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**THE
SHAKESPEAREAN
SOLILOQUY**

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>		<u>Page</u>
I	The Meaning of the Soliloquy	1
II	Realism versus Convention	24
III	The Shakespearean Stage and the Soliloquy	47
IV	Uses of the Soliloquy	72
V	Hamlet As Seen Through his Soliloquies	99
VI	Some Tragic Characters and Their Soliloquies	118
VII	Some Comic Characters and Their Soliloquies-I	139
VIII	Some Comic Characters and Their Soliloquies-II	161
IX	Conclusion	192
	Appendix	202
	Bibliography	203

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CHAPTER I

The Meaning of the Soliloquy

"To be or not to be..."— Is there anyone save he who is utterly impervious to literature that does not associate these lines with Shakespeare? Surely there are few if any lines in our English literary heritage that can equal this opening of a Shakespearean soliloquy in the memory of millions of men and women of all walks of life. In fact, so widely known is this Shakespearean soliloquy (at least in its opening line), that to countless people with little or no education, the soliloquy is identified with Shakespeare and even with literature in general.

It is the purpose of this study to analyze the Shakespearean soliloquy and to relate it to some of the better known of Shakespeare's characters. It is hoped that this approach will provide a significant insight into Shakespeare's dramaturgy, especially in view of the somewhat limited nature of the materials in this field.

According to Walter W. Skeat, the celebrated English philologist, the word "soliloquy" was coined by St. Augustine, who joined "solus" and "loqui" to form "soloquium", a "talking alone."¹ In St. Augustine's usage, the soliloquy was a debate with one's self; his "Soliloquiorum" constitute the record of his mind's musings and doubting, how his "Reason" answered his "Mind" when the "Mind" doubted about anything.²

1. W. W. Skeat, Etymological Dictionary, page 572.

2. King Alfred Edition of Soliloquiorum, preface.

However, St. Augustine's usage is not followed in current practice. Our dictionaries generally define the "soliloquy" as a talking to one's self, when alone or as if alone; a discourse uttered for one's own benefit. The French form "soliloque" is defined as the discourse uttered to one's self.³ The German language has refused to naturalize the Latin "soliloquium", but prefers the term "monologue." This word is derived from the Greek "monos" and "logos", a "talking alone." The dictionaries define the monologue as a scene in which a person of the drama speaks by himself, as contrasted with dialogue or chorus. In effect, the monologue is a dramatic composition for a single performer, a kind of dramatic entertainment performed throughout by one person; a passage in a dramatic piece in which a personage holds the scene to himself and speaks as if to himself.

It is obvious that the two terms can be equated by considering the soliloquy to be wider in scope than the monologue, which is dramatic in nature, but considering the dramatic soliloquy and the monologue to be identical to all intents and purposes. We shall study the dramatic soliloquy as it appears in Shakespeare, and we shall adopt the following definition: A dramatic soliloquy is a passage in a drama in which a character is alone upon the stage (or believes himself to be alone) and speaks to himself. Even when the character is not alone on the stage, his speech is a soliloquy if the character is entirely oblivious to his surroundings.

The above definition agrees with the usage of the term adopted by recent authorities as well as those of the past few hundred years. Thus,

3. As defined, for example, in Nouveau Larousse, volume 7.

M. B. Kennedy, who has made an exhaustive study of the oration in Shakespeare, considers both the oration and the soliloquy as examples of declamation, or set speech. "When the set speech is used in a choral way, and the speaker acts the part of speaking to himself alone, the set speech is called a soliloquy."⁴

The reference to "chorus" in the above definition raises the question of whether there are other kinds of dramatic expression which share elements of similarity with the soliloquy, and we shall return to this question after a brief historical sketch.

In classical Greek drama, the soliloquy is not often encountered, doubtless because the presence of the chorus removed the basic need for the soliloquy as a means of exposition. As Friedrich Leo points out,⁵ there are three soliloquies in the works of Aeschylus, two in Sophocles, and 13 in Euripedes. Aristophanes also has several set speeches delivered as if to one's self.

Just as the presence of the chorus eliminates much of the need for monologue in the Greek drama, so the presence of the "confidant" reduces the number of set speeches of this sort in such Roman dramas as those of Seneca. Many addresses which, in Elizabethan drama, would be addressed to one's self are, in Seneca, addressed to a nurse, a character such as a messenger, or some other personage. Since Plautus and Terence largely dispense with the chorus, we expect the soliloquy to appear in many and diverse forms, and this, indeed, is an expectation justified by the facts.

We continue to discover the monologue in the miracle, mystery, and

4. Kennedy, M. B., *Orations of Shakespeare*, Chapel Hill, 1942, page 26.

5. Leo, Friedrich, *Der Monolog im Drama*, Berlin, 1908, page 3.

and morality plays of the Middle Ages. Due in part to the Senecan influence, and in large part by virtue of the rich heritage of the monologues of such characters as "Everyman," we find a definite place for the comic as well as serious monologue in the first period of English drama.

In the classicist tragedy of the French, however, the chorus did not utterly disappear, but in effect shrank to the status of a single attendant for each of the chief figures. Thus in Racine's masterpiece, *Phèdre* is ever accompanied by Oenone, *Arcie* by *Ismène*, and *Hippolyte* by *Theramène*, to whom they can unbosom themselves freely; and thus the poet avoids the semblance of the soliloquy while profiting by all its advantages. These confidants are colorless creatures, sketched in vague outlines only, and existing for the sole purpose of being talked to. Mere shadows of their masters and mistresses, they share the same fate; and in the tragedy which is rehearsed in Sheridan's "Critic", where the heroine goes mad in white satin, the confidant unhesitatingly goes mad in white muslin! So transparent is this resort to the confidant that Victor Hugo dismissed this character from his drama and returned to the soliloquy. The argumentative monologue which he bestowed on the King in "Hernani" is one of the longest soliloquies discoverable in all dramatic literature, and is a superb example of Hugo's swelling rhetoric, splendid and stately with soaring figures of speech.

Returning now to the Elizabethan scene, we may say that the dramatic soliloquy had fairly well established itself as a dramatic technique by the year 1587. Without doubt, the soliloquies constructed by Christopher Marlowe had the greatest influence on Shakespeare, since it was Marlowe who built upon the work of Lyly, Peele, and Kyd to develop

the soliloquy as a revelation of thought and feeling. Thus, the Shakespearean soliloquy traces its history almost to the beginnings of literary history, where it is thoroughly consistent with the Greek freedom of lyric self-expression. It continues to be a factor to be reckoned with, even when the soliloquy is transformed into an address to the chorus or a conversation with the confidant. By the time of Marlowe it has attained a technical status which was ripe for fashioning by Shakespeare into a versatile and effective medium for the portrayal of emotion or the presentation of logical thought. The literary device by which the bound Prometheus of Aeschylus gives vent to his woes to the wintry sky is essentially the same device, refined and perfected by consummate skill, through which Iago unveils his villainy, or Hamlet debates over his suicide, or Macbeth suffers the torments of conscience.

We consider now certain literary forms which resemble the dramatic soliloquy in some way, but have sufficient points of difference to make an analysis worth while. First, there is the "aside" of the kind encountered in "Julius Caesar," I, 2, 181-213, where one character talks to another character, but the conversation is not heard by a third character on the stage. Sometimes this aside might have been uttered in an exaggerated whisper, but whether whispered or not, this aside can hardly be called a soliloquy. It violates the basic criterion of the soliloquy, which is that the speaker must be alone or must fancy himself alone. This sort of aside is no more than a sort of secret conversation between two characters and is certainly not a monologue.

There is, however, another and more common type of aside which

some authorities consider almost identical with the soliloquy. This is the aside, practically abandoned in modern drama, which seeks to give to the audience, but withhold from the other characters on the stage, factual information on which the plot hinges. This is spoken while the other characters are present and are known to be present. It is likely that these asides were spoken in whispers or with some indicative bodily posture, as indicated by Dryden's stage direction for an aside: "Softly, or turning from her."⁶ In order to distinguish this aside from the one previously described, A. Hennequin has suggested the term "apart" for the remark made by a character to the audience, but not heard by the other characters.⁷ We shall follow this usage and refer to such an aside as an "apart". A good example of the apart addressed to the audience is found in "Richard III:"

Gloucester (Aside). So wise so young, they say, do never live long.

Prince of Wales. What say you, uncle?

Gloucester I say, without characters, fame lives long.
 (Aside). Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity,
 I moralize two meanings in one word.⁸

A. Hennequin suggested that the apart is little more than "a short monologue"⁹, something separate from the dialog itself, and yet a potent factor in the total representative effect. Following him, H. M. Paull insisted that the apart is simply a short soliloquy.¹⁰

6. Dryden, *Secret Love*, II, 5.

7. Hennequin, A., *The Art of Playwriting*, London, 1890, page 152.

8. *Richard III*, III, 1, 79.

9. *Ut supra*, page 153.

10. Paull, H. M., *Fortnightly Review*, May, 1899, page 863.

Despite the weight of such authority, there are distinct differences between the apart and the soliloquy. First, the speaker of the apart is not alone on the stage, nor does he believe himself to be alone; he is fully aware of the presence of the other characters, and yet expects his apart not to be overheard. Secondly, he is not speaking to himself, as the author of a soliloquy is supposed to be doing, but nearly always addresses the audience, often in the midst of dialogue. Finally, the soliloquy transcends the mere imparting of information to the audience, which is the general purpose of the apart, but is a vehicle for psychological self-revelation or exposition. On all these counts, therefore, it seems best to exclude the apart from the category of the soliloquy. Whether this distinction is justified or not is perhaps an academic question, since the discussion of the soliloquy, with suitable changes, could also be applied to the aside.

Our next question is the relation of the soliloquy and the chorus. As Stapfer points out,¹¹ the pretended choruses of Shakespeare are nothing but prologues (which we shall presently consider); but there are in his theater other characters who realize in part the ideal role of the classical choruses. These "chorus characters" are members of the *dramatis personae*—often not the principal characters—who sum up episodes in the play, or whose remarks have obvious appropriateness as an interpretation of the play as a whole. This interpretation is to be taken as the author's clue as to how his play is to be understood.

A. C. Sprague has carefully analyzed Shakespeare's chorus characters, and he points out that the part of the chorus character and the soliloquy often accomplish the same purpose in the development

11. Stapfer, *Shakespeare et L'Antiquité*, Paris, 1880.

of the drama.¹² Nevertheless, it is obvious that the chorus character need not necessarily soliloquize; that is, the chorus character need not be alone (or fancy himself alone) in order to utter those remarks which serve the classical function of the chorus. Therefore, although some soliloquies serve the same purpose as the words of the classical chorus, the soliloquy and the chorus cannot be considered to be alike.

Our next dramatic form to be considered is the prologue, of which there are a number of instances in Shakespeare. Thus, the chorus acts as the prologue in *Romeo and Juliet*, returning only once, at the end of Act I; Gower is the prologue in *Pericles*, reappearing seven times thereafter; and Rumor acts as the prologue to Part II of *King Henry IV*. These characters do not serve as prologues by virtue of their membership in the *dramatis personae*; the fact that they are characters in the drama is only incidental, if indeed the prologue in a particular case is in fact a character. The prologue is more like the announcer or commentator of a radio program, talking directly to the audience, without any pretense that he is alone, talking to himself. The prologue is thus the playwright's direct avenue of communication to the audience, and should not be confused with the part of a character speaking to himself as if he is alone.

All the more should the epilogue not be confused with a dramatic soliloquy. There are no epilogues in Shakespeare's tragedies; in the comedies, the epilogue consists of little more than a character falling out of his part to solicit the applause of the spectators.

Before leaving the classification of the chorus, prologue, and epilogue, it may be of interest to note these remarks by Raleigh on the question of the chorus in Shakespeare:

12. Sprague, A. C., *Shakespeare and his Audience*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1935 page 135 and Chapter VII, *passim*.

"Shakespeare had no Chorus, but he attains the same end in another way. In almost all his plays there is a clear enough point of view; there is some character, or group of characters, through whose eyes the events of the play must be seen, if they are to be seen in the right perspective. Some of these characters he keeps nearer to himself than others."¹³

Along the same lines, Lucas writes:

"A single character might suffice by himself to do much of the work the Chorus once performed....In Hamlet, the work of the ancient Chorus is divided between Horatio, the grave diggers, and Fortinbras; and above all, is Hamlet himself, whose "To be or not to be" might be a chorus of Euripedes."¹⁴

An important question that must be answered if we are to be perfectly clear as to the meaning of soliloquy is the question of whether we are to consider the dramatic soliloquy to be silent thought or spoken words.

On the one hand, there is considerable evidence to indicate that the words spoken by the character in soliloquy are supposed to be symbolic of silent thought, as a sort of convention such as we shall consider in Chapter II. Thus, Clytemnestra's soliloquy, which opens the second act of Seneca's Agamemnon, seems to represent unspoken thought, for the nurse interrupts, asking the cause of Clytemnestra's silent brooding, and the point is emphasized by repetition—*Licet ipsa sileas*—Although thou art silent. This is the opinion of

13. Raleigh, Walter, Shakespeare, London, 1907, page 152.

14. Lucas, A., Tragedy, London, 1927, page 67.

of Congreve, who wrote:¹⁵ "When a man in Soliloquy reasons with himself, and Pro's and Con's, and weighs all his designs, we ought not to imagine that this man either talks to us, or to himself; he is only thinking, and thinking such matter as were inexcusable Folly in him to speak."

Congreve's words might have been echoed by these remarks by Sir Walter Scott: "At length his meditations arranged themselves in the following soliloquy—by which expression I beg leave to observe, once for all, that I do not mean that Nigel literally said aloud, with his bodily organs, the words which follow, but that I myself choose to present to my dearest reader the picture of my hero's mind, his reflections and resolutions, in the form of a speech, rather than in that of a narrative. In other words, I have put his thoughts into language; and this I believe to be the purpose of the soliloquy upon the stage as well as in the closet, being at once the most natural, and perhaps the only way of communicating to the spectator what is supposed to be passing in the bosom of the scenic personage."¹⁶

There are many passages in Shakespeare's works which would seem to be best interpreted as indicating that the soliloquy is silent thought, the revelation of the inaudible contents of the mind. Thus, in "Macbeth," I, 3, the prophecy of the weird sisters has sent Macbeth into contemplation. The first temptation to crime, the "thought whose murder yet is but fantastical," fills him with horror. The other characters on the stage eye him closely as he soliloquizes, but they show no evidence that they are able to hear his words. Thus, Banquo

15. Congreve, Double Dealer, Epistle Dedicatory.

16. Scott, Sir Walter, The Fortunes of Nigel, Part II, Chapter V.

says: "Look, how our partner's rapt," and Macbeth, continuing his soliloquy, is completely unaware that he is not alone. When he awakes to the fact that there are others with him, he offers his apologies, but his apologies are not for talking. Instead, he apologizes for thinking: "Give me your favor; my dull brain was wrought with things forgotten." (I, 3, 149-150)

Similarly, there are many who believe that the famous "To be or not to be" represents unuttered thoughts, not words. Dr. Johnson says: "This celebrated soliloquy, bursting from a man distracted with contrariety of desire, and overwhelmed with the magnitude of his own desires, is connected rather in the speaker's mind than on his tongue."¹⁷

It is of interest to note, in this connection, that, in Lawrence Olivier's film version of Hamlet, made in England and released in 1948, the camera is very close to Hamlet's face during the soliloquies, concentrating on his eyes. For the most part, his lips do not move. The voice seems to come from the recesses of the mind. But a few lines are spoken with normal lip movement. In the speech beginning, "O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt," Hamlet's lips move when he refers to the short time between his father's funeral and his mother's wedding...two months:

"Nay, not so much, not two.

Frailty, thy name is woman....

O God! A beast that wants discourse of reason

17. Furness Variorum, Hamlet, Vol. 1, page 204

Would have mourned longer.

Within a month...."

J. H. Lawson, who has made a study of the technique of the motion picture, describes as follows the criterion by which the director decided which parts of the soliloquy to interpret as silent thought and which to accord the status of spoken words:

"These lines are selected to be spoken by the lips because they touch the heart of Hamlet's problem, the source of the disease which paralyzes his will. His feeling about his mother makes it imperative that he act, yet it entangles him in emotions that inhibit action. These lines are externalized, spoken; they link the soliloquy with the whole system of events,"¹⁸

Although evidence has been presented which indicates that the soliloquy partakes of the nature of unspoken thought (revealed in words through the playwright's artifice), there is ample evidence for the opposing viewpoint that the soliloquy consists of actual speech, rather than a symbol for thought. Thus, when Aeschylus chains Prometheus to the rocks, he makes Prometheus utter this plaint: "Alas! Alas! 'tis hard to speak to the winds; Still harder to be dumb." The logical inference is that the alternative is between silence and the soliloquy, the latter being speaking to the winds. Similarly, in the "Medea" of Euripedes, after the dialog of the Nurse which introduces the drama, we hear the inquiry of the Attendant: "Why dost thou stand here at the gate alone, loudly lamenting to thyself this piteous tale?" This loud lamenting could hardly represent silent thought, articulated merely as a symbol, but not the actuality of spoken words; loud lamenting is surely spoken in fact as well as in spirit.

18. Lawson, J. L., Theory and Technique of Playwriting, N. Y., 1949, Page 393.

Although there is evidence that Molière thought of the soliloquy as a dramatic convention for externalizing unspoken thought, there are a number of instances in which his monologues give every impression of being honest-to-goodness speech. Thus, in "L'Avare" (I, 4), fear enters Harpagon's mind that he has been overheard, and he expresses his concern as follows: "I believe that I have spoken aloud while reasoning by myself." Again, in "Scapin" (I, 4), while Argante is indulging in a monologue, we have this apart by Scapin: "He has already learned of this matter, and it has taken such strong possession of his mind that, though alone, he speaks aloud."

Shelley was himself perplexed in the choice between symbolic or actual thought, and he voiced this perplexity in these lines:

"I think they cannot hear me at that door;
What if they should? And yet I need not speak,
Though the heart triumphs with itself in words.
O thou most silent air, that shalt not hear
What now I think!"
19

There have been numerous interpretations of this passage, which seems to imply that the character must be struck dumb as a result of his logical alternatives. Professor Bates believes the passage affirms Shelley's belief that the soliloquy, if anything, is genuine speech: "This shows that Shelley himself regarded the soliloquy as a form of actual speech instead of as a merely symbolic means of making known to us unspoken and concealed feelings that could not otherwise be made manifest."
20

19. Shelley, *Cenci*, London, 1802, I, 1.

20. Bates, E. S. *Study of Shelley's Drama, The Cenci*, London, page 53.

It is not difficult to adduce a number of instances in which Shakespeare undoubtedly leans away from the symbolic toward the realistic concept of the soliloquy as actual speech. Thus, in "Hamlet," III, 3, Claudius endures agonies of spirit before he prays. The spiritual agonies are given to us in words, although in fact they are thoughts; the prayer is unheard, although it doubtless was put into words:

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:

Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

This is the exact reversal of the situation in real life, where the agonies of the spirit would not be expressed in words, while the prayer would secure verbal formulation. This reversal was doubtless intentional, to create a special effect, but it clearly indicates the status of the soliloquy as indicating words, not thought. This status is again indicated in the famous balcony scene (II,2,25), where Romeo exclaims "She speaks!" and continues "O speak again, bright angel!" We note that Juliet does not seem surprised that her secret thoughts have been overheard, as if she realized that these thoughts had been given verbal embodiment.

Shakespeare himself virtually apologizes for the fact that his soliloquies are actual words rather than thoughts. In Titus Andronicus (III,1), Lucius asks Titus to explain his apostrophe of the stones as tribunes. Titus attempts to make excuses for his verbal outburst by declaring that he prefers to address stones rather than tribunes. This explanation would be hardly in order if the monologue were simply a symbol for thought, vocalized by the character as a dramatic convention.

Into this somewhat confused situation enters the overheard soliloquy, a sort of logical impossibility, but one with which we must reckon. Brander Matthews, the distinguished authority on the drama who was decorated with the cross of the Legion of Honor for his literary services, called the overheard soliloquy an "arrant absurdity, a contradiction in terms."²¹ He pointed out that the audience only is supposed to hear the character in his dramatic soliloquy, and then only when the character is alone on the stage. If the thoughts are made audible for the audience only, the absurdity of one actor actually overhearing another's thoughts becomes²² evident, according to Brander Matthews.

However, the overheard soliloquy is not so fantastic if the monologue is considered to be actual speech rather than symbolic thought, uttered where there are others on the stage only because the character for the moment acts as if he fancies himself to be alone.

Of the cases in Shakespeare of the overheard soliloquy, we have the instance in "Winter's Tale" (IV, 4, 605), where the characters already on the stage are not aware that Autolycus is soliloquizing as he enters, but Autolycus, not certain as to whether or not he has been overheard, says: "If they have overheard me now, why, hanging." Similarly, Angelo, in "Measure for Measure" (II, 4, 10), utters this warning in his soliloquy: "Let no man hear me".

In "Henry VI, Part III" (II, 5), we have the curious situation where the son does not hear the father's soliloquy, nor does the father hear the son's; nevertheless, King Henry, who is also on the stage, overhears both. We have an even more startling situation in "Love's Labor's Lost" (IV, 3), in which, of the four characters, one soliloquizer is aware of none of the

21. Matthews, Brander, Putnam's Monthly, November 1906, page 183.

22. Ut supra, page 184.

others, a second is aware of only one, a third is aware of two, and the fourth, fully recognizing the fantastic situation, remarks that they are "four woodcocks in a dish."

The overheard soliloquy is to be found also in "All's Well That Ends Well" (IV, 2, 27), where Parolles uses the monologue to describe his worries, while the conspirators drink in every word; in "Henry IV, Part I" (V, 4, 102), where Falstaff, supposed to be dead, overhears the elegy which Prince Hal delivers over his body; in "Henry VI, Part III" (III, 1), where the keepers, in hiding, overhear the king soliloquizing, and then overwhelm the king at the conclusion of the monologue; and in "Love's Labor's Lost" (II, 5), where the overhearing of Malvolio's monologue is the source of a most comical situation.

Quite apart from the question of logical possibility, the numerous overheard soliloquies would seem to indicate that Shakespeare's dramatic soliloquies are of the nature of actual speech, rather than of symbolic thought. In fact, most of Shakespeare's monologues are overheard when there are other characters lurking or hiding on the stage, as in many of the above instances, and are less inclined to be overheard when the other characters on the stage are not in hiding but are simply not noticed by the soliloquizers.

If so many of Shakespeare's monologues are spoken speech, it may seem perfectly legitimate to inquire whether people in real life do talk to themselves as do the characters of a play. We shall not follow along this direction too far, since it appears to be a problem of psychology rather than dramaturgy. However, it may not be out of place to record some observations which have been made on this subject. Thus, Franz declared: "No person in full possession of his senses will utter

more than short exclamations when he is alone. He may cry, sing, whistle, even laugh, mumble a few phrases, but never fully express what he feels, least of all what he intends to do." Franz continued by quoting the dramatic critic Jean Paul as saying: "A person who, in his waking moments talks to himself fills us with a shudder; and if I hear myself talking when alone, I have the same feeling." ²³ In the same vein, H. M. Paull remarked: "A person does not speak to himself unless ²⁴ indeed he is beside himself."

On the other side is the comment of Coleridge, who maintained that an audible soliloquy "is far less improbable than is supposed by such as ²⁵ have watched men only in the beaten road of their feelings." Archibald Henderson insisted that "people sometimes--and not infrequently--do give audible expression to their thoughts and feelings," although he counselled ²⁶ against more than "a few words, or, at most, a few sentences."

The maxim of Diderot is often quoted to lend weight to the contention that voicing one's thoughts aloud while alone is a common psychological phenomenon: "You know that I have long been in the habit of soliloquizing. When I return home sad and chagrined, I retire to my study and there I question myself and ask: 'What ails you?' " ²⁷ However, it does not seem that this idiosyncrasy on the part of Diderot should be magnified into a property of human nature. If fact, it must be confessed that the soliloquy is probably not a characteristic mode of behavior of normal people in the customary pursuits of life, and it will have to stand or fall on some other basis than that it is a common practice in life.

23. Franz, R., *Der Monolog und Ibsen*, Marburg, 1907, page 42.

24. Paull, H. M., *Fortnightly Review*, May 1899, page 868.

25. *Furness Variorum, Hamlet*, Volume I, page 280.

26. Henderson, A., *North American Review*, March 1909, page 432.

27. Diderot, *Belles Lettres* IV, Chap. XVII.

We must conclude from this discussion that we must concern ourselves with another aspect of the soliloquy—whether it is a legitimate form of dramatic art, whether Shakespeare's use of it increases his artistry or constitutes a blemish on his technique. In order to explore this avenue, it will be necessary in Chapter III to enter into a consideration of the Shakespearean stage, including its strengths and weaknesses, and the conventions which provide the basic assumptions for dramaturgical development.

At this point, however, it is not out of place to point out that the playwright labors under the most unusual handicaps, even under the best of circumstances. To his major difficulty, the fact that he cannot take the obvious shortcut and address us in person but must speak through the mouths of his characters, are added certain disadvantages inherent in his prescribed method of imparting information—by word of mouth. We in the theatre may neither read again nor turn back; we are exposed to all the distractions of a crowded assembly. The wretch in front of us coughs, and we have lost the crucial word which makes sense out of a complex situation; the minor actor from whom we expect to learn the explanation of it all, happens to mumble or speaks too fast, and much is lost.

To the above enumeration of the playwright's obstacles must be added some that were peculiarly Shakespeare's. His audience was not furnished with programs, and even though we may be inclined to be sceptical as to whether the average playgoer really makes use of the program, its value in elucidating the opening scenes is by no means negligible. There were physical properties of his stage, which we shall consider in the next chapter, which taxed the skill of even the accomplished master of dramaturgic art. His actors spoke quite rapidly, perhaps as fast as

twenty lines of blank verse a minute. As many authorities agree, Shakespeare's audience was none too tractable. Since seats in the Elizabethan theatre were not usually reserved, there was a decided tendency for zealous playgoers to come quite early, and while away their idle moments by talking, smoking, playing cards, reading pamphlets purchased from hawkers, cracking nuts, eating pippins, or drinking ale out of the bottle. It is small wonder that Shakespeare often resorted to a rousing opening for his dramas, if he had to contend with such opening conditions.

Added to these difficulties is the none too impressive opinion that Elizabethan and later playwrights had of the mental ability of their audiences. Planche recounted the anecdote which he credited to George Bartley, actor and stage manager of the early nineteenth century. This was Bartley's comment on the intelligence of the British playgoing public:

"Sir, you must first tell them you are going to do so and so; you must tell them that you are doing it; then that you have done it; and then only, perhaps they will understand you."

Planche added that Shakespeare might have been following this advice. 30

That Shakespeare was under no illusions as to his audience seems to be a proper inference from a number of his dramatic techniques, including the fact often noted, which we shall dwell upon later at some length, that the Shakespearean villain is a villain even in his own mind, as indicated by many of the great "villain" soliloquies.

28. Hart, Alfred, Review of English Studies, VIII, Oct. 1932, page 395.
29. Bridges, Robert, Influence of the Audience, Oxford, 1927, page 334.
Harbage, Alfred, Shakespeare's Audience, New York, 1941, page 111.
Lawrence, W. J., Those Nut-Cracking Elizabethans, London, 1935, page 1-11.
Sisson, Charles J., Le Goût public et le théâtre, Dijon, 1922, page 52-65.
30. Planche, Recollections and Reflections, London, 1872, page 208.

Professor Schucking, after a careful analysis of this problem, concludes that Shakespeare was reluctant to allow his villains to appear as honest characters even in the villains' own eyes, and that he often took pains to portray his noble characters as noble even in the eyes of their wicked enemies.³¹ The reason, as Professor Schucking sees it, is simple. It lies in the careful regard which Shakespeare paid to the limited mental capacity of his public. The poet desired above all to avoid misapprehension of the main outlines of the action and characters, to prevent the spectators from confusing the ethical values. The villain is to be a villain, even when he soliloquizes; the noble character is to be noble, from whichever side we look at him. In view of this insight into Shakespeare's evaluation of the dramatic acumen of his audience, his use of the soliloquy as an expository device, as an index of character, and as an explanation of stage business, all of which we shall consider later, assumes a unique importance.

The role of the soliloquy in crystallizing traits of character was mentioned by Congreve in 1694. "It oftentimes happens to a man to have designs which require him to keep to himself and in their nature cannot admit of a confidant. Such, for certain, is villainy; and other less mischievous intentions may be very improper to be communicated to a second person."³² The reference to the "confidant" recalls an article in "The Saturday Review of Literature," in which it was pointed out that the new confidant in modern plays "is endowed with a locus standi in the form of a character and a real connection with the plot. To him are often confided things which in real life would be confided to no one.

31. Schucking, L. L., *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*, London, 1922, page 366.

32. Congreve, William, *Double Dealer*, London, 1694, Epistle Dedicatory.

The confiding of such things to him is an offense against fundamental reality, whereas the confiding of them through soliloquy is but an offense against superficial reality. It is easier to accept soliloquy as a conventional substitute for thought than to accept confidence as an actual substitute." ³³

Charles Lamb interpreted the purpose of the soliloquy in a similar fashion when he referred to the monologue (and even the dialogue, for that matter) as simply a medium "for putting the reader or spectator into possession of that knowledge of the inner structure and workings of mind in a character, which he could otherwise never have arrived at by any gift short of intuition." ³⁴

In the present century, Jules Lemaitre expressed the role of the monologue very succinctly when he insisted: "The monologue is a necessary convention; there is no better means of making known to us what a character cannot, with verisimilitude, tell others." ³⁵

In the same spirit, the distinguished critic, Brander Matthews, sympathetically described the soliloquy as a medium for making known to us the thoughts and emotions of the personage that would otherwise remain hidden. "It lets a tortured hero unpack his heart; it opens a window into his soul; and it gives the spectator a pleasure not to be had otherwise. It allows us to listen to the communing of a character with himself, as though we were not overhearing what he is saying.... The conflicting emotions of a hero at the crisis of his fate cannot possibly be made known except out of his own mouth." ³⁶

33. Saturday Review of Literature, Dec. 7, 1901, page 710.

34. Quoted in Smith, D. N., Shakespeare Criticism, Oxford, 1916, page 219.

35. Lemaitre, Jules, Impressions de Théâtre, Paris, 1905, page 306.

36. Matthews, Brander, A Study of the Drama, New York, 1910, page 148.

Curry was even more eloquent in his tribute: "Shakespeare's soliloquies are objective embodiments in words of feelings and moods of which the speaker himself is only partly conscious. This is the very climax of literature,--to word what no individual ever words." ³⁷

To Downey, the soliloquy was a "literary necessity for conveying information which cannot be logically conveyed in any other way." ³⁸ These sympathetic remarks on the soliloquy might be multiplied ad infinitum, for, as Matthews wrote:

"Time was, and not so long ago, when the playwright found it very convenient to have the villain lay aside his mask and bare his black soul in a speech to himself. Ibsen made frank use of this device in his earlier dramas. In Sudermann's "Die Ehre", one character, Trast, talked aloud to himself and then, still soliloquizing, rebuked himself for talking aloud. In the "Middleman" of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones as well as in the contemporary plays of Mr. Pinero and Mr. Bronson Howard, the soliloquy and the aside were used without question and without anticipation that they were so soon to fall out of fashion. In these modern plays they were employed as they had been utilized in the medieval drama and in the tragedies and comedies of the Greeks and
³⁹
Romans."

And yet, despite this long record of honorable service by the soliloquy as a dramaturgical device, at the turn of the century we find the dramatic critic Gottschall complaining somewhat bitterly: "From the Berlin Sinai ten new commandments are announced to the kneeling populace. And to these ten belongs the following: "Thou shalt no longer

37. Curry, S. S., Browning and Dramatic Monologue, Boston, 1908, page 56.

38. Downey, J. E., Creative Imagination, London, 1929, page 56.

39. Matthews, Brander, Putnam's Monthly, November, 1906, page 185.

write monologues."⁴⁰ To this commandment William Archer gave the great weight of his prestige when he proclaimed: "The soliloquy should⁴¹ be almost entirely tabooed in serious plays."

Why this unexpected change of attitude on the part of the playwright and playgoers alike? What had happened to open their eyes to the obvious fact that the soliloquy is "unnatural"? To the answer of this question we shall address ourselves in the next chapter.

40. Gottschall, W., Zur Kritik des modernen Dramas, Berlin, 1900, page 109.

41. Archer, William, English Dramatists of Today, London, 1889, page 274.

Chapter II

Realism versus Convention

We have asked what happened to cause the latter-day theater goer to awaken to the obvious fact that the soliloquy is not "natural." Perhaps some light may be shed on this question by a consideration of the views of a number of critics.

The modern period of dramatic criticism probably dates from François Hédelin, Abbé d'Aubignac, who, soon after his ordination as a priest, was appointed tutor to the Duc de Fronsac, nephew of Cardinal Richelieu. A recognized arbiter of taste, a scholar and author, with opinions universally respected, d'Aubignac composed his "Pratique du Théâtre" in 1657. The learned Abbé deduced his principles of the dramatic art partly from the practice of the ancients and partly from his own observations of what gave pleasure to a French audience in the days of Louis XIII.

The "Pratique du Théâtre" was translated into English in 1684 in a volume ingenuously entitled "The Whole Art of the Stage, containing not only the Rules of the Dramatick, but many curious Observations about it." One of his curious observations was on the subject of soliloquies. The Abbé had noted that the soliloquy was welcome in the dramas of his own contemporaries, and he discovered it to have been freely employed in the plays of Plautus as well. He therefore remarked: "I confess that it is sometimes very pleasant to see a man upon the stage lay open his heart, and speak boldly of his most secret thoughts, explain his designs, and give vent to all that his passion suggests; but without doubt it is

very hard to make an actor do it with probability."¹

But it is not only the difficulty of finding the actor for the part which prevents d'Aubignac from endorsing the soliloquy without qualification. He also objects strenuously to the expositional soliloquy, "this strange recourse, this bad artifice;" he objects also to emotional soliloquies, whose position in the drama may make them absurd, as, for example, when a lover, hearing of a danger that may threaten his mistress, soliloquizes at great length instead of hastening to her aid. This criticism is somewhat reminiscent of the convention in grand opera or even musical comedies, where the action comes to a stop while thoughts and emotion are revealed through song. With respect to d'Aubignac's objection to the expositional soliloquy, referred to above, this quotation is enlightening: "An actor must never make a monologue, which he addresses to the audience, with a desire to inform them of something they are to know; but there must be found out something in the truth of the action that may be colorable to make him speak in that manner. Else 'tis a fault in the representation of which both Plautus and Terence are guilty."²

The suspicion of the soliloquy was voiced by many contemporaneous English critics, but by none as gracefully as the Earl of Mulgrave, who laid down this dictum:

"First then, Soliloquies had need be few,

Extremely short, and spoke in passion too."³

John Dryden was a dramatic critic of no small accomplishments. He was

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1. Hédelin, F., *The Whole Art of the Stage*, London, 1684, page 57.
 2. *Ut supra*, page 58
 3. Mulgrave, *Essay on Poetry*, London, 1711, page 21.

denied the laureateship because of his conversion to the Catholic Church; he brought to his knowledge of the drama an intimate familiarity with the works of the French and Spanish, as well as those of the ancients. In his "Essay of Dramatic Poesie", Dryden takes Terence to task for his treatment of Dorias in the fourth act of the "Eunuch," because "she was presumed to speak directly to the audience, and to acquaint them with what was necessary to be known, but yet should have been so contrived by the poet as to have been told by persons of the drama to one another, and so by them to have come to the knowledge of the people.....Phaedria also gives you an account of himself, and of his returning from the country, in monologue, to which unnatural way of narration Terence is subject in all his plays."⁴

While Dryden's words were well-considered and judicious, not so were those of Thomas Rhymer, whose work followed that of Dryden by a quarter of a century. Rhymer, called by Alexander Pope "one of the best critics we ever had," and by Macaulay "the worst critic that ever lived," maintained that he was for verisimilitude, good sense, order, balance, against Elizabethan liberties with the classical rules. He especially decried the wordiness of the soliloquy, one aspect of wordiness in general: "Many, peradventure, of the tragical scenes in Shakespeare, cried up for action, might do better without words. Words are a sort of heavy baggage that were better out of the way...especially in his bombastic circumstances."⁵

4. Dryden, John, *Essay of Dramatic Poesie*, London, 1665, page 31

5. Rhymer, Thomas, *A Short View of Tragedy*, London, 1693, page 17.

Rhymer's strictures were somewhat intemperate, and were almost universally disowned by the critics of the next two centuries, who found in Shakespeare's "wordiness" the marks of genius and of literary immortality. Yet Dryden's suspicions of the soliloquy were renewed by many a critic, usually on the ground of "realism," so that, two centuries later, we find Friedrich Düsel, in his work on dramatic poetry, quoting J. vonSommenfels, the theatrical censor at Vienna, as objecting to all monologues on the ground of improbability. He found them permissible only when passion is at its height, and the heart too small to contain the inner struggle. But even then, long, logically arranged speeches are out of place. "In such moments, the restless character utters disjointed, disconnected speeches, he articulates broken words, he is restless, he sits, stands, runs back and forth, acts strangely."⁶

It is somewhat disconcerting to the lover of Shakespeare to find that all-important soliloquy gradually reduced by generations of critics to an "improbability." Finally, near the turn of the present century, the German critic Freytag, in a work on dramaturgy which was translated in English and widely studied in America, stated that the isolation of a character on the stage "always requires an apology," since monologues are not a necessary adjunct of modern drama, because of the numerous opportunities of disclosing thoughts and feelings which the modern stage gives to the characters, as well as a changed conception of acting.⁷

6. Düsel, F. *Der Dramatische in der Poetik*, Hamburg, 1897, page 15.

7. Freytag, G., *Technic of the Drama*, Chicago, 1894, page 77.

Freytag's low opinion of the soliloquy, which Shakespeare used with such skillful craftsmanship, was doubtless influenced by the dramas of Henrik Ibsen, who has been denounced as a revolutionary seeking to undermine public morals on the one hand, and has been lauded by others as a dramatist of brilliant technique, with a keen understanding of human nature and of human emotions. In the year 1906, the year of Ibsen's death, the German critic Franz, in a study of the soliloquy and Ibsen, came to the conclusion that, despite Ibsen's early use of the soliloquy, it was Ibsen's later dramaturgic art, free of soliloquies, which served to banish the monologue from twentieth century drama.⁸

Henderson, in 1909, also attributed the decline of the soliloquy to Ibsen's influence. In an article in a literary monthly, he pointed out that "the soliloquy seeks to give information which may more veraciously be imparted in more natural ways....Dramatic craftsmanship has today reached a point of such complex excellence that the best dramatists refuse to employ so unworthy a device as the soliloquy." ⁹ Who is at least one of the "best dramatists" is made clear by Henderson's comment on Ibsen's remark that his "League of Youth" is written without "a single monologue, in fact without a single aside." Says Henderson: "In this respect, I believe Ibsen sounded the deathknell of the monologue, the soliloquy, the aside, and by his practice soon rendered ridiculous those dramatists who persisted in employing these devices."¹⁰

8. Franz, R., *Der Monolog und Ibsen*, Marburg, Berlin, 1906, page 709.

9. Henderson, A., *Evolution of Dramatic Technic*, North American Review, March 1909, page 439.

10. Henderson, A., *ut supra*, p. 440

In 1910, Hamilton also attributed the loss of favor of the soliloquy to the technique of Ibsen: "The present prevalence of objection to soliloquy and aside is due largely to the strong influence of Ibsen's rigid dramaturgic structure."¹¹

In the same year, the distinguished scholar, Brander Matthews, in a work dedicated to Jules Jusserand, then Ambassador of the French Republic, as a student of the art of the drama "in which his countrymen have long excelled," concurred with Hamilton: "In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the leading playwrights of every modern language began to display a distaste for the monologue, with Ibsen setting the example of renunciation."¹²

But perhaps even greater than the influence of Ibsen in the English-speaking world was the influence of his translator, William Archer. A leading London dramatic critic, associated with the "Figaro", "World", "Tribune", "Nation", and the "Star", Archer introduced the Norwegian dramatist to English readers and play-goers and to the American and Canadian public by his translations and his editing of the collected works of Ibsen in 11 volumes. A dramatist in his own right through his authorship of "The Green Goddess", in which George Arliss made his celebrated success, Archer wielded an unmatched influence in dramatic circles.

As early as 1888, Archer sought to demonstrate that the emotional states which Shakespeare described when his characters indulged in soliloquies, could be more effectively expressed objectively: "For the practical purposes of dramatic presentation, the symptoms of

11. Hamilton, C., Theory of the Theater, New York, 1910, page 88.

12. Matthews, Brander, Study of the Drama, Boston, 1910, page 144.

passion can be mechanically mimicked with tolerable precision....The simple emotions such as grief, joy, terror can undoubtedly be revealed to the audience."¹³

Nowhere was Archer's advice taken more sincerely than in the silent motion picture of a generation ago, where absence of monologue or dialogue forced actors to accentuate or even exaggerate the conventional signs of emotions for the understanding of the audience. With all due respects to Archer's distinguished career as a critic, we may doubt whether this sort of "mechanical mimicking" is a step beyond the soliloquy of Shakespeare, from an artistic viewpoint.

In 1912, after decades of work on Ibsen, Archer's antipathy to the monologue was more firmly settled. In a text-book on the drama which was widely influential on this continent, Archer pronounced this dictum: "The example of Ibsen has gone far towards expelling these slovenlinesses (the soliloquy and the aside) from the work of all self-respecting playwrights."¹⁴ He went on to maintain that the most delicate analyses could be achieved without the aid of the monologue, and insisted that it became a point of honor with self-respecting artists to accept a dramaturgy somewhat harder to manipulate but all the more tempting to wrestle with and overcome. In a passage strangely reminiscent of the "comic magazine" of today which has made such conquests among children, Archer said in a condescending manner: "A drama with soliloquies and asides is like a picture with inscribed labels issuing from the mouths of figures. In that way any bungler can reveal what is passing in the minds of his personages. But the glorious problem of the modern play-

13. Archer, William, *Masks or Faces*, London, 1888, page 199.

14. Archer, William, *Playmaking*, Boston, 1912, page 397.

wright is to make his characters reveal the inmost workings of their souls without saying or doing anything they would not say or do in the real world."¹⁵

Although Archer was not guilty of such a misinterpretation of the relation of the "real world" to the world of the theater, there are undoubtedly many who would interpret Archer's injunction to the playwright not to have his characters say or do anything "they would not say or do in the real world" to mean that the drama must be a natural mirroring of life, much as one sees his reflection in a mirror. Indeed, there is no doubt that the descent of the soliloquy from its former high estate to a status that requires an apology is in a large measure due to the playwright's search for "realism." The question, then, is more than appropriate: "Is realism the legitimate goal of the drama?"

Hédelin gave a clear answer to this question when he cautioned that "the stage does not present things as they have been, but as they ought to be. The poet must reform everything that is not accommodated to the Rules of his Art, as a painter does when he works upon an imperfect model"¹⁶ This view is thoroughly consistent with the stand taken by Aristotle and the ancients that poetry (and drama) must be a copy--that is, an imaginative interpretation--of life, rather than life itself.

Coleridge took a very illuminating stand on the question of art versus reality in his short essay on the progress of the drama. He pointed out that stage illusion is to men what pictures are to little children, provided that men retain any part of the child's sensibility. Stage illusion, he held, is a suspension of the act

16. Hédelin, F., *The Whole Art of the Stage*, London, 1684, page 65.

15. Archer, William, *Playmaking*, Boston, 1912, page 400.

of comparison, which, assisted by the will, permits the sort of negative belief to accept the illusion. "The true stage illusion consists, not in the mind's judging this to be a forest, but in the remission of the judgment that it is not a forest....Not only are we never absolutely deluded, but the attempt to cause the highest delusion possible to beings in their sense sitting in a theater is a gross fault, incident only to low minds, which, feeling that they cannot affect the heart or head permanently, endeavor to call forth the momentary affections."¹⁷ In other words, as Coleridge said in the few paragraphs entitled "The Drama Generally and Public Taste", the "drama is not a copy but an imitation of nature",¹⁸ and in this he agrees with Aristotle, even though most translations use the word copy in the sense of imitation. In present day language, Coleridge would have said that the drama is not a photographic copy, but an artistic imitation of nature.

Victor Hugo, too, took up the cudgel against the claims of sheer realism in the drama. In his preface to "Cromwell" (this preface being, in fact, a short essay on the drama), Hugo insisted that truth in art cannot possibly be, as several of his contemporary critics claimed, absolute reality. Art, he said, cannot possibly produce the thing itself, nor should it be expected to do so. To understand the drawbacks of an unreflecting promotion of absolute nature, he pointed out that such a stand would lead to the demand that the sun be substituted for the footlights, and real trees and houses for the deceitful wings. "We must admonish the realists, unless they wish to confess themselves ridiculous, to hold distinct the domains of art and nature." ¹⁹

17. Coleridge, S. T., Progress of the Drama (1818), v.2 of Literary Remains, London, 1836.

18. Coleridge, S. T., The Drama Generally and Public Taste (1818), v.2., Literary Remains, London, 1836.

19. Hugo, Victor, Preface to Cromwell (1827), v.3 of Dramatic Works, Boston, 1909.

Hugo adduced an excellent analogy to give vividness to his views:

"Someone has said that the drama is a mirror wherein nature is reflected. But if it be an ordinary mirror, a smooth and polished surface, it will give only a dull image of objects, with no relief--faithful but colorless; everyone knows that color and light are lost in a simple reflection. The drama, therefore, must be a concentrating mirror, which, instead of weakening, concentrates and condenses the colored rays, which makes of a mere gleam a light, and out of a light a flame. Then only is the drama acknowledged by art." ²⁰

Even William Archer, the arch-enemy of the soliloquy, recognized the fact that art is not a photographic representation of nature and should not be degraded to the level of mechanical reproduction. In 1888, he acknowledged that the actor is not necessarily a mere copyist of nature; he must always imitate, though we may permit him to steep his imitation in a more or less conventional atmosphere. "He imitates well", according to Archer, is our highest formula for praise, "even for the operatic tenor or the French tragedian, who may not deliver a single word or tone exactly as it would be uttered in real life." ²¹

This view is somewhat at odds with that of the Renaissance critic Castelvetro, who maintained that the "show on the stage must reproduce the forms of things represented--no more, no less." ²² Criticizing Castelvetro's dictum, Graves points out that such a naive acceptance of reality would lead to the most absurd results. He actually presents the authentic case of a farmer in the audience at the presentation of a Shakespearean revival, who offered Richard, in a loud voice, a steed at a much lower price than the kingdom Richard offered. Another instance

20. Hugo, Victor, Preface to Cromwell, ut supra.

21. Archer William, Masks or Faces, London, 1888, page 196.

22. Charlton, H. B., Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry, Manchester, 1913, p. 63.

of genuine authenticity is that of the good lady who loudly warned Hamlet of the poisoned rapier. But Graves remarks, with his tongue probably in his cheek: "However, no member of an average audience is truly cheated into believing that what he sees on the stage is real." ²³

Bradley weighed the claims of realism, and found them wanting. He concluded that neither the use of verse nor the soliloquy can be condemned on the mere ground that they are "unnatural". "No dramatic language is natural; all dramatic language is idealized. The question as to the soliloquy must be as to the degree of idealization and the balance of advantages and disadvantages." ²⁴

A penetrating insight into the whole question of whether the soliloquy is "unnatural" was afforded 75 years ago by Francisque Sarcey, dramatic critic of "Le Temps", whom Henry James is said to have described as holding in the hollow of his hand the fortune of any new play presented in France. Sarcey was incorruptible, sane, and clear-sighted, demanding perfection in artistic form. But perfection did not to him mean the rigid reproduction of reality; in fact, such reproduction would do violence to art. "Suppose a stage scene painter should give to his canvas backgrounds the tones he has observed in nature; his picture, lighted by the glare of the foot-lights, would appear grotesque. So do facts and sentiments drawn from reality and transferred just as they are to the stage. It is absolutely necessary to accommodate them to the particular disposition of mind

23. Graves, Thornton, Literal Acceptance of Stage Illusion, South Atlantic Quarterly, xxiii, 2, April 1924.

24. Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1929, page 72.

which results among people when they assemble in the form of a crowd, when they compose an audience." ²⁵ Sarcey therefore poses the proposition that deceptions--"tricks if you prefer"--are essential. It is not enough, he says, to affirm that the drama is a representation of life. It would be a more exact definition to say that dramatic art is the sum total of all the "deceptions" by the aid of which, in representing life in the theater, the illusion of truth is given to the audience. Sarcey phrases this proposition in the most vivid phrases: "I hold that reality, if presented on the stage truthfully, would appear false to the monster with a thousand heads which we call the public." ²⁶

In his great emphasis on "deception" to attain the "illusion" of truth, Sarcey is echoing a famous saying of Goethe, who urged those who would work for the stage to study, not nature, but the stage, the effects of scenography, of lights and rouge, of glazed linen and spangles, and all the accoutrements and trappings of the stage. "He should leave nature in her proper place." ²⁷

Of these "tricks" and "deceptions" to give the illusion of truth to the representation of life in the theater, the soliloquy may be regarded as an example. At any rate, it is an excellent instance of what these tricks are known under in more technical language--the convention. The drama is therefore the sum total of the conventions by which the representation of life in the theatre is given the illusion of reality, far more than would reality itself.

25. Sarcey, F., *Theory of the Theater* (1876), New York, 1916, Section 2.

26. Sarcey, F., *ut supra*, Section 3.

27. Ronnfeldt, *Criticisms, Reflections, and Maxims of Goethe*, London, no date, article on "Epic and Dramatic Poetry".

Brander Matthews, who has done much to render the English-speaking world aware of the meaning of the dramatic convention, in 1906 defined the convention as "an implied pact between the artist and his patrons to accept certain variations from real life as absolutely essential means of expression." ²⁸

The Shakespearean scholar Granville-Barker uses almost the same language in discussing the Tudor convention: "There is no escape from the convention in the theater, and all conventions can be made acceptable, though they cannot all be made use of indiscriminately. Together they form a code, and they are as a treaty made with the audience...., and upon its basis we surrender our imaginations to the playwright." ²⁹

The concept of the convention in art is by no means new or novel. Even the most uninitiated layman realizes that painting steals but a glance of time, and represents as motionless that which we know to be vibrating with movement. A portrait in profile is but half of a face, but this convention, accepted without thought by us, was perhaps not so acceptable to the American Indians who were said to have asked when they saw a profile, "Where is the other half of the face?" A portrait in black and white by the very nature of the medium shows a black line around the face, which no one really has. Sculpture is not only motionless but is also generally monochrome, and we do not protest when we view Lincoln in dark bronze, or the Negro Booker T. Washington in gleaming white marble. Such is the nature of conventions that we must freely bind ourselves to their deception if we wish to enjoy the art which itself is largely the sum total of these conventions.

28. Matthews, Development of the Drama, New York, 1906, page 2.

29. Granville-Barker, H., Prefaces to Shakespeare, Princeton, 1942 vol. 1, page 16.

Not only in the plastic arts are conventions in the forefront. It is the convention of the opera that there exists a race of human beings whose natural speech is song, even to the point of singing (as does Tristan) for a half-hour on his death-bed. It is the convention of pantomime that there exists a race of human beings whose natural speech is gesture, and we meet this race of men on the stage occasionally today, although by no means as frequently as we met them upon the silent screen.

It is the convention of the radio (although not of television) that there exists a race of men who are to be heard but not seen, and who must convey in words their actions, their gestures, their facial expressions.

The drama, too, has its share of conventions. Since the dramatist rarely has more than two or three hours for the presentation of his work, he is compelled to select vigorously the vital elements of his theme and to compact his dialogue out of all resemblance to the ample and repetitious speech of daily life. The audience must see the actors, and so at least one wall of the room must be removed. The actors must be heard, and are therefore prevented from turning their backs on the audience while speaking, no matter what posture they might assume in real life. They must speak loudly enough to be heard in the last row, even when whispering words of love.

We accept these conventions without question or even thought, but occasionally some miscarriage of art brings them rudely to our attention. Sprague tells of the fastidious young hero of Novello's comedy, the "Truth Game," whose eyes roved with disapproval over the three sides of the stage living room, with the tasteless and out-of-place furniture. When the hero came to the missing fourth wall,

he continued his inventory of the hypothetical furniture, looking out at the first few rows of the orchestra and their occupants as if they were so many ugly tables or chairs. This snapped the illusion, and the audience tittered and broke into laughter.³⁰

As long as we are careful to stay within the bounds of a convention, there is little difficulty in maintaining the illusion, no matter how strange be the terms of the compact between the playwright and the audience. Brander Matthews tells of a most unusual dramatic convention in Japan at the opening of this century. The prompter sat on the stage in full view of the audience, and the fact that he was dressed in a skin-tight suit of black with a black hood, like a chimney sweep or a goblin, and the fact that he kept his face away from the spectators, were supposed to render him invisible. "As a matter of fact, it was curious how soon one failed to note his presence."³¹

Of dramatic conventions there are almost inexhaustible stores. Aelius Donatus, in the middle of the fourth century, the teacher of St. Jerome, lists some very interesting conventions of dress in the drama of the later Romans: "The old men in comedies wear white costumes, because they are held to be the oldest sort. Young men wear a variety of colors. The slaves in comedy wear thick shawls, either as a mark of their former poverty, or in order that they may run the faster. Parasites wear twisted 'pallas'. Those who are happy wear clean robes; the unhappy wear soiled robes.

30. Sprague, A. C., Shakespeare and his Audience, Cambridge, U. S. A., 1935, page 60.

31. Matthews, Brander, A Study of the Drama, Boston, 1910, page 140.

The rich wear royal purple; paupers wear reddish robes. A soldier has a short purple mantle. A girl wears a foreign robe; a procurer, a robe of many colors; a courtesan, yellow, to designate greed." ³²

One of the most interesting types of convention relates to the language of the actors. We assume that there is a race of people in the world of Corneille, Racine, and Molière whose habitual speech is the alexandrine, with alternating couplets of masculine and feminine rimes, just as we assume that the race of people in Shakespeare speak, except in unusual cases which we shall consider later, in blank verse, the unrimed decasyllabic iambic.

In Sanskrit drama, the heroes speak the nobler Sanskrit, while the women and the servants are allowed only the humbler Pali. In medieval Portuguese passion-plays, the devil was often made to speak in Spanish. ³³ The language problem was a hard one for Shakespeare in King Henry V, where the English characters, of course, speak English, and the French characters also speak English among themselves (since the audience would not understand French), but Katherine, wooed by Henry V, uses the hesitating broken English of a learner of our language:

"Is it possible dat I should love de enemy of France?"

"I cannot tell wat is dat."

"Your Majestee ave fausee French enough to deceive de most sage demoiselle dat is en France." ³⁴

The radio of today has a unique convention on the matter of language, so that the listener may always be aware of the nationality of the speaker. Thus, when Germans converse among each other, even when the locale is in

32. Aelius Donatus, *De Comœdia et Tragoedis*, N. Y., no date, page 17.

33. Matthews, Brander, *Study of Drama*, Boston, 1910, page 141.

34. Henry V, Act V, Scene 2, lines 178, 187, 233.

Germany itself, the radio script writer makes the characters speak in English (as would Shakespeare), but with a decided German accent. Surely that is nothing but a convention, for Germans in Germany do not speak among themselves in English with a German accent. Yet it is a convention which is wholeheartedly accepted by the audience, which enters into the pact in the interests of better listening.

Those who accept all of these conventions in every modern art but strain at the soliloquy might do well to examine the host of new conventions which have entered the American theater with Eugene O'Neill. His technique reminds us of the dramatic convention in Java, where differently painted puppets are employed to depict the effect of different passions on the same character.³⁵ In the "Great God Brown", O'Neill adopts a technique consisting of the use of masks by the leading characters to hide their true selves, as well as to indicate changes going on in their personalities. During the course of the play, the characters constantly put on, take off, and change their masks.³⁶ Attacked by some critics as hocus-pocus, this device nevertheless represents a revolt against the barren concept that the stage should be an exact reflection of life, in favor of the hypothesis that any convention is acceptable if the playwright and the audience enter into a compact to admit it.

Although O'Neill is a very controversial figure, and undoubtedly invited the wrath of many wholesome elements, he nevertheless has given dramaturgy a new horizon. In the "Strange Interlude," which brought protests from many decent people down upon his head, O'Neill evolved a new psychological technique, utilizing speech alone, whereby each

35. Menon, N.C., Shakespeare Criticism, London 1938, page 198.

36. O'Neill, Eugene, The Great God Brown, New York, 1926, passim.

character used two different types of expression. One is the everyday speech of human intercourse, wherewith we carry on the necessary business of life, curbing our passions and adjusting ourselves to the external world. The other is the speech which reveals our emotional nature, whose desires and motives are kept hidden. These hidden thoughts of the characters are inaudible to their fellow men (the other characters of the play), and are meant only for the audience. Most critics would not call these speeches asides, but rather of the nature of the soliloquy. In the actual stage technique used by the producers of the play, each character, before he began to utter his hidden thoughts, waited for a second while the action halted, and then expressed his "hidden" thoughts in a natural manner. Within a few moments after the curtain rose, the audience is said to have swung into the double procedure, and soon differentiated between the ordinary dialogue and the soliloquies. ³⁷

As the lack of reason in materialistic life moved O'Neill closer to Catholicism, O'Neill created still another convention--the use of two separate characters to show two separate selves of the same person, who was clearly O'Neill himself. One character, Loving, is the God-denying self, pessimistic and destructive; he is invisible to the other characters of the play, but is visible to the audience. The other character of the same self is John, who yearns to return to the true faith. ³⁸

37. O'Neill, Eugene, *Strange Interlude*, New York, 1928, *passim*.

38. O'Neill, Eugene, *"Days Without End"*, New York, 1943, *passim*.

No discussion of conventions would be complete without mention of the three unities, which are usually traced to Aristotle. These unities were well stated by Lodovico Castelvetro, of the University of Siena, in his "Opere Varie Critiche", written in 1570: "The scene of the action must be constant, being not merely restricted to one city or house, but indeed to that one place alone which could be visible to one person... Tragedy ought to have for subject an action which happened in a very limited extent of place and in a very limited extent of time....There is no possibility of making the spectators believe that many days and many nights have passed, when they themselves obviously know that only a few hours have actually elapsed; they refuse to be so deceived." These unities of time and place, plus the unity of action, were well established in the time of Castelvetro.³⁹

These unities were no doubt well adapted to the Greek stage, where the chorus encircled the players throughout the production and changes of time and place might have seemed illogical. But in modern times, the conventional unities became increasingly questioned. Thus, Cervantes, in "Don Quixote", complained of the absurdity of having a character appear in the first scene as a child in swaddling clothes, and in the second scene as a bearded man. He similarly complained of a contemporary play in which the first act was laid in Europe, the second in Asia, and the third in Africa, and "had there been four acts, the fourth would doubtless have been in America"⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Cervantes could not give his full support to three classical unities, for he said, in his work on play-wrighting: "There is no use in advising that the action should take place in

39. Charlton, H. B., Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry, Manchester, 1913, p.84.

40. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quixote, 1605, I, 48.

the period of one sun, though this is the view of Aristotle;....let it take place in as little time as possible....But considering that the wrath of a seated Spaniard is immoderate when in two hours there is not presented to him everything from Genesis to the Last Judgment, I deem it most fitting for us to please him."⁴¹

It is significant to note that the three unities were championed until relatively recent times for the same reason that the soliloquy has been attacked in recent times—the claims of realism. Thus, Jean Chapelain, in 1674, stated that a drama with a good plot should not have more than one principal action (unity of action); that the development of the action should be confined to 24 hours (unity of time); that the action should take place in a single place (unity of place). Then Chapelain defended these unities by claiming that "all of this is a necessary corollary to the verisimilar, without which the mind is neither moved nor persuaded."⁴²

The modern view of the convention, as we have seen, is basically different from that of Chapelain, for it is held today that conventions are deceptions, so to speak, which give to the play the illusion of reality, where sheer reality would give the impression of unreality. Furthermore, the modern view of convention is that it by no means partakes of the nature of universality. Conventions drawn by the genius of Aristotle from the dramaturgy of the Greeks need not necessarily be true in every age and for every stage, as can be judged by the fact that Shakespeare violated the classical unities constantly in each of his plays.

⁴¹.Cervantes, New Art of Writing Plays in this Age, in Brewster, W. T., Papers on Playmaking, I, New York, 1914, Section 19.

⁴².Chapelain, Jean, Sommaire d'une Poétique dramatique, Paris, 1674 page 3.

An instance of the general truth that conventions are based on the philosophy of an age and the conditions of its stage is the famous injunction of Horace in his "Ars Poetica" that a fourth person should not be so presumptuous as to speak. This is incorporated in the rules of Bernadino Daniello in his "La Poetica" (1565), described by Saintsbury as the first theory of poetry in modern times. "Comedy should not exceed the limit of five acts, nor comprise less; four characters must not speak at once, but only two or three at most, while the others stand to one side quietly listening." ⁴³

Samuel Johnson took a very dim view of this injunction, which allowed only three speaking personages to appear at one time upon the stage. He regarded this as a sort of accidental precept, conditioned by the circumstances of the origin of the drama in Greece: "Tragedy was a monody, or soliloquy, sung in honor of Bacchus, improved afterwards into a dialogue by the addition of another speaker; but the ancients, remembering that the tragedy was at first pronounced only by one, durst not for some time venture beyond two; at last, when custom and impunity had made them daring, they extended their liberty to the admission of three, but restrained themselves by a critical edict from further exorbitance." ⁴⁴

Whether Johnson was right, or whether the juxtaposition of chorus and actors would have made a drama with more than three speakers confusing to the audience, or whether other factors of the Greek stage were responsible, it seems reasonable that the convention of three speakers should not be admitted to the status of a universal rule, but

43. Daniello, Bernadino, *La Poetica*, Lucca, 1565, page 38.

44. Johnson, Samuel, in *The Rambler*, London, No. 156, Sept. 14, 1751

rather regarded as arising from conditions which prevailed in ancient Greece but do not prevail today. In fact, we might conclude that all of the classical conventions were based on the conditions of the classical theater, and not on universal reason. The theater of Dionysius at Athens, accepted as the earliest of the great Greek theaters, is nevertheless so well preserved that the modern traveler can seat himself in its marble benches and look down into the orchestra where the actors shared the space with the chorus. More than 20,000 persons might have been in the audience, and we can well imagine how small the actor must have looked and how difficult or impossible it would have been to detect any change in the facial expression of the actor. There is small wonder that the Greek actor was raised on lofty boots and wore a mask which towered above his head. Accoutred in this manner, the Greek actor would have had great difficulty to engage in strenuous activity, such as would have been involved in acts of violence enacted on the stage. Is this the basis of Aristotle's injunction in his "Ars Poetica" that things fit to be acted only behind the stage should not be viewed by the people; that Medea should not murder her sons before the audience? The heavy costumes of the actors, as well as the religious circumstances surrounding the performance of the Greek play, thus forbade anything in the nature of violent action, and particularly prohibited any representation of murder. But Shakespeare refused to be bound by such conventions, and we shall note later how his stage had its ample share of corpses.

The point we are making is that a convention is most often characteristic of a certain age and of its stage, and cannot be studied in a vacuum. Gaston Boissier, a learned student of Latin

and an acute critic, declared: "No doubt, the theater at Orange was made for these Latin plays, but the plays were also made for this theater; they were instinctively accommodated to the place where they were to be represented. The actual circumstances of their performance imposed upon them certain necessities which in time erected themselves into rules. It would be easy to prove that many of their qualities and of their defects, for which subtle explanations have been sought, have in fact no other origin than this obligation of the dramatist to conform to the conditions of performances in the only type of theater with which the Latin dramatists were familiar."⁴⁵

As we conclude this study of realism versus convention, we hold that the soliloquy is not to be judged on the basis of whether it is or is not "natural" or realistic; for art does not have to be a faithful and exact reproduction of nature. Art is based on a system of conventions which give the illusion of reality, and these conventions must be adapted to the philosophy of the age and even more so to the mechanics, or better, to the dynamics of the stage. If they conform to this philosophy and stage, the conventions, even though they are "deceptions", will be accepted as true by the audience, and will serve to promote the enjoyment to be derived from the art.

The soliloquy is a convention. It is futile to discuss to too great length whether the soliloquy is "natural" or not, for it could be a poor convention even if it were ultra-realistic, and a good convention even if it never occurred in real life. The important question is to study the characteristics of the Elizabethan stage which made the soliloquy so powerful a technique in the hands of Shakespeare, and to determine whether these characteristics have changed. What was Shakespeare's stage?

⁴⁵. Quoted by Matthews, B., in Study of the Drama, Boston, 1910, page 53.

Chapter III

The Shakespearean Stage and the Soliloquy

In the prologue to "Henry V," the Chorus utters these lines:

"But pardon, gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that hath dar'd
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object. Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques¹
That did affright the air at Agincourt?"

The "unworthy scaffold" was undoubtedly the stage of Shakespeare's theater, probably the newly built Globe, according to Neilson and Hill.² The "cockpit" was no doubt a genuine cockpit, that is, a pit which was host to cock-fighting on occasions when the theater was not in use for the drama. Finally, "the wooden O" gives us a simple clue to the appearance of the Globe Theater--a somewhat circular shape, possibly resembling that of a race-track.

Unfortunately, there seems to be no contemporary description of the Globe Theater, but we may conjecture as to its features both from a study of its origins and a study of contemporary theaters, such as the Fortune and the Swan.

There seems to be little doubt that the Elizabethan theater had its origins in the innyards which formed the theater of many a dramatic troupe. With boards stretched across some barrels in the yard of the

1. Henry V, Prologue, 8.

2. Neilson and Hill, New Cambridge Shakespeare, Boston, 1942, page 710.

inn, and with stables available for use as attiring rooms (later to become the tiring room of the theater), the boards became the stage, the yard accommodated the audience, the sun's light shone with its afternoon brilliance down upon the stage and spectators, and the Shakespearean stage was in the making. Indeed, an innyard of this sort, the Cross Keys in Gracechurch Street, was still in regular use as late as 1594, and was used along with suitable inn accommodations as the winter house for the Shakespearean troupe after 1608.³

If we replace the boards on barrels by a permanently constructed platform, if tiring rooms take the place of the stable, and if the seats surrounding the oval, square, or polygonal innyard are converted into galleries, we have the essential features of the Elizabethan theater.

The accompanying diagrams will give some concept of the architectural details. The plan view of the Fortune Theater (London, 1599) is a reconstruction by Tolman.⁴ The perspective of the Fortune Theater is by W. H. Godfrey, from details in the builder's contract.^{4a} The interior of the Swan Theater is from a drawing by Johan de Witt (1595), who estimated its capacity as 3,000.⁵

John C. Adams, in his work on the Globe Theater, has attempted to reconstruct its features on the basis of original records and contemporary references. He suggests that the Globe Theater had the shape of an octagon, both inside and outside, with the following

3. Chambers, E.K., *The Elizabethan Stage*, Oxford, 1923, II, 379.
4. Tolman, Albert H., *Shakespearean Topics*, Macmillan, 1925, page 152.
- 4a. Matthews, B., *Study of the Drama*, Boston, 1910, page 60
5. Harbage, Alfred, *Shakespeare's Audience*, New York, 1941, page 19.

dimensions:

84 feet from outside wall to outside wall;

58 feet across the yard;

12 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. width of galleries;

12, 11, and 9 ft. height, respectively, of three galleries;

35 ft. height at the eavesline;

43 feet across width of stage;

25 ft. across side of stage.⁶

It is obvious from the diagrams that the Shakespearean stage was a platform, rectangular or slightly trapezoidal, which protruded directly into the audience. Thomas Platter, a Swiss traveler, gives us a good description of the "groundlings" who had to stand around the three sides of the stage, as well as those who sat in the galleries:

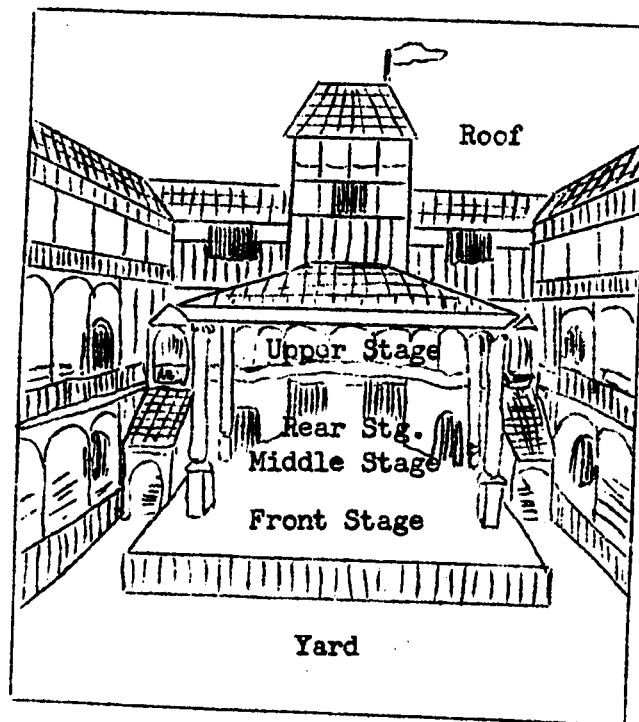
"For whoever cares to stand below (the platform or stage) pays one English penny, but if he wishes to sit he enters by another door and pays another penny, but if he desires to sit in the most comfortable seats which are cushioned, where he not only sees everything well, but can also be seen, then he pays yet another English penny at the door."⁷

Those who wished to make themselves even more visible could sit on the stage, almost at arm's length from the actors. The merits of this vantage point are well stated by Thomas Dekker in his satirical, full-length account of theater behavior, the Gull's Hornbook: "A conspicuous eminence is gotten (by sitting on the stage), by which means the best and most essential parts of a gallant (good clothes, a proportionate leg, white hand, a Persian lock, and a tolerable beard) are perfectly revealed."⁸

6. Adams, J. C., *The Globe Playhouse*, Cambridge, 1942, page 19.

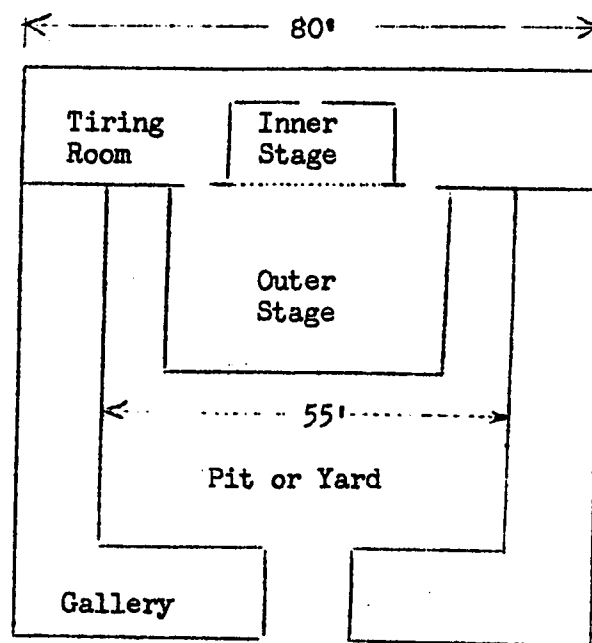
7. Williams, C., *Thomas Platter's Travels (1599)*, London, 1937, page 167.

8. Dekker, Thomas, *Gull's Hornbook*, London, 1609, page 211.

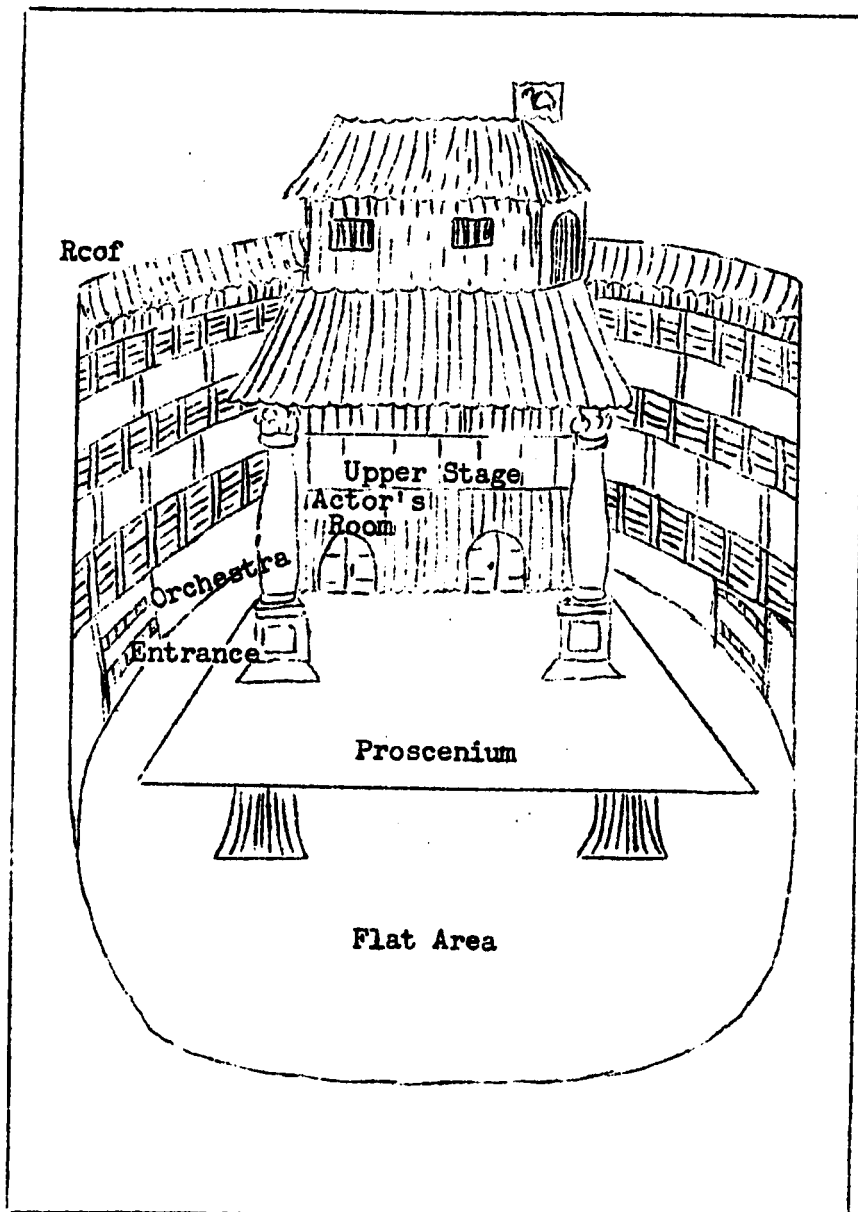


Interior of the Fortune Theater

London 1599



Plan view of the Fortune Theater
(1599)



Interior of the Swan Theater
From a drawing made in 1595

The views of the Fortune Theater show very clearly the inner stage, built directly back of the platform and separated from it, when not in use, by a traverse curtain of tapestry or printed cloth. One view also shows the upper stage, as does the view of the Swan Theater; this upper stage was generally on the level of the second gallery, and was covered by a roof. However, much of the platform stage was open to the sky, as was all of the yard in which the "groundlings" stood throughout the performance.

Since the platform was surrounded by the audience on three sides, it was a sort of neutral background, which might represent a street, a public place, a garden, or the hall of a castle. Access to this platform was to be had through the two doors of the tiring house. Thus, the platform was a "wood near Athens" in "A Midsummer's Night Dream," and the two doors were used according to the directions, "Enter a Fairy at one door and Robin Goodfellow at another " (II,1). However, in "Cymbeline"(V, 2), it was possible for entry to be made by "the Roman army at one door and the Briton army at the other door." In this sort of unlocalized stage, the exact setting of each scene mattered little; when such information was necessary, it was supplied not through the intricate scenery of today, but through dialogue. In the modern stage, pantomime and stage business are relied upon to a great extent in carrying along the action, but on the Elizabethan platform stage, pantomime and business were difficult to observe from all three sides, and the action had to be simple and essential. The audience actually came more to hear the play than to see it, as Ben Jonson intimated:

"For your own sakes, not his, the poet bade me say,
Would you were come to hear, not see a play.
Though we his actors must provide for those
Who are our guests here, in the way of shows,
The maker hath not so; he'd have you wise,
Much rather by your ears, than in your eyes."⁹

There is no doubt that the Elizabethan drama was made to appeal to the ear far more than to the eye. As Menon says, the spoken word engrossed the attention of the audience, for, even though the stage was open to the sky, the pit was only 55 feet across, and the acoustics were not too bad. Shakespeare, he says, consciously appealed to the poetic imagination: "The Elizabethans loved rhetoric; they had poetic imagination." They accepted and admired the soliloquy because they had the love of words which "made them unconscious of the art or artifice of playwrights and actors. When one is hungry, one does not note the behavior of cooks and waiters. The Elizabethans hungered for words which express the complex attitudes of the human spirit."¹⁰

Since words replaced much of the small "business" of the modern stage—it being too difficult to notice such business on a platform stage surrounded by the audience on three sides, and with some of the audience actually sitting on the stage—we should expect that such business as there was should be vigorous, employing broad sweeps of action. This expectation would be justified, as can be seen from the following examples.

9. Jonson, Ben, *The Staple of News*, London, 1625, the Prologue.

10. Menon, C. N., *Shakespeare Criticism*, Oxford, 1938, page 19.

When Romeo receives bad news, he tears his hair and throws himself upon the ground, as indicated by these lines:

"Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,
An hour but married, Tybalt murdered,
Doting like me and like me banished,
Then mightst thou speak, then mightst thou tear thy hair,
And fall upon the ground, as I do now,
Taking the measure of an unmade grave."¹¹

When Elizabeth enters wailing and weeping, the stage directions indicate that she has "her hair about her ears."¹² Similarly, Constance enters with her hair awry:

"Constance....I am not mad. This hair I tear is mine....

King Philip...Bind up those tresses."¹³

Brutus indicates the troubled state of his mind in a rather vigorous manner, for Portia accuses him:

"Yesternight at supper

You suddenly arose and walked about,
Musing and sighing, with your arms across."¹⁴

For essentially the same reasons that the platform stage, surrounded by spectators almost at an arm's length, nurtured the soliloquy and caused "business" to become stylized into gross movements, this stage, a sort of neutral island in a sea of spectators, without benefit of scenery or properties, was remarkably vague as to space or time. With-

11. Romeo and Juliet, III, 3, 65.

12. Richard III, 2, 2.

13. King John II, 4. 44.

14. Julius Caesar, II, 1, 237.

out intending any criticism, Archer gave it as his opinion that the normal state of mind of the Elizabethan audience was one of absolute vagueness and carelessness as to the particular locality the stage was supposed to represent. "They saw actors come in and declaim...and troubled their heads very little as to where they¹⁵ were."

The fondness of the Elizabethan audience for the soliloquy and for rhetoric in general often seems strange to the modern theater-goer who realizes the cosmopolitan composition of the theater-goers of Shakespeare's days. The Elizabethan playhouse was a most democratic institution, as Dekker pointed out:

"The place is so free in entertainment, allowing a stool as well to the farmer's son as to your Templar, that your stinkard has the self-same liberty to be there in his tobacco fumes which your sweet courtier has; and that your carman and tinker claim as strong a voice in their suffrage and sit to give judgment on the play's life¹⁶ and death as well as the proudest Momus among the tribe of critic."

But to both the "squint-eyed groundlings" and to the noblemen on the stage, Shakespeare's theater was more than simply a theater; it was to them what the newspaper, the radio, the lecture platform, the magazine, and a host of media of communication, combined, are to us. Words meant much to such an audience, more than the battlements, throne rooms, and picturesque churchyards which we are inclined to add to Shakespeare revivals, but which were not to be seen at the Globe.

15. Archer, W., *The Old Drama and the New*, Boston, 1923, page 36.

16. Dekker, Thomas, *Gull's Hornbook*, London, 1609, page 93.

This bare Elizabethan stage encouraged a panoramic form of drama, in which the story could be unfolded in a straightforward manner, with soliloquy and narrative supplying the antecedents and filling the gaps. The whole burden of stimulating and sustaining the illusion fell on the actor, who, once he had captured the audience, must hold them literally through the force of his words. Coleridge found merit in such a bare stage: "The very nakedness of Shakespeare's stage was advantageous, for the drama thence became something between recitation and representation, and the absence or paucity of scenery allowed a freedom from the laws of unity of place and unity of time."¹⁷

The freedom from the unities which Coleridge regarded with approval, Voltaire ridiculed in a dedicatory letter to his Jesuit teacher, Père Porée: "If the unity of place were not limited to a comparatively confined space, we should soon see plays like the old Julius Caesar of the English, where Cassius and Brutus are in Rome in the first act, and in Thessaly in the fifth.....All nations are beginning to consider barbarous those ages when the rules were ignored by the greatest geniuses, such as Shakespeare."¹⁸

Voltaire was right in charging Shakespeare with the violation of the unities, for, as Haines has pointed out, "rapidity and variety of change of pace are really the basis of Shakespeare's method,"¹⁹ and Bradbrook has referred to indications of time and place by talk as "unlocalized drama."²⁰

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17. Coleridge, S. T., paper on "Progress of Drama" (1818) in vol. 2 of *Literary Remains*, London, 1836.
 18. Voltaire, *Oedipe*, Paris, 1730, dedicatory letter.
 19. Haines, *Shakespeare and the Theater*, page 58.
 20. Bradbrook, *Elizabethan Stage Conditions*, Cambridge (England), 1932, page 34.

Goethe took exception to Voltaire's criticism of Shakespeare for his violation of the unities. In a conversation in 1825, he pointed out that comprehensibility is the purpose of the three unities, and if observance of them hinders comprehensibility, it is foolish to treat them as laws and to try to observe them. "The pieces of Shakespeare deviate as far as possible from the unities of time and place; but they are comprehensible—nothing more so; on this account, the Greeks would have found no fault in them." Again in 1827, Goethe criticized the tendency to put Shakespeare's plays under scrutiny in regard to observance of laws of the drama. He reminded these critics that Shakespeare had his audience, and not critics, in mind when he wrote his plays, and that he was chiefly interested in what would pass "before the eyes and ears" of the crowd.²¹

What might appear to be Shakespeare's weakness—the need for satisfying the eyes and ears of the groundlings—could well have been his strength. By ignoring place and time in large measure, the characters and what they said captivated all attention. The soliloquies and the dialogues had to fight for attention only with action of a gross and vigorous sort, not with small "business" or details of scenery. This is the true gain of the bare platform stage in the midst of the spectators. By gaining nothing from visual illusion, he won everything for verbal illusion. His drama is attached solely to the actors and their acting; their words almost unaided carry place and time with them as the dialogue and soliloquy proceed.

21. Oxenford, Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret, London, 1913, sections for March 1827 and February 1825.

Shakespeare had as little regard for time as for place on his platform stage. One of the first to call attention to the time problem in Shakespeare was Thomas Rymer, whose blunt and intemperate remarks on Shakespeare's rhetoric we have already considered. Rymer translated Rapin's French treatise on Aristotle's Poetics and was undoubtedly greatly affected by the classical unities. His criticism of "Othello" was particularly severe, where hours suddenly change into days, and days expand into weeks.²² So obscure is Shakespeare's handling of time that North, a century ago, suggested that Shakespeare had two clocks going in his plays, a slow clock for some of the action, and a fast clock for other action that was supposed to be synchronous or concurrent.²³

But perhaps the best explanation is furnished by Granville-Barker, whose very personality was for decades steeped in Shakespeare. It is his contention that the innumerable time inconsistencies, the slow and fast clocks, are to be explained by the simple fact that Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's audience, too, were not essentially concerned with time in the calendar sense. "The play's essence lies in the processes of thought and feeling by which the characters are moved and the story is forwarded; the deeper the springs of these, the less do time, place and circumstance affect them....He may falsify the calendar in 'Othello' for his convenience, but we shall find neither trickery nor anomaly in the fighting of the intellectual battle for Othello's soul, and in the light of the truth of this, the rest will pass unnoticed."²⁴ And we might add that in this intellectual battle, the soliloquy, as "unnatural" as a calendar based on two different time-rates, is a powerful medium for the revelation of thought and emotion for which the groundlings as well as the nobles crowded the Globe.

22. Rymer, Thomas, A Short View of Tragedy, London, 1693, page 120

23. North, Christopher, Blackwood's Magazine, February, 1850.

24. Granville-Barker, H., Prefaces to Shakespeare, Princeton, 1942, 1, 46.

It was not only the physical environment of the Elizabethan theater which encouraged the art of verbal rather than visual illusion (and thus gave power to the soliloquy as a vehicle for the expression of thought and emotion); a unique convention contributed to this as well--the practice of using the boy actor to play women's roles.

Archer has protested that the use of the boy actor in the role of woman strains our credulity, especially when Shakespeare disguises the woman (who is acted by a boy) in the clothes of a boy, as he so often does. "If it be once granted that a wife has only to get into male attire to be wholly unrecognisable to her husband, it is obviously easy to build upon this convention all sorts of comic or melodramatic complications."²⁵

Without attempting to justify the "naturalness" of this disguise, we should point out that it was a convention and accepted as such by the audience. Why Shakespeare should have resorted to the "boy acting a woman disguised as a boy" technique has been discussed by numerous critics. Perhaps Davies has given the best answer when he pointed out that boys, although excellent mimics, could not be expected to enter into female emotions that are alien to their experiences or their natures. Thus, Viola, Portia, Nerissa, Jessica, Rosalind, and Imogen were disguised as boys so that their lines might be more consistent with the nature of the boys who played their roles. Also, "on the modern stage, even a girl has difficulty managing full Elizabethan skirts. Could it be that the Elizabethan dramatist made some dramatic capital of the conventions of his stage by allowing his boys to masquerade as themselves so that they

25. Archer, William, *The Old Drama and the New*, Boston, 1923, page 42.

could devote their attentions wholly to their parts and lend greater
26 realism to their playing."

Granville-Barker gives us an even deeper insight into the effect of the boy actor on Shakespeare's dramaturgy. What could a boy, he asks, bring to Juliet, Rosalind, or Cleopatra beyond grace of manner and charm of speech? What sort of "odd fish" would a boy Juliet seem to us? But Shakespeare turned this limitation to account, and converted a potential loss into a literary gain. Since the feminine charm of which so much is made in the modern stage was denied him, his men and women encounter each other "upon a plane where their relation is made rare and intense
27 by poetry....which surpasses mere primitive love-making."

Shakespeare's use of poetry, referred to above, must also be construed as a convention. Generally speaking, all elevated or sentimental passages, or those uttered by persons of rank or breeding, are in meter. Comic and light parts, including dialect and broken English, are usually in prose. Letters, proclamations, etc., are in prose. Fools, clowns, and those who are drunken or demented speak prose. Masters who customarily speak poetry descend to prose in addressing their servants. The use of poetry is considered by Archer as a device often used by primitive people for the reason given by Goethe, that "art is art because it is not nature," that is, because poetry is a medium clearly marked off from the speech of everyday life. In the case of Shakespeare, he offers as the explanation a corollary of "art is art because it is not nature"—the fact that his actors, standing on a platform engulfed on three sides by a sea of spectators, need poetry as a "convenient and

26. Davies, William R., *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, London, 1939, page 37.

27. Granville-Barker, H., *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Princeton, 1942, i, 14.

even necessary means of differentiation between the mimic personage²⁸ and the audience." Thus, the very nearness of the audience, which made the soliloquy such an intimate bond between the actor and the spectator, required this differentiation of poetry to draw the imaginary line of demarcation.

To the modern playwright who is tempted to venture into meter, it may appear that the use of poetry dispenses the playwright from a careful observance of nature, for it is easier to make the characters speak in poetry than it is to capture, in the greatly condensed dialogue of the theater, the true accent and delicate interplay of conversation of everyday life. But the Elizabethan audience, in an implied pact with the playwright, did not consider Shakespeare's verse as unnatural. As Murry has said, "Modern drama avoids poetry and soliloquy, and produces speech which is neither poetry nor true-to-life prose." The speech of Shakespeare's characters²⁹, he states, "is natural to Shakespeare's stage."

We have looked into the characteristics of Shakespeare's stage in some detail, and we have traced how these characteristics have affected the conventions of his theater. His platform stage, without artificial lighting or drop-curtain, afloat in a sea of spectators, without scenery or other means of visual illusion, with boys acting the part of women, with great vagueness as to time and place, with an intimate contact between the troupe and the audience, almost at arm's length — such a stage bred an environment exceedingly friendly to the soliloquy.

The soliloquy upon the Tudor platform stage is really a case of extremes meeting. There is practically no visual illusion, but there is every verbal illusion. Words build concepts of space and time, of intent and character. Starcey, with his keen penetration, remarked many years

28. Archer, W., Playmaking, London, 1912, page 392.
29. Murry, J. M., Shakespeare, London, 1936, page 289.

ago, that we cannot conceive of a play without an audience. "Take one after another the accessories which serve in the performance of a dramatic work—they can all be replaced or suppressed except that one. A play without an audience is inconceivable."³⁰

We may be assured that Shakespeare, with the financial welfare of his troupe almost entirely dependent on the whims of the audience, wrote his plays with this audience in mind. Let us put ourselves for a moment in the place of one of the spectators. There seems nothing strange about this actor, not even the dress he wears. If we should lean over forward a little, we could almost touch him. Not even the environment cuts us off from everyday life. Overhead, the sky is lowering and we are wondering what to do if the rain comes down. We look again at the actor, and we feel that we are as intimate and familiar with him as it is possible to be. We agree to call him "Hamlet"; that he is where he says he is, although the stage is bare, and that he is located with respect to time when he says he is, although we do not care very much. We admit that his natural speech is blank verse, and that he may on occasion think aloud with perfect naturalness. We admit all this, and that this boy actor is a woman too, and it seems that the more we are asked to accept in this dramatic pact with the playwright, the easier we find it to do so, for without these conventions it would be futile for us to crowd into the Globe Theater for a dramatic treat. Once our imagination starts working, visual illusion is thrown to the winds in favor of the illusion conjured up in the imagination by the actor's words.

30. Sarcey, A., *Theory of the Theater* (1876), N.Y., 1916, page 22.

We watch the hand of Shakespeare feeling its way through a scene to get a grip on us, and we find him getting a stranglehold upon us by way of the soliloquy. By means of this technique of stagecraft, he establishes rapport with the closest emotional states of his characters, and discloses their secret thoughts. We are captivated by this illusion, and are completely unaware that the stage is utterly lacking in scenic illusion. The illusion is woven by our own imagination, and this indeed is second in strength to no other.

In modern presentations of Shakespeare upon our stage of visual illusion, the soliloquies are censured as an unnatural device, spoken under the ridiculous pretence that the player is talking at length aloud to himself. Hamlet murmuring "To be or not to be", like some sort of psychological introspective type, displaying his abnormalities at a distance, may have but a slack hold upon our attention, because we have not delivered our imaginations willingly into captivity in the hands of the playwright when we see him upon today's stage. John Drinkwater, the English poet and dramatist, who was well versed in modern as well as the semi-medieval dramaturgy which characterized the Tudor stage, agreed that Hamlet does not seem to be able to hold the modern theater-goer spellbound, or even interested. He pointed out that when Viola, in coy pretence that there is no one about, goes on for 26 lines to consider how will this "fadge", she runs the risk of appealing to the modern audience as a tiresome girl who talks too much. But when Hamlet walks out of the stage of modern visual illusion on to the edge of the Shakespearean platform and puts all his quick-witted reasoning on suicide bluntly to the groundlings about him, and when Viola asks these same groundlings

point-blank "what the devil she was going to do about it, neither Hamlet nor Viola says a word too many for their own comfort or anybody's patience."³¹

Miss Fenton, in her study of the extra-dramatic moments in Tudor dramaturgy, confirmed Drinkwater's analysis from a somewhat different insight. She agreed wholeheartedly that Shakespeare used the soliloquy because his audience delighted in this intimate revelation of thought and emotion:

"Behind practically all of these soliloquies lies the desire to make the play more vivid and interesting, to please the public.... Because of its personal appeal, the direct address is one of the surest ways of rousing them from boredom or indifference.... In some instances, too, the effect is less of the actor's stepping out of his world than of drawing the auditors into it, making them feel that they are actually a part of it."³²

We must conclude from this discussion that the soliloquy is a tool peculiarly adapted to the Elizabethan platform stage, and should be judged, not as to whether it is "natural" from a realistic standpoint, but whether it was a natural convention for the conditions of the stage on which it was found. This is also the conclusion of William Archer, the great enemy of the soliloquy in the modern theater:

"In the Elizabethan theater, with its platform stage under the open sky, any pictorial exactness of reproduction was clearly impossible.

31. Drinkwater, John, Shakespeare, London, 1933, page 86.

32. Fenton, Doris, Extra-Dramatic Moment in Elizabethan Plays before 1600, Philadelphia, 1930, page 35.

Its fundamental conditions necessitated very nearly a maximum of convention. Therefore such conventions as blank verse and the soliloquy were simply of a piece with all the rest. In the theater of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth, the proscenium arch--the frame of the picture--made pictorial realism theoretically possible. But no one recognized the possibility, and indeed on a candle-lit stage, it would have been extremely difficult. As a matter of fact, the Elizabethan platform survived in the shape of a long "apron", projecting in front of the proscenium, on which the most important parts of the action took place. The characters, that is to say, were constantly stepping out of the frame of the picture, and while this visual convention maintained itself, there was nothing inconsistent or jarring in the auditory convention of the soliloquy."³³

It will be recalled that the Greek and Roman theaters were patterned after the amphitheater, with the actors practically surrounded by the audience. This pattern of stage architecture was the rule for 20 centuries thereafter, being the most important single characteristic of the Shakespearean stage. Archer has pointed out that this characteristic was to be found almost to our own day, for even when the stage left the open courtyard and moved indoors, the only part that was well illuminated was the apron extending into the orchestra. Thus, from the time of Aeschylus, down to the earlier days of Ibsen, the actors were encircled by the spectators. Even the introduction of gas-light and lime-light, which caused the apron to shrink back, did not meet the requirements of the modern concept of the picture-frame stage which Sir Hubert Herkomer formulated as

33. Archer, W. Playmaking, London, 1912, page 398.

follows: "The proscenium should be to the stage-picture what the frame is to the easel picture. It should separate the stage-picture from the surroundings, just as a painted picture should reach the frame."³⁴

Gas and lime-light could not light up the entire stage even as well as Shakespeare's open platform was illuminated by the sky overhead. But the introduction of electricity finally transformed the semi-medieval stage of the Elizabethans into the technological stage of the first half of the twentieth century. Thus Edison, more than any one else, enabled the apron to be cut off, and made it possible for the stage to withdraw from the audience behind and within the frame of the picture. As visual reality was increased, conventions became unnecessary, for it was possible in the stage of the twentieth century to provide such a well set interior on the stage as to require a distinct effort of attention to be conscious of it at all. The appeal of the playwright became less to the ear than in the preceding centuries, and, in the brilliantly lighted land of make-believe behind the footlight, an appeal could be made actively to the eye.

As Brander Matthews points out, Ibsen is commonly credited with the deace of the soliloquy because Ibsen "has been masterly in the adjustment of his methods to the conditions of the picture-frame stage."³⁵ It was Ibsen who first realized that the land behind the picture frame could not live by the laws of the Shakespearean platform stage. In the realistic setting framed by the proscenium arch, the setting seems so "real" and so distant (psychologically if not physically) from the rows of the audience, that stepping out of the picture to talk intimately with the audience would be entirely out of order. Ibsen was the first to realize that a new

34. Quoted in Matthews, B., A Study of the Drama, Boston, 1910, page 63.

35. Matthews, Brander, ut supra, page 64.

technique was required for a technologically new stage, and this new technique discarded the soliloquy and aside.

Just as the Elizabethan dramatists wrote for the platform stage, so the dramatist of the twentieth century wrote for the picture-frame stage, that prison house of light and canvas. The actor is no longer almost surrounded by the audience; the three walls of an expertly contrived room and the fourth invisible wall of the footlights cut him off completely from intercourse with the audience. This magic line of separation has converted rhetoric into boredom, and has made the soliloquy seem "unnatural." It has practically destroyed every convention except those which are subservient to the picture-frame. Gone is the neutral ground of the Shakespearean stage, where the actor might be so close that he could almost touch his spectators, where the setting might be any place and almost any time, the stage which encouraged the long soliloquy, the act of confidential self-revelation. Instead, the actor has withdrawn behind the proscenium, seated in a real chair in what seems like a real room, able to emerge from the frame only at the risk of breaking the illusion.

Such are the reasons, largely technological, which have led to the questioning of the soliloquy. As Paull has remarked, "a convention that is questioned is doomed; its existence depends upon its unhesitating acceptance." The moment a convention is questioned, it snaps the imaginative hold it requires, and the pact between playwright and audience is in danger of being abrogated.³⁶

It seems reasonable to conclude from this discussion that some critics are grievously at fault in branding the Shakespearean

36. Paull, H.M., Fortnightly Review, May 1899, page 870.

soliloquy as "unnatural." It may be "unnatural" to the picture-frame stage with its minimum of convention, but was perfectly suited to the Shakespearean stage of verbal illusion, where time and place were unlocalized except through verbal definition, where blank verse provided a rhetorical background, and where the intimacy between actors and audience invited acts of self-revelation. In the Tudor stage, with its maximum of convention, the convention of the soliloquy was not only "natural" to its environment, but a technique which the skill of Shakespeare converted into an invaluable element of his dramaturgy.

It would be equally unfair to criticize the twentieth century playwright for abandoning the soliloquy. Sir Arthur Pinero, the precursor of Galsworthy and Shaw, stated the case very fairly when he declared that "the drama is not stationary but progressive. By this I do not mean that it is always improving; what I do mean is that its conditions are always changing, and every dramatist whose ambition it is to produce live plays is absolutely bound to study carefully the conditions that hold good for his own day and generation."³⁷

By the same token, there is no assurance that the soliloquy is really dead. The experiments of O'Neill, as we have seen, come exceedingly close to the spirit and word of the Shakespearean soliloquy. O'Neill has done much to break the spell of the stage of visual illusion, and, as we have seen, a convention that is questioned is doomed. Current experiments on Broadway are seeking to escape from the picture frame and again establish the close intimacy between actor and spectator. It is possible that the novelty of the electric light is wearing off, and that the competition of the coldly impersonal talking film and television may be encouraging a new set of dramatic conventions, suited to the second half of the twentieth century. If the picture frame goes, and the actor again finds

37. Pinero, Arthur, *The Critic*, New York, April, 1903.

himself in close intimacy with the audience, the soliloquy may, to use a colloquialism, stage a comeback.

Before concluding this discussion it may be of interest to examine the trend away from the stage of visual illusion. One such effort is described by Miss Gertrude Lawrence, one of Broadway's leading actresses:

"The Music Circus is intimate and exciting. The audience sits in an area which surrounds the circular stage. Players enter and exit down the aisles....The orchestra, in a circular pit just below the stage, was playing the overture to the "Red Mill", the current week's production. Then the lights were dimmed under the big top, and when they came up again, the ladies and gentlemen of the opening number were on-stage. Stage effects are created with a minimum number of sets, props, and lighting effects. No microphones were used. The chorus sometimes sang in the aisles. All this added a sense of intimacy to the performance."³⁸

Although the Music Circus is an enterprise concerned solely with musical comedy, it is not difficult to detect the complete absence of the picture frame. Indeed, one of the picture titles accompanying the above description was, "In arena-style theaters, audiences surround the stage. Arena staging was first utilized by the Greeks." Thus the cycle of two thousand years has drawn to an end, and we return to the amphitheater of Aeschylus.

It is not beyond the realms of possibility that the reaction against the technological stage of the 1950's, meeting increasing com-

38. Look Magazine, July 4, 1950, page 62.

petition from the technologically more perfect screen and television may liberate the actor from his captivity behind the proscenium arch into which he was brought by the electric light, and establish again a bond of intimacy between actor and spectator. If the many experiments which have recently been made in this direction--calling for a stage again almost surrounded by an audience--should meet with a measure of popular favor and should enlist the skill of a really great dramatist, the soliloquy may again be invited into the repertory of valued conventions, and actors will again take the audience into their confidence.

Having established the worth of the Shakespearean soliloquy as being well adapted to the characteristics of the Tudor stage, we proceed to analyze the variety of purposes which this technique served in the Elizabethan dramaturgy.

Chapter IV

Uses of the Soliloquy

We begin our discussion of the uses of the soliloquy by considering one of the most controversial of all of Shakespeare's, as seen through the eyes of critics of the past two centuries. This is the famous soliloquy, "Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun of York," which serves as the prologue of "Richard III."

The first, and perhaps least weighty criticism of this soliloquy is that it constitutes the very beginning of the play. As we have seen, the Shakespearean audience was a very noisy group while they were waiting for the actors to emerge from the tiring room (playing cards, gossiping, cracking nuts, drinking ale, etc.), so it was not very practical to begin a play with the imparting of so much needed information at a time that the audience might not yet have settled into an appropriately quiet state. As Bradley points out, Shakespeare's usual plan is to begin with a short scene, either full of life and stir, or in some other way arresting. "Then, having secured a hearing, he proceeds to conversations at a lower pitch, accompanied by little action but conveying much information."¹ Evidently, Shakespeare violated his own rule in beginning "Richard III" with so important a soliloquy. When this soliloquy is delayed in modern revivals, it is probably not so much because of the opening noise of the audience, but because of late comers. At any rate, the use of the soliloquy as the equivalent of the prologue of the classical play has little to commend it, especially if important information is to be imparted.

1. Bradley, A.C., Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1929, page 43.

However, the basic criticism of this soliloquy is that it is a self-revelation of villainy. Gloucester starts with a description of his deformities:

"Deform'd, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them." (Richard III, I, 1, 20)

Gloucester then proceeds to reveal his determination to be a villain:

"I am determined to prove a villain....
Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the King
In deadly hate the one against the other." (I, 1, 30)

Gloucester's final characterization of himself as "subtle, false, and treacherous" (I, 1, 37) followed by a hint of murder (I, 1, 40), has outraged generations of critics, who protested the psychological impossibility of a person characterizing himself as an utter rogue. Brandes states that when J. L. Heiberg refused to produce "Richard III" at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen, he gave as one of his reasons that this soliloquy violated the standards of psychological possibility.²

Even so sympathetic a critic as Brander Matthews shakes his head at this soliloquy of self-revelation. He considers it to be inconceivable that Gloucester should so completely admit to himself that he is a villain, and confess that he is subtle, false, and

2. Brandes, George, William Shakespeare, New York, 1927, page 127.

treacherous. "To make him say this to the audience is to put into his mouth, not any opinion that he might hold of himself, but the opinion of every outside commentator on his character."³

Psychologically, these criticisms may be justified; but from a dramaturgical viewpoint, they lose their force. The purpose of the soliloquy is not to achieve a psychological delineation of character, but to inform the audience in the most direct manner possible of facts which Gloucester alone knows, and which therefore must come from Gloucester's own mouth. As Granville-Barker, a gifted student and lover of Shakespeare, reminds us, Shakespeare never deliberately misleads us when he presents a character. Shakespeare's auditors were not only those gifted in insight and intelligence, but even the half-literate manual worker. Hence Shakespeare utilized this opportunity to sketch in the chief features, then and there, as unmistakably as possible, so as to leave us from the start no doubt as to the purpose in Gloucester's mind. "He has much to do with his characters-- their talk and action make up his sole medium--and not overmuch time in which to do it. He cannot afford to turn them first in one direction, then in another, and so complicate his task."⁴

It is worthy of note that William Archer, who is generally not too sympathetic to the Shakespearean convention, has a decidedly sympathetic attitude toward the use of the soliloquy for self-revelation. He does not regard this as a reverie externalized, as introversion extroverted. "Richard is made to utter things which would not naturally pass through his mind in that form, because it is

3. Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, N. Y., 1913, page 90.

4. Granville-Barker, H., Prefaces to Shakespeare, Princeton, 1942, 2, 99.

important that certain information should be conveyed to the audience. This soliloquy, in a word, is like the Euripidean prologue, a labor-saving device and time-saving convention—a short cut into the story."⁵

Without trying to defend Shakespeare on the charges of psychological improbability (to which it is necessary to plead "nolo contendere"), we should join with Archer in pointing out that in this soliloquy Gloucester for the moment loses his identity as a *dramatis persona* and becomes one of the choral characters of the type we have already discussed. As a choral character, he may say, under cover of dramatic convention, things which it would be highly inappropriate for him to utter in his own character. The fact that this is practically a prologue heightens the choral atmosphere of the soliloquy.

There is another soliloquy which has been attacked on the same grounds. This is the much-discussed monologue of Prince Hal at the end of Act I, Scene 2 of the "First Part of Henry IV." The Prince comments on the "unyoked humour" of his idleness, as well he might, for although Holinshed's colorless account merely states that "he was grown to audacity and had chosen companions agreeable to his age, with whom he spent his time in such recreations...as he fancied,"⁶ nevertheless Stow in his "Annales" mentions as an example of Prince Hal's insolent behavior the fact that, "accompanied by some of his young Lords and gentlemen, he would wait in disguised array for his own followers and distress them of their money."⁷

In the soliloquy referred to, the Prince gives notice of his intention to throw off his "loose behavior", and his belief that his "reformation" will, because of past looseness, glitter "like bright metal on a

5. Archer, William, *Old Drama and the New*, Boston, 1923, page 39.

6. Holinshed, Raphael, *Chronicles*, London, 1587, iii, 539.

7. Stow, John, *Annales of England*, London, 1605, page 557.

sullen ground." (I, 2, 235) Critics have been free to criticize this soliloquy of self-revelation, perhaps even more than that of Gloucester. Dowden recorded his opinion that this is a great mistake of Shakespeare's. "Surely, in so far as the Prince did act from this purpose (the coldly impersonal cognizance of his present delinquencies and his egotistical purpose to use them as a background for future glorification), he was a charlatan and a snob."⁸ This opinion has been shared by more recent critics. W. A. Neilson summarizes the discussion as follows: "This priggish and hypocritical speech has been defended or explained away as a kind of exposition by the author, the soliloquy serving as a chorus. Be this as it may, the fact that it is uttered by Hal himself leaves an unpleasant impression of insincerity on the reader."⁹

Again, we must plead "nolo contendere" on behalf of Shakespeare. We can only point out that the true worth and ultimate respectability of the Prince must be understood by the audience at the very beginning, especially in view of his past record of wildness. No one but the Prince knows that he intends to throw off his loose behavior (which will merely serve as a background of contrast for his reformed nature), and hence he alone can divulge this purpose. However, we must admit that the Prince is actually speaking as himself, and not as a choral interlude, from whom such revelations might be justified; the critical reader or auditor has ample basis for objecting to this soliloquy as a psychological blunder, even if it is a necessary dramaturgical device to acquaint the audience with Prince Hal's intentions.

8. Dowden, E., Shakespeare, His Mind and Art, London, 1875, page 211.

9. Neilson, W. A., and Hill, New Cambridge Shakespeare, Boston, 1942, p. 632.

Self-identification is even more important when the character is disguised, a situation which occurs with considerable frequency in Shakespeare. Thus, in "Cymbeline", Cloten enters at the beginning of Act IV, soliloquizing on the intended murder of Posthumus. "How fit his garments serve me," he observes (IV, 1, 3), and so that there might be no later confusion, he tells us, "the lines of my body are as well drawn as his," (IV, 1, 10). This act of identification is all the more important in view of the fact that it is Cloten's head that is cut off (IV, 2, 113), so that when Imogen sees the headless body, she cries:

"A headless man! The garments of Posthumus!

I know the shape of 's leg; this is his hand." (IV, 2, 308)

We however, having been let into the secret by Cloten himself, are under no doubts as to the actual identity of the corpse.

In the same play, Imogen herself enters in boy's clothes, and utilizes her soliloquy to establish her disguise:

"I see a man's life is a tedious one." (III, 6, 1.)

In "Lear", Edgar enters in Act II, Scene 3, and proclaims his intention to disguise himself:

"My face I'll grime with filth,

Blanket my loins, elf all my hairs in knots,

And with presented nakedness out-face

The winds and persecutions of thy sky." (II, 3, 9)

Later, when Edgar enters as a Bedlam beggar, we have no difficulty in recognizing him, because of this advance warning of the nature of the disguise, even to the point where the Fool observes "He reserv'd a blanket, else we had all been sham'd." (III, 4, 67)

No less important than the identification of one's self is the identification of the next character that is to enter the stage, and we find numberless instances where an actor, soliloquizing, ends his monologue by identifying the approaching person. Thus, in the famous monologue of Gloucester, which we have discussed at great length, the last line is:

"Dive, thoughts, down to my soul! Here Clarence comes." (I,1, 41)

Similarly, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream", the concluding line of Oberlin's short soliloquy is:

"Here comes my messenger. How now, mad spirit!" (III, 2, 4)

The end of a soliloquy is often utilized to herald the approach of the entering personages, even when precise names are not used. Thus, in "Othello," Iago is waiting for the Gentlemen as he soliloquizes, and he concludes with "But here they come." (II, 3, 64).

Often the formula is varied, with a more literary flavor, as in "Lear", where Edmund is soliloquizing and comes to the subject of Edgar. He then remarks, "Pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy," and Edgar enters. (I, 2, 145).

The soliloquy is adapted to other forms of identification as well, and we shall consider a few varied types.

Talking in one's sleep evidently comes under the criteria of the soliloquy, but often the purpose is simply to inform the audience that the character is asleep. Thus, in "Julius Caesar," Lucius dreams that he still is at his instrument, and cries out, "The strings, my lord, are false." (IV, 3, 292).

The soliloquy may also be utilized to indicate that another character is asleep. Thus, earlier in "Julius Caesar," Brutus addresses this monologue to Lucius:

"Boy! Lucius! Fast asleep? It is no matter;
Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber."
Thou hast no figures nor no fantasies
Which busy care draws in the brains of men;
Therefore thou sleep'st so sound." (II, 1, 239)

In "Romeo and Juliet", the soliloquy is used twice to identify the actions involved in the act of suicide. We must remember that stage business was difficult to detect on Shakespeare's platform stage (at least, more difficult from some angles than others, since the stage was surrounded on three sides by spectators, with spectators sitting on the stage not at all infrequently.). Hence, the soliloquy explains the "business" of committing suicide. When Romeo views the apparently lifeless body of Juliet, he soliloquizes thus:

"Eyes, look your last!
Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
A dateless bargain to engrossing death!
Come, bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide!
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rocks they sea-sick weary bark!
Here's to my love! (Drinks) O true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die." (V, 3, 112)

The last sentence was evidently written to clear up any doubt in the minds of the audience as to the import of the stage business involved in the drinking. A few moments later, Juliet, revived, sees Romeo dead, and goes through the acts of suicide herself, with an explanatory soliloquy, first for her attempt to die by poison, and then by the dagger.

"What's here? A cup, clos'd in my true love's hand?

Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end.

O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop

To help me after? I will kiss thy lips;

Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,

To make me die with a restorative.

.....

Yea, noise? Then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!

This is thy sheath; there rust and let me die." (V, 3, 161)

It must be admitted that little reliance is placed on visual illusion in this episode of Juliet's suicide. Instead, verbal illusion is employed to explain the rather complicated stage business, very much in the manner of the radio announcer who is commenting on some event. Juliet's suicide could well be heard over the radio without any uncertainty as to what was transpiring, so skillfully did Shakespeare use the soliloquy to identify the action.

The monologue is also used to indicate the actual death of a character after the uncertain business of suicide. In this case, a character who is on the stage with the victim of self-destruction answers, so to speak, the question in the minds of the audience, as to whether death has actually come. This is the situation in "Antony and Cleopatra," after Cleopatra applies the second asp to her arm; then Charmian soliloquizes:

"So fare thee well.!

Now boast thee death, in thy possession lies

A lass unparallel'd." (V, 2, 317).

Actually, in this soliloquy, Charmian completes with "In this vile world" the line uttered by the dying queen, "What should I stay..".

This rhetorical way of indicating death has been burlesqued by Sheridan in the "Critic" (III, 1. 227), but it must be admitted that Shakespeare knew what his audience wanted (for his livelihood depended on pleasing his audience) and he gave his auditors the tricks of literary technique for which they thirsted.

There are many other details of stage business which need verbal explanation, especially on the bare Shakespearean platform. Thus, in "King John," Arthur leaps from a wall and lies inanimate thereafter. This act would hardly convey much meaning without explanation, and this explanation is supplied by Arthur himself in his soliloquy:

"The wall is high, and yet will I leap down.

Good ground, be pitiful and hurt me not!

.....

If I get down, and do not break my limbs,

I'll find a thousand shifts to get away.

As good to die and go, as die and stay.

O me! my uncle's spirit is in these stones.

Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones." (IV, 3, 1)

If the act of jumping down from a wall on the stage is a difficult bit of stage business to make comprehensible without verbal aid, small business would be even more difficult to interpret. Therefore, when Robin squeezes the magic juice in Lysander's eyes, he explains the business most skilfully:

"On the ground

Sleep sound.

I'll apply

To your eye,

Gentle lover, remedy." (III, 2, 448).

A somewhat different use of the soliloquy is related to the rather complicated business of entering and leaving on the Shakespearean stage. The absence of the drop curtain introduced many problems with which the modern playwright does not have to contend.

The simple matter of entering on the scene is difficult if the first two characters cannot logically enter simultaneously. Thus, when Macbeth and young Siward are to enter upon the scene in which young Siward is slain, it would be patently inappropriate for their entrance to be simultaneous. Hence, Macbeth enters first, and consumes a few moments (which, in dramatic convention, could mean several minutes) in the following soliloquy:

"They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But, bear-like, I must fight the course. What's he
That was not born of woman? Such a one
Am I to fear, or none." (Macbeth, V, 7, 1)

Similarly, in the next scene, Macbeth enters and spends a few moments in a soliloquy, so that Macduff might then enter in a natural manner. (V, 8, 1)

In "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", Eglamour is to meet Silvia outside the Duke's palace, under Silvia's window, but it would be straining probability for both to enter the scene at the same moment. Hence Eglamour enters first, and tells us in a short soliloquy that:

"This is the hour that Madam Silvia
Entreated me to call and know her mind.
There's some great matter she'd employ me in.
Madam, madam!" (IV, 3, 1)

When one of two characters leaves the stage and a third character is to enter, there seems to be need for a transition between the exit and entrance. William Archer, the foe of the soliloquy in the modern drama, used the interjection "h'm" for this purpose on a number of occasions in "Pillars of Society" and other plays.¹⁴ True, this is one of the forms of the soliloquy which Archer accepted, for, in his "Playmaking", he had asked the question: "Are there in modern drama any admissible soliloquies?" He answered this question, in part, by saying: "A few brief ejaculations of joy or despair are, of course, natural enough, and no one will cavil at them."¹⁵

Comparable to this interjection is the single line of soliloquy which King John utters ("My mother dead!") to separate the exit of the messenger and the re-entrance of Hubert. (King John, IV, 2, 181.) Somewhat longer is the soliloquy to the sleeping Lucius by Brutus to which we have already referred (Julius Caesar, II, 1, 229), which fills the time between the exit of all but Brutus and the sleeping Lucius, and the entrance of Portia. This soliloquy serves the purpose of more than mere stage mechanics: it is important to show that Portia's entrance is staged far enough away from the exit of the conspirators to remove any possibility that Portia might have been able to overhear their plotting.

The use of the soliloquy for this detail of stage mechanics was a valuable part of Shakespeare's dramaturgy. Cailhave, in 1772, declared: "It is necessary to prepare and to lead from a little

14. William Archer, Prose Dramas, London, page 210.

15. William Archer, Playmaking, London, 1912, page 403.

distance another character who, by the aid of a monologue, places a believable distance between him and the characters who should not be found with him.¹⁶"

The soliloquy is also valuable as a convention to indicate the passing of time. Thus, in Richard III, Clarence is murdered by the first murderer, who must drag off the body, dispose of it, and return. The interval in which he is accomplishing this is represented by a three line soliloquy:

"A bloody deed, and desperately dispatch'd!
How fain, like Pilate, would I wash my hands
Of this most grievous murder! (I, 4, 279).

Similarly, in "Romeo and Juliet", the Nurse calls, and Juliet leaves saying: "Stay but a while, I will come again." (II, 2, 138) The interval during which Juliet confers with the nurse and returns is indicated by just three lines of Romeo's soliloquy, "O blessed, blessed night!... (II, 2, 139-141). Again, in "Macbeth," four lines of soliloquy by Lady Macbeth suffice to send a messenger to summon Macbeth and for Macbeth to enter in response to the summons. (III, 2, 4)

It is obvious that this is a convention, for no one would claim that this very condensed timing is at all realistic. Hennequin points out that "the supposed duration of events upon the stage is about five or six times as long as the actual period occupied by the representation. That is, at the end of a dialogue of five minutes, it is allowable to make one of the characters say, "Here we've been talking for a whole half-hour."¹⁷

16. Cailhave, "De l'Art de la Comedie", Paris, 1772, page 27.

17. Hennequin, Alfred, Art of Playwriting, Boston, 1890, page 150.

It must be admitted that Shakespeare did not confine himself to the five-to-one or six-to-one ratio mentioned by Hennequin. A soliloquy of three lines, even if its time were multiplied by five or six, could not correspond to the time required to exit, accomplish a purpose, and return. We must accept this sort of a soliloquy as frankly a convention to indicate a period of time adequate for the purpose involved, without reference to the number of lines spoken in the interval. A similar circumstance that has been made the subject of considerable comment is the one hour's duration between the lines indicated in Hamlet (I, 1):

"Tis now struck twelve..." (Line 7) and

"The bell then beating one." (Line 39).

Using the estimate of 20 lines of blank verse per minute given by¹⁸ Hart, these intervening 32 lines would take less than two minutes to say, and yet they correspond to a time interval of one hour. This too is a convention, and should not be subject to criticism. As Lowes says, "Art deals in illusion. Literal accuracy, even when possible, is art's undoing. The tension between the 32 lines that take less than two minutes to repeat....in the first scene of Hamlet is to all intents and purposes, an hour; sixty literal minutes of intervening talk on the stage would drag it to eternity. These are truisms."¹⁹

Continuing in the matter of stage mechanics, we come to the problem posed to the playwright as to how to make two characters leave the stage without interposing the needless coincidence of a simultaneous exit. The modern drop curtain solves this problem by having neither of the actors leave, but Shakespeare had to clear the stage after every scene without benefit of a curtain. He therefore utilized the soliloquy

18. Hart, A. Review of English Studies, October 1932, 395

19. Lowes, Convention and Revolt in Poetry, Boston, 1919, page 20.

to space out the exits. Thus, in "Richard III", when King Richard treats Buckingham with contempt, it would not seem appropriate to have all the characters leave simultaneously. Hence Richard and his company leave first, and Buckingham remains to brood through four lines of a soliloquy (IV, 2, 123-6) before he too exits. Again, in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford discuss Falstaff after his exit; then Mrs. Ford leaves to direct her part in the plot, while Mrs. Page remains to soliloquize for five lines before she too leaves the stage. (IV, 2, 105)

The use of the soliloquy as an "exit-spacer" can be judged by the fact that, of the eleven soliloquies in "The First Part of Henry VI", every one of them is followed by an exit. This, however, characterizes one of the earlier plays of Shakespeare (1590), and it is quite likely that Shakespeare overused the soliloquy for this purpose in the play.

Nowhere is Shakespeare's lack of a drop-curtain so noticeable to the modern audience (if the play is presented without the changes often made to accommodate a curtain) than the problem of the corpses. To satisfy his audience (if for no other reason), there was a considerable amount of bloodshed on the Shakespearean stage, and these "dead" actors had to be removed from the stage so that the stage would be clear for the next scene or act. In the modern theater, the curtain can be lowered and the actors may walk off under their own power, as it were. Not so on the Tudor stage. Thus, in "The Second Part of Henry VI", Whitmore enters with the body of Suffolk, who has just been killed, and the First Gentleman exits with the body,

presumably by dragging it off. As he leaves with the body, he utters the following soliloquy:

"O barbarous and bloody spectacle.

His body will I bear unto the King;

If he revenge it not, yet will his friends;

So will the Queen, that living hold him dear." (IV, 1, 144)

It is safe to say that a modern audience would consider the act of dragging the corpse along the stage more "barbarous" than the actual murder, for such an act would probably break the spell of the illusion for a present-day audience. Again, in the fourth act of the same play, Iden drags the body of Cade off the stage, suiting his words to the action in his soliloquy:

"Hence I will drag thee headlong by the heels

Unto a dunhill which shall be thy grave." (IV, 10, 82)

In the fifth act, there is a variation, for Young Clifford bears the dead body of his father upon his shoulders, as he indicates in his soliloquy as he leaves the stage:

"Come, thou new ruin of old Clifford's house.

As did Aeneas old Anchises bear,

So bear I thee upon my manly shoulder." (V, 2, 61)

The necessity of carrying off the corpse in so many scenes of great tension prevented Shakespeare from concluding his scenes or acts in a climactic manner. In fact, we may generalize and say that the lack of a drop curtain forced scenes to draw to a close in a sort of hum-drum manner, with an air of calmness or even anti-climax. Haigh, in his study of the "Tragic Drama of the Greeks," has called attention to this characteristic of the Elizabethan drama: "The successive portions of a play were terminated, not by a curtain, but by the actors walking

off the stage; and for this reason it was impossible to finish up with a climax, as is now the invariable custom."²⁰ For a modern audience (but not for the Elizabethan audience which accepted the practice as a convention) we can imagine hardly anything that would be post-climactic more than dragging a body off the stage! This merely objectifies the importance of the convention in Shakespeare's stage, to which we have devoted considerable space.

Another lack of the Shakespearean stage, the absence of painted scenery, necessitated a verbal substitute. Thus, in "The Merchant of Venice", we must learn through words ("How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank ..." V, 1, 54) the details of the setting for the honeymoon of Lorenzo and Jessica. Again, Macbeth's stronghold is given us, not through paint and canvas, but in words: "This castle hath a pleasant seat..." (I, 6, 1). In fact, words must be used for all manner of stage effects, such as the dawn ("How bloodily the sun begins to peer. Above yon hill," - 1 Henry IV, V, 1, 1); the enchanted yellow sands in "The Tempest" ("Come unto these yellow sands," - I, 2, 376); the moonlit orchard for lovemaking in "Romeo and Juliet" ("But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?" - II, 2, 1). What Shakespeare accomplished with a few words, a whole corps of research people and technicians would be required to reproduce for the modern motion picture, and even for many performances of Shakespeare's plays in the past century!

Among the instances where the soliloquy was used to substitute for the absence of painted scenery is the famous description of the apothecary's shop in "Romeo and Juliet":

20. Quoted in Matthews, B., Study of the Drama, Boston, 1910, page 57.

"An alligator stuffed, and other skins
Of ill-shap'd fishes; and about his shelves
A beggarly account of empty boxes
Green earthen pots, bladders and musty seeds,
Remnants of packthread and old cakes of roses." (V, 1, 43)

Since the audience saw no signs of this shop, it was necessary for Romeo to conclude the soliloquy with an identification of the shop:

"As I remember, this should be the house.
Being holiday, the beggar's shop is shut.
What ho! apothecary." (V, 1, 55)

Not the least of Shakespeare's production problems was the utilization of the bare platform of the stage for a variety of localizations, including a battlefield where two armies are locked in battle. Sir Philip Sidney aptly described this problem:

"You shall have Asia of the one side and Africa of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of a shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave. While in the meantime, two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?"²¹

But not always does Shakespeare have the opposing armies symbolically traverse the stage, as they do in "Cymbeline" ("Enter

21. Sidney, Philip, Defence of Poesie, London, 1580, section 24.

Lucius, Iachimo, and the Roman army at one door and the Briton army at another" - V,2), or in "Antony and Cleopatra" ("Canidius marcheth with his land army one way over the stage, and Taurus, the lieutenant of Caesar, the other way" - III,10). He occasionally allows the armies to battle off-stage, and supplies the action by way of narration through dialogue or monologue. Thus, in "The Third Part of Henry VI," York describes the progress of the battle in the soliloquy, "The army of the Queen hath got the field." (I, 4, 1) In the second act of the same play, King Henry says, "Here on this molehill will I sit me down" (II, 5, 14) and discourses on how the battle fares. Of the two methods of representing a battle, Shakespeare's audience probably preferred the actual swordplay, for they loved spectacles of all sorts. The effect of rich costumes, of processions, of witches and ghosts was equally enjoyed, especially by the groundlings for whom the stage was perhaps the only reliable source for such spectacles. Stephen Gosson complained of this trend in 1582:

"For the eye, beside the beauty of the houses and the stages, he sendeth in garish apparel, masques, vaulting, tumbling, dancing of jigs, galliards, morrises, hobby-horses, showing of juggling casts; nothing forgot that might set out the matter with pomp, or ravish the beholders with a variety of pleasure."²²

Compared with actual swordplay, the device of indicating the progress of the battle through monologue indeed seems restrained, and probably the more artistic of the two.

22. Gosson, Stephen, *Plays confuted in Five Actions*, London, 1582, 110

Just as the soliloquy is much simpler than the actual portrayal in the indication of fighting, so it is also an economical device for summarizing events of various sorts with which the audience should be familiar. As we have seen, the modern dramatist attempts to make such events a part of the action or at least of the dialogue, but the Shakespearean convention permitted the actor to take the audience into his confidence and tell his auditors what should be known. Thus, in "The Comedy of Errors", the Courtezan closes Act IV, Scene 3 with a summary of events, some known to the audience, and others not, so that they may fully comprehend the action that follows. An even more striking instance of the use of soliloquy to narrate events is the monologue of Tyrrel in "Richard III" (IV,3,1), in which he skillfully weaves into his own discourse the conversation of the two murderers:

"O, thus,' quoth Dighton, 'lay the gentle babes;'
'Thus, thus,' quoth Forrest, 'girdling one another
Within their alabaster innocent arms.
Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,
Which in their summer beauty kiss'd each other.
A book of prayers on their pillow lay,
Which once,' quoth Forrest, 'almost changed my mind;
But O! the devil' --there the villain stopp'd;
When Dighton thus told on: 'We smothered
The most replenished sweet work of Nature
That from the prime creation e'er she fram'd.'"

This, surely, is a somewhat novel use of the soliloquy: not to present one's own thoughts, or to describe action which one saw, but to describe and summarize action by quoting the words of others.

As the final instance of the use of the soliloquy to narrate or summarize events, we may consider the impassioned soliloquy in "Hamlet", Act I, Scene 2. When the Prince is introduced to us, the tragedy of his nature has already begun. His soliloquy reveals the depth of misery and despair into which the death of a loved father and the hasty marriage of his mother have plunged him. The purpose of this soliloquy is not only to give us entry to Hamlet's thoughts, but to acquaint and remind us of some important facts, that "within a month.... she married with mine uncle." (I, 2, 145) This is so cleverly done that it hardly seems to constitute a sort of exposition, which it undoubtedly is; rather it is of the nature of opening a window into Hamlet's troubled mind.

There remain to be considered those uses of the soliloquy which are not part of stage business, which do not serve to identify, and which do not include the narration of present or past events. These uses, relatively few in number, are almost integral parts of the action itself. Obviously, a soliloquy that is not overheard can have no great influence on the future action, except to map out what may be in the character's mind. But an overheard soliloquy can have a decided influence on the progress of the plot. Thus, in "Love's Labour's Lost", Biron enters Act IV, Scene 3, soliloquizing, and then, as the King enters, unaware of Biron's presence, Biron says in an aside, "In faith, secrets!" (IV, 3, 25) Then the King soliloquizes, overheard by Biron; Longaville enters and soliloquizes, unaware of the presence of the other characters. Finally, Biron soliloquizes, unheard by the others:

"Like a demigod here I sit in the sky,

And wretched fools' secrets heedfully o'er eye...

.....four woodcocks in a dish!" (IV, 3, 79)

A similar incident of the overheard soliloquy occurs in "All's Well That Ends Well," where Parolles enters without noting the presence of the second French Lord and the soldiers in ambush, and prattles of his secrets, admitting that he finds his tongue "too foolhardy" (IV, 1, 32) and that it "prattles him into these perils" (IV, 1, 46).

In "King Lear", Edmund uses the overheard soliloquy to impress Edgar with the state of his mind: "My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam. --O, these eclipses do portend these divisions! fa, sol, la, mi." (I, 2, 148) Taken in by this feigned soliloquy, Edgar replies: "How now, brother Edmund! What serious contemplation are you in?" (I, 2, 150).

Our final discussion in the use of the soliloquy relates to the reading of a letter on the stage. This sort of soliloquy has been discussed by many critics. Archer quotes George Bernard Shaw as saying: "Nowadays, an actor cannot open a letter on the stage without having to face a brutal outburst of jeering."²³ Evidently, the audience, in a reaction against the conventions of past centuries, had decided that the reading of a letter was too easy a device to merit the name of art, and to be ruled out with all other kinds of soliloquies. Archer takes issue with this stand:

"A word must be said as to a special case of the soliloquy-- the letter which a person speaks aloud as he writes it, or reads over to himself aloud. This is a convention to be employed as sparingly as possible, but it is not exactly on a level with the ordinary soliloquy. A letter has an actual objective existence. It has the same right to come to the knowledge of the audience as any other utterance. It is, in fact, part of the dialogue of the play, only that it happens to be

23. Archer, William, Playmaking, London, 1912, page 404.

inaudible."²⁴

Shakespeare has utilized the soliloquy of the letter on a number of occasions. In "Cymbeline", the stage directions for Act III, Scene 2 are: "Enter Pisanio, reading a letter", and we learn of his master's command that Pisanio murder Imogene. Then Pisanio hands another letter to Imogene, and we hear the contents of this second letter too. (III,2,40)

Similarly, Lady Macbeth's soliloquy at the beginning of Act I, Scene V consists in reading a letter, and Mistress Page reads Falstaff's letter in her soliloquy ("The Merry Wives of Windsor", II, 1, 1).

It is doubtful whether, among the uses of the soliloquy, there should be included the desire of the playwright to have a character establish intimacy by addressing his auditors. We have, of course, pointed out that the Shakespearean soliloquy should not be considered as a sort of introspective revery, in which a character moves over in a corner to commune with himself. On the contrary, the Shakespearean soliloquy was a frank effort to establish intimacy with the audience by admitting them to the inside of things. Yet few enough are the indications in the text that the actor was actually addressing the audience. There are two such indications in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona". In one soliloquy, Launce seems to be addressing one of the spectators:

"Now, sir, this staff is my sister, for, look you, she is as white as a lily and as small as a wand." (II, 3, 21)

In a later scene, Launce again uses the second person: "You shall judge" (IV, 4, 17) and uses the direct address to the audience a few more times in the same soliloquy.

In "The Taming of the Shrew", Petruchio, in a soliloquy, outlines his plans for making Kate know "her keeper's call", and ends with this invitation to the audience:

24. Archer, William, Playmaking, London, 1912, page 404.

"He that knows better how to tame a shrew

Now let him speak; 'tis charity to show." (IV, 1, 213)

However, despite these relatively rare instances, we should, in justice to Shakespeare, recognize that, generally speaking, there is no evidence that the soliloquy was primarily and essentially a direct address to the audience in its literary form. Yet we must not ignore the probability that the manner of delivery did serve to bring the actor and the audience together on more intimate terms. Granville-Barker compares the soliloquy with the self-revelations of the London music hall of recent years:

"For a parallel to its full effectiveness on Shakespeare's stage, we should really look to the modern music hall comedian getting on terms with his audience. We may measure the response to Burbage by recalling—those of us that happily can—Dan Leno as a washerwoman, confiding domestic troubles to a theater full of friends, and taken unhindered to their hearts. The problem is not really a difficult one, if we solve the physical side of it by restoring, in essentials, the relation between actor and audience that the intimacy of the platform stage provided, and the rest should soon solve itself."²⁵

In this chapter, we have reviewed a number of uses of the soliloquy. Obviously, it has been impossible, in this brief space, to be encyclopedic in the cataloguing of the great variety of uses. Arnold²⁶ has listed Shakespeare's soliloquies, and an examination of his list impresses us with the difficulty of being exhaustive on the subject.

25. Granville-Barker, H., Prefaces, Princeton, 1946, i, 17.

26. Arnold, M.L., Soliloquies of Shakespeare, N.Y., 1932, Chap. 2. A table of soliloquies, adapted from Arnold, will be found in the Appendix of this work.

Furthermore, a too detailed analysis may involve the risk of building too great a structure on an inadequate basis, for we are not always sure where the hand of another leaves off and that of Shakespeare begins. Thus, "Titus Andronicus" is usually accepted as a genuine Shakespearean play. From numerous contemporary references, Collins concluded that "it was one of the most popular plays on the Elizabethan stage", and that it was unhesitatingly accepted by the early editors.²⁷ On the other hand, Sir Sidney Lee quotes Edward Ravenscroft, an unimportant dramatist, who wrote in 1678 of "Titus Andronicus":

"I have been told by some anciently conversant with the stage that it was not originally Shakespeare's, but brought by a private hand to be acted, and he only gave some master-touches to one or two of the principal parts or characters."

Sir Sidney considers that this assertion deserves acceptance, and that "Titus Andronicus" was probably written originally in 1591 by Thomas Kyd, perhaps aided by Greene or Peele, and improved by Shakespeare on its revival in 1594.²⁸ Robertson goes even farther and denies Shakespeare any share in the authorship of this play.²⁹ Masefield, recognizing Hazlitt's comment that the play "is certainly as unlike Shakespeare's usual style as it is possible," accepts the probability of Shakespeare's authorship, but is revolted by the nature of its plot and the crudity of its construction, remarking that "poets do not sin against their art unless they are in desperate want; Shakespeare certainly never touched this job for love."³⁰

27. Collins, J.C., *Studies in Shakespeare*, London, page 104.

28. Lee, Sidney, *Life of William Shakespeare*, London, 1915, p.129.

29. Robertson, J. M., *Did Shakespeare write Titus And.*, London, 1905.

30. Masefield, J., *William Shakespeare*, London, page 50.

In view of such complex problems of authorship, we should be approaching a point of diminishing returns through elaborately circumstantial and minute analyses of the great variety of uses of the Shakespearean soliloquy in advancing the playwright's dramaturgy. The 400 soliloquies have a weight much greater than could be revealed through such analysis, a weight much greater than might be inferred from their actual numbers.

We shall therefore turn our attention in succeeding to a somewhat different avenue of approach, through a study of the insight the soliloquy affords into the mind and personality of the *dramatis personae*.

Chapter V

Hamlet as Seen through his Soliloquies

The soliloquies of Hamlet have the distinction of being singled out by William Archer for special comment:

"We, all of us, when we are alone, talk to ourselves. The talk is generally inaudible; but if we choose to utter our thoughts aloud, we may; though if our friends overhear us, they will probably advise us to see a doctor. Such soliloquies as Hamlet's, in any case, do not jar upon the nature of things. It may even be said that he is precisely in the state of nervous excitation in which men do actually tend to utter their thoughts aloud."¹

Hamlet utters six important soliloquies, which we shall consider in due time. They are all rhetorical pieces, but we must avoid considering them mere instances of rhetoric. Kennedy, who has made a thorough study of rhetoric in Shakespeare, warns against giving any measure of eminence to mere literary style:

"Plot, action, and character were regarded by Shakespeare as the dominant elements in the play, not the dialogue and the theatrical acting. Plainly, Shakespeare was not writing rhetorical drama in Hamlet. The rhetoric of the soliloquies was intended as a part of the psychological analysis."²

1. Archer, William, *Old Drama and the New*, Boston, 1923, page 39

2. Kennedy, M.B., *Oration in Shakespeare*, Chapel Hill, 1942, page 58.

Hamlet's soliloquies are true to the etymological meaning of the word, which, as we have seen, is derived from the work of St. Augustine entitled "Soliloquiorum", in which St. Augustine debated with himself. Hamlet's soliloquies are indeed self-debates. They indicate a schism which has already begun before the play begins; the immediate cause is his mother's hasty re-marriage to his uncle. It is suddenly intensified by the supernatural revelation that his father was murdered. His task becomes a hard one: he is to kill an anointed king, his mother's husband, and he will have to justify his deed to her and to the world.

In this tragedy of spiritual struggle, discord will be at its worst when Hamlet is left alone with his thoughts, and these we shall examine through his soliloquies.

We first meet Hamlet's inner mind in the soliloquy, "O, that this too solid flesh would melt" (I, 2, 129). This is used for a number of purposes. It explains that uncertain attitude toward each other of the King, Queen, and Prince, which we have sensed before this soliloquy. It provides a date for the marriage, effected less than a month ago, and within a month of him who was both brother, husband, and father. It gives us, in an unpredictable combination of disgust and anger, the feel of the mood resulting from brooding over the miserable business for the better part of a month. But beneath the bitterness for his mother's hasty and "incestuous" marriage, we detect some of the stuff of which Hamlet's character is made; we find evidence of a sensitive reverence for what is good and beautiful in his recollection of his father's marriage. In his somewhat off-hand reference to his father's brother as no more like his father "than I to Hercules" (I, 2, 153), we detect Hamlet's own weak opinion of his strength, and this confession of weakness is strengthened by his final line, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (I, 2, 158).

In assessing the soliloquies of Hamlet, one must recognize that it is the business of the dramatist to deal with action, or at least with character in a dynamic state of transition. From this viewpoint, there is perhaps some justice in criticizing the present soliloquy as a weakening or delaying device in the current of action. Yet, the audience must know the present state of Hamlet's mind, especially in view of the fact that his shocking experience with the Ghost will set new and more violent emotions surging through his breast.

We should note also the artistry inherent in this dramatic interlude offered by the soliloquy. The business of the Council has been quite orderly, and the King has been smooth and silky in his urbanity; then comes the upwelling of passion through the vehicle of the soliloquy, passion that is self-exhausting and self-consuming. Through contrast with the ordered peacefulness of the preceding events, the lack of purpose and the sense of loneliness expressed in the soliloquy contribute much more to the ongoing action than they detract through temporarily slowing down the action.

It is of interest to note that Hamlet, at the conclusion of the soliloquy, does not seem to recognize his very good friend Horatio. It may be conjectured that his eyes have filled with tears at the thought of the "incestuous sheets" and that he cannot see through the mists. The England of Shakespeare was not as squeamish as the Anglo-Saxon world today in regard to the shedding of "unmanly" tears.

The next to the last line of the soliloquy, "It is not, nor it cannot come to good" (I, 2, 158), marks a sort of temporary cessation of action, but is also an augury of events to come.

The scene in which the second soliloquy is contained (Act II, Scene 2) is the longest scene of the play -- 634 lines. In this scene, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are set to work, the Ambassadors return from Norway, Polonius plans to prove that Hamlet is mad for the love of Ophelia, and Hamlet awakes from his lethargy, planning to prove the King's guilt by letting him discern its reflection in the "Murder of Gonzago." However, the action is not perceptibly advanced. In fact, all of this seemingly inconsequential activity and evasive talk, all of the small gossip and casual encounters -- all are a sort of continued preparation for the next soliloquy, the outburst which begins:

"O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" (II, 2, 575)

This scene emphasizes the problem which faces Shakespeare in writing a drama about a man's inaction. There must be action in a play; some thing must be going on all the time. Furthermore, the main character must have some part in this action, even if it is frustrated or futile action; for he must delay, or else this play could not be.

This lengthy soliloquy gives Hamlet ample opportunity to brood over his own lethargy:

"Why, what an ass I am! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion!" (II, 2, 616)

Then, in an abrupt turn-about, he tells of his plan to trap the King:

"About, my brain! I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play

Have by the very cunning of the scene

Been struck so to the soul that presently

They have proclaimed their malefactions." (II, 2, 621)

Then comes the relatively calm sequel to the impassioned beginning of the sequel:

"The spirit that I have seen

May be the devil; and the devil hath power

T'assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

As he is potent with the spirits,

Abuses me to damn me." (II, 2, 627)

The implication seems clear enough: doubt, excusing the weak will, is entering--doubt as to whether the apparition might not actually have been the devil, seeking to ensnare him. Thus doubt paralyzes the will, and keeps him constantly about-facing. The soliloquy ends with a reaffirmation of the previous purpose:

"The play's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King." (II, 2, 633)

The apathy of will, over which Hamlet broods in this soliloquy, leaves his mind more active, more sensitive, more subject to the slightest dislocation. From this delicate equilibrium comes his "madness", the fever which besets his mind; in this super-sensitive state in which Hamlet really is (despite his muddled state), he is quick to suspect Polonius and his schemes, his schoolfellows' duplicity, Ophelia's innocent guile. He is quick to retaliate, although his weapons are but words, words, words.

Before we leave this soliloquy, we should note how it begins-- "Now I am alone." (II, 2, 575) The Prince, constantly surrounded by attendants, appreciates what it is to be alone, out of sight of the

spies who attend him. Yet the first burst of his soliloquy is not the revelation of his plans to trap the King by having the players "play something like the murder of my father before mine uncle" (II, 2, 623). Instead, his unrestrained passions, his intemperate self-reproach must be given the chance of discharging the poison from his system; only after he has been cleansed of this paralyzing bitterness does he continue with the plans we first glimpsed when he warned us of the coming change in his conduct with

"The time is out of joint;--O cursed spite,

That ever I was born to set it right!" (I, 5, 189)

As we leave this soliloquy, we feel that the torturing of Hamlet's soul has markedly advanced since the first soliloquy. At first it was misery and disillusion, but now the supernatural mandate Hamlet has received has moved to disintegrate his personality. Of the several faculties of feeling, faith, intellect, and will, we may say that they are all alive and functioning, but each is at war with the other, each is too conscious of its discord with the others to allow for integration of personality. At first, Hamlet was at odds with the cruelty of the external world; now he is also at odds with himself, constantly buffeted by shame, doubt, self-reproach, anger, disillusion, revenge.

This soliloquy also advances the action. We now know what Hamlet had in mind when he asked the First Player whether he could "study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which I would set down and insert in it." (II, 2, 565) The soliloquy gives us the key to this:

"I'll have these players

Play something like the murder of my father

Before mine uncle..., If he but blench,

I know my course." (II, 2, 623)

The third soliloquy which we shall consider is the famous "To be, or not to be." (III, 1, 56). Only 56 lines separate this soliloquy from the second, but it is like a change from storm to calm. The concentrated passion of the second soliloquy, abated only partly by the conclusion that "the play's the thing", now changes to the relative calm of philosophic thought.

The literature dealing with Hamlet rivals in volume and in psychological analysis the attention that has been given to many actual historical personages. Most of the criticism is related to the sort of "inconsistency" to which we point here, the transition from the white heat of passion to philosophical contemplation in 56 lines. It is possible, perhaps even probable, that this inconsistency was intentional on the part of Shakespeare, and that the playwright definitely intended to portray a mind swayed hither and thither by contending aims and emotions. These unmodulated changes from storm to calm give the appearance of symptoms of Hamlet's madness, and this is probably how Shakespeare intended it.

However, Professor Stoll, in his study of Hamlet, has given a somewhat different interpretation of the true import of this scene of relative tranquility. He points out that Polonius and the King are concealed behind the arras throughout this celebrated monologue, as is indicated by these lines:

"Her father and myself, lawful espials,
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,
We may their encounter frankly judge." (III, 1, 34)

Stoll further points out that, when eavesdroppers are at hand for that purpose, soliloquies on the Elizabethan stage are generally overheard. Therefore, Hamlet may not be allowed to refer to his plans against Claudius, as we should expect him to do so soon after his decision that

the play's the thing. Instead, as Stoll states, "he plays the King's game and beats him at it." The spectators would be expected to start up in their seats in anxiety lest Hamlet reveal all to the hidden King, but the hero does not commit himself as to his plans, falling rather into " a philosophical discourse and reverie."³

If Stoll is right, and the Shakespearean audience would be expected to infer that the soliloquy, even if it is only a soliloquy, could be overheard by the secreted Polonius and the King (simply because soliloquies uttered when eavesdroppers are present must be understood as being capable of being overheard), there would be ample justification for Hamlet to avoid his plans and the attending passions in his monologue.

"To be, or not to be" is a question tersely put, yet it should not be interpreted to be a question between physical life and death. It is more likely that Shakespeare was here voicing a theological question in a guarded manner. We must remember that it was very difficult for the Shakespearean playwright to introduce a theological problem. Not only were the players subject to a harsh licensing law⁴, but plays were carefully censored. The Common Council of London assumed the right of censorship under the terms of this decree:

"No innkeeper, tavernkeeper, nor other person whatsoever within the liberties of this city shall openly show or play, nor cause or suffer to be openly showed or played, within the house, yard, or any other place, any play, interlude, comedy, tragedy, matter or show, which shall not be first perused and allowed."⁵

3. Stoll, E. E., Hamlet, Minneapolis, 1919, page 34.

4. Chambers, E. K., Elizabethan Stage, Oxford, 1923, iv, 337

5. Chambers, ut supra, iv, 273.

In addition, a play had to be "allowed" by an appointee of the Sovereign, the Master of the Revels. Sir Henry Herbert, who held this post in 1622, has recorded his censorship in a manner which his Shakespearean predecessors failed to do, and we can learn from him how plays were supposed to keep from depicting unchaste, unseemly, and "unshamed" scenes or speeches, as well as to avoid discussion of religion or politics. One of Sir Henry's interesting observations is to the effect that he "received of Mr. Kirke, two pounds for a new play, which I burned for the ribaldry and offense there was in it."⁶

There is no evidence that Shakespeare was so summarily treated; yet he undoubtedly had to be cautious in his treatment of questions of religion or theology. For this reason, we may well ask whether "To be, or not to be" questions, not material existence, but eternity itself, the eternal life of the supernatural soul. "To die; to sleep; no more"--this could well imply the suspicion in Hamlet's mind that death is an endless sleep, and that soul dies with body. The "consummation devoutly to be wished" in this soliloquy could be not simply the death of the body, but the death of man's immortal soul. Whereas in Act I, Scene 5, Hamlet waived away fear of the Ghost with

"And as for my soul, what can it do to that,

Being a thing immortal as itself." (I, 5, 66),

this noble faith is gone, and in its stead is the dread of doubt. The poison which the treachery of his mother to his ideals has poured into his heart has spread and deepened its infection. His disillusioned spirit has asked whether the seeming spirit of his father is not working the devil's game, as treacherous in seeking to damn him. From this doubt he moves to deeper doubt, doubt as to the worth of man, the thought that possibly man would be better off if eternity meant simply sleep.

6. Adams, J.Q., Records of Sir Henry Herbert, New Haven, 1917, pp. 23,39.

Whether or not this interpretation is correct, there seems little doubt as to the opinion Hamlet has of the worth of his own nature or that of men in general. A very direct answer to his question, "To be, or not to be" is his own declaration, uttered only thirty lines after the conclusion of this soliloquy:

"Get thee to a nunnery; why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me....What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth? We are arrant knaves all."

(III, 1, 122)

Toward the end of this soliloquy are the lines which show that Hamlet's nature is disintegrating under the discord among faith, reason, and will, and the demoralizing effect of his introspection in a soul torn asunder. These are the self-revealing lines beginning, "Conscience does make cowards of us all", (III, 1, 83), in which the editors have interpreted "conscience" to mean reflection, or the introspective knowledge of one's self. But this passage, ending in "And lose the name of action" (III, 1, 88), also serves to return us, even in a negative manner to the course of action which he has planned in the "play within the play," the course of action which we have been led to expect when Hamlet bemoaned the fact that he was born to set the times aright.

Despite the philosophic introspection of this scene, the audience must have been alert and tense, for, in addition to the hidden King and Polonius, there is also Ophelia, who is probably in the inner stage, ready to enter at her cue "lose the name of action." This brief and almost irrelevant episode is undoubtedly a skillful dramaturgic device to keep the audience keyed up for the main trend of the action which is soon to be resumed and to reveal still another insight into Hamlet's character.

The fourth soliloquy occurs after the play has been acted and has answered to Hamlet's purpose. Hamlet is excitedly triumphant, for the King's guilt is now manifest to him. But when we at last are expecting him to swoop to his revenge, he is summoned to his mother's closet, and the thought of her guilt takes first place again in his mind. Almost as if he wanted a chance to indulge in a soliloquy, he says, "Leave me, friends" (III, 2, 405), and begins the soliloquy with the famous opening line, "'Tis now the witching time of night." He stirs us up with these portentous lines:

"Now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look upon." (III, 2, 408)

These words have all the more meaning in the light of Hamlet's answer to Polonius's request that he call upon the Queen, for Hamlet thrice dwells upon the fact that he will see her "by and by". Does this repetition of "by and by" (contrasted with the "and presently" of Polonius) imply that the thought has raced through Hamlet's mind that he ought to go see his mother only after he has first paid a visit to his uncle, the King, with murder in his heart and mind? This is what we must guess is the real meaning of "drinking hot blood", but again, in the middle of the soliloquy, Hamlet about faces, and tells us, "Soft! now to my mother...." (III, 2, 410). Then, as he pauses before he goes to heed his mother's call, we hear what is practically a prayer to be saved from the baser self which is slowly taking possession:

"O heart, lose not thou nature! Let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom;
Let me be cruel, not unnatural.
I will speak daggers to her, but use none." (III, 2, 411)

Well might Hamlet pray, for we have watched him as his finer sensibilities have become dull and blunt. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have cured him of his onetime impulsive, trustful affection, for in dealing with them he has learned to be callous. He has learned that he must contend with treachery, adultery, and murder. His very self-doubtings have driven him into the necessity of being cruel, callous, ruthless. And so, when he was torturing Ophelia in so vengeful a spirit, we were realizing that his soul was undergoing a transmutation into base stuff. His reassurance, then is not out of place; he will stop short of giving "seals" to his words, that is, confirm them by deeds.

Hamlet leaves, ostensibly to see his mother, but in our thoughts we still recall his repeated "by and by." We therefore should not be too greatly surprised in the fifth soliloquy to find him with the King, and not the Queen. Here we have a juxtaposition of soliloquies—the so-called prayer scene of the King (III, 3, 36-72) and the soliloquy of Hamlet, which is supposed to be going on while the King is praying (III, 3, 73-96).

Actually, the prayer scene is a misnomer. By the peculiar workings of this convention, we do not hear the actual words of the King's prayer; instead, we hear the inner thoughts which are coursing through his mind while his lips utter a prayer. This is an important point, since it explains why Hamlet is misguided into believing that the King is actually praying, and this misinterpretation has an important bearing on the plot.

Claudius is trying to pray, but he cannot, and he knows he is not praying, because he reminds himself, at the close of the false prayer, that his "words fly up" (these are the words his lips are supposed to utter, which we do not hear), but "his thoughts remain

below", for they are not fit to go to heaven.

The so-called prayer of Claudius begins with, "O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven.....A brother's murder....Pray I cannot." Then it turns to a theological discourse on the efficacy of prayer on the part of one whose guilty heart cannot pray. Only the consummate skill of Shakespeare could have gotten this scene past the censor, who would in any event be inclined to look askance at theological discourses. But the final outcome of this effort at prayer is not the purging of the soul, but rather planning how to save his skin by ridding himself of son as well as father.

This, of course, Hamlet does not know. He certainly does not hear any of the King's inner thoughts expressed in the soliloquy; he possibly may be supposed to hear some of the prayer which the King is supposed to be uttering (but not vocally), or he may infer that the King is praying.

As Hamlet enters he is bent on the revenge the King's presence unattended so conveniently offers, and says, "Now might I do it pat," but instantly takes note that the King is praying. We thus have these curicus lines:

"And now I'll do it--And so he goes to heaven;

And so am I reveng'd. That would be scann'd."

It is not difficult to analyze this train of thought, as Hamlet views the praying King. To kill him now, "in the purging of his soul, when he is fit and seasoned" for his passage to Heaven--is this revenge, asks Hamlet. Certainly this sort of revenge should be scanned, that is, scrutinized carefully. And under such close examination, sending the guilty King to heaven by killing him at his prayers would not be revenge, concludes Hamlet, would be "hire and salary." So, "up, sword" and the immediate threat of murder is over.

There is a fearful irony in Hamlet's decision to spare the guilty King because he wants to assure not only death but damnation. Instead of doing what might well be accepted as human justice upon the falsely praying King, who was to arise from his prayers bent upon still another murder, Hamlet passes him by, and so opens the Pandora's box of evils that are to come so swiftly: the killing of Polonius, Ophelia's death, the Queen's death, Laertes' and his own. This is the irony of the soliloquy, that each is in the dark as to the other; Claudius is unaware of Hamlet, and Hamlet is unaware of the guilty and evil thoughts that course through the King's mind as he is detected in the posture of prayer.

The technical execution of this double soliloquy is superb. First we hear, for the first time, a straightforward revelation by Claudius of his guilt in the murder of his brother; then probably the King lapses into silence for the attempted prayer, and Hamlet appears, when both the King and the audience might believe him to be with his mother. We note Hamlet's surprise that here is the chance he has long contemplated in his self-debates, and then we note his soliloquy superimposed on that of the King, based on a premise which we of the audience know to be false. Each is engaged in a logical analysis of the most abstract sort: the one, on the merits of prayer while one still benefits from the crime; the other, on the futility of killing a murderer while the guilty one is praying. These two logical analyses complement each other, to give us a single outcome, the fatal irony of Hamlet's quick change of purpose, on a par with all his other reversals.

As Hamlet leaves us in this scene, there is a portent of future action in his final words:

"When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed,

At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't, --
Then trip him, that his heels may trip at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
As hell, whereto it goes." (III, 3, 91)

Then Hamlet is reminded that his mother awaits him, and leaves with the parting warning, unheard by the King, that "this physic (i.e., prayer) but prolongs thy sickly days." The threat is unheard by the King, but heard by the audience, to remind us, not only that the King's days are numbered, but that Hamlet's deception by the appearance of prayer may have dire results.

The sixth soliloquy comes after Hamlet has reproached his mother for her sin and has killed Polonius, leaving embittered and in a savage mood. It comes after Hamlet refuses to disclose where he has hidden the body, and prepares to set out for England, where we know he is to be put to death, if Claudius can achieve this end.

For this last soliloquy, the stage is set in a most direct way. Fortinbras and his army are traversing Danish territory nearby; on his way to the harbor, Hamlet encounters a Captain of the army, with whom he holds brief conversation, to accentuate the contrast between the frank, bold, man of action, and the irresolute introvert who oscillates from one pole to the other in the course of a single soliloquy. Then the stage is cleared for this last soliloquy in one of the most abrupt of fashions:

Ros. Will't please you go, my lord?

Hamlet. I'll be with you straight. Go a little before." (IV, 4, 30)

There seems little doubt that Hamlet is under guard, and that Rosencrantz is politely, but urgently asking Hamlet to proceed to the port for England. But Shakespeare wishes Hamlet to indulge in a soliloquy, so he proceeds by the most direct way, "Go a little before" (and so clear the stage). This is hardly artistic—practically to push one's warden off the stage so that the prisoner may soliloquize, but Shakespeare is too much preoccupied with the plot and the development of character to worry here about details of stagecraft.

The opening lines of the soliloquy bear witness to Hamlet's sense of frustration: "How all occasions do inform against me

And spur my dull revenge." (IV, 4, 33)

This last glimpse of Hamlet in soliloquy is given to us to carry with us while he passes for a while out of the action. It is worth noting that the action of "Hamlet" is concentrated at Elsinore in much the manner required by the classical Unity of Place. Usually, in Shakespeare, when principal characters are traveling, we travel with these characters. But not in "Hamlet". There is plenty of traveling, but it is all by hearsay. We may well conjecture why Shakespeare departed from his usual dramaturgical treatment of his space-structure to keep us at Elsinore. Perhaps it was for the purpose of emphasizing that this is a play of inaction, with a hero who is not only inactive as far as so much of the plot is concerned, but is actually physically inactive, preferring sedentary occupations to active physical activity. The world is constantly going and coming about Hamlet, but Hamlet is inactive, save for the scenes in which he is away from home. But here too, instead of going along with Hamlet, as Shakespeare would have us do with any other

tragic hero, we remain at Elsinore.

This soliloquy, therefore, creates the impression which we shall carry with us while Hamlet is gone from the action. This is the view at parting, and this is the view which will determine how we shall regard him when he returns.

We have seen Hamlet in the pictures painted by the other five soliloquies, but in each of them the picture has had no comparisons-- Hamlet has measured himself only against himself. Now, with the play-within-a-play over, having thrown away the fruits of this stratagem, we find Hamlet comparing himself with the strength of Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, whose army has just passed over the stage, in the typical Shakespearean convention:

"Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed,
Makes mouths at the invisible events,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell." (IV, 4, 47)

In comparison, how has he, Hamlet, used his "god-like reason"? He rightly concludes that he has used reason only to battle against faith and will, and thus destroy action:

"Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th' event,--
A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward." (IV, 4, 39)

Yet we know, and Hamlet knows, that he is no coward, for the revelation comes to him, baffled as he is:

"I do not know

Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,'

Sith I have cause and will and strength and means

To do it." (IV, 4, 43)

Since "god-like reason" seems to have led him astray, there seems to be only one conclusion to be drawn from his self-measurement, and he formulates the conclusion which concludes the soliloquy and remains with us as a harbinger of events to come:

"O, from this time forth

My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

The audience cannot have much doubt as to the final outcome: Not only will Hamlet do the deed which he shrank from in the "prayer-scene", but it will be done, as he has done everything, too late. Hamlet's war with himself, finally resolved into action, will yet drag down with him the whole constellation of characters in which he was sent adrift. There is no need for us to continue beyond this last soliloquy; this is the psychological end. The rest is but an inevitable result of Hamlet's final self-evaluation and the bitter irony of the prayer-scene.

So we conclude the study of "Hamlet" as seen through the lines of Hamlet's own soliloquies. It must be admitted that no other lines, so relatively few in number, give us even a thousandth part of the insight into the psychological motivation of the play, or even a fraction of such great revelation of the unfolding plot. Truly is this a great convention of the Shakespearean play, if it almost constitutes the skeleton upon which the development of the plot and of the characterization can be considered to be based.

Perhaps it is not out of place to devote a final paragraph to an evaluation of Hamlet in his theological doubts and perplexities. Shakespeare lived in a land and an age when it was fashionable to reduce all issues—even one's chance of salvation, to matters of personal judgment. Hamlet is a man adrift without faith except what can be secured from his own reason, which, being at war with his faith, could hardly be relied upon for an answer to his questionings. He was cut off from eternal truth, and truth became a shadowy thing, varying with time and place and personal judgment. Once his faith in the true Church had been snapped, the flaw ran down uncontained through the whole of his being, and at the first real test to which his personality was subjected, it disintegrated under the force of doubt. With his reason set free to roam at will in darkest caverns of the mind, and faith enslaved to be an enemy rather than leader of reason, he lapsed into impotence and then into irrational determination to drown his troubles in blood.

His philosophy was to prove all things, and hold fast to that which is true; but the fatal flaw was that the proof had to be through his own unaided judgment, for Hamlet owed respect to no man to set him on a truer course. Without recourse to the spiritual guidance of the father-confessor, with nothing to turn to except the ebbing and flowing of his own distorted reason, Hamlet might have done well to heed the warning of his friend Horatio:

"What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other, horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason?" (I, IV, 69)

Horatio truly pictured what we were given reason to fear in the soliloquies, and what finally occurred.

Chapter VI

Some Tragic Characters and Their
Soliloquies

In the last chapter, we have sought to exemplify the significant role of the Shakespearean soliloquy by tracing the character development of Hamlet as a *dramatis persona* and the unfolding of the plot through the medium of the soliloquy. To do the same for each Shakespearean character would obviously be an ambitious project beyond the scope of this work. We shall therefore confine ourselves to only one or two soliloquies for each character.

One of the most unusual insights to be gained from a single soliloquy is the glimpse offered by the first of Brutus's soliloquies at the beginning of Act II of "Julius Caesar." We shall quote this soliloquy in full before analyzing it:

"It must be by his death; and for my part,
I know no personal cause to spurn at him
But for the general. He would be crown'd:
How that might change his nature, there's the question.
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
And that craves wary walking. Crown him? That--
And then, I grant, we put a sting in him
That at his will he may do danger with.
Th' abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
Remorse from power; and to speak truth of Caesar,
I have not known when his affections sway'd
More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,

Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Caesar may;
Then, lest he may, prevent. And, since the quarrel
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities;
And therefore think him as a serpent's egg
Which, hatch'd, would, as his, grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell." (II, 1, 10)

This series of syllogisms may well be summed up as follows:
Caesar is a good ruler and there is no present reason to quarrel
with him. However, he might wish to be crowned. Crowning might
change his nature, and make him a tyrant. Therefore, we must kill
him now, so as not to allow these possibilities to become actualities.

Of this apology for murder through syllogisms based on
questionable premises, Coleridge had this to say: "I do not at present
see into Shakespeare's motive, his rationale, or in what point of view
he meant Brutus's character to appear."¹

One hundred fifty years later, a great lover and student of
Shakespeare, Harley Granville-Barker, admitted a similar perplexity
as to the true import of this soliloquy in contributing to Brutus's
character development:

"Wise editors have found this inconsistent, some with their
own ideal of Brutus, some, rather more reasonably, with the fully drawn
figure of Shakespeare's play. But at this stage of development, why

1. Quoted in Dowden, E., Shakespeare, his Mind and Art, N.Y., 1880, p. 26.

should we be puzzled? If the argument is super-subtle and unconvincing, why should it not be? It may be that Shakespeare himself is still fumbling to discover how this right-minded man can commit his conscience to murder."²

Many generations ago, Edward Dowden advanced a theory which offers at least a partial explanation of this pseudo-syllogistic soliloquy. According to Dowden, Shakespeare was seeking to show us, in a rather indirect way, the grounds on which many political idealists act:

"There is, as it were, a sorites of abstract principles about ambition and power, and reason and affection; finally, a profound suspicion of Caesar is engendered, and his death is decreed. It is idealists who create a political terror; they are free from all desire for blood-shedding; but to them the lives of men and and women are accidents; the lives of ideas are the true realities; and armed with an abstract principle and a suspicion, they perform deeds which are at once beautiful and hideous."³

Without subscribing to this blanket indictment of all political idealists, it must be admitted that Dowden, seventy years ago, painted a quite accurate portrait of some American political idealists whose logic has been as faulty as that of Brutus. We recall so many American "liberals" who defended the brutal and murderous Russian "purges" as being necessary to avoid a counter-revolution. We recall Henry Wallace defending the Communist "coup" in Czechoslovakia on the grounds that it was an excusable reaction to the fear that America was fomenting an anti-Russian atmosphere in that country. And even at the moment of writing, there are some so-called liberals who defend the Communist rape of South Korea on the ground that the South Koreans,

2. Granville-Barker, H., Prefaces to Shakespeare, Princeton, 1947, 11, 354.
3. Dowden, Edward, Shakespeare, his Mind and Art, N.Y., 1880, page 26.

incited by Americans, were plotting to attack North Korea. It would appear that Shakespeare has painted a rather accurate picture of the poor dupes who, in our day, present a semi-respectable "liberal" front for the conscience-less world enemies of freedom and respect for the human personality, and who condone the death of liberty in the name of liberty.

The contemporary Shakespearean scholar, Tolman, has offered two interpretations of this soliloquy, which supplement rather than exclude each other. One explanation is based on the theory that Shakespeare was unconsciously hostile to Brutus as the champion of a republic. This would explain Shakespeare's cold, unsympathetic treatment of Brutus as a *dramatis persona*. He allows Brutus to proceed on the path of logic (or logical fallacy, we should say), without attempting to endow his character with the color of life through the exposition of his emotions. The Elizabethan dramatic conventions are far better adapted to interpret emotion than thought, but of emotion Shakespeare gives Brutus hardly any; instead, there is the cold pursuit of reasoning, even if it is fallacious reasoning, the intellectual adherence to "principles" too firmly held to detect their error. Even in his death (V, 5, 21), Brutus displays a sort of arrogant pride of reason, never admitting even to himself the fatal judgments he has made, too much aware of his own superior virtue as "the noblest Roman of them all", concerned rather with the task of dying in good form than of facing up to the mess his "principles" have wrought. "Why is this weakness allowed to mar the close of the tragedy?" asks Tolman, and he gives this answer: "My own belief is that Shakespeare, when he was writing this play, had no sympathy with the idea of a republic, that he was personally antagonistic to the democratic spirit, and that at this point, perhaps unconsciously, the needs of the tragedy were disregarded to suit his personal prejudices."⁴

4. Tolman, Albert, *Shakespearean Topics*, New York, 1925, page 24.

Despite the fact that Shakespeare's audience consisted, as Ben Johnson said, of "gamester, captain, knight, knight's man,...shop's foreman"⁵, Shakespeare has been described as being contemptuous of the working class. Crosby has adduced an impressive array of quotations which place the worker in a lowly position, unworthy of much notice.⁶ Tolman's conjecture that Shakespeare, perhaps without realizing it, was hostile to Brutus as the representative of the republican theory may have much of truth in it. After all, it was Shakespeare, in this very tragedy of "Julius Caesar", who penned these lines:

"When beggars die, there are no comets seen;

The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes." (II, 2, 30.)

Tolman's second interpretation of the lack of logic in Brutus's soliloquy in his orchard, "It must be by his death...", is based on the very concept of the soliloquy as a dramatic convention. We have seen that the soliloquy may variously be construed as talking aloud, talking to one's self, or thinking aloud, or thinking to one's self. After quoting the comment of Hudson that, if Shakespeare meant Brutus for a wise and good man, "this speech seems to be utterly unintelligible," Tolman reminds us that the soliloquy represents a difficult form of art, and cannot be realistically fully interpreted. "To kill Caesar because he may later deserve death is preposterous. We cannot conceive Brutus as saying the words of this soliloquy. To be really influenced by considerations that would startle one if distinctly set forth is no unusual experience."⁷

What Tolman means is that this soliloquy represents the workings

5. Jonson, Ben, *Commen. Verses*, Introd. to Fletcher, "Faithful Shepherdess," 1608.

6. Crosby, Ernest, *Tolstoy on Shakespeare*, New York, 1906, chapter on "Shakespeare's Attitude Toward the Working Classes.

7. Tolman, *Shakespearean Topics*, New York, 1925, page 24.

of the irrational mind of Brutus, the mind which is confused by prejudices, wishful thinking, illogical conclusions, fears and hates, and all the other influences which often cause the reasoning processes to bog down in error. It is the undisciplined mind of Brutus at work, or in the jargon of today, we are listening to the workings of the "unconscious" mind of Brutus. This is what Tolman may have meant when he said that we may be influenced by motivations that would startle us if we were fully conscious of them.

Before we leave Brutus as a *dramatis persona*, we ought not ignore the deep insight we may gain into his character through the consideration of only a single soliloquy; what speculations we have been led to with respect to Shakespeare as a dramatist, and what possibility there is that we have uncovered a new meaning for the soliloquy--unconscious thought.

For our second character study based upon the soliloquy, we shall select Othello, the noble Moor. We shall consider two soliloquies, the one depicting the beginning of Othello's jealous fancy, the other heavy with the culmination of his passion and his sorrowful determination to murder his beloved.

We use the word "jealousy" to represent Othello's passion, despite the uncertainty as to whether this word truly applies. Stoll has pointed out that "any psychologist must define Othello's passion as jealousy;" yet such is the contrary illusion that Coleridge was unable to discover that it satisfied the tests of jealousy laid down by himself.⁸

Granville-Barker agrees that, if this be jealousy, it is decidedly pathological, for "of vanity, envy, self-seeking and distrust, which are the seeds of jealousy in general, Othello, it is insisted from the beginning, is notably free, so free that he will not readily remark

8. Stoll, E., *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare*, Cambridge, 1934, 117.

them in others, in Iago, for instance, in which they so richly abound."⁹

Our first soliloquy finds Othello with the seeds of suspicion planted in a soul which has a few moments before proclaimed, "Thinkest thou I'd make a life of jealousy?" (III, 3, 177):

"If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my own dear heartstrings,
I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind
To prey at fortune....

I'd rather be a toad
And live upon the vapours of a dungeon
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For other's uses.....

Look where she comes,
If she be false, O heaven then mocks itself!
I'll not believe it." (III, 3, 260)

These seeds of doubt, once planted, do not find the usual nurture for them to flourish, for Othello is a man of high integrity, of commanding presence, of simple eloquence, and of complete self-mastery. These are attributes not found in those who are constitutionally given to jealousy. The nurture for this seed of jealousy is provided partly by Othello's native honor which makes duplicity so alien to him that he cannot recognize its signs, as Iago says in one of his own soliloquies which we shall consider later:

"The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,

9. Granville-Barker, H., Prefaces to Shakespeare, Princeton, 1947, ii, 112.

And will as tenderly be led by the nose

As asses are." (I, 3, 405)

The seed of jealousy flourishes also because Othello lacks many elements of essential experience. He has had a military career, and his accomplishments are of the field of battle rather than of the drawing room, for, as he admits, "rude am I in my speech, and little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace." (I,3,81). He knows little of the virtues or vices of Venetian society, as he is reminded pointedly by Iago, to whose misinformation he can but reply, "Dost thou say so?" (III, 3, 205). Othello's is thus a nature untaught to resist a gross attack on it, should it come. And when it comes, there is only a preliminary struggle, for he insists that "I'll see before I doubt" (III,3,190) and "give me the occular proof or...answer my wak'd wrath!" (III, 3, 360)

Once the belief in the guilt of Desdemonia has secured a foothold in Othello's mind, the results are swift and deadly. We have but to listen to Othello's own words in this soliloquy to appreciate how transformed his character has become:

"Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.

Put out the light, and then put out the light.

If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,

I can again thy flaming light restore,

Should I repent me; but once put out thy light,

Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,

I know not where is that Promethean heat

That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd the rose

I cannot give it vital growth again,

It needs must wither.... I will kill thee

And love thee after." (V, 2, 6)

So spoke a man who later confessed that he was one "who loved not wisely but too well; one not easily jealous, but, being wrought....." (V, 2, 344). But when he uttered these words, he conceived of himself as an agent, not of personal vengeance, but of divine retribution.

It would be a natural conclusion that Othello's credulity and his rapid descent into the miasma of jealousy are contrary to reason and to common sense. Indeed, there is danger that his utterly needless deception (which a simple word to Desdemona might have avoided) would seem more comic than tragic, were it not that Othello suffers so and causes so much suffering. It is noteworthy that in Othello's suffering there is no battle between good and evil, or not even the realization of evil at work in him, until too late. It is the story of a simple soul, blind and overwhelmed with folly, a dupe for another's wicked wiles, a man run mad for no real cause. One who gazes at this spectacle of a man so possessed that facts and reason become the plaything of his moral lesion, of evil working in him all but unquestioned until the end, would readily agree with Othello's own epitaph:

"Whip me, ye devils....

Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulfur!

Wash me down in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!" (V, 2, 277)

Only one factor rescues this play from making us the victims of the feeling of incredulity and the lack of sympathy with his almost comic befooling. That factor is Iago, as Tolman has pointed out:

"It is generally recognized that Iago is Shakespeare's most consummate villain, but it is perhaps not clearly seen that he had to be this, or else the play would be a partial failure. He makes Iago such a subtle schemer, such an attractive deceiver, that we do not consider Othello either weak or foolish because he is deceived and led

on to his ruin by the machinations of his pretended friend.... But there is a danger to which the play is exposed at this point, the danger that Othello shall appear a weak and unworthy character rather than one really tragic."¹⁰

We therefore leave Othello, as we see him through his soliloquies, with the feeling that his character is incomplete without the study of the fiend who duped him so disastrously--Iago.

Iago is truly a literary by-word for intolerable villainy. The reasons for his infamy are none too clear. True, Iago resents the fact that Cassio has been promoted to the lieutenantcy, as in his complaint, "he in good time must his lieutenant be, and I...his Moorship's ancient." (I, 1, 32). There is an element of sexual jealousy (I, 3, 393), but these two reasons together seem hardly sufficient to account for the concentrated venom in Iago's evil-doing.

We meet Iago in a soliloquy not far from the beginning of the play. Brander Matthews is of the opinion that Shakespeare "did not want the turbulent groundlings to be in any doubt as to the wickedness of his "honest" Iago. And so it is that at the end of the first act, Iago simply talks aloud to the audience, frankly taking them into his confidence and exposing his own dark designs."¹¹

In this first soliloquy, Iago gives us a hint of his own (unfounded) jealousy("it is thought abroad...he has done my office."), and of his determination to get the lieutenantcy, which seems to be the motivating factor in his design for villainy:

10. Tolman, A., Shakespearean Topics, N.Y., 1925, page 108.

11. Matthews, Brander, in Putnam's Magazine, Nov. 1906, page 185.

"I hate the Moor;

And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office. I know not if 't be true;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man: let me see now:
To get his place and to plume up my will
In double knavery---How, how? --Let's see:-
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife....
The Moor is of a free and open nature.....
I have't. It is engendered. Hell and night

Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light." (I,3,392)

Dowden cannot find in this soliloquy a sufficiency of motive to account for the dark iniquity of Iago's plotting. He quotes with approval the comment of Coleridge that this soliloquy reveals the "motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity." Dowden suggests that there must be more to Iago's villainy than a simple reaction to real or fancied wrongs. "Intellectuality is Iago's proper character; that is, intellect has in him cast off all allegiance to the moral reason, and has become a law unto itself, so that the mere fact of his being able to do a thing is sufficient cause for doing it."¹²

The hatred of Iago for Othello is a sort of profitless hate, almost a hate for its own sake, to "plume up my will in double knavery", as he confesses in the above soliloquy. This "double knavery" is the will to do evil for its own sake (as well as for the profit in it) that

12. Dowden, E., Shakespeare, His Mind and Art, N.Y., 1880, page 214

carries Iago both to triumph and disaster.

The soliloquy at the end of the first scene in the next act does not supply more motivation than the plumbing of Iago's will in double knavery--his material advantage plus the flattering of his egregious conceit in his own wickedness. In this soliloquy, there is a half-hearted attempt to convince himself that he loves Desdemonia, "not out of absolute lust,....(but) that I do suspect that the lusty Moor has leaped onto my seat." His own supreme conceit and his pandering to his villainous nature are indicated in these lines:

"Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me

For making him egregiously an ass

And practising upon his peace and quiet

Even to madness." (II, 1, 317)

The plan is still confused, for "knavery's plain face is never seen till us'd", but this second soliloquy has confirmed us in our estimate of Iago, as an intellect turned to wickedness for its own sake, lacking the motivations which drive ordinary sinners to their misdeeds.

The third soliloquy, at the end of the second act, convinces us that our appraisal has not been wrong. Twice he asks, in irony, why he is a villain, when he has plotted so skillfully that his victims seem to be going to their doom through no fault of "honest" Iago.

"Divinity of Hell!

When devils will the blackest sins put on,

They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,

As I do now."

So speaks the consummate artist in villainy, who is obsessed with conceit at the progress of his machinations. There would be no point in continuing to examine Iago's self-revelations as he proceeds to lay bare his wicked soul in soliloquies in the rest of the play. What the first soliloquy revealed the last soliloquy will confirm, that Shakespeare is developing a character whose soul has the dreadful capacity for devotion to evil out of all proportion to such motives as may exist. Iago is the absolute infidel, for he is devoid of all faith in truth or justice, whether it be human or divine. He feels that it is not only natural but right for him to prey upon all men as if they were destined to be the fools and dupes of his plotting.

Thus, the two characters of Othello and Iago interlock in dramatic interaction; the one is the perfect dupe, the victim of the other, the supreme knave. Human weakness and human wickedness combine to bring the heavens down upon the good as well as the evil.

These few soliloquies reveal that Othello is not a spiritual tragedy in the ordinary sense. It is an almost intolerable exhibition of human wickedness and folly. Here is not plainly the "katharsis" of Aristotle, whereby our emotions are purged; instead, we are filled with anger and resentment that such a miserable creature as Iago, with his outrageous conceit in his villainy, should be able, without opposition, to encompass the ruin of Othello and Desdemona. This incongruity, revealed at the very first by Shakespeare, is the keynote of the play.

The next character whom we shall examine through the medium of the soliloquy is the emotional and weak, but ambitious Macbeth. Oddly enough, we gain our first glimpse of the real Macbeth, as he is at the beginning of the play, through the words of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy.

Thus, we learn that his nature is "too full of the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way;" that he is "not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it"; that what he would "highly" he would also "holily". (I,5,18)

But almost at the same time that Lady Macbeth is thus characterizing, events are moving to change that characterization. He is hailed by the third witch, "All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter," (I,3,50), and, extrovert though he is, Macbeth's imagination conjures up the image of murder in an aside that would be a soliloquy if there were no other characters on the stage:

"This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth?.....
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart rock at my ribs." (I,3,131)

Then comes the famous debate on murder. Between this soliloquy and the above aside, he has had a chance to ruminate on the strange invitation of fate, and when he returns home, Lady Macbeth speaks words with hidden meaning: "Your face, my thane, is as a book where men may read strange matters". (I,5,63) A strong current of understanding seems to pass between them, and we suspect that Macbeth's suggestion, "We will speak further" will get them deeper into the contemplation of murder. Hence, this soliloquy by Macbeth is no surprise:

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly....that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here." (I,7,1)

Thus reasons Macbeth in his debate on murder: if the assassination could be accomplished without consequence in this world he would risk or "jump the life to come". But murder returns "to plague the inventor:"

"This even-handed justice

Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice

To our own lips." (I,7,10)

Then comes a clear recognition that the thought which surges through his mind is wrong on two scores: first, "I am his kinsman and his subject"; then "his host". Duncan's virtues and pity "shall blow the horrid deed in every eye". Finally, Macbeth admits to himself that there is nothing to commend the thought of murder to him save his own ambition:

"I have no spur

To prick the sides of my intent, but only

Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself

And falls on th' other." (I, 7, 25)

Thus, to the fateful promptings of an apparent supernatural nature have been added an almost irresistible opportunity and an urging that could not be gainsaid. Nevertheless, this soliloquy discloses that his heart is not in the wicked venture, for in murdering Duncan, Macbeth feels that he will be murdering his better nature.

So cogent and revealing is the Shakespearean soliloquy that we may leap from Act I to Act V with confidence as to what we shall find: the fulfillment of the premonition that murder will return to plague him:

"I have liv'd long enough. My way of life

Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;

And that which should accompany old age,

As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends

I must not look to have; but, in their stead,

Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath

Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not." (V,3,21)

It must not be inferred that these workings of conscience are the result of an initially pure nature which has been misled. Shakespeare is not attempting to depict a sudden transformation of character from loyalty, nobility, and uprightness into that of a traitor and a murderer. There is nothing at the beginning to indicate that Macbeth is devoted to truth, dedicated to justice, pure in heart, and upright in character. All that we can gather from Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in Act I, Scene 5, is that he has affinities for good and possible aptitudes for evil. He is not the champion of good; he is simply not yet allied with evil. Concerning this attitude of neutrality between good and evil, Dowden had this to say:

"Shakespeare felt profoundly that the careless attitude of suspense or indifference between virtue and vice cannot long continue. Those who drop into a languid neutrality between the antagonistic spiritual forces of the world must serve the devil as slaves if they will not decide to serve God as freemen."¹³

Part of Macbeth's undoing was his own ambition, urged on by his imagination, which converts the idea of his murdering the King into the actual thought of him doing it; which presents him a dagger in his soliloquy (II,1,33), with its handle turned toward him, beckoning him to his task; which interprets the ringing of the bell in Act II, Scene 1, f2, as an invitation to send Duncan "to heaven or to hell". But much of his undoing Macbeth owes to Lady Macbeth, whose soliloquies we shall now consider,

13. Dowden, E., Shakespeare, his Mind and Art, N.Y., 1880, p.223.

Generally speaking, the heroines of Shakespeare seem simple and almost transparent as compared with the men, as a result, perhaps, of the use of boy actors to play the parts of women, a convention to which we have already alluded. Even the finest Shakespearean heroines are drawn according to conventional lines: the sentimental Viola, voicing in *Twelfth Night* her willingness to suffer death to give her master ease (V,1); the pathetic Imogen, whom Swinburne considered "the woman best beloved in all the world of song"¹⁴; the witty Rosalind, who enters "like a saucy lackey" in conversation with the love-sick Orlando in "*As You Like It*" (III,2). Very few of Shakespeare's heroines are drawn with full and strong lines comparable to those Shakespeare uses with his men, and one of these women is Lady Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth is Shakespeare's own creation, for Holinshed's only allusion to her is this: "the words of the three weird sisters also greatly encouraged him hereunto, but specially his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a queen."¹⁵ From such small beginnings, Shakespeare developed the fully-drawn character whose part in the play was such that terror seized Mrs. Siddons when she first started, at night, to study the part.¹⁶

We first meet Lady Macbeth in a letter-reading soliloquy, in which she learns that "these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with, 'Hail, King that shall be.'" (I,5,8) In the soliloquy which follows, she accomplishes two purposes: she gives us an insight into Macbeth's character which proves true to the end, and she reveals herself as well. The "nearest way" is contrasted with

14. Swinburne, A.C., *Study of Shakespeare*, London, 1880, page 227.

15. Holinshed, R., *Chronicles*, London, 1587, II, 170.

16. Campbell, *Life of Mrs. Siddons*, London, II, 35.

the "milk of human kindness"; the desire to be "great" is contrasted with "the illness" that "should attend it", as if it is impossible to be great without resorting to deeds bringing evil; "highly" wished things are presented as not being holy; in short, here is a woman whose ambition for her husband, founded on a true appraisal of his character, is to have far-reaching influence. The soliloquy closes with her resolve to speed her husband's decision and with her thoughts of the "golden round" which the weird sisters have promised:

"Hie thee hither

That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,

And chastise with the valour of my tongue

All that impedes thee from the golden round

Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem

To have thee crown'd withal." (I,5,26)

This soliloquy is broken by the entrance and exit of the messenger. When the soliloquy is continued, it is the strange form of a prayer to the forces of evil, in which Lady Macbeth acts as the she-villain in the grand style, with pseudo-masculine vigor. Few if any other characters of Shakespeare's women are pictured as giving vent to such villainous thoughts. Literally, it is a prayer to make one's blood run cold:

"Come, you spirits,

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full

Of direct cruelty! Make thick my blood;

,.....Come to my woman's breasts

And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers." (I,5,41)

It is worthy of note that Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth address the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, not words. This is evidently one

of those soliloquies which serve as the revelation of unspoken thoughts, thoughts which perhaps no mortal woman in her senses would put into spoken words. The last words of the soliloquy are:

"Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry, "Hold, hold." (I, 5, 51)

Here is the feminine Lady Macbeth, physically slight, the perfect hostess, throwing herself with masculine energy into her "great business," cutting herself off without recourse from her better nature, yielding to no weak paltering with conscience. This steely purpose she maintains where Macbeth falters; while Macbeth asks, "'ill all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?" she takes the daggers from her husband's trembling hands to "gild the faces of the grooms" with blood. When she returns, she gloats, "A little water clears us of this deed " (II, 2, 56). She welcomes the chief guest Banquo as Queen (III,1), and presides with consummate skill at the banquet (III, 4).

But we feel that her delicate, high-strung frame, filled with nervous energy driving relentlessly toward the fulfillment of the wicked ambitions she has for her husband, cannot maintain themselves at such a pitch indefinitely. The warning of impending disaster comes in a four-line soliloquy in Act III, Scene 2:

"Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content,
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy." (III, 2, 4)

Once conscience has found a way to penetrate Lady Macbeth's armor, we may expect her tight, taut personality to snap and disintegrate under the strain of her unnatural emotions. We hear nothing from Lady Macbeth in the fourth act, and when she enters the fifth act, the string has snapped, and we recall her boast that a little water would clear her of the deed. There are others on the stage during this scene, but Lady Macbeth is unaware of their presence in her sleep-walking. How closely her discourse meets the criteria of a soliloquy may be argued, but there is no room for difference of opinion that the woman who steeled herself to man's worst villainy has lost the masculine strength of purpose which enabled her to throw herself single-mindedly into her evil plans. It is not the susceptible, haunted mind of Macbeth that snaps, but the mind of Lady Macbeth, who has prided herself on being realistic, practical, matter-of-fact. The fearful self-accusation of "Out, damned spot!" and "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand!" tell us the end is soon at hand, and this sleep-walking soliloquy is indeed her last appearance. Later, we learn that she died "by self and violent hands". (V, 8, 70)

Why Lady Macbeth, who is the driving force in the early part of the tragedy, drops out after Act III, to return only when near death, may well be debated. Her early soliloquies show that she, at the very beginning, had already reached the pinnacle of emotional strain, and it would seem that this state of stress could not long be maintained; so Shakespeare abandons her to her fate, and turns his attention to the principal character, Macbeth. The first soliloquy tells us that this is a character who has not far to travel before she reaches the point of no return, and falls into the abyss.

This concludes our study of the tragic characters of Shakespeare. So potent a dramatic technique is the soliloquy that we have been able to gain a substantial understanding of the development of the personality of a number of tragic heroes and their contributions to the advancement of the plot almost entirely through the study of their soliloquies.

The noteworthy role of the soliloquy is its function in aiding the playwright to give us expectation in preference to surprise. From the very beginning we are shown the discordant personality of Hamlet, torn asunder by inner strife; the simple nature of Othello, unversed in the wiles of the drawing room; the villainy of Iago, who deceives a noble nature and brings it to ruin while we suffer in silence; the idealist Brutus, whose "intellectuality" causes him to become a "front" for conspirators; the ambitious Macbeth, who realizes that he is killing his own better nature when he plans the murder of Duncan; the single-minded Lady Macbeth, hard and self-seeking, a rare example of a woman on the Shakespearean stage who gives vent to villainous thoughts.

This power of the Shakespearean soliloquy stems from the nature of the Shakespearean stage and its resultant conventions, which promoted a maximum of intimacy between the playwright and his audience, which enabled the actor to take the spectators into his confidence, which almost erased the line dividing the world of make-believe and the world of reality.

Chapter VII

Some Comic Characters and their
Soliloquies - I

Of the comic characters in Shakespeare there are almost endless types. We shall consider the more noteworthy instances through their soliloquies.

The discovery by English scholars, in the age just preceding that of Shakespeare, of Plautus and Terence provided the stage with classical models of comic characters which may have had the hoary dust of ages on their shoulders, but are effective even in the theater of today. Among these characters were rascals, slaves, ingenious parasites, shameless courtesans, jealous husbands, braggart lovers, swashbuckling soldiers, miserly fathers, love-sick youths. These Shakespeare adopted and added some of his own: the resourceful or blundering servant accompanying the hero, and the maid or nurse of the heroine; the ladies-in-waiting and friends of the hero who are overflowing with wit; the kind-hearted burgher who is homely and rough; the fool or professional jester; the rustic bumpkin, the hempen home-spun, the huge feeders, the sleepers by day, the chop-logicians and twice-sod simpletons, and the whole species of clowns; the foreigner, with his idiosyncrasies and broken English; the affected fop or "water-fly"; the self-conscious melancholic and kill-joy; and finally the tradesmen and artisans, as well as the comic constable and schoolmaster.

Not all of these comic characters attained the stature worthy of the soliloquy, but those that did soliloquize constitute a goodly number, and we shall consider each type represented in monologues.

We shall first consider the caricature of lovers offered by Pyramus and Thisbe in the Interlude of the "Midsummer Night's Dream". The tale as related by Ovid (Metam.iv) was universally familiar in the Middle Ages. Since their parents forbade their marriage, Pyramus and Thisbe, who lived in adjacent houses, were wont to converse through a chink in a wall. Once, when they had agreed to meet at the tomb of Ninus, Thisbe, who had arrived first, fled at the aspect of a lioness who had just slain an ox; she dropped her cloak on the way, and the lioness, mauling it, stained it with blood. Pyramus, finding the garment, believed Thisbe had been killed, and slew himself. Thisbe, returning, saw her lover's body and also put an end to her life.

It would seem very much that this tale offers the makings of a parody of "Romeo and Juliet." This likeness of a sort has not gone unnoticed, as indicated by the comment of Maginn: "As Romeo, the gentleman, is the unlucky man of Shakespeare, so here does he exhibit Bottom, the blockhead, as the lucky man, as he on whom Fortune showers her favors beyond measure."¹

It is Bottom who plays the part of Pyramus, and we shall consider Bottom in his own right presently. Now we turn our attention to the presentation of the Interlude in Act V.

The first soliloquy of Pyramus occurs as he enters to meet Thisbe but discovers the bloody cloak:

"I trust to take of truest Thisbe sight.

But stay, O spite!

But mark, poor knight,

What dreadful dole is here!.....

Thy mantle good,

What, stain'd with blood!

1. Maginn, W., Shakespearean Papers, London, 1860, page 122.

Approach, ye Furies fell!

O Fates, come, come.

Cut thread and thrum;

Quail, crush, conclude, and quell! (V, 1, 280)

This travesty of the tragic soliloquy must have appealed to Shakespeare's groundlings as well as nobles, and is still "sure-fire theater" today, despite the passing of melodramatic speeches. On the same note of burlesque is the supplication Pyramus addresses to Nature:

"O wherefore Nature, didst thou lions frame?

Since lion vile hath here deflowr'd my dear;

Which is--no, no--which was the fairest dame

That liv'd, that lov'd, that lik'd, that look'd with cheer."

A factor in the effect of parody is probably the use of alliteration throughout the soliloquy, which serves to lampoon the rant which was not uncommon in Elizabethan drama. Even Hamlet asked the players for a passionate speech--Aeneas's tale to Dido (II,2,467), and acknowledged that a well-turned play might not be acceptable to the millions, but was more like "caviar to the general". Yet Hamlet's advice to the players was given with a view to toning down the rant:

"Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently....O, it offends me to the soul to see a robustious, periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise." (III, 2, 1)

It is quite apparent that Pyramus is violating all of the precepts laid down by Hamlet, which were probably also the precepts laid down to the Shakespearean company of actors, but not too rigidly followed.

In the close of Pyramus's soliloquy, he parodies the soliloquy itself, or at least that use of the soliloquy, to which we have called attention, which serves to describe the death of the hero. The necessity of concluding such soliloquies with explanations of the stage "business" seems to prolong the dying speech out of relation to the normal death-scene, and this is pounced upon for ridicule by Pyramus:

Come, tears, confound;

Out, sword, and wound

The pap of Pyramus;

Ay, that left pap,

Where heart doth hop. (Stabs himself.)

Now die I, thus, thus, thus.

Now I am dead,

Now I am fled;

My soul is in the sky.

Tongue, lose thy light;

Moon, take thy flight.

Now die, die, die, die, die." (V, 1, 300)

Shakespeare was here obviously lampooning his own tendency to send his tragic heroes into the next world on the wings of a long soliloquy itemizing the details of their death.

Even more palpably on the side of travesty is Thisbe's soliloquy on discovering her lover dead. Such lines as, "Speak, speak! Quite dumb?"; "Those lily lips, this cherry nose, these yellow cowslip cheeks.";--these are lines that burlesque our tragic heroines, and this parody continues

to the inevitable soliloquy ending announcing one's death:

Come, trusty sword;

Come, blade, my breast imbrue! (Stabs herself)

And, farewell, friends;

Thus, Thisby ends.

Adieu, adieu, adieu!" (V, 1, 351)

The travesty of this soliloquy deserves no more than the comment of Theseus: "Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead."

Shakespeare could obviously laugh at the ludicrous elements of his own dramatic techniques when these techniques were exaggerated by his own skill.

Bottom, who plays Pyramus, is an inimitable clown in his own right. Cowden-Clarke aptly described him as "the epitome of all the conceited donkeys that ever strutted or straddled on this stage of the world."² Such a clown would naturally be more in his element in dialogue, as when he promises to "roar as gently as any suckling dove", or to "speak in a monstrous little voice" (I,2,54). However, we do have a soliloquy in which Bottom exemplifies the country bumpkin, the hempen home-spun, who never labored in his mind until he tried to produce a play. This is the soliloquy which occurs after he is disenchanted by Puck, and awakes, musing on his strange dream:

"I have had a most strange vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream." (IV, 1, 208)

Yet a moment later he proclaims:

"I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream.

2. Cowden-Clarke, C., Shakespearean Characters, London, 1863, page 97.

It shall be called "Bottom's Dream", because it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke; peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her (Thisbe's) death." (IV, 1, 219)

Some of the tricks Shakespeare resorts to in order to make Bottom act the clown are not far removed from the antics of present-day radio comedians. One of these devices is to start a sentence, and, after a break, to continue with a departure from the grammatical structure:

"Methought I was---there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, -- and methought I had, -- but man is but a patch'd fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had." (IV, 1, 212)

A few of Bottom's lines sound as if they were the originals of a present-day radio script, where the script contains malapropisms that might have come directly out of "Alice in Wonderland":

"The eye of man has not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was." (IV, 1, 215)

All in all, we may well believe that Shakespeare's groundlings had the same uproariously good time which a modern audience might have in witnessing the antics of a vaudeville comedian, or his ultra-modern counterpart, the television clown. But Shakespeare had the harder task, for he achieved his allusion without benefit of powerful stage lighting or television Kleig lights which make every change in facial expression visible to the audience. Shakespeare, by virtue of the conventions of the platform stage, achieved his effects through his masterful use of the techniques of verbal illusion.

The malapropism was one of Shakespeare's favorite devices, especially with characters on the lower social levels. A good example is Mrs. Quickly in Henry V (or rather the Hostess since she married Pistol), who denies that Falstaff ever cried out against women or called them devils incarnate: " 'A could never abide carnation; 'twas a colour he never lik'd" (II,3,36). Whether the Mistress Quickly of "I Henry IV," "II Henry IV," and "Henry V" is the same Mistress Quickly as in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" is conjectural. The simplicity of her nature in all of these parts, and the comical nature of her phraseologies may well make the reader surmise that the same garrulous woman is presented to us throughout. At any rate, the Mistress Quickly resorts to the same sort of malapropisms as her namesake in the King Henry plays. It is she who is described by Evans as Dr. Caius's "nurse, or his dry nurse, or his cook, or his laundry, his washer, his wringer." (I, 2, 1, Merry Wives of Windsor) One gasps at the appellation "laundry, washer, wringer", so often used ironically today to indicate that the charwoman is a substitute for the mechanical washing machine; truly, this passage is as modern as today. Surely, Mistress Quickly is the master of the art of guileless duplicity; she conceals Simple in a closet, soothes Dr. Caius when he discovers the intruder, tells Simple that Dr. Caius is in love with Anne Page, tells Fenton that she is sure Anne loves him (I,4). She informs Falstaff that both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are in love with him, and highly commends their virtue (II,2), and is termed by Mistress Ford "that foolish carrion" (III,3). But it is in her own soliloquy that her guileless duplicity is best revealed, when she promises herself that "I will do what I can for them all three":

"A kind heart he hath. A woman would run through fire and water for such a kind heart. But yet I would my master had Mistress

Anne; or I would Master Slender had her; or, in sooth, I would Master Fenton had her. I will do what I can for them all three; for so I have promised; and I'll be as good as my word; but speciously for Master Fenton. Well I must of another errand to Sir John Falstaff from my two mistresses. What a beast I am to slack it!" (III,4,106)

In this soliloquy, "speciously" is just another of Mistress Quickly's malapropisms for "especially".

Of Shakespeare's goodly number of clowns, Benedick in "Much Ado about Nothing" is a fine example of the self-confident, supercilious "no less than a stuffed-man", "four of whose five wits went halting off", as Beatrice phrased it (I,1,58). As a further characterization, we may quote what Beatrice tells Benedick while the latter is masked:

"He (Benedick) is the Prince's jester, a very dull fool; only his gift in devising impossible slanders. None but libertines delight in him, and the commendation is not in his wit but in his villainy." (II,1,122)

Concerning this characterization, Gervinus had this to say:

"At Beatrice's jibe that he is a 'jester', he becomes perplexed and wounded, he takes counsel with himself as to whether his merry vein had really procured him this title. Pride of intellect is the strong point of his self-love...it appears in him and becomes excitable and sensitive as soon as he is seriously reproached."³

This comment is in large part based on the brief soliloquy of Benedick not long after being called a "jester", in which he talks as if he could not believe his ears: "The Prince's fool! Ha? It may be I go under that title because I am merry. Yea, but so I am apt to do myself wrong. I am not so reputed." (II, 1, 210)

3. Gervinus, Shakespearean Commentaries, London, 1875, page 415.

We learn an amazing amount about the character of Benedick by way of the three soliloquies in the third scene of the second Act. The first soliloquy, opening the scene, reveals his philosophy of love, which fits snugly the disdainful prince of jesters. He first snickers at Claudio because, "after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love; and such a man is Claudio." (II,3,9) Then Benedick, in a moment of trepidation, asks himself whether such a calamity might befall him, and he answers:

"I cannot tell; I think not. I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster; but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool." (II,3,24)

Then follows one of the most egotistical, opinionated, self-conceited evaluations of one's self:

" One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen (ask the price of) her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be of what color it pleases God. Ha! the Prince and Monsieur Love!" (II,3,29)

After this soliloquy, Benedick conceals himself, but is observed by Don Pedro and the others; he listens to a prearranged conversation in which Beatrice's supposed passion for him is dilated on. Convinced by what he has heard, he vows that her love shall be requited, first assuring himself that he is not being deceived:

"This can be no trick; the conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady (Beatrice). It seems her affections have their full bent." (II,3,228)

Benedick rehearses the qualities he has set for that paragon of all virtues worthy of becoming his wife, and he finds them in Beatrice. He stops a moment at her wisdom, for after all, is she not in love, but he concludes that this weakness is "no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her". (II,3,242) He does not worry much about the reactions of his fellow comical spirits at the news that he might marry: "I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have rail'd so long against marriage; but doth not the appetite alter?...Shall quips and sentences (maxims) and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour?" (II, 3, 244). The final argument for changing his attitude to marriage and love is, "The world must be peopled." (II,3,250)

As Benedict concludes the soliloquy, he remarks that he spies some marks of love in the entering Beatrice, but he is rudely met with "Against my will am I sent to bid you come to dinner." In the soliloquy which follows the brief dialogue with Beatrice, he ruminates over her impertinence, trying to find a "double meaning" in her saucy remarks, and he succeeds, as any egotist would:

"Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner;' there's a double meaning in that. 'I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me;' that's as much as to say, 'Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks.' If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain." (II,3,266)

These few lines from the soliloquies surely give us a better insight into the character of Benedick than hundreds of lines of ordinary

dialogue; such are the potentialities of the soliloquy.

Before we leave Benedick, we ought consider one of the passages of a soliloquy already discussed, worthy of one who is likened to the Benedictus (III,4,74), the medicinal herb which "strengtheneth all the principal parts of the body, sharpeneth both the wit and the memory, quickeneth all the senses."⁴ We are referring to the expression "noble, or not I for an angel" at the beginning of Scene 3. Many indeed are Shakespeare's puns on the coin "noble" (worth 6s.8d.) and "angel" (worth 10s.) Thus, when Prince Hal dismisses the nobleman, who has been sent as a messenger from the court, with these words: "Give him as much as will make him a royal man (I Henry IV, II,4, 317), he is punning on the names of the two gold coins, noble and royal, which differed in value by ten groats. Similarly, Falstaff is not above thinking of the legion of angels that are at the bidding of Mistress Ford (The Merry Wives of Windsor, I,3,60). Benedick, who partakes of the sharp wit of the Benedictus herb, is truly in his proper role when he introduces into his monologue the reference to Beatrice and himself as "noble, or not I for an angel" and thus vindicates his reputation as jester.

Of the clown type, there is an endless variety, and it is a far cry from Benedick, the jester of the Prince, to Launce, the clownish servant of Proteus in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona." We first meet Launce in what is probably as uproarious a monologue as any vaudeville comedian delivered a generation ago when that form of art was in its heyday. He is enlarging on the callous behavior of his dog when the usual malapropism is introduced:

4. Cogan, T., Haven of Health, London, 1584, page Xlvi.

"I have received my proportion (portion), like the prodigious (Prodigal) son." (II,3,3) Then follows the hilarious discourse to the audience which instantly informs us what manner of clown this new character Launce will prove to be:

"My mother weeping, my father wailing, my sister crying, our maid howling, our cat wringing her hands, and all our house in a great perplexity, yet did not this cruel-hearted cur shed one tear. He is stone, a very pebble..." (II,3,6)

Lest we have any remaining doubts as to the overflowing reservoir of fun that Launce is to be, we have only to listen to the conclusion of the soliloquy in which Launce goes through the antics of describing his family through the use of objects near at hand: "This shoe is my father; no, this left shoe is my father; no, no, this left shoe is my mother; yes, it is so, it is so, it hath the worser sole. This shoe, with the hole in it, is my mother, and this is my father, a vengeance on it! there 'tis. Now sir, this staff is my sister, for, look you, she is as white as a lily, and as small as a wand. This hat is Nan, our maid. I am the dog—no, the dog is himself, and I am the dog—O, the dog is me, and I am myself, ay, so, so...." (II,3,15)

True to the style of Shakespeare's comic characters, Launce cannot resist the temptation of indulging in a pun on "soul" and "it hath the worser sole." And a few lines later, he commits another pun on "tide" and "tied".

Launce meets Speed at Milan; they exchange banter about their masters' love affairs and repair to an ale house. In the following scene, Launce regales us with a catalogue of his own sweetheart's "conditions", not forgetting to include a pun or two, and indulging in a somewhat tantalizing mood:

"He lives not now that knows me to be in love; yet I am in love;
but a team of horses shall not pluck that from me; nor who 'tis I
love; and yet 'tis a woman, but what woman I will not tell myself;
and yet, tis a milkmaid; yet 'tis not a maid, for she hath had gossips;
yet 'tis a maid, for she is her master's maid, and serves for wages....
(Pulling out a paper.) Here is the catalogue of her conditions.

'Imprimis: She can fetch and carry.' Why, a horse can do no more;
nay, a horse cannot fetch, but only carry; therefore, is she better than
a jade." (III,1,263)

The word "jade", then as today, means an "ill-conditioned horse"
and a "loose woman", so that we have a pun to remind us of the "gossips"
(the sponsors for a child born out of wedlock) and the horse that can
carry but not fetch, both mentioned earlier in the soliloquy.

One of the most boisterous and rollicking of soliloquies is that
in which Launce rates Crab for his bad manners, just before he con-
fesses that he lost the "little jewel" of a dog, destined by Proteus
as a present for Silvia and offered Crab in lieu of it. The language
of the soliloquy is undoubtedly vulgar, and brings to mind the indig-
nation voiced by the late poet-laureate Robert Bridges, in an essay
printed in the "Stratford Town Shakespeare" in 1907, and reprinted in
1927.⁵ Bridges could not reconcile the vulgarity found in many of
Shakespeare's plays with the gentility of mind of the great playwright.
He found no other explanation for the coarse jokes, the indelicacies,
and the obscenities that mar so many plays for the modern audience,
except on the hypothesis that Shakespeare found it necessary to write

⁵ Bridges, Robert, Collected Essays and Papers, Oxford, 1927, Volume I,
Essay on "The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's
Drama.

down to his audience. He felt that Shakespeare not only utilized such questionable devices to win the favor of his audiences, but, even worse, he deliberately took advantage of the low cultural and moral level of his audience to make use of pornography and obscenity.

There is little doubt that there are too many coarse, ribald, indecent passages in Shakespeare to suit the modern taste, but it would be hard to prove that the playwright intentionally pandered to the stupidity and moral dullness of his audience. Granville-Barker takes a more kindly view:

"There is the pornographic difficulty....Saving their presence, it exists, for it exists aesthetically. Shakespeare's characters often make obscene jokes. The manners of his time permitted it. The public manners of ours still do not....Suppression of a few of the more scabrous jokes (in modern revivals) will not leave the play much the poorer."⁶

Perhaps in the category of the "more scabrous" jokes is the monologue by Launce on his dog, which is introduced, as will be noted, by the expression "bless the mark", a formula that was perverted to serve as an introduction for an obnoxious remark:

"He (Crab) thrusts me himself into the company of three or four gentlemanlike dogs, under the Duke's table. He had not been there—bless the mark—a pissing while, but all the chamber smelt him. 'Out with the dog!' says one. 'What cur is that?' says another. 'Whip him out!' says the third. 'Hang him up!' says the Duke. I, having

⁶ Granville-Barker, H., Prefaces to Shakespeare, Princeton, 1947, I, 21.

been acquainted with the smell before, knew it was Crab, and goes me to the fellow that whips the dogs. 'Friend', quoth I, 'you mean to whip the dog?' 'Ay, marry, do I,' quoth he. 'You do him the more wrong,' quoth I; 'it was I did the thing you wot of.' He makes me no more ado but whips me out of the chamber. How many masters would do this for his servant?" (Iv, 4, 18)

The soliloquy, so far addressed to the audience, is now turned to the dog Crab: "Did I not bid thee still mark me and do as I do? When didst thou see me heave up my leg and make water against a gentlewoman's farthingale? Didst thou ever see me do such a trick?"

Many a modern audience would feel a little uncomfortable under this brand of humor. The illusion would be broken, and the effect intended would be lost. The modern audience, a satirist would say, prefers a little of the indecency to be left to the imagination. It is with this thought that we leave Launce, the loutish narrator of vulgar stories.

Not to be confused with Launce of "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" is Launcelot, so referred to except when he is first mentioned as Launcelot Gobbo, the servant of Shylock in "The Merchant of Venice". Gobbo is typical of many of Shakespeare's stage clowns—a juggler with words, neat, agile, resourceful, and occasionally familiar with the audience, as a clown and juggler should be—under a thin disguise as a character in the play. We shall consider only one of his soliloquies, a somewhat lengthy one in the opening part of Act II, Scene 2, which is noteworthy because it consists almost entirely of a dialogue or conversation among Gobbo, his conscience, and the fiend, all expressed as a monologue, as in this passage:

"The fiend is at mine elbow and tempts me, saying to me, 'Gobbo, Launcelot Gobbo, good Launcelot,' or 'good Gobbo,' or 'Good Launcelot Gobbo,

use your legs, take the start, run away,' My conscience says, 'No, take heed, honest Launcelot; take heed, honest Gobbo,' or, as afore-said, 'honest Launcelot Gobbo; do not run; scorn running with thy heels.'.....'Conscience,' say I, 'you counsel well;' 'Fiend,' say I, 'you counsel well.' The fiend gives the more friendly counsel. I will run, fiend; my heels are at your commandment; I will run."

(II, 2, 1)

Not the least point of interest in this soliloquy is the fact that it seems a frank parody of the most serious note of any struck in Shakespeare's soliloquies-- the war of one's better and more evil natures. Launcelot Gobbo, through this soliloquy, achieves the stature of a comic philosopher as well as a clown. Shakespeare knew how to express the most sublime as well as the tritest thoughts through the same vehicle of the soliloquy.

Most of Shakespeare's clowns have the makings of a rogue about them, but it remains for Autolycus in "The Winter's Tale" to have a character synonymous with "rogue." His character is said to have been based on the recollection Shakespeare had of 'A booke in Englyshe metre of the great Marchaunte man called Diues Pragmaticus, very prety for children to rede' by Thomas Newbery (1563)⁷. The mythical Autolycus was the son of Mercury, god of thieves, and Shakespeare's Autolycus, one of the most engaging rogues in comedy, tells us that he was born when the planet Mercury was rising:

"My father named me Autolycus, who being, as I am, litter'd under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles."

(IV,3,24)

7. Newbery, Thomas, A booke in Englishe...(1563), London, 1910.

The language of Autolycus is often as difficult for modern ears to comprehend as that of a modern rogue might have been for the contemporaries of Shakespeare. It would be a rare modern reader who would understand the lines which follow, taken from the above-mentioned soliloquy, without the explanations in parentheses:

"My traffic is sheets; when the kite builds, look to lesser linen. (Watch your sheets when I'm around, as you guard your smaller pieces from the kite, who likes to steal them.) With die and drab I purchased this caparison. (Through dice and women have I come into this outfit of rags.) And my revenue is the silly cheat. (I make my money from petty thieving.) (IV, 3, 23).

In his next soliloquy, Autolycus lives up to his prototype, the son of Mercury and Chione, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as translated by Golding (1565): "Now when shee full her tyme had gon, shee bare by Mercurye A sonne that Awtolychus, who provde a wyly pye, and such a fellow as in theft and filching had no peer."⁸ In the soliloquy in Act IV, this rogue without peer, after having visited the rustics' merrymaking and having disposed of his wares, congratulates himself on the ease with which he has fleeced the rustics:

"Ha, ha! what a fool Honesty is!...I have sold all my trumpery... They throng who should buy first,....by which means I saw whose purse was best in picture, and what I saw to my good use I remembered.... You might have pinched a placket;...'twas nothing to geld a codpiece of a purse (rob a trouser pocket); I would have filed keys off that hung in chains. No hearing, no feeling...." (IV, 4, 605)

⁸Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, xi, 312, translated by Golding, London, 1565

After this soliloquy, Autolycus is confronted by Camillo and Florizel and made to change garments with the latter, who is hastening to sail for Sicily. For his rags, Autolycus has exchanged the garments of a courtier, and his next soliloquy expresses his thoughts as a true namesake of the son of Mercury:

"This is the time that the unjust man doth thrive...Sure the gods do this year connive at us, and we may do anything extempore. The Prince himself is about a piece of iniquity, stealing away from his father with his clog at his heels. If I thought it were a piece of honesty to acquaint the King withal, I would not do 't. I hold it the more knavery to conceal it; and therein am I constant to my profession." (IV, 4, 687)

But soon Autolycus overhears the shepherd and his son planning to tell the King the truth about Perdita, and, in his guise as a courtier, terrifies them by telling them that they are in danger of torture and death. He receives gold from them to present their case at Court, and resolves to befriend the Prince and be reinstated in his service. The soliloquy which follows divulges his intentions:

"If I had a mind to be honest, I see Fortune would not suffer me; she drops bocties in my mouth. I am courted now with a double occasion, gold and the means to do my master good; which who knows how that may turn back to my advancement." (IV, 4, 861)

However, Autolycus was not destined to be the fortunate announcer of the good news about Perdita's parentage, for sea-sickness prevents the execution of his plan, and he soliloquizes over his escape from the important role of solving the mystery:

"Now, had I not the dash of my former life in me, would preferment drop on my head....But 'tis all one to me; for had I been the finder out of this secret, it would not have relished (been acceptable) among my other discredits." (V, 2, 122)

Autolycus has good reason for being so philosophical about the turn of events, for a moment later, he meets the Shepherd and the Clown, whom he had so ill-used and abused, and pleads with them, who are now enriched, to commend him to the Prince. There is a full cycle of poetic justice in the soliloquies, starting from the aside following the first soliloquy, with reference to the Clown:

"If the springe (snare) holds, the cock (silly bird) is mine." (IV, 3, 36)

The cycle ends with the words of the clown addressed to Autolycus, following the last soliloquy:

"Come, follow us; we'll be thy good masters." (V,2,188)

So Autolycus, trusting the unknown forces which guide his destiny, takes the bitter with the sweet as another verdict of Fate.

Equally unfortunate in his destiny is the braggart Parolles of "All's Well That Ends Well." He is the braggart of whom Helena says in an aside at the beginning of the play:

"I love him for his sake;

And yet I know him a notorious liar,

Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;

Yet these fix'd evils sit so fit in him,

That they take place when virtue's steely bones

Looks bleak i' th' cold wind. Withal, full oft we see

Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly." (I,1,109)

The plot of this play is derived from a tale⁹ in the "Palace of Pleasure," which in turn is derived from Boccaccio's Decamerone (Day iii, Nov.9). However, the character of Parolles does not appear in

9. Painter, Palace of Pleasures, London, 1566, Tale xxxviii.

these sources, and is Shakespeare's own contribution. The derivation of the name, Parolles, evidently suggests that he is a braggart, a man of "words" only. There is some likeness between Parolles and Sir John Falstaff, whom we shall consider later. However, Dowden considers this likeness quite superficial: "Parolles has been compared to Falstaff, but they ought to be contrasted; for Sir John is a man of genius, with real wit and power of fascination, and no ridicule can destroy him, but the exposure of Parolles makes him dwindle into his native pitifulness."¹⁰

The true character of Parolles is indicated in connection with his first soliloquy. Just before the soliloquy, he has a hot altercation with the old lord Lafeu, and all he can counter to Lafeu's insults is:

"Hadst thou not the privilege of antiquity upon thee--"

"My lord, you give me the most egregious indignity."

"I have not, my lord, deserv'd it."

"My lord, you do me most insupportable vexation."

These sentiments seem moderately restrained, and hardly the mark of a braggart. But the moment Parolles is alone, even though for only a moment before Lafeu is to return, he assumes his role in a soliloquy:

"Well, thou hast a son shall take this disgrace off me, scurvy, old, filthy, scurvy lord! Well, I must be patient...I'll beat him, by my life, if I can meet him with any convenience, an he were double and double a lord. I'll have no more pity of his age than I would have of--I'll beat him, an if I could but meet him again." (II,3,249)

But Lafeu immediately re-enters, and tells Parolles in no uncertain terms:

"Thou wert best set thy lower part where thy nose stands.
By mine honour, if I were but two hours younger, I'd beat thee."

I think thou wast created for men to breathe themselves upon thee."

To this, Parolles, who, a moment ago was uttering words of fire in his soliloquy, meekly responds: "This is hard and undeserved measure, my lord." (II,3,273)

It is in the fourth act that the humiliation of Parolles is completed. As he enters at the beginning of the act, a lord and a handful of soldiers are in ambush, eavesdropping on his soliloquy, in which he seems to have misgivings as to his braggadoccio:

"What shall I say I have done? It must be a very plausible invention that carries it. They begin to smoke me, and disgraces have of late knock'd too often at my door. I find my tongue is too foolhardy; but my heart hath the fear of Mars before it and of his creatures, not daring the reports of my tongue." (IV, 1, 28)

To this the lord, in ambush, replies in an aside: "This is the first truth that e'er thine own tongue was guilty of."

Parolles continues in his soliloquy, while the eavesdroppers listen:

"I must give myself some hurts, and say I got them in exploit. Yet slight ones will not carry it. They will say, 'Came you off with so little?' And great ones I dare not give. Wherefore, what's the instance? Tongue, I must put you into a butter-woman's mouth and buy myself another of Bajazet's mule (Balaam's ass?) if you prattle me into these perils."

Then follows a truly farcical episode, in which Parolles continues to soliloquize on possible "slight hurts" he may give himself, while he is overheard by those in ambush, who offer facetious remarks, as an aside, on each of the suggestions Parolles makes to himself. The rollicking nature of this episode is based, of course, on the conven-

tion that a soliloquy may be overheard if characters on the stage are in hiding, and on the possibility of carrying on what amounts to a dialogue through replying to a soliloquy with an aside. We are reminded of the modern radio device wherein a radio is heard within a radio program and the actors on the program intersperse questions as the announcer's voice is heard--questions which are answered by the announcer even though he does not hear them. Such a trick is Shakespeare's in this soliloquy:

Parolles. (In soliloquy) Though I swore I leap'd from the
window of a citadel--

Second Lord. (Aside) How deep?

Parolles. (In soliloquy) Thirty fathom. (IV, 1, 63)

We take leave of Parolles with the soliloquy he utters after he narrowly escapes disaster in the plot the nobles have arranged for his undoing. We see the soul of the braggart laid open:

"Who knows himself a braggart,
Let him fear this; for it will come to pass
That every braggart shall be found an ass.
Rust, sword! cool, blushes! and Parolles, live
Safest in shame!" (IV, 3, 369)

Parolles, the French braggart, thus takes his place with Shakespeare's native stock.

We have considered a number of Shakespeare's comic characters in this chapter, the clown, the fool, the rogue, the braggart. In each case, we have found that the soliloquy makes a unique contribution to our understanding and enjoyment, far out of proportion to the actual number of lines utilized. Not without reason did Shakespeare make use of this convention.

Chapter VIII

Some Comic Characters and
Their Soliloquies - II

In this chapter, we shall continue the study of the soliloquies of characters in Shakespeare's comedies. We shall have fewer of the illiterate loiterers, of the jesters and the fools, the clowns and rustic bumpkins, the ragged rogues and craven braggarts, who are usually huge-feeders, snail-slow in profit, or sleepers by day.

In this chapter, we shall consider the less rollicking type of comic character; the characters who are not always stumbling awkwardly about the stage and bumping into people; who do not run away on errands before they learn what they are sent for; who do not constantly reveal the secrets they are pledged to keep; who are not always falling into fisticuffs and bursting into comic tears.

Decidedly superior to such types is Don Adriano de Armado, the "fantastical Spaniard", the grandiloquent braggart whose prototype was the "miles gloriosus" of Plautus, the master of bombast.

Although, as Ward points out¹, Don Armado was probably not created by Shakespeare in order to ridicule the cult of "Euphuism", there seems little doubt that Don Armado and a number of other characters of "Love's Labour's Lost" were created to serve as a burlesque of contemporary fads and affectations. Fleay² has argued that Don Armado was intended as a parody of John Lyly himself, the author of

1. Ward, *English Dramatic Criticism*, London, i, 276.

2. Fleay, *Shakespeare and Puritanism*, Anglia, 1884, vii, 223.

the "Euphues" books. Lee has maintained that the origin of Armado is to be found in the character of Sir Tophas, "a foolish braggart" in the play "Endimion" (1591)³.

Regardless of the paternity of Armado as a character, it seems clear that his preposterous bombast is a part of a more general setting, which includes the wit-combats of the lords and ladies, the affected diction of the sonneteering courtiers, the pedantic alliteration of Holofernes, and the quips of Moth; this whole picture is decidedly one of burlesque of the prevailing interest in linguistic accomplishments and its abuses or excesses among almost all classes of Elizabethan society.

Our first introduction to Don Armado in "Love's Labour's Lost" is afforded by the King of Navarre, who replies to the question, "Is there no quick recreation granted?" with this reply:

"Ay, that there is. Our court, you know, is haunted

With a refined traveller of Spain;

A man in all the world's new fashion planted,

That hath a mint of phrases in his brain;

One who the music of his own vain tongue

Doth ravish like enchanting harmony;....

But, I protest, I love to hear him lie,

And I will use him for my minstrelsy." (I,1,163)

Costard, the clownish swain, is then put in Armado's custody for the sake of the sport that may come of the combination, and Armado converses with Moth, whose quickness of retort he resents.

3. Lee, S., Life of William Shakespeare, London, 1915, page 105

He asks, "what great men have been in love?" and admits he is enamoured of Jaquenetta, who, on entering, saucily banters him. Don Armado then soliloquizes over his love for the "wench" Jaquenetta:

"I do affect the very ground, which is base, where her shoe, which is baser, guided by her foot, which is basest, doth tread. I shall be forsworn, which is a great argument of falsehood, if I love. And how can that be true love which is falsely attempted? Love is familiar (demon); Love is a devil; there is no evil angel but Love." (I, 2, 172)

To suit his character as a high-class braggart, we have a passage in the soliloquy which displays Don Armado's knowledge of the duel, in which Cupid's butt-shaft is shown to be too hard and too great odds for a Spaniard's rapier. The words in parentheses explain the duelling terms:

"The first and second cause (reasons for duelling) will not serve my turn; the passado he respects not (forward thrust with the sword); the duello (code of duelling) he regards not; his (Cupid's) disgrace is to be called boy, but his glory is to subdue men. Adieu, valour! rust, rapier! be still, drum! for your master is in love." (I,2,183)

The soliloquy concludes with an appeal to "some extemporal god of rhyme to help him in this determination: Devise, wit! write, pen! for I am for whole volumes in folio." (I,2,190)

Don Armado's grandiose protestations of love for the country "wench" who is "allow'd for the day-woman" (approved for the dairy woman) are no small contribution to comedy. Courthope presents this interesting analogy: "The lofty gravity with which the Spaniard proclaims his passion for the stolid Jaquenetta is a curious anticipation,--though the absurdity takes a different form,--of Don Quixote and his Dulcinea."⁴

4. Courthope, W.J., History of English Poetry, London, 1903, IV,ii,40.

No catalogue of Shakespeare's comic characters would be complete without a representative of that stock character of Roman comedy--the jealous husband. Such a character is Ford of "The Merry Wives of Windsor." We meet Ford in Act II, Scene 1, where he is told by Pistol that Falstaff is in love with Mistress Ford. Despite Pistol's reputation--he is the character who said, "The world's mine oyster, which I with sword will open." (II,2,2)--Ford becomes suspicious, and determines to visit Falstaff in the name of "Brook". As "Brook", he bribes Falstaff to "lay an amiable siege" to Mistress Ford (II,2,243). Then follows a soliloquy marked by its intemperate language, the ranting and fuming ravings of a personality who seems to be momentarily unbalanced. How diverted the groundlings must have been to listen to his effusions:

"See the hell of having a false woman! My bed shall be abus'd, my coffers ransack'd, my reputation gnawn at; and I shall not only receive this villainous wrong, but stand under the adoption of abominable terms, and by him that does me this wrong. Terms! Names! Amaimon sounds well; Lucifer, well; Barbason, well; yet they are devils' additions, the names of fiends; but Cuckold! Wittol!--Cuckold!--Cuckold! The devil himself hath not such a name. Page is an ass, a secure ass..... Fie, fie, fie! cuckold! cuckold! cuckold!" (II,2,304)

During the first five scenes of Act III, plot and counterplot march across the stage, but Ford fails to prove his suspicions, and rebuked for his jealousy, becomes all the more determined to prove his point. Falstaff leaves him with "Master Brook, you shall cuckold Ford " (III,5,139), and Ford declaims the soliloquy of the frantic, frustrated cuckold who is resolved to avenge his honor, come what may:

"This 'tis to be married! This 'tis to have linen and buck-baskets! Well, I will proclaim myself what I am. I will now take the lecher; he is at my house; he cannot scape me; 'tis impossible he should. He cannot creep into a half-penny purse, nor into a pepper box....I will search impossible places. Though what I am I cannot avoid, yet to be what I would not shall not make me tame. If I have horns to make one mad, let the proverb go with me: I'll be horn mad."
(III,5,144)

Here we do not have the passion of jealousy in the grand, tragic manner, to sweep unopposed to ultimate destruction. This is Shakespeare's comic version of jealousy, and we can only laugh at Ford in his discomfiture. The good fun is carried through to the conclusion, for Mistress Page vows that "We'll leave a proof, by that which we will do, Wives may be merry, and yet honest do." (IV,2,106) True to the intention expressed in this soliloquy, Mistress Ford sees to it that all becomes clear, and the play ends with Ford happily exclaiming:

"Let it be so. Sir John,
To Master Brook you yet shall hold your word,
For he tonight shall lie with Mistress Ford."

Among the comic characters that cannot be classified as simple buffoons is Thersites, of "Troilus and Cressida." He does not appear in medieval romances, but Shakespeare no doubt took him from Chapman's "Iliads:"

"But he the filthiest fellow was of all that had deserts
In Troy's brave siege: he was squint-ey'd and lame of
either foot;

.....He most of all envied

Ulysses and Aeacides, whom still his spleen would chide."⁵

That Shakespeare was acquainted with the classical identity of Thersites is obvious from the passage, "Thersites' body is as good as Ajax', when neither are alive," from "Cymbeline".⁶

Those critics who look for a "fool" as a member of the dramatis personae of each of Shakespeare's comedies were hard put to find one in this play, with its dark and unpleasant temper, its atmosphere of corruption and disintegration, and the dissipation of energy in petty dissensions. But if a fool is to be designated, it should undoubtedly be Thersites, in the technical sense, as Walker has pointed out⁷, for his filthy, flaying commentary broods over the entire play.

Early in the play (I,3,73), Agamemnon refers to Thersites as "rank", with "mastic jaws", the term "mastic" being somewhat uncertain, but we can well imagine what was intended. In the second act, Thersites rails at Ajax, and Ajax not only beats him, but indulges in these epithets between blows: "dog; bitch-wolf's son; toadstool; porpentine; cobloaf; whoreson cur; stool for a witch; cur." (II,1)

Thersites responds in kind, so that, at the end of the scene, we are more than ready for the soliloquy of Thersites, in which he bitterly recalls the beating:

"He beats me, and I rail at him....Would it were otherwise; that I could beat him, whilst he rail'd at me." (II,3,3)

We gain a deep impression of the futility which is to emerge from this play in the opinion Thersites has of the muscle-bound "mongrel beef-witted" Ajax and Achilles:

5. Chapman, G., *Iliades of Homere*, London, 1598, ii, 212.

6. *Cymbeline*, IV, 2, 252. Also, Stapfer, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, London, page 163.

7. Walker, S., *Critical Examination of the Text of Shakespeare*, London, 1860, 117.

"Shall the elephant Ajax carry it thus? ... Then there's Achilles, a rare engineer! If Troy be not taken till these two undermine it, the walls will stand till they fall of themselves....that little, little less than little wit...that they have, which...is so abundant scarce it will not in circumvention deliver a fly from a spider, without drawing their massy irons and cutting their web." (II,3,7)

Finally, Thersites delivers himself of a resounding curse on the Greek army, of which he is so ill-regarded a member:

"I'll learn to conjure and raise devils...After this, the vengeance on the whole camp! or rather the bone-ache! for that, methinks, is the curse dependent on those that war for a placket (woman). I have said my prayers, and devil Envy say amen!"

Achilles then enters and treats him as a sort of licensed buffoon, as Thersites gives the other chiefs a biting account of Ajax. Achilles then entrusts to Thersites the duty of bearing a letter to Ajax, to which Thersites replies, "Let me carry another to his horse, for that's the more capable creature." (III,3,309). Thersites' next few words, giving a like opinion of Achilles, are in the form of a brief soliloquy:

"Would the fountain of your mind were clear again, that I might water an ass at it! I had rather be a tick in a sheep than such a valiant ignorance."

In three other soliloquies, Thersites gives vent to his overflowing contempt of the Greek chieftains. These descriptions are culled from these soliloquies:

Agamemnon: "He has not much brain as ear-wax." (V,1,57)

Menelaus: "To be a dog, a mule, a cat, a fitchew, a toad, a lizard, an owl, a puttock, or a herring without a roe, I would not care; but to be Menelaus! (V,1,69)

Diomedes: "A false hearted rogue; the sun borrows of the moon when Diomed keeps his word." (V,1,95)

Nestor: "Stale old mouse-eaten dry cheese." (V,4,11)

Ulysses: "Dog-fox." (V,4,12)

Menelaus and Paris: "The cuckold and the cuckold-maker; bull, dog." (V,7,9)

A human touch is added at the end of the play when Thersites proclaims himself a bastard, "bastard in mind, in valour, in everything illegitimate," and refuses to fight a fellow bastard, Margarelon." (V,8,16)

As the technical fool of the play, Thersites is in proper character, for this is a comedy that might well have been classed as a tragedy. With what intention did Shakespeare write this strange comedy? All the Greek heroes who fought against Troy are pitilessly exposed to ridicule; Helen and Cressida are light, sensual, and heartless, for whose sake it would seem infatuated folly to strike a blow; Troilus is an enthusiastic young fool; and even Hector, though valiant and generous, spends his life in a cause which he knows to be unprofitable, if not evil. This is a comedy of disillusion, in which the young love and faith of Troilus given to one who was false and fickle, and his discovery of his error lend color to the whole play. In this mood of contemptuous depreciation of life that must have come over Shakespeare, there was not room for the writing of conventional comedy, and it became the function of Thersites, whose mind is made up of the scum and foulness of human life, to create the overlying atmosphere through his scurrilous remarks and even more in his soliloquies. Thus the play becomes almost a parody of Chapman's translation of the "Iliad", and the fool emerges as the most essential character in a comedy of disillusion.

Much as the comedy "Troilus and Cressida" has caused critics to debate the intentions of Shakespeare in creating such a "tragical" sort of comedy, almost as much discussion might be expended on Shakespeare's intention in creating the character "Malvolio" in "Twelfth Night." It is quite likely that the name is simply a transposition for Malivolo, which does not speak too well of what the playwright had in mind for him. Professor Stoll has shown that the "Malcontent" by John Marston is older than "Twelfth Night", and this play contains the character "Malevole", which means the man of "ill-will", or "malcontent".⁸ That Malvolio's name intended to convey the same meaning is indicated by his character. He is sour and discontented, with the Puritan's antipathy to popular recreations. There is thus good reason to believe that Shakespeare sought to ridicule those features of Puritanism which made a proud assumption of complete holiness, which boasted hostility to the devil and all his works, which claimed personal intimacy with God and the possession of His especial favor.

We are at first not clear as to Malvolio's role; in Act I, Lady Olivia contents herself by chiding him, "O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite." (I,5,97). But in Act II, he upbraids Sir Toby and his companions for their noisy carousals, and is bantered by the revellers; when he leaves, they discuss him in this fashion:

Sir Toby. "Tell us something of him."

Maria. "Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of puritan."

.

Maria. "The devil a puritan he is, or anything constantly, but

8. Stoll, E. E., Modern Philology, III, 281

a time pleaser; an affection'd ass that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself, so cramm'd, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him." (II,3,149)

The "fantastical" Malvolio is thus a ready victim for Maria's plot to deceive him, as is evident from the soliloquy in which Malvolio tries to fathom Maria's seemingly friendly overtures:

"Maria once told me that she did affect me,...that, did she fancy, it should be one of my complexion. Besides, she uses me with a more exalted respect than any one else that follows her. What should I think on't?" (II,5,27)

The soliloquy of which these are the opening lines is one of the longest and most farcical Shakespeare has written. We listen to Malvolio soliloquize on his ambitious dreams: "To be Count Malvolio!... The lady...married the yeoman of the wardrobe." (II,5,40): Maria and her companions, in hiding, listen to his extravagant dreams, expressed in the soliloquy, and can hardly contain themselves: "Fire and brimstone...Bolts and shakles...Shall this fellow live?...Out, scab!" (II,5,56)

Then, to the main soliloquy is added the soliloquy of reading from the forged letter, which Malvolio picks up and believes to be from Olivia. He then determines to fulfill all its absurd injunctions:

"I will be proud, I will read politic authors, I will baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance, I will be point-device the very man...I will be strange, stout, in yellow stockings, and cross-garter'd...I will smile; I will do everything that thou wilt have me." (II,V,175)

Fantastically attired, as directed in the forged letter, Malvolio presents himself before his mistress, with quaint gestures; he quotes to her from the forged letter, to the point where she responds, "This is very midsummer madness." (III, 4, 61)

As Olivia leaves, saying, "Let some of my people have a special care of him," Malvolio soliloquizes on the supposed success of his wooing:

"I have lim'd (caught) her; but it is Jove's doing, and Jove make me thankful! ... Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes. Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked." (III,4,82)

Three times above, and five times altogether, Malvolio uses the name "Jove" where it would be hardly appropriate for one who was called a puritan. Speculation as to this inconsistency may possibly be solved by noting that the act of 1606, "for the preventing and avoiding of the great abuse of the Holy Name of God in Stage playes, Interludes, Maygames, Shows and such like," provides that, if any person shall in such performances "jestingly or prophanely speak or use the Holy Name of God or of Christ Jesus, or of the Holy Ghost or of the Trinity," he shall be fined ten pounds for each offence.⁹ It is not beyond probability that the word "Jove" was repeatedly inserted to conform to this statute, and that the original of the above soliloquy may have read: "Well, God, not I, is the doer of this, and He is to be thanked." This interpretation would be consistent with the puritan's claim to personal intimacy with God and to the possession of His especial favor.

That Malvolio was meant to be a puritan has been questioned by some--by no less than William Archer: "(The view that makes of Malvolio) a satirical type of the Puritan as Shakespeare conceived him, will not hold ground for a minute."¹⁰

9. Gildersleeve, V., Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama, New York, 1908, page 19.

10. Furness Variorum edition of "Twelfth Night", page 399.

In refutation of Archer's stand is an interesting contemporary poem which bears directly on Malvolio's antics in the above soliloquy, when he disports himself in his fantastic attire for the approval of Olivia. The poet, Henry King, bemoans the fact that the Court disliked a contemporary play, and comments drily that things would have been otherwise if a "cross-garter'd man" had been in the cast:

"Had there appear'd some sharp cross-garter'd man,
Whom their loud laugh might nick-name Puritan,
Gas'd up in factious breeches and small ruffe,
That hates the surplis, and defies the cuffe:
Then sure they would have given applause to crown
That which their ignorance did now crown down."¹¹

It would seem a logical conclusion to assert that Shakespeare's audience recognized Malvolio to be a Puritan.

The remaining comic characters to be considered in this chapter differ from those we have already analyzed in that the remaining characters are in plays which are not classified as comedies. Nevertheless these characters have a definitely comic aspect or function, even if they appear in the histories or tragedies. Such a character is Faulconbridge, the "Bastard" of "King John." We meet him in the very first scene, when, with his brother Robert, he appears before the King to claim his inheritance, but Robert resists the claim on the ground that Philip is illegitimate. As Philip prefers to be the "reputed son of Coeur-de-Lion," he gladly resigns his patrimony and is dubbed by King John as "Sir Richard and Plantagenet." Then follows the soliloquy in which Faulconbridge comments satirically on his new-made honor:

11. Mason, L., English Poems of Henry King, New Haven, 1914, page 28.

"A foot of honour better than I was,

But many a foot of land the worse;

Well, now I can make any Joan a lady." (I, 1, 182)

We can well believe that it may have been Shakespeare himself, speaking through the mouth of Faulconbridge, zestfully holding up the foibles of the great for the edification of the groundlings:

"And if his name be George, I'll call him Peter;

For new-made honour doth forget men's names,

'Tis too respective and too sociable

For your conversion." (I, 1, 186)

Particularly hilarious must have been the description, in the soliloquy, of after-dinner habits among the elite, doubtless acted out with mimicking in full detail:

"And when my knightly stomach is suffic'd,

Why then I suck my teeth and catechise

My picked (fastidious) man of countries. 'My dear sir,'

Thus, leaning on mine elbow, I begin.....

But this is worshipful society

And fits the mounting spirit like myself.....

Which, though I will not practice to deceive,

Yet, to avoid deceit, I mean to learn." (I, 1, 191)

But the next few scenes turn this light irony into bitterness after the breach of faith he learns is all too common:

"Mad world! mad kings! mad composition!

John, to stop Arthur's title in the whole,

Hath willingly departed with a part;

And France.....cheats the poor maid...." (II,1,561)

Then follows the satire on "Commodity" (that is, compromise or expediency, or even pragmatic opportunism), the "bias" of the world (that is, the piece of lead in the side of a bowl, making it take a curved course). There seems little doubt that in this soliloquy, Faulconbridge is voicing the sturdy good sense and integrity of the best type of Englishman, despite its ironical tone:

"Commodity, the bias of the world,--
The world, who of itself is poised well,
Made to run even upon even ground,
Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,
This sway of motion, this Commodity,
Makes it head from all indifferency,
From all direction, purpose, course, intent.

This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word..."(II,1,574)

Faulconbridge is particularly concerned lest this "Commodity", which has drawn England from "a resolv'd and honorable war" to a "most base and vile-concluded peace," may be a disturbing factor in the maintenance and strengthening of national unity, the proponent of which he is in this play. Nevertheless, Shakespeare senses the impropriety of converting Faulconbridge into a moralist who picks flaws in mundane activities from a superior level. He therefore brings down the character who is frankly called the "Bastard" to the level of those subject to human ills and temptations:

"And why rail I on this Commodity
But for because he hath not woo'd me yet?
Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail
And say there is no sin but to be rich;
And being rich, my virtue then shall be

To say there is no vice but beggary.

Since kings break faith upon Commodity,

Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee." (II,1,587)

Although Faulconbridge is mentioned by Holinshed as "Philip, bastard son to King Richard" who "killed the vicomte of Limoges, in revenge of his father's death",¹² there is no doubt that his dramatic character is the creation of Shakespeare. Though his levity approaches clowning at times (and thus vindicates his designation as a comic character), he is actually more of a hero than King John, who must lose the claim to the status of hero in the play because of his vices and tyranny, his cowardice and shiftiness. Shakespeare must have found John hard to stomach, and turned to Faulconbridge with zest to clothe with the sturdy sense and patriotism of the loyal Englishman. This trait shines through the satire of the soliloquies, and it is this trait which earned the "Bastard" the right to recite the last two lines of the play:

"Naught shall make us rue,

If England to itself do rest but true." (V,7,116)

Among Shakespeare's comic characters, we might expect to find the drunkard, such as might be found on the vaudeville stage of a generation ago. But being drunk was not a particularly comic attribute in Shakespeare's time. The drinking of liquor, even to excess, was quite common at that time. Very few, if any, men abstained from drinking, and almost everyone became drunk at more than one occasion. The description of the three degrees of drunkenness was for the common run of man rather than the

12. Holinshed, R., Chronicles, London, 1587, 111, 160.

exception:

Olivia. What's a drunken man like, fool?

Clown. Like a drown'd man, a fool, and a madman. One draught above heat makes him a fool, the second mads him, and a third drowns him. (Twelfth Night, I,5,139)

Falstaff himself is an instance of Shakespeare's somewhat tolerant attitude toward drunkards, and the tavern life of the Falstaff plays abounds in drinking scenes. Falstaff says to the florid, red-nosed Bardolph: "Thou art...an everlasting bonfire-light. Thou hast saved me a thousand marks in links and torches, walking with thee in the night betwixt tavern and tavern." (I Henry IV, III,3, 46)

When Malvolio chides his masters for "making an alehouse of my lady's house" (Twelfth Night, II,3,96), Sir Toby responds, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (II,3,123) This is the same Toby, who, when he is led in drunk and learns that the surgeon is drunk, exclaims, "I hate a drunken rogue." (V, 1, 207)

The cataloguing of Shakespeare's drunken characters would be endless, from the drunken clowns such as Sly in "The Taming of the Shrew," to characters whose drunkenness is a feature of the plot, as Stephano in the "Tempest". Only occasionally does Shakespeare sermonize on the evils of drink: in "As You Like It," Shakespeare introduces this observation, even though it is not called for by the plot:

"Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty;

For in my youth I never did apply

Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood." (II,4, 47)

The second instance occurs in "Hamlet" in the second Quarto but omitted from the Folio:

"This heavy-headed revel east and west
Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations.
They clepe us drunkards.....
.....The dram of evil
Doth all the noble substance often dout
To his own scandal." (I,4,17)

Conjectures have been made as to why the above lines were dropped from the Folio. In the opinion of Raleigh, they were omitted "because they came too near to censuring the vices of Queen Anne of Denmark's court."¹² Nevertheless, they probably reflect Shakespeare's thoughts; as Raleigh says, "they have little dramatic value, and illustrate Shakespeare's habit of making room in his plays for any topic that is uppermost in his mind."¹³

A third instance of sermonizing on the evils of excessive drinking occurs in "Othello", when Cassio is dismissed from office for drunkenness. Sobered by the shock, Cassio bitterly reflects on the disgrace of intoxication:

"Drunk? and speak parrot? and squabble? swagger? swear? and discourse fustian with one's own shadow? O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil.
....O that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should, with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts." (II,3,280)

To this, the evil Iago responds, "Come, you are too severe a moralizer....Good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well us'd. Exclaim no more against it." (II,3,301)

Perhaps the smooth explanations of Iago summarized the opinion

13. Raleigh, Walter, Shakespeare's England, Oxford, 1916, i, 17.

14. Raleigh, ut supra, i, 18.

of the average Elizabethan, and possibly the bitter regrets of Cassio expressed the beliefs of Shakespeare; these are no doubt conjectures, but the fact remains that drinking to excess was a commonplace in Elizabethan life and in Elizabethan drama. It would hardly be profitable, then, to set up a drunkard as a character whose soliloquies it would be worth investigating, unless that character were notably exceptional. Such a notable character is the drunken Porter in "Macbeth."

It will be recalled that the Porter comes stumbling across the stage after the murder of Duncan, and proceeds to soliloquize:

"Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. Knock, knock, knock...I pray you, remember the porter." (II,3,1)

Although the stage directions merely say, "Enter a Porter," we may be reasonably certain that he is meant to be intoxicated by his own confession: "Faith, sir, we were carousing till the second cock; and drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things." (II,3,26)

The drunken Porter has been made the subject of innumerable comments. Capell offers a very practical explanation, that the scene offers Macbeth an opportunity to wash his hands and change his attire.¹⁵ But many critics of past centuries felt that the ribald speech was out of place in the tragedy and could not be Shakespearean; Coleridge could not believe that the babbling, drunken monologue could have been written by Shakespeare.¹⁶

However, late in the last century, Hales sought to establish the genuineness of the soliloquy on these grounds; (1) that a Porter's speech is an integral part of the play; (2) that it is necessary as a relief to

15. Furness, New Variorum edition of Macbeth, page 109.

16. Coleridge, Notes and Lectures, London, 1849, i, 249.

the surrounding horror; (3) that it is necessary according to the law of contrast elsewhere obeyed; (4) that the speech we have is dramatically relevant; that its style and language are Shakespearean.¹⁷

Professor Hales summarized in his article an attitude which was gradually crystallizing at his time and was being increasingly held by critics. Thus, De Quincy, in his famous essay on the knocking of the gate, pointed out that the soliloquy of the drunken porter must be referred to the preceding state of affairs. The retiring of the human heart, and the entrance of the fiendish heart, had to be expressed and be made evident. We had to be introduced to a different world, in which murderers could consummate their wicked plots beyond the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. In this world, Lady Macbeth is "unsexed" and Macbeth forgets that he is born of woman. Both are conformed to the world of devils. That this new world may step in, the real world must for a time be cut off. As De Quincy says:

"The murderer and the murder must be insulated--cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested--laid asleep, tranced, racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated, relations to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is that when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds; the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflex upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first

17. Hales, J.W., On the Porter in Macbeth, Transactions of the New Shakspeare Society, 1874, Part II, page 255

makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parentheses that had suspended them."¹⁸

Truly, the knocking at the gate and the entrance of the porter make us realize how far preceding events have departed from normality, and the soliloquy of the drunken porter carries us with force back to the normal world. Thus, this "comic relief" was not introduced necessarily to give the audience a rest from grief through the babblings of the sottish porter; indeed, this comic scene has the effect of intensifying the tragic scenes which precede by throwing them into emotional relief. Goethe thus interpreted Shakespeare's tendency toward a strange mixture of tears and smiles:

"Plays, especially tragedies, in which a uniform tone, uninterrupted by change, prevails, have always something wearisome about them..... Perhaps the lively scenes introduced into Shakespeare's plays rest upon the 'law of required change.'"¹⁹

There is still another aspect to the soliloquy of the drunken porter which is worth attention. Although rejecting the soliloquy as a whole, Coleridge allowed two lines because of the contribution of these lines: "I'll devil-porter it no further; I had thought to let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire."²⁰ This drunken porter, who, even in Coleridge's reduced soliloquy, pretends to be the keeper of Hell Gate, speaks truer than he knows: he is the keeper of Hell Gate, though he knows it not! This is bitter irony for the future of Macbeth, not lost upon Shakespeare's audience. Thus, Bodenstedt writes: "After all,

18. DeQuincy, Works, First Edition, vol. xiv., page 197.

19. Oxenford, Conversations of Goethe, London, 1913, sections for January 31, 1827..

20. Coleridge, Notes and Lectures, London, 1849, i, 249.

his uncouth comicality has a tragic background: he never dreams, while imagining himself a porter of hell, how near he comes to the truth. What are all these petty sinners who go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire compared with those great criminals whose gates he guards?"²⁰

We may well end our study of the soliloquy of the drunken Porter with this thought; how enormous is the crime which has just been committed compared with the sins of those whom the Porter fancies himself to be passing through the Gates of Hell: the "farmer that hanged himself on th' expectation of plenty" (the farmer, who, having hoarded grain to sell at high prices, foresaw his ruin when crops proved plentiful); or the "English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose" (French hose being a tight-fitting kind, in the making of which it would be hard for tailors to steal any cloth). (Macbeth, II,3,4) Truly, not without cause does the Porter end his soliloquy with "I pray you, remember the porter."

For the last of Shakespeare's comic characters to be studied in this chapter, we shall select a "man at once young and old, enterprising and fat, a dupe and a wit, harmless and wicked, weak in principle and resolute by constitution, cowardly in appearance and brave in reality, a knave without malice, a liar without deceit, and a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier without either dignity, decency, or honour. This is a character which, although it may be decomposed, could not, I believe, have been formed, nor the

20. Quoted in Furness, New Variorum Edition of Macbeth, page 110.

ingredients of it duly mingled, upon any recipe whatever. It required the hand of Shakespeare himself to give to every particular part a relish of the whole, and of the whole to every particular part--alike the same incongruous, identical Falstaff."²¹

With a character of as many facets as Falstaff, it would obviously be out of the question to deal fully with every insight into his nature in a work of this kind. We shall therefore confine ourselves to the much-debated question of his honor, with whatever light can be shed on the question through the soliloquy.

The legend of the cowardice of Falstaff is probably related to the association of this greatest of Shakespeare's comic characters with Sir John Fastolfe, who according to Holinshed, was elected to the Order of the Garter, but, "for doubt of misleading" at Patay, had taken from him "the image of Saint George, and his garter."²² In "I, Henry IV", Talbot tears the garter from the "craven" Sir John Fastolfe's leg, and denounces him for cowardice at Patay. (IV,1,15)

A second element in supporting the charge of cowardice is the Gadshill Robbery. At the beginning of the play (I, Henry IV), at Poins' suggestion, Falstaff agrees to join in waylaying travelers at Gadshill, early on the following day. On hearing that the travelers number eight or ten, Sir John fears lest he himself be robbed, but overcomes them in the encounter and is successful in robbing them. But Sir John and his co-plotters are set upon by the Prince and Poins in disguise, and beat a hasty retreat, leaving the booty behind. Later, Falstaff accuses the Prince and Poins of being cowards, where-

21. Morgann, Maurice, Essay on the dramatic character of Sir John Falstaff, London, 1825, page 150.

22. Holinshed, R., Chronicles, London, 1587, iii, 601.

upon the trick is revealed and the Prince prepares to bring home to Falstaff the charge of cowardice. But Falstaff, whose quick mind may have anticipated this eventuality, so excels himself in exaggerations and lies that the answering of these lies leaves little time to press the charge of cowardice. As Morgann said, "There is no such thing as totally demolishing Falstaff; he has so much of the invulnerable in his frame that no ridicule can destroy him; he is safe even in defeat, and seems to rise, like another Antaeus, with recruited vigor from every fall."²³

Although Falstaff wittily parries the charge of cowardice, there is no question that enough remains to make us question his honor. Then comes the soliloquy on his "hundred and fifty battered prodigals":

"If I be not ashamed of my soldiers, I am a sous'd gurnet (pickled fish)....You would think I had a hundred and fifty tatter'd prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff (swill) and husks. No eye hath seen such scarecrows. I'll not march through Coventry with them, that's flat." (I, Henry IV, 4,2,12) Surely this does not represent outward cowardice, but rather a realistic appraisal of the merits of "discarded unjust serving men, younger sons to younger brothers, revolted tapsters and ostlers trade-fallen, the cankers of a calm world and a long peace," whose services had been bought to fill out his depleted ranks. Perhaps it is in the light of such misgivings that the soliloquy on honour is to be interpreted:

"Honour pricks me on....Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No...What is honour? A word.

23. Morgan, Maurice, et supra, page 180.

.....Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon: and so ends my catechism." (V,1, 128) Again, this is not necessarily cowardice, but rather the frame of mind of one who "supposed that, by infinite play of wit, and inexhaustible resource of a creative genius, he could coruscate away the facts of life, and always remain the master of the situation by giving it a clever turn in the idea, or by playing over it with an arabesque of arch waggery."²⁴

With the charge of cowardice not yet proved, we come to the soliloquy during the battle, where in the midst of war, he indulges in his punning--"though I could scape shot-free (without paying)":

"Though I could scape shot-free at London, I fear the shot here; here's no scoring but upon the pate. Soft! Who are you? Sir Walter Blunt (dead). There's honor for you! Here's no vanity! I am as hot as molten lead, and heavy too. God keep lead out of me! I need no more weight than mine own bowels. I have led my ragamuffins where they are peppered. There's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive, and they are for the town's end, to beg during life." (V,3,30)

In evaluating this soliloquy, we must recall the fact that characters almost always tell the truth, as they see it, in their soliloquies. Since this convention is an important technique for opening up the thoughts of the characters for the audience to inspect, Shakespeare was careful not to deceive the audience. Hence, it would be wrong to interpret "I have led my ragamuffins...." as sheer boast. Rather, we should admit that Falstaff is being honest with himself and

24. Dowden, E., Shakespeare, his Mind and Art, New York, 1880, page 70.

with his audience: he did lead his ragamuffins, not without honor, even though he may affect a certain disdain for honor as a concept. This soliloquy, which reveals the courageous stratum in the "cowardly" Falstaff, must be accepted as evidence that we have a man here who does not always or necessarily run from physical danger.

This argument does not imply that Sir John was meant in any way to approach the foolhardy madcap who faces the prospect of death without a thought. Far from it! Indeed, we have Falstaff's own confession to the contrary, in the soliloquy which follows by only a few moments the one just quoted:

"Well, if Percy be alive, I'll pierce him. If he do come in my way, so; if he do not, if I come in his willingly, let him make a carbonado (cut meat) of me. I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath. Give me life; which if I can save, so; if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end." (V,3,65)

This is indeed a window into the soul of a reputed "coward;" the insight we gain from this soliloquy is that here we have a man who did not lack courage--he simply practiced a discreet economy in employing it, preferring life to a hero's death. And if any of Falstaff's literary critics call this cowardice, are they prepared to disagree with Falstaff, when he gazed at the dead body of Blunt and confessed, "I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath!"

Falstaff appears again in "The Second Part of Henry IV," where the element of courage is not uppermost. His soliloquy over Justice Shallow smacks a little of the arrogance which those who are physically big feel with respect to those who are small. His contemptuous remarks are replete with scintillating wit, from "I do see the bottom of Justice Shallow" (III,2, 324) to "I will make him a

philosopher's two stones to me" (as valuable as two philosopher's stones, changing base metals to gold). The thought that is actuating these contrivings is undoubtedly that expressed in a later soliloquy: "If I were sawed into quantities, I should make four dozen of such bearded hermits' staves as Master Shallow." (V,1,69)

No study of Falstaff, however brief and fragmentary, would be complete without reference to the fact that Sir John literally lubricated himself through the Henry IV plays by means of intoxicating liquor. None of the "humours" of Sir John is any more brilliant than his soliloquy on sack, with its forty-five lines of eloquent tribute to that beverage. A few lines will suffice to indicate that in this soliloquy we have a summary of one of Falstaff's best known attributes:

"A good sherris sack hath a two-fold operation in it. It ascends me into the brain; dries me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapours which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetful, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes; which, delivered o'er to the voice, the tongue...becomes excellent wit." (IV,4, 104)

Falstaff appears again in "The Merry Wives of Windsor." This is the play which, according to the tradition handed down by Dennis and Rowe, Shakespeare's early editors, was written by Shakespeare in a fortnight, at the bidding of Queen Elizabeth, who desired to see Falstaff in love. Hudson agrees with this tradition: "That the free impulse of Shakespeare's genius, without suggestion or inducement from any other source, could have led him to put Falstaff through such a series of uncharacteristic delusions and collapses, is to me well-nigh incredible."²⁵

25. Hudson, H.N., Shakespeare: His Life, Art and Characters, London, 1848, i, 298.

Similarly, Hartley Coleridge tells us that "the Falstaff of 'The Merry Wives' is not the Falstaff of 'Henry IV.' It is a big-bellied imposter, assuming his name and style."²⁶ In the same vein, Dowden cannot believe that it is the genuine Falstaff whom we have in the "Merry Wives," for he says, "Here the knight is fatuous, his genius deserts him; the never defeated hangs his head before two country dames; the buck-basket, the drench of Thames water, the blows of Ford's cudgel are reprisals too coarse upon the most inimitable of jesters."²⁷

In short, the Falstaff of the "Merry Wives" is no longer the greatest comic character ever created, but is simply a gullible ton of flesh. He admits his degradation in a soliloquy:

"If it should come to the ear of the court, how I have been transformed, and how my transformation hath been washed and cudgell'd, they would melt me out of my fat drop by drop.....I warrant they would whip me with their fine wits till I were as crestfallen as a dried pear." (The Merry Wives of Windsor, IV,5,96)

Falstaff actually spreads his bulk over four plays, for his illness is reported in "Henry V," and the manner of his death is related by Mistress Quickly (IV,7). In "The Shakespeare Allusion-Book," the number of allusions to Falstaff was so great that it was necessary to put him in a category equal to that of a separate work. Indeed, in the period from 1650 to 1700, there were 48 listed references to Falstaff, compared with 37 for the play "Hamlet," and an equal number for the play "Othello," both of which yielded to Falstaff in frequency of mention.²⁸

26. Coleridge, Hartley, Essays and Marginalia, London, ii, 133.

27. Dowden, E., Shakespeare, London, 1875, page 105.

28. Shakespeare Allusion Book, New York, 1909, ii, 540.

Despite this dramatic stature of Falstaff, some critics have sought to assign to Sir John a somewhat minor role. Thus, this statement has been made: "The usual fool not appearing in 'I Henry IV,' Falstaff seems to be introduced merely to fill his place at first."²⁹ Even so astute a judge as Professor Stoll was critical of Shakespeare's handling of the character of Falstaff; he pointed to the aftermath of the Gadshill Robbery incident, which we have already discussed, and voiced his dissatisfaction:

"Falstaff piles up his exaggerations pellmell, despite the interrupting jeers of the Prince and Poins, and turns at once from wit to butt....That Falstaff the wit should thus turn into a butt involves a lack of unity and consistency in the portrayal which in higher art is nowadays impossible but was then not rare. He was the comic character--men asked no more."³⁰

In this criticism, Professor Stoll perhaps exposed himself to the animadversion of De Quincey, who reminded us that "a long list can be cited of passages in Shakespeare, which have been solemnly denounced by many eminent men (all blockheads) as ridiculous."³¹ However, the true role of Falstaff should be appraised in the light of Shakespeare's treatment of the character of Prince Hal. It will be recalled that the playwright utilized the convention of the soliloquy to reveal Prince Hal's true intentions:

"So, when this loose behaviour I throw off...

...like bright metal on a sullen ground,

29. Porter and Clarke, Poet-Lore, volume xi, page 98.

30. Stoll, E.E., Falstaff, in "Modern Philology," October, 1914, page 86.

31. De Quincey, T., Schlosser's Literary History, Tait's Magazine, Sept. 1847.

My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes...
I'll so offend to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will." (I Henry IV, I, 2, 231)

We have pointed out that this soliloquy is consistent with Shakespeare's technique, rarely if ever violated, of never intentionally confusing or misleading his audience. He simply had to keep Prince Hal from appearing vile in the eyes of the audience, and he accomplished this purpose by having the Prince inform the audience in a straightforward manner that he would soon cast off his loose behavior, and appear all the more noble by virtue of the contrast.

However, there is a more subtle manner by which Shakespeare has contributed to making his characterization of the Prince seem plausible for the audience, and Falstaff plays an almost exclusive role in this dramatic technique. In short, the magnetic and captivating quality of Falstaff's personality is Shakespeare's excuse for the lack of dignity and loose morals we deplore in the future king. We almost pardon Prince Hal because we agree that Falstaff cannot be resisted. When Lee says that "Shakespeare touched the comic scenes of the old drama with a magic of his own, and summoned out of its dust and ashes the radiance of the inimitable Falstaff,"³² he is also implying that Prince Hal would be more than human if he failed to be tempted by the witty knight. In one of his soliloquies, Falstaff furnishes an inkling of his hold over the Prince: "I will devise matter enough out of this Shallow to keep Prince Harry in continual laughter the wearing out of six fashions, which is four terms, or two actions, and 'a shall laugh without

32. Lee, Sidney, *Life of William Shakespeare*, N.Y., 1916, page 241

intervallums.....O, you shall see him laugh till his face be like a wet cloak ill laid up." (II Henry IV,V,1,86) Falstaff, the irresistible wit, could obviously move even the immovable body!

In the "Second Part of Henry IV," Shakespeare seeks to lay a background for explaining the inevitable breaking of Falstaff's hold over the Prince. We catch glimpses of self-indulgence, egotism, and looseness which offend our taste, especially in the sordid world of Mistress Quickly and Doll, whose name, Tearsheet, is probably a corruption of Tear-street—street walker, terere stratam (viam). But we are still not prepared for the end, when King Henry, the newly crowned sovereign, spurns his erstwhile crony:

"I know thee not, old man; fall to thy prayers.

How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!

I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,

So surfeit-swell'd, so old, and so profane;

But, being awak'd, I do despise my dream." (II Henry IV,V,5,51)

Falstaff, whose armor of wit presented an iron curtain to the facts of life, cannot live down this scene, which removes the very excuse for his existence. True, the Epilogue, spoken by a dancer, promises us another play "with Sir John in it" (Epil.,29), but this promise is not fulfilled in "Henry V." Instead, we are told early in the first scene of the regeneration of the king:

"The breath no sooner left his father's body,

But that his wildness, mortifi'd in him,

Seem'd to die too." (I,1,25)

We realize that it is only a matter of time before Falstaff's death will be announced, for the irrepressible knight must finally be repressed. In the second act, his illness is reported, and his death in the third.

Perhaps no single line so well expresses the power of Falstaff's dramatic personality as Bardolph's simple obituary, "Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, in heaven or in hell!" (II,3,7) We can guess where Shakespeare's sympathies must have been by the Hostess's reply: "Nay, sure he's not in hell. He's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom."

This concludes our study of Shakespeare's comic characters. It is obvious that the field is almost unlimited, and we have been content to confine the discussion to the role of the soliloquy in delineating the personality of some of the better-known characters and in developing the unfolding of the plot. So rich is this field that Moulton truly said: "Shakespeare illustrates every phase and variety of humour; a complete analysis of Shakespeare's humour would make a system of psychology."³³ There is perhaps justice even in Johnson's words:

"Instead of vindicating tragi-comedy by the success of Shakespeare, we ought perhaps to pay new honors to that transcendent and unbounded genius that could preside over the passions in sport; who, to actuate the affections, needed not the slow gradations of common means, but could fill the heart with instantaneous jollity or sorrow, and vary our dispositions as he changed his scenes. Perhaps the effects even of Shakespeare's poetry might have been greater, had he not counteracted himself; and we might have been more interested in the distresses of his heroes, had we not been so frequently diverted by the jokes of his buffoons."³⁴

33. Moulton, G., *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, London, 1893, page 285.

34. Johnson, Samuel, in "The Rambler," No. 156, September 14, 1751.

Chapter IX

Conclusion

Our study of the Shakespearean soliloquy has confirmed our definition of the soliloquy as a passage in a drama in which a character is alone on the stage (or believes himself to be alone) and speaks as if to himself. We have met innumerable variations of this basic definition; in some cases the soliloquy perilously approaches a direct address to the audience, and in others we almost sense the workings of the character's unconscious mind. We have encountered genuine soliloquies when many characters occupy the stage, unnoticed by the speaker, and the soliloquy may be overheard or not, depending upon circumstances. In short, this versatile medium can not be found in Shakespeare crystallized in a set form, but possesses almost infinite variety.

Our brief historical analysis has shown the soliloquy to have been an accepted dramatic convention well into our own day. The criticism directed at it in the past century may at first seem to have originated in a desire for greater realism, but a study of conventions results in the conclusion that reality as such has no inherent claims in the development of an art. Rather should we consider an art to be a bundle of conventions, so to speak, whereby we create the illusion of reality through techniques of deception.

Shakespeare's platform stage was ideally adapted to the promotion of verbal illusion, because of the intimate physical and psychological relationships between the actor and the audience. The soliloquy was thus of one piece with all the other conventions of time and place which were verbal rather than visual.

With the perfection of artificial illumination, the evolution of the stage was in the direction of the picture-frame concept. The stage has withdrawn itself from the audience, with an invisible but effective barrier in the form of the heavy sheet of light across the footlight. In this prison house devised by the technology of the past 75 years, the actor is constrained to live out his dramatic life in the company of his fellow actors, almost as if they were separated from the audience by interstellar space. In this stage of visual illusion, it is not appropriate for the actor to reveal the course of the action and to expound his most secret thoughts for the benefit of the audience; indeed, the stage technique can be hardly different from what might be expected in a studio from which the drama was being televised to a theater hundreds of miles away.

Our conclusion from this analysis was that the soliloquy was a casualty resulting from the development of a stage in keeping with the potentialities of the technical progress of the past 75 years. If the present trend toward breaking away from the mechanical drama of the motion picture and television screen continues, we may witness, in the growth of the movement which looks with misgivings at the domination exercised over the stage by mechanical "gadgets," a tendency to the return of the soliloquy. The new type of drama which emphasizes the "stream of consciousness" is particularly hospitable to the return of this honored convention. There is every hope that in the next generation the stand of critics at the turn of the century may be reversed, and the soliloquy may attain new stature as a dramatic technique. If this cycle is completed, it will not be because the soliloquy is intrinsically more realistic in one generation than another, but because the physical and psychological postulates of the stage will enable the soliloquy, through deception, as it were, to make a contribution to reality.

Since Shakespeare accepted the soliloquy without question as a valuable resource, he turned it to a multitude of uses. He soon discovered that opening the play with a monologue was not "good theater," since the noise of the unruly audience was too likely to drown out the actor's voice. Nevertheless, once the audience settled down to listen, many a scene was made the better because of the soliloquy.

Among the uses of the soliloquy which we have discussed are the following: to identify the name of the speaker or of an entering character; to let the audience see through the disguise of the speaker; to indicate that a character is asleep; to indicate the meaning of "stage business" which accompanies the action, especially when such business might not be distinctly visible from all three sides of the platform stage; to herald death through suicide or violence; to avoid simultaneous entrance on the scene, or simultaneous exit; to indicate the lapse of time, especially when a character leaves the stage to accomplish some errand; to overcome the difficulty presented by the absence of a drop-curtain on the Elizabethan stage, as in cases where a character must leave, dragging a dead body with him; to indicate time and place through verbal means, often a necessity on the unlocalized and elastically timed stage of Shakespeare; to create the verbal illusion of the environment in the absence of painted scenery; to narrate action that is progressing offstage; to narrate or summarize past events; and in general, to serve as a lubricant for the somewhat difficult stage mechanics (as viewed by the modern eye) characteristic of the bare, platform stage.

From a less mechanical viewpoint, the soliloquy serves to acquaint the audience with the inner thoughts of the characters, whether they be conscious or unconscious, in the sense in which these terms are used in certain present-day psychological theories. There is almost no internal evidence that these soliloquies were actually addressed to the

audience, but there is little doubt that the effect was an intimate revelation of thought. Shakespeare took pains to avoid any sort of deception in such soliloquies, with the result that villains proclaim their evil intentions in a manner contrary to the dictates of human nature as most critics see it. Yet to Shakespeare such "unnatural" conduct was the lesser of two evils, for the soliloquy had to be a vehicle of communication in which the audience could put its trust.

Our analysis of the soliloquies of many tragic and comic characters has disclosed the deep insights which this convention affords. We see Hamlet in all the fullness of his self-conscious grief, in an excess of self reproach, in an excitement bordering on murderous frenzy, in a despair verging on suicide, or in the calm admission that he is ignorant of himself. Perhaps these soliloquies give us, unintentionally, a somewhat distorted picture, for no one can view himself too long with his mind's eye without losing the real perspective. Yet in no way can Hamlet's personality be so economically developed as through the soliloquy, and it is through this means that we can discover the several elements of Shakespearean tragedy most readily: crime and its consequence; fate, or the "divinity that shapes our ends;" musings over the dead; revenge; the tragic nature of the hero; the external conflict between protagonist and villain; the internal conflict between the passion for revenge and little-understood inner forces; the inner flaw, which makes the hero his own worst enemy; the misfit character, an introvert confronted by times that are out of joint; the tragic mood, not depressed but almost exalted, as the tragedy nears its close. All of these can be discovered in hundreds and hundreds of lines of dialogue, but they are to be found too in a half dozen soliloquies spaced out at strategic intervals.

Our study of other tragic characters was made in less detail. Through the medium of the soliloquy, we investigated Brutus, the political idealist used as a tool by those less scrupulous than he, who allows his vaunted intelligence to sink to the level of illogical fallacy; Othello, the noble Moor, a man of high integrity, of a free and open nature, and of complete self-mastery, whose personality becomes utterly disorganized under the stress of a pathological jealousy; Iago, Shakespeare's most consummate villain, whose cult of devilry is the only factor which makes Othello's fall tragic instead of comic; Macbeth, ambitious, but emotional and weak, whose heart is not in his wicked venture, and who realizes that in murdering Duncan he is yielding to his baser nature; Lady Macbeth, small and delicate, who unsexes herself with masculine fire, unrepressed by the weight of flesh, in unbridled ambition for her husband, and succumbs to this unnatural purpose. In each of these cases, the soliloquy eliminates the possibility of later surprise and substitutes expectation instead. From the very beginning we are given sufficient information by the characters themselves to enable us to follow the development of the tragic plot without confusion.

Our study of comic characters yielded a new perspective, almost another dimension, of Shakespeare's skillful use of the soliloquy. We met Pyramus and Thisbe, almost a parody of Romeo and Juliet, with the comic soliloquies of suicide; Bottom, the epitome of conceited actors, with his malapropisms and his uncompleted sentences; Mistress Quickly, or the Hostess, with her garrulous phraseologies and her unwitting double-dealing; Benedick, the prince's jester, whose conceited self-evaluations are the height of egotism; Launce, the clownish servant, who, attended by his dog Crab, heads the procession of the clowns of Shakespeare who would feel fully at home on the modern

vaudeville stage; Launcelot, the agile, resourceful juggler with words, who parodies one of the most serious of Shakespeare's techniques—the tragic character's self-debate ; Autolycus the rogue, littered under Mercury, who follows his "lucky" star in his thievery, only to have his plans miscarry; the braggart Parolles, who outdoes himself in the episode of the overheard soliloquy and discovers that every braggart shall be found an ass. Some of these characters are stock roles of the Latin comedy, but Shakespeare has transformed them with his inimitable touch, and nowhere does his genius shine forth so brightly as from the soliloquies.

We have considered some of the more "serious" of Shakespeare's comic characters: Don Armado, with his preposterous bombast, probably a burlesque of prevailing pedantry and affectation; the jealous Ford, the comic version of the self-imagined cuckold; Thersites, of the filthy mouth, whose commentary broods over Shakespeare's comedy of disillusion; Malvolio, "sick of self-love", who could well have been Shakespeare's opportunity for ridiculing the Puritan's assumption of complete holiness; Faulconbridge, the Bastard, who clothes in the irony of his satirical soliloquies the aspirations of the honest Englishman for a better, united England; and, finally, the inimitable Falstaff, Shakespeare's (and perhaps the world's) greatest comic character, who casts the shadow of his huge bulk over four plays and emerges with greater dramatic stature the more he is studied.

Through their soliloquies, we learn to know these characters intimately, for we have a direct view into their very souls. Few dramatists could stand to have their clowns and rogues so minutely inspected, but Shakespeare's characters pass the inspection with

honor. His characters are normal rather than abnormal; he does not use pathologic deviations or perversions simply to elicit laughter from the groundlings, hanging on every word. As Coleridge wrote:

"Shakespeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice:- he never renders that amiable which religion and reason alike teach us to detest;...he neither excites nor flatters passion in order to degrade the subject of it; he does not use the faulty thing for a faulty purpose...Vice never walks as in twilight."¹

True, in the matter of one's sense of delicacy, Shakespeare may offend or even disgust a modern taste, but he never offends the mind, as Coleridge reminded us: "Shakespeare has been accused of profaneness. I for my part have acquired from perusal of him, a habit of looking into my own heart, and am confident that Shakespeare is an author of all others the most calculated to make his readers better as well as wiser."²

Our praise of Shakespeare has not blinded us to a number of imperfections, some of which are disclosed in his soliloquies. But we may well accept these blemishes in a tolerant mood, remembering the kindly words of Matthew Arnold: "Shakespeare frequently has lines and passages in a strain quite false, and which are entirely unworthy of him. But one can imagine him smiling if one could meet him in the Elysian Fields and tell him so; smiling and replying that he knew it perfectly well himself, and what did it matter?"³

Of the innumerable encomiums passed on Shakespeare by his students and critics, a large proportion may be traced, in part, to

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1. Coleridge, S., *Lectures on Poetry, the Drama, and Shakespeare*, London, 1818, 175.
 2. Coleridge, S., *Outline of an Introductory Lecture on Shakespeare*, London, 1812.
 3. Arnold, Matthew, *Essays in Criticism*, London, 1888, page 135.

the playwright's masterful use of the soliloquy as a dramaturgic technique. Thus, when Carlyle said of Shakespeare that "his characters are like watches with dial-plates of transparent crystal--they show you the hour like others, and the inward mechanism also is all visible,"⁴ he could well have been referring to the window that opens into the mind through the medium of the soliloquy.

When Sir Walter Scott wrote, "Nothing went before Shakespeare which in any respect was fit to fix and stamp the character of a national drama, and certainly no one will succeed him, capable of establishing by mere authority, a form more restricted than that which Shakespeare used,"⁵ he was unconsciously forecasting that the drama of visual illusion championed by Ibsen would not forever replace the drama of verbal illusion, with its freedom of time and place and its ready welcome for the soliloquy.

When Baynes wrote, "It is Shakespeare's unique distinction that he has an absolute command over all the complexities of thought and feeling that prompt to action and bring out the dividing lines of character,"⁶ he might have been paying a glowing tribute to the economy and efficiency of the convention of the soliloquy in depicting character and developing the plot. The same may be said of Thomson's fervid lines:

"Thrice happy! could we catch great Shakespeare's art,
To trace the deep recesses of the heart;
His simple plain sublime, to which is given
To strike the soul with darted flame from heaven."⁷

4. Carlyle, T., *On Herces, Herc-Worship, etc.*, London, 1898, page 104.

5. Scott, W., article on "Drama", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 6th ed., viii, 157.

6. Baynes, T.S., article on "Shakespeare", *Ency. Britan.*, 9th ed., xxi, 763.

7. Thomson, J., *Prologue to Tancred and Sigismunda*, 1745.

It would be possible almost endlessly to present the approving comments of Shakespearean critics, and in each to find added reason for valuing the soliloquy as a most versatile and effective technique, one which Shakespeare received rough and imperfect, but passed on with such literary prestige as to earn for itself a place in the dramatic consciousness of even the illiterate. Instead, however, we wish to close with the penetrating tribute paid to Shakespeare by John Henry Newman a few years before Pope Leo XIII created him Cardinal Deacon of the Title of St. George in Velabro. So comprehensive is the scope of this literary appraisal that it would be foolhardy for us to point to any one phrase as revealing the value of the soliloquy; yet we may be sure that the soliloquy may claim its modest share of credit for the greatness that is Shakespeare.

"A great author, gentlemen, is not one who merely has a copia verborum, whether in prose or in verse, and can, as it were, turn on at his will any number of splendid phrases and swelling sentences; but he is one who has something to say and knows how to say it. I do not claim for him, as such, any great depth of thought, or breadth of view, or philosophy, or sagacity, or knowledge of human nature, or experience of human life, though these additional gifts he may have, and the more he has of them the greater he is; but I ascribe to him, as his characteristic gift, in a large sense the faculty of Expression. He is master of the two-fold Logos, the thought and the word, distinct, but inseparable from each other. He may, if so be, elaborate his compositions, or he may pour out his improvisations, but in either case he has but one aim, which he keeps steadily before him, and is conscientious and single-minded in fulfilling. That aim is to give forth what he has within him; and from his very earnestness it comes to pass that, whatever be the

splendour of his diction or the harmony of his periods, he has with him the charm of an incommunicable simplicity. Whatever be his subject, high or low, he treats it suitably and for its own sake. If he is a poet, "nil moliter inepte." If he is an orator, then too he speaks, not only "distincte" and "splendide," but also "apte." His page is the lucid mirror of his mind and life:

"Quo fit, ut omnis

Votiva pateat veluti descripta labella

Vita senis."

He writes passionately, because he feels keenly; forcibly, because he conceives vividly; he sees too clearly to be vague; he is too serious to be otiose; he can analyze his subject, and therefore he is rich; he embraces it as a whole and in its parts, and therefore he is consistent; he has a firm hold on it, and therefore he is luminous; when his imagination wells up, it overflows his ornament; when his heart is touched, it thrills along his verse. He always has the right word for the right idea, and never a word too much. If he is brief, it is because few words suffice; when he is lavish of them, still each word has its mark, and aids, not embarrasses, the vigorous march of his elocution. He expresses what all feel, but all cannot say; and his sayings pass into proverbs among his people, and his phrases become household words and idioms of their daily speech, which is tessellated with the rich fragments of his language, as we see in foreign lands the marbles of Roman grandeur worked into the walls and pavements of modern palaces.

Such pre-eminently is Shakespeare among ourselves."⁸

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8. Newman, John Henry, "The Idea of a University", in "Literature," 1873, ix, 292.

APPENDIX

The following table of Shakespearean soliloquies is adapted from Arnold.¹ The numbers at the left indicate the probable date of authorship, and the two numbers at the right indicate the number of soliloquies and the number of lines these soliloquies comprise.

| | | | |
|------|---------------------------|----|-----|
| 1589 | Henry VI, Part I | 11 | 90 |
| 1590 | Henry VI, Part II | 12 | 221 |
| 1590 | Henry VI, Part III | 21 | 351 |
| 1591 | Titus Andronicus | 8 | 85 |
| 1591 | Love's Labour's Lost | 8 | 153 |
| 1591 | Two Gentlemen of Verona | 16 | 297 |
| 1591 | Comedy of Errors | 7 | 62 |
| 1593 | King John | 5 | 91 |
| 1593 | Richard III | 17 | 245 |
| 1594 | Richard II | 3 | 79 |
| 1594 | Midsummer-Night's Dream | 21 | 237 |
| 1595 | Taming of the Shrew | 11 | 78 |
| 1595 | Merchant of Venice | 3 | 41 |
| 1596 | Romeo and Juliet | 20 | 293 |
| 1597 | Henry IV, Part I | 8 | 142 |
| 1598 | Henry IV, Part II | 7 | 177 |
| 1599 | Henry V | 7 | 131 |
| 1599 | Merry Wives of Windsor | 16 | 195 |
| 1599 | Julius Caesar | 16 | 158 |
| 1599 | Much Ado About Nothing | 7 | 118 |
| 1600 | As You Like It | 6 | 36 |
| 1601 | Twelfth Night | 8 | 213 |
| 1602 | Troilus and Cressida | 10 | 144 |
| 1602 | All's Well That Ends Well | 10 | 123 |
| 1603 | Measure for Measure | 8 | 131 |
| 1603 | Hamlet | 14 | 291 |
| 1604 | Othello | 15 | 172 |
| 1605 | King Lear | 17 | 185 |
| 1605 | Macbeth | 18 | 245 |
| 1607 | Timon of Athens | 11 | 210 |
| 1608 | Antony and Cleopatra | 9 | 92 |
| 1608 | Pericles | 7 | 100 |
| 1609 | Coriolanus | 4 | 36 |
| 1610 | Cymbeline | 24 | 430 |
| 1611 | Winter's Tale | 6 | 153 |
| 1612 | The Tempest | 5 | 73 |
| 1612 | Henry VIII | 3 | 59 |

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