

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
WOMAN AS DRAMATIC MECHANISM
IN SHAKESPEARE'S EARLY WORK:
A STUDY OF THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA,
LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST, AND RICHARD III

by

JUDITH E. KEARNS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the function of the female characters in three of Shakespeare's early plays - The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, and Richard III. It will focus particularly on the way in which Shakespeare presents a critique of the conventional stereotype of woman. Because of the limitations of the role into which their society casts them, the female characters of these three plays assume the role of understanders and interpreters of action and character, and thus exert control over the response of the audience. They become significant structural mechanisms in each of these plays - a function we may term "dramatic" in the largest sense of the word.

The introductory chapter will deal with the general trends in critical approaches to Shakespeare's female characters. The assumption of traditional critics has been that the women are of peripheral interest because of their marginal involvement in the working-out of the plot, or at best worthy of examination as moral exemplars only. Modern feminist critics have tended to maintain the interest of their nineteenth-century predecessors in the female characters as personalities by shifting their focus from traditional moral virtues to such values as assertiveness, but in dealing with the functions of the female characters, they draw conclusions largely unwarranted by the text. The apparent contradiction between the female characters' severely limited sphere of action and their effect on the audience,

which suggests a power greater than that which has been demonstrated within the world of the play, however, is not insoluble. The role of the women in these early plays is that of the passive stereotype, but Shakespeare is able to subject the stereotype to scrutiny and to make it serve a dramatic purpose.

The following chapters (II, III, IV) will examine the relationship between the female characters' role limitations and their dramatic function, between their restricted powers to act and their development of a perceptive and forcefully expressed analysis of the action and the other characters, in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, and Richard III. In each of these three early plays, the women present by what they do or what they say a standard according to which the audience must measure the male protagonists, while their more distanced perspective on the action unfolding within the world of the play enlarges the audience's understanding and shapes its perception of the design of the play. The conclusion will consider the development, over the course of these three plays, of Shakespeare's presentation of the women's capacity for a more encompassing, and frequently more realistic, vision of their society.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Critics have traditionally ignored the role of the female characters in Shakespeare's plays because of the women's inability to affect the development of the action, as if action were the whole of the dramatic presentation. Evidence of the general failure to deal adequately with this large group of characters can be found not only in the scarcity of articles and full-length studies devoted to an examination of Shakespeare's female characters, or in the few lines usually accorded them in any consideration of a particular play, but as well in the unsatisfactory conclusions frequently reached by those critics who - ostensibly at least - open the topic for discussion. Frank Harris, for example, in The Women in Shakespeare (1911), criticizes as inadequate "the talkative princess and her maidens in Love's Labour's Lost", and maintains that "the innumerable duchesses and great ladies of the early historical plays are all just as wooden, mere marionettes".¹ Harris is clearly concerned with the presentation of life-like characters in these plays - a concern which is illuminated by his fundamental assumption that the stages of Shakespeare's depiction of women are controlled by the playwright's personal experiences - and his biographical approach to the study of the female characters is, furthermore, coloured by his preconceptions about the nature of women, which effectively close his eyes to the significance and vitality of

the Princess and her ladies, or of the two queens in Richard III.

The critical errors of Harris's study are unfortunately repeated in later works; on the one hand, critics are misled by their own views of women's role in society - where they consider it a subject worthy of study at all - and on the other, they tend to associate Shakespeare's treatment of women on stage with a more general attitude towards women, towards love, or towards sexual relationships.² The effect of popular stereotypes on critical vision can be discerned as late as Sargent's discussion of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, despite the fact that his analysis of Shakespeare's sources is in general both open-minded and perceptive. He is particularly interested in the influence of the story of Felix and Felismena, in the Diana Enamorada of Montemayor, which is "told by the injured woman herself, with a thoroughly feminine point of view",³ and goes on to suggest that

In Montemayor, Shakespeare found ample source material both for Julia's bold conduct and for the development of her inner responses as a heroine of a romantic drama. In fact, it is possible that one of the factors which commended this tale to Shakespeare was its relatively rich portrayal of the psychological states of the heroine.⁴

Nevertheless, Sargent defines the thoroughly feminine point of view, which he assumes operates as a liberating force for the dramatist, in a particular and restrictive way, tending to measure the actions of the women against his own standards of feminine behaviour, rather than to examine their function in the play. Thus, in his consideration of the play's conclusion, he judges that "The silence of Silvia at this point is untrue to feminine behaviour, and a major dramatic lapse",⁵

and describes the final actions in this way:

At this point, Valentine and Silvia have played their parts. Now again Proteus has a decision to make. But immediately Shakespeare brings in the warmth of the feminine touch. Julia, bold but pathetic, lacking the sterner stuff and rigid confidence of Valentine and Silvia, by nature or design, swoons at the offer of Silvia to Proteus.⁶

One may counter Sargent's conclusions about Silvia's silence with Berry's assertion that Shakespeare here demonstrates his infallibly good taste, by distancing the women from the young men's "Big Production" of remorse and forgiveness.⁷ Julia's faint, like Silvia's silence, is indeed an emblem of women's powerlessness in the world of The Two Gentlemen, but her earlier activity in the play makes an important comment on the action of both young men, and should not be dismissed in favour of what the critic feels is more typically feminine behaviour.

A more encouraging note can be found earlier in Mackenzie's The Women in Shakespeare's Plays (1924), which opens with a clear-sighted analysis of the shortcomings of previous studies of Shakespeare's female characters:

in the nineteenth century as in the eighteenth, the opinions of women upon themselves were derived in the main not from their own direct observation of the subject, but from the attitude towards it of the opposite and more articulate sex...whether colouring their minds by the insidious influence of suggestion or the more overt but more turbid one of contra-suggestion.⁸

Mackenzie's examination of the Shakespearean canon is unquestionably more enlightened. Nevertheless, her premise, that pre-Puritan

Renaissance women could be found sharing life fully and influencing it profoundly, although viewing it from another angle than the masculine perspective more commonly reflected in literature, introduces a central confusion between women's expression of an alternate vision and their power to influence the course of events. Her general evaluation of the significance of the female characters in the working-out of Shakespeare's plays reflects this confusion:

there are few plays of his where the women are not conspicuous in the determining of the solution, whether happy or unfortunate: none, save Richard II, in which their relation to the general action is not made of considerable importance. It is in these points, as a rule, that he is interested, rather than in the characters of the women so to speak in themselves, for generally he is content to draw them in a somewhat more external fashion than his men...he understood his subject sufficiently to be aware of his own limitations, and to be cautious.⁹

The relation of the female characters to the action is important, but their perspective on it is not automatically to be equated with a role in determining the solution.

Mackenzie's focus on the female characters, furthermore, is diffused by the rationale behind it, that such an examination is important because relations between the sexes are interesting, complex, and universal, and by the extensive scope of her intended study:

the literary treatment of the women characters in Shakespeare's work, and the growth and change of his artistic attitude towards them and towards their specific share in the actions and endurances of life - of human life that is both men's and women's.¹⁰

Once again, the examination of the actions and dramatic function of Shakespeare's female characters is neglected for the establishment of a vaguely-defined attitude on the part of the dramatist and for a study of the effects of women on the male characters. Mackenzie maintains, for example, that The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Love's Labour's Lost

are courtly comedy, and the feminine element in them is what makes the play; the feminine element, not the women, for they are in the main no more than motivation.¹¹

It is not surprising, then, that she under-rates the importance of the female characters in the action of both plays, ignoring the ironic commentary which their speeches and participation make on the emotions and reactions of the men. As well, such comments as that not one of the women in Richard III "has much personality as a woman",¹² and her preference for the sprightly, demurely mischievous but honourable Silvia over Julia, "the incarnation of romantic devotion",¹³ suggest that despite her initial caution Mackenzie has fallen prey to the traditional temptation to judge women as personalities or role models, secondary in importance to the male characters they inspire to action.

This bias is produced in part by the confusion between "personality" and "character" in the criticism of drama. Michael Black discusses this problem, in an article entitled "Character in Shakespeare" (1974), in his comment on the type of criticism prevalent early in the twentieth century:

"Character" turned out to be fixed: a stew of qualities, not a growing or degenerating organism; a set of remarks, not an individual voice.¹⁴

He goes on to discuss the effects of critics like Leavis and Knight on the re-introduction of the idea of organic form and the emergence of the notion that plot and character exist only as a balance of response on the part of the reader or spectator. The unfortunate result, as he sees it, is that distinctions between the elements of drama begin to fade in the attempt to find an overall "meaning", and that the characters tend to "stand for" something other than what they are, and what they are experienced as being by the audience of any particular play. Black nevertheless feels that these are not unreal notions, and that they need only to be sharpened and made serviceable - a process which seems now to have been encouraged by recent critical developments, in the examination of Shakespeare's language and in the study of theatrical productions of his work.

Studies of the various productions of Shakespearean plays have enriched many modern critics' understanding and consciousness of dramatic techniques, as distinct from literary devices, and have been indirectly responsible for some interesting, though generally incidental, lights cast on the functions of Shakespeare's female characters. Champion's notion of "comic pointers", which forms an important element of his study in The Evolution of Shakespeare's Comedy: A Study in Dramatic Perspective (1970), but which is weakest in its failure to acknowledge that the female characters function as significant forces in the plays, is picked up and expanded by Bilton, in Commentary and Control in Shakespeare's Plays (1974), an examination which includes the histories and the tragedies as well as the comedies. His focus in this study is on

one aspect of Shakespeare's shaping of audience response: his use of characters who seem to be intermediaries, in that they comment on the action or even control it.¹⁵

The two aspects of this role can of course be distinguished from each other, as they are in the case of the female characters, and Bilton is sensitive to the unique relationship with the audience which the women are able to develop because of their lack of concrete power within the worlds of the various plays. In Richard III, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, and Love's Labour's Lost, they are seen as commenting on the actions of the major male characters, controlling audience response to the experience of the plays, and controlling the development of the play in a way which is distinct from the power the men exert in their actions, but often more effective from the spectator's perspective. The reader interested in the function of Shakespeare's female characters can only wish that Bilton's study were more intensive, for the wide scope of his study means that the comments on individual characters are relatively brief, and that no attempt can be made to determine why particular groups of characters are able to operate dramatically as controllers and commentators.

With the current increase in feminist criticism, it is inevitable that the female characters of Shakespeare's plays should become a new focus of critical study. Unfortunately, it is perhaps no less inevitable that some of the work produced - ostensibly from an examination of these characters - has been misguided by the attempt to make of Shakespeare a dramatist ahead of his time in his attitude towards women, one of the first on the bandwagon of liberation, so to

speak. Barbara Bellow Watson charges that feminist critics have tended to ignore the text;¹⁶ in Shakespeare studies this has led to a neglect of the dramatic operation of the female characters within the play, and to an isolation of their characteristics as evidence of a broad-minded understanding of women's capacities on the part of the dramatist.

These failures of critical method, ironically, link some modern feminist views of women in Shakespeare to the popular nineteenth-century character sketches of "Shakespeare's heroines"; both approaches are weakened by the impossible attempt to serve two masters, formal criticism on the one hand and ideology or morality on the other. It is nothing new, then, to encounter difficulties in dealing with Shakespeare's female characters, even when individual critics have been willing to give them more than the perfunctory glance usually offered by traditional male critics, who, as Carole McKewin points out in a recent review of feminist criticism and the needs it serves, have too often ignored the complexity of the female characters in favour of simplistic or superficial judgments.¹⁷

If the assumption made by traditional critics, then, is that Shakespeare's female characters are of peripheral interest, because of their marginal involvement in the working-out of the plot, or at best worthy of study as moral exempla only, feminist critics have tended to maintain the interest of their nineteenth-century predecessors in the characters as personalities, by shifting their focus from moral virtues to such modern values as assertiveness; in dealing with the function of the female characters in the plays, they draw conclusions largely unwarranted by the women's admittedly restricted roles. Clara Claiborne

Park, for example, who recognizes that "whoever and wherever they are, the sphere of action ...[Shakespeare]... allows his women is severely limited",¹⁸ is yet provoked by her desire to find acceptable role models for women in the classics to maintain that

What catches his imagination...is a young woman...who, by her energy, wit, and readiness to give as good as she gets, successfully demonstrates her ability to control events in the world around her, not excluding the world of men.¹⁹

The difficulty thus seems to arise from the conflict between the female characters' severely limited sphere of action and their effect on the audience, which suggests a power greater than that which has been demonstrated within the world of the play itself. Over-compensation for the neglect and bias of the past is a very real danger, and it is the concern for political statement about the nature and role of women which mars the recent full-length study of Shakespeare's female characters by Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (1975). Furthermore, Dusinberre, in her attempt to cover social history and dramatic concerns from the Elizabethan to the Restoration eras, fails to come to terms with the individual plays and the particular female characters. As Anne Barton, in her review of the work in the Times Literary Supplement, points out:

Much of the book reads like a random anthology of speeches by and about women in Elizabethan drama with little concern for their precise sense and function.

...[T]he truth is that attitudes towards women in the plays of the public theatres are simply not monolithic and feminist in the way this book pretends.²⁰

Shakespeare and the Nature of Women is perhaps most valuable in the issues it raises; although Dunsinberry's "interpretation of social history totters on overoptimistic assumptions",²¹ her attempt to place Shakespearean drama in its historical background is a provocative one:

it is a cliché to say that the Renaissance was a period of intense questioning of many orthodoxies - from Copernicus, to Luther, to Machiavelli. It would have been strange if attitudes to women has escaped, especially as the way societies think about and treat women is often a means of measuring how civilized they are.²²

An attempt to determine something about women's position in Shakespeare's world seems worthwhile, for his dramatic treatment of women must have grown from the influence of conventional stereotypes and realities on a mind clearly interested in other areas in the playing off of appearance, illusion, and convention against the reality of existence and, particularly in the comedies, of social relationships. McKewin comments that

Dunsinberry develops an important trend in ...[feminist]...criticism when she insists that Renaissance drama questions the illusions surrounding women's nature. The use of stereotypes in the dramatic realization of feminine character - the images of the woman in the man's mind which may comically or tragically jar with the reality - may be the most fertile ground of inquiry which feminist critics are cultivating²³,

and she further quotes from a seminar presented by Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz to the effect that:

The feminists show us that Shakespeare frequently used society's stereotyped

attitudes towards women to emphasize dramatic conflict at the same time that the action of the play denies the truth of the stereotype.²⁴

Lenz's point is relevant to the relationship between the two main groups of characters in The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Love's Labour's Lost, while Richard III's comments on what he believes to be the typically feminine behaviour of Anne and Elizabeth provide an incidental light on his character and the transition of his fortunes. While the expression of conventional attitudes, contradicted by the personalities of the female characters, may be used to emphasize dramatic conflict, these three plays rather subject the stereotype to scrutiny than deny its truth. The power of the conventional stereotype is, in fact, never denied - each group of women is restricted in its capacity for action - but it is illuminated by the dramatic function it is made to serve.

Dusinberre's hypothesis, that the Renaissance saw the questioning of woman's nature and role as of many other issues, would seem to be a sound one in the light of the political, educational, and economic developments documented in the works of Stenton, Pearson, and Wright.²⁵ Stenton concludes her discussion of the English woman in the sixteenth century with the observation that women were "still in subjection, both in law and theory, but in fact they...[were]...confounding those who would keep them there."²⁶ The controversy which raged over such issues as a woman's place in the family and society, her virtue, and the state and existence of her soul reflects this situation,²⁷ but also suggests, although Dusinberre neglects this possibility, that a questioning of conventional assumptions and stereotypes does not

necessarily mean their overturning, and that a close examination of the literature of the period is essential to measure the effect of this controversy. Beside the fact that Elizabeth herself invited comparison to her father, Henry VIII,²⁸ for example, must be set the observation that the rhetoric of praise celebrates the conventional virtues of beauty and chastity: Spenser's Gloriana is called a "Goddesse heavenly bright, / Mirror of grace and majestie divine, / Great Ladie of the greatest Isle".²⁹

The Renaissance controversy about the nature of women appears as the culmination of the dominant attitudes towards women held in the Middle Ages, which Hanning defines in his article on Chaucer's treatment of the roles women play:

In broadest terms, the high medieval image of women (a theoretical construct often much qualified by pragmatic or customary considerations in a given time or place) yoked together two apparently irreconcilable contraries. On the one hand, woman is the emblem of all man's striving for self-perfection and self-fulfillment - for his "joye and solas", in the words of Geoffrey Chaucer. On the other hand, she is man's temptress, the cause of his loss of self-control, freedom, and happiness.³⁰

He goes on to discuss this dichotomy in terms of the orthodox religious responses to the figures of Eve and the Virgin Mary, and to conclude that:

Theological reconciliation aside, however, the existence of equally strong impulses to idealize (Ave) and to stigmatize (Eva) woman remains a defining characteristic of medieval culture. Both impulses, of course, effectively dehumanize their object, and they suggest that a basic

inability to confront woman as person and individual was endemic to that culture.³¹

Hanning's conclusion about these apparently contradictory traditions and the common source from which they spring is an important one, and it is of course relevant as well to literature of periods other than the Middle Ages.

These two trends in medieval attitudes are clearly reflected and developed in Renaissance popular literature - in the sonnets which grow from the courtly love tradition, on the one hand, and, on the other, in the misogynist pamphlets which drew a resounding response from defenders of noble womanhood and from women themselves. Kelso comments that

it took the middle ages to produce the phenomenon called the war of the sexes, in which, at its height in the sixteenth century, recognized traducers and champions charged and countercharged, often changing sides and even fighting on both sides at once.³²

Kahin confirms this evaluation. Her article on two of the figures participating in the controversy - Jane Anger and John Lyly - begins with the observation that:

Elizabeth's England, like France of the fifteenth century, was the stage for a heated literary debate. In this paper quarrel some of the protagonists spattered the female sex with scurrilous invectives, while others showered them with extravagant praise. Occasionally men like John Lyly, with charming adaptability, wrote on both sides of the question.³³

Her conclusion probes the rationale behind Lyly's apparent change in

opinion concerning the nature of women:

In the two years between the first printing of the defamatory Cooling Card and the publication of Euphues and His England in 1580, Lyly had learned that a politic writer living in Elizabeth's England wrote in favour of her sex, not against it. Indeed no one was quicker than he to sense the growing importance of the ladies on whose toes he had so heedlessly trod, to realize that women as rulers, readers, patronesses, and moulders of public opinion were figures to be seriously considered and gently handled.³⁴

Two things are significant in this judgment on Lyly's reasons for changing sides in the controversy; first, that women's importance in his society has increased to the point at which a writer could no longer take up the battle for dispraise or misogyny lightly, and secondly, although Kahin does not draw this conclusion, that the "extravagant praise" which countered the attack on women was as incapable of dealing with the real issue of women's nature and roles in society as were the "scurrilous invectives" against the sex. An individual woman is neither Eve nor Mary, to use Hanning's categories, although the persistence of such figures as the shrew, the garrulous old woman, and the beautiful and virtuous maiden in all forms of literature perpetuated the belief that the whole sex could be fitted into a relatively small number of convenient categories.

Ruth Kelso's examination of Renaissance documents, in order to determine the ideal towards which a woman was expected to work, reveals this tendency in those who defend women against their attackers. The moral ideal for a woman, she concludes, is essentially Christian, and focuses on the suppression and negation of self in chastity, humility,

piety, and patience in suffering; the moral ideal for a man is essentially pagan, and centres around self-expansion and the realization of all his powers. The Faerie Queene of course, illustrates Kelso's hypothesis; its over-all emphasis is on magnificence, or magnanimity, represented in the person of King Arthur, and directed towards the glory presented in Elizabeth, or Gloriana. Of the six books, only the third, dealing with the private and Christian virtue of chastity, centres around a heroine, and the virtues which the heroes of the other books present are predominantly public, according to Spenser's general aim "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline."³⁵

The two attitudes towards women which the Renaissance inherited from the Middle Ages can as well be found in Shakespeare's plays, but a striking feature of The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Love's Labour's Lost is that the expression of these conventional sentiments is put into the mouths of characters already suspect for their over-eager and unquestioning acceptance of artificial roles and codes of conduct. In both of these early comedies, the major male characters regard women at various times as objects of veneration - to be placed on a pedestal and thence disregarded - and as sexual objects or as temptresses. The attitude of the men in these plays to their female counterparts thus provides an index to their characters, as indeed Richard III's evaluation of Queen Elizabeth as a "Relenting fool and shallow, changing woman" and his use of the two women he courts as political tools reveal the narrow perspective which will contribute to his downfall. One of the important functions of the women in Shakespeare's early plays,

then, is to provoke revelatory comments by the major male characters, and to inspire actions and emotions which originate, or further, the development of the drama.

The women themselves, of course, present a disturbing refutation of the feminine stereotype. Their general good sense and encompassing vision of the action is particularly marked in contrast to the short-sightedness and self-absorption of the men in all three of these early plays. In accepting the restrictions which his society imposes upon women, Shakespeare is free to recognize and make dramatic use of the special talents developed by a group limited in its power to act. Kelso, citing a 1560 document of Gerolamo Capello on prudence as a virtue of women, presents the rationale behind his argument as a realization of these special skills:

Dispute over the prudence of women arises, said Capello, only if the common opinion is accepted that prudence consists wholly in knowing how to find a plan in some emergency, men being credited with natural ability to act more quickly than women; but not to act so wisely, he thought, since men lack the subtlety that belongs to women's colder, less active, but more penetrating, nature.³⁶

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, and Richard III, the source of the female characters' less active "nature" is clearly to be found in the restrictions which their society places on their ability to act, and against which women like Queen Margaret and Queen Elizabeth so violently chafe.

These restrictions are emphasized in each of the plays. Julia and Silvia are for the most part passive, free only to accept or

reject their suitors, who in contrast have been able to make a choice about their pursuits; the female characters in Richard III are at the mercy of the male characters who wield political power. The circumstances of Love's Labour's Lost epitomize the women's restrictions, for the Princess and her ladies are effectively shut out of Navarre's court. Consequently, the female characters have for the most part no effect on the plot of the plays - in The Two Gentlemen, the interplay between the male and female characters accomplishes nothing, and in the other early dramas, only at the conclusion are the women able to influence events in the world of the play.

The role of the women in these early plays, therefore, is the passive stereotype. Despite this acceptance of the power of conventional roles, however, Shakespeare neither hails the stereotype of womanhood as an ideal nor accepts it without question; the expression of preconceived notions about the nature of women by the male characters is in fact contradicted directly by the personalities and perception of the women in the play, and thus becomes a humorous comment on the men's attitudes and limited perspective. What Shakespeare does in these three early plays is to subject the stereotype to scrutiny; the stereotype is made to serve a dramatic purpose, and is thereby illuminated.

The female characters of Shakespeare's plays are important neither because they are passively "good", as the Victorians would understand them, nor because they are aggressively self-assertive, as modern feminists would have them, but because from the role they normally play in society as Shakespeare (and we) know it they provide a useful perspective on that society. Julia's comments on the extra consider-

ation which her limitations necessitate explicitly associate women's roles as passive spectators with their accurate observation of the action and the other characters, which leads in turn to the generally more encompassing vision of the female characters in Shakespeare's plays. While this relationship is primarily assumed in Love's Labour's Lost, in which the Princess and her ladies react to their exclusion from the men's sphere, in Richard III the female characters self-consciously comment on the motivation and effectiveness of their vocal opposition to the protagonist, and thus make clear the relationship between their restricted powers to act and the development of a perceptive and forcefully expressed analysis of the action. Unable to become immediately involved in the action, the women gain a wider perspective on the play's development, and they thus assume the role of understander and interpreter of character and action. In each of these three early plays, they present by what they do or what they say a standard according to which the audience must measure the protagonists, while their distanced and perceptive vision of the action unfolding within the world of the play is effective in shaping the audience's perception of the design of the play; the control which the female characters exert over the response of the audience is thus founded in Shakespeare's illumination of the conventional stereotype. Because they are limited in their powers to control plot, Shakespeare's female characters become significant structural mechanisms in these plays - a function we may term "dramatic" in the largest sense of the word, for they exert control over the response of the audience to the characters and events within the more limited world of the play.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

Much critical work has been devoted to considering the applicability of Renaissance codes of love and friendship to the issues of The Two Gentlemen of Verona; such speculations have been, in general, provoked by a desire to justify the awkwardness of the play's concluding scene, and particularly of Valentine's willingness to offer the woman he loves to a treacherous friend but newly repentant. The codes of friendship and love, while ideally compatible and mutually reinforcing, are thus seen as susceptible to conflicting claims, and Valentine's actions are explained in a variety of ways in order to prove that The Two Gentlemen concludes with a satisfying reconciliation.¹ Such a focus on the play usually follows the development of the two male protagonists, Valentine and Proteus, as a progression towards the perfection which is variously, and incompletely, defined throughout the course of the play. Nevertheless, it neglects the dramatic importance of two clusters of minor characters - the servants and the women - who have distinct but often comparable roles to play. The speeches and actions of these two groups, given the significance of their relationships to the protagonists, widen the audience's perspective on The Two Gentlemen, so that the larger issues of human conduct subsume the rival claims of love and friendship. The comments of these characters, and most particularly

the women, control the response of the audience to the actions and development of the protagonists, and qualify its judgment on the two men.

It may well be, as Quiller-Couch and Wilson maintain, in the introduction to their edition of the play, that

The Two Gentlemen would seem to be the earliest play in which Shakespeare turned from construction - that idol of artistic beginners - to weld character into his plot,²

and that Shakespeare is able to work most happily on those characters least tied to the exigencies of the plot. The main male characters are restricted by the requirements of the plot and the importance of their behaviour to its development, as well as by the roles which they themselves choose to play, but the minor characters of The Two Gentlemen - and the women - serve an invaluable function in commenting on the self-conscious and conventional conduct of Valentine and Proteus, the courtly lovers, and in assisting the audience to maintain the necessary ironic distance from the central characters. Bilton, in his analysis of Shakespeare's use of "comic pointers", discusses the way in which Julia's disguise provides her with a sense of distance from the action in which she is of course involved, and points out the effect of this distance on her dramatic function; Julia, he maintains,

is the first of Shakespeare's many women who disguise themselves as men. She is thus enabled to be on stage incognita, and establishes a private line of communication with the audience through frequent asides.³

Silvia, whose involvement in the events of The Two Gentlemen is

limited by the stereotype into which she is cast, is yet able to serve as a touchstone against which the audience may measure the men, through her dignity, intelligence, and fidelity. Thus, while the use of the servants in this play as "comic pointers" has been criticized because they are not fully integrated in the plot, and because even their peripheral involvement is largely absent in the second half of the play, the female characters of The Two Gentlemen are able to usurp their functions as commentators on the action and other characters. The women's significance as the objects of the men's desires and their powerlessness to affect the development of the action combine to create an effective dramatic mechanism, and it is through the speeches and behaviour of the female characters that the audience's perspective on the issues of The Two Gentlemen is widened and its responses to the male protagonists and the action of the play controlled.

Antonio speaks early in the play of the education which he hopes his son Proteus will receive along with Valentine at "the Emperor's court",⁴ and both young men themselves speak of the honour to be gained through travel and worldly experience. The range of activity for the two gentlemen is clearly much broader than the scope allowed the female characters, who are restricted to the role of adored mistress, but either man's very freedom to act operates against his considering seriously his role, identity, and behaviour. The men's characters are conveyed early in The Two Gentlemen, and little that happens as a result of their desires and motivations comes as a surprise - no change or "education" has taken place. The verbal swordplay which occupies their attention for much of the first scene is conventional in

Both Valentine and Proteus are clearly committed to role-playing, and the lists which Valentine and the servant Speed provide of the lover's common features serve to emphasize the external standards to which they are conforming; Proteus goes beyond the assumption of a role to the idea of change in the person behind the familiar appearance of the lover, and, as in his comment that "I amnot Love" (I.i.38), the idea of a disparity between roles and reality is introduced.

The question of identity is raised repeatedly in Proteus's later justifications of his infidelity, and in Valentine's reaction to being banished from the presence of his mistress. Clearly, to be in love, in the terms of this early romantic comedy, is to be unsure of one's identity beyond the facile acceptance of the behaviour and appearance traditionally associated with a lover. The men have a certain degree of freedom, both of choice and movement, within their roles, but the apparently greater liberty which they enjoy produces only an unthinking acceptance of conventional behaviour, and an absence of any consideration of the relationship between character, motivation, and role. The apparent lack of conflict produces a false security; suggestions of the problem which will arise from the men's failure to contemplate such issues as identity and motivation are contained in the few lines which Proteus addresses to himself in the first scene - lines concerned with the conflicting ambitions he and Valentine represent respectively, and indicative of a dichotomy within his character, in their description of the ill effects which falling in love has had on his worldly attributes and reputation:

Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphos'd me;
 Made me neglect my studies, lose my time,
 War with good counsel, set the world at naught;
 Made wit with musing weak, heart sick with thought.

(I.i.66-9)

This suggestion of an unresolved conflict underlying Proteus's assumption of the role of a lover is picked up in the final lines of Act I, in which his reluctance to undertake the journey his father commands is qualified by his acknowledgement that "my heart accords thereto" (I.iii.90). Parental opposition, in this case, is but a dramatization of the complications of Proteus's own conflicting desires, and it is thus appropriate that his own attempt to outwit Antonio has been responsible for the approaching separation from his mistress. Despite his assertions of devotion to Julia and to the role of a lover, then, Proteus reveals the essential instability of his character and motivations within the first act of The Two Gentlemen.

The audience is as well provided with a wider perspective on the male world of the play, through such figures as Antonio, Panthino, and the Duke, whose authority and values both young gentlemen accept; the values of their society indicate the direction in which Valentine and Proteus are heading in their unthinking acceptance of the choice of roles it provides for them. Panthino's initial inducement to Antonio to send his son abroad is the challenge presented by the opinion of the world - "Other men, of slender reputation, / Put forth their sons, to seek preferment out" (I.iii.6-7) - and particularly by Valentine's anticipated advancement in the Emperor's court. That Antonio is goaded by this appeal to his own sense of honour, and hence operates according to self-interest and worldly reputation, is evident in the announcement

of his plans to Proteus, and in the information that

What maintenance...[Valentine]...from his
 friends receives,
 Like exhibition thou shalt have from me.

(I.iii.66-9)

The emphasis which both men place on the appearance of honour and worth, for which they compete with other men, is picked up by the younger men in Valentine's attack on his rival, Thurio:

You have an exchequer of words, and I think no
 other treasure to give your followers; for it
 appears by their bare liveries that they live
 by your bare words.

(II.iv.39-42)

Similar concerns pervade the Duke's court, and Valentine is rejected as a "base intruder, overweening slave" (III.i.157), in favour of the man whom Valentine admits is "rich and honourable" (III.i.64), while Silvia is threatened by the loss of what the Duke considers his most worthy gift:

Then let her beauty be her wedding-dower;
 For me and my possessions she esteems not.

(III.i.78-9)

Despite the earlier assertion that a young man will learn and be perfected through travel, then, the scenes in Milan show a world not unlike that of Verona, a world similarly dominated by the values of deceit, materialism, and self-interest.

Furthermore, it is clear that the two gentlemen themselves are being perfected only in their more thorough acceptance of these values.

While Valentine has disdainfully announced to Proteus that the Duke prefers Thurio's suit "Only for his possessions are so huge" (II.iv.171), his advice to the Duke on his hypothetical mistress, that he should "Win her with gifts, if she respect not words" (III.i.89), indicates his assumption of commercial values, as do the frequently material metaphors of both young men's speeches. The implications of their vocabulary are indicated in their competition concerning the relative merits of their mistresses; as Valentine and Proteus tell their respective "tales of love" (II.iv.121), the women, who are ostensibly the source of praise and celebration, are effectively reduced to the position of mere counters in a competition of wit and ego, objects to be used for the man's presentation of himself as a lover:

...Why, man, she is mine own,
 And I as rich in having such a jewel
 As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl,
 The water nectar, and the rocks pure gold.

(II.iv.164-7)

Valentine's description of his metamorphosis has begun with a long account of the effects of love on his character and behaviour - ironically, he maintains that the "mighty lord / ...hath so humbled me" (II.iv.131-2) - while it concludes with a demonstration of the way in which the conventions of love, rather than his own desires or those of the lady, determine his action:

My foolish rival that her father likes
 (Only for his possessions are so huge)
 Is gone with her along, and I must after,
 For love, thou know'st, is full of jealousy.

(II.iv.170-3)

Valentine's self-centredness, materialism, and conventionality are thus put into action, and it is appropriate that Proteus, in his soliloquy after Valentine's exit, continues to present the two mistresses merely as sources for romantic posturing and self-aggrandizement. The possibility that "Valentinus' praise" (II.iv. 192) has inspired his new love for Silvia is reinforced by the vocabulary of his speech, which denies the women any power as personalities; he describes his devotion to Julia as "a waxen image" (II.iv.197) thawed by the immediate presence of "a newer object" (II.iv.191) which is yet but a "picture" (II.iv.205).

The frank hypocrisy of the young men's exaltation of their mistresses is clear, as it is in Valentine's advice on courting to the Duke:

If she do chide, 'tis not to have you gone,
 For why, the fools are mad, if left alone.
 Take no repulse, whatever she doth say,
 For 'get you gone' she doth not mean 'away!'
 Flatter, and praise, commend, extol their graces;
 Though ne'er so black, say they have angels' faces.

(III.i.98-103)

On the basis of his own falseness, then, fully exposed to the audience in this revealing conversation, Valentine expects the same duplicity in the words and conduct of the woman being courted, and his attitude prepares for Proteus's persistence in wooing the reluctant and eventually outraged Silvia. The audience's awareness of the gap between what the men say and what they really feel reaches a climax with Proteus's attempted rape of Silvia, once he has discovered the boundaries of the flattery both he and his friend employ:

Speed later turns the very terms of Valentine's criticism of Proteus against the "metamorphosed" (II.i.29-30) Valentine himself, uses the exaggerations of the romantic convention, in his asides during Valentine's conversation with Silvia, to question its validity, and points out the blindness which the two friends share. While both Proteus and Valentine claim that the object of their desire is "a heavenly saint" (II.iv.140), "Sovereign to all the creatures on the earth" (II.iv.148), and that "She excels each mortal thing / Upon the dull earth dwelling" (IV.ii.50-1), their servants' recognition and acceptance of "Eve's legacy" (III.i.330) in the woman they discuss further demonstrates the limitations of the noblemen's perspective, and reinforces the impression of a disjunction between reality and role-playing.

The servants thus function to undercut the effect of the young gentlemen's declarations, and to control to a certain extent the audience's awareness of the dichotomy between appearance and reality, as present in the men's behaviour, but the standard of reality is presented by Julia, who can operate in this world of poses most freely by employing a disguise. As Berry points out, this technique is one which Shakespeare will continue to use and will develop further:

the play's centre of sanity is placed unequivocally with the women. Silvia is necessarily a sketch only, but Julia is of the line that produces Portia and Viola.⁵

In Twelfth Night, a play which is also concerned with the theme of illusion and deceit, and which concludes with a similar failure to confront reality, the disguise and movement of Viola closely duplicates that of her predecessor Julia, while her perception of the

play's difficulties probes the nature of character and role in order to direct the audience's understanding of the action:

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women's hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we
For such as we are made, such we be.⁶

Portia moves beyond the traditional sphere of a woman's action not only through disguise, but through the assumption of a male role in assigning judgment, although here as well the emphasis is placed on her limitations:

in the only play besides As You Like It where Shakespeare allows a woman's action to control the outcome, Shakespeare makes sure that Portia does not have her day in court until she has explicitly affirmed her subordination to her husband-to-be.⁷

In each case, then, the movement of the female characters into the male sphere of activity is framed by the men's determination of events and by the limitations of the female stereotype.

Despite the freer movement allowed her by the disguise, Julia is unable to alter the direction in which the male protagonists are leading the action - she cannot win Proteus for herself or prevent him from pursuing Silvia, and her powerlessness provides a critique of the conventional female role. In contrast to the freedom of the men, Julia can initially choose only among a number of suitors in order to play the role preordained for her, that of the passive, adored mistress, while Silvia is as well restricted to disguised acceptance of

Valentine and defensive resistance to the two other lovers whose attentions are forced upon her. Silvia is even more thoroughly confined to the conventional role, but Julia's movement away from its restrictions only enables Proteus to use her disguise to further her own destruction, while the fidelity which Silvia displays - an essential feature of the stereotype of womanhood - enables her to serve as a touchstone against which the audience may measure the conduct of the men.

The women's restriction from action has a further effect on their function in The Two Gentlemen. While the men's energy, once they have chosen their roles with little consideration of their motivations in doing so, is directed outwards, to action in the world, the lack of freedom in the women's initial situation turns them back into themselves and into a more thorough contemplation of their natures and roles. This introspection produces a degree of self-awareness lacking in the male protagonists, but essential to character development and maturation; the women's subsequent ability to accept the reality of their lovers' imperfections, as revealed through the course of the play, in itself casts an oblique reflection on the men's failure to develop significantly from the self-absorbed poseurs introduced in the first scene. The women's power as personalities as well presents a refutation of the young men's reduction of their mistresses to objects for use in self-praise, and thus an implicit criticism of male attitudes. It is because of the consequences of their conventional limitations, not despite them, that the female characters of The Two Gentlemen are able to function as dramatic mechanisms. The stereotype itself provides a commentary on the behaviour of the male protagonists and serves to

enlarge and control the audience's perspective on the play.

It is clearly important for the women of the early comedies, given the nature of their worlds, to have a thorough understanding of the rules of the romantic game before they enter into its action, and in The Two Gentlemen this awareness is closely related to the women's greater introspection. Julia's self-consciousness differs from Proteus's rhetorical justifications of his treachery or even Valentine's recognition that he has changed roles in that she alone recognizes the limitations of such behaviour, and openly acknowledges its lack of coherence with her true thoughts and feelings. Her discussion with Lucetta allows the latter freedom to admit sensibly to the instinctive and irrational impulse to love - "I have no other but a woman's reason: / I think him so, because I think him so" (I.ii.23-4) - which stands in opposition to the deceptively reasonable argument of the play's opening scene and to the competition in which the two men debate the relative attractions of the two women. Julia's soliloquy, which follows, is also marked by its common sense, as she comments ruefully on the difficulties of a woman's role within the conventions of courtship:

...maids, in modesty, say 'no' to that
Which they would have the profferer construe 'ay'.
Fie, fie; how wayward is this foolish love,
That (like a testy babe) will scratch the nurse,
And presently all humbled kiss the rod!

(I.ii.55-9)

Dusinberre points out that Julia here faces up to and expresses the conflict between the rules of modesty and the inclinations of honesty,⁸ between the frown which she has taught her brow and the "inward joy" (I.ii.63) of her smiling heart. In the scene which introduces her to

the audience, then, Julia confronts the problem of romantic illusion and reality directly, and it leads her to the eventual recognition that true modesty is in the mind, not in outward forms; her understanding of the waywardness of love leads as well to her later statement of the central complication of the plot - that "love should be so contrary" (IV.iv.83).

The consequences of these realizations are presented in a number of ways in the first two acts of The Two Gentlemen. They produce a greater consistency between Julia's motivations and her speech and action, for even Proteus speaks of the integrity of her behaviour, in his comments on her letter to him:

Sweet love, sweet lines, sweet life!
 Here is her hand, the agent of her heart;
 Here is her oath for love, her honour's pawn.

(I.iii.45-7)

This evaluation of the coherence between Julia's hand and oath, in the expression of her feelings, and her heart and honour, as symbols of her character, strongly contrasts the uncertainty which Proteus feels about his own emotions, and which the audience - partly through the very standard of conduct which Julia provides - begins to feel about his declaration of love. Julia's integrity is stressed again in her decision to undertake a pilgrimage to her absent lover, as she and Lucetta discuss the dichotomy between appearance and reality which is implied by the donning of a disguise. Her choice of the dress of "some well-reputed page" (II.vii.43) is made in order to "prevent / The loose encounters of lascivious men" (II.vii.40-1), for beyond this concern she cares only that what she wears is "meet, and is most mannerly"

(II.vii.58). The fashion of her hair, in fact, becomes a visual parody of the young lover's conventional style and concern with the external signs of his state:

...I'll knit it up in silken strings,
 With twenty odd-conceited true-love knots:
 To be fantastic may become a youth
 Of greater time than I shall show to be.

(II.vii.45-8)

Her appearance, then, bears for Julia a significance far different from the men's eagerness to conform to external standards; her disguise will have a functional purpose and will serve as well as a visual reminder of the role she is self-consciously playing.

Julia's determination of the particular role and action she will undertake is here again preceded by the confrontation of her internal conflicts, and she is accordingly freed from the dangers of instability and infidelity which beset the men as a result of their failure to evaluate accurately the implications of their roles and behaviour. Her concern about her honour, for example, is expressed in terms of reputation, an external standard of conduct:

...how will the world repute me
 For undertaking so unstaïd a journey?
 I fear me it will make me scandalis'd.

(II.vii.59-61)

Through Lucetta's statement of the only safe alternative, however, Julia is able to establish her priorities and to choose her pilgrimage over the avoidance of infamy, with a full grasp of the possible consequences of her decision. The likely opposition of the world

around her operates in this scene as did her society's determination to cast her in the role of adored mistress, in The Two Gentlemen's second scene, to turn Julia back into herself for a thorough consideration of her nature and desires.

A more discerning vision is as well implied in Julia's choice of vocabulary, and what it reveals about her values. She uses the commercial terms of the young men's speeches ironically in receiving Proteus's letter from Lucetta - "Now, by my modesty, a goodly broker!" (I.ii.41) - and the prevailing tone of her bantering with Lucetta here indicates the superior awareness which both women share, and which enables them to exploit the disparity between the conventional roles and the reality of transactions between the lovers. The values which Julia herself upholds are suggested indirectly in her decision to leave "My goods, my lands, my reputation" (II.vii.87) at Lucetta's disposal while she, unlike Proteus, is willing to "set the world at nought" (I.i.68) to travel to her lover, in an action which anticipates Silvia's later defiance of the Duke's wishes. It is thus appropriate that Julia's final words of farewell to Proteus have mixed the religious and commercial terms which suggest the two extremes between which the two men move in their attitudes towards love and its place in the world. Following the exchange of rings she asks that they "Seal the bargain with a holy kiss" (II.ii.6), and her ability to join the spiritual significance of fidelity with the values necessary to operate in the world, in a consistent vision, contrasts the dichotomy evident in the men's speeches according to the role of their listener. A similar point is made by the fact that both Proteus and Julia use the image of

conventional behaviour it assigns to him. That the women's practicality and realism has no effect on the artificiality of the men's game and role-playing, however, is emphasized by the juxtaposition of Silvia's appearance and comments with the men's dialogue on love and their mistresses, and with the soliloquy in which Proteus's change in affection, falseness to Julia, and hypocrisy in dealing with Valentine is disclosed. The character traits which the women have displayed thus far in the play contradict the male attitude and implicitly provide a wider perspective for the audience's evaluation of the two gentlemen.

The women themselves, once conscious of the serious implications of the young men's false values and role-playing, go further to criticize the men's easy dismissal of the mistresses' significance. In seeking to justify the betrayal of friend and loved one, Proteus asserts the importance of self - "If I lose them, thus find I by their loss" (II.vi.20), because "I to myself am dearer than a friend" (II.vi.22) - and uses this notion to determine the position of the other characters only in their relation to him:

I will forget that Julia is alive,
Rememb'ring that my love to her is dead
(II.vi.27-8).

His failure to confront reality as he constructs a romantic artifice around the centre of his own self-image is dramatized as Proteus disposes neatly of both Valentine and Julia in his attempt to overcome Silvia's resistance to his suit:

I grant, sweet love, that I did love a lady,
But she is dead.

(IV.ii.102-3)

I likewise hear that Valentine is dead.

(IV.ii.109)

Silvia, however, insists on Julia's reality and importance, and imaginatively replaces her in Proteus's life in the message she sends through the servant Sebastian:

...Tell him for me,
One Julia, that his changing thoughts forget,
Would better fit his chamber than this shadow.

(IV.iv.116-8)

Sebastian is of obvious assistance in this recreation of the absent mistress, and while Silvia is perhaps forced by the conventions of her role to send the requested picture to Proteus, she is also able to use it as a symbol of the appearance he worships, to criticize his values and conduct as revealed in this concentration on externals, and to contrast the picture to the reality which Proteus refuses to confront.

While Silvia is unable to do more than resist Proteus's unwanted advances, then, because the stereotype into which she has been cast limits her action to a pattern of passive reaction, her explicit opposition to his treachery is communicated to the audience, and Proteus's own words indicate how clear a standard of moral conduct and fidelity she presents even to his love-blinded eyes:

...Silvia is too fair, too true, too holy,
To be corrupted with my worthless gifts.
When I protest true loyalty to her,
She twits me with my falsehood to my friend;
When to her beauty I commend my vows,
She bids me think how I have been forsworn
In breaking faith with Julia whom I lov'd.

(IV.ii.5-11)

The audience is thus reminded by Proteus's own admission that Silvia's steadfastness to Valentine, even during his absence and in the face of parental opposition - features which make Silvia's situation an exact reflection of Proteus's own - presents the value of faithful devotion to contrast and criticize her new suitor's infidelity. His enumeration of her objections to his declarations, furthermore, cuts through the rhetorical haze of his previous rationalizations to define his guilt and to provide a reminder of the reasons for maintaining his vows. When the two characters are again presented together, Silvia is forthright in her evaluation of Proteus's character - "Thou subtle, perjur'd, false, disloyal man" (IV.ii.92) - and she is indignant about the judgment of her virtues on which he appears to be acting:

Think'st thou I am so shallow, so conceitless,
To be seduced by thy flattery,
That hast deceiv'd so many with thy vows?

(IV.ii.93-5)

Her denial of these characteristics contradicts Valentine's earlier account of women's reactions to the conventions of courtship, as does her inflexible resistance to the wiles of Proteus and Thurio; it also suggests the uncompromising vision of the relationship between character and action which Silvia does not hesitate to apply in an evaluation of her own conduct - "[I] by and by intend to chide myself, / Even for this time I spend in talking to thee." (IV.ii.100-1)

A similar integration of identity and role, of character and behaviour, is evident in Julia's employment of a disguise, and again functions dramatically to criticize the values, superficiality, and

romantic posturing of the male protagonists. Proteus's priorities are evident in his employment of Sebastian

...chiefly for thy face, and thy behaviour,
Which (if my augury deceive me not)
Witness good bringing up, fortune, and truth

(IV.iv.66-8)

and particularly in his acceptance of a face which has, in another context and as Julia repeats in her conversation with Silvia, "become as black as I" (IV.iv.154). Proteus has shifted from the assertion that Julia is "but a swarthy Ethiopie" (II.v.26) in comparison to Silvia to an admission of the two women's comparable beauty, thus inadvertently emphasizing the unreliability of a focus on appearance and stressing how his lack of self-control has led to a perversion of his retrospective vision of Julia. Sebastian relates the change in Julia's appearance to her lover's abandonment and its effect on her character:

...since she did neglect her looking-glass,
And threw her sun-expelling mask away,
The air hath starv'd the roses in her cheeks,
And pinch'd the lily-tincture of her face

(IV.iv.150-3)

The lover's pallor is here a reality, unlike the wreathed arms and heavy sighs of the young men's posture, and Julia's disguise gives her an appearance which is similarly functional. Her entrance as Sebastian is preceded by Proteus's comment to Thurio that "love / Will creep in service where it cannot go" (IV.ii.19-20), a comment which gains ironic resonances through the course of Proteus's pursuit of Silvia, but which accurately defines the selfless nature of Julia's love and indicates

the appropriateness of her new role.

As Bilton points out, Julia's disguise provides her with a kind of distance from the scene and the action which directly concerns her future, and this serves to facilitate her communication with the audience. Her witty comments on Proteus's song to Silvia, and her verbal plays on the Host's responses, lead him to praise her "quick ear" (IV.ii.61), while the audience gains a new appreciation of her ability to react in a difficult situation. Her reflections on Proteus's unfaithfulness and changeability undercut the effect of his new declarations of love, and provide a touchstone for the audience's response to the scene; although Julia has defended her lover against the suspicions of Lucetta, once faced with evidence of his double-dealing she recognizes the truth which his conduct reveals about his character and reinforces the judgment which Silvia is expressing directly to Proteus. Julia's ability to find coherence in a new and unconventional role is again associated with her self-consciousness about its implications and difficulties, implied in the comments of Sebastian on the woman who "dreams on him that has forgot her love" (IV.iv.81) and insisted on in her response to Silvia's questions about Julia, that he knows her "Almost as well as I do know myself" (IV.iv.141). As Scott comments, in her discussion with her supposed rival, Julia

gains an ironic distance from her plight and contemplates it as an outsider with dignified pathos. She is not Ariadne but someone who remembers having played the role of Ariadne.¹⁰



The disguise thus visually reinforces the audience's impression of

Julia's ability to separate herself from her feelings and actions and to evaluate them objectively; the value of this contemplation is evident in her capacity for reaching a realistic compromise between the role of "unhappy messenger" (IV.iv.99) for Proteus and her own feelings for him:

I am my master's true confirmed love,
 But cannot be true servant to my master,
 Unless I prove false traitor to myself.
 Yet will I woo for him, but yet so coldly
 (IV.iv.103-6).

As before, Julia's considerations of the problems inherent in the role which has been assigned her precede her entrance into relationships determined by that role, and permit the integrity of character and behaviour which is lacking in the young men.

The journeys of The Two Gentlemen play out the inevitable results of the men's role-playing, duplicity, and self-centredness; while the female characters continue to function as standards to measure male behaviour and as commentators to enlarge the audience's perspective on the unfolding action, the journeys undertaken as a result of the plot complications emphasize the limitations of the women's attempts to control and alter the development of the action, which has been determined by the men's characters and desires. The decisions made by Julia and Silvia to undertake pilgrimages are motivated largely by the effect of the male characters on their lives, but in each case the woman considers her choice thoroughly, and her consideration of the implications of her decision results in the integrity which has been evident in her character throughout. Although Valentine's despairing

soliloquy after the disclosure of his deceit to the Duke is reminiscent of Julia's reflections on the effects of separation on the lover's state, he has, like Proteus earlier, indirectly invited the opposition of the older generation. Furthermore, he is convinced by Proteus to take a journey which contrasts Julia's pilgrimage, because of its direction away from the loved one. In practical terms, of course, Proteus's advice is sound, but the contrast between Valentine's vulnerability here to the arguments of a false friend and Julia's earlier persistence despite the hesitations of her confidante indicates that, particularly in the light of the exaggerated claims which the men have made concerning their devotion, Valentine fails to measure up to the standard he has verbalized, and which Julia has presented to the audience through her action. Julia has as well rather used Lucetta as a sounding-board for her own feelings and opinions, as "the table wherein all my thoughts / Are visibly character'd and engrav'd" (II.vii. 3-4), than as an external measure for deciding her course of action.

Valentine has already considered the effect on his identity of banishment from the woman who is "my essence" (III.i.182):

To die is to be banish'd from myself,
 And Silvia is myself: banish'd from her
 Is self from self.

(III.i.171-3)

The suggestion that Valentine has placed himself in a position in which he, like Proteus, although for different reasons, must change his form, regardless of the alternatives he chooses, is supported by Lance's malapropism - "Sir, there is a proclamation that you are vanished"

(III.i.216) - and dramatized by his transformation into the king of the outlaws, whose participation in the values of the male world is clear in their reasons for choosing Valentine as their leader. Even among them, however, the young gentleman must pose and give a false cause for his banishment because of his concern with appearance.

Silvia's flight from Milan is in part determined by the same external forces, but it is perhaps indicative of her greater integrity of character and behaviour that her travels will take her, not away from her loved one, but "to Valentine, / To Mantua, where I hear he makes abode" (IV.iii.22-3). Julia's decision to go with Proteus in pursuit of his new love is made "more to cross that love / Than hate for Silvia, that is gone for love" (V.ii.54-5); the relationship between the two women has come increasingly to replace the broken friendship of Valentine and Proteus. Sebastian's inability to help Silvia against Proteus's advances and the attempted rape, along with Silvia's own powerlessness to do more than resist, dramatize the fact that their efforts to control the action, and to move out of the female stereotype of passivity and simple responsiveness, have here reached a dead end - no more can be done until the male protagonists themselves decide to alter the direction of the action. The dialogue which precedes the attack summarizes the relationship between the male and female characters of The Two Gentlemen; Proteus demands the "boon" (V.iv.24) which he feels is owing for his services, while Silvia evaluates his demand frankly as solicitation, and the system of values underlying the attitudes of each are thus recalled for the audience immediately before the play's conclusion. Silvia's speech informs the audience of the implications

of Proteus's behaviour, but is of no use in defending her against his advances.

The shock of Valentine's appearance operates for Proteus as a greater deterrent than has Silvia's verbal opposition or the presence of the servant Sebastian, a fact congruent with the emphasis the men have placed on the notion of reputation throughout the play. Valentine's presence indicates public recognition of the guilt which has existed for some time, of the reality which underlies the courtly pose, while Silvia's and Sebastian's knowledge of his double-dealing has been insignificant to Proteus throughout; Valentine represents the world of the court, and of men, and it is the humiliation of a public exposure which leads to Proteus's private sense of shame, his suffering, and his repentance. Valentine's exaggerated rhetoric and his offer of Silvia to his penitent friend, however, disrupt even the audience's sense that the pattern of The Two Gentlemen is being fulfilled as expected. In one line, Valentine duplicates the change in form which has taken his friend several acts to accomplish, and his speech as a whole indicates a return to the values of the court, in the company of Proteus, despite his apparent rejection of this way of life at the beginning of the scene. Valentine's comparison of his forgiveness with the appeasement of divine wrath leads naturally to his disposal of Silvia as an object important only as she is connected with him - "All that was mine in Silvia I give thee" (V.iv.83) - because the young man is as concerned with the role he is playing as he was in performing as the eager traveller or the courtly lover. In the light of these words, and of the rapidity with which Proteus has assumed the

role of humble penitent, Berry's argument that the men are here staging "the Big Production" which is the logical conclusion to the rest of the play seems the most convincing.

The women's responses to this stunning upset are both emblems of women's powerlessness - Silvia is shocked into silence, while Julia faints. On her revival, and the revelation of Sebastian's true identity, Julia presents a final expression of the distinction between appearance and reality, form and substance, which encapsulates the central distinction between the two groups of characters in values, speech, and action:

Be thou asham'd that I have took upon me
Such an immodest raiment; if shame live
In a disguise of love!
It is the lesser blot modesty finds,
Women to change their shapes, than men their minds.

(V.iv.104-8)

Modesty, then, is redefined as a private virtue, as a kind of integrity which speaks of the essential character even through a disguise, and Julia's speech has resonances back throughout the play, from the men's early assumption of conventional roles without questioning the appropriateness of those roles to their characters or motivations, to the change in affection which both Proteus and Valentine eventually undergo.

Julia's speech is important as it comments to the audience on the central issues of The Two Gentlemen, and as it provides a standard of morality, wisdom, and reality against which to measure the exaggerations and hypocrisy of the men's behaviour, but, while Proteus

apparently picks up the moral implications of constancy and inconsistency in his response, the couplet which ends his brief speech returns to the deceptively reasonable justification of his action which the audience has witnessed before, and to the focus on appearance which has been throughout the central tenet of the men's system of values:

What is in Silvia's face but I may spy
More fresh in Julia's, with a constant eye?

(V.iv.113-4)

Valentine's defiant speech to Thurio - "Take thee but possession of her with a touch: / I dare thee" (V.iv.128-9) - suggests merely a new role for the romantic lover, but the transformation from humility to bristling self-confidence is sufficient to win over the Duke. The men, then, have not been changed or educated to a new perfection. The fact that the pairing-off which concludes The Two Gentlemen has been engineered to provide the satisfying resolution of "One feast, one house, one mutual happiness" (V.iv.121) further indicates that the women have had as little effect on the development of the plot as on the characters and false values of the male protagonists.

The female characters of The Two Gentlemen are thus powerless to exert any control over the development of plot, but their very restrictions, which stress their distance from the determination of the play's action, facilitate their communication with the audience, and the stereotype is hence made to serve a dramatic purpose. The women's passivity provides the greatest possible contrast to the mindless activity of the male protagonists, and the introspection and observation encouraged by the limitations of the stereotype into which

Julia and Silvia are cast enables them to serve a choric function in the play, through their commentary on the action and the other characters. The standard of conduct which they present through the integrity of their behaviour provides a means by which the audience may measure the speeches and actions of the male characters, and the women's comments on the development of The Two Gentlemen further broaden the audience's perspective on its issues and characters; while the female characters are unable to exert control within the world of the play, then, they are highly effective in shaping the audience's experience of it, and are hence significant in controlling its apparent design.

CHAPTER III

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST

Criticism of Love's Labour's Lost has in the past tended to focus either on the possible origins of Shakespeare's plot, situation, and characters, or on the changes undergone by the men of Navarre's academy as the play progresses, and this attention to the men's characters and their transformation has tended to reduce our perception of the dramatic function of the female characters to that of a simple catalyst. In more recent years, a good deal of purely linguistic analysis has been produced, in the light of which a significant new understanding of the women's role may be emerging: by their superior control of language the women function at a key point in this play's structure.

Certainly the Princess and her ladies do operate as a catalyst to the action of the play, and their entrance, shortly after the men's taking vows to study and asceticism, introduces the conflict and complication which sets the whole merry game in motion. But even in their absence, the female characters serve as the subject of discussions and the objective of goals which reveal a great deal about the limited understanding of the noblemen; and further, by their mastery of the verbal game which the men regard as their own, the women spur the movement of the play towards reality, while the men's progression towards this conclusion is illuminated by their changing attitudes towards the women of Love's Labour's Lost.

Furthermore, while the female characters are clearly limited throughout the course of the play in their power to affect its development, they have a dramatic function which is directly related to their role limitations; as in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Shakespeare's characterization draws attention to the stereotype and subjects it to question, for the women of Love's Labour's Lost display an ability to communicate effectively with the audience as an implied consequence of their limited powers to act. In the light of the ladies' comments on the action and their male counterparts, the play becomes a piece of social criticism, and attention to their participation in its issues reveals a far greater satirical substance in Love's Labour's Lost than has been allowed up to now.

Critical studies, however, have in the past been unwilling to grant the female characters of this early comedy any significant function beyond the dramatic usefulness of their presence as it produces the complication of the plot. Barber, for example, assigns to Berowne the responsibility of maintaining a more encompassing vision of the action and a greater consciousness of the game which is being played, while Champion asserts that it is Berowne and Boyet who operate in Love's Labour's Lost as comic pointers, guiding the audience's perspective on the play, its characters and events.¹ Other critics focus on what the men learn during the course of the play, the way their new understanding is reflected in their speeches and attitudes, and the means by which the comic effect of this transformation is controlled, but little is said in these studies of the speeches and actions of the women who so fundamentally affect their male counter-

parts.

More recent criticism has begun to correct this imbalance, and to pay more attention to the neglected women of Love's Labour's Lost. Anderson, for example, points out that "Much of what the ladies say and do is a comment, explicit or implicit, on the men's attitudes";² he defines their functions in the play as a means of exposing the men's faults, as the embodiment of the norms of conduct, against which the aberrations of the men must be measured, and as the dispensers of corrective punishment at the end of the play. Berry, in his discussion of the levels of reality revealed by the uses to which the different groups of characters put language, confirms this assignment of a central place to the women of the play. The Princess, he states, "is beyond question the internal arbiter of values in Love's Labour's Lost",³ and he further expands the significance of this role to its establishment of a primary function for women in this and others of Shakespeare's plays, and its provision of a means by which the speeches and attitudes of their male counterparts can be evaluated:

The Princess's court - and one can legitimately include the epicene Boyet in the group - upholds the value of truth, or reality...This not only accords with their sexual function - the word game is more serious for women - it expresses an intellectual role, women as realists, that we see elsewhere in Shakespeare. At all events, they play the word game with an essentially serious skill that deservedly puts the men to shame.⁴

Bilton agrees with this evaluation, for he maintains that the Princess's "authority extends to the spectators",⁵ and he further comments that:

In the manoeuvres of her 'escadron volant', and in her speeches, the Princess is the teacher. She is the commentator to whom we should pay most heed, the prime mover in establishing real values.⁶

As in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, the values which the women establish, and according to which they act, are thus set in contrast to the artificiality of the play's young noblemen.

In this play, then, the association of the female characters' limitations, their skilful observation of action, and their use of speech for criticism and evaluation, which has been defined in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, is similarly evoked for the purposes of the women's control of audience response, if not of the plot development. The female characters of both early comedies have limited powers to act within the world of the play itself - the Princess and her ladies being restricted to a defensive position comparable to that which Silvia holds in response to Proteus's unwanted suit - but are able to function dramatically as a consequence of their developing compensating powers of observation and speech. Both groups of ladies, furthermore, present the standards of virtue and reality according to which the speeches and actions of their male counterparts must be measured, but in Love's Labour's Lost in particular these values centre, like the deviations of the men, around the issue of language, which involves such matters as oaths and political agreements, outrageous praise and accurate evaluation, contests of wit and courtship.

The female stereotype, nevertheless, is used explicitly in Love's Labour's Lost primarily to cast a reflecting light on the characters and limited understanding of the male protagonists. There is thus a

more explicit pointing in Love's Labour's Lost; while its dramatic context identifies the restrictions placed on the Princess of France and her ladies, and while, until the end of the play, there is no attempt to deny the power of the stereotype, the focus is placed on the inadequacy of the men's conventional expectations about a woman's character and behaviour. The men's attitude towards the women remains essentially unchanged after their first meeting, although their interest has been aroused; the King's announcement that the women may not come within his gates has all the signs of an untested virtue, fugitive and cloistered, while Longaville's few words on Maria consider the possibility that she is "light in the light".⁷ Despite their attraction, the men cannot move beyond the conventional stereotype of the temptress and wanton, and their development during the course of the play presents a vision which is merely the other side of the coin - women as object to be won rather than woman as wanton to be excluded. The men operate from preconceived notions of a woman's nature and behaviour, moving from extreme to extreme during the course of the play, from the harshness of their injunction against female visitors to the extravagant praise of the sonnets and back again to the military aggression of their assaults on the women's wits and affections. Each position is equally untrue to the nature and behaviour of the real women with whom Navarre and his men are concerned in Love's Labour's Lost, and by the end of the play the men will need the help of those women to resolve the problem.

The female characters of Love's Labour's Lost, like those of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, thus play a more significant role than critics

have in the past allowed, and an examination of the text reveals the complex effect which the women have on all aspects of the play. While the noblemen of Navarre's academy are merely playing at love, and their words indicate no serious motive behind the game, the Princess and her ladies insist on taking them as lightly as their words are used, and evaluate their speeches, letters, and gifts merely as "pleasant jest, and courtesy, / As bombast and as lining to the time" (V.ii.770-1), as nothing more than the efforts of a genial host to provide a pleasant pastime for his guests. As Evans points out, the women's wider perspective is evident in Rosaline's desire for some assurance of success, in order that she may more thoroughly exploit the comic potentialities of the game by playing on the discrepancy between her concept of its fixed rules and Berowne's attempts to stretch them to suit his purposes:

O! that I knew he were but in by the week!...
 So Pair-Taunt like would I o'ersway his state
 That he should be my fool, and I his fate.

(V.ii.61, 67-8)⁸

To the women of Love's Labour's Lost, then, must go the credit for a superior awareness of the game which is being played, and of its proper place in relation to the real business of life. As the embodiment of a more encompassing vision, they have as well a more significant effect in controlling the perspective of the audience than has generally been recognized.

The limitations of Navarre's project are implicit in the very speeches with which he sets it forth and invites his men to take their

oaths. His opening lines present to the audience the ulterior motive which underlies the announced search for knowledge - the desire for fame, which he is confident will defeat time and death:

When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,
Th' endeavour of this present breath may buy
That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge,
And make us heirs of all eternity.

(I.i.4-7)

Navarre's language alone suggests the weakness of his plan and his fondness for using rhetoric to serve the purpose of logic and the wisdom of experience. His desire to be graced "in the disgrace of death" (I.i.3), for example, has a fine rhetorical ring and a subtle appeal to man's reluctance to face the inevitable limitations of the human condition, but it is this reluctance which the end of the play confronts. Equally, the responses which Longaville and Dumaine make to this invitation to a world-famed academy, "Still and contemplative in living art" (I.i.14), indicate their common susceptibility to attractions created by the manipulations of language, and their similar propensity for a logic based on emotion and rhetoric rather than on reason; the former discounts the severity of the task - "'tis but a three years' fast" (I.i.24) - while the latter, like his King, exaggerates the appeal of "living in philosophy" (I.i.32).

Berowne, though, is less easily fooled, or at least more willing to acknowledge his hesitations about neglecting "The grosser manner of these world's delights" (I.i.29), and his objections accurately pinpoint the King's deviation from his original plan of study:

I only swore to study with your grace,
 And stay here in your court for three years space.

(I.i.51-2)

Berowne is clearly distinguished from Longaville and Dumaine, more ready followers of Navarre, at this early point in the play, in a way which prepares for his strong supporting role in the scenes which follow, and which corresponds to the treatment of the female characters. The pairing-up which forms the comic dance is as rapid and apparently as superficial as in most comedies, but, while the King and the Princess are matched primarily on the basis of their social levels, Berowne and Rosaline form an agreeable complement based on their importance in the play and on the audience's intimations of their characters.

Berowne's objections to a life of seclusion and his counter-proposals, which suggest the Platonic ladder of love as an alternate means of gaining higher knowledge, are the basis on which some critics maintain that his role is that of a comic pointer. His comments on the futility of an isolated and barren course of study, his return to the ulterior motive of the King's plan - "Too much to know is to know naught but fame" (I.i.92) - and his anticipation that "Necessity will make us all forsworn / Three thousand times within these three years' space" (I.i.148-9) do indeed indicate a greater consciousness of the shortcomings of the King's proposal than the other men display, but the course of the play reveals that Berowne is unable to see beyond, to other values and a different perspective. His wit, like that of his fellows, "is at an end" (V.ii.430) when the women persist in their refusal to let the game of wordplay and the comic battle of the sexes

serve the function of a serious courtship. The vision which can contain both sides of the play's experience and perceive their relationship to the wholeness of life belongs to the women, and Berowne's ability to cope with the darker realities of existence is proved inadequate by Rosaline's final judgement on him.

The men's plans for their two sets of visitors reveal as much about their faulty perceptions as do their manipulations of language to prove points which cannot be supported by experience. Costard and Armado are to serve as recreation, as the sport of men whose own education enables them to see the humour of the former's errors and the latter's "fire-new words" (I.i.177), but, while Armado's perverted scholasticism and Costard's malapropisms are undoubtedly amusing for the duration of the play, one must question the wisdom of choosing them as sole companions for a three-year stint at the books. On the other hand, any woman who dares approach the secluded academy does so "on pain of losing her tongue" (I.i.122). The penalty, exploiting the old cliché about female talkativeness, is perhaps an inadvertent admission of the women's ability to match the men at their favourite sport of verbal swordplay, and just as ironically, the punishment for any man who disdains the requirements of his oath reveals the concern for reputation - for words - which is the ulterior motive of the men's goal:

If any man be seen to talk with a woman
within the term of three years, he shall
endure such public shame as the rest of the
court can possibly devise.

(I.i.128-31)

As in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, the notion of reputation and the

fear of public humiliation have a greater influence on the young men than does any sense of inner conviction, and in Love's Labour's Lost the disparity between these two sets of values is exploited by the noblemen's frequently erroneous choices. Moreover, none of the female characters in this comedy bears any resemblance to the stock figure of the shrew. The Princess, in fact, stops the word games of her ladies when they move from a playful means of entertainment to personal criticism, and claims to "beshrew all shrows" (V.ii.46).

When the King considers the possibility of female companions, the military image of his initial speech takes a surprising turn from the zeal of the reformer to the brutality of the fanatic. This fury against women, especially ironic in the light of the men's own fondness for and misuse of language, is placed in the context of conventional contemporary attitudes by Armado's letter; his definition of a woman as "a child of our grandmother Eve" (I.i.253) and as "the weaker vessel" (I.i.259) is in complete accord with the views of religious authority, while Jaquenetta's imprisonment as "a vessel of thy law's fury" (I.i.260-1) accurately reflects the helplessness before the law of a sixteenth-century woman. The first scene of Love's Labour's Lost, then, presents the two prevalent conceptions of woman - as temptress and as subject - as a reflection on the characters of the men expressing them.

Appropriately, it is the verbose and pedantic Armado who offers the main authoritative defenses for the subjection of women. The scene played by Armado and Moth further prepares the audience for the meeting between the male and female courts, and underlines the central action

of the play. Armado extends the military imagery of the King's initial speech to transform his announcement of love into a criticism of the loved one, and into a declaration of battle against his desire:

I will hereupon confess I am in love; and as it is base for a soldier to love, so am I in love with a base wench. If drawing my sword against the humour of affection would deliver me from the reprobate thought of it, I would take Desire prisoner, and ransom him to any French courtier for a new-devised courtesy.

(I.ii.54-60)

To Armado, love is a temptation and an evil spirit, and, were he to have his wont, it would take second place to the fascination with words that is his exaggeration of the noblemen's study. Nevertheless, ancient authority tells him that neither the wit of Solomon nor the strength of Hercules is sufficient to withstand the butt-shaft of Cupid, whose "glory is to subdue men" (I.ii.170-1); Armado's resistance is as short-lived as will be that of his masters, and by the end of the scene he is already calling for some god of rhyme to help him "turn sonnet" (I.ii.174). Armado's attitude towards the change which Jaquenetta and love represent is as much a reflection of the noblemen's views as is his reluctant surrender to his affections and the extreme form it takes.

In one sense, the first meeting of the two groups of characters identifies the limitations within which the women must operate. The Princess is aware that the political objective of their visit assigns to them the role of "humble-visaged visitors" (II.i.34), and she has heard, furthermore, of the men's vows to study and avoid the company of women:

Therefore to's seemeth it a needful course,
 Before we enter his forbidden gates,
 To know his pleasure

(II.i.25-7).

Respect and a ready acceptance of Navarre's authority are mingled here, and the men's oath, while an index to the absurdity of much of their conduct, serves as well to dramatize the restrictions surrounding the play's female characters. Boyet's information-giving function, which becomes clear as he re-enters just before the other men, reinforces the sense of the women's limited powers; the Princess and her ladies must rely on a man, who alone can move between the two courts, to keep them one step ahead of the King's party. The news which he offers them here, of Navarre's intention "to lodge you in the field / Like one that comes here to beseige his court" (II.i.85-6), presents them with the predominantly military mode of the men's speeches and attitudes, and enables the Princess to begin the game of wordplay and contradiction with the King. Her response to his welcoming speech sets the tone for the exchange to follow:

welcome I have not yet: the roof of this
 court is too high to be yours, and welcome
 to the wide fields too base to be mine,

(II.i.91-3)

while her anticipation that "will...and nothing else" (II.i.99) will lead the men to break their vows establishes the women's position in regard to the men's intentions. The Princess has little choice but to accept Navarre's "forbidden gates", but she can provide a witty criticism of the men's behaviour and an explicit rejection of the

notion of woman as temptress. Similarly, her refusal to continue with comments on the advisability of the men's scheme is properly submissive, but she is able to turn her recognition that "I am too sudden-bold: / To teach a teacher ill beseemeth me" (II.i.107-8) to a renewed urging of her political motive, and may in fact have taken the more diplomatic stance for this very purpose. The female characters of Love's Labour's Lost are thus able to work within imposed restrictions for the benefit of their own purposes and for the enlarged understanding of the audience; the fact that they are entrusted with a political mission, for which they must sue the King, epitomizes this capacity for action within the conventional constraints placed upon a woman.

The conventional view of women is in another sense shattered by the entrance of these perceptive and well-spoken opponents to the men in the battle of wits to follow. The women's ability to judge their male counterparts, and to evaluate the treatment they deserve, is suggested just prior to the first meeting of the two groups, and their views on the witty dialogue which dominates Love's Labour's Lost provide a means of judgment. Maria maintains that Longaville's only fault

Is a sharp wit match'd with too blunt a will;
Whose edge hath power to cut, whose will still wills
It should none spare who come within his power.

(II.i.49-51)

Katherine's appraisal of Dumaine's character follows a similar pattern - a recognition of the lord's virtues interrupted by a realistic summary of his shortcomings. As Longaville's "sovereign parts" (II.i.

44), his skill in the arts and at arms, are balanced by Maria's comments on the blunt willfulness of his will, so Katherine contrasts her report on Dumaine's accomplishments with a similar anticipation of his power to do harm and with a criticism of his failure to live up to his promise - "much too little of that good I saw / Is my report to his great worthiness." (II.i.62-3) The women thus offer steady, shrewd observation and balanced judgment of the men's characters, in contrast to the men's preconceptions about their visitors. Even Rosaline's description of Berowne, which contains no explicit criticism, is carefully controlled.⁹ The Princess, nevertheless, focuses perceptively on the compliments which precede the reservations, commenting that "every one her own hath garnished / With such bedecking ornaments of praise" (II.i.78-9). This notice given to the men's worthiness, qualified though it is, is important as a preparation for the conclusion of Love's Labour's Lost, when the women accept their suitors, even under harsh conditions. In many romantic comedies the concluding resolution in marriage seems hasty, contrived, or imposed. Here, the men are established early as worthy opponents and deserving suitors, while the criticism the women offer issues in the sober restraint of the final penance, pointedly altering the conventional "happily ever after".

The discussion of the political matter indicates as well that the Princess's perceptive evaluation of Navarre's character matches her ladies' ability to judge the other men. That he values "honour" is clear to her from his persistence in keeping the oath she thinks so foolish, and when he denies having received the hundred thousand crowns she challenges him at just that point; he will

...wrong the reputation of your name,
 In so unseeming to confess receipt
 Of that which hath so faithfully been paid.

(II.i.155-7)

Her retort that "We arrest your word" (II.i.160) establishes her own definition of honour, a scrupulous attitude towards verbal contracts which reflects as well the general belief of her ladies that words are - or should be - symbols of something real. They are not misled by their own views, however, into false expectations about the men's use of language, and Maria's comment on Berowne, that "not a word with him [is] but a jest" (II.i.216), encapsulates the central problem, the men's inability to distinguish clearly between a word as an oath and a word as a jest. As Berry points out about Berowne's later attack on the integrity of words:

he accords too little fixed value to words.
 He has betrayed an oath, and the frivolity
 of that original oath is itself the fault
 ...Berowne's fate is to have the true
 meaning of jest painfully instilled into him.¹⁰

The first meeting of the two forces, then, reinforces the audience's impressions of the men's characters and speeches; the women articulate the standards by which the actions and declarations of their male counterparts are to be judged, and thus control, to a large extent and aided primarily by the minor characters, the audience's response to Love's Labour's Lost. As in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, while the words of the men themselves occasionally invite the audience to observe the disparity between the abstraction and the reality, the speeches of the female characters offer an explicit comment on the

men's confusion and focus on the limitations of the men's understanding. The Princess, for example, later provides the view necessary to balance the simplistic attitude towards fame which Navarre expresses in his opening speech; in her discussion with the forester at the beginning of Act IV, she points out the temptations felt particularly by those who seek for fame:

And out of question so it is sometimes,
 Glory grows guilty of detested crimes,
 When, for fame's sake, for praise, an outward part,
 We bend to that the working of the heart

(IV.i.30-3).¹¹

Throughout the play, then, as well as at its conclusion and the dispensing of penances, the women serve to comment on and provide a necessary balance for the men's frequently misguided and often simplistic views.

While the framework of the play places control of the action firmly in the men's hands, as is insisted on by Navarre's refusal to allow the women entry into his court, the ladies are not themselves deceived by the apparent limitations of the conventional stereotype; they go on, in fact, to present the method of evaluation which opposes conventional thought and finds it wanting. In the Princess's opening dialogue with Boyet, for example, her response to his praise of her "graces", as extravagant as the expressions of the noblemen, is sensible and realistic, and anticipates her ladies' skeptical reception of the lords' speeches and letters. Her criticism is based on what she feels is a rather tenuous relationship between Boyet's words and the reality he is describing, rather than on the artificiality of his

language per se, and the metaphorical mode of her speech reveals a similar skill and delight in witty wordplay:

...my beauty, though but mean,
Needs not the painted flourish of your praise:
Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye,
Not utter'd by base sale of chapmen's tongues.
I am less proud to hear you tell my worth
Than you much willing to be counted wise
In spending your wit in praise of mine.

(II.i.13-9)

Rosaline, whose dark beauty seems susceptible to criticism by her own friends and by Berowne's, shares her mistress's realistic attitude when she offers an accurate and humourous appraisal of the claims which Berowne's sonnet makes for her:

The numbers true; and, were the numbering too,
I were the fairest goddess on the ground:
I am compar'd to twenty thousand fairs.

(V.ii.35-7)

Beauty may indeed be in the eye of the beholder, as the Princess claims, but these ladies are unlikely to be swayed by "the painted flourish" of their lovers' praises to an exaggerated respect for their own attractions, in contrast to the way in which their male counterparts have been swayed by the influence of the spoken word. Furthermore, the perception of the Princess's remarks strikes at the heart of the matter of language and communication; they are clearly applicable to the false logic of Navarre's plans and speeches, guided by his concern for fame and the admiration of the world. The rules by which the women will play the game of courtship are established here, and they take as a basis for the game the understanding that rhetorical flourishes are

concerned rather with the display and contest of wits than with the subject of discussion. The ground-rules are evident in the debate in which the women indulge amongst themselves. In the final scene of the play, Rosaline and Katherine are engaged in a series of plays on the words "light" and "dark", which leads to the use of the former in the scene of "wanton" or "wayward" and to Rosaline's confusion about the intentions of her opponent; Katherine's response allows for the possibility of mistaking a show of verbal dexterity for a personal comment, and she attempts to stop the game to avoid giving offense:

You'll mar the light by taking it in snuff;
Therefore I'll darkly end the argument.

(V.ii.22-3)

When Rosaline pursues the point, the Princess who, as an observer of the game, has no misgivings about its intentions, closes the action by judging it and limiting it to no more than a game - "Well bandied both; a set of wit well play'd" (V.ii.29).

The attitude of the female characters towards communication is illuminated by the speeches of Boyet, who offers the women his analysis of the situation on the basis of his "observation, which very seldom lies" (II.i.228). His mistress will not let the matter rest on this defense, and his response to her request for a reason states the ideal relationship between speech, intention, and observation; Boyet says that he is merely disposed

...to speak that in words which his eye
 hath disclos'd.
I only have made a mouth of his eye,
By adding a tongue which I know will not lie.

(II.i.251-3)

Boyet is wise, in the first place, to evaluate particularly these men on the basis of their facial expressions rather than on that of their words. His speech, moreover, though it is highly metaphorical and follows a conventional pattern and choice of vocabulary in the description of the lovers, makes a valid point; his observation is correct and his mode of expression appropriate in its anticipation of the conventional poses which the love-sick men will strike. Words, then, are here indicative of a real emotional state, and, while his listeners make Boyet's speech the subject of an allusive satire, they have already recognized in Navarre and his fellows worthy combatants in the battle of wits, if not in the battle of the sexes which love will become to these men. The conclusion to which the Princess draws the jesting between her ladies, that "This civil war of wits were much better us'd / On Navarre and his book-men, for here 'tis abus'd" (II.i.224-5), anticipates their taking up the gauntlet in the fifth act of the play; it establishes, furthermore, the place assigned to such verbal swordplay by the leader of the female faction, that of an exercise for good wits, to be employed on those who both deserve and invite the sound trouncing which the men will receive.

The sonnets which the noblemen address to their ladies reveal, on the one hand, a uniformity of thought and expression in accordance with the conventionality of their stereotypic attitudes, and, on the other, the men's inability to distinguish between the two kinds of words - oaths and jests. As C. L. Barber points out, the men hope to carry the day through what is only a playful parody of the declarations and negotiations of love and marriage, by exerting no more effort than that

required by the demands of a game which they enjoy:

The festivity releases, not the delights of love, but the delights of expression which the prospect of love engenders - though those involved are not clear about the distinction until it is forced upon them; the clarification achieved by release is this recognition that love is not wooing games or love talk.¹²

The formula of the sonnet, as these men employ it, is inadequate to convey real emotion, and their words present nothing more than the facade of a lover, a pose to which the men can fit themselves in anticipation of the game of courtship and its familiar, conventional moves. Berowne's description of Longaville as "The shape of love's Tyburn, that hangs up simplicity" (IV.iii.54) acknowledges the artificiality of the dance which they are setting in motion, and Navarre, too, plays with the familiar depiction of the lover's stance in his sarcastic evaluation of his companion, who

Did never sonnet for her sake compile,
Nor never lay his wreathed arms athwart
His loving bosom to keep down his heart.

(IV.iii.132-4)

Longaville's decision to "lay these glozes by" (IV.iii.367), and Dumaine's similar plan to include "something else more plain" (IV.iii.119), like Berowne's disdain of the "painted rhetoric" (IV.iii.236) which Rosaline's beauty does not need, suggest that the men have some awareness of the limitations of the convention, and that they are more thoroughly caught than the spirit of the game, and their pleasure in

the pose, would indicate. Nevertheless, Berowne's debate with his companions concerning Rosaline's beauty and his lengthy justifications for breaking their oaths identify his rejection of rhetoric as yet another conventional flourish, while the speeches of the men in Act V, and their visit in disguise, demonstrates how far indeed these noblemen are from plain-dealing. Although the effect of the women has been to move the men from their initial plan of solitude and study, Navarre and his fellows have not developed significantly from the beginning of the play; they remain as fond as ever of manipulating language.

Furthermore, that the sonnets hide a reality of emotion much more complex than, and in part contradictory to, the conventional expression of love, is made evident in the persistence of the two stereotypes of woman. On the one hand, the sonnets suggest a view of women as objects to be won, and the ladies to whom they are addressed are presented as being of heavenly stature, queens and goddesses, at whose feet the submissive and humble lovers worship and plead their cases - Navarre depicts her "triumphing in my woe" (IV.iii.34), while Berowne fears to wrong her by the inadequacy of his praise. On the other hand, however, unmasked and supposedly unobserved, the men continue to describe their plans with the martial imagery which makes of woman an opponent to be defeated, and which thus picks up on Navarre's earlier refusal to allow the Princess's party to enter his court. Following their admissions of love and their decision to woo, Navarre calls his "soldiers, to the field" (IV.iii.363), and Berowne extends this metaphorical statement of their approach to the women:

Advance your standards, and upon them, lords!
 Pell-mell, down with them! but be first advis'd,
 In conflict that you get the sun of them.

(IV.iii.364-6)¹³

The conflict has been anticipated and parodied in Armado's letter to Jaquenetta; his declaration that "I profane my lips on thy foot, my eyes on thy picture, and my hand on thy every part" (IV.i.83-4) inadvertently reveals his true attitudes, and his praise of Jaquenetta is contradicted both by his expectation of a nuptial catastrophe in which he will be the victor and she the captive, and by the threatening post script.

The case of Navarre and his men is of course not so extreme, but their view of women as opponents to be overcome is as inadequate for the matter of love and the nature of the women in the play as is the conventional pose of the humble courtly lover. The men's perspective, it is clear, will still have to be greatly altered before the women will consent to a "world-without-end bargain" (V.ii.779) with them. Berowne's final lines in Act IV, that "justice always whirls in equal measure" (IV.iii.381), anticipates the redressing of wrongs which composes the fifth act, but his elaboration of this theme, that "Light wenches may prove plagues to men forsworn" (IV.iii.382) and that forsworn men would deserve such treatment, while it indicates an awareness of the situation beyond that of his fellows, also demonstrates Berowne's inability to move beyond the stereotypes which the men have already considered. Notwithstanding the assertions of critics like Barber and Champion, Berowne is, like his male companions, incapable of providing the encompassing vision which places such diverse pursuits

as love and study in their proper relationship to the whole of life.

In Act V, the perils of the men's misuse of words surface as reality impinges upon the play-like atmosphere of all that has gone before. The men's confusion about the relationship between the roles which they are playing and the reality of the situation which they are trying to control is dramatized by the visit of the "Muscovites", which provides an object lesson in the potential for confusion and deception inherent in either a disguise or a role. The final blow is struck by the women's exchange of love tokens; the comic scene resulting, in which the men, "Following the signs, woo'd but the sign of she" (V.ii.469), epitomizes the disparity between the men's stereotypic view and the real nature of the women they are courting. The women have been enabled to mock the "mockery merriment" (V.ii.139) of the men's courtly game by Boyet's advice to "Arm, wench, arm" (V.ii.82) against the approach of disguised love, and the military imagery of his speech reflects the attitudes of those he has overheard. His faithful account offers as well a more explicit revelation. The King has described the Princess as an angel, and advised Moth not to fear but to speak boldly; Moth's response points out the contradiction implicit in Navarre's words, for "An angel is not evil; / I would have feared her had she been a devil" (V.ii.105-6). The words of the "Muscovites", furthermore, reinforce this impression of the men's double attitude; while the usual lovers' speeches are made, Longaville's suggestion to the witty Katherine that "You have a double tongue within your mask, / And would afford my speechless visor half" (V.ii.245-6) implies a criticism of a woman's bold speech as shrewish garrulity, and his "Will you give horns, fair

lady?" (V.ii.252) recalls earlier descriptions of women as wantons.

The King retreats from the battle of wits with the name-calling which prevents an honest evaluation of his opponents' skill: "Farewell, mad wenches: you have simple wits." (V.ii.264) The leader of the male faction is thus reduced to an expression of hostility, and the verbal contradiction of his parting shot points to the confusion and bewilderment at the root of this anger. The men are unprepared to confront the real nature of their female opponents or to deal with those aspects of the women's character not readily defined by either of the conventional stereotypes; once the defenses of their preconceived notions have been broken down, the men retreat ignobly. Boyet's presence ensures a more just analysis of the women's wit and verbal skill, but it is towards him that the noblemen direct their hostility; because the Princess and her ladies accuse their suitors of "poverty in wit" (V.ii.269) and, in conversation, reduce them to "lamentable cases" (V.ii.273), the frustrated academics and would-be wooers vent their rage on the man who "knows the trick / To make my lady laugh when she's disposed" (V.ii.465-6). The subsequent attack accuses Boyet of submissiveness unbecoming in a man and casts aspersions on his virility - "A smock shall be your shroud" (V.ii.479).

The next shock to the men's belief that they can carry the day through gamesmanship rather than by the honest pursuit of love comes with the Pageant. Berowne's counsel, that "'tis some policy / To have one show worse than the king's and his company" (V.ii.508-9), indicates a new capacity for objective evaluation, but he shares with his fellows an inability to recognize the Pageant's ironic reflection of the

noblemen's own confusion of roles and reality. As well, the simple force of Holofernes's objection to the noblemen's mockery - "This is not generous, not gentle, not humble" (V.ii.621) - belies the power of their smooth verbosity, offers a contrast to the convoluted complexity of their witticisms and sonnets, and thus continues the breaking-down of the noblemen's use of language. Navarre's plea to "Construe my speeches better" (V.ii.341) is overturned by the Princess's retort that he should "Then wish me better" (V.ii.342), or use his words as coherent symbols of the real emotions he wants to communicate, while Rosaline responds to Berowne's long speech adjuring the use of "Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, / Three-pil'd hyperboles, spruce affection, / Figures pedantical" (V.ii.407-9) by pointing out his inability to do so. Berowne's statement that "My wit is at an end" (V.ii.430), therefore, marks a significant point in Love's Labour's Lost - the point at which the men make the admission, through Berowne, that they cannot "conquer" the women in their intellectual games.

The intrusion of reality into the "play", which follows, forces to the surface the matter of love and marriage, which has been distinct from the game of courtship at least in the women's minds and in the men's practice. The information that Jaquenetta is pregnant by Armado puts an end to the Pageant as the men's witty criticisms have not quite been able to do, and as utterly as Marcade, with his news, destroys the playlike atmosphere of all that has gone before. The parallel is significant, for, while the messages are connected by their similar dramatic effect, they speak as well of the two boundaries of human experience - birth and death. The comic dance is thus dissolved by the

more encompassing vision of reality which the two pieces of news introduce, and which the songs of Winter and Spring will repeat symbolically.

The parallel is insisted on by the vocabulary of Berowne - as Righter points out, his metaphor in the comment that "The scene begins to cloud" (V.ii.712) has been suggested by the Pageant but is relevant to the main action as well - and the echoes it sets up prepare for the effectiveness of his final evaluation, after the penances have been imposed:

Our wooing doth not end like an old play;
Jack hath not Jill: these ladies' courtesy
Might well have made our sport a comedy.

(V.ii.864-6)

Righter says of Berowne's disappointed remark:

Rising from and in a sense explaining the entire structure of the comedy in which it occurs, it is far more than a simple valedictory remark, an obeisance to the symmetry of plot. Berowne is in deadly earnest when he compares the life of Navarre, the illusory nature of its attitudes and values, with the play. Marcade, the personification of death, has rudely destroyed the fairy-tale world of the park, even as the practicality of the Princess of France and her ladies destroyed the artificial scheme of the Academe, or the gibes of the King, Berowne, Dumaine, and Longaville shattered the Pageant of the Nine Worthies. Contrivance fails when confronted, unexpectedly, with a superior reality.¹⁴

The earlier suggestion of this image, in the ladies' destruction of the game of the Muscovites "like a Christmas comedy" (V.ii.462), should

perhaps have prepared the men more thoroughly for the women's response to their more straightforward courtship, but the insensitivity of Navarre's resumption of the courtship indicates the persistence of that narrow vision which will not to the course of romantic love admit impediments.

The men are thus unable to progress beyond the failure of their contrivances, to cope with the superior reality with which they have been confronted, and the rhetorical manipulations of Navarre's speech ally this confusion between roles and reality to the men's misuse of language:

...since love's argument was first on foot,
 Let not the cloud of sorrow justle it
 From what it purpos'd; since, to wail friends lost
 Is not by much so wholesome-profitable
 As to rejoice at friends but newly found.

(V.ii.737-41)

Similarly, Berowne, in his attempt to clarify Navarre's intentions, moves from the "Honest plain words [which] best pierce the ear of grief" (V.ii.743) to the justification, through rhetoric rather than by reason, of their situation:

...we to ourselves prove false,
 By being once false for ever to be true
 To those that make us both, - fair ladies, you:
 And even that falsehood, in itself a sin,
 Thus purifies itself and turns to grace.

(V.ii.762-6)

The weaknesses of the men's attitudes towards language and towards reality are thus associated and emphasized just prior to the imposition of corrective punishments, as the women's attraction to the men has

been recalled, by Berowne's comment to them that "you are not free, / For the Lord's tokens on you do I see" (V.ii.422-3), in time to make the tentative conclusion which closes Love's Labour's Lost something more than the easy fitting together of comic puzzle pieces.

The penances which are assigned address both issues - the men's inability to distinguish between word as oath and word as jest, and their similar confusion between reality and the comic, romantic game. The imposition of corrections thus indicates the women's perceptiveness concerning the characters and limitations of their partners, and accords with the reality which has been introduced by Marcade and his news. Navarre is to become acquainted with the austerity of life, which will balance his current preference for the pleasanter side of experience and will temper his "offer made in heat of blood" (V.ii.790), as will the waiting periods necessary for the equally impatient Longaville and Dumaine.¹⁵ The final emphasis is placed on Rosaline's plan for Berowne's reformation, which addresses itself directly to the issue of language as it reflects the distinction between reality and poses. Her intention recalls the Princess's earlier criticism of witty praise as a type of speech used primarily for its display of the speaker's skill rather than for the benefit of the listener or the object of praise; Rosaline's comments on the correction of the fault which both she and her mistress perceive provide as well a sensible standard for the employment and success of joking speeches:

...that's the way to choke a gibing spirit,
Whose influence is begot of that loose grace
Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools.
A jest's prosperity lies in the ear

Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it

(V.ii.848-53).

The attempt to move laughter in the throat of death will define for Berowne the limits of his verbal power, but the penance's direction moves from the issue of language to force a confrontation with a reality which remains unaffected by jests, rhetorical manipulations, or the playing of games. In spite of Berowne's disappointment at the movement from the world of the play into that of reality, the women themselves refuse to let the symmetry of the dance blind them to its possible consequences in the rest of their lives, and the songs which conclude the play present a therapeutic dramatization of the inevitable balance, in life, of the harshness of Mercury's words and the more pleasant songs of Apollo.

Hence Love's Labour's Lost concludes with an emphatic statement concerning the use of language, but the statement relates this matter, which is a key issue in the play, to the more basic theme of reality and role-playing. Barton, after demonstrating the proof in such Elizabethan plays as Tamburlaine and Shakespeare's history plays "that words are self-sufficient: not the servants of reality, but reality's masters",¹⁶ says of this play:

Love's Labour's Lost stands out amongst the comedies as a play overtly about language, filled with verbal games, with parody and word patterns, firing off its linguistic rockets in all directions. Yet this, paradoxically, is a play which ends with the defeat of the word.¹⁷

Her conclusion is that the men of the play reach an impasse after admitting that the language of love has become too contaminated to exact belief, and that this impasse can be broken only by serving the penance which the women assign - Berowne's experience will demonstrate the way language breaks down before the reality of pain and death, while the other three men must accept silence as a means of proving their love genuine. Such an analysis of the conclusion of the play, however, would deny the pleasure which the audience feels in the vitality of its language and the dynamic force of the dialogues; the women, although they become the imposers of punishments designed to correct the men's faulty attitudes towards language and relationships, are as eager to join the battle of wits as the men and as delighted with the display of their verbal dexterity. Furthermore, Barton's analysis ignores the way in which language is used in the play to reflect attitudes towards the reality which moves Love's Labour's Lost from its predominantly playlike and artificial realm.

Contrary to Barton's comment, Love's Labour's Lost concludes with language restored, not destroyed, and this restoration is precisely the function of the play's women; not only do the female characters repeatedly prove themselves masters in the control and manipulation of words and the understanding of their various levels of meaning, but they are able to assume control of the action in the play's conclusion by teaching the noblemen what they need to know about language and by directing them towards an understanding of the distinction between reality and the games they have been playing. Given the women's realistic outlook - the emphasis on observation and accurate evaluation rather

than preconceived notions and conventional wisdom - their skill at communication as well as at verbal games, and their dramatic effectiveness, the power they wield over the world of the play as it is forced into a more realistic than comic realm is highly appropriate. Thus, by their superior control of language, the women function at the very centre of this play's structure, and their final insistence on contract, after the playfulness of much of the dialogue, re-establishes the importance of the word, and completes the pattern begun with the men's oaths and with the negotiations between Navarre and the Princess's father. In the end, the women rather insist on returning words to their proper relationship with reality than despair that such an integrity is not possible, and the word is thus redeemed by the female characters who have functioned throughout Love's Labour's Lost as the defendents of its validity.

CHAPTER IV

RICHARD III

The Two Gentlemen of Verona develops the relationship between women's roles as passive and restricted observers and their accurate observation of the action and the other characters, which enlarges the perception and understanding of the audience. Love's Labour's Lost assumes this relationship, and its implicit effectiveness leads to the limited power which the Princess of France and her ladies wield over the world of the play at its conclusion, as well as their control of audience response. In both plays, then, the female characters have a dramatic function which is directly related to their role limitations, and Richard III, which most emphasizes the restrictions placed on its female participants, and their utter political helplessness,¹ is marked by the central significance of the women's role in providing a structural opposition to the protagonist and in controlling the audience's perception of the play's characters and of the pattern of its development. The female characters' restricted power to act is as well thematically significant; their recognition of their helplessness is a prerequisite to their reminders to Richard of his own ultimate inability, despite his exuberant self-confidence, to control the future. Richard III presents, in the largest sense, a study of power, embodied in its protagonist, and the female characters, with their bitter consciousness of their own powerlessness, operate from the beginning to

define the limitations which Richard refuses to confront in his steady rise to power, insisting that actions in the past determine events to come.

In some ways the history play is more explicit than either of the comedies about the connection between these two facets of the women's roles: in the first place, the women themselves comment on the motivation and effectiveness of their vocal opposition to the protagonist, making clear the relationship between restricted powers to act and the cultivation of verbal skill; and, secondly, the four women present the pattern of this development in the variety of their experiences and responses to Richard. If, as Rossiter suggests, Margaret may be seen as the last stage of woman-in-politics,² then the other women of Richard III present various points in the progression towards her situation, and as their fortunes produce a growing understanding of their powerlessness, they eventually come to share in her realistic and vengeful vision, and to welcome her aid in expressing this vision effectively.

The female characters provide a structural opposition to the protagonist throughout the course of Richard III - a steady counterpoint of recollections, warnings, and curses which forcibly remind Richard of the past he would like to forget, and of the retributive justice which awaits him in the future he cannot control as surely as he anticipates. Their insistence on an alternative vision of the action, and on a pattern of time which contrasts his own pragmatic view and belief that he will be able to control the course of the future, is the primary means by which the inevitability of the plot is conveyed to the audience.

Thus, although until the end of the play they are unable to affect its events, the female characters of Richard III serve to widen the audience's perspective on these events, and to control its perception of the design of the plot.

In the simplest form of their function as a dramatic mechanism, the scenes in which the women predominate are those that interrupt the rapid action of the plot, in order to clarify the pattern of a long series of events telescoped into a greatly shortened and accelerated movement. The women's speeches thus provide an invaluable guideline for an audience caught up in the rapid rise and fall of various parties and individual characters, and this function is clearly related to the women's powerlessness to control action within the world of the play and their habitual roles as observers. Bilton, in his brief summary of the way in which the female characters, and in particular Margaret, are able to operate both as Chorus and as participants to control the audience's perspective on Richard III, points out that:

In this play, ingredients that might be thought of as 'choric' are integrated into the structure.

Most conspicuous of these is the witch-like Queen Margaret, unhistorically lurking about the court. With grievances that reach back through two earlier plays, and a thirst for revenge that can only vent itself in curses, she keeps memories of past misdeeds fresh and foreshadows events to come. Although violently biased herself, she keeps the virtually insoluble moral debate of the tetralogy about the right to the crown and the misdeeds done in its name alive in our minds.³

Margaret's compelling performance is in part due to her presence at those earlier conflicts, her long involvement in the power struggle which has given her a wider perspective on the action and a more clear-

sighted perception of Richard's progress; the particular conjunction of political helplessness and accurate evaluation which is present in her role is evident as well in the play's other female characters. All four share a position dependent on the fortunes and favour of their male relatives and threatened by the political upheavals of the last Plantagenet reigns, although only Margaret at the beginning of the play is impervious to the skilful manipulations of the protagonist and completely disillusioned about her power to exert influence over the course of events. As the play progresses, the other women come to recognize in Margaret the pattern of all their losses, and, inspired and taught by her, to perform as self-consciously and as effectively as Richard himself, in repeating the story of the murderous deeds which composes the dark underside of his meteoric rise to power, and in confidently foreshadowing the violent downfall which is the inevitable consequence of his bloody past.

The restrictions placed on the women are established early in the play; Richard's opening soliloquy puts the female characters in their proper historical place, by identifying their lack of importance in the political sphere which, to Richard and his henchmen at least, takes precedence over all other activities. They are disdainfully associated with the regrettable turn in recent years from an awesome show of manly force to the leisurely trivialities characteristic of Edward's court:

Grim-visaged War hath smooth'd his wrinkled front;
 And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds,
 To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
 He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber,
 To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.⁴

The apparent motive behind Richard's attitude to this choice of activities, as suggested by his vocabulary, is a moral condemnation of amorous subjection to women, but the ambivalence of his stance is made explicit in the narrowed focus on his own state which follows, in which he seems primarily to regret his own inability to perform. He is "not shap'd for sportive tricks, / Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass" (I.i.14-5), and his belief that he has been cheated by "dissembling Nature" (I.i.19) provides a contradictory account of his bitter contempt for those pastimes enjoyed with a "wanton ambling nymph" (I.i.17). Thus Richard can be seen from the beginning of the play presenting his own vision of events and of his own character to suit his immediate purposes, and his practice here, as throughout the first wooing-scene, indicates the belief on which he will act during the play - that he can control the action to gain his desired ends.

Richard uses the stereotype of woman as wanton, and his own self-portrait, furthermore, to justify not only his discontent with this "weak piping time of peace" (I.i.24), but also his ambition and villainous designs:

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

(I.i.28-31)

His argument works by rhetoric and emotional appeal rather than by reason, and his use of the conventional image of woman suggests the way in which the play's female characters will recurrently become the scapegoats of his plans and excuses. Similarly, when Clarence enters,

Richard makes their brother Edward's contrasting attitude and weakness for women both the cause of Clarence's imprisonment and the justification for a general statement on the upset caused in the smooth running of the world "when men are rul'd by women" (I.i.62).⁵ Edward will be criticized throughout the play for his amours and for his acquiescence in Queen Elizabeth's advancement of her family; Richard's attack on the power of such "mighty gossips in this monarchy" (I.i.83) as the queen and Jane Shore is an appropriate preparation for the way in which he will treat the women in the play, and for the conflict between him and the women who so consistently pierce his dissembling mask.

Given such a preamble, the audience is not surprised to hear that Richard's wooing of Anne will be

...not all so much for love
 As for another secret close intent,
 By marrying her which I must reach unto.

(I.i.157-9)

Woman is thus a means to an end, an inert object to be incorporated into Richard's design. Anne serves in this scene as an effective foil for those women who will follow; she embodies the stereotype of female passivity, and her vulnerability to the force of Richard's will provides the audience with its first view of his power and skill in manipulation. Clemen states that

Anne is for Richard a mere object, and not a real 'antagonist'. Her function in the scene is largely that of revealing Richard's character. Moreover, the scene, which lacks any basis in the source, is curiously unrelated to the main action of the play, for Anne and the marriage for which Richard

strives are of little importance later on.⁶

Anne's importance as a dramatic mechanism to spur the display of Richard's technique and character is thus emphasized, and this early scene functions as well to demonstrate woman's inability to affect the action. It is in fact Richard's lack of concern for Anne as a person which links the scene to later developments in the play, for his attitude indicates both his willingness to exploit those more human feelings which cause Anne's susceptibility to his rhetorical and dramatic persuasion, in order to accomplish his goals, and, with the later suspicion that he has hurried on her death, his eagerness to dispose of those no longer useful.

Anne's influence on the audience's understanding of the protagonist is direct as well as indirect. In addition to revealing his nature through their interaction in this scene, her descriptions of him as a "black magician" (I.ii.34) and "defus'd infection of a man" (I.ii.78) begin the characterization of Richard which will be continued and developed in the speeches of vengeful women throughout the play. In their accurate evaluation of the protagonist, the female characters of Richard III perform as do their counterparts in Love's Labour's Lost, to reinforce the impressions which the audience has received from the speeches of the men themselves, and to articulate clearly the flaws evident in the men's words and actions. Anne's criticisms of Richard's past deeds, furthermore, introduce the notion of a retributive scheme of time which Margaret will establish and the other two women develop to anticipate his downfall; her curses and appeals invite Richard to become, as she is, a spectator to the unnatural state his "deeds

inhuman and unnatural" (I.ii.60) have provoked:

For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,
 Fill'd it with cursing cries and deep exclams.
 If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
 Behold this pattern of thy butcheries.

(I.ii.51-4)

Richard, however, is concerned in this scene only with performing, and his delight will come, after Anne's exit, with his recollection of a successful performance. Unlike the Princess and her ladies, then, Anne fails to perceive the mode in which the male protagonist is operating, and she is accordingly unable to counter the demonic appeals he makes to her finer qualities, in striking contrast to the capacity which Rosaline in particular demonstrates in Act V of Love's Labour's Lost, to pierce through the rhetorical appeals of the dissembling Berowne in order to evaluate and correct the faults in his attitudes.

Clemen points out Richard's skill in provoking Anne to an increased passion, which burns out her fury before the transition to wooing; in leaping from dissimulation to an open avowal of his misdeeds, which causes Anne to accept his candor as genuine; and in exploiting the psychological distance between her wish for his destruction and the accomplishment of that deed. He concludes that:

Richard's strategy for converting Anne is a true off-spring of his diabolical nature: he conquers by appealing to the best in the person he is seeking to win over - but to a best that is often at the same time a weak spot which he quickly and cunningly exploits.⁷

MacNeir adds, moreover, that Anne's extravagant attitude of mourning in itself makes her vulnerable to Richard's considerable dramatic power,

and that she surrenders in the wooing-scene to a more conscious tragedian and a better actor.⁸

Anne's function in the scene is thus double-edged, and corresponds to the audience's dual response to Richard. Despite her fears that both his heart and tongue are false, Anne cannot comprehend either the extent of his acting or, as Elizabeth will later understand when he sues for the hand of her daughter, the possible motives for his actions and duplicity. She is less capable an opponent than the other female characters, and her attempt to hold centre stage and make of Richard a spectator is a naive one. Only the increased suffering at his hands which the play brings about will lead her to an acceptance of the role in which the women of Richard III are most effective - that of a Chorus-like group of commentators on the proceedings, who present a consistent antagonism to Richard's plans and who provide the audience with an alternate and more encompassing vision of the play's direction and import.

Nevertheless, Anne does operate as an observer offering the audience an accurate evaluation of the protagonist's character; she is perceptive enough to name Richard as a dissembler, although she cannot recognize the deceit of his declarations to her. Anne's recitation of his past history, on which her epithets for him are based, supplies information essential to the development of the plot and to the control of audience response to the protagonist, and she provides the evidence which reinforces his announcement that "I am determined to prove a villain". Her initial reactions to his interruption of the funeral procession, then, establish Richard's character in the eyes of the

supply him with the first real proof of his ability to control and dazzle the rest of the cast. For the time being, he is successful in his attempt to control the situation and the other characters; it is not until the end of the play that the female characters, having recognized their own limited powers to act and their inability to stop Richard's ambitious progress, can force upon the protagonist a confrontation with the limitations of his dissembling, and with his ultimate powerlessness to change the course of events.

Anne's performance seems as well to confirm Richard's opinion of women as unimportant, for he turns in his soliloquy from the appreciation of his own successful performance to a disdainful appraisal of Anne's poor show - of her rapid forgetfulness of her murdered husband, whose virtues Richard enumerates, and of her willingness to "abase her eyes" (I.ii.247) on a new suitor who himself admits that his "all not equals Edward's moiety" (I.ii.250). Although he has appealed to Anne's finer qualities, as well as to her vanity, and thus won his suit, in evaluating the episode he considers only her lack of perception about his true nature, and presents a sarcastic evaluation of her vision of him:

I do mistake my person all this while!
 Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
 Myself to be a marvellous proper man.

(I.ii.253-5)

Ironic as his words are, Richard's very real sense of his manipulative powers and personal appeal contradict the excuse he has used to justify his choice of the role of villain, and the soliloquy which ends this

scene moves from the bitterness of his opening tirade against "dissembling Nature" to the delight which the star performer experiences in witnessing his own ability to dissemble:

I'll be at charges for a looking glass....
 Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass,
 That I may see my shadow as I pass.

(I.ii.256, 263-4)

Richard comes to his next encounter with the female characters of the play fresh from his success in the wooing-scene, but the triumphant act is not to be repeated without the effectiveness of skilful competition. Rossiter comments on this development in symphonic terms:

Richard established, his cruel and sardonic effectiveness demonstrated on Clarence and Anne, there arises against his Carl Orff-like music the one voice he quails before (if but slightly): the sub-dominant notes of Margaret and her prophecy of doom, to which the ghosts will walk in the visionary night before Bosworth. It is a conflict between a spirit and a ghost.⁹

While Margaret's performance has the most immediate dramatic power, even Elizabeth, whose lack of control over events is disguised by her influence on Edward, presents a more realistic evaluation of the situation and a less-easily deluded opposition to Richard. Her opening conversation with Rivers and Grey, concerning the state of Edward's health and her fearful anticipation of her own position should he die, makes clear the precariousness of her power in the kingdom. Like Anne, she depends for her security totally on her male connections - hence the advancement of the Woodville party which Richard has already

criticized - but her political experience provides her with a less naive perspective, and enables her to see through the solace which Grey attempts to offer, that, in the event of Edward's death, "The heavens have blessed you with a goodly son, / To be your comforter when he is gone" (I.iii.9-10). Political realist that the queen is learning to become, she turns from the blessing that Heaven has provided to the treatment that Richard is likely to offer under the guise of friendly promises, from the illusion of filial comfort and support to the reality of political helplessness:

Ah! he is young; and his minority
Is put unto the trust of Richard Gloucester,
A man that loves not me, nor none of you.

(I.iii.11-3)

Her evaluation is, of course, accurate, as the events of the play will bear out and as the audience, given the soliloquies' revelations of Richard's character, can readily accept; the situation Elizabeth anticipates here will eventually parallel that of Margaret, who has lost her family and her power, and to whom the threat of death is less painful than the isolation of her banishment from court.

In this scene, nevertheless, although Elizabeth's suspicions indicate an awareness beyond that of Anne or of the men who attempt to comfort her, she is still operating with limited self-awareness, and her avowal of humility in the view that God has "rais'd me to this careful height / From that contented hap which I enjoy'd" (I.iii.83-4) resembles Richard's later and more blatant thankfulness for his humility. The audience may more readily accept her declared preference for a less exalted role -

I had rather be a country servant-maid
 Than a great queen, with this condition,
 To be so baited, scorn'd, and stormed at:
 Small joy have I in being England's queen

(I.iii.107-10) -

but Margaret's comparison of their states and bitterness at the loss of power she has experienced present an implied reproof of the statements which both Richard and Elizabeth make about their reluctance to assume high places. Elizabeth as well places the guilt of the past and its consequences in the future in a distorted relationship; at the height of her power and aware of the dangers pressing round her, she yet hopes that she may not have to face a future at Richard's hands. Furthermore, while Richard will at least admit the wrongs done to Margaret, and, for the sake of his role of humility, publicly "repent / My part thereof that I have done to her" (I.iii.307-8), Elizabeth, despite the evidence of her ambitious designs in the past and present, refuses to acknowledge the guilt consequent on the rise of her party to power. She is operating in a mode of denial, while Richard acts according to his belief that an apparently penitent confession, accompanied by a variety of excuses, will continue to serve to erase his past and to prevent its harmful consequences in the future. The audience has seen the success of this belief in the first wooing-scene; the culminating statement of the philosophy comes in the second, in which Richard sues for the hand of Elizabeth's daughter:

Look, what is done, cannot be now amended:
 Men shall deal unadvisedly sometimes,
 Which after-hours gives leisure to repent.

(IV.iv.204-6)

Such minor episodes as Richard's refusal to live up to his promise of an earldom for Buckingham reinforce the audience's understanding of the limitation to the protagonist's vision, while the fact that it is this omission which leads Buckingham to ponder "made I him king for this?" (IV.ii.119) indicates the significant role which this flaw in Richard's method plays in his downfall. Richard believes himself free to alter his own character and the pattern of events; it is Elizabeth who, having learned to recognize her own powerlessness to control events in this world, will confront the protagonist with the limitations of his manipulative skill.

At this early point in the play, then, both Elizabeth and Richard attempt to distort the rigid pattern of cause-and-effect which Margaret's curses assert. Until Elizabeth has experienced the loss of her supposed power, through her influence over her husband, she will neither recognize nor acknowledge her own helplessness in the political sphere and the frustration which this helplessness engenders; accordingly, her antagonism to Richard in this scene is weakened by her attempt to hold off a complete weighing of the future she may anticipate at his hands with a prayerful appeal:

...we know your meaning, brother Gloucester;
 You envy my advancement and my friends'.
 God grant we never may have need of you!

(I.iii.74-6)

Her grasp of the situation is exposed as flawed by the entrance of Margaret, a seasoned political performer who possesses the ability to evaluate her opponent's tactical ploys, his manipulative prowess

and his motives. Richard's response to her participation in the debate - the recollection of her bloody past - diverts the course of the third scene from its new focus on the wrongs done to Margaret, on the "wrangling pirates" (I.iii.158) who have wrested her powerful position from her, and particularly on that "gentle villain" (I.iii.163), the dissembling Richard, but the old queen is no political novice to be so easily swayed from her purpose:

What! were you snarling all before I came,
 Ready to catch each other by the throat,
 And turn you all your hatred on me now?

(I.iii.188-90)

Richard has attempted to make his outspoken opponent serve as a common enemy, against whom he can unite the dissident forces he is trying to control - here, as in the prearranged "scene" with Buckingham later, the women of the court become his most convenient scapegoats - but Margaret is determined to play the role she has chosen, and not one assigned to her by a rival performer.

Once she has moved to centre stage, Margaret manipulates the attention given her by the other characters to make the points only she, from the vantage point of her age, past involvement, and present detachment, has the perspective to perceive fully. Bilton comments on Margaret's performance in this scene that:

In her first appearance (Act I, scene 3), she establishes contact with the audience, and a clear-eyed view of Richard and the others, in a series of asides, before she finally sweeps down into their midst and calls down her curses upon them. The curses provide structure and suspense as they come true one

by one, minor wheel-of-fortune stories being enacted within the main one.¹⁰

Buckingham, like Richard, attempts to interrupt the fury of her speeches, with an appeal to "peace, for shame, if not for charity" (I.iii.272), but Margaret provides a consistent contrast to Anne's virtuous weakness in her refusal to be sidetracked from the central issue:

Urge neither charity nor shame to me:
 Uncharitably with me have you dealt,
 And shamefully my hopes by you are butcher'd.
 My charity is outrage, life my shame,
 And in that shame still live my sorrow's rage!

(I.iii.274-8)

Furthermore, Margaret is skilled as an observer of character and able to cut through Richard's rhetorical flourishes to define him accurately as "A murd'rous villain" (I.iii.134); she alone is Richard's equal in the ability to move an audience, and even Buckingham, who will later assist Richard in his accession through the direction of an important scene, acknowledges the effectiveness of her performance - "My hair doth stand on end to hear her curses" (I.iii.304). Her skill as a performer enables Margaret to perceive Richard's ploys, but her experience in the political world allows her, unlike her opponent or the other women, to see beyond the immediate acquisition of power to a more encompassing vision of the cause-and-effect relationship of events in this world. From the beginning, she foresees Richard's downfall, and his inability, despite the successful manoeuvres by which he accumulates an apparently ultimate power, to avoid the consequences of his evil actions.

What Margaret's speeches provide in the development of the drama, then, is a clear and unwavering vision of a dimension suggested in Elizabeth's expectations of the future, culminating in her image of the wheel of fortune - "I fear our happiness is at the height" (I.iii.41). Even here, then, the queen anticipates the cause-and-effect chain of events that Richard ignores, and her suspicions are paralleled by the later fears of the anonymous citizens, that they must "look to see a troublous world" (II.iii.9). These fears the minor figures attribute to a number of signs of political unrest; the anxiety of the more powerful participants in the action is more directly motivated - both Elizabeth's "All-seeing heaven, what a world is this!" (I.i.82) and Edward's "O God! I fear Thy justice will take hold" (II.i.131) are a response to the news of Clarence's death - but it is Margaret's memories and prophecies which most clearly give a concrete form to this pattern, and present it in its entirety.

Berman comments on Margaret's speeches that:

Her function, consciously undertaken, is to provide in the court of time present a strong sense of the guilt of the past. She is the voice of an order of time which has its own laws of 'induction' and 'consequence'.¹¹

While this is a role in which the other women of the play will participate, in the first encounters of the deadly game Margaret alone envisions the exactitude of a revenge which takes "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" as the necessary outcome of the inevitable pattern rooted in the past. Anne, it is true, has attempted to confront her suitor with just such a pattern, but Richard has countered her

accusation that his bloody deeds were "provoked by thy bloody mind, /
That never dreamt on ought but butcheries" (I.ii.99-100) with an
appeal to her vanity and a rationale that includes her in his guilt:

Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom

(I.ii.121-4).

As he alters the cause-and-effect relationship which Margaret would more
strictly define, so he is perceptive enough to determine the justifi-
cation for the same inglorious past which will appeal to Elizabeth; he
offers assistance to Edward as his motive and presents the king's
forgetfulness (a fault of which he will soon become guilty) as the cause
of his present disfavour: "I was too hot to do somebody good, / That
is too cold in thinking of it now." (I.iii.311-2)

It is with Margaret's entrance that the pattern of the play's
events surfaces, as she presents a scheme in which the future is
inexorably determined by the past:

Though not by war, by surfeit die your king
As ours by murder, to make him a king!
Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,
For Edward my son, that was Prince of Wales,
Die in his youth by like untimely violence!
Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,
Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self!...
Long die thy happy days before thy death,
And, after many length'ned hours of grief,
Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen!

(I.iii.197-203, 207-9)

Rivers, Dorset, and Hastings are to expect "some unlook'd accident"
(I.iii.214) to cut off their lives as the murder they witnessed did

himself, are concerned either with the manipulation of perspective to accommodate their leader's purposes or with the denial of a moral structure on the basis of Machiavellian political thought. Catesby responds to Hastings' description of England as a "tottering state" (III.ii.37) with the rationale that "'twill never stand upright / Till Richard wear the garland of the realm" (III.ii.39-40), while Buckingham's debate with the Cardinal epitomizes the ongoing conflict between the philosophy of expedience and the institutions of conventional morality. As Berman comments:

In the story of Richard III Shakespeare found ready to hand the equivalent of a workable myth in which the 'natural' and the traditional engage in what is quite literally a death struggle. He writes...of far more than the involvement of political ideologies. He writes of a world of order attacked by the anarchy of the self.¹²

The ease with which Buckingham overcomes the Cardinal's scruples is thus indicative of the ascendancy of Richard's party, and the encounter clearly displays the dynamics of the protagonist's success.

This success is increasingly countered by the female characters of the play, as they join forces with Margaret in opposition to Richard. The death of the two young princes at the hands of their uncle is the turning point in the role of the other women, but their participation in Margaret's hunger for revenge and her dramatic function has been prepared for as the events have unfolded. The Duchess's early reminders to her son of the virtues he lacks, and her response to the Archbishop's assurances of Richard's graciousness - "I hope he is; but yet let mothers doubt" (II.iv.22) - continue the contrast between

the two groups of characters established in Elizabeth's initial conversations with the men of the play, and in this scene the speeches of both women become more generalized and anticipatory. The Duchess presents the past which allies the women, by speaking of the many "Accursed and unquiet wrangling days" (II.iv.55) she has known, while Elizabeth's vision of the future and the rising of Richard's star moves from forebodings about the state of her family's fortunes to a generalized perception repeated in the anxiety expressed by the citizens:

Ay me! I see the ruin of my house!
 The tiger now hath seiz'd the gentle hind;
 Insulting tyranny begins to jet
 Upon the innocent and aweless throne:
 Welcome, destruction, blood, and massacre!
 I see, as in a map, the end of all.

(II.iv.49-54)

The prophecy remains, as yet, formless, but the clear pattern for the future which Margaret has asserted is soon to be validated; the power of her curses is dramatically established by the recollection of Grey and Rivers just before their deaths. The two men speak as well of her curse on Hastings, who will be the next to fall, and on Buckingham and Richard himself. What Clemen describes as "the nemesis pattern of the plot" becomes increasingly clear from this point, and it is in the recognition of this pattern that the women are divided from the men of the play.

The female characters become, as well, increasingly self-conscious about their performance in the action. In her first appearance, Margaret has included Elizabeth in her disdain for those who fail to perceive the rigidity of the moral scheme she presents, and has pointed

out the narrowness of Elizabeth's vision:

Poor painted queen, vain flourish of my fortune!
 Why strew'st thou sugar on that bottled spider,
 Whose deadly web ensnareth thee about?
 Fool, fool! thou whet'st a knife to kill thyself.
 The day will come that thou shalt wish for me
 To help thee curse that poisonous bunch-back'd
 toad.

(I.iii.241-6)

With the death of Edward and her announcement of the "act of tragic violence" (II.ii.39) which she will play, Elizabeth has been forced to widen her own perspective and has implicitly accepted Margaret's theatrical evaluation of her role, as "The flattering index of a direful pageant" (IV.iv.85). With the murder of her two sons she recalls Margaret's prophecy to confirm explicitly, as have Rivers and Grey, the validity of the old queen's vision:

O! thou didst prophesy the time would come
 That I should wish for thee to help me curse
 That bottled spider, that foul bunch-backed toad!

(IV.iv.79-81)

Anne is correspondingly forced to admit the effectiveness of the curse she has uttered against herself, unwittingly, in the wooing-scene, and uses her new knowledge to attempt control over her destiny:

Anointed let me be with deadly venom,
 And die ere men can say, God save the queen!

(IV.i.61-2)

As Berman points out, the women here gain a mystical and prophetic vision of time, in contrast to Richard's pragmatic and secular view,

according to which time is a commodity to be used and controlled by the force of the individual will:

The contingencies of time fall into a scheme which stretches from past to future: he lives in the world of the conditional, in which things happen according to the direction imposed upon them. Time does not exist in this sense for the defeated...The defeated live in the midst of horror recollected and anticipated.¹³

What is particularly effective about their alternative vision of the action is the power of the women's speeches, both as they control the audience's perception of the plot and as they come increasingly to correspond with the weakening of Richard's power.

The female characters themselves comment on their role in providing vocal opposition to Richard, and suggest its source in the frustration engendered by their restricted powers to act.¹⁴ Elizabeth's response to the Duchess's query - "Why should calamity be full of words?" (IV.iv.126) - indicates her awareness that she has no other recourse, and her frustration that even curses may affect only the emotions of the speaker:

Let them have scope: though what they will impart
Help nothing else, yet they do ease the heart.

(IV.iv.130-1)

The dialogue which follows, and the exchange between Richard and his mother, amplifies the theme of words as the only possible alternative for the action which is denied Elizabeth and the Duchess. The latter sees their attempt as part of the pattern which Margaret has made

familiar, for she responds to Elizabeth's justification with a further defence of the power of cursing:

If so, then be not tongue-tied: go with me,
And in the breath of bitter words let's smother
My damned son, that thy sweet sons smother'd.

(IV.iv.132-4)

Her reaction to Richard's questions, on his entrance, indicates that this violence is as well a substitute for the action which might have prevented her involvement in the guilt of his rise to power, for she identifies herself as

...she that might have intercepted thee,
By strangling thee in her accursed womb,
From all the slaughters, wretch, that thou
 hast done!

(IV.iv.137-9)

With more sympathetic motivation than that of Lady Macbeth, the Duchess here makes a similar denial of her maternal instincts and womanly compassion; by this point in the history of Richard III, all of the women are rejecting the gentle, passive role and virtuous weakness of Anne in the wooing-scene.

The Duchess's implication, in this speech, that she has been unwittingly involved in the evil of Richard's actions, suggests another dimension of the commentary which the women provide on Richard III. Although they articulate a sternly moral scheme against which the protagonist's wrong-doing must be measured, the distinction between the three major female characters of Richard III and their counterparts in the comedies - embodiments of virtue and characterized as a clear

contrast to the flaws of the male characters - is an important one. While Elizabeth has adopted the guise of wronged innocence in response to Richard's antagonism - "My lord, you do me shameful injury, / Falsely to draw me in these vile suspects" (I.iii.88-9) - her warning to Derby concerning his wife's "proud arrogance" (I.iii.24), and his defense that this criticism is founded on "The envious slanders of her false accusers" (I.iii.26), make clear Elizabeth's implication in the ambitious intrigue and power-dealing which will later collapse her own position. Richard has already commented on her involvement to Clarence, and repeats the warning in his advice to Rivers:

She may help you to many fair preferments,
And then deny her aiding hand therein,
And lay those honours on your high desert.

(I.iii.94-6)

Further evidence of her influence, and of her readiness to use it, emerges in her decision to "acquaint his majesty / Of those gross taunts that oft I have endur'd" (I.iii.105-6), and regardless of our sympathy for her abuse at the hands of Richard here and elsewhere in the play, the scene places Elizabeth in the circle of those who, to a greater or lesser extent, have invited the fate visited upon them by the ruthless Richard.

This is again shared by all the women, and most immediately apparent in Margaret, whose foul and merciless deeds Richard alludes to in his attempt to alleviate the force of her accusations of him. Although no specific guilt is attributed to the Duchess of York, she is at least conscious enough of a sense of general guilt to deny

responsibility for Richard's vices:

He is my son, ay, and therein my shame;
Yet from my dugs he drew not this deceit

(II.ii.29-30),

while Anne berates herself for the responses that led to her involvement in her husband's destructive progress, for the "woman's heart" (IV.i.78) which left her powerless to resist him. This impression of a general corruption is reinforced as well by the anxious comments of the anonymous citizens, whose evaluation of the state of the nation is that

All may be well; but, if God sort it so,
'Tis more than we deserve, or I expect.

(II.iii.36-7)

Richmond's victory, according to this vision of the play, then, purges more than just the specific guilt of Richard; it can be seen as a correction of "the grossness of this age" (III.i.46), as a climax to the destruction of the guilty past in which Richard, among others, has taken part.

Margaret's final appearance marks the movement of the play from the "dire induction" (IV.iv.5) of the first acts to the "consequence / ... as bitter, black, and tragical" (IV.iv.6-7) which Richard's actions have produced. Her asides during the laments of Elizabeth and the Duchess gather the multitude of murders into a clear pattern of "dying debt[s]" (IV.iv.21), without payment of which the drunken unrest of England can never be purged. Even Richard's fratricide becomes the justice of an avenging God, and Margaret's words on the appropriateness of his mother's sorrow present a vision of that "troubler of the poor

world's peace" as the scourge of God, as "hell's black intelligencer,
/ Only reserv'd their factor, to buy souls / And send them thither"

(IV.iv.71-3); she tells the Duchess that

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept
A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death...
O upright, just, and true-disposing God,
How do I thank thee, that this carnal cur
Preys on the issue of his mother's body,
And makes her pue-fellow with other's moan!

(IV.iv.47-8, 55-8)

Margaret emphasizes that the Duchess, in giving birth to Richard, is inadvertently caught up in the consequences of his actions. The women, like England itself, are involved in the evil which Richard embodies, and their helplessness and growing awareness reflect the same process in the body politic.

The women yet retain their capacity for perceptive observation, which produces in this act a revelation of Richard's growing uneasiness. While Anne's final appearance is framed by indications of Richard's control over her - in the scene following he gives Catesby instructions to "give out / That Anne, my queen, is sick and like to die" (IV.ii.56-7), and plans to "take order for her keeping close" (IV.ii.52) - she is able to perform a unique function in the drama by mentioning the "timorous dreams" (IV.i.84) which disturb her husband's sleep as the first indication that his boundless self-confidence has been shaken. This suggestion is reinforced in the inconsistency of his argument with Elizabeth in the second wooing-scene; Richard wavers between the recognition that "I cannot make you what amends I would" (IV.iv.312) for the past wrongs he has done her, and the attempt to make

reparations:

The loss you have is but a son being king;
 And by that loss your daughter is made queen...
 Again shall you be mother to a king;
 And all the ruins of distressful times
 Repair'd with double riches of content.

(IV.iv.310-1, 320-2)

The significance of these indications, and in particular of Anne's comment, is strengthened by the proof they offer of the accomplishment of the first stage of Margaret's curse on her opponent:

The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul!...
 No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
 Unless it be while some tormenting dream
 Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils!

(I.iii.222, 225-7)

Hence internal and external developments coincide: as the power of his opposition - represented by the female characters - grows, Richard's confidence begins to decline, and this development culminates in the battle of Bosworth, preceded by the appearance of ghosts from his guilty past.

The protagonist is thus moving towards a confrontation with the reality that the female characters have pointed out, and the audience recognized, from the initial stages of Richard's accumulation of power - that he cannot escape indefinitely from the consequences of his evil in the past. The second wooing-scene provides the clearest statement of the opposing visions of the protagonist and the female characters, while Richard's failure to attain his objective stands in strong contrast to his earlier successes, epitomized in his wooing of

Anne. While he employs a variety of previously successful techniques to avoid confronting his guilt, Elizabeth returns consistently to her list of his past crimes, for which he must take responsibility, "Unless thou could'st put on some other shape, / And not be Richard that hath done all this." (IV.iv.289-90). Throughout the course of the play's events, Richard has played a variety of roles and has altered his shape to fit his purposes, and the recurrence of the acting metaphor has convinced the audience of his pride in his skill as a performer; Elizabeth's words, however, strip the illusion from the reality of his nature and point out the inseparability of his past actions from his character. Furthermore, Richard has assumed that he can alter not only his own shape but the shape of events to suit his purpose, and he must now recognize that he cannot alter events, that they are being shaped by a greater power than his.

The dynamics of this scene indicate how thoroughly Elizabeth has assumed the role of the departed Margaret, and how far she has come from her earlier susceptibility to Richard's arguments. His attempt to deny personal responsibility for the death of the young princes is firmly countered by her recognition that "Whose hand soever lanch'd their tender hearts, / Thy head, all indirectly, gave direction" (IV.iv.225-6), and neither his repentance for the unadvised actions "Which after-hours gives leisure to repent" (IV.iv.296) nor his promise of "many goodly days" (IV.iv.323) to come for her and her family can soften Elizabeth's stern vision of his wrong-doing. Like Margaret, she clarifies the pattern of Richard's guilty rise to power by placing it in the context of England's turbulent past, and her responses to

his arguments give repeated evidence of the realistic perspective she has gained through her experiences. Her reasons for opposing his suit are "Too deep and dead, poor infants, in their graves" (IV.iv.366), and her constant remembrance of the past leads as well to the realistic recognition that her daughter's life and promised title will last only "As long as hell and Richard likes of it" (IV.iv.357).

None of the evasions which have served Richard and his party to this point, then, has any effect on Elizabeth's refusal to acquiesce in his "great designs" (IV.iv.420); it is significant that she resists his urging of "the necessity and state of times" (IV.iv.419) which has defeated the Cardinal's moral scruples. Elizabeth's persistence in articulating a retributive scheme of time recalls Margaret's earlier opposition to the protagonist, and while she has claimed to have "much less spirit to curse" (IV.iv.197) than the Duchess, her verbal skill indicates how well she has learned the old queen's lessons. The desperation of her situation is reflected in the lengths to which she will go to prevent her daughter's becoming prey to Richard's designs - "I'll corrupt her manners, stain her beauty, / Slander myself as false to Edward's bed" (IV.iv.207-8) - while her vocal power is presented again as an alternative to the action which is denied Elizabeth:

But that still use of grief makes wild grief tame,
My tongue should to thy ears not name my boys,
Till that my nails were anchor'd in thine eyes

(IV.iv.230-2).

Accordingly, in her antagonism to Richard in the proxy wooing, Elizabeth reverses his distinctions between past, present, and future to declare, like Margaret, that the present and future are tied to the past

provoked by Richard's justifications and call to expedience to beat him at his own game; her responses change after his final appeal, but the absence of any comments indicating a change in her overall attitude suggests that she deludes her opponent into believing that he has achieved his intent, in order to lull his suspicions while she aids in the preparations of his enemies. The irony of her deception is reinforced both by his contempt, reminiscent of his criticism of Anne after the first wooing-scene, for one who appears to be a "Relenting fool, and shallow-changing woman" (IV.iv.434), and by the fact that Richard has earlier limited woman's usefulness to that of a tool for cementing political alliances. Thus Elizabeth, accepting the restrictions of the female stereotype as she has in recognizing the limitations to her power, is able to turn the stereotype to her advantage, and to join her forces with Richmond, who will defeat Richard. She acts, rather than merely reacting, but in marrying her daughter to the future king she reasserts the traditional female role.

As she moves into action, as in her reflection on the general guilt of her association with Richard, Elizabeth once again reflects the state of the nation now welcoming a force from outside to reject the embodiment of its own corruption. The women of Richard III may thus be seen operating on a number of different, and complementary, levels; their responses to the protagonist at once reflect processes occurring in the body politic and control the perception of the audience, while their movement towards a recognition of personal helplessness enables the female characters to comment on the limitations of power, as it is embodied in Richard himself.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of these three early plays, then, Shakespeare presents a critique of the conventional stereotype of woman. Unable to become immediately involved in the action, his female characters gain a wider perspective on the other characters and on events within the world of the play, and they thus assume the role of understander and interpreter. Because of the limitations of the stereotype into which their society casts them, the women of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, and Richard III develop compensatory skills: their powerlessness to affect the development of the action, and the frustration this helplessness engenders, result in a vocal effectiveness that travels beyond the boundaries of the play's action to communicate to the audience and to shape its experience of the play.

The female characters' role is thus a structural one. Their words, and the standard established by the behaviour of the women in the two comedies, provide a means for the audience to judge the male protagonists and to evaluate the action of the plays; the women direct the audience's perception of the design of each play. Accordingly, while the female characters are for the most part restricted to a passive role within the world of the play itself, in their control of audience response they operate as significant dramatic mechanisms.

Their dramatic function has been more commonly recognized in Richard III than in either of the early comedies - it is generally accepted that Queen Margaret and Queen Elizabeth perform as a kind of

chorus to the proceedings. The evidence of the two approximately contemporary plays, however, suggests a pattern to Shakespeare's dramatic employment of his female characters. As the women of Richard III comment on, criticize, and anticipate the downfall of the protagonist, so in The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Love's Labour's Lost the women's words and actions provide a more distanced and satirical perspective on the behaviour of the young men than critical studies have traditionally allowed. Furthermore, in each of these plays the emphasis is placed on the women's restricted powers to act, and, while each may focus more pointedly on one aspect of the female role than another, the function of the female characters in general illuminates the stereotype of woman. To view Richard III in the light of The Two Gentlemen and Love's Labour's Lost is to perceive a clear development in the presentation of the woman's capacity for a more encompassing, and frequently more realistic, vision of their society.

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, this vision is entirely incapable of affecting the development of action within the comic world; the two gentlemen determine the course of events from beginning to end, and the actions of Julia and Silvia at the play's conclusion epitomize their helplessness. Nevertheless, the relationship between their roles as passive observers and their accurate analysis enriches the audience's awareness of the design of the play and its understanding of the protagonists, and the thoughtfulness necessitated by their restrictions is an implicit component of the skill with which the Princess and her ladies play the romantic games of Love's Labour's Lost. In this comedy, the inadequacy of the men's expectations about women, which has been a

part of the criticism of Verona's young gentlemen, is more pointedly developed, while the women's superior control of language and understanding of reality enables them to function at the very centre of the play's structure, and to exert power over the world of the play at its conclusion.

Richard III, like The Two Gentlemen, offers explicit comments from the female characters themselves on the relationship between restricted powers to act and the development of perceptive observation and verbal skill; the women of the historical play are again able commentators on the protagonist and on the course of events unfolding on stage. They provide as well structural opposition to Richard and his ambitious rise to power even as they reflect, in the variety of their responses to him, the development of the nation's ultimate rejection of him. Most significantly, as in the comedies the female characters have a dramatic function which is directly related to their role limitations, so in Richard III the women's consciousness of their own powerlessness enables them to present an alternate vision of the pattern of the play's events and to define the limitations to his power which Richard must eventually confront.

Hence in these early Shakespearean plays the female stereotype is made to serve a dramatic function and is thus illuminated, but not denied. Even the female characters' movement into the control of action at the conclusions of Love's Labour's Lost and Richard III serves to develop this aspect of their role rather than to break away from or to deny the power of the conventional stereotype. The Princess and her ladies persist in their resistance to the noblemen's

suit, while Elizabeth's marrying her daughter to Henry Tudor reinforces the passive role of women in cementing political alliances. That these actions do control the outcomes of both plays is in a sense the logical, if paradoxical, conclusion to what has gone before: the control which the female characters are able to exert over the world of the play is, like their control over audience response, founded in the conventional stereotype and the unique perspective in which it results.

NOTES:

Chaper I

¹Frank Harris, The Women in Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1911), p. 47. It is interesting that Harris uses the adjective "talkative" to dismiss women who are, after all, only joining the men in their own game with a skill and dignity that suggest their verbal efforts deserve more attention. A willingness to speak up for herself has traditionally been suspect in a woman, and it is one of the dominant characteristics of two stock figures in drama, the shrew and the foolish old woman. Pearson, in The Elizabethans at Home (Stanford, California: California University Press, 1957), comments of the Elizabethan attitude towards the subject that "at this time women frequently suffered criticism for their loud speech and disagreeable 'clacking of tongues'. Their running shrill voices continued to be the point of attack all through the century." (p. 112) This stereotype, reflected in popular contemporary literature, is not surprising; what is startling is that it should persist to blind critical examination of the characters whose leader, as I shall point out in my chapter on Love's Labour's Lost, is aware of and consciously guards against the danger of being judged and disregarded in this fashion.

² One finds in turn that the women of Shakespeare's plays become astoundingly different - as personalities experienced by the reader and as characters functioning in the world of the play - according to the particular axes which various critics have to grind. Eric Stockton,

for example, in "The Adulthood of Shakespeare's Heroines" (in Shakespearean Essays, edited by Alvin Thaler and Norman Sanders [Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1964]), provides a contrast to Victorian women's interest in the female characters' moral attributes through his examination of the evidence of their worldly sophistication - the women of Love's Labour's Lost are to him primarily "experts in bawdy badinage" (p. 169). Leslie Fiedler's study of The Stranger in Shakespeare (New York: Stein and Day, 1972) is distorted by his preconception, defended through an analysis of the sonnets, that Shakespeare "began with an antifeminist bias" (p. 18); he sees in both The Two Gentlemen of Verona and Love's Labour's Lost a recurrent Shakespearean myth of men sundered by love or the intervention of women - and a singularly unpleasant business it is, according to Fiedler. Eric Partridge's discussion of Shakespeare's Bawdy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947, rep. 1968), however, contains some perceptive insights into characterization in the plays. Of the distinction between the bawdy language used by men and that preferred by women he comments that

The sadism or, rather less cruelly, the brutality or, less brutally, the 'manly' roughness of so many male terms for 'to copulate (with)' is as noticeable as the submissiveness, or even the fatalism, of many of the female verbs

(p. 28).

His further brief reflections on the matter suggest that Shakespeare presents the convention of female submissiveness to the male, but that he does not encourage it.

³ Ralph M. Sargent, "Sir Thomas Elyot and the Integrity of The Two Gentlemen of Verona", in PMLA, 65 (1950), p. 1171.

⁴ Ibid., p. 1171.

⁵ Ibid., p. 1166.

⁶ Ibid., p. 1180.

⁷ Ralph Berry, "Love and Freindship", in Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 51. Berry's chapter on The Two Gentlemen focuses on the young men as figures satirized throughout the play for their overly-conventional behaviour and their propensity for role-playing. It is thus distinguished from the work of so many other critics who have accepted Valentine at least as a romantic ideal, and Proteus as failing only in his change in devotion, an acceptance which has generally led to the neglect of the female characters' ability to function beyond the inspiring of romantically inclined young men.

⁸ Agnes Mure Mackenzie, The Women in Shakespeare's Plays (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1924), p. xii.

⁹ Ibid., p. xii.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. xi.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹² Ibid., p. 73.

¹³ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁴ Michael Black, "Character in Shakespeare", in Critical Review, 17 (1974), p. 113.

- ¹⁵ Peter Bilton, Commentary and Control in Shakespeare's Plays (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), p. 7.
- ¹⁶ Barbara Bellow Watson, "On Power and the Literary Text", in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 1 (Autumn, 1975), Number 1, p. 112. Cited by Carole McKewin, "Shakespeare Liberata: Shakespeare, the Nature of Women, and the New Feminist Criticism", in Mosaic, 10 (Spring, 1977), Number 3, p. 161.
- ¹⁷ McKewin, p. 163.
- ¹⁸ Clara Claiborne Park, "As We Like It: How a Girl Can Be Smart and Still Popular", in The American Scholar, 42 (Spring, 1973), Number 2, p. 265.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 264.
- ²⁰ Anne Barton, "The Feminist Stage", a review of Juliet Dusinberre's Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, in The Times Literary Supplement, 24 October, 1975, p. 1259.
- ²¹ McKewin, pp. 158-9.
- ²² Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), p. 1.
- ²³ McKewin, pp. 162-3.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 163.
- ²⁵ Some comments on Renaissance history and social developments may be instructive here. Shakespeare's age is remarkable for its acceptance of female political power, in the persons of England's

Mary I and Elizabeth I, Mary of Guise and her daughter Mary, Queen of Scots, and Catherine de' Medici, while, according to Doris Mary Stenton, in The English Woman in History (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1957), the existence of a number of highly educated, primarily aristocratic women in the Elizabethan age forced men to consider anew the social and legal position of women. Lu Emily Pearson, in The Elizabethans at Home (Stanford, California: California University Press, 1957), and Louis B. Wright, in Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1933), both emphasize that, despite the weight of tradition given to male authority and a view of women as "the weaker vessels", within the hierarchical framework of a household the wife could operate with a considerable degree of freedom, depending of course on the nature of her husband. Books on domestic relations stressed the intelligence and capability necessary for a woman to perform a diversity of tasks in the household; as her role contributed to her husband's success, the commercial expansion and more widely-distributed wealth of the Tudor era increased the woman's freedom as it augmented her responsibilities.

²⁶ Stenton, p. 141.

²⁷ Stenton and Wright, as well as Ruth Kelso, in Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), cite a variety of participants in this debate and comment on the questions raised within one central issue.

²⁸ Park cites a speech of Elizabeth I's to her lords that

"though I be a woman, I have as good a courage answerable to my place as ever my father had" (pp. 264-5).

²⁹ Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, in The Complete Poetical Works of Spenser, edited by R. Neil Dodge (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1936), Book I, Invocation, iv, ll. 1-3. Park cites the unpublished Columbia dissertation of Betty Bandel concerning this discrepancy in the works of Shakespeare:

Shakespeare never dramatizes, even peripherally, a learned woman (although women may be, even should be "wise"). Nor, in so many plays that deal with politics, does he ever present a woman who is active in politics in her own behalf, in spite of the example of the sovereign under whom he spent his formative years...[E]ven when a tradition of independent action clearly exists, as with Cleopatra, Shakespeare does not use it

(p. 265).

³⁰ Robert W. Hanning, "From Eva to Ave in Eglentyne and Alisoun: Chaucer's Insight into the Roles Women Play", in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 2 (Spring, 1977), Number 3, p. 580.

³¹ Ibid., p. 581.

³² Kelso, p. 6.

³³ Helen Andrews Kahin, "Jane Anger and John Lyly", in Modern Language Quarterly, 8 (March, 1974), Number 1, p. 31.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

³⁵ Spenser, "A letter of the Authors", p. 136. Spenser himself makes a distinction between the twelve private moral virtues which he

intends to expound in The Faerie Queene in the person of Prince Arthur, and "the politicke vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king" (p. 136), which he hopes to frame in the next twelve books. Nevertheless, with the exception of Book I, containing the legend of the Red Crosse Knight, or holiness, the virtues embodied in the male heroes of the existing books are public in comparison to Briomart's chastity; the distinction between these - temperance, friendship, justice, and courtesy - and political virtues would still hold. The dichotomy between inward virtues and outward appearances recurs prominently in The Two Gentlemen of Verona and the discussions held by its characters concerning the education of a young man to perfection.

³⁶ Kelso, p. 29.

NOTES

Chapter II

¹ Peter Lindenbaum, in "Education in The Two Gentlemen of Verona" (Studies in English Literature, 15 [Spring, 1975], Number 2), for example, maintains that Valentine's is an effort to duplicate the pattern of divine love by means of the comprehensive forgiveness and charity which make the gesture humanly implausible, while Sargent, in "Sir Thomas Elyot and the Integrity of The Two Gentlemen of Verona" (PMLA, 65 [1950]), attempts to demonstrate how Shakespeare is able to reconcile the two ideals of romantic love and masculine friendship according to the conventions of his age and through the high standards of conduct which his characters eventually learn to uphold. Thomas Perry, in "Proteus, Wry-Transformed Traveller" (Shakespeare Quarterly, 5 [1954]), and William O. Scott, in "Proteus in Shakespeare and Spenser: The Lover's Identity" (Shakespeare Studies, 1 [1965]), also focus on the education and development of the play's male protagonists. Fiedler, on the other hand, in The Stranger in Shakespeare (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), takes the notion of conflict in The Two Gentlemen to its furthest extreme; he maintains that the play presents

a variant form of a theme found throughout Shakespeare's work: men bound together by friendship are sundered by the love of women...and must somehow make another, more fragile compact or sadly learn to part

² Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson, "Introduction" to The Two Gentlemen of Verona (England: Cambridge University Press, 1921), p. xi. Champion, on the other hand, claims that the many who have criticized the play have done so on the mistaken assumption that Shakespeare has failed in an attempt to make the characters credible, and maintains that:

Admittedly these characters are one-dimensional: Shakespeare is interested neither in character development nor in credible motivation. Instead he is interested in the comic potential of a situation popular with his audience. Hence, the characters in effect do not determine the events but merely perform the roles which the action has pre-determined.

(pp. 25-6)

Clifford Leech, in his "Introduction" to the New Arden edition of The Two Gentlemen of Verona (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1969), would seem to agree, for he maintains that "this is not a play where detailed comment on the characters is a worth-while occupation" (p. lxiii). On the basis of this comment, and his belief that "Shakespeare has used no character directly as a commentator, and has let the comic light play on Valentine, Silvia, Proteus, and Julia while at the same time getting us interested in a double romantic comedy" (p. lxviii), it is not surprising that Leech seriously underestimates the significance of the female characters in the play, although he admits Julia's important role in the final scene: "Julia, of course, though she is not given many words to speak, is indeed the light of common day in the last scene" (p. lxiv).

³ Peter Bilton, Commentary and Control in Shakespeare's Plays (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), pp. 43-4. Park, in her discussion of the female characters in "As We Like It: How a Girl Can Be Smart and Still Popular" (The American Scholar, 42 [Spring, 1973], Number 2), considers disguise as one of the techniques by which Shakespeare is able to "create women who were spunky enough to be fun to be with, and still find ways to mediate their assertiveness so as to render them as nonthreatening as their softer sisters" (p. 265). This theory becomes an important part of Park's analysis of Rosalind's role in As You Like It:

The most useful dramatic device for mediating the initiative of the female...is the male disguise. Male garments immensely broaden the sphere in which female energy can manifest itself...Once Rosalind is disguised as a man, she can be as saucy and self-assertive as she likes...The male characters will accept her behaviour because it does not offend their sense of propriety, the female characters because (like the audience) they know she's playing a role. With male dress we feel secure. In its absence, feminine assertiveness is viewed with hostility, as with Kate the Shrew, or at best, as with Beatrice, as less than totally positive.

(pp. 270-1)

Furthermore, Park points out, the assertiveness of the female character is only temporary, as is her disguise, which is voluntarily relinquished by the end of the play.

Robert Weimann, in "Laughing with the Audience: 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' and the Popular Tradition of Comedy" (Shakespeare Studies, 22 [1969]), also includes Julia's disguise as one of the means by which Shakespeare controls the audience's perspective on The Two

Gentlemen, but he does not discuss the technique in any detail, and prefers to concentrate on the functions of Speed and Launce.

⁴ William Shakespeare, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, edited with an introduction by Clifford Leech (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1969), Act I, scene i, line 38. All further references to The Two Gentlemen of Verona will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the body of the text.

⁵ Ralph Berry, "Love and Freindship", in Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 50-1.

⁶ William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, in William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, edited by Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), Act II, scene ii, lines 26-31.

⁷ Park, p. 272.

⁸ Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975), p. 71.

⁹ Berry, p. 45.

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Chapter III

¹ C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1968), and Larry Champion, The Evolution of Shakespeare's Comedies: A Study in Dramatic Perspectives (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970).

² J. J. Anderson, "The Morality of Love's Labour's Lost", in Shakespeare Survey, 24 (1971), p. 61. Anderson maintains as well that women have always stood apart from men's attitudes and never become a part of their world, and that this distance produces their more encompassing awareness - their ability simultaneously to appreciate wit and to recognize the limitations and the proper subjects of jest.

³ Ralph Berry, "The Words of Mercury", in Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 79.

⁴ Ibid., p. 81

⁵ Peter Bilton, Commentary and Control in Shakespeare's Plays (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), p. 50.

⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

⁷ William Shakespeare, Love's Labour's Lost, edited with an introduction by Richard David (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1951),

Act II, scene i, line 199. All further references to Love's Labour's Lost will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the body of the text.

⁸ Bertrand Evans, Shakespeare's Comedies (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 23. Evans further comments that:

Here, as usually in the comedies, it is the ladies who hold the advantage; the gentlemen, supposing themselves overpeerers, are from the outset overpeered.

(p. 22)

He would, nevertheless, agree with Berowne that Boyet, in assisting the ladies, betrays his own sex.

⁹ Anderson in fact asserts that Rosaline's attitude towards Berowne hardens over the course of the play as she becomes more aware of the hurtful potential of his laughter. While she is less critical to begin with, then, Rosaline moves to a judgment like that of Maria's concerning Longaville.

¹⁰ Berry, p. 77.

¹¹ It may be interesting to note that the distinction the Princess makes between the "outward part", or concern for appearances, and the inner "workings of the heart" allies her position on these matters with that of Julia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

¹² Barber, p. 93.

¹³ Juliet Dusinberre, in Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), comments that in Love's

Labour's Lost Shakespeare puts Petrarchanism in the physical world and confronts it with the facts of life, with which the men cannot cope except through an aggressive sexuality.

¹⁴ Anne Richter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p. 101.

¹⁵ Anthony J. Lewis, in Shakespeare's Via Media in Love's Labour's Lost" (Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 16 [Summer, 1974], Number 2), points out the similarities between the men's descriptions of the contemplative life and the ladies' commands for testing their loves; as their desire to play the role of courtly lovers has overcome the men's desire for a life of solitude and austerity, so it seems the Princess and her ladies return their lovers to situations approximating the earlier plan in order to measure the weight of the men's affection.

¹⁵ Anne Barton, "Shakespeare and the Limits of Language", in Shakespeare Survey, 24 (1971), p. 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

NOTES

Chapter IV

¹ Juliet Dusinberre, in Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), maintains that the women of Shakespeare's political world are smaller and more domestic characters than their counterparts in the comedies or the tragedies. This is a fairly common critical observation; Eric Stockton, in "The Adulthood of Shakespeare's Heroines" (in Shakespearean Essays, edited by Alvin Thaler and Norman Sanders [Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1964]), also comments that history is primarily a man's world and that Shakespeare "has far more women of central interest in his comedies than his tragedies or historical plays" (p. 168). Nevertheless, comments on the participation of Richard III's female characters occurs frequently in discussions of the play, and the apparent discrepancy seems to be the result of an inability to distinguish between capacity for action in a predominantly male world and the ability to function as a dramatic mechanism.

² A. P. Rossiter, "Angel with Horns: the Unity of Richard III", in Angel with Horns and other Shakespeare Lectures (New York: Theatre Art Books, 1961), p. 14.

³ Peter Bilton, Commentary and Control in Shakespeare's Plays (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), p. 34.

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⁴ William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of King Richard the Third, edited with an introduction by A. Hamilton Thompson (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1907, rep. 1932), Act I, scene 1, lines 9-13. All further references to Richard III will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the body of the text.

⁵ It is interesting to compare Richard's accusations to the reflections of Milton on the rule of women in Paradise Lost:

...Thus it shall befall
Him who to worth in Woman overtrusting
Lets her Will rule; restraint she will not brook,
And left to herself, if evil thence ensue,
She first his weak indulgence will accuse.

(IX.ii.1182-6)

The speech itself is put into Adam's mouth, but the sentiments expressed are coherent with Milton's presentation elsewhere in Paradise Lost of the conventional religious beliefs for the subjection of women. There is no reason to believe that a man of Shakespeare's time wouldn't have agreed, at least as concerning the relationship of the sexes in his own household. The subject is broached in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, in Speed's reaction to the reversal of roles between Valentine and Silvia, and in Love's Labour's Lost, in Armado's definition of a woman as "a child of our grandmother Eve" (I.i.251) and as "the weaker vessel" (I.i.258) according to religious authority.

⁶ Wolfgang Clemen, A Commentary on Shakespeare's Richard III, English version by Jean Bonheim (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1957), p. 22.

⁷ Ibid., p. 35. Clemen's first observation about Richard's skilful technique is reinforced by a recent review of the 1977 production of Richard III at the Stratford Festival. T. E. Kalem maintains that Richard's wooing of Anne provides "a scene of audacious psychological insight", and he further comments on this particular performance that

The enticing Martha Henry, who plays Anne, begins this scene in a tearful fury and ends it with a tiny purr of awakened sensuality. Out of his unerring intuition, Shakespeare knew that a strong emotion at its peak is volatile and may be swiftly transformed into its opposite.

(Time, June 20, 1977, p. 66)

⁸ Waldo MacNeir, "The Masks of Richard III", in Studies in English Literature, 11 (1971), p. 175. Anne's surrender is at least in part conditioned by her social role and its limitations; women are traditionally spectators rather than performers. As the participation of the other female characters will demonstrate, their observation can lead to more profound perceptions about the other characters and the course of events in their world, but Anne's lack of skill in "acting" makes her susceptible to Richard's power and unable to counter it.

⁹ A. P. Rossiter, p. 13.

¹⁰ Bilton, p. 34.

¹¹ Ronald Berman, "Anarchy and Order in Richard III and King John", in Shakespeare Survey, 6 (1953), p. 58.

¹² Ibid., p. 52. Buckingham's attack on conventional morality and its institutions, represented by the Cardinal and his support of

"the holy privilege / Of blessed sanctuary" (III.i.41-2), accepts change, which has ushered in "the grossness of this age" (III.i.46), as a fact of existence which one can manipulate to serve one's purposes. The attitude towards what Daniel calls "th'onrunning state of things / (Gathering corruption as it gathers days)" (Samuel Daniel, Musophilus, in The Renaissance in England: Non-dramatic Prose and Verse of the Sixteenth Century, edited by Hyder E. Rollins and Herschel Baker [Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1954], ll. 565-6), should be sufficient to arouse the suspicions of any Elizabethan audience, and Berman points out that in claiming "the relevance of the present necessity" (p. 55) Buckingham exemplifies the Machiavellian aspects of Richard's philosophy.

¹³ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁴ Dusingerre comments of the Duchess and Queen Elizabeth that "Women use words to create the illusion of action" (p. 279). Margaret has been aware of this potential for dramatic effect since her first appearance, and her skill in presenting the illusion is such that, unlike Anne, she can be considered a rival performer to Richard.

Dusingerre, however, sees the effect of the women's impotence as directing their attacks against each other; while it is true that they operate with quite different levels of awareness at the beginning of Richard III, and are thus at cross purposes, their drawing together as all gain a new consciousness of their impotence seems a clear pattern in the play.

The dynamic established by Richard's disdain for the play's female characters and the violence of their speeches to and concerning

him is reminiscent of the sentiments expressed in Jane Anger her Protection for Women, included in By a Woman Writt, edited by Joan Goulianos (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books Inc., 1973, rep. 1974):

Was there ever any so abused, so slandered,
so railed upon, or so wickedly handled
undeservedly as are we women? Will the gods
permit it, the goddesses stay their undoings
for such evil practices? Oh Paul's steeple
and Charing Cross! A halter hold all such
persons! Let the streams of the channels
in London streets run so swiftly as they may
be able to carry them from that sanctuary!
Let the stones be as ice, the soles of their
shoes as glass, the ways steep like Etna, and
every blast a whirlwind puffed out of Boreas
his long throat, that these may hasten their
passage to the Devil's haven!

(p. 24)

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