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IN RELATION TO ENGLISH DRAMA OF 1597
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SHAKESPEARE'S TROILUS AND CRESSIDA IN RELATION
TO ENGLISH DRAMA OF 1597 TO 1604

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

BY
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

_Troilus and Cressida_ seems to have offered confusions from the beginning of its career in print. The Quarto described it as a comedy in the introduction and called it a history in the running title. In the First Folio, Hemmings and Condell planned to put it after _Romeo and Juliet_ among the Tragedies. After what were apparently copyright difficulties, they placed it at the last minute between the Histories and the Tragedies. Given the notorious casualness of Renaissance printing houses, one cannot draw many conclusions from all of this. But the fact remains that modern criticism and scholarship have not yet decided what to do with _Troilus and Cressida_. With apparently equal plausibility scholars have interpreted the play as a satire, as a fundamentally serious consideration of political and moral problems, and as a tragedy.

Before looking at the scholarly attempts to deal with _Troilus and Cressida_, it might be well to review briefly the major difficulties presented by the play. There are ambiguities and apparent contradictions in
all three of the major plots: the Greek war effort, the Trojan defense, and the love affair of Troilus and Cressida.

Among the Greeks there seem to be three major forces: Ajax, Achilles, and Patroclus (seditionists who refuse to obey orders or to pursue the war); Thersites (a raider who denounces the war itself and attacks all of the Greek factions); and Agamemnon, Nestor, and Ulysses (leaders who are trying to unite their forces and conclude the war). Each of these three forces needs separate treatment.

Ajax, Achilles, and Patroclus are largely anti-heroical. Ajax is a complete fool; Achilles seems a little brighter, but is no intellectual giant. Anticipating Ulysses' stratagem, Thersites accuses Ajax of being "bought and sold among those of any wit, like a barbarian slave" (II.1.44-45). Later speaking to both Ajax and Achilles, he says, "[Ulysses and Nestor] yoke you like draught-oxen, and make you plough up the wars" (II.1.105-106). Both men in fact are taken in by Ulysses' stratagem. In II.iii Ajax boasts of his humility and in the classic mode of comical satire becomes a butt of satiric asides. If Achilles is less obviously absurd, he has even more serious vices. Living up to his reputation for treachery, Achilles kills Hector not by superior strength or skill, but by a
treacherous stratagem. If Achilles is indeed the mainstay of Greek forces—as even those most irritated by his pride and sedition seem to admit—he is nevertheless no hero; he is not the moral equivalent of Hector.

Thersites is presented more ambiguously. The Greeks find him either amusing or irritating; all find him contemptible. Sharing Falstaff's attitude toward honor, he will do anything to save his life. When asked his rank by the fastidious Hector: "Art thou for Hector's match? / Art thou of blood and honour?" (V.iv.24-25), he prudently avoids a battle, "No, no; I am a rascal; a scurvy railing knave; a very filthy rogue" (V.iv.27-28). As O. J. Campbell points out, this type of satirist simply rails for the sake of railing. He is quick to detect vice and hypocrisy, but is himself so enmeshed in vice that he is incapable of seeing virtue. Thersites, then, is one of the major vehicles for satiric comment. Assuming that the whole Trojan war is ignoble, he is quick to find the anti-heroical in everything. He is too perceptive to be ignored, but it would be dangerous to automatically equate his views with the theme of the play.

Perhaps the most ambiguous is the trio of Greek worthies: Agamemnon, Nestor, and Ulysses. Agamemnon serves, or attempts to serve, as the king in Shakespeare's system of social order. He tries to rally the dissenting
forces around his own standard, and he once uses the royal "we." But, it seems to me, he is not presented unambiguously as the embodiment of the kingly principle and the source of order and justice. In burlesquing the serious councils, Achilles refers to the absent Agamemnon as "the magnanimous and most illustrious six-or-seven-times-honoured captain-general of the Grecian army, Agamemnon, et cetera" (III.iii.275-277). Achilles, of course, is not likely to respect authority, but Aeneas, who is neither an anarchist nor a republican, addresses Agamemnon with unmistakable irony:

How may
A stranger to those most imperial looks
Know them from eyes of other mortals?
(I.iii.223-225)

Later he asks, "Which is that god in office, guiding men?" (I.iii.231). Coming from no known seditionist, this mockery is curious in Shakespearean practice. In Shakespeare's chronicle plays, right-thinking men might criticize kings for specific mistakes, but they do not mock the kingly pretentions as such—not even those of foreign kings. Only in a play like Julius Caesar, where kingly rights are problematic, does this sort of mockery occur. And so one very important matter seems to be left unclear. The major problem of the Greeks is social disorder, but we do not know very much about the norm by which this disorder is to be
judged. Agamemnon can be viewed as the victim of sedi-
tion, as Ulysses implies, or as an ambitious man trying
to enforce an unreasonable claim, as Achilles and Aeneas
seem to imply. Some details in the play seem to suggest
that he should function as a king; other details suggest
that he should try to be only a commander-in-chief. In
spite of all the discussion of political theory, the
Greek political structure is not at all clear.

Agamemnon's two counsellors, Nestor and Ulysses,
are presented with the same sort of ambiguity. Nestor
is treated as the embodiment of age and reason in several
passages, but Thersites claims that he is merely senile
and loquacious. After Ulysses' passionate and thought-
ful speech on order, we might expect him to be the
voice of reason among the Greeks. Ulysses is a man who
is extremely proud of his intelligence. After all of
his busy and self-satisfied plotting, he has taken in
the fools. But he has accomplished less than nothing.
After substituting Ajax for Achilles as Greek champion,
he has simply intensified Achilles' petulance and made
Ajax more unmanageable than ever. As Thersites sums
up the results of all this intrigue:

O't'other side, the policy of those crafty-swear-
ing rascals, that stale old mouse-eaten dry cheese,
Nestor, and that same dog-fox, Ulysses, is proved
not worth a blackberry. They set me up in policy
that mongrel cur, Ajax, against that dog of as
bad a kind, Achilles; and now is the our Ajax
prouder than the cur Achilles, and will not arm today; whereupon the Grecians begin to proclaim barbarism, and policy grows into an ill opinion. (V.i.v.8-16)

Depending on which details we decide to emphasize, we can, it appears, interpret Ulysses as a self-important intriguer meddling in matters beyond his depth or as an intelligent and decent man making a hopeless stand against anarchy.

As far as the Greek camp is concerned, then, Achilles and Ajax are fools and obviously the legitimate butts of satire. Thersites, an admitted rogue himself, points out the roguery of others, but it is not easy to know how far we can trust him. Finally, it is not clear how we are to take the Greek state itself. We know that the Greeks are severely disunified and that this disunity is an important part of the theme. But the play does not seem to give any kind of norm by which we can consider the problems of order and disorder. Are the Greeks quarrelling because Agamemnon is simply pretending to authority not rightly his own or because Ajax and Achilles seditiously refuse to recognize the natural order of the state? Are Nestor and Ulysses heroically fighting a losing battle against disorder or incompetently intriguing for a pretender? Are we to view the Greek theme as a serious struggle between order and disorder or as a totally satirical picture of
a society exclusively governed by Machiavellian self-interest?

When we first turn to the Trojan camp, things may not seem as confusing. Except for Pandarus, who scarcely figures in the public issues of Troy, there are no obviously absurd fools. If the debate scene (II.11) portrays a serious Trojan mistake—as it almost certainly does—the Trojans appear far more dignified than the Greeks. Paris and Troilus are young and more or less expected to be rash; Hector certainly attaches excessive importance to honor, but he does not succumb to the reckless egoism of Achilles or Ajax. With the prophecies of Cassandra and the foreboding of Priam and Andromache, Shakespeare seems to be evoking the pathos of Troy's fall, surely one of the most frequently cited tragedies in Renaissance literature. It seems, then, that one might interpret the war plot as the tragedy of Troy's fall and Hector's death. In refusing to yield Helen against the claims of both right reason and political prudence (II.11) the Trojans commit a major tragic error. In refusing to stay out of battle on the fatal day, Hector is again guilty of a kind of hubris, which leads directly to his death. Once Troy has lost its mainstay, its final destruction is practically inevitable.

But since the play devotes more space to the Greek
camp and to the private love affair of Troilus and Cressida
than to the public affairs of Troy, it is difficult to
see Troy's destruction as the play's major theme—especial­
ly since the play ends before the tragic climax.

If Hector is simply the tragic champion of a doomed
Troy, it is difficult to see why Shakespeare made him
behave so oddly in his first scene (II.11). With some
help from Helenus, Hector has been arguing that both
prudence and morality demand that Helen be restored.
Hector easily refutes the arguments of Paris and Troilus,
appeals to Cassandra's prophetic lament, restates his
case, and then unsays everything that he has been say­
ing so eloquently. Criticism of the Trojan theme often
turns on this curious speech in which Hector inexplicably
reverses himself. In the last few lines Hector summarizes
his argument and then off-handedly joins Paris and Troilus.

If Helen then be wife to Sparta's king,
As it is known she is, these moral laws
Of nature and of nations speak aloud
To have her back returned. Thus to persist
In doing wrong extenuates not wrong,
But makes it much more heavy. Hector's opinion
Is this in way of truth. Yet, ne'ertheless,
My sprightly brethren, I propend to you
In resolution to keep Helen still;
For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence
Upon our joint and several dignities.

(II.11.183-193)

In the name of honor Hector promises to persist in doing
wrong, a policy he has rejected just two lines earlier.
In moments of crisis Shakespearean heroes often ignore
formal logic, but here the speech seems to emphasize the contradiction itself, not the deeper, interior source of the contradiction. The "sprightly brethren" hardly suggests the tragic passion that springs from a reality deeper than logic. Hector himself describes the result of his decision as a "roisting challenge" (II.ii.208). There seems to be something extremely superficial in the way Hector reverses himself on such an important national decision.

But he is not the only one who can change his mind so casually. In this scene Troilus is passionately championing the war to retain Helen, "a pearl / Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships / And turned crowned kings to merchants" (II.i.81-83). Right or wrong, then, this war is too glorious to be abandoned. But when he first expressed his opinion about the war—at a time, incidentally, when he was not particularly interested in military glory—he dismissed it as a sordid domestic squabble:

Fools on both sides! Helen must needs be fair, When with your blood you daily paint her thus. I cannot fight upon this argument; It is too starved a subject for my sword. (I.i.92-95)

When told that Paris was wounded by Menelaus, he delivered
a couplet Thersites might have admired:

Let Paris bleed; 'tis but a scar to scorn;
Paris is gored with Menelaus' horn.
(1.1.113-114)

If the Trojans themselves are so confused about what they are doing, it is perhaps not surprising that critics disagree on just what is happening in this part of the play. Many important details tempt us to take the Trojans seriously. We are constantly reminded of the pathos of Troy's destined fall. When compared with most of his Grecian counterparts, Hector seems to be a very decent and admirable human being. And however wrong-headed the Trojans may be, their dedication to honor seems at least less materialistic and selfish than most of the Greek motives. But the very Trojans who speak most eloquently for the worth and dignity of their cause are the ones who condemn it as unworthy. Troilus, who defends it most passionately, has also rejected the entire war most succinctly: "Fools on both sides!"

Finally, the third plot element, the private affair of Troilus and Cressida, has proved itself equally capable of distinct and often contradictory interpretation. Cressida seems to be the least ambiguous character in this plot. She is presented simply as a whore throughout the play. She admits as much to Pandarus in her
first scene (I.ii.261-271). During the affair itself she makes some suspicious generalizations, e.g., "You men will never tarry" (IV.ii.16). Her actions in the Greek camp are clear enough, and she is immediately classified as one of the "daughters of the game" (IV.v.63).

Critics have fairly well agreed on Pandarus' character; he falls somewhere between the sentimental gentleman of Chaucer's version and the outright bawd that Shakespeare was soon to portray in Pompey Bum. He certainly underlines the physical aspects of the affair: "How now, how now! How go maidenheads?" (IV.ii.23-24); "Would he not, a naughty man, let it sleep?" (IV.ii.32-33). But what is the function of these comments? Does he simply make explicit (like Thersites among the Greeks) the lechery inherent in Troilus' attitude, or does he (like the nurse in Romeo and Juliet) point up by contrast the idealism and purity of Troilus' love? Critics tend to interpret the dramatic function of Pandarus in relation to their evaluation of Troilus' attitude toward the affair.

Troilus is the key to understanding the entire private plot, but no generally accepted interpretation has emerged. To some critics Troilus represents a noble figure tragically deceived. 5 Many of his speeches are dignified and moving, and most of his words and actions suggest that his attachment is deep and serious.
A man interested in only a little fun would not react as violently as Troilus when he discovers the infidelity of his mistress. But there is something undeniably foolish in many of his actions. He makes every effort to protect Cressida's reputation; his dedication to "secrecy" would have satisfied any medieval troubador. But when Aeneas wants to see him at dawn, Paris immediately directs Aeneas to their place of assignation. Troilus makes the appeal to discretion as one gentleman to another, "And, my Lord Aeneas, / We met by chance: you did not find me here." Aeneas solemnly assures Troilus, "Good, good my lord; the secrets of neighbour Pandar / Have not more gift in taciturnity" (IV.ii.70-73). As we watch all of this elaborate discretion devoted to an affair that most of Troy knows about by this time, we may be reminded of Ulysses' elaborate plottings that come to nothing. As moving as we may find Troilus' rhetoric as he watches Cressida betraying him, its emotionalism is underlined both by Ulysses' embarrassed attempts to quiet him down and Thersites' terse question: "Will 'a swagger himself out on's own eyes?" (V.ii.136).

A number of critics, in fact, refuse to take him seriously at all. To O. J. Campbell he is simply a refined sensualist and rake who finally gets what he deserves—all in the best traditions of comical satire. At least once, Troilus does make one rather irreverent
comment on his love. After an alarum is sounded, Aeneas
exclaims, "Hark what good sport is out of town today!"
Troilus answers, "Better at home, if 'would I might'
were 'may'" (I.i.115-116). This is probably his only
unambiguously leering remark, but other speeches have
suggested various interpretations. One crucial passage,
for example, is Troilus' soliloquy just before the
consummation:

I am giddy: expectation whirls me round.
Th'imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense. What will it be
When that the watery palate tastes indeed
Love's thrice repurèd nectar?--death, I fear me,
Swooning distraction, or some joy too fine,
Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness,
For the capacity of my ruder powers;
I fear it much, and I do fear besides
That I shall lose distinction in my joys,
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps
The enemy flying.

(III.11.18-29)

Shortly after this, he remarks to Cressida:

This is the monstruosity in love, lady— that the
will is infinite and the execution confined; that
the desire is boundless and the act a slave to
limit.

(III.11.79-82)

Many critics read these lines as an expression of the
spiritual intensity that will finally lead to Troilus' trag
deat; he yearns to raise the temporal and the finite
to the eternal and the infinite.7 Campbell, on the other
hand, reads them simply as the frustrations of a roué
looking for some undefined ultimate in sexual gratification. Alice Walker finds Campbell's interpretation a little too narrow, but does feel that the play unsentimentally presents Troilus as a foolish and naive young man—or, as Thersites put it, a "young Trojan ass." Depending, then, on how one interprets Troilus' character, the private plot can be described as, among other things, a comical satire directed against lechery, a sympathetic but anti-sentimental picture of youthful naiveté, the celebration of intuition against reason, or a tragedy of disillusionment.

In all three of the plot elements, then, we are confronted with roughly similar problems. Each plot element is composed of the heroic and the anti-heroic, but it is not precisely clear how these opposites are related to each other. Does the anti-heroic emphasize the heroic by contrast, or does it contaminate the heroic and expose the commitments of the heroes as mere pretense? In some ways *Troilus and Cressida* seems to be Shakespeare's most ambiguous play. Many of his plays have been able to bear many different interpretations. In rejecting Falstaff Hal has suggested everything from the morality-play *Juventus* rejecting Evil Counsel to a Machiavellian politician sacrificing all human values to his lust for power. Critics still argue over the exact relation of Malvolio or Shylock to the
over-all work. But despite these important differences in emphasis and interpretation, there is fairly general agreement on what these plays are about and how they are working. Virtually all of the different interpretations of Hamlet have assumed at least that the play is a tragedy that somehow raises serious questions about human life.

But with Troilus and Cressida critics have been unable to reach even such minimal agreement. In general, critical opinion has divided fairly evenly between two essentially contradictory approaches. It can be treated as a serious tragedy in which heroic elements are modified by or contrasted with satirical passages, or as a satire— even a travesty— in which the pretensions of those who claim to revere honor, loyalty, and love are not only denounced by railers but also undermined by the very people who stand for these values. Most interpretations of this play have been somewhat hesitant and provisional, perhaps because neither approach has been able to account satisfactorily for all important elements in the play. If the play is leading to the death of Hector and the fall of Troy, why does it end, not with the burning towers, but with Pandarus comically bequeathing his venereal diseases to the audience? If it expects us to take Troilus' disillusionment seriously, why is the object of his love unmistakably degraded from the very beginning? If the play is fundamentally satirical and
anti-heroic, why do so many passages seem to treat the heroes seriously and sympathetically, and precisely what is being satirized or attacked and according to what norms? By concentrating on some elements and passing over others, one may argue that the play seriously renders the tragedy inherent in making "the service greater than the god." By choosing to emphasize and play down different elements, one can claim with Thersites that "all the argument is a whore and a cuckold."

In dealing with this difficult play, scholars have helped to settle one important matter. Early in this century John P. Tatlock and Hyder Rollins initiated valuable studies on the sources of *Troilus and Cressida.* Tatlock concentrated on the traditions relating to the public half of the play. However pathetic Renaissance writers may have found the fall of Troy, they did not treat the story with the epic dignity associated with Homer. By 1500 Ajax was a byword for folly; Achilles was mainly known for his treacherous ambush of Hector; Cressida was the "lazar kite" fittingly punished for lust and infidelity. Tatlock seriously doubted that Shakespeare used Chapman's Homer and posited the general Renaissance treatments, most fully embodied in Caxton's *Recuyell* and Lydgate's *Troy Book.* These books derive, of course, from various Medieval accounts, most of which
sided with Troy and presented Greek and Trojan knights who did not always live up to the ideals of chivalry. Rollins found roughly the same sort of debasement when he investigated the sources of the Troilus and Cressida plot. Henryson's picture of the immoral Cressida was firmly implanted in the Renaissance mind. W. W. Lawrence also considered the Medieval sources of the story and argued that part of the play's anomalies are simply inherent in the sources themselves. Given audience associations and expectations, Shakespeare could not have presented a highly idealized picture of the Trojan war or of the private love affair.

More recently Robert K. Presson has argued that Shakespeare also used Chapman's translation of the Iliad. In treating the Greek plot Shakespeare followed Homer in concentrating on a single action, not a series of events. It is only in Homer that the withdrawal of Achilles becomes a central fact and mainspring of action, rather than one event among many. As Presson demonstrated, Shakespeare turned to Homer's epic—rather than the Medieval chronicles—for this unifying idea. This suggests strongly that Shakespeare was acquainted with Homer or with an intermediary source derived from Homer.

But in arguing that Shakespeare attempted to capture the general spirit of Homer, Presson was less convincing.
He dismissed Thersites as simply the embodiment of sedition in the ranks, but failed to explain why Shakespeare gave so much space to a man who in Homer appears only once and is then completely bested by Ulysses. Presson also ignored the sharp contradictions in the play: the wily Ulysses, none of whose schemes work; the fame-hungry Achilles, who treacherously murders Hector; and so on.

Among the plausible sources, then, we have Homer's Iliad, which suggested the principle of organization, but which contributed little to tone or theme. We have Caxton's Recuyell and Lydgate's Troy Book, which embodied the Medieval, non-Homeric attitude toward Troy. We have also a 1599 production of Troilus and Cressida, of which only a portion of the plot remains; it too seemed to imply a knowledge of Homer. For the love story we have, of course, Chaucer's Troilus and Crisseyde and Henryson's conclusion. Shakespeare apparently followed Chaucer for the plot and relied rather more heavily on Henryson's homiletic approach to Cressida's character.

By carefully describing the sources of Troilus and Cressida, scholars have kept us from naively expecting a dramatized version of Homer and Chaucer. But although they have helped to orient us, they have not accounted for the major difficulties of the play: the absence of clearly defined ethical norms, the unresolved mixture of the heroic and the satiric, the inconclusive ending, and
In dealing with these difficulties, scholars have offered a wide range of explanations. But as we shall see, practically all of these explanations make one assumption in common: *Troilus and Cressida* is so anomalous that it requires some special explanation.

A number of scholars have been especially struck by what they consider an un-Shakespearean bitterness or cynicism in this play. It is not so much that the treacherous Achilles slays the chivalrous Hector, but that Shakespeare seems to present the scene without a firm condemnation of Achilles and without unmistakable sympathy for Hector. Shakespeare not only allows a young man to be betrayed in love but also permits Thersites to mock him at the very moment he discovers the truth. Shakespeare not only includes a character like Pandarus but also permits him to deliver the epilogue. J. S. Tatlock has tried to explain why the play is "on the whole so inconclusive, displeasing, disquieting" and finds the answer in Shakespeare's inability to handle this particular material adequately. As Tatlock put it, the unpleasant effect of this play is "due quite as much to its confusion and want of internal harmony as to anything else." Mark Van Doren suggested that Shakespeare was writing a comedy at a time when he was in a mood appropriate to tragedy.
and hence wrote an unsuccessful play. G. C. Taylor argues that Shakespeare habitually balanced idealism against irony and mockery, but in *Troilus and Cressida* let the latter mood predominate and produced a play whose attitude toward love and honor appears to be "bitterly cynical." Since the publication of Sisson's *The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare* (London, 1934), pictures of the despairing or nihilistic Shakespeare have gone out of fashion. But there are attempts to account for the bitterness and ambiguity of this play by references to some specific change of mood on Shakespeare's part.

Other scholars have tried to account for *Troilus and Cressida* by the sudden prominence of satire in drama at the turn of the seventeenth century. In 1938 O. J. Campbell approached this matter with great precision. He very lucidly described the theories and practices of satire in the English Renaissance. He described how satire became increasingly more popular on the stage after the 1599 ban on printed satires. Showing how Jonson led the way with *Everyman Out of His Humour*, he listed the major elements that Jonson's "Comicall Satyre" borrowed from formal verse satire: 1) a series of vicious or foolish people who are a) described, b) shown behaving characteristically, and c) reformed by being forced to see themselves as they
really are; and 2) a satiric commentator who points up the moral and reacts with appropriate emotions. He also distinguishes between two satiric commentators: 1) the "ethical expositor," who states the moral norm and who reacts appropriately and 2) the buffoon, who has appropriated the satyr-like qualities of the formal verse satirists. The latter laughs at everything and need not be free of vices himself. Campbell examined one important trend in the dramatic practices of the period by defining the content and structure of several plays, and he used the often vague term "satire" very precisely.

Campbell then tried to demonstrate that Troilus and Cressida is also a comical satire. Much of his exposition is pertinent. Thersites does seem much closer to the buffoon (cf. Carlo Buffone in Everyman Out) than to the Fool or satirist proper. As I have mentioned earlier, Ajax is treated as a satiric type very much in the tradition of comical satire. But Campbell had to wrench the play considerably out of shape to fit all of it neatly into Jonson's pattern. He posited an Inns of Court performance, for which the play was specially written. Without detailed support he simply claimed that the students would have found the love story hilarious from beginning to end and that Troilus, like Ajax and Pandarus, is
merely a satiric type. By selecting particular passages, he argued that Ulysses is essentially a satirist, a view that seems to ignore the over-all structure of the play and Ulysses' difficulty in controlling the forces he tries so hard to manipulate. Campbell has, I feel, helped to explain important parts of the play, but has not explained its over-all direction or meaning.

Other scholars have tried to explain *Troilus and Cressida* as one satirical episode in the War of the Theatres. Alfred Harbage has demonstrated how unlikely such an interpretation is—and even so, the War of the Theatres motif would account at most for only two or three scenes.

Perhaps the most common and durable hypothesis is that Shakespeare wrote this play for a special audience of highly sophisticated and worldly viewers, the most popular candidates being the law students from one of the Inns of Court. In 1928 Peter Alexander suggested that *Troilus and Cressida* was commissioned by one of the Inns of Court for the Christmas festivities. Although he first suggested this as a solution for bibliographical problems, the hypothesis proved valuable for interpretation. In his later *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, Alexander explained the play as an attempt to startle "a group of worldly-wise young clerks . . . out of their complacency."

In arguing that *Troilus and Cressida* is a comical satire,
Campbell posited, as we saw, an Inns of Court production to explain why Shakespeare undertook such an experiment. In his curious argument that *Troilus and Cressida* is the *Love Labours Won* mentioned by Meres, Leslie Hotson assumed a special audience of law students. Muriel Bradbrook and Theodore Spencer both offered this hypothesis. In 1950 J. G. McManaway could say that it was "generally accepted" that *Troilus and Cressida* was written for an Inns of Court production.

In 1952 Alfred Harbage demonstrated that such an explanation creates as many difficulties as it claims to solve. He pointed out that "there is no recorded instance before or during Shakespeare's career . . . when a regular play was bought, rehearsed, and acted by a professional company exclusively for a special audience." He also exposed the major historical weakness of this hypothesis. After noting that in 1602 the Middle Temple purchased one performance of *Twelfth Night*, he commented, "Why, in the same period, any of the inns should have subsidized a production instead of purchasing one, no one has bothered to explain." As his detailed discussion of playhouse economics revealed, such a subsidy would be financially prohibitive. Harbage's argument has been supported by other scholars.

But the hypothesis still holds its own as an explanation for the difficulties of *Troilus and Cressida*. The
appeal of this hypothesis is perhaps most cogently expressed by W. W. Greg, who asserts that an Inns of Temple audience "would explain some of the peculiarities of the piece and give us a hint respecting its history," but goes on to point out that there is "no shred of external evidence" for such a conjecture. Geoffrey Bullough also postulates a special audience. Alice Walker points out that "in spite of the lack of supporting external evidence, the suggestion [i.e., a commission for a special Inns of Court production] has been generally accepted as it accords with what is known of Inns of Court tastes." In his 1967 revision of Kittredge's *Troilus and Cressida*, Irving Ribner offers this hypothesis since "no other account has been suggested which accords so well with what few facts we do have."

The special Inns of Court performance, like the other explanations, takes one point as more or less self-evident: *Troilus and Cressida* is so different from Shakespeare's other plays and the general run of Renaissance drama that it must have been written under unusual circumstances: a momentary fit of cynicism or depression on Shakespeare's part, the sudden popularity of satire, the war of the theaters, or a commission for an especially sophisticated audience.

Although many scholars concentrate on explaining why Shakespeare wrote such an unusual play, very few of them
look in detail at what playwrights were doing at the time Shakespeare wrote *Trollus and Cressida*. They posit the fact that it is an anomaly without establishing this fact or without determining precisely how it differs from the general dramatic practice of the time. There are, however, two major works which discuss certain Renaissance dramatic practices that are especially relevant to *Trollus and Cressida*. Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York, 1952) and Robert Kimbrough's *Shakespeare's "Trollus and Cressida" and Its Setting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964) help us to assess more accurately the extent to which the play is anomalous. But as we shall see, both of them make important assumptions without full support.

Harbage distinguishes sharply between two traditions in Renaissance drama. Starting early in the sixteenth century, he discusses the adult companies and the various organizations of choir-boy companies. He demonstrates that each followed a distinct tradition and appealed to sharply different audiences. After a very detailed study of the organization, finances, and general stance of each tradition, he turns to the repertoire of each. The adult companies, he maintains, appealed to a broad range of people (from apprentice to aristocrat) and in general accepted the humanist synthesis of the sixteenth century. They accepted the Anglican compromise and shared the Tudor
horror for revolution; they found human nature essentially dignified and, like Spenser and Milton, exalted sexual love in marriage, as a result of which they celebrated virginity before marriage and fidelity after marriage. The private companies appealed to a coterie and embraced a cynicism which, according to Harbage, pointed back to the Augustinian debasement of human nature. Their plays concentrated heavily on human nature at its worst; in tone, the plays alternated between moral outrage and prurient fascination.

Since the general tone of each tradition corresponds roughly to the tones that seem to exist in uncertain balance in *Troilus and Cressida*, Harbage's approach seems especially promising. But Harbage at times oversimplifies important matters. He tends to posit each tradition as a static unit and ignore the development that each underwent during more than a century. Furthermore, he frankly dislikes the private tradition and often stresses or underplays certain details in order to maintain the polarities between the healthy, democratic, optimistic traditions of the adult companies and the neurotic, snobbish, pessimistic tradition of the children's companies. On a broad, general level he convincingly establishes the two major trends, but his biases can lead to serious distortions when applied *a priori* to a relatively short period of time, especially when change and experi-
mentation are in the air. Harbage, in any case, is unable to account for *Trollus and Cressida* and assigns it "a unique and mysterious place in the canon" (*Traditions*, p. 119).

The one extensive attempt to apply Harbage's insights to *Trollus and Cressida* is Robert Kimbrough's *Shakespeare's "Trollus and Cressida" and Its Setting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964). After a full discussion of the play's general problems and its relation to non-dramatic sources, Kimbrough turns to specifically dramatic influences. He posits a very specific explanation of the play's anomalies. Seeing the competition of the coterie theaters, Shakespeare attempted a play that would embody some of their themes and dramatic techniques. But since this play was designed for the Globe itself, he was unable or unwilling to follow coterie conventions to their logical conclusion; as a result he produced a hybrid, half popular theatre and half coterie theater.

As helpful as this book is, it does not try to prove its major thesis. Like Harbage, Kimbrough simply assumes *a priori* that the two traditions are in full effect and totally distinct at this time. His discussion of contemporaneous non-Shakespearean drama is rather brief, approximately eight pages for each of his three major topics--love and lust, war and honor, order and disorder. In these sections he discusses specific parallels and
dissimilarities (lecherous heroines, heroes who place honor above morality, and the like), but he makes no effort to establish the general tone, subject matter, or technique of either tradition.

Kimbrough's book represents another attempt to explain *Trollus and Cressida* by a special circumstance—in this case, Shakespeare's timid foray into the world of "coterie" theater. But the book leaves unanswered two important questions: Were there two distinct traditions at the turn of the sixteenth century? And if so, what was the exact nature of each tradition?

There is reason to suspect that dramatic traditions may have been undergoing more than ordinary changes during this period. Intellectual ferment increased during the last years of Elizabeth's reign. Young poets like John Donne were introducing new literary tastes. As for drama itself, playwrights like Marston, Chapman, and Jonson began to challenge customary dramatic practices with deliberate experiments. Several of Shakespeare's proverbially "difficult" plays were written at this time: *Julius Caesar* (1599), *Hamlet* (1601), *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602-1603), *Measure for Measure* (1604).

Given the generally restless and experimental nature of these times, we ought to look carefully at specific plays before we decide that *Trollus and Cressida* is so atypical that some special explanation is indispensable.
It is just possible that a regular patron of the Globe in 1602 or 1603 would not have been shocked, outraged, or totally confused by the novelties of this play. He might have noticed interests and patterns of which we are unaware. After looking carefully at dramatic practices in this period, we may decide that *Troylus and Cressida* is less of a sport than is normally assumed.

In order to see what dramatists and playgoers would have considered normal, one ought to look carefully at the plays written shortly before, during, and immediately after the time Shakespeare was writing *Troylus and Cressida*. In order to view this play against its dramatic context, I have examined all the extant commercial plays assigned in Harbage's *Annals* to the years from 1597 to 1604: a period that includes the two years before the children's companies reopened in 1599 and the year or year and a half immediately after the composition of *Troylus and Cressida*. Since the chronology of Renaissance plays is often uncertain, I have checked Harbage against Chamber's *Elizabethan Stage* and occasional studies on individual authors. Where the range of dates is relatively narrow, I have simply accepted Harbage's dating. Where the range is wider, I discuss the dating either in the text or in footnotes. Where there is strong reason to doubt that a play belongs in this period (e.g., *The Noble Soldier* or *Royal
King and Loyal Subject), I have consulted the play, but have not relied upon it for evidence. In the Bibliography such plays are preceded by an asterisk.

In the second and third chapters I will deal with the non-Shakespearean plays from this period. In the second chapter I will discuss the plays that deal with problems of national order and public life. I will consider both the chronicle play—the genre that dominated the first years of this period—and a number of experimental plays that challenged the assumptions of the chronicle play. In the last section of this chapter I will discuss the overall treatment of public life in the adult companies. In the third chapter I will deal with the treatments of private life. I will discuss the romantic comedy and the bourgeois comedy—two genres that dominated the adult companies early in this period—and the comedy of humours, a new genre that introduced a special interest in social and psychological analysis. I will then discuss the overall treatment of private life, first in the children's companies and then in the adult companies. In both of these chapters I will concentrate on the areas of human experience presented in these plays, the thematic significance of this material, and the ways in which these themes were embodied in dramatic form.

After describing how the adult companies responded to new challenges, I will discuss in Chapter IV how
Shakespeare himself began to explore new themes and experiment with forms appropriate to them. In the last chapter I will discuss *Troilus and Cressida* in relation to broad trends at this period of Renaissance drama and Shakespeare's response to those trends. Using these plays as a context, not as "influences," I will see what further light they can throw on Shakespeare's purpose and achievement in *Troilus and Cressida*. After a full examination of dramatic practice at this particular time, we will be able to see how much of *Troilus and Cressida* can be explained, not as an isolated peculiarity, but as the logical outcome of Shakespeare's technical and thematic interests at this turning point in his development.
NOTES


2  For a full description of the techniques of comical satire, see O. J. Campbell, "Comical Satyre" and Shakespeare's *"Troilus and Cressida"* (San Marino, 1938).

3  *Comical Satyre*, pp. 64-70.

4  See, for example, Robert K. Presson, *Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" and the Legends of Troy* (Madison, 1953), pp. 141-142. Presson sees Hector, Troilus, and even Achilles as prototypes of Shakespeare's later tragic heroes.


6  *Comical Satyre*, pp. 207-218.


8  *Comical Satyre*, pp. 211-212.

9  New *Shakespeare Troilus and Cressida*, p. xx.

10 John S. P. Tatlock, "The Siege of Troy in Elizabethan

11


12

Legends of Troy (Madison, 1953). Geoffrey Bullough [Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, VI (London, 1966), 86-90] also argues for Homeric influence and points out that several versions of Homer were available to Shakespeare.

13


14

"Chief Problem." 141.

15


16

"Shakespeare's Attitude Toward Love and Honor in Troilus and Cressida," PMLA, XLV (1930), 783.

17

Comicall Satyre (San Marino, 1938).

18


19


20

"Troilus and Cressida, 1609," The Library, 4th Series, IX (1928), 267-286.

21


22

Bradbrook, "What Shakespeare Did to Chaucer's 
Troilus and Criseyde," SQ, IX (1958), 311. Spencer, 
Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, 2nd ed. (New York, 

"Recent Studies in Shakespeare's Chronology," 

Rival Traditions, p. 116.

Rival Traditions, p. 116.

See, for example, The Variorum "Troilus and Cressida" 
eds. Harold Hillebrand and T. W. Baldwin (Philadelphia, 
1953), pp. 356-357; M. A. Shaaber, "A New Variorum Evi­
dition of Shakespeare," SQ, IV (1953); and Robert Kimbrough, 
Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" and Its Setting (Cam­

340.

Sources, VI, 86.

New Shakespeare Troilus and Cressida, p. xxiv.

Troilus and Cressida, ed. George Lyman Kittredge, 

Alfred Harbage, Annals of English Drama, rev. S. 

Although most of the plays written during this transitional period concentrated on comedy and the problems of private life, a significant number of them explored the larger problems of national order. Among the extant plays listed by Harbage for the years 1597-1604, the following deal explicitly with important political problems.

1 Henry IV. Shakespeare. 1597 (1596-1598), Chamberlain's.

2 Henry IV. Shakespeare. 1597 (1597-1598), Chamberlain's.


Henry V. Shakespeare. 1599, Chamberlain's.


1 Edward IV. Heywood (?), et al. (?). 1599 (ca. 1592-1599), Derby's.

2 Edward IV. Heywood (?), et al. (?). 1599 (ca. 1592-1599), Derby's.
Among these works the most dominant genre seems to be the chronicle play. Out of twenty-six works, twelve
are based on English history: 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV, 1 Robin Hood, 2 Robin Hood, Henry V, 1 Sir John Oldcastle, 1 Edward IV, 2 Edward IV, Look About You, When You See Me, 1 If You Know Not Me and Sir Thomas Wyatt.

It is worth noting that not one of these twelve plays was performed by the children's companies. As we shall see, these companies concentrated much more heavily on comedies than on histories or tragedies, and on the few occasions when they turned to plays about serious political problems, they ignored English history and utilized Continental or classical themes. It is also worth noting that practically all of these chronicle plays were performed before 1600; none, at any rate, was performed from 1600 until about the end of Elizabeth's reign.

With James' accession modern Tudor history became available for less restricted treatment on the stage, and there appeared a few plays dealing with England's recent past. But the chronicle play never regained the dominance it held during Elizabeth's reign.

An interesting pattern emerges. At the end of the 1590's the adult companies were still performing plays in this popular genre. When the children's companies reopened in 1599, their authors completely ignored the chronicle play. Soon afterwards the adult companies themselves drastically shifted ground. Whereas from 1597 to 1599 practically all of their extant plays on political themes belong to this genre, for the longer
period from 1599 to 1604 there are only three extant chronicle plays. Even after we take into account the random way in which some plays survive and others disappear, it seems reasonable to conclude that this popular genre was one of the first casualties in the turn-of-the-century clash between the traditional and the modern. A close look at these chronicle plays, however, will show that the decline of this genre is more than simply a matter of literary fashion and that it involves important ways of looking at life and human society.

The Chronicle History and the Traditional Pattern of Social Order

One of the most revealing chronicle plays is Sir John Oldcastle, because it devotes much more than average space to a theoretical consideration of the problems of obedience and order. Its authors probably did not set out to explore political theory. They planned to vindicate the historical Sir John Oldcastle, an ancestor of Lord Cobham and a figure who had been currently mentioned in Catholic and Puritan polemics and who had just recently been treated rather irreverently in the original version of Shakespeare's Henry IV. But in vindicating a Lollard who managed to obey his own conscience while remaining loyal to his monarch, the playwrights were almost forced into a theoretical treatment of the relationship between sovereign and
subject. The play deals with sedition that arises from various motives—some sincerely moral, others purely selfish. Throughout the play, Oldcastle is presented as a norm. He follows his faith privately and does everything permissible to support it publicly, but he never forgets his duty to his king.

The play opens with a comparatively mild brawl between Lollards and supporters of the old faith. Compared to the upheavals that follow, this is a relatively mild breach of order. The combatants are brought to trial, and the presiding judge is disturbed that subjects should take such matters into their own hands. He is the first to state the norm by which all of the play's action is to be judged. Although both men are defending sincere religious convictions, he points out

This case concerns the king's prerogative,
And is dangerous to the state and commonwealth.
(I.ii)³

It is always dangerous when subjects meddle with a royal prerogative, and he reminds the disputatants that disturbances are especially dangerous now that Henry V is planning his French expedition. Although the Lollards have been fighting in Oldcastle's name, he knows nothing at all of this brawling and would have been one of the first to rebuke the men fighting in his name.
The judge's fears for English order are well-founded. Subjects are prepared to ignore their duty to the king in order to defend what they consider the true faith. Even the Bishop of Rochester, a minister of Henry V, contravenes a royal decree, to issue a warrant for Oldcastle's arrest. Given the context of general treason, this is a comparatively mild disobedience, and he receives only a public rebuke.

Much more serious is the Lollard insurrection instigated by Acton, Bourn, and Beverly. Although their motivation is never completely clear, these three noblemen at least say nothing that calls into doubt their sincere desire to reform religion. But the playwrights are careful to keep this insurrection in proper perspective. In order to finance their movement, the noblemen have called in Murley, the brewer of Dunstable, a rich and foolish old man. As he admits, he is more interested in being knighted than in reforming the commonwealth: "We come to fight," he explains, "for our conscience, and for honour. Little know you what is in my bosom; look here, mad knaves, a pair of gilt spurs" (III.11). Although such a speech does not necessarily reflect on the other leaders, it cannot but remind us of the selfishness that often masquerades as honor and conscience.

Sincere or not, this insurrection cannot be taken
lightly. After a decisive defeat, Beverly explains to Henry that his faction, "meant no hurt unto your majesty, / But reformation of religion." Henry answers,

Reform religion? was it that you sought?  
I pray, who gave you that authority?  
Belike then we do hold the sceptre up,  
And sit within the throne but for a cipher.  
Time was, good subjects would make known their grief,  
And pray amendment, not enforce the same,  
Unless their king were tyrant; which, I hope,  
You cannot justly say that Harry is.  

(IV.ii)

Murley has already expressed the logical outcome of undertaking such an insurrection. If his followers should kill the king, he explains, "Then we'll make another" (III.ii). No one, not even the prisoners themselves, expect Henry to show mercy in this case, and all the leaders are executed for treason.

Once the conspirators enter into armed resistance to the king, the audience is given no opportunity to sympathize with them or their problem. Earlier in the play, however, the problem of the sincere non-conformist is considered. Henry has been persuaded that Oldcastle is joining the Lollard conspiracy and calls him to account for himself. While quite eloquent in maintaining his political loyalty, Oldcastle is uncompromising in following his own conscience:

If out of Holy Scripture they [i.e., those loyal to the old faith] can prove
That I am in error, I will yield,
And gladly take instruction at their hands:
But otherwise, I do beseech your grace
My conscience may not be encroached upon.
(II.iii)

Henry immediately accepts the distinction between private belief and public duty:

We would be loth to press our subjects' bodies,
Much less their souls, the dear redeemed part
Of him that is the ruler of us all:
Yet let me counsel you, that might command.
Do not presume to tempt them with ill words,
Nor suffer any meetings to be had
Within your house, but to the uttermost
Disperse the flocks of this new gathering sect.
(II.iii)

A political scientist might like a sharper distinction between private and public life. But in this play there is no doubt that the distinction exists; the God who demands that Oldcastle should follow Holy Scripture and remain a loyal subject would not require the impossible. In what seems to be a Catholic application of the Elizabethan compromise, a good Protestant must lead his private life according to his own conscience, but in no way disobey the king publicly.

Toward the end of the play, England is faced by an even greater threat. While the Lollard conspiracy is reaching its climax, Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey plot a purely political insurrection. Although they spend some time discussing Cambridge's superior claim to the throne, they are largely interested in personal
benefit and make no secret of their treasonable intentions. The Lollards were prepared to resist Henry if necessary, but hoped to avoid a direct confrontation. This insurrection is aimed directly at the king. "Harry shall die," says Grey, "or else resign his crown" (III.1). Oldcastle pretends to join the conspiracy, but immediately warns Henry, who surprises the conspirators just before he begins his expedition into France.

The ending of this play shows signs of revision and is a bit confused. In the last scenes, Oldcastle finally escapes to Wales, where in the non-extant sequel, he will presumably be executed on trumped-up charges of treason. But before dealing with the hero's escape, the play quickly resolves the final threat to England. The conspirators are captured, and a few lines indicate that England is now sufficiently united to fight a war with France.

Sir John Oldcastle is especially interesting because it explicitly states the assumptions that underlie almost all of the chronicle plays of this period. It never denies that there are seriously disruptive forces in society. It is very likely that honest men will differ on important matters. Men like the Brewer of Dunstable can be persuaded that morality demands serious changes—especially if those changes will lead to personal advancement. There are likely to be down-
right traitors like Cambridge and his supporters. But however strong these centrifugal forces may be, the moral order provides a system in which they can be controlled. Both morality and nature require the subject to obey duly consecrated authority—in the case of England, the anointed monarch. The king, in his turn, must be willing to respect the rights of his subjects. In this play Henry carefully sifts the charges against Oldcastle and finds him innocent; he condemns the Lollard conspirators to death. The king must temper justice with wisdom and mercy, but when necessary he must punish severely acts of high treason that endanger the entire realm. In general this play seems to affirm the Tudor conception of public order. It affirms the monarch’s obligation to rule wisely with mercy and justice; it affirms the subject’s obligation to obey without question such a monarch, unless he is forced to violate his conscience. It glosses over—as most Tudor apologists do—the one ambiguity: exactly when does the subject’s conscience take precedence over royal command? The play further assumes that this pattern of order works. Henry rules well and practically all of his subjects support him against misguided or ambitious rebels. Given a rational order, then, a return to morality almost automatically means a return to social health. Dur-
ing this period, as we shall see, virtually every chronicle play turned to English history for examples to reaffirm these assumptions—to show the sufferings and disorder that resulted when subjects or rulers neglected their moral obligation, to show how a return to morality would reunify and heal the nation, and to celebrate the health of a united England.

Few of the other chronicle plays deal so explicitly with theory, but they generally take the same assumptions for granted. The last half of Heywood's Edward IV concentrates on the private tragedy of the Shore family. But the first half of the play deals with a serious threat to England's national order.

To liberate Henry VI from the tower, Falconbridge is besieging London with the only men he could muster, an irresponsible crew of knaves and fools. Although he insists that his followers are not like those of Cade or Straw, one of them makes quite clear what London can expect if they are successful; they will insist that

The costermongers fruite us,
The poulters send us in fowl, And butchers meate without controul: And ever when we suppe or dine, The vintners freely bring us in wine. In [sic] anybody aske who shall pay, Cut off his head and send him away. (p. 11)

The forces of disorder are met by resolute and efficient
Londoners, and the rebels turn their potential anarchy against themselves. After one significant defeat, they try to kill one another in the hope of obtaining pardons and rewards. The restoration of order is celebrated with appropriate stateliness, and Edward grants knighthoods to the loyal leaders who have saved his capital from rebellion.

The middle section of the play shows that Heywood understood one serious weakness in the Tudor doctrine of obedience. After putting down the rebellion, Edward goes in disguise as the courtier "Ned" and has dinner with Hobs, the Tanner of Tamworth. Hobs is rustic and eccentric, but he is clearly the embodiment of English common sense and patriotism. In a conversation with "Ned" he expresses what appears to be the popular reaction to all the dynastic quarrels:

King: Faith, whether lovest thou better Harry or Edward?
Hobs: Nay, that's counsel, and two may keep it, if one be away.
King: Shall I say my conscience? I think Harry is the true king.
Hobs: Art advised of that? Harrys of the old house of Lancaster; and that progeny do I love.
King: And thou dost not hate the house of York?
Hobs: Why, no; for I am just akin to Sutton Windmill; I can grind which way soe're the wind blow. If it be Harry, I can say, Well fare Lancaster. If it be Edward, I can sing, Yorke, Yorke, for my mony.

(p. 45)

Edward on the whole finds this a fairly sensible reac-
Farewell, John Hobs, the honest true tanner!
I see plain men, by observation
Of things that alter in the change of times,
Do gather knowledge; and the meanest life
Proportiond with content sufficiency,
Is merrier then the mighty state of kings.

Although Heywood, as we have seen, treated Edward's right to the throne as divinely sanctioned, he here reflects that Edward's kingship may simply be due to the luck of battle. Here he seems to suggest that the divinely appointed king may be whatever man happens to possess the throne and that it might be wise to leave it at that.

Heywood realized that there were two ways of approaching Falconbridge's uprising. He could present Falconbridge as the loyal supporter of Henry VI defending his king or as a rebel against Edward IV. He firmly adhered to the latter approach. During the uprising, Falconbridge is simply a rebel unleashing chaos on England. Only toward the end of the play, when he is harmless, is he permitted to explain his position before dying gallantly.

In Edward IV Heywood tried to illustrate the virtues of English monarchy, not to explore problems in any depth. Even at the end of the play, long after the political problems have been solved, the note of
English unity is once again struck. After Edward receives war contributions from his wealthy subjects, a widow—a poor widow, it goes without saying—offers more than her quota to the king she loves. As the play ends, the English king embarks on a foreign war with the support of all his subjects, even the most humble. As we shall see, the chronicle play seldom ends without some indication of the state of the kingdom, even when it has concentrated most heavily on other matters.

In 2 Edward IV Heywood devoted less time to primarily public problems than in the first part. Most of the play deals with Edward's foreign triumphs and with the tragedy of Jane and Matthew Shore. Only toward the end does it depict the rise of Gloster and the troubles he inflicts upon the nation.

Even here, Heywood concentrated heavily on Gloster's cruelty to the Shores, but he apparently felt required to touch upon the political effects of Gloster's usurpation. He devoted some space to portraying the treacheries by which Gloster achieved power. Once Gloster achieves the throne, he turns viciously on Jane Shore, his dead brother's mistress. Heywood concentrated primarily on evoking pity for the dying Jane Shore and admiration for her husband, who forgives her in death. Emotionally and thematically, their death is
the climax of the play, but Heywood was apparently un­
willing to close a chronicle play with the fate of the
nation still unsettled. In the last few lines of the
play, Richard dismisses Buckingham, who exits promis­
ing to undertake the action that will free England from
this tyrant:

Richard. Ile sit upon thy crumped shoulder,
I faith, I will, if heaven will give me leave;
And, Harry Richmond, this hand alone
Shall fetch thee home, and seat thee in his throne.
(p. 187)

Although Heywood did not include the actual restora­
tion of English order and unity, he included a scene to
at least remind the audience of how soon this restora­
tion is to come.

Look About You is a curious play structurally. It
is largely a disguise farce that happens to open and
close in the English court. 4 But within the seven or
eight hundred lines that deal with politics, the play
takes quite seriously an intolerable public anomaly:
two kings are simultaneously occupying the English
throne. 5 Alienated by her husband's affair with Rosa­
mund and ambitious for her children's advancement,
Queen Eleanor has led a faction against Henry II and
forced him to permit the coronation of their oldest
son, Henry. (As if to underline this anomaly, the
text at this point refers to them as "Old King" and
"Young King.") Most of the courtiers try to act responsibly. Although a few eagerly follow the winning side in order to enrich themselves, the majority either remain loyal to the legitimate king or reluctantly cooperate with the de facto king in order to keep a bad situation under reasonable control. The playwright leaves no doubt about what morality and nature dictate. Young Henry steels himself to actions that he admits are sinful and unnatural:

Pride, seize upon my heart: wrath, fill mine eyes!
Sit, lawful majesty, upon my front,
Duty, fly from me; pity, be exil'd:
Senses, forget that I am Henry's child.

(p. 426)

Prince John reproaches his brother with ingratitude and includes his own treason as part of his favors to Henry; he has, he tells young Henry,

Writ in black characters on my white brow
The name of rebel John against his father.

(p. 398)

Even more dangerous for England is the way young Henry plans to exercise the authority he has usurped. When Falconbridge tries to restrain his tyranny by citing a "statute from the Confessor," Henry makes quite clear his attitude toward tradition and the legal rights
of his subjects:

The Confessor was but a simple fool.  
Away with books; my word shall be a law,  
Gloster shall die.  

(p. 427)

When the farce plot begins, England is in very perilous condition: it is being ruled by two kings, the stronger of whom plans to be a tyrant. Gloster, one of the supporters of Henry II, is arrested for treason, escapes from prison, and from then on indulges in a series of mad-cap adventures. He and Skink impersonate almost every important character in the play, cheat Prince John of a gold chain, expose the folly of a jealous husband, and so on. Except for brief passages that show the young king confirmed in his tyranny, the serious political issues are almost completely forgotten. But the author apparently finds it necessary to solve England's problems before closing the play. Young Henry conveniently repents of his disloyalty and decides to retire to a life of meditation. Henry II resumes undisputed rule and closes the play with a prayer for unity:

Beseeching grace from Heaven's eternal throne,  
That England never know more prince than one.  

(p. 506)

In Robin Hood the authors devoted a great deal of space to the adventures of the exiled Earl of
Huntington in Sherwood Forest. But his fortunes are closely related to the fate of England at large. Before the play opens, Richard I has appointed as regent the Bishop of Ely. Ely cooperates in the intrigue that drives Huntington into exile. Prince John, in love with Marian, who is betrothed to Huntington, has tacitly supported this injustice. But he now uses it as a pretext to begin a civil war that unseats Ely. Most of the play concentrates on two problems, undoing the private injustice to Huntington and restoring natural order to England. The play pushes to its logical extreme the Providential view of history and is almost geometric in meting out justice. When John seizes power, he turns on all those who were party to cheating Huntington. Ely, who let worldly pride blind him to justice, must now try to escape disguised as a peasant woman. To complete his humiliation he is comically mistaken for a monster. Huntington's uncle, the Prior of Saint Mary's, has let greed turn him against his own nephew. He soon undergoes a series of financial catastrophes, loses his benefice, and finds himself completely impoverished. Warden, the steward who betrayed his generous master, loses his position and must turn to beggary. He is scorned by people for whom he had previously done favors. A widow recognizes him as the ungrateful steward of
Huntington and gives him something, a rope to hang himself like Judas. Each of these men devotes at least one soliloquy to marvelling over the exquisite appropriateness of his punishment.

Once John has been instrumental in punishing the others, it is his turn to pay for his own crimes. Inflated by his initial success, he uses the royal "we" to Leicester, Richard's messenger, and welcomes him to "our court." Leicester quickly understands the situation and sums up England's danger:

Your Court in England, and King Richard gone,
A king in England, and the king from home:
This sight and salutations are so strange,
That what I should, I know not how to speake.
(Sig. G4r)

Another war soon follows and John is defeated. Like the rest of Robin's enemies, he flees to Sherwood Forest.

When the full demands of justice have been met, mercy can add to the final social restoration. Like the Forest of Arden, Sherwood has a special moral and psychological effect on almost all who enter it. Ely, Warman, and the Prior meet Robin, are forgiven by him, and sincerely repent. John, who has been a rather petulant coward up to this point, disguises himself as one of Robin's men and suddenly begins to act with courage. Like the others who enter Sherwood he under-
goes a moral change and repents of his political ambition. The stage is set for Richard to return, restore Huntington to his estate, and forgive John's usurpation. With justice and mercy in perfect balance, Richard can resume rule in a kingdom where order is based on both authority and love.

In 2 Robin Hood the authors dealt with King John, whose reign raises the two greatest difficulties in the Tudor doctrine: the identity of the true king and the question of out-and-out tyranny. As we shall see, this play tends to sidestep both issues and concentrate on uncontroversial moral and political lessons.

John took the throne in spite of the stronger claims of his nephew Arthur. In some versions he is accused of killing his young rival. The play glosses over these early years in an allegorical vision; Arthur and his mother are shown following "Insurrection" (Sig. D3v), and John's role in Arthur's death is simply not mentioned. The authors of this play simply were not interested in real questions about the problems of succession.

As for the question of tyranny the authors offered two contradictory reactions without trying to resolve them, perhaps without noticing the contradiction. Before defining these two views, we ought to
consider the source and exact nature of John's tyranny.

King John is inflamed with passion for the chaste Mathilda (formerly Robin Hood's Marian). After brief debates with himself and his counsellors, John decides to have her at any cost. He is prepared to become a tyrant if necessary. To strengthen his position, he begins arbitrarily to demand hostages from the leading barons, especially those directly related to Mathilda. From here the course of tyranny and resistance follows a predictable course. When Leicester refuses to accept John's ultimatum, he seems to have a feudal contract in mind. He replies that his personal pledge should warrant his loyalty to the king:

I will not leave my armes, nor break my word
Except I be provok't: your liege-man I am sworne:
That oath is pledge enough. If you mislike

The King finishes this clause, "Thou hearest me say, I doe." Leicester triumphantly answers, "And I reply, that pledge refus'ed, I have no more for you" (Sig. F2v). Behind this quibble seems to be the feudal relation between lord and liegeman: when John publicly discards Leicester's pledge, this pledge is no longer binding.

When old Fitzwater, the father of Mathilda, refuses to offer her as a hostage to the king—and the arrangement after all is a very thinly veiled way of asking Fitzwater to accept the seduction of his own daughter—
his refusal is more in keeping with Tudor notions of monarchy:

Pardon me soveraigne: all my power is yours:  
My goods you may commaund, my life you may:  
My children too I know with both their lives,  
Will readily adventure deaths worst wrongs,  
To doe such service as true subjects should:  
But honorable fame, true chastitie

The King interrupts him at this point,

Make no exceptions, yield her up to mee,  
Or looke for ever for my enmitie.

Fitzwater gives the only answer he finds consistent with his own honor:

Nay then Fitzwater tells your Majestie,  
You doe him wrong; and well will let you wit  
He will defend his honour to the death.  

(Sig. F2v)

In this dialogue John upsets the natural order of society by claiming tyrannical authority. To preserve his own honor, Fitzwater must reluctantly resist the king.

Nothing in the play appears to discredit Fitzwater's reluctant rebellion against tryanny. But the play also presents an entirely different reaction. John is served by two principal agents, Brand and Hubert. Brand is cruel by nature and willingly carries out whatever atrocity John assigns to him. Hubert, on the other hand, disapproves of the king's tyranny,
but continues to serve him--on principle. In one soliloquy he explains his position. He remains loyal to John and tries to moderate the King's cruelty. He will carry out immoral actions, but only if the King cannot be dissuaded. He justifies his position with an extreme application of the Tudor position on obedience to kings:

For though kings fault in many a foule offence Subjects must sue, not mend with violence.
(Sig. IJV)

The playwrights apparently approved of this position. After his repentance, the King reproaches Brand for carrying out his orders so eagerly. Had he been served by more men like Hubert, he might have repented before the atrocities were committed. And so the playwrights apparently approved of Hubert's response as well as that of Fitzwater. But the two positions are completely contradictory. If subjects can never "mend with violence," then Fitzwater is guilty of treason. If subjects may refuse to carry out immoral or dishonorable commands, then Hubert is guilty of whatever crimes he committed under orders from John. The playwrights do not appear even to have noticed this contradiction. The play ends, at any rate, not with the clash and resolution of these two contradictory claims, but with a celebration of virtuous kingship and English patriotism.
The result of John's tyranny is a terrible civil war. This section of the play evokes the chaos of civil war and concentrates on the sufferings that result directly from John's cruelty. He has decided to wipe out the Bruce faction, and two scenes are devoted to Lady Bruce's pathetic attempts to save her little son. Mathilda is captured and finally poisoned by Brand when she refuses to yield to John.

As it turns out, John's tyranny is self-destructive. At the height of his military successes, he is defeated by his own cruelties. The insurgent forces discover the corpses of Lady Bruce and her little son, both starved to death by the express command of the king. When the bodies of mother and son—clear evidence of John's atrocities—are publicly displayed, the forces previously loyal to John turn from him. When the body of Mathilda—the martyr to chastity—is brought on stage, John is now facing an entire nation united against him. At this moment John, presumably overwhelmed by this evidence of his own cruelty and perhaps reacting to the new political situation, repents of his tyranny, reproaches Brand for carrying out his orders so eagerly, and reminds his subjects that the king of France, summoned by the insurgents, is now landing in England to offer the dubious protection of foreign troops. Although due honors are done
to Mathilda, a perfect symbol for the victims of recent tyranny, England looks to the future as a united nation rallying around a reformed king and prepared to resist foreign dangers.

In these six chronicle plays, written between 1597 and 1599, we can notice that the public sections conform to one basic pattern. The order of England is challenged (by insurrection, by intrigue and usurpation, or, in the single instance of 2 Robin Hood, by tyranny), good men rally to the cause of moral and natural order, and justice and unity are finally restored. Some of these plays took passing notice of difficulties in the Tudor theory, but did not deal with them extensively or let them modify the basic theme and structure of the genre. As we shall see in Chapter IV, Shakespeare's chronicle plays conform basically to the regular pattern, but deal more seriously with the theoretical weaknesses.

As I have mentioned, of the twelve extant chronicle plays listed by Harbage for the whole period of 1597-1604, all but three were written before 1600. The three later plays, Sir Thomas Wyatt, When You See Me and 1 If You Know Not Me, preserve many features of the chronicle pattern, but with some significant differences.

Sir Thomas Wyatt is the least typical of all
these plays. I will later discuss in detail the political philosophy and the view of human nature that seem to inform this play. For the present I will simply point out that it shares certain superficial qualities with the rest of these chronicle plays. **Sir Thomas Wyatt** deals largely with the dangers of insurrection. Wyatt puts down the rebellion of Northumberland and Suffolk, who are trying to put their children (Lady Jane Grey and Guilford) on the throne as queen and consort. But when Queen Mary announces her plans to marry King Philip, Wyatt leads his own rebellion against Spanish domination. It is not completely clear how the authors want us to judge Wyatt at this point, but his rebellion is finally put down. The play ends with the execution of the principals of the two rebellions. It is climaxed by the pathetic farewells of Lady Jane and Guilford and by the brave death of Wyatt. This play does not merely ignore the conventional celebration of English unity; it fails to give any details at all about the state of the kingdom. We can only infer that Mary's authority is established and that England is once again orderly.

The remaining two late chronicle plays seem to share the basic assumptions of this genre, but were composed in a slightly different spirit. Almost as
soon as Elizabeth died Englishmen began to look back at the Tudor period as a kind of Golden Age. The authors of *When You See Me* and of *If You Know Not Me* seem to have been writing out of a mellow nostalgia. They do not concentrate on an ordeal or trial undergone by England in order to illuminate current problems; instead they simply celebrate a kind of love affair between England and a popular sovereign. At the center of interest in each play is the personality of the sovereign, not a political conflict.

Early in *If You Know Not Me*, Mary's counsellors discuss various popular uprisings. But they seem fairly calm, and no rebels ever appear on stage. These uprisings serve only to motivate Queen Mary's cruelty to Elizabeth, who of course has nothing whatsoever to do with the rebels who are acting in her name. Elizabeth speaks sharply only when directly accused of treason. She is prepared to obey any of Mary's commands with only one exception: she will not "submit" to Mary in any way that might be interpreted as an admission of treason. Otherwise, she bears extraordinary abuse with angelic patience.

In this play we find very little conflict; almost all of the action is devoted to pure exposition. One scene after another depicts either Elizabeth's virtue and love of the people or the people's love
for her. When Mary dies, Elizabeth and England are free to consummate the love that the play has been evoking. Appropriately enough, the play closes with Elizabeth's coronation. She graciously accepts an important gift from the Lord Mayor of London: a copy of the Bible in English. England will now enjoy a golden age with a reasonable religious settlement under a virtuous sovereign.

*When You See Me* consists of three major sections, each with a dominant event: the birth of Edward, Henry's incognito adventures in London, and the education of Edward. Like *If You Know Not Me*, it concentrates on exposition rather than conflict. Each section presents a danger of one kind or another, but none of these dangers is taken very seriously. To furnish his play with a Machiavellian intriguer, Rowley added about fifteen years to the life span of Wolsey. But even so, Wolsey is more interested in winning the Papal crown than in influencing England and as a villain turns out to be completely harmless. When Henry finally decides to remove him, there are no difficulties at all. In the last section of the play, Rowley gives some attention to the intrigues of Bonner and Gardiner, but they are plotting against the queen (Catherine Parr), not against the king or the realm.
In this play Rowley is primarily interested in painting an attractive portrait of two Tudor sovereigns, Henry VIII and Edward VI. In so far as the facts allow, he presents Henry as an ideal king. He emphasizes his courage, his love of England, his magnanimity. Rowley either ignores Henry's bad qualities or turns them to his credit. Rowley, for example, never mentions Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, or Katheryn Howard. As for the famous fits of rage, Rowley turns them into excusable faults or actual virtues. In this play Henry enters into an epic rage because of his grief at Jane Seymour's death. On another occasion, he lashes out at courtiers for flattering him. Except for a few lovable faults, Henry is a perfectly virtuous man.

In the middle section of the play, he goes into disguise and has a night of adventures reminiscent of Prince Hal's Eastcheap escapades. But during this night he learns of abuses and injustices that he sets about to correct. Like Hal, he uses the common touch to learn more about the people he is entrusted to rule.

The last section of the play concentrates on the education of Prince Edward. He first appears as a youngsters more interested in playing tennis than in studying Latin or logic. But he quickly matures and is soon asking his tutor Cranmer skeptical questions
about purgatory, the saints, and other matters that suggest a good Protestant in the making. When he successfully intercedes with the king for his stepmother, now under attack from Bonner and Gardiner, Edward proves that he knows how to apply his learning and religious convictions to daily life.

This play deals with comparatively mild threats to English welfare. But it does more than justice to the third element of the chronicle play, the celebration of English unity and power. It is quite clear in this play that the ailing Henry is to be replaced by a son worthy of him. The last scene is devoted almost exclusively to a pageant in which the Holy Roman Emperor pays a formal visit to the English Court (a visit which historically occurred at least twenty years earlier) and gratefully accepts the Order of the Garter. As if to underline the prestige of the English Court, the play lists the many titles of this man who is so flattered by its attentions. This visitor is "Great Charles, the first Emperour of Almayne, King of the Romans, Semper Augustus, warlike King of Spaine and Cicily, both Naples, Navar and Arragon, King of Creete, and great Jerusalem, Arch-duke of Austria, Duke of Millaine, Brabant, Burgundy, Tyrrell and Flaunders" (Sig. Llv). This play closes with the point behind practically all of
the chronicle plays we have looked at: an England which is governed by a just king and served by loyal subjects can match any kingdom in the arts of either war or peace.

With the single exception of Sir Thomas Wyatt, all nine of the chronicle plays of this period share one very important assumption. No matter how bad things become, order is at least the natural condition of the world. At the beginning of four of these plays (1 and 2 Robin Hood, 2 Edward IV, and When You See Me), England is orderly and well-ruled. 1 Sir John Oldcastle opens with a relatively minor skirmish and presents gradually more serious challenges to national order. But even when the play opens in the middle of disorder or chaos, it makes clear that most of the problems have been caused by people opposing what is obviously the natural fitness of things. Very often, in fact, the guilty parties admit that they are sinning against nature. We have already seen how young Henry and John in Look About You describe themselves as unnatural rebels. When speaking to his own allies, Wolsey of When You See Me frankly admits that he puts his own ambition above the welfare of England. Perhaps more frequent are characters like John of 1 and 2 Robin Hood, or Richard of Look About You. These men are involved in actions that seriously endanger the nation's peace and unity. They do not appear to think much about
what they are doing; but some event makes them realize the enormity of their actions, and they repent in speeches that clarify the close relationship between personal morality and public order. When characters disrupt England's order from motives they appear to find completely moral, the playwright is quite careful that the audience is not confused by this apparent sincerity. The audience is never allowed to forget what happens when a subject, no matter how admirable his motives, breaks the order that binds the kingdom. In Edward IV, for example, Heywood makes it perfectly clear that Falconbridge, who is besieging London simply in order to rescue Henry VI, cannot control the rebellion he has begun. The Wycliffites of Sir John Oldcastle soon learn that they cannot attack the established religion without also attacking the king.

In a few of these plays Providence seems to take a direct hand in meting out justice and restoring order. We have already noticed how in Robin Hood each villain is given a punishment that is perfectly appropriate to his major crime. In Edward IV St. Anselm is inspired to predict how the guilty will suffer under Richard III and how the tyrant himself will fall after three years.

Occasionally, then, these plays posit a Providence that intervenes in the day-to-day life of human
society. But most of them assume a less mechanical Providence. God has created the world with a perfectly apparent natural order. If men follow the reason that God gave them—and this is obviously the problem—they can live in an orderly and sane world. But when things go wrong, it is up to men themselves to restore the rule of reason. And since the order of Nature is fundamentally unchanging, it is quite normal to turn to examples from history in order to throw light on current problems.

The chronicle play is firmly committed to the assumption that there is a natural order in society—an order which is usually equated with the Tudor system of monarchy. It generally does not concentrate on analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the system itself. It turns to history for examples that reinforce the connection between moral order and political order. And so although the plays of this genre face squarely the difficulties of ruling a society, they are optimistic in one important sense. They assume that men know the rules of the game, that society is governed by divinely ordained principles, and that these principles correspond with the moral precepts graven in the human conscience. Practically all of these plays, then, turn to English history to demonstrate one important principle. If king and
subject will simply do what they know they should do, society—or at least English society—will function quite satisfactorily.

**Challenges to Traditional Assumptions**

When the Children of Paul's began performing in a building near St. Paul's in 1599, London once again had a company performing for an exclusive audience. They were soon followed by the Children of the Chapel, who began performing in the Blackfriars. Both companies charged considerably higher admission fees than did any of the adult companies and tried to offer the more sophisticated playgoers material that they could not find in the public theatres. If playwrights wished to produce drama in the new spirit of the times, they would presumably find the greatest freedom and scope among these new companies.

John Marston was one of the first important poets to write new plays for the Children of Paul's. He may have had some previous dramatic experience writing a play or two for Henslowe. But under the pseudonym "W. Kinsayder" he had established a fashionable, if somewhat notorious, reputation as the author of *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* and *The Scourge of Villainy*. As one of London's most outspoken satirists, he was very much in the forefront of the
new literary fashions. From the beginning of his association with the children's companies, Marston seemed aware that he was writing for a select and presumably more sophisticated audience. In the Prologue to Antonio and Mellida, his first play for Paul's, he addressed his "Select and most respected auditors" and humbly presented his work (the product "of slight idleness") to their "authentic censure," "attentive ears," and "fertile spirits."

It is not clear precisely what this select audience would have made of Marston's new play. In striving for something new, Marston does not seem to have solved all of his technical problems. He apparently started out to create a romantic comedy about "the comic crosses of true love" (V.11.264). When briefly summarized, the plot seems ideal for this genre. Andrugio, Duke of Genoa, and his son Antonio wage a war with Piero, Duke of Venice, to force the latter to permit the marriage of his daughter Mellida to Antonio. Antonio and Andrugio lose the war and escape from their sinking ships, and each assumes that the other has been drowned. Antonio, disguised as an Amazon, courts Mellida and finally persuades her to run off with him. After the appropriate amount of suffering, father and son are reunited and the lovers are permitted to marry.
But Marston was doing much more than writing a romantic comedy. In such a genre, for example, Piero should exist primarily to block the course of true love. But as soon as he enters, he begins talking more like an Italian tyrant than an uncooperative parent:

Victorious Fortune, with triumphant hand,
Hurleth my glory 'bout this ball of earth,
Whilst the Venetian Duke is heaved up
On wings of fair success to overlook
The low-cast ruins of his enemies;
To see myself ador'd and Genoa quake,
My fate is firmer than mischance can shake.
(I.i.35-41)

In the flush of victory he forbids the Genoese to permit their duke to return to his country and offers a bounty to anyone bringing in the heads of Antonio and Andrugio. Frustrating his daughter's marriage plans becomes only a side issue to vengeance and ambition.

The courtiers surrounding Piero barely notice his grotesque tyrannies. Their ambitions seem to involve nothing more serious or harmful than a fashionable cloak or a love letter from one of the court flirts. They seem a bit out of place in the court of an Italian tyrant; more than anything else they resemble the silly London fops that Jonson and Chapman had been ridiculing in their humours comedies.

Within the framework of a romantic comedy, then, this play devotes about equal space to a love story, the absurdities of courtiers, and the bloody ambitions
of a tyrant. The results of this mixture are not always artful. In his emotional soliloquies Antonio appears to find Piero about equally guilty for preventing his marriage with Mellida and for trying to murder his father. The courtiers are too shallow either to resist Piero’s tyrannies or to give him any support. They are frequently on stage with him, but do not really seem to live in the same world.

One element seems to give some sort of unity to this curious mixture of genres: Marston’s interest in human passions. Accepting the presence of evil as more or less axiomatic, he tries to show how evil passions deform those who surrender to them and to test current stoic doctrines about resisting the effects of evil. Marston is not interested in explaining what went wrong with the Venetian court or in offering any sure pattern for restoring a viable social order. In dealing with evil, he is mainly interested in anatomizing its various forms and catching both its dangers and its inherent absurdities.

With the virtuous characters, Marston is presenting some possible reactions to evil. Antonio is constantly in the control of essentially virtuous passions: devotion to his father, love of his mistress, indignation at any injustice. His opening speech
summarizes his characteristic approach to all problems and introduces the major theme of suffering:

Heart, wilt not break? And thou, abhorred life,
Wilt thou still breathe in my enraged blood?
Veins, sinews, arteries, why crack ye not,
Burst and divuls'd with anguish of my grief?
(I.1.1-4)

Throughout the play he expresses the subjective response to suffering: the intensity of the pain itself and the instinctive appeal to some kind of justice. But except for his unsuccessful attempt to elope with Mellida, he simply suffers whatever is in store for him. He is capable of maintaining his own virtue, but he is in no way able to control his own destiny.

One courtier, Peliche, tries to live by what Marston takes to be the extreme application of stoicism. Peliche renounces all ambition and envy and professes himself perfectly content with being precisely what he is. "I envy none," he says, "but hate or pity all" (III.ii.46). After rejecting various apparent forms of human happiness, he almost boastfully celebrates his humble contentment with his own lot:

When I discourse all these, and see myself
Nor fair nor rich nor witty, great, nor fear'd,
Yet amply suited with all full content,
Lord, how I clap my hands and smooth my brow,
Rubbing my quiet bosom, tossing up
A grateful spirit to omnipotence. (III.ii.55-60)
But goaded by the stupidity that surrounds him, he cannot maintain the Olympian detachment that he professes. Only a few lines after celebrating his own contentment, he falls into an absurd passion after a court fop brags of an amorous success:

Confusion seize me, but I think thou liest.
Why should I not be sought then as well?
Fut! methinks I am as like a man.
Troth! I have a good head of hair, a cheek
Not as yet wan'd, a leg, faith, in the full.
I ha' not a red beard, take not tobacco much,
And 'slid, for other parts of manliness—

(III.ii.68-74)

Feliche's pose of detachment is useful in his role as satirist, but Marston makes clear that it cannot really console Feliche for the world in which he must live.

Andrugio, who must face more serious problems, is also committed to stoic ideals of virtue. He assumes that his son is already killed and, wandering in Piero's territory, expects to be captured and executed. But like a true philosopher, he is determined to find happiness in his own virtue. As he explains to his servant Lucio

'Tis not the unsavory breath of multitudes
Shouting and clapping with confused din
That makes a prince. No, Lucio, he's a king,
A true right king, that dares do aught save wrong,
Fears nothing mortal but to be unjust;

Who can enjoy himself maugre the throng
That strive to press his quiet out of him,
Who sits upon Jove's footstool, as I do,
Adoring, not affecting, majesty,  
Whose brow is wreathed with the silver crown  
Of clear content. This, Lucio, is a king,  
And of this empire every man's possess'd  
That's worth his soul.  

(IV.1.51-66)

But like Peliche, he is unable to live up to the  
stoical standards he sets for himself. No sooner  
does his servant mention the Genoese enemies than  
he loses all self-control:

Name not the Genoese; that very word  
Unkings me quite, makes me vile passion's slave.  
O you that made open the glibbery ice  
Of vulgar favor, view Andrugio:  
Was never prince with more applause confirm'd  
With louder shouts of triumph launched out  
Into the surgy main of government;  
Was never prince with more despite cast out,  
Left shipwreck'd, banish'd, on more guiltless ground.  

(IV.1.68-76)

But he soon sees his own failure to live up to his  
ideals:

Spit on me, Lucio, for I am turn'd slave;  
Observe how passion domineers o'er me.  

(IV.1.83-84)

Unlike Peliche he understands himself too well to ac­
cept stoic doctrine as a pat solution to human suffer­
ing. Nevertheless he resolves to master his emotions  
as well as he can.  

The play ends, not with a logical resolution of  
the chief problems, but with a sensational coup de  
théâtre. Andrugio determines to die honorably. He
enters Piero's court in full armor, including a head piece that conceals his identity, offers the head of Andrugio, and claims the bounty. When Andrugio reveals his true identity, Piero is so impressed by this courage that he instantly repents, forgives Andrugio, and permits Antonio and Mellida to marry.

In *Antonio's Revenge*, the sequel to *Antonio and Mellida*, Marston was still interested in the problem of evil and human passions. His Prologue explains that this play was not written for someone

> Who winks and shuts his apprehension up
> From common sense of what men were, and are,
> Who would not know what men must be.
> (Prol. 17-19)

The play is designed for "a breast / Nail'd to the earth with grief" (Prol. 21-22) or "any blood . . . stifled with true sense of misery" (Prol. 24-25).

For this play Marston turned to a genre that had been popular about a decade earlier, the tragedy of revenge. In the first scene we learn that Piero had only pretended to forgive Antonio and Andrugio and that he has just murdered Feliche and Andrugio. He stabbed Feliche and then worked up charges that he had caught him making love to Mellida. He secretly poisoned Andrugio in the expectation that the death would be attributed to natural causes. Piero is motivated by revenge (we learn in this scene that many years earlier
Andrugio had married the woman that he himself wished to marry) and by the stage-Machiavel's love of evil for its own sake. Until Antonio settles on his plans of revenge, Piero has things his way and is about to marry Maria, the widow of Andrugio and mother of Antonio.

Most of the play concentrates on the reactions of the victims of Piero's tyranny. As in the previous play, Antonio gives full vent to his passions and rejects patience as the "slave to fools" (I.i.271). Pandulpho, the father of the murdered Feliche, attempts to live in stoic detachment and to find happiness and consolation in a sense of his own virtue. Unlike Antonio, who sees mighty passions as part of the great man's character, Pandulpho rejects them as undignified and base:

Would'st have me cry, run raving up and down
For my son's loss? Would'st have me turn rank mad,
Or wring my face with mimic action,
Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike?
Away, 'tis apish action, player-like.
(I.i.312-316)

In the first half of the play, Marston devotes most of his space to examining these two opposite reactions to misfortune. Until Antonio learns that Piero has murdered his father and defamed his beloved, he can do little but express his emotions in the manner ridiculed by Pandulpho. In several scenes Pandulpho pro-
vides the rationale behind his Stoicism. Several scenes simply exhibit this stoicism. At times Pandulpho, the bereaved father, tries to console Antonio, the grieving son. In one scene Piero, apparently for the sole purpose of driving Pandulpho into some expression of emotion, refuses to permit the burial of his son, confiscates his property, and finally banishes him. To all of this Pandulpho gives the classical stoic answer: if a man considers his own virtue as the highest good, he is invulnerable to the death of loved ones, the loss of property, exile, and all the blows of fortune. At the end, however, this exemplary stoic breaks down and admits that all of his virtue had been a mere pretense. "I spake more than a god," he confesses to Antonio, "Yet am less than a man" (IV.11.74-75).

Before this play is over, then, Marston apparently rejects two extreme possibilities: total surrender to emotions is absurd and ineffective; total indifference to emotions is impossible for human nature. Once the Ghost of Andruglo appears to Antonio in Act III, Marston spends less time on the problem of suffering and concentrates on action. As soon as Antonio learns that Piero has killed his father, he completely accepts the ethic of revenge—the ethic that underlay earlier revenge tragedies like the Spanish Tragedy or Titus Andronicus. In fact, the revenge ethic seems to
supersede all other moral considerations. The Ghost con­
cludes his revelations with a Senecan quotation that ap­
parently sets the principles by which Antonio's future
actions are to be judged: "Scelera non ulcisceris,
nisi vincis," "Injuries are not revenged except where
they are exceeded," (III.1.51). In a particularly
grusome scene, Antonio murders Julio, the young,
innocent son of Piero. Antonio, who in an elaborate
conceit wished that he could murder only that half of
Julio which belonged to the father, felt no remorse
at the act, nor does anyone else in the play feel that
this vengeance has perhaps gone too far. At the end
of the play almost all of the virtuous characters (in­
cluding Maria, who had almost been persuaded to marry
Piero) join in the revenge conspiracy. They finally
bind Piero, cut out his tongue, show him the dead
body of his little son, and after much gloating and
triumphing, stab him to death. The Ghost of Andrugio
is now satisfied and blesses the action:

'Tis done; and now my soul shall sleep in rest.
Sons that revenge their father's blood are blest.
(V.iii.114-115)

The Senators, who have just intercepted letters
fully revealing Piero's tyranny are delighted and offer
Antonio the "chiefest fortunes of the Venice state"
(V.iii.141). The play ends as the conspirators refuse
any material gain from their tyrannicide and determine to spend the rest of their lives in religious meditation. We are given no indication of the future of the Venetian state. Unlike the authors of the chronicle plays, Marston seems interested in neither the morality nor the practical results of killing the legitimate ruler of a state. He has used the conventions of the revenge tragedy to explore and express human emotions and to provide a great deal of sensational action. But he has not used this genre to illuminate or challenge theories about the commonwealth at large.

After *Antonio's Revenge* Marston concentrated for a while on comedies dealing with the problems of private life. A few years later, probably in 1604, Marston turned again to the broader problems of statecraft. In *The Malcontent* he seems to have found a medium more appropriate to his own assumptions about human society. He has on the whole managed to coordinate the various plot elements and to create a world appropriate to all of his characters and to his theme.

The Genoa of this play is suffering from terrible political and moral sickness. It is governed by Pietro Jacomo, a usurping duke who lacks strong moral convictions and the strength and intelligence to be a successful tyrant. Plotting against him is Mendoza, a
ruthless and hypocritical intriguer, who has no moral scruples whatsoever. When Pietro nominates Mendoza as his successor, it is clear that the stronger of the two villains will soon win out. Mendoza, in fact, has only contempt for Pietro's foolish gesture. The Genoese courtiers understand the jungle rules that apply in this dukedom; they too are willing to ignore questions of legitimacy and support whichever party is strongest. This opportunism is beautifully caught by the courtier Bilioso, who professes himself to be "Of the duke's religion, when I know what it is" (IV.v.92).

This corruption has spread into almost all phases of Genoese life. The social life of the court is virtually run by the old procuress, Maquerelle. Taking bribes on all sides, she arranges most liaisons and teaches the young ladies of the court how to deceive their husbands and how to get the most generous gifts from their lovers. Sex, in fact, has practically nothing to do with either love or marital obligations. Mendoza seduces the Duchess simply to enhance his own political power. Bilioso is prepared to offer his wife or daughter-in-law to anyone currently in favor with the Duke. Malevole quite succinctly sums up the court's moral tone: "I would sooner leave my lady singled in a bordello than in the Genoa palace" (III.11.27-28). The common people are
Central to the play's theme is the deposed Duke Altofronto, who returns to court disguised as the malcontent, Malevole. He fell because he had ruled virtuously and because he had expected more or less the same virtue from his subjects. He explains his fall to Celso in this way:

I wanted those old instruments of state, Dissemblance and suspect. I could not time it, Celso; My throne stood like a point in middest of a circle, To all of equal nearness; bore with none; Reign'd all alike; so slept in fearless virtue, Suspectless, too suspectless; till the crowd, Still lickerous of untried novelties, Impatient with severer government, Made strong with Florence, banish'd Altofront. (I.iv.9-17)

Like the ideal king of the chronicle play, he assumed that morality would guarantee a healthy state and assumed that the majority would support and faithfully serve a virtuous ruler. But when he returns to his court in disguise, he finds only three people who have remained faithful to their legitimate ruler.

As the malcontent, Malevole, he expresses a deepening cynicism. Finding practically no virtue,
honor, or religion among the men around him, he dismisses the church as the "public place of much dissimulation" (I.iii.4). There will soon be no more simony, he argues, because this age will leave nothing holy to sin with. In consoling Pietro, who had finally been ousted by Mendoza, he expresses the contempt of the world which he learned from his own experience and observations:

Think this: this earth is the only grave and Golgotha wherein all things that live must rot; 'tis but the draught wherein the heavenly bodies discharge their corruption; the very muck hill on which the sublunary orbs cast their excrements. Man is the slime of this dung pit, and princes are the governors of these men . . .

Now what are thou like to lose? A jailer's office to keep men in bonds, Whilst toil and treason all life's goods confounds. (IV.v.107-18)

The malcontent is not the only one to express a profound pessimism about human nature. When Pietro in his turn falls from greatness, he too generalizes, "All is damnation, wickedness extreme. There is no faith in man" (IV.iv.16-17). Mendoza was apparently born knowing what Pietro learned only after much experience. With no illusions about his fellow man or the kind of world in which he lives, he understands perfectly well why "Fortune still dotes on those who cannot blush" (II.1.29). As duke he expects no more loyalty from his subjects than he gave to his former
lords; hence his one maxim of rule is "'Tis good trust few; but, 0, 'tis best trust none" (IV.iii.137).

The first step toward wisdom, then, is to admit the worst truths about human nature. When Altofronto speaks as Malevole we do not know how much of his cynical philosophy is pose and how much sincere conviction. But he has unquestionably learned from his experiences. When he is restored to his dukedom, he knows that the ruler who relies on mere virtue is almost certain to be destroyed by the strongest and most ruthless of his subjects. But total cynicism leads only to immorality and offers society no hope for regeneration. Altofronto goes beyond Mendoza's cynicism. He has, after all, found at least three people who remained faithful to him: his wife, the courtier Celso, and an unnamed captain. Through suffering and repentance, Duke Pietro and his wife come to admit their responsibilities to society and to each other. Gradually Altofronto finds more and more support for his legitimate claim to the throne. His hard-earned cynicism does not lead him to despair completely of human nature or to practice the immorality he sees everywhere about him. When he assumes his rightful throne he is ready to rule well. Unlike the good king of the chronicle play, he does not assume that order is the natural condition of
human society. Given the general viciousness and folly of most men, the wise ruler must expect to fight almost constantly to maintain order. Altofronto finally trusts in his own understanding of human nature and in Providence—but a Providence that works, not through the general run of humanity, but through those few who have learned the bitterest truths about the world and who are still willing to work unselfishly to establish or maintain the tenuous control of sanity and justice.

Samuel Daniel’s *Philotas* is perhaps the most self-conscious attempt during this period to reform English drama. As a member of the Countess of Pembroke’s circle, Daniel was aiming at the educated gentleman, not the typical playgoer. As far as we know, none of Daniel’s plays except *Philotas* was ever intended for public performance. And with its rather elaborate rhyme schemes, its chorus, its lengthy speeches, its relative lack of action and its attention to classical decorum, *Philotas* itself seems most appropriate for readers or for a private performance among gentlemen scholars. In a letter to Lord Cranborne, Daniel described his own intentions in this play: "... to reduce the stage from idlenes to those grave p**sentments of antiquitie used by the wisest nations ... ."" For one reason or another the Children of the Queen’s Revels were will-
ing to try this novelty and performed Daniel's play sometime late in 1604 or 1605.

The plot itself is simple enough: there is a conspiracy against Alexander during his Persian campaign, and Philotas is tried and executed as a member of this conspiracy. But it is not clear how Daniel wanted his audience to react to these events. Philotas is technically innocent of the charges made against him. There is no evidence linking him to the conspiracy. Even under torture none of the conspirators name him as part of their plot. In one way, then, Philotas seems simply to be the victim of a tyrant's suspicions. On the other hand, he has been highly critical of Alexander's policy. In what is obviously a parallel to the career of the Earl of Essex, he makes lavish gifts to various soldiers, builds his own faction, and generally courts popularity. When warned of the assassination plans, Philotas fails to inform Alexander. Daniel never makes it clear whether Philotas keeps silent because (as he himself claims) he does not believe the report or because (as Alexander claims) he would have been quite happy to see someone else carry out the assassination. Philotas is presented both as a potential rebel and as a victim of injustice, but it is never clear which aspect is emphasized most heavily.
This central ambiguity is quite appropriate to the sort of world Daniel is presenting in this play. Although his approach and rhetoric are less strident than Marston's, he too paints a rather disturbing picture of human society. Philotas, for example, has won personal honor by his service to Alexander but by his very success has provoked the envy and fear in the noblemen around Alexander. Almost in self-defense he builds his own faction and in turn provokes greater fear and envy among his peers and perhaps in the heart of his king. Conversely, Alexander cannot conquer and rule without subjects motivated by ambition for personal glory, but he cannot trust subjects who achieve too much personal glory. Sensing this distrust, the subject must consolidate his own power to protect himself from his jealous sovereign. Caught in this cycle, Philotas must increase the very power that is provoking his king's suspicions. Soon either subject or sovereign must strike first. But it is hard to determine at what precise point the subject's reasonable self-defense becomes sedition. In this play, Daniel vividly portrays the impasse and does not try to determine the precise degree of moral guilt in either subject or sovereign.

Just as Philotas has been presented more as the victim of a system than as an out-and-out rebel, Alex-
Alexander is seen not as a blood-thirsty tyrant, but as a man more or less trapped by his kingship. He cannot rule effectively without subjects motivated by personal glory and power, but he cannot trust subjects who achieve too much glory and power. Although he has obviously rigged the trial against Philotas, he may well have acted prudently by simply anticipating the rebellion that Philotas would have felt sooner or later obliged to undertake. But he is nevertheless moving toward tyranny. In the chorus a Persian draws the moral with perhaps a bit of smugness:

Well, then I see there is small difference now Betwixt your state and ours, you civill Greeks, You great contrivers of free governments, Whose skill the world from out all countries seeks. Those whom you call your kings, are but the same As are our Sovereigne tyrants of the East; I see they only differ but in name, The effects they shew, agree, or neere at least. Your great men here, as our great Satrapaes I see layd prostrate are with basest shame, Upon the least suspect or jealousies Your Kings conceive, or others envies frame; Only herein they differ, That your Prince Proceeds by forme of law t'effect his end.

(lines 1767-1780)

The Grecian sadly agrees that the Persian is right. But he can see no alternative. Given the danger of powerful nobles, the king should not exempt even nobles from torture in cases of high treason. Alexander, then, is drifting into tyranny. To overawe his subjects, he has claimed divine descent. But
like many monarchs, he gradually begins to believe in the divine sanctions he first adopted merely as a matter of policy. The sickness in Alexander's state arises not so much from human perversity as from one apparently unavoidable paradox. Civilization cannot exist without ambition and authority, but both are highly dangerous to those who possess them and to society at large. Daniel seems to offer no solution to this dilemma. A weak king leads to chaos; a strong king endangers the precious freedoms of his subjects. The chorus of common people, who seem more or less to speak for Daniel, suggest no salvation for society at large. At the end of the play they simply offer one bit of sad common sense, namely that it is probably wisest to stay out of politics all together:

The which may teach us to observe this straine,
To admire high hills, but live within the plaine.
(lines 2131-2132)

George Chapman did not begin his dramatic career with the children's companies. As early as 1597 he was writing plays for the adult company managed by Henslowe. A classical scholar very much interested in literature and philosophy, he was a bit of an innovator even with this conservative company; along with Jonson he can claim most of the credit for the popular vogue of humours comedies. Some time after
1602 he began writing for the children's companies. He still concentrated largely on comedies dealing with the frictions of private life.

But in Bussy D'Ambois Chapman turned to the larger problems of public life. Compared to the other playwrights we have looked at so far, Chapman seemed to concentrate less on life-and-death social problems and more on the ethical or even aesthetic defects of national politics. In Bussy D'Ambois the state is not threatened by foreign conquest or internal chaos; it is, however, pervaded by an oppressive and grubby mediocrity. Virtually everyone is out for his own personal good and defines that good exclusively by the outward manifestations of wealth and power. Monsieur, the brother of the King and heir to the throne, directs his actions not toward the present welfare of France, but toward his own possession of the crown. As he explains in his first speech,

There's but a thread betwixt me and a crown; I would not wish it cut, unless by nature; Yet to prepare me for that possible fortune 'Tis good to get resolved spirits about me. (I.i.41-44)

He is not a traitor; nothing in the play suggests that he would plot against his brother's life. But if nature should cut that thread, Monsieur's grief for his brother would be modified by the realization that
he is now the king, a man whose "words and looks / Are like the flashes and the bolts of Jove" (I.1.36-37).

For Monsieur, a king is glorious not because he behaves greatly but simply because he is a king. Only one thread, therefore, stands between him and greatness. Almost the entire court judges greatness as Monsieur does. Toward the end of the play, when Montsurry learns that his wife, Tamyra, has betrayed him with Bussy, he has Bussy killed and refuses to be reconciled with his wife. Earlier, however, he had been a far more philosophical husband. When his wife complained of Monsieur's insulting advances—"opportunities almost to rapes / Offer'd me by him" (II.ii.67-68)—he simply asked her to take a larger view of things:

Pray thee, bear with him,
Thou know'st he is a bachelor and a courtier,
Ay, and a prince.

(II.ii.68-70)

For Montsurry, then, his wife's honor depends less on her own chastity than on the rank of the man with whom she is dealing. Maffé, steward to Monsieur, shares the typical court attitude. When he first sees Bussy dressed in poor clothes, he assumes that Bussy is not worthy of attention. For him as for practically everyone in this world, a man is judged solely according to his rank, and his rank is judged solely according
to his clothes.

It is in this sort of world that Bussy tries to rise simply by remaining true to his own nature and virtues. His real merits are seen by two people. Tamyra, who has ignored the rank and gifts of Monsieur and was appalled by her husband's complacency, chooses to love Bussy. Under his influence she comes to realize that

"Man" is a name of honor for a king. 
Additions take away from each chief thing. 
(IV.1.49-50)

The King is immediately impressed by Bussy's frankness and chooses him as his eagle, who will uncover all truths hidden from him by court flatterers. On one level, the play can be interpreted as a de casibus tragedy illustrating that the world will not tolerate an honest man. Bussy is sponsored by Monsieur, but he quickly wins the favor of the King. Monsieur then temporarily joins forces with his rival, the Duke of Guise, and the two of them successfully plot Bussy's destruction.

But a number of things complicate this interpretation. Judged by conventional standards Bussy is not a perfect hero. On his first day at court he kills three men in a duel. The king pardons him, but Bussy refuses to admit that he has been wrong,
even in theory. Justice, he claims, is by definition incapable of righting a slight to one's honor. Bussy in fact gives absolutely nothing precedence over his private sense of honor. Suspecting that Monsieur may be plotting against him, Bussy delivers a threatening speech that sums up his own self-reliance and contempt for monarchy or, in fact, for any social institution that stands between himself and what he thinks is right:

Were your king brother in you; all your powers,  
Stretch'd in the arms of great men and their bawds,  
Set close down by you; all your stormy laws  
Spouted with lawyers' mouths and gushing blood  
Like to so many torrents; all your glories  
(Making you terrible, like enchanted flames)  
Fed with bare coxcombs and with crooked hams;  
All your prerogatives, your shames, and tortures  
All-daring heaven, and opening hell about you;  
Were I the man ye wrong'd so and provok'd  
(Though ne'er so much beneath you), like a box-tree  
I would, out of the roughness of my root,  
Ham hardness in my lowness and, like death  
Mounted on earthquakes, I would trot through all  
Honors and horrors, thorough foul and fair,  
And from your whole strength toss you into the air.  
(IV.1.81-96)

If the King insulted Bussy, he would avenge himself. He would defy "honors and horrors" (i.e., merits as defined by society and the sufferings he would inflict and endure) to achieve what his own conscience tells him he must. The King had suggested a kind of theoretical justification for this position. In a speech that would have sounded very strange from either Elizabeth or James, the King of France admits monarchy is
on the whole a rather undesirable social system made necessary by human vice, and he asserts

Kings had never borne
Such boundless empire over other men
Had all maintain'd the spirit and state of D'Ambois.
(III.ii.95-97)

But Bussy is committed to the subversive assumption that he is still living in the state of nature and plans to conduct his life accordingly. Finally, as we shall see, he appears to consider matrimony as another purely arbitrary institution that a genuinely virtuous man can ignore. Unlike the traditional hero of Elizabethan drama, he is prepared to turn an adultery into a kind of sacrament.

We have seen so far that Bussy's conception of virtue sharply contradicts conventional assumptions about justice, monarchy, and matrimony. Bussy's claim to distinction is his absolute honesty and frankness. When Monsieur offers to sponsor him, he accepts the offer almost in the spirit of a scientific experiment:

I am for honest actions, not for great.
If I may bring up a new fashion
And rise in court for virtue, speed his plow.
I'll venture that; men that fall low must die
As well as men cast headlong from the sky.
(I.1.128-143)

Bussy will demonstrate by his own life whether virtue
and honesty can thrive at court. The confrontation between Monsieur and Bussy in Act III challenges in two ways the basis of Bussy's unique virtue. First of all Monsieur claims that Bussy speaks honestly, not to reform the court but to provoke the combats that will satiate his "cannibal valor" (III.11.418). He asserts that Bussy is not a unique hero, but simply a grotesque dominated by one humour, and he concludes

That in thy valor (which is still the dunghill
To which hath reference all filth in thy house)
Th' art more ridiculous and vainglorious
Than any mountebank, and impudent
Than any painted bawd.

(III.11.436-440)

Monsieur attacks, first of all, the sincerity of Bussy's desire to reform the court. He also attacks, on the theoretical level, the effectiveness of Bussy's kind of frankness as a method of reform. Bussy assumes that unreserved frankness is the highest form of friendship, since one is obliged to tell a friend of his faults. Ironically accepting this principle, Monsieur proposes that he and Bussy exchange their honest evaluations of each other. The result is a brilliant contest of insults. After they have accused each other of treason and almost total moral depravity, Monsieur ironically draws the conclusion, "Why, now I see thou lov'st me, come to the banquet" (III.11.491). This scene must at least qualify our admira-
tion for Bussy. We may not agree that he is merely a fire-eater, but we cannot deny that, whatever Bussy's real intentions may be, his vaunted honesty has simply sown dissension without effecting any real improvement in his society.

Perhaps the most ambiguous feature of this play is Bussy's affair with Tamyra. Bussy simply refuses to consider the affair from a Christian viewpoint. Sin, he tells Tamyra, is merely a device to frighten cowards. He is rather naively indignant when he learns that Montsurry means to avenge his wife's betrayal. For Bussy the affair is morally commendable because it is based on a mutual respect for each other's virtues. But he is unable to push this principle to its logical conclusion. In order to defend Tamyra's honor, he does not insist on the merit of her choice and the virtue of their loves; instead, he simply plans to hide their affair. His peculiar attitude reaches its most absurd manifestation when Bussy offers to join with the outraged husband and fight anyone who claims that Tamyra did what both Bussy and Montsurry know she did. As the play reaches its climax, Bussy, the eagle who would flush falsehood wherever it hid, must now stake his life and his mistress' honor on defending a lie.
It is not clear how much of this ambiguity is intentional and how much resulted from a certain amount of confusion on Chapman's part. Madeleine Doran, at any rate, has included Bussy D'Ambois as one of a number of Renaissance plays that "are characterized by a puzzling failure of direction because two or more different ethical or political points of view are unreconciled." However ambiguous some of the important nuances may be, Chapman's over-all intentions seem clear. Just before the catastrophe Monsieur and Guise meet, praise the virtues of their enemy, and agree that Bussy's downfall will prove that "Nature hath no end / In her great works responsive to their worths" (V.11.1-2). By being too consistent to compromise with the world's evils, Bussy will be destroyed by the world. Whatever else this play does, it portrays the general baseness that seems to corrupt human society. It offers, somewhat uncertainly and ambiguously, one alternative to that baseness. At the end of the play, the rebel has been destroyed, partly by society's resistance and partly by a combination of intractability and internal contradiction in his character. The tragedy of Bussy seems to reside in the total waste of his life and death; society remains exactly what it was before his career briefly illumined it.
Ben Jonson did not ally himself with any single acting company. During his stormy career in the opening years of the 1600's, he jumped back and forth between the adult and children's companies. Like Chapman he was drawn to the most modern elements in contemporary thought and attempted from the beginning of his career to reform English drama. After offending almost everyone in several highly topical comedies, he turned to what he felt would be the safer genre of tragedy. In 1603 the Chamberlain's Men performed his Sejanus; shortly afterward Jonson was called before the Council to answer charges of "popery and treason."

As the setting for his classical tragedy, Jonson picked one of the most corrupt periods of Roman history and evoked its social evil and decay with extraordinary vividness. Very early in the play, the Emperor Tiberius retires to Caprae, where he can indulge his unusual sexual appetites in privacy. He leaves Sejanus in Rome as his agent. The low-born Sejanus won the attention of Tiberius first as a partner in homosexual love and later as a capable politician. He had counseled Tiberius that a monarch may commit any crime consistent with policy and state. In Rome he carries out this amoral philosophy quite consistently. A few Senators, still longing for the ancient liberties of Rome, resist him. But for the most part, he is over-
whelmed with cooperation. Driven by a combination of fear and greed, most of the Senators compete with each other in serving Tiberius and whoever may be his current favorite. Whether it be a new temple in his honor or the condemnation of a potential enemy, Tiberius has only to hint hesitantly at what he wants. As the avowed favorite, Sejanus has almost unlimited power. The Senate gives him whatever he wants. When he decides to poison Tiberius' son, Drusus, he has only to suggest his plan to win over Drusus' wife and physician. In this play, then, an absolute and ruthless tyrant rules over an almost completely passive nation.

The structure and meaning of Jonson's play are fairly clear from certain angles. If we concentrate on the career of Sejanus, the play is a typical example of de casibus tragedy. Growing overconfident of his own success and underestimating the shrewdness of Tiberius, Sejanus finally plans to replace Tiberius. He hopes to eliminate the current successors to Tiberius in such a way that most of the blame would fall on Tiberius himself. When he reveals the extent of his ambition by asking for the hand of Tiberius's daughter, Tiberius decides it is time to find a new agent. The last two acts of the play reveal how Tiberius manages this change of personnel. At the end Sejanus is charged with high treason and butchered
by the Roman mob. The play closes as Arruntius draws the conventional moral of *de casibus* tragedy:

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Forbeare, you things,
That stand upon the pinnacles of state,
To boast your slippery height; when you doe fall,
You pash your selves in pieces, nere to rise:
And he that lends you pitty, is not wise.
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To this, Terentius adds the religious application:

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Let this example moove th'insolent man,
Not to grow proud, and careless of the gods.
(V. 893-899)
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If we concentrate on the character of Tiberius, the play analyzes the way in which a clever politician can retain his power. Most of the action concentrates on the power struggle beneath the apparent cooperation of Sejanus and Tiberius. Each is working for the same end: the elimination of politically dangerous Romans. But each is trying to concentrate most of the public resentment on the other. Toward the end of the play, the audience realizes that Tiberius had everything under control from the beginning. He simply manipulates agents like Sejanus or Macro into advising him to do what he wanted to do in the first place. The Senate is convoked to beg him to do whatever he might want to do. When he decides to eliminate Sejanus, he sends a series of contradictory letters, some condemning Sejanus, others praising him. While
the Senators are busy trying to figure out who the favorite is, they have no time to form conspiracies either with or against the current favorite. As we learn, Tiberius' apparent indecisiveness is simply a ploy to keep everyone off balance while he achieves his next goal. From this point of view, the play is a quite effective anatomy of tyranny.

But the play becomes ambiguous when we turn to the fate of Rome at large. The fall of Sejanus solidifies Tiberius' hold on power, but it in no way changes the condition of Rome. Tiberius selects Macro to replace Sejanus simply to "raise one ill / Against another, and both safely kill" (III.657-658). In his first public act, Macro gives a taste of the sort of rule Rome can expect. Having turned Sejanus over to the multitude to be slaughtered, he orders the execution of Sejanus' entire family. Learning that the law forbids the execution of a young virgin, Macro orders the hangman to rape Sejanus' little daughter before strangling her. As far as Rome is concerned, the change from Sejanus to Macro is little more than a spasm in its illness.

It is not clear what course of action this play is recommending. Among the virtuous senators, opinion is divided. The outspoken Arruntius sees Tiberius simply as an overweening politician: "O, what is it,
proud slime will not believe / of his own worth?"
(I.381-382). Arruntius sees nothing divine in this tyrant, and would not hesitate to rebel if such action seemed feasible. Silius broadens an attack on Tiberius into what appears to be a weakness in monarchy itself:

Since I have done thee that great service, CAESAR,
Thou still hast feared me; and, in place of grace,
Return'd me hatred; so soon, all best turns,
With doubtful Princes, turn deep injures
In estimation, when they greater rise,
Then can be answer'd . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
It is your nature, to have all men slaves
To you, but you acknowledging to none.

(III.300-310).

Other senators, however, insist upon the sanctity of the legitimate ruler. Replying to a mildly treasonous comment by Arruntius, Lepidus reminds him of the zeal and duty that should prevent rebellion "with the thought, he is our Prince" (IV.372). Sabinus seems to capture the general confusion of the virtuous senators and perhaps also Jonson's ambivalent feelings on the subject. A number of Sabinus' former friends are attempting to draw from him some remark that can be considered treasonous. They enumerate the sufferings and injustices of the time, and Sabinus gives the following answer:

'Twere better stay,
In lasting darkness, and despair of day.
No ill should force the subject undertake
Against the soveraigne, more then hell should make
The gods doe wrong. A good man should, and must
Sit rather downe with losse, then rise unjust.
Though, when the Romanes first did yeeld themselves
To one mans power, they did not meane their lives,
Their fortunes, and their libertys, should be
His absolute spoile, as purchas'd by the sword.

(IV.161-170)

This is clearly the speech of a man torn by conflicting
convictions. Resisting the emperor is implicitly
posited as unjust. Not even the most terrible atroci­
ties and injustices can justify violating the sacred­
ness of the sovereign. And yet, he goes on to argue,
the present system of rule is based on the voluntary
agreement of his ancestors, and the current sovereign
is violating that agreement. Although Jonson apparent­
ly did not reject the principle of revolution emphatical­
ly enough for everyone on the Council, he does not real­
ly seem to commit himself to either position. The play
vividly portrays the evils and sufferings resulting
from tyranny and suggests how absolute monarchy tends
toward the excesses of tyranny, but it shows no way
out of Rome's dilemma and suggests no workable alter­
native to monarchy.

Although Jonson's Sejanus was written for the
Chamberlain's Men, it has very much in common with
the plays written by Marston, Daniel, and Chapman
for the children's companies. Like those plays,
it makes some very coherent judgments about the fate
of individual men, but is rather ambiguous about the problems of society as a whole. Like Marston, Daniel, and Chapman, Jonson is rather suspicious of absolute monarchy, but has no clear-cut alternative to offer. Like them, he has no divinely sanctioned pattern by which he can judge specific problems; he has only an uneasy sense of the enormous, almost unsolvable problems of human society.

In all six of these plays, the authors tended to challenge the basic assumptions behind the chronicle play, which went to English history to illustrate a doctrine already accepted as self-evident. When certain historical facts tended to blur or challenge this doctrine, the chronicle plays either ignored them completely or passed over them rather quickly. The main purpose of the chronicle play was to show how God has offered men a workable pattern of order.

But it was the difficulties of human society that most interested these newer playwrights. They seemed more interested in exploring the problems of social evil and disorder than in finding ready-made solutions to these problems. We have noticed the dominant pattern of the chronicle play: the progress from disorder to order or from order to disorder to order. We hardly find this pattern in the newer plays. In only one of these plays, Marston's *The
Malcontent, does the commonwealth undergo a fundamental change. When the other plays close, society is still suffering from the same ills that plagued it in the beginning. It seems clear, first of all, that the innovating playwrights were clearer about what was wrong with society than about how to remedy those problems.

In a general sort of way, the two sets of plays locate the sources of social disorder in the same areas. In both sets of plays, the instability of the commons is treated as a potential for anarchy. But in the innovating plays we have looked at, the commons never play a decisive role and do not, in fact, ever appear on stage. They are dismissed as unstable and fickle and, in these plays, merely approve off stage what the principals have already done. Both sets of plays devote a great deal of attention to the intrigues of noblemen, who cause great unrest and disorder through ambition for greater power or even for the throne itself. The newer plays differ here only in assuming a much higher percentage of seditious noblemen.

Perhaps the most striking difference is in the treatment of rulers. The Tudor political philosophy naturally acknowledged the sovereign's obligations to respect the rights and liberties of his subjects.
But here is perhaps the weakest part of its philosophy. Tudor apologists tended to rely heavily on the good faith of the sovereign. If pushed into a corner, most of them conceded theoretically that one may rebel against the worst forms of tyranny, but they were understandably reluctant to advertise this proviso and rather vague in defining what degree of tyranny would justify rebellion. The authors of the chronicle plays, like the Tudor apologists and most sixteenth-century Englishmen, seemed to feel that almost any private grievance was preferable to the kind of anarchy that dominated the fifteenth century. As we have noticed, only one of the chronicle plays of this period deals with a legitimate king who disrupts society by a tyrannical abuse of power. In all the other chronicle plays disorder arises from rebellious commoners, intriguing noblemen, or illegitimate rulers who usurp the throne. In *2 Robin Hood Fitzwater's reluctant rebellion against King John* is presented with sympathy and apparent approval. But the authors of the chronicle plays generally preferred to sidestep this issue and concentrate on the duties and responsibilities of subjects.

The newer playwrights, on the other hand, were very much interested in the problem of tyranny. In the six innovating plays we have looked at, all but
two (Bussy D'Ambois and The Malcontent) present societies ruled by a legitimate sovereign who is also a tyrant. The Genoa of The Malcontent is also ruled by the tyrannical Pietro Jacomo, but he is not really the legitimate Duke. The French King in Bussy D'Ambois has no tyrannical ambitions, but he is not strong enough to control the intrigue in his own court. All of these plays, then, present societies where something is fundamentally wrong at the source of power. Four of these societies are ruled by legitimate sovereigns who are tyrants, one by a usurper who is a tyrant, and one by a king who is just, but ineffective.

These playwrights, then, were especially interested in the one area where Tudor theory was weakest. Predictably enough, Tudor authority tended to be most sensitive where its theory was weakest. This may partly account for the fact that none of these plays is based on English history. It may well have appeared more prudent to avoid English kings while treating the problem of tyranny. By deliberately making a Sforza Duke of Venice and giving Republican Genoa a Duke, Marston insisted upon the purely fictitious nature of his plot. And by making the sovereign a duke, rather than a king, he may have softened some of the subversive nature of his work.
There was a certain amount of risk involved in presenting historical abuses of monarchs. We have already seen how Jonson had to defend himself against charges of "popery and treason." Daniel's Philotas also drew the attention of the Privy Council, because the tragedy of Philotas seemed such an obvious parallel to Essex's final days and perhaps because Daniel did not unreservedly condemn Philotas-Essex and show greater sympathy for the dilemma of Alexander-Elizabeth. Fortunately for English playwrights the Privy Council and other representatives of Tudor authority exercised a rather haphazard control over the drama. But there can be little doubt that the authors of many plays of this period were asking very disturbing questions.

It is difficult to decide what answers they suggested to these questions. Unlike the authors of the chronicle plays, they did not evoke social problems in order to show how they can be solved. As we have seen, only The Malcontent ends with a society restored to order. In all of the others, society remains precisely what it had been. Not having clear-cut answers to public problems, these playwrights understandably concentrated on comedies dealing with the problems of private life.

When they did try their hands at public problems, their works betray a certain confusion. Having rejected
the traditional philosophy of government and having nothing definite to offer in its place, they had to search for new meanings and approaches. On one level, especially in the plays by Marston, we note a kind of frivolous cynicism that Harbage seems to feel characterizes much of this "coterie" drama. If one decides that it is unrealistic to offer a pat solution to difficult problems, one can simply offer no solution at all and exploit the sensational possibilities of a world given over to evil. On the public level the two Antonio plays seem to do this. Compared to Daniel's neurotically indecisive Alexander or Jonson's quietly effective Tiberius, Marston's Duke Piero seems hollow and purely theatrical. His speeches are exciting, but his ambition is so mechanical and simple-minded that he can reveal nothing about the real problems of power. In the sequel to Antonio and Mellida, Marston returned to the revenge play, an old-fashioned genre perfectly suited to sensationalism. Frequently Marston let sensational effects confuse the ethical issues of his play. In Act III, we come across the highly effective midnight murder of Piero's little boy. Marston works hard to catch the full horror of this scene, but simply ignores the problems raised when his virtuous hero murders a completely innocent boy,
who happens to be the brother of his intended bride. In the gruesome conclusion, when all the virtuous characters mock and torture Piero before killing him, Marston risks turning the audience's sympathies to his villain at the very climax of the play. Marston's first two works contain many sections that exist almost exclusively for their sensational value. These two plays, it seems to me, are not typical of the remaining four, but they do illustrate that one does not need clear-cut answers to a problem in order to write an effective drama about it.

While not ignoring the sensational possibilities in their pessimistic estimation of human society, these playwrights were trying to confront real problems seriously. One need not have a definite answer in order to try to present the question as effectively and coherently as possible. Even if one despairs of improving things, it is at least useful to know the kind of world in which he must live. If Marston's Antonio's Revenge failed to deliver, it at least promised a picture "of what men were, and are" and "what men must be" (Prol. 18-19). Some of the other plays worked more successfully at this goal. In Philotas, for example, Daniel tried to portray not only the specific effects of tyranny, but to explore what caused it.
We have already discussed the interlocking causes and effects that drove two normally decent men toward sedition and tyranny. In *Sejanus* Jonson was not interested in the origins of Tiberius' tyranny, but he was quite fascinated by the techniques of that tyranny. The play's "truth of Argument" ("To the Readers," lines 18-19) does not include an explanation of the source of evil nor a solution, but it does include a meticulous exposition of how one tyrant had managed to destroy the liberties of his subjects and retain his power against all rivals. The whole point of Marston's *The Malcontent* is the necessity of understanding the world as it really is. Once Altofronto-Malevole learns to expect only a small minority of honest subjects, he is prepared to cope with his politicians and rule his dukedom. These authors have clearly lost faith in the kind of assumptions that made the chronicle plays seem to be relevant treatments of current political problems. But they did not solve their problems by accepting a cynical real politik. All of their plays have at least one virtuous character to speak for the ideals of justice and to express his own outrage and frustration at the kind of world he must live in. When the innovating playwrights considered their new audience, they apparent-
ly did not envisage a theatre full of complacent cynics. These plays seem to appeal to the traditional ideals of English liberties and justice. But these new plays present the problems of politics from the viewpoint of a man who is no longer convinced that the Tudor system of government can guarantee traditional liberties and justice and, who, in fact, is doubtful that any human form of government can securely guarantee a livable, let alone an admirable, society.

Having decided that the chances for a just and reasonably virtuous world are rather slim, the innovating playwrights asked the next logical question: how can a good man live in an evil and unjust world? Sejanus and Philotæs concentrate on the mechanics of evil and treat this question as more or less corollary. Jonson’s picture of the impotence of the virtuous politicians and the bad end of his evil politician certainly suggests, at least by inference, that a good man ought to stay as far away from politics as possible. We have already seen how the last chorus of Philotæs explicitly states this judgment. Marston’s Antonio plays are probably the most confused of the six we have looked at, but the soliloquies of his virtuous characters are constantly raising this question: how should a good man bear the sufferings and injustices resulting from a
corrupt world? Apart from assassinating the tyrant and then retiring to a life of religious meditation, they offer no generally applicable solution. Central to the theme of *Bussy D'Ambois*, of course, is this question. The whole point of Bussy's career is the question he himself asks: can he flourish in a king's court and still remain true to his own conception of honor and virtue? Marston's *The Malcontent* is the only one of these plays to answer the question with a trace of optimism. If a man can achieve that delicate balance required for a total cynicism about other people and a personal devotion to honor and justice, he may be able to practice virtue without being destroyed by the world he lives in.

It is clear that these playwrights have broken with traditional assumptions of the Elizabethan Age and are beginning to raise new problems. But no coherent tradition emerged to replace the old one. Thematically the plays asked new questions, but only groped for answers. Formally they were adapting older genres to new problems. Some of the formal experiments were less successful than others. When Marston tried to adapt the romantic comedy in *Antonio and Mellida* and the revenge tragedy in *Antonio's Revenge* to his own themes, he ended up with a contradictory mixture that succeeded neither
in reviving the old or consistently expressing the new. In *The Malcontent* he was more successful in placing the humours satirist into a play of serious political intrigue. Somehow this new form was adapted well to Marston's peculiar conception of the philosopher-king, or more accurately perhaps, the satirist-king. In *Sejanus* Jonson attempted to write a play in the native form of *de casibus* tragedy. He was also working for a play that would conform to classical standards, "truth of Argument, dignity of Persons, gravity and height of Elocution, fulness and frequency of Sentence" ("To the Readers," lines 18-20). This may have given him fairly firm control over his material, but he did end up concentrating on a character who is merely a pawn to Tiberius and ignoring both Tiberius himself, who is actually the major antagonist to the liberties of Rome, and a character like Silius, who is defending these liberties. Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* is a *de casibus* tragedy and an exposé of court corruption. But the relation between these two genres is ambiguous, because it is not clear whether Bussy's fall illustrates the corruption of Henry's court, destiny, or Bussy's rashness. *Philotasia*, as we have seen, is another one of Daniel's closet plays—a classical tragedy as it was then understood—that somehow found its way onto a commercial stage.
The thematic uncertainty of these plays, then, is reflected in form. Having rejected the chronicle play as irrelevant to modern problems, these playwrights were experimenting with new forms—generally new combinations of older genres—in an attempt to at least define the problems, if not solve them. In a general sort of way, they have found dramatic possibilities for their pessimistic view of human society: plays can simply exploit the sensational manifestations of evil and violence; they can analyze social evils without suggesting specific remedies; and they can concentrate on the tragic dilemmas facing an individual in a corrupt world. In these experimental plays we can see some approaches that finally led to Jacobean tragedy. But by 1604 nothing had yet emerged coherent enough to be called a tradition. During this period of transition, the political assumptions behind the chronicle play had been challenged, by implication if not by conscious intention. The experimental dramatists were apparently reacting to thoughts and feelings that would dominate the next age. But it was not yet clear whether they would find a coherent political philosophy and new dramatic forms to embody that philosophy.
When considering the chronicle plays, the adult companies' major genre for treating broadly political themes, we noticed a coherent and consistent set of assumptions underlying them. Fundamentally, they all accepted England's political order as natural and divinely sanctioned. When treating a period of national disorder, they found the source of trouble in some breach in the moral order of nature. Confident of the theory behind the English system of monarchy, they considered it their major duty to point out didactically the relationship between morality and the political order and well-being of England.

We have seen how the experimental playwrights challenged these assumptions. They explored situations where these assumptions did not seem to apply. Their plays reflected specific doubts about monarchy itself and, more broadly, about the possibilities of any social order. These plays portrayed societies in which Providence apparently had little effect. All in all, their authors seemed very doubtful that man can be expected to control his own vices or to create a system that can somehow accommodate those
vices. As a result they concentrated not on the possibilities of restoring social order and justice, but on the methods of living in a world almost bound to be evil.

After 1599 the chronicle play apparently lost its popularity. As we saw, only three chronicle plays were written from 1600 to 1604, and these were not consistently informed by the political philosophy earlier associated with the genre. There is no way of knowing whether the adult company playwrights themselves lost faith in this political philosophy, whether such dogmatism began to appear old-fashioned, or whether some other reason accounts for the decline of the genre. It is significant, however, that before 1604 no coherent political philosophy came to replace the one that was abandoned with the chronicle play.

We do find two plays that attempt to teach political lessons, but they are confined to relatively non-controversial topics. A Larum for London depicts the Spanish pillage of Antwerp in 1576, and A Warning for Fair Women deals with a recent murder. Both, as we shall see, are sure of their theoretical grounds and, as their titles suggest, are consciously didactic.

At the beginning of A Larum for London, the
foolish burghers of Antwerp are trying to remain neutral during the Dutch insurrection against Spain. They rely on Spanish promises to respect their neutrality and refuse to accept the aid of Egmont—aid which could clearly save their city. The Spanish soon drop any pretences of neutrality and overwhelm the now defenseless city. The second half of the play renders the famous Spanish fury. Scene after scene portrays systematic looting, rape, and murder. There are several scenes in which a number of Dutch soldiers rally and give the Spanish considerable trouble; they are finally killed, but might have saved their city had more citizens showed this kind of courage. Time appears as epilogue and draws the obvious lessons. It makes some general observations about the dangers of sin and luxury. More specifically, it suggests that, with enemies like the Spanish, cowardice is extremely bad policy. This play simply avoids any questions that might complicate its moral. It does not even hint at the legitimate claims of the Spanish monarchy upon the loyalties of the Dutch. Nor does it suggest that neutrality could ever be a wise policy. This play simply warns Londoners that if they imitate the foolishness of the burghers in the first half, they will suffer the fate they underwent in the last half of
the play.

As the epilogue to A Warning for Fair Women, Tragedy appears and justifies the play. The audience might be puzzled by the absence of revengers (the tragedy of blood is coming back into fashion) but this play is about "truth" (Sig. K3v). It portrays a real event—a famous murder that had occurred recently. Behind the play is the basic assumption that human life is somehow sacred. The plot itself is fairly simple. George Brown falls in love with Anne Sanders, the wife of a prosperous London merchant, wins her over, and plots with her to murder Master Sanders. The first half of the play renders the horror of the act they are planning. Both Brown and Anne Sanders are fairly decent people and struggle greatly with their consciences before giving in to progressively more terrible temptations. Before each major decision, the action stops for a masque in which Chastity, Lust, Murder, and other appropriate abstractions illustrate the full meaning of that decision. On two occasions Brown is providentially prevented from actually murdering Sanders. He never hardens himself to the horror of his deed and almost loses his resolution.

Once the murder takes place, Providence and the nature of things seem to conspire to reveal the
murderer. One of Sanders' servants—left by Brown for
dead—recovers long enough to identify the murderer
and dies immediately afterward. All present see the
hand of Providence in this miraculous recovery. But
Brown would have been captured anyway. He leaves a
series of clues while trying to establish an alibi.
Implicit in this play is the assumption that human
life must be inviolate if the commonwealth is to
survive. Further, it assumes that Providence,
nature, and the united human hatred of the murderer
will all combine to see that murder will never re-
main unpunished. Before the trial of the murderers,
there occurs another masque, in which Mercy cedes
its place to Justice. Although both guilty parties
repent, there is no question of pardoning them.
This play takes for granted a moral order that is
both just and effective; it serves as a warning
against violating the most sacred precepts of that
society.

Both plays, then, turn to history to illustrate
a clear-cut generalization: the cruelty of Spain
of the heinous nature of murder. Unlike most of
the chronicle plays, these plays employ allegorical
abstractions to drive home their morals. They simp-
ly apply the dogmatic spirit of the chronicle plays
to safer political areas.
The remaining plays on political topics tend to be rather incoherent and, on the whole, make no attempts to preach a philosophy or even to analyze precisely what has happened.

Only one of these plays, *Sir Thomas Wyatt* by Thomas Dekker and John Webster, attempts to treat the problem of sedition and civil war seriously. It presents a rather confused picture of various uprisings during the reign of Queen Mary. One of the play's most confusing features is its treatment of Arundel. With Suffolk, Northumberland (the father and father-in-law of Lady Jane Grey), and other noblemen, he is conspiring to put Jane Grey on the throne. His faction has persuaded the dying King Edward to appoint her as his heir, in spite of Henry's will and the Act of Parliament supporting that will. As head of the Council, Arundel commissions Suffolk and Northumberland to raise troops against Queen Mary. When the Treasurer, who supports Mary, is apprehended trying to escape from the Council, he expects to be either assassinated or tried for treason against Queen Jane. To his surprise, Arundel treats him with great kindness and readmits him to the Council. Whatever else Arundel may be, he is not the deep-dyed villain that the rebel so often is in Renaissance drama. At the Council meeting, Wyatt states Mary's claim to the
throne and wins over Arundel and most of the other
members.

If Dekker and Webster were primarily interested
in reaffirming the traditional Elizabethan view of
politics, they could have treated Arundel as a decent
human being who temporarily forgot his duties, but
who is now returning to morality and right reason.
But from this point on, the authors simply ignore
Arundel's relationship with his Queen and concentrate
on what appears to be his treachery to his former
allies. After his defeat, Northumberland pointedly
comments on the high mortality among his friends;
yesterday he had five hundred friends at court,
"... And now," he says, "I have not one, simply
not one" (II.ii.76). Before he surrenders to
Arundel, he points out that he is now being charged
with treason for carrying out the commission that
Arundel himself authorized. There is a certain
lameness in Arundel's response:

| It may be that it hath pleased her Majestie           |
| To pardon us, and for to punish you.                 |
| I know no other reason, this I must,                 |
| I am commaunded, and the act is Just.                |
| (II.ii.91-94)                                       |

At the end of this first insurrection, the play
concentrates not on the suffering that England
narrowly escaped or the happy return of order, but
on the grievances and dignified bearing of one of the rebels. With this emphasis Arundel, who appeared a generous and honorable man while he was in rebellion, now looks very much like a time-server when he returns to his duty.

Even more confusing is the treatment of Sir Thomas Wyatt. He at first appears to be the spokesman for the traditional principles of politics. During his speech to the Council, he argues for the legal and divinely sanctioned rights of Mary:

If others have ground from Justice, and the law,  
As well divine as politicke agreeing,  
They are for no cause to be disinherit.

(I.vi.69-71)

Henry's will, which guaranteed the inheritance of his children, was supported by an Act of Parliament. To resist these claims, he argues, is to commit treason and to endanger the commonwealth.

But as soon as Queen Mary announces her intentions of marrying Prince Philip of Spain, Wyatt leaves the court and raises an army to prevent the marriage. The play makes no obvious attempts to manipulate consistently the audience's responses to this decision. Mary is not presented sympathetically. She quite frankly breaks the oath she took at Framingham on the grounds that subjects cannot force the acts of sovereigns. In his soliloquy following
this scene, Wyatt emphasizes his complete about-face and offers justifications that might appeal to an English audience:

O who so forward Wyat as thy selfe,  
To raise this troublesome Queene in this her Throane?  
Philip is a Spaniard, a proud Nation,  
Whome naturally our Countrie men abhorre.  
Assist me gratious heavens, and you shall see  
What hate I beare unto their Slaverie.  
Ile into Kent, there muster up my friendes,  
To save this Countrie, and this Realme defend.  

(III.1.159-166)

Shortly afterwards, however, we find a passage that seems to parody Wyatt's anti-Spanish sentiments.

Captain Brett of the Queen's troops persuades a number of soldiers to mutiny and join Wyatt's forces. His speech is simply an absurd extension of Wyatt's argument: "No, a Dondego is a desperate Vilago, a very Castilian, God bless us. There came but one Dundego into England, and hee made all Paules stincke agen, what shall a whole army of Dondegoes doe my sweete Countrimen?" (IV.11.54-58). His peroration combines appeals to this sort of illiterate nationalism and more practical considerations:

Right, for he caries not the Englishmans yard about him, if you deale with him looke for hard measure: if you give an inch hee'le take an ell: if he give an ell, youle take an inch. Therefore my fine, spruce, dapper, finicall fel­lowes, if you are now, as you have alwaies bin, counted politque Londiners, to fly to the stronger side, leave Arundell, leave Norfolke,
and love Bret.  

(IV.11.64-69)

The authors do not seem to have made up their mind on where they stood on Wyatt's insurrection. Wyatt himself defends his position vigorously, but not very coherently:

Tis not the name of Traitor paules me,  
Nor pluckes my weapon from my hand.  
Use me how you can,  
Though you say Traitor, I am a Gentleman.  
Your dreadfull shaking me, which I defie,  
Is a poore losse of life, I wish to die,  
Death frights my spirit, no more then can my bed,  
Nor will I change one haire, loosing this head.  

(IV.iv.31-38)

In other words, he is not a traitor because he is a gentleman and will die bravely. Like the treatment of the last insurrection, this section emphasizes the courage of the rebel and ignores the broader significance of the rebellion itself.

The war scenes capture little but the confusion of the civil war. In one scene an ally of Wyatt deserts and takes his supporters to the other side. In the next scene Captain Brett persuades a group of loyalists to join the rebellion. When Wyatt attempts to enter the city of London, he is refused by Lord Pembroke. Pembroke's speech suggests that he has thought out his position and is acting in
response to firmly held convictions:

Avaunt thou Traitor, thinkes thou by forgerie
To enter London with rebellious armes?
Know that these gates are bard against thy entrance
And it shall cost the lives of twentie thousand
True subjects to the Queene before a Traytor enters.
(IV.iii.19-23)

But in the very next scene Pembroke is offended by some rumors and refuses to fight. Only after considerable cajoling and bullying does he finally agree to fight for the Queen, to whom he had just pledged "twentie thousand / True subjects."

Dekker and Webster have neglected every opportunity to support the traditional Elizabethan philosophy of government. In fact, the play does not seem to be built on any coherent political philosophy. Compared to the characters we encountered in the experimental plays, there is a fairly high percentage of men with personal honor and generosity. But if they are better men in private life, they are not much better citizens than most of the characters from the experimental plays. The play vividly captures the confusion and folly of social disruption, but does not indicate whether the fault lies primarily with the sovereign, the subjects, or the system itself.

The climax of the play is the pathetic deaths of Jane Grey and her husband Dudley. These young
people have been pushed into the struggle by their ambitious elders. Many of those who forced them to reluctantly occupy the throne have been pardoned, and some are now among the judges trying them for high treason. Jane Grey and her husband are of course found guilty, in spite of the attempt of each to take the entire blame. Throughout the play, Jane had tried to avoid the crown and expressed her strong conviction that happiness can be found only in a private life. For the first time during this period, chronicle material is employed not to celebrate the pattern of order that can save England, but simply to illustrate the fundamental injustices and folly of public life. Although the characters of this play are all drawn from the chronicles of English history, they are living in a world very much like the one we found in the experimental plays.

The three remaining plays, Jeronimo, Hoffman, and Lust's Dominion, are all set on the Continent and are almost all purely fictional.

Part One of Jeronimo seems to be rather carelessly put together. It was written to cash in on the popularity of the revived Spanish Tragedy. At the beginning of the play Jeronimo is appointed Marshall of Spain. At the end, the Ghost of his son Andrea appears demanding revenge on Balthazar; it ends at
the very point where the Spanish Tragedy begins. Written in approximately 1604, it poses as Part One of the Spanish Tragedy. It is not very successful either on its own terms or as the first half of the Spanish Tragedy. It deals with only one important public event, the war between Spain and Portugal. It is fought almost purely for honor; at stake is a token tribute that Spain does not particularly need and that Portugal objects to only on principle. But in this play principle is everything. As the King of Portugal sums up the issue, "... Hee is a base King that payes rent for his throne" (II.1.33). Andrea is sent to soothe the King of Portugal, but he is as intractable and hot-headed as the King. The result, of course, is a war between the two nations—a war that is portrayed almost exclusively in the geometrical single combats of the principals. If taken seriously this play would suggest a fairly cynical attitude toward wars and diplomacy. But one suspects that the play is not meant to reflect what the author considered to be the real state of the world; it is simply an attempt to compress as much melodrama as possible into the time at the author's disposal.

A brief plot summary would suggest that Chettle's Tragedy of Hoffman deals extensively with the kinds of problems raised by the chronicle play. Ferdinand,
Duke of Prussia, looks at his only son and predicts an unhappy future for his dukedom: "... A witless foole must needs be Prussia's heire" (line 290). To avert this problem, he disinherits his son and appoints another man, Hoffman, to succeed him. His son, in league with a clownish servant, stirs up an insurrection, which is easily put down. At this point, the successor has Ferdinand poisoned, assumes his title, and sets out to avenge his own private grievances. His villainy is unmasked by one of his servants, and he is tortured and killed by a group of the principal courtiers.

But in spite of the may perilous calamities Prussia suffers in this play, Chettle is only indirectly interested in its fate. Primarily he is interested in exploiting the sensational possibilities of the revenge tragedy. In the first scene Hoffman enters and announces his grand scheme of revenge; he plans to murder not only all the men who sentenced his father to death but almost anyone related to those men. The first two stage directions indicate the kind of mood Chettle is working for: "strikes ope a curtaine where appeares a body" and "thunder and lightning" (Sig. Bl²). Amid thunder and lightning, Hoffman pulls the inner curtain to reveal the skeleton of his executed father. After he tortures his
first victim on stage and murders him, he hangs the body beside his father's. As he exhibits this trophy, he comments directly on its theatrical possibilities:

Come image of bare death, joyne side to side,
With my long injur'd fathers naked bones;
He was the prologue to a Tragedy,
That if my destinies deny me not,
Shall passe those of Thyestes, Tereus Jocasta, or Duke Jasons jealous wife;
So shut our stage up, there is one act done
Ended in Otho's death; 'twas somewhat single;
Ile fill the other fuller.

(lines 397-405)

Hoffman, in effect, promises the audience even more spectacular murders, and this is primarily what the play is designed to provide. Duke Ferdinand is treated as a pawn in the complicated intrigues that follow, but never as the sacred head of a commonwealth. When Hoffman pursuades the virtuous Lodowick that Ferdinand intrigued against his brother's life, Lodowick simply plans to assassinate the Duke. No one suggests that such an act is immoral. In fact nothing in the play suggests that such an act might influence in any way the welfare of Prussia. When Hoffman himself becomes Duke, the audience's attention is drawn only to the fate of his specific victims, never to the commonwealth. When Hoffman, in his turn, is assassinated, none of the courtiers consider the problem of succession or anything related to the welfare of the state. The courtiers,
as virtuous revengers, forgive Hoffman and pray for his salvation. Hoffman, as the villainous revenger, forgives nobody and dies, cursing the people that he had not been able to kill.

As co-author of the two Robin Hood plays Chettle had had some experience with chronicle plays that concentrated on private plots. But neither of these plays ignored the significance of public acts. Both Robin's sylvan adventures and Mathilda's martyrdom were closely related to the over-all welfare of England. Neither play ended without clarifying the condition of the entire kingdom. But in Hoffman Chettle used his more or less fictional Prussia simply as the background for the private revenges of his protagonist. Whether or not Chettle was losing confidence in the traditional patterns of order, he was not in this play interested in either illustrating or testing them.

The final play of the group, Lust's Dominion, is also a revenge tragedy that concentrates on the fortunes of a villain-revenger. But in the process of depicting Eleazar's career, Lust's Dominion presents a rather disturbing picture of human society. When Hoffman enters the court of Prussia, he is like some sort of monster turned loose on a society of fairly decent human beings. In Lust's Dominion, however, the court of Spain is hopelessly corrupt. King
Ferdinand is too busy with his own lusts to pay much attention to governing his kingdom. After one misunderstanding, Prince Philip and Cardinal Mendoza leave court and rebel against the King. The Queen Mother, in love with Eleazar, is prepared to deny the legitimacy of her own son to further the ambitions of her lover. All in all, Eleazar succeeds simply because he is the most ruthless and most intelligent of the monsters in the Spanish court.

Although this play does not find an over-all pattern of order, it does make a few pertinent judgments. It suggests, for example, a close relationship between public and private morality. Early in the play Eleazar states that "Murder and lust are twins" (I.i). Most of the tragic events in this play are, in fact, the direct or indirect results of someone's lust. The play also illustrates quite vividly the advice that the dying King gives to his son Ferdinand:

Govern this kingdom well; to be a king
Is given to many, but to govern well
Granted to few.

(I.iii)

He apparently does not feel that monarchy requires only ordinary good will upon the part of kings and is convinced that the good king is the exception rather than the rule.
Although the play depicts many serious social evils, it does not really attempt to suggest any remedy. And it certainly does not explore that sacred relationship between sovereign and commonwealth that is so important in the chronicle play. When Eleazar assassinates King Ferdinand and assumes the throne, this event is treated primarily as one further step in his career. Once Eleazar is king, the play concentrates, not on what he did to the commonwealth, but on the spectacular tortures he devised for his personal enemies. When he is finally killed, it is not through any realignment in Spanish politics, but through the private intrigues of Eleazar's victims and one of his dissatisfied accomplices. At the end of the play, each of the major characters announces his intention of reforming his private life. As one of the many events that tie up the loose ends of the plot, Prince Philip assumes the throne. Except for one tangential judgment, his final speech does not suggest that he has found the secret of ruling well or what effect his rule will have on the commonwealth at large:

And now, Hortenzo, to close up your wound,  
I here contract my sister unto thee,  
With comic joy to end a tragedy.  
And, for the barbarous Moor and his black train,  
Let all the Moors be banished from Spain.  
(V.vi)
Lust's Dominion has portrayed a good deal of social evil, but only as the setting for a good story of murder and intrigue. It has no particular political philosophy to illustrate; appropriately enough, it ends, not by restoring order to the commonwealth, but by rewarding two of its virtuous characters and disposing of the possible allies of the villain. Like a number of adult company plays of this period, Lust's Dominion deals with very serious social problems, but has no clear, generally applicable solutions.

It is difficult to categorize neatly the entire drift of political thought manifested in the plays produced by adult companies during this period.

The chronicle plays written before 1600 seem to embody the optimistic political philosophy that Hargrave defines as part of the popular tradition. The authors of these plays went to English history for examples that would support the virtue and practicality of the Tudor approach to government. This faith in the Tudor system was based on two optimistic assumptions; first, that the majority of people from all classes (sovereign, noblemen, and commons) are reasonably virtuous and, second, that the English monarchy is capable of uniting the men of good will and of either neutralizing or destroying the disruptive forces of evil men. We noticed how the facts
of history presented occasional difficulties and how the playwrights tended to adjust the facts to fit the desired moral. Apparently confident of their theoretical ground, they found in the chronicle play a perfectly natural form for telling a diverting story and reminding their audiences of important moral and political truths.

It is harder to classify the other political plays written for adult companies during this period. They no longer expressed the same philosophy of government, but they were not simply attempts to imitate the experimental playwrights or to adopt the "coterie tradition." Two other didactic plays, A Larum for London and A Warning for Fair Women, were written while the chronicle play was still popular. They no longer dealt with the central issues of politics, but were organized to illustrate important but perhaps less controversial generalizations: the cruelty of Spain and the sacredness of human life. With their heavy reliance on abstractions and explicit morals, they tended to be even more self-consciously didactic than the average chronicle play.

The three chronicle plays written late in this period even more clearly illustrate the tensions of this transition period. When You See Me and If You Know Not Me are attempts to celebrate the best tradi-
tions of English government. But we have already noticed how the authors of these two plays tended to dodge the central issue. They avoided the real crises of the periods they depicted and concentrated on the personality of the monarch, but not on the general character of monarchy. They simply turned to history to celebrate the past nostalgically, not to find examples and lessons for the present. In Sir Thomas Wyatt Dekker and Webster were rather confused about the significance of the rebellions they depicted, but they quite vividly portrayed the character of the rebels and clearly illustrated the difficulty of arriving at real justice for each subject. In these later chronicle plays we find the traditional optimism about human nature; Sir Thomas Wyatt, in fact, is confused partly because of the emphasis it gives to the personal merits of the rebels. But these plays are very much like the experimental plays in one important respect: they tend to pass over the problems of society at large and concentrate primarily on the personality and fate of individual characters.

Although less prone than the children's companies to experiment for its own sake, the adult companies were willing to move further from their traditional approaches to politics. When Jonson temporarily left the children's companies, the King's Men
purchased and performed his controversial *Sejanus*. The King's Men also got hold of the script and performed *The Malcontent*, originally written for the Children of the Queen's Revels.

The revival of the revenge tragedy is also significant. Cutting themselves free from English history and setting their plays in a loosely historical Prussia or Spain, the playwrights found it easier to pass over the fate of the commonwealth and to simply exploit the sensational possibilities of intrigue, rebellion, murder, and regicide.

In spite of the general trends, then, neither adult nor children's companies appear to have followed clear-cut traditions in this period. The authors writing for children's companies did not develop an approach consistent enough to be called a tradition. The adult companies were willing to perform some of the innovating plays and did a certain amount of experimenting themselves. After they abandoned the chronicle play and its political philosophy, they too were groping for new themes and forms. During this period of transition, various kinds of experiments were undertaken, not only by self-conscious innovators but also by less ambitious craftsmen simply trying to write acceptable plays. Some authors ignored the new doubts by recalling the glories of
popular monarchs; others simply exploited the worst doubts about human nature and created theatrically effective presentations of extraordinary evil and suffering; still others turned to psychological and ethical considerations of the individual man fated to live in an essentially evil world. By 1604 two important questions had not yet received definitive answers. What are the basic truths about human society? And how should plays reflect those truths? In Chapter IV, we will see how Shakespeare approached these questions.
NOTES

1
As I indicated in the last chapter, data on these plays are derived primarily from Alfred Harbage, Annals of English Drama, rev. S. Schoenbaum (London, 1964), pp. 64-89 and E. K. Chambers, Elizabethan Stage, corrected ed., repr. (Oxford, 1965), Vols. III and IV. I have given the date assigned by Harbage. Where there is no general agreement on date, I have included in parentheses the widest range of generally accepted dates.

2

3
Throughout this dissertation all quotations from plays are taken from the editions listed in the Bibliography. Except for normalized u and v, i and ï, and long ñ, spelling is not modernized.

4
In the Annals (p. 71) Harbage quite appropriately classifies it as a comedy. In The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (p. 258), Ribner claims that it is not really a history play. But in the small space that the play allots to politics, it raises some important issues and illustrates characteristic attitudes.

5
The playwrights either did not understand or did not wish to go into what was fairly typical dynastic policy among the Normans. As it turned out, of course, Henry II had good reason to regret the coronation of his oldest son, and when young Henry died, refused to have a new successor elected and crowned. At any rate, the playwright saw fit to use the incident to analyze the basic problem of the chronicle play, English unity.

6
A number of characters in both parts of this play have more than one name. One character, for example, is
called Salisbury, Oxford, and de Vere. Huntington becomes Robin Hood in Sherwood. In general, his betrothed is called Mathilda, except in Sherwood, where she is called Marian. Since she is Mathilda after the opening Sherwood scene in Part 2, I will refer to her by this name.

7 For what evidence there is of Marston's pre-1599 dramatic career, see Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, III, 428.

8 Although the date is still debated, 1604 is most generally accepted today. For a recent summary see the discussion of M. L. Wine in his edition of Marston's *The Malcontent*, Regents Renaissance Drama (Lincoln, 1964), pp. xiv-xvi.


13 See Laurence Michel's preface to *Philotas*, pp. 36-66.

14 See *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York, 1952).

15 *Rival Traditions*. 
CHAPTER III
THE PROBLEMS OF PRIVATE LIFE IN ENGLISH DRAMA: 1597-1604

Dominant Genres

An author writing a play that deals with civil war, rebellion, or other actions that involve the welfare of an entire nation cannot easily avoid committing himself on important issues. As we saw in the last chapter, the very absence of a coherent philosophy leads to its own kind of judgments. But an author writing on the private affairs of men can, if he chooses, tell a diverting and exciting story without committing himself to any particular philosophy of life. He can, for example, portray a complicated courtship without making general assertions about matrimony or the rights and duties of parents. Around the turn of the sixteenth century, two popular genres, bourgeois comedy and romantic comedy, were devoted almost exclusively to this sort of harmless entertainment. At this time there were experiments in a new form that came to be called comedy of humours. Although it soon died out as a distinct genre, it introduced certain types of ethical, social, and psychological analysis into the treatment of private life and had a profound influence on the drama that fol-
Before looking at the over-all practice of each repertoire in this period, we ought to look at the two genres that were most popular during the early years of this period and the first conscious set of experiments in the treatment of private life.

Heywood's *Fair Maid of the Exchange* is typical of the bourgeois comedy of this period. In the major plot, three brothers are courting the same girl; she is in love with a fourth man. The hero, Frank Golding, is the youngest of the three brothers. Through disguise and a complicated series of intrigues, he outsmarts his brothers, the girl's parents, and the girl herself. Heywood raised no controversial issues in this play; he was not even interested in the position of the girl tricked into marrying a man she does not love. He was not trying to make the audience think seriously about love and marriage; he simply wanted to amuse them with the adventures of an audacious and clever young man who won the woman he loved. The quarto title page catches what Heywood and many of his contemporaries were working for in comedy; it promises the reader a play that is "very delectable, and full of mirth" (p. 1).

Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday* is set among the English middle classes and concentrates primarily on the fate of lovers: the crippled veteran who finds his lost bride and the young couple who finally marry in spite of the objections of parent and guardian. Two other extant bourgeois
comedies (Two Angry Women of Abington and Englishmen for My Money) are devoted mainly to getting the right young people married to each other. In all of these plays, the plot exists for its own sake, not to direct attention to problems or didactic messages.

The romantic comedies from this period tend to be equally escapist. The Trial of Chivalry and The Merry Devil of Edmonton simply provide more exotic environments in which lovers can find each other. Another popular theme for romantic comedies is the adventurous wanderings of exiled noblemen. In The Weakest Goeth to the Wall, Lodowick, Duke of Bulloigne, is driven into exile by the Duke of Anjou. He and his family are befriended by Barnaby Bunch, an English tailor, who generously helps them out of tight places. Bulloigne learns to live by his wits and ekes out a meagre living as a church sexton. Toward the end of the play, France is invaded by Spanish forces, and Anjou fails to resist them. Bulloigne naturally leads an army to victory. At this point the French king returns from a pilgrimage just in time to punish the wicked Anjou and restore Bulloigne to his rightful place. To crown Bulloigne's happiness, the young hero, Ferdinand, turns out to be his long-lost son. In The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green, Momford is dispossessed by his brother. He undergoes many adventures disguised as a blind beggar. King Henry VI appears at the end of the play and restores
Momford to his position. In Heywood's *Four Prentices of London*, the Duke of Bulloigne is unjustly banished. His four sons become apprentices to London crafts. They join the Crusades, fight lustily for the honor of their crafts, and win great renown. At the end of the play, each is rewarded with a kingdom from the territory he helped to conquer. With this kind of plot Heywood was able to combine the excitement of chivalric themes with appeals to London patriotism.

In many of the bourgeois and romantic comedies, then, playwrights were aiming primarily at amusement rather than instruction. Characters exist not so much to illustrate ideas as to perform exciting or funny actions. In *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, the bourgeois father of Rose and the noble uncle of Lacey object to their children marrying outside their class. But Dekker is not really interested in exploring their objections. The viewers know perfectly well that Rose and Lacey will be married by Act V; they are interested in how the young people will outsmart the old people.

Playwrights do not appear to have approached the writing of these comedies as they did the chronicle histories, whose plots were not only amusing, but were also useful in illustrating important truths about national life. In these comedies the major goal was mirth and innocent diversion, not serious moral lessons. But in depicting
the adventures of his heroes and heroines, an author had to put them in some kind of human society. It is hard to say whether these fictional societies reflect the author's assumptions about the way things really are, his conception of how things should be in a comedy, or some combination of the two. In any case, the authors of these plays tended to offer their audiences a reassuring and optimistic picture of society.

First of all, these plays posit a harmonious social structure, in which most men can find an honorable and satisfactory place. In Four Prentices of London, for example, the noble sons of Bulloigne are just as proud of their craft guilds as of their knighthoods. Quite typical is Dekker's treatment of marriage across class lines in The Shoemakers' Holiday. In the first scene the Lord Mayor of London and the Earl of Lincoln plan how to prevent this marriage. The Earl politely disparages his nephew's character, but his real objections reside in class considerations. The Lord Mayor is equally polite, but he feels that his daughter is too good to marry an irresponsible aristocrat. This pride of class is made more explicit in the character of Simon Eyre, the mad-cap but financially shrewd shoemaker. For him shoemaking is a "gentle craft" because membership automatically confers nobility of character--"... prince am I none, yet am I noblie borne, as being the sole sonne of a Shoomaker..." (II.iii.42-43). It
is a world in which nobleman and citizen can meet one another, each proud of his own status and just a bit patronizing toward the other. But whatever snobbery exists here is based on self-satisfaction, not on divisive emulation or resentment. And as Henry V asserts at the end of the play, it is individual merit that is the really important thing:

Dost thou not know, that love respects no blood?
Cares not for difference of birth, or state,
The maid is young, well borne, fair, virtuous,
A worthy bride for any gentleman.

(V.v.103-106)

Compared to plays that we will consider later in the chapter, there are very few villains in these plays, and they exist primarily to further the plot, not to provide an analysis of serious social evils. The father in Englishmen for My Money, for example, is a miser and a usurer. He delivers a couple of gold-worshipping soliloquies—almost de rigueur for the stage miser; but otherwise little is made of either the origin or social effects of his vice. His greed is important because it leads him to favor four grotesque foreigners, instead of the agreeable English gentlemen that his daughters love. In The Weakest Goeth To the Wall Anjou begins a civil war. He reappears occasionally to deliver a Machiavellian speech, but the author is not interested in the social evils Anjou created. The author devotes just enough space to the Spanish inva-
sion to establish the importance of Bulloigne's victory. This invasion is not treated as a national crisis, but simply as an occasion to restore Bulloigne to his inheritance. The bourgeois and romantic comedies concentrate on virtues and amiable eccentricities. For the most part, really immoral characters appear only when the plot requires a villain.

These plays tend to treat sex and marriage with the same sort of reassuring optimism. Bellmira of The Trial of Chivalry and Rose of The Shoemakers' Holiday are treated as unassailable paragons of chastity. Englishmen for My Money and Two Angry Women of Abington are based on somewhat more realistic premises. Each warns of the danger of expecting a girl to remain a virgin forever or to remain faithful to a husband she despises. But both are based on the assumption that a normal English girl will remain chaste if she is married at a reasonable age to a man that she can love. If not blocked by greedy or snobbish parents, young people have every opportunity of contracting honorable and happy marriages.

Most of these plays concentrate on courtships rather than marriages; when they do portray a marriage it is not to introduce the theme of adultery. Patient Grissil faithfully follows the Griselda legend and illustrates the patience of the ideal wife. In The Shoemakers' Holiday, Jane completely forgets her wealthy
suitor as soon as she learns that her shoemaker husband is still alive. In *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* Bulloigne's wife resists all temptations, even when she is no longer certain that her husband is still alive. As we shall see, cuckoldry is a common theme in many plays of this period. But the bourgeois and romantic comedies concentrate on the spring-time world of love and courtship; on the occasions when they do deal with marriages, it is not to introduce the cuckoo's unpleasant song.

It is clear, then, that a large number of plays written in this period were offered primarily as innocent diversion. Their lovers and adventurers lived in an appropriately reassuring world of self-reliant and patriotic citizens, generous aristocrats, chaste girls, and faithful wives. These plays were not offered as either analyses of serious problems or as uncompromising pictures of the world as it really is.

Chapman was the first to experiment with a form of drama that could exploit current interest in "humours," or human eccentricities. In 1597 he wrote a play called *An Humourous Day's Mirth*. To manage the action, he created a character who is motivated almost exclusively by a connoisseur's delight in human vagaries. At the beginning of the play, Lemot describes his major function: "Thus will I sit, as it were, and point out all my humourous companions" (11.20-21). The play is crowded
with eccentrics. There is the elderly Count Labervele, who has married the young Florella and courts her as if she were a Petrarchian goddess. Under the hypocritical guise of Puritanism, she rejects his attentions and hides her own desires to taste forbidden pleasures. There is the wealthy, simple-minded Labeesha, who is courting Martia. He has the father's approval, but not the young lady's. There is the young Count Moren, who is totally dominated by his elderly and jealous wife. There is the King of France, who is more interested in amusing himself than in governing. He is currently trying to seduce Martia. And finally there is a series of young gentlemen who betray various eccentricities, but who do not fit into any of the major plots.

Lemot undertakes a series of intrigues specifically designed to bring out in the sharpest possible detail the humour of each of these characters. Persuading Florella that a virtue is real only after it has been tested, he succeeds in making an assignation. He brings a group of people to eavesdrop on the melancholy soliloquy of the deranged Dowsecer. He next invites his friends to dinner at the ordinary of Verone. There he arranges for the King and Count Moren to dine together with Martia and another woman. He finds a place for Florella. To complete the day's mirth, he brings the Queen, the Countess Moren, and the Count Labervele to discover their spouses in
compromising situations. At the climax, most of the characters remain true to their humours. The Puritan Florella, for example, takes a very high moral line (e.g., "Cursed be he that maketh debate 'twixt man and wife!"—xiv.178-179), and her doting husband promises never to suspect her again. Count Moren tries to disguise himself as a candle-bearer, but he is trembling too violently to maintain the deception. The company finally calms the Countess, but it is clear that the Count will never stand up to his wife's irrational jealousies. Only one character manages to purge himself of his humour; as soon as Dowsecer falls in love with Martia, he gives up his excessive melancholy.

An Humourous Day's Mirth does not devote much space to teaching moral lessons or to exploring serious social problems. It concentrates on follies, rather than vices, and however uncomfortable characters may make themselves, there is no hint that they will seriously disrupt social order. Like the romantic and bourgeois comedies, this play is primarily designed as diversion. The audience is invited to share Lemot's tolerant delight in human eccentricities. The play ends on a note of universal forgiveness and understanding as each character is given a gift and posy appropriate to his humour. Each character is thus allowed to laugh at the follies of the others and invited to acquiesce gracefully when they laugh at his own. In the
last lines of the play, the King asserts that the day
was "spent with unhurtful motives of delight" (xiv.363),
and he proposes an appropriate celebration:

> And here I solemnly invite you all
> Home to my court, where with feasts we will crown
> This mirthful day, and vow it to renown.
> (xiv.367-369)

But since Chapman is primarily interested in exposing
human eccentricities, his play makes fundamentally important
changes in the treatment of plot and character. In romantic
and bourgeois comedies, the plot is central and characters
exist to perform exciting and diverting actions. But in
this first comedy of humours, character is central, and
the actions of the plot exist to reveal the full nature
of the various characters. By traditional standards of
comedy, the plot of this play is developed rather slowly.
Once Chapman has gotten the proper people on stage together,
he concentrates on dialogue that will play off one humour
against another. In several lengthy passages Lemot
deliberately draws out the humours of his eccentrics.
On one occasion he repeatedly insults Labeesha simply to
demonstrate how much this gull will put up with. On
another occasion he throws out conversational clichés,
after predicting quite accurately what cliché will follow
from his own. Chapman is willing to devote a great deal
of space to fashionable conversations about clothes, gam-
bling, money, and the like. He tends to hurry over mat-
ters that would be highly important in traditional comedies. Dowsecer, for example, recovers his wits, falls in love with Martia, and marries her in spite of her father's preference for another suitor. Chapman devotes less than twenty-five lines to all of this. In ten lines (vii.207-216) Dowsecer announces his love for Martia and exits. He returns only toward the end of the play. It requires only twelve lines (xiv.94-105) for Dowsecer to explain that his love for Martia has restored his mental equilibrium and for the King to persuade Martia's father to consent to the marriage.

Chapman is primarily interested in plot situations that lead to analysis. Thus the random conversations are just as important as the courtships and the marriages that make up the major plots. The treatment of the Laberelvele marriage, for example, concentrates on exposition, not development. At the end of the play, the marriage has not changed at all, but the audience has learned more about the absurd devotion and credulity of Count Labervele and about the devious hypocrisies of his wife. The action and vitality of this play result not so much from what the characters do as from what they reveal about themselves.

A year later, in 1598, Ben Jonson wrote a comedy of humours, *Every Man in His Humour*, for the Chamberlain's Men. In this play there are two different kinds of humourous characters. There are, first of all, men who know
themselves and their place in society fairly well, but who have let one particular passion give a special bias to their character. Young Lorenzo and Prospero are well-bred gentlemen, each of whom will grow up to be a credit to his family. At the moment, however, they are indulging in the impudence and adventurousness appropriate to youth. The merchant Thorello is a sensible man in everything but his irrational jealousy of his young wife. The mad-cap judge, Doctor Clement, frequently lets his love of a good joke interfere with the strict letter of the law, but he shows a solid, common-sense understanding of justice and equity. Except for his inability to suffer fools patiently, the choleric Giuliano is a fairly normal human being. But there are also a group of gulls whose humours involve deception of self and others. Stephano, for example, is a country bumpkin who has just come into money. He now wants to become a London gallant. He wishes to hunt, smoke, swear, and do everything else that the gentlemen do. As models he naturally selects two other upstarts, Matheo and Bobadilla. Matheo, the son of "an honest man, a good fishmonger" (II.iii.59-60), is also posing as a gentleman and a fashionable poet. Bobadilla's claim to consideration derives from his valor as a soldier; it goes without saying that this braggart exposes his cowardice before the end of the play. The humours of these characters involve not only a bias in personality but also a claim to unearned
rank and merit.

Jonson develops the plot much as Chapman did in *An Humorous Day's Mirth*. Young Lorenzo and Prospero share Lemot's intellectual delight in eccentrics. They collect odd people, deliberately introduce them to each other, and settle back to enjoy the show. After talking to Stephano for a few minutes, Young Lorenzo recognizes another interesting specimen—"Nay then, Ile furnish our feast with one Gull more toward a messe" (I.11.66-68). The "feast," of course, is a great success, and the play devotes a great deal of time to the absurd posturings of Stephano, Matheo, and Bobadilla. For most of the play Jonson, like Chapman, concentrates on scenes that bring out eccentricities: Thorello torn by the normal demands of business and his desire to guard his wife at all times, Matheo reciting sections of *Hero and Leander* as his own, or Bobadilla explaining that he was bewitched when he allowed himself to be beaten. Toward the end of the play, a series of intrigues, largely instigated by the servant Musco, begin to take effect, and the tempo of the plot speeds up. Thorello and his wife meet at what they assume is a brothel and accuse each other of infidelity. Old Lorenzo has arrived expecting to catch his son misbehaving and is, himself, accused of lechery. In the last scene all the characters appear before Justice Clement, who straightens out the various deceptions, sentences Matheo and Bobadilla.
to public humiliation, and counsels the other characters to be merry, curb their humours as much as possible, and be reconciled with one another. Like the King in *An Humorous Day's Mirth* he closes the play by proposing a feast. At this feast, Musco is to preside as a sort of Lord of Misrule: 

"... this night you shall be all my guestes; where weele enjoy the very spirite of mirth, and carouse to the health of this Heroick spirite [Musco], whom to honor the more I do invest in my owne robes..." (V.v. 442-445).

Although Jonson includes a few passages explaining the correct relation between emotion and reason, he concentrates on entertainment, most of which derives from the detailed analysis of character. In his next three plays, *Every Man out of His Humour*, *Cynthia's Revels*, and *The Poetaster*, Jonson experimented with forms that could apply this kind of psychological analysis to more serious ethical ends.

It is clear that Jonson was fully aware of creating radically new forms. He invented a special name for this type of play, comical satire. To help the viewer, or reader, or both, understand what he was trying to do, he fashioned an elaborate frame for the first play, *Every Man out of His Humour*. In this frame two enlightened viewers discuss the play with Asper, the man who has written the play and who will take the part of Macilente,
the envious satirist. The two viewers, Mitis and Cordatus, remain on stage and comment on the play as it progresses. Mitis is the straight man who raises objections; Cordatus, who has seen the play before, clarifies the author's intentions and squares the plot and characterizations with critical theory.

The subject matter itself is roughly similar to that of *Every Man in His Humour*. There is only one example of socially destructive vice. The yeoman, Sordido, is hiding all of his corn and looking forward to the famine that his almanac predicts. So enormous and irrational is his greed that he hangs himself at the first signs of a good harvest. But except for this monstrous character, Jonson deals with follies rather than vices. Many of these characters would fit neatly into his first comedy of humours: Fastidius Briske, the courtier who goes deeply into debt in order to maintain appearances; Sogliardo, the wealthy bumpkin who wants to be a gentleman; Deliro, the wealthy merchant who dotes on his scornful wife; Fungoso, the young man who is always just one suit behind the fashion.

In *Everyman out of His Humour*, however, Jonson treats these characters in a radically different manner. Every element of this play is directed exclusively to didactic ends: to expose psychological traits and to clarify the full social and ethical significance of these traits. There is no longer room for tolerant connoisseurs of ec-
centricities. In this play the burden of satiric comment is carried by the railing Carlo Buffone and the bitter Macilente. These two characters are strongly motivated to search out every conceivable self-deception and folly. To make sure that the audience understands the ethical issues correctly, Jonson is also careful to clarify the exact moral position of the satiric commentators. Carlo Buffone takes a savage delight in ridiculing others and has no claim to the audience's sympathy. Macilente is an intelligent scholar, who sees most of the honors and goods of the world going to undeserving men. He is a fundamentally decent person, but his view is seriously distorted by his envy. Like everyone in the play, he has a humour that he must purge.

The entire plot of Every Man out of His Humour is centered on the humours of various characters. Until the last scenes of Act III, very little action takes place. In each scene, several characters exhibit their humours, usually in conversation, Buffone and Macilente comment on these humours, and Cordatus and Mitis criticize the meaning and effectiveness of the scene. Toward the end of Act III, each of the characters is forced, in one way or another, to reject his humour. After hanging himself, Sordido is cut down alive by a peasant. As soon as they recognize him, a group of characters begin to curse him and the man who saved his life. Realizing for the first
time how bitterly he is hated, Sordido repents of his avarice and vows to devote his wealth to charity. At this point, Mitis sees where the play is going and expresses what Jonson no doubt hoped was the suspense now gripping his audience: "... but I wonder, what engine hee will use to bring the rest out of their humours!" (Ill.viii.95-96). We are now, Cordatus assures him, at the "Epitasis, or busie part of our subject" (Ill.viii.102); the remainder of the play will show one character after another brought out of his humour. Some of them make what amounts to a formal act of contrition and resolve to change their characters. Fungoso, who has gone hopelessly in debt trying to keep up with Briske's rapidly changing wardrobe, formally abjures the world of fashion. When Deliro finds his wife kissing another man, he loses all his illusions about her. We do not find out precisely what he plans to do next, but it is clear that he will no longer let her dictate to him. Macilente loses all sense of envy—in one version, when he looks upon the perfection of Queen Elizabeth; in the other version, when he sees all of the characters out of their humours. Other characters, however, give up their humours only because it has become physically impossible to continue indulging in them. Buffone, for example, stops railing temporarily because Puntarvole has beaten him and sealed his lips with candle wax. Fastidius
Briske gives up the life of a courtier simply because he will be spending the next few years in debtors' prison.

By concentrating exclusively in Every Man out of His Humour on didactic purposes, Jonson ends up with a play that is extremely slow by the conventional standards of comedy. Until he is ready to have his many characters renounce their humours, he can do little with them but place them on stage together and let their dialogue play off each other's eccentricities. In the dialogues of Mitis and Cordatus, Jonson occasionally refers to his plot difficulties. Cordatus, for example, justifies an early exit by Macilente on these grounds: "... he [the author] had continued the Scene too long with him as't was, being in no more action" (I.iii.154-155). Later, Mitis and Cordatus get to the heart of the conflict between entertainment and instruction:

Mit. Me thinkes, CORDATUS, he dwelt somewhat too long on this Scene; it hung i' the hand.
Cor. I see not where he could have insisted lesse, and t'have made the humours perspicuous enough.
Mit. True, as his subject lies; but hee might have altered the shape of his argument, and explicated 'hem better in single Scenes.

(II.iii.288-294)

Jonson apparently decided to anticipate this kind of criticism from the audience. At the end of the play, Macilente reverts to his role of the author "Asper," walks over to Mitis and Cordatus, and asks, "Gentlemen, how like you it? has't not beene tedious?" (V.xi.66). All of this elaborate
critical machinery shows that Jonson realized that he was experimenting radically and that he had not solved all of his problems.

In 1599 Jonson temporarily abandoned his association with the Chamberlain's Men and wrote his next two comedies, *Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster* for the Children of the Chapel. In *Cynthia's Revels* he was still working with the genre he called comical satire. He introduced a few important changes, apparently to sharpen the analysis of character traits and to clarify more fully the ethical standards by which these traits are to be judged. He has, first of all, narrowed the range of topics. In *Every Man out of His Humour*, he included several social levels and treated various kinds of folly. In *Cynthia's Revels* he deals only with the follies associated with courtiers. In the earlier play, his satiric commentators were themselves in the grip of passions, and the audience had to take this fact into account while evaluating their comments on other characters. In the later play, the major satiric commentator is quite different. He is, as Mercury describes him, "A creature of a most perfect and divine temper. One, in whom the humours and elements are peaceably met, without emulation of precedencie. . . . He doth neyther covet, nor feare; hee hath too much reason to doe eyther: and that commends all things to him" (II.iii.123-145). The audience can take his comments as the ethical norm of the play. And
finally Jonson has worked out a more emphatic technique for bringing his characters out of their humours. We have already noticed that in *Every Man out of His Humour* some characters merely bowed to necessity without really changing internally. In this play, set in Cynthia's court in Gargaphie, Jonson introduces a number of masque-like and allegorical elements. In the last act there occurs a masque in which each of the fools appears disguised as the virtue opposite his dominant trait. At the end Cynthia unmasks each and discovers his real character. After this literal unmasking, each person is prepared to admit the truth about himself and set about to improve himself. To underline this theme of self-recognition and repentance, Jonson has each of these characters recite a formal palinode. Through these changes Jonson sharpens the didactic expression of his major theme.

But except for dropping the cumbersome machinery in which viewers discuss the play, he has not tightened or speeded up the plot. Until the final masque, the major characters have done nothing but expose a series of absurdities—again almost completely through dialogue. Although much of this dialogue is witty and inventive, the repetitive structure seriously risks monotony.

In *The Poetaster*, the last of this series of comical satires, Jonson retains much of the same form and content. Part of the plot concentrates on Demetrius and Crispinus,
who are partly burlesques of Dekker and Marston and partly
generic types of the bad poet. Among their friends and
admirers are the usual humorous characters: the bragging,
cowardly soldier; the citizen's wife who longs to go to
court; her doting elderly husband; and the like. In most
of their scenes, these characters reveal how seriously
they misunderstand the nature and purpose of poetry. As
in the other comical satires, this exposition is handled
almost exclusively in dialogue. After a mock trial, each
is given an allegorical punishment appropriate to his
faults. The bragging soldier is publicly humiliated.
Demetrius frankly admits that he writes only to eke out
a living and that he attacked Horace only out of envy;
he is pardoned after his public confession. Crispinus
had made more exalted claims to poetic achievement. He
is given a purge and vomits up his obscure vocabulary—
naturally words employed by Marston, e.g. "glibbery—lubri-
call—defunct" (V.iii.472).

In exposing the follies of his humorous characters,
Jonson has used the same static plot development. In
this play he devotes much more space to the positive
eamples of virtuous people. This exposition tends to
be equally static. Horace simply defends his own integrity
and explains what finally drove him to satire. Virgil ap-
ppears only in the last act. He is the ideal poet standing
aloof from all the squabbles of literary feuds. He is
appointed to judge between the good and bad poets.

In treating Ovid, however, Jonson almost completely abandons the techniques of comical satire. Ovid, clearly a great poet and just as clearly an immoral man, raises some very complicated questions. Jonson explores these questions by presenting, in the traditional narrative manner, certain important events in Ovid's life: his resolution to abandon the study of law, the blasphemous orgy that leads to his banishment, his farewell to Julia, and the like. Jonson seems simply to let the facts speak for themselves. It is clear that Ovid, like Horace, is the victim of envious gossip. It is also clear that his flagrant immorality is a serious scandal. Jonson seems to give about equal weight to Augustus' defense of justice and Horace's appeals for mercy. In this section of the play, Jonson does not have the firm moral certitude that is necessary for satiric treatment; he simply presents the historical facts without trying to fit them into the form of comical satire.

We do not know how satisfied Jonson was with his final achievement in this genre. He was aware of how much animosity these plays were causing in some circles. He may have felt that pure satire was a dead end for drama. At any rate, he abandoned the genre after The Poetaster. He turned next to the classical tragedy, Sejanus, and then spent two years on masques and royal
entertainments. When he returned to comedy with *Eastward Ho!* and *Volpone*, he was still interested in didactic content, but he had found much more satisfactory ways of dealing with plot.

We have looked at five experimental plays which were created to analyze in detail the humours of various characters. They do not constitute a sharp, final break with the popular traditions of comedy among the adult companies. First of all, they split about evenly between adult and children's companies: three (*An Humorous Day's Mirth, Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man out of His Humour*) were performed by adult companies; two (*Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster*), by a children's company. These plays offer a reasonably optimistic picture of life. Except for Sordido in *Every Man out of His Humour*, none of the characters are guilty of enormous vices or of follies that seriously disrupt social order. And in dealing with follies, Chapman and Jonson seem fairly sure of their ground intellectually. The humourous characters are presented in such a way that they do not challenge the convictions of either author or viewer. As the authors parade their eccentrics across the stage, they keep before the audience the ethical and intellectual norms by which these characters are to be judged.

But by their very nature these plays challenged some customary practices of comedy. Since the traditional comedy concentrated on plot, it tended to deal with
problems that could be solved by external action: two lovers who are prevented from marrying, a married couple who are separated, a man who is unjustly deprived of his property, or the like. The play comes to its natural end when, after a series of complications, the lovers marry, the couple is reunited, or the man is restored to his inheritance. But since Chapman and Jonson selected relatively static plot situations that served primarily as the basis for psychological analysis, they could posit problems for which there was no solution. And so we find marriages which are threatened, not by some external difficulty, but by incompatible ages or the absence of affection. At the end of An Humorous Day's Mirth, Florilla has not yet betrayed her elderly husband, but she has every intention of doing so at the first opportunity. At the end of Every Man out of His Humour Jonson does not even bother to explain whether Deliro plans to take his wife back or whether, if he does, she will be faithful to him. Once a playwright decides that he does not have to tie everything together at the end, he is able to raise a number of problems previously inappropriate to comedy.

And since these plays were structured to analyze a theme, they could suggest new possibilities for comedy. After writing one essentially playful comedy of humours, Jonson wrote three radically experimental plays in which he worked for a satisfactory method of dealing exclusively
with psychological and ethical analysis. These three plays clearly showed the danger of static plot development inherent in this kind of analysis. As we shall see, playwrights of the period did not try to imitate them directly by writing their own versions of pure comedy of humours or comical satires. But Chapman and Jonson had broached new topics and suggested formal innovations for those who felt that comedy should deal seriously with the real problems of private life.

We have so far looked at two dominant approaches. We examined several plays from the adult company repertoires in order to understand the general nature of the closely related genres of bourgeois comedy and romantic comedy. We looked at five plays drawn from both repertoires in order to understand the newly fashionable comedy of humours. In the rest of the chapter we will look separately at the overall repertoire of children's companies and of adult companies in order to see how each group employed the dominant genres, what modifications they made, and what new genres they began to experiment with.

**Repertoires of the Children's Companies**

When playwrights began producing comedies for the newly formed children's companies, they had two important models to rely upon. There was, first of all, the tradi-
tion embodied in the romantic comedies. This sort of play concentrated on people striving for some goal, most often marriage for true love. It tended to posit this goal as unquestionably good and to concentrate on certain external obstacles. As a result this sort of play was designed to present an entertaining and exciting picture of people in action, not to analyze the real character of these people or the nature and value of their goals. As we have seen, the comedy of humours virtually reversed these priorities. It tended to neglect action and to concentrate on analyzing characters and their goals.

As we look at all the extant children's company plays from 1599 to 1604, no consistent pattern seems to predominate. We find various uses of the two dominant genres and a few experiments in completely new genres.

Two children's company plays are perfect examples of romantic comedy. The Maid's Metamorphosis (1600) and Wily Beguiled (ca. 1602) concentrate exclusively on external obstacles to true love and show no influence of the comedy of humours. The Maid's Metamorphosis portrays the wanderings of Eurymine through an enchanted forest. Part of the action is no doubt designed to show off the scenic possibilities of the indoor theatres; there is a visit from Juno and her train, a vision from Morpheus, and the appearance of Apollo. The main action concerns Eurymine's fidelity to her lover, Ascanio, and their final union. She
graciously resists the courtships of a local forester and a shepherd. When she is about to be raped by Apollo, she tricks him into pledging his word to grant a boon. She then asks to be changed into a man. He reluctantly complies. Eurymine has preserved her chastity, but created an apparently insurmountable barrier to her union with Ascanio. In the end, of course, she is restored to her original sex, overcomes the objections of her future father-in-law, and marries Ascanio. For good measure, she discovers that she is really the daughter of a king and therefore completely worthy of her husband.

The prologue of *Wily Beguiled* notes and denounces the didactic bent that is beginning to become fashionable. The title of the play is to be *Spectrum*, another mirror of the times. With a sigh, one of the actors offers to "supply the place of a scurvy prologue." He begins,

Spectrum is a looking-glass, indeed,  
Wherein a man a history may read  
Of base conceits and damned roguery:  
The very sink of hell-bred villainy.  

(p. 221)

To his relief a juggler enters and changes the title to *Wily Beguiled*. "Mass, and 'tis well done!" he exclaims. "You all are welcome . . ." he tells the audience and promises, "We'll make your eyes with laughter flow" (p. 223). This clearly is to be an entertaining play, not another picture of the vices of the times.
In the opening scenes, the play does, in fact, make a few motions toward social analysis. An avaricious landowner begins to rack-rent an impoverished tenant. A lawyer boasts of the dishonest tricks of his profession. But the author almost immediately drops these thematic possibilities. The land-owner wants to marry his daughter to a wealthy bumpkin, and we hear little more of his economic activities. Once the action gets under way, the lawyer functions almost exclusively as another undesirable suitor. The play concentrates on the intrigues by which the father and unwanted suitors are outwitted and the heroine is permitted to marry the man she loves.

These two plays are pure romantic comedy with practically no trace of the social or psychological analysis typical of the comedy of humours. Many more of the plays written for the children's companies, however, tend to combine the two genres. In The Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll (1599), Jack Drum's Entertainment (1600), Blurt, Master Constable (1601), May Day (1602), Sir Giles Gooscap (1602), The Gentleman Usher (1602), and All Fools (1604), the major plot is devoted to the adventures of lovers and the subplot to the eccentricities of humourous characters. At first glance it appears that the playwrights have found a way to make satiric points and still avoid the monotonously static plot inherent in pure comedy of humours. A close look at these plays will reveal that some of
them manage to blend the two elements harmoniously while others let the humours section contaminate the romantic plot.

Nothing in the nature of romantic comedy or comedy of humours would force the two to clash. The folly and vice practiced in the satiric sub-plot need not challenge the assumptions that underlie the romantic major plot. As we noticed when looking at the pure comedy of humours, the satiric treatment tends to presuppose firm ethical and intellectual convictions. As in the pure comedy of humours, the vices and follies of humours characters are self-evident. The absurd social climbers are presented not to attack or challenge the current social system, but to illustrate negatively the merit of knowing oneself and one's real role in society. In these plays the sub-plots frequently present the comically unsuccessful adventures of lecherous men. But these men are grotesque from the beginning. In May Day an old man is trying to seduce a young woman; in Jack Drum's Entertainment an extravagant foreigner expresses his constant sexual desire in absurd hyperboles. Blurt, Master Constable has two lechers: one, an old man; and the other, a beggarly and pretentious Spaniard. These men meet with universal ridicule and often end up drenched from slop jars, dropped into coal bins, or arrested for burglary. These plots exist primarily for their entertainment value; in so
far as they have any serious moral significance, it would be to point out the absurdity of uncontrolled lust. In these satiric sub-plots, the themes of social status and sexual morality are not presented problematically. The norm is not questioned; these plots concentrate on the absurdities of characters who deviate from an understood norm.

The theme of cuckoldry could, of course, undermine a play whose major plot resolves all problems in marriages that will presumably turn out to be happy. In two of these plays, *Jack Drum's Entertainment* and *May Day*, the climax of the sub-plot involves cuckoldry. In *Jack Drum's Entertainment* an overweening satirist involves his wife, without her knowledge, in a plot to gull a sex-mad Frenchman. For the first time in the play, the Frenchman succeeds in seducing a woman and is able to describe to the husband "de finest little varte your knowe veare . . ." (p. 240). The satirist admits that he has gulled himself. He accepts the pair of horns proffered him and plans to brazen it out, "... spite of all your teethe / Ie weare this Crowne, and triumph in this horne" (p. 240). In *May Day* most of the humours characters are swindled by a fraudulent captain who promises them a commission in his nonexistent company. He never discovers that his wife regularly betrays him. At the end of the play he manages, while in disguise, to make an assignation with
his wife. When he unmasks, she exclaims in surprise, "God's me, I took you for Signor Placentio!" Showing extreme confidence or complacency, he dismisses the whole thing, "'Sfoot, thou liest in thy throat! Thou knew'st me as well as myself" (V.1.307-309). In both of these plays cuckoldry is introduced not to explore problems of marriage, but to show a conceited trickster being tricked. The emphasis is on the individual cuckold, not on the institution of marriage.

In All Fools Chapman introduces the theme of cuckoldry in typical fashion. A foolishly jealous husband finally drives his wife to the infidelity that he has always been accusing her of. If confined to the sub-plot, this appropriate punishment need not contaminate the world of the romantic lovers. But Chapman deliberately involves the lovers in the theme of cuckoldry. It is one of the romantic heroines who suggests revenge to the long-suffering wife. "... 'Twere indecorum," she argues, "This heifer should want horns" (I.ii.56-57). Before it is finished, the play suggests that cuckoldry is not merely the punishment of unreasonable jealousy, but is the fate of practically every husband. The abused husband is assured that he has honestly inherited his cuckoldry and advised to follow the example of his
father, who accepted his cuckoldry with great prudence:

No, when he saw 'twas but her humour (for his own quietness' sake) he made a back-door to his house for convenience, got a bell to his fore-door, and had an odd fashion in ringing, by which she and her maid knew him, and would stand talking to his next neighbor to prolong time, that all things might be rid cleanly out o' the way before he came, for the credit of his wife. This was wisdom now for a man's own quiet.

(V.ii.196-203)

One of the romantic heroes backs up this argument and asserts that cuckoldry is now almost universal among men. He stands to deliver a lengthy bravura speech in "the praise and honour of the most fashionable and authentical HORN" (V.ii.232-233). He traces humanity's passage through the seven ages of the world: ".  .  .  into the golden age, the silver, the brass, the iron, the leaden, the wooden, and now into this present age, which we term the horned age .  .  .  (V.ii.238-241). Since the horn is virtually inevitable, he delivers a series of arguments asserting its worth and honor. Chapman makes it clear that the young man is fairly drunk when he delivers this speech and that it is designed as a series of paradoxes. But such a scene tends to violate the decorum of romantic comedy and introduce a world less reassuring than is typical of comedy. Such a world is presented in several other plays of this period.

As we look through the major plots of these plays, we can find some that remain completely uncontaminated
by the satiric sub-plot and scrupulously maintain the decorum of romantic comedy. Katherine and Pasquil, the lovers of *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, display a devotion of epic proportions. When Katherine hears a false report of Pasquil's death, she immediately goes insane from grief. She is about to commit suicide when Pasquil appears and restores her to sanity. But their problems are not over at this point. Katherine is trapped by the villain, who threatens to "poison" her face if she does not yield to his lust. She naturally refuses and undergoes disfigurement. Pasquil generously declares that he loves her virtue, not her beauty, but she insists that they separate. It is now the hero's turn to go insane. Only after Katherine's beauty is restored and Pasquil returns to sanity can they enjoy the rewards of their extraordinary devotion to each other. The lovers of *Sir Giles Goosecap* do not have to undergo such exotic hardships, but there is no question of their love and fidelity. Like *The Maid's Metamorphosis* and *Wily Beguilded*, these plays deal with lovers who can never be happy if separated from each other and who can never be unhappy if united. The obstacles to their happiness reside in certain temporary circumstances, not in their own characters or in the nature of marriage. They are heroically virtuous, and the world of the romantic comedy is structured to reward the good and punish the evil.
But in some of the other romantic major plots, this line between good and evil becomes blurred. In The Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll, for example, one of the heroines has allowed herself to be seduced by a nobleman who is disguised as one of her father's servants. When the deception is discovered, he agrees—rather sulkily—to marry the young lady. He argues that they are not really guilty of fornication:

She was my wife before she knew my love
By secret promise, made in sight of heaven.
(Sig. C2r)

But once he is married, his love completely disappears because of a peculiar perversity in his own character:

I cannot rellish joyes that are enforst,
For were I shut in Paradlce it selife,
I should as from a prison strive t'escape.
(Sig. D2v)

During the wedding feast, he marches off, pursued by his abandoned bride, into a nearby forest. Whether or not the author expects his audience to accept the marriage "in sight of heaven," he treats the heroine with the utmost sympathy and concentrates on the pathetic nature of her fidelity to such a churlish husband. At the end, her husband is restored to her, and nothing is made of her fornication at the beginning of the play.

In his romantic plots Chapman sometimes becomes
restive about the conventions of romantic comedy. In May Day he deliberately pokes fun at the conventions and diction of romantic comedy. Aurelio loves Aemilia, but he is paralyzed by his respect for her virtues. She loves him, but is too devoted to her own modesty to make the first move. Without a go-between neither of them would ever get beyond love-sick soliloquies. The heroine's cousin, Lodovico, is a worldly, plain-spoken man, who is a close friend of the hero. With bustling practicality he arranges an interview below Aemilia's balcony and brings along a ladder. The entire scene burlesques the conventional posturings and diction of romantic comedy by contrasting them with the prosaic common sense of Lodovico. The opening dialogue establishes the two tones that dominate the scene.

**Lod.** Here's thy ladder, and there's thy gallows; thy mistress is thy hangman, and must take thee down. This is the terrace where thy sweetheart tarries; what wouldst thou call it in rhyme?

**Aur.** Celestial sphere, wherein more beauty shines--

**Lod.** Room for a passion!

**Aur.** Than on Dardanian Ida, where the pride of heaven's selected beauties strived for the prize.

**Lod.** Nay, you shall know, we have watered our horses in Helicon. I cannot abide this talking and undoing poetry; leave your mellifluous numbers, yonder's a sight will steal all reason from your rhyme, I can tell you.

(III.iii.1-12)

After much discussion Lodovico persuades Aemilia to
secure the ladder, and he must now get Aurelio to climb it.

At the foot of the ladder Aurelio at first declines

Unworthy I t'approach the furthest step
To that felicity that shines in her.

(III.iii.96-97)

As he approaches Aemilia, he again bursts into rhapsodies,

O sacred goddess, whatsoever thou art,
That, in mere pity to preserve a soul
From undeserv'd destruction, has vouchsaf'd
To take Aemilia's shape——

Lodovico breaks out impatiently,

What a poetical sheep is this! 'Slife, will you
stand rhyming there upon a stage, to be an eye-
mark to all that pass? Is there not a chamber
by? Withdraw, I say for shame; have you no shame
in you?

(III.iii.106-113)

When Aemilia's father returns, the couple must separate quickly. To Lodovico's impatience, they waste valuable minutes in reciting blank-verse farewells. The whole point of this scene, of course, is to contrast the romantic behavior of stage lovers with the prosaic details of real-life courtships.

Interestingly enough, Chapman never makes clear what happened in the chamber itself. While he is standing guard, Lodovico has a brief crisis of conscience. He asks himself, "... this is no pandarism, is it?"
He decides not, since there is no "lasciva actio animi,"
I think for his part, much less hers" (III.iii.129-132).
The lovers themselves are too intoxicated by their own rhetoric to know what they will do next. They of course marry at the end of the play, and Chapman does not find it necessary to tell us whether they consummated their love before or after they married.

In The Gentleman Usher, Chapman takes his lovers more seriously. They combine a deep romantic attachment with the kind of wit and common sense displayed by Lodovico. They are quite capable of arranging things themselves. In a gesture that consciously defies social convention, they plan to make their own laws and arrange their own sort of matrimony. The heroine justifies their action in this way:

... may not we now
Our contract make, and marry before heaven?
Are not the laws of God and Nature more
Than formal laws of men? Are outward rites
More virtuous than the very substance is
Of holy nuptials solemniz'd within?
Or shall laws made to curb the common world,
That would not be contain'd in form without them
Hurt them that are a law unto themselves?
(IV.ii.132-140)

They devise their own vows of eternal fidelity. This ceremony, according to the hero, "binds as much as marriage" (IV.ii.182). Only at the end of the play do they secure permission from their parents for a conventional wedding ceremony.
In Chapman's *All Fools* the two couples marry secretly without their parents' permission. There is no hint of sexual relations before marriage, but these lovers are not completely typical of romantic comedy. We have already noticed that the heroines first suggest the "decorum" of cuckolding a jealous husband and that one of the heroes delivers the speech in praise of the horn. Although he has persuaded his father that he is really a bashful and retiring young man interested only in managing his father's farm, he is actually an accomplished gentleman and a bit of a swaggerer. Even after his marriage, he gambles, gets drunk, and occasionally beats up the watch. The world of *All Fools* is in many ways like the world of Restoration comedy. Love is real, but it makes no spectacular character transformations. The young lovers are very fond of one another, but make no pretensions to superhuman or eternal devotion. Marriage is one part of life, but not its sole purpose or most important activity. One no doubt hopes to avoid adultery, but if it appears, one must work out some graceful and sensible accommodation.

One of the strangest treatments of romantic comedy is found in Middleton's *Blurt, Master Constable*. It begins typically enough. An Italian knight returns from war and, in the best courtly love tradition, presents a prisoner to his mistress. Unfortunately,
the young lady and the prisoner fall in love. Losing all interest in gallantry and the law of arms, the knight throws his prisoner into a dungeon and even toys with the idea of assassinating him. The prisoner himself behaves exactly like a courtly lover. His reflections on love show that combination of suffering and hope that is ideal for the adventures of romantic comedy: "O, what a heaven is love! O, what a hell!" (I.i.230). When offered freedom if he will give up his love, he refuses and is convinced that his suffering will eventually earn for him the right to enjoy that love:

O happy persecution, I embrace thee
With an unfetter'd soul! So sweet a thing
Is it to sigh upon the rack of love,
Where each calamity is groaning witness
Of the poor martyr's faith. I never heard
Of any true affection, but 'twas nipt
With care, that, like the caterpillar, eats
The leaves off the spring's sweetest book,
the rose.

(III.i.35-42)

He refuses freedom on his rival's terms. But shortly afterward a prostitute, who has fallen in love with him, helps him to escape from prison. At this point, he is torn between loyalty to his beloved and gratitude to his benefactor. Middleton gives him a very ambiguous soliloquy at this point:

Shall I profane
This temple with an idol of strange love?
When I do so, let me dissolve in fire.
Yet one day will I see this dame, whose heart
Takes off my misery; I'll not be so rude
To pay her kindness with ingratitude.

(III.11.15-20)

On the night after his marriage to the heroine, he enters a brothel, arm in arm with the prostitute. His speech to the prostitute is also a bit ambiguous:

Dear lady! O life of love, what sweetness dwells
In love's variety! The soul that plods
In one harsh book of beauty, but repeats
The stale and tedious learning, that hath oft
Faded the senses; when in reading more,
We glide in new sweets, and are starv'd with store.
Now, by the heart of love, my Violet [his bride]
Is a foul weed, (O pure Italian flower!)
She a black negro, to the white compare
Of this unequalled beauty? O most accurst,
That I have given her leave to challenge me!
But, lady, poison speaks Italian well,
And in her loath'd kiss I'll include her hell.

(V.11.8-20)

The last section of this speech suggests a certain amount of insincerity, since he still loves Violetta and has no intention of poisoning her. But his actions prove that he is quite sincerely interested in "love's variety." He is interrupted as he is preparing to go to bed with the prostitute. Violetta comes to the brothel, wins over the prostitute, and takes her place in the bed. At the end of the play, the young man, who in Act III was prepared to be a martyr to true affection, consummimates his marriage in a brothel, apparently under the impression that he is making love to a prostitute. Middleton does not seem to have been consistently exploring any new
theme, but his new twists have moved him rather far from
the decorum of romantic comedy.

We have looked at nine children's company plays
which were written completely or partly as romantic
comedies. Four of them, The Maid's Metamorphosis, Wily
Beguiled, Jack Drum's Entertainment, and Sir Giles Goose-
cap, adhere to the decorum of the genre in both charac-
ter and plot. Five of them, The Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll,
May Day, The Gentleman Usher, All Fools, and Blurt, Master
Constable, tend to break from the limits of this genre.
These five plays are primarily entertaining stories about
love and courtship; they do not seem to be designed to
comment seriously about life or to explore difficult
problems. But by including, among the appropriately
faithful and virtuous couples, lovers who have sexual
relations before they have married, young husbands will-
ing to commit adultery, and young wives who can advise
cuckolding a bad husband, these plays have at least
brought to the attention of the audience and other
playwrights patterns of human behavior normally ex-
cluded from the comic treatments of love and marriage.

Among other plays from children's companies, we
find more extensive modification of comic form. Three
plays, What You Will (1601), Monsieur D'Olive (1604),
and The Dutch Courtesan (1604), retain the humours sub-
plot, but completely drop courtship from the major plot.
The heroine of Marston's *What You Will* is already married when the play begins. There are rumors that her husband, a prosperous merchant, was drowned at sea. In *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, which Marston wrote a year earlier, the heroine went insane under roughly similar circumstances. The heroine of this play turns out to be considerably less prone to grief. Within three months, before her husband's death is confirmed, she is planning to marry a foppish French knight. Her brothers-in-law and another suitor conspire to prevent the marriage. One of the brothers-in-law suggests spreading a rumor that the Frenchman is gelded, but the suitor rejects this plan because "... she knowes to well tis false ..." (I.1). Most of the city, in fact, assumes that she is already having an affair with the Frenchman. The brothers-in-law try to petition the Duke to prevent or postpone the wedding, but he is too interested in indulging his own pleasures to worry about giving justice to his subjects. His extraordinary indifference to both justice and public opinion is illustrated by the following stage direction:

*Enter the Duke coupleld with a Lady, two couplels more with them, the men having tobacco pipes in their hands, the woemen sitt, they daunce a round. The Petition is delivered up by Randolfo, the Duke lightes his tobacco pipe with it and goes out dauncing.*

(I.1.)
The suitor suggests the plan that they adopt. They disguise a merchant as the lost husband and send him to stop the wedding.

One hardly needs to mention that the real husband arrives on the wedding day. Marston fully exploits the farcical possibilities of this situation, but he is interested in doing more than this. He seizes every opportunity to generalize, to show that the individual evils of his characters serve as types of the world at large. Quadratus, the closest thing to the voice of reason in this play, expects the very worst from human nature. A rhetorical question, "O where doth Piety and Pity rest?" draws the following response from him:

Fetch cordes he's irrecoverable, mad, ranke madde
He calls for strange Chymeras, fictions
That have no being since the curse of death
Was throwne on man: Pitty and Piety,
Whole daine converse with them? alas vaine head,
Pitty and Piety are long since dead.
(I.1)

When the husband learns of his wife's plans to remarry, he first reproaches her and then generalizes about the human condition. After evoking the theoretical view of the sanctity of love and marriage, he denies its current truth:

But 0 tis growne a figment; love a jest:
A commick Poesie: the soule of man is rotten
Even to the core; no sound affection.
Our love is hollow-vaulted, stands on proppes
Of circumstance, profit or ambitious hopes.
The first pure time, the golden age, is fled!
Heaven knowes I lie, tis now the age of gold,
For it all marreth and even virtues sold.

(III.1)

He resolves on a policy of almost universal mistrust:

... babes & fooles Ile trust,
But servants faith, wives love, or femalls lust
A usurer and the divill sooner.

(III.1)

If his grief may have led him to exaggerate his convictions, he does nevertheless live by them. Once he establishes his identity, he recovers his property and reconciles himself with his wife without even inquiring about her relations with the Frenchman. Having lost faith in "sound affection," he is apparently quite willing to settle for whatever he can get. The emphasis of the play is on the farce of mistaken identity, but the generalizing comments seem to suggest that the world of the play reflects corruptions in the real world. But apart from reminding his audience of how accurately his plot mirrors this sort of corruption, Marston does little with this theme.

In the major plot of Monsieur D'Olive, Chapman explores some psychological states not easily handled by the current approach of the comedy of humours. The heroine, unjustly accused of infidelity by her husband, has vowed never to leave her house or to see the sun.
The hero, deeply in love with his deceased wife, rejects the customary rites by which men can express their grief and respect for the dead. He refuses to permit the burial of his wife's body. Instead he has embalmed the body and, like a monk of some religion of his own, performs his own rituals and courts the death that will reunite him with his wife.

In the first half of the play Chapman quite vividly evokes the eerie, almost grotesque, nature of these reactions. We see things largely through the eyes of Vandome, who has just returned from a long voyage and is startled by the strange behavior of his friends. On first returning, he goes to the home of the heroine. He discovers that no company is admitted and that she and her household have reversed the normal order of time, sleeping through the day and stirring only at night. He is appalled by "this bat-like life" (II.1.91) and resolves to restore his friends to a healthier way of life.

The hero and heroine, however, are not typical humours characters. Chapman treats them with a great deal of sympathy. He makes it clear that their humours grow, not from self-indulgence or pride, but from an idealistic demand for perfection. The heroine, according to both Vandome and her husband, has lived a life of irreproachable virtue. Her husband's momentary lack of faith exposed to her the injustice inherent in all
society. Her husband, long since repentant, justifies her reaction:

There could not be a more important cause
To fill her with a ceaseless hate of light,
To see it grace gross lightness with full beams,
And frown on continence with her oblique glances:
And nothing equals right to virtue done,
So is her wrong past all comparison.
(I.1.119-124)

The hero, of course, takes quite literally his vows of eternal love. Faced with the death of his wife, he still refuses to admit any kind of limitation to his love.

In the first half of the play, Chapman presents an interesting question: what sort of compromises should virtuous people make with the world? But he is apparently unable to answer this question. At any rate, he devotes most of the last half of the play to the farcical sub-plot. As for the major plot, Chapman concludes it rather mechanically. Vandome simply drives out one humour with another; he tricks the heroine into jealousy and arranges to have the hero fall in love with the heroine's sister.

The major plot of Marston's The Dutch Courtesan is constructed to test various attitudes toward passion and morality. At the beginning of the play, the two young heroes, Freevill and Malheureux, debate about sexual morality. Assuming that lust is relatively harmless
and that most men cannot control their passions, Freevill defends the institution of prostitution as a necessary evil:

I would have married men love the stews as Englishmen love the Low Countries: wish war should be maintain'd there lest it should come home to their own doors. What, suffer a man to have a hole to put his head in though he go to the pillory for it! Youth and appetite are above the club of Heroules.

(I.1.62-67)

Malheureux condemns lust categorically as "a most deadly sin" (I.1.68). Knowing little of his own nature, he feels himself completely beyond temptation. At the end of the scene, he agrees to accompany Freevill to a brothel, because, as he puts it, "The sight of vice augments the hate of sin" (I.1.153).

The young men soon reverse roles. Freevill, who has fallen in love with a virtuous girl, plans to marry and give up his wild life. He is going to the brothel, in fact, to say good-by to his whore, Franceschina. As soon as Malheureux sees her, he completely surrenders to passion. In a series of rationalizations, he argues that passion cannot be resisted. The ironic Freevill is amused by this reversal of roles. "I believe my cast garment," he observes, "must be let out in the seams for you when all is done . . ." (I.ii.158-159). He closes
this scene with a concise summary of Malheureux's pride and fall:

Of all the fools that would all man out-thrust
He that 'gainst Nature would seem wise is worst.

(I.11.160-161)

Angry at Freevill's rejection, Franceschina promises to make love to Malheureux only after he murders Freevill. There follows a complicated intrigue, which brings Malheureux to the gallows, where he is saved only by the last-minute appearance of Freevill. He loses his passion for Franceschina, not by satisfying it, but by seeing vividly the ugliness of her character. She hates not only Freevill but also anyone who is dear to him. To the fiancée who is grieving for Freevill's supposed death, she boasts that he really loved her. She is delighted to have drawn tears and, to complete her revenge, hopes to drive the poor girl insane. "If dat me knew a dog dat Freevill love," she says, "Me would puisson him . . ." (V.1.13-14).

There are no easy generalizations in the play, but both heroes have grown in wisdom. Freevill learns that vice is not as harmless or as easily controlled as he has assumed. It often has effects undreamed of at the beginning. Malheureux has lost his naive conceptions of good and evil and his smug sense of superiority to wicked people. He learns that he, like everyone else,
is prone to vice. Finally, in himself and in Franceschina, he sees the real nature of extreme vice. He can now begin to build virtue on a firm basis of self-understanding. The spirit of the play is briefly conveyed in a soliloquy of Freevill:

But is this virtue in me? No, not pure; Nothing extremely best with us endures. No use in simple purities; the elements Are mix'd for use. Silver without alloy Is all too eager to be wrought for use: Nor precise virtues ever purely good Holds useful size with temper of weak blood. Then let my course be borne, though with side wind, The end being good, the means are well assign'd. (IV.ii.39-47)

There is no pure virtue in man. People must learn to accept this truth and do the best they can with the nature they have been given.

In these three plays the courtship of young lovers is not merely modified to suit the author's needs; it is dropped all together. These plays do not seem to be moving in any single direction, but they show that some playwrights no longer feel satisfied with the conventions and assumptions of romantic comedy and are experimenting with new themes and new forms for comedy.

In Middleton's The Family of Love, dated 1602 by Harbage, we find a play that begins very much like a romantic comedy, but soon turns into a very different kind of play. The young lovers make all the conventional speeches in praise of the divinity of love. When Doctor
Glister, the heroine's uncle and guardian, forbids them to marry, they show a very unsentimental kind of practicality. The hero pretends to be in complete despair, wills his possessions to the heroine, and prepares for a long voyage, during which he hopes to find death. Glister is too greedy to suspect anything. He eagerly oversees the delivery of the chest supposedly containing the hero's wealth and places it in his niece's chamber. As most of the audience no doubt suspects, the chest contains, not the hero's possessions, but the hero himself. For the next few months he spends his days hiding and his nights making love to the heroine. When she becomes pregnant, they contrive to have the uncle charged with fathering the child. When he is finally released from charges of rape and incest, the uncle is more than happy to consent to the marriage of the young couple. Middleton indicates no disapproval of their sexual behavior or their deception. Compared to the other characters, in fact, these young people are models of virtue.

Most of the play concentrates on successful and unsuccessful attempts at adultery. Two libertine courtiers try to seduce all three city wives in the play. Doctor Glister, who is regularly making love to Mistress Purge, foils them in their attempts to seduce his mistress and his wife. He tricks them
into beating each other. When they lodge in his house for treatment—really to seduce his wife—he pretends to be taken in and then gives them a very powerful laxative.

Mistress Purge is very active sexually. Besides her affair with Glister, she regularly attends religious meetings of the Family of Love, meetings that usually end in sexual orgies. After a brief sermon the candles are put out because, as she explains to a potential convert, "... we fructify best i' th' dark..." (III. iii. 22). Master Purge does not mind his wife kissing customers in the interest of business, but he objects to being a cuckold. In disguise he attends one of the meetings. When the candles are put out, he seduces his own wife and, to prove it later, takes her wedding ring. At the mock trial that closes the play, she brazens it out successfully: "Now, as true as I live, master doctor, I had a secret operation, and I knew him then to be my husband e'en by very instinct" (V.iii. 296-298). Purge is not convinced, but yields to the court judgment in favor of his wife.

The Family of Love does not present a world in which virtue is ultimately rewarded and vice punished. Purge, who is faithful to his wife, is cuckolded egregiously. Glister can cuckold another man and preserve his own honor because he is smarter than his various rivals. The young lovers defeat him, not because true
love has to win over all obstacles, but because they are just as unscrupulous as he is and a little bit smarter. In the world of this play, people get, not what they are entitled to, but what they are smart enough to take and keep. On the whole Middleton seems very complacent about this approach to life and describes with zestful detail the way these scoundrels work and plot for what they want.

At the end of this period we find three extant examples of a new genre, which treats more seriously the kind of world presented in The Family of Love. The Phoenix (1604), Westward Ho! (1604), and Law Tricks (1604) present a kind of social anatomy. We see most of the action from the viewpoint of a disguised observer. In Middleton's The Phoenix, the son of a duke pretends to set out on foreign travels, but actually goes into disguise in order to learn the real condition of his father's dukedom. What he finds is almost universal corruption.

He finds most marriages polluted by lust, pride, and avarice. A knight, for example, is willing to let a nobleman sleep with his wife. On the other hand, he has only to call a citizen's wife "Lady" to enjoy her sexual favors and her money. One of these women admits that the title is "worth an hundred angels at all times" (III.11.3-4). The knight, finding that several men desire his wife, tries to force her into prostitution. Later, in what seems to be a satiric exaggeration of
the effect of avarice on marriage, he draws up a legal bill of sale for his wife:

To all good and honest Christian people, to whom this present writing shall come: know you for a certain, that I captain, for and in the consideration of the sum of five hundred crowns, have clearly bargained, sold, given, granted, assigned, and set over, and by these presents do clearly bargain, sell, give, grant, assign, and set over all the right, estate, title, interest, demand, possession, and term of years to come, which I the said captain have, or ought to have . . . in and to Madonna Castiza, my most virtuous, modest, loving, and obedient wife . . . together with all and singular those admirable qualities with which her noble breast is furnished.

(II.ii.88-104)

The document goes on to itemize each of his wife's virtues and accomplishments and to assign all of them to the purchaser.

In the career of Tangle, the disguised observer learns of the corruptions of the law. Although not a lawyer himself, Tangle has been involved in so much litigation that he knows as much law as the best lawyers. He seems to derive about equal satisfaction from ruining other men and from enriching himself. His career has been full of excitement. He has been "at least sixteen times beggared, and got up again" (I.iv.125-126). At present he is quite wealthy and has twenty-nine simultaneous suits at law, at least four of which involve the infidelities of his wife. For him, as for most of the attorneys he knows, law is not an institution for
dispensing justice, but a highly complex form of financial speculation. Even more corrupt is the justice of the peace who accepts bribes as a matter of policy. He also maintains his own band of thieves; he automatically finds them innocent and collects his share of the loot.

Like a comedy of humours, this play is structured to analyze human behavior. But it differs from a typical comedy of humours in two important ways. It does not concentrate on follies and eccentricities; it devotes a great deal of time to socially dangerous vices. And, by implication, it makes a far more comprehensive attack on human behavior. The comedy of humours presents isolated characters who vary from generally accepted norms. When working in this genre, Chapman and Jonson concentrated on defining and ridiculing the aberration itself. They did not feel obliged to comment on how widely it was spread in contemporary society. In *The Phoenix*, however, Middleton constantly insists that his vicious characters are typical of most human beings. When asked why his inn harbors knaves and whores, a groom answers, "... are there honest men enough, think you, in a term-time to fill all the inns in the town?" (I.i.30-32). The hero-observer, who seems to speak for the author, sees the specific abuses as perfect types of the general corruption of the times. After observing the knight's bill of sale for his wife, the observer delivers a lengthy solilo-
quy, which first praises the original institution of matrimony and then enumerates the various evils that are poisoning the great majority of marriages:

First, rare to have a bride commence a maid,
But does beguile joy of the purity,
And is made strict by power of drugs and art,
An artificial maid, a doctor'd virgin,

But if chaste and honest,
There is another devil haunts marriage—
None fondly loves but knows it—jealousy,
That wedlock's yellow sickness,
That whispering separation every minute,
And thus the curse takes his effect or progress.

And most of men in their sudden furies
Rail at the narrow bounds of marriage,
And call't a prison.

(II.11.176-190)

Learning of the corrupt justice of the peace, the observer reacts with another broad condemnation of the times:
"Henceforth hang him that is no way a thief; / Then I hope few will suffer" (III.11.244-245). There is nothing in the play to contradict this pessimistic evaluation. In all his travels, the observer finds only a handful of virtuous people. At all levels of society, from the nobleman who plots the assassination of the duke to the inkeeper who knowingly lodges criminals, the generality of mankind appears hopelessly corrupt and prepared to do any conceivable evil. "I'm sick of all professions . . ." (IV.11.101) says the narrator. Like the hero of Marston's The Malcontent, he learns to regard virtue as exceptional and to prepare himself for the very worst from his fellow
human beings and future subjects.

In *Law Tricks* John Day explores serious social problems. One cynical position is held by a courtier who is very fond of Machiavelli's writings. This courtier maintains that honor, as defined by the world, has nothing to do with truth or individual virtue. A human being is honorable only as long as the world accounts him so. The entire play is structured to explore the relationship of appearance and reality in contemporary society.

Although this play presents a less pessimistic view of society than does *The Phoenix*, it deals with some disturbing phenomena. Count Lurdo, for example, judges all human actions by their legality, not their morality. Theoretically, this may be a defensible position, but his career shows little connection between law and justice. He gives the following summary of his career:

```
... I was a man
Borne to no hopes, but a few shreds of witt
A Grammer Scholler, then a Scrivenor,
Dealing for private use twixt man and man,
and by close broak age set them at debate:
Incenst them unto Law, which to maintaine,
I lent them money upon Lands and Plate,
After the rate of seaven-score in the hundred.
Then did I learne to counterfeit mens hands,
Noble-mens armes, interline Evidences,
Make false conveyances, yet with a trick,
Close and cock-sure, I cony-catch'd the world.
Having scrap'd prettie wealth, I fell in League
With my first wife, and (though I say't my selfe)
She had good dooings, her back oommings in
And private goings out, rais'd me aloft:
I followed cases of the law abroad,
And she was merrie with her friends at home.
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(lines 900-917)
After divorcing his first wife, he married the duke's sister and became one of the most powerful men in the kingdom. When she became useless to his purposes, he managed by bribing witnesses and judges to divorce her. Behind his respect for law is the lust for power and wealth. For him law is not an instrument of justice, but a weapon. With his "law tricks" he has risen from poverty to the heights of power and is able to corrupt almost any institution that stands in his way.

The duke's son is a scholar who despises even innocent recreation. But as soon as this stern moralist is given authority, he immediately turns into an irresponsible rake-hell. When his father returns in disguise to announce his own death, his son is overjoyed and plans a reign of ostentatious self-indulgence.

Much of this action is seen through the eyes of the duke's daughter, who arrives incognito and who continues to hide her identity in order to "trie what mettle our Genowaiies wits are made of, as also to put my Brothers humor to the test" (lines 310-311). She and her father, both in disguise, learn the truth behind the appearance and can restore justice. But the play's subtitle, "Who Would Have Thought It?", suggests that important truths are often very difficult to discover.

In *Westward Ho!* Dekker and Webster also use a disguised observer to expose the truth behind social
appearance. Convinced that he is a cuckold, the merchant Justiniano assumes several disguises to discover how many men share his fate. He is pleased to learn that his wife, even though suffering extreme poverty, resists the subtle blandishments of a pander and an urbane nobleman. But apart from the wife he misjudged, his pessimistic expectations are realized. At the climax of the play he enters a brothel to inform three merchants that their wives are keeping a rendezvous in the suburbs with several gallants. After accepting several gifts, the wives decide that they do not like their gallants and remain technically chaste on this occasion. But nothing indicates that they plan to remain faithful in the future. When surprised by their husbands, the wives, who have learned of the visit to the brothel, reproach them with infidelity. After mutual recriminations all of the partners, who certainly deserve each other, are reconciled.

While following these sordid adventures, the audience is given detailed anatomies of various kinds of evils. It can see how merchants cater to the prodigality of courtiers in order to lend them money at exorbitant interest, and, conversely, how courtiers cater to the avarice of merchants in order to get at the city wives, whom they consider easy marks. The audience is given a detailed view of the world of prostitution. It watches how the bawd, Mistress Birdlime, lures impoverished women into prostitution and how
she guarantees her own commission with experienced prostitutes. In the brothel scene, the play details the means by which bawd and whore milk as much money as possible from their clients. With the notable exception of the observer and his wife, the institution of marriage looks little better than that of prostitution. Husbands and wives refuse to practice the chastity that they expect from their partners.

As we look over all the dramas of private life performed by children's companies in this period, we notice a gradual change. At first authors for these companies tend to rely on ready-made models. In the sub-plots, they imitate the satire of the comedy of humours. In the major plots they concentrate on the adventures of young lovers and, following the decorum of romantic comedy, make these lovers unquestionably virtuous and faithful. At the beginning they present a clear-cut, fairly optimistic picture of human society. Evil and foolish characters, with whom the audience would never identify, are judged against a norm that author and audience presumably share. Sympathetic characters tend to embody human nature at its best.

As the period progresses, authors introduce a wider range of human experience. Often several young lovers are involved in lust or infidelity. Gradually a higher percentage of sympathetic—or at least not
obviously unsympathetic—characters betray serious vices. Sometimes these moral irregularities appear to be introduced merely to liven up the plot.

But toward the end of this period authors consciously try to reflect the real world as they see it and to deal with some of its problems. In these plays they do not, on the whole, paint a very cheerful or reassuring picture of the world. Marriage is often poisoned by the lust of one or both partners. Several plays even insist that chastity is almost impossible for human nature. Social relations tend to be dominated by avarice and pride. The whole approach to society is becoming more pessimistic. In earlier plays certain characters were singled out for not fulfilling properly the role of their class or profession. It is now taken almost for granted that people are out to exploit one another. More and more authors are depicting the conflict and resentment among classes and professions.

These plays reflect different degrees of pessimism. In Law Tricks, for example, Day deals with serious corruptions in law without implying that practically all lawyers are dishonest. But in The Phoenix Middleton constantly insists that the corruptions he depicts are typical of the general run of humanity. In two plays, Monsieur D'Olive and The Dutch Courtesan, the authors attempt to work out a definition of virtue applicable
to the modern world. In *The Family of Love* Middleton seems content to enjoy the ruthless intrigues of a totally amoral world. In the last years of the period, the exposé comedy appears. It offers no particular program for reform, but attempts to anatomize the evils prevalent in the world. By the end of the period, no single philosophy or dramatic approach has come to dominate comedy. But more and more plays attempt to deal with the problems of real life and reflect an increasingly more pessimistic view of the world.

**Repertoires of the Adult Companies**

It is not easy to characterize neatly the way in which adult company plays treat the actions of private life. At the beginning of this chapter we noticed that two genres, the romantic comedy and the bourgeois comedy, unlike the chronicle history, concentrate much more heavily on amusement than on instruction. These two genres retain their popularity during most of this period. Among the extant works dealing primarily with private life, a little over half belong to these two genres: *Englishmen for My Money* (1598), *Two Angry Women of Abington* (1599), *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* (1600), *Patient Grissil* (1600), *The Four Prentices of London* (1600), *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green* (1600), *The Trial of Chivalry* (1601),
Satyromastix (1601), The Fair Maid of the Exchange (1602), and The Merry Devil of Edmonton (1602). As we have already noticed, these plays make little claim to deal seriously with the problems of real life. They are usually set in either an exotic foreign locale or in an idealized version of merry England. Except for obviously reprehensible villains, most of the characters are virtuous and admirable. The villains themselves often repent at the end of the play and are, in any case, met with almost universal condemnation. The plots are not constructed to explore or expound moral topics. Instead they are designed to build suspense with highly complex intrigue, often involving some disguises, to arouse pity during the middle section and joy at the resolution, to excite innocent laughter at the eccentricities of people who at heart are usually quite good—in short, to excite and amuse the audience. There are a few passages in which a character draws edifying generalizations from particular actions or situations, but the play is primarily structured to delight rather than to instruct.

We do not find in adult company plays the striking contrasts in subject matter and approach that we find in the children's company plays, but toward the end of the period there is a noticeable tendency to treat vices extensively and to somehow deal with the problems of contemporary life. Up to 1602 only a few extant plays
are structured to deal with serious moral problems. The plot of Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* (1599) originates in a boon granted by the allegorical Fortune. Throughout the play allegorical characters appear to underline the play's two important lessons: that it is dangerous to count too much on any worldly good since all is governed by a capricious fortune and that it is especially dangerous to surrender to greed. The play is filled with characters who are corrupted and destroyed by greed. Fortunatus and his vicious son both die because of their greed; his virtuous son is destroyed by the greed of others. But even in this essentially didactic play, Dekker seems to maintain much of the decorum of romantic comedy, even if it is not demanded by his theme. An English princess shamelessly gulls other characters out of their money, but Dekker chivalrously draws the line at inchastity and in one scene allows her to preserve the virginity that she has been pretending to sell. Dekker devotes a great deal of time to the highly diverting intrigues by which most of the characters try to gull each other and to the exotic scenic possibilities in this allegorical fable. The printer of the 1600 Quarto calls it, without appearing obviously absurd, a "pleasant comedie." We have already looked at the three humours comedies produced by the adult companies: *An Humourous Day's Mirth* (1597), *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), and *Every Man out of His Humour*
(1599). Only the last of these plays shows an uncompromising devotion to ethical analysis.

*How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* (1602) is the first extant adult company play in this period to deal primarily with marriage and sexual morality. The young hero is already married when the play begins. He was married while quite young, and, although his wife is extraordinarily beautiful and virtuous, he is bored with her. He perversely misinterprets her every word and gesture. Before long he begins an affair with a prostitute; as a final gesture of contempt he brings her home and, in front of company, tells her to sit in his wife's place. The wife bears all this with the patience of Griselda and is still willing to obey her husband in all things. She resists the persistent advances of a gentleman who relies heavily on what would be understandable resentment on her part. The husband, believing that he has successfully poisoned his wife, marries the prostitute. He finds that his second wife is the exact opposite of his first. She moves her former bawd and pander into their home, seeks domination in all things, and hardly bothers to conceal her infidelities. When he confides to her that he killed his first wife for her, she immediately denounces him to the law. He is saved at the gallows by the first wife, who of course has not really been
poisoned. Like a perfect stage manager, the husband places one woman on each side and draws the play’s obvious moral:

My first wife, stand you here: my second, there, And in the midst, myself; he that will choose A good wife from a bad, come learn of me That have tried both, in wealth and misery. A good wife will be careful of her fame, Her husband's credit, and her own good name; And such art thou. A bad wife will respect Her pride, her lust, and her good name neglect; And such art thou. A good wife will be still Industrious, apt to do her husband's will; But a wide wife, cross spiteful and madding Never keep home, but always be a gadding; And such art thou.

They that my fortunes will peruse, shall find No beauty's like the beauty of the mind.  

(V.iii)

Two other plays, The Fair Maid of Bristow (1604) and The London Prodigal (1604), are built on the same pattern. In both plays a young rake-hell marries a virtuous young lady, mistreats and finally attempts to poison her, forms an alliance with a prostitute, is betrayed by the prostitute, and almost dies on the gallows.

These three plays tend to be didactic rather than objectively analytical. They warn the audience of the evils of adultery and lust without trying to consider in detail the problems that lead to the breakdown of marriages. In How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, the fact that the hero was pressured into marriage is mentioned once and then dropped. In The London Prodi-
gal the wife actually preferred a different suitor. But she is a virtuous woman, and once married to her good-for-nothing husband she remains heroically faithful and even attempts to take his place on the gallows. These plays make a rather arbitrary, unimaginative classification of good and bad people, but they show a new interest in dealing with real problems. And in order to do so, they promote vicious people to key roles in the major plot.

It is interesting to note that *The Wise woman of Hogsdem* (1604), the only extant adult company play of 1603-1604 that is structured primarily as an entertaining intrigue comedy, also has the increasingly popular rake-hell hero. He manages to become engaged to all three heroines and marries one of them, but because of a highly complicated set of intrigues he doesn't know which one. While wooing one woman, he offers to poison the woman to whom he thinks he is married. Wife-poisoning is apparently becoming automatic for the wicked husband. But for all the vice that is present, this play is primarily an entertaining intrigue comedy. The main interest lies, not in drawing a terrible picture of vice, but in finally letting the characters figure out who is married to whom. The hero is engagingly flippant until his rather mechanical repentance at the end of the play. At least one adult company playwright has discovered entertainment possibilities in an evil
During the last year of this period, two adult company plays, *The Honest Whore* and *The Woman Killed with Kindness*, raise serious moral problems for which there are no pat answers.

In *The Honest Whore* Middleton and Dekker aren't interested in sweeping denunciations of human nature, the sort of denunciation made in *The Phoenix*, which Middleton wrote for a children's company. The two heroes of *The Honest Whore* take contradictory positions: Matheo is an urbane rake who plausibly defends his casual approach to sexual morality and love, Hippolito is virtuous and unswervingly faithful to his beloved, even after he believes her dead. The sub-plot concentrates on relatively harmless humours, a wife who wants to make her husband lose his temper at least once in his life. The play explores prostitution from several points of view. It gives a number of details, for example, simply on the financial practices of the trade. One lengthy scene is devoted to the prostitute, Bellafronte, entertaining some of her clients. She maneuvers them into paying for wine, which her pander pretends to spill on the way. The guests apparently understand this delicate method of payment and cheerfully pay for another round of drinks, which never arrive. Later, a bawd and
pander discuss the economics of the brothel:

Roger: But stay Madona, how must our agreement be now? for you know I am to have all the commings in at the hall dore, and you at the chamber dore.

Bawd: True Roger except my vailes.

Roger: Vailes, what vailes?

Bawd: Why as thus, if a couple come in a Coach, and light to lie down a little, then Roger, thats my fee, and you may walk abroad; for the Coach-man himselfe is their Pandar.

Roger: Is a so? in truth I have almost forgot, for want of exercise; But how if I fetch this Citizens wife to that Gull, and that Madona to that Gallant, how then?

Bawd: Why then, Roger, you are to have sixpence a lane, so many lanes, so many sixpences.

(III.ii.69-81)

This play, however, is not merely an imitation of the exposé comedy, which was becoming popular in the children's companies. It also explores the full meaning of "honesty," that is, feminine chastity and honor. When denounced by the virtuous Hippolito, Bellafronte falls in love with him. Fully aware of the paradox, she determines to become an "honest whore." At first she wants to become Hippolito's mistress; she will be honest in the sense that she will be faithful to him. When he rejects this offer, she examines herself, discovers the full ugliness of vice, and completely repents. But is a chaste woman with an immoral past still a whore? Most of her acquaintances think so. When she claims, "I am
not as I was," she receives the following answer:

I am not what I was! no Ie be sworne thou art not: for thou wert honest at five, and now th'art a Puncke at fifteene: thou wert yesterday a simple whore, and now th'art a cunning Conny-catchig Baggage to day.

(III.iii.40-44)

But even if she succeeds in convincing the world of her sincerity, it is still not easy for her to regain her honor. By reforming she of course assures her salvation and restores her private virtue, but she is still neither maid, wife, nor widow. The contradiction between her private virtue and her public reputation leads to the anomaly of the title, "the honest whore." But since this is a comedy, there is a convenient way out of her dilemma. Matheo was the first to seduce her, and he refused to marry her. At the end of the play, he is pressured by the duke to marry her. Matheo is consistently frivolous about sex and, after the usual protests against marrying a whore, he gives in with whimsical gracefulness:

Its better
To take a common wench, and make her good,
Than one that simpers, and at first, will scarce
Be tempted forth over the threshold dore,
Yet in one sennight, zounds, turnes arrant whore,
Come wench, thou shalt be mine, give me thy gols,
Weele talke of legges hereafter.

(V.ii.445-451)

Bellafronte is thus enabled to regain her honor—in
other words to square her external reputation with the true state of her soul. The last act of the play takes place in Bethlehem Hospital (the London lunatic asylum transported to Milan). There is much comic comment on the practical difficulty of telling the sane from the insane. Each of the major plots illustrates, on one level or another, the difficulty of distinguishing appearances from reality: a pair of young lovers disguised as friars, the husband whose extreme patience begins to look like insanity, and the whore who is really chaste. Although this play has its share of sententious warnings against lust, it concentrates, not on teaching clear-cut principles, but on exploring the difficulties of making principles accurately reflect human experience.

Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* also deals with problems of honor and morality. In the sub-plot, an impoverished gentleman discovers that he has been aided by an enemy. He can find only one way to avoid the disgrace of an unpaid debt of honor: he persuades his sister to give herself to his enemy. He thus offers his one remaining possession of value, his sister's honor. She wants to preserve her brother's honor, but is concerned with her own. She explains to her brother how she will resolve this dilemma: she plans to commit suicide before her virginity is lost. He approves of
this magnanimous gesture and plans to match her death with his own. The young man, however, matches their honor and generosity and offers to marry the sister. Once the relentless demands of honor are met, the sub-plot ends happily.

In the main plot Heywood presents a problem that can end only in tragedy. In the middle of the play Anne Frankford agrees to have an affair with Wendoll, a close friend of her husband. Both Anne and Wendoll are fundamentally moral people, and Heywood devotes a great deal of space to their motivations. When Wendoll first thinks of seducing Anne, he is torn violently between guilt and desire. He is perfectly aware of how monstrously ungrateful he would be to his friend and benefactor, but finally determines to go through with his plan. He sees himself as a villain "hatching treason to so true a friend" (vi.87). He finally surrenders to what he considers an irresistible destiny:

The swift Fates drag me at their chariot wheel
And hurry me to mischief. Speak I must--
Injure myself, wrong her, deceive his trust.
(vi.101-103)

Anne, who is virtuous and deeply in love with her husband, is outraged at Wendoll's first advances. But she is soon won over, primarily by his appeals to her generosity. He points out that by thus addressing her he has put his whole future into her hands, and he
promises complete secrecy. Anne also feels herself in the hands of some fatalistic force and reluctantly agrees, "This maze I am in / I fear will prove the labyrinth of sin" (vi.160-161).

Frankford at first violently rejects any suggestions that his beloved wife is betraying him. But evidence accumulates and he contrives to catch her in the act. Both husband and wife still love each other, but the wife's adultery has destroyed their marriage. However much Anne wants to be forgiven, she could not respect Frankford if he were to do so:

He cannot be so base as to forgive me,
Nor I so shameless to accept his pardon.
(xiii.139-140)

She expects Frankford to kill her and asks only that he do not mutilate her face. Frankford has already prayed for the patience not to use violence, but although he doesn't plan to kill his wife, he too considers it base to forgive such a fault. After some consideration he announces his plan. He will exile Anne from him and their children, but will provide her with what material things she desires and do what he can to protect her reputation. Frankford has found a way both of being kind to the woman he still loves and of preserving his own honor.

Wendoll's response betrays neither extraordinary
vice nor virtue. He genuinely regrets his ingratitude to Frankford and the unhappiness he has caused Anne. As a gesture of repentance, he exiles himself. But he has not lost sight of the main chance. While abroad, he plans to pick up some foreign languages, and he hopes eventually to return to England and find some sort of position at court.

Anne, however, responds with heroic virtue. She vows never to eat or drink again. Even the gruff servant Nicholas, doggedly loyal to his master, is moved to tears by her sorrow and repentance. When Frankford finally comes to visit her, she is dying—presumably of malnutrition. She begs him to forgive her so that God will forgive her. Frankford can now give the one kind of forgiveness that can satisfy both his and Anne's sense of honor. As she dies they are united in a kind of spiritual marriage; although their bodies are divorced their souls are united. "New marry'd and new widowed" (xvii.123), Frankford exclaims when Anne dies. In the main plot, a dilemma of honor is resolved tragically. Frankford's just and honorable kindness inspired in Anne the kind of repentance that could finally lead to this kind of forgiveness.

These last two plays have moved quite a distance from the treatment of love and marriage typical of the romantic and bourgeois comedies. Although the
adult companies did not try to outdo the children's companies in pessimism or sensationalism, their plays show a gradual but significant shift in this period. The plays concentrating on private life become more interested in ethical problems as the period advances.

In some ways, the treatment of private life is an inverse image of the treatment of public, political problems. As we noticed in the second chapter, the chronicle play dominated adult company treatments of public life. It rested on clear-cut assumptions about order and morality and was structured to illustrate these truths. By the end of this period, the chronicle history had lost its hold, and playwrights were content to amuse the audience with sensational events or with nostalgic presentations of past English glories. At the beginning of this period, the romantic comedy dominated the treatment of private life. In this genre the author often included a few sententiae, but he built his play to amuse, not to deal with serious ethical or social problems. He set his characters in a world which was created to excite and amuse, not to focus attention on the problems of real life. The heroes and heroines are admirable in an uncomplicated way. The comic characters tend to betray follies rather than vices; often, they turn out to be quite good-hearted in spite of their foibles. Villains are
usually given just enough attention to provide necessary plot complications. But as the period advanced, there was a growing interest in the origin, nature, and effect of evil. Increasingly, central characters are evil or, more often, fundamentally good but marred by some ethical flaw. Some of the plays were content with straightforward and uncomplicated warnings against vice. Two of them, *The Honest Whore* and *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, examine what caused certain problems and explore how effectively current ethical concepts can deal with complicated realities of human character. The adult companies did not express the overriding cynicism that we found in many children's company plays. But they too began to feel that drama should deal seriously with the evils and corruptions of private life. During the last two years of this period, only one extant comedy, *The Wisewoman of Hogsden*, was concerned with pure entertainment. And as we have seen, its protagonist is very different from the typical hero of romantic comedy. Like their competitors, the adult companies were now abandoning the enchanted forests and ideal societies of romantic comedy. Some of their plays preached, others explored ethical dilemmas. By the accession of James, the playwrights of both companies were working with new themes. As we have seen, these themes differed considerably and implied various evaluations
of human nature and society. But almost all of these themes deliberately called to mind the imperfections and difficulties of the real world.
NOTES

1
In the 1616 Folio, Every Man in His Humour is called simply a "comedy." Every Man out of His Humour, Cynthia's Revels, and The Poetaster are each called "comical satyre." See Ben Jonson, eds. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford, 1925-1952), III, 299 and 419 and IV, 27 and 198. For a full discussion of what Jonson meant by this term, see O. J. Campbell "Comical Satyre" and Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" (San Marino, 1938).

2
The printed version of this play is quite long—almost twice as long as, for example, Every Man in His Humour. The title page promises more material "than hath been Publickly Spoken or Acted" (Ben Jonson, III, following page 418). There is no way of knowing for certain which sections were and were not performed or whether the new material was written for the stage and cut by the actors or written especially for the published version.

3
In the printed version, Jonson included an alternate ending in which Macilente appears before the Queen.

4

5
selects 1605. In *The Elizabethan Stage*, III, 440, Chambers selects 1604 to 1607. Since the quarto was registered in 1607 and its preface speaks of a significant lapse in time, the play probably was not written much after 1605 at the latest.

6

At the beginning of this transition period, Shakespeare was working on a group of chronicle plays that eventually formed a tetralogy covering the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V. As we saw in Chapter II, playwrights for the adult companies turned most often to the chronicle history when they wanted to deal with national and political themes. The traditional chronicle histories, especially those written before 1600, reflected an orderly, fairly optimistic philosophy of history. These plays assumed that order was the natural condition of English society. God had created a hierarchy and had assigned rights and duties to every station of society. The keystone of this system was the king, who derived his authority directly from God and who was personally responsible for justice and order in his kingdom. The chronicle plays attempted to trace social evils to serious sins—usually usurpation or rebellion—that violated the natural order. To show the gravity of disobedience to the king, they portrayed the suffering of all classes during the result-
ing disturbances and celebrated the unity and order that almost immediately resulted when the unnatural subjects were defeated or returned to their duties. As we have seen, this approach to history made moral and social analysis more or less synonymous.

In many important ways, Shakespeare shared these assumptions and utilized the traditional structure of the chronicle play. In both parts of Henry IV, the King attributes his many troubles to the "crook'd ways" (Pt. 2, IV.v.184) by which he came to the throne. By deposing the legitimate Richard II and countenancing his murder, Henry broke the natural order of the state and opened the way to many chaotic forces. But if Shakespeare insisted that Henry deserves his troubles, he in no way excused the rebels. However doubtful Henry's claims may be, he is the consecrated king, and rebellion against him is clearly treason. The rebels very eloquently describe their grievances, but they often behave like men who know they are morally wrong. At one point, for example, Worcester explains why his faction

Must keep aloof from strict arbitrement,
And stop all sight-holes, every loop from whence
The eye of reason may pry in upon us . . .
(Pt. I, IV.i.70-72)

Like most chronicle plays, 1 Henry IV ends with the King's
forces triumphant and the nation again under unified rule. *2 Henry IV* perhaps corresponds even more closely to the typical pattern. At the end of this play, the forces of rebellion are again destroyed. But, even more important, the morally faulted Henry IV is replaced by his son, who has a clear claim to the throne and who has learned how to govern himself and his people. *Henry V* is largely a celebration of the newly won unity of England. Thematically the entire tetralogy seems to illustrate the Tudor philosophy of history; structurally, it relies on the basic pattern of the chronicle history: order, disorder, restored order.

But if we look closely at each of these plays, we notice some new concerns and some important shifts in emphasis. Only the first play of this tetralogy, *Richard II*, falls outside the period I have been considering. But since it first raises problems that are dealt with throughout the tetralogy, a close look at this play can help clarify Shakespeare's political thought during this period.

*Richard II* deals with a bad king—a problem that was especially difficult for Tudor political philosophy. During this period only one extant non-Shakespearean play, *2 Robin Hood*, dealt with a tyrant king, and it tended to oversimplify and permitted John's repentance to solve everything. Shakespeare's treatment gives
serious consideration to the major alternatives and finds no easy solution. John of Gaunt advocates the traditional doctrine of obedience and refuses to rise against the King. His son, on the other hand, leads a rebellion and deposes the King. During Richard's misrule, England must choose between royal injustice and the chaos of insurrection. At the end of the play, both alternatives seem undesirable.

There is little reason to believe that even without Bolingbroke's rebellion Richard could have restored order or justice to his kingdom. He is afflicted with a combination of ruthlessness and weakness. Before the play begins he has instigated the murder of his own uncle. When this assassination becomes the subject of a judicial duel, Richard exiles both combatants and thus manages to alienate both factions. He is guided by frivolous companions and exhibits no consistent purpose. He has wasted most of his treasure with "too great a court / And liberal largess" (I.iv.43-44). When a rebellion breaks out in Ireland, he farms out the royal taxes and plans to extort special payments from the wealthy. Financial speculators appear to have derived the greatest profits from these unpopular means of revenue. When John of Gaunt dies, Richard seizes the estate and disinherits Henry Bolingbroke. At this point England is in a particularly dangerous situation. Its king is suf-
ficiently self-willed and thoughtless to violate the rights of commoners and of powerful nobles, but he is not strong enough to control the resistance he is bound to inspire. When Bolingbroke returns to demand his inheritance Richard is too poor to finance a new army, too unpopular to secure support, and too indecisive to take any action at all.

It would seem that any man selected at random would be likely to rule more effectively. And Bolingbroke quickly demonstrates a better-than-average ability to rule. But Tudor orthodoxy maintains that there is a nemesis which punishes usurpers and kingdoms which countenance usurpation. The last half of Richard II explores this generalization. Shakespeare tests it against the known nature and behavior of the men involved. He selects details, not to heighten the dogmatic effect of a scene, but to explain exactly why the characters behaved as they did. Although, as we shall see, Shakespeare is very interested in moral issues, he concentrates on the practical effects of important decisions.

When York warns Richard against disinheriting Bolingbroke, for example, he concentrates not on the immorality of the act, but on the practical effects of this particular
kind of immorality:

Take Herford's rights away, and take from time
His charters, and his customary rights;
Let not to-morrow then ensue to-day:
Be not thyself. For how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession?

Call in the letters patents that he hath
By his attorneys-general to sue
His livery, and deny his off'red homage,
You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts,
And prick my tender patience to those thoughts
Which honour and allegiance cannot think.

(II.i.195-208)

Chronicle plays frequently underlined the evil of rebellion by emphasizing the selfish ambitions and cruelty of the conspirators. In this play, however, Shakespeare is more interested in explaining the rebels' motives plausibly than in making them reprehensible. After Richard disinherits Bolingbroke, several noblemen plan resistance. They say nothing explicitly treasonous until they have felt out each others' sentiments. They do not, like the rebels in Sir John Oldcastle, concentrate on their own ambitions. Rather, they complain of Richard's heavy taxations, his unsuccessful foreign policy, his injustice to Bolingbroke, and—fearing this dangerous precedent—their anticipations of suffering from similar injustices. As one of them puts it,

We see the very wrack that we must suffer,
And unavoided is the danger now,
For suffering so the causes of our wrack.

(II.i.267-269)
Bolingbroke himself returns first to inherit his father's title and estate. It is never made precisely clear when he decides to depose Richard and ascend the throne. The conspirators are motivated not by ruthless egoism, but by patriotism, sympathy with the victims of injustice, and an understandable fear for their own welfare.

In dealing with the results of this rebellion Shakespeare concentrates on plausible explanations of human behavior, even if this treatment tends to blur moral issues. In a play like _2 Robin Hood_, King John has only to repent, and his nobles immediately return to their allegiance. If a playwright is primarily interested in ethical instruction, it is useful to create a dramatic environment in which every moral choice has an appropriate and predictable effect. But Shakespeare is attempting to check dogma against the facts of history. Richard cannot undo the damage he has done simply by repenting. His tyranny has created a series of events over which he has lost control. Bolingbroke and his followers soon find that they have gone too far to turn back.

Richard expects Providence to somehow defend his crown. But God's "glorious angel" (III.11.61) does not come to smite his enemies. The soil of England does not conspire against the usurper. In his despair Richard temporarily seems to accept Bolingbroke's pragmatic approach. "Well you deserve," he tells Bolingbroke,
"They well deserve to have / That know the strong' st and
surest way to get" (III.iii.200-201). Bolingbroke, however, learns that Richard's original faith is not totally unfounded. Immediately after he deposes Richard, the first conspiracy begins against him. Richard predicts, accurately this time, the treachery and rebellions that will characterize all of Henry's reign. The first wave of rebellion comes from factions who remain loyal to Richard. The next wave, more ominously, will come from Henry's allies. Richard himself predicts the strife that will dominate the next two plays.

Henry succeeds in restoring a degree of unity to England. The Duke of York, who as Richard's regent was torn by indecision, now regretfully forgets Richard and gives his full allegiance to the de facto king. So great is his longing for settled order that he even denounces the treason of his own son. Henry, unlike Richard, responds decisively to emergencies. In dealing with the defeated rebels, he prudently combines rigor and mercy. To eliminate a rallying point for future rebellions, he darkly hints at the assassination of Richard. When a courtier takes the hint, Henry publicly repudiates the act and promises a crusade "to wash this blood off from my guilty hand" (V.v1.50). But he too will find that repentance cannot eliminate all the effects of criminal action. Like Richard, he
has created a dangerous precedent and unleashed forces that he cannot completely control. As Henry is already learning, the nemesis exists; it arises from human nature and the structure of English society. At the end of Richard II, Shakespeare shows no way out of England's dilemma. The legitimate king would have ruined England. The more capable Bolingbroke, in deposing him, has created patterns of fear, envy, and ambition, which will trouble England for many years to come.

In 1 Henry IV Shakespeare concentrates on the struggles between Henry and the Percy faction. At stake in this struggle is the unity and well-being of the entire kingdom. In the opening speech Henry evokes the horror of civil war and dreams of uniting his people in a crusade to the Holy Land:

. . . those opposed eyes,
Which, like the meteors of a troubled heaven,
All of one nature, of one substance bred,
Did lately meet in the intestine shock
And furious close of civil butchery,
Shall now, in mutual well-beseeming ranks,
March all one way, and be no more oppos'd
Against acquaintance, kindred, and allies,
The edge of war, like an ill-sheathed knife,
No more shall cut his master.

(I.1.9-18)

This unity will not be easily won. The members of the Percy faction do not need extraordinary temptations to turn against Henry. As Richard predicted, they envy the present king as an upstart who owes his crown to
them. Over and over, they refer to Bolingbroke's poverty and helplessness before they supported him. And what is worse, they know that Henry knows that they envy and resent him. As Worcester puts the case, fear is even more important than ambition:

And 'tis no little reason bids us speed,
To save our heads by raising of a head;
For, bear ourselves as even as we can,
The King will always think him in our debt,
And think we think ourselves unsatisfy'd,
Till he hath found a time to pay us home:
And see already how he doth begin
To make us strangers to his looks of love.

(I.iii.277-284)

Theoretically, the rebels can make a plausible defense. They are backing Edmund Mortimer, who has a stronger claim than Henry to the throne. Mortimer descended from Lionel, the second son of Edward III; Henry descended from John, the third son. Furthermore, Richard appointed Mortimer as his successor. This latter point might have an especially strong effect on a London audience in the 1590's, when many responsible Englishmen were urging the Queen to name a successor and prevent anarchy and civil war after her death.

But the rebels, even though they are fighting in the name of legitimacy, do not offer much hope for English stability. The first scene of Act III presents their first united council. At one point, they divide the kingdom into three parts. Although Mortimer claims
the English throne, he would not, if victorious, really replace Henry as king. Instead, he would lead one of several feudal factions. And we are given an idea of how these factions would rule a divided England. While planning a revolution, at a time when their own unity is absolutely essential, they fall to bickering over the spoils they have yet to win. They are an unstable group of men, and neither Mortimer, the titular leader, nor Worcester, the major strategist, can impose unity.

Throughout 1 Henry IV England still faces a difficult dilemma. On the theoretical level it must either support the reigning monarch and thereby countenance regicide and usurpation or support the pretender and thereby concede the right of any sincere claimant to take the throne by force. On the practical level England must either support the King, whose past is bound to alienate powerful nobles and give a theoretical justification to treason, or support the pretender, whose faction would dismember the kingdom and almost certainly create civil war and chaos. Whatever Shakespeare thought of his Bolingbroke, he clearly supports his Henry IV as the lesser of two evils. But he does not minimize the difficulties of Henry's reign. At the end of 1 Henry IV, the King has temporarily checked the forces of rebellion, but, in the last lines of the play, he reminds his followers of the
works still to be done:

Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway,
Meeting the check of such another day,
And since this business so fair is done,
Let us not leave till all our own be won.

(V.v.41-44)

At the key points of 2 Henry IV, England's dilemma is reiterated. In despairing grief for his son's death, Northumberland determines to destroy all order and leave only "darkness" as "the burier of the dead" (I.i.160). Here Northumberland explicitly evokes the kind of chaos that was hinted at in Part 1.

Henry, weakened both by the rebelliousness of powerful subjects and by his own sense of guilt, can only hold on desperately and meet each difficulty as it comes up. But he has no way of solving his problems once and for all. As a king with a flawed title, he cannot employ ruthless repression. As the Archbishop of York points out, Henry

hath found, to end one doubt by death
Revives two greater in the heirs of life:
And therefore will he wipe his tables clean,
And keep no tell-tale to his memory
That may repeat and history his loss
To new remembrance. For full well he knows
He cannot so precisely weed this land
As his misdoubts present occasion.
His foes are so enrooted with his friends
That plucking to unfix an enemy
He doth unfasten so and shake a friend.

(IV.1.199-209)

On the other hand, the rebels are too deeply enmeshed in
hatred and fear to be won over by mercy. Even if Henry would completely forget their past treachery, they are in no position to trust him. And as the Gaultree negotiations suggest, their suspicions are not unfounded. Shakespeare, who seems to have detested Machiavellian politics as much as any Englishman, deliberately emphasizes Prince John's treachery. Henry's supporters are defending a morally ambiguous dynasty—and by now, it seems to me, every spectator is ready to equate England's welfare with the fortunes of this dynasty—and cannot afford absolute moral rectitude. Henry's position demands a certain amount of treachery, as well as a sure instinct for knowing whether mercy or justice is called for.

Just before Henry's death, another form of anarchy is evoked. Unaware of his son's reformation, Henry pictures a return to royal misrule:

For the fifth Harry from curb'd licence plucks The muzzle of restraint, and the wild dog Shall flesh his tooth on every innocent. 0 my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows! When that my care could not withhold thy riots, What wilt thou do when riot is thy care? 0, thou wilt be a wilderness again, Peopled with wolves, thy old inhabitants! (IV.v.130-137)

This passage is not designed to build suspense on the narrative level. Even the dullest spectator must know by this time what sort of king Hal will be. This passage, however, is thematically important. Up to this point,
the play has concentrated on rebellion and on the rule of an effective, but morally flawed, king. Before portraying the resolution of England's dilemma, Shakespeare includes a passage that recalls the origin of all the difficulties, the misrule of a legitimate ruler. Henry V will reunify England because he has a firmer claim to the throne than his father and because, unlike Richard II, he knows how to rule wisely.

In the first three plays of this tetralogy, Shakespeare faced two important questions that the other chronicle histories tended to avoid. What should subjects do with a completely ineffective ruler? Where should subjects place their allegiance when the succession is genuinely doubtful?

To the first question, he gave an ambiguous answer. During Richard's reign the alternatives of obedience and resistance each lead to their own problems. If, as many critics argue, Shakespeare condemned the deposition of Richard, one can at least say that he does not make this condemnation unmistakably clear. Irving Ribner, for example, argues plausibly that Shakespeare, with some reluctance, finally prefers the effective usurper to the legitimate, but weak, king. During Elizabeth's reign, printers were not allowed to include the deposition scene in the quartos of Richard II. As we know, Essex's followers commissioned a special production of Richard II.
on the eve of their uprising. Shakespeare's contemporaries apparently interpreted this play as at least a potential justification of rebellion.

To the second question he gave a surer answer. If the de facto king is at all competent, he must be obeyed. Before everything else, England needs order. Given the complicated history of England's monarchy and the tangled webs of royal inheritance, chaos would result if every subject could give allegiance to whichever claimant he felt had the best pedigree. At the end of Richard II, when there are genuine moral arguments for the men who rebel against Henry, the instincts of the Duke of York are quite sound. During a period of disorder and confusion, it is especially important to support the man in power and to put down any form of treason. When the choice is between chaos and order, wise men must settle for order, whatever practical and moral imperfections such a choice might entail.

Ultimately, Shakespeare accepts the traditional political philosophy of his times, but not as optimistically as the other playwrights. He arrives at it only after examining it in depth and rejecting moralistic oversimplifications. In most chronicle histories, civil disorders are treated as aberrations in nature. In 2 Robin Hood, King John is possessed by a totally irrational lust and throws aside absolutely all bound of responsibility
and restraint. Conspirators like Prince Henry and Prince John of *Look About You* and Gloucester of *2 Edward III* (or the Gloucester of Shakespeare's earlier *Richard III*, for that matter) openly proclaim their unnatural treachery. When these aberrations are somehow neutralized, society returns, by its own weight as it were, to order and peace. But in Shakespeare's second tetralogy disorder is caused by reasonably normal people responding to motives that are frighteningly understandable. As Shakespeare's treatment of England's past demonstrates, social order often demands more than good will and typical common sense. The order of a kingdom, in fact, is often a tenuous condition that demands constant human effort. Accepting the key role of the monarch, Shakespeare shows an especially great interest in the character and responsibilities of the king.

The entire tetralogy emphasizes the burden of rule. Richard, as we have seen, discovers that he cannot easily undo past mistakes, and he bitterly reproaches himself for betraying God's responsibility. Both Henry IV and Henry V learn how uneasily a king sleeps and find kingship an onerous responsibility rather than a privilege. The sub-plot, which occupies about half of both *Henry IV* plays, culminates in Hal's education for kingship. Admiring and seeing through both Hotspur's idealism and Falstaff's cynicism, he comes, by his own way, to his father's
religious dedication and practical intelligence. After his father's death, he chooses the Chief Justice as counselor and rejects Falstaff. England's dilemma is solved when it is ruled by a legitimate king with the sense of responsibility and wisdom to bear the heavy burden of kingship, by a man who knows that he must fight with the crown "as with an enemy" (2 Henry IV, IV.v.166).

Besides evoking English patriotism, Henry V elaborates the definition of kingship implicit in the preceding three plays. The conspiracy of Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey is presented too briefly to emphasize any serious threat to the realm. But it permits Henry to display the proper qualities of mercy and justice. He pardons the drunken soldier who railed against him, but commits to immediate execution the men who conspired with France against him. Throughout the French campaigns, he insists upon a general policy of clemency to the French (even to the point of executing soldiers guilty of civil outrages), but shows rigor when necessary.

The frivolous, disorganized rule of France may reflect a typically English view of the French national character, but it also brings out by contrast the seriousness with which Henry approaches his responsibilities. After Henry carefully considers the justice of his French claims and the strength of his kingdom, the French ambassadors enter to deliver the Dauphin's tennis-ball jest. The French
King appears quite weak and lets his nobles turn the war into a game. At the first setback they either flee or, consigning order to the devil (IV.v.22), rush back pell-mell to the battle. It is, of course, the serious leader and his outnumbered "warriors for the working-day" (IV. iii.109) who finally win.

Henry V is, in its own way, a celebration of the Tudor ideal of monarchy. Henry unites all of his kingdom—including his "father's enemies" (II.ii.29) and representatives of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. With a legitimate, competent ruler and natural subjects, England achieves order and glory. But even in this optimistic play, Shakespeare reminds us that the system is not self-perpetuating. Henry, as we know, does not live long enough to consolidate his new empire or to lead a crusade to Constantinople. As the play ends, the Chorus briefly summarizes the unhappy reign of the next monarch:

Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown'd King Of France and England, did this king succeed; Whose state so many had the managing, That they lost France and made his England bleed. (V.Chor.9-12)

In Henry V, the last chronicle play he was to write for many years, Shakespeare celebrated the highest virtues of English monarchy. His dramatic reworking of England's past persuaded him of the monarch's importance to England's welfare. Convinced that the Tudor system of monarchy of-
fers a reasonable chance, but not an automatic guarantee, of order and justice, he was deeply interested in exploring the complex problems facing a monarch and the qualities required for solving them. Like many Englishmen at this time, he may also have been wondering what sort of monarch would replace the aging Queen.

Shakespeare completed this historical tetralogy in 1599, the year when the children's companies reopened and when the adult companies suddenly dropped the previously popular chronicle history. With *Julius Caesar*, also written in 1599, Shakespeare began to explore some of the problems that were being explored by his fellow dramatists in the adult and children's companies.

At first glance the Rome of *Julius Caesar* might suggest the England of *Henry IV*. After a turbulent period of civil wars, Rome is ruled by a strong man with ambiguous sanctions for the power he claims. But Tudor patterns of order simply do not apply to Rome's situation. There is no place there for the divinely appointed monarch of Tudor thought. When Caesar rose to power it was clear that Rome needed some kind of strong central authority, but republican traditions militate against the permanent establishment of such authority. As a result Rome faces an apparently irresolvable dilemma: public order demands a form of government that is unconstitutional.

As a brief look at the plot will show, Shakespeare found no practical solution to Rome's dilemma. When the
play opens Caesar has seized absolute power and is toying with the possibility of officially accepting a crown. In the name of Rome's ancient liberties a group of conspirators assassinate him, but fail to fill the power vacuum they have created. In the ensuing civil war, the followers of Caesar win and reestablish an autocratic rule, which promises to be far more oppressive than that of Caesar. And in place of one ruler, there are now three men sharing power. In the early relationship of Antony and Octavius we see clear hints of the discord that will later rend the triumvirate and the entire Empire.

Whatever else it does, *Julius Caesar* deals with a notable failure of social order. Such a topic, of course, might be useful by clarifying precisely what went wrong. But it is not clear that Shakespeare committed himself here to any coherent theoretical interpretation of Rome's failure. Should we, for example, interpret the assassination of Caesar as regicide or simply as murder? Toward the end of the play, we sense that the conspirators are pursued by a nemesis much like that which avenged Christian kings. Regal vengeance is suggested by the spirit of Caesar, which Antony predicted would speak with "a monarch's voice" (III.i.272). Earlier in the play, however, Caesar's right to rule is treated in a very problematic manner. The moral Brutus is deeply disturbed by the deed he feels obliged to perform, but he never once refers to any special
sanctions surrounding the life and authority of Caesar. It is clear that Caesar himself would like the crown, but he is never given a chance to explain to the audience what right he has to it. Even Antony, who once offered him the crown, insists that he was not "ambitious," i.e., anxious to usurp illegitimate authority. Given the details of the play, it is possible to argue that Caesar is a man with some kind of legitimate claim to kingly authority, a practical leader choosing the lesser of two evils, or a potential usurper attempting to subvert the liberties of Rome.

In the fall of Caesar and the ensuing struggle for power, there is not much material that would serve directly as a "mirror" for prince and subject in Tudor England. In the tetralogy he had just completed, Shakespeare had shown the political and psychological truths that gave special relevance to the Tudor system of government and tried to define the sort of monarch who could fulfill the responsibilities of such a system. As we saw, he accepted this system as most appropriate to the realities of English politics, but as liable to many breakdowns. The material of *Julius Caesar* has little direct bearing on Tudor monarchy, but it throws a great deal of light on how men behave when a social system begins to break down. Shakespeare exploits this material to explore the motivation and mechanics of political behavior. In the first section
of the play he concentrates on the various causes of political discontent—personal grievances, envy, greed, patriotism, and the like. He is interested in showing how these various motives were finally welded into a unified movement, especially how a malcontent like Cassius was able to feel out and eventually enlist an idealist like Brutus. Toward the end of this section, Shakespeare concentrates on some of the logistical difficulties of killing a head of state.

The climactic middle section of the play concentrates on the mechanics of seizing political power. Antony manages to combine an apparently genuine grief for his slain leader with a clear-headed concern for his own interests. Having won permission, against the better judgment of Cassius, to deliver Caesar's funeral oration, he stirs the Roman mob to riot and, in the confusion that follows, seizes control of the state. One hardly need comment on Shakespeare's interest here in the rhetoric of political persuasion. From a few remarks in Plutarch about Brutus' laconic style and Antony's florid, Asiatic style, Shakespeare constructs two orations that embody the approach of each character. The turning point of the play, of course, occurs during Antony's speech, when he opens by acknowledging his debt to the "honourable men" who permitted him to speak. He skillfully manipulates the term "honourable" until, within 120 lines, he is able to call
them "traitors" with the full approval of the mob.

In the last section of the play, the Caesarians consolidate their power and completely defeat the conspirators. This section also concentrates on rhetoric, here the rhetoric of the inner council, rather than that of the rostrum. Brutus, having earlier been persuaded by Cassius to join the conspiracy, manages to make most of the major decisions, many of which are serious errors. We also see the inner councils of the triumvirate. It does not make the kind of errors that arise from excessive generosity or nobility. When we first see these leaders together, they are compiling the list of citizens to be killed.

With a chilling reasonableness, Antony agrees to the death of his nephew in exchange for the death of Lepidus' brother. Antony, having moved the mob through Caesar's bequests to the public, now revises the will to the advantage of the triumvirate. But this kind of sensible self-interest has its own dangers. Before this scene is over, Antony suggests easing Lepidus out of power. Nothing comes immediately from this suggestion, but it seems to raise doubts about Antony in Octavius' naturally suspicious mind. When Antony and Octavius argue about the disposition of their respective armies, we see the beginnings of the hostility that will later rend the Empire.

In over-all effect and in individual scenes Julius
Caesar represents a new direction in Shakespeare's political thought. As we have seen, it explores in minute detail why and how men behave in times of social disorder, but it suggests no ideal pattern of order to solve the problems it presents. Furthermore, its treatment of moral issues is rather ambiguous. So important a moral question as Caesar's right to rule is left unsettled. Nor does Shakespeare appear to have displayed a consistent attitude toward the conspirators. After first approaching Brutus, for example, Cassius delivers a soliloquy that suggests the stage villain who deliberately tempts a good man to evil:

Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet I see
Thy honourable mettle may be wrought
From that it is dispos'd; therefore 'tis meet
That noble minds keep ever with their likes;
For who so firm that cannot be seduc'd?
(I.11.305-309)

But later in the play we see him primarily as the professional soldier and as the sincere friend of Brutus.

It is, as a result, difficult to evaluate the morality of the public actions in this play. Caesar may have brought order and justice to Rome, but he violates many of the traditions and laws of Rome and thinks seriously of over-turning the entire system of government. The conspirators may have upheld Roman liberties, but they commit murder and destroy national order without considering how to restore it. Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus sincerely wish
to avenge Caesar and have realistic notions of political order, but they are guilty of both cruelty and corruption. It is only in the realm of private virtues that a certain moral coherence emerges. Cassius and Brutus, like true Romans, die with bravery and dignity. Octavius shows typical Roman magnanimity by accepting into his own service the captured followers of Brutus and Cassius. It is consistent with the non-political emphasis on private virtues that Antony delivers the moral vindication of Brutus:

This was the noblest Roman of them all.  
All the conspirators save only he  
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;  
He only, in a general honest thought  
And common good to all, made one of them.  
His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, "This was a man!"

(V.v.68-75)

In this play, written as early as 1599, Shakespeare approached two problems that, as we saw in Chapter II, came to dominate the political plays written for the children's companies. Throughout, he concentrated on the purely human details of political action, without a clear orientation in either a guiding Providence or a divinely sanctioned order. In important parts of the play, especially those involving Brutus, he dealt with the fate of a more or less honest man who must live in a corrupt and confused society. As we shall see, this
second problem receives even greater attention in some later Shakespearean plays.

Approximately two years later—that is, about 1601—Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*. Like *Julius Caesar*, this play is set in a country undergoing a political crisis. The first two scenes concentrate heavily on political issues. As we learn in the first scene, Denmark is preparing to resist a foreign invasion. The ghost of the former king appears and seems to foretell some internal problems in the state. As it turns out, Denmark easily counters the threat of invasion, but is seriously troubled by the corruption at its center.

Political issues, of course, are very important in this play, and although critics tend to treat them as relatively obvious, there are certain ambiguities about Denmark's political problems. It is often assumed, for example, that since Shakespeare had the English constitution in mind, he took it for granted that Claudius was a usurper.² It follows, therefore, that Hamlet can solve Denmark's problems simply by following the ghost's orders, killing Claudius, and assuming the throne that is rightly his own. But in several passages characters refer to "election," the early Scandinavian system that did not necessarily recognize primogeniture. Other passages refer to the Norwegian state, where old Fortinbras was succeeded by his brother, not his son. There is nothing
to suggest that Shakespeare wished us to regard the Norwegian king as either a tyrant or a usurper. It is not clear, it seems to me, that Claudius' theoretical claim to the throne is definitely settled.\(^3\) But it is clear that on the practical level he is not an effective king. Although he possesses a certain talent for foreign policy and the manipulation of courtiers, he has not won the support of the people. Almost as soon as Laertes returns to Denmark, he is able to raise an insurrection that could easily have toppled Claudius. At the end of the play, Denmark's problems are resolved rather ambiguously. By giving Fortinbras his "dying voice" (V.ii.354), Hamlet presumably saves his country from a disputed succession. But Shakespeare took no steps to indicate what sort of king Fortinbras would make. During the complicated action of this play, one social and political abnormality has been purged, but there are very few hints about the future condition of Denmark.

If we remember how Shakespeare treated the problem of monarchical legitimacy in Richard II or I Henry IV, it seems clear that he was not interested in exploring this problem further in Hamlet. There simply are not enough details to let us know precisely who should rule Denmark. Nor is it clear that Shakespeare was interested in exploring any clearly defined pattern of social order. As in Julius Caesar, he was interested in the mechanics of
political power: Claudius' ability to manipulate his courtiers, the devious sophistries of Polonius, the ineffective time-serving of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the like. The political situation in Denmark may not suggest any theoretical solution to human problems, but it does reflect various corruptions that were getting more and more attention from playwrights. Central to Hamlet, of course, is its protagonist's reaction to these corruptions.

As the various, and often contradictory, interpretations of Hamlet suggest, Shakespeare did not have a neatly defined "message" in this play. Whether or not he was familiar with Marston's Antonio's Revenge, he saw in the old-fashioned revenge tragedy a genre that could raise certain kinds of questions. In Shakespeare's version of the revenge tragedy, an idealistic young man is placed in a position where he must face some of the worst evils of human life and somehow undertake difficult responsibilities. At the beginning of the play, he is in grief at his father's death and his mother's incestuous marriage. He is soon to learn of the terrible crime against nature that underlies the current government of Denmark. And he must somehow act to restore moral and political health to his nation.

As the malcontent revenger, Hamlet is, of course, an ideal spokesman for the young turn-of-the-century
Elizabethans. Hamlet has a keen eye for the weaknesses in everyone's character, including his own, and generalizing from his own experience, he abandons his early idealism and decides that man, far from being "the beauty of the world" and "the paragon of animals" (II.i.310-311), is actually the worst creature in a corrupt universe. Pushing his pessimism to its logical extreme, he devotes an entire soliloquy to perhaps the most fundamental question of all: Why should a man continue to live? In this soliloquy hecatalogues evils drawn indiscriminately from public and private life:

... the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disproiz'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes ... 

(III.i.70-74)

Whether or not Shakespeare formulated any coherent answers in Hamlet is still a matter of critical and scholarly debate, but it is clear that he was here trying to raise moral questions broader and deeper than those he had raised in the chronicle plays. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Shakespeare's chronicle plays raised problems for which there were possible, if not automatic, solutions. In a sense, Hamlet pushes beyond the questions raised in Julius Caesar, which analyzed political action in a state apparently doomed to disorder and injustice. A small portion of that play, largely that section dealing with Brutus,
considered the dilemma of a political leader trying to
drive a moral life in this sort of society. Most of Hamlet
deals with this kind of problem and broadens the field to
include not only political injustice and disorder but also
most of the evils surrounding human life. Critics still
disagree on the morality of many of Hamlet's actions. But
it seems clear that he does not completely escape the moral
corruption of the world he inhabits. As he himself puts
it,

I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could
accuse me of such things, that it were better my
mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful,
ambitious, with more offences at my beck, than I
have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give
them shape, or time to act them in: what should
such fellows as I do crawling between earth and
heaven?

(III.1.122-129)

Shortly after this speech, Hamlet deliberately refrains
from killing Claudius lest his uncle escape damnation.
After arranging the murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,
he casually dismisses any moral responsibility: "Why, man,
they did make love to this employment, / They are not near
my conscience . . ." (V.i.57-58). Like many heroes of
revenge tragedy, Hamlet permits his terrible responsibilities
to blunt his conscience.

Central to the play's final resolution is one inescap-
able fact of life--human death. An agent from the other
world sets in motion the principle actions of the play.
Just before the catastrophe of the play, there is the lengthy graveyard scene, which contributes little directly to the plot. But through Hamlet's long reflections on the paradox of human grandeur and death, the audience is enabled to see society in a broader perspective and is prepared for Hamlet's acceptance of his own fate. Convinced that "the readiness is all" (V.ii.220), Hamlet seems to accept with equal serenity his victory over Claudius and his own death.

Although much of *Hamlet* has eluded convincing interpretation, we can see the general direction in which Shakespeare is moving. This play is clearly a response to the less optimistic mood beginning to permeate the drama of this time. There are, of course, many responses available to an author who is losing faith in a political system or who is becoming primarily interested in problems that transcend political solutions. He can simply express his pessimism in witty cynicism. He can concentrate on the worst possible aspects of human nature and portray physical and moral horrors that will shock or titillate. He can give up the search for solutions and simply offer an anatomy of the evils men can expect to undergo before they die. Or, perhaps most difficult of all, he can confront certain inevitable evils and try to work out some vision of tragedy that can restore meaning and dignity to human life. In writing *Hamlet* Shakespeare did not ignore
any of these possibilities. In the talk of incest, rotting corpses, and the like or in the actual on-stage presentation of murders, Hamlet is as successfully sensational as Antonio's Revenge or Hoffman. Hamlet himself anatomizes his society with Jonsonian thoroughness and with a cynicism as elegant as Marston's or Middleton's. But Hamlet also represents an important new direction in Shakespeare's development. It is perhaps the first extensive experiment in the kind of tragic form that will dominate Shakespeare's work from Othello to Antony and Cleopatra. Whatever else it does, Hamlet portrays the life and death of a protagonist who has failed to find an easy solution for the world's problems and who has been partly corrupted by the evil he faces. But in defeat this protagonist finds a wisdom and a dignity that is a kind of victory for human nature. Much in this play is confusing—the exact significance of many key events, the relationship between Hamlet's private life and the fate of Denmark, and the like—but it is a start toward the concept of victory in defeat that underlies all of Shakespeare's mature tragedies.

Shakespeare's next tragedy, Othello, was written three years later—approximately 1604. Compared to Hamlet it presents few problems in structure and meaning. There appear to be no unresolved political problems in the play, since it tends to ignore difficult issues in this area. Except for the Turkish invasion, a danger which disappears
early in Act II, Venice suffers no really serious political problems. After Act II all the action takes place in Cyprus, and order is soon restored to this outpost of the Venetian empire. Even in the midst of his personal problems, Othello is able to carry out his public responsibilities effectively.

Othello is, of course, an extremely important official in the Venetian state. This fact helps to establish the power and nobility of his character, but it has little direct bearing on the important issues of the plot. To a great extent Shakespeare took the structure and conventions of the domestic tragedy and transferred them to a more exalted social level. Had Othello been, say, a prosperous goldsmith and Iago his trusted journeyman, our reaction to the tragedy would no doubt be different. But in a way impossible for Julius Caesar or Hamlet, much of the action—Iago's plot, Othello's struggle with doubt, the murder of Desdemona—could have been transferred to a middle-class setting without obvious absurdity.

Although there are many political details in its background, Othello is essentially a tragedy of private life. There are certain ambiguities in the play; critics and scholars still disagree, for example, on the exact nature of Iago's motivation or on the degree of moral guilt to be attached to Othello's gullibility. But however we rate its over-all merits, Othello seems to be a more coherent and
internally consistent play than either *Julius Caesar* or *Hamlet*. By turning to the essentially private world of the domestic tragedy, Shakespeare found a fairly manageable background for the problems of this play.

*Othello* is not an exercise in fashionable pessimism. Except for Iago, Roderigo, and perhaps Bianca, most of the major characters seem to be fundamentally decent human beings. But *Othello* is a tragedy nevertheless, and it raises problems that do not admit of easy political or ethical solutions. As Othello learns at the end of the play, a man must live and act without always being able to understand the real nature of every important matter. Shakespeare showed great interest in two major sources of human confusion: deliberate deception and a man's inability to understand himself. In Iago, of course, Shakespeare found a perfect chance to explore the mechanics of deception. Critics still disagree on just how well Othello understands himself, but just as Iago first begins to undermine his faith in Desdemona, he expresses an obviously unjustified confidence in his ability to settle all his doubts quickly and accurately:

>I’ll see before I doubt, when I doubt, prove,  
And on the proof, there is no more but this:  
Away at once with love or jealousy!  

*(III.iii.194-196)*

After a life of commanding soldiers effectively and of holding his own before heads of state, Othello expects to deal
sensibly with one more crisis. But he is less at home in the world of private intrigue. He makes wrong judgments and learns the truth only after he has destroyed his own happiness and committed what he considers an unpardonable sin.

The conclusion of the play does not emphasize any neat moral that can be drawn from the plot. Othello has fallen not because he yielded to any clear-cut temptation to sin, but because he was unable to judge a very ambiguous situation accurately. Looking at the fallen hero, Lodovico asks the question that this tragedy tries to answer:

O thou Othello, that wert once so good,
Fall'n in the practice of a damned slave,
What should be said to thee?

(V.ii.292-294)

Othello is no doubt guilty of a serious crime, but he has attempted to act in good faith. In his final speeches, he expresses the tragic anguish of a man who has been deceived into destroying what he most values. Like Hamlet, he approaches death with thoughts of his future reputation. He asks the gathered onlookers for understanding:

... I pray you in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of them as they are; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice; then must you speak
Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme...

(V.ii.341-347)
Like Brutus and Hamlet, he is both defeated and corrupted by the evil in the world, but achieves a kind of spiritual victory by a death worthy of the best of his virtues.

The plays we have discussed so far show a significant shift in Shakespeare's approach to national problems. Until 1599 he concentrated on chronicle plays dealing with English history. The Richard II-Henry V tetralogy subjected current Tudor doctrines of order to a searching analysis. In his treatment of this crucial period of English history, Shakespeare seemed to suggest that the Tudor doctrine of monarchy offers the only possibilities for order and justice in England, but not that order will result almost automatically from sincere virtue. Life is not as simple as a morality play, and the good monarch must wage a constant struggle for order and justice.

In 1599, at about the same time that the newly established children's companies provided an outlet for experimental drama, Shakespeare began to raise a more complex set of problems. In Julius Caesar, Hamlet, and Othello, he no longer concentrated on a system designed to prevent various types of human evil. Instead he attempted to explore more deeply the nature of evil. In Julius Caesar he concentrated primarily on the mechanics of political action in troubled and corrupt times. Shortly afterwards experimental plays like Philotus and Sejanus showed the same interests. In Hamlet Shakespeare concentrated not so much on political
problems as on the reaction of the protagonist to a wide range of human evils. Experimental plays like Antonio's Revenge, The Malcontent, and Bussy D'Ambois reflected the same interest. In both Julius Caesar and Hamlet we find many of the ambiguities and confusions typical of this transition period. Like the experimental playwrights of the children's companies, Shakespeare was groping for both new insights and new dramatic forms to embody them. As he and other playwrights became more and more interested in human problems for which there are no easy solutions, they were moving into an area especially appropriate to tragedy. In Macbeth and his later tragedies Shakespeare found a form that permitted him to deal coherently with the inevitable evils of human life. Although this tragic form seems uniquely Shakespearean, it grew out of the doubts, interests, and experiments that were shaping forces in this period of transition.

The Problems of Private Life

While grappling in the chronicle plays with the problems of English politics, Shakespeare also produced some of his most cheerful comedies, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night. Like most of the comedies written for adult companies before 1600, they concentrate on entertaining stories of young love and tend to ignore or minimize serious vice
or suffering. Although they subject certain human values to ironic analysis, they are set in an orderly, reassuring world and raise only those problems that can be solved by the rules of that world.  

The Merry Wives of Windsor, written probably in 1597, is Shakespeare's first and only bourgeois comedy. As such, its setting superficially resembles the "real" world that Shakespeare's audience would recognize as its own. The play abounds in local color from Windsor and includes many details of the life of the contemporary gentry. It even reflects the city-court frictions in Windsor. But all of these details are carefully controlled to give an ideal picture of bourgeois values and to soften the picture of courtly vice.

A few years later, as we saw in Chapter III, many comedies would picture bourgeois wives as either absurd prudes or notoriously easy marks for a courtier. In this play, however, they are neither stuffy nor lecherous. In the main plot, Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page illustrate that "wives may be merry, and yet honest too" (IV.11.98). And in spite of Master Ford's congenital jealousy, the sanctity of marriage is never challenged in this play. Falstaff's physical appearance and arrogant manners prevent him from being a serious threat to virtue. Furthermore, the wives learn early in Act II that he is cynically attempting to seduce both of them. The audience is led to wonder, not
whether the seducer will succeed, but how the wives will baffle and humiliate him. Almost as ridiculous as the would-be seducer is Master Ford, whose view of female chastity is so pessimistic that he fears even the aging, penniless knight. By the end of the play, he takes a more reasonable view of women's virtue. In fact, he expresses so absolute a faith in his wife that Master Page warns him not to be "as extreme in submission / As in offense" (IV.iv.11-12).

The minor plot involves the courtship of Anne Page. She wishes to marry Master Fenton, a young courtier, but both her parents disapprove of him. Here there are some references to contemporary social antagonisms. Master Page objects to him as a man "too great of birth" (III.iv.4), who has been guilty of "riots" and "wild societies" (III.iv.8). He thinks that Fenton is merely another bankrupt courtier trying to repair his fortunes with a dowery. Fenton candidly admits that he first approached Anne for her money, but explains that he was soon won over to sentiments more appropriate to comedy:

Albeit I will confess thy father's wealth Was the first motive that I wooed thee, Anne: Yet, wooing thee, I found thee of more value Than stamps in gold or sums in seal'd bags: And 'tis the very riches of thyself That now I aim at.

(III.iv.13-18)

Outwitting the disapproving parents and undesirable suitors,
the young people marry. With the common sense typical of comedy, the parents bow to the inevitable and accept their new son-in-law. In the Windsor of this play, snobbery quickly gives way to true love.

The Merry Wives of Windsor concentrates on presenting lively and amusing intrigue, not on analyzing the objects of these intrigues. One set of intrigues, as we have seen, would lead to adultery, but we know from the beginning that it is doomed to comic failure. The other leads to an honorable and happy marriage. It appears that Shakespeare, in reworking the original play, eliminated one set of intrigues. Mrs. Quickly, drawn from Eastcheap to be the housekeeper of Dr. Caius, worries at one point about her jealous master finding her with a man (I.iv.46-47). But nothing more is made of any sexual relations between the two. Shakespeare at this time did not find adultery or fornication appropriate to the world of comedy.

Shakespeare's next comedy, Much Ado About Nothing, is usually dated around 1598 and almost certainly belongs to the period from 1598 to 1600. Turning again to romantic comedy, Shakespeare set this play in Messina and concentrated on the courtships of young aristocrats. In this play Shakespeare did not completely avoid serious moral evils. Margaret, one of Leonato's servants, is having an affair with Borachio. Don John, the illegitimate brother of Don Pedro, is a malcontent by temperament and
prepared to commit any villainy to destroy whatever virtue or beauty he sees. But Shakespeare spent little time in analyzing any of these evils. We do not, for example, see what led Margaret to sacrifice her honor or how her sin affects her character or fortunes. Except for his illegitimate birth, no reason is given for Don John's extraordinary malignancy. Nor do we see in detail, as we do in *Julius Caesar* or *Othello*, the manner in which evil men prevail upon genuinely virtuous people. The deception of Don Pedro and Claudio takes place off stage. Like the villains of most romantic comedies of this period, Don John, Borachio, and Margaret exist primarily to complicate the plot and influence the fate of other characters.

The villains exist because someone has to deceive the virtuous Don Pedro and Claudio regarding Hero's honor. This deception results in the climactic altar scene, where Claudio publicly disgraces and repudiates the innocent Hero. This scene, of course, is central to both major plots. In one of these plots Claudio and Hero fall in love immediately and implicitly accept the rules and values of romantic love. Claudio's rejection of Hero is the logical result of the absolute ideal of love shared by both of them. Until he learns that Hero is faithful, he can do nothing but reject her. In the altar scene, one pair of lovers is separated, but the other pair is united. Beatrice and Benedict are at-
tracted to each other, but resist their feelings and mock
the claims of romantic love with wit and irony. After
the successful intrigues of their friends, they are
almost ready to confess their love to each other. Both
are deeply moved by the suffering of Hero, and after a
brief flurry of wit they speak seriously of their feel­
ings for each other. Assuming the conventional role of
lover, Benedict offers to do anything for his mistress.
He is shocked when Beatrice makes a very serious request,
"Kill Claudio" (IV.1.288). After an initial refusal he
agrees to challenge his friend. Although he never com­
pletely abandons his rather cynical attitudes (his love
of freedom, his fear of horns, and the like), he fully
accepts the rules of romantic love.

As we have seen, then, the altar scene is the turn­
ing point in both plots. It is just possible that Shake­
speare was too successful in creating a theatrically
striking effect. Many critics, at any rate, are unwill­
ing to forgive Claudio's unnecessary cruelty. Shakespeare
may have seen this problem, but, if so, he was willing to
risk some sympathy for his hero in order to create an
effect which would be highly exciting on the stage and
which would sufficiently motivate the reactions of
Beatrice and Benedict. But except perhaps for an unin­
tentional blot on Claudio's character, the play's struc­
ture seems effective and appropriate. The two courtships,
united but sharply contrasted, reach a crisis during the
altar scene, and each ends happily in the preparations for a double wedding. On the plot level, these courtships make possible some exciting intrigue and amusing dialogue. On the thematic level, they permit Shakespeare simultaneously to evoke the nature and power of romantic love and subject it to ironic commentary. The play does not yield a clear-cut, dogmatic message, but while amusing its audience, it has dealt with apparently contradictory attitudes toward love and marriage. It has presented with some power the poetic claims frequently made for romantic love and contrasted them to the everyday facts of human experience. In Benedict, who consciously decides to "be horribly in love" (II.iii.229) and who eagerly goes to his wedding still joking about light heels and horns, there is a kind of resolution of two very different conceptions of marriage: the union of a divinely perfect woman and a worshipping man; and the union of two human beings each with various virtues and vices, and each with a will of his and her own.

In As You Like It, usually dated 1599 or 1600, there are two separate worlds. The play opens in a supposedly civilized world, which is currently governed by evil men. Frederick has usurped his brother's dukedom, Oliver has succeeded to his estate lawfully, but tyrannizes most cruelly over his youngest brother. But as in Much Ado About Nothing, very little attention is given them. Their major dramatic function is to drive the other characters
into the Forest of Arden. Once they have done this, the villains practically disappear until the very end of the play. After the first act, except for a few very brief scenes, all the action takes place in Arden.

There are no villains in Arden. There we find some folly, but no serious moral evil. Although critics still debate the exact thematic significance of *As You Like It*, it seems clearly to follow the pastoral tradition in presenting several possible reactions to love and to worldly ambition. As in *Much Ado About Nothing*, romantic love is both celebrated and critically analyzed. Orlando seems to have grown in virtue through love, but his poetry inspires more laughter than sentiment. The absurdity inherent in the lover as servant receives its ultimate parody in Silvius. Some sort of resolution is again achieved in Rosalind, who is deeply devoted to romantic love and fully aware of its impostures.

The play also deals with the relation between ambition on the one hand and virtue and happiness on the other. The banished Duke lives in Arden with a few loyal followers. The Duke, perhaps making a virtue of necessity, argues that the primitive life of the woods is superior to the sophisticated life of the court. Unlike courtiers, the elements refuse to lie to him. And, he argues, he has finally outwitted Fortune by limiting his ambitions to bare essentials—food, shelter, and simple pleasures.
This view does not go unchallenged. After Amiens sings the praises of pastoral simplicity, Jacques parodies this pastoralism and mocks the "gross fools" (II.v.54) who pretend to like the discomforts of the forest. Touchstone adds to the debate both by mocking the absurdities of court life and by pointing up the artificiality of court-bred people pretending to be shepherds or foresters.

The play's final verdict seems to be that civilized men cannot really return to the primal simplicity of Arden. In the end, at any rate, only the melancholy Jacques refuses to return to his own world. Having seen through pastoralism, he decides to visit the forest's hermit and try asceticism. The rest of the exiles return to their former places in society, presumably after learning greater wisdom from their brief sojourn in Arden. The evils that first drove them into exile have conveniently disappeared. Both Frederick and Oliver visit Arden and are almost instantly converted to virtue. Aesthetically, it seems to me, these last-minute conversions are appropriate and economical. The play has dealt, not with vice, but with the nature of certain kinds of virtue. Arden can teach good men something about themselves and about the world. When the exiles have remained there to learn all they can, the villains are no longer necessary. In this cheerful comedy, Shakespeare has not so much denied as ignored the problem of evil. He has concentrated on virtuous people, placed
them in an idealized environment, and let them learn new truths about themselves, about the nature of love, and about the responsibilities they have in the real world.

Twelfth Night, probably the last of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, is usually dated 1600 or 1601. There are no villains at all in this play. There are many varieties and degrees of folly, but no genuinely serious evil. In the Illyria of this play, roisterers violate the social proprieties; idealists go to fanatical extremes. But no mortal sins are committed; no serious damage is done. To exclude serious moral problems, Shakespeare makes one significant deviation from his source, in which the young noblewoman is made pregnant and then deserted by the male twin. Here Shakespeare deliberately sacrifices a potentially effective dramatic situation. If Olivia were pregnant, the denial of Viola-Caesario would seem more heartless to the other characters, and her innocence even more comically obvious to the audience. Hurrying over the secret marriage between Olivia and Sebastian, Shakespeare not only loses dramatic effect but also blurs the motivation for this important matter. After arranging the marriage, Olivia promises to keep it secret if Sebastian, for some reason or other, is reluctant to admit that he is her husband:

Plight me the full assurance of your faith,
That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace. He [i.e., the priest]
shall conceal it,
While you are willing it shall come to note,  
What time we will our celebration keep  
According to my birth. 

(IV.iii.26-31)

This passage is not very clear, but it provides for a necessary plot complication without compromising Olivia's virtue. A pregnant, unmarried heroine apparently does not fit Shakespeare's sense of the decorum of romantic comedy at this time.

Like the other romantic comedies we have looked at, Twelfth Night deals with virtues and with follies that fall short of serious vice. Among the lower characters, Malvolio is too self-important to see the necessary place for cakes and ale in human life. Sir Toby, on the other hand, wants life to be nothing but cakes and ale. Among the more exalted characters, the nature of love is once again an important theme. Orsino makes romantic love the total goal of his life. With almost fanatical devotion to its ideals, he faithfully courts the same woman long after it is clear that she will never return his love. At the other extreme Olivia denies any place for romantic love and, with equal fanaticism, devotes her life to mourning a dead brother and refuses to admit the necessity of sexual love. At the end of the play, these extremes are resolved. In transferring his affections to the woman who loves him, Orsino modifies his overly idealized devotion to romantic fidelity. In
falling in love with Sebastian, Olivia admits that her type of asceticism is not really appropriate to her nature. In the Twelfth-Night atmosphere of Illyria, crime and vice are banished. Here essentially moral human beings undergo a series of comic misunderstandings in order that they might grow in wisdom and self-understanding.

In these four plays Shakespeare carefully observed the decorum of romantic comedy. Although characters like Jacques and Malvolio may reflect a growing interest in comedy of humours, Shakespeare kept these elements from contaminating the romantic major plots. Even at the expense of more dramatic effects Shakespeare preserved his romantic lovers from sexual immorality. Thematically he tended to avoid serious vices and concentrated on defining certain types of virtue and wisdom. This thematic emphasis blended in well with the conventions of romantic comedy. Except for some problems with Claudio's treatment of Hero, these plays betray none of the tension between form and content that were typical of many plays during this period of transition. In these plays Shakespeare apparently found an ideal genre and the themes that enabled him to keep the promise implicit in Feste's conclusion to Twelfth Night:

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain;
But that’s all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.
(V.1.404-407)
In these entertaining comedies Shakespeare ignored or side-stepped disturbing elements and restricted himself to those areas of human experience that were amenable to the traditional conventions of romantic comedy.

In the first years of the seventeenth century, when several comedies of the adult companies began to explore serious moral and social evils, Shakespeare wrote two of his most difficult comedies, *All's Well That Ends Well* (1601-2) and *Measure for Measure* (1604). Although the pessimism of these "dark comedies" can be seriously exaggerated, they present and explore worlds very different from those of Shakespeare's previous comedies.

The opening action of *All's Well That Ends Well* occurs in a highly admirable society. At Rossillion Bertram's widowed mother supervises an idyllically peaceful household. At Paris the aging king rules with wisdom and a profound love for his subjects. But before long the action shifts to the Italian wars, where Bertram undergoes his moral decline. In a sense this play reverses the pattern typical of many romantic comedies. In plays like *As You Like It*, characters leave the "real" world and enter a kind of enchanted land where they can learn new truths about themselves. When Bertram leaves the protective world of Rossillion and Paris and runs off to Italy, he has a chance to reveal his true nature.

The world that Bertram finds is not notably immoral,
certainly nothing like the world of *Westward Ho!* or *The Phoenix*. We learn little about the justice of Florence's cause, but its army seems to behave with reasonable decorum. Diana, her mother, and her neighbors are respectable examples of Florence's citizens. And although some critics have objected to Helena's lack of maidenly bashfulness, no one can accuse her of serious vice. In saving her disdainful husband from his own vices and in meeting the conditions he imposed, she shows a remarkable degree of virtue and intelligence. As in the romantic comedies, Shakespeare here seems interested in exploring certain kinds of virtue.

But in spite of all these virtuous people, *All's Well That Ends Well* is quite different from Shakespeare's typical romantic comedies, most of which tend to avoid evil characters completely or to relegate them to minor roles. In this play Shakespeare concentrates heavily on two major characters who are guilty of very serious vices. Parolles, for example, first looks like another relatively harmless humours characters. He overdresses absurdly and tells outrageous lies about his soldierly virtues. Like Malvolio he is an assiduous social climber. But his weaknesses go far beyond the follies dealt with in romantic comedies. He acts as go-between when Bertram attempts to seduce the virtuous Diana and, if he sees any advantage to himself, is prepared to betray the "foolish idle boy" (IV.111.207) whom he has sworn to serve. As a soldier he is guilty of
the ultimate treachery. Believing himself captured by the enemy (actually his own comrades), he reveals every military secret to which he is privy. He offers to betray all of his friends—not through policy, but through complete, abject cowardice. His faults are graver than Malvolio's and his punishment is crueler. After his public humiliation, he is left without a device to delude even himself. Accepting his own baseness, he limits his ambitions to mere survival, on any terms. At the end of the play he gratefully accepts Lafew's rather contemptuous offer of charity, "... though you are a fool and a knave you shall eat" (V.ii.50).

As Bertram's military honors prove, he is made of better stuff than Parolles. His nature is not hopelessly corrupt, but he displays a disastrous moral blindness at important moments of his life. He is so obsessed with Helena's social rank that he cannot see her obvious beauty and virtue. He rejects an ideal wife and publicly defies his king. On his own in Italy, he turns for counsel and advice to Parolles, a braggart who deceives practically no one else in the play. When this blindness is combined with immature selfishness, it leads to very serious moral evil. In trying to seduce Diana, Bertram is guilty of more than lust. He promises to marry Diana when his present wife dies, but he has no intention of keeping such a promise. Having slept with the woman he believes to be Diana, he immediately flees from Florence. In the
last scene, which parallels the public disgrace of Parolles, he lies continually to the King in order to save his worsening reputation. He first denies his relations with Diana and, when his affair is apparently proved, accuses her of being "a common gamester to the camp" (V.iii.187). It is not insignificant that in pursuing her Bertram gave up a family heirloom even though such an act was, in his own words, "the greatest obliquy i' th' world" (IV.ii.48). At the end of this play, Bertram has very little honor left.

Like the romantic comedies All's Well That Ends Well closes with the reconciliation of the major characters. Bertram agrees to love his wife dearly, the King promises Diana a suitable husband, and the characters exit to tie up all the loose ends of the plot. Practically no critic is satisfied with the conclusion of this play. Bertram's cruelty to Helena and treachery to Diana have been presented so vividly that his hasty repentance (only four words long, in fact) fails to counterbalance the over-all impression that he has made.

There have been to date no convincing interpretations of this play. It seems clear, however, that Shakespeare is trying to apply the conventions of romantic comedy to new subject matter. When two central characters are unmasked they betray more than naive idealism or relatively harmless self-indulgence. The hypocrisies of Parolles and Bertram are far more dangerous and vicious than those of Malvolio.
In *As You Like It* we tend to accept Oliver's conversion and marriage to Celia with little difficulty; after Act I we hear little of his cruelty, and we can expect him to respond to the special influence of Arden. But Bertram's cruelty and dishonesty have been among the central concerns of the play—especially of the last two hundred lines. Deciding to employ comedy for the exploration of serious moral evil, Shakespeare is forced to move villains to the center of the stage. Such a shift of course creates serious problems with the conventions of romantic comedy. In *All's Well That Ends Well* Shakespeare does not appear to have solved all of these problems.

In *Measure for Measure* there are elements similar to those of the exposé comedy, which became popular among the children's companies toward the end of this period. A duke pretends to leave his dukedom temporarily and then disguises himself as a friar in order to observe the true nature of his subjects. He finds corruption on all levels of society. One of his comments would have fit neatly into *The Phoenix* or *Law Tricks*. Asked for news, the disguised Duke replies,

None, but that there is so great a fever on goodness that the dissolution of it must cure it. Novelty is only in request, and it is as dangerous to be aged in any kind of course as it is virtuous to be constant in any undertaking. There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure; but security enough to make fellowships accurst. Much upon this riddle runs the wisdom of the world. This news is old enough, yet it is every day's news.

(III.11.216-224)
In the many scenes devoted to Vienna's low life, the play looks extensively at human immorality. Bawds, prostitutes, and dissolute young men not only display their own vices but also remind us that certain human weaknesses are universal. The rake Lucio defends lechery as natural and assures the disguised Duke that it will not be legislated out of existence "till eating and drinking be put down" (III.i.99). We also see some of the economic background of Vienna's vice. The bawd Pompey offers his own defense of his profession: "I am a poor fellow that would live" (II.i.220). The authorities, in an effort to find him a lawful trade, apprentice him to a public executioner. Pompey accepts the opportunity, but not without some ironic reflections on society's sense of values. He also criticizes the priorities that tolerate economic sins and punish sexual ones: "'Twas never merry world since, of two usuries, the merriest was put down, and the worser allowed by order of law . . ." (III.i.6-8). Although Measure for Measure concentrates on sexual morality, it raises questions about a broader range of ethics.

But to concentrate exclusively on the low-life scenes would seriously distort Measure for Measure. In a play like The Phoenix Middleton is content to demonstrate with rich detail and an almost perverse enthusiasm that human nature is corrupt and that the world is hopelessly immoral. That human vice creates serious social problems is an
important hypothesis of Shakespeare's theme, but is not the sum total of that theme. Although the play offers no easy, dogmatic answers, it explores ways in which rulers and private citizens can cope with human evil. Escalus and Angelo, the two deputies appointed by the Duke, represent two very different approaches, neither of which is completely appropriate. Relying on his good nature and common sense, the elderly Escalus is often able to make the best of the weak and sinful human nature that he understands and pities. He would certainly have treated Claudio's crime with greater wisdom and justice than did his more rigorous colleague. Escalus behaves reasonably in the trial over which he presides. After finally making some general sense out of the magnificently tangled testimony of Elbow, Froth, and Pompey, he manages to impose a rough kind of solution. He advises the foolish Froth to avoid the bad company that has been devouring his inheritance. Discovering that the ineffective Elbow has been a constable for the last seven and a half years, he praises Elbow's extraordinary self-sacrifice and arranges to relieve him with a more competent officer. But his tact and wisdom cannot cope with hardened sinners like Pompey or Mistress Overdone. His severe lecture to Pompey has no effect whatsoever. As he himself is forced to admit, a magistrate should not always employ mercy.

At the other extreme is Angelo, who tries to root
out vice by a rigorous application of justice totally unalloyed by mercy. To put back into force Vienna's severe law against fornication, he chooses to execute Claudio, whose crime is making love to the woman to whom he is betrothed and whom he has every intention of marrying. Such a decision represents a very inflexible application of justice which is too rigorous for the general run of humanity and, as his subsequent career proves, too rigorous for himself as well. As Angelo will learn at the end of the play, mercy and justice are both necessary when one governs human beings.

Among the private citizens we find various attitudes toward virtue and vice. Most of those who either manage or patronize the brothels of Vienna maintain that vice is a necessary and natural condition of human life. Their cynicism helps expose the weakness in the philosophy of Angelo, who would "unpeople the province with continency" (III.ii.168-169). But this kind of cynical tolerance leads ultimately to chaos; it is to mitigate this kind of vice that the Duke instituted his project in the first place.

Less extreme is Claudio's attitude toward ethics. He is a normally virtuous young man who tries by and large to do what is right, but he doesn't expect extraordinary virtue from others or from himself. When he learns that his sister, Isabel, can save his life by
submitting to Angelo, he at first refuses even to consider so dishonorable an exchange. Before long, however, he begins to rationalize with his sister and finally begs her to save his life. But Isabel's dedication to virtue admits of no compromise. Before meeting her brother she has already made her decision: "More than our brother is our chastity" (II.iv.184). She not only rejects Claudio's appeal but also bitterly denounces him for making it:

O, you beast!  
O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch! 
Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice? 
Is't not a kind of incest, to take life 
From thine own sister's shame? What should I think? 
Heaven shield my mother play'd my father fair: 
For such a warped slip of wilderness 
Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance, 
Die, perish! Might but my bending down 
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed. 
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death; 
No word to save thee.

(III.1.135-146)

This speech is central to many interpretations of the play. Some critics accept Isabel's attitude toward virtue (and Shakespeare rarely, if ever, defended extra-marital sex under any circumstances) and defend her words here as an accurate summary of Claudio's character and an appropriate or, at any rate, justifiable reaction to his request. Others emphasize the harshness of this speech and accuse Isabel of placing her personal honor above the greater demands of charity and natural affection. Others accept Isabel's decision to preserve her honor at all costs, but
criticize the inflexibility and lack of understanding that she manifests here. 9

The solution of the play's problems also presents serious ambiguities. To save Claudio's life, the Duke persuades Isabella to agree to Angelo's offer and then substitutes Mariana, a young lady who was betrothed to Angelo and then abandoned. For the Duke, this trick solves all the problems: "... by this is your brother saved, your honor untainted, the poor Mariana advantaged, and the corrupt deputy scaled" (III.1.253-256). Given the intricacies of de futuro wedding contracts, this trick permits Mariana to legally claim Angelo as her husband. 10 But from any Christian viewpoint the act remains fornication. Oddly enough, the rigorous Isabel does not even raise the issue.

Like All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure ends with a lengthy trial scene. The Duke lets Isabel believe that her brother has in fact been executed through Angelo's treachery. In accordance with the strict demands of law and justice, Angelo is sentenced to be executed immediately after marrying Mariana. Although still grieving for her brother's death, Isabel forgives Angelo and joins Mariana in pleading for mercy. This action leads to an effective theatrical scene and climaxes the play's treatment of the theme of mercy. Had she known that her brother was alive, Isabel obviously could not have made
so magnanimous a gesture. But the play has so vividly presented the suffering of Claudio and Isabel that the Duke's deception seems unnecessarily cruel. He offers a brief explanation:

But I will keep her ignorant of her good,
To make her heavenly comforts of despair
When it is least expected. (IV.iii.108-110)

In a romantic comedy, where evil and suffering are treated obliquely, this explanation might suffice, but here it seems purely mechanical and ineffective.

The play employs the happy ending typical of romantic comedy. The Duke forgives Angelo, who will presumably be a good husband to the wife who pleaded so eloquently for his life. The play ends as the Duke persuades Isabel to marry him and then promises to clear up all the plot intricacies for the rest of the characters.

When we look at all of Shakespeare's comedies from 1597 to 1604, we notice a distinct shift in the middle of the period. The Merry Wives of Windsor and the three romantic comedies of this period concentrate heavily on the intricate courtships of virtuous couples. The sub-plot may feature a humours character like Jacques or Malvolio, but such a character is free of serious vice. These plays do not try to explore the problem of evil. They either exclude seriously evil characters or restrict them to minor roles. These characters perform evil actions
to further the plot, not to make didactic points or raise questions that the plot will illuminate. Shakespeare's romantic comedies exist largely to give pleasure. They achieve thematic unity, not through didactic emphasis or philosophical speculation, but through the celebration of relatively self-evident human values.

But as we have seen, the last two comedies deal directly with the problem of evil. Adultery, almost completely excluded from the romantic comedies, becomes one of the central issues in both of these plays. Evil characters do more than create interesting plot complications; their moral progress is an important part of the action, and their deeds raise issues fundamental to the theme. This new subject matter necessarily changes the nature of the comedy. While experimenting restlessly with form, Shakespeare retains many of the conventions of romantic comedy. As we have seen, many of the difficulties of *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* result from the tensions that exist between the old forms and the new subject matter.

It is impossible to know whether Shakespeare was satisfied with these two experiments. But we do know that he abandoned the comic form for the next four years or so. During this eight-year period he devoted increasing attention to the problem of evil. In history, tragedy, and comedy, he admitted more and more evil into his dramatic world and explored the ethical problems of private citizens
and ruler. After this period of experimentation he apparently found tragedy and tragical history most appropriate to the themes he wished to develop. But before finding and shaping these genres, he made many experiments with form and content. In the midst of this experimentation, after Hamlet and just before or after All's Well That Ends Well, Shakespeare turned to the Trojan War and the love affair of Troilus and Cressida.
NOTES


4 There is no definitive work on Shakespeare's romantic comedies. I found useful literary background in T. M. Parrott, Shakespearean Comedy (New York, 1949) and helpful analysis in John Dover Wilson, Shakespeare's Happy Comedies (London, 1962); H. B. Charlton, Shakespearian Comedy (London, 1938); and C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, 1959).

5 For a description of remnants of an earlier play which Shakespeare apparently revised, see the introduction by Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson in the New Shakespeare The Merry Wives of Windsor, repr. (Cambridge, Eng., 1964). pp. xii-xix.

6 See, for example, E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's Problem Plays (Toronto, 1950), pp. 110-113.


8 See, for example, John Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare (Cambridge, Eng., 1932), p. 116 or H. B. Charlton, Shakespearian Comedy, pp. 253-257.
9 Muriel Bradbrook, for example, finds Isabel one of Shakespeare's "most intelligent women," but one who is also "young and pitifully inexperienced" ["Authority, Truth Justice in Measure for Measure," RES, XVII (1941), 395]. J. W. Lever interprets this speech as one of several steps in Isabel's moral education [the New Arden Measure for Measure (London, 1965), pp. lxxix-lxxxiii].

CHAPTER V

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA AND THE TRANSITION PERIOD

Relying on broad generalizations about English drama in the Renaissance, many critics have joined Alfred Harbage in assigning Troilus and Cressida "a unique and mysterious place in the canon." But in looking carefully at all the extant commercial plays written between 1597 and 1604, we have seen that the customary generalizations are not very accurate when applied to the period in which Troilus and Cressida was written. By 1600 the chronicle play and the romantic and bourgeois comedy had declined in popularity, and no comparable genres had been developed to replace them. In the last four years of the period playwrights for both adult and children's companies were experimenting with new forms to deal with new themes. After looking at all the plays of this period, we must reject the assumption that in 1602 or 1603 an average Globe audience had simple, easily defined tastes that Shakespeare refused to satisfy when he wrote Troilus and Cressida. Even plays like Lust's Dominion and 1 Jeronimo, which appear to be nothing but well-meaning attempts to amuse an audience, betray the same sort of thematic and
structural confusion that we find in the plays of more ambitious artists. When viewed as an experiment in a particularly restless period of transition, the major elements of *Troilus and Cressida* begin to fall into place.

**The Problems of Public Life**

Had Shakespeare been trying to write a play with a clear-cut political lesson, *Troilus and Cressida* would have to be judged a perverse failure. Although this play raises interesting questions about the responsibilities of leadership and about the motives of public action, it offers no sharply defined answers and leaves many important matters unsettled.

In dealing with the Greek leadership, Shakespeare deliberately undercuts Agamemnon's claim to regal authority and thus renders the Tudor doctrine of obedience irrelevant to the Greek struggle for order. When the Greeks first assemble in I.iii, they discuss their situation at some length. It is Ulysses who gives the most penetrating analysis. The Greeks cannot establish order in their own ranks because they have been neglecting degree. Ulysses sees the full dangers inherent in the ruthless egoism of Ajax and Achilles. If uncontrolled, such an attitude would lead to a world where
Strength should be lord of imbecility,  
And the rude son should strike his father dead;  
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong,  
Between whose endless jar justice resides,  
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.  
(I.iii.114-118)

According to Ulysses, then, only degree can guard society against these terrible evils. But as we saw in Chapter I, the Greeks lack a system that can provide a theoretical framework for the kind of degree Ulysses describes. Although he implies that Agamemnon ought to serve as the queen to the hive or the sun to the cosmos, he can give Agamemnon no title higher than "our great general" (II. iii.256). Agamemnon himself uses an occasional first person plural, but never makes explicit claims to royal authority.

Although Ulysses cannot rely on the sort of authority that he feels the Greek leader ought to have, he tries throughout the rest of the play to make the best of a bad situation. 2 Many of the Greeks realize that their own self-interest demands unity under the banners of Agamemnon. Joining forces with these reasonable men, Ulysses hopes by some kind of policy to draw the seditious Ajax and Achilles back into the war. Toward the end of this scene he characterizes them, not as rebels against a divine order, but as fools who let their passions blind them to reason and self-interest. For Ulysses, then, the struggle for order will pit men who believe
in "policy," "wisdom," "prescience" and "observant toil" (I.iii.197-203) against those who blindly follow their own passions. In a vivid analogy, he epitomizes the folly of those who scorn reason and policy:

So that the ram that batters down the wall,
For the great swing and rudeness of his poise,
They place before his hand that made the engine
Or those that with the fineness of their souls
By reason guide his execution.  

(I.iii.206-210)

But in spite of his earnest efforts, Ulysses' policy is not much more effective than the blind egoism of Ajax or Achilles. Ulysses succeeds in deceiving both Ajax and Achilles, but the ultimate effect is not what he expected. Ajax is so puffed up by his good showing with Hector that he too takes to his tent and refuses to fight. Although Achilles has determined to fight Hector, a letter from Hecuba persuades him to stay out of the war. For all of its surface success, Ulysses' elaborate plot has made things worse than ever. Theristes deftly summarizes the final outcome of this conflict between reason and passion: "... the Grecians begin to proclaim barbarism, and policy grows into an ill opinion" (V.iv.15-16). Achilles and Ajax finally return to the war to avenge fallen friends. As it turns out, the Greek success illustrates no coherent solution to social problems. The system of degree advocated by Ulysses does not apply to the Greek situation; Ulysses'
politic stratagems fail. The Greeks simply blunder into unity.

Although the Trojan state does not suffer from the sort of sedition that plagues the Greeks, it faces its own kind of dilemma. Since Priam is not a decisive leader, Troy makes its major decisions through a committee of national leaders, with Hector apparently as the unofficial chairman. In such a situation political rhetoric can be quite important, especially when issues are complicated. In the lengthy second scene of Act II, Shakespeare presents Troy's dilemma as it emerges from the passionate and subtle rhetoric of its leaders. When Hector opens the debate, he tries to keep the issues as uncomplicated as possible. Since the Greeks are willing to accept the return of Helen without claiming any further damages, the Trojans have an opportunity to withdraw from the war with no further damages. Both prudence and morality, he argues, demand the restoration of Helen. She is not worth the bloodshed she is costing, and the Trojans have no moral right to separate her from her husband. But Troilus and Paris point out that the Trojans have already committed their honor to defending the theft of Helen. Before long, Hector must abandon his neat classification. What he wished to approach as the conflict of right and wrong can also be viewed as the conflict between honor and morality. Instead of making a choice based on some coherent system of values,
he must choose between two systems that happen to conflict at this moment.

Had Shakespeare wished to make the sort of clear-cut moral lesson we find in chronicle plays like 2 Robin Hood and 1 Sir John Oldcastle or in didactic plays like A Larum for London and A Warning for Fair Women, he would have handled this material much differently. He might have portrayed the council when the Trojans first decided to keep Helen, before they had made any binding commitments. Or he might have had Paris and Troilus concentrate only on Helen's beauty or the glory of the Trojan adventure. Instead he introduces two separate codes of ethics and emphasizes their present incompatibility. As a result, Hector's decision to retain Helen does not involve an uncomplicated preaching against preferring will to reason or sin to virtue. Instead we watch a man committed to both morality and honor trying to make the best choice in a complicated situation. We are given no neat generalizations about what leaders ought to do; we simply watch the process by which a highly important decision was made.

Besides dealing with the problems of making national policy, Troilus and Cressida explores some of the forces that motivate the actions of men in public life. Both Greeks and Trojans are motivated by the quest for honor. As we shall see, each side has a different concept of honor, and each concept brings its own kinds of problems.
Among the Greeks honor is not an internal reality; it is what other people think of one. Shakespeare manipulates much of the action in the Greek camp to explore the full meaning of this concept of honor. Ajax foolishly overrates his fame and tries to live up to a reputation that he does not have. This sort of pride is ridiculed in a scene reminiscent of comical satire. Achilles' high opinion of himself coincides with his reputation and is treated more seriously. When Ulysses tries to draw Achilles back into the war, he appeals directly to Achilles' concept of honor. Having persuaded Achilles that he is no longer highly valued Ulysses can show him how badly he is playing his own game. The world, Ulysses points out, has a very short memory. Yesterday's deeds are consigned to oblivion and only today's deeds are remembered. One hardly needs to posit a fit of pessimism on Shakespeare's part in order to account for this advice. It is simply the logical extension of Achilles' concept of honor. If a man defines his greatest good as his reputation among other men, he had best work assiduously and not count too heavily on the memory of most people. Achilles understands perfectly well the distinction between inherent merit and public reputation, and his final triumph illustrates another logical extension of this concept of honor. Achilles' goal is not necessarily to be the man who killed Hector; it is simply to be the man famed for killing Hector. As
a result he quite happily lets his followers surround and kill the unarmed Hector and instructs them to take up the shout, "... Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain" (V. viii.14).

It is no doubt regrettable that the cynical Achilles triumphs over the more genuinely honorable Hector. But at this time neither Shakespeare nor his fellow dramatists were in the habit of altering their sources to let virtue triumph over vice. Shakespeare is less interested here in portraying ideal patterns of justice or virtue than in exploring analytically the motives of public action. The desire for reputation is such a motive, and although Shakespeare's treatment of Achilles is not in the heroic tradition, it throws light on the exact nature of this motive.

The Trojan concept of honor differs considerably from that of the Greeks. For them honor is not one's external reputation, but one's fidelity to a worthy cause. Achilles has no objection to abandoning his former allies and friends; it is precisely this kind of inconsistency that the Trojans find dishonorable. In the middle of the debate Troilus sums up the Trojan case for fidelity. He argues that the Trojans cannot honorably abandon Helen, any more than a husband can honorably abandon his wife because he no longer desires her. He ends this speech by picturing the ignobility
of such inconsistency:

O, theft most base,
That we have stolen what we do fear to keep!
But thieves unworthy of a thing so stolen,
That in their country did them that disgrace
We fear to warrant in our native place!

(II.ii.92-96)

This devotion to fidelity is of course useful in preventing the kind of sedition that divides the Greeks, but it can lead to serious troubles when a man or a nation has been pledged to a foolish or dangerous course. Hector feels the full force of Troilus' argument, but is still convinced that his present judgment of Helen's value is more accurate than the one the Trojans made seven years ago. Although reluctant to go back on his word, he warns that "'Tis mad idolatry / To make the service greater than the god . . ."

(II.ii.56-57). Troilus, on the other hand, is not worried by any possible inconsistency between the cost of the war and its object. When told that Helen is not worth what she costs Troy, he asks, "What's aught, but as 'tis valued?"

(II.ii.52). In this question he sums up his whole philosophy of conduct. The value or dignity of a cause, he argues, is determined by what its supporters choose to dedicate to it. Helen is a "pearl" precisely because she has "launched above a thousand ships / And turned crowned kings to merchants" (II.ii.81-83). Great men can dignify any cause by virtue of their courage and devotion to that
cause. It is this philosophy of conduct that determines the rest of the Trojan actions.

Shakespeare’s denigration of Helen, sometimes explained as another symptom of bitterness and pessimism or as a jibe at Chapman’s recent translation of the *Iliad*, actually needs no special explanation. Thersites’ terse summary, “All the argument is a whore and a cuckold,” combined with the more reasoned evaluations of other characters, helps to put in proper perspective the decision made by the Trojans. Except in the Trojan council scene, where Helen’s value is the subject of debate, no one but Paris speaks well of her. She is spoken of slightingly by the Greeks who have launched an expedition to win her back and by Troilus who insists upon Troy’s obligation to defend her. Even at the expense of psychological inconsistency, Shakespeare underlines the fact that Helen is not worthy of the efforts that Trojan honor makes in her behalf.

Much of the public action in *Troilus and Cressida* explores the nature of honor as a motive for political and military action. It distinguishes sharply between two different concepts of honor and exposes several advantages and disadvantages in each. Neither motive leads to ideal public action. Ulysses cannot channel the lust for personal glory to unselfish service to the state; Hector cannot impose a prudent flexibility on
the Trojan devotion to fidelity. The play explores the full implications of each concept of honor, but it fails to offer an ideal compromise or alternative.

If we expect the kind of moral and political certitudes typical of the chronicle play, we are bound to be puzzled by *Troilus and Cressida*. In this play Shakespeare first confuses the theoretical pattern of authority among the Greeks and then sets up Ulysses as a force for common sense and reason—only to have him fail. He presents Hector as a leader motivated by honor and morality and then places him in a position where the two values are in conflict. He explores the strengths and weakness of two concepts of honor, but presents no ideal pattern.

Such ambivalent treatment is not as unusual as we might have assumed before examining this transition period in detail. Many playwrights began to approach political problems as Shakespeare did in *Troilus and Cressida*. There are significant similarities in the treatment both of political leadership and of the forces that motivate public action.

By the time *Troilus and Cressida* was written playwrights from both adult and children's companies had almost completely abandoned the chronicle play. When they turned from English to foreign histories, they found fewer parallels to Tudor England, but they found events appropriate to what they were then interested in. Some
of them concentrated on melodrama and ignored the thematic significance of the disorder and upheaval they portrayed. Others took their material more seriously, but no longer worked for easy morals perfectly tailored to contemporary England. Instead they looked for the source of social disorder in certain relatively constant traits of human nature.

While the chronicle plays were popular, playwrights tried to iron out any theoretical ambiguities they might have found in their sources. The authors of *Edward IV* almost completely ignored whatever legitimate claims the former Henry VI might have to the throne. The authors of *Look About You* ignored the intricacies of Norman kingship and treated young Henry simply as a usurper and traitor. When authors turned to foreign history, they often emphasized the ambiguities or contradictory principles that they found in their sources. They were willing to sacrifice perfectly coherent solutions in order to explore the behavior of national leaders in difficult times. In *Sejanus* Jonson deliberately stressed the theoretical and practical ambiguities in Tiberius' claim to the throne in order to explore the activities of time-servers and genuine patriots. In *The Malcontent*, Marston ignored the sacred nature of the anointed ruler; instead he concentrated on his hero's education in the truths about human nature and about the best ways of
imposing some sort of order and justice in a corrupt world. In the four chronicle plays he wrote just before the reopening of the children's theatre, Shakespeare occasionally confused theoretical issues in order to explore the behavior of men in times of confusion. Like Ulysses Henry IV had to impose order on a country where the moral basis of authority was seriously weakened. In *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare blended the claims of Imperial and Republican Rome in order to concentrate on the reactions of a shrewd politician like Antony or an idealist like Brutus when moral issues were not clear. In *Hamlet* the ambiguity of Claudius' claim to the throne was a very important element in the protagonist's dilemma. In refusing to remake the Greek state in the image of Tudor England, Shakespeare was simply exploring the kind of themes that had already been occupying him and many of his fellow dramatists.

Since they were primarily interested in analytical, rather than didactic, exposition, playwrights tended to ignore any direct connection between ethics and social order. In the chronicle play, order was treated as the natural result of moral actions. When King John in *Robin Hood* decided to violate the rights of his subjects, he knew that he was doing wrong and expected the rebellion that followed. As soon as he repented, his subjects returned to loyalty—just as he had expected them to do.
The conspirators in 1 Sir John Oldcastle and the ambitious Gloster of 2 Edward IV spoke like the villains they were. Most of the material was selected and shaped to illustrate that virtue leads to order and happiness just as sin leads to chaos and misery. This approach almost completely disappeared after 1600. Instead of recommending certain types of action, the authors of the newer plays tended to explore the ways in which important decisions were made. The heroes of such plays were often reasonably moral men, but they were no longer given a clear-cut decision between right and wrong or reason and folly. The hero of Marston's Antonio plays, for example, had to choose between murdering the legitimate ruler or disobeying his father's commands. Throughout both plays Marston concentrated on how Antonio and other honorable men bore suffering and injustice, not on how they tried to right the world's wrongs. In Sejanus Jonson explored many possible reactions to Rome's problems. In Philotas Daniel did not concentrate on painting morally repulsive pictures of treason and tyranny. Instead he explored the human forces that drove the loyal Philotas to the brink of treason and pushed a humane monarch like Alexander closer and closer to tyranny. During this period Shakespeare showed a growing interest in exploring the actions of fundamentally moral men in difficult situations. Even in his Chronicle plays he occasionally blunted moral points in order to
explain in plausible terms why the rebels behaved as they did. In *Julius Caesar* Brutus was torn by what he took to be his duty to the Republic and his sense of the immorality inherent in the conspiracy. Hamlet was not presented a choice between good and evil; he was in a situation where he had to struggle to decide what is good. Othello fell not because he deliberately chose evil, but because he was deceived and chose wrongly in good faith.

By the end of this period the treatment of national leaders had changed significantly. At first political problems were generally approached didactically. Playwrights defined good and evil sharply and concentrated on portraying the ugliness of vice and the enormity of the disorder it caused. But before long they began to consider the evil caused by relatively normal men instead of self-confessed villains. These playwrights tended to concentrate less on rendering the horror of evil and more on accounting for it plausibly. Given the dominant interests of this period, there is nothing extraordinary in the complicated and ambiguous dilemmas with which Shakespeare confronts Ulysses and Hector.

In a great many plays of this period, authors concentrated primarily on exploring the forces that motivate public action, without defining the correct attitude toward such motives. Some of these plays, as
we have seen, presented serious confusion in their treatment of political themes. In Sir Thomas Wyatt, for example, Dekker and Webster dealt with rebels who were motivated by sincerely religious and patriotic motives. But the authors had not decided whether to treat these men as rebels against national order or as defenders of religious and national liberties. In the revenge tragedy, which was regaining popularity in both adult and children's companies, the hero was motivated by the desire to avenge a real injustice, but his obligation conflicted with both Christian morality and the system of temporal law. Antonio's Revenge and Hoffman simply ignored these ethical conflicts. In Hamlet Shakespeare did not try to resolve these contradictions between ethical systems; he made them part of his hero's moral problems. In Sejanus Jonson concentrated on another important motive to political action: the ambition for power. He portrayed the subtle conflict between a politician who wanted to seize imperial power and the emperor who wanted to hold and increase his power. In this play Jonson analyzed in minute detail the actions and motives of ambitious men, but did not try to suggest any way of channeling ambition into useful areas or replacing it with a better motivation.

A number of plays besides Troilus and Cressida concentrated on honor as the major motive of public action. In none of them do we find anything that purports to be
the last word on the rightful place of honor in the over-
all scheme of things. In *Jeronimo* Spain and Portugal
went to war over a tribute that had no practical importance
to either side. Spain demanded the tribute only as a
matter of principle; Portugal refused merely because it
is dishonorable to pay upon compulsion. A war of this
kind suggests the Trojan policy in *Troilus and Cressida*.
The authors of *Jeronimo*, however, were primarily inter-
ested in the spectacular effect of battle scenes and
never tried to judge the war from the viewpoint of morality
or prudence. In Daniel's *Philotus*, Alexander confronted
the kind of dilemma that faced Agamemnon. Alexander needed
warriors motivated by the desire for glory, but if one of
his followers achieved too much fame, he became a potential
rival. Sensing the king's suspicion, the rival was forced
to cultivate a following that engendered even greater sus-
picion. As we have seen, Daniel concentrated on the in-
exorible logic of this dilemma without suggesting any
solution. In the play's only positive note, the Chorus
recommended the relative safety of private life. In
*Bussy D'Ambois* Chapman depicted the career of a man who
decided to guide his life completely by his own code of
honor. Chapman was apparently unsure of how he felt
about this devotion to honor. At any rate, the ending
of the play seemed to draw contradictory morals: Bussy
fell because he was unwilling to live reasonably or be-
cause the world could not tolerate a really virtuous man. We have also seen how in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare treated Brutus' dedication to honor. It was both the source of Brutus' folly—if not immorality—and the quality that marked his superiority to the other characters. Although honor was not the central theme in *Hamlet*, it received a certain amount of attention and was again treated ambigous-ly. While meditating on Fortinbras' expedition against Poland, Hamlet seemed to approve of this war fought merely for honor, but described it in such a way as to emphasize its absurdity. Laertes placed his honor before everything else—his duty as a subject, his moral responsibilities, his salvation. Critics still debate whether we should take Laertes as a model of what Hamlet should have been or as a horrible example of what Hamlet would have been without his moral scruples. It appears that Shakespeare, like several dramatists at this time, was quite interested in honor as a motivating and guiding force, but had not found a coherent place for it in his political philosophy.

During this period it was not unusual for playwrights to raise problems that they could not solve. Having re-jected the clear-cut answers of the chronicle play, they explored the causes and effects of various kinds of political evil without offering a system that could solve them. The political plays of this period are filled with the kinds of irresolution that have struck critics as
extraordinary in *Troilus and Cressida*.

**The Problems of Private Life**

If one approaches the love plot of *Troilus and Cressida* expecting a celebration of young love or a didactic exposition on lust, he will of course be disappointed. But when we looked at all the dramatic treatments of private life from this period, we saw that there is no reason for approaching *Troilus and Cressida* with such expectations. Romantic comedies or didactic plays on the order of *The London Prodigal* formed only part of the repertoires of adult and children's companies. Before deciding that the love plot of *Troilus and Cressida* was too sordid, too paradoxical, or too bitter for an average audience in 1602 or 1603, we should see precisely how Shakespeare treats this story and how his practice accords with the over-all dramatic practices of this period.

In developing the love story Shakespeare does not emphasize elements that could contribute to a straightforward condemnation of lust. The young lovers have no intention of marrying, but nothing is made of this fact. A play like *The London Prodigal* or *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* drives home the evil of lust by letting its hero win the woman he desires; *Troilus and Cressida* stresses the pathos of Troilus' loss, not the disadvantages of winning and keeping an immoral woman. Rather than making
Troilus a slave to lust, the play stresses his fidelity and serious devotion to Cressida. He expresses a normal interest in sexual pleasure, but he hardly seems to be the "expert in sensuality" described by O. J. Campbell. Both Pandarus and Ulysses believe in Troilus' constancy. Upon learning that the lovers must separate, Pandarus worries about the grief of his friend Troilus, not that of his niece Cressida. Ulysses describes him as "a true knight" who is "matchless-firm of word" (IV.v.96-97). In the scene just before Troilus watches Cressida betray him with Diomedes, Thersites enters and attacks Diomedes— not for lechery, arrogance, or folly, but for untruthfulness:

That same Diomed's a false-hearted rogue, a most unjust knave; I will no more trust him when he leers than I will a serpent when he hisses; he will spend his mouth and promise, like Babbler the hound; but when he performs, astronomers foretell it; it is prodigious, there will be some change; the sun borrows of the moon when Diomed keeps his word.

(V.i.86-92)

It is hard to explain Thersites' sudden emphasis on promise-keeping, since insincerity is not a crucial part of Diomedes' character. In the public plot, there is no scene where his fidelity or willingness to keep a promise is important. In wooing Cressida, he makes no promises whatsoever. This attack makes sense only as an attempt to sharpen the contrast between Diomedes and Troilus just before Cressida exchanges one for the other.
Unless we accept Troilus' protestations of fidelity, it is difficult to account for his behavior in the last act. All the details of the play support Troilus' assertions about his own character. In the scene where Pandarus, Troilus, and Cressida each predict their future reputation, Troilus characterizes himself in this way:

Yet, after all comparisons of truth,  
As truth's authentic author to be cited,  
'As true as Troilus' shall crown up the verse  
And sanctify the numbers.  

(III.ii.179-182)

Shakespeare does not concentrate, then, on making Troilus an object lesson in the dangers of lechery. Instead he concentrates on Troilus' inability to find happiness and lasting values on the terms he himself defines. The principles that he espouses in the council scene are the same principles by which he tries to guide his private life. He belongs to a society committed to the defense of an unfaithful woman, and he ignores marriage, the normal institution by which society tries to ensure sexual fidelity. Nevertheless he makes eternally faithful love his highest goal. He apparently believes that his own virtue and fidelity will inspire a reciprocal fidelity, just as he believes that Trojan courage can dignify the actions of Paris and Helen. We have seen how many plays of this period concentrate on the difficulties of judging between appearance and reality and the social and ethical
problems that result from this difficulty. Troilus' solution to such problems is quite simple; genuinely dedicated people can, by virtue of their fidelity and courage, turn appearance into reality. 5

Seen in the light of this theme, the important elements of the love plot fit into place. We hardly need to posit a deep fit of pessimism and misogyny or an unusually jaded audience to account for the sordid details in the characterization of Cressida. Before the play is over, Troilus has to face the real value of the woman he has tried to create in the image of his own virtue. It is crucial that the audience understand from the beginning how grossly she falls short of Troilus' ideals.

When Troilus is forced to admit the truth, his first reaction is a kind of epistemological crisis. 6 Two ways of viewing the world suddenly conflict, and he faces the "madness of discourse" (V.11.142), where two contradictory assertions seem equally true:

Bifold authority! where reason can revolt
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
Without revolt. This is, and is not, Cressid!
(V.11.144-146)

The two Cressids of course are the woman created by Troilus' imagination and the real woman whose nature he sees for the first time. But after this brief attempt to salvage his faith or, as Thersites puts it, to "swagger himself out on's own eyes" (V.11.136), he accepts the truth about
Cressida. When he receives a letter from her shortly afterwards, he is able to admonish her words and the wind to "turn and change together" (V.iii.110).

Gradually Troilus gives up the passion that has occupied his private life. He first transforms his love of Cressida into hatred of Diomedes. In the last scene of the play, he seems to have forgotten his personal vendetta against Diomedes and rushes out to meet the "great-sized coward" (V.x.26) who treacherously murdered Hector.

The closing of the play reemphasizes Troilus' new evaluation of appearances. At the opening of the play he accepts Pandarus as a worthy agent in the service of love. But he soon learns that his trusted confidant is nothing but a foolish, lewd, and gossiping old man. By the end of the play, Pandarus is no longer the convoy and bark carrying him to the richest pearl in India; he is simply a bawd ministering to lust. In his last speech in the play, Troilus dismisses his former confidant with curses appropriate to a bawd:

Hence, broker-lackey! ignominy and shame
Pursue thy life, and live aye with thy name!
(V.x.33-34)

To conclude the play, Pandarus accepts the role given him by Troilus and discusses with his fellow "traders in the flesh" (V.x.45) in the audience the disadvantages of the
"hold-door trade" (V.x.50).

At the end of the play the hero sees how seriously he has misjudged appearances and devotes most of his energies to public duties. *Trollus and Cressida* without doubt lacks the firm resolution found in some contemporary plays. In the romantic comedy, the principal characters faced external obstacles to happiness which were removed at the end of the play. Didactic plays like *The London Prodigal* established clear-cut principles by which the major character, and others like him, could have avoided the problems in the first place. But as we have seen, there is no reason to assume that audiences demanded, or even expected, such firm, clear-cut resolutions for every play. In Chapter III we considered many differences between romantic or bourgeois comedy and the comedy of humours. One of the most fundamental differences involved the general approach to subject matter. For the most part the romantic or bourgeois comedy dealt with external problems; when disapproving parents finally relented or when a lost lover was found, all of the characters' problems were solved. The comedy of humours, on the other hand, concentrated on problems that arose from character traits or from conditions that were not easily remedied. In this genre the playwright was primarily interested in problems that invited analysis, but which did not necessarily yield easy solutions.
Although the comedy of humours soon died out, the interest in analysis remained a dominant feature in the last half of this period. From 1600 to 1604 there were all sorts of experimental approaches, no one of which came to dominate either repertoire. But a significant number of these plays explored problems that arose from a discrepancy between appearance and reality, without always finding a neat, universal solution. The exposé comedy, which was popular in the children's companies toward the end of this period, was structured to reveal the real truths behind the respectable appearances of mankind. The authors of these plays firmly condemned the vices they exposed, but did not try to offer any solution to the problems that resulted from these vices.

In the repertoire of the children's companies, we find two plays that were designed to explore ethical problems rather than apply general principles to human problems. In *The Dutch Courtesan*, Marston introduced the world of prostitution, not to condemn lust, but to examine the validity of two contradictory approaches to sexual morality. Marston worked for some middle ground between the asceticism of Malheureux and the libertinism of Freevill. In *Monsieur D'Olive*, Chapman dealt with two idealists who demanded perfection from the world. He tried to evoke fully both the theoretical justice and the practical unreasonableness of these demands. As we saw,
however, he was unable to resolve these contradictions and
introduced external intrigues to restore his protagonists
to a balanced relationship with the world.

At the same time the adult companies had almost
completely dropped romantic and bourgeois comedies. In
a number of overtly didactic plays, a young man rejected
a good wife, fell in with an immoral woman, and learned
to his grief the full extent of vice. In these plays
the discrepancy between appearance and reality was pre­
cisely what even the most unsophisticated moralist would
expect. Beneath the prostitute's superficial beauty was
an ugly and totally selfish character. The plot was
grounded to expose realities which could be judged against
self-evident principles. But in the repertoire of adult
companies we find some problematic approaches to the
treatment of appearance and reality. In _A Woman Killed
with Kindness_ Heywood showed the evils of adultery, but
this was not the major theme of his work. Instead he
explored what motives led good people to perform immoral
actions. In the last part of the play, he concentrated
on the dilemma of the husband who still loved his unfaith­
ful wife and the wife who sincerely repented her infidelity.
Both the major plot and the subplot of this play explored
the difficulty of applying sharply defined standards of
honor and morality to the highly complex acts of indi­
vidual human beings. In _The Honest Whore_ Dekker fully
developed the paradox implied by his title. Although he included a few scenes exposing the underworld of prostitution, Dekker concentrated on Bellafronte's attempts to regain her lost reputation. His play was not primarily a preaching against lust, but an examination of the real meaning of chastity and the possible contradictions between reputation and reality. In Chapter IV we saw that throughout this period Shakespeare showed a similar interest in exploring, rather than illustrating, generalizations. Although designed primarily as entertainment, his romantic comedies subjected to a certain amount of ironic analysis the genre's basic assumptions about love and virtue. The two comedies that Shakespeare wrote late in this period applied the techniques of romantic comedy to more difficult ethical problems.

At the time when Shakespeare wrote *Troilus and Cressida* audiences would have been accustomed to a number of quite different treatments of private life. They would have seen several plays that explored in various ways the discrepancies between appearance and reality. Troilus, as a young man who approached life with extreme self-confidence and who later learned what a serious mistake he had made, was by no means an anomalous hero for this period. When he asked "What's aught, but as 'tis valued?" (II.ii.52), the audience would have expected him to receive some interesting answers before
the play was over. And if the extant plays of this period are any indication of audiences' tastes, they would not necessarily have demanded an easy, affirmative answer to Troilus' question.

Summary

After examining carefully all of the commercial drama contemporaneous with Troilus and Cressida, we are not in a position to pronounce it an easy or a perfectly harmonious play. This was a period of difficult and often discordant plays. When playwrights abandoned the chronicle play and the romantic and bourgeois comedies, they had no ready-made models to rely upon. In viewing Troilus and Cressida against the highly experimental plays of this period, we are in a position to see that it is not the anomaly it has so often been called. The major difficulties of this play result from Shakespeare's exploration of the dominant interests of this period.

It is frequently claimed that Troilus and Cressida is so extraordinarily bitter and cynical that it can be explained only if Shakespeare were working for an audience with very special tastes. But as we have seen, the subject matter of this play is not so extraordinary as we might have assumed before examining the period in detail. Once playwrights decided to examine the motives and practices of wrongdoers, instead of merely preaching against them,
they were forced to devote more attention to these people. If compared to the chronicle play or the strictly didactic comedy, their plays may seem morally ambiguous or cynical. In some of these plays, the authors explored what caused reasonably moral men to commit evil deeds. In *Philotæs*, for example, both the action and the choral comment suggested that even normally moral national leaders were practically forced to create either anarchy or tyranny, simply because of inherent traits of human nature. In other plays of this period we find a very different kind of cynicism. Some of these plays concentrated on exceptionally immoral characters and often went so far as to suggest that such characters were typical of the general run of humanity. In *What You Will* Marston seemed to agree with the protagonist, who generalized from his wife's infidelity to the over-all decline of the institution of matrimony. The philosopher Quadratus discussed every specific evil he encountered as simply another specimen of total human corruption. In the popular exposé comedy, the playwright introduced various kinds of evil, not merely to examine them, but to demonstrate how widespread they were. Although critics seem to find this kind of pessimism in *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare did not try to make sweeping generalizations about the human condition. When Troilus generalized from Cressida to the immorality of all women, he was
immediately taken up by Ulysses: "What hath she done, prince, that can soil our mothers?" (V.11.134). In the sense that *Troilus and Cressida* concentrated more heavily on human vices than on virtues and did not offer a solution to all the problems caused by these vices, it could be termed a pessimistic play. But this sort of pessimism dominated the drama of this entire transition period. We may find Shakespeare's presentation of vice quite vivid and compelling, but we hardly need to posit a psychological crisis or a special audience to account for interests and emphases typical of the entire period.

The sharp contradictions in *Troilus and Cressida* may or may not be perfectly integrated, but they do not require a highly specialized explanation. These contradictions were, as we have seen, central to the play's theme and grew out of the dominant interests of this period. All of the major plot elements involved sharp contradictions. Ulysses was trying to reestablish degree under the authority of a man who has no claim to authority. Ajax and Achilles were striving for reputations that did not have to correspond to their real achievements. Hector was forced to choose between two conflicting ethical principles. The Trojans had to persuade themselves that Helen was worth what she was costing them. In the private plot Troilus tried to deify a woman totally unworthy of his devotion. For
the audience to comprehend the full nature of what was happening, Shakespeare necessarily stressed both sides of these contradictions. The audience had to see both Ulysses' intelligence and his absurd failure. It had to see both the Trojans' heroism and the sordid goal for which they are fighting. It had to realize fully the discrepancy between Cressida and Troilus' idea of Cressida. These requirements help to explain the deliberately jarring shifts in tone and attitude. After Troilus' lyrical praise of Cressida in the first scene, Cressida entered to describe her petty and frankly lecherous attitude toward love. After the sober deliberation of the Greeks, Thersites' scurrilous denunciations of Helen and the warriors established the other important viewpoint necessary for the audience's full understanding. During this period Shakespeare was not interested in manipulating his source to illustrate a clear-cut political doctrine. Like many playwrights at this time, he chose to concentrate on the dilemmas faced by men who must judge complicated situations and make difficult decisions.

Finally we must concede that Troilus and Cressida does not fit into an easily definable genre. But this fact requires no special explanation. In the early years of this period, until approximately 1600, playwrights tended to fashion their material into already established genres. When dealing with national problems they generally wrote
a chronicle play; when dealing with private life, they generally wrote a romantic or bourgeois comedy. These genres provided both a form and a general theme. When playwrights lost interest in these genres, they spent the next few years experimenting with various possibilities. Marston's first experiment, *Antonio and Mellida*, was a very unsuccessful blending of romantic comedy, comedy of humours, and political intrigue. His next play, *Antonio's Revenge*, combined comedy of humours and the old revenge tragedy. In *The Malcontent* he more successfully blended satirical commentary with a story of political intrigue. In *Philotus* Daniel attempted a correct classical tragedy. In *Sejanus* Jonson attempted a play based on a detailed and rigorously accurate use of Roman history, but he also employed the older form of de casibus tragedy as the basic structure of his play. In *Bussy D'Ambois* Chapman also relied on the form of the de casibus tragedy, but apparently without deciding whether the protagonist's fall should illustrate his own pride and vice or the corruption of the world at large.

We have seen the same sort of experimentation in the treatment of private life. From the beginning of this period, the comedy of humours offered an alternative to romantic and bourgeois comedies. After 1600 playwrights tried various combinations of these forms as well as some new forms. Once they decided to concentrate on problems of marriage instead of courtship, they could no longer
rely on the older forms. Among the various new forms were the didactic plays about lecherous young men and the exposé comedies.

As we saw in Chapter IV, Shakespeare too was experimenting with new forms during this period. As Jonson would do shortly afterward in Sejanus, he adapted the form of the de casibus tragedy for a play about Roman history. Brutus' rise and fall provides the basic structure of Julius Caesar, although his career is not the play's only, or even major, interest. In Hamlet Shakespeare adopted the structure and many of the conventions of the revenge tragedy to a wide range of interests. In Othello he worked important variations on the basic structure of the domestic tragedy. In All's Well that Ends Well and Measure for Measure, he employed the structure and major conventions of the romantic comedy to explore the nature and results of serious vices and to test various ways of neutralizing or modifying the disruption they cause. In every play he wrote from 1601 to 1604, Shakespeare experimented radically with form. Probably no critic today is inclined to write off any of these plays, but there still seems to be legitimate ground for debate regarding the relative success of several of these experiments.

At the time he was writing Troilus and Cressida Shakespeare shared the problems of his fellow playwrights. He too gave up the genres he had already mastered. No longer
content simply to illustrate the Tudor doctrine of obedience or to concentrate on the courtships of virtuous lovers, he too seemed willing to raise problems for which he had no solutions. After our consideration of the curious confusions and ambiguities that appeared even in his most successful works, it seems difficult to deny that Shakespeare, like so many of his fellows, was simultaneously searching for new things to say and new ways in which to say them.

Unless strikingly new information turns up we ought to abandon the hypothesis of a special audience for *Troilus and Cressida*, since no external evidence supports it, since it creates serious historical difficulties, and since the nature of the play simply does not require it. An audience conditioned by the many experimental plays we have discussed might or might not have liked *Troilus and Cressida*, but it would not have considered it the freak or anomaly that twentieth-century criticism so often evokes. *Troilus and Cressida* is one of many experimental responses to the concerns that dominated this turning point of English drama. In trying to explain it as the isolated product of some unique phenomenon, we are getting further from where all the available evidence suggests we should look. In approaching it as part of the mainstream of English drama, we are most likely to understand its real nature and its place in Shakespeare's development.
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