanicals or the Silviuses and Phebes or Arden were always brought into relationship with the rest of their world by the smiling welcome of their betters, themselves gaining all the light of their new company though their betters gained nothing but more merriment. Only in the darkening plays were these childish--as opposed to fool-like or child-like--characters gradually seen as really being necessary to their world and not just a happy appendage, as the Dogberrys and Elbows began to deal in their own unique way with evil, and deal far more effectively than even a Rosalind might have suspected them capable of--perhaps because, under the increasing pressure of tragedy, the author began to see all levels of society as each starting out with nothing at all, not even stupidity,

which could save it from pain, and each level as therefore having to prove itself to the limit of its capacity, as even Oswald had to prove himself as much as did Kent or the Fool or Goneril or Gloucester, and, when failing, failing as independently as did any evil masters. "The selfsame sun that shines upon his [Polixenes'] court/Hides not his visage from our cottage but/Looks on all alike," says Perdita (11.445-47), and her words place us visibly at that authorial vantage point from which we have been viewing all these last plays: that point which is removed so much from all levels that it can give each level the same full chance for harmony or for dissonance as its fellows, and makes each level choose, just as that level which Polixenes in Act I termed "clerk-like experienc'd, which no less adorns/ Our gentry than our parents' noble names,/In whose success we are gentle" had to choose, from Camillo to Paulina to Antigonus. Perhaps indeed this very opportunity for choice, equal in a First Fisherman or a prince, in a First Gaoler or a Lord, in a Clown or a Florizel, is what accounts for the fact, more than any plot-tale, that the childish players in Bohemia are absolutely essential to the nobles as much or more than the nobles are essential to them, for when Polixenes reveals himself and with a king-father's sudden wrath disinherits Florizel and threatens Perdita with disfigurement and she and her aged Shepherd-foster-

father with death, not even Camillo can aid the distraught lovers without the help of the Old Shepherd and Clown and Autolycus, each of whom can offer something, whether it be the positive boon of the proof of Perdita's true birth or the negative one (assented to freely, though "by chance") of not running to tell the enraged Polixenes of the lovers' escape to Sicilia:

> Autolycus: Are you a party in this business?
>
> Clown: In some sort, sir: but though my case be a painful one, I hope I shall not be flayed out of it.

The Clown was indeed a party to the baby Perdita's rescue from death by exposure and indeed is about to become party to the bride Perdita's rescue from wrath: no wonder, then, that he should have been drawn to the music Autolycus was selling, since he has been acting in tune with his world from his first appearance on this dramatic stage, no matter how shy he has been about singing or how much sly profit his questioner is making from the music's magic. No wonder either it is, when later in Sicilia the consequences of the Clown's choices blossom into happy reward, that the Old Shepherd will say, "I am past moe children, but thy sons and daughter will be all gentlemen born," for what is more natural than that even the lowest level of society be raised up as high as it can go, not just by the help of this or that king but by listening to, and choosing to follow, its own uncertain stirrings to soar?

How perfect it is that this drama which points up so expressly how much true art is like nature, should be, more than any other of the last plays, the one to state most explicitly the truth taken for granted by them all: just how much nature is like art--the truth which was seen half-seriously in earlier comedies and half-obscuredly in earlier tragedies but which was made forever visible in Lear where all of life was seen to be one vast drama with no movement of any player superfluous in the shaping of his own fate and that of his fellows, and no act or gesture unobserved by the watching cosmos. "I see the play so lies that I must bear a part," says Perdita as she assumes the disguise whereby she will be taken on shipboard in her escape to Sicilia--and indeed so clear and undimmed by tears is her sight of the drama-nature of the world that she can penetrate at once Polixenes' disguise ("These are flowers/Of middle summer," she told him before he made his revelation, offering him her majoram and marigold, "and I think they are given/To men of middle age"--a remark so flawless in its innocence of flattery by the way it plainly reminds the man of his years, that one may perhaps too easily overlook the fact that she does not say "old age"), for in a world where the author has at last seen, from the practice of a lifetime of artistic vision, just how much life does have all the cohesiveness of art to begin with,

nothing is more conspicuous than a player's trying to masquerade in a role other than his own, for his natural role was art-like from the start and anything more he adds to it must be merely artifice. Then perhaps the loveliest display of sympathy in this girl so full of sympathies all graceful and fearless, may have come when she did not choose to reveal Polixenes' disguise before him, for so shy is she about the conspicuousness of her own borrowed festival-goddess trappings that she would naturally not want to remind the man, especially if she thinks him the king, of that fact of costume which might be as embarrassing to him as her own is to her.

Indeed Shakespeare uses this fact of disguises to help portray the blur and heat of youthful passions that shimmer the atmosphere of the summer air of Bohemia. If in Sicilia everyone was grief-fixed in the rightness or the wrongness of his actions, Hermione and her son rigid at the center of their world, Leontes arrested on the edge of chaos by the fact of their death, Paulina nurse-like beside him about to lead him back, Camillo and Polixenes and Perdita broken off into exile,--here in Bohemia nothing stands still but rather everything seems to revel in the moving periphery of the seasons and especially the second-to-second changes of the summer-present: Camillo's and Polixenes' disguises followed by Autolycus' succession

of disguises followed by the fields of shepherds and shepherdesses all tricked out too, none so noticeably as Perdita and Florizel, followed by the unmasking of Polixenes and Camillo followed by the new disguises of the lovers, till the whole stage begins to look like one parti-colored ribbon unfurling in the wind, changing hues with each new whim of chance in a way almost as unnecessarily artful as was Leontes' stiffening his stage into dead stasis--for there was no confidence in nature or art but only artifice which set Florizel dashing gaudily to disguise (and a double one at that: an earthly prince as a shepherd as a god-prince) instead of trusting his father's magnanimity about Perdita, which in turn set his father dashing to disguise after him, and so on. One gets the sense, especially at the end of the Bohemia episode with Autolycus chasing the Old Shepherd and Clown chasing Camillo chasing Florizel and Perdita, and Polixenes chasing them all, almost everyone altered in costume from the way he began the scene, that truth is as much in motion here as is life itself, in a manner that, from our knowledge of the fixity of the oracle at the center of the cosmos, we know it should not be, each of the players thrown a little bit off by his donning of disguises--from Perdita who felt embarrassed, to Florizel and Polixenes and Camillo all of whom should have felt embarrassed--and running to keep their balance,

till there is not a touchstone of fixity to be seen, Autolycus leaping atop it all in a different attire a second, giddy with the exhilaration: it is no accident that the only dances in the play take place in Bohemia.

But the time for the dancing stops when all the players' steps lead them from the bright outskirts of fixity back to its very center:--to that kingdom of Sicilia which has fixed itself around a fact of truth as constant as life is changeable--the fact of the impact of life-or-death, whether manifested by an oracle who tells a man his son is dead or simply by the sight of the grave of that son himself: the fact of the truth of nature's inescapable core of absolute power which every man must eventually face after all his running, the simple shock of which impact alone is enough to make all the variegated notes and colors of a lifetime of heedless summers fall, quite literally naturally, into place.

As with the portrayals of Pericles and Cymbeline before him, if Shakespeare works through Leontes' relationship with his wife to bring out the intensest human dimension of the man's capacity for tragedy or joy, he works through the relationship with the daughter to bring out the intensest cosmic dimension. "Mine eyes were not in fault, for she was beautiful," said Cymbeline of his queen: "Mine ears that heard her flattery, nor my heart/That thought

her like her seeming. It had been vicious/To have mistrusted her: yet, O my daughter" (V.v.62-66)!--and in his words are poised, one for the woman he chose, one for the woman he fathered, all the affections and all the feelings larger than affection which a man can give, as Pericles gave to Thaisa and Marina, and as Leontes himself withheld from his own two women and turned to gall within himself. If Leontes' break with his wife was like a break with his own best self, as if half the center of his soul was broken off leaving him forever incomplete as a man, his break with his daughter was like a break with that world which, as its king, he is supposed to rule father-like from the center, as the gods rule the universe surrounding them which they themselves created. And indeed in the years of Perdita's absence, all that Leontes has for his rule is his own broken center, his own immediate kingdom which remains as rigid and motionless as an isolated point of rule could be, never quite joined to the turning, changing, colorful transition around him. "Welcome hither,/As is the spring to th'earth," he now cries to Florizel and Perdita (V.i.150-51), welcoming, even more than a kingdom of thaw to follow his own season of ice, all the spring-like heat and color and motion of the cycle of all the seasons to be set around his own winter-truth fixity, each needing the other and neither cancelling the other out, as the ever-new needs the age-old, as the age-old needs the ever-

new. Yet to view the Leontes-Perdita reunion as a cosmic parable alone is to miss the point of Shakespeare as well as of the play: for the playwright does not use the characters as he would mere figures of ideas, but rather uses the force of the cosmic dimensions the players suggest to give us just some notion of the forces father and daughter each feel within themselves, as if Perdita's desire for her parent were so strong that it carries with it all the longing impetuousness of a whole creation striving to join itself to its maker, and as if Leontes' remorse at having disinherited his daughter is as intense as what a cosmic father himself would feel who had banished his subjects as too mortal and changeable and vulnerable, only to find too late that his own dazzling otherness means nothing unless it can be shared.

Then it is not surprising that when the actual reconciliation between father and daughter does come, complete with proofs from the old Shepherd and verifications from Paulina, the scene itself cannot be shown on stage: for though the sacredness of such a reconciliation, containing as it does the re-joining of the fallen-away cosmos to its mad center to make all whole again, cannot be greater but only as great as the absolute sacredness of the Lear-Cordelia, Pericles-Marina, Cymbeline-Imogen reunion scenes,

there is here such an edge to the sacredness--for the child Mamillius still lies cold and never will be restored to the father--that no audience watching could absorb the impact of seeing all creation at one stroke healed simultaneous with the impact of knowing that all creation has been left forever rent, even as Paulina, on her own level, must watch all her expectations for the happy outcome of truth knit together while recognizing that her happy expectations for Antigonus will never knit together ("But O, the noble combat that 'twixt joy and sorrow was fought in Paulina!" says one observer. "She had one eye declined for the loss of her husband, another elevated that the oracle was fulfilled").

One eye to laugh, the other eye to cry would be the only way in which this scene could be witnessed: one ear for that Pericles-harmony that comes when a universe does knit together, one ear for that Lear-dissonance when parent reaches for child, child for parent, only to have the contact snapped by death. "The dignity of this act was worth the audience of kings and princes; for by such was it acted," says the First Gentleman who, like us, missed it all and had to be told (V.ii.79-80)--for only a king or a prince, long practiced to rule by life-or-death juxtapositions over a world turning round him juxtaposition by juxtaposition, could laugh and cry at the same time, seeing

that he was at once at the center of everything and nothing. So basic indeed is the forked-animal paradox of this scene--on the one hand, creation linking out wider and wider, from Leontes and Polixenes to Florizel and Perdita to Paulina and Camillo to the Old Shepherd and Clown to Autolycus; on the other hand, only destruction linking out, from Leontes and the dead Hermione to Mamillius to Antigonus to all those mariners who perished with Antigonus--that there is a special rightness in its not being presented like a drama. For we do not have to be watching from Lear but only from Pericles or Cymbeline to realize that more basic even than the truth that life is like art because the world is a stage, is that child's truth that the world seen most primally, is like, more than a stage, an old tale--which is in fact how this scene is played out: not acted by the participants but narrated by the Second and Third Gentlemen who, however, not being kings or princes, have not that Perdita-like trust in an artistic genre that recognizes its perfect mirroring of reality ("This news which is called true is so like an old tale, that the verity of it is in strong suspicion," one of the Gentleman says). Yet standing meekly in a corner of the reunion scene described is an old man, the Shepherd, fourscore and upwards in years, who seems to be as at home in the midst of this narrative of primal life-or-death as

if he had seen it all before and were being blessedly allowed to see it all again from the safe vantage point of a spectator--"Now he [Leontes] thanks the old shepherd, which stands by like a weather-bitten conduit of many king's reigns"--and we have only to focus on him in the Third Gentleman's description of the scene to remind ourselves of just how accurate in heart's truth an old tale can be.

As in Pericles, only after the universe as a whole has knit back together, only after father regains daughter, can each level be fulfilled itself, as Paulina is formally betrothed to Camillo (the nurse betrothed to the man whom Florizel called in Bohemia "the medicine of our house"), as Florizel is formally betrothed to Perdita, and as Leontes is reunited with Polixenes and with Hermione at the center of it all. And if we looking from the audience uncertainly feel that we might, by doing nothing more than blinking, at once see the shadow of Antigonus in the place of Camillo and the shadow of Mamillius in the place of Perdita and the lost Hermione in place of the restored one, Shakespeare meets our uncertainty by making this last scene such an hypnotic wonder that none of us can blink, even if we want to, so strong is the hold of the sights of the scene upon the backs of the eyes of our senses.

As we watch Paulina move among the players she brings to her chapel, hushing them, ordering them, urging them to

attend, we see in her the last incarnation of those healers of Lear and Pericles and Cymbeline with their fires and herbs and flowers and, most of all, their musics, who were in turn the last incarnations of those friars and doctors of Messina and Rousillon and Vienna who were present in one way or another in the resurrection scenes of their own plays. Here, in the person of this nurse, healing becomes nothing but a function of harmony itself: that harmony which Lear's physician and Thaisa's evoked when they ordered more music to be struck, as each note played mirrored the harmony of nature, now changing it, now adding to it, now altering it as in any true art, but never distorting it into an invention or pattern of their own--for healing, with these men, was that highest of all arts which mended nature simply by tuning it like an instrument so that their patients, mirroring the music, might be tuned and mended too.

It is but the logic of the hieratic beauty of this scene that Paulina, standing at the grave-chapel center of Leontes' isolate kingdom for so many years should have been able to play upon the stiff eternal winter-harmonies about her, in a playing so true to nature that its music was the perfectest of arts, re-arranging and re-tuning so subtly and so meekly that Hermione was kept alive in the only way she could have been kept alive and still have

mirrored the nature her nurse was working with: rigid, scarcely moving, statue-like. Then only logical it is, when all the bright moving circles of transition and color and vitality of the Bohemian court which Perdita brings with her are joined to the fixity of Sicilia, when all the stiff short strings of harmony which Paulina had to play upon suddenly find themselves healed to their vibrating counterparts to extend farther and farther out into a whole restored universe of motion--that if Paulina play on the harmonies now at her disposal ("Music, awake her; strike!") she can make Hermione move again and walk again and speak, for again Paulina is only mirroring nature perfectly: nature, which now <u>is</u> moving again. Hermione breathes, Hermione lives, Hermione descends from her pedestal: as resurrection--from the first awkward re-appearance of Hero to the restorations of Helena and Julietta's Claudio to the re-awakening of Lear--becomes at last a direct function of the melodies, pulses and impulses, of the living universe, transmitted through the art of a human healing medium.

Yet all the arts by which Paulina makes her Queen mirror nature, before constricted and cold and immobile, now moving and heated and flushed and once more vital, give way in awe before the artless fact of the Queen herself who is surely the most haunting creature in all the

plays of Shakespeare:

Leontes: But yet, Paulina,
Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
So aged as this seems.

Polixenes: O, not by much.

Paulina: So much more our carver's excellence,
Which lets go by some sixteen years and makes her
As she lived now.

Not until we see the face of Hermione, paler than the ruddy harmonies Paulina now plays upon, stiffer than the movement of the spheres revolving all about her which imbued her with life, sadder and remoter than the perfectness of her reunion with her mate would seem to justify, do we realize why this play is called The Winter's Tale, and, realizing, grow silent. We see in this figure no crystal-tensile Snow Queen preserved from life for endless ages till by the miraculous motion of the spring she is melted into beauty even purer than before. We see in her only the sad consummate miracle, not of art which mirrors nature perfectly, but of human life which mirrors nature imperfectly, not constantly renewing its cycle but simply growing old and, once old, staying old till one day, it dies. We see in Hermione the utter waste of sixteen years not one moment of which will ever come back, each moment of which is a reproach to the very concept of the value of a tragic choice, for Leontes has indeed regained his wife, but has regained her older, changed, different, when he might never have lost her at all:

Clown: Good madonna, why mournest thou?

Olivia: Good fool, for my brother's death.

Clown: I think his soul is in hell, madonna.

Olivia: I know his soul is in heaven, fool.

Clown: The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven (I.v.71-76).

Only now, at the ultimate extremity from comedy and tragedy, do we see what the nature of tragedy is in a world where all the Hamlets and Othellos and Lears presumably could go to heaven as Olivia's brother did in Twelfth Night. One look at the ageing Hermione tells us more piercingly than whole libraries of commentary that it matters not, whether somewhere Hamlet will find Ophelia or Othello Desdemona or Lear Cordelia; tells us that these men need never have lost trust in the first place, and that every moment each man spent on the diverted and tortuous path he chose to take was the waste of a life spent in a pain that need never have come about to begin with; tells us that even if Cordelia arose in her last act and took her broken father by the hand, her older eyes would remind him that all the sorry time spent since the play's opening had been spent wrongly, unnecessarily, complicatedly, for she had held out her hand to him from the beginning though he would not then make the meek choice to take it. Though now a reunion between a tragic hero and his wife

and child does take place on stage, and though the wedded pair are indeed united beyond tragedy at the end as they were at the beginning, one can only gaze at this altered Hermione and at the empty place of Mamillius and wonder, when Leontes answers to "his part/Perform'd in this wide gap of time, since first/We were dissever'd," just how much, if anything, the knowledge he has gained in this terrible way was worth.

"A sad tale's best for winter," said Mamillius--and as we gaze at the Queen's silver brow which no miracle of art or nature can ever make young again, the boy's words seem to be gazing with us through all the pattern of kingdom and cosmos which has been made so clear, looking with us through all the clarities of art and nature so perfectly etched out, to the human beings who move so awkwardly and uncertainly among them. Yet sad as the boy's phrase is, we would be missing its point if we did not feel suffuse through its sadness the trace of the author's self-smile, half-rueful, half gentle, playing over the fact that for him the perpetual wonder of such tales, the part to which he himself will always give first and final emphasis even while he sees cosmic clarity after clarity stand out like crystal, <u>is</u> the very awkwardness, the very uncertainness of whatever quirk in men makes each of them so mortal. And if mortality must end in winter, what can

we do but only thank him, that he has brought us there so beautifully.

CHAPTER VII

THE TEMPEST

"Hark! do you hear the sea?" Edgar asked from the last verge of human tragedy, as he and his blind father wheeled high above the bone-white ridge of England like two broken birds whose cries were etched so sharp in the Dover air that the line of the roar of the breakers below could only echo as the edge of some eternal mockery, too clear in its indifference to be heard by those in pain for more than a moment and be endured: "Hark, do you hear the sea?" "No, truly," Gloucester answered. But to view or to read the last plays of Shakespeare is to hear four times Shakespeare's answer, each articulated cleanly and surely: "Yes." "Yes." "Yes." "Yes."--as with each affirmation one confronts the fact of a playwright who has allowed himself to hear and, more than hear, portray in Dover all of the mockery and cruelty seas or chance or fate or gods can inflict on even the most innocent of players, only to himself see at once, after so many tragedies, than such infliction must be accepted because quite simply it cannot ever be successfully fought, even by the fiercest oldest titan who ever called himself King Lear in a cosmos where only life-or-death is king; an acceptance which, once made, allows the playwright suddenly to hear the music which has

been in the sea all along with all the roaring, and suddenly to see the kindness which has been behind so many stiff and salty veils of chaos.

One hears everywhere in these final plays the music, the roaring of the sea--or is it of the forest or the meadow or the stars or of the gods themselves? Indeed the countless little melodies one hears between the lines in each of the four last plays seem to be the very sounds of a cosmos so dear to the author that he has at last succeeded in hearing all of it, terror and pity, indifference and concern, and lets these sounds now crash up around his audience wave upon wave, clarity after clarity, without imposing his own dark or bright bent upon them, so that they dance in their freedom like so many beads of spray flung up at the sun, he himself in one sweep of generosity taking his audience up with him to look down at the spectacle of the million separate moments of life's pain and joy and madness and sanity and surprise from the vantage point not of comedy or tragedy but of vision itself. And in The Tempest is that audience caught up to the sun to stay, as from the first stage-direction--"on a ship at sea; a tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard"--it finds itself looking down on every foam-flecked particle a universe is made of, now cruel, now kind, from an atmosphere of light so high and an air so rare that

laughter is the only means of catching one's breath.

***

Gonzalo: Nay, good, be patient.

Boatswain: When the sea is. Hence! What cares these roarers for the name of king? To cabin: silence! trouble us not (I.i.15-18).

So opens the sea-world of The Tempest with its backdrop of life-or-death overpowering all on stage with a sense of the stark chaos that can overtake any player at any time it wishes, as from the first Shakespeare with an awful clarity, as he has done in the opening trial of Pericles by Antiochus and the opening banishment of Posthumus by Cymbeline and the opening imminence of death for those men on crutches mentioned by Archidamus and Camillo, emphasizes from the lesson of the tragedies just how much the word "mortal"--which we all are--means "vulnerable," and just how absurd man's pride in his own willfulness is, even if it be a king's, when he cannot ever impose it upon anything that will give him one more second of life or breath than he is destined to have. And the measure of the force of this emphasis is nowhere made more evident than in Gonzalo himself who in the short space of fifty lines is washed clean of the last traces of his self-important perspective to echo the Boatswain's cry with an even clearer one of his own: "Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground, long heath, brown furze, anything.

The wills above be done! but I would fain die a dry death," as he finally wills himself to accept being in the hands of those gods whose hands he has been in all along.

Only when we see in the next scene Prospero with Miranda do we realize at once what all the terrified mariners and land-lubbers do not: that however much the backdrop of watery life-or-death resembles chaos as it plunges now this way, now that, rushing over them, sucking them in, hurling them out, this chaos has a center, as indeed does any chaos the cosmos inflicts upon men, whether it be the chaos of the force of water or air or fire or earth, every element of which Miranda mentions in her opening words--"If by your art, my dearest father, you have/ Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them./The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,/But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,/Dashes the fire out"--for all these elements, waters and welkin and fire and pitch alike issue forth in their madness from Prospero himself. We see in Prospero at once <u>the</u> final ruler-figure of the Shakespearean universe, completely at that universe's center not only in his initiating of all his world's pity and terror and trials and machinations and justice and mercy and inscrutibility and clarity, as was Simonides or Pericles or Cymbeline; and in his initiating of all his world's sudden evil as well as sudden good, as was Leontes; but

also in his absolute initiating of all his world's sudden physical movements, healing or fragmenting, dissonance or harmony, with no Cerimons or Corneliuses or Paulinas to detract: he himself the physician as well as the head of state, the center of art as well as the center of life, all of life and death unfolding around him as if all the streams of fire and air, earth and water were radiating out like light from the cosmic mantle he is wearing round his shoulders, himself standing at the center of a cell in the center of an island to which all the players are drawn, expelled and drawn again. Easy it is for such a healer-figure standing at the center of all harmony to shift and play upon that harmony, changing and re-arranging the order of nature much as Paulina did, only with a ruler's born right <u>to</u> be at the center: the very playing an attempt to mend nature to human purposes in an art which is, to the Renaissance and to ourselves if we but think of its function and not of its since-dimmed name, the highest of all arts and sciences--magic--for the way in which it transforms nature directly, not in this or that piece of music or sculpture or machinery, but in life itself, as Hermione does come to life again and as the sea does mount to the welkin's cheek, as if Prospero or any authentic magician were a playwright not writing with ink but with brine and pitch and flame and light, attempting to make the very world his masterpiece.

Nor is even this highest art something beyond good and evil but is, too, subject to that one criterion by which everything of worth in the late Shakespearean universe must be judged: choice--for Prospero, like Cerimon and Cornelius and Paulina before him, must choose to use his art to mend and benefit nature, since he can as easily use it to destroy. Only when we hear his first words--"Be collected:/No more amazement: tell your piteous heart/There's no harm done"--do we know at once, as he wishes us to know at once, that his magic is white not black, and that he plays upon nature's harmony to produce more harmony, not dissonance, however much like dissonance it first may seem. And indeed when he begins to speak, the very rhythm in his voice that has such power to control the seas seems, even after he removes his magic robe, to soothe the angry waters and make the waves to mirror the gentle motion of its rising, falling, hypnotic cadences: "I have done nothing but in care of thee,/Of thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter ...", "there is no soul,/No, not so much perdition as an hair/Betid to any creature in the vessel/Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink ...", "twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year since...."

Especially the fact that he does remove his robe, and remove it voluntarily ("Lend thy hand,/And pluck my magic garment from me.--So:/Lie there, my art") divides

Prospero from those Lears and Antiochuses and Cymbeline-queens and Leonteses of old who in their pride allowed themselves to forget that all their center-powers to govern their universe were only lendings, mirrorings of the central truth of the universe itself; players who would not see until too late that any gift a mortal possesses, whether it be rule or talent or art or beauty, is but a gift of the gods that can be recalled at any moment, and who, in clutching their lendings tighter and tighter about themselves career madly from the point of all cosmic fixity to the edges of a chaos more fragmented than any angry seas'. Nowhere in any of the plays of Shakespeare is all the potential remoteness and pride of a creator-figure, be he ruler or artist, given up so immediately as Prospero's is here, nor given up so beautifully, as he allows his own created daughter to remove his robe herself, letting her approach and touch all of his infinitude and take it gently from him, joining himself to her while giving her the illusion that the joining is as much of her own initiating as it is of his. "It is mightiest in the mightiest," said Portia in The Merchant of Venice, speaking as much of pridelessness as of mercy, though then we could not see the pridelessness as clearly. Here in the figure of this ruler-father-physician-magician we see the mightiest mortal whom playwright can create, and the most prideless

("Wipe thou thine eyes; have comfort"), whose mercy is indeed mighty--for who among us at the peak of his anger if he had the power to destroy all his enemies to the death in sea or forest or lightning-flash would not only save them with a "no harm done" for their better purpose, but would then wonderfully let it look as if the frailest tenderest slip of a girl who was so protective of them all did some of the saving herself, which she wanted to do so badly.

Indeed Miranda must wipe her eyes to have comfort, for she cries; of all the late play heroines, she alone weeps. But to gaze at her in her weeping is to realize at once the mark of wonder that Shakespeare places on her tears: for she alone, of all the late play heroines, is the only one not to have pain directly inflicted upon her--no sea-loss of husband and child, no attempted kidnapping or brothel-rape, no loss of jealous husband's love, no accusations of adultery, no enraged prospective father-in-law--and therefore there is not the slightest chance that her audience may think she is weeping for herself. No; the marvel of Miranda's tears is that now when Shakespeare--as if in reward to all the Thaisas and Marinas and Imogens and Hermiones and Perditas who suffered so much so needlessly--created at last one heroine who does not suffer from any manner of harsh abuse and who has no need

to cry, she cries for them all, and weeps in fact for all heroines and heros, servants, rogues and fools who have first-hand known the pain that she has been spared. "O, I have suffer'd/With those that I saw suffer!" she cries at the sight of the shipwreck--and her tears have in them nothing at all of self but are rather the seal of a personality so purely human and loving that its simple existence seems the last possible stage of loving-kindness mankind could ever come to through thousands of evolving years of purgation and anguish: for who has not, loving, had to look on in horror at the sudden physical or mental agony of parent or spouse and not felt helpless that his own body continued to radiate a health which he could not even begin to impart to the sufferer, a health which could only absorb but a fraction of the pain it beheld in another and wanted to take unto itself. Here Miranda in body and in spirit is nothing but this pure sympathy--she suffers, she pains, she weeps--and not for a husband or a child whose life has become intermingled with her own over a span of years, but for a boatload of human beings none of whom she knows at all, as if she were, in the quickness of her capacity to love, beyond even Cordelia and so acutely felt the common bond of mortality which links her to her fellows that if she were in the tent at Dover she could not have looked at the Doctor or Kent

in their own secret mute pain without seeing through to it and feeling it with them too. "Her voice was ever soft,/Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman," said Lear of his hanged child at the end of his play; but now in Miranda, as in Marina and Perdita, we hear that voice again, not only touching each note of pain in the soul of a sufferer with a tempering note of its own, but here revealing beneath even that pure music, the notes of the suffering in her own soul that makes us see at last how such a girl could know so perfectly how <u>to</u> temper and heal: not by happy chance nor by an otherworldly fore-knowledge of what needs to be done, but by simply being so purely <u>one</u> with the sufferer in his pain that he may, if he chooses, become one with her in her tenderness. "O, the cry [of the shipwrecked crew] did knock/Against my very heart," she says; but the cry not only knocked at her heart: it opened it full-deep and responsive. Then for such a girl to be separated from that sorry crew by a span of sea not even sympathy can bridge--for she quite simply cannot get <u>to</u> them--would be the cruellest of all torments; and perhaps the real reason for her tears, coming as they do in addition to her suffering, is that her very eyes instinctively mirror the salt-stinging grief that is blinding her fellows, as if she felt so strongly the fact of a commn human nature that the whole shipwrecked crew's

drowning is her own drowning too. Yet if this girl's capacity for perfect sympathy seems like an echo of some vanished Eden--as indeed the girl herself has been kept on an island where she knows not anything about the human race with which she is about to come into contact--we cannot look at her without remembering the Marinas and Perditas to whom she is so similar, and the Cordelia who came before them, not to mention the Heros and Helenas and Isabellas and Ophelias and Desdemonas before her; and without thinking that if she is like a creature from a high island of earthly paradise, she has come there not at the beginning of the life-experience the playwright has envisioned for so long, but at the end of a long line of heroines so purged by pain that every bit of perfection she has, she has not been given but won; and that if she herself knows nothing about the human race, the author who has created her as the most real of earthly females, has created her after knowing everything about it, and has simply imbued her with all the undimmed humanness which he now sees a human being can have.

One of the special delights of The Tempest is that in it alone of all the final plays father and daughter have time to be together on stage often, for long periods of time, without being torn apart by the pridefulness of one or the anguish of the other, as if Shakespeare in this

one drama where so much of the plotting has nothing whatever to do with a strict source-plot were at last giving himself the blessed present of being able to bring out at his own leisure with no sense of limit or pressure all the infinite nuance of this one relationship which has been the cradle of his thought for so long. Indeed there is something in the air of the first Prospero-Miranda dialogue as it unfolds at its rich slow-measured pace which suggests, now when we are seeing so carefully and so surely into the very fabric of the father-daughter relationship, now when we see creator speaking to created and created to creator not just in tears but in smiles and teasings and shrugs and little chidings and jests, that some new and special revelation about the workings of the universe may be forthcoming, so intimately do we see its delicatest interworkings contained in this unhurried dialogue between parent and child. And, as the dialogue draws to a close, that revelation comes:

Miranda: How came we ashore?

Prospero: By Providence divine.

In these three words, spoken at this particular moment, Shakespeare with a golden consecration sets his four last plays apart from the body of their comic and tragic predecessors, as indeed they have been set apart from the first words of Gower in Pericles. If the peculiar mark

of the world of comedy was that its universe was always shaped by the whims of the characters so that we could not see a Lysander or a Rosalind or a Viola in danger without seeing too that they each somehow had the power of turning any dark law of danger into the greater law of their own merriment, no nocturnal love-potion or murderous uncle or shipwreck enough to frighten away their own good spirits or our own; then the terrifying mark of the world of tragedy was the characters' slow discovery that no law of the universe would yield in the slightest to any player's wish or will, from the French king's death in Navarre to Claudio's "beheading" in Vienna to all the disasters of Elsinore and Venice and Scotland and Lear's Britain, where all the Gertrudes and Emilias and Banquos and Gloucesters had to search to the death for just what these laws or fates or decrees or gods were which were so constricting them, each player fighting to see just what kind of universe he <u>was</u> in, so that he could grapple with it the better. More and more in these tragedies were more and more laws dislodged from the very firmament to hang visible to each player--that no man may fight life-or-death; that no man may perform a single act unobserved by the watching cosmos; that each man is responsible for each choice he makes, however unaware, because each choice has a consequence which unfolds independently of its own wishes; that the

world is a stage whose finished shape is too vast for man alone to have planned, though each man chooses the shape of the part he plays; that no man may manipulate the cosmos any more than he can manipulate his own birth or postpone his own destfuction--the worthy characters accepting the existence of these laws if not their logic or their mercy or their scope for free will, the villainous characters each insisting that he alone was a law unto himself. And to these laws, so painfully searched out and so searingly discovered in a pitch-dark universe where each player had to begin his search from the bottom up--from a Gloucester-like realization that existence is a chaos to a greater and greater illumination of the life-or-death reasons why it is a chaos, how much the fault is man's, how much the gods'--it was somehow appropriate for the author to give the random terms "chance," "destiny," "the stars," or whatever, for one term seemed as good as another to name the unnameable. But here in the last plays, for us if not always for the author, the time for randomness in terminology ceases, for though the laws that govern Pericles and Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale and The Tempest are the same that governed Hamlet and Othello and Macbeth and Lear, life-or-death for life-or-death, there is an essential change in perspective, and to this essential change there is an essential difference in name:

To fight up through layer after layer, law after law, of a darkened universe to seek the light above is to get a blind sense of each law, as one touches it and struggles to understand it, and this blind sense we call "fate"; but to have succeeded, as Lear may have succeeded and as Timon too-late succeeded and as Pericles succeeds from the first, in actually breaking through the last of these laws to arrive past the summit of them all, is to achieve a face-to-face viewing of the gods themselves and a retrospective viewing of all that one has passed beyond, from the gods' own vantage point: from the top down--and this sense, this point of view of the laws, fully illuminated, daylight-clear and bright, we simply call "providence."

Here from this summit of light can we at last perceive that there <u>is</u> a purpose to the laws as well as a terror, a mercy to them as well as a justice, as Diana revealed at Mytilene and Jupiter in Britain and the oracle in Sicilia; that there is a magnanimity to the gods in back of all their stringency, and that the reason so many Hamlets and Othellos and Macbeths and Lears perished was that none of them had the child-like trust to act magnanimously himself so that the cosmos might mirror the action. Here from the summit, human life becomes envisioned not in negatives of what not to do--do not fight the imminence of life-or-death, because it cannot be fought; do not put

self-pride above forgiving another, because the universe will react in kind and crush that self-pride and oneself with it--but rather in positives, because the laws are now not seen in darkness but in full illumination: accept the imminence of life-or-death; trust forgiveness over self-pride, as Pericles trusts, and Simonides and, eventually, Cymbeline and Leontes, all of whom have more than even Lear's power not to trust if they so choose. Then if the universe is indeed seen in this way, positively, radiantly, openly, no wonder its world is as free and unconstricted a place as Shakespeare envisions from the moment of Gower's first couplets: for the laws that are so visible everywhere in golden hierarchy from the lowest Gaoler to the highest Jupiter are seen no longer as constrictions or obstructions to man's freedom but rather only glowing steps and rungs and opportunities for greater and greater freedom the more they are trusted and accepted and followed right up to the gods we can see at the very top.

"By Providence divine," says this father who, like all fathers in the last plays, seems speaking for his very cosmos to the created child who cannot yet see as much of its purposes as he--nor can any of his usage of "fate" and "destiny" and "bountiful fortune" which follows impinge upon the force of the word as he uses it here, any more than all the Telluses and Aesculapuses and Junos in

Pericles could detract from the eminence of Diana. Then how can we, listening, view with blind terror any shipwreck or chaos or even death itself, even if it shatters the loveliest Thaisa or Imogen or Perdita or the noblest Ferdinand, when we can see enough of truth to trust the bright gods who did the wrecking? And if the plots of each of the last plays has the victims return to life, is that not simply a way of the author's sharing with us his trust that even the worst of all fate's blows does have a beneficent purpose, since in a risen Thaisa or Ferdinand we can see at last the fact of the magnanimous beneficence whose presence he so everywhere implies. Then if in a Mamillius no fact comes, the absence of specific confirmation does not seem so much to deny the presence in the universe of beneficence or purpose as much as, as in life itself, to place the trust in that purpose solely in our hands for us to accept it, causelessly, unrewardedly, as Leontes accepted it and as Hermione. Dare we refuse?

To observe Shakespeare as he builds each scene in his last plays is to become aware of the astonishing degree to which he makes even the rudiments of stagecraft mirror the purpose of his drama--as, for example, the sheer rapidity of events in the shipboard scene in Pericles with its storm and childbirth and death and burial of the wife

and the husband's acceptance all in less than seventy lines conveys the shocking brevity of any life-experience far more finally than any wealth of verbal eloquence; and as the similar forest-scene in Cymbeline with the deaths of Cloten and Imogen and the anger and then lamentations over them and the "heat o' the sun" acceptance of them and the re-awakening of Imogen all take on a slower, more massive, more rhythmic movement suggestive of the age-old life-death-rebirth cycles of a grandly moving universe, simply from the slow-paced way one action is linked to another with interludes for music and dirges; and as the very placing of the oracle at the center of the drama in The Winter's Tale, let alone the bluntness of its phrasing, brings out whole levels of revelation of the configuration and the quality of truth--and in The Tempest this staging ability is evident from the first: as in the quick jagged opening shipwreck scene followed immediately by the long Prospero-Miranda conference, all the violences of seas' reverberations are caught in long sweeps and eddies which absorb their shocks and bring out their providential significance. However, not even in looking at this parent-child scene alone do we marvel at the way in which its own structure etches out subtle wealths of meaning--as Prospero gives narration after narration of past events like some Gower or Chorus, in yet another instance of his

being the figure at the center of his universe even to his now doing all the concentrating of time and place and motivation himself; as Miranda interposes, periodically breaking up the otherwise inordinate length of the narration in response to her father's obviously unfounded accusations of sleepiness, only to fall sleepy immediately afterwards, at once bringing the dialogue to an end and making Prospero's stern warnings of slumber seem like the most teasing-gentle foreknowledge--but in the Prospero-Ariel scene which follows, for its very structure brings out a truth which gives the Shakespearean universe of the four last plays an entire new dimension, lighting up even further the infinite illumination which this final universe has been from the beginning.

The Prospero-Miranda and the Prospero-Ariel scenes are each ordered in the identical way: Ariel is constantly asked by his master those same kind of attentiveness-questions Miranda was asked too, in the middle of the same kind of ducal-choral narration of past events; only instead of being accused of sleepiness, Ariel is accused of forgetfulness ("Hast thou forgot her?" "Where was she born?" "Is this not true?"). We cannot see the way Prospero treats Ariel, in fact, without everywhere seeing bright wisps and shadows of the way he treated his own daughter, and in this strange mirroring we catch the gleam of what

is the curiousest and certainly the playfullest of all the wonders of the last plays: for Ariel, this tricksy spirit who performs all of Prospero's art, is that being whom Prospero treats like some sparkle of a daughter ("Why, that's my spirit!"), like some work or working of art to whom he himself stands in the function of a creator ("It was mine art,/When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape/The pine, and let thee out"), over whom he has mastery by the sheer fact that, like a book, like a painting, like a play, like a child, he somehow brought this marvel into existence--though of course the real profundity of the parallel between Miranda and Ariel, between daughter and art, is its inexactness, since an artist does not really father his spirit of genius as he does a child but rather comes upon it full-grown and independent of himself, to be caught and tamed and teased like a bird to do his bidding, himself never sure when it might escape again. At once all the ruler-father figures of the last plays, the Pericles' and Cymbelines and Leontes' are seen in the sheerest fancy of a light which gives them all, among all their universal significance, a curiously personal one: for was not the loss of a Marina or an Imogen or a Perdita like a playwright's loss of his own work of art through trying to force it into his own image and likeness when it was already willing to bloom that way naturally ("Behold, my

lords," said Paulina trying to convince Leontes of his babe's legitimacy, "Although the print be little, the whole matter/And copy of the father," as Shakespeare, here as always in these last plays, lights up the commonplace of the print metaphor for producing children to expose its original connection with producing a work of art); and was not the reunion of father with daughter, with its consequent setting off of harmony, like an artist accepting the completeness his creation gives to him; and was not his subsequent meek giving up of that daughter to a Lysimachus or Posthumus or Florizel like the giving up of his dear creation to the world, to flourish there independent of him, "whose joy," Polixenes said of all fathers, of all creators, "Is nothing else/But fair posterity"? All these parallels do we see here in Prospero's treatment of Ariel, none perhaps more touching or profound than the fact that Ariel now and always understands his master's constant teasing questions <u>as</u> teasing while Miranda does not, as if a creature of art can understand at once all the artfulness of the man who brought him into existence, whereas the creature of life takes all the man's art as trustingly as if, like his art in herself, it were but straightforward nature and nothing but nature. Then when Prospero ends the scene by going from Ariel to Miranda as quickly as from "go, hence with diligence!" to "Awake, dear heart,

awake!" how can we not hear in his voice his greater wonder that the spirit he just dismissed to transform itself into a "nymph o' the sea" cannot begin to match in its created illusion the created reality he beholds in his own nymph o' the sea whose very lack of sprite-like, print-like, play-like eternality makes her far more lovely and far more dear to him than any immortal elf of a foster-child.

> Prospero: The fringed curtains of thine eye advance,
> And say what thou seest yond.
>
> Miranda: What is't? a spirit?
> Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,
> It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit
> (I.ii.411-14).

It is particularly fitting that the magic of this first description of Ferdinand be heralded by Prospero's touch of words to Miranda's eyes, for in this last of the last plays, as in them all, <u>sight</u> is the one most precious sense which a human being has to perceive a universe grown clear and visible around him, where gods and good and evil and harmony and dissonance and sanity and madness are all open to the observation of anyone who would look, and where one may love or hate an object of perception by simply glancing at it, one glance revealing as much as would years of close acquaintance and study since all that can be exposed about anything is transparent from the beginning, and has but to be seen to be completely known. Not just Antiochus'

daughter, but every player in the world of the last plays is a "glass of light," whether fair or not--as indeed were all the players from that moment in Lear when Shakespeare at last saw through to the center of every living being's starkest and most Heath-like naked nerve of humanity--each player now able to see as far into the nature of his fellows or his environs as he wants to, even as Imogen would choose to gaze at Posthumus till her eye-strings cracked and even as Leontes would choose not to gaze at the oracle at all, both objects existing to be gazed at. This sheer visibility of the universe, in fact, is what makes the characters of all four of these plays at once so accesible and so miraculous, for so completely has the author removed the last traces of obscurity from the atmosphere that these characters need not, as indeed they do not, depend upon any kind of discursive reasoning to gain enlightenment but rather depend upon intuitive reasoning alone--pure sight--to obtain every particle of their inner illumination, since all they have to do is look to understand, as if the author were giving his players, and his audience, all the immediate apperception of the angels to show all the more wonderfully how frail, how impulsive, how easily deceived, how unlike the angels they still are.

"I can live no longer by thinking," Orlando cried in Arden, as for one instant life seemed too short and love too

brief to while away in anticipation and melancholy (V.ii.50); but in the late plays life seems brief and tenuous not just for a moment but all the time, because it is tenuous, with shipwreck or betrayal or death a full possibility every new instant--and this certainty of life's brevity rather than some abstract sense of human-to-angelic evolution is what gives the intuiting power of the players its all-too-mortal impetus, as it seems they can all see through to the inner truth of things at once simply because they have no time for any discursiveness in a world where all one's perceptions must grow quick as thought from the knowledge that death is quicker. Then it is only natural that Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love at once ("At the first sight/They have chang'd eyes," Prospero says), as did Olivia and Sebastian or Rosalind and Orlando or Hero and Claudio or Juliet and Romeo or the French Princess and Navarre or so many, many pairs of lovers in earlier dramas; only now, in the clarity of the final vision, do we see the phenomenon of love-at-first sight for what it has been all along: no mere plot-trick of romance or idealistic fancy but the surest, highest, intensest kind of faculty a human being can possess, which not only seems to make lovers like angels but which, even more than angels, makes them seem like the most life-frail mortals who see everything at once since they cannot waste a moment in pondering.

And if Miranda's highest adjective for admiration for Ferdinand is "brave," as it is everyone's highest adjective from Prospero to Caliban, how perfect the word is, and how perfect that the first use of it should be by this particular girl in this parlicular context--no more to mean simply "making a fine display," as it is so often used by Shakespeare (III.iv.39-41: as in Celia's teasing of Orlando to Rosalind: "O, th[illegible]'s a brave man! He writes brave verses, speaks brave words, swears brave oaths, and breaks them bravely") but meaning now even more wonderfully when used by the worthy Tempest-characters, "daring," "courageous" (III.ii.134-135: as in the stark-stiff distant reaches of I Henry VI "the noble Duke of Bedford late deceas'd" was spoken of as "A braver soldier never couched lance,/A gentler heart did never sway in court")--for if human existence in the last plays is seen as so dangerous-brief that men must intuit what they have not time to cogitate, the living of life itself is the most visible act of bravery there is, and anything which seems, as Ferdinand seems to Miranda at this moment, to be as fully alive and as fully actualized as it can possibly be must be quite naturally fully splendid-gallant, fully brave.

To see now Prospero begin his test of Ferdinand and, after Ferdinand, all the other shipwrecked characters in the drama, is not only to see, as we have done all along,

the spectacle of human life played out from the viewpoint of one who can see all its laws and patterns and idiosyncracies from above, having grappled with them all, but to hear, as we have heard all along from the beginning of Pericles, the omni-directional laughter which fills every nook and cranny of a universe thus gazed at and to share in it delighted. The disappearance of laughter in All's Well That Ends Well or Measure for Measure was caused, at its most basic, by the disappearance through the increasing pressures and constrictions of tragedy of any room at all for self-consciousness, none of the Helenas or Isabellas or Bertrams or Angelos any longer able to even think of teasing or bantering their way out of any given situation because they felt at every point too put-upon by the force of the terrors around them to be able to distance themselves from those terrors sufficiently to see their incongruity; and so, too, was the span of the existence of the tragic hero increasingly cramped and constrained by the pressure of awful events and thoughts and fears, Lear's so much more crushing than even Hamlet's that midway through his own drama he had no space at all for even a shred of the sense of self-humor which the Dane could keep to the end. When the blackness of the fate one is struggling with becomes utter pitch the more one tries to rip away its last mystery, it is only natural that the

struggler cannot even begin to suspect, so blinded is he by the totality of the pain being inflicted on him, that he is only grappling with the dark side of the laws of the universe, and that there is another side. Then when, after Lear, after Timon, Shakespeare does break through to that other side and see all the laws he has passed through lit up by a purpose of magnanimity which transfigures them all, the breaking through becomes not just a passing from fate to providence, from a sense of absolute constriction to a sense of absolute freedom, but from the sense of a close blindness to a sense of utter self-consciousness--a sense of one's ease of movement in one's thoughts or in one's world, of being able to look not only at onself but in back of and ahead of oneself as well--and this sense of ease allows space for humor everywhere: humor which sees beyond the immediancy of this or that struggle or conflict to the place of that conflict in the scheme of things and sees the magnanimity with which that conflict, in itself so anguished, can be at once dispersed and turned to joy. For the humor of the spirit of providence, after all, comes not so much from its fore-consciousness of what is going to happen but rather from that self-consciousness which is, simply, the sheer fact of its distance of perspective from all the warps and darknesses of immediacy, so that, for example, the infinitely gentle laughter

which plays over Prospero's admonitions to his daughter lest she fall asleep during his narrating comes not so much from his seeing ahead to the sleep that will overtake her but from his seeing that all her certainty of the present wakeful moment is but a partial view of a life far wider than she is yet aware of; and his delight is not that he himself sees it all--past, present, and future--but rather a delight for her, that there are infinite possibilities of surprise open all around her which she cannot yet see, which she has but to await in meekness to discover for herself. And if what she cannot yet see awaiting her just a few breaths away <u>is</u> sleep, or even death, her own or that of one she loves, there is something in the nature of Prospero's consciousness which suggests that if one can indeed see all of life, not just to the next event but to the next and the next to the very last, there always is at the very last, after whatever sleep or death or pain does come, an awakening.

Then when we see Prospero begin his test of Ferdinand in language as terrible and as dark as fate itself, Miranda crying out "Why speaks my father so ungently?", how can we miss the self-consciousness playing over, under, around and through his every utterance as it issues forth like sunlight in aside after aside after aside, as he speaks not just in the voice of a cosmic providence--and

in so speaking himself gives fo[illegible] phrases which voice the same universe-magnanimity of purpose which Jove uttered in Cymbeline in his "to make the gift/The more delay'd, delighted": "But this swift busines- [the courtship of Miranda]/I must uneasy make, lest too light winning/Make the prize light"--but in the voice of a fully realized human being for whom self-consciousness means not necessarily a specific foreknowledge into this or that future instance, but only simply a way of viewing one's life, even that part of it which one has not yet lived or, lived, not yet understood, as a whole: so that when the last pain of some stark disaster has been absorbed it can be gone beyond and not cankered upon, for no more reason than the child-like trust that there is always something more of life to go on to.

Even the fact that Prospero's harshness is the last instance in Shakespeare of the cosmos's testing of a young lover, with all the right that the cosmos does have to test--"O dear father,/Make not too rash a trial of him, for/He's gentle, and not fearful," cries Miranda, never dreaming to question that right, as Cordelia never dreamed to, nor Thaisa nor Marina nor Imogen nor Hermione nor Perdita--even the fact that Prospero's harshness catches all the reverberations of the stark trials of Navarre and Hero's Claudio and Bertram and Angelo and most beautifully Pericles (who in his passing of his Simonides-test for

Thaisa, went not only from lover to bridegroom but from prince to king), is as nothing before the fact that such harshness is but part of a greater magnanimity when the tester is indeed one with the wishes of the universe and seeks not to destroy or torment the young man but only to make more precious to him the feeling in his lover's soul, so that a Pericles or a Ferdinand may, in defending that feeling, intensify it, growing able to love more and more brightly than ever he thought himself capable of before. Then none of Prospero's harshness is there that is not merely the dark side of his glowing, his gentle, his smiling magnanimity which sees so clearly how wonderfully a Ferdinand should come through such a test that all the pleadings of Miranda are merely tributes to the immedicy of her love, that she who intuits at once that any paternal harshness is but a trial at once forgets her marvelous intuition and indeed forgets the very worthiness of her young man in her asking that he should be spared what cannot bring him harm but only greater glory:

> Miranda: Sir, have pity;
> I'll be his surety.
>
> Prospero: Silence! one word more
> Shall make me chide thee if not hate thee. What!
> An advocate for an imposter! hush!
> Thou think'st there is no more such shapes as he,
> Having seen but him and Caliban.

We do not need one of Prospero's golden asides, but only the transition from a father's "Silence!" to a father's

"hush!" to see the tenderness with which he views his daughter and, through her, all men moving bravely and meekly through life, as if in his very distance from their so-pressing immediacies he is far closer to them, far more moved by their sorrows and more rejoicing in their joys, than the most passion-blinded observer, for in a universe where one loves in proportion to what one sees, how can we even begin to absorb the depths of the warmth of the gentle radiances of this man who sees, quite literally, everything.

"This boy is forest born," said Orlando of the disguised Rosalind in Arden, "And hath been tutor'd in the rudiments/Of many desperate studies by his uncle,/Whom he reports to be a great magician,/Obscured in the circle of this forest" (V.iv.30-34); but in the circle of Prospero's island, as befits the world of the last plays, nothing is obscured but all is made of space and air and light, clear as thought to every spectator and bright as full wakefulness. To watch, at the center of that circle, Prospero enlarge the scope of his play to include not only Ferdinand but Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, Trinculo, Stephano, and an endless assortment of nymphs and satyrs and demi-demons and sprites, is to watch the entire universe at work and to realize at once, with who knows how much wonder and delight, that a universe at work,

when we finally do see it with none of our own fancy shading it into dark ponderosity, is the infinite spectacle of a universe at play:

"What, ho! slave! Caliban!/Thou earth, thou! speak," Prospero calls, "... Come forth, I say! there's other business for thee:/Come, thou tortoise!" as, at the same time he dismisses Ariel with a flick, he summons this other darker curiosity of his island to him, this strange amphibian who is all earth and water to Ariel's air and fire. No marvel is it that Caliban should seem made of the baser elements of the cosmos in this world where all of nature seems but the projection of the moods and temperaments not just of the gods but of the earthly dwellers as well, so that, for example, we could see the very quick of Marina's temperament made as visible in her purple violets and marigolds as we could see Diana's in the mild or angry seas, or could see the innermost soul of Cymbeline imprinted in every color of courage and grandeur in the landscape of his kingdom, or could see the deepest feelings of Hermione sad and Leontes bleak in the universal configuration of winter; rather the marvel of Caliban is that, though he unlike all the human characters of the last plays begins quite literally compounded out of lowly earth and water, his character does not seem to have been dictated by these elements in some abstract or symbolic fashion

but he himself seems, as freely as a Marina or a Leontes, to have chosen to mirror that part of physical nature which he does now mirror, himself willing to be like the compound of primeval slime which makes up but a part of the environment of his island, from the natural sympathy he feels in it to the slime which he revels to proclaim is his own soul. Him did Prospero begin to raise, freely and undetermined by the elements of his birth, "till thou didst seek to violate/The honour of my child." "O ho, O ho! would't had been done!/Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else/This isle with Calibans," the slave replies, who in his pride of disobedience chose to be a slave where he had been made an equal, characteristically assuming that any child of his and Miranda's would have nothing of the air and fire which are mixed with her sea-nymphliness and her lovely clay but would only come out another Caliban, as if he himself not only would not let himself be raised to higher elements but would bring the higher elements down to his own level to expunge them. No mere compound of base physicals is he but rather that most basic human quality of which such physicals are only the innocent reflections, for he is that black impulse of the very will to evil which was so visible at the center of Leontes and so inexplicable: "Shrug'st thou, malice?" Prospero asks, and indeed malice the slave is, with all the causelessness

and chaos and almost accidental origin malice has, so that it is peculiarly fitting that Shakespeare should have rooted this quality in so many plays, as he does now, in a bastard ("Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/ Upon thy wicked dam"). And if, in his brutality and his clumsy violence he far more resembles Cloten, that is because he is so much closer to the blusterous thunder of chaos than any instinct of the lightning, and consequently almost as entertaining as he his dangerous from the sheer gusto he takes in the lumpishness of his ignorance in a world so intelligent at center that we can laugh at him while he is so effectively kept at the peripheries, though all the time he waits to run muckishly forward and again encompass all.

Then when we see Prospero at the center of this circle of an island, with Ariel and Caliban hearkening to his bidding, the one all air and fire ("I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,/Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,/I flam'd amazement"), the other all liquid, all solid; the one consenting to Prospero willingly because the magician is using him for that white purpose which alone can control the highest elements (black magic having no control over air or fire, as Caliban's dam Sycorax found the sprite "too delicate/To act her earthy and abhorr'd commands"), the other consenting only under

force to Prospero because the lower elements must conform to anything higher than they whatever its purpose--we see fragments and shards and colors of all these elements in each of the Alonsos and Antonios and Gonzalos and Trinculos and Stephanos whom Prospero now controls, himself crystallizing everything around him the instant that he sees it, every bit of delicacy and malice, sullenness and joy, hate and love, rejection and acceptance, each drop of sea and particle of earth and spark of air and fire falling into place at his very glance, so that the whole universe seems no chaos at all but only the most dazzling, multi-hued, light-transfigured display of order: for we see it all from Prospero's point of view who <u>is</u> its center and whose every whim or wink of will alters the display, now this way, now that, as if all of creation were one jewelled kaleidoscope-pattern, ever-changing, ever shifting about one point of bright fixity, who is himself only a bit of glass reflecting the changelessness of truth itself. And if the Antonios and Trinculos, let alone the Calibans, themselves have no sense of pattern, that only increases our delight in them the more, that they each sparkle and glister like coal, like paste, as part of the magic design, despite themselves.

Nothing is at once more sad or more wonderful a difference between the universe of the late plays and that of

the lyric romantic comedies of old than the difference Shakespeare everywhere points up between the golden-ageishness of Prospero's island, in which Gonzalo would have "no use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;/No occupation; all men idle, all;/And women too, but innocent and pure:/ No sovereignty" and that of the forest of Arden where, in Duke Senior's words, "this our life exempt from public haunt/Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,/ Sermons in stones and good in everything (II.i.149-52; II.i.15-17). Here the teasing edge of Duke Senior's evocation, so conspicuously missing in Gonzalo's sweep of statement, cuts deep and painful into the later man's too-positive words as if to make them entirely false for their trying to sound so entirely true: for Shakespeare no longer plays with the concept that an innocent environment alone is enough to temper men, as it was when Oliver and Duke Frederick immediately succumbed to the freshness of the spell of the forest the instant they entered its green reaches, but rather now leaves the opportunity for innocence or guilt entirely to men themselves irregardless of the influence of their surroundings, so that we, listening to Gonzalo, never believe for a moment that an age can make men golden if men themselves do not choose to be so. And the sorry conclusion to be drawn from Shakespeare's unteasing, absolutely accurate portrayal of the shipwrecked

crew which tumbles on to Prospero's island pair after pair like stragglers from some gaudy ark--two conspirator-brothers, Sebastian and Antonio; two pragmatic old counsellors, Gonzalo and Adrian; two childish rogues, Stephano and Trinculo--is that men do not wish to be so: each of them falling on the other to either murder or platitudinize or corrupt, all of them in varying degrees turning in short order whatever gold they can find on the island to the most outrageous rust, so that we almost forget, as indeed we should not, that Ferdinand came along with them too. Yet nothing is as strange to observe, in the scene in which all but the two simpletons are present, as when--after Gonzalo has inflicted formulas about the beneficence of the providence in which he believes upon the unwilling ears of King Alonso who is mourning the loss of his son with a despair and a melancholy and a fatalism that would do credit to a Leontes ("Prithee, no more: thou dost talk nothing to me")--that providence actually comes, as it does in the person of Ariel who wakes the king from his dream of despair with a warning saving him from the murderous intent of his brother ("My master through his art foresees the danger/That you, his friend, are in; and sends me forth," the sprite whispers to Gonzalo, "--For else his project dies,--to keep them living"), as if in men like this random sampling of humanity we can at last see not

only that providence exists, and not only in formulas but in action, but also--indescribably mixed in with our happiness at so seeing--can see why it is necessary that providence should exist: simply, among its grander purposes, to keep men alive when, if left to their own devices, they would most certainly all destroy each other faster than any cosmos could begin to interpose.

"Justice, justice, justice, justice!" Isabella entreated in Vienna; and it is impossible to recollect that moment without thinking that each of her four cries is met one by one by the four last plays, where everything is indeed made open to justice to see and, seeing, seize, from the deepest hid faults of Antiochus and Cleon to the blatant evil of Cymbeline's queen to the politic wrongs of Antigonus, each stroke of justice flaming down from heaven full visible, since the playwright sees the workings of the universe too clearly to any longer trifle with such outer disguises of haphazardry or accident as the obscured striking down of Emilia or Banquo, but shows these workings acting as they do beneath their disguises, direct and purposeful. Nor is anything more direct or more visible than that cosmic justice as it is perfectly administered through Prospero by Ariel to the Alonso and Antonio and Sebastian who supplanted him from his rightful throne of Milan and who would, the latter two, supplant Alonso

himself from Naples, themselves not only acting as deceivers but as those love- and blood-tied men, Antonio to Prospero, Sebastian to Alonso, in whom deceit is most painful: brothers. From Ariel does that law of justice of the universe come issuing forth in what is surely its most terrifying statement in all the last plays for the way in which it casts its iron net over anyone onstage or off who would scoff at justice's authority because he, crime-guilty, is as yet unscathed: "the powers, delaying, not forgetting, have/Incens'd the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,/Against your peace" (III.iii.73-75). "Delaying not forgetting": there are not more awful words dared spoken in all of Shakespeare than these three, aimed at the group of conspirators who have--through the magic of Prospero which is less illusion than the most clear glimpse into life-experience made intenser, quicker, more immediately apprehensible; made, in other words, into art--just been treated to a banquet presided over by a twinkling Ariel and his gentle minions, only to see it disappear in a trice, as quickly as do all the delights of an unpaid-for life when long-delayed justice strikes; when the sprite they thought had been some private lucky guardian angel turns abruptly into a harpy of revenge; when all the rewards which fate so long allowed the deceivers to heap up, all the pleasures, all the satisfied tastes, are removed

at once with mocks and mows, with the accent on the "mock." "You fools!" Ariel cries. "I and my fellows/ Are ministers of Fate: the elements,/Of whom your swords are temper'd, may as well/Wound the loud winds, or with bemock'd-at stabs/Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish/One dowle that's in my plume," reminding the blinded men that no man can kill the watching sea or air or any of the visible life-or-death which alone decides when a man will suffer pain or destruction, as it alone decided when he should suffer birth:

It is especially fitting that Ariel should use at this point the term "fate" rather than any other, for fate is the sense of the universe which man has when, in struggling with the laws of that universe he feels only their harshness, their justice: only when a man meekly accepts the laws and ceases his struggle can he have a sense of the universe as providence, and feel in the touch of all those laws upon his soul not their harshness but their most balm-like mercy. It is too early yet for Alonso and Sebastian and Antonio to hear that Ariel is a minister of providence as well as fate, for providence they would not yet understand, let alone that all the madness and pain now being inflicted upon them is, more than a justice, a mercy to purge them to a better purpose, just as Caliban cannot yet see, and indeed might never, that the logs which it is

his incessant task to carry are in reality but the dark, heavy aspect of what is, if one only thinks to apply the spark, nothing but the lightest, brightest, rarest of fuels.

> Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
> That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open, and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
> I cried to dream again (III.ii.133-41).

Melodious, clear, haunting, it is surely the most curious amazement of this play so full of amazements, that these words do not come forth from Miranda or Ferdinand or from some musing Prospero but from Caliban himself in this last and most memorable instance of the loveliness of the late Shakespearean world being so objective in its reality that even the language of the most benighted or vicious of characters must bow to it in kind. Yet even more than the objectivity of the beauty of the words themselves is the objectivity of the beauty of their content: the presence in the atmosphere of Mytilene and Cymbeline's Britain and Sicilia and Bohemia as well, of the fact of audible harmony, binding each disparate element in that atmosphere together whether it wishes to be bound or not, so that even a Caliban--as did a Cloten before him who set up the musicians to serenade Imogen with the freshness of

"Hark, hark, the lark!" if indeed he did not actually do the singing himself--must recognize and yearn towards the music he hears all about him, not necessarily from any willful sympathy with the sounds but from that involuntary sympathy of his whole person, which is being held together by such a basic harmony of cohesiveness that he can as little deny the power of music as deny the power of breath, for without it he would fragmentize past fixing. Then for such a creature to will himself to reject a melody and an order which his entire being perceives, by encouraging the Stephano and Trinculo whom he encounters to kill Prospero who stands at the center of that order and maintains it safe from encroaching dissonance, is not only as heinous an act as can be imagined--because the conspirator knows exactly what he is doing, even as Leontes knew who could see the oracle-truth as plainly as this bastard can hear the music--but an act whose very planning etches out for us the essential nature of malice itself: for Caliban in killing that cosmic musician who is his master would be killing the harmony in himself which is his one good instinct, as if evil at its most basic not only were an act of madness but of self-destructive madness, as indeed was so apparent in Othello and Macbeth and Lear and so transparent-clear in Leontes.

Yet even more of a perfection of plot structure than

that Caliban should instinctively join himself to two servants and joy in their enslaving him to their blindness ("Freedom, hey-day! hey-day, freedom! freedom, hey-day, freedom!") in a union which suggests that pure chaos-evil is naturally more drawn towards ignorance than the intelligence of an Antonio or Sebastian, is the way in which Shakespeare juxtaposes the test of this buffoon-trio in the third act ("... or with a log/Batter his [Prospero's] skull," Caliban says to his cohorts) with the log-bearing test of Ferdinand, and in the fourth act juxtaposes the price's and the churls' consequences for the way they each have met their tests, as if he wanted to show, this time visibly after the portrayal of so many Parolles' and Lucios and Clotens, just how stupid, how drunken, how droll evil really is, not in itself, never in itself, but in contrast to a goodness which achieves far more bliss from its right choices than the most boisterous sots can ever achieve from their wrong ones.

"My bounty is as boundless as the sea," Juliet cried to her lover, "My love as deep," and her words found echo in Orsino's description of his passion for Olivia: "But mine is all as hungry as the sea,/And can digest as much"--as always in the Shakespearean interplay between lover and maid it is the girl whose greatest joy in love is to give, and the man whose greatest joy is to take--the joy, the

desire of each sex rooted in its very ocean-surge of blood (II.ii.133-34;II.iv.102-03). Then when we hear Miranda during the Act III log-test speak the simple words she does speak in answer to Ferdinand's question of why she sheds her tears of joy at hearing him declare his ardor ("At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer/What I desire to give; and much less take/What I shall die to want") we see at last the transparent thought which lay behind Juliet's dark blush of imagery even to the clearest etching out of just how much eagerness of hunger is behind a woman's giving, just as in Ferdinand's "Hear my soul speak:/ The very instant that I saw you, did/My heart fly to your service" (III.i.63-65) we hear at last in the male forthright and child-like that desire to bountifully give which was beneath all his crested desire to devour so emphasized in to very many plays--as if beneath the female and the male, with all the apparent differences between them, one indeed living to give, the other indeed living to take, there flows such a common sea of humanity that now, as the two stand together, all talk of the distinctiveness of giving and taking becomes beside the point, as the quality of one being flows into the other, as the quality of the other being flows back into the first, till the very concept of which is Ferdinand, which is Miranda, dissolves before the single configuration (which indeed the inner

rhymes of their names implied from the first) of Ferdinand-and-Miranda, Ferdinand-and-Miranda, as beautiful and as eternal a sound when taken together as the sound of running water.

The sight of the two lovers standing together as one, in fact, opens up more than just a vision of humanity as a shining whole which somehow in most cases has painfully fragmented and fragmented till love heals the disparity, as in the breaking and reunion between lover and mistress or brother and brother or friend and friend or father and daughter or cosmos and creatures of earth; it opens up a vision into the very language the lovers speak, and indeed the language that all the Shakespearean players have spoken from the beginning of their author's earliest works. "For several virtues/Have I lik'd several women; never any/ With so full soul, but some defect in her/Did quarrel with the noblest grace she ow'd,/And put it to the foil," Ferdinand says in his declaration of adoration, his words confronting us with that commonest verbal device of any Shakespearean drama--the pun: does the young man mean that some defect in his past ladies set off their graces, as a jeweller's foil would, or rather put those graces to the death, as a fencer's foil would? There is here, as always, something in the inner workings of the pun which makes even the mildest example of this form, let alone the most

outrageous, perpetually delightful to an audience, and in these final dramas more than even in any earlier, Shakespeare pushes the back out of the form to light up the nature of its magic to stay: for the pun in this playwright's hands seems to be a very key to the nature of the universe so clearly revealed in the configuration of Ferdinand-and-Miranda. In one simple everyday word--here "foil"--we can see a sharp disparity of meanings (even to the dark dialect suggestion of "foul") existing each apart from one another, not necessarily opposite, not necessarily complementary, yet somehow co-existing in origin at one common point, one wholeness, one truth, as if Shakespeare in his frequent usage of this miraculous verbal device were drawn to it more and more clearly by his increasingly seeing in it a reflection, small-scaled but accurate, of the diversity-in-unity which the cosmos itself is. "... And much less take/What I shall die to want," Miranda says, as the fact that "die" in the English Renaissance may mean not only the act of perishing but the act of sexual surrender holds the two eternal facets of love and death suspended in one word whose mystery encompasses both. And--to take a page out of the book of the Fool in Lear who in his "Merlin"-speech jumped far ahead of his subject by a leap of chronology--one feels irresistibly tempted to view the changes in the English language after Shakespeare,

which washed over his works like a tide, deepening puns already there with new meanings, mossing puns as etched as his "to die," creating puns where none were there before (most delightfully in adding the meaning "to desire" to Miranda's "to want" or "to lack," most beautifully in adding the meaning of a slow, crusty tortoise to the dove-like sadness of Paulina's final "I, an old turtle,/ Will wing me to some wither'd bough, and there/My mate, that's never to be found again,/Lament till I am lost"), as nothing more nor less than sea-changes, ever deepening, ever enriching the words and phrases of this one poet who by his puns illuminated so much of the mystery of the universe in trick after trick of speech that the universe itself could scarcely wait till he was dead to begin to play its own happy tricks upon him.

> Full fathom five thy father lies;
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes:
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.
> Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
>
> Burthen: Ding-dong.
>
> Hark! now I hear them,--Ding-dong, bell--

So sang Ariel in the first act of this drama in which every level of creation, from Caliban to Stephano to the highest sprites and deities give voice to the harmonies which string the air like golden wire about them. But in

listening to his song here and his later "Where the bee sucks, there suck I:/In a cow-slip's bell I lie," a difference between the most beautiful songs of the four last plays and the most beautiful songs of Athens and Arden and Illyria unfurls bright in the atmosphere. There was scarcely any of the loveliest of the melodies of earlier lyric dramas which did not in it carry the melancholy note of the sadness of change which, like a dark and dusky foil, made its graces more luminous, from the long-legg'd weaving spiders of a moonlit midsummer's night, to the winter and rough weather setting off the springtime green of the greenwood tree, to the "'tis not hereafter" of dissolution making tenderer the sounds of present mirth and present laughter, to the most beautiful evocation of love which ever made more poignant the brevity of a twelfth night: "Come away, come away, death,/And in sad cypress let me be laid;/Fly away, fly away, breath;/ I am slain by a fair cruel maid." But here in the last plays, when such reminders of doom occur at all--as indeed they usually do not, from the radiance of "Hark, hark, the lark!" to the undimmed merriment of Autolycus' "When daffodils begin to peer" and his "merrily hent the stile-a" to Ariel's own bees and cowslips, as the author everywhere creates his new songs in the same way as he creates his new young heros and heroines: with no dark foils at all

but only in brightness illuminating brightness--they occur not in sadness at change but with the note of joy in accepting change as part of the marvel of life: as all the winter and sootiness in the "heat o' the sun" is accepted in a blink and passed beyond, and as Autolycus when he does mention death refuses all melancholy for a blithe "But shall I mourn for that, my dear?" and as Ariel does imply decay of beauty but only in greater terms of something brighter, richer and stronger than any sea-decay and far more worthy of emphasis--each song in the last plays a song of bravery, of not being sad though there is always around the singers every reason to be sad, each singer shrugging aside that reason in a trice (and the author himself shrugging aside in a trice his precious ability to be as darkly haunting as only the creator of "sad cypress" can be) for the greater achievement of praising the beauty of the sunlight in sunlight's own terms. Any poet worth his muse can deal worthily with beauty that must die, for the very proximity of the death makes the beauty seem more precious; but when death's shadows have been so well seen in themselves for the horror that they are, that it would be a mockery to use them any longer as a dusky part of loveliness (as indeed Prospero does not, when he describes Ferdinand at first entrance as "something stain'd/With grief, that's beauty's canker"), when loveliness is dealt with in the

light of its own radiances alone and conveyed in words even more worthily written than before, we are no longer faced with poetry as illusion but poetry as the clearest of realities, and with the presence of an artist no longer darkly courting beauty but married to it.

"Fair encounter/Of two most rare affections!" said Prospero as he looked on at an invisible distance at the declaration scene between Ferdinand and Miranda, as one who has foreseen such a scene in his hopes all along. "Heavens rain grace/On that which breeds between 'em!" Now, at the beginning of Act IV as the betrothed couple stand before him, that grace comes. Indeed the very presence and mention of grace is one of the shining constants of the four last plays, more and more spoken of in the motion of rain--most memorably in Hermione's first words after moving from a statue and beholding her daughter: "You gods, look down,/And from your sacred vials pour your graces/Upon my daughter's head," as even here she does not cry, but now would kindly give the heavens leave to do so, if they so wish--and always spoken of at the most luminous points of the drama, as when Marina turns the brothel-bawd's money-talk from darkness to light by saying of the gold-bearing Lysimachus, "What he will do graciously, I will thankfully receive," or when Posthumus initially turns Iachimo's innuendos about Imogen's being a gift of

the gods to purest affirmation in his "Which, by their graces, I will keep" (IV.vi.59-60;I.v.90). Over and over again is the word intermingled with the presence of the gods and of beauty and harmony until at last we begin to see just what this grace is which is everywhere referred to but nowhere defined: simply that point of contact between the harmony, the beauty of the universe and the harmony within men--that phenomenon which makes the human not just parallel to the cosmic but touching it, so that, for example, a Marina can have within her the "sweet harmony,/And other chosen attractions" which an onlooker mentions in Pericles' awakening scene, and a Perdita can dance like a wave o' the sea, because in each girl's every motion she is touched by the music of the heavens or the quickness of the spray--a touch which is perfectly captured in the image of some essence pouring from heaven, even as rain itself is the light, transparent touch of the sky upon the mortals below, not reshaping them nor lifting them up to the divine but simply penetrating them with the shower of its gentle contact, and awakening within them, if they choose to accept it as an awakening and not a persecution or an indifference, a feeling of oneness with the very harmony of the ceiling of creation. "There she shook/ The holy water from her heavenly eyes,/And clamour moisten'd," said a Gentleman of Cordelia's grief for her

father (IV.iii.30-32), and indeed only when Lear feels these drops upon his face as holy ("Be your tears wet? yes, faith") is the harmony within himself restored as it never could have been by all the Heath-torrents he so willfully fought. Then when we see Prospero presenting Ferdinand and Miranda with the betrothal gift of a pageant of the gods, and behold the first goddess to come as Iris, presaging "the queen o' the sky/Whose wat'ry arch and messenger am I" (IV.i.70-71), we cannot but see too the graces which his beneficent father promised to rain down upon them, as through Iris the couple is everywhere touched with the harmony and the beauty that Juno and Ceres motion out before them, the droplets of the multihued rainbow a tenuous bridge between the mortal and the cosmic:

> Juno: Honour, riches, marriage-blessing,
> Long continuance, and increasing,
> Hourly joys be still upon you!
> Juno sings her blessings on you.
>
> Ceres: Earth's increase, foison plenty,
> Barns and garners never empty;
> Vines with clust'ring bunches growing;
> Plants with goodly burthen bowing;
> Spring come to you at the farthest
> In the very end of harvest!
> Scarcity and want shall shun you;
> Ceres' blessing so is on you.

Here at last, after undergoing log-essentialized and intensified all the pain of suffering for love and for marriage, does the young man see, long after he trusts to

accept that suffering without knowing the reason, what that suffering was for. "All thy vexations/Were but my trials of thy love," Prospero tells him before the songs, "and thou/Hast strangely stood the test." But in the songs themselves he hears just what it is in marriage that he has had to be made so worthy of: not the mere coupling of man and woman by their own desires alone but their coupling in harmony with the universe, so that there is nothing in that coupling which is not chaste because there is nothing in the coupling which is not as natural as "Earth's increase, foison plenty"; and so audible is the harmony of this universe in the songs of the goddesses as they ring out brightness upon brightness, that Ferdinand and Miranda have but to hear it to take unto themselves wide awake all the warmth and fertility of a lifetime of wedded love which the lovers at the end of the midsummer's night of Athens could only apprehend half-visibly in their dreams, even as the two can actually see each other fall in love at first sight rather than just inwardly sense it.

Then it is somehow especially appropriate that this the last instance of the backdrops of the universe being given voice by the playwright--from Diana to Jupiter to Apollo--be not the voice of sea-like life-or-death or the voice of royalty or even the voice of truth but rather the voice (or voices, if one would hear Juno and Ceres apart

as two facets of the same thing) of the backdrop to life of love itself, chaste and fecund: that most golden mystery of the cosmos by which mortals glow more and more burnishedly the more they mirror it perfectly; or rather that one mystery of life so ruddy in its wonder that, as we look at the spirits of Juno and Ceres, it seems more that the cosmos itself is mirroring the goldenness of man. Yet no matter which way the parallel between cosmos and creatures works, the higher touching the lower or the lower touching the higher, it is the point of contact of the touch that is the common marvel of both, as that point is here made visible by the art of Prospero. And as we see his presence hovering over Ferdinand and Miranda, leading them to the sight of Ceres and Juno as much as he brings Juno and Ceres to them, it seems no accident that Shakespeare made this radiant figure a duke and not a king--so that the man may be addressed over and over again by the audience, till the sound of the words becomes as dulcet as heavenly music, as "Your grace."

One of the most precious marks of the bravery of the four last plays is how so much of these dramas seems to have sprung into existence from the playwright's not blotting out of his memory several of the most excruciating passages of Lear because they were too painful to be borne--as in the Heath-intensity of good or evil or anguish or

madness at the quick of the human soul, or the terror of a cosmos revealed lightning-visible, or the million vulnerabilities everywhere present in the mystery of the father-daughter relationship--but rather building his final dramas directly out of these passages with a courage of acceptance which subsumes all their still-as-intense pain under a greater, omni-faceted trust. Of those painful passages in Lear, perhaps the most unbearable to be admitted to constant scrutiny was the French suitor's phrase "trice of time" which took awful root on the Heath in character- and cosmos-shock-changes of such instantaneousness that the whole agony of a long life of continuous experience seemed concentrated into one moment of pure pain--the fact that a life could be so concentrated seeming much too fearful to contemplate for long, as if all that mortal existence was was a trice of time, all the grandeur and the horror of a Lear coalescing into a moment and, in a moment, over.
It was this trice-of-time consciousness which was made by Shakespeare the very fabric of his final plays, himself paring away all opaque and cumbrous disguises of motivation to get to the Gower-like fork of motivation beneath, seen in a second, understood in a second; doing away with all the trappings of tragic deliberation to get to that one instant of choice (Do I obey Simonides as king or not? Do I hate my husband Posthumus or not? Do I believe Apollo's

oracle or not?) which is the fork of all tragedy or trust, and following it with another moment and another and another--each trice making human life seem briefer and briefer as seen against the eternity of the watching universe. Yet the glory of the spirit of this essentializing vision is, from its first inception in Pericles, that all the brevity of human existence, whether seen in Pericles' losing his wife or Cymbeline's gaining his daughter or Leontes' losing his son, is seen by the playwright as no stark mockery devised by an immortal universe to the torment of its pitifully mortal inhabitants but rather as the most precious uniqueness a human being has: that a creature so noble and so base, so meek and so proud, so capable of storming heaven itself to make the very gods awake and hearken, lives a span of time no longer than that, and then vanishes as if he were a dream too marvelous to have been entirely real:

> These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air,

says Prospero to Ferdinand and Miranda as in his words we hear all the infinite echo of the truth seen so clearly in tragedy and accepted so freely beyond: that the world is a stage, a drama, a play whose eternal authors here, as in Pericles and Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale, can be seen mirrored in the person of the ruler, a person so ultimately providential above all his dark inscrutability that we can

but listen to his phrases and rest in them:

> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself .. --

as with each new phrase he echoes not only the cosmic authors of earthly creation, but the author of his own dramatic creation as well, whose world for so long was a Globe which, at the time of Prospero's speaking in the year 1611 or 1613, had already proven too baseless to support any more of life--

> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind,

the very question of whether "rack" carries the note of "cloud" or "pain" seeming here irrelevant before the wholeness of the fact of the magic of its dissolution. And if there is a paradox in Prospero's fatherly stage-creation of those spirit-gods of Juno and Ceres who were his own parents, that paradox is not paradox but only the final mirroring of a universe where sometimes the creators, be they Ceres or Juno or Jupiter or a whole Heath-Tempest, act so madly that they must be forgiven as if they were children, by the creatures whom they themselves fathered and tormented, even as Lear takes on the role of created child in asking Cordelia to absolve him and even as, in the final act of this play, Alonso will say to Ferdinand "But, O, how oddly it will sound that I/Must ask my child forgiveness!"

No wonder it is, then, but only magnanimity that Prospero frees his spirit-parents from himself at the same time that he frees his daughter from himself in marriage: for he _is_ the king-point of contact between heaven and earth, and yet is so utterly meek that he can let heaven go back to heaven and earth go back to earth, leaving himself with nothing at all but only with the generosity of his action--in a cosmos where generosity is everything.

Nothing more perfectly conveys Shakespeare's special genius for making even scene-structure mirror the thought and emotion of his drama than does the falling of the fourth act into two halves--the first of which is that bestowal upon Ferdinand and Miranda of the spirit-pageant of Juno and Ceres and the subsequent dance of "certain nymphs and reapers" which displays everywhere Prospero's mercy and providence; the second of which is Prospero's dealing with Caliban and Trinculo and Stephano by a spirit-pageant of a quite different sort: shapes and shadows of dogs and hounds which, goaded by Prospero and Ariel, drive the would-be murderers tormented off stage. The fact that Ferdinand and Caliban (and here again, strangely, the names seem almost to rhyme, both log-men as they are and both tested by Prospero) are each in this act rewarded or punished for their acceptance or rebellion, is not nearly as important as the parallel of the _way_ in which each of them is dealt with by

Prospero: for the spirits which assume the shape of deities for the young man are the same spirits which assume the shape of monsters to the bastard (just as Ariel could change from nymph to harpy), as if the same laws of the universe are indeed being unleashed upon both of them, though to one it does seem all mercy and providence and to the other it seems all fatal justice. "I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun,/ And wish the estate o' the world were now undone!" said Macbeth in a couplet which, more than being perhaps the most profound statement in all the tragedies of the sheer exhaustion of struggling against the strength of a tireless cosmos, is the barest undertone of a reminder that the sun Macbeth sees as a dull and wall-eyed orb is the same sun which Duncan saw as golden, just as the environment of Scotland for the one man <u>is</u> the meaningless chaos of a duns-inane while for the other Scotland is a sweet and pleasant seat (V.v. 49-50). Nothing is more clear, in the sight of Caliban and his fellow rogues' being chased by the hounds, than the fact that the spirit-hoard engulfing them is their own masque of the gods, their own dance of nymphs and reapers. Nor does it matter whether Prospero's spirit-minions now objectively have the shape of demons and his own voice the sound and shape of fate, or whether the conspirators from the distorted malice of the way they look at the world only think that the spirits are demons and Prospero's voice the

voice of the awful justice they fear (as indeed the magician's cries to the hounds seem not so much the hounds' objective names as the way in which the men see the hounds and the man who sets them on: "Fury, Fury! there, Tyrant, there! hark, hark")--the point is still the same: that at the hands of the same man administering the same kind of test, Ferdinand's choice of acceptance earns him the entertainment of a prince, irregardless of his birth; and Caliban's choice of rejection and rebellion earns him, irregardless of birth, the entertainment of a slave. And if the very stage-directions for the Ferdinand-spirits differ from the Caliban-spirits--"enter <u>certain</u> reapers" as opposed to "enter <u>divers</u> spirits in the shape of dogs and hounds"--the difference only seems to stem from the aura of providential selectiveness which glows around the concept of "certain" ("not these, but these"--a selectiveness which seems far more wonderful in this Prospero-world of "certain fathoms in the earth" where the selecting is everywhere tempered by this human father, than in the Oberon-world of Athens where the dark-fairy father there used the word in its harsher sense of "fixed, exact, rigid": "and certain stars shot madly from their spheres ..."; "a certain aim he took ..."), as opposed to the haphazard chaos of "divers": as if even the smallest adjectives describing the entertainments of these two so-different suitors of

Miranda each reflected the way the two men saw their world.

And if there are sly whispers and undertones and mockeries of the tragedies playing all around the conspirators in this and every one of their scenes (certainly the funniest being Stephano's priceless one-line incarnadine mimic of Macbeth: "Give me thy hand. I do begin to have bloody thoughts"), that is only because the playwright now sees how absurd the chaos of a tragic choice can be, in a universe where truth, like Prospero himself, is the only standard at the center of a world of illusion and where, accordingly, when men try to set up their own standard for themselves (as Caliban in Act II sets up Stephano as his king: "I will kiss thy foot: I prithee, be my god"), the result can only come out parody:

> Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves;
> And ye that on the sands with printless foot
> Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
> When he comes back; you demi-puppets that
> By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,
> Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose pastime
> Is to make midnight mushrooms, that rejoice
> To hear the solemn curfew; by whose aid--
> Weak masters though ye be--I have bedimm'd
> The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
> Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
> The pine and cedar: graves at my command
> Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth
> By my so potent art (V.i.33-50),

word upon word, phrase upon phrase flashing forth from the

glistering Prospero as, at the opening of Act V, he sets all the bright and dazzling elements of his kaleidoscope-world dancing atremble before he begins to draw them all towards himself in a final pattern, as jewels are scattered before they are set in place. Splendor after splendor we now witness unfold more and more blindingly about the figure of this one man who, by right of father and ruler and physician and magician and musician, stands at the direct center of his universe, exercising all the power over that universe that a mortal can ever feel run through his fingers like live sunbeams. Here at last is the ultimate actualized human being at the peak of his achievement, so far beyond even Lear in that old monarch's opening scene that one can only surmise that if Lear then were put in Prospero's place now, with all the pride-in-kingship the old man had, he would go so mad from the glory of his position that not all the Heaths or Cordelias in creation could ever bring him back.

Yet it is not in the glisterings of Prospero that the man's real glory as a character lies nor in any of his cosmic dimensions, but rather in the fact of the painful humanness beneath all his dealings in infinitude: for at every point in this drama, like Pericles and indeed like every other character in the last plays, he is faced with an opportunity for choice--pride or meekness, tragedy or

trust, rejection or acceptance--and at every point he makes the magnanimous choice, with what difficulty one can only imagine in a world where even so total a monarch as Cymbeline or Leontes could succumb, if he let himself go for a second, to the intoxicating lure of willfulness. At every point in the drama Prospero can make the same choice as Lear, and at every point he does not: he can destroy his enemies in a rage-tempest and yet does not; he can test Ferdinand to the point of destruction, yet draws back mild the moment the young man's mettle is proved; he can bind his daughter to love him alone for the rest of his life and yet not only frees her to love Ferdinand but brings Ferdinand to her for no other reason than for her freedom, just as he can bind Ariel to himself for the rest of his life as some perpetual reminder of his own cosmic authority, yet promises throughout the play to free the sprite--the very tone of the teasing with which the freeing is always mentioned reminding us constantly of Prospero's constant temptation to go back on his promise, as indeed all of Prospero's teasing of Ferdinand and Miranda and Gonzalo and Alonso and everyone else in the play continually reminds us in the faintest of faint undertones just how easy it would be for this most gifted of men to turn all of his teasing of his less gifted fellows to the cruellest mockery. All these tragic choices, all these temptations

to be the tyrant which he, more than any other mortal player imaginable, certainly has the power to be (even to his playing in his first dialogue with Miranda with the hints of being another Leontes if he choose to: Miranda: "Sir, are you not my father?" Prospero: "Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and/She said thou wast my daughter"), he puts aside after who knows how much inner struggle, in moment after moment of mildness, each moment as dramatic in its decision as any choice-for-terror would be and perhaps as surprising to Prospero himself when it does come as it is to us.

Then when we see Prospero standing amidst the lightning flashes of his "ye elves of hills" we are seeing a man so far fulfilled in his humanity, who has fought so far beyond the last temptations of every flaw of human nature from jealousy to ambition to even highest human pride (himself following the terror of his "At this hour/Lie at my mercy all mine enemies" with his dispersing of that terror by a greater magnanimity: "Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,/Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury/Do I take part") that there is but one temptation left, the last temptation remaining to a man who is, as he stands, everything wisest a human being can be: the temptation of superhuman pride--does absolutely fulfilled man, total ruler, total father, (and, perhaps of sharpest interest to a

Shakespeare) total artist, strive to reject the husk of his manhood and become a god? This, after all, has been Prospero's temptation from the beginning and, in fact, has been the one wrinkle in his character all along in his partial yielding to its lure: for, if we remember, the reason he was expelled from Milan in the first place was that, in his own words to Miranda, "my state grew stranger, being transported/And rapt in secret studies" and even now on his island he can still revel in his love for "mine own library with volumes that/I prize above my dukedom," himself still not realizing even in Act I that his kingdom is composed of human lives even the basest of which should be more important to him than his highest book. Easier and easier for him is it to be more and more rapt in those books which seem almost to be able to make him divine even to that most dizzying pinnacle on which he now stands, from which he <u>is</u> able to command graves to "wake their sleepers, ope, and let 'em forth." Yet all the divine dizziness, whirling faster and faster around him from the thirty-third line of his scene through the fiftieth, he catches up short midway through the fiftieth in one phrase which etches out his choice in letters more simple than a child's first alphabet:

> But this rough magic
> I here abjure.

"Weak masters though ye be," said Prospero of those spirit-forces of the universe which were such Heath-hard masters to a Lear but who grew milder and milder the meeker their subject treated his own subjects; and now that Prospero has decided to not just treat his subjects mildly--not only the Ariel-spirits of his magic arts but his Miranda and Gonzalo and Alonso and Antonio as well--but magnanimously to free them completely, one can only imagine that the high cosmos itself at the moment of Prospero's "I here abjure" becomes, less than a weak master, no master at all to him, but rather takes its last hands off him to let him be as free, as undetermined a creature as whatever angel or demi-deity he ever might have coveted to become.

There comes a moment midway through the glittering steel framework of Coriolanus when the hero, who is in his soldier's way the most noble, most powerful, most god-like man to stand at the center of his world and yet whose very integrity of perfection seems itself the coldest of inhuman flaws, is described by a First Officer in words which pin-point the nature of that flaw and of that white-hot coldness exactly: "He seeks their [the common people's] hate with greater devotion than they can render it him, and leaves nothing undone that may fully discover him their opposite" (II.ii.20-23); in other words, this best of all men hates the base more than even he loves the good--and this one

flaw alone is enough to destroy him to the last unbending shard. But here in the last scene of Shakespeare's four last plays, though we have before us the noblest, most powerful , most god-like man ever created by playwright, and though that man is surrounded by Antonios and Sebastians and Stephanos and Trinculos more bad and more base than those tribunes and commoners Shakespeare was so careful to make so malevolent and chaotic in Coriolanus, we feel no coldness at all in Prospero's treatment of these men who are by their own chosen actions so far beneath his concern, nor no hate at all, but only smile upon smile radiating like warmth from him upon them, simply because they are men and brothers to him who now feels himself so mortal. He cannot hate but only can forgive, solemnly for those men who were malevolent ("I do forgive thee,/Unnatural though thou art"), winkingly for those men so chaotic that forgiveness is etched out only in the boisterous negative of the fact that he does not destroy but only tweaks them ("O touch me not;-- I am not Stephano, but a cramp"). Nor does anything mark the freedom visible in the very air of this scene and at the very core of Prospero, more than the truth-clear phenomenon which follows these forgivenesses: so free are these men in their world after Prospero has released them all from their madness or cramps or whatever other spiritual or physical distortions they had willed their way into,

that no pressure is brought upon them to repent in the slightest--Prospero accepting them all as they are, from the truly repentant Alonso to the possibly not-repentant-at-all Sebastian and Antonio, to the who-knows-what state of contrition of Stephano and Trinculo. "Please you, draw near," are the last words he speaks in the scene, and the sunlit wonder of the words, spoken by this man so much greater in his high integrity than even Coriolanus, is that they exclude no one.

No accident is it at all but only more perfection that the last of the resurrections Shakespeare treats of in his plays--that of Ferdinand whom Alonso his father thought drowned, and that of Miranda of whom Prospero beautifully says to the grieving parent, "Supportable/To make the dear loss, have I means much weaker/That you may call to comfort you, for I/Have lost my daughter"--is presided over by that physician-magician Prospero who is so much more the center of the universe than was any Friar Francis or Helena's father or Duke of Vienna or Doctor to Lear or Cerimon or Cornelius or even Paulina: as if Shakespeare were making this last resurrection issue directly and perfectly naturally from that very quick of the cosmos which issues all shocks of life-or-death. "A most high miracle!" exclaims Sebastian, and his own subjective unworthiness only makes the beauty of his words shine more objective

and more true, as we see Prospero "discover Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess"--in its way as perfect an essentialization of the moves and counter-movements of courtship as was log-carrying of the pains of an inscrutable trial.

"A most high miracle": the words reverberate like luminous echoes, like cascades of truth over this whole last act of the drama in which, if we but notice, as indeed Sebastian's words make us notice and remember, all the players, save Prospero at the center, are resurrected: not just Ferdinand and Miranda whom Alonso thought dead, but Alonso and Gonzalo and Sebastian and Antonio and the whole company of counsellors whom Ferdinand thought dead, and the party of Trinculo-buffoons whom the counsellors thought dead, and finally the widest commonest most variegated bulk of humanity--the entire crew of the wrecked ship down to the last boatswain--whom all the court members and hangers-on thought dead. It is as if, in fact, Shakespeare were washing the whole stage with new birth to remind us of that rueful-gentle truth which he increasingly brought out at the resurrections of Hero and Helena and Julietta's Claudio and Cordelia and Thaisa and Marina and Imogen and Perdita and, most of all, Hermione: what a sad peculiarity of the human race it is, that man does not see the marvel of those fellow-creatures who are around him every day, till one of them, thought dead, is brought back to life not

so very different than before, only then to be seen as something special and wonderful and worthy of love. Then if this stageful of reborn people in The Tempest does seem to the spectators like a "brave new world," those spectators may only wonder later, though now they all rejoice, just why it takes a most high miracle, and all the pain which came before the most high miracle, to make them all notice as brave and new something not so very changed, Ferdinand for Ferdinand, Alonso for Alonso, Antonio for Antonio, Trinculo for Trinculo, from when they saw it first. "'Tis new to you," says Prospero to Miranda; and his words only point up the more the fact that this world is not new at all, but has been there in its goods and evils, nobilities and absurdities, all along. And the unspeakable part of his words is that, though he contradicts Miranda's statement that this world is new, he does not ever contradict her discover, and so-late our own, that this world is brave.

Yet the final magnificence of the spectacle of the magnanimity of acceptance which is the final act of this final play comes with the sight of the treatment of the two players at the furthest remove apart from one another in the drama: one hovering near Prospero at the center of this world, now here, now there, now a flame, now a bird, the other crawling around the muck of the peripheries. If the greatness of the portrayal of Caliban is that, though the

creature is half-human half-dregs ("This demi-devil;--For he's a bastard one," Prospero hurls at him in judgment), Shakespeare constantly emphasises the humanness--then the absolute glory of the portrayal of Ariel is that, though the creature is quite literally air and fire and nothing but air and fire, Shakespeare everywhere brings out how much Ariel yearns towards the human, plays with it, teases with it, hovers near it just a liitle bit longer than all his skyward instincts are forced to hover, so that when we see him just after the start of the final scene ask his master for mercy for the conspirators--

> Ariel: Your charm so strongly works 'em,
> That if you now beheld them, your affections
> Would become tender.
>
> Prospero: Dost thou think so, spirit?
>
> Ariel: Mine would, sir, were I human--

it is as if the highest rarest element of cosmic laughter were dancing atop the whole splendid, sorry spectacle of human existence, and crying a little because it cannot quite participate.

Then the sight of Prospero dealing with Caliban and Ariel at the end of the final act seems like man himself dealing with the basest and highest parts of his own nature, so touched by the human seem the two creatures as they are drawn to the center to meet him. And the marvel that emerges when he does deal with them is perhaps the

touchstone to all the magnanimities which laugh through the atmosphere of this scene and this play and indeed all the last plays. For we cannot see Prospero begin his harsh motion to prepare Caliban for freedom (which the bastard will probably receive whenever he learns what freedom is, as indeed he is beginning to learn already: "What a thrice-double ass/Was I, to take this drunkard for a god,/And worship this dull fool!") without thinking that as much as Prospero has helped and is helping this creature, this creature has helped <u>him</u> too, as we hear in Prospero's words now "This thing of darkness I/Acknowledge mine" an echo of his words to Miranda in the first act where he acknowledged that even a Caliban is of some benefit to the universe, just as every log can one day, if not repudiated but assisted, be made flame: "We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,/Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices/ That profit us"; nor can we see Prospero begin and complete his gentle motion to free Ariel who knows what freedom is to the last wisp of ether, without seeing how, more even than his master is now helping him, he has helped his master, not so much by this trick or that transformation, but by his light meek reminders to his master of the human magic of mercy which is Prospero's all along if only the man does not forget it (as indeed he does not, when he answers Ariel's "Mine would, sir, were I human," with a meditative

"And mine shall"), just as Miranda by her tender cries to her father during the trial of Ferdinand ("Pity move my father.... Sir, have mercy") perhaps tempered him in a way he would otherwise have forgotten: a work of art or nature teaching its creator more than even its creator has taught it.

Then when we see Prospero about to release or actually releasing the lowest elements of humanity as well as the highest from his bondage--"My Ariel, chick,/That is thy charge: then to the elements/Be free, and fare thou well!"--his very releasing of them only seems to make the two yearn for him the more, as if in his willingness to give up both, he has retained both, and stands neither as a muck-tormenting tyrant nor an angelic demi-god, but simply as man: that one being in creation who, if he can but accept his creation as it is and not as he would re-make it, can stand with his feet on the ground and his head among the stars, with all the music of both coursing through him as one. And if, after seeing the magic of this double-magnanimity conveyed in all the four last plays--whereby the more one gives away, the more one receives from the beneficiary, whether the two be father and daughter or creator and creation, or man and his servants or man and his rarest masters--we still do not understand quite how the phenomenon works or indeed why it should exist in the first place, let alone

how a playwright could make it glister and shine in so many different ways in so many different colors to so many different musics, we would be missing the point of all four plays together if we did not accept the marvel of the phenomenon on the faith of our delight in it alone, and not seek to torture that phenomenon into some causality which will make it conform to a logic so mechanical that no Shakespeare but only any hack would have been needed to make it all work. Anyone who assiduously tries to analyze magic into reason deserves his results.

> Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
> And what strength I have's mine own,
> Which is most faint,

Prospero begins, as in couplets as child-like as those spoken by the Gower-Chorus to introduce us to the world of the final vision, this most kindly of all Choruses leads us gently out of it, starting from the nothing-point of his giving up of Caliban, Ariel, eternality, everything which is of the gift of art:

> now, 'tis true
> I must be here confin'd by you,
> Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
> Since I have my dukedom got,
> And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell
> In this bare island by your spell,

meekly asking his audience to send him back to his Italian homeland--which he would have before escaped from as from fallible humanity itself into the angelic order of his books, and in the escaping have been crushed by the cosmos

for trying to re-make his own nature higher than the gods created it--because he wants to rejoin himself to that human race whose members he even now begs to help him:

> But release me from my bands
> With the help of your good hands:
> Gentle breath of yours my sails
> Must fill,

asking his audience not just for their applause but for their laughter to hearten him, who has from the moment of choosing to accept his fellow creatures rather than divorce himself above them, passed beyond the last remembered agony of tragedy into a world where laughter <u>is</u> breath:

> or else my project fails,
> Which was to please,

as if all the four last plays and all the plays before them and indeed all of Shakespeare's poetry together were all united by this one common purpose, until they seem a single shining uni-verse conceived in one thought and projected in one instant by one father-creator who even now would give up--and indeed has just given up, though the giving is more getting--all his infallible genius if that genius would separate him from us:

> Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,

for, if we remember, the action of <u>The Tempest</u> is set in the span of hours from a little after midday to six in the evening ("The time 'twixt six and now/Must by us both be spent most preciously," said Prospero to Ariel in

Act I), and the artist's giving up of his genius has in it nothing of a bravura gesture but only that meekness of knowledgde that all talents <u>are</u> only gifts which must be given back, a knowledge filtering through the play as naturally as the full and slanting shadows of a golden afternoon:

> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,
> Which pierces so, that it assaults
> Mercy itself, and frees all faults,

just as Lear himself so pierced the very heavens with his pleadings that they opened unto a world which he still had too much dross of despair in his eyes to clearly see.

Then comes the final couplet which, as it unfolds simple and plain, seems not a couplet at all but only the most child-like repetition of that double-magnanimity which not only forms the world of the final vision but which now extends out to include the spectators into that world by the common human bond which has linked them to it all along: asking the spectators to release the artist from the bondage of his perfection so that he may join them, and asking those spectators to effect his release as they themselves would want to be released from the bondage of their own imperfections:

> As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
> Let your indulgence set me free.

And among the gold in the sunset and the gold in his child-mildness and the gold in the music of the harmony which plays round his words, it is somehow only natural that the Rule upon which Shakespeare poises the whole miracle of the four last plays is golden, after all.

AFTERWORD

To read the four final plays of Shakespeare and then to come to the last one and be told, "Here it ends, here it is cut off," is to come face to face not with a sense of death or of decay but rather with a sense of a voice saying, "Now I am waked up, now I am nothing but awake."

Then if the playwright stops, that is simply because now even the brightest, quickest, plainest, livest words are grown to sleepy to follow him, for how could he continue if continuing meant leaving behind those words which are the voices of his world. Only natural it is that he should stay with them and sleep too, till they one day have strength enough to wake.

VITA

Richard Halperin was born in Chicago, Illinois, on July 2, 1943. He received his elementary and secondary education in Chicago and New York. Since 1956 he has lived in New York City. He received his B.A. degree in English Literature from Manhattan College in 1965, and his M.A. degree in English Literature from Hunter College in 1967.