

SHAKESPEARE'S TREATMENT OF THE INDIVIDUALIST

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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April, 1950

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INTRODUCTION

A discussion of Shakespeare's treatment of the individualist would appear to presuppose a knowledge of his attitude to individualism and indeed to other aspects of human behavior. But there is no way of establishing with absolute certainty what Shakespeare's own conclusions were about life, about God and man, about the human situation. For in none of his plays is there any passage about which we can say with finality: "This is Shakespeare speaking his own mind." It has become a commonplace, therefore, to say that he was not a moralist but a mirror, content merely to reflect, passing judgment on nothing, becoming for the moment whatever character he was depicting. The player's business, says Hamlet, is "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature." But even a mirror can hardly be neutral; what it reflects is determined by its position and angle--its point of view, in short. Even if it is not designed to distort in favor of the poet's own moral bias, what and how it reflects is bound to be influenced by his assumptions about right and wrong. Hamlet suggests this relationship by following the mirror image with a description of what must be its manner of reflection: "...to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." In Hamlet's view at least, art cannot be divorced from morality.

It is fair, then, to inquire what Shakespeare's assumptions were about good and evil in human behavior, since those assumptions colored his picture of life. What his purpose was in writing, or

even if he consciously possessed one, is another matter. His intention may very well have been, as Sidney's was, "to delight and instruct"; but even if it could be demonstrated that this was his purpose, the fact would only prove that Shakespeare was in the Renaissance literary tradition. In any event, the morality is there, even if he did not, so far as is known, deliberately set out to inculcate it. And with the morality there goes the moral judgment which, it will be argued, Shakespeare passes on certain aspects of life, and on the individualist in particular. He passes this judgment implicitly, but he passes it; it is registered in his choice of characters, in how they affect others and in what happens to them. As Lily B. Campbell says:

In his histories and his tragedies alike, Shakespeare patterned a moral universe in which the wages of sin is death; in both genres he acted as a register of God's judgments.¹

The moral assumptions themselves have increasingly come to be recognized as an important influence in his work. In regard to these assumptions, Shakespeare was, briefly, a traditionalist.

In a recent study Hardin Craig says:

I would say that Shakespeare lived and thought in conformity to an older authoritarian system and that his breadth as well as his sweetness reveal themselves in this ancient order.²

As a traditionalist, he saw the maintenance of order as of prime importance. Justice and life itself depend on order; without it there is nothing but chaos. Furthermore, for Shakespeare order is not a state of affairs which miraculously comes about when each man is free to go his own way; on the contrary, it is based on the idea of submission to authority. Order founded on

authority, authority which recognizes its responsibility, is in the Shakespearean morality the prerequisite of the spiritual and physical well-being both of the individual and of the social organism. Since the oft-quoted words of Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida only make explicit what is implied in the structure of almost all of the plays, they can fairly be seen as expressing the playwright's own conviction in this matter. Ulysses says:

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
 Observe degree, priority, and place,
 Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
 Office, and custom, in all line of order;
 And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
 In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd
 Amidst the other, whose med'cinable eye
 Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil
 And posts, like the commandment of a king,
 Sans check, to good and bad. But when the planets
 In evil mixture to disorder wander,
 What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,
 What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
 Commotion in the winds! Frights, changes, horrors
 Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
 The unity and married calm of states
 Quite from their fixture! O, when degree is shak'd,
 Which is the ladder to all high designs,
 The enterprise is sick! How could communities,
 Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
 Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
 The primogenity and due of birth,
 Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
 But by degree, stand in authentic place?
 Take but degree away, untune that string,
 And, hark, what discord follows! Each thing meets
 In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
 Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
 And make a sop of all this solid globe;
 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.
 Then everything includes itself in power,
 Power into will, will into appetite;
 And appetite, an universal wolf,
 So doubly seconded with will and power,
 Must make perforce an universal prey,
 And last eat up himself....³

Order based on "degree" is thus a paramount necessity in society, in Nature, in the human soul. It is not necessary to argue that Shakespeare was a student of Catholic theology to see him as heir of a tradition which goes back at least as far as Saint Thomas Aquinas, and which was still very much alive in the Elizabethan age. Meyer says of Thomistic thinking in general:

But if we are looking for the concept that goes deepest into Thomistic thought, the most apt and adequate concept is that of order.⁴

In the Thomistic view, order must prevail in every area of life, from the human body to the stars in their courses. So at one point Aquinas says:

But it is manifest that the form which God chiefly intends in created things is the good of the order of the universe.⁵

To Aquinas order was based on the ultimate authority of God. All life looked up to God and found its salvation in obedience to Him and in submission to the orders established by Him. Every subordinate system under God's rule had its place in the divine order, and the idea of hierarchy prevailed. As the head was above the body and directed it, although neither one is complete without the other, as the stars are above the earth (in Mediaeval belief), as God is above man, so every functioning organism must, as Shakespeare's Ulysses said, "by degree, stand in authentic place."

To say that Shakespeare was a traditionalist, then, is to say that he accepted the concept of order established by authority as the ideal state of affairs in all areas of life, and to say further that his universe was theocentric. He saw God as the ultimate authority. Thus, in very general terms, with Shakespeare

a man is good or bad as he conforms to the order established by God.

Order in the political sphere was seen as an important aspect of the divine plan. It is mainly with political order and disorder that the history plays deal. They make it abundantly clear that for Shakespeare the prerequisite of political order was unquestioning obedience, on the part of the subject, to an absolute monarch who was traditionally seen as the deputy of God. Obedience to him was therefore seen as obedience to God. This view of the kingship can be traced back at least as far as John of Salisbury, who in his Policraticus, says his editor,

...contributed a heritage of ideas whose momentum made them, in spite of the newer influences, the dominant force in political thought down to at least the middle of the sixteenth century.⁶

Concerning the meaning of monarchy, John of Salisbury has said:

For all power is from the Lord God, and has been with Him always, and is from everlasting. The power which the prince has is therefore from God, for the power of God is never lost, nor severed from Him, but He merely exercises it through a subordinate hand, making all things teach His mercy or justice.⁷

Whatever its antecedents, this was the currently accepted view of the monarch in the England of Shakespeare's day. The relative harmony and stability which the house of Tudor had finally achieved made many think that under Elizabeth God's plan for society was actually a reality. The ideal of the monarch as "the image of the almighty God," whose laws therefore "bear the stamp of divine laws,"⁸ ardently longed for by Bodin in France, was seen to be a reality in England. Perhaps it was, as Figgis suggests, partly a desire to strengthen the claim of the Protestant Tudors against

the counter-demands of the Pope that led the Tudors to assert a claim to divine appointment.⁹ At any rate, Dover Wilson states:

Social stability, in the form of a hierarchy or rank or degree, crowned by the monarch, was...the condition of Elizabethan political thought.¹⁰

This hierarchy has been admirably described by Lily B. Campbell:

God as King of kings, or God of gods; the ruler as viceregent of God, exhibiting His justice in the world; the subordinate magistrates as in turn representing the divine authority when clothed with the king's authority; the subjects bound by divine command to obedience to God and to God's representatives, the King, and to the King's representatives, the magistrates:-- these are the tenets upon which the Tudor theory of the state was constructed.¹¹

It is evident from the context of both the history plays and the tragedies that it was this view of the state that Shakespeare accepted. As Spaight says: "...the image of authority most familiar to him was the absolute ruler."¹² And it follows from this that a necessary condition of virtue in a human being was absolute obedience to an anointed king on the part of the subject, and, on the part of the king, recognition of his responsibility as a deputy of God--conformity, in short, to "degree, priority, and place." To be virtuous in the political sense, a man must recognize his place in the order established by God.

But while obedience to the anointed king was the most obvious mark of virtue, it was not the whole story. Order must prevail, as Ulysses' speech suggests, in all spheres of life, all being related. It must prevail in the family and in the human heart as in the state. Concerning Shakespeare's view of order as ideally prevailing throughout the whole of life, Theodore Spencer says:

Everything in the world was part of the same unified scheme, and the body and soul of man, each a reflection of the other, were the culmination and the final end of God's design.¹³

Shakespeare, then, appears to have accepted the ideal that to be a complete person a man must see himself as part of a greater whole, in which he has a definite place, and to which he has a definite responsibility. It was this ideal of social coherence to which John Donne, concerned as he was with its threatened breakdown, gave expression when he said in a famous passage:

No man is an Iland, intire of itself; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine.

Where does the individualist enter the picture, then? For purposes of this study, the individualist may be defined as the one who breaks the divinely sanctioned order at any or all points. A broad definition like this calls, of course, for further explanation.

To begin with, the most obvious manifestation of such individualism is rebellion against the king. What rebellion meant to most Elizabethans followed as a natural corollary of their view of the king as God's deputy. Figgis says:

The very causes which drove men to support the Tudors at all, drove them also to insist upon the paramount importance of obedience, and to proclaim the iniquity of rebellion.¹⁴

It was an offence against God himself. This view was expressed in a passage from the 1583 edition of A Mirror for Magistrates, quoted by Lily B. Campbell.

For whatsoever man, woman, or childe, is by the consente of the whole realme established in the royall seat, so it have not bene iniuriously procured by rigour of sword and open force, but quietlye by title, eyther of

enherytaunce, succession, lawful bequest, common consent, or eleccion, is vndoubtedlye chosen by God to be his deputie; and whosoever resisteth anye such, resisteth agaynst God him selfe, and is a ranke traytour and rebell.¹⁵

Shakespeare was also a traditionalist in this regard, as will be shown. Therefore the individualism that revealed itself as rebellion against the divinely established institution of monarchy was always equated with evil, whatever its motives were. For the very act of rebellion was an attack on the divine order of things.

But obedience to the monarch, while basic, did not by itself satisfy the requirements of virtue. Order must be maintained in all spheres of life. The pattern of this order was established by tradition, and the individualist is to be seen as the man who persists in charting his own course, who sees himself as his own final authority and law. The view of man that was increasingly coming to the fore was what a modern theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, calls the concept of the "autonomous individual," associated with Renaissance optimism about the potentialities of unaided human nature. So Niebuhr speaks of "the Renaissance emphasis upon unique individuality."¹⁶ This was the optimistic view that the individual needs no guide outside of himself for his behavior. This kind of self-reliance Shakespeare invariably condemns. Individualistic behavior, in the sense of it being a denial of the claims of the external order, whether it be the order of the soul, of the family, of the state or of the stars, is always equated with evil. It always brings chaos and disorder. It is often, as will be shown, equated with service to the self, with motives of the crudest kind of self-interest. But whatever its motivation, or even if, as in the case of Iago, it appears to have none, individualism as we have defined it is always pictured as destructive, or potentially destructive.

Conformity to established order then becomes, in the Shakespearean morality, the condition of virtue, and non-conformity or individualism the condition of villainy. This is the framework within which Shakespeare presents good and evil in human affairs. Saying this, of course, is not to pretend to tell the secret of his power of characterization. For all his characters are individuals, each one different from the other. In a recent article Morozov suggests that this individualization was achieved partly by the quality of the images used by each character in his or her speech, as, for example, the animal-images so common in Iago's speech, and the seed-images in Banquo's.¹⁷

For that matter, individualism itself took many forms. Within the pattern of established order, a man, while recognizing his social responsibility, could fail to live up to it. Instead, through weakness or defiance, he could insist on plotting his own course of life. It is surely such failure to obey a recognized traditional obligation that lies at the root of the dramas of such characters as Henry VI, Macbeth, and King Lear. The nature of, and the reason for, the failure in each case are what help to stamp them as distinct individuals. They are, in short, both individualists and individuals.

Yet without falling into the trap set by those who would over-classify and so reduce to a deceptive order the infinitely varied Shakespeare, we can distinguish another type of individualist, whose individualism goes beyond mere defiance of an accepted order. These are the ones who from the beginning deny, or seem to deny, its claims altogether, who show no significant development of

character because they appear as non-conformists from the time they first appear. It is with examples of this type of "rugged individual" that this study is concerned, with Shakespeare's characterization of them, with the nature of their individualism and with his verdict on that individualism.

Studying them thus will involve a study of Shakespeare's whole treatment of these individualists and not simply of his moral attitude to them. In other words, it will involve seeing them in their particular plays. For they have no real identity or existence apart from their respective dramas. A character does not live at all outside of the vehicle for which the playwright created him. What he is is shown us by how he talks and moves in relation to others, what his effect is on them and on the action. The nature of each individualist is inextricably bound up with the dramatic requirements of the play to which he belongs, and he cannot be separated from it. In this regard, each one is unique. It is comparing the incomparable, for example, to say, as Brooke says, that Iago and Falstaff are identical in spirit,¹⁸ when the plays to which each owes his life are so dissimilar in nature, theme, tone and treatment. A full discussion of each of the characters chosen as he appears in the play or plays for which he was created, will be undertaken in an effort to see if underlying all these real or apparent individualists there is actually a consistent moral judgment on the kind of individualism that has been defined above. The study will follow the chronological pattern of the writing of the plays, beginning with Richard of Gloucester, who, in telling us that he is himself alone, provides us with a definition of what

individualism is, even if he does not suggest many of its deeper implications in human life.

NOTES ON INTRODUCTION

1. Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's "Histories," Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy, p. 307.
2. Hardin Craig, "Trend of Shakespearean Scholarship," Shakespeare Survey, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, II, 114.
3. Troilus and Cressida, I, iii, 85-124. This and all subsequent quotations from the plays are taken from The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. George Lyman Kittredge.
4. Hans Meyer, The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 528.
5. Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas, ed. Anton C. Pegis, p. 275.
6. The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury, trans. John Dickinson, p. xviii.
7. Ibid., p. 4.
8. Readings in Political Philosophy, ed. Francis William Coker, p. 379.
9. John Neville Figgis, The Divine Right of Kings, p. 90.
10. J. Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare, p. 92.
11. Lily B. Campbell, Tudor Conceptions of History and Tragedy in "A Mirror for Magistrates," p. 7.
12. Robert Spaight, Shakespeare and Politics, p. 9.
13. Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, p. 20.
14. John Neville Figgis, op. cit., p. 88.
15. Lily B. Campbell, Tudor Conceptions of History and Tragedy in "A Mirror for Magistrates," p. 14-15.
16. Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 62.
17. Mikhail M. Morozov, "The Individualization of Shakespeare's Characters through Imagery," Shakespeare Survey, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, II, 83-106.
18. Tucker Brooke, Essays on Shakespeare and Other Elizabethans, pp. 46-56.

CHAPTER I

Richard of Gloucester - "one lost in a thorny wood"¹

Richard of Gloucester's dark star begins to rise in the third part of Henry VI, and by the time that play is over we have him complete. In a sense, all that comes after, in the play that bears his name, is anti-climax. Dramatically, of course, Richard III is no anti-climax; on the contrary, it stands by itself in its superlative stagecraft. It gives us the man in action, and the picture we have of him by the end of 3 Henry VI is largely a static one. But it is complete. And for purposes of cold-blooded critical dissection there is an advantage in that. We can study him more easily while he is relatively still, before he has begun to mark what Hazlitt called his "lurid track"² across the blood-soaked boards of his own play.

He emerges, then, in the third part of Henry VI, as a unique character. It is true that he makes a brief pugnacious entrance near the end of the second part of Henry VI. But here he is not really a personality. A hint or two is all that Shakespeare gives us at this point of Richard's later sinister distinction. He is marked out from his brothers only by his physical deformity, and with this his enemy Clifford taunts him:

...foul indigested lump,
As crooked in thy manners as thy shape!³

Marked out as he is by his crooked shape, and also, it would appear, by a murderous disposition, he is however not really separated in kind from most of the others in this violent play, any one of whom could take to themselves Richard's ferocious invocation:

...Heart, be wrathful still.
Priests pray for enemies, but princes kill.⁴

But in the play that follows we learn the secret of the man--that he is one set apart from others, apart from society, apart from humanity, apart from God, almost apart from the earth itself, it seems. And he has been so set apart from his birth. He is thus completely outside the recognized order of things, a man so contemptuous of order that in comparison to his contempt for order the disorder of the age seems almost orderly. For Richard has been born to chaos. All this will be made clear when he stands before us at the end and indicates the various aspects of his diabolic individualism.

One of the characteristics of such a complete individual would be entire lack of loyalty. This is certainly true of the later Richard. But at the beginning of the play he reveals an almost worshipful devotion to his father:

...my warlike father.
Methinks 'tis prize enough to be his son.⁵

This could be seen, with Palmer, as the one genuine affection of Richard's being. An elaboration of this view could build on Richard's expression of grief over his father's death

Richard, I hear thy name; I'll venge thy death
Or die renowned by attempting it.⁶

to make it responsible for the man he became. But this seems to me far too flimsy to bear the weight of Richard's later villainy. The

point is really unimportant, because this single loyalty dies with the Duke of York, and with it the riddle of its having existed at all. It is only hinted at once more when Richard, early in the next play, refers with apparent sincerity to "my noble father."⁷ And for the rest, as will be seen, he knows no devotion except to himself.

From the beginning, too, we see him as a valiant man, filled with a sort of animal courage which is neither good nor bad, but which we cannot help but admire. He is truly "lion-hearted" like the other Richard, or at least he is tiger-hearted. He is referred to, alone of his associates, as "valiant Richard" by Warwick.⁸ Better testimony to his fearlessness is given by his father, who publicly commends him:

Three times did Richard make a lane to me
And thrice cried "Courage, father! fight it out!"⁹

And Richard demonstrates his valour before our eyes in his challenge to Clifford:

Then, Clifford, were thy heart as hard as steel,
As thou hast shown it flinty by thy deeds,
I come to pierce it or to give it mine.¹⁰

Associated with this valour, we see a callous savagery in Richard which, however, does not in itself set him apart from his fellows. But it does show a sort of whole-hearted brutality that gives promise of a carefree wholesale spilling of blood to come. Both the stage direction and the speech illustrate this savagery at the point where he says:

(Showing the Duke of Somerset's head)
Thus do I hope to shake King Henry's head.¹¹

And now that we know the kind of action that Richard relishes, perhaps it is not too soon to speak of his love of action for its own

sake. He is obviously no intellectual, is Richard; the calm cloisters of secluded thought for the sake of thinking are not for him; he must be doing, and as we shall see, he is crippled when there seems to be nothing further to do. This love of action will be seen throughout both plays; it is excellently revealed in the heavy irony of one of his early conversations with Warwick:

But in this troublous time what's to be done?
 Shall we go throw away our coats of steel
 And wrap our bodies in black mourning gowns,
 Numb'ring our Ave-Maries with our beads?
 Or shall we on the helmets of our foes
 Tell our devotion with revengeful arms?
 If for the last, say "Ay," and to it, lords!¹²

Richard is clever, and knows supremely well how to make his mind go to work to serve his ends, but it is surely a distortion to say, as many older critics were fond of saying, that he is primarily a man of intellect.¹³ "'Tis no time to talk"¹⁴ could be taken as Richard's motto on all occasions where there is a choice between action and deliberation, although he can talk well enough when the occasion demands it. And there is no delay for Richard between action and deliberation. His brother Edward says of him:

He's sudden if a thing comes in his head.¹⁵

But these characteristics, while they contribute, do not in themselves make Richard the unique kind of individual that he is, do not set him apart absolutely from normal society. Yet he is so set apart, first of all by his congenital physical deformity. The most obvious feature of this is the hump on his back, but this seems to be accompanied by a general misshapeness which gives Richard an entirely grotesque appearance.¹⁶ His humanity, in the physical sense, is an outrageous caricature of normalcy. Descriptions

of him abound, all reliable because the audience has Richard before them in the twisted flesh for proof. Thus, for example, Margaret says to Richard's father:

And where's that valiant crook-back prodigy,
Dicky your boy, that with his grumbling voice
Was wont to cheer his dad in mutinies?¹⁷

He is truly, as Margaret says, a "misshapen stigmatic."¹⁸ And there is evidence that to an Elizabethan audience such physical deformity would indicate moral depravity and so would be a reason for scorn and not pity. Such a person was by his hump "Mark'd by the Destinies to be avoided."¹⁹ Furness says:

Birth-marks, in connection with the old belief in planetary influences, were thought to be indications of character.²⁰

And an older critic, Hudson, said:

Richard's personal deformity is regarded not only as the proper outshaping and physiognomy of a certain malignity of soul, but also as aggravating that malignity in turn.²¹

At any rate, Shakespeare clearly intends Richard's hump to be a symbol of an inner inhumanity. It is the devil's mark on him, and as such not the cause but the accompaniment of his perversion. It would be possible, indeed more possible for us than for an Elizabethan audience, to see the hump as the reason for his villainy, and not merely the stigma of it. Seeing him thus would open the way for an obvious psychological explanation of his behavior. Richard himself suggests such an explanation in his third act soliloquy, when he says:

Why, love foreswore me in my mother's womb;

 She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe

To disproportion me in every part,
 Like to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear-whelp,

 And am I then a man to be belov'd?
 O monstrous fault to harbour such a thought!
 Then, since this earth affords no joy to me
 But to command, to check, to o'erbear such
 As are of better person than myself,
 I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown
 And, whiles I live, t'account this world but hell²²

But whatever Shakespeare's intention may have been at this point, he later, as I hope to show, makes it crystal clear that Richard's inward inhumanity is only proven and not caused by his outward appearance. That outward appearance possibly is an excuse for his later cynical attitude towards gallantry in the boudoir, where a well-favored appearance is the first requirement for success, but apart from that it serves only to prepare the audience for his total depravity. It does not justify or excuse that depravity.

Indeed, we see that Richard is marked from his birth by other physical stigmata which serve as symbols of his peculiar individualism but do not deform him at all. For one thing, he was born with teeth. King Henry says to him, after enumerating the evil omens that accompanied Richard's birth:

Teeth had'st thou in thy head when thou wast born
 To signify that thou cam'st to bite the world.²³

So the truth is that Richard is delving deeper into his own nature than he probably realizes when he says of himself that he is

...like one lost in a thorny wood,

 Not knowing how to find the open air²⁴

He accommodates himself very comfortably to the thorny wood; he even invites others, and, in a sense, his audience, to share it with him, but he is constitutionally unable to leave it.

Two other symbols of his individualism echo throughout both plays, indicating that he is both distinct from, and more depraved than, the generality of men. For one thing, he is continually compared to an animal, usually a dog or a boar. This indicates that he is both essentially inhuman, and lower than humanity. Again, and this in a sense is the most powerful undercurrent of the plays, he is repeatedly labelled a citizen of Hell, and as such, outside of the natural order altogether. Like Hell itself, he is born of Chaos and old Night. This note is sounded more strongly in the last play in which he appears, by almost all who are close to him. Margaret's description of him as "devil's butcher"²⁵ at the end of the third part of Henry VI suggests Richard's hellishness powerfully, since it comes from one who is peculiarly suited to recognize diabolism when she sees it.

And Richard has the devil's skill with words. He is a completely unscrupulous casuist, using words as instruments to thwart conviction and inspire illegal action. The first demonstration of this ability is given in his exhortation to his father to attack Henry, at the cost of a broken oath. He says:

An oath is of no moment, being not took
 Before a true and lawful magistrate
 That hath authority over him that swears.
 Henry had none, but did usurp the place.
 Then, seeing 'twas he that made you to depose,
 Your oath, my lord, is vain and frivolous.
 Therefore, to arms!...²⁶

This is only one of the many instances of Richard's practice of this aspect of the black art.

This, then, is the man whom we see before us by the end of the third part of Henry VI. By nature established as entirely

unprincipled, he now need give no further rational explanation of his behavior. Isolated by nature from all human loyalties, he is his own black law. This is what he tells us of himself at the end of the play:

I have no brother, I am like no brother;
And this word "love," which greybeards call divine,
Be resident in men like one another,
And not in me! I am myself alone.²⁷

"I am myself alone." Separated as he is from man, Richard is able to do nothing but evil, Shakespeare seems to be saying here.

And this is the man who aspires to the throne of England. In his aspiration there is no hint of any recognition on Richard's part that possession of the crown would involve obligations to society in general. His motives appear to be purely selfish and purely irresponsible. He says:

...I
Stay not for the love of Edward but the crown.²⁸

He wants the crown because he pictures it, falsely as it turns out, as the very summit of earthly bliss. This illusion he confides to his father when he says:

...And, father, do but think
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown,
Within whose circle is Elysium
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.²⁹

It is perhaps no accident that Richard's picture of the home of happiness is Elysium, a pagan paradise. But whatever the crown stands for to him, the fact of his intense longing for it is early established, and this longing carries with it the suggestion that no human scruple will block his road to his goal.

Richard comes to life before the end of the third part of Henry VI, and we see him for a little while in brief but typical

action--first in his part in the brutal slaying of young Prince Edward,³⁰ and second with the murder in the Tower of King Henry.³¹ The succeeding play (Richard III) is concerned altogether with the impact on society of this human devil.

We are prepared for that impact to some extent, however, for the England of Richard's day has elements of diabolism in it too. The natural order of things has been upset; the times are out of joint and almost ripe for a Richard. Hardin Craig is surely wrong when he speaks of the "established virtue" of the age, against which Richard stands alone.³² The basic disorder of the times is symbolized by the stiff little scenes in the earlier play in which King Henry sees the son that has killed his father, and the father who has killed his son.³³

But this suggestion of general disorder is carried much further in Richard III. Here, in a sense, Shakespeare creates his own disordered world, a world admirably suited to Richard, and a world which he invites the audience to enter. The moral judgment on that world and its values, while ever-present, is muted and subdued. We, the audience, share Richard's thorny wood to a degree, and we make our home in it for the time being. It is only at the end that we step outside, as will be shown, and pass a verdict on Richard and his world. But for the first four acts, instead of Richard's peculiar distinction being accentuated by comparison with normal life, the distinction is partially merged in a society that is made for him. The whole world veers giddily towards him, as it were, carrying the audience with it in an exuberant outburst of evil-doing. We view him with more fascination than horror. In that sense, the

play is certainly less serious than much of Shakespeare's later work. In it we seem to see the high spirits of the youthful playwright predominating, allowing only hints of the sober moral judgment of maturity to break through. But those hints are there, and they furnish the direction, if not the content, of Shakespeare's final judgment on irresponsible individualism. In general, however, this play is in a class by itself, as a stunning melodramatic tour de force.

As a play, too, Richard III is self-sufficient. It needs no acquaintance with what has gone before to explain it. For it begins with a soliloquy in which Richard with whom we became acquainted in the previous play introduces and describes himself to his audience. And here, for one thing, he makes perfectly clear what the relation of his physical deformity is to his villainy. It is clearly the symbol, and not the cause, of his depravity. A first reading of the soliloquy might give the opposite impression and lead us to believe that, being crippled, he is by reason of his deformity cut off from earthly society and therefore perforce must turn to evil. For he says:

I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion
 Deform'd, unfinished, sent before my time
 Into this breathing world scarce half made up
 Why I, in this weak piping time of peace,
 Have no delight to pass away the time,
 And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
 I am determin'd to prove a villain.³⁴

But in the acting we would surely see the truth, and a closer reading of the passage puts the hump in its place, as it

were, as merely the accompaniment of Richard's general depravity. For hump or no, he has no desire to behave honourably; his lamentation is directed at "this weak piping time of peace,"³⁵ at the order to which he prefers the disorder of "grim-visag'd war,"³⁶ for Richard despises harmony; his picture of the peacetime pleasures of a gentleman such as he is one of whoring, of "sportive tricks"³⁷ in a lady's chamber, and these are the only pleasures which his hump forbids him. He is a villain; by nature he is, as he assures us, "subtle, false, and treacherous."³⁸ Thus by the end of the soliloquy he stands before us clearly, a twisted mind in a twisted body. To prove it, he immediately springs into action by informing us leeringly of his plan to betray his gentle brother Clarence, a plan which, within a few seconds, we see in process of succeeding.

There is no need to follow through the action of the play in detail, for it adds little to our knowledge of Richard. It only confirms what we already know. Of course, to the playgoer, that confirmation in all its daring, violent brilliance is the main interest. But what we are chiefly interested in here is an analysis of the hero-villain Richard, and his play tells us little further about him. It is interesting, however, to note what happens to him when he has no more worlds to conquer. More important for our purposes will be an attempt to see the nature, and the limitations of the judgment that Shakespeare seems to pass on the individualism for which Richard stands. Something of this judgment has already been indicated.

In Richard III, then, we discover Richard's total disloyalty in action, and as we would expect, we discover that it is accompanied

by a complete hypocrisy. He is an artist in treachery, as is revealed by his betrayal of his brother Clarence, whom he first deceitfully imprisons and then promises to help:

Well, your imprisonment shall not be long;
I will deliver you, or else lie for you.³⁹

Immediately after this he proceeds to assure us of his intentions to murder Clarence:

...I do love thee so
That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven.⁴⁰

And before the end of the act, Clarence, of course, is dead.

We see Richard's disloyalty, too, in the betrayal of all the others to whom by any canon of decency he would owe fidelity, but whom he first deceives and then murders. We see it, ironically, in the final betrayal of his fellow-conspirator Buckingham, who fatuously plays Beelzebub to Richard's Satan, only to be contemptuously brushed aside when he pauses for reflection.⁴¹ At the end Buckingham's ghost says to Richard:

The first was I that help'd thee to the crown;
The last was I that felt thy tyranny.⁴²

Illustrating Richard's treachery and the way he makes a game of deceiving others but never, of course, himself, at least one bravura display of his diabolic skill in twisting words to suit his purposes is given us. This occurs in his famous dialogue with Lady Anne. Here he atrociously courts her before the coffin of her father-in-law whom he has murdered, disposes flippantly of his murder of her husband,

Anne: He is in heaven, where thou shalt never come.
Glou: Let him thank me, that help to send him thither.⁴³

and astonishingly ends by winning her favor, immediately afterwards confiding the extent of his deceit in a leering aside to the audience:

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
 Was ever woman in this humour won?
 I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.⁴⁴

We see this skill with words put to a different use in his final rabble-raising address to his soldiers.⁴⁵ This speech is complete with all the shabby rhetorical devices of the man who knows how to use words to darken, rather than enlighten, the human mind. Of its kind it is, being Richard's, a masterpiece.

Related to this power of deceiving others is Richard's continual pose, cynical in the extreme, of being a simple, honest fellow, too good and innocent for the dark machinations of an evil world, the climax of which comes in his solemn pretence of unfitness to rule, in his carefully staged scene with the unsuspecting citizens, where he asks them:

Alas, why should you heap this care on me?
 I am unfit for state and majesty,
 I do beseech you take it not amiss,
 I cannot nor I will not yield to you.⁴⁶

And along with this goes the delicious farce of his: "O, do not swear, my Lord of Buckingham."⁴⁷

We see, too, in Richard III the same fearful energy, the compulsion to translate idea into immediate action, that Richard revealed in the previous play. And this, when coupled with his complete lack of scruple, results in some bloody action indeed. His "Come, bustle, bustle"⁴⁸ sounds Richard's keynote. And this "bustle" in cold-blooded action is shown in the scene where he rudely disillusion the trusting Hastings by saying:

himself ...Thou art a traitor,
 Off with his head! Now by Saint Paul I swear
 I will not dine until I see the same.⁴⁹

This note of an immediate, bloodthirsty call to action is sounded again and again. "Chop off his head!"⁵⁰ says Richard in reply to Buckingham's query about what they should do to Hastings if he refused to co-operate with them. And with the statement,

...I wish the bastards dead,
 And I would have it suddenly perform'd,⁵¹

he proceeds to arrange for the murder of the two young princes in the Tower, arrangements hastened by the urging that they be speedily executed, for he asks the murderer impatiently: "Shall we hear from thee, Tyrrel, ere we sleep?"⁵²

Indeed, this love of "bustle" is responsible for a point that is dramatically interesting, but not decisive for our purposes. This point is illustrated by what happens to Richard after he has attained the crown which was to enclose the imagined Elysium. Having attained it, he discovers that he is unable to endure the stagnation of having achieved his goal and so having an end put to his need for action. Achievement brings with it a flagging of what Palmer calls Richard's "virtuesity." Richard himself notes the phenomenon. It foreshadows, although it does not cause, his approaching defeat. He says of it before the final battle:

I have not that alacrity of spirit
 Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have.⁵³

But there is never any remorse in him, from beginning to end. The nearest that he comes to it is in the dream scene, when the succession of ghostly visitors drives him to a momentary half-hysterical, half-unconscious self-examination. However, when fully awake he is

himself again, and dismisses the attack of "coward conscience"⁵⁴ as the baseless fear induced by a nightmare. For the rest, Richard appears perfectly happy in his evil-doing, governed throughout as he is by a spirit of "merry diabolism."⁵⁵

Indeed, Richard is hardly a human being at all. Again and again there recurs the suggestion, already made in the preceding play, that he belongs to Hell. Not only Margaret, the one character who from the beginning is never deceived by him, but Anne, his mother, and finally Richmond, the leader of the "good" forces, repeatedly suggest that Hell is his proper home. Richard himself confesses the aptness of the association with Hell when he says:

And thus I clothe my naked villany
With odd old ends stol'n forth of holy writ,
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.⁵⁶

That, and the frequent animal comparisons already referred to, remind us continually that he is beyond the pale of normal humanity.

What moral judgment, if any, is passed on Richard's kind of individualism? And how much is included in that judgment, if it is passed? To answer these questions we must note again the nature of the play. We must note again that Richard III is primarily a high-spirited, brightly-colored melodrama, which for the first four acts, at least, casts over the audience a spell of "diabolic intoxication,"⁵⁷ that takes them on a "moral holiday."⁵⁸ Therefore we must not expect too much of this play, or for that matter the one that preceded it, by way of sober moral comment, implied or otherwise. "Bad is the world"⁵⁹ in the days of Richard; but our condemnation of that world and of the central figure in it is weakened by the fact that Shakespeare makes us revel in it so gleefully. The Second

Murderer's mockery of conscience⁶⁰ introduces the moral holiday, and rings only too sympathetically in our ears. In this play we almost seem asked to suspend our faculty of moral judgment for the moment.

The fact is that in his bad world Richard is too inhuman for us to identify him very closely with humanity as we know it. He is a monster posing as a man, and in his monstrosity impressive and even fascinating. But he is not really a man, and we do not feel the need of passing judgment on him as a man. He is too remote from life; he does not, as all men must, deal in morality or immorality at all; animal-like, he lacks the knowledge of good; he is amoral. This stamps him as inhuman and remote from life more than even absolute immorality would. Richard has no conscience at all.

Moreover, Richard is not depicted in such a way as to encourage us to look either deep within him or far beyond him. He is all of one consistent shade. He has neither complexity nor subtlety. He lacks both undertones and overtones. Later on Shakespeare will expose the inner secrets of men's souls; he will give us characters in whom we will see a part of the world go by; but Richard is only Richard. In this sense, too, he is himself alone. He has his own powerful dramatic justification, and by the very nature of the play that is all he needs to have. Richard III hardly demands anything more of us than that we enjoy it. The question of what Richard stands for as a human individual is to a large extent irrelevant.

At the same time, judgment is passed on Richard, and it points the direction for Shakespeare's treatment of the man who persists in cutting himself off from his obligations to society. This

judgment is implied throughout, even when the villains are having their day and the audience its moral holiday. We are assured that there is a moral order by Clarence's account of his dream in the first act.⁶¹ There is a God who will punish evil-doers, he assures the audience. He invokes this God when he says:

O God! if my deep pray'rs cannot appease thee,
But thou wilt be aveng'd on my misdeeds,
Yet execute thy wrath on me alone.⁶²

And to his murderers he says:

...for He holds vengeance in His hand
To hurl upon their heads that break His law.⁶³

Again, in a different way, the unbending reaction of the citizens to Buckingham's hypocritical appeal to them on behalf of Richard--"No, so God help me, they spake not a word"⁶⁴--reveals a sort of soundness in the people and assures us that underlying the moral chaos of the world of Richard III there is a foundation of homely wisdom and common sense which will one day restore order to the land. Finally even Buckingham, on his way to his execution, reveals a belated faith in the existence of divine justice which operates to restore order in the end. He says:

That high All-Seer, which I dallied with
Hath turn'd my feigned prayer on my head
And given in earnest what I begg'd in jest.
Thus does he force the swords of wicked men
To turn their own points in their masters' bosoms.⁶⁵

Order finally is restored, and with that order comes the death of Richard. And if we are to look for Shakespeare's judgment on Richard the individualist we will find it in Richard's violent death and in the words of Richmond,⁶⁶ the representative of that restored order, at the end of the play. Here Richmond says:

Let them not live to taste this land's increase
That would with treason wound this fair land's peace!⁶⁷

However, the nature of the play and the nature of Richard forbid us to look very deeply into the moral basis of Shakespeare's work at this point. All that we can reasonably deduce is a general idea of the direction of his thought about the kind of individualism with which this study is concerned, and which Richard represents to an over-simplified extreme.

NOTES ON CHAPTER I

1. 3 Henry VI, III, ii, 174.
2. William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespear's Plays, p. 143.
3. 2 Henry VI, V, i, 157-8.
4. Ibid., V, ii, 70-1.
5. 3 Henry VI, II, i, 19-20.
6. Ibid., II, i, 87-8.
7. Richard III, I, iii, 174.
8. 3 Henry VI, II, i, 198.
9. Ibid., I, iv, 9-10.
10. Ibid., II, i, 201-3.
11. Ibid., I, i, 20.
12. Ibid., II, i, 159-65.
13. See, for example, Coleridge--"Pride of intellect is the characteristic of Richard carried to the extent of even boasting to his own mind about his villainy."--quoted by R. N. Hudson in Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters, p. 152.

W. W. Lloyd--"like Iago, he believes in the absolute sway of will-wielded intellect to subject and mould passion to its own determination."--quoted by H. H. Furness in A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare--Richard the Third, p. 558.

C. Knight--"To the last the poet exhibits the supremacy of Richard's intellect."--quoted by Furness, p. 562.

H. Giles--"Richard the Third, like Iago, is a man of mind."--quoted by Furness, p. 563.

R. G. Moulton--"(Richard) approaches villainy as a thing of pure intellect."--quoted by Furness, p. 570.
14. 3 Henry VI, IV, v, 24.
15. Ibid., V, v, 86.
16. Richard's own description of his physical appearance (3 Henry VI, III, ii, 156-60), would, of course, only confirm what the audience can see when they first meet him.

17. 3 Henry VI, I, iv, 75-7.
18. Ibid., II, ii, 136.
19. Ibid., II, ii, 137.
20. H. H. Furness, A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare--Richard the Third, p. 98.
21. R. N. Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters, p. 144.
22. 3 Henry VI, III, ii, 153-69.
23. Ibid., V, vi, 53-4. See also V, vi, 70ff.
24. Ibid., III, ii, 174-7.
25. Ibid., V, v, 77.
26. Ibid., I, ii, 22-8.
27. Ibid., V, vi, 80-3.
28. Ibid., IV, i, 125-6.
29. Ibid., I, ii, 28-31.
30. Ibid., V, v, 39.
31. Ibid., V, vi, 57.
32. Hardin Craig, Shakespeare, p. 106.
33. 3 Henry VI, II, v, 55-124.
34. Richard III, I, i, 18-30.
35. Ibid., I, i, 24.
36. Ibid., I, i, 9.
37. Ibid., I, i, 14.
38. Ibid., I i, 37.
39. Ibid., I, i, 114-5.
40. Ibid., I, i, 118-9.
41. Ibid., IV, ii, 85-124.
42. Ibid., V, iii, 168-9.

43. Ibid., I, ii, 106-7.
44. Ibid., I, ii, 227-9.
45. Ibid., V, iii, 315-42.
46. Ibid., III, vii, 204-7.
47. Ibid., III, vii, 220.
48. Ibid., V, iii, 290.
49. Ibid., III, iv, 74-6.
50. Ibid., III, i, 193.
51. Ibid., IV, ii, 18-9.
52. Ibid., IV, ii, 83.
53. Ibid., V, iii, 73-4.
54. Ibid., V, iii, 180.
55. John Palmer, Political Characters of Shakespeare, p. 105.
56. Richard III, I, iii, 336-8.
57. John Palmer, op. cit., p. 117.
58. Ibid., p. 66.
59. Richard III, III, vi, 13.
60. Ibid., I, iv, 137ff.
61. Ibid., I, iv, 1-75.
62. Ibid., I, iv, 69-71.
63. Ibid., I, iv, 204-5.
64. Ibid., III, vii, 24.
65. Ibid., V, i, 20-24.
66. Nothing can be added to Dowden's summary of Richmond's function. He says: "Richard conquers, and he conquers expressly as the champion and representative of the moral order of the world, which Richard had endeavoured to set aside." Edward Dowden, Shakspeare: His Mind and Art, p. 190.
67. Richard III, V, v, 38-9.

CHAPTER II

The Bastard - "A little from the right"¹

From the point of view of this study, the Bastard as an individualist is more interesting for what he is not than for what he is. For he is not at heart a villain; he is far from being in rebellion against the established order of things or against the idea of order itself. On the contrary, he stands before us in this play as a stout defender of the institution of monarchy and therefore of the ruling anointed king. And incidentally, because nationalism had by Shakespeare's time come to be associated with the rightful order of things, he is a valiant champion of England in her conflict with the outside world.

Thus the Bastard's individualism is more apparent than real. Like Richard of Gloucester's, it is strongly marked. But he is another kind of man than Richard was, and he appears in a different kind of play. Basically, the setting of this play is a situation of prevailing order. The order is relative--there is disorder in England in the story, but the disorder is not basic to the theme. And within the order that on the whole prevails stands the Bastard, upholding it and helping to restore it when it threatens to collapse. He has, one feels, all the qualifications of the born rogue, of the man who is destined from birth to play the Ishmael, his hand against every other man. But apparently marked for darkness, he emerges on

the side of the angels. He is loyal to the King and to himself, and he triumphs in the end. Yet he is a bastard; he ought to be a rebel like the later Edmund, we feel, for his very existence is a symbol of disloyalty.

But he is not. And it would seem that at this point Shakespeare's concern with his story, with his sources, and with the creation in the Bastard of a character vital enough to bolster an uninspiring hero, outweighed all other considerations. Yet we can read the direction of a judgment on unrestrained individualism here as we could in Richard III. For the Bastard is like Richard in reverse. Resembling him outwardly in many ways, at bottom he fails where Richard succeeds and succeeds where Richard fails. He is, as it were, a good man who is made to bear the mark of villainy. And this duality in him reveals both the nature and the limitations of Shakespeare's judgment on the individual when he wrote this play.

The duality is apparent from the very first. We are not sure what this fellow will turn out to be. His physical appearance, of course, is all in his favor. And well it might be. For his father is none other than Richard the Lion-hearted, whom the Elizabethans called Cordelion. He resembles his father, as Cordelion's mother recognizes instantly, for she says when she first sees him:

He hath a trick of Cordelion's face;
The accent of his tongue affecteth him.
Do you not read some tokens of my son
In the large composition of this man?²

And King John says admiringly:

Mine eye hath well examined his parts
And finds them perfect Richard.³

The Bastard, comparing his own physique to that of his half-brother, pays mocking tribute to his as yet unidentified sire:

in the Fair fall the bones that took the pains for me!⁴

For he Yet for all his good appearance he has a deformity, as real though not as obvious as that of Gloucester. This is his bastardy, which, apart from his name, is brought home to the audience at the very beginning. That he is illegitimate is first claimed by his half-brother Robert, who says:

As I have heard my father speak himself,

.
That this, my mother's son, was none of his;⁵

And the whole story comes out with his mother's admission:

King Richard Cordelion was thy father.⁶

Now bastardy to an Elizabethan audience was, more than it would be today, an acceptable symbol of villainy,⁷ just as Richard's twisted body was. For it was a sign that such a one was born outside of family loyalty and so was by nature unlikely to recognize other social obligations. The question of whether the bastard concerned was to blame for his fault was hardly likely to arise; it was his hard luck that the fates had blighted him from birth, and no further inquiry was called for in the matter. Of course, bastardy did not necessarily imply moral deformity, but it was likely to. And Philip of Faulconbridge is a bastard.

However, as soon as he assures us of the Bastard's dubious distinction, Shakespeare takes pains to point out mitigating circumstances, as it were. These daringly end by establishing him as a man marked by a rather commendable eccentricity more than by a deformity. For one thing, he comes from within the home, he and his half-brothers having been brought up together. His illegitimacy is only revealed to him when he is a man. The Bastard is legitimate

in the eyes of the law. So the King rules, in speaking to Robert.

For he says:

Sirrah, your brother is legitimate.
Your father's wife did after wedlock bear him,
And if she did play false, the guilt was hers.⁸

But it was hardly a fault on her part, for as we have seen, it was the hero Cordelion whom she allowed to father her child. And there is far more merit in "the honour-giving hand"⁹ than there was in the whole body of Lady Faulconbridge's husband Robert. So her broken marriage vow is really to her credit, since Cordelion was the cause of its being broken. By the breaking of it her eldest son was blessed, not cursed. So he comes to view the matter:

Now blessed be the hour, by night or day,
When I was got, Sir Robert was away!¹⁰

Indeed, he has much to be grateful for. He has his father's impressive physique, as we have seen. Moreover, he owes him more than that, as will be revealed. For while, unlike two unworthy later kings of England, he cannot boast his father's name, he does inherit his very heart, and like him will prove to be lion-hearted--both valiant and magnanimous.

Thus the Bastard accepts his bastardy. For he has, in fact, a choice in the matter, according to King John's ruling, and at one point this choice is actually offered. Elinor makes it explicit when she says:

Whether hadst thou rather be a Faulconbridge,
And like thy brother, to enjoy thy land,
Or the reputed son of Cordelion,
Lord of thy presence, and no land beside?¹¹

He chooses to be a bastard then, and his reasons for so choosing tell us much about him. In giving up his Faulconbridge heritage he resigns

affortune; in choosing to be seen as Richard's son he identifies himself with the honour of the Lion-hearted. So he answers Elinor and his brother:

Brother, take you my land, I'll take my chance,
Your face hath got five hundred pound a year;
Yet sell your face for five pence, and 'tis dear.
Madam, I'll follow you unto the death.¹²

It is essentially an honourable choice, then, and with it he is well content. He is not marked by it for villainy, but only perhaps for eccentricity. He is truly, as he lightly admits, "a little from the right,"¹³ but only a little. He implies to us, if we take the word in its deeper sense, that there is nothing sinister in his make-up. And so he accepts himself as he is:

And I am I, howe'er I was begot.¹⁴

He concludes by not only forgiving but actually thanking his mother for her infidelity--an interesting contrast to Gloucester's false and malicious slandering of his mother. For the Bastard says to Lady Faulconbridge:

Now, by this light, were I to get again,
Madam, I would not wish a better father.
Some sins do bear their privilege on earth,
And so doth yours. Your fault was not your folly.
.
.
.
.
Ay, my mother,
With all my heart I thank thee for my father!
Who lives and dares but say thou didst not well
When I was got, I'll send his soul to hell.¹⁵

But for all his rejoicing in his illegitimacy, and his previous suspicion of it, he has hesitated to blacken his mother's name, leaving it to her to make the disclosure. He says to the King:

But for the certain knowledge of that truth
I put you O'er to heaven and to my mother.¹⁶

Typically, he makes a joke of the whole business by associating his

threatened legitimacy with the legacy it would assure him, if it could be established:

Heaven guard my mother's honour and my land!¹⁷

So, whatever else he is, he has convinced us by the end of the first act that King John's first comment about him is the plain truth. He is "a good blunt fellow."¹⁸

This, and more than this, he proves to us when we see him in action. Like Richard of Gloucester, he loves to be up and doing. "Speed" is to him what "bustle" was to Richard. So, "Speed then to take advantage of the field,"¹⁹ he urges King John just before the first battle. And "The spirit of the time shall teach me speed,"²⁰ he assures the King when he is sent on a mission. And at the end, it is the virtue of decisive action as opposed to the paralysis of indecision to which he prompts his King:

Be stirring as the time; be fire with fire;

 Show boldness and aspiring confidence.
 What, shall they seek the lion in his den,
 And fright him there? and make him tremble there?
 O, let it not be said! Forage, and run
 To meet displeasure farther from the doors
 And grapple with him, ere he come so nigh.²¹

Then, too, he makes effective use of this love of action. For like Richard he knows no fear, either on the battlefield or in the face of a personal foe. His enemies sense this, and it makes him a formidable man to cross. His followers know it, and it makes him a great leader of men. His valor is recognized from the beginning of the action, for when Chatillion is describing the impressive array of "dauntless spirits"²² who have crossed the Channel to attack France, he mentions the Bastard ahead of them all, except for the royal party itself. He says:

With them, a bastard of the king's deceased....²³
 With cheerful recklessness ^{the Bastard} urges both kings to begin the battle,
 calling a halt to dull and actionless talk:

Why stand these royal fronts amazed thus?
 Cry "havoc!" kings. Back to the stained field,
 You equal potents, fiery kindled spirits!
 Then let confusion of one part confirm
 The other's peace. Till then, blows, blood, and death!²⁴

He is equally fearless in personal encounters, as is shown by his exchanges with the Duke of Austria. Although the Duke is a comic figure here, and a butt for the Bastard's wit, he is no mean foe as is evidenced by his slaying of Cordelion. This last gives the Bastard a special reason for hating him, and he challenges him in public at their first meeting. For when the Duke asks, stung by the Bastard's rude interruption of him:

What the devil art thou?²⁵

the Bastard instantly replies:

One that will play the devil, sir, with you
 And a' may catch your hide and you alone.²⁶

The exchange culminates in the Bastard hunting down and destroying the Duke in battle--

(Enter Bastard, with Austria's head)²⁷

He is indeed a terror in action--a terror to his enemies at any rate--and a born leader. He speaks the truth, when in reply to Salisbury's

Stand by, or I shall gall you, Faulconbridge.²⁸

he answers:

Thou wert better gall the devil, Salisbury.²⁹

As a leader he is by this time addressed as more than equal by the

greatest in the land, as "renowned Faulconbridge."³⁰ He is capable of fighting a battle almost single-handed, as the rebellious Salisbury later ruefully acknowledges:

That misbegotten devil, Faulconbridge,
In spite of spite, alone upholds the day.³¹

Yet for all his intimidating prowess in war, he is one of the most likeable of Shakespeare's men. He has all of Gloucester's wit and skill with words, but none of his duplicity. His diabolism is entirely sympathetic. He is a good blunt fellow. He makes a joke of his bastardy in his mother's presence, as we have seen, but with no intention of hurting her. In his badgering of Austria he shows no mercy, of course, but here we as audience are entirely on his side. With him we mock the pompous show-off in the lion's skin, as the Bastard taunts him about it:

It lies as sightly on the back of him,
As great Alcides' shows upon an ass.
But, ass, I'll take that burthen from your back
Or lay on that shall make your shoulders crack.³²

There is sheer verbal horseplay in his next encounter with the Duke, when in reply to the words with which Constance ends her castigation of Austria,

Thou wear a lion's hide? Doff it for shame,
And hang a calve's-skin on these recreant limbs.³³

Austria replies:

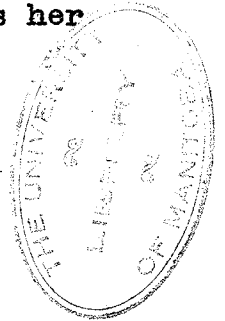
O, that a man should speak those words to me!³⁴

and the Bastard instantly and gleefully takes up the challenge by repeating:

And hang a calve's-skin on those recreant limbs.³⁵

On hearing this Austria thunders:

Thou dar'st not say so, villain, for thy life.³⁶



This brings the prompt response:

And hang a calve's-skin on those recreant limbs.³⁷

And this line the Bastard proceeds to repeat with variations every time the Duke opens his mouth during the remainder of the scene. He sharpens his wit vindictively on him, indeed, whenever they meet.

But the Bastard has the contempt of the genuine master of words for false fine language. This contempt is seen in his mockery of the Dauphin's expression of admiration for Lady Blanch, when the Bastard says:

Drawn in the flattering table of her eye,
Hang'd in the frowning wrinkle of her brow,
And quartered in her heart! he doth espy
Himself love's traitor. This is pity now,
That, hang'd and drawn and quarter'd, there should be,
In such a love so vile a lout as he.³⁸

He has, moreover, the rarer faculty of being able to turn the laugh on himself. So he interrupts King John's pompous proclamation to the citizens of Angiers about his bringing to their walls "twice fifteen thousand hearts of English breed,"³⁹ with the observation "bastards and else." No sooner has the king resumed with a further announcement of the "well-born bloods" who accompany him than the Bastard interrupts again with "Some bastards too."⁴⁰ And at the end, speaking to Hubert, he drily refers to his bar sinister, when he says:

Thou mayst befriend me to much as to think
I came one way of the Plantagenets.⁴¹

The Bastard's wit is a token of his honesty with others and with himself.

All this results in a forthright frankness which deals with life directly, asking no favors of it and yet not taking it too

seriously, a sort of high-spirited and honest shrewdness. We are bound to sympathize with him even if we do not follow him. He is attractive even when he views the situation at Angiers and coolly advises the royal enemies to co-operate for the nonce:

By heaven, these scroyles of Angiers flout you, kings,
 And stand securely on their battlements,
 As in a theatre, whence they gape and point
 At your industrious scenes and acts of death.
 Your royal presences be rul'd by me,
 Do like the mutines of Jerusalem,
 Be friends awhile, and both conjointly bend
 Your sharpest deeds of malice on this town.⁴²

War indeed is like a game, to which he joyously spurs them on,

An if thou hast the mettle of a king,
 Being wrong'd as we are by this peevish town,
 Turn then the mouth of thy artillery,
 As we will ours, against these saucy walls,
 And when that we have dash'd them to the ground,
 Why, then defy each other, and pell-mell
 Make work upon ourselves, for heaven or hell.⁴³

meanwhile chortling to himself over the trap that Austria and France are falling into:

...From north to south!
 Austria and France shoot in each others mouth.⁴⁴

His viewing war as a game, of course does not in itself distinguish him from others of his day. The Dauphin for one refers to "this easy match, play'd for a crown."⁴⁵ But in this game the Bastard is a boisterous leader.

Yet all this, while relevant to his real nature, is superficial. If we are to discover what gives the Bastard his essential distinction we must look at the nature of the world in which he moves and ask ourselves where he stands in relation to it.

On the whole, Shakespeare in this play gives us an England in which order prevails. It is true that disorder in the realm is

caused by rebels against the king, rebels who come to see the error of their ways and so return to the fold from which they have strayed. But this disorder is really incidental. For the main conflict is caused by the threat from abroad, a threat which England, under the leadership of the Bastard, overthrows to stand triumphant at the end, justifying the famous triumphant boast:

This England never did, nor never shall
Lie at the proud feet of a conqueror
.....
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them....⁴⁶

Within this framework the Bastard stands as the champion and upholder of the established order, and defender of the king. Indeed, he is the compensation for the inadequacy of the king. As Spaight says, "John contributes the legitimacy, and Faulconbridge the authority, of kingship."⁴⁷ And so, although King John dies at the end, his death is not in any sense a moral judgment on him, and his right to the throne is assured through his son. The Bastard himself, in his service and loyalty to the king, is the very opposite of the selfish individualist that Shakespeare had pictured in Richard the Third.

But the treatment of this theme of order upheld is not straightforward. Shakespeare was writing a historical play, and so was hemmed in by certain historical facts which even he could not ignore. The fact is that the historical King John was a bad king, perhaps one of the very worst in England's history--weak and selfish and irresponsible. And the King John of Shakespeare's play is unimpressive, as Dover Wilson points out.⁴⁸ Shakespeare's treatment of him is uncertain. He is now good, now bad, now held in respect, now in contempt. The playwright chose not to make the religious

controversy central to the theme, and so he could not attract sympathy to John by making him the champion of Protestantism against Rome. Pandulph, the representative of the Pope, is an almost neutral figure whose advice is finally ignored by both sides. That left Shakespeare with John, for better or for worse, as the symbol of English kingship. And unfortunately perhaps for the clarity of the story, he did not choose to falsify him entirely. So John seems to be regarded as both good and bad alternately--good because he is the king, and bad because he is John. And the final note is one of acceptance of him without regard for his evil-doing. Thus the dying Melun advises the rebels at the end that at least they have in John a better leader than they would have had in the French King:

Even this ill night, your breathing shall expire,

 If Lewis, by your assistance win the day.⁴⁹

And so Salisbury, heeding the advice, decides to return to John, giving an unconvincing show of repentance for his on the whole commendable rebellion:

We will retread the steps of damned flight

 And calmly run on in obedience
 Even to our ocean, to our great King John.⁵⁰

But John is really far from great. In the first place, his title to the crown is more than questionable. At the very beginning his mother reminds him of this fact when, in answer to his boastful "Our strong possession and our right for us!" she says, "Your strong possession much more than your right."⁵¹ It is John's unjust seizure of the throne that is France's pretext for initiating the war. It is in a despicable attempt to maintain his "strong possession" that John arranges for the murder of Arthur. It is not his fault that the

plan miscarries, and it ultimately results in Arthur's death. John himself regrets, if he does not repent, his murderous plot, showing that he recognizes the unnatural disorder which he has created, both within and without. This recognition is evidenced when he says:

My nobles leave me, and my state is brav'd
 Even at my gates, with works of foreign pow'rs;
 Nay, in the body of this fleshly land,
 This kingdom, this confine of blood and breath,
 Hostility and civil tumult reigns
 Between my conscience and my cousin's death.⁵²

Yet with no further justification, he is at the end unequivocally accepted by his followers as their rightful king, and, as we have seen, even Salisbury returns to him. However, before the play ends, this most unconvincing symbol of England's glory is conveniently disposed of by means of poison administered by an unnamed and unmotivated monk.⁵³

And we are glad to see him go. For he is neither a satisfactory villain nor a convincing hero. But the Bastard's lustre is all the brighter for John's mediocrity. He is the real hero of this play, and it is he who redeems it from uncertainty of theme and gives it a focal point and a meaning. Certainly he is a far more interesting and consistent character than King John. But he is more than that. He is something of a symbol of order in society, upholding an ideal in the midst of threats of disorder from within and without the realm. We see him from the beginning as completely and selflessly loyal to his king. His first words--"Your faithful subject"⁵⁴--give an accurate picture of his attitude throughout the action.

It is to the crown, we find, and to the idea of kingship itself, that he is so devoted. He would no doubt see the king, of England at least, as one of the "anointed deputies of heaven,"⁵⁵

as Pandulph does. When John is king, then, he has the Bastard's undivided allegiance, an allegiance which is of course promptly transferred to John's lawful successor, to whom he says:

...with all submission, on my knee,
I do bequeath my faithful services
And true subjection everlastingly.⁵⁶

It is England, indeed, in the person of the king, that the Bastard is faithful to, as his final speech in the play indicates.

That the Bastard is this kind of man is proven again and again in the course of the action. His initial choice of "a foot of honour" in preference to "many a many foot of land"⁵⁷ is proof of his selflessness. In the second act soliloquy he pretends that he will follow the way of the world and be completely self-centred. He says:

Well, while I am a beggar, I will rail
And say there is no sin but to be rich;
And being rich, my virtue then shall be
To say there is no vice but beggary.
Since kings break faith upon commodity,
Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee.⁵⁸

But he convinces nobody, not even himself. In this sense he is a complete contrast to Richard of Gloucester, whose evil actions if anything exceed his evil intentions. The Bastard is entirely unsuccessful in his attempt to be a villain, for he is completely a man of honour, completely loyal to traditional values.

This integrity gives him the right to stand in judgment--on his king, to whom he is loyal but over whom he towers, and on his age, which he stands as far above as Gloucester was beneath his. He is the best and loftiest character of the play. In a sense, he is the king, through his support giving John's rule the semblance of order which it would otherwise lack. He says in delivering the challenge to the French forces:

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...Now hear our English king,
For thus his royalty doth speak in me.⁵⁹

And so in fact the royalty of the King speaks through the Bastard all during the play's action. For his is the voice of the King as he ought to be, and so he towers above the actual King, advising him, urging him to action, and finding himself utterly at a loss to reconcile John's kingship with his ignoble part in the death of Arthur. But the murder, for all that he sees it as a

...bloody work,
The graceless action of a heavy hand,⁶⁰

does not cause him, as it did Salisbury, to swerve in his loyalty to John. Unworthy as he is, he is still the anointed king.

It does lead him to comment on his age in a way that reveals how far he is above it, and how completely his course represents the reverse of evil individualism such as that of Richard in the earlier play. He is speaking to Hubert, who bears in his arms the body of Arthur, and he says:

I am amaz'd, methinks, and lose my way
Among the thorns and dangers of this world.
How easy dost thou take all England up!
From forth this morsel of dead royalty
The life, the right, and truth of all this realm
Is fled to heaven; and England now is left
To tug and scramble....

.....
Now powers from home and discontents at home
Meet in one line; and vast confusion waits,
As doth a raven on a sick fall'n beast.
The imminent decay of wrested pomp....⁶¹

His tone here is more bitter than it was in the early soliloquy on "Commodity"--commodity, the "bias of the world"⁶² which, as we have seen, he pretended that he himself was going to follow. But both this and the earlier soliloquy, for all its pose of cynicism, ring with

the sincerity of a man whose moral superiority has given him the right to pass judgment on others. The Bastard is, if anything, too good for his age.

Thus, by seeing him as the obverse of Richard of Gloucester, we can discern once again, more obliquely this time, the direction of Shakespeare's thought about the individualist. We see it in what the Bastard is not. For the unmistakable approval of him, which echoes all through the play, and the Bastard's own scorn for the man who places "Commodity" ahead of social obligation, show him to be something of an idealist. Yet the Bastard might have been the other kind of man; in many ways, as has been shown, he appears predisposed to evil. But his individualism is superficial; at heart he is a man of honour, loyal to the demands of tradition.

But the verdict on individualism which he reflects only points a direction; no elaborate or subtle conclusions about human nature are suggested by this play. Shakespeare's main concern, overruling and almost eliminating all others, must at this point have been to write a stageworthy play. It would probably be of more significance to him that the audience find the Bastard the 'most interesting and dynamic character in the play than that they find him morally the best, or even the most convincing as a human being. Then too, in this play Shakespeare is dealing, however loosely, with historical facts. Perhaps that is why he was compelled to attach the misleading label of bastardy to his most virtuous character.

The Bastard, then, was created primarily to captivate an audience, as Richard was; he is human, as Richard is not; but like Richard, he shows himself to be neither a very subtle nor a very com-

plex being. Like Richard, he lacks both undertones and overtones; we do not identify him closely with humanity, as we will so many of Shakespeare's later heroes and villains. Nor is the confused background against which he appears, the mingled order and disorder of King John's England, an ideal setting for him. But he does show us what Shakespeare meant by both order and disorder in human affairs; he does show us again that for the playwright disorder was associated with selfish individualism.

NOTES ON CHAPTER II

1. King John, I, i, 170.
2. Ibid., I, i, 85-8.
3. Ibid., I, i, 89-90.
4. Ibid., I, i, 78.
5. Ibid., I, i, 107-11.
6. Ibid., I, i, 253.
7. See Chapter VI, p. 113, for a discussion of the significance of bastardy as a symbol of evil in Shakespeare's day.
8. King John, I, i, 116-8.
9. Ibid., I, i, 53.
10. Ibid., I, i, 165-6.
11. Ibid., I, i, 134-7.
12. Ibid., I, i, 151-4.
13. Ibid., I, i, 170. See note 1 above.
14. Ibid., I, i, 175.
15. Ibid., I, i, 259-72.
16. Ibid., I, i, 61-2.
17. Ibid., I, i, 70.
18. Ibid., I, i, 71.
19. Ibid., II, i, 297.
20. Ibid., IV, ii, 176.
21. Ibid., V, i, 48-61.
22. Ibid., II, i, 72.
23. Ibid., II, i, 65.
24. Ibid., II, i, 356-60.
25. Ibid., II, i, 134.

26. Ibid., II, i, 135-6.
27. Ibid., III, ii, beginning of scene.
28. Ibid., IV, iii, 94.
29. Ibid., IV, iii, 95.
30. Ibid., IV, iii, 101.
31. Ibid., V, iv, 4-5.
32. Ibid., II, i, 143-6.
33. Ibid., III, i, 128-9.
34. Ibid., III, i, 130.
35. Ibid., III, i, 131.
36. Ibid., III, i, 132.
37. Ibid., III, i, 133.
38. Ibid., II, i, 504-9.
39. Ibid., II, i, 275.
40. Ibid., II, i, 279.
41. Ibid., V, vi, 10-11.
42. Ibid., II, i, 373-80.
43. Ibid., II, i, 401-7.
44. Ibid., II, i, 413-4.
45. Ibid., V, ii, 106.
46. Ibid., V, vii, 112-7.
47. Robert Spaight, Shakespeare and Politics, pp. 10-11.
48. John Dover Wilson, ed. King John, editor's introduction p. lix.
49. King John, V, iv, 36-9.
50. Ibid., V, iv, 52-7.
51. Ibid., I, i, 39-40.
52. Ibid., IV, ii, 243-8.

53. Ibid., V, vi, 29.
54. Ibid., I, i, 50.
55. Ibid., III, i, 136.
56. Ibid., V, vii, 103-6.
57. Ibid., I, i, 182-3.
58. Ibid., II, i, 593-8.
59. Ibid., V, ii, 128-9.
60. Ibid., IV, iii, 57-8.
61. Ibid., IV, iii, 140-54.
62. Ibid., II, i, 574.

CHAPTER III

Falstaff - "out of all order, out of all compass"¹

A serious study of Falstaff is to some extent an absurdity. For the most obvious way to deal with him is to laugh at him and with him. This he recognizes himself when he says:

Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me. The brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause of wit in other men.²

So Falstaff is primarily a comic character, a buffoon. His buffoonery and our laughter at it overshadow and in a sense forbid a serious estimate of him. It is difficult to pass judgment on him while we are laughing, and the sympathy our laughter arouses tempers that judgment. It is difficult, in brief, to take Falstaff seriously. Yet there is that in him which calls for sober judgment, as long as we remember that it is an underlying note and not his principal one. If we ignore as far as possible the pure fun which is his main raison d'être, there is some point in our trying to discover the kind of man he is, and where Shakespeare places him in relation to other men.

His most obvious characteristic, of course, is his physical appearance. He is "a gross fat man."³ This in itself is comic and is a source of endless humor. Falstaff's fatness is the theme upon which the prince can construct his numerous catalogues of amiable

insults.⁴ And Falstaff can laugh at it himself, as when he says to the Prince when he is urged to put his ear to the ground to listen for the coming of their prospective victims: "Have you any levers to lift me up again, being down?"⁵ He is a "fat-guts" indeed,⁶ and this alone makes him laughable.

But it is a mark of more than that in Falstaff. For he is gross as well, as we are told, and his fatness is part of his grossness. In an age when gluttony was clearly recognized as a sin, the deformity of fatness could be seen as an indication of a deeper moral deformity. While Shakespeare's audience would laugh, as we do, at this "stuff'd cloakbag of guts"⁷ for the very size of his belly, they would also recognize, as we do not, that it was a symbol of iniquity. From such a one they could expect to find defiance of the established moral order. And if their laughter did not overcome their moral sense completely, they would expect to condemn him in the end as a villain, much as they had come to love him as a clown.

In what sense then is Falstaff a villain, if he is a villain, and what is the nature of the moral judgment that Shakespeare asks us to pass upon him, after our laughter is done?

Falstaff is, we find, marked out from other men by his assumptions about the world he lives in. Here we see him as a complete individualist, in the sense that he does not recognize himself as part of an established order which includes everything and everybody around him and to which he owes a definite responsibility. He is himself alone, like Richard, and he knows no loyalty except to himself. Almost every description of Falstaff emphasizes this point. In his lack of loyalty he is indeed "the strangest fellow,"⁸

as the Prince describes him. There is no point of reference then, outside of Falstaff himself, which he recognizes as a guide to his conduct. This fundamental disloyalty is an integral part of his character, and it determines his actions throughout both plays. It is nowhere better illustrated than in his mocking response to Hal's stirring call to arms. For when Hal cries:

The land is burning; Percy stands on high,
And either he or we must lower lie,

Falstaff replies:

Rare words! Brave world! Hostess, my breakfast, come.
O, I could wish this tavern were my drum!⁹

The comparison with Richard must, of course, end here. For while each of them is himself alone, Falstaff is a different kind of self. He is a comic self. Part of what we laugh at in him is the fact that in every situation his chief motive is self-preservation. He has no real desire to aggrandize himself; all he wants to do is to protect himself, to gratify his bodily desires, and to keep himself alive. His self-interest, then, is limited to this. He presents no menace to the world, for his universe is bounded by his own fat flesh, and his ruling motive is to protect that universe. And so, because he is so solicitous of his physical self, while at the same time so completely devoid of danger to others, others have no fear of him. He will not help them, but he is not likely to hurt them, and that is part of the secret of his comedy. Thus, for example, where Richard killed, Falstaff only talks of killing. For killing would involve the risk of being killed, a risk he will not take. Thus he has regard only for himself, and he sees himself purely in terms of physical life.

If we accept Falstaff's assumptions about life, his argument on honour becomes unanswerable. Honour only helps to destroy his world, which is himself; it does not preserve it. So he concludes: "I'll none of it."¹⁰

Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or
take away the grief of a wound? No....What is honour?
A word.¹¹

At all costs, then, he will preserve himself. That is his prime aim in life.

This desire for physical life explains not only his care to keep himself out of harm's way; it explains also his fear of death and senility. Already an old man, ridden with disease, he cannot bear the thought of an end to his vigor. In the midst of the company's fooling a reminder of death can sober him instantly. For example, when Doll asks him

...when wilt thou leave fighting a-days and foining a-nights, and begin to patch up thine old body for heaven?

he replies:

Peace, good Doll! do not speak like a deaths' head.
Do not bid me remember mine end.¹²

And again, the Prince's cruel jest with the apple-johns was effective for the same reason. In telling the story the Second Drawer says:

The Prince once set a dish of apple Johns before him, and told him there were five more Sir Johns, and, putting off his hat, said, 'I will take my leave of these six dry, round, old, withered knights.' It ang'ered him to the heart.¹³

In view of this, the much-debated question of whether or not Falstaff is a coward becomes irrelevant. For although he may not be a coward by instinct, he is a coward by policy. Shakespeare makes this abundantly clear, although he leaves us in some doubt as to

Falstaff's attitude when there is no alternative but to stand and fight as long as he can.

"When everything is ended, then you come,"¹⁴ says Lancaster to him after the peace is made. And if he does have to fight, he resorts to trickery to save his life, as for example, in his fight with Douglas, when he "falls down, as if he were dead." "'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that termagent Scot had paid me scot and lot too."¹⁵ He does say flatly at one point, "I am...no coward, Hal,"¹⁶ and he does perform bravely enough when he has to, but his most characteristic action is to retire to safety "after a blow or two"¹⁷ as he did during the robbery at Gadshill. For Falstaff's chief object in life is to save his own skin. He not only refuses to risk it if the risk can be avoided, he refuses to wear it out with needless waste of energy. He is lazy for the same reason that he is cowardly. "It were better to be eaten to death with a rust than to be scoured to nothing with perpetual motion," he says.¹⁸

Indeed, the devices by which he extricates himself from one predicament after another become the chief source of the fun we have with Falstaff. If he cannot extricate himself, he will unblushingly turn the situation to his own advantage. This is seen when the company gathers after the robbery at Gadshill, and Falstaff's inglorious surrender of the spoils is brought to light. He is revealed as a liar and poltroon, and there is no way of escaping the revelation, since it is Poins and Hal who have robbed him. But in the midst of this exposure he instantly seizes on the important thing, and brushes the rest aside. The money is safe in their hands, and that is all that really matters. "But, by the Lord, lads, I am glad you have the money,"¹⁹ he says to them.

Another example of the way in which Falstaff can turn a situation to his own advantage is seen in his shabby but hilarious treatment of Mistress Quickly. She, backed by the forces of the law, is foolish enough to try to collect some money from Falstaff. As always, he is clearly in the wrong. As the Lord Chief Justice says to him, "You have, as it appears to me, practic'd upon the easy-yielding spirit of this woman, and made her serve your uses both in purse and in person,"²⁰ Falstaff, of course, does not deny the charge. However, he does end the encounter by talking the Hostess not only into forgetting the debt for the time being, but into promising to scrape up another ten pounds for him and inviting him to supper as well!

Allied to this ability to extricate himself from predicaments is Falstaff's skill at turning to his own advantage situations in which he is not directly involved. This is perhaps best illustrated by his shameless misuse of the king's press on two occasions. He gleefully tells the whole story of the first occasion:

I have misus'd the King's press damnably. I have got, in exchange of a hundred and fifty soldiers, three hundred and odd pounds...they have bought out their services; and now my whole charge consists of ancients, corporals, lieutenants, gentlemen of companies, slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth...²¹

On the second occasion in return for the "three pound to free Mouldy and Bulcalf,"²² he gladly lets his two most promising men go. It is clear, then, that in Falstaff we have a man whose ruling passion will be "commodity"²³ in the sense of the crudest kind of self-interest, who will live up to his own observation that "a good wit will make use of anything."²⁴

But the exercise of that wit is limited by the nature of Falstaff's world. It is, of course, a comic world. In that world, although he is completely self-centred, he is not frightening. He aims, as has been pointed out, at self-preservation and not self-aggrandizement. Moreover, because it is a comic world, its values are entirely material. The life which Falstaff aims to preserve is one of food and drink and bodily pleasure. By the nature of his comic being he is entirely human--that is to say, animal. He has in him nothing of the angelic or diabolic. When Prince Hal refers to him as "that old white-bearded Satan"²⁵ the remark is purely in jest. Falstaff's existence is on this earth and terminates in death. He sums it up when he says:

To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed.²⁶

Spiritual considerations do not, in fact, enter Falstaff's orbit at all. Completely selfish though he is, his influence for good or evil is limited by his total lack of appreciation of things he cannot touch. Honour to him is but a word, as we have heard him remind us. Prince Hal tells the literal truth about him when he says to him: "there is no room for faith, truth, nor honesty in this bosom of thine. It is all filled up with guts and midriff."²⁷ This, of course, limits our moral judgment of him as an individual. For the values that most men live for and die for are simply irrelevant to him and his comic world. Poins says of him: "Marry, the immortal part needs a physician. But that moves not him; though that be sick, it dies not."²⁸ But in truth it moves him not because so far as we

can see Falstaff has no soul, or at least he never reveals it if he has. Thus Charlton, in finding King Henry and Falstaff alike, indicates an absolute difference between them, when viewed from the angle of the values to which each man dedicated his life. He says:

In efficiency, indeed, efficiency to live the life to which one is called, there is only one person in the play to set beside Falstaff, namely, the King himself... The King's immediate task is to maintain the welfare of the state of England; Falstaff's is to preserve the well-being of the corporation of Sir John.²⁹

Falstaff, then, has no ideal whatever outside his immediate material well-being, and in this sense he is entirely different from a responsible member of society like King Henry.

But in his own world Falstaff succeeds very well. We are too busy laughing to be bothered passing judgment, and it is one of the characteristics of such a world that ordinary moral values are suspended. However, when the serious world impinges on it, then Falstaff is in trouble. What Shakespeare really gives us in these two plays (Henry IV, parts one and two) is two worlds--Falstaff's and the serious world of history. In the end he brings them together, passing harsh judgment on Falstaff's kind of individualism and his kind of world. But he does not convince us entirely that these two worlds can or should be brought together, or that Falstaff the clown deserves to be dismissed as an ordinary villain. Falstaff has to be rejected, because he can not be allowed to dominate the serious world of Henry V. His rejection is dramatically necessary. But it is psychologically unsatisfactory. Realization of this fact forced Bradley to the conclusion that in the creation of Falstaff the playwright "overreached" himself. He says:

In the Falstaff scenes he (Shakespeare) overshot the mark. He created so extraordinary a being, and fixed him so firmly on his intellectual throne, that when he sought to dethrone him he could not. The moment comes when we are to look at Falstaff in a serious light, and the comic hero is to figure as a baffled schemer; but we cannot make the required change, either in our attitude or in our sympathies.³⁰

Perhaps Shakespeare himself felt this doubt, for he promises in the epilogue of the second play to bring Falstaff and his world back to carefree life. But Falstaff's knell had sounded, and the promise could not be kept. Once rejected, he is as good as dead. There was nothing to do with him in the next play but report his death. And in The Merry Wives of Windsor we are given a character who has Falstaff's name and Falstaff's shape, but who is not Falstaff at all, who has little trace of Falstaff's "good wit."

Prince Hal is the only one who is able to make the best of both worlds. He appears to become completely a part of Falstaff's world. But in order to preserve him for his later role as the ideal king, Shakespeare must at the beginning have him indicate to us that he is only playing a part in pretending to be one of Falstaff's company. We are reminded of this occasionally, as when the Prince sees that the victims of the Gadshill robbery are re-imbursed. And at the end Shakespeare must have Hal reject Falstaff. The Prince cannot have both worlds at once. So Hal, in addition to being a foil for Falstaff's wit, becomes a standard by which he is judged. It is in Hal's verdict at the end that we can see the direction of Shakespeare's judgment on Falstaff's kind of individualism. Because Falstaff as a comic character is sympathetic, we find the Prince's attitude priggish and hypocritical. But the Prince is more than a comic character. He has a serious role to play, and he must assure us of his fitness to play it.

So even as the tavern brawls begin, Shakespeare has him indicate to us exactly what his position is. He rejects the fat knight and his crew in advance, as it were, while at the same time he pretends to accept them:

I know you all, and will a while uphold
 The unjok'd humour of your idleness.
 Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
 Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
 To smother up his beauty from the world,
 That, when he please again to be himself
 Being wanted, he may be more wond'ered at
 By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
 Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.³¹

Now this attitude of Hal's tells us two things. It indicates first of all where Shakespeare stands on the matter of Falstaff and the kind of life he represents. For Prince Hal to become the ideal king that he later does, he will not only have to reject Falstaff at the end, but he must make it clear to us that he never whole-heartedly accepted him. The device may be unpleasant, it may make Hal appear a hypocrite, but in terms of Shakespeare's moral assumptions it is necessary if Hal is to make sense. In the second place, it tells us directly that Falstaff's kind of individualism has no acceptable place in society. He is indeed, as he says of himself, "out of all order, out of all compass."³² He belongs to "the foul and ugly mists" of moral disease. This note echoes throughout both plays. It is perhaps most clearly heard in Hotspur's scornful remark about

The nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales,
 And his comrades, that daff'd the world aside
 And bid it pass.³³

The Prince, then, must daff his own world aside to be of Falstaff's world. Shakespeare must make him do this in order to secure his comic effects, and also to be true to his sources. But

he must also make clear to us that this is what he is doing, and that Falstaff is basically an outcast from the world of order which the Prince really represents. As Warwick assures King Henry,

The Prince but studies his companions
Like a strange tongue...

...which once attain'd,
Your Highness knows, comes to no further use
But to be known and hated....³⁴

The Prince and Falstaff thus both "play the fools with the time."³⁵ But in doing so Falstaff is following the laws of his own nature, while the Prince is playing a game.

So Falstaff becomes an outcast indeed at the end, for he has no place in the world to which Prince Hal belongs. He is unequivocally rejected by his former companion:

I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!³⁶

Falstaff's complete misunderstanding of the situation at the end, while it is part of his tragedy and has attracted much sympathy to him, is also an indication of his essential villainy. He shows that there is in him no trace of real loyalty or real affection. All that he thinks of is turning Hal's friendship to his own advantage. "The laws of England are at my disposal,"³⁷ he exults when he hears that Hal has become king. He hopes to win Hal with a trick, with a show of love for him. For he does not know what real love is. "But to stand stained with travel, and sweating with desire to see him, thinking of nothing else, putting all affairs else in oblivion, as if there were nothing else to be done but to see him."³⁸

Falstaff's chief function in the plays, then, as we said at the beginning, is to be a clown, to make his audience laugh. But the

sympathetic laughter, while it overshadows the condemnation, cannot entirely conceal it. For Falstaff is also a complete individualist, and in his individualism he is, in Shakespeare's scheme of things, a villain. He recognizes no obligations to society; he is not even aware of their existence. He has no concept of loyalty to anything but his own body. Shakespeare's verdict on such individualism as his is clear and unmistakable. We hear it in Hal's final speech, when we see Hal as one who, having turned his back on Falstaff's world, now represents decent order, who now can say:

For God doth know (so shall the world perceive)
That I have turn'd away my former self.³⁹

For Hal's final words to Falstaff are:

I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swell'd, so old, and so profane;
But being awak'd, I do despise my dream.
...Know the grave doth gape
For thee thrice wider than for other men.⁴⁰

NOTES ON CHAPTER III

- 26.
27. 1. 1 Henry IV, III, iii, 23.
28. 2. 2 Henry IV, I, ii, 7-12.
29. 3. 1 Henry IV, II, iv, 559.
4. Ibid., II, iv, 491-505, for example.
5. Ibid., II, ii, 36-7.
6. Ibid., II, ii, 33.
7. Ibid., II, iv, 497.
8. Ibid., V, iv, 158.
9. Ibid., III, iii, 226-9.
10. Ibid., V, i, 144.
11. Ibid., V, i, 133-7.
12. 2 Henry IV, II, iv, 251-5.
13. Ibid., II, iv, 4-9.
14. Ibid., IV, iii, 30.
15. 1 Henry IV, V, iv, 113-5.
16. Ibid., II, ii, 70-1.
17. Ibid., II, ii, 109.
18. 2 Henry IV, I, ii, 245-7.
19. 1 Henry IV, II, iv, 303-4.
20. 2 Henry IV, II, i, 124-7.
21. 1 Henry IV, IV, ii, 12-28.
22. 2 Henry IV, III, ii, 260-1.
23. Ibid., I, ii, 279.
24. Ibid., I, ii, 277-8.
25. 1 Henry IV, II, iv, 509.

26. Ibid., V, iv, 116-20.
27. Ibid., III, iii, 173-5.
28. 2 Henry IV, II, ii, 112-4.
29. H. B. Charlton, Shakespearian Comedy, p. 203.
30. A. C. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, pp. 259-60.
31. 1 Henry IV, I, ii, 219-27.
32. Ibid., III, iii, 23.
33. Ibid., IV, i, 95-7.
34. 2 Henry IV, IV, iv, 68-73.
35. Ibid., II, ii, 154.
36. Ibid., V, v, 51-2.
37. Ibid., V, iii, 141-2.
38. Ibid., V, v, 25-9.
39. Ibid., V, v, 61-2.
40. Ibid., V, v, 53-8.

CHAPTER IV

Hotspur - "out of limit and true rule"¹

Hotspur's tragic quarrel with life originates primarily in his situation and not in himself. He is a rebel at odds with ordered society; Blunt pictures him at the end as being "out of limit and true rule" because he stands "against anointed majesty."² So in this sense he is an individualist, and Blunt's verdict on him would appear to be Shakespeare's own, for by then the playwright has made clear to us that Hotspur is an outcast. His death is a symbol of his outcast state. Yet the sentence on him is passed reluctantly, it seems, for in some ways he appears to be an ideal figure. That he is at odds with society is to a large extent the fault of society and not of himself. In this regard he reminds us a little of Hamlet, although he is, of course, neither so finely drawn nor so subtle. Like Hamlet he finds the existing order of things to be out of joint with his own nature; like Hamlet he is destroyed by a conflict between his situation and his concept of right and wrong. So while his role, unlike Hamlet's, is essentially a villainous one, his death arouses more of the pity due a tragic hero than the scorn due a villain, or at least it would if Shakespeare let it.

This situation in which Hotspur finds himself must first be examined with some care before we judge the rebellion against "true rule" which is his individualism. We meet Hotspur first in Richard II, and here we find that the situation is not at all clear. He is

from the beginning a rebel, but the lines of true rule are so ambiguously drawn that others beside Hotspur are led into rebellion, believing it to be their highest duty. He is allied with Bolingbroke, who is later as King Henry the Fourth to be a symbol of divinely appointed kingship in England. If Hotspur is to be condemned for his first disloyalty, then Bolingbroke must be held even more blameworthy. Yet Bolingbroke prospers on the whole while Hotspur later comes to a disastrous end. What is the verdict here on disloyalty?

The answer appears to be that Richard II is unique in that it contains no unequivocal condemnation of rebellion per se. Hardin Craig sums up the matter when he says that in the Elizabethan age

The weight of opinion was that no degree of inefficiency or wickedness justified the rejection of God's anointed. It would be better to bear any amount of temporary oppression than to anger the Almighty by interfering with his establishment....Such seems to be the basis of all the plays in Shakespeare's two great series except this one (Richard II), and there are traces of it here.³

Craig concludes that in Richard II "it is not possible to tell clearly what Shakespeare's judgment on the dethronement issue is."⁴

Thus, while Hotspur is first introduced to us as a conspirator in the dethronement of a king, he is not an ordinary rebel at this point. For Shakespeare makes it fairly clear that Richard deserves to be overthrown. Under his rule England has become like a garden overgrown with weeds, and in deposing him Bolingbroke merely does the office of a careful gardener who restores the garden to health. This is the plain man's view given us by the Gardener when he says:

He that hath suffer'd this disorder'd spring
Hath now himself met with the fall of leaf.
The weeds which his broad-spreading leaves did shelter,

That seem'd in eating him to hold him up,
 Are pluck'd up root and all by Bolingbroke--
 ...and Bolingbroke
 Hath seized the wasteful King.⁵

Bolingbroke, then, cannot be considered as merely a usurper. Indeed, we are left in some doubt as to what his part in the dethronement really is. It is only later that we learn that Richard had named Mortimer his successor. Meanwhile, in Richard II, the deposition is made to appear a more or less voluntary abdication in favor of Bolingbroke. Neither he nor those who follow him appear to be condemned for their rebellion.

Hotspur's support of Bolingbroke's insurrection, then, is on the whole commendable. In such a confused time men of good faith are to be found on either side. The worst that can be said of Hotspur's initial rebellion is that it is neither good nor bad. It does seem to stamp him, however, as a man who is likely to be on the rebellious side, and it prepares the ground for our second introduction to him, when he emerges more sharply into focus.

This time he is clearly on the wrong side. For Bolingbroke, as Henry the Fourth, is now the anointed king. He is, it is true, an uneasy king, tormented by unrest within his own mind and within his realm, "a king with an unquiet kingdom and an unquiet mind,"⁶ and this unrest may be a divine judgment on him for his usurpation of the throne. His troubled conscience before his death is evidence of this.

He says to Hal:

...God knows, my son,
 By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
 I met this crown; and I myself know well
 How troublesome it sat upon my head.⁷

Henry's title to the throne is not good, and the rebellions with which

he has to cope may be seen as further divine punishments that were added to his guilty conscience. Thus Hotspur would rather ironically be understood as serving a divine purpose by rebelling, for all that his rebellion was an offense against God. As Lily B. Campbell says:

Rebellion was the rod of chastisement to the bad king, but the rebels were no less guilty because they were used by God.⁸

In actual fact Bolingbroke justifies his title to the throne by turning out to be not a totally bad king. Though the crown sits "troublesome" on his uneasy head, it sits fairly securely. Plagued by private doubts and suspicions as he is, he nevertheless rules England with a strong and, on the whole, a fair hand, placing the welfare of his kingdom above personal gain or vanity, as a good king ought to do. His rule is directed to securing peace in the realm, as he on his deathbed assures Prince Hal.⁹

This is the king against whom Hotspur is in revolt when we meet him for the second time. Ironically it is the same man whom he joined in rebellion against Richard. But now Hotspur is seeking to overthrow a properly anointed and, on the whole, satisfactory king. In so seeking he is denying his clear duty to the order of society, is thereby establishing himself as a thoroughgoing individualist. This fact weakens him fatally, whatever his show of strength may be. For a man to become a rebel was for him to make himself definitely inferior to other men who remained loyal, and this is the position in which Hotspur places himself. Such a one cannot fight with good heart, Shakespeare tells us; all who follow him will be infected. Mortimer expresses this belief when accounting to

Northumberland for Hotspur's defeat and death. The context gives us no reason to look for a double meaning in the speech. He says:

My lord your son had only but the corpse,
 But shadows and the show of men, to fight;
 For that same word, rebellion, did divide
 The action of their bodies from their souls;
 And they did fight with queasiness, constrain'd,
 As men drink potions, that their weapons only
 Seem'd on our side; but for their spirits and souls,
 This word, rebellion, it had froze them up,
 As fish are in a pond.¹⁰

It is not out of conscious villainy, however, or any clear motive of self-interest, that Hotspur becomes a rebel. His individualism does not aim at enriching himself. Indeed, he has the circumstances to blame as much as himself for his rebellion. The involved argument in the first scene of 1 Henry IV leaves us uncertain as to which side is right. It does show that Hotspur has little choice but to support his father and turn against his king. He is to a degree forced into rebellion.

However that may be, he rushes into it eagerly. Northumberland and Worcester, by their urging of him, only add fuel to the fire already burning in him. His early reluctance to let anything come "Betwixt my love and your high Majesty"¹¹ turns with startling suddenness into a ranting denunciation of "this ingrate and cank' red Bolingbroke."¹²

Shakespeare has, in fact, perfectly suited Hotspur's nature to the part he must play. For it hurries him into revolt. Being Hotspur, he responds with fervid enthusiasm to the challenge of the situation. He is utterly sincere and single-minded, in contrast to the cold-blooded wily Worcester. We can believe such a man capable of folly, but hardly of evil. And yet the course he has turned to is an evil one. Worcester for one makes this clear when he is debating the

king's offer of pardon before the battle in which Hotspur is killed. In this case his words can be relied on, for he is speaking to a fellow-conspirator about their own deeds. Talking about Hotspur, he refers to "my nephew's trespass," to "his offences," and "his corruption."¹³ So there is an ironic contradiction between Hotspur's nature and his evil-doing, while at the same time what he is helps to lead him into evil.

And when we come to examine Hotspur's character, we discover both why it is that rebellion is suited to him and why he is at the same time so engaging. In the first place, his nature is entirely open and frank. Guileless to the point of innocence, he is incapable of using deceit as a means to achieve his ends. His speech is always direct and honest, for he is utterly without duplicity. He tells the truth about himself when he says:

By God, I cannot flatter, I defy
The tongues of soothers!...¹⁴

But indeed, he mistrusts speech altogether, partly perhaps because, as his wife tells us after his death, he speaks "low and tardily," on account of

...speaking thick (which nature made his blemish).¹⁵

Deeper than that, however, is his mistrust of speech, which grows out of the fact that he, like Richard and the Bastard, is basically a man of action. When there is something to be done, there is, in his view, no time to talk. His address to his soldiers before the battle is curt and pointed:

Arm, arm with speed! and, fellows, soldiers, friends,
Better consider what you have to do
Than I, that have not well the gift of tongue,
Can lift your blood up with persuasion.¹⁶

A messenger cuts the speech short, and after the interruption he resumes:

I thank him that he cuts me from my tale,
For I profess not talking. Only this--
Let each man do his best,...¹⁷

With Hotspur's directness goes his complete contempt for any kind of affectation in others. He can be eloquent enough in expressing this contempt, and with this eloquence we find a satirical wit which probably indicates that Shakespeare is using Hotspur to express his own feelings. We see this first in Hotspur's angry description of the

...certain lord, neat and trimly dress'd,
Fresh as a bridegroom...¹⁸

who came up to him as he leaned on his sword after the battle, and, perfume box in hand, questioned him about his prisoners. We see it again in his mocking deflation of Glendower, and it is characteristic of Hotspur that he is probably the first man who has dared to beard the redoubtable Welshman. For to Glendower's bragging "I can call spirits from the vasty deep," Hotspur retorts:

Why, so can I, or so can any man;
But will they come when you do call for them?¹⁹

But best of all is his opinion of the hack-poets who infest the court:

I had rather be a kitten and cry mew
Than one of these same metre ballad-mongers.
I had rather hear a brazen canstick turn'd,
Or a dry wheel grate on the axletree,
And it would set my teeth nothing on edge,
Nothing so much as mincing poetry.
'Tis like the forc'd gait of a shuffling nag.²⁰

Hotspur's speech rings vivid and true when he is aroused.

But he prefers action to speech, and the kind of action he loves best of all is a fight. We feel that this natural love of

battle is partly responsible for his initial eagerness to join the insurrection. We see this quality indeed the very first time that we meet him, when he challenges Aumerle to single combat:

...there I throw my gage
 To prove it on thee to the extremest point
 Of mortal breathing. Seize it, if thou dar'st.²¹

He appears, in fact, to love the embraces of war more than those of his wife. For at one point he tells her cruelly:

...This is no world
 To play with mamnets and to tilt with lips.
 We must have bloody noses and crack'd crowns,
 And pass them current too.²²

One feels that with Hotspur it is always such a time, and in view of this love of fighting he probably needed no very convincing reason to persuade him to join the rebellion in the first place. The thought of armed adventure, of "Danger" coupled with "Honour," sets his head in a whirl. So his father remarks of him:

Imagination of some great exploit
 Drives him beyond the bounds of patience.²³

And he cannot wait, as we have seen, for the final battle to begin, even though he suspects that it will be his last. If he had his way, he would join battle on the very night of the arrival of some of his supporters, when more are still to come.²⁴

He has no patience at all, in fact, either in great or small matters. This lack of patience is first revealed in his refusal to surrender his prisoners to the king. It is seen again in his abrupt reactions to the letter from his defaulting ally: "Hang him, let him tell the King! we are prepared. I will set forward tonight."²⁵ Nor has he any sympathy whatever for other people's reasons for delaying him. Even his father is not exempt from his scorn when Hotspur

receives a message from him saying that he is too sick to fight.

Hotspur believes the excuse, but he is contemptuous of it:

'Zounds! how has he leisure to be sick
In such a justling time?...²⁶

Yet he determines to proceed, convincing himself somehow that his father's defection will be an advantage to them. To the point of folly he is truly the "hot Lord Percy," "on fire to go," as Glendower describes him.²⁷

So feverish is his nature that the action of going somewhere often becomes more important to him than the direction in which he is going. He even forgets to bring the map when the rebels meet to plan their strategy, so unimportant does mere planning appear to him.²⁸

All who have come to know him can agree with Worcester's verdict that in many ways he is "A hare-brained Hotspur, governed by a spleen."²⁹

He is, as his wife tells him, "altogether govern'd by humours."³⁰ Or at least he is governed by humours more than he is by rational considerations. So, irritable and on edge when excitement is in the air, he is so on fire for action that he loses regard for himself and for others. His wife describes his behavior as the battle approaches:

Tell me, sweet lord, what is't that takes from thee
Thy stomach, pleasure, and thy golden sleep?
Why dost thou bend thine eyes upon the earth,
And start so often when thou sit'st alone?
Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks
And given my treasures and my rights of thee
To thick-ey'd musing and curs'd melancholy?³¹

In his uneasy slumbers he fights imaginary battles, she tells him.

All these are evidently familiar warnings to her that her husband has "some heavy business" in hand.³² Hotspur's name, then, is a good indication of his passion-governed nature.

Such a person is, of course, an easy prey for schemers. And so it is with Hotspur. He is, to some extent at least, a gullible

victim of others. At least he is something of a pawn in Worcester's hands. This is seen at the very beginning, when after Hotspur has worked himself up to a fine pitch of indignation Worcester artfully introduces a full-blown scheme for rebellion. Hotspur pounces on the scheme unreflectingly:

I smell it. Upon my life, it will do well.

Why, it cannot choose but be a noble plot.³³

And at the end he loses his final chance of redemption through his unthinking acceptance of Worcester's lie about the King's offer of pardon. There is, of course, no way of knowing whether Henry would have broken his promise had the rebels accepted it. At the final encounter with them John of Lancaster persuades them to accept an armistice that he has no intention of keeping. However, this is not relevant, for we find that in this case even the suspicious Worcester believes that the King will honour his pledge for the time being at least. But it is Worcester who deceives the gullible Hotspur about that pledge.³⁴

The truth is that Hotspur, likeable as he is, is something of a fanatic. His fanatical qualities can be seen as either good or bad. He is blessed, or cursed, with the fanatic's unyielding obstinacy, an obstinacy which can drag its owner, almost in spite of himself, into both constructive and destructive effort. Worcester, who is a shrewd observer of human nature, sums up this quality in Hotspur's character very penetratingly:

In faith, my lord, you are too wilful-blame.

You must needs learn, lord, to amend this fault.

Though sometimes it shows greatness, courage, blood--

Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,

Defect of manners, want of government,
Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain.³⁵

Most of all, Hotspur is a fanatic about "Honour." In this regard he is a complete contrast to Falstaff--Falstaff, who, as we have seen, eliminates honour entirely from his scheme of living, because it threatens his success in achieving his prime aim, self-preservation. Hotspur, on the other hand, is so devoted to honour that in its name he will gladly sacrifice not only his own life but the lives of others. Where Falstaff is all common sense to the utter exclusion of honour, Hotspur is all honour to the point of sacrificing common sense entirely. This contrast between Hotspur and Falstaff, surely deliberate on Shakespeare's part, is vividly presented in the scene where, immediately after Falstaff's exit with the lines:

To the latter end of a fray and the beginning of a feast
Fits a dull fighter and a keen guest,³⁶

Hotspur enters with his impractical suggestion:

We'll fight with him tonight.³⁷

Yet Hotspur is attractive even at his most foolish, because even in his folly he is almost entirely unselfish. His individualism then is really negative, in the sense that it does not consist of self-consideration. "Honour," however vaguely defined, is a thing outside himself, a cause for which he is willing, even eager, to die. Honour is his god, and in its worship he even becomes guilty of the high-flown speech which normally he despises. In comparison with honour everything else is worthless. He says:

Send Danger from the east unto the west,
So Honour cross it from the north to south,
And let them grapple....³⁸

And again,

By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
 To pluck bright Honour from the pale-faced moon,
 Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
 Where fathom line could never touch the ground,
 And pluck up drowned Honour by the locks,
 So he that doth redeem her thence might wear
 Without corrival all her dignities;³⁹

Indeed, this essentially knightly aspect of Hotspur's character is known and admired by all who meet him, friend and foe alike. King Henry sings his praises at the very beginning, when he contrasts him to his own unpromising Hal, and envies Northumberland that he should be

...the father to so blest a son--
 A son who is the theme of honour's tongue,
 Among a grove the very straightest plant,
 Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride;⁴⁰

Hotspur is to Prince Hal a "child of honour and renown."⁴¹ He is to Douglas "the king of honour."⁴² After Hotspur's death the Prince speaks of him as having been "the noble Percy."⁴³ In retrospect Lady Percy sees her husband's honour as having been a quality that

...stuck upon him as the sun
 In the grey vault of heaven, and by his light
 Did all the chivalry of England move
 To do brave acts....⁴⁴

Finally, he is more than once extolled by King Henry as an ideal for his erring son to emulate.

Indeed, only once is there seen an outburst of frank self-interest in Hotspur. This occurs in the scene where the rebels plan their division of the spoils. Here Hotspur says:

Methinks my moiety, north from Burton here,
 In quantity equals not one of yours.
 See how the river comes me cranking in
 And cuts me from the best of all my land
 A huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle out.
 I'll have the current in this place damn'd up,
 And here the smug and silver Trent shall run

In a new channel, fair and evenly.
 It shall not wind with such a deep indent
 To rob me of so rich a bottom here.⁴⁵

But on examination this manifestation of self-interest is seen to be an amusing peccadillo rather than a basic trait. It is part of Hotspur's love of a quarrel for its own sake. It is also a point of honour, in a queer perverted way. For when Glendower yields the point to him, his answer is:

Hot: I do not care. I'll give thrice so much land
 To any well-deserving friend;
 And: But in the way of bargain, mark ye me,
 I'll cavil on the ninth part of a hair.⁴⁶

him: All that we have said about Hotspur, then, adds up to a nature that will serve a cause with selfless fervor and loyalty, a nature whose very faults are attractive. But it is also a nature that, almost in spite of itself, and still thinking that it is pursuing "Honour," can easily be swept into an essentially dishonourable course. So in an age that in many ways invited rebellion, when it was not easy to distinguish what true rule was, it was almost inevitable that such a man as Hotspur should be a rebel. This is part of his tragedy. For Shakespeare makes it abundantly clear, as we have seen, that true loyalty was actually to be found in service to the house of Bolingbroke.

Hot: And so this "very valiant rebel"⁴⁷ comes to an end which is really a judgment on the fact of his rebellious individualism, a judgment which is fittingly executed by Prince Hal. Hal has now emerged as the symbol of ideal kingship; men on both sides recognize that "England did never owe so sweet a hope"⁴⁸ as he. Hotspur's star is setting while Hal's is rising; there is no room for a Hotspur who is against such a prince. Hal says to him before they fight:

Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,
 Nor can one England brook a double reign
 Of Henry Percy and the Prince of Wales.⁴⁹

so Hotspur dies at Hal's hands.

And there is great irony in the final meeting of these two. For they are alike in many ways. Although Hotspur, like most of the others, has from the beginning misunderstood the Prince's true nature and has despised him as a "sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales,"⁵⁰ Hal has consistently admired Hotspur, as we have seen, for his nobility and honour. Had Hal been Hotspur's king, Hotspur might have served him with as loyal a devotion as the Bastard served a far worse king. This could not be, of course, if for no other reason than that Shakespeare was dealing, however loosely, with historical facts. But in this historical framework he has made Hotspur such a man as could not serve under such a king as Henry the Fourth, when there was such provocation to rebellion. He has given us a man whose circumstances and whose impractical idealism combine to lead him into the kind of individualistic villainy represented by an upsetting of the established order. Underlying this picture there is a persistent note of tragic irony.

This irony is emphasized by the odd foreboding of death that Hotspur feels before his final battle. It seems to be more than the familiar fatalism of the fighting man. This foreboding can be seen in his brief final address to his men, when he says:

An if we live, we live to tread on kings,
 If die, brave death, when princes die with us!⁵¹

For he has just told them:

O gentlemen, the time of life is short!⁵²

And a day or so before the battle he concludes a conference with Worcester and Douglas with the grimly jovial prophecy:

Doomsday is near. Die all, die merrily.⁵³

It is what Hotspur does, then, and not what he is that we are asked to condemn, although what he is contributes to what he does. But his trouble is mainly in his situation. At the worst he is foolish, and not deliberately villainous; he is, as it were, an accidental individualist, and under different circumstance he might have been a model of loyal leadership. For he is not lacking in loyalty; he is merely loyal to the wrong things. And this fault in him is mitigated by the fact that he lives in an age when it was difficult to know where true loyalty belonged. But being a rebel against what more and more clearly comes to be seen as "true rule," he is doomed. Yet he is not damned, partly because his good qualities outweigh his bad, and partly because he is a tragic victim of circumstances towards which his own weaknesses hurry him. Gullible and impatient, he is led into rebellion by hypocritical advisers who end by betraying him into a hopeless battle. He is the most sympathetic of all Shakespeare's individualists--so sympathetic that he can hardly be called a villain at all. So perhaps it is not too fanciful to use for a farewell to him the words from Prince Hal's epitaph over his dead body:

Adieu, and take thy praise with thee to heaven!⁵⁴

NOTES ON CHAPTER IV

1. 1 Henry IV, IV, iii, 39.
2. Ibid., IV, iii, 40.
3. Hardin Craig, Shakespeare, p. 316.
4. Loc. cit.
5. Richard II, III, iv, 48-55.
6. Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's "Histories," Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy, p. 213.
7. 2 Henry IV, IV, v, 184-7.
8. Lily B. Campbell, op. cit., pp. 214-5.
9. 2 Henry IV, IV, v, 178-220.
10. Ibid., I, i, 192-200.
11. 1 Henry IV, I, iii, 69.
12. Ibid., I, iii, 137.
13. Ibid., V, ii, 16-22.
14. Ibid., IV, i, 6-7.
15. 2 Henry IV, II, iii, 24.
16. 1 Henry IV, V, ii, 76-9.
17. Ibid., V, ii, 91-3.
18. Ibid., I, iii, 33-4.
19. Ibid., III, i, 53-5.
20. Ibid., III, i, 129-35.
21. Richard II, IV, i, 46-8.
22. 1 Henry IV, II, iii, 94-7.
23. Ibid., I, iii, 199-200.
24. Ibid., IV, iii, 1-29.
25. Ibid., II, iii, 37-8.

26. Ibid., IV, i, 17-8.
27. Ibid., III, i, 267.
28. Ibid., III, i, 6.
29. Ibid., V, ii, 19.
30. Ibid., III, i, 235.
31. Ibid., II, iii, 43-9.
32. Ibid., II, iii, 66.
33. Ibid., I, iii, 277-9.
34. Ibid., V, ii, 26ff.
35. Ibid., III, i, 177-85.
36. Ibid., IV, ii, 85-6.
37. Ibid., IV, iii, 1.
38. Ibid., I, iii, 195-7.
39. Ibid., I, iii, 201-7.
40. Ibid., I, i, 80-3.
41. Ibid., III, ii, 139.
42. Ibid., IV, i, 10.
43. Ibid., V, v, 19.
44. 2 Henry IV, II, iii, 18-21.
45. 1 Henry IV, III, i, 96-105.
46. Ibid., III, i, 137-40.
47. Ibid., V, iv, 62.
48. Ibid., V, ii, 68.
49. Ibid., V, iv, 65-7.
50. Ibid., I, iii, 230.
51. Ibid., V, ii, 86-7.
52. Ibid., V, ii, 82.

53. Ibid., IV, i, 134.

54. Ibid., V, iv, 99.

CHAPTER V

Iago - "Honest, honest Iago."¹

"More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea!"²

"I am not what I am."³

There is in Iago a contradiction that cannot be resolved. Any attempt to make him psychologically believable inevitably founders on the rock of the absolute dualism between his inner and outer nature. The terrible tension of the drama arises in part from this contradiction. For the audience is in on a secret about Iago which is hidden, until the very end, from almost all who know him. All his acquaintances, whether they are wise or foolish, whether they know him intimately or slightly, are deceived about him. Othello, Lodovico and Desdemona variously describe him as "honest," "good," "bold," "kind," "full of love and honesty," "wise," "brave," "just," and "valiant"--"honest" being the adjective applied to him again and again by Othello, the wisest and the noblest of them all, and the principal object of his hatred. Othello's eyes are still shut to Iago's real nature even after his betrayal, when he continues for a time to see him as "an honest man."⁴

This contradiction has proved a stumbling-block to many critics. Tucker Brooke, for example, unable to accept Iago's psychological improbability, takes the evidence of his friends at its face value, and interprets him as a fundamentally honest man who is led into villainy against his better nature, and who is repentant at

the end.⁵ Nicoll says that Iago is to be considered as "a pitiful plaything of circumstance."⁶ But explanations like these, ignoring as they do Iago's self-revelations in soliloquy and in his first act conversations with the uncomprehending Roderigo, are most unconvincing.

The fact is that Iago's deceit of his friends simply has to be accepted. In truth he is from the beginning what he is seen to be by all at the end--the "inhuman dog,"⁷ "more fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea."⁸ Yet none except the audience know it until after his inhuman work is done. Then, and then only, do all awaken to his true nature. And Shakespeare has made this postulate so dramatically convincing that the psychological question it arouses is not asked. Iago is the moving spirit in what is probably Shakespeare's most successful play, from the point of view of its immediate effectiveness upon the stage. This is by no means to say that Othello is absolutely his best play. But in terms of its ability to produce an immediate and powerful effect upon an audience, through its poetry and drama, few plays can equal it. And few characters on any stage can equal Iago in vitality and color. He is the diabolic hero of Othello; without him it would be nothing. And this is enough for him to be.

This must be said at the beginning in order to clear the air. Iago is an individualist and therefore relevant to this study, but there is much that we ought not to look for in him. His individualism is not the most important thing about him; it is neither as coherent nor as far-reaching in its human implications as is that of some of the other characters studied. Shakespeare passes judgment on Iago's individualistic behavior as he does on that of the others. But his primary concern--to make him and the play as effective as possible

in the performance--seems to have outweighed every other consideration. Iago may be the popular Elizabethan concept of the Machiavel; he may have in him, as Stoll argues, more of the Mediaeval Vice than anything else; he may be a devil straight from Hell. It is impossible, however, to prove any of these contentions. As any one of these he would, of course, be an effective stage villain. But even if we accept the dramatic trickery involved, as an audience does, and assume that all his friends are deceived about him until the very end and that therefore their evidence about his "honesty" is worthless, nowhere in Othello do we find Iago explicitly associated with either the Machiavel or the Vice. The hell-symbol recurs a few times, most notably when Iago compares his code of behavior with that of a fiend.

He says:

When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now....⁹

And he precedes this with an oath which may be regarded as the invocation of his true lord, when he exclaims: "Divinity of hell!"

Iago, in short, is like a devil, as he himself admits, and as others finally come to recognize. He is a total villain and being this is diabolic. But to say that he is a devil is to guess at Shakespeare's intention by reading something into the play that is not there. All that is certain is that Iago is Iago, and as Iago he behaves very like a devil, there being no limits to his villainy. At any rate, the point here is that as a specimen of humanity he is sharply limited by his diabolism, if that is what it is. He is at bottom inhuman, as Shakespeare takes pains to assure us. And so, for all his scintillating on the stage, he cannot be seen as very closely

related to mankind in general. He reflects the individualism of real life only in the most general fashion.

In this regard he resembles Richard the Third, who seems to be his most closely related ancestor. He is, of course, much more subtly drawn than Richard. Iago has no obvious deformity, for one thing. He reveals himself in soliloquy, like Richard, but less crudely and directly. Like Richard he knows neither repentance nor shadow of repentance at the end, in spite of the flimsy evidence which Mr. Brooke adduces of it.¹⁰ For he is damned from the beginning. In spite of his wit and charm and apparently well-favored appearance he is outside the human pale and never comes close to being within it. Like Richard he is a diabolic individualist.

But his position in Othello is not the same as that of Richard in his play. Perhaps this difference between the two indicates on Shakespeare's part a deepening awareness and condemnation of the selfish individualist. For this is not primarily Iago's story. He is Othello's antagonist, and although he overcomes Othello he is always overshadowed by the Moor. Perhaps indeed Iago's villainy is deliberately deepened to bring out by contrast Othello's praiseworthy and ever-evident natural nobility of soul. There is, then, no "moral holiday" in Othello as there was in Richard III; however much we may be inclined to revel in Iago's light-hearted total villainy, we are constantly reminded, from the beginning of the third act on, that the story is Othello's tragedy. And whatever Iago may be, Othello is a human being. This play is tragedy, not merely melodrama, and in it the melodramatic villain, Iago, is subordinated to the tragic hero, Othello.

However, Iago's villainy is the impelling factor in the tragedy, and his villainy is rooted in his peculiar individualism. This villainous individualism he reveals fully in the first two acts, so that by the time that his plot against Othello swings into action he is completely known to us. Our first meeting with him shows that as an individualist he is utterly self-centred and so is completely contemptuous of all external loyalties. He serves his own interests exclusively. He assures us of this truth about him more than once. For example, he undoubtedly tells the truth about himself when in describing his concept of the ideal follower to Roderigo he says:

...Others there are
 Who, trimm'd in forms and visages of duty,
 Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves;
 ...These fellows have some soul;
 And such a one do I profess myself...¹¹

In the same speech he says of his service to Othello:

In following him, I follow but myself.¹²

The fact that Iago consistently follows but himself is the mark of his individualism; the verdict on such individualism is seen in its clear association with destructive villainy. However, the peculiar feature of Iago's self-interest is that it is not plainly directed to the achievement of any positive advantage for himself, but apparently has only the negative aim of evil for its own sake. This in fact is the diabolic aspect of his individualism. It is true that he at different times suggests plausible reasons for his behavior. But in no case can the statement be considered a straightforward or adequate explanation of the dark forces that drive him on. On the contrary, these motives, tailored to fit Iago's need of the moment, vary with the occasions that inspire them. None of them, even if

we grant that Iago from the beginning is totally self-centred, as we must, but deny that he is basically inhuman, can be construed as accounting for his subsequent actions or as even bearing a very close relation to them. Unprejudiced examination of Iago's part in Othello emphasizes the exactness of Coleridge's oft-quoted comment concerning this villain's "motiveless malignity."

This fact is borne out in our introduction to Iago. In the opening scene he gives an explanation of his grudge against Othello and the world, and a suggestion of what he hopes to gain by his rebellion against his injurers. He is an old soldier of proven merit, he reminds Roderigo, one who should through "old gradation"¹³ be promoted automatically by right of mere seniority. But the position he has coveted and thought to have by right has been taken by an upstart theoretician, one Cassio, "that never set a squadron in the field,"¹⁴ but who was an adept in the unpleasant art of boot-licking. Therefore, it is implied, Iago may right this unjust situation, or at least be avenged (an understandable and entirely human motive) on those who have wronged him.

But here as elsewhere Iago is simply producing a motive to serve him as a tactic in his game of evil-doing. For the very first thing that we learn about him is that he hates Othello. "Despise me, if I do not,"¹⁵ he says in answer to Roderigo's reminder. Hatred, of Othello as well as of everyone else, is his ruling emotion, and this hatred does not yield to any explanation. Because Roderigo is completely under his spell, he bares his soul to him, telling the truth about himself which he tells to no one else, but tells elsewhere only in soliloquy. So in soliloquy later he repeats the theme: "I hate

the Moor."¹⁶ And the explanation of this sentiment that he pours into Roderigo's foolish ear simply will not bear the weight of that unholy hatred. It convinces Roderigo, however, and this is its main objective. That Iago has his tongue in his cheek is evident later when he admits in soliloquy that the Othello whom he has pictured to Roderigo as blinded to Iago's merits because of his "loving his own pride and purposes"¹⁷ is in reality "of a constant, loving, noble, nature."¹⁸ Of the Cassio whom he here condemns he later in soliloquy tells the simple truth when he says:

He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly,...¹⁹

Iago often tells the truth about himself to Roderigo. But when he tells a different story in soliloquy, it must be assumed that he is deceiving Roderigo for a purpose. And it seems obvious that his purpose in building up to Roderigo the injustice done him is simply to enlist the services of the eager fool by giving him a credible (to Roderigo) reason for his hatred of both Othello and Cassio. As for Iago, he needs no reason to hate. The hatred is out of all proportion to the offence described here, as anyone but Roderigo would see; what reason is there, unless it is inborn malignity, for the statement that immediately follows? Here Iago says of Othello:

I follow him to serve my turn upon him.²⁰

Nor do the other motives that Iago suggests carry any more conviction than the initial one. For they are inconsistent with each other, and although they are uttered in soliloquy and could at the moment of utterance be sincere, they seem to be forgotten as soon as they are spoken. At any rate, they are never referred to again as a

motive for Iago's conduct. The most serious of these is the accusation that Othello has made a cuckold of him. He says to himself of this fancied wrong:

For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards,...²¹

The very idea of this treachery, he avers, makes him mad for vengeance. It leads him as well to love Desdemona, as he says:

...Now I do love her too;
Not out of absolute lust (though peradventure
I stand accountant for as great a sin)
But partly led to diet my revenge.²²

A strange love this! It tells us little of its object, but much of Iago. What passes for love with him is a compound of "lust" and a thirst for "revenge."

And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife;
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure....²³

This soliloquy of course cannot be ignored. Perhaps Iago honestly does "suspect the Moor." The suspicion, however, follows the mention of his lust and his passion for revenge, and may be an attempt to justify them to himself. And it is certainly not consistent with his earlier soliloquy, when he denied that the rumour of Othello's adultery with Emilia carried any special conviction with him. For there he says:

And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office. I know not if't be true;...²⁴

There in fact his only concern was how to harness the uncertain and, to him, indifferent, suspicion to the service of his hatred. It is no explanation of that hatred, for he goes on to say:

Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety...²⁵

Nowhere in fact, except in the one soliloquy, is there anything to make us think that Iago sincerely believes in Othello's betrayal of him with Emilia. On the contrary, he more than once acknowledges the Moor's nobility and integrity. And indeed, in the soliloquy in question he follows the accusation against Othello with a similar one against Cassio:

For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too.²⁶

Neither of these pretences can be believed, although it is not clear why Shakespeare has Iago profess them to himself. If for the moment he really believes them, it is only for the moment; the "poisonous mineral" that has gnawed his "inwards" is far more deep-rooted and enduring than they. The malicious tone of the soliloquy, however, is in tune with his spirit, and the note on which it ends reveals his inmost soul. For an honourable desire for vengeance would be understandable, but what Iago sees in himself has nothing to do with his trumped-up injuries. The action that he will take, as yet undefined, he terms "knavery." So he concludes:

Knavery's plain face is never seen till us'd.²⁷

No other human motives are explicitly avowed, and none are even implied very clearly, although many have been found. A bit of flimsy guesswork, for example, might see Iago as honestly in love with Desdemona, and so jealous of both Othello and Cassio. But this breaks down in the face of his stated intention to undo both Othello and Desdemona.²⁸ Again, Iago has no prospect of enriching himself by his conduct, nor does he show any eagerness to do so. So he is not simply a materialist. If he has a lust for power, he chooses

an unpromising approach to it. Mere pique, or even the rage of frustration, does not adequately account for what he does. In fact, Iago's only unvarying guiding principle is his hostility to goodness and happiness. So he hates Othello for his goodness, and hates him even more for his new-found happiness. A statement of this hatred always precedes a statement of one of his unconvincing reasons for so hating. He hates on principle, because he is so constituted that he does evil simply because it is evil. And this is the content of his service to himself, which is his individualism. In following but himself he follows the very principle of evil, naked and unadorned.

This guiding principle then, if it can be called a principle, is made abundantly clear in the first two acts. It is crystallized as we have seen in his hatred of Othello. That he hates Othello is the first fact about him which is established, and it is a fact about which he re-assures us at intervals. And then this hatred is seen to broaden out into a hatred of humanity in general, a hatred that is rooted in an instinctive malice. From this general malice it follows that Iago will do evil to anyone at all, merely for the sake of evil-doing. To do this is his delight, his "sport and profit."²⁹ He betrays his true malice when he eggs Roderigo on to injure Othello, for he says:

If thou canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure,
me a sport.³⁰

The fact that Iago's destructiveness is aimed not merely at one person but at happiness itself is evidenced by his reaction to the bliss of Othello and Desdemona, when he says in an ironic aside:

O, you are well tun'd now!
But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
As honest as I am.³¹

He is determined to ruin Desdemona, to "turn her virtue into pitch"³² in the eyes of the world. He will "have our Michael Cassio on the hip."³³ He will in the process destroy Roderigo, "this poor trash of Venice."³⁴ His malice extends to everyone within his range.

And this is essentially inhuman. Iago, as we have seen, specifically compares himself to a devil at one point. His love of evil for its own sake is diabolic in its motivelessness. Thus he concludes of his plot to involve Desdemona, Othello and Cassio in a disastrous misunderstanding:

I have't! It is engend'ed! Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.³⁵

And at the end Othello, his eyes belatedly opened, sees him for what he really is--a "demi-devil."³⁶ Iago himself describes his devilry appropriately, when it is half-accomplished, as "my poison."³⁷ And again he says ironically:

Work on,
My medicine, work!³⁸

The "medicine," then, is "poison," administered not to cure but for no other reason than to cause anguish.

That this is so is made perfectly clear in the final soliloquy of the second act, when Iago, abandoning all his previous pretences of motivation, exults unblushingly in his determination to do evil for no other reason than that it is evil and in fact, in a passage already quoted, equates himself with a fiend. Rejoicing in his deceit of others--"And what's he then that says I play the villain?"³⁹--he includes in his scheme of destruction "th' inclining Desdemona,"⁴⁰ the Moor, "enfetter'd to her love,"⁴¹ and Cassio. From Desdemona's very goodness he states that he will

...make the net
That shall enmesh them all.⁴²

Iago's evil is negative in the sense that it is a complete absence of good. It is Satanic. Being what he is, he is by nature unaware and incapable of good. Like Milton's later Satan, whom he in some ways resembles, he might have said, because there is nothing else for him to say about good, "Evil, be thou my good." Like Satan, he will exploit goodness to bring about evil. But unlike Satan he has not even the memory of good behind him to give him for a time the dignity of tragedy. Like Richard the Third, he is wholly devoted to the principle of evil, is wholly cut off from good, and there is no suggestion that he is or ever has been otherwise.

But the evil that he brings on others is more subtle than Richard's evil. The injuries that he inflicts penetrate to the very soul, for he is more concerned with spiritual than with bodily destruction. He does not shrink from physical violence of course, and he even appears, like Richard, to relish the idea of it. Thus he prefers if possible to have Desdemona maimed as she is murdered. For when Othello, by this time fully convinced of Desdemona's infidelity, turns to him for advice as to her punishment, Iago, his villainy now able to assert itself quite openly, replies viciously:

Do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed, even
the bed she hath contaminated.⁴³

Yet Iago is chiefly bent on the destruction of souls. Above all else his main target is the soul of Othello and the emanation of Othello's soul--his love for Desdemona. And in this play Othello, in his nobility of soul, in the universal confidence which he inspires, appears to be a representative of some kind of desirable moral order

in the world. He is the best in human nature. In Othello, morality may be subdued and under-emphasized, but it is there. And Othello's love for Desdemona, unselfish and pure as it is, is surely the very apex of human love. This is one manifestation of the quality that can, and should, bind human beings together in the world.

It is this emotion which is entirely outside Iago's nature. He has no comprehension of it, therefore. This lack of understanding is revealed in his coarse and mistaken estimate of the quality of that love. For when Cassio says of Desdemona:

She's a most exquisite lady.

he replies:

And, I'll warrant her, full of game.⁴⁴

That the love of Othello and Desdemona carries with it overtones of some kind of ideal love is made clear by Othello's statement of what its destruction would involve. For at one point he says to her:

...And when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.⁴⁵

Iago's devilish individualism, then, is associated with the bringing about of Chaos. He would destroy Othello's soul by destroying his love. And if he destroys Desdemona's body into the bargain, so much the better. The only way to destroy love (which involves complete trust and which he does not understand) is to replace it by its opposite, hatred (which he does understand). The instrument to achieve this exchange is jealousy, which involves mistrust. Therefore the play becomes centred about Iago's efforts to make jealousy prevail, most of all in Othello.

In the first two acts he shows his skill at arousing this destructive emotion, and he gives a foretaste of what he will do to

Othello later on. His first victim is his easiest--the gull Roderigo, already fancying himself in love with Desdemona. It is no trick at all to inflame Roderigo's apparently adolescent passion to a pitch of jealousy. Iago can now use him as a tool in arousing a different kind of jealousy--that of a father for his daughter. Here he only adds fuel to a fire already burning in Brabantio's breast. But Brabantio's efforts to injure Othello are defeated by Othello's obvious integrity, and Iago does not succeed in turning Othello against Brabantio. For when he tells Othello of Brabantio's alleged villainy, Othello merely answers:

Iago
 Let him do his spite;
 My services which I have done the signiory
 Shall out-tongue his complaints....⁴⁶

And so they do. Othello will not be destroyed this easily. So Iago now addresses himself in earnest to the task, and the last three acts are concerned almost exclusively with his efforts to conquer Othello's soul by breaking the bond between him and Desdemona.

The steps in that struggle are so familiar, having been retraced so often and so well, that no attempt will be made to follow them in detail here. It should be noted, however, that Iago, being altogether evil, is quite indifferent to the suffering and death that result from his actions. Physical injury is not his chief concern, but the more there is of it, the better pleased is Iago. There seems little ground for arguing, as Tucker Brooke does, that Iago is driven by boredom to inflict more injury than he intends, that he is as it were, an accidental villain. It is nonsense, in fact, to talk of his "honesty and innate kindliness."⁴⁷ Iago's actions speak for themselves and reveal the sort of being he is. For not only, as

has been shown, does he, when it is safe for him to be outspoken, brutally advise Othello to strangle Desdemona, but with his own hand he unhesitatingly stabs his wife Emilia when at the end his back is to the wall and she seems to be a threat to him. He sets Roderigo and Cassio to fighting, urging Roderigo to remove Cassio by "knocking out his brains,"⁴⁸ hoping that either one or the other, or preferably both, will be killed:

...Now whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my game...⁴⁹

When Roderigo loses the fight and his death seems certain, Iago attempts to speed Cassio on his way as well, by attacking him from behind.⁵⁰ Then, in case Roderigo does not die, he betrays him to a certain punishment.⁵¹ He even attempts to have the poor strumpet Bianca accused of complicity in a murder plot.⁵² How can it be said that this brutality, at best indifferent to suffering and at worst positively bloodthirsty, is not one of Iago's inborn traits?

Other characteristics appear in him. When the time is ripe for it he, like Richard, favors sudden action. His advice to Roderigo might be taken as his own motto:

...Ay, that's the way!
Dull not device by coldness and delay.⁵³

He is resourceful in an emergency, as is shown by his quick thinking in allaying Roderigo's growing suspicion of him. At this point he first flatters the poor fool and then coaxes him on to do further treacherous service to himself. He says to him:

...I see there's mettle in thee...Give me thy hand,
Roderigo...⁵⁴

But these qualities are secondary. Iago is more subtle than Richard. His chief weapon is words, and where Richard was skillful

with them when the need arose, Iago's skill with them is the means by which he attains his ends. It is with words, for example, that he pours the poison in Othello's ear. With them he attacks Othello's very soul, which is his main objective. He knows when to insinuate, when to play the innocent, when to wax poetic, when to act the bluff, plain-spoken soldier, when to attack and when to withdraw. Most of all, he knows when his enemy is ready to fall, so that he can deliver the verbal coup de grace, the "strangle her," the response to which will prove that love is dead.

And through all this, Shakespeare has made Iago a deplorably delightful villain. We enjoy his wit and bland hypocrisy all the more because we in the audience are not deceived by it, as when he says to Montano:

I had rather have my tongue cut from my mouth
Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio.⁵⁵

Perhaps it is because in his atrocious hypocrisy, he is fundamentally inhuman. At any rate, he is impressive and not repulsive; he speaks both prose and poetry; ironically, some of his most hypocritical statements are couched in his most memorable poetry, as for example, his well-known moralizing about "good name," which begins:

Good name, in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls...⁵⁶

Yet he is a villain, a diabolic individualist, and as such, the play implies, he is deserving only of condemnation. For one thing, there are aspects of decent human life which he cannot understand, and we are from time to time reminded of this lack. For example, to him "honour" is meaningless; it is nothing he insists, to the man who has it, and it is a deception to others. By

"reputation" Cassio clearly means "honour," for it is his "immortal part."⁵⁷ But "reputation" is deflated by the uncomprehending Iago to less than nothing. He says: "...Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; oft got without merit and lost without deserving. ..."⁵⁸ If he is a materialist, it is simply because all positive spiritual realities are entirely outside his ken.

Most important, when order is restored at the end Iago is undone. And order is restored. He is successful in his villainy, but not absolutely successful. He takes Othello down to Hell with him. He sees Desdemona to her death. He overthrows entirely the order of Othello's limited world. But Othello's eyes are opened before the end. He sees Iago for what he is, and he recognizes the abyss into which Iago has dragged him. Desdemona's innocence has not been touched. She is simply a tragic victim like Cordelia in King Lear, but unlike Cordelia an entirely passive one. That order has been restored the closing words of Lodovico assure us, and Iago's overthrow is the verdict on him. He is only at home in a situation of disorder.

Iago as an individualist is condemned. But it would be a mistake to look for too many overtones of humanity in him. He consistently follows but himself, as he assures us from time to time. But the exact content of his service to himself is never made clear. Psychologically analyzed, Iago would surely reveal himself as a pathological case. But he is not meant to be analyzed psychologically. He is a villain for villainy's sake. Shakespeare compels us to accept him as that, just as he compels us, for the duration of the performance at least, to believe that Iago's friends could think him honest, when in reality their opinion of him is no indication at all of his

true nature. Shakespeare's success in so tricking us is a measure of his artistry. Yet Iago is not totally unlike a man. His individualism, even if it is diabolic, is also in itself a very human quality, and for that individualism he is clearly condemned.

NOTES ON CHAPTER V

1. Othello, V, ii, 154.
2. Ibid., V, ii, 362.
3. Ibid., I, i, 65.
4. Ibid., V, ii, 148.
5. Tucker Brooke, Essays on Shakespeare and Other Elizabethans, pp. 46-58.
6. Allardyce Nicoll, Studies in Shakespeare, p. 94.
7. Othello, V, i, 62.
8. Ibid., V, ii, 362. (See note 2 above.)
9. Ibid., II, iii, 357-9.
10. Brooke (op. cit.) points to Othello, IV, ii, 134 and V, i, 19-20, for example, as evidence of Iago's horrified discovery of his villainy.
11. Othello, I, i, 49-55.
12. Ibid., I, i, 58.
13. Ibid., I, i, 37.
14. Ibid., I, i, 22.
15. Ibid., I, i, 8.
16. Ibid., I, iii, 392.
17. Ibid., I, i, 12.
18. Ibid., II, i, 298.
19. Ibid., V, i, 19-20.
20. Ibid., I, i, 42.
21. Ibid., II, i, 304-6.
22. Ibid., II, i, 300-3.
23. Ibid., II, i, 307-11.
24. Ibid., I, iii, 393-5.

25. Ibid., I, iii, 395-6.
26. Ibid., II, i, 316.
27. Ibid., II, i, 321.
28. Ibid., II, iii, 362-5.
29. Ibid., I, iii, 392.
30. Ibid., I, iii, 376-7.
31. Ibid., II, i, 201-3.
32. Ibid., II, iii, 366.
33. Ibid., II, i, 314.
34. Ibid., II, i, 312.
35. Ibid., I, iii, 409-10.
36. Ibid., V, ii, 301.
37. Ibid., III, iii, 325.
38. Ibid., IV, i, 45-6.
39. Ibid., II, iii, 342.
40. Ibid., II, iii, 346.
41. Ibid., II, iii, 351.
42. Ibid., II, iii, 367-8.
43. Ibid., IV, i, 220-1.
44. Ibid., II, iii, 19-20.
45. Ibid., III, iii, 91-2.
46. Ibid., I, ii, 17-9.
47. Tucker Brooke, op. cit., p. 48.
48. Othello, IV, ii, 236.
49. Ibid., V, i, 12-4.
50. Ibid., V, i, 26.
51. Ibid., V, i, 59.

52. Ibid., V, i, 85-6.
53. Ibid., II, iii, 393-4.
54. Ibid., IV, ii, 207-36.
55. Ibid., II, iii, 221-2.
56. Ibid., III, iii, 155ff.
57. Ibid., II, iii, 264.
58. Ibid., II, iii, 269-70.

CHAPTER VI

Edmund - "A manifold traitor"¹

Edmund is Shakespeare's clearest comment on human individualism. For in *King Lear* the playwright looks at life more directly, more searchingly, more inclusively, and more realistically than anywhere else. It is true that the play's first assumptions are incredible in terms of real life; to get the action under way, we must accept the supposition that a king would parcel out his kingdom to two flatterers while he rejects the one who has always loved him, and later that a father would believe a bastard son's defamation of the true son when the bastard is almost unknown to him, having been away for nine years. But of the first scene Granville-Barker aptly says: "Its probabilities are neither here nor there. A dramatist may postulate any situation he has the means to interpret, if he will abide by the logic of it after."²

Given this postulate, then, what follows is not simply dramatic life; it is surely life itself as Shakespeare saw it. It is high art too, of course, with life sharpened and compressed and rarefied so that the drama gives us the very essence of it. But one feels that if the dramatist anywhere comments profoundly and directly on human life and human actions and human motives as he saw them, it is here. This being so, we may expect to find in King Lear a man who, more fully than in any other play of Shakespeare's, represents

the kind of individualism with which this study is concerned. We may expect to find one who is convincingly human, but whose character suggests more of the implications of such individualism in human society than any we have yet seen. We may also expect to discover a clear judgment passed at the end on him and his way of life.

Edmund is just such a man. In terms of Shakespeare's judgment on the individualist he is the most significant figure dealt with in this study. However, the problem of dealing with him is complicated by the fact that he is a secondary character in the play. Dramatically, he is not nearly as vividly or as sharply delineated as Iago, his immediate ancestor. He does not occupy as much of the foreground in King Lear as Iago does in Othello. In his play, as has been shown, Iago is all villain, an almost unbelievable (in terms of real life) human devil whom the poet's art compels us to accept, a sort of refined Richard the Third. But with Iago this does not matter. Edmund on the other hand is in this regard much more than Iago, for he invites comparison with life. In him we feel that Shakespeare is commenting on one aspect of human behavior as it actually is. On the stage, then, he is less striking than Iago; as a type of humanity, Edmund is much the more significant of the two.

Indeed, his secondary but decisive position in the action is an indication of Shakespeare's judgment on the place of Edmund's type of individualism in life. For, as has been suggested, in King Lear Shakespeare is looking at life directly and seeing it whole. It is certainly a dark and perhaps a bitter view, but it is not, as Middleton Murry suggests, a distorted one. King Lear's madness does not reflect Shakespeare's own state of mind when he wrote the play.

But here he does plunge disturbingly deep into the depths of human experience. The result is an artistic presentation of life that for profundity has perhaps never been equalled. It is always human life in this play, for all its characters are recognizable human beings. King Lear then, in a sense, is a direct reflection of the human situation. And in this picture the individualist who from the beginning pursues his own gain in complete disregard of others plays a vital role. He brings great harm to the others. He is a villain. As such he is subordinate both to those like Lear and Gloucester who are a tragic mixture of good and bad, and to those like Cordelia and Edgar who are all but perfect. Edmund's villainy is released only when the weaknesses of the central figures open the door to it. He is at the bottom of the human heap.

At the same time, he is within it. He is all the more impressive because Shakespeare has made him so entirely human. He is all too uncomfortably mortal indeed, and there is little need to suspend our disbelief in order to accept him. He is engaging and even comic because he so light-heartedly surrenders to evil. But granting his inborn tendency to self-aggrandizement, his motives for behaving as he does are clear and consistent, and to some extent we are even tempted to sympathize with him. This sympathy is increased by the discovery that Edmund has a conscience; there are hints, as will be shown, that he has better feelings which struggle, weakly it is true, against the course he is following. And at the end in a flash of self-realization he sees how far he has removed himself from the acceptable order of things. His remorse turns him into a minor tragic hero for a moment before his death. Edmund, in short, is an intelligent

human being. But this fact only serves to emphasize his villainy, the more terrible because it is so convincingly human. This villainy is rooted in his complete individualism.

Yet in both his humanity and his individualism Edmund is so much one of us, so commonplace in a way, so human, that we in an age which has made a virtue of individualism may resent the fact that almost from the beginning of the play Shakespeare so clearly labels him a villain.³ He is so sturdily self-reliant, so freely enterprising in overcoming his natural handicaps, so charged with individualistic initiative, that we may be inclined to wonder at the evil consequences of his conduct, and at the harsh verdict Shakespeare pronounces on this man and his way of living. Perhaps, it is suggested, the poet was morally confused, to have such evil flow out of such virtue. Indeed, it has been said by some that this play has no clear moral foundation at all.⁴ The havoc caused by the initial transgressions of Lear and Gloucester is not commensurate with the essentially trivial nature of the sins themselves. So there is no real point in looking at King Lear as, among other things, a serious moral pronouncement, they say.

This may be so. But there is another way of viewing the play, a way that has been suggested here. This is to see King Lear as founded on certain assumptions about man and the universe and from the viewpoint of these assumptions to see it as encompassing in a clear-eyed sweep more of the human situation than Shakespeare had yet attempted to encompass in a single work. In that situation we see Edmund as the intelligent individualist, ruled entirely by self-interest. The evil results of his individualistic behavior and the

fact that humanity unequivocally rejects him at the end tell us Shakespeare's opinion of such individualism. This opinion merely reinforces the judgment we have already seen him pass on all such individualists, but here the verdict as far surpasses in directness and profundity all earlier verdicts as the play itself surpasses in directness and profundity all others that Shakespeare wrote.

Edmund, then, is both human and evil. And on the first occasion when he has the stage to himself he tells us directly what manner of man he is. For it is in soliloquies of course that he reveals himself explicitly. He informs us at the beginning of his first soliloquy that he is a devotee of "Nature." He says:

Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound....⁵

These lines demand close scrutiny, for they are the key to his character. What does he mean by "Nature"? Why and how are his "services" "bound" to her "law"? Edmund's whole subsequent career supplies the answer to the first question. For the service that he renders to the goddess reveals what "Nature" is to him. Nature is the world around him, the world of profit and loss, of here and now. It is life lived on the level of bodily existence, in which a man's ability to enrich himself is his only criterion of success. Edmund is thus a complete pagan.⁶ In his second soliloquy he reveals this fact even more fully. Here he seems to eliminate morality entirely from any reference to divine authority. Edmund's "Nature" clearly rejects the concept of God or indeed of any supernatural power as irrelevant and unnecessary to the real business of life.

Consequently, a worshipper of "Nature," if like Edmund he whole-heartedly follows the logic of his belief, will reject the

intangibles like love and loyalty which are based on some kind of religious faith. He will thus, denying the values that bind men together, be a complete individualist, keeping his eye fixed on nothing but his own material power and profit in this world. This at any rate is one possible implication of materialism, and it is what Edmund shows us he means by serving the law of "Nature." There is too an unspoken contradiction here, since his "goddess," being a denial of divinity, is not a goddess at all, but only chaos.

The question of how and why he is bound to her service is only suggested by Shakespeare. He does not try to answer it, nor is an exploration of it demanded by the drama. All we are required to do is to accept Edmund's statement that he is bound. Yet further irony is suggested by it, perhaps accidentally. Is it Edmund's fault that he is what he is? Like most individualists, he sees himself as entirely free. Released from what he sees as the naive belief of his father, which he dismisses as mere superstition, "the excellent feppery of the world,"⁷ released he thinks from the power of the gods, he sees himself as completely master of his own fate. Thus he says mockingly in his second soliloquy: "...as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion...and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on."⁸ But the implicit contradiction of this follows immediately, as Edmund suggests that, heavenly influence or not, he was born a villain. For he says: "I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing."⁹

Released from the tyranny of the heavens, he seems to half-recognize himself as subject to a far more sinister necessity. And

it was certainly no choice of his own that made him a bastard. That was foreordained for him by his father. The question then of why he is bound to the goddess, far from being answered, is not even asked explicitly. But the point is relevant because our feeling for Edmund is tempered somewhat by the suggestion that he is a victim of a wider tragedy of life, that he could not help being the kind of man he is.

At any rate, he could not help being a bastard. Whatever else it is, his bastardy is surely the symbol of his bondage to the law of "Nature." For in one regard at least it places him outside the accepted order of things.¹⁰ It did not absolutely predestine him for villainy, but it was frequently seen as a likely accompaniment of an outcast state and a very obvious mark of it. John Lyly says:

For if the mother be noted of incontinencie, or the father of vice, the childe will either during life be infected with the like crime, or the trecheries of his parents, as ignominy to him will be cast in his teeth.... The guilty conscience of a father that hath troden awry, causeth him to think and suspect that his father went not right, wherby his own behavior is as it were a witness, of his own baseness.¹¹

A bastard then, as a product of his parent's disloyalty, is likely to reflect in his own person the "ignominy" of the parent. He stands for the breaking of order in a primary social institution--the home.

And it may be significant that Edmund's conception and entry into life were accompanied by a total disruption of the order of his father's home. This is in contrast to the origin of the earlier Bastard in King John, whose mother's sin with Cordelion was seen as almost admirable, and who was brought up as a legitimate son within the home, unconscious of his bastardy. But Gloucester's silly boasting in the first scene shows Edmund to be the product of an entirely

unholy alliance. For Gloucester says smirkingly:

Though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair, there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged.¹²

The whoreson must be acknowledged now, but until now he has not been admitted by his father. Gloucester says, airily:

He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again.¹³

It would probably be pressing the point too far to see Edmund's bastardy as the cause of his peculiar attitude to life. It is, however, clearly a token of that attitude. Gloucester's gross but commonplace sin, and his frankly hedonistic motive in committing it, are accurately mirrored in Edmund, the product of the sin. We feel a reluctant admiration for the light-hearted manner with which Edmund accepts and almost glories in his state. We see this at the end of the first soliloquy, after he has made it clear that "bastardy" is identified in his mind, as it is in the minds of others, with "baseness." This gleeful acceptance is seen in his ironic invocation addressed to the gods in whom he does not believe:

...I grow; I prosper.
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!¹⁴

The first soliloquy then does not really demand sympathy for Edmund, except for his sheer virtuosity in displaying his evil intent. Having begun by assuring his audience that his general attitude to life, his worship of "Nature," is already firmly established, he proceeds to treat his bastardy as now simply an obstacle to be overcome, a problem to be solved. It is manifestly unfair that he should be considered less worthy a man than his brother, simply because of his birth.

...Why bastard? Wherefore base?
 When my dimensions are as well compact,
 My mind as generous, and my shape as true
 As honest madam's issue?¹⁵

But his motive in trying to solve this problem is an entirely selfish and materialistic one:

...Well then,
 Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.¹⁶

By the end of the soliloquy, what Granville-Barker calls "the insistent malice of the man"¹⁷ is fully revealed.

So, bastardy apart, Edmund by the time that we meet him is a self-confessed traitor to his immediate family, a traitor who sees "the plague of custom"¹⁸ as evil simply because it thwarts his own self-interest. The extent and nature of his manifold treachery, extending beyond his family to almost the whole world, is revealed when he is seen in action in the drama that follows. His own character is further revealed by his manner of conducting his unprincipled affairs, and by his reaction to both success and failure. Finally, when the world which Edmund has betrayed turns on him and opens his eyes to the truth before it destroys him, he is at once identified more closely than ever with mankind and made into a clear symbol of Shakespeare's judgment on a certain aspect of humanity.

His first act of treachery is to play Jacob to Edgar's Esau, evidently with the sole intention of stealing his brother's birth-right. This involves discrediting Edgar with his father, and frightening each of them as to the other's intentions. But the idea of murder enters the picture and shows the color of Edmund's scheming. He has his father read, over Edgar's forged signature, a letter which ends:

If our father would sleep till I wak'd him, you should enjoy half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother.¹⁹

Immediately afterward he assures Edgar that his father's displeasure with him "at this instant so rageth in him that with the mischief of your person it would scarcely allay."²⁰ Edmund at this point appears to plan no murder, but the idea of it is in his mind. The suggestion is that no scruple will bar him from achieving his goal. There are no reservations to his closing remark:

All with me's meet that I can fashion fit.²¹

And in action no scruples do block his path. Edgar is preserved by the requirements of the plot and not by any kindness of his brother. But Edmund succeeds in making a hunted outcast of him, and he can hear with satisfaction a chilling promise of imminent death to Edgar, when Cornwall, who equals Edmund in ferocity but not in intelligence, says of Edgar:

If he be taken, he shall never more
Be fear'd of doing harm....²²

This is the pass to which Edmund has brought his brother. Now he turns on his father, whose land, now Edgar is out of the way, he plans to acquire immediately. The opportunity for treachery arises when his father confides in him a story about a secret letter he has received, and tells him of his intention to relieve the lost Lear. Edmund's reaction to this fatherly confidence is prompt. He says after Gloucester's exit:

This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the Duke
Instantly know, and of that letter too.
This seems a fair deserving, and must draw me
That which my father loses--no less than all.
The younger rises when the old doth fall.²³

This betrayal ends in Gloucester's losing "no less than all," for he is first dispossessed in favor of Edmund, then left to the tender mercies of Cornwall, Goneril and Regan, to be blinded and then

cast out. Finally he dies as a result of it. Edmund has no direct part in these or any other acts of violence, but he is the one primarily guilty of them. Knowing this, we see great irony in Cornwall's concern for Edmund's feelings when Cornwall says:

The revenges we are bound to take upon your traitorous father are not fit for your beholding.²⁴

Edmund's betrayals do not end with his family. His appetite for power and profit is insatiable; if need be all must fall that he may rise. So with Cornwall out of the way, and with the ironical situation of both Goneril and Regan, his equals in evil, contending for his hand, all that he needs to do is win the battle, choose one or the other of the sisters, and dispose of Albany and the other sister. To make assurance doubly sure, he will also need to see that Lear and Cordelia are disposed of. He turns all this over in his mind before the battle:

To both these sisters have I sworn my love;
 Each jealous of the other, as the stung
 Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
 Both? one? or neither? Neither can be enjoy'd,
 If both remain alive. To take the widow
 Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril;
 And hardly shall I carry out my side,
 Her husband being alive. Now then we'll use
 His countenance for the battle; which being done,
 Let her who would be rid of him devise
 His speedy taking off. As for the mercy
 Which he intends to Lear and to Cordelia--
 The battle done, and they within our power,
 Shall never see his pardon; for my state
 Stands on me to defend, not to debate.²⁵

It should be noted that lust appears to have no place in Edmund's nature. In this respect he is unlike Goneril and Regan. To him they are only pawns in a larger game, and there is the suggestion in the soliloquy just quoted that the loser in the contest would have to be destroyed.

His plan succeeds in part. For he wins the battle, and he brings about the death of Cordelia and with her of Lear. Again he initiates, but does not execute, the deed of violence. Nevertheless he is the guilty one here as well, for he sends an officer to "follow them to prison"²⁶ with instructions to dispose of them. Yet he cannot be rid of Albany, for, as will be shown, Albany, the leader of the forces of restored order, is the obstacle he cannot overcome. And by that time Edmund's race is run, as is that of Goneril and Regan.

Throughout this action Edmund reveals other characteristics that help to make him a distinct person. Because of his secondary position in the play, they are not elaborated in great detail, and some of them are merely suggested. But they explain his personal attractiveness. For one thing, he is well-favored physically. In the opening scene the always honest Kent answers Gloucester's apology for Edmund's irregular origin by saying: "I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper."²⁷ He is intelligent, as is apparent from the whole context of his speeches. He is brave, and his bravery unites with his intelligence to make him a born leader of men. This ability is evidenced by his brilliant conduct of the battle, in which he is not troubled by Albany's scruples about the honesty of the cause he is fighting for. These qualities combine with a light-hearted hypocrisy and a sardonic wit to make him on the surface an oddly attractive figure. Then, too, he is fastidious in his villainy as we have seen, neither crudely bloodthirsty nor crudely lustful.

But he causes both blood and lust to start in others. And his wit, his hypocrisy, his intelligence and his physical charm unite to give him the mastery, until the end, of every scene where he has a

principal part. His deceit of others who are with him is a joke between him and the audience. It is part of this joke that time after time he ironically describes himself, although his listener thinks he is talking of someone else, or he causes the listener to apply to an innocent third person a description that fits Edmund exactly. So, for example, in warning his father of Edgar's supposed plot, he describes his own intentions precisely, in the guise of a false accusation of him by Edgar. For he reports that Edgar has said to him of the alleged plot:

...I'd turn it all
To thy suggestion, plot, and damned practice.²⁸

Again, when he hears his father's report about the harsh treatment of King Lear by Cornwall, Regan and Goneril, his sardonic reply is: "Most savage and unnatural!"²⁹ And after he has told Edgar of his father's wrath against him, Edgar says:

Some villain hath done me wrong.

To this Edmund solemnly replies:

That's my fear....³⁰

The joke is not really a joke at all. Edmund's deceit is aimed at violence and murder; he himself is the savage and unnatural villain. Thus, immediately after his pious censure to his father of Cornwall, Regan and Goneril, Edmund does the savage and unnatural deed of betraying Gloucester to his blinding at the hands of the same three. And his was the villainy that forced Edgar to flee, his life in danger. Twice in the play, indeed, before the final revelation, Edmund's conduct is described directly and accurately. The first time is when Regan callously informs the blinded Gloucester of his bastard son's treachery. But to her, Gloucester and not Edmund is

the traitor. She says:

Out, treacherous villain!
Thou call'st on him that hates thee. It was he
That made the overture of thy treason to us;
Who is too good to pity thee.³¹

Again, the extent of Edmund's villainy is admirably suggested by the "gentleman" who reports the betrayal of Gloucester to Albany. He says of Edmund:

... 'Twas he inform'd against him,
And quit the house on purpose, that their punishment
Might have the freer course.³²

There is evidence, however, that Edmund possesses a better self, a self he must deny in order to pursue his course of evil. He is not, like Falstaff, a materialist because he is by nature oblivious to the idea of unseen realities. Rather, he deliberately denies the spiritual values of which he is aware; he knows both good and evil, but he forcibly suppresses his best instincts. Edmund has a conscience, in short. This is seen of course most clearly in his admission of guilt and his repentance at the end, which will be discussed more fully. But traces of it emerge before the climax. It is possibly indicated by his evident reluctance to witness the violence done to his father. The forcible suppression of conscience is specifically shown at the point where, speaking of his plot to betray his father, which he calls his "course of loyalty," he says in an aside:

...I will persevere in my course of loyalty, though the
conflict be sore between that any my blood.³³

And Regan, although she is an untrustworthy witness in matters of pity, is probably telling the truth when she tells Oswald of Edmund's belated errand of mercy on behalf of his blinded father:

...Edmund, I think, is gone,
In pity of his misery, to dispatch
His nighted life;...³⁴

Edmund's defiance of the accepted moral order, his selfish individualism, is as thoroughgoing as that of any villain we have seen. At the same time, the complexity of his character suggests that he is closer to conscience-stricken humanity than any of them. For he has in his nature the awareness of both good and evil. It is this compound of real humanity and utter villainy that makes him in the moral sense the most terrible of all Shakespeare's villains.

He belongs to a drama which speaks of life as it is. We are assured in King Lear that there is a moral order, against which Edmund and his kind wage unceasing warfare. The entire play is confirmation of it. Kent, for example, speaks for this order through all his actions; everything that he does is designed, as will be shown, to help restore it. Albany is the one who gives words to the play's convictions about morality. It is he who clearly emerges at the end as the spokesman for what Shakespeare sees as both right and, in the long run, triumphant. But even before the end, he clearly expresses the absolute opposition between the chaos of Edmund's unregulated "Nature"³⁵ and the idea of a divinely controlled moral order. If men are cut off from the heavens, says Albany, it follows that the bonds which join them together will be broken. The resulting havoc will be limitless, and Edmund is the living demonstration of this proposition. In Albany's jarring prophecy of what will happen if the human race rejects the order imposed by divinity, the uneven metre suits the harshness of the thought and underlines its urgency. Albany says:

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.³⁶

There must be moral order.

And the outcome of the drama affirms that there is such order in the universe. The first indirect proof of this is the servant's defence of Gloucester. A report of this impels Albany to state his faith, a faith which is amply justified by the action which follows the statement, and which contradicts those who say that in King Lear Shakespeare revealed a despair over life. For Albany exclaims:

This shows you are above,
You justicers, that these our nether crimes
So speedily can venge!³⁷

In this scheme the power of France must be seen as an agent in the restoration of moral order. This is explained by Cordelia, who surely stands for absolute human good, and for whose cause France is fighting. She says before the battle, addressing an imaginary Lear:

...O dear father,
It is thy business that I go about.
Therefore great France
My mourning and important tears hath pitied.
No blown ambition doth our arms incite,
But love, dear love, and our ag'd father's right.³⁸

Yet France of course is England's traditional enemy, even if the long-standing issue of war between the two countries is not really relevant here. Therefore to an Englishman it would not make moral sense that France should emerge the victor in any battle. Shakespeare resolves the dilemma, rather awkwardly perhaps, by having France defeated. But then Edmund, while still in the full flush of victory, is overthrown by Edgar. The faithful Albany emerges as the strongest man in the kingdom. A forewarning of Albany's emergence was given earlier. For Oswald reported to Goneril that Albany had merely smiled at news of France's landing. He had further answered

scornfully Oswald's reference to the "loyal service" of Edmund. Albany had, says Oswald, "told me I had turn'd the wrong side out."³⁹ Albany is no fool. But he is afflicted with integrity. He says of himself:

...Where I could not be honest,
I never yet was valiant...⁴⁰

Our chief concern, however, is with the fact that in this process Edmund is overthrown. This was to be expected from the fact that the play asserts that moral order does prevail, that there are "justicers" above, whose concern it is to punish such "nether crimes" as Edmund's deeds represent. But in his overthrow Edmund tragically reveals the potential breadth of his humanity. He engages pity as no other whole-hearted villain has done, and in fact, he goes to his death, as has been suggested, a minor tragic hero. The question that arose at the beginning and was not answered is again implied: the question of whether Edmund freely chose his course of evil or whether he was inescapably bound by the ugly facts of his existence. Again the question is only suggested; it is not answered.

At any rate, Edmund comes to complete self-realization. For as he lies dying, even before he knows who his antagonist is, he confesses to him:

What you have charg'd me with, that have I done,
And more, much more. The time will bring it out,
'Tis past, and so am I....⁴¹

Then Edgar, revealed as the opponent, asserts his conviction that there is a just, if harsh, moral order, the operation of which is proven by the fates of both Edmund and Gloucester. Edgar says:

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us.
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.⁴²

In his reply Edmund shows that he accepts this truth entirely. He answers sadly:

Th'hast spoken right; 'tis true.
The wheel is come full circle. I am here.⁴³

Edmund's confession is followed by genuine remorse. He comes to it slowly and reluctantly, and much too late to do any good. But it proves the existence in him of emotions and intentions which he has so far repressed. In answer to Edgar's account of Gloucester's end, he says:

This speech of yours hath mov'd me,
And shall perchance do good;...⁴⁴

Finally there comes the complete denial of all that he has been and done, when he exclaims at the end:

I pant for life. Some good I mean to do
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send
...to the castle.⁴⁵

The remorse is too late to save Cordelia, and therefore too late to lighten in any way the blackness of Edmund's total villainy. It does make that villainy appear the more opprobrious, by showing that it has stemmed from a man who is fundamentally an intelligent, sensitive and believable human being, profoundly immoral because he is capable of both good and evil.

Not only that, but Edmund's evil-doing carries with it overtones of all man's inhumanity to man. King Lear, as has been said, is a comprehensive and direct view of the human situation, a fact which is made clear by Albany's closing words, in which he says in part:

...we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.⁴⁶

He is speaking of the dead Lear himself of course, but his words

carry an echo of the scope of the entire play. And in Edmund those who are left when these words are spoken, have seen not just one man's villainy, but human villainy in general. He has broken the harmony of well-ordered life at almost every point. His "heinous, manifest, and many treasons"⁴⁷ reveal his total disloyalty. Edgar tells the truth when he says to him:

...thou art a traitor;
False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father;
Conspirant 'gainst this high illustrious prince;
And from th'extremest upward of thy head
To the descent and dust beneath thy foot,
A most toad-spotted traitor.⁴⁸

In his disloyalties there can be seen suggestions of the individualistic rupture of the solidarity of human society in the pursuit of personal profit that was emerging capitalism. There can be seen, too, suggestions of the Renaissance man's mockery of traditional concern with the spiritual world in his excessive pre-occupation with things present. In Edmund there can in fact be seen all the divisive forces that were tending to disrupt the traditional order of things in Shakespeare's England. In Edmund, and not in Edgar, as Gloucester has been led to believe, "all ruinous disorders"⁴⁹ have sprung to life. For Edmund is, in fact, as Bald says, "an extreme and dangerous individualist who scorns the conventional restraints and for whom the ordinary bonds of society and morality have no meaning."⁵⁰

Finally, in the ignominious death of Edmund, Shakespeare is giving us his judgment on such individualism. It is villainy, and death is its fitting punishment. This verdict far overshadows the traces of sympathy for Edmund's rugged self-reliance that were evident at the beginning, when Edmund won the audience with his assertion of independence. In a properly constituted order of things, the

Edmunds of this world are not even very significant. Their place is at the bottom of the human scale. This is what Albany suggests when he hears of Edmund's death. For he remarks:

That's but a trifle here.⁵¹

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NOTES ON CHAPTER VI

1. King Lear, V, iii, 113.
2. Harley Granville-Barker, "King Lear", Prefaces to Shakespeare, first series, p. 146.
3. In a new study of King Lear, Danby, discussing Edmund's view of Nature, suggests as I do that Edmund's individualism has an attraction for moderns that it would not have possessed for Elizabethans. He expands the suggestion as follows: "To a post-Darwinian age, of course, the Nature Edmund addresses as Goddess is a deceptively familiar commonplace. We follow Edmund easily when he appeals from Custom. We understand him, when he prefers to regard it as a system of purely local and arbitrary peculiarities. We sympathize when he points to the urgent personal drives it is obstructing, when he calls attention to his handsome body, his superior intelligence, the vigorous animality derived from 'the lusty stealth of Nature'. Each of his arguments awakens answering echoes in a modern mind. Whatever Goddess this is, she seems the guardian of powers we approve: strength of mind, animal vigour, handsome appearance, instinctive appetite, impatience with humbug, iconoclastic force. Edmund might be Peer Gynt." John F. Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature, p. 32.
4. Middleton Murry, for example, says, "...King Lear makes upon me the impression of a Shakespeare who is out of his depth. He does not really know what he wants to say; perhaps he does not know whether he wants to say anything." John Middleton Murry, Shakespeare, p. 338.
5. King Lear, I, ii, 1-2.
6. In a recent article, R. C. Bald says of Edmund's concept of Nature: "His 'Nature' is a disruptive force, the antithesis of order and degree, and in its name he violates the very principle for which it should stand. This conception of nature implies a savage primitivism; it is related to the earlier, unorganized stage of society when human life was close to that of animals and when action prompted by instinct or impulse was unfettered by the rule of law." R. C. Bald, "Thou, Nature, Art my Goddess: Edmund and Renaissance Free-Thought," Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Lectures, p. 342.
7. King Lear, I, ii, 129.
8. Ibid., I, ii, 133-8.
9. Ibid., I, ii, 143-5.
10. Danby says of the significance of Edmund's bastardy: "... 'bastard' is the Elizabethan equivalent of 'outsider'. Edmund

is a complete Outsider. He is outside Society, he is outside Nature, he is outside Reason. Man, Nature and God now fall apart." John F. Danby, op. cit., p. 44.

11. John Lyly, Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit, Euphues and His England, ed. Edward Arber, p. 125.
12. King Lear, I, i, 21-4.
13. Ibid., I, i, 33.
14. Ibid., I, ii, 21-2.
15. Ibid., I, ii, 6-9.
16. Ibid., I, ii, 15-6.
17. Harley Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 160.
18. King Lear, I, ii, 3.
19. Ibid., I, ii, 54-7.
20. Ibid., I, ii, 177-9.
21. Ibid., I, ii, 200.
22. Ibid., II, i, 112-3.
23. Ibid., III, iii, 23-7.
24. Ibid., III, vii, 7-9.
25. Ibid., V, i, 55-69.
26. Ibid., V, iii, 27.
27. Ibid., I, i, 16-7.
28. Ibid., II, i, 74-5.
29. Ibid., III, iii, 7.
30. Ibid., I, ii, 180-1.
31. Ibid., III, vii, 87-90.
32. Ibid., IV, ii, 92-4.
33. Ibid., III, v, 22-4.
34. Ibid., IV, v, 11-13.
35. See my discussion of Edmund's view of Nature, p. 111, and Note 6 above.

36. King Lear, IV, ii, 46-50.
37. Ibid., IV, ii, 78-80.
38. Ibid., IV, iv, 23-8.
39. Ibid., IV, ii, 9.
40. Ibid., V, i, 23-4.
41. Ibid., V, iii, 162-4.
42. Ibid., V, iii, 170-3.
43. Ibid., V, iii, 173-4.
44. Ibid., V, iii, 199-200.
45. Ibid., V, iii, 243-5.
46. Ibid., V, iii, 325-6.
47. Ibid., V, iii, 92.
48. Ibid., V, iii, 133-8.
49. Ibid., I, ii, 125.
50. R. C. Bald, op. cit., p. 347.
51. King Lear, V, iii, 295.

CHAPTER VII

Kent - "his offence, honesty"¹

Kent is a rebel when first he appears, a rebel against his king. For his defiance he is condemned to exile on pain of death. But the situation being what it is, and Kent being the kind of man he is, his rebellion is consistently seen as a mark of merit rather than of infamy. This does not imply any confusion in the moral judgment that is applied to Kent. For his only offence is his honesty; he is from first to last, as Gloucester describes him, "the noble and true-hearted Kent."² His trouble, indeed, is not in himself but in his situation. As a symbol of order he is not at home in a disorderly world. When disorder threatens he must protest immediately against it.

His individualism, like that of the Bastard in King John, is thus all on the surface. It is not the result of either folly or self-seeking on his part. It is rather a repudiation of these aberrations in other men; Kent's apparent individualism is intended to aid in restoring the order which has been overturned by irresponsible individualism in others. He thus runs the reverse of Edmund's course. He is outside established authority at the beginning only because established authority is clearly in the wrong. But he is not against it as such; on the contrary, he faces death in returning to help restore it. His loyalty is limitless. He rebels, as it were, in favor of his king and not against him. He dares to "come between the

dragon and his wrath"³ because he would save the "dragon" from the self-destruction implicit in his capricious anger.

It is clear that Kent has Shakespeare's unqualified approval, clear if for no other reason than that the values which he represents emerge triumphant at the end. He is, in a narrow sense, an ideal figure, the other side of Edmund's coin. Thus the approval which Shakespeare bestows on the extreme loyalty that lies under Kent's superficial individualism re-inforces his condemnation of the genuine individualist like Edmund. Therefore Kent must, in order to defend and help restore rightful authority, appear in his contempt for disorder to be contemptuous of all authority. Like Hotspur, he is out of tune with his times. But his individualism is less deep-rooted than Hotspur's, because unlike Hotspur he is plainly right, while the times are plainly wrong. He stands clearly for order in the midst of disorder. This is the role of apparent individualism which he must play.

Shakespeare has perfectly suited the man to this part. For Kent is pre-eminently a man of courage, perception and incorruptible good judgment in the broadest sense. But in the narrow sense he is neither patient, tactful, nor tolerant. All these characteristics he demonstrates at the beginning in his rebellion against King Lear. The significant thing here is that, although all perceive Leart's sinful folly, Kent is the only one to lift his voice against it. His nature is such that he cannot do otherwise than follow his perception with immediate action. He is "sudden," like Richard the Third, but in an infinitely better cause than Richard's. For he is always right. But he will not be content to bide his time, like the cautious Albany.

Kent has good reason, then, for his rebellion. It is not indeed the kingship against which he revolts. The first thing he does is to assure his audience of his continuing fidelity when he says:

Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,
Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers--⁴

What he rebels against is rather Lear's denial of his kingship, implicit in the "hideous rashness"⁵ of the unwise division of the realm. His anger at the unjust rejection of Cordelia precipitated his insurrection. The whole moral foundation of the play depends on the assumption that this action of Lear's is a deliberate sin, far worse than an old man's foolish weakness. Others recognize this and either deplore it privately or seize on it eagerly for their own advantage; Kent is the first to hurl the ugly truth in his master's face. He says to him:

...Revoke thy gift,
Or, whilst I can vent clamor from my throat,
I'll tell thee thou dost evil.⁶

Being Kent, he can not do otherwise. His rash courage knows nothing of diplomacy. He is single-minded in his devotion to duty. Therefore he sees no other course before him than to oppose the situation head-on. He makes this clear when he says to Lear:

...Be Kent unmannerly
When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound
When majesty falls to folly....⁷

This speech very powerfully suggests, as Flatter points out, "the frantic haste and violence with which Kent endeavours to bring Lear to his senses."⁸

More than this, these lines reveal the deepest truths about Kent. They show that he, no less than Hotspur, is governed by a concept of "Honour." Only to Kent honour is a far simpler and more straightforward thing than it is to Hotspur. It is laced, as Hotspur's honour is not, with a generous proportion of practical common sense. Yet in Kent's common sense there is no hint at all of materialistic self-aggrandizement. He is entirely and consistently selfless. So his honour points the way for him to the course which he knows to be right, a course which has nothing to do with his own advantage. This course is simply whole-hearted loyalty to Lear, whom he sees as the symbol of divinely established kingship in England.

There is, furthermore, a suggestion or two that Kent's selflessness is informed, as such an attitude invariably appears to be in the Shakespearean morality, by a firm faith in an over-ruling supernatural control. Thus in thanking Gloucester for coming to aid the king he piously invokes the gods, when he says to him: "The gods reward your kindness!"⁹ And he explicitly states his faith to the "Gentleman" who brings him the news of Cordelia, when he exclaims:

It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions.¹⁰

His near-worship of Lear, which to him is the only honourable course, is more than simple hero adoration. It stems from the fact that he sees Lear as a representative not only of properly appointed kingship, but of the gods as well--in short, as a symbol of divinely established order. And so his honour compels him to defy Lear when Lear defies his own responsibility. What Lear stands for in his mind Kent makes clear in his first conversation with him after he returns disguised. For here he says:

...you have that in your countenance which I would
fain call master.

And to Lear's query:

What's that?

Kent replies:

Authority.¹¹

To men like Kent, properly exercised authority is a divinely imposed necessity, binding both on those who exercise it and on those who are subject to it.

All this is implied in the concept of honour which lies behind Kent's every action; like Hotspur, he counts his life as nothing in comparison to the service of it, which in Kent's case means the service of Lear. He tells Lear as much when he says:

My life I never held but as a pawn
To urge against thine enemies; nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive.¹²

But Lear is bent on destroying his best self; there is apparently nothing left for Kent to serve. So he is forced by the conflict between the situation and his own lofty, entirely praiseworthy concept of honour into a course of rebellion. His parting words make this position clear. For he says to Lear:

Fare thee well, King. Since thus thou wilt appear,
Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.¹³

This is the limit then of Kent's individualism. It is not really individualism at bottom at all, for basically he rebels not against order but against disorder, not against his king but against the ruinous and self-destructive folly of his king.

His loyalty to what he sees as right does not end, however, with his initial rebellion. From that point on all his energies are

directed towards helping to restore Lear to his senses and to his rightful position in the kingdom. To do this he will endure any ignominy, even to assuming the guise of a servant and unjustly being forced to spend a night in the stocks, a disgrace which he cheerfully accepts as part of his service to Lear. But in it there is an ironical parallel between Lear's indignant but futile protest over the fact that they have maltreated his servant--

...Wherefore
Should he sit here?¹⁴--

and Kent's own equally futile protest over Lear's treatment of Cordelia.

Thus it is obvious that from beginning to end Kent places Lear's well-being far above his own. His devotion knows no bounds. So, in stating his intention to brave his sentence of banishment, he says:

...Now, banish'd Kent,
If thou dost serve where thou dost stand condemn'd,
So may it come, thy master, whom thou lov'st,
May find thee full of labours.¹⁵

A further revelation of his complete submergence of self-interest in his service to Lear is given when he is urging the mad King to enter a hovel for shelter from the storm. Here Lear asks:

Wilt break my heart?

To this Kent replies:

I had rather break mine own....¹⁶

Edgar pays tribute to this quality in Kent when he is telling of Kent's emotion on recounting the "piteous tale of Lear and him"¹⁷ when the royal master was mad and the faithful follower was guiding him in his outcast wandering.

And at the end, Kent suggests that his is the ultimate in loyalty. Thanks partly to his efforts, order has been restored. But Lear, the symbol of order to Kent, is dead. All that is left for Kent to do, his work on earth being finished, is to follow his master to the kingdom of death, his master who has at the end dimly recognized him for what he is. So Kent's last words are:

I have a journey, sir, shortly to go.
My master calls me; I must not say no.¹⁸

Thus throughout the play Kent is pictured as just such a man as would delight to follow the steep and narrow path on which his feet are set. Some of his qualities have been described. Utterly single-minded and honest, he is by nature incapable of dissimulation. The disguise that he assumes is a conventional physical one, dictated by the needs of the drama. Underneath it he is the same Kent still; the "servant Caius" is, as ever, "a good fellow," who will "strike, and quickly too,"¹⁹ and this Lear has reason to know, whether he is with Kent in or out of his disguise.

This being so, we can always, with one exception that will be pointed out, take Kent's statements at their face value. This is true whether he is describing himself or commenting on the situation in general. For instance, we see him portray himself exactly (except, of course, for the final flippancy) when he in his new guise introduces himself to King Lear on his return. Here he says:

I do profess to be no less than I seem, to serve him truly that will put me in trust, to love him that is honest, to converse with him that is wise and says little, to fear judgment, to fight when I cannot choose, and to eat no fish.²⁰

He goes on to describe himself with the blunt wit characteristic of him, and with a precision characteristic of this play, where

even minor characters are delineated with care. He says:

I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it and deliver a plain message bluntly. That which ordinary men are fit for, I am qualified in, and the best of me is diligence....I have years on my back forty-eight.²¹

Kent also has the plain man's contempt for affectation. In this, and in other respects as well, he is the lineal descendent of the Bastard, and a close relative of all the other plain, bluff men who seem to have had a special place in Shakespeare's affections. Like the Bastard, he indulges in a top-lofty flight of oratory mocking the servile flatterers. This is his one dissimulation, and it is not intended to deceive the audience. When criticized for his bluntness he says to Cornwall with mock servility:

Sir, in good faith, in sincere verity,
Under th'allowance of your great aspect,
Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire
On flickering Phoebus' front--²²

But here, as he tells us in the next breath, he is out of his "dialect"; he tells the simple truth about himself when he says: "I am no flatterer."²³ He is in fact quite the opposite, as we have seen; his courage, blunt wit and honest combine into a devastating frankness at times, as when he says, facing Edmund, Cornwall, Gloucester, Oswald and Regan:

Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain.
I have seen better faces in my time
Than stands on any shoulder that I see
Before me at this instant.²⁴

From all this, it follows that like the Bastard, Kent prefers to deal with life directly, and above all prefers action to words. This is illustrated by his manner of dealing with the problem that the cringingly arrogant steward Oswald presents, a problem which he

solves by tripping Oswald up and threatening him with further physical violence.²⁵ It is illustrated again by his reply to Lear's order to go to Gloucester, when he says: "I will not sleep, my lord, till I have delivered your message."²⁶ And he describes this quality himself when, after having attacked Oswald a second time, he explains his action to Lear. The attack was the result, he says, of his "having more man than wit about me."²⁷

The play gives Kent no opportunity to display the qualities of leadership that distinguished the Bastard, whom he otherwise resembles. His is essentially the role of a perfect follower. But within his limits he is without doubt an ideal figure; Shakespeare's approval of him, as has been pointed out, is made clear and unmistakable at the end. The reason for the approval is basically that everything which Kent stands for is opposed to Edmund's kind of individualism.

Yet he is, it must be admitted, less interesting than Edmund. This is no doubt partially, and regrettably, due to the fact that he is so good. But it is also a result of the uniformity of his goodness. He lacks Edmund's complexity; he is too completely single-minded; he never deviates in the least from his goal. There is thus no evidence of a moral conflict in Kent, or of any very complicated emotions. Nor has he any of the poet's imagination, a lack which his essentially prosaic speech indicates. He is trustworthy but not colorful, then, except for the dash furnished by his headstrong courage, as in the first scene.

Perhaps it is to compensate for this lack that Kent is allowed to captivate the audience with one flamboyant display of prowess in a field other than that of physical action. This occurs in his colorful

castigation of Oswald,²⁸ where ordinary name-calling is ornamented to the point of a compelling originality. And Kent consistently does display a rough wit, as has been seen, that suits his character and adds to his attractiveness.

In general, then, Kent for all his limitations exemplifies an important side of what Shakespeare saw as the ideal man in society. His apparent defiance of established order is in reality a true-hearted refusal to abandon what he sees as his proper position when many about him are conspiring, through weakness or malice, to overthrow the established order of society. His is thus the ideal extreme of loyalty. His only disloyalty is to established disorder, and his apparent individualism is only a means of warring against the real individualism unleashed by Lear's offense. This is made plain by everything he says in the rebellion scene.

And Shakespeare's verdict on Kent emphasizes by a sort of negative his judgment on the kind of evil individualism we have seen him condemn so often. For Kent is under sentence of banishment and death at the beginning, when disorder has triumphed in the realm. He remains in constant peril until order is finally restored. When the topsy-turvy social situation is righted--the situation in which Kent's honesty had been an offense--then at the end he, along with Albany and Edgar, is completely vindicated. Because he represents the total opposite of irresponsible individualism, Kent is, to Shakespeare as well as to Cordelia²⁹ and to Gloucester,³⁰ always the "good" Kent; his final justification in the last scene is proof of his place in the playwright's mind.

NOTES ON CHAPTER VII

1. King Lear, I, ii, 127.
2. Ibid., I, ii, 126.
3. Ibid., I, i, 124.
4. Ibid., I, i, 141-4.
5. Ibid., I, i, 153.
6. Ibid., I, i, 167-9.
7. Ibid., I, i, 147-51.
8. Richard Flatter, Shakespeare's Producing Hand, p. 163.
9. King Lear, III, vi, 6.
10. Ibid., IV, iii, 34-5.
11. Ibid., I, iv, 29-32.
12. Ibid., I, i, 157-9.
13. Ibid., I, i, 183-4.
14. Ibid., II, iv, 113-4.
15. Ibid., I, iv, 4-7.
16. Ibid., III, iv, 4-5.
17. Ibid., V, iii, 214.
18. Ibid., V, iii, 321-2.
19. Ibid., V, iii, 283-5.
20. Ibid., I, iv, 13-9.
21. Ibid., I, iv, 33-42.
22. Ibid., II, ii, 111-4.
23. Ibid., II, ii, 117.
24. Ibid., II, ii, 98-101.
25. Ibid., I, iv, 95.

26. Ibid., I, v, 6-7.
27. Ibid., II, iv, 42.
28. Ibid., II, ii, 15-26.
29. Ibid., IV, vii, 1-2.
30. Ibid., III, iv, 168.

CHAPTER VIII

Caliban - "this demi-devil"¹

Is it possible to know what Shakespeare had in mind when he created Caliban? Stoll says in effect that he had nothing in mind but Caliban himself--an admirable evasion of the issue, equivalent to saying that a painting has no depth or inner significance at all, but is only what it appears on the surface. Concerned exclusively with his art, says Stoll--with drama and poetry--Shakespeare had no room in his writing for the real life around him. As if the drama and poetry of the man who had written Hamlet and King Lear could be seen as distinct from life or as originating in any other source.

Not that there is any profit in seeing Caliban as precisely allegorical or symbolical, interpretations which Stoll, rightly if somewhat feverishly, rejects. Interpreting him thus is to place the background in the foreground, and to elaborate it and heighten it with details from the critic's own imagination. Shakespeare's prime concern in creating Caliban, as in creating all the others with whom he took any trouble, was undoubtedly to make him as dramatically real and solid, as poetically alive, as possible. There is no more evidence here than elsewhere that he was concerned with either allegory or symbol. His primary aim in bringing Caliban to life was to present a character so vivid on the stage that his innate vitality was its own justification, who needed no symbolic or allegorical prop to sustain him. Caliban is Caliban, and no other.

However, he did not spring to life in a vacuum, nor does The Tempest stand alone. It comes at the end of a succession of great plays, all of which are founded, more or less directly, on life as Shakespeare knew it.² For Shakespeare's art must surely have had its origin primarily in life itself. His view of life is a constant substructure implicit in all his plays. Thus Stoll is essentially meaningless when he says: "The Tempest, like every other Shakespearian or popular Elizabethan drama, stands like a tub on its own bottom, a story in its own right and for its own sake..."³ On the contrary, The Tempest, being the last of the great plays, is in some ways the richest of them all in terms of its implied comment on life.⁴

At any rate, Caliban himself is human in one respect at least, and in this sense he has much to say concerning life as Shakespeare saw it. For in his attitude to others Caliban is an individualist, the descendent of a family of individualists. In a sense, he includes them all. For in him there are echoes of Richard the Third, Falstaff, Iago and Edmund. There could hardly help but be, indeed. Stoll impoverishes the play unnecessarily and depreciates Shakespeare's art when he says that there is nothing to Caliban but what would appear on the surface to an Elizabethan audience.⁵ In writing The Tempest, Shakespeare may have been above the struggle, indifferent to it, or even "half bored to death," as we are told that Mr. Strachey suggests.⁶ But being Shakespeare, he could not do otherwise than reflect it in his work. So in The Tempest Caliban reflects that aspect of the human struggle which in the other figures of this study was seen as individualism. He reflects it differently to be sure, since neither

this play nor its characters are like the earlier ones, Shakespeare presumably having reached a new level. But the verdict on Caliban's kind of individualism is essentially the same as was the verdict on the individualism of Richard or Edmund. He, like them, is shown as one who, left to his own devices, is completely intolerable. Unlike them, of course, he does not need to be rejected at the end, for he is never left to his own devices, and so his individualistic tendencies remain latent.

Indeed, Caliban himself, in his monstrous flesh, is Shakespeare's verdict on individualism, which in other plays, as we have seen, has been weighed and found wanting. For here, in the person of this "moon-calf," it is reduced to impotent absurdity. There is no real conflict in The Tempest, because on the Enchanted Island moral order prevails from the beginning, and is never seriously threatened. In this situation Caliban the individualist and his bumbling efforts to assert himself are ludicrous and foredoomed to failure; Caliban himself arouses laughter and scorn, but no fear whatever. For he moves in a setting where life is exalted to something approaching what it ought to be. This is not to say that in The Tempest we are given a blueprint of the ideal way of life; saying that would be pushing the point much too far. But the quality of order that prevails on the Island is flawless; it reduces those who would break it, including Caliban, to impotence. From the beginning he has been an individualist, and from the beginning he has been helpless. In the figure of Caliban then, Shakespeare is putting the individualist in his lowly place; Caliban, as it were, is serving the sentence for Edmund's kind of sin.

That the moral order of The Tempest, the setting in which Caliban moves, is ideal, is witnessed by the fact that in it absolute innocence, in the person of Miranda, is safe from harm. She, who to her wise father as well as to the doting Ferdinand is "so perfect and so peerless"⁷ that she is able to "outstrip all praise,"⁸ is never seriously endangered by such as Caliban, although he would harm her if he could. But his clumsy threats cannot prevail against her. For the heavenly powers are with her always. Cordelia's goodness was tragically crushed by the real world of King Lear; Miranda's is safe in the ideal harmony and order of the Enchanted Island.

This harmony and order is enforced by an authoritarian regime. Prospero is the Island's philosopher-king, whose very magic is subordinated to his reason. It is reason, not passion, which determines his course of action against his enemies at the end. For he says, before he announces his judgment:

Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance....⁹

Under this rule of reason Caliban is permitted to act, but in a strictly controlled fashion. Prospero's toleration of him and his pardon at the end are conditional on Caliban's acceptable behavior. But there is never any doubt as to Prospero's mastery of the monster's intended individualistic behavior.

To achieve that mastery, Prospero avails himself of magic, it is true. With its aid he overcame the counter-magic which evil, in the person of Sycorax, was able to enlist against him, and he has the power to restrain her bastard son Caliban, who is a "demi-devil." But in spite of their magic both Sycorax and Prospero are human; as Kittredge

points out, an Elizabethan audience would see nothing impossible in such powers as these two wield.¹⁰ Dover Wilson says: "Practically everyone in Shakespeare's time believed in witchcraft."¹¹ The use of magic, besides giving the play its peculiar charm, serves to heighten the action and indeed to make it possible and credible within the limits of the single day allowed for the story to unfold. It also serves to throw a brighter light on Prospero's power for good, as it blackens Caliban's evil by its association with his unnatural origin.

Prospero then consistently uses his magic power to serve the right--to establish justice and to overthrow the evil-doers. Those who are capable of good but have yielded to evil, like Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio, are brought to see the error of their ways and are finally regenerated or at least humbled. There is, of course, an unsolved problem suggested with Antonio and Sebastian: although Prospero speaks of their being "penitent," and Alonso is brought to remorse for his sin, the other two show no sign of real repentance. But they are effectively disposed of; like all the others, they are in Prospero's power throughout the action, and at the end they are subordinated to the repentant king Alonso, although he is still not aware of their attempted treachery. Antonio in particular is a potential individualist. All that can be said at this point is that any future villainy of these two is outside the limits of this play and therefore is irrelevant. In terms of the moral requirements of The Tempest, they are adequately taken care of. And they are part of the older generation from whose hands the reins are falling; our interest at the end is focused on the young couple, Miranda and Ferdinand. But Caliban, we feel, is the villain in whom the playwright is really

interested; it is significant that the utter depravity of Caliban's inborn individualism is never allowed to express itself freely. For the moral order against which such individualism is at war prevails securely from beginning to end. Prospero upholds that order, a sovereign ruling the Island with justice and mercy.

To remove all doubt of Prospero's significance, the clear implication runs throughout that he is on the Lord's side. So Gonzalo, the equivalent in this play of Kent in King Lear, a man of integrity who has supported Prospero from the beginning, is a believer who sees the working of the heavenly will in all human happenings. "The wills above be done!"¹⁴ he exclaims piously at the moment of shipwreck. And so Ariel, acting as Prospero's agent, condemns the erring three (Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio) in a denunciation that has in it the echo of divine judgment. He says to them:

You are three men of sin, whom destiny--
That hath to instrument this lower world
And what is in't--the never-surfeited sea
Hath caus'd to belch up you, and on this island,¹⁵

Ariel's own function is made clear when he says immediately after this:

...I and my fellows
Are ministers of Fate....¹⁶

And the morality is made explicit when Ariel says:

...you three
From Milan did supplant good Prospero;
...for which foul deed
The powers, delaying (not forgetting), have
Incens'd the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,
Against your peace....¹⁷

The judgment passed on the sinners, attested by Gonzalo, re-affirms the fact that there is a moral order here with Prospero at its head. For Gonzalo says of the three who have just heard Ariel's indictment:

...Their great guilt,
Like poison given to work a great time after,
Now gins to bite the spirits....¹⁸

Prospero then, it is clear, is the lodestar of the play's morality; he sets the moral tone for the setting in which Caliban moves.

Prospero is not God, of course. For all his great powers he is human and lives in the shadow of mortality. He, like the others, will be inundated by the relentless tide of time; he has no magic to stop its coming in. So the sad unanswered question about life's transience that recurs like a minor melody in most of Shakespeare's later plays is suggested again by Prospero, in his words after the pageant is done, lines too familiar to require repetition:

Our revels now are ended...
.....
...We are such stuff
As dreams are made on...¹⁹

Again, at the very end, he says that after his return to Milan "Every third thought shall be my grave."²⁰ Prospero has no illusions about his humanity. And this fact is further evidence that in The Tempest Shakespeare has real life in mind. In this ideally organized society which is yet relevant to life as it is, Prospero is the dominant force, the rightful authority. Caliban is continually seen in relationship to him. Where he stands is a measure of the judgment on him. So it is necessary to know both Prospero and Prospero's kingdom before Caliban can be seen in his true perspective. But what is Caliban himself?

He is, to begin with, only half-human. The other half has its origin in Hell. He was "got by the devil himself"²¹ upon a mortal woman who had given herself to the black art. This means, in the first place, that he like Iago is damned from the beginning. He is a

"monster" in human guise, as we are constantly reminded, and there is never any doubt about his moral as well as physical monstrosity. His diabolism, unlike that of Richard and Iago, is overt and unequivocal. He is quite specifically a "demi-devil."²²

But at the same time he is half-human, subject to all the ills and longings of the flesh. He is more human in some ways than some of his predecessors. For his malingering, for example, he is subjected to the torments of a very human "ague."²³ His crude sensuality is, of course, only suggested, Shakespeare being Shakespeare. But it is part of his nature. There is no doubt about that. It is evidenced by his frank but hopeless aspiration to violate Miranda, a longing which of course has been frustrated by Prospero. The story of this comes out in retrospect. For when Prospero says to him:

...(I) lodg'd thee,
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honour of my child.

Caliban boastfully and impenitently replies:

O ho, O ho! Would't had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.²⁴

He has a very human longing for power and wealth, a longing that is evidenced by his futile scheme to murder Prospero and establish himself as master of Prospero's riches, or at least as the right-hand man of their new owner.

But the point about Caliban that sets him apart from all earlier individualists is that both his own nature and his circumstances prevent him from ever realizing his grandiose aspirations, prevent him even from making much progress towards their realization. For in his own nature he is pictured as basically servile, fit only

to be commanded by others. In spite of the fact that he looks back with longing to the time when Chaos ruled the Island, when, says Caliban, "I...first was mine own king,"²⁵ he is by nature incapable of any kind of leadership. Prospero addresses him habitually as "slave," and Caliban is fit for nothing else. He sees himself as "subject to a tyrant,"²⁶ but immediately afterwards like a child he invokes Prospero's aid to protect him against Ariel, when he says to Ariel:

I would my valiant master would destroy thee.²⁷

The only freedom that he envisages is a new form of bondage under another master. So he sings when such a change is in prospect:

'Ban, 'Ban, Ca- Caliban
Has a new master. Get a new man.²⁸

He has, in fact, a pander's soul. Thus, to ingratiate himself with his prospective new master, he promises him Miranda, who as we have seen is the object of his own lust. He says:

...She will become thy bed, I warrant,
And bring thee forth brave brood.²⁹

But even if Caliban knew what to do with it, there is no possibility of his achieving the mastery of the Island. He is never allowed to threaten seriously the harmony of this enchanted realm. Far from establishing himself as servant of a "new master," an achievement which would still come short of the supremacy he longs for in his muddle-headed way, Caliban has not the remotest chance of succeeding in his plot to overthrow his old master, Prospero's magical power being what it is. For with Ariel invisibly at his elbow to confuse him, and with Prospero directing the proceedings from the background, it is no wonder that he and his fellow-conspirators end in a cess-pool

instead of in Prospero's cell as they had planned. So Ariel gleefully describes their discomfiture to his master:

...At last I left them
I' the' filthy mantled pool beyond your cell,
There dancing up to th' chins, that the foul lake
O'erstunk their feet.³⁰

Caliban, then, is never really a serious threat to the order of the Island; he is not to be taken seriously as a villain.

Yet he is a villain by nature and by instinct, even if a thoroughly frustrated one. His villainy is rooted in his instinctive individualism. That is to say, he knows no loyalty, except an enforced one, to anything outside himself, and this trait, with him as with all Shakespeare's self-seeking individuals, is uncompromisingly associated with villainy. This lack of loyalty in Caliban is evidenced first by Prospero's initial account, the truth of which there is no reason to doubt, of Caliban's clumsy attempt to exploit his mentor's early kindness to him for his own advantage. Prospero says to him:

...I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other....I endow'd thy purposes
With words to make them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
Could not abide to be with....³¹

His fundamental disloyalty is further evidenced by his eagerness to destroy Prospero and return anarchy to the Island.

Villainy thus accompanies Caliban's individualism, as it does in the case of all Shakespeare's thoroughgoing individualists. There are heard in him, indeed, overtones of every human sin, for Prospero early says of him without reservation that he is "capable of all ill."³² Everything that he touched, if he were free to carry out his wishes, would turn to evil, for he, being half-devil, is incapable of good.

And yet, being half-human, he has in him the villainy of mankind. The miracle of language turned to blasphemy in his mouth. He says to Prospero:

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse....³³

He would visit endless injuries on the only humans that he knows. For on his first entrance he says to Prospero and Miranda:

As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen
Drop on you both! A south-west blow on ye
And blister you all o'er!³⁴

To his fellow-conspirators he says of Prospero:

...thou mayst brain him,
Having first seiz'd his books, or with a log
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his wezand with thy knife...³⁵

Tillyard says of his conduct here: "...Caliban's conspiracy typifies all the evil of the world which has so perplexed (Prospero)."³⁶ He is lecherous, as has been seen. He is greedy for riches and hungry for power. He comprehends in his person all the villainous intentions of all Shakespeare's earlier individualists.

Yet unlike them he can accomplish none of his intentions. His malice, while real, is easily thwarted. Not only is Caliban self-confessedly "a sot,"³⁷ but an ideal order prevails on the Island, as we have seen, which Caliban is powerless to disturb. In this order he has his servile place. It is as though Shakespeare were recognizing in him the existence of the completely unregenerate human being, who is both man and devil, for whom there is no hope of redemption, but who cannot help being what he is. A note of pity for Caliban is even permitted to enter, and he is allowed to speak some of the most

memorable lines of the entire play, when he tells of his dream of delight in the familiar lines:

...The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.³⁸

But for the most part he is an object of scorn and not of pity. He is, like Falstaff, a comic figure, but unlike Falstaff he lacks the wit to make us laugh with him; we only laugh at him. His helpless floundering as he strives to effect his villainy is mirth-provoking and not awe-inspiring, for it is evident from the beginning that his efforts will fail.

And because his evil-doing is confined to his intentions, Caliban is not condemned in the end. He is, however, returned to the servitude which is his proper place, with a promise of forgiveness on condition of continuing good behavior. For Prospero says to him:

...Go, sirrah, to my cell;
Take with you your companions. As you look
To have my pardon, trim it handsomely.³⁹

Caliban's demi-humanity speaks out in his final lines. He comes, like Edmund, to a complete self-realization and an acknowledgment that grace (he uses the word) is to be found in striving after what Prospero stands for. He says in answer to Prospero's final dismissal of him:

Ay, that I will! And I'll be wise hereafter
And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
Was I to take this drunkard for a god
And worship this dull fool!⁴⁰

The question of whether Caliban, being a "born devil"⁴¹ can or will find "grace" is not answered, it being in the undisclosed future. The significant thing is that within the play his individualism

has clearly been held up to mockery, but has never been allowed the smallest measure of success.

Now if in writing The Tempest Shakespeare was as mindful of the actual human situation as he must have been when he wrote King Lear, then it seems clear that Caliban re-inforces the judgment on unregulated individualism that we have seen passed on earlier individualists. That there is a definite morality implicit in this play and consistent with that of the previous plays is amply evidenced by the utterances of the completely "good" characters, Prospero and Gonzalo, and the humbling, already referred to, of the erring three, Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio. In this picture Caliban appears as a specimen of diabolic humanity, and as such he is entirely self-seeking and therefore contemptuous of all moral duty.

This of course is in the background. Primarily, as was pointed out at the beginning, Caliban is Caliban, a comic and preposterous villain who arouses no fear because he carries no real menace, a moon-calf, a demi-devil illegally and absurdly begotten by a spirit of the lower world upon an evil mortal woman. Dryden said almost all that can be said about Caliban as a character eminently and daringly suited to his part, when he declared that in conceiving him Shakespeare

seems to have created a person who was not in Nature, a boldness which, at first sight, would appear intolerable; for he makes him a species of himself, begotten by an incubus on a witch;...therefore, as from the distinct apprehensions of a horse and of a man, imagination has formed a centaur; so, from those of an incubus and a sorceress, Shakespeare has produced his monster.... the poet has most judiciously furnished him with a person, a language, and a character, which will suit him, both by his father's and his mother's side: he has all the discontents and malice of a witch, and of a devil,

besides a convenient proportion of the deadly sins; gluttony, sloth, and lust, are manifest; the dejectedness of a slave is likewise given him, and the ignorance of one bred up in a desert island. His person is monstrous, and he is the product of unnatural lust; and his language is as hobgoblin as his person; in all things he is distinguished from other mortals.⁴²

Caliban is all this in the flesh, and perhaps we need to look for no deeper meaning to him. But human individualism is in his background, and all its overtones are there. Like Iago, he would follow but himself; unlike Iago, he is very human in that he knows exactly what profit he would make by his self-seeking. Caliban has entirely human longings. He would have riches, power, and all forms of sensual gratification; he would enthrone Chaos to achieve his desire, for he cares nothing about the happiness or well-being of others. And this is precisely the kind of individualism with which we have been concerned.

In Caliban such individualism is reduced to a monstrous parody of what it was in the others, a brutal demi-deviltry entirely outside and beneath the human scale. In him it is rendered impotent and ridiculous. And, Shakespeare seems to be saying here, that is where it ought to be in a suitably ordered society. In Caliban's own deformed person individualism then would appear to be placed in what Shakespeare saw as its proper perspective.

NOTES ON CHAPTER VIII

1. The Tempest, V, i, 272.
2. Tillyard, speaking of the relation of this play to Shakespeare's earlier work, sees The Tempest as completing the "tragic pattern" of destruction and regeneration begun by the great tragedies. As such, it is organically related to what has gone before, he holds. "Thus, however much else The Tempest means,...it is also the necessary epilogue to an already apprehended series of tragic masterpieces." E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's Last Plays, p. 85.
3. E. E. Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Writers, p. 281.
4. Dover Wilson goes so far as to read a Christian comment on life into The Tempest. He says: "Is The Tempest a Christian play? It is surely a profoundly religious poem, and of a Christ-like spirit in its infinite tenderness, its all-embracing sense of pity, its conclusion of joyful atonement and forgiveness, so general that even Caliban begins to talk of 'grace'." J. Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare, p. 144.
5. E. E. Stoll, op. cit., p. 297.
6. Ibid., p. 314.
7. The Tempest, III, i, 47.
8. Ibid., IV, i, 10.
9. Ibid., V, i, 26-8.
10. George Lyman Kittredge, ed. The Tempest, p. xviii.
11. J. Dover Wilson, op. cit., p. 17.
12. The Tempest, V, i, 28.
13. Ibid., V, i, 15-6.
14. Ibid., I, i, 69-70.
15. Ibid., III, iii, 53-6.
16. Ibid., III, iii, 60-1.
17. Ibid., III, iii, 69-75.
18. Ibid., III, iii, 104-6.
19. Ibid., IV, i, 148-58.
20. Ibid., V, i, 311.

21. Ibid., I, ii, 319.
22. Ibid., V, i, 272. See Note 1 above.
23. Ibid., II, ii, 68.
24. Ibid., I, ii, 346-51.
25. Ibid., I, ii, 341-2.
26. Ibid., III, ii, 48.
27. Ibid., III, ii, 57.
28. Ibid., II, ii, 188-9.
29. Ibid., III, ii, 112-3.
30. Ibid., IV, i, 181-4.
31. Ibid., I, ii, 353-60.
32. Ibid., I, ii, 353.
33. Ibid., I, ii, 363-4.
34. Ibid., I, ii, 321-4.
35. Ibid., III, ii, 96-9.
36. E. M. W. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 54.
37. The Tempest, III, ii, 101.
38. Ibid., III, ii, 144-52.
39. Ibid., V, i, 291-3.
40. Ibid., V, i, 294-7.
41. Ibid., IV, i, 188.
42. W. P. Ker, ed. Essays of John Dryden, Vol. 1, "Preface to Troilus and Cressida, Containing the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy," pp. 219-20.

CONCLUSION

The choice of individualists studied has of necessity been rather arbitrary. For, as was suggested in the Introduction to this study, Shakespeare's work does not readily yield itself to over-orderly classification. If individualism is seen as defiance of the order imposed by God upon Nature, society, and the soul, then there are many more individualists in his plays than those we have studied. Macbeth, for example, in murdering his rightful king and usurping the throne, is following an individualistic course of action, a course which is manifestly evil. He invites comparison with Richard of Gloucester, being no less himself alone than Richard was, in his denial of all traditional obligations. But Macbeth's individualism develops, and his character changes, as the play proceeds. At the beginning he is "the noble Macbeth"¹ who has just fought a glorious battle on the king's behalf. He is not an individualist when we first meet him then, and for this reason he has not been included in our list.

Again, Coriolanus, in his consistent unconcern both for the welfare of the citizenry and of the state itself, could perhaps be seen as an example of the individualist going his own heedless way, to the complete disregard of the welfare of society. Coriolanus' brand of individualism appears to consist of an overweening vanity, the other side of which is his vast contempt for people, a contempt which completely over-rides his concern for political order. His only loyalty is to himself and to his family. Palmer says:

Shakespeare, according to Marcius the palm for valour, is careful to indicate that his hero's bravery is inspired by family feeling and love of fame rather than any desire to serve the commonwealth.²

But the treatment of Coriolanus is not entirely clear. Thinking chiefly of his own personal dignity, he also thinks of his family duty, and, in a queer perverted way, perhaps of his country too, although he betrays it to satisfy his arrogant vanity. His contempt for established order seems mingled with respect for it as well, so he too has been omitted.

Yet if the choice has not been all-inclusive, it has been wide enough to prove that Shakespeare clearly and consistently condemns individualistic behavior in human affairs. From beginning to end the verdict has been the same. What Brooke calls "the essential unity of Shakespeare's attitude to life"³ has been demonstrated in his unchanging moral judgment on the individualist, just as it also is demonstrated by his unvarying respect for traditional values. The judgment on all the individualists is basically the same. They are consistently condemned.

That the individualist is thus condemned is evident from the entire treatment of him--from his position in relation to others, from the effect he has on them, from what he says, from what happens to him at the end. It is evident, too, from the fact that there is never a good individualist. When a man becomes a law unto himself, his ends are either entirely selfish, as in the case of Richard of Gloucester, Falstaff, Iago and Edmund, or at the very least they are hopelessly mistaken, as in the case of Hotspur. Virtue is to be found in conformity to the established order; evil chaos attends the defiance of order. Obeying one's own law, then, is the opposite of virtue. Iago makes this clear when he says to Roderigo:

Virtue? a fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus
or thus.⁴

And exactly what these individualists are in themselves has been shown. The only two admirable characters, Faulconbridge and Kent, were not really individualists at all, but on the contrary were paragons of loyalty to the established order. By his evident approval of them for their loyalty, Shakespeare emphasizes his disapproval of the real individualist.

Shakespeare, then, consistently condemns the thorough-going individualist and takes pains to assure us that his course of individualism is an evil one. One is tempted to conclude further that individualism is increasingly equated with evil, and that the lines are ever more sharply drawn. In King John, for example, Faulconbridge bears the stigma of bastardy but is an entirely praiseworthy character; later, with Edmund, symbol and reality are blended to make a total villain of Gloucester's bastard son. Falstaff, who is both witty in himself and the "cause of wit in other men," is so sympathetic that his rejection as a villain is accepted only with a pang. It is proof, however, of the consistency of Shakespeare's attitude to the individualist that Falstaff too is condemned. But at the end the comic individualist has become a Caliban, at whom we laugh but on whom we waste little sympathy.

And if individualism is increasingly repudiated, there seems also to be a deepening awareness of its destructiveness. In Shakespeare's picture of it, it is seen as bringing chaos to all areas of life. The discord that follows a failure to observe "degree, priority, and place" is seen, in the case of Edmund for example, to extend to the family relationship, to the state, to the very heavens. When individualism triumphs, justice itself loses its meaning in the resultant disorder, just as Ulysses' speech suggested it would.

But in the Shakespearean morality, individualism does not triumph finally. At the end it is degraded so that the individualist is not allowed to enjoy even a moment of glory. Caliban, the last of them, is never allowed his "moral holiday," as Richard of Gloucester was. Shakespeare seems to be saying that in an ideal order such as that of the Enchanted Island individualism can only be tolerated as long as it keeps its subordinate place.

Yet it is tolerated, and even accepted with enthusiasm. Shakespeare recognizes the existence of the individualist, and equates him with villainy, with Chaos in the soul and in the body politic, with the opposite of the harmony and order that he pictures as ideal. And so he condemns him. Yet at the same time he delights in him, for he is a part of life. The conflict between order and disorder which he helps to bring about is part of the drama of life, which it is the mirror's business to reflect. In other words, with Shakespeare the moral judgment is always completely blended with the picture he presents. In this case, condemnation of the individualist does not imply rejection of him. All life was Shakespeare's province; in a sense, he seems to have been above its conflicts.

In this regard he is a complete contrast to Milton, and in his view of human nature a good deal more realistic. For Milton's ideal for man was a combination of autonomy and near-perfection, and there arose of course a profound conflict between this ideal individualism and the rude reality that he thought he saw, of order destroyed by a self-seeking man. This conflict led him to reject altogether the real world rather than admit that individualism in itself was evil. In comparison Shakespeare, accepting the individualist but seeing his

individualism as evil, has a harmony in his view of man that has in it no trace of self-delusion.

NOTES ON CONCLUSION

1. Macbeth, I, ii, 67.
2. John Palmer, Political Characters of Shakespeare, pp. 257-8.
3. Tucker Brooke, Essays on Shakespeare and Other Elizabethans, p. 58.
4. Othello, I, iii, 322-3.

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