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INVERSION OF COMMON SENSE:  
THE DELUSIONS OF  
NAVARRE, HOTSPUR, SHYLOCK, MALVOLIO, ANGELO  
AND TIMON

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A B S T R A C T

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INVERSION OF COMMON SENSE:

THE DELUSIONS OF  
NAVARRE, HOTSPUR, SHYLOCK, MALVOLIO, ANGELO  
AND TIMON

Many a Shakespearean character pursues with unmitigated passion and rigor an idea which so dominates the mind that the intelligence fails to keep pace with the mobility of things. Such parochial thinking brings forth the tendency to shape things in accordance with one's fixed idea, to recreate reality in one's own image, instead of shaping one's ideas according to things. It leads to the inversion of common sense and, in all likelihood, to insanity.

By feverishly following a single and dominant notion --a conception of glory and honor, stern morality and absolute virtue, inexorable justice and unblemished goodness--Navarre, Hotspur, Shylock, Malvolio, Angelo,

and Timon fail to know themselves and to be alert to their social surroundings. They fail, as well, to heed reality. Consequently, they become rigid, absentminded and unsociable, qualities in which the essence of the ludicrous is inherent.

Unsociability, in particular, breeds vicious individualism, isolation, and unnaturalness. And rigidity, which is entwined with unsociability, precludes the exercise of that preeminent Shakespearian virtue, gracefulness, the quality which helps us to metamorphose harsh realities into something endurable, something lyrical, and to get to know what we are.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### COMMON SENSE INVERTED

O madness of discourse,  
That cause sets up with and against thyself,  
(Bi-fold) authority, where reason can revolt  
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason  
Without revolt: this is, and is not Cressid.  
(Troilus and Cressida, V.ii. 142-46)

Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,  
Nothing goes right; we would, and we would not.<sup>1</sup>  
(Measure for Measure, IV.iv. 36-37)

(The dreamer) feels he has not ceased to be  
what he is; yet he has become someone else. He  
is himself, and not himself.<sup>2</sup>

Henri Bergson, "Laughter"

In his essay "Of Repentance" Montaigne refers to the everchanging nature of the world, the incessant flow of consciousness, the contradictory spirit of life, the necessity of adapting to the now, and the need for self-exploration.<sup>3</sup> These crucial points more or less make up the basis of Henri Bergson's essay "Laughter." According to Bergson, the essence of what is laughable lies in our rigidity and unsociability, our automatism, our absent-mindedness. It is inherent in our failure to recognize and accept the essential absurdity of life, the discrepancy

between human purpose and performance, as well as in our immobility.

"The rigid, the ready-made, the mechanical," says Bergson, contrasts sharply with "the supple, the ever-changing and the living."<sup>4</sup> If we are to avoid being ludicrous we should be attentive to life, we should get to know ourselves and be constantly in touch with other members of society. This essay will try to show how those self-deluded characters, Navarre, Hotspur, Shylock, Malvolio, Angelo and Timon, become ridiculous precisely because they lack the attentiveness, the constant alertness to self, to the sense of being, to the reality of experience, to the other members of the human community. It will show that only by dispelling their delusions can we rouse such human beings and their likes from slumber.

Much of what Bergson has to say about the comic in his illuminating and perceptive essay applies to Shakespeare's comedies. His all-embracing views also shed a flood of light on Shakespearean tragedy. I point this out in order to forestall any objections likely to be raised to my using, for the purposes of this essay, different genres--comedy, chronicle history, tragedy; and minor and

major characters--Hotspur, Timon of Athens. Three points should be emphasized in this connection. The first concerns the nature of Timon of Athens. Whether Timon, as it stands, is a proper tragedy is a question that is difficult to resolve. To be sure, the play shares definite thematic concerns with King Lear, Coriolanus, and Antony and Cleopatra, as well as with the other tragedies--the question of appearance and reality, the central figure's absolute idealism and intransigence, the fickleness of fortune, time and mortality, and other themes. But unlike the heroes of the other tragedies, Timon is a weak and ineffectual character, essentially incapable of profound insights into the nature of man, and unfit for ripeness and patience. In his book Anatomy of Criticism Northrop Frye says regarding the play:

Timon of Athens impresses us as more ironic and less heroic than the better known tragedies, not simply because Timon is a more middle-class hero who has to buy what authority he has, but because the feeling that Timon's suicide has somehow failed to make a fully heroic point is very strong. Timon is oddly isolated from the final action, in which the breach between Alcibiades and the Athenians closes up over his head, in striking contrast with the conclusions of most of the other tragedies, where nobody is allowed to steal the show from the central character.<sup>5</sup>



In The Power of Satire Robert C. Elliott expounds the view that Timon of Athens is a tragical satire,<sup>6</sup> a view shared or suggested by other critics and scholars like Cyrus Hoy<sup>7</sup> and Theodore Spencer.<sup>8</sup>

The second point I wish to make concerning the mingling of genres and characters is the interaction of the comic and the tragic. King Lear, for example, approaches the absurd and the grotesque, while any of Shakespeare's last four plays, for instance The Winter's Tale, or an earlier play like Measure for Measure, borders on the tragic. According to Frye, "comedy can contain a potential tragedy within itself."<sup>9</sup> As for tragedy, Frye points out in his essay "The Argument of Comedy," it is "really implicit or uncompleted comedy." Frye also tells us that, "the tragic story has a comic sequel."<sup>10</sup>

This brings us to the third point and back to Henri Bergson. It has to do with the contrarities of life, the element of the incongruous that is fundamental both to comedy and to tragedy. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript Soren Kierkegaard expresses the highly perceptive view that "the comical is present in every stage of

life, for wherever there is life there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction the comical is present."<sup>11</sup> Contradiction is an essential element both in tragedy and comedy; "but the tragic," Kierkegaard points out, "is the suffering contradiction, the comical, the painless contradiction."<sup>12</sup> The tragic and the comic differ "in the relationship between the contradiction and the controlling idea. The comic apprehension evokes the contradiction or makes it manifest by having in mind the way out, which is why the contradiction is painless. The tragic apprehension sees the contradiction and despairs of a way out."<sup>13</sup> Bergson provides a similar insight. He argues that in the eyes of a disinterested spectator life seems absurd. To a person looking upon human actions from an impartial perspective "many a drama will turn into a comedy."<sup>14</sup> As for the Kierkegaardian notion concerning the despair of tragedy and the redemption of comedy, Bergson expresses a view that is not unrelated. Bergson says in essence that the comic character is corrigible, while the tragic is not--he is, in a sense, beyond the reach of society. The comic individual, being unaware

of his vice or folly, will let society correct and re-integrate him into its ranks; while the tragic character "will make no change in his conduct because he will know how it is judged by us." The tragic character will keep up his conduct in spite of his "feeling keenly the horror he inspires in us. But a defect that is ridiculous, as soon as it feels itself to be so, endeavours to modify itself or at least to appear as though it did."<sup>15</sup>

As I have already said, Bergson's essay is highly illuminating on the question of the comic. The essay, in spite of its perspicacity and comprehensiveness, does have its shortcomings. Two salient limitations come readily to mind, the first having to do with the laughter--the spectator himself, and the second with the nature of the comic character. Concerning the first point, Bergson observes that laughter is usually accompanied by "absence of feeling."<sup>16</sup> The spectator is supposed to be unsympathetic to the comic presentation; he is at best insensible, and at worst cruel, to the comic character's fault and discomfiture. "Depict some fault, however trifling, in such a way as to arouse sympathy, fear, or pity; the mischief is done, it is impossible for us

to laugh."<sup>17</sup> Our emotions are not to be affected, nor our feelings aroused. Sympathy is inconceivable for "a soul which is not in tune with itself."<sup>18</sup> Bergson is emphatic on this point: insensibility on the part of the spectator is an essential condition for laughter.

Bergson's viewpoint on the laugher's callousness, though well presented and argued, has, I am afraid, experience against it. It has to do with the difficult question of the audience's involvement or detachment in the theatre, or the question whether the theatrical illusion should be maintained or broken. The theatre of Bertolt Brecht comes readily to mind. Brecht was all-out for breaking the illusion and maintaining disbelief, and went out of his way to ensure, in the plays he wrote, that this be done. He didn't quite succeed. Anybody watching Mother Courage, for example, will find it very hard, if not impossible, to remain callous and uninvolved, especially in the last scenes of the play. And who can withhold sympathy for an Alcèste, a Timon, a Falstaff, a Shylock or an Angelo? One may try to do so, but one will need all the effort one can muster up to remain unfeeling.

In making the point about the spectator's insensibility, Bergson was following his line of thought that comedy served a corrective purpose, and, in order to accomplish this purpose, derisive laughter was required. He failed to mention or to observe that laughter is not invariably the goal of comedy. "The laughter of comedy is not always derisive, (...), as some of Shakespeare's greatest comedies prove; and there are plays, such as Shakespeare's last ones, which are well within an established tradition of comedy but in which laughter hardly sounds at all. These suggest regions of comedy on which Bergson's analysis of the genre sheds hardly any light at all."<sup>19</sup> Regarding Bergson's incomplete analysis of laughter, Wylie Sypher observes that while comedy may not arouse laughter at all, "certain tragedies; on the other hand, may make us laugh hysterically."<sup>20</sup> Shelley regarded the comedy in King Lear as "universal, ideal, and sublime." Comedy, according to Ben Jonson, did not always aim at arousing laughter. Lecturing on Hamlet and King Lear, Coleridge noted the close connection between terror and the ludicrous, since "the laugh is rendered by nature itself the language of extremes, even

as tears are." Hamlet, Coleridge pointed out, "will be found to touch on the verge of the ludicrous," because "laughter is equally the expression of extreme anguish and horror as of joy."<sup>21</sup>

As regards the other limitation, it has to do with Bergson's notion that every comic character is a type.<sup>22</sup> High-class comedy, says Bergson, deals with "characters, that is to say, general types." In depicting "general types," comedy "is the only one of all the arts that aims at the general." This, he adds, is what sets comedy in opposition to "tragedy, drama and the other forms of art." Thus comedy "is situated on the borderline between art and life," and, "by the generality of its subject-matter it contrasts with the rest of the arts."<sup>23</sup> Comedy is concerned with classes and tragedy with individuals. Here again Bergson's analysis needs qualifying. Comedy is assigned an inferior position: it is "begotten of real life and akin to art."<sup>24</sup> It is not entirely art since art "always aims at what is individual."<sup>25</sup> Unlike the comedian, the "dramatist" probes deep into the human soul so as to give us its "life-history," its "individualised"

feelings and events.<sup>26</sup> The notion that comedy aims only at the general, and has no business to do with individual beings and individual feelings, provides an inadequate vision of the comic spirit. Shakespeare's last plays, for instance, give us an imitation, in Theodore Spencer's words, "not only of man in relation to society, but also in relation to himself and to the larger forces by which he feels himself controlled."<sup>27</sup> The element of pathos is undeniable in these plays. Here we are not dealing with "types" but with fully individualized human beings.

People like Prospero and Hermione are supreme creations whose soul's "life-history" pulsates with "feelings and events," and whose elevated vision of human nature lambently illuminates our sense of life. If Shakespeare does, in Bergson's words, "offer us types, that is to say, characters capable of self-repetition,"<sup>28</sup> then he makes such types more meaningful by finding them "a place in social life and subjecting" them to the "ironies of social and biological vicissitudes."<sup>29</sup>

At the beginning of this essay we mentioned that the essence of the ludicrous, according to Bergson, is

embedded in unsociability, rigidity, mechanization and absentmindedness. Such states of being develop as a result of the individual's growing slack in the attention and alertness required by self, society and existence. Self-scrutiny, human fellowship and solidarity, and exploration of the meaning of life are a must if we are to maintain presence of mind and ward off the danger of contracting rigidity and becoming dehumanized, that is to say, ridiculous. What such diverse and diversely motivated characters like Navarre, Hotspur, Malvolio, Angelo, Shylock, and Timon have in common is rigidity. Each one of them is the prey of misconception. And each pursues an idea with unmitigated passion and rigor, an idea so dominant and dominating that it curbs the mind's mobility and isolates the individual from the community. No sooner have these characters appeared on the stage than Shakespeare makes us aware of their inflexibility. They all adopt an extreme position, whether in their inexorable effort to achieve the desired end that overwhelms and obsesses them, or in their reaction when faced with the reality of experience. It is the absolute that they are after: in the case of Navarre, it is the absolute



of fame and glory, in the holy war against the realm of common sense, in order to achieve "godlike recompence;"<sup>30</sup> in the case of Angelo and Malvolio, it is a vicious grasp of virtue; in Shylock's case it is unqualified justice, and in Timon's, prodigality and utterly indiscriminating love.

By being intensely preoccupied with an obsessive idea, these characters are, or are on their way to becoming, unsociable. And unsociability breeds isolation, unkindness, unnaturalness, gracelessness. To be unsociable, to lose "the sense of solidarity," is a grievous fault in Shakespeare's work. It is a fault that at times is dreaded more than death itself. It is not death that preoccupies Macbeth and his wife toward the end of the play but the agonizing prospect of being cut off from the rest of the world. Neither for Macbeth, says Alfred Harbage, nor for Lady Macbeth "is the fear of death the penalty. The penalty is isolation, exclusion from the community of men, the loss of the sense of solidarity." This is the penalty of the unkind who suffer the loss of "human companionship, warmth,

intimacy."<sup>31</sup> An egregious example of unsociability, lack of grace, and unnaturalness is Richard III:

I have no brother, I am like no brother;  
And this word "love," which greybeards call divine,  
Be resident in men like one another  
And not in me. I am myself alone.

(3 Henry VI, V. vi. 80-83)

This inhuman fiend, who sounds so much like that other fiendish character, Iago, and whose diabolical dictum is, "I am myself alone," brags in 3 Henry VI that he is devoid of pity, love and fear (V. iv. 68). But at the end of Richard III his stony heart, having, like Macbeth, supped full with horrors, thaws and pleads for mercy (V. III. 178), pity and love, to which he has been impervious. Despair is his doom:

I shall despair. There is no creature loves me,  
And if I die no soul shall pity me.  
Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself  
Find in myself no pity to myself?

(Richard III, V. iii. 200-03)

At the end Macbeth also craves for love and companionship.

My way of life  
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,  
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

(Macbeth, V. iii. 22-28)

Unnaturalness and unsociability are Coriolanus' major faults and contribute largely to his undoing and eventual tragic downfall:

But out, affection!  
All bond and privilege of nature, break!  
Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.  
(Coriolanus, V. iii. 24-26)

This discordant note of unnaturalness is further reinforced when Coriolanus, besides barring the door to love, commitment and resiliency, declares that he will never

Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand  
As if a man were author of himself  
And knew no other kin.  
(V. iii. 35-37)

The scene is fraught with masterly irony. What Coriolanus needs is a Prospero to chase the ignorant fumes mantling his clearer reason,<sup>32</sup> "that now lies foul muddy."<sup>33</sup> And speaking of Prospero, he should know all too well what it means to expel "remorse and nature"<sup>34</sup> and to be unnatural.

"The spirit of compassion," says Harbage, permeates Shakespeare's work. "This spirit conveys a sense of human solidarity, so that the spectator can experience every emotion except loneliness and despair."<sup>35</sup> In

Shakespeare's work the word "sociable" implies sympathy, compassion, friendliness and tolerance. Sociability implies the exercise of common sense. And common sense is lacking in Navarre, Hotspur, Shylock, Malvolio, Angelo and Timon, just as it is lacking in Coriolanus. These characters, each in his own way, reject affection, commitments and ties with others. They make a virtue of obstinacy and are unwilling to listen to instinct, opting to stand "As if a man were author of himself/And knew no other kin." As such they are ridiculous and arouse our sympathetic laughter. "Any individual," Bergson tells us, "is comic who automatically goes his own way without troubling himself about getting into touch with the rest of his fellow-beings. It is the part of laughter to reprove his absentmindedness and wake him out of his dream."<sup>36</sup> The individual who develops "callousness to social life"<sup>37</sup> is one who shuts himself up in his own peculiar character. His common sense has fallen into abeyance or is on the way to becoming inverted.

The notion of sociability has many affinities with common sense. The Oxford English Dictionary defines

"common sense" as the "endowment of natural intelligence possessed by rational beings; (...), the plain wisdom which is every man's inheritance. (This is 'common sense' at its minimum, without which a man is foolish or insane.)" The O.E.D. informs us that "more emphatically" common sense means "good sound practical sense; combined tact and readiness in dealing with the every-day affairs of life; general sagacity." The O.E.D. also defines common sense as "the general sense, feeling, or judgement of mankind, or of a community. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines common sense as "good sound ordinary sense: good judgment or prudence in estimating or managing affairs esp. as free from emotional bias and intellectual subtlety or as not dependent on special or technical knowledge." Webster's tells us further that "among Cartesians" common sense means "something that is evident by the natural light of reason and hence common to all men." Common sense is the faculty embodying the intuitions "common to all mankind."

Quite a few notions having to do with the six characters under study in this essay--as well as with

numerous other Shakespearean characters, tragic or comic--emerge from these definitions of common sense. Foremost among them are naturalness and rationality; the significance of our instinctive faculty; worldly wisdom and alertness to life; elasticity and adaptability; the sense of solidarity and commitment, and the harmony between reason and passion. Nowhere in these notions do we detect any trace of foolishness, absurdity or extremism. Common sense will reject Navarre's "maddened pedantry"<sup>38</sup> just as it will reject Hotspur's utter impracticality, Shylock's all-consuming passion for justice and revenge, Angelo's rigid virtue, Malvolio's stern morality and Timon's lamentable lack of sophistication.

Common sense implies presence of mind, attention. The absentminded is the person who will "continue to see what is no longer visible, to hear what is no longer audible, to say what is no longer to the point." He will adapt himself "to a past and therefore imaginary situation," when he should be shaping his conduct "in accordance with the reality which is present."<sup>39</sup>

Rather than face facts he indulges in fancies, and instead of pursuing reality he aims at illusion.

"Illusion," says Frye, is "whatever is fixed or definable and reality is best understood as its negation: whatever reality is, it's not that."<sup>40</sup> The absentminded will remain immobile, while the alert will adapt and re-adapt to the ever-changing stream of life.

Frye's definition of illusion and reality brings back to mind the contrast, already referred to, between the rigid, the ready-made and the mechanical, and the supple, the ever-changing and the living. It is the contrast between automatism and free activity.<sup>41</sup>

Freedom, the key word here, is the fountainhead "of all that is serious in life."<sup>42</sup> The absentminded, ensnared by illusion, does not so much act, for action is conscious or intentional,<sup>43</sup> as react, to use the words of Nietzsche, to an outside stimulus.<sup>44</sup> Gesture, then, rather than action characterizes his behaviour; and gesture, in contrast to action, is automatic and isolated.<sup>45</sup>

Examples of absentminded behaviour abound in Shakespeare's plays. Apart from the six characters,

with whom this essay is concerned and who will be discussed in detail in later chapters, we may cite Richard II and Henry VI. The two kings, who happen to be weak and ineffectual, mostly shun action in favor of words and contemplation. Both have lost contact with life and reality, being immersed in what ought to be or might be rather than in what is. A victim of vanity, King Richard II, we are told, "is not himself" (II. i. 241). In response to Aumerle's urgent request to collect himself, Richard says, "I had forgot myself; am I not King" (III. ii. 83)? Richard, who is far more concerned with the theory of kingship and its divine inspiration than with statecraft, may very well pose the question. What Richard says is most eloquent but no longer to the point:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord.  
For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd  
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,  
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay  
A glorious angel; then, if angels fight,  
Weak men must fall, for Heaven still guards the right.

(Richard II, III. ii. 54-62)



Richard has withdrawn into himself, rejecting good sense and all practical counsel.

Henry VI, though a more pious and saintly figure than Richard II, is equally helpless and ineffectual. In 1 Henry VI we are given several hints of the King's devoutness and rigid virtue, which will emerge more clearly and forcefully in Parts II and III. When Gloucester suggests to the King that he marry, Henry, in a reply reminiscent of young Navarre, says:

Marriage, uncle! Alas, my years are young!  
And fitter is my study and my books  
Than wanton dalliance with a paramour.

(1 Henry VI, V. i. 21-23)

The King, however, does agree, though reluctantly, to the match proposed by Gloucester since it is a marriage of convenience. Henry, though mild, affectionate and peaceful, shows an appalling lack of policy. His weakness becomes proverbial; words like "weep," "wail," "misery," "groan" form a prominent part of his diction. Friends and foes alike are dismayed by his feebleness, his naiveté, his infinite resignation, and his boundless mercy--his "too much lenity" and "harmful pity" (3

Henry VI, II. ii. 9-10) are deplored by Clifford. When

urged by the Queen to fly from danger, Henry readily resigns himself to his fate: "can we outrun the heavens?" To which the Queen replies:

What are you made of? You'll nor fight nor fly.  
Now is it manhood, wisdom, and defence  
To give the enemy way, and to secure us  
By what we can, which can no more but fly.

(2 Henry VI, V. ii, 73, 74-77)

What the saintly Henry lacks is presence of mind, the elasticity needed to adapt to the realities of the moment. He has shut himself up "in his own peculiar character as a philosopher in his ivory tower"<sup>46</sup>

To Henri Bergson common sense represents "the endeavour of a mind continually adapting itself anew and changing ideas when it changes objects. It is the mobility of the intelligence conforming exactly to the mobility of things. It is the moving continuity of our attention to life."<sup>47</sup> Change and mobility are crucial to Bergsonian thought. Change is life--"to cease to change would be to cease to live."<sup>48</sup> When this conformity between the mind's mobility and the mobility of things breaks down, as a result of pursuing, with fervor bordering on insanity, a central idea, common sense is inverted. This is a very special inversion

of common sense. "It consists in seeking to mould things on an idea of one's own, instead of moulding one's ideas on things,--in seeing before us what we are thinking of, instead of thinking of what we see."<sup>49</sup>

An individual whose common sense is so inverted is likely to become monomaniacal. He follows his idée fixe with a logic resembling that of a dream. This enables Bergson to state the "theorem" that comic absurdity is of the same nature as that of dreams.<sup>50</sup>

Dream logic, like that of fixation, "is a logic lacking in tension and, for that very reason, affording us relief from intellectual effort." The rules of reasoning in both are generally relaxed.<sup>51</sup> The automatic pursuit of a fixed idea is akin to a dream.

"Now, a dream is a relaxation. To remain in touch with things and men, to see nothing but what is existent and think nothing but what is consistent, demands a continuous effort of intellectual tension. This effort is common sense: And to remain sensible is, indeed, to remain at work."<sup>52</sup>

Such sensibleness is absent in someone like Troilus. Like Angelo, Timon, Coriolanus, and others,

he refuses or fails to see what is existent, thus closing his mind to reality. In spite of all rules of reasoning, and despite the pleading of Ulysses, that formidable monument to common sense and order, Troilus sees only what his mind wants to see. Act V, Scene II of Troilus and Cressida embodies a nice epitome of the concerns of this essay. The fixedness of illusion, the inversion of common sense, the shattering frustration of the idealist on encountering the reality of experience, the withdrawal from reality, the split personality of the dreamer, and the chaos that follows a shattered illusion--all this is present in this scene.

Troilus' absolute idealism is fixed for us when he tells Ulysses that,

Never did young man fancy  
With so eternal and so fix'd a soul.  
(V. ii. 165-66)

The spectacle of Cressida who has vowed she will be true to Troilus (IV. iv. 71), the Cressida who has most solemnly declared that she will not go to the Greek camp, renouncing all for the love of Troilus:

I have forgot my father;  
I know no touch of consanguinity;  
No kin, no love, no blood, no soul so near me

As the sweet Troilus. O you gods divine,  
Make Cressid's name the very crown of falsehood,  
If she ever leave Troilus! Time, force, and death,  
Do to this body what (extremes) you can;  
But the strong base and building of my love  
Is at the very centre of the earth,  
Drawing all things to it...

(IV. iv. 102-11)

--the spectacle of the forsworn Cressida dallying with Diomed proves a most shocking and shattering experience to the self-deluded Troilus. "You flow to great distraction," (V. ii. 42) the supremely rational Ulysses tells Troilus as he watches the young man plunge into a dreamlike stance. In spite of his automatically repeated promise to remain patient (V. ii. 29, 46, 54, 64), Troilus does succumb to "plague and madness" (V. ii. 35) and "break out," as Ulysses rightly predicts (V. ii. 50). The mobility of Troilus' intelligence has ceased to conform exactly to the mobility of things and his common sense is inverted. Anguished and in conflict with himself, Troilus is reluctant to leave,

Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,  
An esperance so obstinately strong,  
That doth invert th' attest of eyes and ears,  
As if those organs had deceptious functions,  
Created only to calumniate.

Was Cressid here?

(V. ii. 120-25)

\ Pursuing further his dream logic Troilus says,

O madness of discourse,  
That cause sets up with and against myself,  
(Bi-fold) authority, where reason can revolt  
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason  
Without revolt: this is, and is not, Cressid.  
(V. ii. 142-46)

This is the anguish, the indecision, the chaos that follows when a mind hinging on a fixed idea comes to grips with reality. Troilus' confused state of being is reminiscent of Angelo's. Having reached a similar cul-de-sac, Angelo declares:

Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,  
Nothing goes right; we would, and we would not.  
(Measure for Measure, IV. iv. 36-37)

When the ideal collapses, when the truth withers, nothing goes right for a Troilus, an Angelo, or a Timon. Insanity could be forthcoming. We are reminded here of poor Gulliver's fate, who, because of an "inviolable attachment to truth, of a rigid vow to strictly adhere<sup>54</sup> to truth," becomes monomaniacal and ends by conversing<sup>55</sup> with his horses "at least four hours every day." The hero of Molière's play The Misanthrope also comes to mind. Like Timon, Alceste is, in the words of George Meredith, "an impracticable creature of a priceless virtue."<sup>56</sup> At the end of the play Alceste, the

absolute idealist, decides to avoid human society and shut himself up. He seeks a place not unlike the "solitary island" sought by Gulliver. But, as the good and sensible Don Pedro tells Gulliver, it is "altogether impossible to find such a solitary island."<sup>57</sup> The Portuguese Captain's words are in vain, of course; Gulliver and Alceste will not listen to common sense. Molière does not pursue Alceste to his "solitary island" to tell us what is to become of him; but indications are he will meet a fate similar to Gulliver's.

These characters are inflexible because they have isolated themselves from reality, neglecting to heed life or to make a serious attempt at self-scrutiny. "The chief cause of rigidity," says Bergson, "is the neglect to look around--and more especially within oneself."<sup>58</sup> Rigidity is inseparable from automatism, absentmindedness and unsociability. To eliminate rigidity, three things essentially are required: first, to know self; second, to be resilient, and third, to be in constant touch with life and the reality of experience.

In his essay on Montaigne, "L'Humaine Condition," Erich Auerbach says that "Know Thyself" is for Montaigne "not only a pragmatic and moral precept but an epistemological precept too."<sup>59</sup> What Auerbach says about Montaigne can be applied to many Renaissance philosophers and writers particularly Shakespeare. Self-analysis, a great imperative of the Renaissance, was, according to Lily B. Campbell, "the means by which virtue might be attained."<sup>60</sup> To know self was not egoism, says Tillyard, but "the gateway to all virtue."<sup>61</sup> It is a major thematic concern in Shakespeare's work, and his plays abound in examples of individuals who meet with catastrophe or discomfiture because they fail or do not bother to know themselves. Tragedy befalls Titus Andronicus and many others in the play mainly because "he is not with himself."<sup>62</sup> When Antony wanders out of himself, "He comes too short of that great property/Which still should go with Antony."<sup>63</sup> In his hour of shame Antony tells his attendants, "let (that) be left/Which leaves itself."<sup>64</sup> Thersites may be a thorough cynic, but he is right when he says about the



inflexible Ajax, "that fool knows not himself."<sup>65</sup> Ajax "wears his wit in his belly and his guts in his head."<sup>66</sup> Angelo, who has stepped out of his own self, says in bewilderment, "What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?"<sup>67</sup> He may very well ask the question, as he has never bothered to search his soul and get to know himself.

The fond and foolish Lear is of course a classic example of failure of self-knowledge. "See better, Lear,"<sup>68</sup> the sensible Kent tells the irrational old man. Lear's "poor judgement"<sup>69</sup> is due to a lack of self-scrutiny--"he hath ever but slenderly known himself."<sup>70</sup> The fool castigates the King for being old before his time:<sup>71</sup> "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise."<sup>72</sup> In sharp contrast to Lear we have the figure of Prospero, who strives hard to know himself, and the Duke in Measure for Measure who "above all other strifes; contended especially to know himself."<sup>73</sup> In Henry VIII Wolsey attains serenity, calm and peace of mind when he finds himself.

I know myself now; and I feel within me

A peace above all earthly dignities,  
A still and quiet conscience.

(Henry VIII, III. ii. 378-80)

Next to self-knowledge is the need to convert rigidity into plasticity, to adapt and re-adapt to the social environment, to life. Life requires the individual to be resilient, to achieve grace when under pressure. The word "grace," says Northrop Frye, "with all its Renaissance overtones from the graceful courtier of Castiglione to the gracious God of Christianity, is a most important thematic word in Shakespearean comedy."<sup>74</sup>

"Grace" has several connotations, of course. The one that concerns us here is the tendency and readiness on the part of the individual "not to take life too seriously, nor the blows of life too hard."<sup>75</sup> This has to do with the individual's willingness to metamorphose painful things in life into something lyrical, to translate mundane conditions into something enduring. In Richard II Gaunt tells

Bolingbroke, who has just been banished:

All places that the eye of Heaven visits  
Are to a wise man ports and happy havens.  
Teach thy necessity to reason thus:  
There is no virtue like necessity.

(I. III. 275-78)

In As You Like It we have the most beautiful passage concerning this notion of grace and patience in adversity. I am referring to the lines spoken by Duke Sr. at the beginning of Act II Scene I of the play. The Duke finds life in banishment in the forest of Arden sweeter than the pomp and envy pervading the court:

Here feel we not the penalty of Adam  
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang  
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,  
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body  
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say,  
"This is no flattery: these are counsellors  
That feelingly persuade me what I am."  
Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;  
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.  
(II. i. 5-17)

Amiens has all admiration for the Duke's capacity for translating "the stubbornness of fortune/Into so quiet and so sweet a style" (II. i. 19-20). Not only is the Duke a pattern of patience, but he also contends especially to know himself. In Hamlet Laertes says of Ophelia, "Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,/She turns to favour and to prettiness" (IV. vi. 188-89). The sensible and unruffled Horatio arouses

Hamlet's overwhelming admiration for his ability to take "Fortune's buffets and rewards" with "equal thanks" (III. ii. 72-73).

The heroes and heroines of Shakespeare's last plays are patterns of patience and gracefulness. They too come to realize that the uses of adversity are sweet indeed. Pericles, for instance, bears

A tempest, which his mortal vessel tears,  
And yet he rides it out...

(Pericles, IV. iv. 30-31)

In The Winter's Tale Leontes discovers that his affliction "has a taste as sweet/As any cordial comfort" (V. iii. 76-77). In The Tempest young Ferdinand is not daunted by the adversity he meets with; "most poor matters," he says, "Point to rich ends" (III. i. 3-4). He arouses the gentle Prospero's great admiration for having "strangely stood the test" (IV. i. 7). For Hermione, Imogen and Marina one has all the respect and admiration one can muster up; their supreme gracefulness, endurance and resiliency in adverse circumstances are unique indeed. With inflexible individuals like Coriolanus, Angelo, Timon, Shylock, Malvolio and their likes, who are unwilling

or unable to adapt to the mobile reality, we may contrast the resilient Benedick and Beatrice. Taunted and teased by Don Pedro for adapting to the social environment and marrying Beatrice of all people, Benedick unleashes an indisputable truth: "man is a giddy thing" (Much Ado About Nothing, V. iv. 108-9).

Benedick's "conclusion" says a lot indeed about the human condition, about the essential absurdity of existence. Not only has Benedick finally decided to be reintegrated into society and to maintain a sense of solidarity, but he has also discovered basic truths. One of these truths concerns the incongruity of intention and deed--" what we do determine oft we break... What to ourselves in passion we propose, / The passion ending, doth the purpose lose."<sup>76</sup> Another related truth has to do with the changing stream of life which requires change and adaptability on the part of the individual. Erich Auerbach regards as "a very realistic conception of man," a conception based on "experience and in particular on self-experience," the notion that "man is a fluctuating

creature subject to the changes which take place in his surroundings, his destiny, and his inner impulses."<sup>77</sup>



CHAPTER TWO

MORE FOR PRAISE THAN PURPOSE:  
THE DELUSION OF HONOR

Indeed for the most part they (the wiseacres) seem to have stepped down even from common sense. For you may see the peasant and the shoemaker go their way simply and naturally, speaking of what they know; whereas these, trying to strut and swagger with the learning that floats on the surface of their brains, perpetually entangle and trip themselves up.<sup>1</sup>  
Montaigne, "Of Pedantry"

As true we are as flesh and blood can be.  
The sea will ebb and flow, heaven show his face,  
Young blood doth not obey an old decree.  
We cannot cross the cause why we were born;  
Therefore of all hands must we be forsworn.  
(Love's Labour's Lost, IV. iii. 215-19)

He apprehends a world of figures here,  
But not the form of what he should attend.  
(Henry IV, I. iii. 209-10)

I. Navarre: Glory and the Working  
of the Heart

In "Laughter" Bergson speaks of a contemporary philosopher, "an out-and-out arguer," who, in response to a suggestion that his arguments, "though irreproachable in their deductions, had experience against them," dismissed

the matter by remarking that experience was in the wrong.<sup>1</sup> What the philosopher in question aimed at was for life to function like clockwork. The idea of regulating life "as a matter of business routine" could be "the very quint-essence of pedantry, which, at bottom, is nothing else than art pretending to outdo nature."<sup>2</sup> The antithesis between art and nature, a thematic movement particular to the Renaissance, is a major concern of Love's Labour's Lost.

The question of art and nature is too broad an issue for the purposes of this essay, but it would be appropriate to point out some fundamental views on the matter. Among other Classical writers, Longinus and Horace grappled with the issue. Longinus' opinion is that "art is perfect when it seems to be nature, and nature succeeds when it has art concealed within."<sup>3</sup> On art, says Longinus, depends "infallible correctness for the most part," but "striking elevation, even though not consistent, is dependent on greatness of soul." It is proper, therefore, "that art should give assistance to nature. When the two work in harmony, they should produce perfection."<sup>4</sup> Though admitting that it is



debatable "whether a good poem be the work of nature or of art," Horace's point of view regarding the interdependence of art and nature is essentially consistent with that of Longinus. "For my part," says Horace in "The Art of Poetry," "I fail to see the use of study without wit, or of wit without training: so true is it that each requires the other's aid in helpful union."<sup>5</sup> The clever imitator is urged "to look to life and morals for his real model, and draw thence language true to life."<sup>6</sup>

In the Renaissance, Sir Philip Sidney is one of numerous writers to discuss the subject. In "The Defense of Poesie" Sidney asserts that all arts depend principally on "the works of nature." Sidney, however, assigns to poetry a superior role, claiming for it "another nature," whereby the poet improves on nature, or, "quite anew," comes up with "forms such as never were in nature."<sup>7</sup> According to Tasso, the poet is "an imitator of human actions and habits."<sup>8</sup> Shakespeare's position on the matter could well be the view expressed by Polixenes in The Winter's Tale: art, the means by which nature is improved or changed, is a means which nature itself brings

about: "The art itself is Nature."<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare, says Harry Levin, attempted "to reconcile art and nature."<sup>10</sup>

Navarre, the "frigid wiseacre,"<sup>11</sup> and his three courtiers, to whom the Princess gives the apt epithet "Navarre and his bookmen,"<sup>12</sup> very much resemble the wise-acres Montaigne speaks of<sup>13</sup> in their rejection of common sense, their overweening pride, their superficiality, and their clumsiness. In their fierce dedication to art at the expense of life and reality, in the all-out effort to outdo nature, Navarre and his bookmen show all the attributes of the comic figure as visualized by Bergson: the arrest of the mind's mobility, the rigidity and consequent lack of self-awareness, the absentmindedness, and the unsociability; attributes which arouse our laughter. "They are all guilty of that excess of art over reality which we term affectation."<sup>14</sup> And affectation becomes "a way of life" for them, rendering them "unfit for love and life."<sup>15</sup>

Navarre's Academe, which Frye describes as "pseudo-monastic,"<sup>16</sup> is no less than a dream and, as such, bespeaks a special madness peculiar to dreams.<sup>17</sup>

As a dream it entails a general relaxation of the rules of reasoning;<sup>18</sup> Navarre's aspiration, his "maddened pedantry"<sup>19</sup> rather, will virtually eliminate common sense. In order to realize his dream Navarre proposes a rigorous program staggering even to a saint: not to see women, to fast once a week, eat one meal a day, sleep no more than three hours at night and take absolutely no rest during the day. It is a relentless war against the senses<sup>20</sup> and against the body's vital urges. The ultimate objective of the Academe--to achieve grace "in the disgrace of death" (I. i. 3)<sup>20</sup> and to attain to "godlike recompence" (I. i. 58)--arouses our sympathy and earns our good wishes. It is not so much the end as the means, whereby the Academe will be realized; which strikes us as being ridiculous. The personality and psychological make-up of the votaries themselves, as well as the truths and factors militating against the achievement of the Academe, point up the glaring absurdity of the plan.

Navarre and his courtiers will have to come to grips with quite a few factors and certain essential

truths, which they do in the course of the play. Foremost among them are youth and inexperience. Like Angelo, Navarre and his men are untried idealists, extreme and inflexible.<sup>21</sup> Theirs is a "half-baked ideal."<sup>22</sup> Naïveté and the zeal of youth have blinded them to the constitution of human nature: their would-be community will admit of no passions, no suffering, no social commitments. Says Longaville:

I am resolv'd; 'tis but a three years' fast.  
The mind shall banquet, though the body pine.  
Fat paunches have lean pates, and dainty bits  
Make rich the ribs, but bankrupt quite the wits.  
(I. i. 24-27)

It is as simple as that--"deceptively simple."<sup>23</sup> The young men stand the risk not only of being soon forsworn but also of endangering their health and leading a sterile life. "Books," says Montaigne, "are pleasant companions, but if by associating with them we end by losing gaiety and health, our best possessions, let us leave them. I am one of those who believe that our enjoyment of them cannot outweigh this loss."<sup>24</sup> Being young and inexperienced they have no adequate moral strength to carry out an ascetic program worthy of saints: "Young blood doth not obey an old decree" (IV. iii. 217).

As it has been already pointed out, we sympathize with the courtiers' endeavor to achieve a lofty ideal. But it is an isolated individual endeavor: by ignoring common sense they have opted to sever contacts with society and to abolish all bonds, a very unnatural choice. Nor was such alienation condoned by the moral thinking of the Renaissance. Any endeavor that did not take the community into consideration was lacking and inadequate. As C.B. Watson points out, Renaissance morality hinged on the twin poles of individual achievement and social obligation. The two poles were correlated.<sup>25</sup>

Closely related to this is the fact that the lack of a strong moral purpose in Navarre's program, its ignorance of social realities, its cruelty, its disregard for feeling and suffering, not to mention the basic flippancy of the four young men, turn the fervently sought-after fame into vainglory. Praise, not purpose, has the upper hand. The words of the Princess, who is always alert, clear-sighted and sensible, are highly relevant:

And out of question, so it is sometimes,

Glory grows guilty of detested crimes,  
When for fame's sake, for praise, an outward part,  
We bend to that the working of the heart;  
As I for praise alone seek to spill  
The poor deer's blood, that my heart means no ill.  
(IV. i. 30-35)

Montaigne expresses a similar view: our soul must not play her part "for outward show."<sup>26</sup>

Another important factor militating against Navarre and his men is the delicate constitution of oaths and vows, especially those taken in heat, in the face of time and change. We are all subject to the changes which take place in our surroundings, our destiny, and our inner impulses.<sup>27</sup> The fragility of oaths is a theme in many a Shakespearean play or sonnet. The Player King in Hamlet becomes a spokesman for humanity when he says:

Most necessary 'tis that we forget  
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt.  
What to ourselves in passion we propose,  
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.  
(Hamlet, III. ii. 202-5)

"Our thoughts," he goes on to say, "are ours, their ends none of our own" (III. ii. 223). In The Tempest the wise Prospero reminds young Ferdinand that "the strongest oaths are straw/To th' fire i' blood," urging

him to be "more abstemious, / Or else good night your  
vow" (IV. i. 52-54). Cassandra, the perceptive and  
unheeded prophetess, tells proud and unrelenting Hector:

The gods are deaf to hot and peevish vows.  
They are polluted off'rings, more abhorr'd  
Than spotted livers in the sacrifice.

(Troilus and Cressida, V. iii. 16-18)

With profound insight Cassandra reminds Hector of a  
fundamental human truth, a truth Navarre and his book-  
men have ignored or are unaware of: "It is the purpose  
that makes strong the vow, / But vows to every purpose  
must not hold" (V. iii. 23-24). In Henry V men's oaths  
are again likened to straws, their faiths to wafer-cakes  
(II. iii. 53).

That Navarre and his men lack strength of purpose  
becomes obvious upon encountering reality in the person  
of the Princess and her ladies-in-attendance. No sooner  
have the King and his men made their vow than Biron  
hastens to remind his sovereign of the imminent arrival,  
on an important state visit, of the Princess. "Why,  
this was quite forgot" (I. i. 142), says Navarre in a  
classic gesture of absentmindedness. The sober Biron  
is not the least surprised: a mind obsessed and domina-

ted by a single idea will sooner or later "forget to do the thing it should" (I. i. 145). The King is too self-absorbed to pay any attention to his subjects, to affairs of state, to the maintenance of law in his own territory.

The King's absentmindedness is nicely matched by characters in the sub-plot, which, incidentally, becomes a brilliant parody of the main plot, like the fantastic Armado and Holofernes, that perennial pedant. The dandy Armado, the "child of fancy" (I. i. 171), the "magnificent" man of "fire-new words" (I. i. 179), who revels in "high-born words" (I. i. 173)--this knight of fashion (I. i. 179) often gets so carried away by the power of words as words, not as a means of communication, that he no longer says things to the point. His numerous bombastic, stilted, tedious and largely irrelevant arguments end by posing the inevitable and familiar question: "How did this argument begin" (III. i. 106), a question which usually leaves the common-sense men like Costard and Moth dazzled and stunned. Armado's absentmindedness and irrelevant



arguments are matched by Holofernes (IV. ii. 95-100), and, like Navarre and his lords, the two of them plus Nathaniel see "words as things in themselves, rather than as symbols for other realities,"<sup>28</sup> a concept which so obsesses the personality that it "excludes an awareness of reality,"<sup>29</sup> and hampers the alertness and attention demanded by self, by others, and by life.

Armado's and Holofernes' preoccupation with language as fancy rather than as a means of communication produces in them the repetitive patterns and conditioned responses--the mechanization that Bergson finds utterly ridiculous--which come into existence as a result of the individual's rigidity. Not content with one word to denote a thing, they will muster up all the synonyms in the language to express that thing or idea in order to, sweetly vary the epithets, as the gull Nathaniel admits (IV. ii. 8-9). Thus "earth" is used along with "terra," "soil," "land" (IV. ii. 7); "undressed," "unpolished," "uneducated," "untrained," "unlettered" (IV. ii. 17-18); not only do we see the repetition but also the arrogance and snobbery

bred by fancy:

Sir, it is the king's most sweet pleasure and affection to congratulate the Princess at her pavilion in the posteriors of this day, which the rude multitude call the afternoon.

(V. i. 92-95)

This arrogant and snobbish statement draws an equally snobbish and hypocritical response from Holofernes:

The posterior of the day, most generous sir, is liable, congruent, and measurable for the afternoon. The word is well cull'd, chose, sweet, and apt, I do assure you, sir, I do assure.

(V. i. 96-99)

Snobbishness and pride of the intellect--a keen, incisive wit, are the main driving-force behind Navarre's embarking on his academe. As untried idealists, Navarre and his men adopt an inflexible attitude admitting of no compromises in spite of Biron's repeated warnings that their oath "will prove an idle scorn" (I. i. 311) and that necessity "will make us all forsworn/Three thousand times within this three years' space;

For every man with his affects is born  
Not by might mast' red, but by special grace.  
If I break faith, this word shall speak for me;  
I am forsworn on "mere necessity."

(I. i. 150-55)

And forsworn they become, much sooner than they thought,

the "necessity" being supplied by the Princess and her entourage. The encounter with the reality of experience shatters their illusion and hurls them into the abyss of moral chaos. Their reaction, as with other untried idealists coming to grips with realities, is drastic: they switch from one extreme to another, from soldiers for fame and glory to soldiers for love, from a lofty ideal to a lowly reality. The awakening is rude but not final.

The trouble now is how to get out of an oath unscrupulously and with impunity. Knowing full well the impossibility of renouncing their oath without a guilty conscience they begin to equivocate and rationalize their way out:

A woman I forswore; but I will prove,  
Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee. (IV.iii.64-5)

It is the moral dilemma of Angelo ("we would, and we would not") and, to a large extent, that of Tarquin who, realizing full well that the gods will not abet his sinful intent, resolves to make "Love and Fortune" his gods and his guide (The Rape of Lucrece, 351), a point that is echoed in Sonnet 129. Navarre and his men are

on the brink of the same moral chaos. Their new task, as barren as the old one, is to "prove" that,

It is religion to be thus forsworn,  
For charity itself fulfils the law,  
And who can sever love from charity?

(IV. iii. 363-65)

The conclusion itself is irrefutable, but the premises are highly questionable: loss of the oath is now equated with self-discovery, thus rendering the question of renunciation an imperative. The equivocations and rationalizations pile up:

My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love;  
Thy grace being gain'd cures all disgrace in me.  
Vows are but breath; and breath a vapour is;  
Then thou, fair sun, which on my earth dost shine,  
Exhal'st this vapour-vow; in thee it is.

(IV. iii. 66-70)

Ill, to example ill,  
Would from my forehead wipe a perjur'd note;  
For none offend where all alike do dote.

(IV. iii. 124-26)

Thus they grope about, desperately seeking "some salve for perjury" (IV. iii. 289), some authority, some "tricks, some quilllets, how to cheat the devil" (IV. iii. 287-88), and prove their "loving lawful," and their "faith not torn" (IV. iii. 285). The

prevarications culminate in the King's desperate appeal to the Princess to

Rebuke me not for that which you provoke  
The virtue of your eye must break my oath.  
(V. ii. 347-48)

The clearsighted Princess hastens to condemn the equivocation and put Ferdinand in his place:

You nickname virtue; vice you should have spoke,  
For virtue's office never breaks men's troth.  
(V. ii. 349-50)

Navarre, as inflexible as ever, persists:

Teach us, sweet madam, for our rude transgression  
Some fair excuse.  
(V. ii. 431-32)

To which the Princess replies with finality: "The fairest is confession" (V. ii. 433). The Princess is too sensible, too rational, too perspicacious to be taken in by such double talk.

The final awakening occurs when "the scene begins to cloud" (V. ii. 730) with the intrusion of the finality of death upon it. But even here Navarre's rigidity, the failure of his mind's mobility to conform to the mobility of things, continues to blind him to reality--he has not yet learned to control his extreme behaviour, to trammel his temerity. His final indiscre-

tion is asking the Princess, grief-stricken as she is over her father's death, to make a hasty decision giving love priority over sorrow, since "love's argument was first on foot, /Let not the cloud of sorrow justle it/From what it purposed" (V. ii.757-59). His reason is logical but removed from the reality of the moment:

to wail friends lost  
Is not by much so wholesome-profitable  
As to rejoice at friends newly found.  
(V. ii. 759-61)

"I understand you not;" says the Princess, "my griefs are double" (V. ii. 762). And in this she has our full sympathy and understanding.

Neither full confession of faults and folly nor the intrusion of death will finally do. What will, however, is purgation. Only by being purged will Navarre and his men come to know the middle of humanity, to understand the working of the heart, to know the real meaning of suffering, and finally to appreciate life. And only by getting in touch with nature and the sick, by overcoming their vanity and affectation, will they be able to ripen and achieve humility. The solution has been prescribed for them. But it is not

an easy solution, and Navarre and his men appreciate this full well. "Humility," says T.S. Eliot, "is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself."<sup>30</sup>

## II. Hotspur: The Theme of Honour's Tongue

King Henry IV is no Timon of Athens. Unlike the naive and unfortunate Greek, the king is well aware, both in theory and practice, that policy sits above conscience. Policy and efficiency are the twin poles of his conduct; nothing, in his view, "can seem foul to those that win" (1 Henry IV, V. i. 8). As if to temper his political cunning, Henry has entertained two wishes; the first, dubious and rather tendentious, is to go to the Holy Land, and the second, a more genuine desire, to see his son, the Prince of Wales, become another Hotspur. In Henry's view Hotspur is "the very straightest plant," the "minion" and "pride" of Fortune (I. i. 82-83). The fiery young man seems to the king "the theme of Honour's tongue" (I. i. 82).

That Hotspur has an all-consuming passion for honor is a matter that is indisputable. What is to be questioned, however, is the nature of the honor itself. Curtis Brown Watson tells us that honor played a prominent role in Renaissance thought. Honor, in the sense of fame, glory, virtue, was a very high ideal. It was not to be divorced from virtue but to be closely allied with it, the cardinal virtues being wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Nor was it to be divorced from social obligation: individual achievement and social ties as embodied by Renaissance morality were intermingled. The Renaissance, being simultaneously influenced by Christian Medieval thought and pagan humanism, pursued paradoxically a secular aristocratic code coupled with the ideal of Christian perfection, a curious blend of glory and humility. Vicious individualism, which breeds arrogance, boastfulness and obstinacy, was frowned upon.<sup>31</sup>

A close study of Hotspur's honor will reveal that it falls short of the Renaissance ideal, has no basis in reality and is far removed from it. It will reveal that such honor is based on self-satisfaction and



insolent pride, as well as on social callousness. Ultimately we will come to realize that Hotspur approaches the very verge of insanity, becoming a menace that has to be reckoned with. King Henry's wish for his son to emulate the young firebrand thus needs qualifying: he might want Hal to straighten up and mend his wild ways; this is understandable. But the politically shrewd Henry, to be sure, would never want the future king to emulate Hotspur's utter inefficiency and injudiciousness.

Hotspur's honor, spurred by insolent pride, is "contaminated with inglorious elements of sheer selfishness."<sup>32</sup> Like Navarre's honor, it has the potential of growing guilty of detested crimes, since for "fame's sake, for praise, an outward part," it has no scruples over its taking precedence of "the working of the heart." Feeling and social obligation are either non-existent or relegated to an inferior position. It is the kind of honor that pays no due regard to ethical considerations but is rather embedded in abstraction and vanity. Hotspur would readily agree

with Troilus that Helen "is a theme of honour and renown,

A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds  
Whose present courage may beat down our foes,  
And fame in time to come canonize us;  
For, I presume, brave Hector would not lose  
So rich advantage of a promis'd glory  
As smiles upon the forehead of this action  
For the wide world's revenue.

(Troilus and Cressida, II. ii. 199-206)

He would not think twice about waging war over any "theme of honour and renown" like Helen. Nor would he fail to heartily support Paris in equivocating and rationalizing his way out of any consequent moral confusion. Here is an example of what Paris says concerning Helen at the Trojan council:

Sir, I propose not merely to myself  
The pleasures such a beauty brings with it;  
But I would have the soil of her fair rape  
Wip'd off, in honourable keeping her.

(Troilus and Cressida, II. ii. 146-49)

War, in Paris' eyes, is fully justified when it is fought over a "subject" like Helen whom the "world's large spaces cannot parallel" (161-62).

In his immaturity, vainglory, rigidity, withdrawal and impulsiveness, Hotspur is very much like Navarre. And, as D.A. Traversi shrewdly suggests, the

fiery youth is something of a forerunner of many a Shakespearean tragic herolike Othello, Antony, and Coriolanus who, "each in his own distinct way, reflect in their rhetoric a tendency to justify themselves, or to conform to an idealized presentation of their own behaviour in the very moment of failure."<sup>33</sup> Hotspur, like the King of Navarre and his courtiers, suffers from "moral adolescence."<sup>34</sup>

Such moral adolescence nourishes his clownish lust for honor, an idea so dominant and uncontrollable that it cuts him off from reality, from self-scrutiny and from the community. People and things are seen and judged, by appearance, to be sure, in terms of honor. His mind is concentrated and fixed upon a single idea which he seeks to mould things on: he sees before him what he is thinking, instead of thinking of what he sees. As a result, his mind's "normal traffic,"<sup>35</sup> the mobility of the intelligence conforming exactly to the mobility of things--"the moving continuity of our attention to life"<sup>36</sup>--is arrested. One of Hector's weaknesses in Troilus and Cressida, according to

Tillyard, is that he stands "for the anachronistic continuance of the chivalric code into a world which has abandoned it."<sup>37</sup> Allowing, of course, for the difference in character between the two, what Tillyard says about Hector largely applies to Hotspur as well. To persist, in a world of ruthless political dealings and expediency--such as King Henry IV's world, where policy sits above conscience--in following the vestiges of a fading code, is to become something of an anachronism at once ridiculous and pathetic. What's more, Hotspur's chivalric canon, deficient as it is in its moral scope, leaves a lot to be desired. It is inapplicable, unsatisfactory, and, like his language most of the time, artificial. "Hollow" and "dated"<sup>38</sup> are the words Traversi uses to describe Hotspur's rhetoric in his delirious response (IV. i. 111-24) to the way Vernon describes Hal's preparation for war. It is the case of the absent-minded individual who clings to the past, seeing what is no longer visible, saying what is no longer to the point.

Here (IV. i. 111-24) as elsewhere in the play (IV. iv. 52-88 is a good example) Hotspur's utterances are irrelevant and overexcited. His delirium portends insanity. References to Hotspur as mad, choleric, rash and distracted abound in the play, and in 2 Henry IV more references are made to his delirious and absurd behaviour. "Imagination of some great exploit," says his own father, "drives him beyond the bounds of patience" (I. iii. 199-200). Bardolph expresses a similar view: Hotspur, "with great imagination

Proper to madmen, led his powers to death,  
And winking leap'd into destruction.

(2 Henry IV, I. iii. 31-33)

Hotspur's inefficient, injudicious and utterly unrealistic mentality had been deplorable before his destruction: he "lin'd himself with hope, / Eating the air, and promise of supply, / Flatt'ring himself in project of a power / Much smaller than the smallest of his thoughts" (2 Henry IV. I. iii. 27-30). "Eating the air" is a nice phrase to describe Hotspur's self-delusion, a kind of bovarysme which is, in the words

of T.S. Eliot, "the human will to see things as they are not."<sup>39</sup> To the very end Hotspur stubbornly refuses to listen to reason, choosing to base his thinking on "conjecture, expectation and surmise" in his encounter with the ruthless reality of a "bloody-fac'd" "theme" (2 Henry IV, I. iii. 22-23). The incorrigible Falstaff sees Hotspur as "the mad fellow of the north" (1 Henry IV, II. iv. 368-69).

Hotspur's obsession with honor renders him a prey of absentmindedness. In an unnatural outburst he asserts that he shall "solemnly defy" "all studies," concentrating all his energy on "how to gall and pinch this Bolingbroke" (I. iii. 228-29). The destruction of Henry IV becomes a matter of honor for Hotspur. But it takes much more than abstract honor to defeat the supremely cunning and efficient king. And Hotspur lacks both the policy and the capacity to achieve this purpose. He fails, however, or is unable to see this reality, in spite of Worcester's cunning. Worcester, acutely aware of his nephew's absentmindedness, is forever trying to rouse him from his dream. Hotspur, says Worcester, "apprehends a

world of figures here, /But not the form of what he should attend" (I. iii. 209-10). Like a Ulysses trying to rouse a Troilus from his slumber, Worcester tells Hotspur: "You start away /And lend no ear unto my purposes" (I. iii. 217-18). Hotspur's mad impatience, impulsiveness and self-absorption are pointed out by his father:

Why, what a wasp-stung and impatient fool  
Art thou to break into this woman's mood,  
Tying thine ear to no tongue but thine own!  
(I. iii. 236-38)

Hotspur's absentminded behaviour is limned with great comical touches by Shakespeare in the scene with his wife (II. iii. 39-120); in Hal's brilliant satirical portrayal of his counterpart (II. iv. 113-21); in Hotspur's long-winded and irrelevant speech (IV. iii. 52-87), which Hotspur himself admits is not to the point (IV. iii. 89); in Hotspur's inattention to everyday affairs (IV. ii. 81), and in his neglect of crucial matters (III. i. 6). In all these scenes Hotspur's inattention, his failure to look around, is shown in a highly comical light. The delayed response, the mechanical gestures

of the absentminded individual, the irrelevance of language to reality, are all employed to depict the ridiculousness of a man who has wandered out of his own self.

In Hal's shrewd satirical portrayal of Hotspur (II. iv. 113-21) certain essential truths emerge both about the speaker and his subject. The passage, though couched in hyperbolic terms, reveals Hal's shrewd observation and his sharp alertness to others, to life, and to his own self. We get a glimpse of Hotspur's "homicidal monomania,"<sup>40</sup> of his disdain for the quiet life, indeed for life. Hotspur is too earnest a young man to know or appreciate the joie de vivre so essential in the eyes of Hal. He is too much of a narcissist, too attached to "those proud titles" (V. iv. 79) of honor and glory, to pay any attention to life which he describes as "brittle" (V. iv. 78) and "time's fool" (V. iv. 81). In most of his speeches the emphasis is on blood (IV. i. 115-117) and death; "Long live death!" seems to be his motto: "die all, die merrily" (IV. i. 134). It is a most unnatural, morbid feeling.



In this satirical portrayal we have "Hal's first reference to Hotspur and he instinctively recognizes the antithesis between his own sociable nature and his rival's combative militarism."<sup>41</sup> In sharp contrast to Hotspur, Hal is resilient and sociable: "I can drink with any tinker in his own language during my life" (II. iv. 20-21); "I am now of all humours that have showed themselves humours since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight" (II. iv. 104-6). Modesty, generosity, openness, a readiness to learn and to teach, an ability to see and recognize merits in others, and an alert presence of mind (V. ii. 52-59)--all these attributes are nicely blended in the young prince and will emerge more prominently in Henry IV and Henry V.

Where Hal is perceptive and flexible, Hotspur is narrowminded and rigid. Hotspur does have an occasional insight into human nature and is at times capable of irony (I. iii. 29-69) (IV. iii. 52 ff.), but on the whole he is blind to the true nature of things, attaching more importance to manner than to matter and judging by

appearance rather than by reality. Nothing can be farther removed from reality than Hotspur's view of Hal as "the nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales" who "daff'd the world aside/And bid it pass" (IV. i. 95-97); and, in spite of Vernon's assertion that Hal's "wantonness" is grossly "misconstrued" (V. ii. 69), Hotspur is too obstinate to change his opinion about the prince (V. ii. 71-72). Hotspur is not the least aware of Hal's sociability, grace, and role-playing; he has no idea that his rival is determined to follow a course whereby

I'll so offend to make offence a skill  
Redeeming time when men think least I will.  
(I. iii. 239-40)

Hal is surely not the man who will daff the world aside and bid it pass.

Hotspur's inflexibility is pervasive; he shows no willingness at all to compromise or be accommodating (I. iii. 125-26), to listen to sound advice (IV. iii. 5), or to budge:

But in the way of bargain, mark ye me  
I'll cavil on the ninth part of a hair.  
(III. i. 139-40)

Worcester, who is clear-sighted in his judgement, sees Hotspur as "too wilful-blame," a fault he has to learn

to amend. According to Worcester, Hotspur is haughty and disdainful, lacking in grace and in self-control, attributes

The least of which haunting a nobleman  
Loath men's hearts and leaves behind a stain  
Upon the beauty of all parts besides,  
Beguiling them of commendation.

(III. i. 186-90)

And Hal has this to say about Hotspur's unaccommodating nature and his overweening pride:

The Douglas and the Hotspur both together  
Are confident against the world in arms.

(IV. i. 115-16)

Navarre's wit may be cruel, incisive and un-discriminating, his vow most unnatural; but he does not pose a serious threat, since society is capable ultimately of dealing with him and reintegrating him into its ranks. Hotspur's *idée fixe*, on the other hand, poses a real and serious threat. In Nostromo Joseph Conrad says:

A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane.  
He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea  
of justice; for may he not bring the heaven  
down pitilessly upon a loved head?<sup>42</sup>

A fundamental contempt for life--his own and that of others, is the basis of Hotspur's "creed."<sup>43</sup> Hotspur's abstract honor renders him "a menace to himself, to his

friends, and to the world of his time. It is an ally of the rashness of his temperament,"<sup>44</sup> Society cannot rehabilitate or reinstate someone who absolutely fails to adapt and re-adapt himself to it, to the ever-changing stream of life, someone with a fundamental contempt for life. Hotspur's final words show no enlightenment but only suggest a sense of utter disenchantment: Life is "time's fool, / And time, that takes survey of all the world, / Must have a stop" (V. iv. 81-3). It is a negative attitude: life seen as mere sound and fury. Bardolph's words come back to haunt us: Hotspur, he says,

with great imagination  
Proper to madmen, led his powers to death,  
And winking leap'd into destruction.  
(2 Henry IV, I. iii. 31-3)

CHAPTER THREE

LILIES THAT FESTER:

THE DELUSION OF ABSOLUTE VIRTUE

"Why should the worm intrude the maiden bud?  
Or hateful cuckoos hatch in sparrows' nests?  
Or toads infect fair founts with venom mud?  
Or tyrant folly lurk in gentle breasts?  
Or kings be breakers of their own behests?  
But no perfection is so absolute,  
That some impurity doth not pollute:  
(The Rape of Lucrece, 848-54)

In nature there's no blemish but the mind;  
None can be call'd deformed but the unkind.  
Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil  
Are empty trunks o'erflourish'd by the devil.  
(Twelfth Night, III. iv. 401-04)

I. Malvolio: The Self-Worshipping Padant

The world of Illyria is a world governed by "most brisk and giddy-paced times" (II. iv. 4-5), where "foolery" "does walk about the orb like the sun," shining everywhere (III. i. 43-44), a world where, as C.L. Barber points out, madness is a key word.<sup>1</sup> It is a place that somehow reminds one of Navarre in its

"unique combination of formality and actuality, fantastication and common sense,"<sup>2</sup> in its blend of artifice and sentiment.<sup>3</sup> Its extremely self-regarding inhabitants like Orsino and Olivia have a tremendous capacity for imagination, for feeling and loving. Gropingly they seek an outlet for their excessive emotions, an adequate form--"the form of my intent," as the judicious Viola puts it (I. ii. 55). They have wandered out of the self on a voyage of "mere extravagancy" (II. i. 12) to find this form. This particular Illyrian mood is described for us by that shrewd observer, Feste, who tells the Duke:

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

(II. iv. 75-81)

This atmosphere of reverie and melancholy is sharply juxtaposed with the earthy ribaldry, rioting and calculated anarchy of Sir Toby Belch and company. The two atmospheres--of feeling and saturnalia--combine to make up a world that leaves little or no room for a commingling of blood and judgement. Such a commingling

can of course be found in a Feste or a Viola, those individuals who are able to participate in and detach themselves from what goes on in Illyria.

In a world like Illyria, where melancholy and festivity, imaginative ardor and frivolity, have the upper hand, a man addicted to cold decree, pure judgement, strict discipline, etiquette and solemnity is hardly welcome, if not expelled from it. Such an alien is Malvolio, a man who tends to negate life and the joy of living, to whom merry-making is anathema. Malvolio affects virtue so feverishly that he has become rigid, absentminded, unsociable and inhibited. Consequently, essential realities elude his attention. A basic human truth that he is either unable or unwilling to recognize is that "we all are men,

In our natures frail, and capable  
Of our flesh; few are angels...

(Henry VIII, V, iii. 10-12)

Virtue that is fiercely upheld can become vicious:

For nought so vile that on 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.  
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;  
And vice (sometime's) by action dignified.

(Romeo and Juliet, II. iii. 17-22)

Another essential truth is the one expressed in Sonnet 121 that we cannot and should not judge others by ourselves, especially if our own standards, like Malvolio's, happen to be absolute. Isabella tells Angelo, another absolutist:

We cannot weigh our brother with ourself.  
Great men may jest with saints; 'tis wit in them,  
But in the less foul profanation.

(Measure for Measure, II. ii. 126-28)

In his inexorable attempt to outdo nature, Malvolio qualifies as a full-fledged pedant. His demand for perfection, like Navarre's, being far beyond the scope of nature,<sup>4</sup> is ridiculous: it is "at variance with common sense and nature."<sup>5</sup> Pedantry is embedded in affectation. And affectation, according to Bergson, is a major target for laughter, for it is here that the incongruous is most palpably present. "Incongruity," says Cyrus Hoy in his introduction to The City Madam, "is of the essence in comedy, and nothing is more incongruous, or more ridiculous, than the spectacle of men and women seeking to pass themselves off for what they are not."<sup>6</sup> Affectation is caused either by vanity or hypocrisy.<sup>7</sup> Malvolio's "overwhelming self-concern"<sup>8</sup> causes him, as we shall see,



to be doubly foolish--vain and hypocritical.

"I and my bosom must debate a while" (Henry V, IV. i. 31), says Henry V, a man who contends especially to know himself. Such an utterance and such a resolution would seem most strange and most unlikely to Malvolio, a man living in illusions, who is an egregious example of somebody who does not know himself. The inevitable outcome of this failure to look around, as Bergson constantly reminds us, and more especially within oneself, is, as has been pointed out, unsociability, absentmindedness, automatism and rigidity.

As a man who judges others by his own strict standards, a man who, being cheerless and incapable of humor, cannot bring himself to laugh with and at someone like Feste, Malvolio takes to task no less a person than his own superior, Olivia, for taking delight in "such a barren rascal" as Feste. Pompously and pedantically he tells her: "I protest, I take these wise men that crow so at these set kind of fools no better than the fools' zanies" (I. v. 95-96). A person who takes no delight at all in, indeed frowns upon,

Feste is a person who cannot be normal or sane. To be immune to Feste's mirth is to be unnatural. Feste's reminder to seize the day is addressed as much to the spoilsport Malvolio as to Olivia and Orsino:

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter.  
Present mirth hath present laughter;  
What's to come is still unsure.  
In delay there lies no plenty;  
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,  
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

(II. iii. 48-53)

Nor will, for that matter, the festive and dreamy mood of Illyria; sooner or later we are going to be brought down to earth, once more to the harsh realities of existence, to face the wind and the rain.

But Malvolio stubbornly refuses to take part in the mirth. Having exiled himself from the community, he lacks the feeling of fellowship, the sense of solidarity needed to become resilient in life. He shudders at what he terms the "uncivil rule" (II. ii. 132) of Sir Toby Belch. We might sympathize with him here and feel he is justified if we did not know that it is not only Belch's wild revelry that he takes exception to, but all forms of merry-making. Threateningly and authoritatively he seeks to impose his own

rigid anti-social criteria on others (II. iii. 105-07, 130-33). Belch, who is terribly attached to life, will have none of this: "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale" (II. iii. 123-25)? Toby goes so far as to question Malvolio's right to life and existence: "shall this fellow live" (II. v. 68)? Malvolio thus becomes, as Anne Barton points out, "the churl at the banquet, the sobersides at the carnival," the grudging giver who "refuses to yield himself to the extraordinary."<sup>9</sup> He is not unlike Erasmus' "sage": "Take your sage to a feast, and he will mar the good cheer either by a morose silence or by conducting a quiz." Unable to "put off his gravity," he will "dampen the mirth of the audience." When it comes to the simple realities of everyday life "you will say that this wiseacre is no man, but dead wood." He is so "far out of step with general ways of thinking and modes of life among the folk" that he "is bound to fall into odium, through the great diversity between his and their lives and minds."<sup>10</sup> It is precisely such odium which explains and justifies the plot to ensnare Malvolio and open

his eyes, the inevitable though somewhat cruel (since it is carried to excess) trap ingeniously laid down by Maria and perpetrated by Sir Toby, Fabian and Feste.

Malvolio's aloofness makes Northrop Frye classify him as the "idiotes" in the play, the character who withdraws from the comic society "in a more concentrated way" than the fool or the clown. In Twelfth Night Malvolio becomes the butt of "the anti-comic mood."<sup>11</sup> Malvolio's superiority is resolutely asserted when he bluntly tells Sir Toby, Maria and the others, "I am not of your element" (III. iv. 137). In spite of her self-absorption Olivia is able to diagnose Malvolio's malaise:

O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio and taste with a distemper'd appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon-bullets.  
(I. v. 97-101)

In making this statement, Olivia, unimpeded by her need of and respect for him (III. iv. 5-6, 66-70), turns the spotlight on Malvolio's weakness: his insufferable vanity. In so doing she becomes, as Feste tells her (I. v. 120), a spokesman for humanity. But it is

Maria who has closely studied and observed Malvolio. She sees him as "an affection'd ass" (II. iii. 160-61), a self-righteous pedant and snob who is so enamored of himself and of his "excellencies" (II. iii. 163), so overconfident--"an overweening rogue" (II. v. 34)-- that he is deluded into believing that all who look on him "love him" (II. iii. 164). In "practising behaviour to his own shadow" (II. v. 20), Malvolio approaches the very verge of insanity; and Maria's letter is designed to "make a contemplative idiot of him" (II. v. 22-23).

Malvolio's excessive vanity renders him, like Hotspur, a victim of bovarysme, the human tendency to see things as they are not. His dream--to marry his superior and become Count Malvolio (II. v. 40)--and the dream logic he uses to justify it, will ultimately bring about discomfiture and prove his undoing. The dream, like Navarre's academe, seems deceptively simple: all depends on fortune: "'Tis but fortune. All is fortune" (II. v. 27). Regarding this point M.C. Bradbrook says: "As a victim of self-love, Malvolio tries to climb the wheel of Folly's mistress,

Fortune."<sup>12</sup> Malvolio's divulgence of his wishful thinking (II. v. 27 ff.) gives us a chance to confirm earlier doubts by Sir Toby--"Art any more than a steward?" (II. iii. 122-23)--and Maria's statement: "The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser" (II. iii. 159-60). It, moreover, makes us aware of his hypocritical attitude: his burning desire for wealth, luxury and the easy life makes a mockery of his seeming asceticism. Seeming virtue, as in Angelo's case, becomes "little more than vanity and self-ornament."<sup>13</sup>

Whether in his self-love and burning ambition for wealth and social consequence Malvolio is one of what L.C. Knights, in Drama and Society in The Age of Jonson, calls the "new men,"<sup>14</sup> or whether, as Harold Fisch points out, he could be regarded as one of three Puritans in Shakespeare, who seeks social power,<sup>15</sup> is beside the point here. What's important is that Malvolio, like the "self-centered" and "self-dramatizing" Emma Bovary, lets his imagination dwell on a dream beyond the reach of either his

"station" or his "capabilities."<sup>16</sup> His aversion to simple truths and to festivity can be equated with Emma's hatred of "commonplace heroes and moderate feelings such as are to be found in life."<sup>17</sup> By fixing the intelligence on his impossible dream, on a single idea, Malvolio becomes immobile, slackening in the attention required by life, society and self. Common sense, "the endeavour of a mind continually adapting itself anew and changing ideas when it changes objects,"<sup>18</sup> is thus inverted. "It is Malvolio's defect," says Traversi, "to be inextricably rooted in a fixed idea of things, in which he himself occupies the center (....) This defect makes him a legitimate object for the comic derision which so abundantly overtakes him in the course of the play."<sup>19</sup>

Malvolio's *idée fixe*, which inverts his common sense, plunges him into a position similar to Don Quixote's setting out for the wars:

The romances he has been reading all tell of knights encountering, on the way, giant adversaries. He therefore must needs encounter a giant. This idea of a giant is a privileged recollection, which has taken its abode in his mind and lies there in wait, motionless, watching for an opportunity to sally forth and become embodied in a thing. It is bent on entering the material world,

and so the very first object he sees bearing the faintest resemblance to a giant is invested with the form of one. Thus, Don Quixote sees giants where we see windmills. This is comical; it is also absurd.<sup>20</sup>

So it is with the would-be Count Malvolio. He is so busy trying to recreate reality in his own image, so pre-occupied, indeed occupied, with his fantastic dream of marrying Olivia, exercising absolute power and pomp in his "branch'd velvet gown" (II. v. 52-53), attaining to fabulous riches, putting an end to rioting and revelry, and rehearsing his future role--he is so carried away by all this that he is ready to "take false shadows for true substances,"<sup>21</sup> and to fall easily into the trap like a "trout that must be caught with tickling" (II. v. 26).

The very first object he encounters--Maria's letter which so cleverly caters to his obsessive whims--overwhelms him merely and, like Don Quixote's windmill, is, in no time at all, given substance and translated into a reality to which he will desperately cling.

"Go to, thou art made if thou desir'st to be so" (II. v. 168-69), the letter urges him, tantalizing his cherished dream. And "go to" he does, letting nobody and nothing, not even language, stand in his way: "If I could make that resemble something in me" (II. v. 131). From



now on he will only see what is not existent and think only what is not consistent, moulding things on his fixed idea. He will "crush" things "a little" in order to make them "bow" to him (II. v. 152-53). Henceforth all circumstances and utterances will concur "directly with the letter" (III. iv. 73) and everything will adhere together (III. iv. 86). Things and language will be simplified and moulded to suit his purposes (III. iv. 71-92), and all obstacles are bound to vanish: "Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes. Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked" (III. iv. 89-92).

It is a mind on the verge of insanity. The words used to describe Malvolio's state of mind all denote madness: "very strange manner" (III. iv. 7-8); "possessed" (III. iv. 9); "rave" (III. iv. 10); "tainted in's wits" (III. iv. 13-14); "very midsummer madness" (III. iv. 61); "improbable fiction" (III. iv. 141). To restore such a mind to sanity, to make the intelligence once more conform to the mobility of things, drastic measures may have to be taken. Sir Toby's remedy--"we'll have him in a dark room and bound" (III. iv. 148-49)--proves too crude and

too cruel even for the taste of the arch-reveller himself who begins to feel the pricking of conscience (IV. ii. 71-77)--"I would we were well rid of this knavery" (IV. ii. 72-3). But it is fraught with irony: Malvolio, the enemy of recreation, is made "a common recreation" (II. iii. 145); he becomes an object of pleasure and pastime (III. iv. 150-51), and, worst of all, the king of misrule himself, Sir Toby, presides over the whole operation, as Malvolio himself puts it in his letter addressed to Olivia: "... you have put me into darkness and given your drunken cousin rule over me..." (V. i. 311-13). No greater humiliation than this can be envisaged for someone like Malvolio.

Malvolio, to be sure, has been roused from his slumber. He freely admits the embarrassing humiliation he has been through (V. i. 350-53). But whatever measure of humility he may have achieved while imprisoned in the dark room seems to have left him in the end, though his language seems to have become more natural (I. v. 338-52). One still detects traces of arrogance culminating in his threat to be "reveng'd on the whole pack of you" (V. i. 386). How seriously, or how far Malvolio will

carry his threat, is a question that is difficult to resolve. R.M. Frye thinks this is "but another of his ridiculous pomposities, and the audience is surely meant to agree with Fabian's appraisal of the situation" (V. i. 373-76).<sup>22</sup>

But a feeling of uneasiness, augmented by the somber mood foreshadowed in the end, lingers persistently. For one thing Malvolio, in spite of Olivia's promise to redress him (V. i. 359-63) and Fabian's just and balanced appraisal (V. i. 364-76), is not the least gracious in defeat. Malvolio is not one who will sit "like Patience on a monument, /Smiling at grief" (II. iv. 117-18). Nor is he willing to "gather honey from the weed, /And make a moral of the devil himself" (Henry V, IV. i. 11-12); adversity seems to serve no solid purpose for him: he would not use it to find out what he is. The impression he gives us at the end of the play is of one who is reluctant or unable to convert rigidity into plasticity and achieve gracefulness. Rather than have recourse to gracefulness, a virtue which life and society require of the individual in order to escape ridiculousness, he succumbs to unmitigated fury and contemplates revenge.

There is a glimmer of hope that he might be reinstated, in the Duke's words: "Pursue him and entreat him to a peace" (V. i. 389). But it is only a glimmer; to achieve gracefulness and generosity of spirit Malvolio will have to concede a simple truth:

Any thing that's mended is but patch'd; virtue that transgresses is but patch'd with sin, and sin that amends is but patch'd with virtue.

(I. v. 51-4)

## II. Angelo: Stricture and Firm Abstinence

"As if our touch were infectious we," says Montaigne in his essay "Of Moderation," "by our handling, corrupt the things which in themselves are good and beautiful. We may grasp virtue in such a manner that she will become vicious, if we embrace her with too violent and fierce a desire."<sup>23</sup> Angelo is one character who, through fierce dedication to ideas good and beautiful in themselves, has caused virtue to become vicious, turning its beauty into beautiful evil and

transforming his essentially noble nature into a deformity. The transformation leads him to pay no heed to the promptings of common sense, to disregard the general sense, feeling, or judgement of mankind. An isolated figure, Angelo becomes arrogant, intransigent, unkind and unnatural. In his feverish desire to rise above the human condition--to become no less than an angel--he endeavors, like the hero of Crime and Punishment,<sup>24</sup> to overstep the limitations of humanity, and ends by becoming a monster. By committing the folly of wandering out of the self, as Bergson puts it, and escaping from "the man," he transforms himself into a beast instead of an angel. Instead of raising he degrades himself.<sup>25</sup>

Angelo has several things in common with Malvolio: the pursuit of absolute values, the injudiciousness, the grim austerity, the lack of cheer and humour, the social callousness, the pedantry. Like Malvolio, he is guilty of affectation; he shares with Malvolio an excessive vanity, flaunting his lofty ideals in the same way as the steward flaunts his strictures upon cakes and ale. As for hypocrisy, it is more likely

than not that Angelo is largely sincere in his behaviour.

As Isabella tells the Duke in the end:

I partly think  
A due sincerity govern'd his deeds,  
Till he did look on me...

(V. i. 450-52)

The consensus seems to militate against his being a hypocrite. As G. Wilson Knight puts it, "Angelo is not a conscious hypocrite: rather a man whose chief faults are self-deception and pride in his own righteousness--an unused and delicate instrument quite useless under the test of active trial."<sup>26</sup> His pride borders on hubris. From his absolute, supremely self-assured statement to Isabella early in the play, "Look, what I will not, that I cannot do" (II. ii. 52), he will, as the play progresses, proceed--having been plunged into a chaotic situation--to the morally confounded "Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,/Nothing goes right; we would, and we would not" (IV. iv. 36-37).

His vanity makes him embark on an absurdly inflexible and rigid conduct. In clinging to his absolute and rigid virtue Angelo cuts a sorry and ridiculous figure. Bergson makes a rather reluctant confession

that "we laugh not only at the faults of our fellow-men, but also, at times, at their good qualities."<sup>27</sup> With people like Malvolio, Angelo and Alceste in mind, we cannot but wholeheartedly agree with Bergson that a "flexible vice may not be so easy to ridicule as a rigid virtue."<sup>28</sup>

It is definitely not Angelo's virtue which arouses our laughter but the fact that it is maintained as a mere abstraction in complete isolation from society. True virtue should be forthgoing, for "if our virtues/ Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike/As if we had them not" (I. i. 34-36); it should be brought into accord with the general sense, feeling, or judgement of mankind. As the Duke tells Angelo:

Thyself and thy belongings  
Are not thine own so proper as to waste  
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.  
(I. i. 30-32)

Viola expresses a similar view when she tells Olivia that she certainly usurps herself, for "what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve" (Twelfth Night, I. v. 199-201). By hoarding his good qualities Angelo forgoes the generosity of spirit and the free disposition so

essential to maintaining resiliency in life.

The Duke is surely thinking of Angelo when he says that, "There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure; but security enough to make fellowships accurst" (III. ii. 239-41). The statement gives prominence to an important point: Angelo's "security." Security in the sense of overconfidence and insolent pride is a fault with which many a Shakespearean character is afflicted, people like Hotspur, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Antony. "It is security, 'mortals' chiefest enemy," that makes Macbeth "spurn fate, scorn death, and bear/His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace and fear" (Macbeth, III. v. 30-33). And it is "firm security" that renders Antony foolishly obstinate and inflexible, goading him into giving up himself "merely to chance and hazard" (Antony and Cleopatra, III. vii. 48-49).

This is the same security which blinds Angelo to reality, clouding his common sense and making him strut to his confusion. Obsessed with his self-righteousness, Angelo does not bother to look around or, more importantly, to carry out self-scrutiny. Failing to closely examine himself Angelo becomes preposterously



rigid. Neither Isabella's persuasive powers nor Escalus' humane and prudent approach can make him budge. "No remedy" (II. i. 295 and II. ii. 47) is a nice phrase to describe his rigor and utterly unaccommodating position. It is rigor that accounts for his sadly simplistic views of justice, of crime and punishment; at one point (II. ii. 89-99) he goes so far as to resolve to check the growth of evil and eradicate sin. His ultimate plan is to bring about a congruity of intention and deed, to practice on earth what is "set down" in heaven (II. iv. 50), where "the action lies/In his true nature" (Hamlet, III. 61-62).

Another appalling truth about Angelo is his unnaturalness, his reluctance to commit himself and his fear of social obligation. Angelo, the Duke tells us, "is precise,

Stands at guard with envy, scarce confesses  
That his blood flows, or that his appetite  
Is more to bread than stone...

(I. iii. 50-53)

Lucio, hyperbolically, harps on the same theme (III. ii. 115-19). Angelo flaunts his snow-broth control over his instincts and impulses, claiming he can

regulate passion and thus avoid temptation (II. i. 17-31). Speaking of Angelo's passionless existence and his precise nature, H.B. Charlton says: "For most of the situations of life, Angelo's is a kind of virtue which seems to serve. But it is fundamentally insecure: blood may at any time assert itself, and the more violently because it has been so rigorously restrained."<sup>29</sup>

When the blood does assert itself, when Angelo comes to grips with the reality of experience, he is hurled into a whirlpool of moral confusion. As in the case of that untried idealist, Navarre, though in a much more intense way, he is faced with a moral dilemma. Equivocation, of course, becomes his only outlet:

What's this, what's this? Is this her fault or mine?  
The tempter or the tempted who sins most?

(II. ii. 162-63)

To Isabella he says:

Might there not be a charity in sin  
To save this brother's life?

(II. iv. 63-64)

The equivocation provides only a chimerical solution, an ephemeral remedy. It will not do. Angelo has to regain his common sense: the intelligence, which has been arrested as a result of pursuing a fixed notion, has to be set in motion again in order to keep up with the mobility of things.

Basic human realities will have to be faced and accepted. Among these is the belief that love thrives when there is a balance of spirit and instinct; to emphasize one at the expense of the other is to invite chaos and possibly insanity.<sup>30</sup> Instinct, as A.P. Rossiter points out, cannot be regulated or subjected to law.<sup>31</sup> Cloistered virtue is ineffective and ineffectual; it is an unsociable virtue since it dreads social contacts and commitments. Another basic reality is the "ambiguous fabric of existence which renders the pure idea invalid in the face of the human act."<sup>32</sup> In Crime and Punishment Raskolnikov learns after undergoing many excruciating trials and ordeals that men and women after all are made of flesh and blood and not of bronze.<sup>33</sup> Angelo will

have to come to grips with these essential truths. Unlike Malvolio, he shows a willingness to go through a thorough self-examination, to learn, to achieve a degree of humility, to adapt and re-adapt himself to society. His sincere though harsh contrition in the end augurs well for reintegration into the ranks of society.

CHAPTER FOUR

NAIVETE AND INEXORABLE JUSTICE:

THE DELUSION OF CONGRUITY

It is a good divine that follows his own instructions; I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than to be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching.

(Merchant of Venice, I. ii. 15-18)

How can you possibly live all your life without human companionship?<sup>1</sup>

Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment

I. Shylock: I Crave the Law

From the common notions of common sense, referred to in Chapter I, as the combined tact and readiness in dealing with the every-day affairs of life, the general sense, feeling, or judgement of mankind, and the faculty embodying the intuitions common to all mankind, to the more philosophical Bergsonian conception of it as the endeavor of a mind continually

adapting itself anew and changing ideas when it changes objects--from all these notions emerge mainly the themes of naturalness and rationality; the significance of our instinctive faculty; worldly wisdom and alertness to life; elasticity and adaptability; solidarity and commitment, and the harmony between reason and passion. By failing to exercise their common sense, Hotspur, Navarre, and Malvolio alienate themselves from the community and from mankind.

Such alienation, somber enough in the case of Malvolio, presents a tragic potential in Angelo's case. The same tragic potential, embodied in Shylock, is finally realized in Timon of Athens. Radically different otherwise, Shylock and Timon are alike in lusting after the absolute, exhibiting misanthropic tendencies, and fiercely endeavoring to reconcile thoughts and words, intentions and deeds. By desperately seeking to achieve a correspondence between what is contemplated and what is uttered; by acting unnaturally; by being utterly inflexible, and by failing to know himself, Shylock, though humanized and personalized by Shakespeare, acquires a mechanical aspect. He provides a very good

example of Bergson's conception of something mechanical encrusted upon the living. His mind and energies, being entirely concentrated on a set of ideas--retaliation, inexorable justice, material interests--warp his judgement, weaken his affection for his own daughter, preclude a thorough self-scrutiny, and ultimately invert his common sense, bringing him to the brink of insanity.

His attempt to make words conform with ideas and, more importantly, to make deeds correspond with ideas all the time, shows a basic ignorance of self, of the human condition in general and the essential absurdity of existence in particular. He is too preoccupied to see, as does Portia, that man is a giddy thing, a fluctuating being; that absolute congruity is the business of heaven--where there is "no shuffling," where "the action lies/In his true nature" (Hamlet, III. iii. 61-62)--and of saints. The sensible and clear-sighted Portia, who is fully aware of this human limitation, knows better;

If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions; I can easier teach twenty what

were good to be done, than to be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching.

(I. ii. 13-18)

Her modesty and self-knowledge are in striking contrast to Shylock's unreasonable pride and distorted judgement.

The attempt at congruity and the passion for consistency contribute to Shylock's rigidity, producing largely mechanical attitudes, movements and utterances which curb the imagination and stifle spontaneity. As a result, his behaviour becomes systematic and predictable. It is an absurdity: a living human being acting like a machine. The effect is surely comical: "We laugh," says Bergson, "every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing."<sup>2</sup> The mechanical aspect is seen most clearly in Shylock's language which is thus almost drained of metaphor and imaginative power. Shylock will only say what he means; if he does say more, if he does at times give rein to the imagination, he will hasten to explain and qualify it with a phrase like "I mean" (I. iii. 22-25) (II. v. 29-35). Elsewhere his language is stiff and formal. He tells Antonio, for example, that

If you repay me not on such a day,



In such a place, such sum or sums as are  
Express'd in the condition, let the forfeit  
Be nominated for an equal pound  
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken  
In what part of your body pleaseth me.  
(I. iii. 147-52)

The language is surely part of the "tediousness" that Jessica so bitterly complains of (II. iii. 3), the tediousness pervading Shylock's home.

Shylock's self-expression is cramped and his imagination curbed as a result of the automatism governing his behaviour, which consists largely in a series of automatic and isolated gestures. Free activity, the antithesis of automatism, is inhibited. And action is paralyzed, giving way to reaction to outside stimuli or to what Bergson calls "inner itching." Distinguishing between action and gesture Bergson says:

Action is intentional or, at any rate, conscious; gesture slips out unawares, it is automatic. In action, the entire person is engaged; in gesture, an isolated part of the person is expressed, unknown to, or at least apart from, the whole of the personality.<sup>3</sup>

This is brilliantly illustrated in the scene between Shylock and Tubal (III. i. 83-136): Here Tubal, apparently aware of Shylock's weakness, manipulates at

will and goads him into a series of automatic gestures. The scene produces a highly comic effect which precludes sympathy in spite of the presence of a potential for pathos:

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

Shylock. Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my tourquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.

(III. i. 123-28)

Whatever pathos is generated here--Shylock's tender remembrance of his wife--quickly degenerates into bathos through the crude but unconscious juxtaposition of "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor" with "a wilderness of monkeys," the juxtaposition of pure emotion with something grossly material. The "wilderness of monkeys," being extremely funny in this context, catches our attention, in spite of ourselves, at the expense of Leah's memory. Such a sharp contrast is not unrelated to Bergson's view that "any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned."<sup>4</sup> A similar juxtaposition, and just as funny, is found in Act II Scene

VIII where Shylock unwittingly mixes "daughter" with "ducats," ducats becoming "Christian ducats" (II. viii. 14-24). Once again the scene is too funny to arouse sympathy. The comic notion of "the body taking precedence of the soul"<sup>5</sup> applies here as well.

Shylock is so "closed up tight inside himself,"<sup>6</sup> so "bound up in self"<sup>7</sup> that he is unable to carry out any soul searching or pay attention to realities. The result is rigidity and absentmindedness, or, to use the words of Northrop Frye, "a humor" or "a mechanical form of repetitive behavior."<sup>8</sup> This is best seen in his ridiculous repetition of words and phrases, a repetition that serves no obvious purpose on the part of the speaker but only to point out his tedious and rigidly precise nature. "I will be assured I may; and, that I may be assured, I will bethink me" (I. iii. 30-31) is an example. The word "well" is unconsciously and mechanically repeated three times (I. iii. 1, 3, 6); "my daughter" and "my ducats" are reiterated seven times (II. viii. 15-22); "let him look to his bond" (III. i. 49, 50, 52); "at our synagogue" (III. i. 134, 135); "are you answer'd" (IV. i. 46, 62) and words to

the same effect (IV, i. 42, 43, 52), and, most notoriously, the phrase embodying his *idée fixe*, "I will have my bond," which is repeated five times in a passage of no more than thirteen lines! "Shylock hammers out his phrases and can find no way of varying them once they are uttered," says John Palmer. He adds: "It is the utterance of a man whose mind is concentrated, obsessed, focused upon a narrow range of fixed ideas."<sup>9</sup> Shylock's mind, according to John Russell Brown, is "out of control."<sup>10</sup>

Shylock's fixed idea is riveted upon relentless justice, revenge and material interests. It is for the most part in terms of such a fixation that he views his relationship to self, to others and to life. And it is out of this idea, and upon it, that he moulds things. Common sense has thus fallen into abeyance or is rather inverted, since the intelligence fails or cannot keep pace with the constant mobility of things. The inversion of common sense verges on frenzy, producing a passion that is "confus'd, / So strange, outrageous, and so variable" (II. viii. 12-13) as in the scene when he discovers he has been robbed of

daughter and wealth (II. viii. 12-24). At other times it brings about delirious behaviour as in the scene mentioned earlier (III. i. 83-136) where Tubal, precisely because he plays on Shylock's fixed idea, has no difficulty at all in manipulating him like a puppet. His speech becomes absurd and incoherent:

"I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hears'd at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin" (III. i. 91-94). Here as elsewhere in this scene, Shylock's inhibited feeling, his obsession, comes to the fore, only to be promptly checked again. Regarding this point Bergson has this to say: "In a comic repetition of words we generally find two terms: a repressed feeling which goes off like a spring, and an idea that delights in repressing the feeling anew."<sup>11</sup>

Shylock's delirious behaviour reaches its climax at the trial scene where his *idée fixe*, his fierce dedication to absolute justice, overwhelms him: "I stand for judgement" (IV. i. 103); "I stand here for law" (IV. i. 142); "I crave the law" (IV. i. 206);

"I charge you by the law" (IV. i. 238); "I stay here on my bond" (IV. i. 242). The compulsive, repetitive pattern becomes pathetic here; we feel for him: sympathy cannot be withheld for a person who follows a single idea with a sweeping, all-consuming passion. We cannot grudge him sympathetic feeling: Shylock is sadly unaware that his intent of ideal justice can never be literally translated into deed; to translate his determination into action would be to overstep the scope of humanity. Shylock's ideal justice cannot be countenanced by humanity. Nor is it countenanced by God: Shylock, who speaks so passionately for his race (III. i. 56-68), chooses to ignore, or is apparently unaware of, basic teachings of his faith, particularly a fundamental precept in the midrash, the ancient Jewish commentary on part of Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>12</sup> The precept has to do with the issue of justice and mercy:

Thus said the Holy One: "If I create the world with mercy, sin will abound; and if I create it with justice, how can the world exist? Therefore I create it with both mercy and justice, and may it thus endure."  
Midrash, Bereshith Rabbah<sup>13</sup>

Shylock, as inflexible as ever, does not respond to Portia's urgent plea for mercy. He cannot: Shylock responds to self, to others and to life only "on compulsion" (IV. i. 183), "of force" (IV, i. 56), as he himself puts it. . . And .

The quality of mercy is not strain'd  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath.

(IV. i. 184-86)

Portia reminds him--to no avail, to be sure, as Shylock is too rigid to listen to common sense--of an essential human truth: "in the course of justice none of us/Should see salvation" (IV. i. 199-200). Mercy is "an attribute of God himself;/And earthly power doth then show likest God's/When mercy seasons justice" (IV. i. 195-97).

It is the truth Angelo has to be made aware of, the lesson he has bitterly--almost tragically--to learn. "The action of the Merchant of Venice," says Frye, "moves from justice to mercy, and mercy is not opposed to justice, but is an authority which contains or internalizes justice. The justice of Shylock's bond is external and the fall of Shylock is part of

the process of internalizing justice."<sup>14</sup> By pressing to the limit his claim of ideal justice, Shylock poses a potential threat--thereby bringing the play to the brink of tragedy--to the balance of harmony, and has to be reckoned with. As in Angelo's case the awakening from his dream is rude and its effects dire. From his absolute, unyielding and unfeeling "I stand here for law," Shylock, once more like Angelo ("we would, and we would not"), is hurled into the bewilderment of "Is that the law" (IV. i. 313)? The very simple question, like Shylock's last words "I am not well" (IV. i. 396), shrouds the gruelling moral anguish, the muted fury, the bewilderment, the inferno of doubts which the self-deluded people like Troilus, Angelo, and Timon, are faced with when the illusion is shattered and the truth withers. The reality of experience, they realize to their utter chagrin and discontent, does not square with their cherished dreams of the ideal.

If Shylock insists on absolute law and justice he will have no less than the absolute: "as thou urgest justice," Portia assures him, "Thou shalt have justice,



more than thou desir'st" (IV. i. 315-16), adding that he "shall have all justice," "he shall have nothing but the penalty" (IV. i. 321-22). Having callously turned down the appeal for mercy, Shylock "shall have merely justice and his bond" (IV. i. 339). Shylock, with fine dramatic irony, is thus ruined by his own devices against others. This is a variation of the comic theme of the robber robbed.<sup>15</sup> "Not infrequently," says Bergson, "comedy sets before us a character who lays a trap in which he is the first to be caught." It is the case of "the villain who is the victim of his own villainy, or the cheat cheated."<sup>16</sup> Shylock, according to Harry Levin, "is not, strictly speaking, a villain; he is a serio-comic intriguer who will justly be hoisted with his own petard."<sup>17</sup>

When common sense is inverted, the supple, the ever-changing and the living give way to the rigid, the ready-made and the mechanical; manner seeks to outdo matter, the letter aims at ousting the spirit.<sup>18</sup> Shylock isolates himself from life, the community and self, thus becoming rigid, unsociable, absentminded and unnatural. His utterly unaccommodating attitude permeates the play.

No lesser a person than the Duke himself, who is supposed to be impartial, says of Shylock that he is

A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch  
Uncapable of pity, void and empty  
From any dram of mercy.

(IV. i. 4-6)

Salerio points out that no soul can dissuade Shylock from "forfeiture," justice, and "his bond" (III. ii. 285-86). Words denoting rigidity are used to describe his attitude: "impenetrable" (III. iii. 18); "bootless prayers" (III. iii. 20); "rigorous course," "obdurate" (IV. i. 9); "brassy bosoms," "rough hearts of flint," "stubborn" (IV. i. 31-32). Shylock is impervious to mercy and friendly persuasion: "tell me not of mercy" (III. iii. 1), he says with alarming finality. Arrogantly he asserts:

I'll not be made a soft and dull-ey'd fool  
To shake the head, relent, and sigh, and yield  
To Christian intercessors. Follow not;  
I'll have no speaking; I will have my bond.  
(III. iii. 14-17).

He will not budge because he has "an oath in heaven" (IV. i. 228), and no power "in the tongue of man" will alter him (IV. i. 241-42). Shylock's hubris reminds us of Coriolanus, another individual who makes a virtue of

obstinacy and refuses to yield to instinct (Coriolanus, V. iii. 24-37).

Like Malvolio and Angelo, Shylock would most willingly "devise laws for the blood" (I. ii. 19) and for denying humanity any more cakes and ale. His discomfiture, like that of Navarre, Malvolio and Angelo, is precipitated precisely through choosing to impose cold decree on blood. Shylock's "sober house" (II. v. 36) is barred to music, festivity and merry-making (II. v. 29-38). His own daughter admits that their house "is hell" and is marked by "tediousness" (II. iii. 2-3). Shylock does not obey the finer instincts of love, compassion and mercy but the baser instincts of revenge (III. ii. 71-76, 98). His attitudes and behaviour are determined by his "humour" (IV. i. 43) which he defends with rigorous logic (IV. i. 89-100).

Shylock's conduct is not motiveless but perverse,<sup>19</sup> being largely based on "mere moral anarchy."<sup>20</sup> Shylock is a resourceful debater; his reasoning in general (IV. i. 35-62), particularly about moral issues (IV. i. 89-103), is adroit but misleading. His absolute, unrelenting nature and his unshakable logic are eloquently

brought to light by Antonio (IV. i. 70-83). Antonio maintains that reasoning with Shylock is no less an impossible feat than, and as futile as, reasoning with nature. But if nature were ever to listen and relent, Shylock would not. In other words, Shylock strives to outdo nature, a foolish effort for which he pays dearly in the end.

A man of no geniality, Shylock has a grim, morbid, and macabre sense of humour: the pound of flesh is suggested "in a merry sport" (I. iii. 146); man's flesh is "not so estimable, profitable neither, / As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats" (166-68); he will go to the banquet "to feed upon the prodigal Christian" (II. v.15). The aversion for jocose imagination and geniality is interwoven with the antipathy to sociability, as well as with the essentially rigid outlook on things.

Shylock's alienation and unsociability have several reasons behind them. The most important is his unsympathetic attitude to fellowship and solidarity (I. iii. 39) (II. v. 16, 34, 52), as well as to merry-making. His raging pride and self-isolation have brought about, and sustain, a vicious individualism, an attitude which,

through emphasizing private values, was not looked upon favorably in the age of Shakespeare.<sup>11</sup> This does not help his image as an alien in an unfriendly environment. The unfriendliness is not entirely unjustified: by his obsession with material interests,<sup>22</sup> by taking usury, Shylock is regarded by the community as a moral offender.<sup>23</sup> Usury was considered something unnatural and unsociable: "All the evils of the time," says L.C. Knights, "are attributed to usury."<sup>24</sup> The following passage from Joseph Conrad's Nostromo is relevant and sheds further light on the matter in general and Shylock's character in particular:

There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle.<sup>25</sup>

The two major concerns of The Merchant of Venice are love and wealth. To Antonio, Portia and the other characters, there is, says Mark Van Doren, "no incompatibility between money and love." But Shylock "cannot reconcile the two."<sup>26</sup> Shylock is "the alien element in a world of love and friendship,"<sup>27</sup> and as such, he poses

a menace to its romantic fibre. At the end of the play, Shylock, having been defeated and humiliated, is forgiven and asked to rejoin the ranks of the community. Roused from his dream and out of his absentmindedness, he becomes an utterly disillusioned man. Regarding Shylock's exit Erich Auerbach has this to say:

In the end Shakespeare dismisses him, without greatness, as a circumvented fiend, just as he found him in his sources, and after his departure he adds a whole act of poetical fairy-tale sport and amorous dalliance, while Shylock is forgotten and abandoned.<sup>28</sup>

Shakespeare gives us no clear indications of "any genuine accommodation of Shylock within the Venetian social order."<sup>29</sup> But the memory of Shylock lingers persistently: he has dominated the stage too strongly and too intensely to be easily dismissed. As Frye suggests, although Shylock disappears in the fourth act, "we never quite forget him."<sup>30</sup> Before Shylock can be reintegrated--we hope he will be--he will have to be resilient and graceful, to be alive, to be attentive to his environment, to have a sense of solidarity, to reconcile himself to human limitations. He should begin to heed "the finer conscience of humanity,"<sup>31</sup> and to develop the "capacity for tolerant

and compassionate understanding," the sole basis of "any durable human relationship."<sup>32</sup>

## II. Timon of Athens: Impracticable Creature of a Priceless Virtue

The potential tragic elements of The Merchant of Venice and Measure for Measure become much more manifest in Timon of Athens. Timon of Athens is listed among the tragedies in Shakespeare's work. And a section of critics and readers do regard it as a tragedy. G. Wilson Knight, to give one notable example, sees Timon as the "archetype and norm of all tragedy."<sup>33</sup> But if, as Professor Hoy points out, one could argue that Shakespeare's final plays "are, in effect, tragedies with happy endings,"<sup>34</sup> one would be in a position to see Timon of Athens as a comedy-- a dark one, to be sure--with a sad ending. The play is not a proper nor a profound tragedy in the sense that Hamlet or King Lear--with which it has several affinities--is: the hero, too weak and ineffectual

to be tragic, goes through no excruciating soul searching and internal anguish, does not endure patiently, is incapable of profound insight, and, finally, does not undergo change and regeneration. In shifting from one attitude to another, Timon, according to Harry Levin, "cannot be said to have moved from the one extreme to the other through the medium of introspection; nor does he, as an ascetic hermit, engage his thoughts in spiritual meditation."<sup>35</sup>

The view that the play is closer to comedy than to tragedy has many supporters. Donald Stauffer sees it as a tragédie manquée on the grounds that Timon goes through no illumination concerning himself and human nature in general but "dies unreconciled," and that death is not transcended "in the discovery of truth."<sup>36</sup> Northrop Frye also sees the play as a failed tragedy: "It may seem an irresponsible paradox to speak of Timon of Athens as a comedy. Yet if we think of it simply as a tragedy, we are almost bound to see it as a failed tragedy, comparing it to its disadvantage with King Lear."



Frye thinks that "this extraordinary play" has many features "making for an idiotes comedy rather than a tragedy."<sup>37</sup> A. C. Bradley also sees it as an imperfect tragedy,<sup>38</sup> and R. M. Frye fails to see profound tragedy in what he regards as the unsuccessful endeavor of "a social climber."<sup>39</sup>

The tragic elements in the play are undone and undercut by satire: Timon of Athens is Shakespeare's most explicitly satiric play, presented in the idiom of the Jacobean theatre. Its vitriolic satire is directed against the twin poles of affectation--vanity and hypocrisy--prodigality, the evils of wealth, and overt expediency. Like Volpone and The Alchemist, the play focuses its satire on "an irrationally acquisitive, capitalistic society."<sup>40</sup>

The idea that Timon of Athens is, for the above reasons, more akin to comedy than to tragedy, as well as the modern consensus that the distinctions between tragedy and comedy are tenuous and often tend to break down, enables us to see Timon largely as a comic figure and to place him in the company of such diverse characters as Shylock and Angelo,

Gulliver and Alceste. Like Shylock, Timon inhabits a world where material interests play a prominent role. But the Timon of the first part of the play is presented in sharp contrast with Shylock: he is expansive, outgoing, generous, genial, sympathetic and concerned for the community. Incurably idealistic, Timon, like Shylock but without his perverse motivations, is fiercely bent on achieving absolute standards. Ideal goodness, ideal friendship and ideal generosity are what Timon is after; and in order to achieve these impossible goals, he has set himself to make his "actions square with his words, and both actions and words" to "square with his inner desire, regardless of how destructive this may be."<sup>41</sup> He wants to be the "good divine" Portia speaks of (Merchant of Venice, I. ii. 15-16), to do what is "set down" in heaven but "not in earth" (Measure for Measure, II. iv. 50). It is a saintly purpose, and G. Wilson Knight, in his penetrating if romanticized study of the play, bestows on Timon a Christlike image.<sup>42</sup> With a relentless passion for sincerity, Timon, like the hero of The Misanthrope, believes that "A man should be sincere; and in all honor/He shouldn't say a word his

heart disclaims.<sup>43</sup> To Alceste, as well as to Timon, sincerity becomes a talent:

My greatest talent is to be sincere;  
I don't know how to win by double talk.<sup>44</sup>

But Timon is absurdly and pathetically self-deluded. The world he inhabits is a world resembling that of Henry IV in its belief that "nothing can seem foul to those that win" (1 Henry IV, V. i. 8); it is a world that vies with the devil himself in cunning and expediency (Timon of Athens, III. iii. 27-35). Expediency has reached alarming proportions: "Men must learn now with pity to dispense, / For policy sits above conscience" (III. ii. 93-94). And sincerity has become an antiquity, the virtue of artless and simple people. Everybody is fashionably dedicated to purpose but few to performance. Intentions and promises do not have to be kept:

Promising is the very air o' th' time; it opens the eyes of expectation, performance is ever the duller for his act; and, but in the plainer and simpler kind of people, the deed of saying is quite out of use. To promise is most courtly and fashionable; performance is a kind of will or testament which argues a great sickness in his judgement that makes it.

(V. i. 24-31)

Timon, who is inflexibly dedicated to the "deed of saying,"

will come to realize this most bitterly. To Alcibiades he says with harsh cynicism:

Promise me friendship, but perform none. If thou wilt not promise, the gods plague thee, for thou art a man! If thou dost perform, confound thee, for thou art a man!

(IV. iii. 72-75)

To cling rigorously to absolute ideals in a world such as this one, where policy has the upper hand, and much more importantly, to expect others to follow one's ideals, is clearly to invite discomfiture if not catastrophe. And in the case of Timon, who is tragically moulded and lacks the strength to face adverse circumstances, catastrophe is imminent. Machiavelli's insight is to the point: a man "who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous."<sup>45</sup>

By not keeping up with the times, by stubbornly refusing to change, Timon becomes absentminded and rigid. An idealist with common sense, which Timon definitely is not, will recognize the truth no matter how bitter it is. Admitting bitter and shocking realities about human wickedness does not mean accepting them and abiding by them. Though shocked and disturbed by evil, the

sensible idealist will not be surprised. With his ideals grounded in reality he is aware that, as Albert Camus puts it, "on the whole men are more good than bad."<sup>46</sup>

Timon's absentmindedness and rigidity result from his being too self-absorbed, too obsessed with an idea to pay any attention to self, society and life. His quixotic idea--his ideal of unsoiled goodness and exemplary friendship--is the idea of the dreamer who, in Bergson's words, has not ceased to be what he is; yet he has become someone else. "He is himself, and not himself."<sup>47</sup> It is a special madness that is peculiar to dreams. Timon suffers from a dichotomy of personality similar to the dreamer's, "expressing itself in an abnormal sensitivity to the disparity between the world as it should be and the world as one sees it."<sup>48</sup> Timon's dichotomy--absolute love and absolute hate--is "specific to men incapable of adjusting themselves to society."<sup>49</sup>

When Timon's ideal collapses upon collision with reality, when the truth withers for him, he plunges into "madness or insensate fury"<sup>50</sup> Renouncing his philanthropy, Timon dedicates himself fanatically to misanthropy.<sup>51</sup> His defiance of mankind reminds one

of Alceste's:

All I see everywhere is flattery  
Injustice, treason, selfishness, deceit.  
It makes me furious; I cannot stand it;  
I will defy the entire human race.<sup>52</sup>

This preposterous final and unnatural statement is the product of a mind which has failed: the intelligence has refused to move with the mobility of things. Common sense fails to function; the moving continuity of our attention to life comes to rest. Timon's "irrational dreams about human nature have proved false."<sup>53</sup> As an escapist from reality, Timon always seeks an extreme, where "issues are simplified into being either rosy or without hope."<sup>54</sup>

Another facet of his self-delusion is that his excessive generosity is not all for purpose and no praise. Timon seems to crave for flattery in order to nourish his vanity, the "plague" which self-absorbed and self-deluded men fall victim to.<sup>55</sup> As Apemantus reminds him,

Thou gav'st thine ears, like tapsters that bade welcome,  
To knaves and all approaches...

(IV. iii. 215-16)

At the beginning of the play Apemantus refers to the affinity existing in some sort between flattery-seekers

and flatterers. He reminds the Poet that, "He that loves to be flattered is worthy o' th' flatterer"

(I. i. 232-33). Apemantus rightly takes Timon to task for indulging in "feasts, pomps and vain-glories"

(I. ii. 249), flatly refusing to flatter him: "if I should be brib'd too, there would be none left to rail upon thee, and then thou wouldst sin the faster" (I. ii. 244-46). Apemantus is positively right here. Flattery helps Timon not the least; it has only darkened further his already belated self-knowledge.

Timon lacks Feste's alertness and common sense. Feste is the better for his foes and the worse for his friends because friends "praise me and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass; so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused" (Twelfth Night, V. i. 19-22). When Timon says "Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given" (II. ii. 183), one of the few insights he is capable of, he arouses our sympathy. The consequences of this unwise conduct are catastrophic in Timon's case. We apprehend this with dismay and come to realize the destructive potential such ignorance poses to self and

to the community. "The evil that is in the world," says Camus, "always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding."<sup>55</sup> With profound insight Camus adds "there can be no true goodness nor true love, without the utmost clear-sightedness."<sup>56</sup> Having taken leave of his common sense, Timon shows little or no clear-sightedness in his behaviour either in prosperity or in adversity.

As we have often observed in this essay, lack of self-knowledge and of awareness of one's surroundings produces rigidity and automatism, attributes which, along with unsociability and absentmindedness, are redolent of the ludicrous. There is something strangely mechanical about Timon's generosity: just as Shylock is a compulsive hoarder, Timon is a compulsive giver. At times Timon's generosity strikes one as a mere gesture: it is neither intentional nor conscious. This automatic aspect of Timon's excessive generosity, which arouses laughter, is laid bare by one of the senators swarming round Timon:

If I want gold, steal but a beggar's dog



And give it Timon; why the dog coins gold.  
If I would sell my horse and buy twenty more  
Better than he, why, give my horse to Timon,  
Ask nothing, give it him, it foals me straight,  
And able horses. No porter at his gate,  
But rather one that smiles and still invites  
All that pass by.

(II. i. 5-12)

It is the folly of "raging waste" (II. i. 4) that will inevitably metamorphose Timon from a flashing "phoenix" into "a naked gull" (II. i. 30-32).

His mechanical giving is matched by mechanical cursing; Timon becomes a cursing machine. The cursing, ceaseless and systematic, conforms to the mechanical form of repetitive behaviour which was noted in our discussion of Shylock. Excessive cursing and malevolence supplant excessive giving and benevolence. The repetitive pattern persists, rendering Timon immobile and rigid, and ultimately dehumanizing him. Timon's rigidity is truly notorious. Flavius, his sincere and loving servant, says sadly of his master:

It is in vain that you would speak with Timon;  
For he is set so only to himself  
That nothing but himself which looks like man  
Is friendly with him.

(V. i. 119-122)

"All's in vain" (V. i. 188), he adds with ominous finality. Timon does not relent, because his "discontents are unremoveably/Coupled to nature" (V. i. 227-28).

Timon's admitted "general and exceptless rashness" (IV. iii. 502), born of his rigidity, is most unnatural. Absolute hate replaces absolute love--"hated be/Of Timon man and all humanity" (III. vi. 115). He would extend his hate to "the whole race of mankind, high and low" (IV. i. 40). Timon's reaction is extreme: from indiscriminating love to indiscriminating hate, from warm sociability and geniality to misanthropy, from love of harmony and order to invocation of universal chaos--"let confusion live" (IV. i. 21)! He does not seem to recognize, or be ready to embrace, the middle of humanity. Apemantus is fully justified in telling Timon:

The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends. When thou wast in thy gilt and thy perfume, they mock'd thee for too much curiosity; in thy rags thou knows't none, but are despis'd for the contrary.

(IV. iii. 300-304)

-Apemantus' words are reminiscent of Nerissa's:

"they are as sick that surfeit with too much, as they that starve with nothing. It is no mean happiness, therefore, to be seated in the mean. Superfluity comes sooner by white hairs, but competency lives longer"

(Merchant of Venice, I. ii. 5-10)

"Competency" is a word Timon does not know or care for.

Nor does Timon possess that essential Shakespearean virtue, resiliency or gracefulness. Timon is unwilling to translate the stubbornness of fortune into something lyrical; to transform adverse circumstances into something bearable; since he does not care for self-knowledge, Timon does not let himself be feelingly persuaded by the cruel forces of nature to know what he is. Adversity, "to the blessed in spirit, is blessed. It wins fragrance from the crushed flower. It melts in aged hearts sympathies which prosperity had frozen."<sup>57</sup> In Timon's case, however, it only leads him to gloat, to intensify his unqualified hatred, to brood on revenge. He fails pitifully and miserably to contemplate the very virtue of compassion, to be enlightened that the "rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance" (The Tempest, V. i. 27-28). Timon's fury,

not his nobler reason, gets the upper hand. In The Misanthrope Philinte speaks for us when he tells

Alceste:

I'll agree with everything you please.  
The world is run by selfish interest,  
And trickery and graft are in the saddle,  
And man should be a different kind of creature.  
But is his guiltiness sufficient reason  
To drive us out of his society?  
These human failings furnish us with means  
Of exercising our philosophy,  
And that's the best employment of our virtue.<sup>58</sup>

Misfortune does not make a wiser man of Timon:  
instead of mingling with the community once more and  
making an effort to recognize human guiltiness,  
failings and limitations, he takes, and persists in,  
the unnatural course of "total isolation" from "his  
society."<sup>59</sup>

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Laughter, in Henri Bergson's view, is aroused mainly when something mechanical is encrusted on the living: when the automatism, the rigidity, the repetitive pattern of the machine are imposed on the freedom, the suppleness, and the ever-changing stream of life. We become ludicrous when we behave automatically; rigidly, absently or unsociably. Such behaviour is chiefly caused by inattention to self, to one's surroundings and to realities.

Life requires of the individual to be alert, to maintain presence of mind, to change in conformity with its state of flux, for "to cease to change would be to cease to live."<sup>1</sup> We should endeavor to ward off the mechanical form of repetitive behaviour, that is to say, automatism which is ridiculous and ultimately dehumanizing. The fundamental law of life, according to Bergson, is the complete negation of repetition.<sup>2</sup>

Automatism is interwoven with rigidity, unsociability and absentmindedness, the states of being in which the essence of the ludicrous is inherent. Absentmindedness consists in adapting ourselves "to a past and therefore imaginary situation, when we ought to be shaping our conduct in accordance with the reality which is present." One becomes absentminded when one persists in seeing what is no longer visible; hearing what is no longer audible, and saying what is no longer to the point.<sup>3</sup>

Absentmindedness is the ludicrous folly of a Don Quixote, an Alceste, a Gulliver, a Timon, a Navarre, an Angelo, a Hotspur and, to a lesser extent, a Malvolio, that is to say, the individual who aims at lofty but impracticable ideals--the impracticable creature of a priceless virtue, as George Meredith would describe him.<sup>4</sup> Closely connected with it is the folly of bovarysme which is, as T.S. Eliot points out, "the human will to see things as they are not."<sup>5</sup> By wandering out of the self, the absentminded person pursues a logic not unlike the logic of a dream.

If we fail to examine and get to know ourselves, if we are not alert to our social surroundings, and if we fail to heed realities and familiarize ourselves with human fallibility and limitations, we will run the risk of contracting rigidity. The risk will be greater if the mind is allowed to be parochial, to be dominated by a severely limited scope of fixed ideas. Common sense--"the endeavour of a mind continually adapting itself anew and changing ideas when it changes objects"<sup>6</sup>--is inverted when the mind sees only what it wants to see, only what it is thinking. This, Bergson tells us, is a very special inversion of common sense. "It consists in seeking to mould things on an idea of one's own, instead of moulding one's ideas on things,--in seeing before us what we are thinking, instead of thinking of what we see."<sup>7</sup> Malvolio, for instance, tries ludicrously to recreate reality in his own image.

The rigidity issuing from failure to know self and be attentive to realities and social surroundings breeds, foremost, gracelessness, unnaturalness and

overweening pride. Such pride, inextricable from vicious individualism, is the hybris which, as Northrop Frye points out, is possessed by "the great majority of tragic heroes." Frye defines hybris as "a proud, passionate, obsessed or soaring mind which brings about a morally intelligible downfall."

Hybris, "the normal precipitating agent of catastrophe,"<sup>8</sup> is the sin committed by, each in his own distinct way, Navarre, Hotspur, Malvolio, Angelo, Shylock and Timon.

Like Coriolanus, who strikes me as the character most palpably guilty of hybris, the six individuals in question are all unnatural and make a virtue of obstinacy. They too reject affection:

But out, affection!  
All bond and privilege of nature, break!  
Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.

(Coriolanus, V. iii. 24-26)

They cut themselves off from society and disregard the finer instincts of compassion and mercy. Their inflexibility, their utterly unaccommodating spirit, is notorious:

I'll never  
Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand



As if a man were author of himself  
And knew no other kin.  
(Coriolanus, V. iii. 34-37)

Absolutely determined not "to be other than one thing"  
(Coriolanus, IV. vii. 42), they react by shifting  
from one extreme to another when their illusions are  
shattered upon encountering the reality of experience.  
Timon, for instance, switches from philanthropy to  
misanthropy; and Navarre and his men switch from  
soldiers for fame and glory to soldiers for love.

Rigid virtue, as in the case of Angelo and Timon,  
is an absurdity. It can become vicious if it dis-  
regards social obligation and if it lacks sensibleness  
and true knowledge of the human condition. "There  
can be no true goodness nor true love without the  
utmost clear-sightedness,"<sup>9</sup> says Albert Camus in  
The Plague, a novel whose major thematic concern is  
man's involvement and commitment to society. The  
exercise of common sense contributes largely to the  
clear-sightedness Camus speaks of.

Inherent in common sense is the notion of  
sociability. And sociability implies, among other  
things, social obligation, sympathy, friendliness,

tolerance, compassion. To spurn social obligation, solidarity and compassion is to be unkind. It is a heinous sin in the work of Shakespeare, and its penalty is the loss of "human companionship, warmth, intimacy."<sup>10</sup> The spirit of compassion, of human solidarity, pervades Shakespeare's plays.<sup>11</sup> It is the "very virtue of compassion" (The Tempest, I. ii. 27) that makes the gentle and loving Prospero declare at the sight of Gonzalo:

Holy Gonzalo, honourable man,  
Mine eyes, ev'n sociable to the shew of thine,  
Fall fellowly drops.

(The Tempest, V. i. 62-64)

Such "fellowly drops" cannot be shed by James Duffy, the central character in James Joyce's "A Painful Case." Duffy, a spiritually paralyzed man, an outcast from life's feast, who leads an even way of life, believes that "every bond is a bond to sorrow."<sup>12</sup> That may be true; but Duffy realizes in the end, to his utter chagrin and discomfiture, that one cannot forever shun human society and shirk bonds and social obligation. In Crime and Punishment an utterly bewildered Sonia asks the unnatural and

unsociable Raskolnikov:" How can you possibly live all your life without human companionship?"<sup>13</sup> Sonia's great bewilderment is shared by the faithful steward Flavius when Timon decides to sever all ties with humanity; by the Portuguese captain when Gulliver expresses absolute determination to seek "a solitary island,"<sup>14</sup> and by Philinte when Alceste makes up his mind to "seek some lonely cranny of the earth/Where man is free to be a man of honor."<sup>15</sup> Like Alceste and Gulliver, Timon ends up by approaching the very verge of insanity.

Insanity is a likely fate for Navarre, Hotspur, Malvolio, Angelo, Shylock and Timon, whose common sense is inverted. Timon is destroyed in the end. A man of unqualified rigidity, Timon shows no willingness at all to heed advice such as the one offered by the sensible Philinte to the inflexible Alceste:

Don't take so seriously our social habits,  
And be more merciful to human nature.  
Don't treat it with such rigorous principle,  
And look a little kindly on its errors.<sup>16</sup>

Hotspur, too, is destroyed: he poses too serious a

threat to his social surroundings and, more importantly, makes no effort at all to become adaptable. Navarre, Shylock, Malvolio, and Angelo are roused by society from their dream, their absentminded stance. The awakening is rude, and in the case of Shylock and Angelo it borders on the tragic. Each is given a chance to adapt and re-adapt himself to society. Whether they will take the chance or not is rather unresolved at the end. The important thing, however, is that their excessive pride, their aloofness, has been castigated; the four individuals have been chastened. Whatever humility they have achieved augurs well for reintegration into the ranks of society. There has been an awakening to self-knowledge, which, as Northrop Frye points out, "is typically a release from a humor or a mechanical form of repetitive behavior."<sup>17</sup>

To be resilient and adaptable they will have to ward off automatism and rigidity and to be graceful, that is to say, to learn "not to take life too seriously, nor the blows of life too hard."<sup>18</sup> The spirit of compassion expressed by Prospero's "fellowly

drops" has to be entwined with the effort to be "feelingly" persuaded by nature's "counsellors"-- "the icy fang/And churlish chiding of the winter's wind" (As You Like It, II. i. 6-11)--to contemplate self-knowledge: It is the grace under pressure, the patient endurance to metamorphose harsh and painful realities into something bearable, something lyrical. It is the grace that the Duke in Othello counsels the impatient and grief-stricken Brabantio to contemplate:

When remedies are past, the griefs are ended  
By seeing the worst, which late on hope depended.  
To mourn a mischief that is past and gone  
Is the next way to draw new mischief on.  
What cannot be preserv'd when fortune takes,  
Patience her injury a mock'ry makes.  
The robb'd that smiles steals something from the  
thief;  
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.  
(Othello, I. iii. 202-09)

The endeavor to be resilient, to be graceful, entails recognition of "simple truth" (Sonnet 66), of the "middle of humanity" (Timon of Athens, IV. iii. 300), of human limitations. Man is a "fluctuating creature subject to the changes which take place in his surroundings, his destiny, and his inner

impulses."<sup>19</sup> Pascal sees man as a "roseau pensant, a thinking reed; frailty is his misery, thought his greatness."<sup>20</sup> Man's fallibility is a truth that Angelo and Timon in particular fail to see. Blinded by their absolute criteria, they cannot bring themselves to realize that, as Albert Camus points out, "on the whole men are more good than bad,"<sup>21</sup> and that "there are more things to admire in men than to despise."<sup>22</sup>

Absolute values and absolute ideals, like Navarre's and Timon's, that are not grounded in external reality are futile. Vice and virtue are rather intermingled and relative:

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipp'd them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherish'd by our virtues.

(All's Well That Ends Well, IV. iii. 83-87)

The interaction of good and evil and the notion of relativity apply to life. In life, harsh and pleasant realities, the wind and the rain and joy, co-exist. This simple reality is beautifully expressed in Feste's song at the end of Twelfth

Night (V. i. 398-417) and in the Song of Spring and  
Winter in Love's Labour's Lost (V. ii. 904-39).

Regarding the final song in Love's Labour's Lost

R.A. Foakes says:

It is not a matter merely of simple oppositions, the owl versus the cuckoo, age versus youth, winter versus spring, wisdom versus folly, but a much more complex vision in which all are necessary, and counterbalance one another, and in which the wisdom of age may be just as vulnerable and as subject to mockery as the folly of youth.<sup>23</sup>

Neither good and evil nor pleasure and pain exist in pure states. Life refuses "to sort itself out with a uniformity of happiness."<sup>24</sup> In Corneille's The Cid,

Diegue says:

We never taste a perfect happiness;  
Our best successes all are mixed with sorrow;  
With all achievements come some heavy cares  
To mar the purity of our delight.<sup>25</sup>

(III. v. 1-4)

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER ONE (pp. 1-33)

1

The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, ed. William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1942). All quotations from Shakespeare throughout the thesis are based on this edition. The numbers following the act and scene refer to lines, not pages, in all references.

2

Henri Bergson, "Laughter," Comedy, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), p. 183.

3

Montaigne, Essays, trans. E. J. Trenchmann (New York and London: Oxford University Press, n.d.), Vol. II. pp. 257-58.

4

Bergson, p. 145.

5

Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 221.

6

The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 140-67.

7

The Hyacinth Room: An Investigation into the Nature of Comedy, Tragedy, and Tragicomedy (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964), p. 315. Hoy says that if comedy "at its most grimly satiric, as in Volpone,



points directly to the tragical satires of Jonson's Jacobean contemporaries like Webster and Middleton and the Shakespeare of Timon of Athens, such a comedy as The Tempest finds its tragic equivalent in a play like Sophocles' Philoctetes."

8

Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (Lowell Lectures, 1942, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 184. Spencer sees the play as a series of satirical tableaux.

9

Frye, p. 215.

10

Quoted in Hoy, p. 295.

11

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Kierkegaard, p. 459.

13

Ibid., pp. 462-3.

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16

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Ibid., p. 152.

- 19 C(yrus) H. Ho(y), "Comedy," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974.
- 20 "The Meanings of Comedy," Comedy, p. 205.
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- 22 Bergson, p. 156.
- 23 Ibid., p. 157.
- 24 Ibid., p. 62.
- 25 Ibid., p. 164.
- 26 Ibid., pp. 164-5.
- 27 Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, p. 209.
- 28 Bergson, p. 167.
- 29 C.L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing, 1958), p. 72.
- 30 Shakespeare, Love's Labour's Lost. I. i. 58.

31 Alfred Harbage, As They Liked It: A Study of Shakespeare's Moral Artistry (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 184.

32 Shakespeare, The Tempest, V. i. 67-68.

33 Ibid., V. i. 82.

34 Ibid., V. i. 76.

35 Harbage, p. 187.

36 Bergson, p. 147.

37 Bergson, p. 147.

38 Frye, p. 309.

39 Bergson, p. 67.

40 Frye, pp. 169-70.

41 Bergson, p. 145.

42 Ibid., p. 111.

43 Ibid., p. 153.

44

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), p. 171.

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46

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47

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51

Ibid., pp. 181-82.

52

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56

George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy," Comedy, p. 23.

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Swift, p. 311.
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Bergson, p. 156.
- 59  
Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 301.
- 60  
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- 61  
E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 66.
- 62  
Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, I. i. 368.
- 63  
Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, I. i.  
58-59.
- 64  
Ibid., III. xi. 19-20.
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Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, II. i. 72.
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Ibid., II. i. 80-81.
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Shakespeare, Measure for Measure, II. ii.  
173.
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Shakespeare, King Lear, I. i. 159.

69  
Ibid., I. ii. 296.

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Ibid., I. ii. 297.

71  
Ibid., I. v. 46.

72  
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74  
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76  
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77  
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1  
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2  
Bergson, "Laughter," p. 91.

3  
Longinus, "On Literary Excellence," Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1962) p. 174.

4  
Ibid., p. 189.

5  
Horace, "The Art of Poetry," Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, p. 141.

6  
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7  
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8  
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9  
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18

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Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 309.

20

Cyrus Hoy, The Hyacinth Room, p. 23.

21

Donald A. Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images, The Development of His Moral Ideas (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 145.

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Theodore Weiss, The Breath of Clowns and Kings: Shakespeare's Early Comedies and Histories (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 28.



23

Hoy, p. 23.

24

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Curtis Brown Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 97.

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27

Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 292.

28

Ralph Berry, "The Words of Mercury," Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 22, 1969, p. 74.

29

Ibid., p. 76. For similar and related views see Thomas Marc Parrott, Shakespearean Comedy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 124- Parrott comments on "Elizabethan extravagant abuse of language." See also Anne Barton in her introduction to Love's Labour's Lost in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 176. Barton speaks of the impossibility for language to exist in a vacuum, and expresses the view that "the speaker should consider the nature and feelings of the hearer."

30

T.S. Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," Elizabethan Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1926), p. 40.

31

Watson, pp. 1-97.

32 H.B. Charlton, Shakespearian Comedy (1938; rpt. London: Methuen, 1961), p. 200.

33 D.A. Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare: Volume I From Henry VI to Twelfth Night ("4th ed., revised and expanded." Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 213.

34 Ibid., p. 213.

35 E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's Problem Plays (London: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 77.

36 Bergson, p. 178.

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38 Traversi, p. 230.

39 Eliot, p. 40.

40 A.R. Humphreys, ed., 1 Henry IV, the Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 61.

41 Ibid., p. 61.

42 Joseph Conrad, Nostromo (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 315.

43 Charlton, p. 199.

44

Ibid., p. 201

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Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, p. 242.

2

Richard David, ed., Love's Labour's Lost,  
the Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1956), p. xiv.

3

Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, p. 329.

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Comedies: A Structural Analysis (London, The Hague,  
Paris: Mouton, 1966) p. 59.

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Philip Massinger, The City Madam, ed.  
Cyrus Hoy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964)  
p. xiii.

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John Russell Brown, Shakespeare's Dramatic  
Style (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 156.

9

Anne Barton, "As You Like It and Twelfth  
Night: Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending," Shakespearean  
Comedy, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 14, pp. 172-73.

10

Desiderius Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, trans. Hoyt Hopwell Hudson (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 33.

11

Northrop Frye, A Natural Perspective, p. 93. Frye remarks that the clown and the idiotes are often "linked by antagonism." This can be seen in the mutual ill-feeling between Feste and Malvolio, p. 95.

12

M.C. Bradbrook, Shakespeare the Craftsman: The Clark Lectures, 1968 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 58.

13

John Vyvyan, The Shakespearean Ethic (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), p. 78.

14

Drama and Society in The Age of Jonson (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), pp. 148-57. Knights points out that the "new men," not being content with "reasonable gain," set "their own profits before the common good" and "refused to observe the limitations of degree. They were, in short (in practice, if not in theory), individualists, at a time when current opinion set the emphasis on community, order and organization." p. 157.

15

"Shakespeare and the Puritan Dynamic," Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 27, 1974, pp. 81-92. The other two Puritans are Shylock and Angelo.

16

Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 9.

17

Ibid., p. 96.

- 18 Bergson, p. 178.
- 19 Traversi, pp. 345-46..
- 20 Bergson, pp. 178-79.
- 21 Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, III. ii. 80.
- 22 Roland Mushat Frye, Shakespeare: The Art of The Dramatist (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 92.
- 23 Montaigne, Essays, Vol. I, p. 196.
- 24 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 282, p. 344.
- 25 Montaigne, Essays, Vol. II, p. 600.
- 26 The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy with Three New Essays (1949; rpt. with minor corrections, London: Methuen, 1972), p. 85. Lloyd C. Sears, Shakespeare's Philosophy of Evil (North Quincy, Mass.: The Christopher Publishing House, 1974), p. 147, thinks that Angelo is not a hypocrite but perfectly sincere and honest. A similar view is expressed in J.W. Lever, ed., Measure for Measure, the Arden Shakespeare (London, Methuen, 1965), p. xciv. Harold Fisch in "Shakespeare and the Puritan Dynamic," Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 27, p. 82, also sees no hypocrisy in the case of Angelo. "A hypocrite, he says, "is a bad man who pretends to be good. This will not do for Angelo." A dissenting view is

expressed by W.W. Lawrence, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 108. Lawrence says: "... it seems more likely that Angelo is to be regarded as having been a smooth rascal, who had been successful in concealing his baseness."

27

Bergson, p. 149.

28

Ibid., p. 150.

29

Charlton, p. 251.

30

Vyvyan, pp. 88-89. This is Carl Jung's view.

31

Angel with Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures, ed. Graham Storey (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961), p. 155.

32

Jocelyn Powell, "Theatrical Trompe L'Oeil in Measure for Measure," Shakespearian Comedy, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 14, p. 206.

33

Dostoyevsky, p. 291.

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1

Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 434.

2

Bergson, p. 97.

- 3 Ibid., p. 153.
- 4 Ibid., p. 93.
- 5 Ibid., p. 94.
- 6 C.L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy.
- 7 D.A. Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare,  
p. 202.
- 8 A Natural Perspective, p. 118.
- 9 Comic Characters of Shakespeare (London:  
Macmillan and Co., 1947), p. 69.
- 10 John Russell Brown, ed., The Merchant of  
Venice, the Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen,  
1955), p. XIii.
- 11 Bergson, p. 108.
- 12 The Concise Oxford Dictionary.
- 13 Quoted in J.W. Lever, ed., Measure for  
Measure, the Arden Shakespeare, p. IXiii.
- 14 Frye, A Natural Perspective, p. 102.
- 15 Bergson, p. 130.

16  
Ibid., p. 122.

17  
Harry Levin, The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 24.

18  
Bergson, p. 94.

19  
Traversi, p. 201.

20  
Granville-Barker, Préfaces to Shakespeare,  
pp. 112-13.

21  
L.G. Salinger, "The Social Setting," The Age of Shakespeare, the Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 2, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971) pp. 15-45. See also Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p. 149.

22  
See Hermann Sinsheimer, Shylock: The History of a Character (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1968), p. 89. Weiss in The Breath of Clowns and Kings, p. 127, says that Shylock is committed, "with a passion wellnigh religious," to materialism.

23  
Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p. 149. Knights says: "Those who set their own interests before the common welfare were moral offenders, and nothing is more common in the economic writings of the time than the expressed opposition between public good and private profit."

24  
Ibid., p. 167. For a discussion of usury and its effects see pp. 162-68.



- 25 Nostramo, p. 429.
- 26 Shakespeare (New York: Henry Holt, 1939),  
p. 96.
- 27 Ibid., p. 104.
- 28 Mimesis, pp. 314-15.
- 29 Anne Barton, introduction to Merchant of Venice, The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 252. A similar view is expressed by D.J. Palmer, "The Merchant of Venice, or The Importance of Being Earnest," Shakespearean Comedy, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 14, p. 116. Palmer says there is no mention at all of Shylock in Act V.
- 30 Frye, A Natural Perspective, p. 103, Harold Fisch in "Shakespeare and the Puritan Dynamic," p. 82, expressing a similar opinion, thinks that the audience feels uneasy at the end, doubting if Shylock has been permanently curbed.
- 31 John Middleton Murry, Foreword to Sinsheimer, Shylock: The History of a Character, pp. 12-13.
- 32 Traversi, p. 204.
- 33 The Wheel of Fire, p. 220.
- 34 Cyrus Hoy, "Jacobean Tragedy and the Mannerist Style," Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 26, 1973, p. 64.

- 35 "Shakespeare's Misanthrope," Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 26, p. 92. Levin makes the sensitive remark that in the first part of the play, Timon held "no mental reservations; hence he needed no asides or soliloquies." In the second part he "continues to speak out directly."
- 36 Shakespeare's World of Images, pp. 231-32.
- 37 A Natural Perspective, p. 98.
- 38 Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth (1904; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 200-201.
- 39 Roland Mushat Frye, Shakespeare: The Art of Dramatist, p. 113.
- 40 Michael Jamieson, introduction to Ben Jonson, Three Comedies, ed. Michael Jamieson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 20. For further details concerning the play as tragical satire see Robert C. Elliott, The Power of Satire, pp. 140-67; Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, pp. 183-84; Cyrus Hoy, The Hyacinth Room, p. 315; and Harry Levin, "Shakespeare's Misanthrope," p. 94.
- 41 Hoy, "Jacobean Tragedy and the Mannerist Style," p. 59.
- 42 Knight, 207-39.
- 43 Molière, The Misanthrope, Eight Plays by Molière, trans. Morris Bishop (New York: The Modern

Library, 1957), p. 224.

44

Ibid., p. 259.

45

Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, tr. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 91.

46

Albert Camus, The Plague, tr. Stuart Gilbert (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), p. 126.

47

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48

W.B.C. Watkins quoted in Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor, p. 319.

49

Frank Kermode, introduction to Timon of Athens The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1443.

50

Willard Farnham, "Timon of Athens," Shakespeare, the Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Clifford Leach (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 122.

51

Ibid., p. 125.

52

Molière, p. 226.

53

David Cook, "Timon of Athens," Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 16, 1963, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, p. 91.

54

Ibid., p. 91.

55 Machiavelli, p. 125.

56 Camus, p. 126.

57 Bradley, p. 273.

58 Molière, pp. 274-75.

59 Northrop Frye, Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 112.

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1 Bergson, p. 81.

2 Ibid., p. 81.

3 Ibid., p. 67.

4 "An Essay on Comedy," p. 23.

5 "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca,"  
Elizabethan Essays, p. 40.

6 Bergson, p. 178.

7 Ibid., p. 179.

- 8 Anatomy of Criticism, p. 210.
- 9 The Plague, p. 126.
- 10 Harbage, As They Liked It, p. 187.
- 11 Ibid., p. 187.
- 12 James Joyce, "A Painful Case," The Essential James Joyce, ed. Harry Levin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 428.
- 13 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 434.
- 14 Swift, p. 311.
- 15 Molière, The Misanthrope, p. 284. See also pp. 274-75.
- 16 Ibid., p. 228.
- 17 A Natural Perspective, p. 118.
- 18 Hoy, The Hyacinth Room, p. 170.
- 19 Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 292.
- 20 Auerbach, "On the Political Theory of Pascal," Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 114.

21

The Plague, p. 126.

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23

R.A. Foakes, "The Owl and the Cuckoo:  
Voices of Maturity in Shakespeare's Comedies,"  
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14, p. 129.

24

Clifford Leech, Twelfth Night and Shakespeare  
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