

THE DARK ELEMENTS IN SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

"Be cheerful; wipe thine eyes.  
Some falls are means the happier to arise."

Cymbeline, IV, ii, 402-403

"HEAVENLY COMFORTS OF DESPAIR":  
THE DARK ELEMENTS IN SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

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IN MEMORIAM

J. Wilson McCutchan

## PREFACE

All references in this thesis to the text of Shakespeare's plays are cited from The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, edited by William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1942), which conforms to the line numbering of the "Globe" edition. This text is the only one listed in the bibliography under "Primary Sources" which was, in fact, used as a primary source. Although the other editions listed are technically primary sources, they were consulted as secondary sources only, for the sake of their editorial matter. The brevity of the list of secondary material is due to the nature of this thesis, which is an attempt at an independent interpretation. I have not ignored the large body of critical books and essays on the comedies, but their usefulness in this study has proved generally to be in supplying specific details of information or criticism only. Accordingly, I have listed not all the works consulted, but those cited in the notes and tables.

My thanks are due to Professor B. A. W. Jackson, my thesis supervisor, whose perceptive comments and kindly criticisms have provided welcome guidance at each

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J. W. S.

Dundas

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## I

### THE IDEA OF A "SERIOUS COMEDY"

Since Aristotle's time we have been accustomed to think of comedy as drama which is concerned with the ridiculous in human nature and which ends happily, and of tragedy as drama of the noble man, ending unhappily. The danger involved in taking Aristotle's observations as rules becomes especially obvious when one approaches Shakespeare's comedies, for some of them are quite different from anything Aristotle described. It is true that a number of the comedies deal primarily with the ridiculous, but others subordinate human folly to the noble elements of man's nature.

One regular feature of Greek drama, Aristotle noted, is that the kind of play consisting of incidents which tend to pity and fear--tragedy--is the kind of play which represents man as nobler than he is.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this coincidence of dramatic elements occurs because man is at his best when faced with adversity. The evidence of some

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<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, Poetics, trans. S. H. Butcher (1895; rev. 1911), in Walter Jackson Bate, ed., Criticism: The Major Texts (New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, [1952]), II, 4 (p. 20); VI, 2 (p. 22).

of Shakespeare's comedies corroborates this view: accompanying the emphasis on man's nobility in certain comedies are incidents tending to pity and fear, such as Aristotle associated with tragedy.

Aristotle distinguished tragedy and comedy mainly on the basis of their approach to human nature, rather than by reference to happy and unhappy endings. But since he states clearly that the unhappy ending is "the right ending"<sup>2</sup> for tragedy, he may well have considered the happy ending "right" for comedy. If we apply his critical technique to the whole range of comedy from Greek times to the present, we shall conclude for ourselves that comedy ends happily. Though it does not follow that every play which ends happily must be a comedy, the association is important when Aristotle's distinction of comedy and tragedy (by reference to their treatment of human nature) breaks down as it does in some of Shakespeare's plays. The Winter's Tale, for example, is primarily concerned with noble characters, although the ridiculous has a place. If we call the play a comedy it may be partly because of the human folly displayed in Autolycus, the Shepherd, and the Clown, but it will be mainly because the action ends happily. The shifting of emphasis from the ridiculous to

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<sup>2</sup>Aristotle, Poetics, XIII, 6 (p. 27).

the noble in mankind, which is evident in some of Shakespeare's comedies, is accompanied by the substitution of serious complications for frivolous ones, simply because a frivolous situation does not engender nobility in a man.

In the Poetics Aristotle seems to give an answer to the question: "What is the emotional effect of Greek tragedy?" Perhaps this is a hint that the emotional effect of drama depends on grave incidents. Surely, at any rate, it is defensible to say that serious or noble themes and actions stimulate the emotions much more than the intellect. Hence the effect of serious elements in Shakespearean comedy may be largely accounted for in terms of emotions, although there are secondary elements of intellectual interest which must be considered. In this thesis I wish, first of all, to follow Aristotle's method of looking at the question in the abstract, by deciding what sort of emotional effect we can expect to find in the kind of comedy which Shakespeare wrote. The aim of this preliminary inquiry is to find some generalizations which will be of use when we turn to the serious elements of the individual plays, the consideration which will form the main part of the thesis.

In most of Shakespeare's comedies we find a mixture (in proportions which vary from one play to another) of the sublime and the ridiculous; few of them are entirely devoid

of either element. If, as I have suggested, the sublime takes its rise in situations of adversity, the audience may well interpret the course of events as a prelude to tragedy, unless the playwright takes care to reassure us that all will be well. The characters on stage, however, will not engage our deep sympathy or excite our emotions if they have our reasons for not taking the situation as hopeless. They must interpret their situation as an intimation of impending tragedy, if they are to experience great suffering. Thus, in any comedy likely to arouse emotions other than the most perfunctory, we may expect to find a complication grave in nature and baffling to the characters involved, but promising the spectator a satisfactory outcome. The emotions aroused in the audience consist of a sympathetic response to characters in trouble, even though we know their difficulties are temporary. Thus pity and fear are not the exclusive preserve of the tragic playwright; when we see a serious comedy performed, we may expect to feel pity for the characters on stage and, by extension, fear for ourselves.

The point of desperation which marks the brink of catastrophe in tragedy occurs somewhere near the middle of the typical serious comedy. Consequently, when we have considered what emotions are likely to accompany the development of misfortune in a comedy, we still have to reckon

with the emotional effect of half the play. The protagonist's good fortune can be expected to inspire emotions just as deep as the pity and fear which the spectator now abandons. These new emotions may be characterized generally as joyful, but there are two kinds of joy which can be distinguished. The one corresponds to Aristotle's "pity", in that it is directed to the characters on stage, and I shall call it "congratulation". The other corresponds to "fear" in Aristotle's terms, because it springs from the spectator's grasp of the relevance of what passes on stage to himself; this emotion I shall call "delight".

These terms are intended to indicate feelings of joy of a deeper sort than those felt in a comedy where there has been no great suffering. What I call "congratulation" and "delight" can be felt only after the spectator has been moved to pity and fear. We feel much greater satisfaction at the spectacle of a character achieving happiness through, or in spite of, suffering than we would if his state of felicity were affected little by the action of the play. The Book of Job corroborates this idea; it is more gratifying to read about Job's second family and the restoration of his wealth, than to be informed at the beginning of the story that "there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters" and that "this man was the greatest of all the men of the east".

A serious comedy may well appeal both to the emotions and the intellect. If a comedy consists mainly of grave incidents, the predominant appeal is to the spectator's feelings of grief and joy; but grave incidents may embody philosophical problems of human life, which make their appeal to the intellect. And where the ludicrous appears, the audience will be moved to laughter by the titillation of the intellect's more frivolous side. In addition, lighter emotions than grief and joy, such as romantic sentiment, may be aroused in a comedy which has more serious overtones as well. The interaction of these elements in a single play would produce a very complex effect, and though the main concern of this thesis is the serious element of the comedies, we can see them in their proper perspective only by noting their relation to the lighter aspects of the plays. The complexity of a serious comedy is further increased by the close juxtaposing of grief and joy, which may arise at once in the spectator. If the dramatist is skilful, he will persuade us to suspend our feelings of assurance that all will be well, and to sympathize as fully as possible with the misery of the protagonist. Nevertheless, we cannot completely forget that we have been promised a happy ending, and in the midst of the most painful part of the action we are likely to feel congratulation and delight in expectation of the

coming turn of fortune, although we still feel pity and fear because the protagonist lacks our reason for optimism.

These, then, are the effects which we are likely to find in a comedy where the emotional appeal dominates. But in some of Shakespeare's comedies serious events are subordinated to other dramatic interests, and these plays do not fit the pattern which I have been describing. Some of them are mainly farcical, the appeal to the spectator stemming from the ridiculousness of human nature; these plays, The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, The Taming of the Shrew, and The Merry Wives of Windsor, form the subject of Chapter II. In Chapter III we shall turn to The Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night, four plays in which romantic sentiment is the centre of interest; though emotions are involved, they are not the deeper feelings of grief and joy. The rest of the plays to be discussed are built around serious portrayals of human misery; yet some of them evoke little or no deep emotion, because of obstacles which prevent the grave incidents from exerting their full impact upon the audience. These plays, The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, All's Well That Ends Well, and Measure for Measure, will be discussed in Chapter IV. The comedies considered in Chapter V coincide most closely with the hypothetical serious comedy to which I

have referred; in Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest a central grave situation is treated in such a way as to call forth from the spectator profound pity and fear, congratulation and delight.<sup>3</sup> This grouping of the plays is not strictly chronological, but the trend of Shakespeare's career in comedy clearly moves from frivolity to seriousness, from lesser to greater emotional interest.

When one points to similarities in certain plays, the information is not particularly valuable if it serves only to define a genre. As Benedetto Croce remarks:

From the theory of artistic and literary kinds derive those erroneous modes of judgement and of criticism, thanks to which, instead of asking before a work of art if it be expressive and what it expresses, whether it speak or stammer or is altogether silent, they ask if it obey the laws of epic or of tragedy, of historical painting or of landscape. While making a verbal pretence of agreeing, or yielding a feigned obedience, artists have, however, really always disregarded these laws of the kinds. Every true work of art has violated some established kind and upset the ideas of the critics, who have thus been obliged to broaden the kinds.<sup>4</sup>

The differences between Shakespeare's comedies are more striking than their similarities, and more important also, as Croce suggests. Hence this survey of the comedies is

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<sup>3</sup>Though Troilus and Cressida is sometimes counted as a comedy, it is omitted here because it has no happy ending.

<sup>4</sup>Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York: Noonday Press, [1962]), pp. 36, 37.



not intended to distort their outlines by making them appear to have come from a common mold. Rather, the object of the subsequent chapters is to examine the diverse effects of human suffering in the comedies of Shakespeare, especially the emotional impact on the spectator, and to note what insights into the individual plays may be provided by a study of their dark elements.

## II

### SERIOUS EVENTS IN FARCE

In four of Shakespeare's comedies, The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, The Taming of the Shrew, and The Merry Wives of Windsor, humor based on the exploitation of the ridiculous constitutes the central dramatic interest. The appeal of the ridiculous is intellectual rather than emotional, since it is the intellect which recognizes the ridiculous and distinguishes it from the admirable aspects of human nature. So regularly maintained is the emphasis on the ridiculous in these plays that our emotions are scarcely touched at all. For when grave events occur, as they do in each play, either their effect is neutralized by the prevailing tone of farce, or else they are actually pressed into service to provide additional sources of humor.

Mental and physical suffering occurs in all four of the plays, but it would surely be a mistake to take these miseries at all seriously. The various indignities which Falstaff endures in his amorous pursuit of the merry wives of Windsor are intended not to move us to sympathy, but to inspire laughter. The same may be said of Ford's jealousy. Though at bottom his situation is somewhat like

Othello's, the dramatic setting of The Merry Wives is so different from that of Othello that we sympathize with the Moor, but laugh at Ford. He is made to seem ridiculous in his dealings with Falstaff (except in his final triumph over the knight), and the spectator's intellect is stirred to merriment, but his emotions are affected not at all. The farcical nature of The Merry Wives of Windsor is readily apparent, and there is little likelihood of any serious claim that the play evokes a significant emotional response. But it demonstrates that serious circumstances can be presented so as to evoke laughter instead of sympathy. And this point must be kept in mind when we consider certain other comedies which have been thought by some to make a profounder emotional appeal than The Merry Wives of Windsor, although in fact they are much like it.

For example The Taming of the Shrew, its slapstick knockabout notwithstanding, treats certain aspects of human relations in a way that may tempt us to think some sort of emotional response appropriate. Harold C. Goddard's psychological analysis of the relations between Katherina and Petruchio<sup>1</sup> implies that we are to take seriously the characters' reactions to their situation, and that we should sympathize with them. But if we com-

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<sup>1</sup>Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1962], I, pp. 69-71.

pare this play with The Merry Wives, it is fairly clear that the one is as purely comical as the other. How is it that a serious event handled in one way rouses sympathy, but only makes us laugh if treated differently? The answer to this question is closely related to Aristotle's distinguishing comedy from tragedy by reference to their outlook on mankind. Ford's jealousy is funny because Shakespeare concentrates on its ridiculous aspects; the jealousy of Othello is moving because our attention is directed to its nobler side. A situation may be either laughable or touching, but not many stage episodes are both at once. Nevertheless, it may be argued that Shakespeare intends us to sympathize with Kate while we laugh at her hardships. Such a point involves aesthetic judgments which each spectator must make for himself; anyone who claims to feel sympathy for Kate must at least concede that the prevailing tone of the play makes any profound or prolonged sense of pity or fear impossible. For a drama to create strong emotional effects, grave circumstances must be present, but they do not necessarily evoke emotions. When the dramatist plays up the ridiculous side of life, the sole result is laughter, an intellectual response.

Although The Comedy of Errors portrays a threat of execution extending from the first scene to the last, emotional impact is lacking here just as much as in The Merry

Wives and The Shrew. And the reason is partly similar: the beatings administered to the Dromios, the plight of Pinch, and the jealous misery of Adriana are presented in a ridiculous light; although there are frequent references to the feelings of the characters in the main plot of the confused identities, we are not touched emotionally because of the playwright's farcical treatment of his matter.

But the emphasis on the ludicrous in the main plot does not account for the lack of emotional interest in the more serious complication of Aegeon's danger. Here too, as in The Taming of the Shrew, we may be tempted to think that some emotional response is in order. For Aegeon's history is indeed a harrowing tale of woe. R. A. Foakes describes in detail a variety of serious implications which he sees not only in the threat of death, but in the complication of the central action also.<sup>2</sup> The play, he maintains, "invites compassion, a measure of sympathy, and a deeper response to the disruption of social and family relationships which the action brings about. Our concern for the Antipholus twins, for Adriana and Luciana, and our sense of disorder are deepened in the context of suffering

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<sup>2</sup>R. A. Foakes, ed., The Comedy of Errors ([New] Arden Edition, London: Methuen; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1962]), pp. xxxix-li. The quotation following is from p. i.

provided by the enveloping action." It is certainly possible to derive serious implications from The Comedy of Errors, but I suggest that in order to do so one must abstract certain philosophical elements from the play as a whole, and further that what one discovers in this way is neither an impression like those one receives during a production, nor compatible with the impressions created by the play considered in its entirety. Foakes claims in one sentence that "in spite of the implausibility and fantastic coincidences of Egeon's tale of the shipwreck, we are directly affected by his wretchedness"; but he admits in the next: "His state is not, of course, tragic; the fantastic nature of his extraordinary adventures prevents us from being deeply troubled by his predicament, or the doom hanging over him."<sup>3</sup> There is a more substantial reason for our unconcern about Aegeon than the coincidences and other improbabilities of the plot. Within fairly generous limits we are ready to accept coincidence as a necessary convention of dramatic structure; and the glaring improbabilities of Lear and Othello do not hinder our emotional involvement in those plays. So these aspects of The Comedy of Errors are no insurmountable barriers to emotion. But the role of chance in this play extends far beyond that in

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<sup>3</sup>R. A. Foakes, The Comedy of Errors, p. xli.

any other of Shakespeare's comedies. Chance not only provides the coincidences demanded for the sake of dramatic economy, but also controls the outcome. In a farcical presentation of mistaken identities such as this, we welcome the coincidences which bring the errors to pass. But we cannot feel emotionally involved in the career of characters whose circumstances, both in origin and in final resolution, depend on chance rather than on their own volition. Chance always plays some part in the course of human life, but we are accustomed to think of human planning as the crucial factor. It is the crucial factor in Shakespeare's other comedies; what happens to the characters in The Merry Wives, for example, is primarily the direct result of the characters' own thoughts and actions. In The Comedy of Errors, however, though human planning abounds throughout, it has comparatively little to do with either the causes or the outcome of the situation. A chance meeting of mast and rock, combined with a chance disposition of fast and slow sails, separated the family in the beginning. By the merest chance Aegeon and Antipholus of Syracuse arrive in the home town of the other Antipholus, only to find that Aemilia, by chance, is there before them. Chance prevents the twins from encountering their opposite numbers while the plot is being developed, and chance brings them together again at the right moment. None of the

crucial events, from first to last, are affected with conscious purpose by the actions of any character, except the pardoning of Aegeon by the Duke after the whole complication has been resolved. Such a state of affairs will do for farce, but it scarcely encourages the "deeper response" described by R. A. Foakes. If a man's actions do not materially alter his fate, we find them simply immaterial and uninteresting. What we respond to is the human factor in a dramatic situation. But the characters in this play lack completely the humanity which is imparted to a dramatic figure when his attributes and actions determine his destiny. We could feel grief at Aegeon's plight and pleasure in the family reunion if these circumstances had been affected by conscious planning. We cannot even take the play seriously by regarding Aegeon as we do Job--one who endures bane and enjoys blessing for reasons beyond human comprehension--for Job's final good fortune depends on his own volition (his patient trust in God), but we are not made to feel that Aegeon's actions affect his end at all.

With regard to the prevailing tone of The Comedy of Errors, it should be noted that the dark first scene casts little gloom over the subsequent action, for Shakespeare gives us a fair promise that Aegeon will be saved, despite his present distress. Though he himself despairs of life the audience, accustomed to recognize advance indications



of the future trend of things, may see in Aegeon's story the sort of comic complication which will be unravelled in due course; and it may be evident, from the circumstances of his dispersed family, how his deliverance will come. In the second scene of the play such surmises are confirmed: we cannot fail to identify Antipholus of Syracuse as the son of Aegeon when we hear his soliloquy, and the First Merchant's unwitting reference to his father is a broad hint that they will be reunited in time.

If, then, the plight of Aegeon has no significant emotional impact in the play, one might well ask why Shakespeare introduced it to the plot as he found it in Plautus, especially since the situation is not itself a source of amusement, either. Shakespeare needed some sort of expository summary of the prior events concerned in the central plot, but he need not have chosen for that function a man condemned to die the same day. There was, however, an additional requirement of the main action, one which the plight of Aegeon was suited to fulfil. However engrossing may be the progressive complication of a plot based on mistaken identities, it is not the sort of knot likely to stir up any great curiosity concerning its untying. For this denouement is particularly easy to foresee: the inevitable climax when the twins are brought face to face, and the inevitable explanations. By introducing Aegeon first,

Shakespeare gave his audience a good reason for curiosity about the outcome of the play, in order to maintain dramatic interest throughout the denouement. The condemnation of Aegeon commands attention from the first couplet of the play, and holds us in suspense until almost the very last, since there is uncertainty as to his safety within forty lines of the end. Although we can feel no great sympathy for him, his situation is absorbing enough to perform useful service in the structure of the play, for exposition, and as a means of sustaining dramatic interest.

Thus in The Comedy of Errors we find an unusual instance of the use of serious incident for farcical purposes; the suffering of Aegeon, instead of evoking emotion, contributes indirectly to the appeal of the play to the intellect through humor and the exploitation of the ridiculous. Love's Labour's Lost resembles The Comedy of Errors in this respect. Its primary appeal is to the spectator's intellect, and we shall consider now the way in which this play, too, presents the theme of death to produce an intellectual appeal, rather than an emotional one.

According to W. A. Neilson and C. J. Hill, "the main point of Love's Labour's Lost for Shakespeare's contemporaries must have been in its pervading burlesque of

current fads and affectations".<sup>4</sup> Like the three plays already discussed, this one addresses itself to the spectator's intellect, especially to that in him which responds with amusement to man's follies. Shakespeare pokes fun at contemporary artificialities in more than an incidental way; the main plot exposes the foolishness of intellectual and sentimental affectation. The distress of Ferdinand and his lords in their failure to maintain their oaths of austerity makes us realize that they were ill-advised to have attempted "Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep" (I, i, 48). And subsequently they incur ridicule for their equally foolish affectation in courtship, of which their disguise as Muscovites is only the most prominent example.

What, then, is Shakespeare's purpose in introducing the death of the King of France to a play in which the intellect is pampered and the emotions starved? Whatever the purpose may be, it is certainly not to arouse grief in the spectator. The mourning of the Princess is presented as briefly and lightly as possible, and we are given little opportunity to feel deep sympathy for her. The death of the King of France, like the threat to Aegeon's

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<sup>4</sup>William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill, eds., The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare (Cambridge, [Massachusetts]: Houghton and Mifflin; Riverside Press, [1942]), p. 54.

life, is mainly intellectual in its impact. This incident is Shakespeare's way of rounding off his satire of affectation and insincerity. The first thing to be noted is that by resorting to an elaborately affected mode of courtship Ferdinand and his lords waste their opportunity for establishing serious relationships with the ladies, an opportunity that is cut short by the news from France. Shakespeare makes this circumstance clear in the final scene:

Prin. We have receiv'd your letters full of  
love;  
Your favours, the ambassadors of love,  
And, in our maiden council, rated them  
At courtship, pleasant jest, and courtesy,  
As bombast and as lining to the time;  
But more devout than this in our respects  
Have we not been; and therefore met your loves  
In their own fashion, like a merriment.  
Dum. Our letters, madam, show'd much more than  
jest.  
Long. So did our looks.  
Ros. We did not quote them so.  
King. Now, at the latest minute of the hour,  
Grant us your loves.  
Prin. A time, methinks, too short  
To make a world-without-end bargain in.

(V, ii, 787-799)

Besides providing a fitting conclusion to the portrayal of the lords' courtly artificiality, the death of the Princess' father gives her an opportunity to wean away the King of Navarre from his former folly. Postponing her answer to his suit for a year and a day while she mourns for her father, she challenges Ferdinand to embark upon a profitable counterpart of the futile austerity which he

undertook previously without proper consideration.

A true understanding of these four plays depends partly on the realization that it is not always appropriate to respond emotionally to what in real life would be a grave situation. It is possible, certainly, to feel emotion for the characters in each of these plays, but one cannot do so without disregarding their total tone and Shakespeare's general approach to his subject. One could, for instance, find evidence in the text of The Merry Wives of Windsor upon which to construct a sympathetic interpretation of Ford's jealousy, but the effort would be as misguided as if one were to ferret out the passages from Othello which allude to the ridiculous aspect of the Moor's jealousy, and to claim that they are intended to make us laugh.

The plays discussed in this chapter are not the only comedies which exploit the ridiculous in human nature. In fact not a single one of the sixteen comedies concerned in this study lacks entirely humor derived from the representation of man as worse than he is. But these four are the only comedies of Shakespeare in which man's folly is at the focus of dramatic interest, in which all potentially emotional matter is made farcical.

### III

#### SERIOUS EVENTS AND ROMANTIC SENTIMENT

In Chapter II the dominant dramatic element was human folly--the element which Aristotle considered the essential ingredient of comedy. Shakespeare's custom of ending his comedies with matrimony<sup>1</sup> suggests that he regarded another theme, romantic sentiment, as peculiarly characteristic of comedy,<sup>2</sup> and this theme prevails in the second group of plays: The Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night.

Of all Shakespeare's comedies, none shows such a concentrated intensity of this theme as A Midsummer Night's Dream, which may fairly be regarded as the epitome of Shakespearean romantic sentiment. Frustration in love pervades every aspect of the complication: it constitutes the central plot, involving Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena; paralleling that action is the quarrel between Oberon and Titania; the tradesmen's "most lamentable comedy" concerns the ill-fated love of Pyramus and Thisbe;

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<sup>1</sup>All but Love's Labour's Lost and Cymbeline.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Biron, Love's Labour's Lost, V, ii, 884-886:  
Our wooing doth not end like an old play;  
Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy  
Might well have made our sport a comedy.

even the unfortunate ass-headed Bottom is the object of Titania's unrequited love; framing the action is the betrothal of Hippolyta and Theseus impatient to be married.

The romantic sentiment inspired in the audience by all these circumstances differs markedly from the amused response we feel to the ridiculousness of the plays discussed in Chapter II, although there is abundant cause for laughter in A Midsummer Night's Dream also. The love plots appeal to the spectator's emotions as well as to his intellect. But this emotion is shallow by comparison with pity and fear, congratulation and delight, because our feelings are stirred only by the felicity of the characters--romantic sentiment presupposes that love is bliss. Suffering in love, of which this play and the others of this chapter are full, does not move the spectator to pity and fear in the dramatic context which Shakespeare gives them. Rather, the audience is interested in complications based on frustration in love from a motive similar to that involved when farcical characters suffer--curiosity as to the means by which the complication is to be unraveled. The appeal of suffering in love, then, is partly intellectual and partly sentimental. Since we feel no pity and fear we cannot feel congratulation and delight. Hence our elevation of spirits in A Midsummer Night's Dream is not a profound emotion.

There are elements of romantic love in A Comedy of

Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, The Taming of the Shrew, and The Merry Wives of Windsor, but whatever romantic sentiment may be evoked in these plays has only a minor effect, by comparison with the humorous aspects. The plays under consideration in this chapter display much stronger romantic elements, but no other significance of an emotional kind is to be expected. Where there is suffering not connected with romantic love, its potential emotional impact is sacrificed for the sake of what it can contribute to humorous or sentimental effects. In Twelfth Night we find death, and separation of kinsmen, but these sources of grief are not exploited in their own right. Although we first meet Olivia in deep mourning for her father and brother, these deaths are important only because they contribute to the complication of the main romantic plot. Similarly, Malvolio is indeed "most notoriously abus'd" (V, i, 388), but we are not actually given much time to sympathize with him, since our attention is focused on the ridiculousness of his nature and the follies of his tormentors, for whom he provides a foil. Viola is in terror for her life when faced with the duel; yet we are moved with amusement, not pity. And her loss of Sebastian is important in the play mainly because it contributes to the central romantic complication. What interests us chiefly in Twelfth Night is the romantic triangle formed by the unrequited love of



Viola for Orsino, Orsino for Olivia, and Olivia for "Cesario"; of secondary interest are the humorous elements: Sir Toby's excesses, Feste's witticisms, and the parody of frustration in love in the persons of Sir Andrew and Malvolio. All other complications are entirely subordinate to these two centres of attention.

Similarly, Oliver's unkindness to Orlando and Frederick's enmity to Rosalind do not affect us deeply. They are simply necessary components of the plot, the means whereby the lovers' encounter in the forest is made possible--and that part of the action accounts for most of the romantic and humorous interest in the play.

The inadequately motivated conversion of Frederick in the denouement has been defended in various ways. This problem may seem less important if we keep in mind that he is not in the centre of dramatic interest at all. His usurpation and his persecution of the rightful Duke's daughter are employed in the play mainly for the sake of the position in which these circumstances put the central romantic characters. Since the origin and course of the usurpation concern us only indirectly, the manner in which it ends is not a major concern. Shakespeare frequently provides no more plausible motivation for an action than is needed in the particular context. Here one's mind is diverted elsewhere when the conversion is related.

Shakespeare's commentators seem unable to find fitting language to describe the charm of As You Like It. The dramatist has taken the sentimental approach to love which he exploited so well in A Midsummer Night's Dream, and has applied it to a much broader range of human experience. What is lost in concentration of effect is gained in the breadth of interest which E. K. Chambers notes thus:

As You Like It is romance incarnate. All the wonderful elements of the secular tradition are gathered together there in its light-hearted compass. There is the romance of friendship in Rosalind and Celia, 'like Juno's swans, still coupled and inseparable'; the romance of Adam's loyalty . . . ; the romance of love at first sight, acknowledged in words by the smitten Phebe's quotation of dead Marlowe's saw, and acknowledged as the mainspring of the whole plot when young Orlando wrestled and overthrew more than his enemies. . . . Then you have Orlando as the typical lover of romance, the love-shaken sonneteer. . . . You have the conventional issues of romance in the wind-up of the story; the sudden changes of fortune which betray a beneficent disposer of events, the repentance of Oliver and the conversion of Frederick to a religious life. . . . Above all, you have the romantic spirit of adventure with which the play is filled.<sup>3</sup>

This broad canvas is unified by the romantic quality of all its parts. The charm of the play arises from this romantic effect, combined with humor. Thus the spectator's response is more complex than in comedies where the ridiculous is everything. In As You Like It Shakespeare created a drama complex in texture because it is romance mixed full of pleasant mirth.

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<sup>3</sup>E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey (New York: Hill and Wang, [1958]), pp. 155-156.

This kind of complexity is characteristic of all four of the plays of this chapter, but As You Like It is an especially good example of what happens when Shakespeare combines the ridiculous with the romantic. Part of the function of criticism, however, is to ensure that all of an artist's work is appreciated properly. And since As You Like It is much more likely to get its due than is The Two Gentlemen of Verona (the good qualities of which may be easily overlooked because of the wretched final scene), it might be profitable to see how the sentimental and the ridiculous interact in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. This is one respect in which the play is worthy of praise; we should try to prevent the affront to our sensibilities of the last scene from spoiling our enjoyment of the rest of the play.

The complication of The Two Gentlemen of Verona is based on frustration in love. Closely related to this central focus of interest is a secondary one, human folly. The departure of Proteus (I, iii, 78-91) rouses the spectator's sympathy, and the parting from home of Launce and Crab (II, iii, 1-35), his sense of humor. The parallel invites one to see each situation in the light of the other. Thus we may feel slightly sentimental about Launce's farewell to his family, despite its humor, and in retrospect Proteus' unhappy departure from Verona may seem a bit amusing, though the scene is basically sentimental.

There is a similar parallel between the mirth-provoking rivalry of Thurio and Valentine for Silvia, and the more seriously handled rivalry of Proteus and Valentine. And the comic scene where Launce berates his dog for repaying so ill his master's many kindnesses (IV, iv, 1-42) parodies Julia's distress at Proteus' faithless requital of her love (IV, ii, 26-141). The result is that instead of feeling only romantic sentiment in one scene and nothing but mirth in the next the spectator finds these elements mingled.

But the question may arise: "If the frustrations in love of Julia and Valentine inspire romantic sentiment, why not also the romantic frustrations of Biron, Antipholus of Syracuse, and Falstaff?" Despite the apparent mingling of humor and sentiment in The Two Gentlemen, however, the dramatist carefully preserves a distinction between those characters who are openly ridiculed, and those who are basically sympathetic. Were we very greatly inclined to laugh at Julia and Valentine, we could not sympathize with them as they are presented in this play. Some of Shakespeare's later comic figures are objects of both sympathy and laughter; we sympathize with Viola in her unrequited love for Orsino, and laugh at her when Sir Andrew confronts her--but even here Shakespeare maintains a distinction between sympathetic and humorous situations. One character who does often seem to inspire sympathy and

laughter at the same moment is Falstaff in the two parts of Henry IV; <sup>4</sup> perhaps this is why he is Shakespeare's most memorable comic character. The people in the farces, however, are not so subtly conceived, and consequently we must either laugh at them or feel for them, but not both at once. In the sentimental comedies Shakespeare invites sympathy for some of the characters by introducing others who provide most of the humor. But there is no such distinction between comic and sympathetic characters in the farcical plays; because we are invited to laugh at the romantic difficulties of Biron, Antipholus of Syracuse, and Falstaff, we cannot sympathize with them as we might otherwise.

When one has said all that can be said on behalf of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, its final scene is still largely indefensible, because Shakespeare stretches our indulgence with dramatic convention too far. We shall find in Chapter IV that this disregard for probability, especially of motivation, is one of the main obstacles to deep feeling in the more serious comedies.

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<sup>4</sup>But not in The Merry Wives of Windsor. Critics have noted that there are differences between Falstaff in Henry IV and Falstaff in The Merry Wives (see Neilson and Hill, Complete Plays, p. 245), and this is one of them. If the legend is true that Shakespeare wrote The Merry Wives at royal command, the altered characterization is not so very difficult to explain.

#### IV

#### THE EARLIER SERIOUS COMEDIES

I have suggested that a strongly farcical or romantic emphasis may make pity and fear impossible in a comedy, even when there is acute suffering on stage. But the emotions may be stifled in a serious comedy, too. In The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, All's Well That Ends Well, and Measure for Measure, pity and fear are aroused, but not allowed free play. The two main objects of this chapter will be to observe what happens to congratulation and delight in these four comedies, and to see what light can be cast on the plays by a comparison of their serious aspects.

The stage conventions of The Merchant of Venice do not present the obstacle to pity and fear which the other three comedies of this chapter do: Portia's disguise is as convincing as Kent's; the provision of the caskets for her marriage is as probable as Lear's plan to divide his kingdom. Such conventions concern us as little in The Merchant of Venice as in Lear, since they are beside the central point of dramatic interest.

Because the central action, the bond plot, is a serious portrayal of a life-and-death struggle one might

expect pity and fear to have free course; Antonio is to be commiserated, not ridiculed, and he is not dehumanized by unlikelike conventions. But the bond plot is the only one of three plots in The Merchant of Venice which is serious, and though it is the heart of the play, the frivolous plots divert attention somewhat from Antonio's plight. The cas- ket scenes are romantic; the plot of the rings exploits the ridiculous. In such company a single serious plot cannot set the tone of a play as it would if it stood more nearly alone. Further, the serious plot directly involves char- acters whose place in the lighter episodes makes it still more difficult to take Antonio's danger seriously. He is scarcely more than the nominal protagonist of the bond plot. The action knits his circle of friends so closely together that Shylock becomes antagonist to them all. The feud between Antonio and the Jew, coinciding with the elopement of Lorenzo and Jessica, makes allies of Antonio and Lorenzo. And Bassanio's obligation to Antonio--the occasion of the bond--involves Bassanio, Gratiano, Portia, and Nerissa in the struggle against Shylock almost as fully, in principle, as Antonio himself. In practice his friends are more actively engaged than he: both in his letter to Bassanio and at the trial Antonio seems to have succumbed to despair; it is Bassanio who pleads with Shy- lock, and Portia who effects his defeat. Hence Antonio

and his friends may be regarded as a collective protagonist in the bond plot. Consequently our sympathy with Antonio is modified because of his association in distress with friends whose roles are rendered less sympathetic by their part in the other plots. The romantic tone of the casket plot is a good indication that nothing involving Bassanio and Portia is likely to be of very weighty consequence. And the ring plot diverts our attention from the serious implications of Antonio's narrow escape.

But we do feel pity and fear, both because of Antonio's danger, and because of his friends' distress on his account. Although the comic subplots dampen the emotional effect of the main plot, they do not prevent us from sympathizing with Antonio, and taking seriously the concern of Portia and the rest for him, to some extent.

When we inquire what is the effect in The Merchant of Venice of its serious parts, one thing to be noted is that Shylock's malice is not the first source of grief to make its effects felt. Almost all of the first one hundred lines of the play deal with the subject broached in the opening line by Antonio: "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad" (I, i, 1). And as the second scene begins, we find Portia confiding to Nerissa: "My little body is aweary of this great world" (I, ii, 1-2). There seems to be no very obvious reason for Antonio's sadness, but Nerissa's



diagnosis of Portia's melancholy may account for his also. According to Nerissa, "they are as sick that surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing" (I, ii, 5-7). When the play begins Antonio is surfeited with wealth and Portia with suitors; boredom is inevitable. During the development of the casket plot and the preparation for the forfeiture of the bond, Shakespeare characterizes Antonio and his friends as victims of aimless ennui. If we were to judge them by their performance in the first part of the play, we could not expect much greatness of character from them. But the dramatist uses the threat to Antonio to shock at least some of them into unwonted acts of nobility. An important part of the deeper and more memorable emotion which we feel in observing the action of the bond plot arises from our gratification at this response to the crisis. We not only pity them, but admire them--the more because of their former apparent shallowness.

Not everyone, of course, profits from having faced death. There is no sign that Gratiano rises to the occasion at all. While Bassanio tries to sway Shylock with civil persuasions, Gratiano abuses him. And he is plainly vindictive when the Jew has been defeated:

Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang thyself;  
 And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,  
 Thou hast not left the value of a cord;  
 Therefore thou must be hang'd at the state's charge.

(IV, 1, 364-367)

The speech following casts irony on Gratiano's words, for the Duke tells Shylock:

That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit,  
I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it.

(IV, i, 368-369)

The Duke means the difference of his spirit from Shylock's, but the contrast with Gratiano's speech reminds us that he has lowered himself to his enemy's moral level.

But Antonio's danger does bring out hidden good in Portia and him. When we first meet her, Portia is a flighty little thing, rather unfeeling in her ridicule of the suitors (I, ii, 36-108), and shallow-minded in her estimation of the Prince of Morocco:

A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go.  
Let all of his complexion choose me so.

(II, vii, 78-79)

Before the forfeiture, she is depicted as having beauty, money, and charming manners, but nothing indicates great strength of character. Thus her reaction to Antonio's danger comes at least partly as a pleasant surprise.

We cannot, indeed, admire her harshness with Shylock at the trial; fear for Antonio makes her act ignobly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The impersonation of a judge, though technically an abuse of law, is only a dramatic convention here. And Shakespeare gives it the sanction of Bellario, a qualified jurist. The disguise is not essential to Shylock's defeat; someone else could have cited the laws which Portia uses. She is open to criticism not for impersonating a judge, but for her attitude to Shylock.

Her conduct is scarcely worthy of the office which she represents, for she is sarcastic to Shylock after he learns of the risks involved in exacting the penalty: "Why doth the Jew pause? Take thy forfeiture" (IV, i, 335). And the tone of her final judgment betrays vindictiveness:

For it appears, by manifest proceeding,  
That indirectly, and directly too,  
Thou hast contriv'd against the very life  
Of the defendant; and thou hast incurr'd  
The danger formerly by me rehears'd.  
Down therefore and beg mercy of the Duke.

(IV, i, 358-363)

Portia's words seem dispassionate, except for that final line, which is full of scorn and vengefulness. Evidently Shylock would get mercy at best only on the most humiliating terms, if Portia were the Duke.<sup>2</sup>

Her conduct here is all the more disappointing because in two ways she acts more admirably than her previous

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<sup>2</sup>Shakespeare, of course, prolongs the preliminaries of the trial for theatrical effect. But he gives the proceedings the dramatic motivation of Portia's desire to humble the Jew. Her appeal to him to take three times the principal and bid her tear the bond is calculated to evoke from him a specific declaration of his intent before the court, which will be used against him not just in the final judgment, but also in the subtler revenge of his remorse at not having taken his opportunity to repudiate the bond. Portia tells Antonio to bare his bosom, and inquires about a physician and the scales, as a way of ensuring that Shylock will not be able to evade the trap by pleading that he intended to relent at the last possible moment. She is cruelly vindictive to Shylock; everything in her preparation for "Tarry a little" (IV, i, 305) is calculated to increase his misery.

conduct gave us reason to expect. First, her scheme to rescue Antonio displays a faculty for swift decision and vigorous action which remained hidden as long as life ran smoothly. Second, her speech on mercy expresses more profound ideas than we have heard from her as yet. In the crisis she faces momentarily the moral and philosophical implications of what is happening. In one sense she speaks out of character, but as Harold C. Goddard points out, she is not just voicing a noble sentiment on behalf of Shakespeare; there is motivation enough for the speech: "Do you confess the bond?" she asks Antonio. "I do," he replies.

Then must the Jew be merciful.

. . . Instantly Shylock seizes on [the word must], pouring all his sarcasm into the offending verb:

On what compulsion "must" I? Tell me that.

. . . He is right--she sees it: "must" and "mercy" have nothing to do with each other.

. . . . .  
The truth from Shylock elicits the truth from her. Instead of trying to brush the Jew aside or hide behind some casu-<sup>3</sup>istry or technicality, she frankly sustains his exception.

Her subsequent vindictiveness is disappointing, but she has not been as impervious as Gratiano to the ennobling effect of adversity.

Antonio's first reaction to the danger is almost completely despairing. His letter to Bassanio sounds hopeless. At the trial Bassanio tries to encourage him:

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<sup>3</sup>H. C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare, pp. 105, 106.

Good cheer, Antonio! What, man, courage yet!  
The Jew shall have my flesh, blood, bones, and all,  
Ere thou shalt lose for me one drop of blood.

(IV, i, 111-113)

But Antonio replies:

I am a tainted wether of the flock,  
Meetest for death. The weakest kind of fruit  
Drops earliest to the ground, and so let me.

(IV, i, 114-116)

His long-standing malice to Shylock gives him good grounds for abandoning hope. When he was beholden to the Jew, he treated Shylock's complaint as rudely as a man could:

[Shy.] Shall I bend low and in a bondman's key,  
With bated breath and whisp'ring humbleness,  
Say this:

"Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last;  
You spurn'd me such a day; another time  
You call'd me dog; and for these courtesies  
I'll lend you thus much moneys"?

Ant. I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.  
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take  
A breed for barren metal of his friend?  
But lend it rather to thine enemy,  
Who, if he break, thou mayst with better face  
Exact the penalty.

(I, iii, 124-138)

Perhaps the irony given this last remark by the turn of events reveals to Antonio the destructiveness of enmity, for he shows surprising kindness when Shylock is foiled:

So please my lord the Duke and all the court  
To quit the fine for one half of his goods,  
I am content; so he will let me have  
The other half in use, to render it,  
Upon his death, unto the gentleman  
That lately stole his daughter:  
Two things provided more, that, for this favour,

He presently become a Christian;  
 The other, that he do record a gift,  
 Here in the court, of all he dies possess'd,  
 Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter.<sup>4</sup>

(IV, i, 380-390)

His former virulence is gone, and it seems too great a change to be explained by saying that Antonio can afford to be generous now. His apprehension and suffering seem to have made him a better man. First-hand experience thus proves to be the more efficient teacher, since it is Antonio, himself faced with death, who displays the most marked alteration of character. Our congratulation and delight at his deliverance is increased because we know that the bygone misery has not been futile. For a moment Portia breaks through the confines of her small nature, and Antonio's attitude to Shylock is transformed.

Though we sympathize with Antonio we are invited to feel sympathy for his antagonist also. Shylock causes grief, but he endures much himself. His discovery of Jessica's elopement and theft is pathetic:

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

Shy. Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I

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<sup>4</sup>"The penalty that he renounce his religion appears to us today as a wanton cruelty, but to Shakespeare's contemporaries it probably did not seem so. Critics have, indeed, suggested that they would regard it as an act of charity to admit Shylock to the benefits of Christian sacraments" (Neilson and Hill, The Complete Plays, p. 116.)

would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.

(III, i, 123-128)

To play this passage for laughs would surely be to distort Shakespeare's intention. For Shylock's complaint against Antonio, earlier in the scene, must be taken seriously:

He hath disgrac'd me, and hind'red me half a million;  
 laugh'd at my losses, mock'd at my gains, scorn'd my na-  
 tion, thwarted my bargains, cool'd my friends, heated mine  
 enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a  
 Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions,  
 senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt  
 with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd  
 by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and  
 summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not  
 bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison  
 us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not re-  
 venge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble  
 you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humil-  
 ity? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his  
 sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The  
 villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard  
 but I will better the instruction.

(III, i, 56-76)

It is clear that Antonio's misfortune is largely his own doing; Shylock is no motiveless villain. We sympathize with them both because there is wrong on both sides. This distinction of moral grey shades between black and white marks The Merchant of Venice as an early form of "problem play" in which Shakespeare discards the naive approach to human nature which characterizes the lighter comedies, and instead faces up to the paradoxes of life. Suffering in the problem plays both appeals to the spectator's emotions, and challenges his intellect on a deeper level than the

humorous. Any serious representation of human distress will convey some sense of the paradoxes of man's affairs, but this aspect of life is especially prominent in certain comedies. Measure for Measure is more strictly a problem play than The Merchant of Venice, because all features of its action, both grave and light, help to portray moral and philosophical problems. Since the effect of The Merchant of Venice is diffused among elements sentimental and deeply emotional, humorous and philosophic, the "problems" are less prominent, and our feelings of pity and fear (and, as a result, of congratulation and delight) are attenuated.

In Much Ado About Nothing, All's Well That Ends Well, and Measure for Measure, dramatic conventions impose the chief restraint upon the spectator's emotions. Shakespeare's representation of motivation in the plays discussed in Chapters II and III frequently seems as conventionally unlikelike as anything in these three plays, but when we were not expected to feel deep grief and joy, the conventions did not conflict with our response to the characters as they do here, where serious events are treated seriously. To appreciate the grave incidents of these plays, we must try to understand the effect of Shakespeare's attitude to motivation on our sympathy with the characters.

Improbable motivation is not the only hindrance to deep emotion in Much Ado About Nothing; the romantic rela-



tions of Beatrice and Benedick dominate the action, and the effect of the play is somewhat diffused, as in The Merchant of Venice. But this obstacle to sympathy is less important than inconsistency in motivation, a problem which merits attention in Much Ado because it resembles what we shall find in All's Well and Measure for Measure.

The main difficulty seems to be the characterization of Claudio. Charles Cowden Clarke calls him "a fellow of no nobleness of character",<sup>5</sup> and Furness refers to his "ignoble character".<sup>6</sup> Anyone who esteems Claudio thus must be distressed by his good fortune at the end of the play. But surely his felicity is a hint that Shakespeare did not intend him to seem despicable. Nevertheless he has been criticized for nearly every significant action of his in the play: his wooing by proxy, his distrust of Don Pedro, his gullibility in being twice deceived by Don John, his public repudiation of Hero, his flippant reception of Benedick's challenge, and his acquiescence to the request that he marry at Leonato's direction. Many of these objections can be dismissed if we take into account all the evidence concerning his character. But in some ways he still lacks humanity.

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<sup>5</sup>Much Ado About Nothing, ed. Horace Howard Furness (New Variorum Edition, 5th ed. [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1899]), p. 40.

<sup>6</sup>Much Ado About Nothing (New Variorum), p. 255.

To determine what is really unsatisfactory in Claudio's role, we should justify what we can. There are glowing reports of him before he appears on stage: "Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio. . . . He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion. He hath indeed better bett'ered expectation than you must expect of me to tell you how" (I, i, 9-11; 13-17). Since we are invited to accept him as a sympathetic character, indulgence (and perhaps a little pity) would be more fitting than censure when he asks Don Pedro to help him woo Hero. He is young and inexperienced, and though he betters expectation in the field it is not surprising that he acts the inexperienced youth in his love.

This is our first indication that he lacks maturity, and his susceptibility to Don John's slander of Don Pedro confirms this view. According to the Cambridge editors, "it will be noticed that Claudio's sudden jealousy of Don Pedro is somewhat inadequately motivated. Indeed, the mistaken idea that the Prince is in love with Hero, under which Leonato, Antonio, Claudio, and Benedick all labour for a time, seems to have little point."<sup>7</sup> But if one com-

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<sup>7</sup>Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson, eds., Much Ado About Nothing (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), p. 123.

compares this deception with the one at Hero's window, it seems that Don John's first abuse of Claudio's credulity is intended to make the second more probable. We should not write off Claudio as a complete fool; others are misled concerning Don Pedro's motives. But we are left feeling that he is over-hasty. The suspicion is "somewhat inadequately motivated" to create that impression.

There is nothing incredible about the trick at Hero's window, once we see Claudio's lack of maturity and wisdom. We dare not be too harsh with him, since Don Pedro (whom Leonato shows respect and friendship) is convinced of Hero's guilt. Thus far Claudio is no scoundrel, and his behavior is self-consistent and probable.

Shakespeare prepares for the repudiation of Hero so that the scene in the church seems to follow naturally from what has gone before. In fact, the motivation for this scene is so ample that we are not likely to be made conscious of the fact that it is a dramatization of a rather unlikely-sounding tale from Bandello. In Much Ado the repudiation is neither incredible nor offensive, however painful the misunderstanding, because Claudio believes that Hero has actually wronged him. And we need not impute entirely to hurt pride his decision to shame her publicly; the standards of his age and Shakespeare's justified public shame as the just due of a "rotten orange". Claudio



Claud. O noble sir,  
 Your over-kindness doth wring tears from me!  
 I do embrace your offer; and dispose  
 From henceforth of poor Claudio.

(V, i, 298-305)

But the situation is nonetheless incredible.

A drama composed entirely of such unbelievable incidents might possibly appeal to the deeper emotions. We object to the improbability of this conclusion less because of its intrinsic nature than because of its relation to what has already passed. Much of the sympathy which we have felt for Claudio and Hero is lost in the shock of the sudden disappearance of dramatic conviction.

Having analysed the obstacle to emotional response in Much Ado, we have yet to note what is the appeal of the serious plot. Beatrice and Benedick occupy the larger part of the action; we are not as affected by the misunderstanding between Claudio and Hero as we would be if there were no diversion from the serious themes. But we do feel pity and fear on their account in the repudiation scene, which is doubly painful because Claudio acts in good conscience. Like the catastrophes of Romeo and Juliet and Othello, the whole thing is a terrible mistake. What reluctance we may feel about sympathizing with them is just a result of the fact that we are not as well acquainted with them as with Beatrice and Benedick. The improbability of the play interferes more with our feelings of congratulation and

delight, which should replace pity and fear when the reconciliation comes. But at that point our sensibilities are numbed to the emotions of the characters on stage, because Shakespeare suddenly treats them as puppets rather than as human beings.

The effect of the serious elements in Much Ado is not confined to the plot of the repudiation, for there is mutual interplay of the pathetic with the ridiculous and the romantic. The Watch's misunderstanding of Borachio's conversation with Conrade is a comic counterpart of Claudio's misinterpretation of the play-acting at Hero's window, and it may be intended to induce the spectator to think of Claudio's mistaking as something to which all mankind is prone, not something in which he is alone faulty. And the deception of Beatrice and Benedick concerning each other is exactly the opposite of the deception of Claudio concerning Hero. In Much Ado, more than in The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare uses the serious plot to enrich the effect of the romantic part of the play. For the repudiation of Hero is crucial to the relation between Beatrice and Benedick. Beatrice desires revenge against Claudio, and Benedick is to be her instrument.

Her cast of the die is not a light one, for she truly loves Benedick. To Shakespeare and to his Elizabethan audience her 'Kill Claudio' was probably a far more dangerous, more fatal, cast than in our day we readily understand; the obligation of a lover to his mistress being, in comparison

with any convention of our own times, so far weaker than that of a man to his friend. This has to be allowed for if we would understand Beatrice's strength--and Benedick's devotion.<sup>9</sup>

The crisis in the affairs of Claudio and Hero brings the other courtship to a point of decision. Thus the serious plot exerts influence beyond its actual space in the play.

If Shakespeare intended to arouse deep feelings of sympathy in the observer of All's Well That Ends Well, he defeated that purpose in his choice of plot material. It is tempting to conjecture that, having succeeded in making plausible such improbable episodes as the deception at Hero's window and the repudiation scene in Much Ado, the dramatist felt he could handle "the harde condition, of two thinges impossible" (as William Painter calls it in his version of the story<sup>10</sup>) represented in Bertram's demands of Helena--in a play with sympathetic characters and a strong emotional appeal. But the spectator cannot contemplate Bertram's conditions with enjoyment or satisfaction, if he is expected to think of the characters as representing human beings in the world as we know it. The appeal of the plot is intellectual; we marvel at the

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<sup>9</sup>Quiller-Couch and Wilson, Much Ado, p. xv.

<sup>10</sup>The thirty-eighth novel of Painter's Palace of Pleasure may be Shakespeare's source. See G. K. Hunter, ed., All's Well That Ends Well ([New] Arden Edition, 3rd ed., London: Methuen, [1959]), p. xxv. The quotation is from Hunter's reproduction of the novel, All's Well, p. 148.

conditions and are entertained by Helena's ingenuity in contriving to fulfil them. But if we venture to associate the plot with actual life, the spectacle becomes intolerable, and we can feel nothing but loathing for Bertram for laying down such terms, and nothing but disgust for Helena because she is willing to meet them. As a romantic tale the situation is diverting, but as serious drama it is extremely distasteful.

We need not charge Shakespeare with a fault in this play if we are willing to conclude that the play is merely a dramatic counterpart of Painter's romantic narrative, intended only as light entertainment without any serious relevance to actual life. It may be a mistake to look for anything more. The plays of Chapter II contain grave events employed solely for the sake of the ridiculous; perhaps All's Well is an exploitation of grave events solely for the sake of the marvelous. Whatever one's view, however, the play does not seem, on any reading, to invite the kind of emotional response which we feel towards the characters of The Merchant of Venice and Much Ado About Nothing.

Except for All's Well, Measure for Measure is the earliest of Shakespeare's comedies in which the serious action stands virtually alone. The comic episodes all contribute to the main plot--the trial of Angelo's virtue. Thus Measure for Measure is at a great remove from such



plays as The Taming of the Shrew and The Merry Wives of Windsor, in which the ridiculous is everything. Here the grave situation is everything; the bulk of the play, like the bond plot in The Merchant of Venice, appeals to the deeper emotions and the profounder depths of the intellect. We feel pity and fear when we see Angelo's temptation, Isabella's dilemma, Claudio's fear of death, and Mariana's unhappiness in love. And all of these situations portray various paradoxical qualities of human life.

Shakespeare's treatment of his characters, however, is like that in Much Ado. He adopts a sympathetic approach during four acts of the play, with care to establish life-like motivation for each action (except those of the Duke, who will be discussed further), and then disposes of the characters and resolves the complications of plot by falling back on conventional comic devices. As our feelings of congratulation and delight in The Merchant of Venice spring partly from satisfaction at seeing the characters ennobled by suffering, so the various distresses which the characters of Measure for Measure endure are such that we may expect them to be ennobled also--and so they are, insofar as Shakespeare reveals their thoughts and feelings after the crisis has passed. But it is this consideration which makes the scamped ending disappointing, and this is why our feelings of joy are stifled.

The trial of Angelo's virtue is developed through three central actions: his judgment of Claudio, his abuse of Isabella, and his lack of good faith to Mariana. But only one of these three is clearly resolved in the denouement. We know that Angelo repents of his abuse of Isabella in forcing her (as he thought) to yield her virginity and then breaking his promise to reprieve Claudio:

I am sorry that such sorrow I procure;  
 And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart  
 That I crave death more willingly than mercy.  
 'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.

(V, 1, 479-482)

But although this speech (Angelo's last in the play) satisfies us on one point, it is a cause for dissatisfaction on another. One of the deputy's chief weaknesses seems to have been that he was unable to understand and appreciate mercy. A certain naiveness of mind can cause a man to shun the complexity of real life and take refuge in simple abstract conceptions. It is easier to deal with the absolute extremes of good and evil, for instance, than the indefinite area between. Justice deals with these extremes--complete guilt or innocence--but not with any compound of the two. The judge in the court, however, has about as much chance of finding the absolute extremes of good and evil in the person he examines, as a physicist has of finding a closed system outside the laboratory; neither situation is impossible, but both are exceedingly rare. And

both are attractive ideas because they are simple. But mercy, a complex conception, is necessary to make justice (as embodied in the simple abstractions of written law) relevant to actual conditions of life. Since mercy deals in paradoxes, Angelo finds the idea of justice less difficult and more attractive. His antipathy to the idea of mercy is apparent when Escalus pleads for Claudio's life:

Let but your honour know,  
Whom I believe to be most strait in virtue,  
That, in the working of your own affections,  
Had time coher'd with place or place with wishing,  
Or that the resolute acting of your blood  
Could have attain'd the effect of your own purpose,  
Whether you had not sometime in your life  
Err'd in this point which now you censure him,  
And pull'd the law upon you.

(II, 1, 8-16)

The beginning of Angelo's answer suggests that he is thinking only in terms of the extremes of good and evil:

'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,  
Another thing to fall.

(II, 1, 17-18)

This observation seems to imply: "Justice acquits the man who avoids sin, and condemns the man who succumbs to it" Angelo continues with an elaboration of the thought of his first sentence:

I not deny,  
The jury, passing on the prisoner's life,  
May in the sworn twelve have a thief or two  
Guiltier than him they try. What's open made to  
justice,  
That justice seizes. What knows the laws  
That thieves do pass on thieves? 'Tis very preg-  
nant,

The jewel that we find, we stoop and take't  
 Because we see it; but what we do not see  
 We tread upon, and never think of it.

(II, i, 18-26)

If Angelo's talk of guilty jurymen seems intended to clarify some other idea, the explanation is simple: Escalus is asking for mercy, which in this situation means treating Claudio as though he had not transgressed. Angelo replies, in effect, that only secret transgressors are treated as though innocent. He means that Claudio could have gone free only if he had not been discovered, but this is as much as to say that there is no such thing as an occasion for mercy; the just judge punishes every fault in sight--as Angelo observes in so many words: "What's open made to justice, / That justice seizes." In the last lines of his speech Angelo comes round to an answer of Escalus' argument:

You may not so extenuate his offence  
 For I have had such faults; but rather tell me,  
 When I, that censure him, do so offend,  
 Let mine own judgement pattern out my death  
 And nothing come in partial. Sir, he must die.

(II, i, 27-31)

But this is just one more categorical repudiation of mercy. Since Angelo's last speech in the play is almost a paraphrase of this rejoinder to Escalus, we must conclude that his experience with guilt and imminent death has taught him nothing about mercy. He seems no more fit a judge

than in the beginning.<sup>11</sup>

This source of dissatisfaction with our last view of Angelo is accompanied by uncertainty as to his regard for Mariana. Beyond admitting the betrothal, he says nothing to indicate that he accepts Mariana as his love. Twice the Duke commands him to love her, (V, i, 502, 532) but he makes no reply. For all the assurance given us, Mariana may be no better off than Helena was on her marriage to Bertram. The resolution of the central character's circumstances is thus at best very incomplete.

Other important matters fare no better. Claudio is mute in the last scene; though much was made of his fear of death, the text tells us nothing about his final state of mind. Nor is he explicitly reconciled with Isabella, who last parted from him full of indignant wrath. No one but the Duke and Lucio speaks after the unmuffling of Claudio. Not only does Isabella say nothing to Claudio, but she makes no response to the Duke's proposal of marriage.

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<sup>11</sup>Angelo's soliloquy in Act II, Scene ii may momentarily give the impression that his attitude has changed:

O, let her brother live!  
Thieves for their robbery have authority  
When judges steal themselves.

(II, ii, 175-177)

But this passage must be interpreted only as an ironic comment on his own weakness, in the light of what he says at the end of the play.

The grave events of Measure for Measure evoke pity and fear; since they are resolved happily, congratulation and delight may reasonably be expected to follow. And there is some satisfaction in knowing that Angelo is repentant. Shakespeare also provides motivation for Isabella's forgiveness of Angelo and her intercession for his life; even Barnardine is disposed of with all the ado befitting his place in the play. But most of the intellectual and emotional problems, which the bulk of the play has led us to accept as its essence, are unresolved. The effect of making Angelo abuse the proper functions of justice and mercy without eventually representing him as coming to a better understanding of human law, the effect of introducing a quarrel between Isabella and Claudio in which both are partly to blame without bringing them to a reconciliation, and the effect of developing at length the estrangement of Angelo and Mariana without giving any final assurance that Angelo will be an acceptable husband, do not encourage feelings of congratulation and delight.

One can hardly maintain that Shakespeare did not intend to evoke joy in the last scene of Measure for Measure, that he aimed at an effect like that of the end of Troilus and Cressida. There are too many of the conventional trappings of the happy ending for that: the marriages of the Duke and Isabella, Claudio and Juliet, Angelo

and Mariana, and even Lucio and his punk; the restoration of Claudio from the dead, as it seems; the unraveling of the plot (though only in the bare essentials of fact). We might conclude, then, that the difficulty with the ending is due to the same cause which we noted in Much Ado--the characters being treated seriously during the bulk of the play, but much more casually in the conclusion.

But the true explanation may not be as simple as that, nor as uncomplimentary to Shakespeare. For there is no improbability in the final situation as it is actually presented to us. Surely it is nothing present in what occurs that makes the ending unsatisfactory; the trouble is that the absence of adequate exposition of the several characters' states of mind leaves us with too many uncertainties. There is nothing improbable about the match between the Duke and Isabella, for example, except its abruptness.

To this abruptness may be traced our difficulties with the disposition of the other main characters and themes. Curiously, all the impressions of abruptness arise from the last fifty lines of the play, not from the last scene as a whole. Up to the unmuting of Claudio, events are unfolded with deliberation; the sending for Claudio in prison is an example of action in the last scene which proceeds at the comparatively leisurely pace of the first

four acts (V, i, 461-474: "I have bethought me of another fault . . ."). Until the revelation of Claudio's safety, Shakespeare seems to be tying up the loose ends of the plot with methodical care: Mariana is married to Angelo; Isabella forgives him and intercedes for him; Angelo repents; the Duke turns Barnardine over to the guidance of the Friar. After Claudio is revealed, however, the action is suddenly hurried breathlessly to an end by the Duke, who has the rest of the play to himself, except for three speeches by Lucio. Even these fifty lines might have been enough to resolve the details of plot and theme, but over half of these (V, i, 504-530) are devoted to Lucio. Everything else is compressed to a point verging on the ridiculous:

She, Claudio, that you wrong'd, look you restore.  
 Joy to you, Mariana! Love her, Angelo!  
 I have confess'd her and I know her virtue.  
 Thanks, good friend Escalus, for thy much goodness;  
 There's more behind that is more gratefull.  
 Thanks, Provost, for thy care and secrecy;  
 We shall employ thee in a worthier place.  
 Forgive him, Angelo, that brought you home  
 The head of Ragozine for Claudio's;  
 The offence pardons itself. Dear Isabel,  
 I have a motion much imports your good;  
 Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline,  
 What's mine is yours and what is yours is mine.

(V, i, 531-543)

In the light of such evidence as this, the theory advanced by the Cambridge editors,<sup>12</sup> that Measure for Measure has

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<sup>12</sup>Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson, eds., Measure for Measure (Cambridge: University Press, 1950), pp. xxxvi-xli; 97-113.



been abridged and expanded again, is tantalizing.

But the causes lying behind the received text are not the concern here; what is important to this study is the effect of the play. Whatever the reason, the conclusion is so hasty that the spectator has difficulty to maintain the sympathy with the characters which is necessary if congratulation and delight are to follow pity and fear. W. A. Neilson and C. J. Hill remark: "From his earliest days as a writer of comedy [Shakespeare] was careless of probability in order that joy might reign and wedding bells might ring."<sup>13</sup> This observation might seem to have application to the last scene of Measure for Measure. But the wedding bells and apparent felicity follow from what goes before. The trouble is that the text gives too little concrete assurance that everyone is happy. Were this play a farce or a romance, we would be less involved in the characters' emotions and problems, and the sort of hurried ending common in Shakespeare's comedies would disturb us less. But few of the comedies demand such intense emotional and intellectual involvement as Measure for Measure, and one can scarcely avoid being disappointed by the abrupt disposition of situations and characters.

The hindrance to deep emotion in Measure for Measure

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<sup>13</sup>Neilson and Hill, The Complete Plays, p. 426.

ure is rather like that in Much Ado, with respect to their endings. But there is another aspect of Measure for Measure which prevents the spectator from feeling the full impact of the serious events. All of the characters except one are given motivation sufficiently lifelike that we can conceive of them as being real persons. They are, of course, only imaginative constructions of Shakespeare's mind, but they have enough similarity to human beings that we can imagine such people actually existing. The Duke's actions, however, lack this consistently lifelike motivation. It is nearly impossible to imagine meeting such a person. The root of the difficulty is much like that with Bertram. One cannot find adequate motivation, say, for the Duke's withholding from Isabella the news that Claudio is safe, for such a thing would be thought almost incredible if it happened in real life. Also, it is hard to satisfy oneself concerning the Duke's reasons for disguising himself as a friar to spy on Angelo. And one may be disturbed by the feeling that the Duke's end in his illegitimate practice of a friar's holy duties--not only in counselling Claudio, Barnardine, and Juliet, but in confessing Mariana--does not justify his means. And the contingencies of the plot require of him a multitude of other falsehoods, including the bed-trick. We may justify him by saying that he represents the "power divine" to which Angelo alludes (V,

i, 374). Or one may prefer to relieve the plot of the necessity of probability by placing it in the same category as the plot of All's Well. But neither of these interpretations allow us to sympathize with the Duke as if he represented a real person. The same situation obtains, however, if we neglect to justify the Duke's actions, for then he seems repulsive. It seems that his part of the plot, regardless of one's interpretation, is such an improbable possibility that we are prevented from feeling pity and fear, congratulation and delight, as the rest of the plot invites us to do.

It is generally wise to give Shakespeare a fairly generous benefit of whatever doubt there may be concerning his artistry. Perhaps he had the elements of his early serious comedies better in hand than this interpretation of them implies. It may be that we should accept them, and try to understand them, as they are. But the effect of grave events in the last four comedies seems a great deal more pleasing, as I shall try to show in Chapter V.

## THE LATER SERIOUS COMEDIES

Although each of Shakespeare's four last comedies manifests the pattern of misfortune and good fortune which we noted in Chapter I, these plays do not seem stereotyped because the dramatist elaborates four different dramatic structures on the same pattern. In this chapter we shall examine Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest; with the object of analysing Shakespeare's use of serious incidents in his maturest comedies.

In all of these plays the main action is serious, and the emotions of deep grief and joy are allowed free course. We experience pity and fear much as we do when observing a tragedy. But it would be misleading to call these dramas "tragi-comedies". I raise this point not because I have an alternative tag to suggest, but because this one seems inappropriate for Shakespeare's last comedies. Prior to the moment of a tragic catastrophe, no dramatic situation can properly be called "tragic" in the technical sense merely because it seems to be tending in that direction. We never know until the catastrophe occurs that it may not be averted. If no plays like Shakespeare's serious comedies existed, this illusion of the inevitability

of tragedy might be harmless. But it can destroy one's appreciation of a serious comedy, if it encourages the kind of view expressed by Charles Gildon concerning Much Ado About Nothing:

This play we must call a Comedy, tho' some of the incidents and discourses are more in a tragic strain; and that of the accusation of Hero is too shocking for either Tragedy or Comedy; nor cou'd it have come off in nature, if we regard the country, without the death of more than Hero.<sup>1</sup>

The labeling of certain "incidents and discourses" as being "in a tragic strain", where there is no tragic catastrophe, must be based on the assumption that tragedy is inevitable in certain situations--or at any rate "fitting". This assumption, which Gildon makes no attempt to justify, is the foundation of his criticism of Much Ado on this point. Swinburne differs with Gildon about the play, but he seems to agree that in some situations tragedy must be the outcome, for he observes of Much Ado: "A tragic end would here have been as painfully and grossly out of place as is any but a tragic end to the action of Measure for Measure."<sup>2</sup> Since Pericles, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale are as liable to such criticism as the two plays just mentioned, we must ask ourselves whether all of these plays are marred because Shakespeare tacked happy endings

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<sup>1</sup>Much Ado About Nothing (New Variorum), p. 347.

<sup>2</sup>Much Ado About Nothing (New Variorum), p. 354.

to situations which by rights are tragic, or whether it is a mistake to insist that any series of events must end tragically. Doubtless few people are disturbed by the effect of these plays in the theatre; yet some uncertainties and reservations may remain as long as we feel that tragedy necessarily follows in some situations.

The outcome of a drama proceeds from two kinds of cause: the volition of the protagonist, and circumstances outside his control, including the volition of other characters. Rarely does one of these causes by itself account for the whole result, but The Comedy of Errors, in which external circumstances control everything, demonstrates that the protagonist's actions and words must have crucial significance in the result if we are to sense any great human interest in a play.<sup>3</sup> In most plays there is a point of crisis when the protagonist determines his fate by his own actions, whether he realizes it or not--a point after which he becomes powerless to reverse the course of events which he has begun. Once the initiative has passed from his hands, the outcome may seem inevitable. And so it would be, if his actions were the only factor influencing the issue. But external circumstances may alter things, either for the better or for the worse, at any time. A

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<sup>3</sup>See pp. 13-16 above.

comparison of The Winter's Tale and Othello provides an apt illustration of the role of external events. When Mamillius and Hermione have been reported dead, Leontes' position is much like Othello's when Desdemona has been murdered. Both characters have acted in such a way as to make further action futile, if not impossible. Every appearance indicates that the two situations are identical --and they are identical with respect to the protagonist's opportunity for initiative. But although Othello is nearly over at this point, The Winter's Tale is only half done. External circumstances, having previously combined with Leontes' actions to create trouble, now provide a way of escape from tragedy: Hermione is alive, Perdita preserved, and Florizel will eventually assume the vacant place of Mamillius and reconcile the kings. The supposed justice of Nemesis notwithstanding, we can scarcely deny Shakespeare the right to introduce events which exempt the protagonist (especially if he is fundamentally noble) from even a part of the suffering which may somehow be thought his due. Indeed, the events of Othello cause one to wish heartily that some circumstance would reveal the truth before it is too late. Surely, then, we should not object when circumstances do intervene in Measure for Measure (in the person of the Duke), in Pericles, in Cymbeline, and in The Winter's Tale.

Pericles inspires a different sort of sympathy from that which we feel for some of Shakespeare's comic protagonists, and the main reason is that he is above reproach. He is not jealous like Posthumus and Leontes, nor intolerant like Antonio, nor credulous like Claudio in Much Ado, nor morally naive like Angelo. F. D. Hoeniger concludes, because he "is drawn without moral weakness --at any rate up to Act IV--and without even any ambivalent passion", that "that is partly why he does not strike us as especially interesting".<sup>4</sup> Hoeniger also notes another fact about the play which might make it seem to lack the human interest so necessary if the spectator's sympathies are to be aroused:

While the leading characters of Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies are drawn as preponderantly active figures, as men and women who make decisions or show fateful indecision, thus contributing to a chain of events which eventually leads to their happiness or ruin, in Pericles the events usually happen to the protagonists. . . . [Pericles] is revealed mainly as the plaything of Fortune and the gods. He does not create his fortune in any important sense: he endures Fortune's blows and accepts her gifts.<sup>5</sup>

Is this play similar to The Comedy of Errors in lacking the element of human initiative which makes dramatic events seem relevant to actual life? I think that we may

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<sup>4</sup>F. D. Hoeniger, ed., Pericles ([New] Arden Edition, London: Methuen; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1963]), p. lxxxi.

<sup>5</sup>Hoeniger, Pericles, p. lxxx.



answer "no", because Pericles is quite different from The Comedy of Errors. When the characters of the earlier comedy are buffeted by Fortune, they make all kinds of fruitless endeavors to help themselves: Antipholus of Syracuse, driven by loneliness, spends futile years in search of his twin; Aegeon seeks through Ephesus for his ransom without success; the characters' efforts to untangle the first complications of mistaken identity only cause greater difficulties. And everything turns out right in the end, entirely independent of their exertions. In Pericles, on the other hand, the characters submit patiently to misfortune--Pericles to the loss of his family, Marina to her oppression in Tarsus and Mitylene, and Thaisa to her separation from husband and daughter. They are tempted to give in to passions such as fear and anger--a kind of action which is really passivity, as the word "passion" implies. In such a situation virtuous action consists in doing nothing. (When one considers how essentially undramatic this episode is, it becomes evident that Shakespeare managed a hazardous experiment very well.)

What sustains Pericles and his family in their patience is faith in divine justice, and their eventual happiness is the due reward of their faith. Unlike the characters in The Comedy of Errors, their decisions are crucial to the outcome. If any of the three had submitted to some vic-

lent passion, such as despair, they might have interfered (by suicide, if in no other way) with the chain of events which eventually reunited them. Their active piety makes a happy ending possible, whereas nothing the people in The Comedy of Errors do is consciously intended to effect the denouement which actually occurs.

Dramatic interest in Pericles is maintained by the concern which events arouse in the spectator as to what Pericles' reaction will be, as one tribulation follows another. At times he expresses his complete acquiescence in the workings of divine power:

Let it suffice the greatness of your powers  
To have bereft a prince of all his fortunes;  
And having thrown him from your watery grave,  
Here to have death in peace is all he'll crave.

(II, i, 8-11)

We cannot but obey  
The powers above us. Could I rage and roar  
As doth the sea she lies in, yet the end  
Must be as 'tis.

(III, iii, 9-12)

When all but life has been lost, his three months' silence is a kind of grim submission to fate--as long as he says nothing, he has not succumbed to the temptation to "curse God, and die".<sup>6</sup> He does temporarily lose patience when he discovers the loss of Marina; according to the stage

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<sup>6</sup>Job 2:9.

direction following Act IV, Scene iv, line 22, "Cleon shows Pericles the tomb; whereat Pericles makes lamentation, puts on sackcloth, and in a mighty passion departs". But he never becomes violent in passion; he stops short of suicide and blasphemy.

The source of interest in Pericles is emotional, but it is philosophic too. Because Pericles is virtuous, we cannot trace through his tribulations the development of his character from bad to good. But his undeserved suffering gives the spectator cause to ponder on the inequalities of fortune. And we feel particularly deep pity and fear because undeserved suffering seems more awesome and mysterious than that which we bring on ourselves. When patience is at last rewarded, we feel a peculiar kind of congratulation and delight which, like our former grief, is heightened by the element of divine intervention involved. If misfortune tests our faith in Providence, good fortune vindicates it.

The reunion of Pericles and Marina has an unusually memorable emotional impact. Hoeniger notes a production of the play "at Stratford in 1958 with Richard Johnson as Pericles and Geraldine McEwan as Marina, who 'made the recognition as poignantly beautiful as the Lear-Cordelia scene'".<sup>7</sup> Their happiness affects us the more

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<sup>7</sup>Hoeniger, Pericles, p. lxix.

because of their former miseries; had they never been separated, their joy and ours in this scene could not be so deeply felt. Shakespeare's serious comedies explore an important area of human emotions which tragedy and comedy, as Aristotle knew them, leave untouched. The pleasure we feel at seeing a man triumph over adversity has no place in either tragedy or light comedy. But we do feel this pleasure in Shakespeare's serious comedies, which inspire us first with pity and fear, and then with congratulation and delight. Only after suffering could a man experience the kind of joy described by Pericles when he has found both Thaisa and Marina:

No more, you gods! Your present kindness  
 Makes my past miseries sports. You shall do well  
 That on the touching of her lips I may  
 Melt and no more be seen.

(V, iii, 40-43)

Pericles might well be called a problem play, since it portrays the suffering of a virtuous man. Hoeniger traces through Pericles' sufferings his various moods of bravado, querulousness, and grim resignation,<sup>8</sup> drawing attention to the affinity between this play and the Book of Job. Here the problem of evil is resolved in the reunion of husband, wife, and daughter. Providence visited them with afflictions, to be sure, but the finding

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<sup>8</sup>Hoeniger, Pericles, pp. lxxxii-lxxxvi.

of Thaisa occurs only through the direct intervention of Diana, who gives Pericles instructions in a dream which direct him to Ephesus (V, i, 241-250). In this part of the denouement the text makes clear that good fortune has succeeded bad through the ministrations of the gods. But the reconciliation with Marina, also, is due in part to divine intervention. Although this circumstance is not as obvious from the text as the vision of Diana, the representation on stage of a few lines of Marina's must make the point clear:

[Aside.] I will desist;  
 But there is something glows upon my cheek,  
 And whispers in mine ear, "Go not till he speak."  
 (V, i, 95-97)

Thus both recognition scenes are direct endorsements of the justice of Providence to man.

Because Pericles' sufferings are undeserved, the play appeals both to the emotions and to the intellect. As in Measure for Measure, grave events are handled so as to elicit a complex combination of thoughts and feelings from the spectator--with this difference, that in Pericles the denouement, despite certain unlikelike qualities, disposes more satisfactorily of the central emotional and intellectual complication, so that there is no hindrance from that quarter to feelings of deep grief and joy.

Pericles and Cymbeline have less of the ridiculous aspect of human nature than any of Shakespeare's other comedies. Even The Winter's Tale has three characters who are the butt of laughter: the Shepherd, the Clown, and Autolycus; and so has The Tempest: Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano. But we are not asked to laugh at anything in Pericles except the inversion of moral standards in the brothel of Mytilene:

Bawd. How now! what's the matter?

Boult. Worse and worse, mistress; she has here spoken holy words to the Lord Lysimachus.

Bawd. O abominable!

Boult. She makes our profession as it were to stink afore the face of the gods.

Bawd. Marry, hang her up for ever!

Boult. The nobleman would have dealt with her like a nobleman, and she sent him away as cold as a snowball; saying his prayers too.

Bawd. Boult, take her away; use her at thy pleasure. Crack the glass of her virginity, and make the rest malleable.

Boult. An if she were a thornier piece of ground than she is, she shall be ploughed.

Mar. Hark, hark, you gods!

Bawd. She conjures; away with her!

(IV, vi, 140-156)

And the only humorous incidents in Cymbeline are the exchanges between Cloten and the two Lords,<sup>9</sup> and a few other events involving Cloten. But the earnestness of Pericles surely contributes a good deal to the warmth of Act V; the deepest kind of joy is not funny. So also in

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<sup>9</sup>Cymbeline, I, ii, 1-43; II, i, 1-56.

Cymbeline: because the situation is serious almost throughout, we are in a mood to be receptive to the profound emotions involved in the play.

Cymbeline illustrates aptly the difference between pity and fear as evoked by tragedy, and pity and fear as evoked by a serious comedy. The latter may be identical to the former--as far as it goes; we feel pity and fear when Posthumus is treacherously led to seek Imogen's death, much as we do when Othello is deceived by Iago. But the pity and fear inspired by the catastrophe of Othello has no place in Cymbeline because Imogen is spared. The threat of disaster, not disaster itself, is the source of pity and fear in a serious comedy.

Pity and fear in Cymbeline are somewhat different from pity and fear in Pericles, where we saw a virtuous man in distress through no fault of his. Interesting as such a situation is because it involves the problem of evil, it has less possibilities for the development of complex emotions in the audience than has the situation of Cymbeline, where noble characters such as Posthumus and Cymbeline suffer for their own shortcomings.<sup>10</sup> In fact, this play epitomizes more precisely than any other

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<sup>10</sup> Imogen, of course, suffers undeservingly; in this she resembles both Pericles and innocent victims of tragedy such as Duncan, Lady Macduff, Cordelia, Desdemona.

of Shakespeare's comedies the theoretical serious comedy that I described in Chapter I.<sup>11</sup>

Cymbeline is partly to blame for his troubles, but he is victimized by the Queen's duplicity, and we cannot but pity him when everything seems to have gone wrong at once:

Heavens,  
How deeply you at once do touch me! Imogen,  
The great part of my comfort, gone; my queen  
Upon a desperate bed, and in a time  
When fearful wars point at me; her son gone,  
So needful for this present: it strikes me, past  
The hope of comfort.

(IV, iii, 3-9)

And the revelation of the Queen's true nature is still in store--her hatred of the King, her murderous intent against him and his daughter, her impenitence in death (V, v, 37-61). Posthumus, for his part, is first torn from his wife, then convinced of her infidelity. Supposing her dead at his command, he repents and vainly seeks death in battle.

But Imogen, who suffers innocently, seems to suffer most. When we first meet her, she is already enduring abuse from the Queen:

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<sup>11</sup> Full emotional response is hindered in comedies of the preceding chapters, and the other plays discussed in this chapter are different from Cymbeline: Pericles is virtuous; the spectator as well as those on stage believe Hermione dead; the action of *The Tempest* portrays only the second half of the pattern--bad fortune changing to good.



Queen. You know the peril.  
I'll fetch a turn about the garden, pitying  
The pangs of barr'd affections, though the King  
Hath charg'd you should not speak together.

[Exit.

Imo.  
Dissembling courtesy! How fine this tyrant  
Can tickle where she wounds!

(I, i, 80-85)

When Cymbeline discovers the couple together, his wrath  
verges on the intent to kill:

Cym. Away with her,  
And pen her up.

Queen. Beseech your patience. Peace,  
Dear lady daughter, peace! Sweet sovereign,  
Leave us to ourselves; and make yourself some  
comfort

Out of your best advice.

Cym. Nay, let her languish  
A drop of blood a day; and, being aged,  
Die of this folly!

(I, i, 152-158)

From the beginning of the play Imogen is abused on many  
sides, as she herself observes:

A father cruel, and a step-dame false;  
A foolish suitor to a wedded lady  
That hath her husband banish'd;--O, that husband!  
My supreme crown of grief! and those repeated  
Vexations of it!

(I, vi, 1-5)

Her grief, however, has just begun. Despite her enemies'  
power she can at first console herself in her husband's  
love and in Pisanio's faithful duty. But in Act III,  
Scene iv she finds herself entirely friendless. Pisanio  
reveals her husband's jealousy and plot to have her life,  
and for a few moments she is persuaded that the servant,

too, is her enemy, "bringing me here to kill me" (III, iv, 120). He quickly reassures her of his good faith by supplying her with a man's clothing and suggesting Lucius, the Roman, as a refuge from her oppressors. Although she is to be left alone, she does not succumb to despair:

This attempt  
I am soldier to, and will abide it with  
A prince's courage.

(III, iv, 185-187)

Nevertheless her troubles are still not at an end. Though determined, she expects to die; few characters in Shakespeare undergo fear of death for such a length of time from so many sources with such scant resources for protection as Imogen. When she encounters Belarius and his "sons", she exclaims:

I see you're angry.  
Know, if you kill me for my fault, I should  
Have died had I not made it.

(III, vi, 56-58)

Their kindness gives her but a short respite, for she awakes from her drugged sleep convinced that Pisanio has been treacherous after all, and she finds the headless body of Cloten which she mistakes for her husband's. From this time until the final reunion of Cymbeline's family she is not subjected to new distresses, since she is in Lucius' protection. But she is an exceedingly pathetic figure. We feel pity and fear not just because of her

pain, but because of dangers of which she has no knowledge --the Queen's plot to poison her, and Cloten's base intention of exacting vengeance for her disdain.

Though we understand Imogen's danger more fully than she, we also know that her situation is not as serious as she supposes. The drug Pisanio had of the Queen is a sedative, not a poison; Imogen's suspicion of Pisanio is unfounded, as are her fears of Belarius and his "sons"; we know that it is Cloten whom she discovers headless, not Posthumus. These facts, in addition to the speed with which adversity overtakes the characters in the first half of the play, assure us that the outcome will be happy, even though Imogen--and Cymbeline and Posthumus as well--reach the verge of despair.

There is hardly a tragedy of Shakespeare's, with the possible exception of Lear, in which the characters suffer more than these do. Indeed, this consideration gives a color of justification for the inclusion of the play among the tragedies in the First Folio. But Cymbeline differs from all of Shakespeare's tragedies in this important respect: the sympathetic characters survive their difficulties, rather than being carried away to death, and the end of the play, notwithstanding what has gone before, brings renewed happiness to the principal figures. The emphasis on human suffering evokes pity and

fear of tremendous intensity, but the subsequent happiness which the characters find inspires the most exquisite congratulation and delight.

The role of grief as the precursor of joy is described in terms reminiscent of Duke Vincentio's expectation of "heavenly comforts of despair" (Measure for Measure, IV, iii, 114), when Jupiter speaks in Posthumus' vision:

Whom best I love I cross; to make my gift,  
The more delay'd, delighted.

(V, iv, 101-102)

It might be objected that happiness without suffering could be preferable to happiness achieved through suffering. But the relation of grief and joy is not treated as naively in Cymbeline as it might seem from Jupiter's bald statement of things. First, there is something to be said for the idea that felicity cannot be fully appreciated except by comparison with its opposite. Second, it is clear from the course of the action that the happy ending of the play was made possible by the grief which came first. Had it not been for Cloten's designs against Posthumus and Imogen (which caused his death at the hands of Guiderius), and for the Roman invasion of Britain (which brought about the apprehension of Guiderius by Cymbeline), this opportunity for the reunion of the King and his sons would have been missed. Similarly, the jealousy of Post-

humus, though directed to compass Imogen's death, protects her from the Queen by luring her from the court,<sup>12</sup> and help to dispose of the villains, since Cloten meets his death in pursuit of Imogen, and the Queen falls sick because Cloten disappeared. Further, the war with Rome, though a distress to Cymbeline, provided a means for Posthumus' return to Britain and his eventual reunion with Imogen. As Lucius tells Imogen when she thinks her husband is dead:

Be cheerful; wipe thine eyes.  
Some falls are means the happier to arise.

(IV, ii, 402-403)

The basic pattern of events in Cymbeline resembles that in The Winter's Tale. But the emotional effect of the latter play is quite different, primarily because of the way Shakespeare handles the deaths of Mamillius and Antigonus and the supposed death of Hermione. Mamillius and Antigonus are the only sympathetic characters in Shakespeare's comedies who are allowed to die. This fact alone makes The Winter's Tale unique among the comedies in its pathos. But in addition the audience is led to believe that Hermione is dead. In every other serious comedy,

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Cornelius, V, v, 43-47:  
Your daughter, whom she bore in hand to love  
With such integrity, she did confess  
Was as a scorpion to her sight; whose life,  
But that her flight prevented it, she had  
Ta'en off by poison.

Shakespeare gives us private information that things are not as bad as they seem. We know that Antonio is to be rescued from Shylock, almost as soon as we learn of his danger, since Portia sets her plans afoot as soon as Bassanio has departed for Venice. In Much Ado the arrest of Conrade and Borachio immediately follows the account of the deception at Hero's window, giving us hope that the truth will out (III, iii); and Hero's innocence is established in the scene after the repudiation (IV, ii). Act I, Scene ii of Measure for Measure portrays the plight of Claudio, but the next scene gives us assurance that the Duke stands ready to hold Angelo's excesses in check. So also in Pericles: we see Thaisa revived in the scene following her supposed death (III, ii); and we know that Marina has been spared death at the hands of Leonine (IV, i) even before the report of her death reaches Pericles (IV, iv). In Cymbeline we know that both Imogen and Posthumus are living when each thinks the other dead, and once Imogen unwittingly encounters her brothers, we can have no serious doubts as to the outcome of the play. Finally, Prospero demonstrates his command of the situation from the very beginning of The Tempest. In each of these plays any significant threat of disaster is accompanied or closely followed by some indication to the audience that a happy ending is still in store. The situ-

ation of Hermione, then, has no parallel elsewhere in Shakespeare's comedies. From the spectator's viewpoint The Winter's Tale is the most sombre of them all.

We do have certain presentiments of a happy ending quite early in the play. As the evil influence of King Leontes' jealousy spreads itself in the first three acts, Shakespeare develops through the person of Perdita an increasing assurance that the outcome will not be tragic. It seems from the remarks of Hermione's ladies that she must be noticeably pregnant at the beginning of the play:

1. Lady. Hark ye;  
The Queen your mother rounds apace. We shall  
Present our services to a fine new prince  
One of these days; and then you'd wanton with us,  
If we would have you.

2. Lady. She is spread of late  
Into a goodly bulk. Good time encounter her!

(II, i, 15-20)

The expected birth provides a hint of new hope, from the moment when we have the first hint of Leontes' jealousy. Later, when Hermione's life is directly threatened, that hope is strengthened by the birth of Perdita. Finally, the scene following that in which we learn of the death of Mamillius and Hermione portrays the rescue of Perdita, an event which, in such a setting as this, promises better things for the future than have come to pass hitherto.

So much for the mitigating influences which make the dire circumstances of the first half of the play seem

less finally hopeless; there is another side of the situation which must be considered. Leontes' inadvised suspicion costs him the life of his son, and we have no inkling that Hermione has survived Mamillius until the conversation of the Gentlemen in Act V, Scene ii, when they refer to Paulina's statue. Even this hint is so veiled that one could scarcely count on the spectator's recognizing it, except in retrospect, when he has actually seen Hermione alive. If this be so, we wait until the last lines of the play (the final scene is only 155 lines long) to find that she has not suffered death with her son.

The prominence of death in The Winter's Tale sharpens and intensifies pity and fear beyond anything in the previous comedies, perhaps excepting Cymbeline. The death of Mamillius gives this play a unique pertinence to actual life, for it impresses the audience with the realization that the evil effects of some sins cannot be undone by any amount of penance, even though the sinner himself may be forgiven and wholly or partly spared the evil which he has set afoot. The Winter's Tale gives us the satisfaction of seeing Leontes overcome his problems in the main, yet not without a remainder of irreparable damage. This situation imparts to the play a lifelikeness which would otherwise be missing. And the idea, that things are never the same after a sin as before it, is



reinforced by Leontes' years of separation from Hermione and Perdita. The family is reunited, but much of their life together has been lost, as Leontes reminds us in a comment on the "statue":

Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing  
So aged as this seems.

(V, iii, 28-29)

The greater the relevance of a grave situation in drama to the spectator's experience with actual life, the greater his feelings of pity and fear, and congratulation and delight when it ends well. The bitter-sweet resolution of the action in The Winter's Tale surely strikes a stronger sympathetic note in the audience than does the effect of perfect sweetness and light which was evidently Shakespeare's aim in the conclusions of Much Ado, All's Well, Measure for Measure, Pericles, and Cymbeline. Hence the effect of congratulation and delight in this play exceeds that of any of Shakespeare's earlier comedies.

The death of Antigonus, though a necessary part of the action,<sup>13</sup> stands outside the central concern of Leontes' jealousy and its results for him and his family. But it augments the ultimate effect of death in the play; Paulina, though remarried to Camillo, must be thought to miss her

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<sup>13</sup>On the stage direction: "Exit, pursued by a bear", see Nevill Coghill, "Six Points of Stage-craft in The Winter's Tale", in Allardyce Nicoll, ed., Shakespeare Survey II (Cambridge: University Press, 1958), pp. 31-41.

first husband.

The conventions of motivation which attenuated the emotional effect of some of the earlier serious comedies do not manifest their influence here. But there are some obviously unlikelike aspects of the situation. It is difficult to find adequate motivation for the concealment of Hermione, though the dramatic necessity for this part of the action is plain: the denouement is delayed until time has elapsed so that Perdita can marry Florizel, who heals the breach between Leontes and Polixenes and supplies a substitute for the missing Mamillius; and in order to make Leontes' reconciliation with his wife coincide with the discovery of Perdita, the Queen must be hidden during the intervening time. It is easy to invent a motivation for the concealment, but Shakespeare himself refers to the subject so briefly that any attempt to rationalize this part of the action must be pure guesswork. One of the most likely-seeming motivations is ruled out by what evidence the play does provide. We may say that the concealment of Hermione gives Leontes an opportunity for suitable penance, and this may be part of Shakespeare's purpose, but it will not pass as a source of dramatic motivation, because there are only two characters who could have contrived the concealment for its effect on Leontes, and one of them, Paulina, expresses feelings at odds with such a



play. Since economy is both a virtue and a necessity in dramatic construction, perhaps he neglected the motivation of this episode because he knew that the question would not arise in the mind of a spectator in the theatre. We cannot conceive the question until we know that Hermione is alive, and we do not discover that until somewhere in the last 155 lines of the play, which constitute a scene of such theatrical power that we are not likely to have time to think about the details of motivation. Leontes refers in passing to the mystery of Hermione's apparent resurrection (V, iii, 139: "But how, is to be question'd"), but he is content to let it remain a mystery for the moment. And in a moment the play is over. Afterwards we find ourselves wondering how the Queen was preserved without Leontes knowledge, but Shakespeare presents this part of the action in such a way that, during the last few moments of the scene, we have the feeling that there is an explanation, all right, even though it has not yet been given.

There is a second aspect of this scene which could easily have interfered with our sympathy for the characters as the conventional devices of some of the earlier plays did, and that is the statue itself. The spectacle of a living woman being mistaken for a statue for such a length of time is at least improbable, and perhaps impos-

sible. But here Shakespeare provides a compelling diversion of our attention, since we are as surprised as Leontes at the discovery of Hermione. The shock of this surprise and the swiftness of the conclusion not only prevent us from asking questions about the concealment (while the play is playing), but also distract our attention from the improbability of Hermione's being mistaken for a statue. It appears as if the playwright managed to do in this play what he accomplished with only partial success in Much Ado and Measure for Measure--to control the effects of unlife-like conventions in a serious treatment of a grave action. In Pericles and Cymbeline he avoids the problem by omitting such conventions, but in this play he attempts a rather daring combination of seemingly incompatible elements--incredible convention and deeply serious circumstance--and in my opinion achieves a complete success. For the final scene of this play surely creates an effect of congratulation and delight like nothing else in Shakespeare's comedies. These emotions result from a combination of sources: the swiftness with which the last complication is unraveled; our complete surprise to find Hermione alive; the greatness of the suffering now bygone; and the peculiarly realistic, bitter-sweet quality of the conclusion. The first of these four factors is common in Shakespeare's comedy, but the others are unique to The Winter's Tale.

The Tempest represents yet another variation on the pattern of evil and good fortune which characterizes the serious comedies. The story of Prospero's whole career is rather like that of Pericles in its general outlines; prosperity turns to adversity, which even threatens the life of the protagonist, but happiness is finally restored. Pericles presents the entire cycle, but the action of The Tempest depicts only the last part--scarcely half--of Prospero's encounter with suffering. The main crisis has passed when the play begins; although Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano form a design against him, and Antonio plots with Sebastian to take the lives of Alonso and Gonzalo, Prospero controls them all from the first scene. We are informed of what events preceded the action on stage, and by the time we have heard Prospero tell Miranda how they chanced upon the island we realize that for him the crisis was his voyage with his infant daughter in "A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd, / Nor tackle, sail, nor mast" (I, ii, 146-147), and that through his study of his books while on the island he has obtained mastery of the elements which now makes inevitable his imminent triumph over his enemies. By beginning the action of the play after the main crisis has passed, the playwright can work out the denouement of the conflict at a very leisurely pace.

The unique serenity which characterizes The Tempest may result partly from the nature of the action; we observe a man in complete control of his situation, righting old injuries:

At this hour  
Lies at my mercy all mine enemies.  
Shortly shall all my labours end.

(IV, i, 263-265)

Now does my project gather to a head.  
My charms crack not; my spirits obey; and Time  
Goes upright with his carriage.

(V, i, 1-3)

Further, Prospero is not vindictive, and the subduing of his enemies is a good deal more pleasant on that account, than it would be otherwise. He treats them with benign firmness:

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th'  
quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part. The rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further.

(V, i, 25-30)

Prospero's magical powers, achieved through study, are the means of his restoration to the dukedom of Milan; perhaps Shakespeare is telling us in The Tempest that if a man is to overcome adversity (such as that which we have observed in the previous serious comedies), he must address himself to the comprehending and mastery of the elements of human life.

The emotional effect of The Tempest is every whit as memorable as that in any of the last four comedies, though it may not seem as intense. Our emotions are not stifled, but muted--pity and fear, because we see Prospero's suffering in retrospect only; congratulation and delight, because he proceeds about the business of righting his wrongs with such confident, unhurried calm.



## VI

### CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I wish to make explicit some of the implications of the previous chapters, in an attempt to view in a single perspective the effect of human suffering in all of Shakespeare's comedies.

By alluding to "earlier" and "later" plays, I have implied certain things about their chronology, a subject which can be frustrating if one has to use such information as the main basis for an argument. This survey of the comedies, however, does not require that we ascertain the date at which each of them was written. It will suffice if we can be reasonably sure of a few details of the order of the plays.

There is good reason to believe that the eight farcical and romantic plays of Chapters II and III, as well as Much Ado About Nothing and The Merchant of Venice, were written by 1602. We can find support for such a dating of all these plays (except The Taming of the Shrew for which, on the basis of internal evidence, Neilson and Hill suggest that "a reasonable date is 1596"<sup>1</sup>) by refer-

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<sup>1</sup>Neilson and Hill, The Complete Plays, p. 146.

ence to the external evidence of contemporary documents (see Table 1). All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure, on the other hand, are likely to have been written later than the turn of the century, but earlier than

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Table 1

First Known References to Nine Comedies\*

Name of Play	Date and Source of Reference
<u>The Comedy of Errors</u>	1594 <u>Gesta Grayorum</u>
<u>Love's Labour's Lost</u>	1598 Francis Meres, <u>Palladis Tamia</u>
<u>The Merchant of Venice</u>	
<u>A Midsummer Night's Dream</u>	
<u>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</u>	
<u>As You Like It</u>	1600 Stationers' Register
<u>Much Ado About Nothing</u>	
<u>The Merry Wives of Windsor</u>	1602 Stationers' Register
<u>Twelfth Night</u>	1602 John Manningham, Diary

\*According to Neilson and Hill, The Complete Plays, pp. xi, 1, 179, 211, 244, 279.

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Table 2

Probable Dates of Composition  
of the Later Comedies

Name of Play	Date and Authority
<u>All's Well That Ends Well</u>	1603-1604, G. K. Hunter, ed., <u>All's Well That Ends Well</u> ([New] Arden Edition, 3rd ed., London: Methuen, [1959]), pp. xviii-xxv.
<u>Measure for Measure</u>	1604, J. W. Lever, ed., <u>Measure for Measure</u> ([New] Arden Edition, London: Methuen; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1965]), pp. xxxi-xxxv.
<u>Pericles</u>	1607-1608, F. D. Hoeniger, ed., <u>Pericles</u> ([New] Arden Edition, London: Methuen; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1963]), pp. lxiii-lxv.
<u>Cymbeline</u>	1608-1609, J. M. Nosworthy, ed., <u>Cymbeline</u> ([New] Arden Edition, London: Methuen, [1960]), pp. xiv-xvii.
<u>The Winter's Tale</u>	1610-1611, J. H. P. Pafford, ed., <u>The Winter's Tale</u> ([New] Arden Edition, London: Methuen; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1963]), pp. xxi-xxiv.
<u>The Tempest</u>	1611, Frank Kermode, ed., <u>The Tempest</u> ([New] Arden Edition, London: Methuen; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1962]), p. xv.

the comedies discussed in Chapter V (see Table 2). This sequence of the groups of plays is enough chronological data for the purposes of the present study. To understand

the dark elements of Shakespeare's comedies we need to refer to dates of composition only to establish that the trend of development in his choice of themes for comedy proceeds from the light treatment of a serious situation to the more grave treatment.

From the chronology of Tables 1 and 2 it appears that Shakespeare developed his farcical and romantic modes of comedy simultaneously in the earlier part of his career: there are very immature-seeming plays of both kinds, such as The Comedy of Errors and The Two Gentlemen of Verona; there are both romantic and farcical plays which seem to belong to a period of the dramatist's greater maturity, such as Twelfth Night and The Merry Wives of Windsor. But we know that Shakespeare wrote The Merchant of Venice by 1598 at the latest, and Much Ado About Nothing not later than 1600. In these two plays he introduced to comedy the grave situation seriously treated--not as the completely dominating dramatic interest, but as a new element among farcical and romantic themes. It would be rash to claim that from the time these plays were written the playwright was planning a further shift of emphasis in comedy from the light to the serious; usually an artist cannot thus foresee the course of his future work. Indeed, the likelihood that Shakespeare wrote several very light-hearted comedies after The Merchant of

Venice and Much Ado About Nothing might indicate that it was some time before he considered writing a preponderantly serious comedy. When he eventually did write All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure, he never reverted to the lighter style, as far as is known, but continued this new line of development with the writing of the four last comedies.

It is often futile and always dangerous to assign the status of fact to inferences from the plays concerning Shakespeare's thought processes. But the evolution of his attitude to adversity in comedy is obvious; one may thus indulge in certain speculations with some assurance, and one may justify the indulgence because it assists us in attaining a perspective which will include all of the suffering figures of the comedies from Aegeon to Prospero.

Apparently when Shakespeare first began to write comedies in which grave events were treated seriously, he did not immediately find means of making such a treatment compatible with his customary approach to the conclusion of a comedy. There is a great deal to be said in favor of his swift denouements, despite the lack of probability which they sometimes entail. Within certain limits, this kind of convention can be easily passed over in a light comedy. But we have seen how ill such a conclusion sorts with a complication which evokes pity

and fear: congratulation and delight are stifled. We noted the effects of inadequate motivation and abruptness in Much Ado About Nothing and Measure for Measure, but it is interesting to see a hint of the problem even in The Merchant of Venice, where the influence of the serious plot is more restricted than in any of the other serious comedies. Antonio's final happiness springs largely from the defeat of Shylock's design on his life, but the restoring of his wealth is important also. Shakespeare's method of doing it is so obviously improbable that he makes no effort at all to explain it. Portia simply informs

Antonio:

And I have better news in store for you  
 Than you expect. Unseal this letter soon;  
 There you shall find three of your argosies  
 Are richly come to harbour suddenly.  
 You shall not know by what strange accident  
 I chanced on this letter.

(V, i, 273-279)

Antonio replies: "I am dumb." And so is the spectator. He does not question the point, because he has neither the time nor the inclination. There are more important things to occupy his attention. But the problem is there, and in Much Ado About Nothing and All's Well That Ends Well it grows as the dominance of the serious theme increases. The same must be said of the received text of Measure for Measure, whether or not the last scene of that play actually represents Shakespeare's intention. Possibly he did

overcome the problem in his original version (if it differed from the received text); the play would certainly seem more satisfying had he disposed of people and situations after the unmuffling of Claudio as he was doing before Claudio appeared.

At any rate, the problem disappears in the last four plays, partly because Shakespeare handles his material more subtly,<sup>2</sup> but also partly because he is content to take a little longer with his denouements than he once did. For the last scene of Cymbeline, nearly five hundred lines in length, is devoted entirely to the final encounters of the main characters. Further, the resolutions of Pericles and The Winter's Tale both occupy two scenes; in each play the penultimate scene<sup>3</sup> deals with the final reconciliation of father and daughter, and the last scene portrays the reunion of husband and wife. Lastly, the whole of The Tempest is just the denouement of Prospero's conflict with his usurping brother.

My choice of an approach to the subject of this thesis was influenced by the belief that the whole of

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<sup>2</sup>For example, in The Winter's Tale he neutralizes the effect of the statue by surprising us with the discovery of Hermione.

<sup>3</sup>Though Gower's appearance at the temple of Diana is assigned to a separate scene, it actually serves only as a prelude to the scene following.

Shakespearean comedy is more than the sum of its parts. It is not that the parts lack artistic integrity; each of the comedies was designed to be played in the theatre by itself. But once we have grasped the connection between each comedy and all the others, the individual play assumes a significance which we had not seen before, and which complements the unique qualities of the work. This principle applies to many aspects of the plays: plotting, characterization, imagery, thought, and so on; but we are mainly concerned here with its relation to the dark elements. The odds are that Shakespeare seldom strove with conscious purpose in the direction towards which his artistic progress was actually to take him. But the pattern of that progress is nonetheless plain. Consequently the later comedies help us to see hints of genius in the earlier ones, which we might otherwise miss. Further, when something in a play seems unsatisfactory, such as the last scene of Measure for Measure or of Much Ado About Nothing, one may be disturbed less by the actual difficulty than by puzzlement as to what the difficulty is, and a broader perspective helps to dispel such puzzlement. The conclusions of Much Ado About Nothing and Measure for Measure are no longer so baffling when they are recognized as points on the line of Shakespeare's progress from farce and romance to serious comedy. The source of trou-



ble may remain, but we will understand the play more clearly, and perhaps appreciate it more, if the difficulty has been precisely defined. And we appreciate the four last comedies all the more when the early, less perfect, serious comedies have shown us how intractable such dramatic material can be, and what greatness is required to subdue it.

When we consider the last comedies in the light of what Shakespeare produced earlier, it becomes clear that these plays represent something different from any of the drama which Aristotle describes in the Poetics, and perhaps different from any comedy written before. One hesitates to say that Shakespeare invented a new genre, since the theory of kinds is such an inadequate mode for literary criticism. In his later comedies he combines dramatic elements commonly associated with two fairly distinct sorts of play: the approach to character and situation of tragedy, and the comic pattern of bad and good fortune. It is commonly agreed that Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest share certain elements which make them different from the other comedies, and one such element generally cited is emotional effect. The evidence of this study of the dark elements in all the comedies seems to indicate that the emotional appeal of these last plays is based on Shakespeare's new combination of dramatic material.

The effect of congratulation and delight which Shakespeare finally achieved in comedy is the result of an artistic trend which can be traced from the early part of his career as a playwright. And perhaps congratulation and delight are the fundamental qualities which account for the uniqueness of the later serious comedies.

Finally, I have tried to show in this thesis that Shakespeare's "serious comedy" is remarkable not just because its emotional effect is different from that of light comedy or tragedy, but also because its approach to life is different as well. The serious comedies do not transport us beyond tragedy--the death of Mamillius reminds us of certain inescapable consequences of wickedness and weakness, and for this reason The Winter's Tale is one comedy of Shakespeare's which might justifiably be called a tragi-comedy--but they portray the world of mankind in a way which justifies a more practically meaningful optimism than is implied either in light comedy or in tragedy. The spectacle of a dramatic character achieving happiness in spite of adversity represents the greatest good to which the spectator can aspire in actual life.

VII

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