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From Tyranny to Authority:

The Dynamics of Power Relations in Shakespeare's Comedies

By: Marta Straznicky

Supervisor: Dr. Irene R. Makaryk

Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies,
University of Ottawa, in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, English Literature.

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ABSTRACT

From Tyranny to Authority:
The Dynamics of Power Relations in Shakespeare's Comedies

In recent years, students of Renaissance literature have turned with increasing frequency to a consideration of the representation of authority in and by literary works of the period. Most of these studies adopt the New Historicist approach to history and literature, an approach which borrows freely from the disciplines of anthropology, history, linguistics, political theory, sociology, and women's studies in an attempt to map out the mutually constitutive relationship of history and culture as a set of mechanisms invariably driven by the circulation of power. This underlying premise of a reciprocal power relationship between the forces of social control and those of cultural production has led to an overbearing emphasis on the prescriptive role of a self-interested crown and its appendages in the Renaissance discourse on authority. Although their attempt to move beyond strictly intellectual contexts to a consideration of the political, cultural, social, and material conditions of literary design is very useful, the New Historicists' major interest in state power has led to narrow and question-begging recreations of what is in fact a vast network of historical contingencies, and this is particularly true about the power relations thought to be at their core.

Related to New Historicists' primary interest in the operations of state power is the expected but theoretically-unjustified emphasis on dramas which most overtly concern themselves with political authority: primarily history and tragedy, and comedy only to the extent that a play foregrounds issues of government. But the comedies are, according to the New Historicists' own principles, exceptionally well-suited to a comprehensive investigation of authority: they are dramas concerned above all with humanity's societal

impulses and with the way those impulses mediate fundamental inequalities between individuals. The accommodation of inequalities by the various social structures designed for this purpose is, in essence, the operative field of authority; the nature of this accommodation is accordingly the area of investigation of the present study.

This dissertation argues that the representation of authority in the comedies of William Shakespeare is more complex than the models of Renaissance authority advanced by New Historicists would seem to allow. The study suggests, first, that authority in the comedies is shaped by the requirements of genre at least as much as it is by the playwright's engagement with contemporary political debates. Second, the dissertation insists on the importance of maintaining distinctions between authority and power, and between just and unjust rulership, both as they are made in the comedies and, implicitly, as they inform Renaissance political theory. The New Historicists typically use the term "authority" in a derogatory sense; according to this view, the monarch is the source of oppression, manipulation, and unyielding restriction, while the dramatist is confined either to endorsing or subverting the status quo. This conclusion about Renaissance political authority and its control over artistic creation inadequately accounts for the representation of authority in Shakespeare's comedies, failing as it does to recognize the benevolent manifestations of authority in the social organizations dramatized in these plays, the distinction repeatedly made there between its proper use and abuse, and the influence of formal--as opposed to political--constraints upon expression. Viewed in terms of genre and with an acknowledgement of some measure of artistic independence from the dominant discourse, the authority dramatized in the comedies poses a fundamental challenge to received theories

regarding the prescriptive power of socio-political structures over Renaissance representations of authority.

Exhibiting a formula typical of the genre, Shakespeare's comedies generally open in a state of disorder and progress, by a variety of constructional techniques, toward--though often not directly to--some kind of resolution whose achievement is largely dependent upon significant changes of perspective or situation for the major characters. Near the beginnings, the abuse of authority is more or less overtly depicted as a contributor to the chaos of the comic world. It is important to recognize that such authority is false authority or, more properly, tyranny. The authority of figures such as Oliver in As You Like It is distorted, a manifestation of authority as self-interested coercion which has forfeited the sanction of prior and communal foundations. Such initial models of authority are among the things which the comedies test and ultimately modify, subjecting the false authority to alteration by means of their structure of inversion and restatement. The endings of the comedies, then, present a different vision of authority--one that is at least implied if not achieved--which is no longer represented simply as a mechanism of the force of one individual over another, but as a consensual bond of the comic community. The transformable worlds of comedy are particularly capable of expressing this movement from tyranny to just authority, and so of confirming the existence in the Renaissance of at least a theoretical distinction between legitimate and illegitimate uses of power.

The dissertation aims to elucidate the ways in which Shakespeare's comedies bring about a change in the definition of authority. I suggest that he stages the operations of three potentially subversive alternative powers: the power of action, the power of voice, and the power of knowledge. But

Shakespeare does not simply propose to replace tyranny with one or all of these alternative means of exerting control; rather, he suggests that their temporary ability to undermine authority is itself potentially undermined by the same forces that deny false authority full supremacy, namely self-interest. The power of action, therefore, is extended only to those characters who define themselves as members of a community and who do not act solely in their own best interests; the power of voice is extended to those characters who use language as a bond between individuals rather than as a deceptive means of self-advancement; and the power of knowledge is given legitimacy only when used to strengthen social cohesion. In other words, Shakespeare's comic structure explores the nature of false authority by unmasking its fundamental flaw, self-centredness, and by examining its generation of alternative powers each of which rehearses the primary defect of its parent. Over the course of the play, authority is reclaimed as a vital communal force whose right to power rests on the absorption of the independent strength of those to whom it is bound and who legitimize it by consenting to be bound. This transformation--much like the inversion typical of the carnival tradition--occurs within a well-defined forum where the false authority is only temporarily impotent. In other words, true to the genre's ultimately conservative inclinations, false authority is not so much in need of replacement, as it is of renewal.

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Introduction

The growth of interest in authority may well be the most significant development in recent literary scholarship on the English Renaissance. Even a bird's-eye view of a current bibliography of Renaissance literary studies, and particularly studies of drama, will detect the prevalence of terms such as "enforcement," "patriarchy," "politics," "power," "subversion," and "transgression." Regardless of their individual emphases, the studies in whose titles these and other related terms appear announce their membership (or bid for membership) in the ascendant critical approach known as New Historicism. Though it is always perilous to generalize about the constitution of any critical school, and especially one as amorphous and unsettled as New Historicism, nonetheless one may with fairness say that these critics are all interested in studying power relations as they are represented in and by the written vestiges of early modern England.[1]

Determining the genuine novelty of this approach is an important focal point in most review essays on New Historicism. One of the earliest assessments of the new trends in Renaissance studies is that of Jonathan Goldberg (1982), who depicts the current return to historical criticism as but the latest swing of the pendulum from aestheticism to historicism, a rhythm which has characterized literary studies since the late nineteenth century. Goldberg's review is particularly interesting because he wrote it before the term "New Historicism" had been coined, before the overt claim to novelty and the implicit suggestion of critical hegemony raised the need for the articulation of a shared theoretical position. Several years later Jean Howard and Louis Montrose, whose back-to-back articles appeared in English

Literary Renaissance (1986), could turn from defining trends in scholarship to considering the nature of "New Historicism" itself. Montrose, speaking with the authority of an insider, writes that "its collective project is to resituate canonical literary texts among the multiple forms of writing, and in relation to the non-discursive practices and institutions, of the social formation in which those texts have been produced--while, at the same time, recognizing that this project of historical resituation is necessarily the textual construction of critics who are themselves historical subjects" (6). In general, Howard applauds this mandate, but in her more pointed investigation of what, precisely, is new about the approach, decides that New Historicism is thus far only cosmetically new, and that this weakness is a result of "its failure to reflect on itself" (31). In order definitively to distinguish itself from the "old" historicism, which flourished at a time when the referentiality of language was a given and the intellectual milieu nurtured the "assumption that literature was a mirror reflecting something more real and more important than itself" (18), Howard warns that a fundamentally "new" historicism will need to engage "a serious attempt to explore what it means to attempt an historical criticism in a postmodern era" (19). The new history, in other words, can claim novelty only to the extent that it refuses to treat history as a neutral ground of transparent and objectively knowable "fact," does away with the dichotomies of "literature and history," of "text and context," and instead views literature as a means of a culture's construction of "reality," self-consciously considers the reasons why a particular historical occurrence has been positioned in alignment with a literary text, and bases its historical investigations on a carefully worked out mimetic theory.

Intensifying the skeptical vein of Howard's article, Edward Pechter has more recently argued, under the formidable auspices of the Modern Language Association, that New Historicists have yet to define their understanding of the key terms "text" and "history" and their interrelationship before the approach can claim credibility, let alone novelty. Focusing on the work of Greenblatt, Pechter finds that his reading of Henry IV, Part 1 is really not any less restrictive than a formalist reading, that Greenblatt's privileging of "the cultural text as the stable and determining point of reference" (293) is, in theoretical terms, nothing more than an inversion of the positivism against which he ostensibly defines his approach. A still more important challenge to the novelty of New Historicism has come from feminist critics who argue that the fundamental assumptions and critical practices claimed as new to the approach are in fact (predominantly) male appropriations of ground-breaking work done by feminist scholars in the late 1960s and 1970s (Newton 153).[2] Appearing in the same volume as Newton's feminist critique of New Historicism, H. Aram Veeser's confidence that "New Historicists can make a valid claim to have established new ways of studying history and a new awareness of how history and culture define each other" (viii) seems prematurely to foreclose this important debate.

Whether the New Historicism is really nothing more than an eclectic collection of approaches developed in the disciplines of anthropology, history, linguistics, political theory, sociology, or women's studies remains to be decided. On the other hand, this very heterogeneity of approach may in fact be merely the supporting structure--rather than the claim to fame--of what seems more properly to be genuinely new about New Historicism, the understanding of the mutually constitutive relationship of history and culture

as a set of mechanisms invariably driven by the circulation of power. It is this underlying premise of a reciprocal power relationship between the forces of social control and those of cultural production which seems to me to be both the strength and the weakness of the approach. The attempt to re-view the social and cultural dynamics that shape versions of history yields an understanding of written documents (texts of all kinds) as having been made within an almost incomprehensibly broad and intricate network of historical contingencies, an understanding which is not only fascinating, but also more satisfactory than traditional historicism because it moves beyond strictly intellectual "contexts" to consider the political, cultural, social, and material conditions of literary design.

But by the very same token, New Historicism frequently arrives at premature and question-begging recreations of this network of historical contingencies, and especially of the dynamics of power thought to be at their core. Because the nature of its evidence is deliberately partial (in both senses of the term), and often as fragile as the "arbitrary connectedness" of two (often no more) seemingly unrelated phenomena,[3] New Historicism encourages reconstructions of the past whose credibility--from both the literary and historical perspectives--is far from persuasive. This inveterate failing of the approach is actually the result of a major methodological difficulty, one which the historian David Harris Sacks has seized upon in his review essay "Searching for `Culture' in the English Renaissance" (1988): the contextualizing of works of literature, argues Sacks, means that

> the literary scholar must become an historian thoroughly familiar with the events, institutions, and ideas of the age that he or she investigates. This means acquiring a

> full command of the relevant historical sources and the debates on their interpretation, and not merely dipping here and there into the modern historical literature for arguments to support one's claims. (474)

Moreover, literary scholars, trained primarily in new critical techniques, are generally ill-equipped fully to interpret historical evidence. Worse, they often neglect to apply their own particular talents when working with history, all too easily conflating literary and other documentary evidence without considering their differing conventions of expression, and failing also to consider the impact of such matters as personal motivation on the reliability of the documents they value for their recording of seditious or subversive activities.[4] This premature colouring in of what is as yet the barest of sketches characterizes much work on the nature of authority in the English Renaissance[5] and warrants a study of a group of plays whose representation of power relations has not only been largely overlooked by New Historicists, but which also poses fundamental challenges to the dominant theory regarding the prescriptive power of socio-political structures over such representations.

As one might expect from their understanding of literature and social institutions as "mutually determining and determined" (White 298), New Historicists' studies of authority have laboured to establish direct lines of connection between the representation of authority in literary texts and the representation of authority by the state.[6] In so far as drama is concerned, and particularly Shakespearean drama, these critics have by and large concluded that the most important determining factor shaping the literary representation of authority is the heavy hand of a thoroughly self-serving crown and its appendages, and that the dramatist is in the unenviable position

of having either to endorse or subvert the status quo. The only sustained attempt to draw up a theory of authority in the Renaissance, Stephen Greenblatt's seminal essay "Invisible Bullets," best expresses the kind of straight-jacket dialogue envisioned by this model:

> the subversiveness that is genuine and radical--sufficiently disturbing so that to be suspected of it could lead to imprisonment and torture--is at the same time contained by the power it would appear to threaten. Indeed the subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers its ends. (30)

According to this view, the regnant authority controls the mental life of its subjects so thoroughly that any attempted subversion is always already an extension of its power.[7] While it would be pointless to deny that the monarch played a crucial role in shaping the cultural contours of what was, after all, a strongly centralized society, it is impossible to accept a model of this society which does not allow for challenges strong enough radically to undermine the dominant powers, strong enough to change the order of things. In this connection, it is odd that while New Historicists trace patterns of failed or illusory subversions, they seem to have overlooked some of the later and more complex thoughts of Michel Foucault, their own founding father, regarding the multivalent workings of power, thoughts which insist that power is not located solely on a trajectory leading to and from those (nominally) in control:

> Between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and a pupil, between everyone who knows and everyone who

> does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual; they are rather the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereign's power is grounded, the conditions which make it possible for it to function. (Power 188)[8]

Foucault's vision of the mechanics of power seems far more suitable to a period of extraordinary social and cultural turbulence than does the static model of Greenblatt, most obviously because it makes allowance for change. While New Historicist studies are replete with the economic terminology of exchange, negotiation, circulation, and appropriation, and while they recognize that the Renaissance was an age of unprecedented transition, they are surprisingly inattentive to change itself. One reason for this gap in New Historicism, as David Harris Sacks has suggested, may be that the distinction between power and authority has yet to be made. Unlike power, which is a coercive dominance of one individual or group of individuals over another and so lends itself--at least for the duration of its supremacy--to the strictly hierarchical model envisioned by Greenblatt,

> authority requires inferiors to accept the legitimacy of their superiors' rule over them, whether this is expressed through some formal procedure for offering consent or through some process of recognition and celebration. In other words, it depends, at a minimum, upon reciprocity in relations between the governors and the governed. (487)

Attending to the nature of this reciprocity between the forces of the politically dominant and those in subjection would enable New Historicists to

consider the dynamics of social change. One such attempt is made in the following study of power relations in a generically related group of texts whose most characteristic formal concern is the dramatization of personal and social adaptation.

Related to New Historicists' primary interest in the operations of state power is the expected but theoretically unjustified emphasis on dramas which most overtly concern themselves with political authority: primarily history and tragedy, and comedy only to the extent that a play foregrounds issues of government. Accordingly, while Measure for Measure and The Tempest have received many and varied treatments by New Historicists, most of the other comedies, and especially those written before the Jacobean age, have gone practically unnoticed.[9] In fact, there has been only one full-length study of the political complications dramatized in and by Shakespeare's comedies, Marilyn Williamson's The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies, a study which, while opening with an invocation of Foucault, actually adopts and expands Greenblatt's static model of Renaissance authority.[10] This imbalance in the representation of genres in politically oriented literary studies is surprising, for according to the premises which underpin the New Historicist approach, Shakespeare's comedies are exceptionally well-suited to a comprehensive investigation of authority: they are dramas concerned above all with humanity's societal impulses and with the way those impulses mediate fundamental inequalities between individuals. The accommodation of inequalities by the various social structures designed for this purpose is, in essence, the operative field of authority; the nature of this accommodation is accordingly the area of investigation of the present study.

In addition to an overbearing emphasis on the lines of communication

between dramatist and monarch, New Historicists typically use the term "authority" in a derogatory sense; the monarch is invariably the source of oppression, manipulation, and unyielding restriction, and her or his authority is nothing more than a means of maintaining a self-willed and absolute sovereignty. Once again, this conclusion about actual political authority in the Renaissance inadequately accounts for the representation of authority in Shakespeare's comedies, failing as it does to consider not only the benevolent manifestations of authority in the social organizations dramatized in these plays, but also the distinction repeatedly made there between its proper use and abuse.

Moreover, the model of authority as coercion may not even be a reliable guide to its non-literary manifestations in the Renaissance. Recent historical work on the nature of order in early modern England suggests that the prevalence during this period of potentially rebellious cultural practices, subversive literature, and social upheaval may be a sign of something quite other than, as the New Historicists have argued, fissures in a totalitarian political system. Fletcher and Stevenson, for instance, have stressed that because the English gentry "based their supremacy and the legitimacy of their control on the equity and universality of England's legal forms" (15), the period's unusually predominant concern with order and disorder generously illustrates the existence of a political structure based on a standard of justice external to those in power:

> Disorder was one face of the conviction that it was proper to participate in seeking justice; order, based on participatory assumptions which had a firm institutional basis in the English judicial system, was its other face.
>
> (15-16)

The significance of such a view of subversive activity for the study of authority in Renaissance literature is profound; it would serve most obviously to unseat the monarch and the ruling classes from their position of command over the discourse on authority, admitting the "real" subversive value of linguistic self-expression, and enabling a full exploration of the sense in which, as New Historicists have already claimed, "literature is an agent in constructing a culture's sense of reality" (Howard ["The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies"] 25).

Another approach to complicating the current notions of authority as coercion is through the field of political theory, particularly the seminal work of Hannah Arendt. In an important essay all too infrequently cited by New Historicists,[11] Arendt opposes the liberal notion that all power corrupts, and argues instead that a fundamental distinction between legitimate power and violence must be maintained on the basis of the presence or absence of a source of power external to the individual ruler:

> The difference between tyranny and authoritarian government has always been that the tyrant rules in accordance with his own will and interest, whereas even the most draconic authoritarian government is bound by laws. . . . The source of authority in authoritarian government is always a force external and superior to its own power; it is always this source, this external force which transcends the political realm, from which the authorities derive their "authority," that is, their legitimacy, and against which their power can be checked.
>
> (97)

Arendt goes on to provide graphic models of each of these kinds of government: authoritarian government resembles the shape of a pyramid, a shape particularly appropriate for the Christian type of authoritarian rule "whose source of authority lies outside itself, but whose seat of power is located at the top, from which authority and power is filtered down, . . . all layers from top to bottom are not only firmly integrated into the whole but are interrelated like converging rays whose common focal point is the top of the pyramid as well as the transcending source of authority above it" (98); totalitarian rule, on the other hand, is organized much like "the structure of an onion, in whose center, in a kind of empty space, the leader is located; whatever he does--whether he integrates the body politic as in an authoritarian hierarchy, or oppresses his subjects like a tyrant--he does it from within, and not from without or above" (99).

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to consider the extent to which this distinction obtains for the ruling strategies of Renaissance monarchs, the distinction did inform Renaissance political theory. For instance, Pierre de la Primaudaye's <u>The French Academie</u> (published in English in 1586 and 1589) echoes Arendt's conception of tyranny when he defines it as a form of government in which "the prince accounteth all his will as a just law, and hath no care either of piety, justice, or faith, but doth al things for his owne private profit, revenge or pleasure;" or when he draws a sharp contrast between the behaviour of a legitimate ruler and that of a lawless tyrant:

> . . . the one maketh great account of the love of his people, the other of their feare: the one is never in

> feare but for his subjects, the other standeth in awe of none more than of them: the one burdeneth his as little as may be, and then upon publicke necessity, the other suppeth up their blood, gnaweth their bones and sucketh the marrow of his subjects, to satisfie his desires. (Armstrong 168)

Similarly, Richard Strier's study of Renaissance theories of disobedience concludes that defining the limits of obedience was an important theme in both humanist and Protestant traditions, and culminated in the advocacy of resistance to tyranny by John Ponnet (A Shorte Treatise of Politicke Power, 1556), Christopher Goodman (How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed, 1558), and, most radically, George Buchanan, tutor to James VI and I from 1570 to 1578 (De Jure Regni Apud Scotos, 1589): "a Tyrant is a publick Enemy, with whom all good men have a perpetual warfare" (Strier 110). The distinction between tyranny and just rule should also be familiar to readers of such plays as Henry VI, Part 3, Richard III, King John, and Macbeth, to mention only the best-known Shakespearean examples. The following study aims to illustrate that the same distinction underwrites the portrayal of authority in Shakespeare's comedies.[12]

Exhibiting a formula typical of the genre, Shakespeare's comedies[13] generally open in a state of disorder and progress, by a variety of constructional techniques, toward--though often not directly to--some kind of resolution whose achievement is largely dependent upon significant changes of perspective or situation for the major characters. Near the beginnings, the abuse of authority is more or less overtly depicted as a contributor to the chaos of the comic world. It is important to recognize that such authority is

false authority or, more properly, tyranny. The authority of figures such as Oliver in As You Like It is distorted, a manifestation of authority as self-interested coercion which has forfeited the sanction of prior and communal foundations. Such initial models of authority are among the things which the comedies test and ultimately modify, subjecting the false authority to alteration by means of their structure of inversion and restatement. The endings of the comedies, then, present a different vision of authority--one that is at least implied if not achieved--which is no longer represented simply as a mechanism of the force of one individual over another, but as a consensual bond of the comic community. The transformable worlds of comedy are particularly capable of expressing this movement from tyranny to just authority, and so of confirming the existence in the Renaissance of at least a theoretical distinction between legitimate and illegitimate uses of power.

The following study aims to elucidate the ways in which Shakespeare's comedies bring about a change in the definition of authority. I suggest that he stages the operations of three potentially subversive alternative powers: the power of action, the power of voice, and the power of knowledge. But Shakespeare does not simply propose to replace tyranny with one or all of these alternative means of exerting control; rather, he suggests that their temporary ability to undermine authority is itself potentially undermined by the same forces that deny false authority full supremacy, namely self-interest. The power of action, therefore, is extended only to those characters who define themselves as members of a community and who do not act solely in their own best interests; the power of voice is extended to those characters who use language as a bond between individuals rather than as a deceptive means of self-advancement; and the power of knowledge is given

legitimacy only when used to strengthen social cohesion. In other words, Shakespeare's comic structure explores the nature of false authority by unmasking its fundamental flaw, self-centredness, and by examining the way it begets alternative powers each of which rehearses the primary defect of its parent. Over the course of the play, authority is redefined as a vital communal force whose right to power rests on the absorption of the independent strength of those to whom it is bound and who legitimize it by consenting to be bound. This transformation--much like the inversion typical of the carnival tradition--occurs within a well-defined forum where the false authority is only temporarily impotent. In other words, true to the genre's ultimately conservative inclinations, false authority is not so much in need of replacement, as it is of renewal.

The Power of Action

Though most studies of the relationship between self and other in Shakespeare's plays have considered the nature of personal power, the investigation has not been thoroughly extended to the comedies.[14] In large measure, the comedies dramatize the dynamics of power relations and the flexibility of authority by setting up as valuable a symbiotic association of individual identity and communal, socio-political structures. As John Cox has recently suggested, these plays favour a notion of self which is radically unlike the socially "invulnerable" self advocated in Renaissance courtesy theory,[15] a dissimilarity which he usefully links with Shakespeare's critique of political power: "For no other Elizabethan playwright is as sensitive and sympathetic to the vulnerability of even the most admirable of human beings, and none so insistently uses this vulnerability as a way of qualifying the claims of privilege" (76). In Shakespeare's comedies, he goes on to write, "characters are repeatedly brought to the end of themselves as a function of achieving their comic end" (76-77). By dramatizing the public vulnerability of powerful individuals, Shakespeare's comedies value a relationship of mutuality between subjects and authority figures,[16] and even extend an independent power of action, a self-willed and effectual militancy, to the subjected individual when the authority fails to exercise its obligation to just rule.[17] But by the same token, Shakespeare is careful to limit that power of action by giving it only a temporary or partial scope. In fact, the power of action is in a sense dependent upon the very authority it seeks to oppose, since it is realized in direct response to the tyrannical self-centredness at the root of the authority's injustice. In turn, the successful

reformation of authority, and the concomitant restoration of social order and achievement of comic closure, rely upon the absorption rather than the suppression of the potentially subversive power of the individuals under its command. The power of action, then, is necessarily either limited or revoked once the business of restoration is complete.[18]

Paradoxically, the strength of an individual in opposition to false authority is relative to the measure of his or her championing of a communal objective. The success of a particular subversive act is ultimately dictated by the breadth of perspective the character possesses; where the character acts--whether intentionally or not--on behalf of social cohesion, tyranny will be overcome and social order restored. The depiction of just authority in the comedies, because its restoration relies upon an assimilation of rebellious forces, includes a societal perspective, an awareness of the ultimately destructive force of supremacist isolation. The dynamics of power relations in Shakespeare's comedies, then, balance individual power, at all levels of the social hierarchy, against its necessarily limiting communal context. Social order, then, is ultimately made possible both by the subversive force of individuals and the proper containment of that subversion within larger public structures.

In The Comedy of Errors and The Two Gentlemen of Verona Shakespeare explores power relations between individuals without making direct connections to the exercise of authority. Still, the dynamic of personal interaction in these plays is adopted in several later comedies which connect the proper balance of self and other with just authority. The Comedy of Errors, in its farcical depiction of perspectivally isolated individuals hopelessly at cross-purposes, suggests that autonomous selfhood hurls society further and further

into chaos, and the play ultimately undercuts, in the coupled restitution of shared experience and social order in its concluding scene, human self-sufficiency. The Two Gentlemen of Verona translates this view into the form of romantic comedy. The power which individual characters possess, particularly the lovers Proteus and Julia, is shown to be impotent when put to the service of self-centred ambitions, and capable of comic restoration only when driven by a genuine concern for others.

In The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night the value of balancing self and society is linked directly to the exercise of just authority. Portia's action on behalf of her society's authoritative structures, both in the casket scenes and in the courtroom scene, may be understood as an extension of Julia's power into the realms of familial and political authority. It is in The Merchant of Venice that Shakespeare begins to characterize that authority as rooted in human love. It is also in The Merchant of Venice, however, that the investment of authority in a single omnipotent figure begins to cloud the comic resolution and glances ahead to the generic complications of Measure for Measure.

The two-part structure (roughly, court and country) of As You Like It superimposes the value of romantic love upon the political concerns of the play, and so constructs a vision of restored and reformed authority--by means of the double-edged nature of Rosalind's self-motivated and yet circumscribed power of action--in which individual and communal interests coexist. In Twelfth Night there is a much more direct correspondence between love and authority in the contrasting behaviours of the play's two authority figures, the enamoured, reclusive Orsino and the equally enamoured but (eventually) publicly effectual Olivia.

In these five comedies, then, the nature of authority is revealed in terms of the positive impact generous individuals exert upon its abusive incarnation. The power of action is imagined as a means of reinvesting authority with the balance between autonomy and community upon which both social and comic resolution depend.

The Comedy of Errors

In The Comedy of Errors, the interest in the nature of personal identity is not directly associated with matters of just or unjust authority. But the dramatic pattern by which Egeon's initial dislocation and emotional isolation are transformed into communal harmony is not entirely irrelevant to the redefinition of authority in others of Shakespeare's comedies, and even here includes, albeit peripherally, an authority figure in the Duke. The play's exploration of the necessary balance of self and other in the constitution of a whole person is, then, a quality important for the present study as it is linked specifically with power in The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night.

The Comedy of Errors opens, apparently, with a generic formula: an opposition between an unjust law and the individual whose death it requires establishes the terminus a quo of the play proper and advances a need for the overturning of the law which normally forms the plot of the comedy. But The Comedy of Errors departs from the rule in several ways. First, the relationship between the opening confrontation and the rest of the play is certainly not one of direct causality, and only obliquely one of thematic transposition.[19] Second, and more importantly for my purposes, the opposition between Egeon and the Duke is something of an inversion: it seems to be the Duke who postpones the inevitable, while Egeon looks forward to his death with calm resignation. The Duke's "Merchant of Syracusa, plead no more" (I.i.3) is oddly at variance with Egeon's opening lines: "Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall, / And by the doom of death end woes and all" (I.i.1-2). At least in part out of dramatic need, the Duke goes on to outline the rationale for the law which "admit[s] no traffic to our adverse towns" (I.i.15), but its

delivery is meaningless and quite superfluous to Egeon who longs for the fulfilment of the sentence: "Yet this my comfort; when your words are done, / My woes end likewise with the evening sun" (I.i.26-27). The Duke continues his conventional function by encouraging Egeon to narrate his story, but Egeon considers the articulation of his "griefs unspeakable" (I.i.32) the heaviest of burdens. He complies only to prove that his end "Was wrought by nature, not by vile offence" (I.i.34), and tells a tale which moves the Duke, who had sternly "[e]xclude[d] all pity from our threat'ning looks" (I.i.10), first to curiosity and then to compassion:

> were it not against our laws,
> Against my crown, my oath, my dignity,
> Which princes, would they, may not disannul,
> My soul should sue as advocate for thee.
>
> (I.i.142-45)

But when the Duke offers the only reprieve in his power, that Egeon be allowed to seek the thousand marks which alone may be accepted in lieu of his life, his response to this generosity is a sigh of despair: "Hopeless and helpless doth Egeon wend, / But to procrastinate his lifeless end" (I.i.158-59).

The reason for Egeon's despondency is revealed in his narrative, which details a succession of devastating familial separations. By the time he lands in Ephesus, Egeon has already lost his wife and one of his sons in a shipwreck and, as he fears, his second son as well. He has been severed, in other words, from the people who gave his life meaning and whose absence is concomitant with self-loss. Having no one to live for, he has no reason to live. Egeon's isolation defuses the traditional threats of authority at the play's opening and sets up an alternative problem which demands resolution:

singleness of being is essentially inimical to the comic spirit. It is appropriate, then, that the internal plot of the play advocates interaction between autonomy and community, between self and other, in the foundation of personal identity, and that this interaction is posed--by the comic structure which eventually heals Egeon's despair--as the solution to his initial predicament.

Much of the farcical quality of the play stems from the ironic counterpointing of the characters' exaggerated sense of independence and their actual lack of freedom. To take independence first: the entire dramatic and thematic success of the play depends upon a fundamental difference between characters. For the audience, the play would be thoroughly confounding if, for instance, the two members of the two sets of twins were not in some way recognizably unlike;[20] and for the characters, confusion would not occur if mistaken persons behaved as those they were mistaken for.[21] The play is built upon the premise that difference of identity is real. This is a rather obvious point. But the importance of personal differentiation is woven more subtly into the very texture of the play in the various ways in which characters struggle to make sense of their experience. Two bases of judgement are used in the interpretation of events: prior experience of an other person's "identity" (in the sense of self-sameness), and one's own predisposition. Both imply that personal identity is stable and complete in itself.

Several times in the play, the assessment of a person's behaviour is made on the basis of acquaintance with his or her reputation or personality. Antipholus of Ephesus, for example, is familiar with his wife's jealousy and knows that he can incite her to wrath by assuming an intimate relationship with the Courtesan. His revenge, so to speak, for having been locked out of

his home consists in prompting her weakness. He instructs Angelo to bring the chain originally made for Adriana to the Courtesan's house so that he may bestow it upon her "for nothing but to spite my wife" (III.i.118). Later in the play, when Antipholus has refused to pay for the chain, Angelo is evidently puzzled because he knows well Antipholus's otherwise impeccable reputation. He informs the Merchant that Antipholus is

> Of very reverend reputation, sir,
> Of credit infinite, highly belov'd,
> Second to none that lives here in the city;
> His word might bear my wealth at any time.
>
> (V.i.5-8)

Confusion, and close at its heels violence, break out when expectations arising from prior knowledge of a person's characteristic behaviour are not fulfilled. This is also the case when, at the play's end, the Duke is told of the Abbess's unseemly behaviour and urged to take action against her. He finds it difficult to believe that the Abbess has committed any wrongdoing and is certain that some mistake has been made: "She is a virtuous and a reverend lady, / It cannot be that she hath done thee wrong" (V.i.134-35). The assumption underlying this kind of confidence is that individuals may be expected to behave in a characteristic fashion which differentiates them from others.

The confusion generated by the covert presence of two sets of twins will naturally give rise to contradictory interpretations of single events, and Shakespeare uses these circumstances to dramatize the way in which individuals make sense of their surroundings according to seemingly self-evident perceptions, perceptions which are actually unreliable sources of truth.[22]

Most obviously, the various assertions of knowledge in the play resonate with irony: Adriana's "I know his eye doth homage otherwhere" (II.i.104), Antipholus of Syracuse's insistence to Luciana that "if that I am I, then well I know / Your weeping sister is no wife of mine" (III.ii.41-42), the balanced force of Dromio of Ephesus's and Egeon's symmetrical "I am sure thou dost[.] / Ay sir, but I am sure I do not" (V.i.304-05), and, most succinctly, Dromio of Ephesus's "I know what I know" (III.i.11) are assertions made, unbeknownst to their speakers, and quite apart from their actual "truth", in a context of increasingly evasive certainty.

Less obvious, but no less telling, are the characters' separate attempts to interpret extraordinary happenings.[23] The pattern of behaviour in this regard is the fashioning of interpretations according to personal predisposition, an act which points again, in the proliferation of misinterpretations, to the limitations of a singular perspective. The dialectical exchange between Luciana and Adriana at the beginning of Act II, for example, illustrates how the same event may be viewed from more than one angle (though not, to the detriment of both women, by the same person). Bearing out her shrewish nature, Adriana interprets her husband's tardiness as a sure sign of his infidelity. Luciana, on the other hand, perhaps because she has no personal stake in Antipholus's behaviour, suggests that "some merchant hath invited him, / And from the mart he's somewhere gone to dinner" (II.i.4-5), and advises Adriana to have dinner without him. Needless to say, both women are wrong. But this is not the point. More important is that the two women speak at cross-purposes, as their exchange regarding the relative freedom of men and women confirms: Adriana's experience under the yoke of marriage has taught her to "bear some sway" in an attempt to assert herself

("Why should their liberty than ours be more?" [II.i.10]), while (unwed) Luciana issues the traditional warning that "headstrong liberty is lash'd with woe" (II.i.15), and that men, by the example of nature and under the auspices of "heaven's eye" (II.i.16), are "masters to their females, and their lords" (II.i.24). The source of the impasse is their dissimilar experience, according to which each makes independent sense of her surroundings:

> A wretched soul bruis'd with adversity,
> We bid be quiet when we hear it cry;
> But were we burden'd with like weight of pain,
> As much, or more, we should ourselves complain:
> So thou that hast no unkind mate to grieve thee,
> With urging helpless patience would relieve me;
> But if thou live to see like right bereft,
> This fool-begg'd patience in thee will be left.
>
> (II.i.34-41)

Although Adriana does show a somewhat broader understanding than Luciana, the exchange ends in a draw, with neither woman assuming the upper hand.

The responses of the two Antipholi to their circumstances similarly chart the invention of meaning according to individual predisposition. Antipholus of Syracuse regularly views his experience through the grid of a personality particularly retentive of and willing to believe what "they say" about mysterious Ephesus. Dromio's strange behaviour moments after landing in Ephesus is taken as a sure sign of the city's reputed enchantment:

> They say this town is full of cozenage,
> As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
> Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,

> Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
> Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
> And many such-like liberties of sin:
> If it prove so, I will be gone the sooner.
>
> (I.ii.97-103)

As his susceptibility to the authority of rumour suggests, Antipholus of Syracuse is fearful by nature and unsure of himself: he typically couples his recognition of mysterious forces with a desire to flee. Jolted back to reality by Dromio's harrowing experience with Nell, Antipholus is relieved to escape from the clutches of Luciana's power (where, a moment before, he had happily bestowed himself), and urges Dromio to secure passage from the dreaded city: "There's none but witches do inhabit here, / And therefore 'tis high time that I were hence" (III.ii.155-56). Finally, delayed by the mistaken bestowal of a chain, and now having inexplicably frightened the company to flee "as fast as may be" (IV.iv.144.S.D.),[24] Antipholus again regards the event, by now almost predictably, as evidence of Ephesian sorcery: "I see these witches are afraid of swords / . . . I will not stay to-night for all the town" (IV.iv.145, 155). Such a withdrawal into magic, as it were, is symptomatic of Antipholus of Syracuse's self-diminishment, a quality which derives from the sense of self-loss he mentions early in the play:

> I to the world am like a drop of water
> That in the ocean seeks another drop,
> Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
> (Unseen, inquisitive) confounds himself.
> So I, to find a mother and a brother,
> In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself. (I.ii.35-40)

Antipholus's characteristic desire for community, for completion by an other, is also confirmed in his otherwise puzzling willingness to follow the assertive directions of a strange woman. Rather than having faith in his own experience, he momentarily accepts the possibility that his perception may not be reliable or self-sufficient:

> What, was I married to her in my dream?
> Or sleep I now, and think I hear all this?
> What error drives our eyes and ears amiss?
> Until I know this sure uncertainty,
> I'll entertain the offer'd fallacy.
>
> (II.ii.182-86)

The self-effacement typical of Antipholus of Syracuse's response to events is neatly balanced by his brother's self-assertion in parallel circumstances.[25] In the displacement made possible by the cross-exchange of master and servant, we learn that Antipholus of Ephesus regularly resorts to violence as a means of enforcing his will. At his first meeting with Antipholus of Syracuse, Dromio of Ephesus reveals that the "marks" of his master's (and mistress's) beatings are indelibly written on his body, and his broad reference to physical violence later in the play suggests that he is no stranger to abuse:

> I have served him from the hour of my nativity to this instant, and have nothing at his hands for my service but blows. When I am cold, he heats me with beating; when I am warm he cools me with beating; I am waked with it when I sleep, raised with it when I sit, driven out of doors

with it when I go from home, welcomed home with it when I return, nay, I bear it on my shoulders as a beggar wont her brat; and I think when he hath lamed me, I shall beg with it from door to door.

(IV.iv.27-37)

Antipholus of Ephesus's regular beatings of his inferiors are only one instance of his predisposition to use violent action in moments of frustration. Unable to imagine that Adriana's behaviour could indicate something other than infidelity, Antipholus of Ephesus dispatches Dromio to "fetch me an iron crow" and intends to break down the doors to his own house. He is cautioned by Balthazar to "be patient," and although he does substitute revenge for violence, his new course of action is no less harmful--in intention--to his wife. When he is thought to be mad and duly bound, Antipholus of Ephesus lashes out at his wife with a vehement threat: "with these nails I'll pluck out these false eyes / That would behold in me this shameful sport" (IV.iv.102-03), and, near the height of confusion, a messenger brings news of his frenzied escape:

My master and his man are both broke loose,
Beaten the maids a-row, and bound the doctor,
Whose beard they have sing'd off with brands of fire,
And ever as it blaz'd, they threw on him
Great pails of puddled mire to quench the hair;
My master preaches patience to him, and the while
His man with scissors nicks him like a fool;
And sure (unless you send some present help)
Between them they will kill the conjurer.

(V.i.169-77)

Much as we may feel that Dr. Pinch deserves exactly such treatment, and laugh accordingly, we welcome the resolution which Antipholus of Ephesus's prostration before the Duke and plea for justice anticipate. Self-assertion, like self-diminishment, is finally inappropriate as a sole basis for action.

Finally, the interpretative behaviour of Dr. Pinch reinforces the tendency of the play's characters to shape reality in conformity with predetermined expectations. Presumably consulted for his medical expertise, Dr. Pinch interprets Antipholus of Ephesus's behaviour according to the categories of his profession, and immediately invokes what he considers to be the appropriate remedy:

> I charge thee, Satan, hous'd within this man,
> To yield possession to my holy prayers,
> And to thy state of darkness hie thee straight;
> I conjure thee by all the saints in heaven.
>
> (IV.iv.52-55)

While Pinch's commonplace exorcism is easily defused by Antipholus in the following line: "Peace, doting wizard, peace; I am not mad," a statement which should suggest the likelihood of alternative explanations of his condition, Pinch continues with the diagnosis. He considers Dromio of Ephesus's endorsement of his master's tale further evidence of Antipholus's madness, and counters Adriana's view of Dromio's needless "soothing" of Antipholus's "contraries" by explaining self-righteously that Dromio "finds his [master's] vein, / And yielding to him, humours well his frenzy" (IV.iv.78-79). But this reading is short-lived, for further developments must be made to fit the diagnosis of insanity:

Mistress, both man and master is possess'd,
I know it by their pale and deadly looks;
They must be bound and laid in some dark room.

(IV.iv.90-92)

So they are, and Pinch receives his due return. While Pinch's assessment of events in accordance with his narrow sphere of knowledge contributes to the pattern of literally self-enclosed interpretation I have been tracing, his mere presence as the (nominal) conqueror of madness also raises the issue of the need to preserve the integrity of human identity: a belief in insanity assumes that normal human behaviour is confined to certain predictable forms, but Pinch's utter impotence as the certified bearer of this opinion suggests that those forms refuse to be bound by the neat classifications which any schema may try to impose upon them.

The pattern of self-referential interpretations extends to all characters in the play, and this universality brings about a salutary levelling of authority. Husbands lose supremacy over wives, fathers over sons, masters over servants. And even the Duke, otherwise an exemplary authority figure, is confounded by the strange circumstances. While no character who has encountered both members of a set of twins is exempt from the ineluctable interpretative plague that grips Ephesus, some are closer than others to admitting the possibility that their own vision is incomplete and that alternative explanations might exist. For instance, the play is sprinkled with admonitions to "be patient,"[26] though these are significant as a group rather than as indications of the superior perspective of any particular character. Balthazar best states this view:

Have patience, sir, O, let it not be so;

Herein you war against your reputation,
And draw within the compass of suspect
Th'unviolated honour of your wife.
Once this,--your long experience of her wisdom,
Her sober virtue, years and modesty,
Plead on her part some cause to you unknown;
And doubt not, sir, but she will well excuse
Why at this time the doors are made against you.

(III.i.85-93)

We have also seen that Antipholus of Syracuse was able to believe himself momentarily caught up in unexplainable circumstances; similarly, Antipholus of Ephesus glimpses the possibility that his wife may be locking him out for some reason beyond his comprehension: "There is something in the wind that we cannot get in" (III.i.69), though this recognition does not mitigate his need for vengeance. In a related way, the Duke's growing pity for Egeon's plight, and his patient forestalling of judgement, reveal a willingness to correct a myopic vision. (Still, even the Duke [mis]reads Egeon's insistence that Antipholus of Ephesus is his lost son: "I see thy age and dangers make thee dote" [V.i.329].) So while The Comedy of Errors is built primarily upon the apparently unresolvable juxtaposition of competing interpretations of single events, the play simultaneously points towards the bridging of differences: before order can be restored, the characters will learn that events are shared, that one's experience is inextricably bound up with that of others, and that any measure of confidence in the truth of one's perceptions requires the relinquishment of (contracted) autonomous points of view in favour of (expansive) communal perspectives.

The elaboration of this need for a communal component of personal identity takes place on many levels in the play, and is certainly not confined to oblique references to the imperfection of unilateral exegesis. Shakespeare's interest in human connectedness is expressed in the deliberate duplication of names for the two sets of twins (and the frequently-noted addition of the servant-twins to Shakespeare's source),[27] the use of symbolic stage props (the rope and the chain),[28] and the controlling image of an entire family symmetrically tied to a single mast.[29] But by far the most extensive treatment of the need for inter-personal bonds is in the unusual portrayal of marriage (unusual in the sense that Shakespeare gives extended attention to the marriage relationship while he eclipses the more typical comic events surrounding courtship).[30] While the inauspicious marriage of Egeon and Emilia serves mostly to enrich the separation motif of the frame narrative, the staged marriage of Adriana and Antipholus is given in enough breadth to include portrayals of jealousy, obedience, and cuckoldry, in addition to the requisite affection and love. Because Antipholus is involved in the confusions with his brother, much of the burden of the theme is given to Adriana. It is significant, then, that her sphere of activity is as close as Shakespeare comes to locating credit for the play's resolution.

Apart from the familiar comparisons with Kate,[31] Adriana rarely receives more than passing mention in commentary upon the play. But her role is actually the most synthetic, combining both the self-effacement and self-assertion characteristic of the two Antipholi. Her initial response to her husband's tardiness, which evokes Luciana's rebuke against women's jealousy and undue liberty, fades, following Dromio's report, into a distinct sense of insecurity and dependence upon her husband's good favour:

His company must do his minions grace,
Whilst I at home starve for a merry look.
Hath homely age th'alluring beauty took
From my poor cheek? then he hath wasted it.
Are my discourses dull? barren my wit?
If voluble and sharp discourse be marr'd,
Unkindness blunts it more than marble hard.
Do their gay vestments his affections bait?
That's not my fault, he's master of my state.
What ruins are in me that can be found
By him not ruin'd? Then is he the ground
Of my defeatures; my decayed fair
A sunny look of his would soon repair.

(II.i.87-99)

However much she enjoys exercising "sway" (II.i.28), and however much she is reputed a shrew (III.i.2), Adriana clearly loves her husband and invests her identity at least partially in his. The benefit of such a duality (one which Portia will also value) is best expressed in Adriana's echo of her brother-in-law's striking image of the self as a water drop, an echo which is significant because both its repetition and its delivery to the wrong Antipholus link Adriana with her husband's namesake and so serve as a connector between the two estranged brothers:[32]

How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
That thou art then estranged from thyself?--
Thyself I call it, being strange to me,
That undividable, incorporate,

> And better than thy dear self's better part.
> Ah, do not tear away thyself from me;
> For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
> A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
> And take unmingled thence that drop again
> Without addition or diminishing,
> As take from me thyself, and not me too.
>
> (II.ii.119-29)

It may be fortunate that Adriana does deliver this eloquent appeal to the wrong Antipholus, for her husband might very well have rewarded her outspokenness with a beating. As it is, her words simply perplex Antipholus of Syracuse, and his failure to answer allows them to resonate beyond the immediate situation as a kind of verbal emblem for the marital relationships restored at play's end.[33]

Unlike her stalwart husband, and unlike the defenceless Antipholus of Syracuse, Adriana draws on the combined strength of personal assertiveness and self-effacement. Driven as she is by love and concern for another, and not by any purely self-serving interests, Adriana is the only character--apart from the Duke--who attempts to rectify the confusion, albeit by a misinterpretation of the problem and by the dubious methods of Dr. Pinch. Her virtue, in so far as such a thing exists in The Comedy of Errors, is in the means if not in the end. While the others are busy contradicting each other and devising plots, Adriana sets about curing her husband of his madness, pushing--almost literally--an otherwise endless series of confusions towards the imminent resolution. Preparing the stage for the flight of Antipholus of Syracuse and his Dromio into the priory, she issues a round of assertive orders: she has

her husband bound, proposes to settle his debt with Angelo and relieve the officer, instructs Pinch safely to convey Antipholus home, and commands the silent Luciana to accompany her (IV.iv.104-28). This is not to suggest, however, that Adriana is in any way a fully-developed Shakespearean comic heroine. Her resourcefulness is balanced, for example, by her erroneous interpretation of events, and, more forcefully, by her self-deprecation before the chastisement of the Abbess and inability to counter her firm "Be quiet and depart, thou shalt not have him" (V.i.112) without the Duke's intervention. Still, the lesser power with which Adriana is endowed may be seen in its motion towards reconciliation as a blurred, though broadly distinguishable, version of the power such characters as Portia and Rosalind will wield.

The deficiencies in Adriana's power of action are supplied by the playwright: the resolution of The Comedy of Errors, like much of its plotting, occurs by sheer coincidence. As Jonathan Crewe has noticed, such a large proportion of coincidence and accident renders highly visible the strokes of the creating mind.[34] But that creating mind also chose to portray a set of characters who are dramatically, if not socially, equals, and none of whom is privileged with ample breadth to orchestrate singlehandedly a comic conclusion. By the same token, none of the characters is excluded from the gossip's feast which crowns the play. Thus Shakespeare strips away the power of self-sufficiency and shows how tenuous are the certainties of apparently autonomous persons. The play's general movement is from separation to reconciliation; but while there is a distinct contrast between the enforcement and repeal of an essentially divisive law at the play's opening and ending, and Egeon's imminent death and the Dromios' hand-in-hand exit, an incremental change from one to the other is impossible to trace. Rather, separation and

reconciliation, autonomy and community, are superimposed upon one another throughout the play: a good emblem of this coexistence is the repetition in the concluding scene of the correct versions of previously confusing experiences (V.i.377-92). This fundamental interconnectedness of self and other suggests the necessary coexistence of two otherwise competing factors in the formation of identity and, by extension, of society.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

The need for a symbiotic relationship between self and society expressed in the more farcical The Comedy of Errors is recast into romantic comedy in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. While still not specifically connected with the authority of a ruler, the power gained by characters with combined personal and social interests is now developed in distinctly political terms. And in its implicit validation of the kind of power which Julia and Silvia hold, The Two Gentlemen of Verona anticipates the just authority of Portia.

Despite the warning that The Two Gentlemen of Verona "is not a play where detailed comment on the characters is a worth-while occupation" (Leech lxxiii), we can, I think, profit from a study of the characters' interrelationships. In principle, of course, there is no quarrel with Leech's assertion that the characters of The Two Gentlemen of Verona are not fully enough developed to be fit subjects for psychological analysis; but the characters do reveal, in their various social networks, competing options for the exercise of personal power which are closely related to the play's interest in boundaries of the self[35] and the way those boundaries both disrupt and enhance social cohesion.

Power in this play, as in many of the comedies, is not vested exclusively in the recognizable garb of the patriarchy. In fact, the patriarchy is rather benign here, and we sense that its conventional injunctions are used for dramaturgical rather than thematic purposes: Julia's gossip with Lucetta is harmlessly interrupted by an order from her offstage father, and Proteus's father sends him off to Mantua to complete his education rather than to impede his amorous pursuits. Both of these fathers vanish from the play once they have served their function: there is no mention of paternal opposition when

Julia plans to follow Proteus, nor when she bequeaths her lands and goods to Lucetta; further, only one of the three stage fathers appears in the closing scene, and the consent of the Veronese fathers to the impending nuptials is simply not considered. Silvia's father, it is true, does figure more prominently in the play. His (attempted) control of Silvia's marital arrangements and his ill-advised banishment of Valentine are actions which place him squarely in the role of unjust authority. But the slender thematic treatment he receives and his easy change of heart at the play's end suggest that he, too, is a function of the plot.

The centre of interest in terms of power relations is evidently not in the patriarchal figures of the play. Instead, we are directed to consider the social behaviour of characters whose measure of power is not dictated by class, gender, or kinship, but is a result of their management of individual will. More specifically, The Two Gentlemen of Verona explores two morally distinct ways of exerting the power of action: an abusive power which betrays others' trust in order to pursue selfish ends, and a benevolent power which is informed by a sense of social connections. The play's interest in the ethics of self-assertion is revealed in the interaction of these two powers of action: the effectiveness of the latter is made possible only against the hazards of the former. So while Shakespeare does condone personal power as a way of influencing others, he cautiously restricts its legitimacy to a social function.

A play in which one of the titular characters is named Proteus will, of course, be interested in self-transformation and in the boundaries separating individuals from each other. John Cox has traced Proteus's dramatic heritage to the medieval Vice figure who, he argues, is used by Shakespeare as an

implicit critique of the ascendant aristocratic ideals of personal invulnerability as a means to power expressed by such continental authors as Castiglione and Machiavelli (78-81).[36] If Cox is right that Proteus's declining career is Shakespeare's qualification of the high-minded ideal of the invulnerable self, then the notion of "perfection," of being whole unto oneself, is treated skeptically in the play. Indeed, what Cox has termed the vulnerable self, the Augustinian notion of self as requiring completion by an other, is directly opposed in The Two Gentlemen of Verona to the naive self-sufficiency and egoism of Proteus. This preferred alternative is invested primarily in the figure of Julia, whose swoon in the concluding scene is emblematic of her self-effacement throughout the play, though Silvia's and Valentine's mutual devotion also validates the notion of selfhood rejected by Proteus.

It has frequently been observed that The Two Gentlemen of Verona's two primary characters are virtually interchangeable, and it is the rejection of this mutuality which will consign Proteus to rapid decline.[37] Even in the first scene of the play the concerted effort to establish difference between Valentine and Proteus appears to be something of a trompe l'oeil. Again and again, what is at first taken to be a sign of difference turns out to be an illusory distinction. Valentine opens the play by pointing out the opposition between his interest in travel and adventure, and Proteus's devotion to "shapeless idleness" (8). But no sooner has this distinction been made than Valentine emphasizes its merely circumstantial nature:

> But since thou lov'st, love still, and thrive therein,
> Even as I would, when I to love begin.
>
> (9-10)

In an analogous gesture of solidarity, Proteus vows to accompany Valentine in spirit, if not in body, promising that "I will be thy beadsman" (18), that he will assume the grievances of Valentine in an attempt to alleviate them. The young men's banter about the effects of love on self-control admittedly does show a difference of perspective, but even here the disagreement is not deep-seated, sounding more like a conventional adoption of roles than a meaningful difference of opinion, and which in any case is easily resolved in their symmetrical use of literary authority: Proteus's "Yet writers say . . . " (42) is deftly balanced, and so invalidated as an index of difference, by Valentine's "And writers say . . . " (45). And just before Valentine takes his leave of Proteus, the two exchange best wishes in echoing metrics:

> Val. All happiness bechance to thee in Milan.
>
> Prot. As much to you at home; and so farewell.
>
> (61-62)

One could not argue, of course, that Shakespeare's interest in the first scene of one of his earliest plays is in the naturalistic depiction of character. But the foregoing commentary is sustained not by the failure of the scene to distinguish between Proteus and Valentine, but by its overtly attempted and deliberately failed differentiation between two personalities who profess to have opposing motivations.

The mutuality of the two gentlemen in the opening scene underpins the entire play and finds its most distinctive statement--and, paradoxically, its most telling blow--in Valentine's narration of their relationship. Asked by the Duke whether Proteus is well known to him, Valentine replies: "I knew him as myself" (II.iv.57). The past tense of the verb here is significant: Valentine goes on to catalogue not, as we might expect, their similarities,

but rather the different directions their lives have taken. This is, it should be remembered, the crucial scene of the play in which Proteus first sees Silvia and in which his obsession with her takes root. It is the scene, in other words, in which the difference between Valentine and Proteus is initially marked and the course of their separation set. They will not be reunited in friendship until the puzzling--though perhaps fitting--exchange of Silvia in the final scene of the play: the interim is, significantly, the arena of Proteus's exercise of self-will.

In his social dealings prior to leaving Verona,[38] Proteus appears rather naive and ineffectual. The opening scene shows him easily outwitted by both Valentine and Speed: in the friendly exchange about love sickness, Valentine has the last word (usually a sign of power) and summarily prevents Proteus from escorting him to the shipyard; in the subsequent meeting with Speed, Proteus, though his wit is not exactly blunt, loses the match when he delivers payment for a service not rendered--we learn in the following scene that Speed has not even met with Julia, having delivered the letter to her maid instead. Proteus's next appearance reinforces our initial impression that he is at least immature if not dull-witted: his father effortlessly turns to his own advantage Proteus's ill-fated attempt to conceal a love letter.

That Proteus is easily outdone in these opening scenes would not be troublesome if he were more capable in the presence of his love. But even here, in the collapse of his loquacious protestation of fidelity, Proteus is ineffectual. In response to his passionate outpouring, Julia simply departs silently, and Proteus is left (the passive construction is significant) to consider the impropriety of his own behaviour:

What, gone without a word?

> Ay, so true love should do: it cannot speak,
> For truth hath better deeds than words to grace it.
>
> (II.ii.16-18)

If Julia's silence is a sign of true love, as the play confirms, Proteus's verbosity should indicate a suspect attachment.[39] Indeed, Shakespeare has already nurtured this suspicion in the pessimistic tone of Proteus's ruminations on the effects of love:

> He after honour hunts, I after love;
> He leaves his friends, to dignify them more;
> I leave myself, my friends, and all, for love:
> Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphos'd me;
> Made me neglect my studies, lose my time,
> War with good counsel, set the world at naught;
> Made wit with musing weak, heart sick with thought.
>
> (I.i.63-69)

The negative cast of this passage and the notable absence here of any sense of the redeeming features of love suggest, together with the dramaturgical proof soon to follow, that our lover does not quite measure up to Leander. Though Proteus instructs Julia to "Answer not" (II.ii.13), her silent exit is still an appropriate response to an overstated, perhaps intentionally idealistic, protestation of commitment where such a commitment is inceptive at best:

> And when that hour o'erslips me in the day
> Wherein I sigh not, Julia, for thy sake,
> The next ensuing hour some foul mischance
> Torment me for my love's forgetfulness.
>
> (II.ii.9-12)

The fulfilment of Proteus's prophecy is looked for even upon one's first reading of the play.

The first three scenes in which Proteus appears, therefore, depict him as more acted upon than acting. Once in Milan, he behaves quite differently, wilfully steering a course of unabashed self-fulfilment. Ironically, Proteus's power in Milan derives from the very connections--namely friendship and love--he carelessly jeopardizes. Thinking himself safe in the company of a friend, Valentine unwittingly frames himself by entrusting to Proteus the secret of his planned flight with Silvia. It is precisely this confidence which will enable Proteus to betray his friend and advance his own interests. Though it takes him a while to perceive the full value of the information he has received, Proteus is already only half-heartedly determined to change the course of his new affection: "If I can check my erring love, I will; / If not, to compass her I'll use my skill" (II.iv.209-10).

In the remainder of Proteus's stay in Milan, that desire and skill easily transform into power. Proteus's next appearance makes clear that he has, indeed, failed to check his erring love and that he fully intends to exploit Valentine's confidence. Interestingly, Proteus justifies his malicious actions on the basis of personal integrity:

> Julia I lose, and Valentine I lose;
> If I keep them, I needs must lose myself;
> If I lose them, thus find I by their loss:
> For Valentine, myself; for Julia, Silvia.
>
> (II.vi.19-22)

His easy substitution of Valentine for himself and Silvia for Julia betrays Proteus's misunderstanding of the integrity he seeks to maintain, a state of

constancy to oneself and to others which will not bear the simplistic role shuffling he imagines here. This naive conception of social relations forecasts the limits of Proteus's power: he shall learn that such sophistry cannot regain the trust of Julia or Valentine, and that his own self-fulfilment will be achieved only when his connections with others are restored. As the irony of this passage becomes apparent in the light of subsequent events, it also becomes clear that, as a source of power, personal will must be more than self-defining, that a person acting solely to fulfil individual desire will not only be unsuccessful, but will indeed also be inhuman--the mythical Proteus is, after all, a monster of varying forms.

The considerable--though temporary--scope of Proteus's power begins to take shape as he confesses to Silvia's father his own conflicting allegiance to friend and patron without admitting the possibility that the resolution of the dilemma will not favour the Duke:

> My gracious lord, that which I would discover
> The law of friendship bids me to conceal,
> But when I call to mind your gracious favours
> Done to me, undeserving as I am,
> My duty pricks me on to utter that
> Which else no worldly good should draw from me.
>
> (III.i.4-9)

By inventing a conflict of interests, and by his apparent reluctance to reveal information, Proteus simultaneously fulfils his duty to the prince and remains true to his friend, in principle if not in action. Any ethical objection to his disclosure of the intended flight is answered by positioning the seeming betrayal within a hierarchical framework of obligations which privileges

gratitude over friendship. The facts may then safely be given in unadorned terms: "Know, worthy prince, Sir Valentine my friend / This night intends to steal away your daughter" (III.i.10-11). The Duke's expected apprehension about the source of information is then deftly preempted by Proteus's assertion that "Myself am one made privy to the plot" (III.i.12), in which the connection between the authority of his privileged information and his friendship says more than he means. Finally, Proteus secures his newly-acquired confidence by shifting attention from himself to the Duke, so that the entire second half of his speech projects and calculatedly incites the Duke's anger:

> I know you have determin'd to bestow her
> On Thurio, whom your gentle daughter hates,
> And should she thus be stol'n away from you,
> It would be much vexation to your age.
> Thus, for duty's sake, I rather chose
> To cross my friend in his intended drift,
> Than, by concealing it, heap on your head
> A pack of sorrows, which would press you down,
> Being unprevented, to your timeless grave.
>
> (III.i.13-21)

Proteus has done more here than anticipate the Duke's response; he has also supplied him with the strongest objection to the illicit elopement: the thwarting of his paternal right to control marital negotiations. Proteus should be suitably relieved to hear the Duke's response, "Proteus, I thank thee for thine honest care, / Which to requite command me while I live" (III.i.22-23), for it confirms that his tactics have succeeded exactly as planned.

Having gained the Duke's confidence, and so established a new source of power, Proteus concludes his plot with a highly ironic bid to have his part in it concealed:

> But, good my lord, do it so cunningly
> That my discovery be not aimed at;
> For love of you, not hate unto my friend,
> Hath made me publisher of this pretence.
>
> (III.i.44-47)

For the audience, this further mention of the conflict between friendship and duty underscores the broken bonds between Proteus and his fellows. Not only has he been untrue to Valentine, but in his manipulation of the Duke, in his renunciation of Julia, in his later goading of Thurio and, most graphically, in his attempted rape of Silvia, Proteus also acts unabashedly "For love of myself": his professed altruism is the fitting inversion of his actual self-centredness. His prostitution of love (line 46), of a bond inherently valued by the genre, indicates how far Proteus has turned away from the comic world.

John Cox has persuasively suggested that Proteus's rhetorical strategy in this scene anticipates that of Edmund and Iago, and that all three are essentially descendants of the medieval Vice figure (79). The Vice's characteristic self-sufficiency is invariably a symptom of moral degeneracy; similarly, Proteus's loss of a sense of community means that, in the system of values expounded by comedy, his dominance is short-lived, and even that his fall is the natural result of his exclusive self-allegiance. The ultimate failure of such power is suggested in the play by the inverse example of Valentine, Silvia, and especially Julia.

The most important contrast to Proteus's pattern of behaviour is in Julia, whose influence throughout the play is directly a result of her love. While it may seem odd that Julia's bond to Proteus be reinforced by her rival, Silvia is actually best suited to express it: in the chasm of Proteus's love, Julia is denied a voice (her silent exit at Proteus's departure may prefigure this), and Silvia becomes her ventriloquist, taking every opportunity to remind Proteus of his forsaken love and repeatedly emphasizing the mutuality he has abandoned: "Go to thy lady's grave and call [her love] thence, / Or, at the least, in hers sepulchre thine" (IV.ii.113-14).

This substitution of Silvia's voice for Julia's is indicative, too, of the bond between the two women, a bond which seems to derive its strength not from long-standing acquaintance, as with Valentine and Proteus, but from a mutual compassion. The complexities of their relationship are conveyed by Julia's paradox of the merely cosmetic differences between herself and Silvia and the strangely real differences between herself and Silvia's portrait:

> Here is her picture: let me see; I think
> If I had such a tire, this face of mine
> Were full as lovely as is this of hers;
> And yet the painter flatter'd her a little,
> Unless I flatter with myself too much.
> Her hair is auburn, mine is perfect yellow:
> If that be all the difference in his love,
> I'll get me such a colour'd periwig.
> Her eyes are grey as glass, and so are mine;
> Ay, but her forehead's low, and mine's as high.
> What should it be that he respects in her,

But I can make respective in myself,
If this fond Love were not a blinded god?
Come, shadow, come, and take this shadow up,
For 'tis thy rival. O thou senseless form,
Thou shalt be worshipp'd, kiss'd, lov'd, and ador'd;
And were there sense in his idolatry,
My substance should be statue in thy stead.
I'll use thee kindly, for my mistress' sake
That us'd me so.

(IV.iv.182-201)

The reciprocity between Julia and Silvia suggested by the last two lines does more than indicate a tie between the two women: by extension, it emphasizes the difference between Julia's deliberate suppression of self-interest ("or else, by Jove I vow, / I should have scratch'd out your unseeing eyes, / To make my master out of love with thee" [IV.iv.201-203]) in response to a kindness bestowed upon her, and Proteus's disregard for the favours granted by the Duke as he ruthlessly pursues self-serving ends. Though the parallel is not exact (Proteus's activity is complicated by his additional betrayal of Valentine), the contrast between Proteus's and Julia's sense of fellowship is clear.

But to what extent can Julia's selflessness be said to gain her a measure of power? Here the text leaves much unsaid. While she takes the initiative to follow Proteus to Milan, and there to enter his service, it would be difficult to trace in her career signs of an inner resourcefulness powerful enough to direct the course of events. In fact, it is Silvia who, in her wittily oblique expression of affection to Valentine, her rebellion against her father, her

persistent refusal to entertain Proteus's suit, and her escorted flight to the forest, would seem to exemplify the kind of power that opens up fields of action for characters who invest a measure of their identity in another self. Unlike her more forceful rival, however, Julia's particular strength may be said to derive from a calculated passivity and self-effacement.

We saw how, in two scenes at the beginning of the play, Proteus was dominated by Valentine, Speed, and his own father. These scenes also frame our first view of Julia in which she and Lucetta discuss courtship and the matter of Proteus's letter. Julia directs the exchange by asking a string of questions intended to lead Lucetta to the topic Julia most wishes to discuss: Proteus. But at the first mention of his name, Lucetta redirects the conversation and, rather than answering the query "What think'st thou of the gentle Proteus?" (I.ii.14), chastises herself for offering opinions about her social superiors: "Lord, Lord! to see what folly reigns in us!" (I.ii.15). But Julia persists and elicits from Lucetta her own opinion of the preferred suitor. Julia next employs a more characteristic strategy of dispassionate understatement in order to evoke an elaboration:

> Jul. And wouldst thou have me cast my love on him?
>
> Luc. Ay; if you thought your love not cast away.
>
> Jul. Why, he, of all the rest, hath never mov'd me.
>
> Luc. Yet he, of all the rest, I think best loves ye.
>
> Jul. His little speaking shows his love but small.
>
> Luc. Fire that's closest kept burns most of all.
>
> Jul. They do not love that do not show their love.
>
> Luc. O, they love least that let men know their love.
>
> (I.ii.25-32)

Here, incidentally, is another refutation of Proteus's sincerity: Lucetta's conclusions about Proteus are ironically undercut by her subsequent introduction of his letter, perhaps the most notorious instrument of those "that let men know their love."[40] The currents of power between Julia and Lucetta take on interesting dimensions here: Julia is clearly the social superior, bidding Lucetta come and go and even striking her. But Lucetta is not exactly blindly obedient: she has enough insight to read her mistress accurately and play the game of service in such a way that Julia gets what she wants most, to read the letter. Overall, though, it is Julia's desire which shapes the scene, with both women playing against each other only to further a single aim: the discourse on love. But the scene does more than illustrate the supremacy of Julia, something we might expect between a comic heroine and her maid; more importantly, the scene serves as an effective contrast, in its singular emphasis on Julia's love, to Proteus's alloyed affections. In this respect, Julia is also Proteus's superior.

Except for the scene (V.ii) where Julia and Proteus deflate Thurio's pretensions, each of their encounters conforms to the same pattern: Proteus advances and Julia retreats. In response to Proteus's declaration of unwavering fidelity, Julia is silent. When Proteus takes Julia into his service, she keeps her identity hidden from him. And as Proteus and Valentine conduct the trade of Silvia, Julia swoons. Though the active/passive pattern overtly suggests that Proteus dominates, we see that the reverse is true: her silence leaves him perplexed,[41] her secret identity enables her to observe his behaviour (and later to narrate his "sentence"), and her (pretended?) swoon is the first step toward reclaiming his love.

As suggested earlier, the root of Julia's power is love, while the

weakness which works to undercut Proteus's power is, appropriately, self-love: like Silvia and Valentine, Julia works within a network of human connections while Proteus works alone. We have already noted Proteus's abuse of love in his manipulation of the Duke. In addition, he blames love for his protean behaviour:

> And ev'n that power which gave me first my oath
> Provokes me to this threefold perjury.
> Love bade me swear, and Love bids me forswear.
> O sweet-suggesting Love, if thou hest sinn'd,
> Teach me (thy tempted subject) to excuse it,
>
> (II.vi.4-8)

and appeals to love for continued support in the advancement of his desire: "Love, lend me wings to make my purpose swift / As thou hast lent me wit to plot this drift" (II.vi.42-43). Proteus's misguided prayer here is ironically echoed by Julia's use, in the very next scene, of the same imagery as support for her desires:

> A true-devoted pilgrim is not weary
> To measure kingdoms with his feeble steps,
> Much less shall she that hath Love's wings to fly,
> And when the flight is made to one so dear,
> Of such divine perfection as Sir Proteus.
>
> (II.vii.9-13)

Arguably, both Proteus and Julia are merely rehearsing Petrarchan rhetoric and will be equally shaken by the reality to which love's wings deliver them. However, while Proteus is changeable in his devotion, Julia remains constant regardless of the circumstances. Furthermore, long after Proteus has replaced

love's power with self-will, Julia continues to be guided by it:

> How many women would do such a message?
> Alas, poor Proteus, thou hast entertain'd
> A fox, to be the shepherd of thy lambs.
> Alas, poor fool, why do I pity him
> That with his very heart despiseth me?
> Because he loves her, he despiseth me,
> Because I love him, I must pity him.
> . . .
> I am my master's true confirmed love,
> But cannot be true servant to my master,
> Unless I prove false traitor to myself.
>
> (IV.iv.90-105)

Unlike Proteus whose primary concern was with being true to himself, Julia relinquishes her best interest in the name of love. She does, however, decide to woo coldly so that Proteus's suit will be lost. But she soon learns that Proteus's affection for Silvia is destined to be unrequited: her attempts to interrupt the progress of love, her fumbling of the letters and refracted self-reference, are unnecessary strategies where there is no real rival. The scene ends, in fact, with the creation of a touching bond between the two women, a bond which prevents Julia from scratching out Silvia's eyes and so from jeopardizing, even in her role as go-between, her selflessness.

While Valentine, the play's nominal love token, is also in many ways an alternative to Proteus's naive egotism, he is the most difficult character to position in the scheme of just and unjust personal power, for his close ties to Proteus and the outlaws seem to qualify the strength of his love and the

justice of the social order over which he presides at play's end. The best way of reconciling the conflicting signals about Valentine is to follow the lead of the opening scene in which the friendship between the two gentlemen shows that difference and sameness are two sides of the same coin. In one sense, then, Valentine has much in common with Proteus, and this resemblance to the play's Vice figure may seem to complicate his role as ideal lover and social superior. Not only does Valentine uphold the ideal friendship with Proteus throughout the play, even when faced with evidence of betrayal (where his dismay is a kind of inverse statement of value), but the pattern of his behaviour is uncomfortably like that of Proteus: he, too, undergoes a metamorphosis in Milan brought on by love of Silvia, attempts to dupe her father, berates Thurio, and, in the voluntary surrender of Silvia, reveals that his constancy is questionable.

From another angle, however, Valentine's behaviour may be the prescriptive version of Proteus's activity, and the resemblances between them intended to throw into relief the extent of Proteus's deviance. For instance, Valentine's depiction of how he and Proteus have come to differ seems to be informed by the same value system which will propel Proteus's deceptions:

> from our infancy
> We have convers'd, and spent our hours together,
> And though myself have been an idle truant,
> Omitting the sweet benefit of time
> To clothe mine age with angel-like perfection,
> Yet hath Sir Proteus (for that's his name)
> Made use and fair advantage of his days:
> His years but young, but his experience old;

His head unmellow'd, but his judgment ripe;

And in a word . . .

He is complete in feature and in mind.

(II.iv.57-68)

Delivered as it is moments before we see the harmful effects of Proteus's self-sufficiency, Valentine's regret that he has not been adequately devoted to the pursuit of "perfection" and that Proteus has achieved an admirable completion of self renders that ideal dubious. To take another example, Valentine's confession of subservience to love is actually an inversion of a similar speech made earlier by Proteus:

O gentle Proteus, Love's a mighty lord,

And hath so humbled me, as I confess

There is no woe to his correction,

Nor, to his service, no such joy on earth.

(II.iv.131-34)

As we have seen, Proteus had entirely omitted any mention of "joy" in his version of love's servitude. But far more important than these echoes is that in his relationship with Silvia Valentine is driven by the kind of mutuality which Proteus has replaced with independence. Banished from Silvia's presence, Valentine decides that he might as well cease living:

And why not death, rather than living torment?

To die is to be banish'd from myself,

And Silvia is myself: banish'd from her

Is self from self. A deadly banishment.

. . .

She is my essence, and I leave to be,

> If I be not by her fair influence
> Foster'd, illumin'd, cherish'd, kept alive.
>
> (III.i.170-84)

The degree to which Valentine and Proteus depend on another is a measurable distinction between the two gentlemen.

But while Valentine's close ties to Proteus may be viewed as a way of proposing a suitable alternative to Proteus's degeneracy, his association with the outlaws is more troublesome. That the outlaws offer Valentine a position of authority among them is strange enough, but when we consider that their choice of leader rests on his perceived "perfection" or wholeness of being, the very driving force of Proteus's actions, the appointment to lead a group of bandits who "make their wills their law" (V.iv.14), raises serious doubts about Valentine's moral superiority and fitness to preside over the play's restored social order. Indeed, Valentine's relations with the outlaws are puzzling, to say the least. First, he inexplicably lies about the reason for his banishment, claiming to have killed a man "manfully," as though this crime were somehow more honourable than an attempted elopement. Then, firmly established as their captain, Valentine confesses that the outlaws are savage and that he has "much to do / To keep them from uncivil outrages" (V.iv.16-17). A few moments later, however, he asks the Duke to pardon his associates, claiming that they are "reformed, civil, full of good" (V.iv.154).

This contradiction of sentiment is let stand, and its clouding of the play's resolution is compounded by the notorious episode where Silvia is transferred to Proteus as a token of renewed friendship and trust. Here Valentine seems to have confused his priorities, taking most interest throughout the scene in expounding the forsaken ideals of male friendship, and

then granting far too speedy forgiveness in accordance, presumably, with those same ideals. The surrender of Silvia, formerly his "essence," is the logical extension of his newly-discovered bond with Proteus, but it fails to bring the play any closer to reconciliation. In fact, it "reintroduces and compounds the dilemmas that Proteus' repentance had almost resolved" (Cox 81).

As an alternative to Proteus's moral degeneracy, the figure of Valentine is fraught with difficulties because his devotion to the ideals of Ciceronian friendship undermines his commitment to the heterosexual bond which alone can lead to the rejuvenation of the comic community. The value of this bond, both in The Two Gentlemen of Verona and in Shakespeare's other comedies, is invested in the female characters who are "constant" and "perfect" in their commitments to love. It is notable, then, that while Silvia and Julia exercise a measure of power in their respective domains, the one by active and the other by passive means, they find themselves virtually powerless when male alliance is reinforced in the forest.

The denouement of the play, as we might expect, dramatizes the relatively uncomplicated overthrow of Proteus's power: following his most overt act of self-enforcement, the attempted rape of Silvia, Proteus is physically overcome by Valentine. Then, faced with a verbal image of his deformity, Proteus repents and is brought back into the fold of friendship. This initial phase of his restoration is followed by Julia's self-discovery which leads to Proteus's most terse and accurate self-image: "O heaven, were man / But constant, he were perfect" (V.iv.109-10). But Proteus must also be reunited with society at large,[42] and Valentine insists that "'tis your penance but to hear / The story of your loves discovered" (V.iv.168-69), a statement which gives, intentionally or not, the final act of supremacy to Julia, for she alone can

supply the complete narration. It may be appropriate, then, that Julia not be mentioned by name in this final phase of Proteus's penance: she has, after all, been acting throughout the play on behalf of a system of values which defines the "perfect" self in terms of its connections with others.

The Merchant of Venice

The limited scope of Julia's power of action in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, marked especially by her self-effacing strategies, is considerably enlarged by the spontaneous and self-determined heroine of The Merchant of Venice. Unlike her earlier counterpart, Portia virtually takes it upon herself to conduct the play's events safely into comic waters. Moreover, her power of action is now combined with the exercise of authority; and the play's vindication of her modus operandi paradoxically constitutes both a definition of just authority and a subversive threat to the comic community.

In The Merchant of Venice, authority is dramatized in two opposing contexts: the generally beneficent authority of Portia's deceased father in the casket scenes, and the abusive authority of Shylock's law in the flesh-bond scenes.[43] In both contexts, it is Portia--and not her male superiors--who determines the outcome of events by observing and even reinforcing the bounds of legitimate power. By playing within the rules established by her father, and indeed by using those rules to her own definite advantage, and by accepting--rather than defying--Shylock's legal terms as guides to her judgement, Portia gains a measure of power which, if we are to take a strictly socio-historical view, is incommensurate with her gender-defined position in what is admittedly a patriarchal world.[44] This culturally unorthodox power is not, as some would argue,[45] an inversion sanctioned by the dominant authority, but rather the direct result of Portia's own resourcefulness, particularly her volatile application of the recognition that authority may claim justice only to the extent that it serves ends which are not determined by naked self-interest, and only to the extent that it promotes social order.[46]

Portia's first appearance raises the issue of her impotence in the choice

of husband. If we take as the correct perspective of her predicament the several lines in which Portia refers to herself as "aweary" and "curb'd," as many of the play's commentators would have us do,[47] we might very well conclude that Portia is a constricted aristocratic heiress whose instinctive consent to an arranged marriage is fully expected. But if we pause and return those lines to their proper dramatic context, we realize that Portia, while certainly not free in any twentieth-century sense, playfully exaggerates her plight and, rather than being within the tight grip of her dead father's will, is in fact making good use of that will to fend off undesirable suitors.

Portia opens the scene with a sigh: "By my troth Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world" (I.ii.1-2), to which Nerissa level-headedly replies, "You would be (sweet madam), if your miseries were in the same abundance as your good fortunes are" (I.ii.3-4). This sensible deflation suggests that Portia's languor is spurious, an impression which is then reinforced by Portia's own energetic philosophizing about the disjunction between understanding and will. When she relapses into self-pity in the notorious passage about her lack of choice, and appeals to Nerissa for an endorsement of her plight, Nerissa's response is once again the corrective lens:

> Por. O e the word "choose"! I may neither choose
> who I would, nor refuse who I dislike, so is
> the will of a living daughter curb'd by the will
> of a dead father: is it not hard Nerissa, that I
> cannot choose one, nor refuse none?
> Ner. Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at
> their death have good inspirations, --therefore

> the lott'ry that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly, but one who you shall rightly love.
>
> (I.ii.22-32)

To read only Portia's half of the exchange in both passages is decidedly to skew the text. Similarly, Portia's apparent submission to the will of her father ("If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will" I.ii.102-04) must be understood in its dramatic context, as a direct response to Nerissa's news that, having accepted the terms of the contest, the undesirable suitors will leave unless Portia may be won by some other means. As Richard Levin has written, "It seems, then, that she is communicating a message designed to ensure her guests' departure" (56).[48] The full rhythm of the scene, including Portia's devastating critique of her suitors, suggests that she is an imaginative and resourceful young woman whose desire is fulfilled rather than curbed by the paternal will. The dramatic fact here, and when Bassanio enters the lottery, is that the wills of Portia and her father are never at cross-purposes.[49]

This conjunction of Portia's will with her father's establishes paternal authority as a beneficent force in the play. Rather than being overbearing and restrictive, it actually enables Portia to exercise a sizeable influence over a situation which might otherwise have been entirely out of her hands. In response to the dilatory pleas of her suitors, Portia hastens the procedure and rehearses the terms of the contract, using her father's will as both

shield and sword. To Morocco she says,

> You must take your chance,
> And either not attempt to choose at all,
> Or swear before you choose, if you choose wrong
> Never to speak to lady afterward
> In way of marriage, --therefore be advis'd
>
> (II.i.38-43)

and to Arragon,

> Behold, there stand the caskets noble prince,
> If you choose that wherein I am contain'd
> Straight shall our nuptial rites be solemniz'd:
> But if you fail, without more speech my lord
> You must be gone from hence immediately.
>
> (II.ix.4-8)

On both occasions, Portia seems willing to accept, and even to emphasize, the rigid rules of the game. But when dealing with the preferred suitor, Portia stalls and deliberately refrains from mentioning the rules, perhaps because she cannot bear to consider Bassanio's failure. She repeats instead the raison d'être of the contest:

> Away then! I am lock'd in one of them, --
> If you do love me, you will find me out.
>
> (III.ii.40-41)

As the traditional folklore protagonist, Bassanio does of course choose the correct casket; in so doing, he initiates a relationship destined further to expand--rather than reduce--the scope of Portia's power.[50]

The socio-historical sources of what might at first appear to be Portia's submission to Bassanio can neither satisfactorily explain their relationship nor make sense of Portia's role in the remainder of the play.[51] Although Portia invokes the traditional hierarchical model of the marital relationship, she also qualifies her consent to the prescribed role and, more importantly, firmly bases that consent in her desire to experience the personal metamorphosis she associates with marriage. In her own words, she considers her willing transformation "the happiest of all" her qualities:

> Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
> Commits itself to yours to be directed,
> As from her lord, her governor, her king.
> Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
> Is now converted. But now I was the lord
> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
> Queen o'er myself: and even now, but now.
> This house, these servants, and this same myself
> Are yours, --my lord's! --I give them with this ring,
> Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
> Let it presage the ruin of your love,
> And be my vantage to exclaim on you.
>
> (III.ii.163-74)

It is notable, too, that Bassanio's acceptance of Portia's offer is given in figural terms which reverse the direction of submission:

> Madam, you have bereft me of all words,
> Only my blood speaks to you in my veins,
> And there is such confusion in my powers,

As after some oration fairly spoke
By a beloved prince, there doth appear
Among the buzzing pleased multitude,
Where every something being blent together,
Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy
Express'd, and not express'd.

(III.ii.175-83)

It is important to remember that Portia's social superiority enables a reversal of the power relations implied in the hierarchical model of marriage, a reversal which has already been hinted at in Portia's musing about Bassanio's perception of the music accompanying his victory:

he may win,
And what is music then? Then music is
Even as the flourish, when true subjects bow
To a new-crowned monarch: such it is,
As are those dulcet sounds in break of day,
That creep into the dreaming bridegroom's ear,
And summon him to marriage.

(III.ii.47-53)

The apparently paradoxical conjunction of a bridegroom's and subject's experience on a joyful occasion is significant: it helps to make the point that the betrothal of Bassanio and Portia involves a mutual surrender. Rather than being subsumed under the will of another, Portia considers herself "converted" (III.ii.167)[52] to a fuller person. There is no sense of loss associated with this arrangement; if anything, we are invited to view Portia as the "prince" of the relationship, both in her self-fulfilling conversion

and her conditional bestowal of the ring.

Accordingly, it is Portia who assumes control when the comic tone is interrupted by the unsettled business of Antonio's bond with Shylock. As in his primary source, Il Pecorone, Shakespeare positions the marriage of his lovers in mid-play, and devotes much of the balance of the story to working out the complementary difficulties of finance and friendship. This is not to say that the romantic thread disappears while the trial proceeds. On the contrary, the trial scene concerns the marital bond as much as the legal bond. Indeed, we are invited to consider this central scene, and especially Portia's management and redefinition of authority within it, as a lens through which to view the social harmony promised by the play's generic signposts.

Perhaps the link between the marital and legal bonds is best made clear simply by recalling that Shylock's threat and the betrothal of Portia and Bassanio appear in the same scene, separated by a scant twenty-eight lines. Portia, of course, will become the connective between Belmont and Venice, teaching Bassanio no less than the merchants and magistrates the meaning of authority, a role for which she alone is fit. We have already seen that Portia's social superiority grants her a considerable personal influence, and we see her now, in a moment of crisis, assume full control. Her resourcefulness--in striking contrast to Bassanio's floundering--appears immediately as she sensibly insists that Shylock be paid triple the amount of the bond, and that Bassanio leave for Venice as soon as their marriage has been made legal. Having dispatched Bassanio, she confers upon Lorenzo the management of her estate, sends Balthazar to deliver a letter to her cousin, Doctor Bellario, and then to bring certain "notes and garments" (III.iv.51) to the ferry she and Nerissa, appropriately disguised, will take to Venice. It

is worth pausing here to emphasize what is at stake for Portia, why she is behaving with such dexterity in a matter concerning someone only distantly related to her:

> in companions
> That do converse and waste the time together,
> Whose souls do bear an egall yoke of love,
> There must be needs a like proportion
> Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit;
> Which makes me think that this Antonio
> Being the bosom lover of my lord,
> Must needs be like my lord. If it be so,
> How little is the cost I have bestowed
> In purchasing the semblance of my soul,
> From out the state of hellish cruelty! --
> This comes too near the praising of myself,
> Therefore no more of it.
>
> (III.iv.11-23)

Portia is driven, in other words, by a sense of connectedness between herself and Antonio.[53] If, as Jessica warns, "law, authority, and power deny not, / It will go hard with poor Antonio" (III.ii.288-89), then, given Portia's link with the defendant, her task is somehow to deal with that law. To anticipate, she will confront the law with an image of its own limitations, and redefine its power by inscribing within it a measure of the bond which is the source of her own strength.

Before looking at the dynamics of the court scene, one ought to clarify the operative tendencies of Portia's opponent, Shylock, who figures

very clearly as the representative of the unjust authority she will reform. Perhaps the two words most readily associated with Shylock are "bond" and "law," and his understanding of each of these terms best sets him apart from Portia. Shylock's initial proposal of the "merry bond" is made under the suspicious rubric of "kindness":

> This kindness will I show,
> Go with me to a notary, seal me there
> Your single bond, and (in a merry sport)
> If you repay me not on such a day
> In such a place, such sum or sums as are
> Express'd in the condition, let the forfeit
> Be nominated for an equal pound
> Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
> In what part of your body pleaseth me.
>
> (I.iii.139-47)

By cloaking his malicious intent under the guise of friendship and jest (notable in this regard is the offhand way in which Shylock rehearses the conditions of forfeit), Shylock is most at fault for abusing a bond which the play as a whole upholds.

Furthermore, as the play proceeds, it becomes apparent that the only bond Shylock values is one from which he benefits, that, like Proteus, he acts strictly on his own behalf and without any sense of responsibility to other human beings. Launcelot Gobbo's desertion of his master, if read in isolation, may not point in this direction; but when read together with the additional rebellion of Jessica it becomes a clear indication of the increasing contraction of Shylock's social circle. It may be objected here

that Shylock regularly positions himself within the broader community of his tribe. But both the regularity and the rhetorically strategic use of such identifications are suspect, and reveal that Shylock's use of these references to his people is much like his use of friendship in devising the bond. For instance, Shylock's lone musing about his grudge against Antonio is intentionally set within a context of traditional Jewish usury, a context which lends Shylock a justification for what is essentially a personal aim:

> I hate him for he is a Christian:
> But more, for that in low simplicity
> He lends out money gratis, and brings down
> The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
> If I can catch him once upon the hip,
> I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.
> He hates our sacred nation, and he rails
> (Even there where merchants most do congregate)
> On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,
> Which he calls interest: cursed be my tribe
> If I forgive him!
>
> (I.iii.37-47; emphasis added)

Similarly, Shylock positions the treatment he has received at the hands of the Christian merchant within a seemingly gratuitous context of racial persecution:

> Signior Antonio, many a time and oft
> In the Rialto you have rated me
> About my moneys and my usances:
> Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,

(For suff'rance is the badge of all <u>our</u> tribe).

(I.iii.101-05; emphasis added)

Even Shylock's most eloquent reference to his Jewishness, the well-known "Hath not a Jew" passage, follows a heated listing of Antonio's offences against Shylock's person:

> ... he hath disgrac'd me, and hind'red me half
> a million, laugh'd at my losses, mock'd at my
> gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains,
> cooled my friends, heated my enemies, --and what's
> his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? ...
>
> (III.i.48-53)

Nowhere else in the play is there any indication that Antonio's abuse of Shylock is motivated by racism, nor is usury identified in the play with the broader racial group. Shylock is despised by Antonio on the grounds of his individual financial practice. Admittedly, most of the other characters repeatedly refer to Shylock as "Jew," and the matter of Christian racism and mutual culpability is well worth looking at.[54] But a thorough look at Shylock's self-perception and motivation reveals a conspicuous individualist who uses his tribe as a ready excuse for pursuing personal aims.

Shylock's individualism, then, feeds his obsession with the legal bond, a kind of immoveable bridge between himself and Antonio which paradoxically functions to prevent rather than facilitate intercommunication. Shylock's almost frantic repetition of such phrases as "I will have my bond" (the highest concentration is six times in fourteen lines [III.iii.4-17]) from the time of the bond's creation to its collapse is a good index of his rigidity and accompanying seclusion.

Shylock's singleminded understanding of the meaning of bond is reflected too in his understanding of the law; like the bond, the law is made to separate rather than unite individuals. As he himself insists, Shylock represents the law: "I stand here for law" (IV.i.142). Throughout the trial, he invokes the law as his assurance that the bond will be honoured, rightly taking heart in the fact that the Venetians are unable to oppose an authority they themselves have established. As Antonio despondently proclaims,

> The duke cannot deny the course of law:
> For the commodity that strangers have
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,
> Will much impeach the justice of the state,
> Since that the trade and profit of the city
> Consisteth of all nations.
>
> (III.iii.26-31)

But the law in which Shylock invests his hope is more powerful than he imagines, and it is Portia's role both to enforce it and to expose its limitations. Her power to enforce it derives from her full acceptance of law as Shylock chooses to define it; her power to expose its limitations derives from her self-imposed exercise of just authority.[55] Drawing upon an ample store of legal and ethical resources, Portia proceeds by alternately feeding Shylock's self-confidence and then offering an alternative to his murderous intentions. She repeatedly mirrors his image of a rigid law: "the Venetian law / Cannot impugn you as you do proceed"; "there is no power in Venice / Can alter a decree established"; "lawfully by this the Jew may claim / A pound of flesh"; "the intent and purpose of the law / Hath full relation to the penalty"; "A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine, / The court awards

it, and the law doth give it" (IV.i.174-75, 214-15, 227-28, 295-96). Shylock is of course delighted with this, and gratefully accepts Portia's judgement: "you are a worthy judge, / You know the law, your exposition / Hath been most sound" (IV.i.232-34). Portia wins Shylock's consent by working from within his conception of legal discourse. But his eager praise of the "Most rightful judge!" (IV.i.297) is destined to be heard again in Gratiano's rude echo, an echo that reinforces the impotence of a singleminded understanding of law (and does much to establish an uncomfortable similarity between the two characters).

Before Portia plays her final hand, she gives Shylock several opportunities to redirect the course of the trial. In her well-known mercy speech, she expounds the virtue in terms which are clearly antithetical to Shylock's steeliness:

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest,
> It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes,
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown.
> His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
> The attribute to awe and majesty,
> Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings:
> But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
> It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
> It is an attribute to God himself;
> And earthly power doth then show likest God's

> When mercy seasons justice: therefore Jew,
> Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
> That in the course of justice, none of us
> Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy,
> And that same prayer, doth teach us all to render
> The deeds of mercy.
>
> (IV.i.180-98)

Here Portia makes plain the limitations of the temporal power which Shylock's law embodies. She suggests that authority is fulfilled only when it is based on a benevolent bond between individuals, that its power transcends the sceptre when it is based on an awareness of humankind's common lot in the face of divine judgement. But Shylock reads Portia all too literally, exclaiming "My deeds upon my head!" (IV.i.202), and so unwittingly puts himself at the mercy of the very law he craves. Portia then again encourages Shylock to be merciful, offering him triple the money owed (IV.i.223, 230), and urges him to show charity by at least employing a surgeon to treat Antonio's wound (IV.i.253). When all of these pleas elicit nothing more than repeated insistence on the letter of the law, Portia meets Shylock on his own ground: "For as thou urgest justice, be assur'd / Thou shalt have justice more than thou desir'st" (IV.i.311-12). Not only does Portia's judgement preclude the fulfilment of the legal bond, but she inverts its relation of obligation in order to reinforce the lesson of her mercy speech.

In the management of her father's will, Portia demonstrated that paternal authority can be benevolent, and in the Venetian courtroom, she makes clear that legal authority is legitimate only to the extent that it is made to serve social order. When authority assumes the restrictive features of Shylock's

law, and so abandons the communal goals it has been established to serve, it engenders alternative powers which expose its weakness and bring about its own destruction; informed by a sense of community, on the other hand, authority ensures its own survival and the survival of the social group. In the final movement of the play, the ring episode, Shakespeare transposes this last point to the scale of marriage. We have already seen that in her bestowal of the ring, Portia had set a condition to the relationship it symbolized; in a sense, she created a law or a bond within which the marriage was to function. But away from Belmont and pressured by competing loyalties, Bassanio all too easily surrenders the ring and so violates the bond it represents. Indeed, Bassanio reveals his tendency to violate bonds at the trial as well, beseeching Portia to "Wrest once the law to your authority, -- / To do a great right, do a little wrong, -- / And curb this cruel devil of his will" (IV.i.211-13). Portia seizes her opportunity to educate Bassanio about the meaning of marital bonds by enforcing the restrictions of legal bonds. She reminds Bassanio that "It must not be" (IV.i.214), that the law cannot be broken. Bassanio's next remark in the scene is his shameful surrender of all of his possessions, including his marriage, to which Portia responds with ironic distance: "Your wife would give you little thanks for that / If she were by to hear you make the offer" (IV.i.284-85). And when Portia has made her legal judgement, Bassanio quickly takes up Shylock's offer to accept triple his due. Again, Portia is quick to intercept: "Soft! / The Jew shall have all justice, --soft no haste! / He shall have nothing but the penalty" (IV.i.316-18). But Bassanio is slow to learn, unthinkingly offering Shylock the principal he demands. Portia halts the exchange: "He hath refus'd it in the open court, / He shall have merely justice and his bond" (IV.i.334-35), finally putting an end to the

negotiations. It is notable that each of Bassanio's remarks in the courtroom while Portia is present is directly answered by her in a way which challenges his intention. In other words, Bassanio's behaviour is being curbed by Portia in an attempt to teach him the significance of bonds.[56]

Because he is the bearer of familial authority, Bassanio's disregard for the ring bond, in a sense the opposite of Shylock's insistence on the legal bond, creates an opportunity for Portia's power to surface. She uses that power, however, in a merciful way, though her strategy in bringing Bassanio close to despair oddly resembles her moves against Shylock. Confronting Bassanio with his infraction, Portia first accuses him of adultery, then threatens to be unfaithful in turn, and finally declares her infidelity a fait accompli by revealing her possession of the ring. This strategy of playing within the rules established by the violator enables Portia, here as with Shylock, to mirror the potential implication of Bassanio's betrayal.

Having made her point, and pushed Gratiano almost to rage, Portia extends mercy to the men, reveals the puzzling circumstances, and brings the play to the comic order that has twice been deferred.[57] But the close of the play is notoriously unsatisfactory. The concluding scene is marked by an uncomfortable residue of Portia's power, and the traditional levelling of awareness we expect in a romantic comedy by Shakespeare is strangely lacking. Throughout the play, Portia has capably managed the direction of events, and the force of this single-handed control is not easily demobilized by a mere gesture of comic closure. Our unease at the end of The Merchant of Venice may be due to our continuing confidence in Portia's power of action, a power whose extensive scope is troubling to the very community it seeks to protect.

As You Like It

Portia and Rosalind are generally thought to be sister comic heroines, with equal restorative powers in their respective plays. But seeing each character in relation to the power structures in The Merchant of Venice and As You Like It reveals a measurable difference: the power of Portia, her command of legitimate authoritative discourses, is nowhere paralleled by Rosalind, whose only outright involvement with authority is her verbal rebuke of Frederick and her ultimate "self-surrender" to father and husband. Rosalind's sphere of influence is restricted to the romantic strand of the play. In the play's two-part structure, however, this restriction enables her connective role in the romantic plot to assume analogous significance for the political themes of the play, specifically as a countervoice to the divisiveness characteristic of the unjust authority dominant at court. By the same token, because Rosalind's power is less expansive than Portia's, her merging with the restored social order is more successful and the play's ending on the whole more satisfactory.

As You Like It is a play of intricate balance.[58] From the pairs of brothers at the opening, to the pairs of lovers at the closing, the play strives to convey an overall sense of symmetry, likeness and relationship. Alluding to the play's ornateness, Helen Gardner has called As You Like It "Shakespeare's most Mozartian comedy" (18). But contrary to what the symmetry of beginning and ending may invite us to conclude, the tonal harmony of the play is something achieved rather than given. To continue Gardner's suggestive simile, the world at the play's opening is set in a minor key, expressing in grave tones an askew version of its proper self, and is, over the course of the play, transposed into the resounding major chords of the

conclusion. Perceiving in As You Like It a broad movement from minor to major versions of the same key is a helpful approach to its thematic and structural dynamics. Because it does not posit an exclusive relationship either of contrast or likeness between the "court" and the "country," the simile enables us to superimpose one upon the other, to trace dialectically the social and moral similarities and differences between the play's two locales, and so to reach the synthesis expressed in the play's resolution.

The play's interest in authority is both reflected in and constituted by this overall two-in-one structure.[59] The world of the court is by and large under the grip of false authority, a state of affairs revealed in the pervasive abuse of hierarchical relationships (prince/subject, older brother/younger brother, father/daughter). The problem with these relationships is transposed into, and worked out in terms of, the problem of romantic love in Arden. At the end of the play, we are still in the world of the court, metaphorically speaking, but the aberrant versions of authoritative bonds have assumed their correct proportions and now include love, the lateral dimension, as it were, which had earlier been suppressed. The play's structural balance, in other words, may be seen both to bring about (in terms of plot development) and to represent (in terms of its Mozartian harmonies) the balance of correlation and independence among individuals which characterizes the redefinition of authority.[60]

The first movement of the play depicts a world in which divisive relationships between individuals are a direct result of the misuse of authority.[61] Orlando opens the play in this key, recalling a pretextual paternal authority which deliberately made restitution for the inequality of primogeniture but whose benevolent aims have been undercut:

> As I remember, Adam, it was upon this fashion bequeathed me by will but poor a thousand crowns, and, as you sayst, charged my brother on his blessing to breed me well; . . . [but] he keeps me rustically at home, or, to speak more properly, stays me here at home unkept; . . . He lets me feed with his hinds, bars me the place of a brother, and, as much as in him lies, mines my gentility with my education.
>
> (I.i.1-20)

Oliver's abuse of the authority he has inherited by social custom involves the undue subjection of his brother, a person who is otherwise his equal. As Orlando reminds him:

> I know you are my eldest brother, and in the gentle condition of blood you should so know me. The courtesy of nations allows you my better, . . . but the same tradition takes not away my blood, . . . I have as much of my father in me as you.
>
> (I.i.43-50)

The difficulty of one person assuming a just relationship of authority over another is compounded here by the fact that the two persons share a single paternity: while Oliver has been given the power to direct the course of Orlando's life, he bears the responsibility of shaping that life according to the charitable wishes of their deceased father. But, as his short soliloquy reveals, jealousy of his brother's talents and fear of his popular appeal have driven Oliver to repress Orlando's development and so to violate both the authoritative and the brotherly bond.

The characters of Adam and Charles each reinforce one element of this dual violation. That Orlando takes Adam into his confidence establishes their affinity; that Adam is linked with Roland de Boys ("Sweet masters be patient. For your father's remembrance, be at accord" [I.i.63-64]) suggests that his perspective is aligned with that of the father's will. Consequently, there is an implicit connection between Orlando and his father through the faithful servant Adam; the justice of Orlando's complaints is never questioned. Adam's short response to Oliver's insult is sufficient to cast doubt on the justice of Oliver's behaviour: "Is old dog my reward? Most true, I have lost my teeth in your service. God be with my old master!--he would not have spcke such a word" (I.i.82-84).

The connection between Orlando and Adam, then, implicitly criticizes Oliver's management of authority. In addition, the role of Charles in the first scene obliquely reveals Oliver's betrayal of the brotherly bond. It is notable that Shakespeare here departs from his major source by attributing Charles's presence at Oliver's household not to the latter's command, but rather to the wrestler's fear of injuring Orlando.[62] In creating such a motive, Shakespeare has Charles express the values of a world beyond the walls of Oliver's orchard, a world which prescribes mutual respect and affection between brothers:

> Your brother is but young and tender, and for your love I would be loath to foil him, as I must for my own honour if he come in. Therefore out of my love to you, I came hither to acquaint you withal, that either you might stay him from his intendment, or brook such disgrace well as he shall run into. (I.i.127-33)

Not only does Charles refer to a bond we know is alien to Oliver, but Oliver's response also knowingly plays up Charles's assumption, inciting him to wrath by inverting his own crime and charging Orlando with a lack of brotherly behaviour:

> I'll tell thee Charles, it is the stubbornest young fellow of France, . . . a secret and villainous contriver against me his natural brother. . . . I assure thee--and almost with tears I speak it--there is not one so young and so villainous this day living. I speak but brotherly of him, but should I anatomize him to thee as he is, I must blush and weep, and thou must look pale and wonder.
>
> (I.i.139-56)

Oliver's wickedness goes without saying, as does the nature of his fault: the recovery of the spirit of brotherhood between Orlando and Oliver, upon which the recovery of just authority depends, may stand as a capsule of the conclusion toward which the dramatic logic of this comedy moves.[63]

The tone struck by Oliver's abuse of Orlando is heard again in Frederick's usurpation of his (older) brother's dominion. But Frederick's evil rule is one-dimensional, lacking the complexity of competing bonds in the Oliver/Orlando relationship. Though its inverted parallelism to the situation of Oliver and Orlando suggests strong thematic likeness between the two pairs of brothers, Frederick's crime is more simply a socio-political backdrop for the effects of abusive authority on personal bonds.

Most obviously, the usurpation has taken its toll on the relationship between Rosalind and Celia. Critics of all persuasions are quick to point out that the girls share an intimate friendship, and feminist critics in

particular seize the attempted eradication of that friendship by the play's patriarchal restoration as evidence of a deliberate repression of female bonds.[64] But the relationship between Rosalind and Celia is marked by division only in the world of the corrupt court. On two successive occasions, Celia emphasizes the division, even as she struggles to reinforce the union, between herself and Rosalind. In response to Rosalind's lament of her father's banishment, Celia suggests that Rosalind simply adopt Frederick as her surrogate father:

> Herein I see thou lov'st me not with the full weight that I love thee. If my uncle thy banished father had banished thy uncle the Duke my father, so thou hadst been still with me, I could have taught my love to take thy father for mine; so wouldst thou, if the truth of thy love to me were so righteously tempered as mine is to thee.
>
> (I.ii.7-13)

But Rosalind is unable--to say nothing of unwilling--to make the substitution Celia desires, and her capitulation attests to the wide chasm between them: "Well, I will forget the condition of my estate, to rejoice in yours" (I.ii.14-15). Following Frederick's banishment of Rosalind, Celia again imagines a simple exchange as the answer to their growing separation: "O my poor Rosalind, whither wilt thou go? / Wilt thou change fathers? I will give thee mine" (I.iii.86-87), and once again invokes their union.[65] But unlike her counterpart in Rosalynde,[66] Celia banishes herself, insisting that she, too, is the implicit victim of her father's tyranny, and if Rosalind fails to agree, she "lacks then the love / Which teacheth thee that thou and I am one" (I.iii.92-93). Assuming that Shakespeare intentionally left out Torismond's

(the Frederick figure's) banishment of his daughter, we may interpret this seemingly insignificant detail as a statement of the importance of the generosity which is quickly disappearing from court.[67] The fortitude with which the girls face their fortunes, the determination and self-righteousness with which they leave the court, indicates that their bond is an effective means of resistance to the divisiveness characteristic of abusive authority.

Another effective resistance to that authority is, of course, romantic love. Like the love of Celia and Rosalind, the love of Rosalind and Orlando is initiated at the court,[68] but its development is cut short by Frederick's tyranny. Early in the play, an affinity between Rosalind and Orlando emerges: each opens one of the two first scenes in a state of discontent which is attributable to a wrongful authority; their love is cemented as each hears of the mirror situation of the other; and both are banished on account of Frederick's hatred of their fathers. (This last point marks another deviation from the source, in which Torismond revered Roland de Boys just as much as did the banished Gerismond [Duke Senior].)[69] But the encounter of the two lovers is marked by one-way gift exchange and silence, and is followed directly by their successive banishments. Although their love seems unable to develop in the poisoned atmosphere of the court, its taking root there is a sign of its imminent role in the restitution of correct authoritative relationships. Like the friendship of Celia and Rosalind (and the ideal master/servant relationship of Orlando and Adam), the love of Orlando and Rosalind is a suppressed major chord in the minor key of the court scenes.

The first movement of the play comes to a partial resolution with the safe establishment of the girls and Orlando in the forest: while Rosalind and

Celia buy property on the edge of the forest and hire the willing Corin as their shepherd, Orlando joins the community of exiled courtiers. The second movement of the play involves the (re)establishment of bonds that were endangered in the court. Except for the meeting of Orlando and Oliver (which occurs offstage), the thematic implications of the relationships in the Forest of Arden seem not to involve the issue of authority so contentious in the play's opening. But if As You Like It is in any way coherent, then there must be a link between the misuse of authority of the first movement and the largely romantic activity of the second. This link can be found in the bonding power of love, a power which was at least embryonic if actively undercut in the court, and which matures in the forest.

The power of romantic love is invested, for the most part, in the character of Rosalind, and the measure of influence Rosalind exerts is an indication of love's role in transforming abusive authority. Some critics consider Rosalind's activity in the forest as solely responsible for the play's resolution (and so the renewal of the court society), while others see in it the dramatist's hesitant bestowal of female power which is in the end revoked and effectively suppressed.[70] Both views are valid, but individually they fall short of accounting for the complexity of Rosalind's role.

Rosalind's power is certainly limited in many ways. For instance, the anxiety caused by her love for Orlando enables Celia to maintain the upper hand in all their dealings, especially in III.ii where Rosalind's will to know is suspended while Celia successively offers and withholds the name of the tree-marring lover. Desperate for Celia's confirmation of her hunch, Rosalind, in the manner of a pleading child, can only pose a string of anxious questions:

> Is it a man? . . . I prithee who? . . . Nay, but who is it? . . . Nay, I prithee now, with most petitionary vehemence, tell me who it is. . . . One inch of delay more is a South Sea of discovery. I prithee tell me who is it quickly, and speak apace. . . I prithee take the cork out of thy mouth, that I may drink thy tidings. . . . Is he of God's making? . . . Nay, but the devil take mocking. Speak sad brow and true maid. . . . Orlando?
>
> (III.ii.177-213).

The commonplace notion that love masters its victims is apparent here, and Rosalind's service to love submits her also to the corrective common sense of Celia throughout the forest episodes.

The sizeable scope of Rosalind's power over her lover underpins much critical speculation about her educative role in weaning Orlando from his affected romanticism.[71] But the play does not bear out such a reading. Though Orlando is eager to prove that he is the paragon of lovers, he answers Ganymede's offer of therapy with a curt "I would not be cured, youth" (III.ii.413). It is only when Ganymede[72] mentions the imaginative play in direct association with Rosalind that Orlando changes his mind, possibly in the hope of alleviating his melancholy through the proposed fiction. And in their subsequent "lessons," Orlando's habitual tardiness and incorrigible invocation of romantic clichés suggest that he is not under the instruction of Ganymede any more than he wants to be. In fact, it appears that he is quite a poor student: in his last meeting with Ganymede, just prior to the resolution, he answers the inquiry about his wounded heart with "Wounded it is, but with the eyes of a lady" (V.ii.24), a resurrection of the banalities

Ganymede had so firmly and eloquently denounced. The relapse is apparently unnoticed by Ganymede, who glosses over it to ask whether Orlando has heard of his accomplished counterfeit faint.

Finally, we need to remember that Rosalind has no role whatsoever in the reunion of Orlando and Oliver (an event which initiates the play's comic closure), in two of the four marriages, and in the restitution of political order made possible by the appearance of Jaques de Boys. Rosalind's sphere of influence, therefore, is not as wide as is often thought.[73] Still, her absence from the politics of Arden does not preclude--and may actually enable--her dominance of the second movement of the play. This dominance is made possible not, as with Portia, by Rosalind's conversance with the structures of authority, but rather by her pivotal function in the play's romantic developments.[74]

Once in Arden, Rosalind's role is both symbolically and narratively enlarged. As suggested by her popularity at court, Rosalind has always had the capacity to bring people together. Liberated from the tyrannous hold of Frederick, she assumes her full dimension. She immediately bears out the justice of her popular appeal by dealing respectfully even with a common shepherd. Significantly, her manner is directly opposed to that of Touchstone, who assumes an air of superiority and haughtiness which Rosalind somewhat satirically characterizes as the manner between kinsmen. Foreshadowing Orlando's treatment of Adam, her own way is suggestive of the proper bonds between "friends", even if they are socially unequal:

> Cel. I pray you, one of you question yond man, if he for gold will give us any food. I faint almost to death.

Touch. Holla, you clown!

Ros. Peace fool, he's not thy kinsman.

Corin. Who calls?

Touch. Your betters sir.

Corin. Else are they very wretched.

Ros. Peace, I say. Good even to you friend.

Corin. And to you gentle sir, and to you all.

(II.iv.60-68)

Agnes Latham notices that "[t]he dialogue at some point modulates from Touchstone's prose to a stately verse-exchange between Rosalind and Corin" (II.iv.60-68n.), a detail which indicates the gentility of Rosalind's management of the episode.[75]

Once comfortably established in her new identity at the skirt of the forest, Rosalind finds herself confronted with the man she adores. Her initial response to Orlando's presence in the forest is "Alas the day, what shall I do with my doublet and hose?" (III.ii.215-16), but rather than shedding the protective disguise, she determines to put it to good use: she proposes to cure Orlando of his love melancholy by carrying on an imaginary courtship so as to secure regular meetings and divine the quality of his affection. But her disguise has a broader thematic and structural importance: in its incarnation of the mutuality of the sexes, in which the feminine (Rosalind) fear of men's insincerity is balanced by the masculine (Ganymede) fear of women's insincerity, it emblematizes the power of love to resolve even the most fundamental biological differences; and, as a unifying agent of sexual (and social, if we consider the relative inequality of men and women) differences, it propels the play towards comic resolution.[76]

The balance of genders in a single figure and its connection with social harmony are evident in Rosalind's participation in, and control of, the courtship of Silvius and Phebe, by means of which she also works out the uncertainties of her own relationship with Orlando. As in the paradoxes of her disguise, in which the female (Rosalind) reveals the faults of the male (Orlando's seemingly insincere platitudes), and the male (Ganymede) reveals the faults of the female (women's moodiness, as promised in her lesson prospectus),[77] the gender relationships between Rosalind/Ganymede and the two shepherds resemble a chiasmus: Rosalind finds in Silvius (male) the expression of her own love and fear of rejection, and in Phebe (female) the imagined derision of Orlando. Her affinity with both Phebe and Silvius transforms, by its power of mediation, an impasse between two persons into a secure, if conventional, bond of love. Rosalind's initial empathy with Silvius's wound (II.iv.41-42) grows into a real substitution of him in Phebe's favour, gains her a measure of power over Phebe's affections, and finally enables her to resolve the shepherds' affair by getting Phebe to accept Silvius in lieu of herself.

The other half of the balance is not quite so apparent. It has often been noted that Rosalind's chastisement of Phebe is in line with what is taken to be her general educative role in the play, her role as the voice of sincerity in a world of romantic convention and inflated Petrarchan rhetoric. But it is instructive to remember that Rosalind's "lesson" to Phebe may not be entirely objective, following as it does immediately upon Orlando's failure to keep his first appointment. Corin's invitation to bring the girls to "a pageant truly play'd" (III.iv.48) is heartily accepted by Rosalind as an opportunity to participate in a spectacle which she instinctively recognizes

as her own:

> O come, let us remove.
> The sight of lovers feedeth those in love.
> Bring us to this sight, and you shall say
> I'll prove a busy actor in their play.
>
> (III.iv.52-55)

She certainly does prove a busy actor in their play, but in a significant way it is also her play: by controlling the relationship of Silvius and Phebe, Rosalind gains some control over her own relationship with Orlando which, considering his tardiness, seems to be rather in his hands than in hers. In a sense, then, Rosalind's chastisement of Phebe is a vicarious chastisement of Orlando. While Rosalind cannot fully direct her relationship with Orlando (primarily because Orlando also has a role in the political contexts of the play), she does defuse one of its potential disruptions, the imbalance of sexual desires.

While Rosalind is powerless to bring about the political resolutions required by the play's initial turmoil, she is singularly instrumental in bringing the play as a whole to its conclusion. The source of her power in this regard, I am suggesting, is her interest in forming and solidifying bonds between individuals. Even in her single most important encounter with political authority, Rosalind had spoken of the importance of bonds between individuals upon which social order depends. Meeting Frederick's absurd charges and imaginary fears with a sensible statement of the fundamental inaccuracy of his construction of reality, she underlines the need for a shared basis of experience between authority and its subjects if that authority is to continue functioning in a civilized manner:

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Duke F. Let it suffice thee that I trust thee not.

Ros. Yet your mistrust cannot make me a traitor.
Tell me whereon the likelihood depends.

Duke F. Thou art thy father's daughter, there's enough.

Ros. So was I when your Highness took his dukedom,
So was I when your Highness banish'd him.
Treason is not inherited, my lord,
Or if we did derive it from our friends,
What's that to me? My father was no traitor.

(I.iii.51-59)

In contrast to Frederick's (and Oliver's) brief flourish of tyranny, Rosalind, and the affairs of love in general, are allotted a significant proportion of stage time, an arrangement which might suggest the centrality of the power of love to the resolution of the play's political and familial troubles; similarly, the two events which frame the resolution of the love plots, Orlando's reunion with Oliver and Frederick's conversion, are committed to the skirts of the play. By juxtaposing the two movements of the play in terms of banishment and community, division and union, independence and mutuality, abusive authority and love, and by locating the comic resolution, both geographically and thematically, in the second movement, the construction of As You Like It points towards inclusion, correlation, and affinity as the basis of order in a society of unequal persons.

Rosalind's part in the play's resolution comprises the greatest concentration of Shakespeare's "Mozartian" efforts. Marco Mincoff has noticed that while Lodge brings the several plot strands of Rosalynde to consecutive

conclusions, Shakespeare attempts to weave them into an intricate pattern of near simultaneity (85). This structural principle informs the entire play, and is brought to its highest level of complexity in the activity surrounding the two love affairs Rosalind orchestrates. Though the crescendo of confusion her disguise causes seems to resemble the "howling of Irish wolves against the moon" (V.ii.110-11), the repetition and modulation of Phebe's, Silvius's, Orlando's, and Rosalind's statements of love, and Rosalind's adroit direction of the rehearsal of promises pending her magic solution are as controlled as balanced as the final movement of any baroque concerto:

Ros. Patience once more, whiles our compact is urg'd.
You say, if I bring in your Rosalind,
You will bestow her on Orlando here?

Sen. That would I, had I kingdoms to give with her.

Ros. And you say you will have her, when I bring her?

Orl. That would I, were I of all kingdoms king.

Ros. You say you'll marry me, if I be willing?

Phebe. That will I, should I die the hour after.

Ros. But if you do refuse to marry me,
You'll give yourself to this most faithful shepherd?

Phebe. So is the bargain.

Ros. You say that you'll have Phebe if she will?

Sil. Though to have her and death were both one thing.

Ros. I have promis'd to make all this matter even.
Keep you your word, O Duke, to give your daughter
You yours, Orlando, to receive his daughter;
Keep you your word Phebe, that you'll marry me,

Or else refusing me to wed this shepherd.
Keep your word Silvius, that you'll marry her
If she refuse me; and from hence I go
To make these doubts all even.

(V.iv.5-25)

This kind of symmetry of phrase and posture in a situation bordering on the chaotic suggests an imminent ordering of confusions and, by extension to the first movement of the play, a balance of competing forces.

Accompanied by Hymen, Rosalind's re-entrance in her own person marks the ritual affirmation of the love bonds she has laboured to secure and which have the power to make "mirth in heaven" (V.iv.107). The unqualified reconciliations between Rosalind, her father, and future husband express a singleness of vision among persons previously divided and bound by uncertain hopes. And on the broader scale demanded by the play's internal logic, Hymen's union of the four couples signifies, in its comic proportions ("There is sure another flood toward, and these couples are coming to the ark" [V.iv.35-36]), the magnitude of harmony achieved:

Here's eight that must take hands
To join in Hymen's bands,
If truth holds true contents.
You and you no cross shall part.
You and you are heart in heart.
You to his love must accord,
Or have a woman to your lord.
You and you are sure together,
As the winter to foul weather.

Whiles wedlock hymn we sing,

Feed yourselves with questioning,

That reason wonder may diminish

How thus we met, and these things finish.

(V.iv.127-39)

It is difficult to see, with many feminist critics,[78] how Rosalind's role in the conclusion represents, at least in terms of the play's own dynamics, a capitulation of her power. She does, after all, voluntarily give herself to father and husband, and this kind of "surrender" of independence has entirely positive connotations in the value system dramatized by Shakespeare's comedies. As John Cox has argued, it is Rosalind's very vulnerability and display of human limitations--rather than any self-sufficiency or autonomy--which connects her to the Augustinian notions of selfhood implicitly valorised by the vestiges of medieval dramaturgy in Shakespeare's play (77). Moreover, she has been the principal agent of the cohesive force of love, and her impending nuptial is the crown of all her efforts. While love certainly does not invest Rosalind with any kind of socio-political power, it does make her at least symbolically responsible for the transposition of tyranny at the play's opening to just authority at the play's end. That Rosalind is assimilated into a patriarchal society may not please twentieth-century commentators,[79] but it does suggest the possibility of an hierarchical social order informed by the spirit of love.

Twelfth Night

In one of the major themes and in the overall structure of Twelfth Night, Shakespeare expressly links the exercise of just authority with human love by involving two complementary authority figures in the play's romantic developments. The respective roles of Orsino and Olivia illustrate the ideal balance of self and other not only in love, but also in the achievement of personal power and social order.

Twelfth Night is a play deeply interested in personal identity, building as it does its central dramatic action upon the elision of boundaries between individuals.[80] In general, the play's narrative movement from comic impasse to comic restoration is marked by a gradual rejection of identity as autonomy in favour of identity as association;[81] but this preferred sense of identity is also periodically emphasized, forming something of a dramatic leitmotiv in which the apparently paradoxical conjunction of resemblance and difference is made.[82] In other words, the play's commentary upon the meaning of identity is reinforced by its dramatic structure, its ongoing illustration of the oxymoronic double entendre of "identity" by a persistent undermining of individualism. This thematic and structural pattern may be traced in the development of the play's two authority figures, Duke Orsino and Olivia, whose conduct in love illustrates, respectively, the negative social effects of an authority deliberately isolated by illusory self-sufficiency, and one deriving its strength from participation in a network of public relationships.

Though he is nominally the play's (and Illyria's) ruler, Duke Orsino at first appears not only secluded but positively ineffectual. Taking the stage with his select group of attendants, Orsino immediately reveals the overriding influence of love upon his person, an influence which will soon call for an

order to "leap all civil bounds" (I.iv.21) in an attempt to enforce compliance from the aloof Olivia:

> O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
> That notwithstanding thy capacity
> Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
> Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
> But falls into abatement and low price,
> Even in a minute!
>
> (I.i.9-14)

Orsino here refers specifically to love's displacement of all other affections, but when measured against his behaviour as a figure of authority, his comment seems also to include love's triumph over his political functions and activities. For instance, when he is asked whether he would like to indulge in sport typically associated with the ruling class, Orsino illustrates the insularity of his love as he "crushes" (à la Malvolio) the query into an allegory of his predicament:

> O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
> Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence;
> That instant was I turn'd into a hart,
> And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
> E'er since pursue me.
>
> (I.i.19-23)

Needless to say, the literal hunt never takes place. As an indication of Orsino's exclusionist definition of the love bond, the significance of this rather minor incident is confirmed by his ambition to be the "one self king" of Olivia's affections:

O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love, when the rich golden shaft
Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else
That live in her; when liver, brain, and heart,
These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and fill'd
Her sweet perfections with one self king!

(I.i.33-39)

This naive desire to "kill" all other affections, underpinned by Orsino's own parochial conception of love, constitutes, as the most evident impasse at the play's opening, the threat to social equilibrium which it is the business of the play to overturn. And because the person who poses this threat is rather untypically a Duke (figures of authority are usually exempt from the romantic threads of comedy--hence the unusual position of the Duke in Measure for Measure), the play's overturning will also involve a redefinition of authority.

Except for two brief appearances with Viola, which scarcely advance the plot, Orsino seeks solitude and accordingly disappears from much of the action in Twelfth Night. The problem posed by his "love-thoughts," by no means forgotten, is taken up elsewhere. The love-struck authority figure is mirrored, fittingly, in Orsino's own beloved, Olivia, and it is in her more fully-developed and active role that we are led to locate the favoured definition of identity as it bears on the meaning of just authority.

As has frequently been noticed, Olivia's behaviour at the beginning of the play recalls the voluntary isolation of Orsino,[83] as the report of her predictable reply to Orsino's solicitation makes clear:

> The element itself, till seven years' heat,
> Shall not behold her face at ample view;
> But like a cloistress she will veiled walk.
>
> (I.i.26-28)

Though it may at first appear that Olivia's mourning is feigned in order to hold Orsino at bay, both the Captain and Sir Toby attest to the sincerity of her devotion. Without any apparent motive for misrepresenting the truth, the Captain informs Viola that Olivia "hath abjur'd the company / And sight of men" (I.ii.40-41) in grief for her brother's death. For Toby's part, he complains that Olivia's gloom dampens his entertainment, hinting at its threat to the comic mood: "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life" (I.iii.1-3). Though Toby's lack of concern for mourning procedures quite obviously assigns a self-interested definition to "care," he does, however ridiculously, bespeak the nature of the problem: as "an enemy to life," such an exclusive "care" as her love of her brother (and Orsino's love of Olivia) blocks the expected progress of the plot. It does so, however, only long enough to generate its own demise.

For both Orsino and Olivia, though more clearly and immediately for her, Viola is the agent of disruption.[84] Having taken the disguised Viola into his service, Orsino's assurance that "It shall become thee well to act my woes" (I.iv.26) only obliquely underscores the source of her impending success. Olivia, however, succumbs to the new attraction both more quickly and more profoundly. Enticed by the youth of the insistent gentleman at her gates (it may be well to remember Olivia's reported refusal to "match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit" [I.iii.106-07]), Olivia commands Malvolio to "[l]et

him approach" (I.v.165) and summons Maria to veil her face. From this point on the scene charts Olivia's progress from deliberate and austere seclusion to rekindled social-mindedness. So quickly charmed by Cesario's wit that she reveals an unavowed willingness to shed her mournful disposition, Olivia enthusiastically plays the game, encouraging Cesario to abandon the well-conned speech, sure of its spuriousness, and to speak rather in his own voice, outside Orsino's text. Olivia's attraction to Cesario grows as he moves farther and farther from his designated message, its turning point marked significantly by the unveiling of her face in willing response to an unscripted request:

> Vio. Most sweet lady--
>
> Oli. A comfortable doctrine, and much may be said of it. Where lies your text?
>
> Vio. In Orsino's bosom.
>
> Oli. In his bosom? In what chapter of his bosom?
>
> Vio. To answer by the method, in the first of his heart.
>
> Oli. O, I have read it: it is heresy. Have you no more to say?
>
> Vio. Good madam, let me see your face.
>
> Oli. Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? You are now out of your text: but we will draw the curtain and show you the picture. [Unveiling] (I.v.224-37)

Olivia is next moved by Cesario's imaginary reaction to her cruelty:

> [I would] Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
> And call upon my soul within the house;
> Write loyal cantons of contemned love,

> And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
> Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out `Olivia!' O, you should not rest
> Between the elements of air and earth,
> But you should pity me.
>
> (I.v.272-80)

Olivia's presumably-murmured "You might do much" (I.v.280) reveals the extent to which she has been charmed by the sincerity of Cesario's speech (the sincerity derives, of course, from Viola's own unrequited love for Orsino), and she prudently goes on to inquire about his parentage, a matter unrelated to the embassy but of great importance to her social consciousness (I.v.281). Finally, Olivia dismisses Cesario with the assurance that she cannot love Orsino (now for an entirely different reason), but slyly reverses the direction of influence to arrange a second interview:

> I cannot love him: let him send no more,
> Unless, perchance, you come to me again,
> To tell me how he takes it.
>
> (I.v.284-86)

Fearing that her intention might miscarry, Olivia also sends Malvolio after Cesario with a ring and a message of strict refusal which she promises to explain if "the youth will come this way to-morrow" (I.v.309). At the end of a scene which she began in secluded mourning, Olivia deliberately seeks out the company of Cesario and rather happily gives herself over to love.

The control Olivia begins to exhibit here, contrary to what her seemingly helpless "let it be" and "ourselves we do not owe. / What is decreed, must be"

(I.v.302; 314-15) may lead us to expect, is evident both throughout her courtship of Cesario/Sebastian and, significantly, in a network of other social relationships.[85] Once released from her restrictive mourning, Olivia assumes her proper position as the mistress of a household. Unlike Orsino, whose love really has nothing to do with Olivia herself and is purely self-indulgent,[86] she is driven by a genuine affection, one that is outward-looking even in its self-gratification (the difference is made clear in V.i. where Orsino threatens to "sacrifice" his lamb, but Olivia redeems Cesario by devising an acceptable motive for his apparent faithlessness). It is this interaction of self-interest and genuine "care" which enables Olivia to model the approved conduct of authority.

As the only actively authoritative figure in the play, Olivia has received surprisingly little critical attention, and, as Harold Jenkins points out, when she does she is "usually . . . underrated" (82).[87] Generally overshadowed by the nubile Viola, Olivia most often figures in commentary upon the play as a shadowy version of Orsino's general malady. What these kinds of readings overlook is the thematic and dramatic significance of Olivia's position at the hub of the play's separate plot strands: it is her uncle and waiting woman who orchestrate the jest against her steward; in a double parody of Orsino's quest, her hand is actively sought by the foolish Sir Andrew and she becomes the object of Malvolio's fantasy of power; and she fixes her amorous desires upon Cesario/Viola, only to marry (unwittingly) her twin brother. In a radial image of Twelfth Night, Olivia would be the centre from which the other characters emanate.

Olivia's authoritative role in this network of public and private relationships, all of which she conducts judiciously, suggests the important

association of power with community, of "sway" with the bonds fostered by love. In this respect, it is significant that Sebastian, her future husband, convinces himself that her declaration of love is sane by instancing the presence of mind with which she conducts routine matters. If Olivia were mad, he muses,

> She could not sway her house, command her followers,
> Take and give back affairs and their dispatch,
> With such smooth, discreet, and stable bearing
> As I perceive she does.
>
> (IV.iii.17-20)

In addition to Sebastian's report, we have solid dramatic evidence that Olivia is in possession of her senses, that her love for Cesario has not interfered--as it has for Orsino--with her responsibilities in the public sphere. In addition to channelling her commands through Maria and Malvolio, Olivia repeatedly takes control of troublesome incidents. In response to Malvolio's apparent derangement, she orders his confinement, but with due regard for his welfare. Finding Toby insubordinate even after repeated warnings, Olivia finally hardens and, where earlier he had mocked her authority, Toby is brought fearfully to withdraw the jest against Malvolio:

> If he may be conveniently delivered, I would he were, for
> I am now so far in offence with my niece that I cannot
> pursue with any safety this sport to the upshot.
>
> (IV.ii.70-73)

And, when the jest has been disclosed, she promises Malvolio due justice:

> Prithee, be content;
> This practice hath most shrewdly pass'd upon thee.

> But when we know the grounds and authors of it,
> Thou shalt be both the plaintiff and the judge
> Of thine own cause.
>
> (V.i.350-54)

Olivia's astute management of these incidents, even though she is deeply in love, together with her pivotal position in the play as a whole, illustrates that she enacts the solution to the play's initial problem, that her role is indicative of the importance of interaction--rather than estrangement--between "care" for others and authority.

The strongest evidence of Olivia's generically necessary combination of love and authority is, of course, in her management of the affair with Cesario/Sebastian, in which she does anything but "let it be" (I.v.302). We have already seen how she cleverly arranged a second interview with Cesario, respecting the bounds of their relationship and so precluding a refusal. Olivia's meaning is easily perceived by Viola, whose comment reveals one of the many undercurrents of resemblance--even interchangeability--between individuals:

> My master loves her dearly,
> And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
> And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
>
> (II.ii.32-34)

At their next meeting, Olivia continues to direct the relationship, first by preventing Cesario from conveying Orsino's messages, and then by unmasking, while seeming to apologize for her forwardness, the reason for sending the ring. Her frank disclosure leads Viola to pity, which in turn puts Olivia on the offensive and forces Viola into retreat. Sensing that she cannot overtake

Cesario by force, Olivia strategically withdraws: "Be not afraid, good youth, I will not have you" (III.i.133), sending him cheerfully on his way, only to ask him first to reveal what he thinks of her. This question leads to one of the play's characteristically confounding statements of identity and to a forthright verbalization of Olivia's will:

> Oli. I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me.
>
> Vio. That you do think you are not what you are.
>
> Oli. If I think so, I think the same of you.
>
> Vio. Then think you right; I am not what I am.
>
> Oli. I would you were as I would have you be.
>
> (III.i.140-44)

This attempted imposition, judging by Olivia's next remark, makes Viola angry, and is resolved by a full confession of affection which is, needless to say, met by a categorical renunciation and a firm resolution never to return. But Olivia is far from surrender: she baits Cesario to visit yet again by suggesting that his mission may soon succeed: "Yet come again: for thou perhaps mayst move / That heart which now abhors, to like his love" (III.i.165-66). Olivia's change of heart is not a very likely possibility, but given Viola's loyalty to Orsino, she will not take the chance. Because the invitation is once again extended within the context of Cesario's official business, it cannot be refused. We may safely assume that Olivia is well aware of this.

Olivia's "headstrong potent fault" (III.iv.206) finds its rightful destination, opportunely, in Sebastian--opportunely because, as Olivia informs Cesario, it "but mocks reproof" (III.iv.207), its force threatening to overflow already pressured bounds: "Well, come again to-morrow. Fare thee

well; / A fiend like thee might bear my soul to hell" (III.iv.218-19). Rescuing Cesario/Sebastian from a sword-fight, Olivia harshly reproaches her insubordinate uncle:

> Will it be ever thus? Ungracious wretch,
> Fit for the mountains and the barbarous caves,
> Where manners ne'er were preach'd! Out of my sight!
>
> (IV.i.46-48)

The force of her command here, met by a meaningful silence and hasty exit from the garrulous Sir Toby, is nicely balanced by her soft tone toward Sebastian, beseeching him to follow her home and allow her to redress Toby's incivility. She hurries him along, musing half-heartedly "would thou'dst be rul'd by me" (IV.i.63), and is delighted to find him unexpectedly acquiescent. One may imagine Olivia seizing Sebastian's hand at this point and running headlong offstage with him in tow. For his part, Sebastian's astonishment at his strange fortune facilitates his submission to Olivia's well-devised proposal for the wedding arrangements (very quickly spoken, one would think):

> Oli. Blame not this haste of mine. If you mean well,
> Now go with me, and with this holy man,
> Into the chantry by: there before him
> And underneath that consecrated roof,
> Plight me the full assurance of your faith,
> That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
> May live at peace. He shall conceal it,
> Whiles you are willing it shall come to note,
> What time we will our celebration keep
> According to my birth. What do you say?

Seb. I'll follow this good man, and go with you,

And having sworn truth, ever will be true.

(IV.iii.22-33)

Sebastian's words are, of course, registered by Olivia, who remembers them in the final scene where the display of her just authority is most overt. Faced with Cesario's neglect, she continues to believe his sincerity even in view of his seeming desertion, inventing as she does an acceptable reason for his behaviour:

> Alas, it is the baseness of thy fear
> That makes thee strangle thy propriety.
> Fear not, Cesario, take thy fortunes up,
> Be that thou know'st thou art, and then thou art
> As great as that thou fear'st.
>
> (V.i.144-48)[88]

Interrupted by the bloody spectacle of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, Olivia easily shifts the direction of her authority, expediently ordering Toby to have "his hurt be looked to" and demanding to know the author of the injury. As if in answer to her question, Sebastian steps on stage and the scene turns decidedly from fragmentation to reunification.[89] Olivia, needless to say, is delighted with the doubling of her lover ("Most wonderful" is her immediate response [V.i.223]), and accepts Sebastian without question. She easily clears up the business of Malvolio's confinement (effectively blocking, for the first time in the play, Feste's circuitous language), and offers to host the marriage ceremonies, to which the Duke complies: "Madam, I am most apt t'embrace your offer" (V.i.319). Olivia's dexterity here, in the play's most important scene, is a culmination of the control she has exercised throughout, a control

whose source is to be found in a love which not only acknowledges mutuality between the lovers, but one which is also aware of, and able to sustain, the necessary coexistence of an entire network of social relationships.

As the negative example of this kind of authority, Orsino is faintly drawn. But certain of his traits are parodically mirrored in the character of Malvolio who is, in a manner of speaking, the dramatic instrument of Orsino's purgation. The circumstances surrounding Malvolio's gulling throw into sharp relief his foibles. First, his "self-love" (I.v.89): Malvolio's lone position at the centre of a group jest is a direct result of his snobbish and divisive exercise of (proxy) authority, his breaking up of a party and threatening, as a child might, to tattle. When his authority is effectively undercut by Toby, in some of the play's most memorable lines ("Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"[II.iii.113-15]), Malvolio turns his inflated supremacy onto a more likely target, Maria, who, as her admonishment for peace indicates, might actually second his entreaty:

> Mistress Mary, if you prized my lady's favour at anything more than contempt, you would not give means for this uncivil rule; she shall know of it, by this hand. (II.iii.120-23)

Maria's apt "Go shake your ears" (II.iii.124), uttered once Malvolio has left the stage, is replete with the characters' general sentiment regarding the steward. His deliberate self-alienation from the rest of the household, including his "distempered" reading of Feste's "allowed" humour (I.v.90), makes him the natural target of a collaborative practical joke.

Linked inextricably to Malvolio's self-love is his self-aggrandizement, and both qualities lead to his isolation (which persists, incidentally, to the

very end: "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you!" is his well-known exit line [V.i.377]). These two qualities also feed his fantasy of authority. He imagines a life as the Count Malvolio, substituting for his previous ineffectuality a comfortable dominance:

> And then to have the humour of state; and after a demure travel of regard, telling them [my officers] I know my place, as I would they should do theirs, to ask for my kinsman Toby. . . . Seven of my people, with an obedient start, make out for him. I frown the while, and perchance wind up my watch, or play with my--some rich jewel. Toby approaches; curtsies there to me-- . . . I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with a austere regard of control--. . . Saying, `Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece give me this prerogative of speech' . . . `You must amend your drunkenness.'
>
> (II.v.52-73)

This speech is, of course, punctuated by Toby's fervent outbursts from behind the box tree, but given as a whole conveys well, in tone and diction, Malvolio's craving for the authority that eludes a mere steward. Predisposed, therefore, to "crush . . . a little" (II.v.140) the sense of the letter that has miraculously appeared at his feet, Malvolio reads into its cryptic features unmistakable evidence of his own self-image, convinced finally that "[t]here is no obstruction in this" and that "[t]his is open" (II.v.118-19; 161). In so doing, he recalls an earlier act of self-centred interpretation in the play, that of Orsino, a real authority (see above) who also displayed a

similar tendency to intentional isolation: "I myself am best / When least in company" (I.iv.37-38).

Malvolio's willing obedience to the ridiculous commands in Maria's letter leads to a diagnosis of madness and signals, as do all of the many such diagnoses in the play, an utter loss of power, a veritable inversion of his ambition. Given as he is to deliberate self-isolation (and echoing, in the connection I am tracing, Orsino's repeated requests to be left alone), Malvolio's confinement in a dark room, standard treatment for insanity in Shakespeare's time,[90] is fitting punishment. In his confinement, he is ironically put at the mercy of another pseudo-authority, Feste/Sir Topas, whose treatment expectedly fails. Unlike Orsino, Malvolio is beyond recall, fervently insisting on his sanity, oblivious to any foul play, locked in a dark room of isolation even after his release, his freedom assured not by any anagnorisis, but merely by Toby's fear of rebuke.

To reverse the comparison, Orsino, unlike Malvolio, does leave the dark room of isolation over the course of the play, welcoming a world of multiple relationships and assuming the posture for which, presumably, he had been famed and on account of which Viola first took interest in him. Although the dimensions of Orsino's change are given in terms of Olivia's role by a substitution typical of the play's emphasis on bonds, there is some indication in his few appearances, mostly by subversions of his initial posture, of an expanding sense of identity. Most important is the admission of Cesario into his favour. Orsino's desire for Cesario's company gives the lie to his earlier insistence that love banishes all other affections. Valentine's surprise betrays the unexpectedness and auspiciousness of Viola's success:

If the Duke continue these favours towards you, Cesario,

you are like to be much advanced: he hath known you but
three days, and already you are no stranger.

(I.iv.1-4)

Valentine's observation is confirmed by Orsino's eager "Who saw Cesario, ho?" immediately as he enters, and his subsequent command to the others, "Stand you awhile aloof" (I.iv.10; 12). In his tête-à-tête with Cesario, Orsino reveals that he has entrusted him with "the book even of my secret soul" (I.iv.14), admitting a connection he might have sworn earlier could not exist in conjunction with his love for Olivia. Much of this fellowship between the two, of course, prepares for their eventual union, but it also creates the possibility for Orsino's reform from seclusion to the public activity proper to his authoritative role.

The increased possibility of Orsino's change is suggested by his own reversal of formerly sincere sentiments. In I.i. he describes his love in words which suggest a cloying attachment, subject to the fluctuations of desire:

If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again, it had a dying fall:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour. Enough, no more. (I.i.1-7)

Later in the play, in a debate with Viola/Cesario about the respective merits of men's and women's love, Orsino ironically echoes his own love rhetoric as he disdains the protean nature of women's desire:

> Alas, their love may be call'd appetite,
> No motion of the liver, but the palate,
> That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt;
> But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
> And can digest as much.
>
> (II.iv.98-102)

Furthermore, Orsino unwittingly cancels the opposing force of his "but" by adopting the rebuked appetite as a metaphor for his own love, and so continues to undercut the retentive capacities of his heart. Though his attentiveness to Viola's tale of another's sorrow hints broadly at Orsino's incipient development,[91] he is not yet prepared to accept the enlarged vision she offers him, a kind of preliminary "natural perspective" in which she yokes the sexes in equal emotional capacity.

Orsino's transformation does not actually take place until the final scene where, in a synecdoche of his role, he expresses both the climax of his fault, threatening to "[k]ill what I love," or else to "sacrifice the lamb that I do love" (V.i.117; 128), and undergoes a "redemption." Though Orsino's threats are divisive in the extreme (in this respect, they fall in line with the rest of the closing scene which accelerates towards crisis before arriving at resolution), his admission to loving at least two persons already suggests a broadening sense of community, and prepares us for the swift turn of events following Sebastian's entrance when Orsino's representative perception of "[a] natural perspective" (V.i.215) indicates an experience of expansion. This expanded vision fosters the Duke's renewed interest in political matters and enables his command of the unfinished business regarding Antonio and Malvolio:

Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace:
He hath not told us of the captain yet.
When that is known, and golden time convents,
A solemn combination shall be made
Of our dear souls.

(V.i.379-83)

The conjunction of political and romantic matters in the Duke's speech signals his full recovery. The pleasure he takes in his restored ability to conduct public affairs is detectable in his voluntary transposition of the "natural perspective" into a dual image of Viola as simultaneously his future "queen" and as the page he has come to love:

Cesario, come;
For so you shall be while you are a man;
But when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.

(V.i.384-87)

Twelfth Night ends, as do most romantic comedies, with multiple marriages, but its expansion of the comic harmony to include a Duke's untypical engagement together with his renewed assumption of authority brings love and power into conjunction for the first time in Shakespeare's comic canon. In Twelfth Night, the contest between self and other, and between social and romantic bonds, is at least momentarily resolved, and the resolution is depicted as a balance important to the legitimate exercise of authority. Strangely, however, the ultimate resolution is contingent upon Malvolio's cooperation, a hint of the vestiges of individualism in Illyria which, along with Feste's mournful concluding song, tend to qualify the ideals

of the comic restoration.

The Power of Voice

It may seem to go without saying that language is a key feature in the portrayal of power relations in what are, after all, primarily linguistic monuments. The claim that Shakespeare's comedies move forward by means of the characters' verbal interchange, by the dynamics of discourse, is anything but surprising. More unexpected, however, is the manifest portrayal of language in several of the comedies as a Janus-like, flexible mediator of contesting wills, as a kind of double-edged sword investing characters of opposing interests either with sovereignty or with the power of subversion. That language is able to serve the interests of mutually exclusive kinds of self-advancement is testimony to its communal foundations: its resources are not fully controlled by those in positions of command, but are also open to those--regardless of sex or social status--capable of wresting them to their own needs.[92] The discursive and rhetorical conventions of language, in other words, are not subject to the governing will of any individual, or even to the will of an entire ruling class: rather, they form part of a heterogeneous and protean cultural system the firm control of which always eludes the groping hand of a false authority. To extend the argument to the power dynamics operating in comedy, a form which labours to reintegrate an initially disparate social group, the use of linguistic mastery for self-serving ends, the use of language to advance what are essentially divisive purposes, will meet with resistance, if not failure, while the voice of righteous opposition will perform the dual task of overturning the false authority and reestablishing language, in however provisional a manner, as a bond between individuals.

The power of language should, however, first be situated within the broader framework of the playwright's linguistic activity. After all, the characters themselves are unaware of their generic restraints, their use of language is conditioned by forces largely beyond their control; they are, in other words, already written into another text whose semiotic and discursive mode seeks to recover the social order jeopardized at the play's opening. The linguistic habits assigned to characters who contribute to the discord of the playworld will, then, be variously undercut, overturned, challenged, reformed, or otherwise altered so that the comedy may proceed to the closure its structures promise. Furthermore, that closure will be drawn very much in terms of a reestablished understanding of language as a social cohesive, as one of the ties by means of which quintessentially separate individuals may understand, trust, and cooperate with one another. Though she rightly argues that Shakespeare was by and large skeptical about the powers of language, Anne Barton inadvertently makes this point. The limits of language, she states, "are never, in fact, far away from the tragic vision of life" (20). Precisely. The unreclaimed breaking of bonds and the triumph of isolation belong to the domain of tragedy, and one should expect language to fail in such circumstances. The inverse argument, then, would hold for comedy: the avowed limitations and inadequacies of language are overcome, surpassed, somehow contained, and its bonding power is reinstated as a condition of the comic community.

Furthermore, the idea of language as a bond between individuals is more than simply a condition of the genre which underwrites the comedies; it is, as Douglas Canfield has recently argued, a master trope of the early modern world. While one need not follow Canfield in the conviction that the word-as-

bond was the key concept in the continuation and proliferation of patriarchal society from the Middle Ages to the Restoration, the trope does have relevant connections to the period's more general concerns with the nature of language itself. In the broadest terms, the basis of the trope is trust: as Canfield puts it, "trusting someone to say what he means and to mean what he says" (84). The very same moral basis, extending from a long tradition of patristic skepticism about rhetoric, may be found in early Renaissance treatises concerned with explaining the mechanics of verbal exchange. Linguistic failure was, in the sixteenth century, assigned to the moral fault of the speaker rather than to the inadequacy of language itself (De Grazia 379). Taking as their points of reference the two Biblical poles of Babel and Pentecost, in a sense the loci of damned and redeemed semiotic theory, Renaissance linguists assign the failure of language to human pride and its redemption to Christian charity. In terms of their exploration of language, it is this very duality which marks both the discordant openings and the relatively harmonious closures of The Taming of the Shrew, Love's Labour's Lost, The Merry Wives of Windsor and Much Ado About Nothing.

The characteristic abuse of language to enforce allegiance in these plays is, though it manifests itself in various kinds of behaviour, quite simply a symptom of pride. The males of Padua actively seek to deprive women of voice, they vigorously defend constricting and barren notions of marriage and female identity which perpetuate the vanity and protect the interests of the dominant sex. In Love's Labour's Lost, Navarre and his votaries pride themselves upon conquering baser human passions, and set themselves apart from--and clearly above--the uninitiated members of their race. They do so, significantly, in martial terms, figuring their vows as an entry into momentous combat. It is a

metaphor of some consequence in all four comedies. Words are commonly described as weapons, language becomes a veritable battlefield, discourse a means of enforcing allegiance; the enemy is usually woman. In a related vein, Falstaff and Ford express misogynistic attitudes which fuel their simplistic understanding of the nature of signs and the nature of female power; both embrace deception as the operative mode of social interaction. And in the many playlets contrived in Much Ado About Nothing, verbal fashioning is a direct means of retaliation for personal injury. Isolation, mistrust, vanity, and deception characterize the abuse of language in all four comedies.

In all four comedies, however, the abusers of language are ultimately ineffectual and language is reclaimed for the betterment of the comic community. This reversal is made possible--indeed even probable--because language always speaks of an other, always implies an other, and so implicitly endows the other with voice. As Michel Foucault has observed, "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (History of Sexuality 101). When the males of Padua label Katherine a shrew, they license her speech; when Navarre mentions the "mere necessity" of the Princess's arrival, he inscribes her in his sovereign voice; when Falstaff seeks deliberately to deceive the wives by lying, he seals his own doom; when they bring Beatrice and Benedick to conformity, the men of Messina authorize their own subversion. This extension of the power of voice to the initially oppressed is not, however, controlled by the oppressors; it is a condition, a given, of linguistic exchange. The power of voice, the power to effect change by using language in ways not sanctioned (though not necessarily prohibited) by the regnant authority, the power to utter combinations of sounds which

point up the injustice of the dominant rhetoric is open to all who speak the tongue. It is a power easily appropriated by those characters whose system of values is in essential alignment with that of romantic comedy.

The Taming of the Shrew

If it is the business of a comedy to transform the force which, at its opening, threatens social harmony, then surely it is the business of The Taming of the Shrew to realize its titular action.[93] However distastefully the process may be named and carried out, there is no escaping the dramatic fact that Katherine stirs the calm of Paduan society, that in the free use of her tongue and fists she upsets the balance of wills requisite to the peaceful coexistence of individuals; she must, if the comedy is to succeed, be changed or contained. But Katherine's rebellious nature is also, as the play repeatedly insists, a symptom rather than a cause of the inveterate corruption of Padua. By juxtaposing the order against which Katherine initially positions herself with her rebellion per se, we may become aware that the comic impasse of The Taming of the Shrew is formulated in terms broader than the disgruntled self-assertion of a single individual. The timely arrival of Petruchio is meant to break this deadlock. Claiming a providential warrant to tame the devilish shrew, Petruchio takes upon himself the cause of the male value system. The contest between Katherine and Petruchio, then, is no less than a contest between a strong-willed woman and patriarchal authority; that the contest ends not in unilateral subjection or triumph but in the creation of an alliance between the two--and against the others--suggests that both parties surrender something of their rigidity and, at least within the dimensions of their relationship, redefine the manner in which the coexistence of individual will and hierarchical authority is salutary.

The agency of both resistance and reform in The Taming of the Shrew is language. The shrew's most powerful weapon and most despised quality is, in all versions of the type, a loose tongue (usually combined, to the distress of

neighbouring persons, with an unrestrained iron fist); and, as Valerie Wayne rightly points out, a loose tongue in a woman is "an illegitimate exercise of power" (161) in a social and linguistic system designed and maintained by men. This insubordination must, if the system is to prevail, be disabled; invented and perpetuated by those whose interests it best serves, the stereotype of the shrew may be considered a metaphorical scold's bridle,[94] a mechanism which effectively clamps the verbal woman's outrage by interpreting it as further evidence of her already established cursedness. In her first appearance, Katherine seems to put her verbal talents to fair use, objecting to Baptista's heartless disclosure of her unpopularity before her sister's suitors and meeting their insulting taunts with just self-defense. But because Katherine speaks out of the discursive strategies put into motion by her opponents, this verbal insubordination only reinforces the stereotype into whose clutches she has already been cast, and evokes the men's ridiculously frightful pleas for deliverance "[f]rom all such devils" (I.i.66). Gremio and Hortensio may, if they are given the benefit of the doubt, be basing their notions of Katherine's satanic power on some pretextual experience; but the identical response of the newly-arrived Tranio--"That wench is stark mad or wonderful froward" (I.i.69)--suggests that all three judgements are premature if not ill-founded, and all three are deaf to the justice of her words. Even worse, this is but the first invocation of the stereotype: in the first act alone, Petruchio is told in no uncertain terms that Katherine is "[r]enown'd in Padua for her scolding tongue" (I.ii.99; also I.ii.252), and a short while later unhesitatingly confirms, in his own embellishment, that "I know she is an irksome brawling scold" (I.ii.186); her name is practically synonymous with "the curst," a title, as Grumio's representative opinion informs us, "for a

maid of all titles the worst" (I.ii.129);[95] she is a "wildcat" (I.ii.195) whose roar all but Petruchio fear; and silencing her is no less a task than the twelve labours of Hercules (I.ii.255).

Compared with Katherine's actual behaviour, these remarks are outrageous exaggerations, and more than anything reveal the extent to which a woman who rejects the cardinal female virtue of silence threatens the very foundations of patriarchal society. At the same time, however, Katherine's rebellious tongue violates convention in an unacceptable way. For one thing, it impedes the progress of the central Shakespearean comic drive, the move toward marriage and social renewal: according to her father's imperative, all wooing of the younger Bianca is deferred until Katherine has been married, and the marriage of Katherine is seemingly impossible in view of her intractability. More specifically, Katherine uses language as a tool of aggression and wilful self-assertion with no attempt at communication or interchange. As she herself sums it up:

> Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak,
> And speak I will. I am no child, no babe.
> Your betters have endur'd me say my mind,
> And if you cannot, best you stop your ears.
> My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
> Or else my heart concealing it will break,
> And rather than it shall, I will be free
> Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words.
>
> (IV.iii.73-80)

The advice to Petruchio to "stop your ears" as she tells "the anger of my heart" is, even within the tradition of authoritative female discourse, far

from an exemplary use of language, and would certainly not earn the commendation of Margery Kempe or Christine de Pizan, both of whom based their authorization of female speech on the articulation of grace and charity.[96] Katherine's understanding of what it means to be "free . . . in words" completely overlooks the paradoxically restrictive and enabling conventions which govern linguistic communication in all societies, however repressive. That Katherine's misuse of language simultaneously expresses the intolerability of her society's value system would seem, then, to be more an authorial corollary than evidence of her own "shrewdness."[97]

But while the play does not fully sanction Katherine's verbal abuse, it also stops short of endorsing the social system she abuses. Most obviously, Padua is plagued by a seemingly endless series of inversions which expose the constructedness of its jealously-guarded hierarchy, and call into question its absolute value. When servants become masters, children sire fathers, wives outwit husbands, and oats eat horses, we may be relatively certain that the social order itself is under the scalpel. More concretely, Paduan patriarchal society generates its own bane. Forever conspiring with and against each other, the men of the play participate in a sophisticated network of competitive underhandedness and circumstantial alliance which is regularly and shamelessly put to the service of advancing personal goals at the expense of others. Tranio and Lucentio are already skilled in the art of male conduct as they arrive in Padua. Smitten by Bianca's (silent) beauty, and claiming to have paid little heed to anything else, Lucentio nonetheless has his wits about him; so much so, in fact, that he is able to recall verbatim the chink in the wall which will allow him access to his beloved: is it not true, he asks Tranio, that the father proposed "[t]o get her cunning schoolmasters to

instruct her?" (I.i.187). This repetition of Baptista's unwitting use of the semantically rich "cunning" (I.i.97) points up not only the flexibility and free appropriation of language, but also the manipulative nature of Paduan social relationships which Tranio and Lucentio are only too eager to join--each, it should be added, for his own advantage. Lucentio's "device" is to pose as schoolmaster to Bianca and so oust his fellow competitors, while Tranio uses the occasion to "suppose" himself Lucentio.[98] Here as elsewhere in the play, it is Tranio who manifests greatest "cunning," prompting Lucentio to propose the clothing exchange which will enable him to lord it over others, and disguising his own goal as a freely offered duty:

> In brief, sir, sith it your pleasure is,
> For I am tied to be obedient--
> . . .
> I am content to be Lucentio,
> Because so well I love Lucentio.
>
> (I.i.211-17)

The advantage incurred by this switch does not escape the notice of Biondello, who remarks with some chagrin that Tranio's change into Lucentio is "[t]he better for him. Would I were so too" (I.i.237). Forming now an alliance which works in their mutual best interest, Tranio and Lucentio set out--in an uncanny duality--to corner the Bianca market. They doubly deceive Baptista by presenting themselves as spurious suitor and schoolmaster; furthermore, in both roles they compete against Bianca's other suitors who are, in turn, both competing against each other and forging an alliance (again for strictly personal aims) to find Katherine a husband and "rid the house of her" (I.i.144-45). But beneath the surface of this alliance, Hortensio and Gremio continue

to plot against each other and against Baptista, the one by having Petruchio offer him as a disguised music teacher, and the other--not to be outdone--by offering "Cambio" seemingly as a token of his affection for Bianca, but really as a messenger of his suit. This network of shifting alliance and competition is carried out in terms of verbal deception, and each of the participants depends for his own success upon outright lies.

The matter which brings all of these males into relationship is, ironically enough, marriage, and their handling of it reveals a culpability even more severe than their uncharitable treatment of each other. Most obviously, marriage in Padua is a financial affair negotiated entirely between fathers and would-be husbands. At the extreme end of this phenomenon is that "auctioning" off of Bianca by her father, with Tranio and Gremio vying against each other in a contest in which he who "can assure my daughter greatest dower / Shall have my Bianca's love" (II.i.336-37). This offhand mention of "love" in a prelude to a luxurious listing of plate, gold, basins, ewers, hangings, ivory coffers, crowns, cypress chests, costly apparel, tents, fine linen, pewter, brass, six score fat oxen, fruitful land, three great argosies, two galliasses, and twelve tight galleys, not to mention "twice as much as whate'er thou off'rest next" (II.i.340-73), is surely meant to raise an eyebrow, if not a laugh. But although this scene is clearly an exaggerated version of mercenary marriage arrangements, it is not inconceivable that its very exaggeration serves to underline the callousness with which such negotiations are commonly conducted not only in Shakespeare's playworlds but also in the world in which the plays were first staged.

In any event, the play itself poses alternatives to such an approach to marriage. First, Bianca and Lucentio bypass the patriarchal will by eloping;

moreover, Lucentio's success depends not upon any wealth he can promise to Bianca (in fact, there is no mention of financial matters between them) nor upon his masculine will, but upon her consent: "Why, gentlemen, you do me double wrong / To strive for that which resteth in my choice" (III.i.16-17). Bianca's refereeing here of the contest between Lucentio and Hortensio for the first lesson easily translates--given the content of their "lessons" and her own insidious talents elsewhere in the play--into a reinforcement of the woman's role in marriage negotiations and reassertion of her own control over the "love" Baptista so wrongly proffers. Secondly, and more importantly, the marriage of Katherine and Petruchio, though it begins as an enforcement of the patriarchal will, evolves over the course of the play into a marriage based on mutual affection, redefining in its evolution the meaning of "right supremacy" and so by implication criticizing the kind of supremacy assumed and exercised by fathers and would-be husbands in Padua.

In addition to its incorrigible competitiveness and exclusively financial conception of marriage, the male hierarchical society is blameworthy (and proved mistaken) for a related linguistic abuse, its pigeon-holing of all women into one of two (supposedly) constrictive, powerless types, the quarrelsome devilish shrew or the submissive docile maiden. Katherine's constraint within the former stereotype has already been mentioned; Bianca, with not a little of her own ingenuity, is confined to the more desirable category of chaste, obedient, and above all silent woman. While Katherine struggles to free herself from the role into which she is cast, and Bianca plays hers so convincingly that she gains power within both her father's and husband's houses, the men fail to appreciate the women's complexity and so remain blind to the strength of their enemy. Even at the end, when saint and

sinner have effectively been reversed, the men see the changes in terms of a simple inversion and overlook the women's show of unorthodox resourcefulness. Only Petruchio learns that his wife is fully human; and he alone, therefore, is granted the "right" supremacy to which the other men lay fraudulent claim.

Petruchio's exclusive understanding is prompted by the intimate alliance that has grown between him and Katherine, an alliance through which he is brought to a richer understanding of love, marriage, and female identity. Before he first sees Katherine, Petruchio expresses more resonantly than any of the other men all of the qualities of patriarchal society which the subsequent action will call into question and eventually overturn. He arrives in Padua a newly-liberated young man whose wealth and future are entirely at his own disposal. In addition to seeking increase of wealth and travel experience, Petruchio is wife-hunting in baldly mercenary terms. When he is informed that the suggested woman has wealth, beauty, and education enough, but is so outspoken and violent that "a mine of gold" were not sufficient recompense, Petruchio calmly replies, "Hortensio, peace. Thou know'st not gold's effect" (I.ii.92), and is immediately taken by the favourable prospect.

Petruchio also enthusiastically subscribes to the stereotypical views of women held by his fellows. Once he has learned that Katherine has a shrewish nature, a type with which he is presumably acquainted and which seems to whet his appetite for competition, he jumps without hesitation to his own, more spirited, version of her personality as he exclaims confidently--before he has even met her--that he "knows" she is "an irksome brawling scold" (I.ii.186), an exaggerated formulation which may be intended to enhance his own reputation for courage. He is quick to belittle the caution of the others and upstage his own fearlessness and heroic qualifications: "a woman's tongue," he

insists, is barely a peep compared with the tumultuous sounds that he has heard. Not only is he displaying here a (delightfully) excessive sense of self-importance, but in his focus on the shrew's tongue as her worst fault, Petruchio echoes the others' single-minded conceptions of Katherine's personality. Needless to say, Petruchio will be surprised not so much by the volume as by the range of pitches her voice has mastered.

When Petruchio's self-glorification is seconded by the men, whose wooing endeavours he liberates by agreeing to "rid the house" of Katherine, he enters the system of male alliance outlined above. No less than a saviour to whom all "rest generally beholding," Petruchio sides, prior to his first meeting with Katherine, with the other men, eagerly promising to subdue the society's intolerable menace. But once he has met his opponent, the alliance between Petruchio and the other men begins to dissolve: they are less and less privy to the details of his strategy, though they continue to imagine that, regardless of puzzling appearances, his actions are advancing, in their terms, the taming of the shrew. While Katherine is devastated by Petruchio's seemingly inexplicable behaviour at the wedding, Tranio is confident that "[h]e hath some meaning in his mad attire" (III.ii.122); and following the bridal couple's fantastic exit, the rest of the company, on Baptista's absurd suggestion, calmly continues the wedding celebration. At Petruchio's country house, another alliance is operative, albeit one that is intuitive rather than overtly articulated, between Petruchio and his male servants. Again, while Katherine is completely overwhelmed by the treatment she receives, the men extend their foreknowledge of her reputation to construe the reason for Petruchio's unusual behaviour: as Peter puts it, "[h]e kills her in her own humour" (IV.i.167). Grumio, in fact, is so certain of Petruchio's strategy

that he adopts it himself by first taunting Katherine with the meat he knows she craves and then withdrawing it because "I fear 'tis choleric" (IV.iii.22). Katherine's raging outburst sums up the firm division between her isolation and their solidarity:

> Sorrow on thee and all the pack of you
> That triumph thus upon my misery!
>
> (IV.iii.33-34)

It is significant, however, that Petruchio himself does not encourage this male alliance and that he discloses the nature of his strategy in soliloquy. To anticipate, there is a shift of alliance over the course of the taming in which Petruchio slides slowly and almost imperceptibly from a position of opposition against Katherine to one of alliance with her and opposition against the other men.

Nevertheless, the play requires that Katherine be tamed, and Petruchio's taming strategy reforms her verbal fault, pointing toward the redefinition of linguistic bonds and hierarchical relationships at play's end. Petruchio's battle cry of "now, Petruchio, speak" (II.i.181) as he is about to enter the fray indicates that, in the main, their battleground is language.[99] Unlike Gremio who mistakenly imagines that the only remedy for Katherine's temper is "to be whipped at the high cross every morning" (I.i.132-33), Petruchio has a suitable alternative. Given that Katherine's most hateful trait is a sharp tongue, Petruchio plans to bar her communicative efforts by receiving them in precisely the opposite sense of her intentions:

> Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain
> She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.
> Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear

As morning roses newly wash'd with dew.
Say she be mute and will not speak a word,
Then I'll commend her volubility,
And say she uttereth piercing eloquence.

(II.i.170-76)

By disabling the force of Katherine's language, Petruchio hopes to control the conversation and gain supremacy. But, based as it is on a reductive conception of Katherine, this first of Petruchio's offensives is largely unsuccessful, and is met by an unexpected range of verbal tricks (mirrors of his own "rope-tricks") which force him into self-defense. Petruchio is most surprised--and delighted, one would think--by Katherine's show of wit, a flexible and unpredictable use of language which he initially finds difficult to undercut and which corners him into engaging in the conversation on her terms. At one point, Petruchio is even reduced to an utterly banal pun, answering her comment that she is "[t]oo light for such a swain as you to catch, / And yet as heavy as my weight should be" with "Should be? Should--buzz!" (II.i.204-06). And the dash may even indicate a pause as Petruchio scrambles to invent a reply more witty than hers. But Katherine does not consistently gain the upper hand; in fact, the passage (II.i.182-259) reveals and insists upon a certain balance of inventiveness and alacrity, an equality for which Petruchio is ill-prepared and which spells failure for his tactics.

One would be hard pressed to conclude that Petruchio has advanced the proposed taming at the end of this first battle, and his confident statement of purpose "in plain terms" seems dangerously overstated (II.i.262). When they are joined again by Baptista, Gremio, and Tranio, Katherine shows--to the others' great satisfaction--that the only change in her shrewishness is an

increased contempt for her father's mishandling of paternal authority. Fearing he may have to admit defeat before his peers, Petruchio transposes the strategy initially drafted against Katherine into a face-saving manoeuvre against the men, informing them how mistaken they have been about Katherine's shrewishness, that it is a pose she adopts "for policy" (II.i.285). Presumably, Petruchio here struggles to muffle Katherine's mouth, for her silence as the "match" is announced and confirmed is otherwise inexplicable, and her physical resistance would indicate what the next two acts bear out, that Petruchio's labour has but begun.

Petruchio's delayed appearance and unseemly behaviour at his wedding are, on one level, simply an extension of the farcical elements of his character. At quite another level, however--one toward which the character aspires--Petruchio is putting into action an educative scheme intended not merely to "tame" Katherine, but also to teach her the significance of the conventions which she flouts and which are requisite to social (and comic) harmony. But there is a difficulty here: the only convention that Katherine actively rejects is the convention of linguistic communication which ideally bonds individuals in mutual, charitable (though hierarchically arranged) interchange; otherwise, she is as eager as the next girl to be married in the traditional manner. Without wanting to give Petruchio too much credit (at this point in the play he is still far from blameless), his travesty of the marital conventions his bride desires ingeniously models, by association, the intolerability of her rejection of linguistic convention, a convention which, however distasteful to the modern egalitarian sensibility, is primarily intended to work in the best interest of the peaceful functioning of the social group.

But to chronicle the taming of Katherine is to chronicle Petruchio's correlative growth from a cardboard character representing the worst elements of a corrupt patriarchy to a complex (though annoyingly insufficiently developed) comic character newly aware of the meaning of "right supremacy." Not to notice a change in Petruchio over the course of the play is to posit that the values he initially represents--and those values are clearly synonymous with an abusive social order--are in no way being questioned or challenged by Katherine's rebellion; it is to posit that, whether tamed or not, Katherine is utterly powerless in Padua and that her vital energy is contained, regardless of her subversive intentions, by the stereotypes of shrew or maiden; it is, ultimately, to make The Taming of the Shrew into a dark comedy. But unlike Duke Vincentio in Measure for Measure, who does not undergo any kind of spiritual evolution, or Bertrand's rapid and improbable repentance in All's Well That Ends Well, Petruchio's vision is convincingly enlarged, even if its dimensions are not as sharply focused as Katherine's.

Much of the reason why "Petruchio is Kated" has to do with the close resemblance between the two characters, a resemblance which the play stresses and which completely undercuts the benefit of a unilateral reformation of the shrew. Before Petruchio even arrives in Padua, a potential mate for Katherine is imagined by Hortensio, who does not despair of finding her a husband even though she is not to his or Gremio's taste: "there be good fellows in the world, and a man could light on them, would take her with all faults" (I.i.127-29). In a different key, Petruchio's verbal and physical abuse of Grumio distinctly echoes Katherine's treatment of Bianca;[100] the connection between them in this regard is fittingly made by Grumio himself, who suggests that "shrew" need not be a gender-specific term:[101]

> O' my word, and she knew him as well as I do,
> she would think scolding would do little good
> upon him. She may perhaps call him half a score
> knaves or so.
>
> (I.ii.107-09)

Even by his own admission, Petruchio proudly announces that he is the perfect opponent for Katherine, and unknowingly implies that he is also her ideal partner:

> I am as peremptory as she proud-minded;
> And where two raging fires meet together,
> They do consume the thing that feeds their fury.
>
> (II.i.131-33)

And although he next likens himself to an immovable mountain (II.i.140-41), Petruchio's eager reply to the report of Katherine's badgering of Hortensio reveals the change she has already begun to effect upon him:

> Now, by the world, it is a lusty wench.
> I love her ten times more than e'er I did.
> O, how I long to have some chat with her.
>
> (II.i.160-62)

The change in Petruchio, then, is largely made possible (and necessary) by the likeness between himself and Katherine. This likeness, in turn, nurtures an alliance between the couple and eventually pits them, in their mutual reformation, against the rest of unregenerate Paduan society. This new alliance is fittingly announced at the end of the travestied wedding, for this is where Petruchio takes upon himself, with great relish and not a little improvisation, the characteristics of a shrew and earns the commendation that

he is "[c]urster than she" (III.ii.152).

Having practically abducted Katherine from the wedding ceremony and brought her to his country house, Petruchio continues his deferral of both private and public consummation of the marriage by denying her food and preaching continency in the bridal chamber, focusing now upon the meaning of human inter-dependency. By her own admission, this is something Katherine has little experience of:

> Beggars that come unto my father's door
> Upon entreaty have a present alms,
> If not, elsewhere they meet with charity.
> But I, who never knew how to entreat,
> Nor never needed that I should entreat,
> Am starv'd for meat, giddy for lack of sleep,
> With oaths kept waking, and with brawling fed.
>
> (IV.iii.4-10)

But even in the play's own terms, Petruchio's overt intention is still a culpable, selfish concern with gaining supremacy, and goes a fair distance to undercut the extent of his "reign":

> She ate no meat today, nor none shall eat;
> Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not.
> As with the meat, some undeserved fault
> I'll find about the making of the bed,
> And here I'll fling the pillow, there the bolster,
> This way the coverlet, another way the sheets.
> Ay, and amid this hurly I intend
> That all is done in reverend care of her.

. . .

This is a way to kill a wife with kindness,

And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humour.

(IV.i.184-96)[102]

The vindication of personal power in comedy, however, precludes this kind of self-imposed and self-enhancing tyranny. Petruchio's single-minded and unself-conscious offensive, then, cannot be realized in the way he expects.

The change of direction which Petruchio's plot undergoes is visible in his third attempt to tame Katherine, one which most clearly seeks to teach her about the arbitrariness of linguistic signs and how their effectiveness depends upon a cooperation of individual wills rather than upon unilateral self-assertion, but which turns out also to teach him the very same thing. Once prompted by Hortensio to "[s]ay as he says, or we shall never go" (IV.v.11), Katherine accepts the terms in which her marriage is to be conducted, though not without some contriving of her own. When Petruchio insists that the sun is (or at least ought to be called) the moon, Katherine agrees full-heartedly, but adds a semantic twist whose determination and subversive value Petruchio is helpless to control:

Pet. I say it is the moon.

Kath. I know it is the moon.

Pet. Nay, then you lie. It is the blessed sun.

Kath. Then, God be blest, it is the blessed sun.

But sun it is not, when you say it is not,

And the moon changes even as your mind.

What you will have it nam'd, even that it is,

And so it shall be so for Katherine. (IV.v.16-22)

In addition, the repetition here of the phrase "I know" recalls Katherine's earlier insistence that "I know it is the sun that shines so bright" (IV.v.5), and certainly suggests that to know the sun shines and to "know" the moon shines are not necessarily mutually exclusive propositions. (It may also be noted in passing that Katherine's reiteration of the preferred form of her name is another advancement of her counter-power, one which may be emphasized at the director's discretion.) In general, Katherine employs her wit simultaneously to confer upon Petruchio the authority he seeks and to underline, by appropriating the power of rhetoric, that authority based on linguistic domination, on the unilateral determination of discursive conventions, is far from absolute: language, as she now knows, is not bound by any single intention it may be made to serve.

To reinforce the lesson and test Katherine's "obedience," Petruchio has her repeat his absurd adulation of the aged Vincentio; Katherine complies so ingeniously that she may well adapt a phrase of Tranio's and say she will invent "twice as much as whate'er thou off'rest next" (II.i.373):

> Young budding virgin, fair, and fresh, and sweet,
> Whither away, or where is thy abode?
> Happy the parents of so fair a child,
> Happier the man whom favourable stars
> Allots thee for his lovely bedfellow.
>
> (IV.v.36-40)

In a similar counter-move, Katherine reinforces her initial perception of the sun when made to apologize for her "mistaking eyes": "Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes, / That have been so bedazzled by the sun" (IV.v.44-45). Here Petruchio may well seem to be delighted with Katherine's inventiveness and

spirit; surely Coppélia Kahn is right to say that he would never have married a woman of the silent and utterly submissive type he claims to desire (99). But the clarity with which their mutual understanding and acceptance are developed leaves much to be desired, and must be communicated, if at all, by gesture. In fact, this opacity of the private dimensions of Katherine's and Petruchio's relationship is precisely the quality of the play which sustains a host of contradictory interpretations: those who read in the play a transcript of utter wifely submission point to the lack of emotional interchange between Katherine and Petruchio; those who entertain a more positive vision insist that the bond is discernible in the playfulness with which both carry out the "game" of domestic hierarchy.[103] The play does, however, give some indication of a growing emotional attachment, even though it is not as well-developed as we might wish. The opacity of an emerging affection and mutual understanding is momentarily made transparent when Vincentio addresses both as partners in "your strange encounter" (IV.v.53), even though Katherine alone has retracted her remark; and Petruchio himself refers to the event as "our first merriment" (IV.v.75). Less obviously, but no less important for the advancement of the comic tone, the weather has improved on the road back to Padua, and Petruchio welcomes company as he and his bride move toward the long-deferred marriage feast.

Petruchio's final "victory"--the word may now be used in a provisional sense--confirms the nature of Katherine's subjection and his own "right supremacy" (V.ii.110). Recalling the resounding kiss of the wedding ceremony, a gesture which was forced upon Katherine, and anticipating the triumphant "Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate" (V.ii.181), the kiss which Petruchio solicits in the street is a potentially powerful emblem of their

growing attachment. Judging by her show of imaginative versatility on the road back to Padua, Katherine may well take matters (and her husband) into her own hands and give Petruchio a kiss to outdo his own "clamorous smack." By so doing, she delineates once again the boundaries of his power and her subjection by playing up those elements--such as intensity--of linguistic commands over which Petruchio holds no sway. Significantly, the tone of this last encounter of wills is distinctly different from Petruchio's and Katherine's first combative meeting:

> Kath. Husband, let's follow and see the end of this ado.
>
> Pet. First kiss me, Kate, and we will.
>
> Kath. What, in the midst of the street?
>
> Pet. What, art thou ashamed of me?
>
> Kath. No, sir, God forbid; but ashamed to kiss.
>
> Pet. Why, then, let's home again. Come, sirrah, let's away.
>
> Kath. Nay, I will give thee a kiss. Now pray thee, love, stay.
>
> Pet. Is not this well? Come, my sweet Kate.
>
> (V.i.130-37)

The Taming of the Shrew's final scene has stirred much critical debate involving both Katherine's troublesome submission (or "submission," depending on one's view), and the nature of the society to whose strictures she submits.[104] As the scene opens, Lucentio confidently announces, in tones reminiscent of the festive endings of other of Shakespeare's comedies, that harmony has been achieved:

> At last, though long, our jarring notes agree,
> And time it is, when raging war is done,
> To smile at scapes and perils overblown.

. . .

My banquet is to close our stomachs up
After our great good cheer. Pray you, sit down,
For now we sit to chat as well as eat.

(V.ii.1-11)

But as soon as they begin to "chat," the Paduans reveal much the same competitive, divisive, prejudicial streak which characterized their behaviour earlier in the play and which was responsible for the "jarring notes" now seemingly resolved. Most obviously, "chat" translates into "verbal competition," and evidences the continued use of language as an instrument of personal supremacy. Notably, Katherine and Petruchio enter into the competition against the others (though not against each other) with as much vigour as anyone else. Insisting upon an explanation of the widow's cryptic remark to Petruchio that "He that is giddy thinks the world turns round" (V.ii.20), Katherine deploys an equally sharp wit, and Petruchio eagerly cheers her on, wagering a hundred marks that "my Kate does put her down" (V.ii.35). This kind of verbal one-up-manship extends into the play's climactic moment, the wager on the wives' obedience. Confessing that Hortensio "has a little gall'd me" (V.ii.60), Petruchio is determined to reassert his superiority, proposing a test of wifely obedience and husbandly authority. It is significant here that Petruchio eagerly raises the stakes, arguing that he would wager the suggested twenty crowns "of my hawk or hound" (V.ii.72), and so marking a distinction, however faint, between his earlier understanding of spousal relationships and his current bond with Katherine. All of the men are taken aback when Katherine instantly obeys Petruchio's "command" (V.ii.97), and even more taken aback by--though utterly powerless

against--their own wives' disobedience. But Petruchio's triumph here is only part of the victory; it is complemented by Katherine's own triumph against the other women. Responding to Petruchio's order to "tell these headstrong women / What duty they do owe their lords and husbands" (V.ii.131-32) with the spontaneous creativity characteristic of her behaviour in her other submissions to Petruchio, Katherine assumes centre stage and marks out her and Petruchio's superiority. The speech itself is too familiar to require quotation: it goes without saying that Katherine paints a picture of domestic harmony in which the woman is unquestionably subject to her husband; but much less obvious is the restriction of female subordination to the kind of husband Petruchio has become: one who "cares for thee," has an "honest will," and is a "loving lord" (V.ii.148, 159, 161). In other words, Katherine's version of marital harmony specifically defines "right supremacy" as the kind of arrangement she and Petruchio have achieved, and is not intended as a blanket warrant for abusive patriarchal domination. Just as the women in her audience are not the kinds of wives they ought to be, the men are not the kinds of husbands who deserve domestic obedience. The image she portrays, then, expresses the private alliance between herself and Petruchio, an alliance whose basis in discursive solidarity has moved at least one plot of The Taming of the Shrew from farce to comedy, but whose achievement remains exclusive. Katherine and Petruchio's exit at the play's end marks their difference from the rest of Paduan society, a society where misogynistic attitudes, constrictive notions of marriage, and belligerent "chat" continue to operate. Their triumphant abandonment of the others for the fruits of the marriage bed announces an alternative vision in which hierarchical authority is no longer at odds with individual fulfilment.[105]

Love's Labour's Lost

"Authority" receives unequivocally bad press in Love's Labour's Lost. Armado's plea to Moth to name "More authority" (I.ii.63), to comfort him in his predicament of being "in love with a base wench" (I.ii.54-55), and Longaville's corresponding desire for "some authority how to proceed" (IV.iii.283) in proving perjury lawful are, in addition to their obvious "sinplicitie,"[106] already cast in a doubtful light by Berowne's earlier summing up of the futility of cloistered bookishness: "Small have continual plodders ever won, / Save base authority from others' books" (I.i.86-87). Though it is narrowly defined as precedent in support of the legitimacy of one's behaviour, this kind of authority is in fact of much greater consequence in the design of the play, feeding as it does the supremacy with which both Armado and the courtiers endow themselves, and so spilling over into the social context within which they necessarily exist. In its difficult move toward comic harmony,[107] Love's Labour's Lost unites literary and political authority to expose the intolerability and indeed inefficacy of self-interested linguistic mastery as an agent of personal supremacy.

Hidden beneath the surface of Navarre's legislative speech is an implicit vertical schema of merit, one which posits--erroneously--both the universality of the Academy's mandate and the superior position of its votaries: fame, "that all hunt after in their lives" (emphasis added), will be awarded to the court of Navarre, "the wonder of the world," for its enforcement of an ascetic scholarly regimen (I.i.1, 12). The militant language in which the "established proclaimed edict and continent canon" (I.i.252-53) is couched emphatically suggests the courtiers' self-proclaimed supremacy as defenders of "eternity."

The paper held by the King is no less than a muster-roll which each of the "brave conquerors" is required to sign as a guarantee of his unwavering dedication to "war against [his] own affections / And the huge army of the world's desires" (I.i.9-10), as insurance primarily against his own (already suspected) future lapse:

> Your oaths are pass'd; and now subscribe your names,
> That his own hand may strike his honour down
> That violates the smallest branch herein:--
> If you are arm'd to do, as sworn to do,
> Subscribe to your deep oaths, and keep it too.
>
> (I.i.19-23)

The superiority implicit in Navarre's edict is brought to light in the votaries' eagerness to distinguish themselves from "the gross world's baser slaves" (I.i.30). The elitism here expressed is memorably summarized in Nathaniel's pronouncement on the ignorance of Constable Dull:

> Sir, he hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in
> a book.
> He hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk
> ink: his intellect is not replenished; he is only an
> animal, only sensible in the duller parts;
> And such barren plants are set before us, that we
> thankful should be,
> Which we of taste and feeling are, for those parts that
> do fructify in us more than he.
>
> (IV.ii.23-28)

The untenability of the discriminatory self-inflation expressed in this passage, as in the king's edict, is compounded by the insularity toward which the Academy strives. Both features account for the static quality of the courtiers' interchanges, and for the complete lack of forward momentum in their communication. Following what is in reality a severe challenge to the King's program, Berowne's eloquent defense of a balanced scholarship, the three unwavering votaries form a united front which not only does not take up Berowne's challenge, but argues ad hominem in what is essentially a sterile "ter coctus":[108]

> King. How well he's read, to reason against reading!
>
> Dum. Proceeded well, to stop all good proceeding!
>
> Long. He weeds the corn, and still lets grow the weeding.
>
> (I.i.94-96)

Even after Berowne arrests this roundabout, the conversation makes little progress. The utter lack of dialogue in this short instance is registered in the King's ultimate response to Berowne's objections: "Well, sit you out: go home, Berowne: adieu!" (I.i.110), a veritable coup d'état which leaves little room for anything but "yielding" (I.i.118).

Throughout the play, it is made evident that the source of sterility in Navarre, the thing which makes the men's tasks "barren" (I.i.47), is a profoundly naive understanding of the workings of language, both as a mediation of mental and physical worlds, and as a tool of interpersonal relationships.[109] Underlying their edict is the belief that, as it were, man can live on words alone. Words become substitutes for food, sleep, and sex. This reification of alphabetical signs leads the men to have full confidence in their ability to control the physical world by linguistic means. The

search for "more authority" is only one aspect of this confidence.[110] When Berowne is under pressure to defend the beauty of his mistress, he vows that "[He'll] prove her fair, or talk till doomsday here" (IV.iii.270), and several lines later he is asked by his partners in the society of the forsworn to "prove / Our loving lawful" (IV.iii.280-81): the actual physical beauty of Rosaline and the perjury of the men becomes secondary, unseated as "truth" by the verbal feat which creates a new, controlled reality. But Rosaline's darkness and the breaking of vows are facts which exist in a world essentially unalterable by words, and both facts reassert their independence from verbal manipulations before the play ends, one in Berowne's eventual, though laboured, abjuration of "painted rhetoric," and the other in the worldly penance which alone will absolve the men of their forswearing.

A further undermining of the men's authority as linguistic masters is their sincere use of the Petrarchan convention in a playworld where its very conventionality is firmly in place.[111] The men's conviction that their uninspired, commonplace love sonnets are transparent vehicles of inimitable emotions[112] ("Our letters, madam, show'd much more than jest" [V.ii.777]) is juxtaposed, to great humourous effect, with the women's incisive critiques, especially their clearsighted perception of the great remove between conventional poetry and emotional reality. The Princess claims she is in receipt of "as much love in rhyme / As would be cramm'd up in a sheet of paper, / Writ o' both sides the leaf, margent and all" (V.ii.6-8); Rosaline says of Berowne's verses that "The numbers [are] true; and, were the numbering too, / I were the fairest goddess on the ground" (V.ii.35-36); Katherine deems Dumain's poetry "A huge translation of hypocrisy, / Vilely compil'd, profound simplicity" (V.ii.51-52); and Maria decides that Longaville's letter "is too

long by half a mile" (V.ii.54). The banal verse is rated, in sum, as "bombast and as lining to the time" (V.ii.773). The women are aware, as are we, that conventional language is a system of signs whose meaning is no longer fully in the power of any individual user, that its referential value is debased by overuse, and that, at best, it heralds "merriment" (V.ii.776), something at quite a different level of signification than the strictly literal sense of the words employed. With great dramatic irony, the men's naive adoption of Petrarchan convention shows conclusively that, while they search for an appropriate and genuine discourse, they are not in control of the signs they use, and that they fail to recognize the order of reality to which those signs belong. For much of the play, the fact that the power of language rests in its essentially pluralistic mediation of mental and physical worlds eludes them.

On the other hand, the men have fully harnessed the ethically objectionable power of language as a means to personal supremacy. Our first external evidence of their character, given by the visiting women in admittedly "garnished" (II.i.78) terms, reveals nonetheless that they share a predisposition to exploit the transformational power of wit by divorcing it from a charitable will. "The only soil of his fair virtue's gloss," says Maria of Longaville, "Is a sharp wit match'd with too blunt a will; / Whose edge hath power to cut, whose will still wills / It should none spare that come within his power" (II.i.47, 49-51); Dumain, similarly, has "Most power to do most harm, least knowing ill / For he hath wit to make an ill shape good" (II.i.58-59); and Berowne's eye "begets occasion for his wit" and is so moving that "aged ears play truant at his tales, / And younger hearings are quite ravished" (II.i.69, 74-75). All three men use their sharp wits to exert a

self-interested influence over others.

This competitive streak informs even their relationship with each other, and it is surely significant that Boyet labels them "competitors in oath" (II.i.82). As R. W. David's gloss points out, "competitors" in this context means "associates, partners"; but the term also brings to mind rivalry, a usage which Shakespeare had already employed in Titus Andronicus,[113] and it is certainly this sense which best characterizes the men's behaviour throughout the play. Costard's version of this kind of self-displaying power of wit as he revels in his (imagined) supremacy over Boyet, "how the ladies and I have put him down" (IV.i.142), may serve as an epitaph for the use to which wit is put in the notorious sonnet-reading scene, at once the site of the courtiers' most intense feelings of community and competition.[114] In structural terms, the scene works rather like an accordion, expanding and contracting to accommodate the direction of the men's desires. The scene opens in its most contracted form, with Berowne solus, inwardly tossed by a turmoil whose existence is contingent upon his isolation from the other votaries: "By the world, I would not care a pin if the other three were in" (IV.iii.17-18). No sooner has he said this than the King enters moaning "Ay me!", sure evidence, as Berowne concludes, that Cupid has "thumped him with [a] bird-bolt under the left pap" (IV.iii.22). Berowne's desire for company, now partially fulfilled, is echoed by the King whose quick move to "shade folly" as Longaville advances turns out to be a needless manoeuvre since they eventually share, as he hopes, a "sweet fellowship in shame" (IV.iii.46). Finally, Dumain caps the rehearsal of his sonnet with similar wishes: "O! would the king, Berowne, and Longaville, / Were lovers too" (IV.iii.120-21). The scene has expanded, then, to embrace a company of perjured lovers who are in exactly the same

predicament. But the expansion seemingly achieved here takes an interesting course; rather than moving toward establishing communal objectives, each of the men in turn advances upon his predecessor an utterly hypocritical superiority. Berowne's behaviour in this respect is most notable, since he exercises the longest period of supremacy. All too easily putting by his earlier desire for company in love, Berowne characteristically "begets occasion for his wit" (II.i.69), and loses no time in asserting his discriminate position, much to the delight of our own superior "over-view." Following a lengthy tirade against the men's folly, he turns with great seriousness to his own virtue and lone heroism:

> I, that am honest; I, that hold it sin
> To break the vow I am engaged in;
> I am betray'd, by keeping company
> With moon-like men, men of inconstancy.
>
> (IV.iii.174-77)

But just as Berowne is settling into this posture of indignation, his tongue nearly tripping over the profuse catalogue of women's parts whose praise he disdains, he abruptly cuts his effusion short and apparently makes a move to dart offstage--his own nemesis has arrived in the person of Costard. Once exposed, he quickly repositions himself to guard against the others' imminent attacks by becoming the spokesman for all "four woodcocks in a dish" (IV.iii.79). But this move to unity is not so easily accomplished, and there is yet another mustering of wit to enforce division rather than community, this time with Berowne defending his mistress's darkness against the deliberate taunts of the others who take the opportunity to enforce their own momentary sovereignty and recover some of their injured self-esteem. As Agnew

has put it, "Rosaline is exalted by Berowne in pursuit of self-exaltation, she is slandered by his fellows in their own self-defense, and both initiative and response tend to reduce her to the status of an object or counter to be manipulated" (46). This expanding and contracting contest of wit is finally brought to a halt by the King, who puts their verbal display into proper perspective: "But what of this? Are we not all in love?" (IV.iii.278). This eventual levelling leads to the formation of a renewed bond between the men, though one whose martial, self-defensive formulation continues to promise division rather than community in the broader context of the play.

Presenting now a united front of forsworn lovers, the men set out, at Berowne's instigation, to protect themselves from the scourge they are sure the women will apply: "justice always whirls in equal measure: / Light wenches may prove plagues to men forsworn" (IV.iii.380-81). This strategy of wooing as a counter-action to scorn is reminiscent of Armado's superficially self-diminishing letter to Jaquenetta earlier in the play (whose ineffectiveness is suggested by the fact that it miscarries--his unexpected success in love, we must assume, is the fruit of some more forthright approach). Though Armado begins the letter--begins, that is, after a lengthy catalogue of Jaquenetta's virtues--with a plea that she "have commiseration on thy heroical vassal!" (IV.i.64-65), the stance of prostration is short-lived. Following a question-and-answer method of development, in which the answer always indicates his own superiority, Armado arrives at the intended result of his amorous advance, the "catastrophe," as he calls it, whose mutuality he adds only as an after-thought: "The catastrophe is a nuptial: on whose side? the king's; no, on both in one, or one in both" (IV.i.77-79). His slip is not so wide of the mark; it reveals that his initial prostration (conventional, we may remind

ourselves, of Elizabethan sonneteering) was a front for a personal force whose suppression is contingent upon the lady's compliance and which can be mustered at will. He ends the letter with the following summation:

> Thus dost thou hear the Nemean lion roar
> 'Gainst thee, thou lamb, that standest as his prey;
> Submissive fall his princely feet before,
> And he from forage will incline to play.
> But if thou strive, poor soul, what art thou then?
> Food for his rage, repasture for his den.
>
> (IV.i.89-94)

As with other parallels between the courtiers and their subordinate sidekicks, Armado here expresses a more vulgar version of the attitude which informs the courtiers' behaviour. Nevertheless, the parallel is telling, and may give credence to Boyet's description of the courtiers in what is surely their weakest moment:

> One rubb'd his elbow thus, and fleer'd, and swore
> A better speech was never spoke before;
> Another, with his finger and his thumb,
> Cry'd `Via! we will do't, come what will come';
> The third he caper'd, and cried, `All goes well';
> The fourth turn'd on the toe, and down he fell.
> With that, they all did tumble on the ground,
> With such a zealous laughter, so profound,
> That in this spleen ridiculous appears,
> To check their folly, passion's solemn tears.
>
> (V.ii.109-18)

The courtiers continue to use wit to establish their own supremacy in their offensive against the actors in the Pageant of Nine Worthies. Despite--or, more likely, because of--having roundly been chastised for abusing their powers and brought to at least a nominal reformation, the men turn their venom upon the only group whom they continue to dominate. In contrast to the Princess's charitable encouragements of the beleaguered actors, the courtiers, with Berowne and Boyet in the lead, block the progress of the Pageant, interrupting the set speeches with deliberately insulting and offputting remarks which are intended to establish their own supremacy as the arbitrators of the illusion. The severity of their attacks culminates in Berowne's aptly-expressed, hot-headed call for "More Ates, more Ates! stir them on! stir them on!" (V.ii.680-81), a fitting motto for the courtiers' belligerent behaviour throughout the play. Marcade's entrance some twenty lines later, sombre as it is, is an appropriately abrupt end to the men's unrestrained harassment. The familiar display of self-importance by means of verbal wit at this late stage of the comedy requires nothing less than a postponement of the denouement.

The self-centred vanity ("vanity" in the sense of self-involvement and, in the context of the play as a whole, futility) of the members of the "little academe," evident most clearly in their consistent use of language to gain power over each other, their subordinates, and their guests, constitutes an impediment to the progression of the genre to which this play claims to belong. In other words, if the comedy is to arrive at or even move toward its imminent resolution, the "brave conquerors" will have to engage in a series of battles for which they are only nominally prepared. Though Love's Labour's Lost replaces comic closure with foreclosure, and its plot is notoriously thin, the play does have a certain momentum: it repeatedly places the

courtiers in positions of combat against forces whose strength and eventual victory indicate the proper use of the power of language. The comic impasse represented by the Academy's initial edict and perpetuated by its members right through to the deus ex machina of Marcade's arrival comes under increasing pressure from its own internal weaknesses, from the insubordination of Costard, and from its most formidable opponent, the women.

The imminent collapse of Navarre's Academy is signalled even at the very beginning of the play, with the King's inaugural address, and is effectively complete by the end of the play's first scene: the remainder of the play does not so much continue to undercut the courtiers' endeavours as labour to bring them to the audience's level of awareness. The first sign of danger is the King's (innocently) incongruous yoking of worldly fame and reclusive contemplation, an unobserved inner contradiction which renders questionable the men's devotion to a search for truth. Similarly, the welcome presence of a certified liar as the Academy's "quick recreation" (a phrase meaningfully set beside the "barren tasks" and "abortive birth" of the Academy) suggests a skewed understanding of the end of study.[115] This suspicion is no sooner formed than it is borne out by the treatment of the first (reported)[116] infraction of the Academy's severe statutes. Rather than concerning themselves with the weightiness of Costard's offence, the men are primarily amused with the linguistic eccentricity of Armado. That Costard has violated a central law of the Academy is only of secondary concern, and his sentence appropriately dwindles from "he shall endure such public shame as the rest of the court can possibly devise" (I.i.129-31), to "you shall fast a week with bran and water" (I.i.291-92). (In the following scene, we learn that Costard's sentence has been further reduced to "a' must fast three days a

week" [I.ii.121], and soon after that he is easily "enfranchised" when his keeper requires a service.) Far from merely a "recreation" at Court, Armado represents both an undermining of the men's solemn vows and, in the political power with which he is endowed (and which enables his own abuse of the law), a real internal threat. None of this, of course, is discerned by the courtiers. Costard himself plays a fairly active role in subverting the courtiers and his strategy works within and makes use of the very verbal conditions which prove to be the men's downfall. Mirroring the static proliferation of synonyms which is the hallmark of the Academy's linguistic style, Costard is able to postpone the King's pronouncement of his sentence:

> King. It was proclaimed a year's imprisonment to be taken with a wench.
>
> Cost. I was taken with none, sir: I was taken with a demsel.
>
> King. Well, it was proclaimed damsel.
>
> Cost. This was no damsel neither, sir: she was a virgin.
>
> King. It is so varied too, for it was proclaimed virgin.
>
> Cost. If it were, I deny her virginity: I was taken with a maid.
>
> (I.i.280-88)

Giving Costard the last word in this excerpt may exaggerate the extent of his supremacy since he is eventually sentenced, though to nothing approaching "a year's imprisonment"; nevertheless, with Costard on the initiative and the King merely following suit, his self-defence here certainly suggests an unorthodox distribution of power. In addition, the place of Costard's subversion in the play's larger efforts to overturn the Academy is reinforced by Shakespeare in the broad dramatic irony with which he invests the King's departing remark:

> And go we, lords, to put in practice that
> Which each to other hath so strongly sworn.
>
> (I.i.297-98)

This statement carries much more significance than the King realizes, coming as it does after the logical inconsistency of his own speech, the unmet challenge of Berowne's defence of true ars vivendi, the "mere necessity" of the Princess's expected arrival, the deeply ironic presence and behaviour of Don Armado, and the transgression and subversive challenge of Costard. Berowne's certainty that "[t]hese oaths and laws will prove an idle scorn" (I.i.300) and Costard's somewhat bewildered and unsolicited confession that "I suffer for the truth" (I.i.302) appropriately turn the scene toward the Waterloo of the Academy.

The most consistent and thoroughgoing challenge to the men's supremacy in Love's Labour's Lost comes from the French women.[117] Indeed, their encounters with the courtiers form nothing less than a series of voiced oppositions in which they gradually establish the upper hand. Though the women themselves are not entirely blameless (they do, after all, echo the men in their own wit-combat; their Princess certainly has no qualms about opening private correspondence which is not addressed to her, and her teasing of the forester does seem rather merciless),[118] their presence in Navarre as delegates of the "mere necessity" which will undo the men advances a moral and social alternative to the doomed Academy. By reflecting the absurdity of the men's vows, by imposing upon them the consequences of their own wrongheaded assumptions about the nature and power of language, the women eventually succeed in overturning the play's comic impasse and establish the conditions for a conventional conclusion.[119]

The women's subversion of the men begins even before they actually meet. Aware that she may be transgressing the laws of the "silent court" (surely an ironic label at this point in the play, not to mention a telling inversion of the usual power of eloquence claimed by patriarchal males; II.i.24), the Princess sends Boyet to inquire how to conduct her "serious business craving quick dispatch" (II.i.31), given that the King has barred women from court. In the meantime, she and her retinue will "attend, / Like humble-visag'd suitors, his high will" (II.i.33-34). As guest of Navarre and as a potential transgressor of the vow made by its courtiers, the Princess recognizes that she is, at least nominally, in a position of inferiority. But a tone of mockery underlies her words here. Not needing "the painted flourish" of Boyet's praise to point up her essential equality with the King of Navarre (an equality, incidentally, which the death of her father will extend into the political sphere), the Princess submits to the "high will" of "this virtuous duke" with some exaggeration.

This initial skepticism about the virtues of the Academy is easily converted into forthright opposition when the Princess learns that the King, appropriately enough, "means to lodge you in the field, / Like one that comes here to besiege his court" (II.i.85-86). In response to the King's conventionally polite greeting, she shows him the absurd difference between his words and his actions:

> King. Fair princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.
>
> Prin. Fair I give you back again; and welcome I have not yet: the roof of this court is too high to be yours, and welcome to the wide fields too base to be mine. (II.i.90-93)

The Princess continues to undermine the intent of his words and easily gains a verbal superiority; her cautious withdrawal of the attack only after she has put into caustic terms the moral implications of the King's dilemma reveals the extent of her power:

> I hear your grace hath sworn out house-keeping:
> 'Tis deadly sin to keep that oath, my lord,
> And sin to break it.
> But pardon me, I am too sudden-bold:
> To teach a teacher ill beseemeth me.
> Vouchsafe to read the purpose of my coming,
> And suddenly resolve me in my suit.
>
> (II.i.103-09)

That the King eventually submits to her authority, and in precisely the terms she uses here ("Teach us, sweet madam, for our rude transgression / Some fair excuse" [V.ii.431-32]), bears out the significance of her initial subversion.

The women do not actually meet the men again until the play's final scene, but the interim is well spent developing and refining a strategy of conquest. The kind of approach they will take is foreshadowed by Boyet's mockery of Longaville and Berowne: he meets their verbose requests with literal interpretations and appropriately absurd replies which prevent the dynamic movement of language:

> Long. I beseech you a word: what is she in the white?
> Boyet. A woman sometimes, an you saw her in the light.
> Long. Perchance light in the light. I desire her name.
> Boyet. She hath but one for herself; to desire that were a shame.

Long. Pray you, sir, whose daughter?

Boyet. Her mother's, I have heard.

Long. God's blessing on your beard!

(II.i.196-202)

Longaville's infuriation indicates that Boyet has managed to overturn the balance of power:[120] by taking rein of the dominant discourse, Boyet is able to thwart Longaville's intent and undercut his (assumed) supremacy. The Princess immediately recognizes the usefulness of this approach, "It was well done of you to take him at his word" (II.i.216): "taking him at his word," meeting the men on their own terms, is precisely what drives the women's offensive throughout the play.[121]

Justifiably insulted by the King's reception, the Princess decides early on that the women's own power of wit would best serve as a weapon against "Navarre and his book-men" (II.i.226), and her martial intentions are clarified by Boyet's perceptive response to her moralizing of the hunt:

Prin. Glory grows guilty of detested crimes,
When, for fame's sake, for praise, an outward part,
We bend to that the working of the heart;
As I for praise alone now seek to spill
The poor deer's blood, that my heart means no ill.

Boyet. Do not curst wives hold that self-sovereignty
Only for praise' sake, when they strive to be
Lords o'er their lords?

(IV.i.31-38)[122]

Though the Princess's words most obviously apply to the folly of Navarre and his men in seeking praise by denying their own mortal needs, in speaking of a

separation of "outward part" from "heart" the passage also lends itself to Boyet's interpretation as a disclosure of the Princess's own evolving scheme to overcome the lords. But the Princess's retaliation, her incisive reply that "praise we may afford / To any lady that subdues a lord" (IV.i.39-40), does not yield a victory. Because she is only too well aware of her own motivations, the Princess maintains her supremacy. Even with all the men's self-involvement, it is precisely this kind of self-knowledge that they lack and that makes them vulnerable to the women.[123]

Forewarned by Boyet that the men are mounting an attack, the women determine to meet them on their own ground, to conquer from within:

> The effect of my intent is to cross theirs:
> They do it but in mockery merriment;
> And mock for mock is only my intent.
> . . .
> There's no such sport as sport by sport o'erthrown,
> To make theirs ours and ours none but our own.
>
> (V.ii.138-54)

Moth's failed prologue bodes ill for the men's advance. Stumped first by Boyet's literal-minded charges, Moth is finally put out by the women's refusal to acknowledge his efforts: "They do not mark me, and that brings me out" (V.ii.173).[124] The women adopt an analogous strategy in managing the men: they first turn upon them the literal implications of their "painted rhetoric":

> King. Vouchsafe, bright moon, and these thy stars, to shine,
> Those clouds remov'd, upon our watery eyne.
> Ros. O vain petitioner! beg a greater matter;

Thou now requests but moonshine in the water.

King. Then, in our measure do but vouchsafe one change.

Thou bidd'st me beg; this begging is not strange.

Ros. Play, music, then! nay, you must do it soon.

Not yet?--no dance:--thus change I like the moon.

(V.ii.205-12)

By taking him at his word, by behaving exactly as the changeable moon she is thought to resemble, Rosaline models the ineffectuality of the King's rhetoric, easily arresting the meaning he seeks to convey.[125] In a similar move, the Princess exposes the idiocy of Berowne's advance:

Ber. White-handed mistress, one sweet word with thee.

Ros. Honey, and milk, and sugar: there is three.

(V.ii.230-31)

Then, compounding the impact of these verbal subversions, the women simply refuse to take part in a dance, a move which frustrates not only the progress of the wooing but also the harmonious social order typically symbolized by dance in Shakespeare's comedies and in the Renaissance as a whole.[126]

Having once beaten the men at their own game, the women continue to impose their supremacy by assuming their proper favours and planning to "mock them still" (V.ii.301). In what is by now a characteristic manoeuvre, the Princess incisively overturns any sense of superiority the King may still possess by answering his invitation to enter the court with a mirror-image--in both phrase and meaning--of the vow which had earlier locked her out:

Now, by my maiden honour, yet as pure

As the unsullied lily, I protest,

A world of torments though I should endure,

I would not yield to be your house's guest;
So much I hate a breaking cause to be
Of heavenly oaths, vow'd with integrity.

(V.ii.351-56)

The King glosses over this problem and insists that the women have been ill-accommodated. With characteristic alacrity, the Princess seizes this remark as an entry into additional mockery, and begins to narrate to the men the story of their own folly. After a final attempt at self-defense, the men seem to accept their defeat:

Thus pour the stars down plagues for perjury.
Can any face of brass hold longer out?
Here stand I, lady; dart thy skill at me;
Bruise me with scorn, confound me with a flout;
Thrust thy sharp wit quite through my ignorance;
Cut me to pieces with thy keen conceit.

(V.ii.394-99)

Berowne's all too eloquent abjuration of eloquence signals an uncertain willingness to reform his use of language. It is appropriate, then, that the men's first lesson is in linguistics. As they nearly perjure themselves yet again, rigorously insisting such things as "I never swore this lady such an oath" (V.ii.451) and "I knew her by this jewel on her sleeve" (V.ii.455), the men are taught that such confidence in words as indices of reality is imaginary. Like the favours whose certain referential value they mistakenly took for granted, words are revealed to the men as being unstable signifiers whose circulation and interpretation are controlled by all who master the rules of language and the mechanics of the dominant discourse. It is

precisely this openness of discourse which the women have seized and which they have turned against the men. Following the abrupt end of the Pageant of Nine Worthies, the Princess apologizes and confesses the women's strategy:

> We have receiv'd your letters full of love;
> Your favours, the ambassadors of love;
> And in our maiden council, rated them
> At courtship, pleasant jest, and courtesy,
> As bombast and as lining to the time.
> But more devout than this in our respects
> Have we not been; and therefore met your loves
> In their own fashion, like a merriment.
>
> (V.ii.769-76)

The King's bewildered reply that their letters "show'd much more than jest" (V.ii.777) establishes the double-sidedness of language, its multivalence and instability as a communicative vehicle of inward states between persons who are quintessentially separate.[127]

Furthermore, the men are taught that mastering the rules of language is not concomitant with power over other individuals. But they seem to resist learning this lesson; to their own detriment, the men continue to abuse language by employing it to enforce their authority over their inferior counterparts in the Pageant of Nine Worthies. Their behaviour here is truly shameful, and the Princess's unfaltering desire to depart upon the news of the death of her father may suggest, in addition to her more refined sense of propriety, that she is also put off. Yielding eventually to a compromise, the women impose upon the men conditions for successful wooing meant to ensure that they will learn to use language in the service of charitable social

interaction. In different ways, the King's and Berowne's sentences are designed to teach them that verbal power is valid only when used to ensure human connectedness: Berowne will learn that words "prosper" only when they aim to communicate with another, only when they mediate between individuals; conversely, in a condition of solitude, the King will find he has no use for language.

By working within the discursive boundaries established by the men, the women have managed to manipulate language in order to point up the men's misconceptions, and, additionally, their wrongful use of language as an instrument of supremacy rather than community. The dynamic nature of language reasserts itself in the hands of informed and responsible users; it is thus also "enfranchised" to work toward human bonding rather than division. Both this dynamic nature and the full potential of bonding are conveyed in the ability of the songs of the cuckoo and the owl to strike an exceptional balance between seeming opposites.[128] Moreover, the King's forthright consent to have the Pageant's concluding songs performed, in contrast with his earlier refusal to hear the Pageant of Nine Worthies, is his most communicative line in the entire play: "Call them forth quickly; we will do so" (V.ii.881). Meagre as it is, this statement, showing that the King finally "speak[s] to be understood" (V.ii.294), may betoken "Love's Labour's Won."

The Merry Wives of Windsor

One of the most frequently noticed features of The Merry Wives of Windsor is the proliferation of intrigues and counter-intrigues, the insatiable appetite for plotting among its characters.[129] Every major character is involved in some kind of scheme against his or her neighbour(s) and is, appropriately enough, in turn the target for the scheming of others. This pervasive complicity gives the play an atmosphere unique in Shakespeare's comic canon:[130] because all of the characters are to some extent both schemed against and scheming, steadfast moral distinctions between them are difficult to make. There is nothing in this play approaching the blatant injustice of an Oliver, the intentionally harmful machinations of a Proteus, or the vice of a Shylock: none of the characters is singled out as an exceptionally dangerous force, and the Windsor villagers' collective attempt to make Falstaff into such a figure has evoked due unease and criticism. The play's major interest, then, is not in vindicating the actions of any single character or group of characters, but in broadly exposing the ultimate untenability of deception as a mode of interchange within the comic community.[131]

Deception does, however, have two morally distinct faces in The Merry Wives of Windsor, and its shifting ethical signification largely parallels the shifts between the roles of beguiler and beguiled which each of the characters acts out in turn. In general terms, deception is reproachful to the extent that it seeks some kind of personal supremacy, and commendable to the extent that it labours to right the balance of powers. In the play's unusually tidy dramatic economy, each schemer is schemed against to the extent that he or she pursues a self-serving goal. The play's overall movement, accordingly,

delineates the shift from (attempted) sovereignty to subjection in the trajectory of individual characters, and (because all the characters find themselves first acting and then acted upon) depicts those shifts as a causal series leading ultimately to the uncommonly satisfying equilibrium of the play's final scene.

This not unfamiliar--though unusually intricate--pattern of the beguiler beguiled is drawn, for the most part, in linguistic terms. Appropriate to the flip-flop pattern of deception, language in The Merry Wives of Windsor is paradoxically the instrument of both supremacy and subversion. As in Love's Labour's Lost, its subversive potential balances its (ab)use in advancing self-centred aims. Because the power of language as the basis of social intercourse is far too unwieldy to be restrained by a single controlling agent, and because discourses do not exist in isolation from each other, their perimeters being necessarily permeable, open to any number of neighbouring discourses with which they are constantly in a state of exchange, language itself acts as a kind of stabilizer of contending forces within the comic community. It is the very mutuality of the linguistic bond which the Windsor villagers (and Falstaff) learn to recognize in their journey from competitive one-up-manship to a levelling of awareness.

The absence of facile moral distinctions between characters--and the attendant inversion of normal social and familial hierarchies--in The Merry Wives of Windsor begins with the ambivalent relationship between authority and crime set up in the opening scene. Justice Shallow, the aptly named representative of legal authority in the play, comes on stage threatening, against the good advice of Sir Hugh Evans, to "make a Star Chamber matter" of Falstaff's offences (I.i.1-2). Though the play itself is generally not

concerned with the nature of legal or even political authority, Shallow is depicted in such a way that Falstaff's pre-textual crime and onstage subversion are acclaimed. Significantly, Shallow's over-reaction to the injustice done him, his threat to bring Falstaff's crime to the attention of no less than the King's Privy Council, is not traceable to an acute sense of justice, but simply to an injured self-worth. Desperate now to reassert his dignity, Shallow insists upon his own social superiority and foolishly accepts his cousin Slender's unintentionally ironic confirmation. Falstaff's presumably boisterous entrance at this point is a welcome disruption of the embarrassingly inept self-expression of Anne Page's would-be wooers.[132] Falstaff's characteristic idiom easily establishes the superior strength of his own sense of self-worth, and effectively defuses any danger Shallow may have posed to his own continued well-being. The threat to "complain of me to the King" is simply considered an idiocy, and the charge that "this shall be answered" is gracefully dodged by a forthright "I will answer it straight: I have done all this. That is now answered" (I.i.101-02, 106-08). This effortless victory of the criminal over the (nominative) authority is hardly disturbing. The manifest folly of Shallow and Slender renders their overthrow not only essentially insignificant to the comedy's movement toward resolution, but actually desirable. Here the audience unreservedly applauds Falstaff's verbal vigour.

But elsewhere in Windsor, Falstaff is to meet his bane. The foremost agents of his ruin are, of course, the merry wives, formidable opponents in terms both of their own skills and of the comic values they represent. Finding himself "almost out at heels" (I.iii.29), Falstaff means to secure the purses of two Windsor citizens by wooing their wives. Falstaff is encouraged

in his plotting by the conviction that the wives already desire him, and that in approaching them he will only be fulfilling their fantasies. Significantly, this preconception is given in terms of reading, with Falstaff interpreting the gestures and words of the wives in such a way that they signify an inceptive victory. Of Mrs. Ford he says:

> I spy entertainment in her: she discourses, she carves, she gives the leer of invitation; I can construe the action of her familiar style, and the hardest voice of her behaviour, to be Englished rightly, is, `I am Sir John Falstaff's.'
>
> (I.iii.41-45)

This sizeable error in translation will plummet Falstaff to his demise. His reading of Mrs. Page is equally mistaken:

> O, she did so course o'er my exteriors with such a greedy intention that the appetite of her eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning-glass!
>
> (I.iii.61-63)

Falstaff's skewed interpretation quite clearly serves to reinforce his egotism, and may have the additional virtue of promising success in his search for "gold and bounty" (I.iii.65). His confident dispatch of twin missives to the wives, however, bodes ill: overly sure of his own power of determining meaning, Falstaff naively believes that each of the wives will interpret the (duplicitous) words in which he cloaks his mercenary aims in strict accordance with his authorial intent.

While Falstaff's mercenary aims remain unperceived by Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, the injudiciousness of his amorous advances expectedly meets with

incredulity and invective. Interestingly, Mrs. Page takes up Falstaff's reading metaphor, asking herself which of her actions may have been misconstrued as a sign of sexual attraction:

> What an unweighed behaviour has this Flemish drunkard picked--with the devil's name--out of my conversation, that he dares in this manner assay me?
>
> (II.i.22-25)

Mrs. Ford, in contrast, looks outward and pins her incredulity on the difference between Falstaff's earlier words and his current proposal:

> he would not swear, praised women's modesty, and gave such orderly and well-behaved reproof to all uncomeliness that I would have sworn his disposition would have gone to the truth of his words; but they do no more adhere and keep place together than the hundred Psalms to the tune of `Greensleeves'.
>
> (II.i.55-61)

Both women decide that Falstaff's indecorous behaviour is deserving of revenge. Curiously, their tactics resemble his own attempt to fulfil <u>their</u> desires by proposing an adulterous liaison: they will "entertain him with hope," and "appoint him a meeting, give him a show of comfort in his suit, and lead him on with a fine-baited delay till he hath pawned his horses to mine host of the Garter" (II.i.91-94). Unlike Falstaff's inept and uninspired plot, however, theirs is eminently successful.[133]

In a scheme which categorically rules out physical encounter, verbal dexterity will obviously be a key factor, and the wives prove to be accomplished verbal manipulators. They first involve Falstaff in a well-

rehearsed playlet in which one acts as his mistress and the other as the outraged rival/neighbour heralding the (true) approach of the husband, and which culminates in his prompted concealment in the foul contents of a buck-basket and due dumping in the Thames. Next, they employ Mistress Quickly to convey their heartfelt apologies and claim complete innocence in the dreadful matter. Driven perhaps by his own desperation, Falstaff returns only to be caught in another charade, made to dress as the despised Mother Prat and soundly beaten by the irate Ford. Following a second fraudulent apology, Falstaff, somewhat more hesitant but willing nonetheless, agrees to the wives' final ruse and is utterly humiliated by the entire community in the play's concluding scene. In each of these gullings the wives' success depends equally upon their own power of using language to convey spurious intentions and upon Falstaff's mistaken faith in the transparency of that language.

But though the wives rightly revenge Falstaff's hopelessly misplaced advances, they exceed the bounds of legitimate deceit and accordingly find themselves subject to gulling in turn. Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford, as the play's eponymous "merry wives," are almost always--and on the whole correctly--referred to as a unit. But it is also instructive, especially when examining power relations in the play, to separate the two and view their distinctive qualities singly. In such an exercise, Mrs. Page comes off far worse. While Mrs. Ford's initial willingness to take revenge on Falstaff is curbed by the condition that the action "not sully the chariness of our honesty" (II.i.96), intending primarily to teach "this gross watery pumpion . . . to know turtles from jays" (III.iii.36-37), and her continuation of the ruse is a laudable attempt to expose her husband's folly, Mrs. Page's motives are less than pure. Also initially vindicated by Falstaff's outrageous (and societally menacing)

proposal, Mrs. Page reveals, as the play progresses, a questionable desire to extend her revenge to the entire male sex. In statements which uncomfortably resemble Ford's abuses of women, Mrs. Page betrays a like tendency to slur an entire group, to use Falstaff as a figure of and scapegoat for all masculine faults. Her first thought upon reading Falstaff's letter is an exuberant, if fanciful, proposal to "exhibit a bill in the parliament for the putting down of men" (II.i.28-29), and following the tremendous success of the buck-basket episode, she wishes that all men of Falstaff's kind "were in the same distress" (III.iii.172). It is significant, too, that Mrs. Page seems to be responsible for devising the baiting of Falstaff in the final scene where his function as pharmakos[134] most obviously fulfils the intention of her gulling elsewhere in the play. Her self-justification here, especially given the less-than-lecherous aims of Falstaff and the happy reconciliation of the Fords, rings hollow: "Against such lewdsters and their lechery / Those that betray them do no treachery" (V.iii.21-22). It would seem, then, that while Mrs. Ford's actions are justifiably meant to redeem the honesty of women[135] and to expose the folly of marital jealousy, and her wish that Falstaff be publicly shamed is at least partially intended to make these aims communal, Mrs. Page takes a somewhat unseemly delight in humiliating Falstaff. Accordingly, her excessive retribution (in addition to her abuse of parental authority, her insensitive and self-serving negotiations for her daughter's hand) will be counter-balanced by the successful and subversive manoeuvres of Fenton and Anne.

Falstaff's infelicitous advances upon the wives are also set against the undercover work of Ford, the would-be cuckold. But Ford's striking likeness to Falstaff, especially his (mis)understanding of the female sex, divests him

of the kind of victory achieved by the wives.[136] Like the merry wives, though more markedly, the two husbands in the play exhibit dissimilar personalities and motivations. Their unlike responses to the reports of Pistol and Nym accurately register the measure of their difference: while Page sensibly refuses to "believe such a Cataian, though the priest o' th' town commended him for a true man" (II.i.139-40), and good-humouredly imagines that if Falstaff "should intend this voyage toward my wife, I would turn her loose to him, and what he gets more of her than sharp words, let it lie on my head" (II.i.173-76), Ford is distrustful from the beginning. Of the roguish Pistol he remarks "'Twas a good sensible fellow" (II.i.141), and reveals an incipient suspicion when he harshly answers his wife's diagnostic query with a denial and rebuke: "I melancholy? I am not melancholy. Get you home, go" (II.i.146-47). He meets Page's spirited proposal with a more sombre version, one which reveals that the jest has misfired: "I do not misdoubt my wife; but I would be loath to turn them together; a man may be too confident; I would have nothing lie on my head; I cannot be thus satisfied" (II.i.177-80). This seed of jealousy germinates when Ford meets his friend's wife attended by Falstaff's page, and is fully mature by the time he has had his first covert rendezvous with Falstaff.

But it is important to state that however exaggerated and irrational his jealousy may seem, Ford's "humour" is not entirely ill-founded: Falstaff does make advances upon his wife and does gain entry into his home. Ford, then, in so far as he works to preserve his marriage is granted a measure of success in his plotting against Falstaff. Significantly, he gulls him in the same way as do the wives, by presenting him with a (verbal) mirror version of the desire he knows is already in place. This reflective strategy is hinted at by Ford

himself as he prepares to disclose his specious plan: "good Sir John, as you have one eye upon my follies, as you hear them unfolded, turn another into the register of your own, that I may pass with a reproof the easier, sith you yourself know how easy it is to be such an offender" (II.ii.179-83). Then, more concretely, the plan itself is revealed as a version of Falstaff's own intentions, the prior commencement of which Falstaff is only too eager to admit:

> Want no Mistress Ford, Master Brook; you shall
> want none. I shall be with her, I may tell you, by
> her own appointment; even as you came in to me,
> her assistant, or go-between, parted from me: I say
> I shall be with her between ten and eleven; for at
> that time the jealous rascally knave her husband
> will be forth.
>
> (II.ii.249-55)

Because he is at the moment all too confident in his imaginary supremacy over Ford, for whom he devises a marvellous list of slanderous epithets, Falstaff is blind to the manipulations he himself is subject to. As with the wives, his defeat here is a result of his mistaken trust in the transparency of the signs which mediate between individuals: just as he repeatedly takes the words of Mistress Quickly as the heartfelt intentions of Mrs. Ford, he takes Master Brook at face value even though he senses that the plan is slightly absurd: "Methinks you prescribe to yourself very preposterously" (II.ii.231-32). This kind of self-assurance makes Falstaff an easy target and leads repeatedly to the thing he most detests, physical discomfort and injury.

Still, Ford's supremacy over Falstaff marks only a partial triumph. His undercover work fans the flame of his notorious jealousy, which gradually slides from a genuine concern for the preservation of marriage to a fervent regard for his own reputation. Further, his wife's apparent willingness to cuckold him is linked in Ford's mind with the deceptiveness of the entire female sex. On both counts he is made to suffer humiliation at the hands of his wife and of his community. His lone rumination following his initial meeting with Falstaff reveals the drift of his thought from indignation at Falstaff's sin, to concern with his own slighted name, and finally to fixing blame upon his wife's certain and predictable feminine frailty:

> What a damned Epicurean rascal is this? . . . I shall not only receive this villainous wrong, but stand under the adoption of abominable terms . . . Terms! Names! Amaimon sounds well; Lucifer, well; Barbason, well . . . But cuckold? Wittol? Cuckold! . . . Then she plots, then she ruminates, then she devises; and what they think in their hearts they may effect, they will break their hearts but they will effect.
>
> (II.ii.276-97)

Ford's outrage is also punctuated by a growing vindication of his wrongly-scorned jealousy which has, as he sees it, brought to light the groundwork of a dangerous scandal. His glorious exclamation toward the end, "Heaven be praised for my jealousy!" (II.ii.297-98), indicates the extent of his self-righteousness, which in turn drives the set of actions he plans to undertake: "I will prevent this, detect my wife, be revenged on Falstaff, and laugh at Page" (II.ii.299-300). In his next appearance, Ford receives what he

considers indubitable evidence not only of his own wife's adultery, but of Mrs. Page's as well. Once told that the boy in attendance is Falstaff's page, Ford is unequivocally convinced that "our revolted wives share damnation together" (III.ii.34-35), and looks forward to his continued crusade against adultery, this time imagining the adulation of the entire community: "Well, I will take him, then torture my wife, pluck the borrowed veil of modesty from the so-seeming Mistress Page, divulge Page himself for a secure and wilful Actaeon; and to these violent proceedings all my neighbours shall cry aim" (III.ii.35-40).

None of these actions ever takes place, of course, and Ford's subjection to the power of the wily wives is testimony of the excessiveness of his own retributive plans. The play makes clear not only that "Wives may be merry and yet honest too" (IV.ii.96),[137] but that the community will not tolerate unfounded jealousy in an overly-suspicious husband, something which Ford himself repeatedly concedes. All of his male companions attempt to curb his passion, and it receives a series of undesirable tags: "fery fantastical humours" (III.iii.158), "distemper" (III.iii.200), "pad conscience" (III.iii.203), "lunatics" (IV.ii.115), "unreasonable" (IV.ii.129), and even a distinct suggestion of spiritual possession: "Master Ford, you must pray, and not follow the imaginations of your own heart" (IV.ii.143-44).[138] In all cases, the community will not allow the undue slurring of a woman's honour, and confirms its disapproval by reproachfully labelling the jealous husband. However much actual adultery is perceived as a threat, its existence in the imaginative regions of a jealous husband's brain does not constitute an offence.

It is significant that the chronicle of Ford's defeat by the wives consists in gullings of precisely the same nature as his own ruse against Falstaff: both the would-be adulterer and the jealous husband are taken in by false appearances and false words, both are beaten by their own failure to recognize the indeterminacy of external signs, even though each invests his own success in exactly such a failure in his victim(s). Both, in broader terms, suffer from a narrow-mindedness which restricts self-awareness and which creates the conditions for abusive self-assertion.

All of these inter-connected plottings involving Falstaff converge in the play's concluding scene, where an important authorial inversion takes place. Sparked initially by Mrs. Ford's concern that "there would be no period to the jest should he not be publicly shamed" (IV.ii.208-09), the final plot against Falstaff grows out of all proportion to his actual transgression (whose original mercenary motive is quite forgotten)[139] and involves the entire community in a ritualistic purging of sexual abandon. Responding first with skepticism and then with eagerness to the wives' plans, all of the play's characters happily assume a role in the charade against Falstaff for reasons which are not entirely exemplary. Mrs. Page seems simply not to want the jesting to end: "Come, to the forge with it, then; shape it: I would not have things cool" (IV.ii.210-11); her husband, in his usual jovial manner, looks forward to the "public sport" of the plot (IV.iv.14); Mrs. Ford (with perhaps the only irreproachable motive of them all) hopes the event will elicit a confession from Falstaff (IV.iv.60); and Ford's motivations go unspecified, though we may assume--given his own humiliation--that he has more at stake than any of the others. On one level, the rest of the community participates because the scene requires an all-against-one arrangement; but underlying this

dramatic requirement is the suggestion that even the minor schemers such as Mistress Quickly, Evans, Dr. Caius, and the Host are quite at home in a group of individuals who delight in "putting down" those over whom they manage to establish some kind of superiority.[140]

In addition to giving the gullers rather thin motivations, Shakespeare undermines their solidarity by introducing into the scene of planning against Falstaff Page's and Mrs. Page's own machinations against each other. As he darts off to purchase silk for his daughter's disguise, Page informs the audience that the scheme against Falstaff will also serve as a pretext for the clandestine marriage of Anne and (the "well landed" [IV.iv.85]) Slender; a moment later, Mistress Page matches her husband's plan with her own to wed Anne to Dr. Caius who "is well money'd, and his friends / Potent at court" (IV.iv.87-88). The link between these two plots and the plot against Falstaff is crucial: by having these characters (not to mention the Host, Slender, and Dr. Caius) participate in a scheme whose mercenary dimensions parallel Falstaff's own original ends, Shakespeare undercuts the united front they present against the "fat knight." In his own eagerness to advance his plot, Page himself lets slip the personal use he intends to make of Falstaff's gulling:

> That silk will I go buy.--[Aside] And in that time
> Shall Master Slender steal my Nan away,
> And marry her at Eton.--Go, send to Falstaff straight.
>
> (IV.iv.72-74)

Falstaff does, of course, deserve some kind of retribution for his manoeuvres, and perhaps also for his ineducable gullibility.[141] His initial interest in lining his pockets has transformed, following his beating, into an

outright vendetta against Ford:

> I'll tell you all, Master Brook. Since I plucked geese, played truant, and whipped top, I knew not what 'twas to be beaten, till lately. Follow me; I'll tell you strange things of this knave Ford, on whom to-night I will be revenged, and I will deliver his wife into your hand.
>
> (V.i.23-29)

This turn of intention has been prepared for by Falstaff's earlier exuberant sense of superiority over the "mechanical salt-butter rogue" (II.ii.267); but on the heels of the outrageous humiliation of being beaten in women's clothing, the (now injured) superiority hardens into a single-minded offensive. Falstaff's challenge to matrimony, his selfish and narrow-minded attempt to secure illicit financial support, and his personal attack against Ford all require that he be exposed and shamed.

Submitting yet again to the deceptive language of the merry wives, Falstaff agrees to meet with them in an exceptionally appropriate "translation" of himself. Though he worries that he will not be able to fulfil his intended mission and prays that "the hot-blooded gods assist me" (V.v.2), the horns he sports are emblematic of the cuckoldry which is perceived by the community as his most potent threat. And while his attempted wooing of Mrs. Ford seems clearly to call upon a series of external aids to his passion, the wives would read only evidence of the lechery they intend to redress: "Let the sky rain potatoes; let it thunder to the tune of `Greensleeves', hail kissing-comfits, and snow eringoes; let there come a tempest of provocation" (V.v.18-21). As Richard Grant White so aptly put it,

"there could have been but one thing sadder for Falstaff than want of success in love, and that was, success" (2:209). Just as he musters the nerve to carry out his plan, he is interrupted by a fitting "Noise of horns" (V.v.30.S.D.),[142] abandoned by the women, and terrified into prostration by the local "fairies."

Here the scene takes on a distinctly fantastical tone, its visual and verbal elements becoming, as has often been noted, decidedly masque-like. Certainly Mistress Quickly's, Pistol's and Evans's magical chanting is beyond the compass of their rhetorical repertoires, and announces the presence of an extra-textual intelligence and probably a topical connection.[143] Still, the constant image of Falstaff crouching on the ground reminds us that these are, after all, spurious fairies and hobgoblins, that the primary dramatic intent of this scene is to bring sin to public account. When the fairies turn to test Falstaff's purity with a "trial-fire" (V.v.85), the masque turns inward upon itself and brings attention to an intra-textual concern. In a sense, the masque for Shakespeare's court audience changes into an anti-masque for the onstage audience, highlighting as it does the evil forces which are soon to be overcome by a ritual extension which will include the entire community. The chastisement begun by the "fairies" is reinforced in turn by each of the play's major figures, who may be imagined to encircle the bewildered "man of middle earth" (V.v.81) as they hurl upon him their own images of his abuses. Falstaff's anti-masque is subverted, then, by a masque which reestablishes the values held by the Windsor audience.

But the entertainment takes an unexpected turn when Page gleefully announces that his wife, too, is to be the object of derision and laughter. This move, and the round of revelations it sets off, suggest that the

masquers themselves are not entirely innocent and will in turn be made into victims. In effect, Page's self-righteous exclamation makes visible the forged unity of the Windsor community and points the way to a further settlement, one in which a more appropriate sense of equilibrium--as opposed to triumph--is established. This more satisfactory vision may be seen in Falstaff's change of place from lone victim to complicit victor. At what may be the weakest point of his entire career, Falstaff helplessly gives himself up:

> Well, I am your theme: you have the start of me.
> I am dejected; I am not able to answer the Welsh
> flannel; ignorance itself is a plummet o'er me;
> use me as you will.
>
> (V.v.162-65)

But several lines later, Falstaff is given an opportunity to recover some of his dignity as Page invites him to a position of superiority over his wife: "Yet be cheerful, knight: thou shalt eat a posset to-night at my house, where I will desire thee to laugh at my wife that now laughs at thee" (V.v.171-73). Then, when Page and his wife realize that they have both neglected to remember the flexible and manipulable referential value of disguise--an error, incidentally, which they share with both Falstaff and Ford--and that they have been bested by the superior plotting of Anne and Fenton (whose motives are, within the comic system of values, entirely commendable and so stand unchallenged),[144] Falstaff levels the balance: "I am glad, though you have ta'en a special stand to strike at me, that your arrow hath glanced. . . . When night-dogs run, all sorts of deer are chas'd" (V.v.231-35).

That the forces of personal contest have found an equilibrium is indicated by the play's unqualified comic resolution; and that that equilibrium is largely invested in an awareness of the multivalency of linguistic and other symbols is underlined by Ford's concluding paradoxical couplet: "Sir John, / To Master Brook you yet shall hold your word, / For he to-night shall lie with Mistress Ford" (V.v.240-42). Simultaneously true and not true, the play's final words bespeak the rich instability of language as a conveyor of "truth," and suggest its consequent ambivalence as an instrument of individual power.

Much Ado About Nothing

King Charles I expressed a common sentiment when he wrote "Benedik and Betrice" against the title of his copy of Much Ado About Nothing.[145] Seemingly subplot characters, this whimsical couple has a way of rising to the surface in stagings and readings of the play. In recent criticism, Hero and Claudio have reclaimed a certain amount of attention because their relationship displays the dynamics of a patriarchal value system currently at the forefront of literary and cultural studies of the Renaissance.[146] Nevertheless, the play continues to be dominated by Beatrice and Benedick, and the persistence of this domination suggests that it may--as the term "dominate" suggests--have more to do with the play's construction of power relations than simply with the characters' attractiveness. In other words, Benedick and Beatrice come to dominate the play not only because they are more witty, more likeable, more fully-developed than any of the other characters, but because the values they represent are countenanced by the play as a whole. Indeed, one may reverse the argument and say that because they represent values set in approved opposition to those of their declining social circle, they are more fully-developed, more witty, more likeable. The dynamics of plot construction in Much Ado About Nothing, then, may be a fruitful way of getting at the play's representation of authority.[147]

As in Love's Labour's Lost, the examination and eventual renewal of authority in Much Ado About Nothing occurs in primarily linguistic terms. More than one critic has noticed the prevalence of "fashioning" in the play, and it is by now a commonplace that the "nothing" of the title is, in Elizabethan pronunciation, a pun.[148] Given the inherently political nature of linguistic exchange, the play's rather overt interest in verbal creativity,

from both the signifying and interpretative ends, will likely be the site of its exploration of the nature of authority. Nearly all the characters in Much Ado About Nothing are involved in staging or interpreting mini-dramas which, with remarkable consistency, reveal a single dynamic of power relations.[149] For all of the play's self-taught directors, staging a dramatic scenario is a means of reviving an endangered personal supremacy over their unwitting spectator(s). In all cases, the credibility of the illusion depends upon the establishment of a well-considered verbal trap meant to bait the spectator's vulnerabilities; conversely, the target of the illusion becomes prey--because of a failure to recognize those vulnerabilities--by misreading the illusion. In Much Ado About Nothing, then, the dynamics of linguistic power are represented by a series of playlets whose direction and interpretation express values, reflect assumptions, and advance the plot. Tracing the chain of playlets and setting them side by side as indices of abusive verbal interaction and culpable interpretation reveals the nature of false authority in the play and, in the subplot, the terms in which Shakespeare suggests its redefinition.

The play's first mini-drama is usually hurried over by critics eager to study the seemingly more substantial matters in the church scene. But the scene of Much Ado About Nothing's crisis is significantly prepared for in Don John's first attempt to disrupt Claudio's pre-nuptial relationship. Providing no less than a rehearsal for Don John's later plot, his first villainy puts into play all of the elements which, reordered and intensified, will spell tragicomedy for the main plot; elements which as a whole reveal the dangers of ill-fashioning in terms both of transmitting and interpreting signs of "reality," reveal, in other words, the nature of the power-play which defines

the boundaries denoted by the "mis" in misinterpretation.[150]

It is fairly obvious that Don John's plot against Claudio is fuelled by revenge, by a desire to disrupt the male alliance against which he defines himself. The source of Don John's vengeance, however, is given somewhat slighter definition. We learn of his attempted subversion of Don Pedro and its subsequent quelling. We also learn that he begrudges Claudio his martial success. On both counts, Don John figures himself as a kind of lever to the society's dominant class: his military esteem decreases as Claudio's rises ("that young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow" [I.iii.62-63]); and the level of festivity at Leonato's feast is proportionately related to his overthrow ("their cheer is the greater that I am subdued"[I.iii.67-68]). Don John's plot to "build mischief" (I.iii.43), then, is an attempt to reassert the power he has lost through regular political channels, and to exercise some measure of control over the ruling class. This early use of verbal theatricality to reestablish personal supremacy is the model of "fashioning" to which all of the play's subsequent playlets conform.

In addition to the overt grudges and injuries Don John bears, his opposition is more generally informed by a basic difference between himself and the society to which he has been forced to defer. In brief, the Messinan ruling class prides itself and thrives upon linguistic ostentation. Long before Don John enters the stage, we sense the sparkling verbosity which forms the basis of social interaction in aristocratic Messina: the messenger's rhetorical flourish as he announces Claudio's heroics, Beatrice's lewd and aggressive double-talk regarding Benedick's service (not to mention their subsequent skirmishes), the outrageously stylized greeting between the governor of Messina and his honoured guest. When Don John meets Leonato's

formal welcome with a terse "I thank you: I am not of many words, but I thank you" (I.i.146-47), his statement throws into relief the predominant characteristic of the society against which he maintains his difference.

Less obviously, but no less surprisingly, Don John establishes himself as an opposing force by scorning the patriarchy's cardinal institution. The recklessness with which he undermines impending nuptials reinforces the generally (and generically) anti-social attitude discernible in his early slur on marriage: "What is he for a fool that betroths himself to unquietness?" (I.iii.44-45). Lining up here rather significantly with the play's other (temporary) champions of bachelorhood, Don John again points up the value of the thing he derides.

As with other subversions of authority in Shakespeare's comedies, Don John's initial plot ventures its success upon mirroring the values of his enemies. That his first attempt capsizes is not an indication per se of the failure of his strategy. Indeed, the forces which he puts into play in the masquing episode are precisely the same forces which will soon lead the play perilously close to (some would argue irretrievably into) tragic dimensions. For the moment, however, Don John's plot serves to foreground the qualities of his opponents which will make them vulnerable to his subsequent, well-considered machinations: an erroneous understanding of the nature of matrimony, especially women's role within it, and a culpable tendency both to transmit and construe linguistic mis-representation as truth.

A play that opens with a messenger's report immediately underscores the role of media in the transmission of ontological truths. But the messenger's successful transmission of pretextual events does not find reduplication among Messinan citizens. In fact, mis-interpretation and deliberate mis-

representation are rampant in Messina; they are the two poles of Much Ado About Nothing's interest in the nature of linguistic bonds between human beings and the two poles between which subversive intentions may position themselves. It is not surprising, then, that the error which Don John fashions as truth is already anticipated by Antonio's report of an overheard conversation between Don Pedro and Claudio (a conversation which we have just witnessed and the reports of which we are subsequently invited to judge):

> The Prince and Count Claudio, walking in a thick-pleached alley in mine orchard, were thus much overheard by a man of mine: the Prince discovered to Claudio that he loved my niece your daughter, and meant to acknowledge it this night in a dance.
>
> (I.ii.7-12)

Knowing as we do that this is a (presumably innocently) skewed version of what has in fact passed between Claudio and Don Pedro, we view Leonato's response as perfectly appropriate: "Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?" (I.ii.15). This is the first instance of the play's overt interest in the nature of evidence. That Leonato pauses to consider the trustworthiness of the "fellow" here is commendable; that he fails to do so when a prince is involved later in the play casts doubt upon his good judgement and reveals an elitism not at all in his favour.[151] Further, Leonato's management here of uncertain evidence foreshadows something of his later behaviour. While he wisely intends to "hold it as a dream till it appear itself" (I.ii.18-19), he betrays a mistrust of his daughter by denying her independent action should the reported proposal be offered: he promptly bids Antonio to inform Hero of the matter "that she may be the better prepared for an answer" (I.ii.19-20),

an answer which we later learn he himself has fashioned.

There is another kind of fashioning to which Hero is subjected, and one which underlies the connection between power and marriage which characterizes the social norm criticized by the play. Learning from Claudio that he is enamoured of Hero, Don Pedro wastes little time in mastering the situation and setting about to direct its development. Claudio has not even completed his thought (one couched, admittedly, in tedious and awkward rhetoric with which Don Pedro is rightly impatient) before Don Pedro interrupts and hastily devises a plot for Hero's overthrow:

> Thou wilt be like a lover presently,
> And tire the hearer with a book of words.
> If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
> And I will break with her, and with her father,
> And thou shalt have her.
> . . .
> I know we shall have revelling tonight:
> I will assume thy part in some disguise,
> And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
> And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart,
> And take her hearing prisoner with the force
> And strong encounter of my amorous tale:
> Then after to her father will I break,
> And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
>
> (I.i.286-307)

Significantly, the wooing is figured in coercive, militant terms, as though the battle with whose termination the play opened was but spadework for the

more formidable challenge of subduing desirable maidens. Don Pedro's eagerness here and elsewhere to manage the affairs of others by fashioning "amorous tales" betrays, at the very least, a family resemblance to the plotting talents of Don John.

Together, Don Pedro's plan and the response of Leonato to a misrepresentation of that plan suggest that fashioning as invention and interpretation in the world of the play is intimately connected with patriarchal control over marriage negotiations. Don John's first plot against his captors draws its strength from this very duality. Taking advantage of the circumstances afforded by the masquing, Don John extends to Claudio an opportunity for self-interested dissembling. In a majestic directorial move, Don John creates for the rather unimaginative Claudio a role behind which to lurk as news of his own betrayal is related in terms which emphasize the speaker's goodwill and sincerity and so set up his credibility:

> D. John. Are not you Signior Benedick?
>
> Claud. You know me well, I am he.
>
> D. John. Signior, you are very near my brother in his love. He is enamoured on Hero; I pray you, dissuade him from her, she is no equal for his birth. You may do the part of an honest man in it.
>
> Claud. How know you he loves her?
>
> D. John. I heard him swear his affection.
>
> (II.i.149-56)

Based on the defracted evidence of an oath, seconded by Borachio in the next line, Claudio arrives at a firm "'Tis certain so" (II.i.162) far too easily, and his subsequent retreat into the commonplace leads him to a series of

offputting conclusions:

> 'Tis certain so; the Prince woos for himself.
> Friendship is constant in all other things
> Save in the office and affairs of love:
> Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues;
> Let every eye negotiate for itself,
> And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch
> Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.
> This is an accident of hourly proof,
> Which I mistrusted not. Farewell, therefore, Hero!
>
> (II.i.162-70)

In addition to his susceptibility to the plotting of an avowed villain, Claudio earns our derision by too easily giving Hero up and by focusing his vain philosophizing and laying greatest blame upon her rather than her aggressor.

The play takes little interest in the precise effect which Don John expects his plotting to have; the general direction is obviously toward agitating the group he views as a conglomerate enemy. In any event, his first plot simply fails, and his involvement in any villainy is overlooked during the general confusion under which all the characters are operating (a confusion, ironically enough, generated by no ill-doing but bearing precisely the same message as Don John's deliberate distortion). From a more strictly dramaturgical perspective, Don John's plot has revealed the operative strategies and underlying values of patriarchal Messinan society. While at this point in the play the comic drive is still prevalent, the reason for the failure of Don John's plot is worth considering. Even though Claudio had

centred his chagrin upon the woman in the triangle, Don John's intended target was actually his brother, Don Pedro, a ruling member of the aristocracy whose transgression would, in any event, be difficult for Claudio to challenge. Later in the play, when the target becomes the woman, when the charge carries a threat against the patriarchy from a person whose power is actively suppressed, the men's response will differ considerably.

Initially at least, Messina also overcomes the challenge posed to its value system by the detractors of marriage, Benedick and Beatrice. But the opposition which these two "wit-crackers" represent is actually much more formidable than the naked villainy of Don John. This is not to say that Benedick and Beatrice triumph over their society, or at least not in the way each of them imagines his or her triumph early in the play; their victory over Messina is built upon a victory over their own fears of the losses associated with marriage.[152]

Opposing as vehemently as they do the value of marriage, and finding in this opposition an important ground for agreement, Benedick and Beatrice are obviously poised for a fall. Each takes advantage of the Messinan linguistic atmosphere to advance an ultimately untenable counter-position against matrimony. Berated by Antonio and warned by Leonato in terms reminiscent of Baptista's censures of his daughter that "thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue" (II.i.16-17), Beatrice swiftly turns the fault into a virtue, claiming that her resultant maidenhood will gain her entry into heaven where she hopes to keep merry company with all the other bachelors (II.i.19-45). This display of wit dazzles Antonio, who finds no effective rejoinder and turns to Hero, the docile, submissive female, with great expectancy: "Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled by your father"

(II.i.46-47--we may assume an emphasis on <u>you</u>). But Beatrice has not left the fray; she answers for her cousin and cuts deeply into patriarchal prerogative with her mockery of filial deference:

> Yes, faith, it is my cousin's duty to make curtsy
> and say, `Father, as it please you': but yet for all
> that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else
> make another curtsy and say, `Father, as it please me.'[153]
>
> (II.i.48-52)

Following yet another verbal triumph in which she disdains "to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust" (II.i.56-57), Beatrice establishes her independence so firmly that Leonato simply surrenders in silence and turns, with what appears to be defensiveness, to his daughter for renewed affirmation of his shaken supremacy: "Daughter, remember what I told you: if the Prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer" (II.i.61-62). But Beatrice insists upon the last word, and offers Hero a more realistic vision of matrimony which even Leonato is brought to commend.

With much less self-assertion--perhaps because as a male he is already invested with the privilege of speaking--though with no less conviction, Benedick assumes an analogous anti-matrimonial pose which he cloaks in language quite as vibrant as that of Beatrice:

> That a woman conceived me, I thank her: that she
> brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks:
> but that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead,
> or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women
> shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong
> to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust

none: and the fine is, for the which I may go the
finer, I will live a bachelor.

(I.i.221-28)

Following Don Pedro's assertion that "I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love" (I.i.229), Benedick issues a trio of licenses to make out of him rather vulgar signs of the idiocy of marriage should he weaken in his resolve. Unlike Beatrice's opposition against Leonato, however, Benedick's has met its match. Though he is granted the victory of this first battle, Benedick will soon be conquered by the very feature which drives his opposition here: a strong self-regard. Once the business of Claudio's and Hero's nuptial has been attended to, Don Pedro turns his directorial talent to devising a trap for the social rebels.

As it turns out, Don Pedro's plan for a complementary gulling is perfectly apt, for it brings to the surface the latent attraction between Benedick and Beatrice. Beatrice's thinly disguised regard for the well-being of Benedick ("I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no?" [I.i.28-29]) is matched by his inadvertently slipped judgement of her beauty: "I can see yet without spectacles, and I see no such matter: there's her cousin, and she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December" (I.i.176-79). Furthermore, that the two are allied in a battle against the values of the others is auspicious. The one thing they agree upon early in the play is their mutual "humour" (I.i.120), which will save not only themselves but each of their respective sexes from injury: while Beatrice feels that Benedick's "hard heart" is "[a] dear happiness to women, they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor" (I.i.116; 118-20), Benedick hopes Beatrice's "cold

blood" does not warm so that "some gentleman or other shall scape a predestinate scratched face" (I.i.120; 124-25).[154] Slim as it is, the evidence promises a celebration of the very institution which both wits initially flout.

In broader terms, the underlying affection of Benedick and Beatrice increasingly takes over the comic values which are abandoned by the play's main plot.[155] When his own behaviour in the play's tragicomic world is recalled, it may appear to be overly generous to suggest that Don Pedro senses the affinity between the two repelling elements he seeks to bond. Nevertheless, he does hit upon something. The strategy he adopts is ideally suited to the analogous nature of its two victims: both are taken in by the verbal ostentation of which they are accomplished masters, and by the fear of public censure. Even though Benedick and Beatrice pose as social rebels, their strength derives from the social attention their rebellious attitudes are able to draw. By fashioning his strategy to play upon a combination of romantic affection and exalted self-regard, Don Pedro is assured a victory. More importantly, his nonce-entertainment will turn out to be better than a sideshow; its nourishment of the only credible love bond in the play will salvage--and arguably at that--the play as comedy.[156]

The scene of Benedick's renunciation opens with a curious double-sided soliloquy which, while seeming to be in line with his earlier pronouncements, actually reveals that his calm self-assurance is beginning to cloud. First, Benedick's opening remarks about the transforming powers of love find their subject rather late, and the speech could conceivably be delivered as self-referential, or at least ambiguous, with the naming of Claudio as a kind of quickly imposed corrective by which Benedick regains his common sense:

> I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviours to love, will, 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.iii.7-12)

In any event, Benedick eventually does (re)turn his thoughts to himself and "wonder" whether he will ever "be so converted and see with these eyes" (II.iii.22). The answer to his query is not the incontrovertible negative we might expect: "I cannot tell; I think not" (II.iii.22-23), and rather than going on to denounce all women, Benedick lists fairly specifically the qualities which the woman who will attract him shall possess:

> Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen 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 colour it please God.
>
> (II.iii.30-35)

Coming from an avowed bachelor, this blazon of female virtues hints obliquely at an impending perjury.

In his imaginary sovereignty, Benedick shows little resistance to the bait offered him. The first short round of suggestions that Beatrice loves him elicits uncertainty rather than scorn, "Is't possible? Sits the wind in that corner?" (II.iii.99), and following the more detailed revelation, he

convinces himself that the authority of Leonato precludes a jest: "I should think this a gull, but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it. Knavery cannot sure hide himself in such reverence" (II.iii.118-20). Then, when the barrage of evidence of Beatrice's love melancholy is given, significantly, on Hero's authority ("you heard my daughter tell you," "so your daughter says," "my daughter tells us all," "your daughter told us of," "my daughter says so," "Hero thinks surely she will die," "we will hear further of it by your daughter" [II.iii.110-99]), and incidental commentary upon Benedick's reputation for callousness is thrown in, he capitulates:

> This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne; they have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady: it seems her affections have their full bent. Love me? Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive the love come from her; they say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry: I must not seem proud: happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending.
>
> (II.iii.212-22)

Benedick is taken by the trick, then, because it feeds his desire for Beatrice and for public approval. On both counts, he expresses values generally upheld in Shakespeare's comedies.

More specifically, however, Benedick is subject to a comic version of inventive fashioning and enacts a comic version of interpretative fashioning

which will reappear later in the play in much darker shades. Following his "conversion," he proceeds to read Beatrice in a way which lines up both with his assumptions and his desire, but which is actually quite mistaken:

> 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.'
>
> (II.iii.248-52)

Needing perhaps to overturn the sense of vulnerability his self-revelation has produced, Benedick here assumes a jolly superiority over Beatrice by making her signs mirror his intentions and by figuring his love as a kind of mercy. While its dynamics fall into the general pattern of fashioning as an exercise of power, the error Benedick commits in following this interpretative route presents no threat to the comic order and tone of the play: that Beatrice will respond in like manner, that she is enabled to seize the same levers of power, will help to balance their relationship and establish a mutuality notably lacking in the play's other romantic relationship.

Beatrice's parallel gulling occurs in the scene immediately following Benedick's. Eager to see her "greedily devour the treacherous bait" (III.i.28), Ursula and Hero fashion disdainful versions of Beatrice in an attempt to injure her pride. As with other acts of fashioning in the play, including that of Don Pedro just mentioned, this plot is an attempt to reestablish or at least partially recover the plotters' sense of supremacy. Beatrice's dominance of female discourse elsewhere in the play is quite overturned here, and Hero certainly takes advantage of her captive audience by

casting Beatrice's rebellious behaviour in decidedly contemptuous terms.[157] Seemingly convinced that Benedick has placed his affections most unhappily, Hero outlines Beatrice's faults in trenchant detail:

> But Nature never fram'd a woman's heart
> Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice.
> Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
> Misprising what they look on, and her wit
> Values itself so highly that to her
> All matter else seems weak. She cannot love,
> Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
> She is so self-endeared.
>
> (III.i.49-56)

This attack upon Beatrice's vanity strikes exactly the right key. It sounds the isolation which accompanies her "humour," an isolation from the social circle upon whose favourable attention she depends. Furthermore, Beatrice's vanity leads to another censured quality which she obviously shares with Benedick and, at another level of the play, with most Messinans--one we may term self-interested (and hence erroneous) fashioning. Not only are her eyes regularly "[m]isprising what they look on" (III.i.52), but she "spell[s] . . . backward" (III.i.61) all men, regardless of their excellence, and generally "never gives to truth and virtue that / Which simpleness and merit purchaseth" (III.i.69-70). Inadvertently confirming Hero's charges, Beatrice responds with fervent self-regard and plans to regain public favour (especially notable is her intensification of the proverb "When your ear tingles people are talking about you" [quoted by Humphreys III.i.107n.]):

> What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?

Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?
  Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!
No glory lives behind the back of such.
  And, Benedick, love on, I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.
(III.i.107-12)

The conjunction here of taming and love is instructive, for though Beatrice and Benedick are obviously brought under the umbrella of the patriarchal value system against which they were initially opposed, the basis of their bond in genuine affection increasingly gains in importance as the shallowness of the traditional patriarchal relationship of Claudio and Hero is revealed. Once Beatrice and Benedick are brought into conformity, the power of voice they possess--and which is nowhere disparaged in the play--surpasses self-interested linguistic manipulation;[158] its basis in love (of self, of other, of community) enables it ultimately to be offered and endorsed as an alternative to the malign, self-enhancing discourse which unilaterally drives the Hero-Claudio relationship.

The power dynamics at work in Don John's first villainy and in the taming of Benedick and Beatrice are brought into play in Much Ado About Nothing's climactic incident, the slander of Hero. Even before Hero is apparently proven guilty, the chain of hostile fashionings which characterize the latter half of the play is begun. Though he opens initially in a position of inferiority and (mock) deference, approaching his brother with a cautious "If your leisure served, I would speak with you" (III.ii.73), Don John's proffering of clandestine information enables him to invert the power relation, drawing Don Pedro and Claudio into his circle of influence in calculatedly foreboding

terms:

> If you dare not trust that you see, confess not
> that you know. If you will follow me, I will show
> you enough; and when you have seen more, and
> heard more, proceed accordingly.
>
> (III.ii.108-11)

In each successive plot that grows out of this one, the plotter uses his power of fashioning to reassert a personal authority deemed threatened or actually challenged. Don Pedro's and Claudio's response to the information they have received, information which has been given largely in terms of impending personal injury, sets off the round of counter-actions. Acutely perceptive of the dangers posed by a sexually liberated woman, Claudio and Don Pedro are completely preoccupied with strategies of defence rather than with assessing the nature of the threat. They immediately imagine the scenario in which they will reassert their authority over the transgressive woman, should she be guilty (the condition is already a premise), and leave no room in their machinations for handling the villainy of Don John and Borachio, should they turn out to have lied (a possibility left unimagined). What begins as an unfounded suspicion rises with alarming speed to the status of a *fait accompli*:

> Claud. If I see anything tonight why I should not marry
> her tomorrow, in the congregation, where I should
> wed, there will I shame her.
>
> D. Pedro. And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will
> join with thee to disgrace her.
>
> (III.ii.112-16)

Further, that the three soon chime together in agonized platitudes is only the first indication of the fundamental similarity of their visions:

> D. Pedro. O day untowardly turned!
>
> Claud. O mischief strangely thwarting!
>
> D. John. O plague right well prevented!
>
> (III.ii.120-22)

If all that Claudio and Don Pedro are eventually deemed guilty of is "mistaking," then mistaking is a weighty offence indeed.

It has often been emphasized that the contrived verification of Don John's information takes place offstage, and that Shakespeare's reason for not mounting the episode was to play up the nature of fashioning and to link its dangerous possibilities with the behaviour of the playworld's social models. Certainly Borachio's lecture on the "deformed thief . . . fashion" (III.iii.127-28) does bear significantly on the poor judgement of Claudio and Don Pedro. In addition, Borachio's report brings to the surface a consideration which has already been pointed to earlier in the play and which should surely occupy the two: the nature of the evidence upon which they base their treacherous actions. They have been overcome by "the devil my master . . . partly by his oaths, which first possessed them, partly by the dark night, which did deceive them, but chiefly by my villainy, which did confirm any slander that Don John had made" (III.iii.149-54). But given that we have already witnessed Don Pedro's and Claudio's (mis)handling of Don John's atrocious suggestions, staging the spying episode might well fall flat; Claudio's outrage is predictably followed by a reiteration of the plot prepared ahead of time when Hero's guilt was not yet assured.

The vengeful streak in Claudio's behaviour is ill-disguised. Deeply offended as he is, the theatrics Claudio stages in the church scene, to say nothing of his callous behaviour following the "death" of Hero, bespeak far more than a thwarted love; they strongly suggest the need to reassert power over the woman who has shamed him. Just as he has the power to bring Hero to a new status by marrying her, so he has the power to reduce her status by refusing to marry her. It is a power he flaunts with a disconcerting confidence, quite out of key with his usual shy, awkward behaviour. Posing as the well-intentioned bridegroom, making technical objections to the phrasing of the ceremony, asking rhetorical questions, indulging in self-righteous moralizing, and taking Don Pedro's carefully positioned cue, Claudio arrives at the substance of his charge thoroughly rehearsed:

> Sweet Prince, you learn me noble thankfulness.
> There, Leonato, take her back again.
> Give not this rotten orange to your friend;
> She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.
> Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
> O, what authority and show of truth
> Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
>
> (IV.i.29-35)

The last two lines may well serve as the motto of the play, and Claudio would do well to plumb their significance. But he is far too involved in carrying on as the injured party and, perhaps because it is a move unscripted by his mentor, entirely overlooks the evidence Hero tries to advance. Following the devastating charges whose effects have already made their full impact on Leonato, Hero is instructed to answer Claudio's "one question" truly, and she

responds, first to her father's absurd demand and then to Claudio's incriminating question, with eminent sensibility:

> O God defend me, how am I beset!
> What kind of catechizing call you this?
> . . .
> I talk'd with no man at that hour, my lord.
>
> (IV.i.77-86)

Hero's testimony here is scarcely heard; the use of her voice as the primary evidence in gulling Benedick is retroactively revealed as an officially authorised female utterance.

Heaped now upon the charges of her betrothed are the even harsher accusations of Hero's father. Convinced by the authority of princely testimony and straitened under the pressure of subversion (seemingly by Hero; overtly by Claudio), Leonato seizes upon his daughter's guilt, and reveals the conditions under which his "love" for her exists:

> Do not live, Hero, do not ope thine eyes;
> . . .
> Why had I not with charitable hand
> Took up a beggar's issue at my gates,
> Who smirched thus, and mir'd with infamy,
> I might have said, `No part of it is mine;
> This shame derives itself from unknown loins'?
> But mine, and mine I lov'd, and mine I prais'd,
> And mine that I was proud on--mine so much
> That I myself was to myself not mine,
> Valuing of her. (IV.i.123-39)

The nearly frantic incantation of "mine" betrays Leonato's primary concern and the sense of ownership which underlies his paternity.

But because Much Ado About Nothing is a comedy, alternative responses to and interpretations of Claudio's charges are not only voiced, but voiced by persons whose moral authority is in line with the play's system of values. Reading with the benefit of some inner illumination, the Friar immediately perceives that the very same blush denounced by Claudio is indeed "the sign and semblance of her honour," and wagers his credibility on that fact. That his subsequent plot for bringing Claudio to repentance fails to materialize has been read by some critics as an undercutting of his presumptuous authority.[159] But surely the Friar assumes no less than we ourselves might:

> When he shall hear she died upon his words,
> . . . then shall he mourn--
> If ever love had interest in his liver--
> And wish he had not so accused her:
> No, though he thought his accusation true.
>
> (IV.i.223-33; emphasis added)

Claudio's failure to show any sign of remorse reflects worse on him than on the Friar, whose authority is not, in any event, made an issue in the play.[160] Furthermore, the opinion of the Friar has the weighty backing of Beatrice, who responds to the slander of Hero with a caustic appraisal of the masculine establishment whose evidence is assumed to be concomitant with truth:

> Princes and counties! Surely a princely testimony,
> a goodly count, Count Comfect, a sweet gallant surely!
> O that I were a man for his sake, or that I had any
> friend would be a man for my sake! But manhood is

> melted into curtsies, valour into compliment, and men
> are only turned into tongue, and trim ones too.
>
> (IV.i.314-20)

It is significant that Benedick's and Beatrice's mutual admission of love takes place just prior to Beatrice's outrage. Her demand to Benedick to assume the challenge her sex prevents her from carrying cements the bond thus far only nominally assured.[161] Benedick's willingness to carry out the order he initially finds absurd indicates the depth of his trust in Beatrice's judgement and, implicitly, the measure of his difference from Claudio.[162] It is surely no accident that it is he who suspects "John the bastard, / Whose spirits toil in frame of villainies" (IV.i.188-89) in the affair. Beatrice and Benedick both read the situation as clearly as one would "see a church by daylight" (II.i.75-76), and voice it in clamorous peals.

In accordance with what may generally be considered the operative principle of the entire play, "frame the season for your own harvest" (uttered by Borachio but shared by all the play's characters [I.iii.24]), Leonato sets out to enact the Friar's plot, hoping thereby to regain his usurped authority. Significantly, this is the one playlet which fails to enhance the power of the plotter. Leonato's and Antonio's furious attack upon Claudio and Don Pedro is met with stunning disregard and mockery. Though it clearly points to the waning rulership of Leonato, this nearly farcical episode, in which all social rules are flouted, more importantly underlines the nature and degree of Claudio's and Don Pedro's "mistaking," and considerably undermines the success of the comic harmony at play's end.[163] That Shakespeare has chosen to illustrate yet another aspect of ill-behaviour at this late stage of the play, when the truth is moments from being disclosed, would seem to be a significant

constructional move. In their merciless taunts of the "old man" and the sense of self-righteousness with which they receive news of Hero's death, Claudio and Don Pedro are virtually divested of sympathy.

With the confession of Borachio firmly supporting his right, Leonato launches two further plots against Claudio meant to restore Hero's reputation:

> Possess the people in Messina here
> How innocent she died; and if your love
> Can labour ought in sad invention,
> Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb,
> And sing it to her bones, sing it tonight.
> Tomorrow morning come you to my house,
> And since you could not be my son-in-law,
> Be yet my nephew.
>
> (V.i.275-82)

Under the pressure of his own guilt, Claudio willingly abandons self-direction and vows to "dispose / For henceforth of poor Claudio" (V.i.288-89). As bidden, he hangs an epitaph on Hero's tomb,[164] and silently defers to Leonato's authority at the nuptial:

> Claud. Sweet, let me see your face.
> Leon. No, that you shall not till you take her hand,
> Before this friar, and swear to marry her.
> Claud. Give me your hand before this holy friar.
> I am your husband if you like of me.
>
> (V.iv.55-59)

It is only after this final self-surrender that Claudio discovers his good fortune.

But there is a notorious sense of dissatisfaction with the conclusion of what is ostensibly the play's main plot. Claudio seems not to have had enough time to consider the weight of his offences, and he gets off rather lightly with the claim that "sinn'd I not / But in mistaking" (V.i.268-69).[165] Furthermore, his exclamation following the disclosure of Hero's innocence is highly dubious:

> Sweet Hero! Now thy image doth appear
> In the rare semblance that I lov'd it first.
>
> (V.i.245-46)

If Hero is merely restored to the same position in Claudio's affections which she held prior to the crisis, then we may well expect another round of difficulties.[166] Within the confines of their plot, the sins of the offenders are not worked out and loom rather large over the play's conclusion.

Within the broader terms of the play as a whole, however, the tragic weight of the offence is counter-balanced by the fortuitous discovery and thematic counterpointing of the Watch,[167] and, more importantly, by the dramatic prominence and alternative example of Benedick and Beatrice. Unlike Claudio who reasserts, by his own submission, Leonato's authority, Benedick usurps that authority by openly defying Leonato's instructions regarding the completion of the marriage ceremonies, and deftly overturns the authority of Don Pedro whom he now faces with his own counsel:

> Bene. Let's have a dance ere we are married, that we
> may lighten our own hearts and our wives' heels.
> Leon. We'll have dancing afterward.
> Bene. First, of my word! Therefore, play, music. Prince,
> thou art sad; get thee a wife, get thee a wife!

There is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn.

(V.iv.116-22)

Taking upon himself as well the punitive responsibilities of the regnant authority, Benedick goes on to preside over the dance with which the play concludes.[168] His exuberant confidence is everywhere apparent, and may reasonably be shared by Beatrice. That Beatrice is silent during the close of the play as Benedick virtually takes upon himself--and renews by so doing--patriarchal authority sits uneasily with critics who would prefer to see the obvious intellectual equality of the two wits extend into marriage. But while the play does not explore the possibilities of an egalitarian marriage, it does emphasize that the source of Benedick's authority, and the source of whatever degree of comic renewal may be claimed for the play (the continuing threat of Don John is not fully overcome), is in his love for Beatrice.[169]

Ironically nurtured by the very crisis that irreparably damaged the comic tone of the main plot, the love of Beatrice and Benedick enables a redefinition of patriarchal gender relationships.[170] Above all, it posits the mutuality of husband/wife as the cardinal virtue and unique strength of a healthy society. Both the mutuality and the reformative value of their relationship are displayed by Benedick and Beatrice in the last theatrical practice of the play. Apparently brought to recognize their mutual affection yet again by the goading of the others, the last encounter of Beatrice and Benedick may actually be a playlet of their own (the only one they stage) which, like the other playlets, reasserts their authority by deriding the presumptions of their victims:

Bene. Do not you love me?

Beat. Why, no, no more than reason.

Bene. Why then, your uncle, and the Prince, and Claudio
Have been deceiv'd--they swore you did.

Beat. Do not you love me?

Bene. Troth, no, no more than reason.

Beat. Why then, my cousin, Margaret, and Ursula
Are much deceiv'd, for they did swear you did.

Bene. They swore that you were almost sick for me.

Beat. They swore that you were well-nigh dead for me.

(V.iv.74-81)

Even if we had not already seen the growing attachment between Benedick and Beatrice, we would suspect the sincerity of this exchange. The patterned syntax and repeated emphasis on the others' testimony and mistakenness suggest a prior rehearsal. Furthermore, Benedick's comic exaggeration of the value of the discovery of their respective (strategically planted?) love-letters reinforces the sense of an on-going charade:

Bene. A miracle! Here's our own hands against our hearts. Come, I will have thee, but by this light I take thee for pity.

Beat. I would not deny you, but by this good day I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption.

(V.iv.91-96)

It is difficult not to read these lines as in some sense a display before the others; a display, significantly, which reinforces the characteristics they championed before their defences were penetrated by those over whom they now enjoy supremacy. Like Kate and Petruchio, who seem in many ways to have been

draft versions of Beatrice and Benedick, Much Ado About Nothing's witty couple find strength to set themselves apart from the company in their love for each other.[171] Considering the unregenerate nature of Messinan society, their ability to do so is estimable. If we are to find a satisfactory comic ending in Much Ado About Nothing, we shall have to look to the "favourites" rather than to the "prince."

The Power of Knowledge

Unlike tragedy, in which an undetected and often undetectable discrepancy between truth and falsehood leads to irreparable destruction, comedy can only exist within a framework of epistemological certainty. Because the substance of "the comic" in comedy derives from a temporary disjunction between reality and appearance, a mistaken assessment of the conditions in which one finds oneself (whose righting then becomes the very business of the play), it would seem that thoroughgoing skepticism is inimical to the comic mode.[172] Unclouded perception and trustworthy knowledge are, accordingly, highly valued, even redemptive qualities in the world of comedy, and the character(s) thus endowed bear something of a moral obligation to bridge the chasm between apparent and real for their neighbours. Paradoxically, however, a full restoration of social order depends equally upon a universal enlargement of awareness, so that the redemptive figure(s) need also to bow before evidence of their own imperfections and vulnerabilities. .. Comedy is unable, in the final analysis, to brook individual grandeur: when it sustains a radically uneven distribution of knowledge, comedy creates a power which effectively subverts its own generic principles.

Three of Shakespeare's comedies--A Midsummer Night's Dream, All's Well That Ends Well, and Measure for Measure--are dominated by extraordinarily powerful figures. Oberon, Helena, and Vincentio exercise practically unrivalled supremacy in their respective dramas, and their mastery of physical and socio-political environments derives from the possession of esoteric knowledge. In each of the three plays, this connection between single-handed control and knowledge places unusual obstacles in the way of what seems on the

surface to be--and what is frequently announced as--an imminent comic closure.

Unlike the powers of action and voice, the power of knowledge is not widely available; indeed, its very potency depends upon a radical cognitive division between individuals, the surreptitious command of occult arts or privileged information. Oberon alone has witnessed the empowering of love-in-idleness, Helena has inherited a remedy unknown to the entire medical academy, and the Duke of Vienna's mendicant disguise gives him access to the secret workings of his subjects' hearts. In a very real sense, the measure of power each of these characters possesses is directly proportional to the exclusiveness of their knowledge: were the strength of the pansy juice available to Titania, she could preempt Oberon's strategem, were Gerard de Narbonne's remedy known to any but Helena, she would be powerless to advance her social position and win Bertram, and were the Duke's disguise prematurely penetrated, his entire project would capsize and considerably damage his authority.

Such a strict division between (epistemologically) dominant and subordinate characters will obviously complicate the achievement of comic closure, and, by extension, the power of knowledge will problematize the exercise of just authority in these plays. Even if this knowledge is used--according to a basic humanist tenet--to guide others to virtuous action, even if it is enlisted in the service of communal goals, as it certainly is in the broader dramatic contexts of these plays, its necessary and paradoxical exclusion of a shared awareness among characters establishes and sustains what is finally a comically untenable supremacy. Moreover, the temptation to abuse a power which is one's private possession proves impossible to subdue. Oberon, Helena, and the Duke of Vienna exceed the legitimate boundaries of

their authority as knowing characters by positioning personal goals ahead of communal goals, by joining, as Machiavelli's prince is advised to do,[173] knowledge with self-interest and coercion, and, most importantly, by neglecting to perceive the significance of their actions, the substance of their abuse.

If there is a saving feature of an authority driven primarily by exclusive knowledge, it is the additional and corrective possession of self-knowledge, a clear-sighted perception of one's limitations, one's dependence upon community, one's participation in the general weaknesses of humankind. What power of introspection these figures possess fails to yield such wisdom. Their continued supremacy at the conclusions of their plays, even though they are all engaged in acts of genuine forgiveness, seriously undermines the harmony of the resolutions they bring about. The independent and effectively unchallenged authority of Oberon, Helena, and Vincentio, then, is both the condition of a power based on generally inaccessible knowledge and the reason for a more sombre comic mode in A Midsummer Night's Dream, All's Well That Ends Well, and Measure for Measure.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

One need not adopt Jan Kott's darkened psycho-sexual reading of A Midsummer Night's Dream to detect the play's gravity. Beneath the surface of an impending wedding feast, of enchanted woodlands blooming with fragrant herbs, of amorous liaisons between creatures of delightfully different orders runs a strong undertow of near-chaotic confusion, hardened vengeance, and pervasive coercion. That this purportedly "happiest work of literature ever conceived"[174] successfully negotiates its dangerous waters is at best a precarious critical position; precarious because the play itself, like its mischief-seeking hobgoblin, delights in pulling the stool out from under any blinkered rendition of its own carefully advertised heterogeneity.[175] Both thematically and dramaturgically we are reminded again and again of cruelty, injustice, pain in the midst of reunion, celebration, play. Bertrand Evans's notice of A Midsummer Night's Dream's anomalous failure to bring its characters to the same level of awareness as the audience, to discover at the end of their journey the source of their confusions and mistakings and so to effect the levelling typical of Shakespeare's comic endings, is well taken:[176] the difficult fifth act, with its peculiar elaboration of "the anguish of a torturing hour" (V.i.37), its strangely unsettled reflections upon the power of imagination, and its concluding exorcism of unspecified blights and curses leaves something to be desired in the way of conservative comic closure.[177]

No small part of the extraordinary instability of A Midsummer Night's Dream may be attributed to its ambivalent settlement of the power struggles which drive its plot. That the play opens with a nuptial announcement is not entirely the auspicious harbinger one might expect, and if its turbulence is subtle at first, it is soon intensified in Egeus's ill-timed plea for legal

enforcement of his parental right, and, a little later on, in the fierce quarrel between the playworld's deities. As stock comic obstructions which are set up only to be overcome during the play, these discordant notes--all having to do with the subversion and recuperation of authority--are not in themselves problematic. But as the first indications of quandaries hardly addressed, let alone resolved, by the remainder of the action, they complicate the received notion of the genre to which A Midsummer Night's Dream subscribes.

As David Marshall has written, much of the action of A Midsummer Night's Dream may be construed as a series of enforced substitutions of and control over the vision of subordinates who are, in all cases but one, transgressive, intractable females: "A Midsummer Night's Dream presents a political question: whether these women will be authors of their own characters or representations upon which the voices and visions of others will be dictated and imprinted" (553). Though he himself does not take it in quite this direction, Marshall's argument could usefully be extended to a consideration of the role of knowledge in the prescription of both voice and vision in patriarchal society, a knowledge which informs the domain of the play's most powerful figure. While Oberon's near-omniscience has been identified as the source of his benevolent agency in the play, the quality which, as Bertrand Evans would have it, is "our means of assurance that . . . no lasting harm will be done" (40), it is precisely his possession of esoteric knowledge which sustains the Fairy King's self-asserting supremacy. As the most elevated model of authority in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Oberon's exercise of power expands into a kind of paradigm within which other lesser authorities reveal their comparable insufficiencies. It is an authority conspicuously unaltered by the

end of the play.

The most obviously problematic authority in A Midsummer Night's Dream is, of course, Egeus, whose very overstatement of the position typically held by New Comedy's overbearing and tyrannical paternal figures may indeed be the first of many overt generic signposts in the play. Though he can hardly lay claim to any kind of knowledge as the source of his authority, except perhaps a Shylockian legal understanding, Egeus does nevertheless trumpet the play's carefully-developed interest in the competing epistemological frames of reference which stubbornly resist unification by an authority with a questionable pedigree. Significantly, Egeus's complaint against his daughter is taken up and seemingly endorsed by Duke Theseus, who expresses the rebellious nature of Hermia's alternative vision in a commonplace simile admitting of no compromise:

> Be advis'd, fair maid.
> To you your father should be as a god:
> One that compos'd your beauties, yea, and one
> To whom you are but as a form in wax
> By him imprinted, and within his power
> To leave the figure, or disfigure it.
>
> (I.i.46-51)

One would expect Hermia to advance the strength of her own vision against her father's, but she too couples her challenge with an admission of powerlessness, "I know not by what power I am made bold" (I.i.59), unwittingly marking an important link in the play between the power of (true) knowing and the power of subversion, both of which are usually given telltale passive constructions.

The whole notion of female passivity sits easily with the regnant patriarchal ideology of the play, which views women variously as imprinted, bewitched, or infatuated, as the passive recipients of external or uncontrolled shaping powers, and at the same time punishable for their state of being. Egeus's attack on his daughter illustrates this duality. Although he approaches Theseus "with complaint / Against my child" (I.i.22-23), Egeus spends most of his invective upon Lysander, whom he accuses of nothing less than sorcery:

> Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
> And interchang'd love-tokens with my child:
> Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung
> With faining voice verses of feigning love,
> And stol'n the impression of her fantasy
> . . .
> With cunning hast thou filch'd my daughter's heart.
>
> (I.i.28-36)

Given this initial direction of blame, Egeus's ensuing shift to Hermia, his orthodox patriarchal request that "As she is mine, I may dispose of her" (I.i.42), is a bit of a logical jolt, foreshadowing a whole series of unresolved tonal dissonances in the play.

As an act of the play's most powerful worldly authority figure, Theseus's handling of the plea deserves some attention, for it is far less reductive than that of the complainant and even invites speculation regarding his backing of Egeus. By the time Egeus storms in with the lovers in tow, we have already met an impatient Theseus, preoccupied with his long-awaited nuptial, shortly to admit that Demetrius's abandonment of Helena is a matter that has slipped his

mind, "being over-full of self-affairs" (I.i.113). We may well wonder, by logical extension, about the degree to which Theseus conscientiously attends to the matter at hand, whether his lecturing of Hermia is perhaps the rehearsal of "well conn'd speeches," part and parcel of a Duke's "Garden of Eloquence." We need not even depend upon hindsight here, upon our knowledge of the Duke's effortless quelling of Egeus's complaint later in the play, to arrive at such musings. An all too easily overlooked remark of his own suggests that Theseus is not entirely unsympathetic to Hermia. Immediately following his recollection of Demetrius's abandonment of Hermia--and so suggesting a cognitive link--Theseus invites Egeus and Demetrius to "some private schooling" (I.i.116), the nature of which is unspecified but is given "a local habitation and a name" with just a little ingenuity. However faint this hint of an alternative procedure may be, it would seem that the political authority of Theseus is not strictly identifiable with the familial authority of Egeus.

But in an ambivalence typical of the play as a whole, Theseus' treatment of his own wife-to-be is not drawn very precisely, and its contours alternately shift from compassion to coercion.[178] It may be worth remarking, too, that the contours of criticism and styles of performance regarding this central relationship shift in analogous ways. Until the publication of Jan Kott's startling reflections on A Midsummer Night's Dream in Shakespeare Our Contemporary, something of a watershed in the play's critical history, Theseus was generally understood to be a benevolent ruler whose treatment of his Amazonian bride is not only irreproachable, but actually desirable: in an admittedly extreme version of this view, David P. Young writes that "It is appropriate that Theseus, as representative of daylight and right reason, should have subdued his bride-to-be to the rule of his masculine will. That

is the natural order of things" (99). In performance, this kind of interpretation had its counterpart in the tradition of casting the couple as loving and affectionate, with Hippolyta clearly accepting of her new submissive role. But following Kott, and especially following the groundbreaking production of Peter Brook in 1970 (actually a consolidation of similar theatrical trends responding to Granville-Barker's 1914 production)[179] which foregrounded the sexual and sinister sides of the play, Theseus's treatment of Hippolyta has darkened considerably. John Hancock's slightly earlier representation of a haggard Hippolyta caged and dragged around the stage[180] by a bevy of attendants may have been, in 1967, a necessary overstatement of the imminent cruelty in the play's pivotal relationship, but it and the staging trends following Brook do make a point which is well-supported by the text itself.[181] First, Hippolyta's response to Theseus's impatient longing for their nuptial is anything but clear-cut; all she really says is that the time will pass quickly, and gives no indication of willing submission to her conqueror-husband. In fact, the image she conjures of the moon as "a silver bow / New bent in heaven" (I.i.9-10) seems more appropriate to a battle cry than to the beginning of a happy marriage. Similarly, though the Arden editor glosses Hippolyta's mention of "solemnities" as a "celebration (often of nuptials) in a festive spirit, not an unsmiling solemn one" (I.i.11 and n.), later critics are not so quick to discount the word's ambivalent connotations.[182] From a different angle, Hippolyta's sensible plea of patience actually seems to be usurping Theseus's studied exercise of "cool reason"--for which he has been rather bewilderingly commended by many readers of the play. And Theseus's own supremacist intentions rear their heads even as he promises to wed Hippolyta "in another key," figuring the celebration as

graced "With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling" (I.i.18-19): the transposition is far less audible than Theseus imagines. Finally, the intervening business of Hermia's disobedience has clear thematic--and even dramaturgical, if we take into account Hippolyta's strange silence throughout the episode--affinities with the play's ducal couple;[183] Theseus's proposal to settle both matters on the same day is profoundly inappropriate:

> Take time to pause; and by the next new moon,
> The sealing-day betwixt my love and me
> For everlasting bond of fellowship,
> Upon that day either prepare to die
> For disobedience to your father's will,
> Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,
> Or on Diana's altar to protest,
> For aye, austerity and single life.
>
> (I.i.83-90)

Theseus's much-noted remark to Hippolyta, "what cheer, my love?" (I.i.122), would seem to affirm her objection to his handling of the matter; at the very least, her continued silence, her lack of verbal commitment, renders dubious any kind of definitive reading of both their roles.

In addition to his involvement in legislative and marital negotiations, Theseus acts as authority in the play's final scene where he is the genial recipient of amateur theatrical offerings, and it is here that the epistemological basis of his authority is fully apparent. Notably, Theseus's understanding of the role of imagination in human perception is double-minded,[184] a duality which calls into question the degree of his self-awareness and, by extension, the justice of his authority. All too confident

that the lovers' testimony of their strange adventures is reminiscent of "antique fables" and "fairy toys" (V.i.3), Theseus expounds his theory of the distortions wrought by imagination, and sets them in meaningful contrast to the much valued "cool reason," a faculty, to be sure, which he imagines his own:

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.
> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact:
> . . .
> Such tricks hath strong imagination,
> That if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy:
> Or, in the night, imagining some fear,
> How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!
>
> (V.i.4-22)

Hippolyta's sensible response that the lovers' tale should not be so quickly dismissed falls on characteristically deaf ears. She does, however, get the last word in this exchange, and the authority of her vision is not only borne out by the wood scenes just preceding, but is also quietly reinforced when Theseus counsels her about the very importance of using one's "shaping fantasy" in receiving the humble offerings of one's subjects, a use of imagination not mentioned in his earlier derision:

> Where I have come, great clerks have purposed
> To greet me with premeditated welcomes;

Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,
Make periods in the midst of sentences,
Throttle their practis'd accent in their fears,
And, in conclusion, dumbly have broke off,
Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,
Out of this silence yet I pick'd a welcome,
And in the modesty of fearful duty
I read as much as from the rattling tongue
Of saucy and audacious eloquence.

(V.i.93-103)

Even more pointedly, Theseus's initial disparagement of imaginative reconstructions of reality is overturned in his inadvertent affirmation of the very kind of experience he had earlier refused to believe: jesting about Bottom's inept representation of suicide, Theseus imagines that "With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover, and prove an ass" (V.i.298-99). Indeed. Throughout the entertainment, in fact, Theseus's willing participation in the completion of the illusion bespeaks the unimagined breadth of his own knowledge and, when set beside the opening speech of this scene, the concomitant limitations of his self-awareness. Nowhere is his blinkered vision made more evident than in the play's final reversion to the all-too-real fairies, and especially to the ubiquitous power of Oberon, as the guardians of his well-being.

And yet to work backward from this point in the career of the play's other-worldly authority is to trace Oberon's similarly disquieting exercise of power, a power based exclusively on his knowledge of the magical properties of a particular flower.[185]

Oberon's role in establishing communal harmony in Athens extends beyond that of bestowing auspicious charms upon unwitting subjects. Unexpectedly discovering the quarrelling Helena and Demetrius, Oberon determines to intercede in favour of the "sweet Athenian lady" (II.i.260) in order to restore the traditional direction of desire. The alignment here of the vision of Oberon with Helena is worth exploring. Throughout the play only she of the four young lovers speaks level-headedly about her experience, and although she does dote on the seemingly unworthy Demetrius, her moralizing of the situation reveals a degree of self-awareness quite lacking in her peers:

> Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
> But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so;
> He will not know what all but he do know;
> And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
> So I, admiring of his qualities.
> Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
> Love can transpose to form and dignity.
>
> (I.i.227-33)

Furthermore, Helena's reproach of Demetrius is imbued with the authority of tradition[186] and marks the point of her most immediate contact with Oberon:

> Fie, Demetrius!
> Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex.
> We cannot fight for love, as men may do;
> We should be woo'd, and were not made to woo.
>
> (II.i.239-42)

In addition, Helena is the only subordinate character who specifically uses knowledge to her own advantage, a use of information which, while it somewhat

undermines tne picture of mutuality she later paints of herself and Hermia, is serviceable in advancing the play's complications:

> I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight:
> Then to the wood will he, tomorrow night,
> Pursue her; and for this intelligence
> If I have thanks, it is a dear expense.
> But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
> To have his sight thither and back again.
>
> (I.ii.246-51)

Oberon's favouring of Helena's part in the quarrel, then, should indicate at least a latent sense of comic propriety.

In general, Oberon's intervention in the affairs of the Athenian lovers is a statement of his justice, seeking as he does a restoration of proper gender relationships as they are defined in the playworld. That his intentions go amiss is often read as a sign of his actual weakness of vision or a meddlesome exercise of authority in a sphere not fully his. Oberon and Puck's joint error is certainly admissive of their vulnerability to the masterless power of verbal and visual signifiers (see especially Puck's extended attempt at lining up his visual data with Oberon's verbal description [II.ii.69-76]). However, the actual significance of Oberon's error may more easily fulfil dramatic rather than thematic requirements, especially since he so effortlessly reclaims control once the error is exposed.

Apart from setting up a scene of hilarious confusion, the mix-up creates the possibility for the hitherto happy lovers to discover--and for the audience to pause over--some of their less-than-happy qualities. The scene of Hermia and Lysander's quarrel has, it should be noted, been fairly carefully

prepared before they are cruelly separated by the misapplication of charmed nectar. Following the legitimation of Egeus's death threat against his daughter, Lysander rather unfittingly points to his proprietary interests over Hermia and demands "Why should not I then prosecute my right?" (I.i.105). Then, when the others have left, he turns to Hermia with what appears to be, at best, a naive optimism: "How now, my love? Why is your cheek so pale? / How chance the roses there do fade so fast?" (I.i.128-29), as though he had not heard Theseus's ultimatum. The couple's reflections about their predicament also introduce some grounds for questioning their likeness of vision. As Lysander launches into a recitation of literary analogues to their troubles, Hermia translates them into increasingly heated curses against the establishment which forbids their love. The exchange has been called a symphonic interlude, meaning presumably that Lysander's and Hermia's voices are elegantly counterpointed and contribute to a single harmonious theme. But to an ear attuned to the play's incongruities, the exchange hits some rather dissonant chords, particularly in Hermia's explosive interruptions of Lysander's formulaic reassurance:

> Lys. Ay me! For aught that I could ever read,
> Could ever hear by tale or history,
> The course of true love never did run smooth;
> But either it was different in blood--
> Her. O cross! too high to be enthrall'd to low.
> Lys. Or else misgraffed in respect of years--
> Her. O spite! too old to be engag'd to young.

Lys. Or else it stood upon the choice of friends--

Her. O hell! to choose love by another's eyes.

(I.i.132-40)

Perhaps even more disquieting is the following exchange, in which Hermia surprisingly abandons her angered self-assertion and adopts instead a pose of martyr-like patience in accordance with the adages Lysander has cited; he, on the other hand, seems to take up her active defiance as he proposes, in a strange logical twist, after admitting that her plea for patience is "a good persuasion," that they should "therefore" flee Athens and make towards the house of his aunt where "the sharp Athenian law / Cannot pursue us" (I.i.156-63). Finally, and perhaps all too obviously, Hermia's extended oration upon men's infidelity and her own contrasting constancy simply affirms the difference which underlies their union. That they actually have a spat about sleeping arrangements once in the wood, and, importantly, prior to any fairy interference, should not surprise us.

The case may be made, however, that Oberon's intervention in the relationships of the young Athenians is not so much a meddlesome intrusion as an act of restoration; in the case of Helena and Demetrius a restoration to the state of their relationship prior to his change of affection, and in the case of Hermia and Lysander a restoration of a solidarity seemingly lost through hardship. But the perpetuation of the lovers' confusion reveals a less laudable aim. Though it is Puck who delights most shamelessly in the folly of the mortals, Oberon's willingness to take in the mirth for well over two hundred lines may indicate a self-indulgent exercise of superior knowledge. In this respect, it points the way towards his treatment of Titania.

Before Oberon resorts to the use of his special knowledge, the quarrel between him and Titania reveals a distinctly unorthodox distribution of power which his ill-disguised need to regain supremacy brings to light. As the two fairy royals hurl insults at each other, it becomes clear that Oberon is on the defensive, while Titania simply stands her ground. She easily undermines the inappropriateness of his stock demand for wifely obedience ("Tarry, rash wanton; am not I thy lord?" II.i.63) by pointing out his own adulterous liaisons which divest him of the right to lordship. She, however, is guilty of similar crimes, though she is adept at changing the topic when so accused. Then, intentionally deflating the import of his request, "Why should Titania cross her Oberon? / I do but beg a little changeling boy" (II.i.119-20), Oberon falters as he is faced with the source of Titania's resolve, her exclusive and impervious bond with the changeling's mother. As with other powerful women in Shakespeare's comedies, Titania sets the conditions of their relationship, and Oberon, refusing to abandon his pursuit, is first left with little option, and then is simply left:

> Tita. If you will patiently dance in our round,
> And see our moonlight revels, go with us;
> If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts.
> Ober. Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.
> Tita. Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away!
> (II.i.140-44)

Though neither of the two parties is willing to compromise, Titania at least reveals, through her eloquent self-defence and her proffering of an invitation to revels, a desire for peaceful reconciliation.

Still, the matter of Titania's relationship with her votaress, and the

subsequent disturbance it creates in her marital affairs, is not entirely to be discounted. Several recent studies have focused upon the breaking of female bonds in the play, and the way in which this signals the patriarchy's persistent need to reinforce its own supremacy.[187] While this may certainly be the case in A Midsummer Night's Dream, in which two female bonds are sundered, the laboured maintenance of such ties is also inimical to the movement of the genre in which these relationships are explored. The bond between Titania and her votaress is an obstacle to the social order which is so overtly announced as the destination of A Midsummer Night's Dream. In fact, Shakespeare seems to make something of an issue out of the threat posed by this relationship: he has Titania describe the effects of her quarrel with Oberon in nothing less than cosmic proportions. From this point of view, the source of the quarrel, an unduly close bond between two women, may be held accountable for all the world's troubles.

But Oberon's strategy against Titania is far from blameless, and its culpability should figure in formulations of Shakespeare's ideological leanings. Oberon's authority has been effectively subverted by Titania, and he now finds himself resorting to infantile retaliation:

> Well, go thy way; thou shalt not from this grove
> Till I torment thee for this injury.
>
> (II.i.146-47)

It is immediately after this resolve that Oberon recalls his privileged knowledge of the powers of love-in-idleness: ("That very time I saw [but thou couldst not], / . . . where the bolt of Cupid fell" [II.i.155-65]), and he now instructs Puck to fetch the herb so that he may reassert his supremacy over Titania:

> Having once this juice,
> I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
> And drop the liquor of it in her eyes:
> The next thing then she waking looks upon
> . . .
> She shall pursue it with the soul of love.
> And ere I take this charm from off her sight
> (As I can take it with another herb)
> I'll make her render up her page to me.
>
> (II.i.176-85)

Oberon's knowledge of herbal potions seems to be quite sound, and his introduction here of the corrective herb is another of the play's generic signposts. Nevertheless, that Oberon's machinations work toward restoring concord to his marital affairs--and by extension to the affairs of the Athenians over whom he has sway--seems to be an effect quite beyond his own intentions. Repeatedly, Oberon's behaviour is driven by a more self-interested goal, the regaining of his authority and restoration of his dignity, than his agency in the comic movement of the play would suggest. The sinister dimensions of his exercise of esoteric knowledge surface in his intent to "streak her eyes, / And make her full of hateful fantasies" (II.i.257-58), and, as he applies the juice, he hopes she shall "Wake when some vile thing is near" (II.ii.33), an entirely superfluous bit of nastiness given that the intent of the spell is simply to shift Titania's affections. Even more troublesome is Oberon's report of his triumph:

> Her dotage now I do begin to pity;
> For, meeting her of late behind the wood

Seeking sweet favours for this hateful fool,
I did upbraid her and fall out with her:
. . .
When I had <u>at my pleasure</u> taunted her,
And she in mild terms begg'd my patience,
I then did ask of her her changeling child;
Which straight she gave me, and her fairy sent
To bear him to my bower in fairy land.

(IV.i.46-60; emphasis added)

Moving then to "release" the fairy queen (IV.i.69), Oberon resumes his authority. Titania wakens in confusion and seems entirely to have forgotten the carefully-guarded changeling boy. That both the changeling and his mother drop from the play at this point and that Oberon's subterfuge is never revealed would seem to suggest that the breaking of Titania's spell, the power of Oberon's knowledge, has more than distracted her current infatuation; it has effectively erased her memory, obliterated her power, and made them "new in amity" (IV.i.86).

And yet one is left with a sense of incongruity, of an all-too-easy victory for the Fairy King, a settlement achieved without the kind of recognition or self-awareness that marks the restitution of authority in others of Shakespeare's comedies. Worse, Oberon's singular victory is only one of the play's ill-resolved tensions: Helena's eventual acceptance of Demetrius's sincerity is less than celebratory, Theseus's triumph over the legally-minded Egeus makes one wonder about the avowed resolve of Athenian law, Bottom's pseudo-Pauline vision has seemingly left his senses more confused than ever, and the fairies' concern--conventional though it may be--for exorcising evil

forces renders the comic harmony less absolute than one might wish. In broader terms, all of this follows rather strangely upon a series of actions which have overtly been announcing their imminent resolution. Oberon begins pointing toward the play's end as early as III.ii, where he promises that, with the appropriate remedy, "back to Athens shall the lovers wend, / With league whose date till death shall never end" (372-73), and Puck good-naturedly expects that "Jack shall have Jill, / Nought shall go ill; / The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well" (III.ii.461-63). Bottom's release is given in similar terms, with the hope

> That he awaking when the other do,
> May all to Athens back again repair,
> And think no more of this night's accidents
> But as the fierce vexation of a dream.
>
> (IV.i.65-68)

And the thunderous dance of Oberon and Titania amidst the drugged Athenians is an important visual emblem of the impending wedding celebrations where they shall be "all in jollity" (IV.i.91), a forecast soon reissued by Theseus himself: "Away, with us, to Athens: three and three, / We'll hold a feast in great solemnity" (IV.i.183-84).

It must be important, given the unidirectional thrust of all these comic anticipations, that the fifth act revolves around a theatrical performance rather than a celebration of matrimony. As has often been noted, the representation of "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth" (V.i.56-57) centres upon the powers of imagination, the power to transform, shape, and alter reality. More specifically, the inept performance of the "rude mechanicals" brings to light

the extent to which voice and knowledge are interdependent in the act of human communication. Following Quince's garbled prologue, the syntax and semantics hopelessly disordered, Lysander makes a key remark: "it is not enough to speak, but to speak true" (V.i.120-21). The conjunction of voice and truth, the ability to articulate knowledge, is a mark of just authority in all of Shakespeare's comedies. In A Midsummer Night's Dream it makes a somewhat oblique appearance, but is emphasized nonetheless in the many attempts of the enchanted dreamers to fit words to their experience in such a way that others may share their special vision. Bottom's desire to tell his fellows about his dream alternates between the need to communicate and the inability to do so:

> Bot. Masters, I am to discourse wonders: but ask me not what; for if I tell you, I am not true Athenian. I will tell you everything, right as it fell out.
>
> Quin. Let us hear, sweet Bottom.
>
> Bot. Not a word of me. . . . No more words.
>
> (IV.ii.28-42)

Similarly, Lysander's rendition of his experience is greatly confused:

> Half sleep, half waking; but as yet, I swear,
> I cannot truly say how I came here.
> But as I think--for truly would I speak--
> And now I do bethink me, so it is:
> I came with Hermia hither.
>
> (IV.ii.146-50; emphasis added)

And Demetrius neatly sums up the sentiment: "I wot not by what power-- / But by some power it is" (IV.i.163-64). Even among themselves, the young lovers are still confused and plan to "recount our dreams" in an effort to get a grip

on what has occurred. Their stories, however, fail to convince Theseus, though Hippolyta is not entirely skeptical. Even Titania, the Queen of Fairies, cannot quite make out her dream and asks to be told about it:

> Come my lord, and in our flight
> Tell me how it came this night
> That I sleeping here was found
> With these mortals on the ground.
>
> (IV.i.98-101)

Oberon's imagined act of telling here is concomitant with his superior knowledge in the play; he alone can tell what has occurred to all the bewildered dreamers, he alone can unravel the truth of their experience. It is another mark of the play's imperfect comic structure that such truth is never communicated to those whose experience it comprises.[188]

Authority based on superior knowledge--and one, as we have seen, of at least partially questionable motivation-- is not redefined in the play. The suggestion of the need for its redefinition, however, and the attendant exploration of the ability of comedy to carry out such a redefinition, are present as an undercurrent of the play in the many unresolved elements which refuse to be buried in the celebratory conclusion.[189] Puck's apologizing epilogue rightly addresses the audience's offence; it is an offence which is far less easily glossed over than a dream, and particularly so in a play where the boundaries between dream and waking experience are almost entirely dissolved. In the final analysis, it is an offence at A Midsummer Night's Dream's own "tragical mirth," the generic cross-breeding which undermines its own purity but which may be better able to express the mongrel nature of human experience.[190]

All's Well That Ends Well

The source tale for All's Well That Ends Well, William Painter's "Giletta of Narbona,"[191] provided Shakespeare with a story of authorised female initiative and expedience set against male effrontery and self-assurance. These dimensions of the tale reappear more or less faithfully in All's Well That Ends Well, but their resolution--in Painter quite without any residual difficulty--is tellingly transposed. Painter's Helena figure, Giletta, is irreproachable throughout the tale, and though she (of necessity) acts "with greate subtiltie" (150), the purity of her motives is given no less than divine sanction (151). Though his role prescribes more scope for change, the "Counte Beltramo" is similarly drawn in the neat brush strokes typical of folktale, portrayed as temporarily misled rather than unregenerately sinning, and eventually well-supplied, in parentheses, with reasons for embracing both wife and marriage when the game is up:

> . . . the Counte knowing the thinges she had spoken, to be true (and perceiving her constant minde, and good witte, and the twoo faire young boyes to kepe his promise made, and to please his subjectes, & the Ladies that made sute unto him, to accept her from that tyme foorth, as his lawefull wyfe, and to honour her) abjected his obstinate rigour. (152)

But Painter's euphoric ending finds only a gestural correlative in Shakespeare's version of the tale. In All's Well That Ends Well, Shakespeare draws out of his source several underlying assumptions which problematize the tale's unreserved comic closure, assumptions primarily concerned with the power invested in a knowledgeable female. And it is here, between

Shakespeare's version of the source and the source itself, that the play's interest in the power of knowledge may be found, forming in the significant re-naming and concomitant recasting of the learned heroine a reflection upon the intersection, or "mingled yarn," of knowledge and knowing in the exercise and maintenance of authority.[192]

Few critics have paused over the re-christening of Shakespeare's heroine, though many notice that Shakespeare seems to have wavered somewhat between "Helena" and "Helen."[193] In a more interpretative vein, Susan Snyder has argued that All's Well That Ends Well's Helena, "the locus of active desire" (72), is directly juxtaposed with Helen of Troy, who is represented by Shakespeare in his version of that tale "as a totally passive object" (71).[194] Though Snyder's line of argument helps to clarify Shakespeare's conception of female subjectivity in All's Well That Ends Well, it seems also to reduce the contrapuntal echoes between the two Helens, and so to limit the semiotic richness of the name as it (re)appears in the later play.[195]

Most importantly, Shakespeare's Helen of Troy is far more than a helpless, fought-over object of desire. While she is talked about quite extensively, the way in which she is portrayed is actually empowering. Verbal objectifications of Helen consistently figure her as a kind of touchstone of the classical world, a universal measure of value whose own inflation or debasement, in the speaker's imagination, augments or diminishes the value of any action carried out in her name. Pandarus, for instance, hopes to spark Cressida's admiration of Troilus by the example of Helen's favour: "You have no judgement, niece. Helen herself . . . praised his complexion above Paris. . . . I swear to you I think Helen loves him better than Paris" (I.ii.92-109). Though Cressida is not beguiled, and in fact takes the opportunity to mention

the derogatory side of Helen's signification ("Then she's a merry Greek indeed" [I.ii.110]), the ingenuous Pandarus imagines that Helen's desire ipso facto invests its object with absolute value. Similarly, Troilus figures Helen in terms which both objectify and implicitly endow her with a power more potent than that of the action she inspires:

> She is a theme of honour and renown,
> A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds,
> Whose present courage may beat down our foes,
> And fame in time to come canonize us.
>
> (II.ii.200-03)

The irony of this encomium within the broader thematic structures of Troilus and Cressida is made explicit by Thersites, whose bitter "All the argument is a whore and a cuckold" (II.iii.74-75) actually reinforces Helen's more common reputation as an adulterous wanton:

> For every false drop in her bawdy veins
> A Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple
> Of her contaminated carrion weight
> A Trojan hath been slain.
>
> (IV.i.70-73)

Helen of Troy, then, is a figure whose ethical and political status is anything but secure.

If the mere change of name from "Giletta" to "Helen(a)" is insufficient evidence for a direct connection between Helena of Rossillion and Helen of Troy (as I should think it is), the play itself makes more substantial links which together suggest that Shakespeare's ambivalence about the earlier Helen is deliberately recalled and reactivated in the moral complexity surrounding

All's Well That Ends Well's heroine. In what may be an unconscious echo (though this would not diminish the significance of the connections I am tracing), both Helena and Helen are greeted in their respective plays as "fair queen" by Parolles and Pandarus, characters whom they engage in similarly bawdy conversations (I.i.104; III.i.44). More importantly, as he leaves Helena and the King alone, Lafew refers to himself as "Cressid's uncle / That dare leave two together" (II.i.96-97), recalling both the faithless Cressida and the faithless Helen, whose parallel sensuality is a given in Troilus and Cressida. The Helena/Cressida/Helen association (all three are infatuated, skilled at bawdy humour, and far from submissive) must, then, raise serious reservations about the moral value of Helena's actions in All's Well That Ends Well. But just as Helen of Troy is revered by some, Helena, again in direct association with the Trojan myth, is deemed worthy. In the Clown's "purifying a' th' song" (I.iii.79-80), in the original version of which Helen of Troy is, presumably, the "one bad in every ten," Helena is made into a redemptive "tithe-woman" (I.iii.81-82), the one good woman to every nine bad:

> Was this fair face the cause, quoth she,
> Why the Grecians sacked Troy?
> Fond done, done fond,
> Was this King Priam's joy?
> With that she sighed as she stood,
> With that she sighed as she stood,
> And gave this sentence then:
> Among nine bad if one be good,
> Among nine bad if one be good,
> There's yet one good in ten. (I.iii.67-76)

The clown has taken liberties with traditional folklore, and the final lines of the passage now refer to Helen with the "fair face," the ancestor of All's Well That Ends Well's Helena whose reputation in all but the Clown's version of the ballad is not estimable.[196] In fact, there is a parallel passage in Troilus and Cressida in which Hector mounts an argument against the retention of Helen on the basis that she is "a thing not ours nor worth to us / . . . the value of one ten" (II.ii.22-23). The clown's "corrupt" balladic contextualization of Helena points, together with the other ties between her and Helen of Troy, to the ambivalence of her position: as both a cunning woman and a "good," Helena is drawn, unlike her counterpart in Painter, in chiaroscuro, in contrasting shades which seem deliberately to complicate the source tale by combining Giletta's approved stealth and knowledge with an ethically unstable mythological ancestry.

A study of power relations in the play reveals that Helena is in possession of a species of knowledge we may term knowing, a perspicacity regarding the dynamics of the situation in which one finds oneself and an alacrity in turning that situation to one's own advantage, a talent which repeatedly puts her in a position of superiority. In other words, her actual medical knowledge (in effect, a metonymy for wisdom) is not per se the thing which propels her toward a realization of her desire, though of course it does provide the basic ingredient for her success. The intersection between Helena's knowledge (applied to achieve broadly-communal aims) and her knowing (applied to achieve a fulfilment of personal desire) is the site of the play's interest in the problem of representing unyielding self-direction in comic form. Beyond the formal dimensions of the play itself, it reflects a related interest in the problem of authority based--as the play's many references to

knowing attest--upon exceptional knowledge and unrelenting guile.

More concrete than the literary sources of this dual knowledge in Helena's character is, of course, her paternal heritage, the literal and direct source of the information which enables her to gain what amounts to a royal patent for the subversion of the strictures regulating class distinctions. Helena "derives," as the Countess would have it, an enigmatic inner virtue from her father, one whose beneficence is only to be compounded by any kind of formal training she is to receive: "I have those hopes of her good that her education promises her dispositions she inherits--which makes fair gifts fairer" (I.i.36-38). In addition to her father's good moral repute (the purity of which is unchallenged), Helena has inherited his medical expertise, a skill which "was almost as great as his honesty; had it stretch'd so far, would have made nature immortal, and death should have play for lack of work" (I.i.17-20). The compass of his skill, it is said--in one of the play's wryest ironies--was confined only by his mortality: "he was skilful enough to have liv'd still, if knowledge could be set up against mortality" (I.i.28-29). Although it has the power to heal an ailing king, knowledge cannot, given the mournful context in which Narbonne is remembered, be advanced against death. It is both the play's first and most memorable suggestion of the limitations of worldly knowledge.

Knowledge can, however, be advanced against many non-physical ailments, including an inferior social position and an obstinate beloved. Helena's first soliloquy, following an exhibition of tears, gives no indication of her esoteric possession. She figures herself as a helpless social inferior whose only joy--the passive observation of her idol--has been taken away and the recovery of which is seemingly beyond her control. But by Helena's second

soliloquy, separated from the first by a fruitful discussion of the ownership and proper disposal of virginity, she recovers her stronghold and hints obliquely at a newly-devised plot which will make profitable use of at least one of her possessions, her medical knowledge: "The king's disease--my project may deceive me, / But my intents are fix'd, and will not leave me" (I.i.224-25).[197] The importance of these lines is augmented by the preceding speech in which Helena outlines the "free scope" of human self-determination, something she already intends to exploit:

> Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
> Which we ascribe to heaven; the fated sky
> Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull
> Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
>
> (I.i.212-15)

And, as Helena's foregoing interchange with Parolles has already illustrated, she is anything but dull. Much to her credit, she knows at the outset what it will take Bertram the entire length of the play to discover, that Parolles is nothing but an arrogant parasite. Furthermore, she knows with the same clarity that she tolerates his presence only because of the connection to Bertram he represents. This kind of knowledge is combined with a talent in bawdy discourse and the confidence to advance a self-assured proposal--wisely de-emphasized by her opponent--that women have the right to dispose of their virginity as they please. Well before we learn of Helena's undisclosed "project," then, we are shown her mental agility and self-assertion. The sincerity of the tears--as markers of helplessness--with which she graces the play's opening may accordingly be questioned. Helena is a woman whose "intents are fix'd", fixed, that is, upon using her knowledge to personal

advantage. It is a statement which should guide our interpretation of her behaviour throughout the play.

In her interview with the Countess, however (the only instance of Helena's inferior awareness in the play),[198] Helena reveals a sympathetic (and perhaps culturally informed)[199] discomfort with her own aggressiveness and insubordination. Teased by the Countess into admitting her love for Bertram, Helena seems at first to be apologetic and self-effacing, though she does, as she exaggerates her defensiveness, lie about her intended course of action:

> Be not offended, for it hurts not him
> That he is lov'd of me; I follow him not
> By any token of presumptuous suit,
> Nor would I have him till I do deserve him.
>
> (I.iii.191-94)

But once assured of the Countess's approval, Helena details the nebulous "presumptuous suit" with surprising precision, concluding that

> My lord your son made me to think of this;
> Else Paris and the medicine and the king
> Had from the conversation of my thoughts
> Haply been absent then.
>
> (I.iii.227-30)

The Countess is rightly skeptical of Helena's success, and expresses a concern which will resurface in Helena's interview with the King and in the blazon announcing her triumph:

> How shall they credit
> A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools,
> Embowel'd of their doctrine, have left off

The danger to itself?

(I.iii.234-37)

The Countess's reservations about Helena's success are well-founded; they foreshadow in a single stroke both the inadequacy of received notions of female knowledge and power, and the miraculous qualities with which Helena will necessarily be endowed. Armed with a reply to this most predictable objection, Helena says she believes "knowingly" (I.iii.245) that "There's something in't / More than my father's skill" (I.iii.237-38), and asks only that she be permitted to try her luck. Setting off for Paris with her medical bag and the Countess's blessing, Helena gives the lie to her earlier complaint that "the poorer born" are "shut . . . up in wishes" (I.i.178-79).

Introduced to the King as "Doctor She," Helena begins her interview with an attempt to secure his trust by aligning her skill with her father's good nature and proffering the precious cure with studied humility:

On's bed of death
Many receipts he gave me; chiefly one,
Which, as the dearest issue of his practice,
And of his old experience th' only darling,
He bade me store up as a triple eye,
Safer than mine own two; more dear I have so,
And hearing your high majesty is touch'd
With that malignant cause, wherein the honour
Of my dear father's gift stands chief in power,
I come to tender it and my appliance,
With all bound humbleness.

(II.i.103-13)

The nature of Helena's motivation here is not considered by the King, who turns instead to her unorthodox position as a young female in possession of a cure which has eluded "our most learned doctors" (II.i.115). In fact, it is interesting that though Helena herself stresses, at least initially, her father's role in the whole matter, Gerard de Narbonne does not figure in the court's interpretation of Helena's knowledge. The issue, returned to again and again, and perhaps best put in the blazon with which Helena's success is crowned, centres upon her sex and the divine aid which is thought to be implicit in her skill: "A showing of a heavenly effect in an earthly actor" (II.iii.23-24). Rather than being given credit for curing the King, even if it were as the daughter of a renowned physician, Helena is consistently figured as a passive, unknowing agent of divine will. This is the only way in which the miraculous event can be made to fit received notions of female power.

But Helena herself, to critical admiration or dismay,[200] exploits this very presupposition in gaining the King's trust. As long as Helena's cure is associated with female craft (again, it is notable that her pedigree is not considered), the King's tangible knowledge of the disease makes him skeptical: "But what at full I know, thou know'st no part; / I knowing all my peril, thou no art" (II.i.131-32). But Helena is persistent, and even though she has already offered a retreat, "I will no more enforce mine office on you" (II.i.125), presses her case by shrewdly identifying her power with the unfathomable workings of divine action:

> He that of greatest works is finisher
> Oft does them by the weakest minister.
> So holy writ in babes hath judgment shown,

When judges have been babes. Great floods have flown
From simple sources, and great seas have dried
When miracles have by the great'st been denied.
(II.i.135-40)

Judging by the King's stopping of his ears that she is having some success, Helena continues her line of argument, now inscribing her remedy within divine knowledge and cautioning the King that his refusal to try her works against the agency of "Him that all things knows." Even more notable, however, is Helena's opportune reversal of her belief in self-determination:

It is not so with Him that all things knows
As 'tis with us that square our guess by shows;
But most it is presumption in us when
The help of heaven we count the act of men.
Dear sir, to my endeavours give consent;
Of heaven, not me, make an experiment.
I am not an impostor, that proclaim
Myself against the level of mine aim,
But know I think, and think I know most sure,
My art is not past power, nor you past cure. (II.i.148-57)

Ironically, Helena's venture, in the event that her remedy fail, to have her "maiden's name / Sear'd,"--the ultimate loss of female authority in a patriarchal world--convinces the King that "in [her] some blessed spirit doth speak / His powerful sound within an organ weak" (II.i.174-75), and brings her to the scene of power:

Hel. But if I help, what do you promise me?
King. Make thy demand.

Hel. But will you make it even?

King. Ay, by my sceptre and my hopes of heaven.

Hel. Then shalt thou give me with thy kingly hand
What husband in thy power I will command.

(II.i.189-93)

With the King's assurance that "Thy will by my performance shall be serv'd" (II.i.201), Helena successfully completes a manoeuvre familiar to other subversive women in the comedies; she has learned to get her way within the very structures which ostensibly define her as passive.[201] That Helena's curing of the King is, indeed, represented by the state press in the discourse of supernatural occurrence testifies to the degree of knowing which guides her use of knowledge.

But in tracing Helena's manipulation of the King's sensibility and gradual acquisition of a position of command, we ought not lose sight of the fact that she does heal an ailing monarch and, through him, an ailing kingdom. The exact nature of the King's disease remains obscure, though, as many critics have been quick to point out, its ties with sexual potency are all but stated. Accordingly, Helena's healing of the King--and Lafew's self-christening as "Cressid's uncle" is certainly a useful bit of evidence here--metaphorically rejuvenates his procreative functions and regenerates the society he represents. This restoration of the whole society also prefigures Helena's pregnancy and retroactively contrasts with the elegiac opening of the play. In other words, however self-interested Helena's motives may appear in the first part of All's Well That Ends Well,[202] the fact that she accomplishes a restoration to outdo the entire medical academy must be factored into an assessment of her use of knowledge to gain power. It is this beneficent "end"

of her behaviour which is generally overlooked or underestimated in readings of Helena as an omniscient, determined, unruly female.[203] Given that she inhabits a comic world, and that she is fully responsible for whatever measure of restoration is achieved by that world at play's end, Helena's use of knowledge to gain supremacy resists a simplistic representation.

The play's endorsement of Helena's benevolent function, already evoked in the Countess's support of her project, is also revealed in the formation of an alliance with the King which is ultimately responsible for the much-disputed entrapment of Bertram and which accordingly mitigates her individual power.[204] During the most intensive display of Helena's command, her pact with the King serves to shift the focus of abusive authority and the compulsion of individual desire to the broader context of patriarchal rule:

> This youthful parcel
> Of noble bachelors stand at my bestowing,
> O'er whom both sovereign power and father's voice
> I have to use. Thy frank election make;
> Thou hast power to choose, and they none to forsake.
>
> (II.iii.52-56)

It is true that Helena herself emphasizes the King's involvement in the fulfilment of the pact. Beginning with a shrewd (and for us, unsettling) restatement of the received interpretation of her act of healing, "Gentlemen,/ Heaven hath through me restor'd the king to health" (II.iii.63-64), Helena "knowingly" orchestrates the King's response by introducing the shameful possibility of a (probable) refusal well before it is actually advanced:

> I am a simple maid, and therein wealthiest
> That I protest I simply am a maid.

Please it your majesty, I have done already.
The blushes in my cheeks thus whisper me:
"We blush that thou should'st choose; but, be refused,
Let the white death sit on thy cheek for ever,
We'll ne'er come there again."

(II.iii.66-72)

Helena's cheeks are strangely eloquent for a "simple maid." The King answers just as expected, with a reinforcement of his stake in the affair, in effect an authorisation for Helena's unusual power:

Make choice, and see,
Who shuns thy love shuns all his love in me.

(II.iii.72-73)

Still more troublesome, Helena next moves into a gratuitous exhibition of her influence, pausing before each of the unchosen wards long enough to suspend above them her Damoclean sword and then to withdraw it in a gesture of mercy. But when she actually reaches Bertram, Helena divests herself of her new-found supremacy:

I dare not say I take you, but I give
Me and my service, ever whilst I live,
Into your guiding power. This is the man.

(II.iii.102-04)

Though she ends, typically, with an assertion of her choice, Helena stops short of enforcing her desire. Significantly, she offers a full retreat immediately after the King's furious recitation of the scope of his power against Bertram: "That you are well restor'd, my lord, I'm glad. / Let the rest go" (II.iii.147-48). This is a moment of some consequence in the play,

and especially in a study of its power relations. Helena withdraws her demand, the power she has gained passes back to the King, and Bertram's refusal accordingly transforms from an offensive social discrimination into an issue of paternal and political allegiance:

> My honour's at the stake, which to defeat,
> I must produce my power. Here, take her hand,
> Proud, scornful boy, unworthy this good gift,
> That dost in vile misprision shackle up
> My love and her desert; that canst not dream
> We, poising us in her defective scale,
> Shall weigh thee to the beam; that wilt not know
> It is in us to plant thine honour where
> We please to have it grow. Check thy contempt;
> Obey our will which travails in thy good;
> Believe not thy disdain, but presently
> Do thine own fortunes that obedient right
> Which both thy duty owes and our power claims;
> Or I will throw thee from my care for ever
> Into the staggers and the careless lapse
> Of youth and ignorance; both my revenge and hate
> Loosing upon thee in the name of justice,
> Without all terms of pity.
>
> (II.iii.149-66)

Bertram relents only when the King threatens him with a reduction of his status and a thwarting of any future aspirations to nobility, in effect an inversion of his promise to ennoble Helena.

But the justice of Helena's claim and the enforced authority of the King are also subject to scrutiny in All's Well That Ends Well. Bertram's initial response to his predicament must strike us as eminently justifiable, and actually echoes the objection of Hermia in A Midsummer Night's Dream whose subjection to an arranged marriage and tyrannical patriarchy is universally despised:

> My wife, my liege! I shall beseech your highness,
> In such a business give me leave to use
> The help of mine own eyes.
>
> (II.iii.106-08)[205]

And Bertram's attempt further to defend himself advances a key argument against the reasoning of the King, one which throws into relief the alliance between Helena and the patriarchy and, obliquely, the uncertain connection between knowledge and power:

> King. Know'st thou not, Bertram,
> What she has done for me?
> Ber. Yes, my good lord,
> But never hope to know why I should marry her.
> King. Thou know'st she has rais'd me from my sickly bed.
> Ber. But follows it, my lord, to bring me down
> Must answer for your raising?
>
> (II.iii.108-13)

Bertram's point is well-taken; his own callowness and Helena's virtue notwithstanding, the enforcement of a socially inferior match upon one of his wards underlines the King's ambivalent exercise of authority founded upon self-enhancing knowledge.[206] Bertram's worth, in other words, is not relevant

to the ethical value of Helena's exercise of power.[207] But Helena's activity continues to be imbued with some virtue, though our sympathy and the sense of her innocence rapidly decrease as she gathers matters into her own hands. Helena's utter submission to Bertram's will as he prepares to shirk his matrimonial obligations certainly sounds like superficial humility, a knowing deferral to his desires. But when next we meet Helena, reporting to the Countess and musing over the contents of Bertram's riddling letter, we witness a solitary expression of her desire for self-effacement, an appropriate reversal of her now repented self-assertion:

> I will be gone;
> My being here it is that holds thee hence.
> Shall I stay here to do't? No, no, although
> The air of paradise did fan the house
> And angels offic'd all. I will be gone,
> That pitiful rumour may report my flight
> To consolate thine ear. Come, night; end, day;
> For with the dark, poor thief, I'll steal away.
> (III.ii.122-29)[208]

Critics who insist upon Helena's complete control of events throughout the play must retreat here into an unprovable proposition, that Helena actually manipulates the audience's knowledge of events--and so undermines the comfortable stability of our usual perspective--just as much as she does that of her fellow characters. These same critics argue that Helena's arrival in Florence, a city quite in the opposite direction of her announced destination, is nothing less than proof of this deliberate misrepresentation of her intents. Her subsequent bribery of the Widow and her invention of the bed-

trick seal the conviction--usually couched in faintly disapproving terms--that Helena is a wilful and conniving woman.

But with a play as protean as All's Well That Ends Well, the case would seem to be more complex. Certainly Helena knows where Bertram is to be found, though her presence in Florence is just as likely one of Shakespeare's notorious geographic slips as evidence of deliberate misdirection. Similarly, she must know that the habit of pilgrim is appropriate to her destination, since the Widow first sees her as another potential client: this makes the point, again, that if Helena has deliberately mistaken her way, it is not her mistake alone ("of enjoin'd penitents / There's four or five, to Great Saint Jaques bound, / Already at my house" [III.v.93-95]). But Helena could not have known that she would meet up with the Widow and Diana, nor that Bertram would already have secured a reputation for rakishness (though she certainly had her suspicions). She could not have anticipated, in other words, that the stage would be set for the fulfilment of Bertram's seemingly impossible conditions, a feat which does not enter into her thoughts until she has accidentally encountered her future accomplices.[209] In fact, the idea is actually suggested by the Widow: "I warrant, good creature, wheresoe'er she is, / Her heart weighs sadly. This young maid might do her / A shrewd turn if she pleas'd" (III.v.66-68). In her first few moments in Florence, then, Helena realizes that circumstances are very auspicious and that she may, if she acts with haste and precision, enjoy more of Bertram than his sight. At this point in the play, Helena's control of events is absolute, and the level of ambivalence surrounding her power is proportionately reduced. Helena's bribery of the Widow has evoked much harsh commentary. It is, however, obvious from the Widow's first view of Helena that she has a healthy business

sense:

> Look, here comes a pilgrim. I know she will lie at my house; thither they send one another. I'll question her: God save you, pilgrim! Whither are bound?
>
> (III.v.30-33)

Still, that Helena "knowingly" secures the widow's favour by offering to "bestow some precepts of this virgin, / Worthy the note" (III.v.99-100) is without doubt a potentially exploitative move, not because she is taking unfair advantage of the Widow, but because she works from a position of superior knowledge: the Widow's mercenary interests have not escaped Helena's notice. Helena's much-derided offer of additional remuneration for assistance, once the bed-trick has been devised, far from glossing over the widow's reservations, just gives her what she wants. Once the financial arrangements are settled, the ethical complications (of the bed-trick itself and of Helena's engineering of it) are duly contained in a riddle, a form of expression fundamentally dependent for significance upon a disparity of knowledge.

This disparity is, of course, at the very heart of Helena's ability to win Bertram. Most obvious is the disparity between Helena's and Bertram's knowledge of Parolles's character, one which suggests, by the nature of their association with him, something of their own personalities. Helena, as we have noticed, sees Parolles as clearly as she sees herself. Bertram, however, is not so sharp. In an attempt to teach the young Bertram the nature of the company he keeps, the two Lords Dumaine stress how ill he really knows Parolles:

First Lord. Believe it, my lord, in mine own direct
knowledge, without any malice, but to speak of
him as my kinsman, he's a most notable coward . . .

Second Lord: It were fit you knew him.

(III.vi.7-13)

Significantly, Bertram himself (as he rightly fears) figures in Parolles's confession, a connection which suggests that the self-knowledge which Parolles gains by his shameful experience could well be imitated by Bertram (that it is not is one of the residual difficulties of the play). Furthermore, Parolles's exposure--both its inception and fulfilment--alternates in the play's construction with the planning and execution of the bed-trick. This is surely not a coincidental occurrence,[210] and the parallel experience of the two victims marks their relation: both are gulled by their own lack of knowledge, Parolles in failing to recognize the voices of his colleagues, and Bertram in failing to know his wife in the very act of "knowing" her. That Helena devises a way of fulfilling conditions Bertram considers impossible, and that her ability to succeed in fulfilling them is based largely upon a shrewd knowledge of the workings of the personalities with whom she interacts, makes Bertram's parting shot to Helena seem distinctly misassigned:

For my respects are better than they seem,
And my appointments have in them a need
Greater than shows itself at the first view
To you that know them not.

(II.v.66-69)

Bertram's eventual prostration before the superior knowledge of Helena--to which he assigns the final condition of acceptance ("If she, my liege, can

make me know this clearly / I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly" [V.iii.309-10])--nicely marks the nature of her victory.

And yet, in another reversal, the bed-trick does achieve desirable ends. The entire episode centres upon the exchange of rings which variously represent social continuity, an idea with important connections to Helena's healing of the King. Bertram's seduction of Diana is focused upon the exchange of rings. His ring, which he initially refuses to surrender, represents the value of his ancestry, precisely that which informed his derision of Helena earlier in the play:

> It is an honour 'longing to our house,
> Bequeathed down from many ancestors,
> Which were the greatest obloquy i' th' world
> In me to lose.
>
> (IV.ii.42-45)

But Diana makes an analogous argument for the value of her "ring", which logically turns Bertram's proposal into an assault on her honour. Sensing defeat, Bertram gives up his jewel, and vows to "be bid by thee" (IV.ii.53), surrendering with as little struggle as Parolles. That the ring will eventually make its way onto the finger of Helena, and that her chastity in turn will be possessed and transformed by Bertram into a continuation of both their ancestries, makes this initial exchange of rings richly symbolic. And, insofar as the exchange of power goes, though Bertram gives control to Diana in an attempt to realize his lust, Helena will--as Diana proposes--give up her control by putting upon Bertram's finger the ring given her (hindsight tells us) by the King, and so relinquish the power of that alliance. The bed-trick, then, potentially represents a kind of levelling of power.

But the problems with Helena's control persist. We learn that she has secretly gained the confidence of the rector of St. Jaques and enlisted his aid in publishing her death throughout the realm. It may be objected, as it frequently is with seemingly minor textual discrepancies, that these puzzling circumstances would hardly trouble the theatre-goer and so need not concern the critic, that they are insignificant details admitting of no measured examination. But Shakespeare brings attention to the issue himself by having the Second Lord specifically ask for the authority of the report (IV.iii.52). Helena's behind-the-scenes manoeuvres are clearly important enough to warrant our attention. And in the play's concluding scene, Helena orchestrates an elaborate revelation rivalling anything that Vincentio or Prospero could invent, and deliberately brings the entire court to chaos and submission. She arrives on cue, a flesh and blood fulfilment of Diana's riddle, and reveals her possession of Bertram's ring and the conception of their child in a strangely garbled, hurried recital of the conditions he had set:

> There is your ring,
> And, look you, here's your letter. This it says:
> <u>When from my finger you can get this ring</u>
> <u>And is by me with child, &c</u>. This is done;
> Will you be mine now you are doubly won?
>
> (V.iii.304-08)

It is a masterly move, taking all entirely by surprise, and dazzling them by her miraculous appearance. Much of the scene revolves around the concept of knowing, with Bertram, Diana, Parolles, Lafew, and the King in turn insisting--with varying degrees of truth--upon their recognition and correct interpretation of various ontological realities in a frantic bid for sanity

and self-assurance. It is Helena, however, who holds the key to all their knowledges, and it is because he has yet to learn the full story that the King checks the harmonious tone in the play's notoriously inconclusive concluding lines:

> Let us from point to point this story know
> To make the even truth in pleasure flow.
> . . .
> All yet seems well, and if it end so meet,
> The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet.
>
> (V.iii.319-28)

The play ends, then, on a note of expectant harmony. That the expectation will be fulfilled is by no means certain. While it may be futile to speculate on a play's afterlife, All's Well That Ends Well invites such analysis by casting whatever resolution is eventually to be achieved into a post-textual realm. In all probability, Helena will reveal, to the satisfaction of the King, that "all is well" as far as her fulfilment of Bertram's tasks is concerned. But there are hints of discord which such a tale will be unable to resolve. Lafew's daughter, presumably another of Bertram's cast-offs, receives no further mention; Bertram's own change of heart is anything but convincing, sparked by the overwhelming pressures of the moment and showing no indication--as his counterpart in Painter's tale did--of a considered repentance; the King's offer of her choice of husband to Diana poignantly questions both the wisdom and justice of his authority; and Helena's dominance shows no signs of waning. All of these residual difficulties are related to the various manifestations of Helena's exercise of power--one derived from an unorthodox possession of knowledge--as a means of

fulfilling individual will. In other words, that Helena has indeed cured the King of his ailment is slowly overshadowed by the other repercussions of her knowledge, the most troublesome of which is, insofar as the comic genre is concerned, her single-handed control of events. To return to the play's sources, one might propose that, by combining the knowledge of Giletta with the know-how of Helen of Troy in the character of Helena, Shakespeare has created a force too unwieldy for comedy. Unlike her sister heroines, Helena has not shared her fate in love with any other female character; her active role in the play has not been mitigated by the parallel circumstances of a Celia, Nerissa, or Olivia, nor by the relieving force of multiple marriages at play's end. The sole heroine in the sole romantic plot in All's Well That Ends Well (the only other hint of love is openly abandoned early in the play) must then bear the responsibility for social renewal. It is a responsibility far too great for any single character to carry out within the bounds of as social a form as Shakespearean comedy, in which a levelling of powers is requisite to satisfactory resolution. Helena's unrestricted personal authority seems in large measure to be the "problem" of this comedy.

Measure for Measure

The title of this most intellectually complex of Shakespeare's comedies is deceptively neat. Both in phrase and meaning it suggests a balanced, symmetrical presentation, anticipates an ultimate equilibrium. But the text which the title brackets is anything but eurhythmic, and the title itself bears the weight of essentially incompatible concepts of justice.[211] Representing both the Hebraic lex talionis and the proverbial lesson of the Sermon on the Mount, the play called "Measure for Measure" simultaneously invokes retribution and mercy, though it does not imagine them inertly deadlocked. Because the play is a comedy, it represents change, it moves--in however circuitous a way--from the law of revenge (an anti-comic maintenance of divisions) to the law of forgiveness (a debilitation of those divisions in a recognition of essential parity).[212] In other words, the comic structure of Measure for Measure may be understood--if we are to take the hint afforded by the title--as aspiring to displace ruthless with merciful jurisdiction. This much most commentators of the play could agree upon; the degree to which merciful jurisdiction is actually achieved, however, is very much in dispute, and the dispute is centred by and large upon the representative of authority in the play, the Duke of Vienna.[213]

The most striking difference between Measure for Measure and its major sources is the development of the role of the Duke into the play's central character.[214] In earlier versions of the corrupt magistrate story, the supreme authority figure is ignorant of his deputy's manoeuvres, and is brought in as the arbiter of true justice only when the worst has been done. In Cinthio's Hecatommithi, the Emperor Maximian the Great also appears at the beginning to delegate power to his Governor:

> Iuriste, the good opinion I have conceived of you while you have been in my service leads me to send you as Governor of so noble a city as Innsbruck; concerning the rule of which I could command you many things. However, I would compress all these into one; which is, that you keep justice inviolate. . . . I can forgive you all other failings, . . . but any deed which is contrary to justice shall receive no pardon from me.[215]

Although the Emperor establishes the tale's juridical context, he too, as a framing device, is entirely absent from the internal plot. Shakespeare's version of the tale, however, brings this peripheral character into the very centre. In so doing, Shakespeare achieves two complementary effects, both of which bear upon the presentation of authority in Measure for Measure. First, the pivotal role of the (virtually) omniscient Duke dramatically and thematically yokes power with knowledge; and second, the Duke's ubiquity steers the play safely into comic waters. While the comedy of Measure for Measure is muted at best, especially by comparison with a comic masterpiece like Twelfth Night, one cannot fail to notice that both the expansion of the Duke's role and the cumulative effect of all of Shakespeare's changes expressly mitigate the tragic dimensions of the tale.

The foregrounding of authority and comedy seems then to have been important to the composition of Measure for Measure. Judging by the divergent critical views of both of these components, one would think Shakespeare missed the mark. Dubbed a "problem" play nearly one hundred years ago,[216] Measure for Measure continues to pose serious difficulties for critical exegesis, a practice which has traditionally sought coherent patterns of meaning. Many a

new attempt to advance understanding of the play seems to accomplish little more than a momentary shift in the critical balance of views (weighing, in reductive terms, satisfactory against unsatisfactory comic resolution). Even Clifford Leech's seemingly-conclusive article, "The `Meaning' of Measure for Measure," heralds a study which resolves only the irony of its own lofty title. It may be, then, that at least part of the reason for the failure of criticism fully to account for the "meaning" of the play is due to the failure of the patterns to fit the work in which they are sought. To restrict the point to the study at hand, if one looks at the representation of authority in the play without considering its generic casing, one will find it sliding, often imperceptibly, between abusive and benevolent manifestations with no apparent settlement: the Duke's strange behaviour--working towards social order and yet doing so with discomfitting manipulation--would seem to indicate a fundamental pluralism regarding the nature of authority. However, if one seeks a broader pattern, if one views the presentation of authority together with the dramatic structure (if, in other words, one tries to explain Shakespeare's two primary changes to the sources as the composite, irreducible problem of the play), Measure for Measure no longer appears to be a comedy manqué.[217]

The kind of authority depicted in Measure for Measure necessitates no less than an expansion of the parameters of comedy. This new form may usefully be described as a dramatic palimpsest the two layers of which correspond to two versions of the same story. In the most easily-legible version, the Duke guides his erring subjects toward harmonious coexistence. In these terms, the Duke himself is in complete control because he has the greatest degree of self-knowledge, and the challenges to his authority are accordingly easily overcome. In this version, the figure of false authority

is Angelo, and his exercise of power is set in opposition to the benevolent authority of the Duke. On this level of the play, the dynamics of authority generally follow the pattern I have been tracing in Shakespeare's earlier comedies: the false authority is overcome by the superior knowledge of one of his "subjects" and, although here he is stripped of his power, he is brought over the course of the play to a heightened self-knowledge which would, presumably, enable him to exercise authority more justly in any future delegations. This text ends with the restoration of order and the promise of social renewal.[218] But it forms only the superficial dimension of the document with which we are engaged. Beneath the surface of the happy comedy may be seen traces of an earlier text, as it were, one which does not easily settle into any kind of harmony, which, quite to the contrary, foregrounds the dubious nature of the "benevolent" authority exercised by the Duke. In this text, the Duke himself appears to have caused the comic impasse of the play, and the requisite for satisfactory closure is, accordingly, a redefinition of his authority. Because of the widely-differing roles of the Duke in each of these two texts, one of which has him fully in control of the other characters, and the other the subject of our scrutiny, the actual level of his self-knowledge, the single most important quality of true authority in Measure for Measure, is problematized.

In the surface text of the play, in what may be called the Duke's comedy, the investigation of authority proceeds generally in the manner of As You Like It or Love's Labour's Lost. Vienna has become a corrupt society, and the Duke has devised the best means of rectifying what is, he acknowledges, the result of his own leniency. The appointment of Angelo is ostensibly a move toward re-ordering the realm, and it provides an opportunity for the Duke to outline the

elements of just authority: equity, temperance, and the knowledge (based upon self-knowledge) judiciously to administer a balance of "Mortality and mercy," the power justly to "enforce or qualify" the laws. Angelo, however, proves to be less than fit for the task, and the repeated derision of authority throughout the play--strictly speaking, these are reflections upon false authority only--points up his failure.

Angelo's harsh application of the letter of the law is without question tyrannical within the context of Shakespearean comedy. Most obviously, Claudio, his prime victim, is drawn in terms which throw into relief the anti-comic characteristics of the deputy. We first learn of Claudio's arrest from the indelicate Mistress Overdone, who informs us in no uncertain terms that "within these three days his head [is] to be chopped off" (I.ii.62-63). The offence: "for getting Madam Julietta with child" (I.ii.66-67). As Claudio himself puts it in a moving, passive writing metaphor emphasizing the public dimension of love, "The stealth of our most mutual entertainment / With character too gross is writ on Juliet" (I.ii.143-44). She is, he clarifies, "[u]nhappily" with child (I.ii.145). This unwanted new life contrasts darkly with Claudio's great fear of death, and his strong desire to live reinforces the comic values which the child should represent:

> The weariest and most loathed worldly life
> That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature, is a paradise
> To what we fear of death.
>
> (III.i.128-31)

Angelo, then, in arresting the only fruitful love in Vienna is, in terms of the Duke's comedy, poised for a fall.

But the deputy's fault as a figure of authority cuts deeper yet. Finding himself enamoured of the virtuous Isabella, he abuses his superior position by falsely promising absolution for Claudio if she yield to his lust. His insistence on enforcing the law against lechery, then, is coloured by his own participation in the crime, and here Angelo fails the test of self-knowledge as the magistrate's primary guiding principle:

> Merciful Heaven,
> Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
> Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
> Than the soft myrtle. But man, proud man,
> Dress'd in a little brief authority,
> Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd--
> His glassy essence--like an angry ape
> Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
> As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
> Would all themselves laugh mortal.
>
> (II.ii.115-24; emphasis added)

The contrast between merciful heaven and the jurisdiction of proud man is between just discrimination and a naive, univocal enforcement of power.

Angelo's false authority is clearly a comic impasse in the surface text of Measure for Measure: he must be overcome if the play is to arrive at the kind of resolution which its structure leads one to expect. But Angelo shares responsibility for the comedy's arrest with Isabella, who reveals disturbing affinities with the deputy she scorns. Not only is she in essential agreement with Angelo about the gravity of Claudio's crime, but she herself also values excessive, anti-comic restraint when she desires to increase the already

severe restrictions of the cloistered life she hopes to adopt.[219] Isabella, too, seems not to have come to terms with her own sexuality. For instance, several times in the play she unintentionally miscarries her meaning in such a way that her words disclose a deep-seated anxiety about sexual restraint. Her very first lines in the play make this suggestion:

> Isab. And have you nuns no farther privileges?
>
> Nun. Are not these large enough?
>
> Isab. Yes, truly; I speak not as desiring more,
>
> But rather wishing a more strict restraint.
>
> (I.iv.1-4)

The point of this opening interchange, surely, is not that Isabella is an exemplary novice nor that she secretly delights in mortification, but simply that her words say far more than she knows. The nun's mistaking of her meaning is exactly in line with our own, and we are grateful for the request for further explanation.

Knowing from Claudio that the persuasive force of Isabella's youth is enhanced by rhetorical skills,[220] and witnessing this first of her inadvertent linguistic slips, we rightly suspect the disastrous result of her interviews with Angelo. There, as many commentators have noticed, Isabella's eloquent argument for mercy is punctuated by sexually-ambiguous remarks: "Hark, how I'll bribe you: good my lord, turn back" (II.ii.146), "I am come to know your pleasure" (II.iv.31), "Sir, believe this: / I had rather give my body than my soul" (II.iv.55-56). Most poignant of all is Isabella's utter denunciation, such as it may be, of Angelo's argument:

> That is, were I under the terms of death,
>
> Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,

And strip myself to death as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame.

(II.iv.100-04)

More generally, Isabella's severe denunciation of Claudio's pleas to fulfil Angelo's ransom also carries more semantic weight than she imagines. First, her inappropriately grandiloquent greeting of the dispirited Claudio suggests the degree to which she already views him and Angelo (and perhaps all unhooded men) as confederates:

Lord Angelo, having affairs to heaven,
Intends you for his swift ambassador,
Where you shall be an everlasting leiger.

(III.i.56-58)

Then she unintentionally reverses her meaning in speaking of the "pang" of death:

The sense of death is most in apprehension;
And the poor beetle that we tread upon
In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies;

(III.i.77-80)[221]

and her subsequent outrage is disturbingly un-Christian:

Take my defiance,
Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death;
No word to save thee. (III.i.142-46)

This kind of obstinacy, coupled with Angelo's single-minded austerity, seals Claudio's doom.

That the Duke steps in at this point in the play is, in terms of the comic structures I am tracing, a dramatic necessity.[222] The characters have arrived at an impasse, and the comedy threatens to take a decidedly tragic turn without the intervention of an external agent. The Duke's invention of the bed-trick, then, is a means of saving the play as comedy.[223] His proposal has the additional virtue of resolving a pre-textual injustice. If it is successfully carried out, the bed-trick--as a synecdoche of the Duke's reparative powers--promises to return order to the realm. It is important to observe that the Duke himself is finally responsible for righting the troubles his leniency has caused. The deputization of Angelo, rather than investing a surrogate authority with the power to restore order, actually creates the ideal circumstances for the Duke's own intervention into his subjects' affairs. His incognito circulation among the inmates and visitors of the city jail increases the measure of his knowledge and puts him in direct contact with the problems which need to be worked out; his mendicant disguise, then, extends rather than limits the scope of his power.

The Duke's use of superior knowledge to engineer the bed-trick and to prevent the execution of Claudio is, at this level of the play, an entirely laudable basis for the exercise of authority. We never learn exactly how he has managed to secure Mariana's trust, but certainly his habit and an avowed intimacy with Angelo could have served well. When he steps in to overturn the imminent tragedy, the Duke claims just such an intimacy to Claudio, and assures him that Angelo's proposal was meant as an exercise in "his judgement

with the disposition of natures" (III.i.162-63): "I am confessor to Angelo, and I know this to be true" (III.i.165-66). That the Duke subsequently confirms the death sentence may, if we are to give him the benefit of the doubt, be read as a necessary fabrication enabling him quickly to turn to Isabella. (Claudio does, after all, learn of his own rescue--and presumably of the Duke's involvement--before any of the other main characters.) Claiming that "fortune hath conveyed [Angelo's assault] to my understanding" (III.i.184), and then openly agreeing with Isabella's harsh condemnation of Angelo, the Duke strategically intervenes with his own solution, basing his credibility on his habit, figuring himself as the passive recipient of an auspicious "remedy", and tacitly invoking the Duke's approval:

> [F]asten your ear on my advisings, to the love
> I have in doing good; a remedy presents itself.
> I do make myself believe that you may most uprighteously
> do a poor wronged lady a merited benefit; redeem your
> brother from the angry law; do no stain to your own
> gracious person; and much please the absent Duke, if
> peradventure he shall ever return to have hearing of this
> business.
>
> (III.i.196-204)

The Duke then leads Isabella--with calculated rhetorical skill--through the tragic tale of Mariana and, having secured her sympathy, insinuates that her cooperation is the <u>sine qua non</u> of Mariana's happiness. Isabella's prostrate "Show me how, good father" (III.i.238) marks the Duke's success. He subsequently launches a detailed plan of action and Isabella departs with thanks and relief: "I thank you for this comfort. Fare you well, good

father" (III.i.269-70).

The Duke has rather more difficulty convincing the Provost to delay Claudio's execution. Again, he alludes to his special knowledge:

> There is written in your brow, Provost, honesty and constancy; if I read it not truly, my ancient skill beguiles me. But in the boldness of my cunning, I will lay myself in hazard. Claudio, whom here you have warrant to execute, is no greater forfeit to the law than Angelo who hath sentenced him. To make you understand this in a manifested effect, I crave but four days' respite.
>
> (IV.ii.152-60)

Failing to secure the Provost's trust by the appeal to "the vow of mine order" (IV.ii.168) and the promise that "If anything fall to you upon this, more than thanks and good fortune, by the saint whom I profess, I will plead against it with my life" (IV.ii.177-80), the friar-Duke draws upon his unusual acquaintance with the Duke, offering for the Provost's inspection his hand and seal, and the confidential information that his imminent return "is a thing that Angelo knows not" (IV.ii.198). Without shedding his disguise, the Duke reveals enough of his actual plans that the Provost is amazed and won over. The scene ends with the Duke herding the Provost to his new commission, assuring him that "all difficulties are but easy when they are known" (IV.ii.204-05).

The bed-trick and the saving of Claudio go off, with a few minor adjustments, as planned and the false authority is publicly exposed in a

dexterous coup de théâtre. Mariana is restored to her husband, Claudio and Julietta are reunited, Escalus and the Provost rewarded for their good efforts, Lucio justly punished, and Isabella offered an attractive proposal:

> She, Claudio that you wrong'd, look you restore.
> Joy to you, Mariana; love her, Angelo:
> I have confess'd her, and I know her virtue.
> Thanks, good friend Escalus, for thy much goodness;
> There's more behind that is more gratulate.
> Thanks, Provost, for thy care and secrecy;
> We shall employ thee in a worthier place.
> Forgive him, Angelo, that brought you home
> The head of Ragozine for Claudio's:
> Th'offence pardons itself. Dear Isabel,
> I have a motion much imports your good;
> Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline,
> What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine.
> So bring us to our palace, where we'll show
> What's yet behind that's meet you all should know.
>
> (V.i.522-36)

In the Duke's summary move, Measure for Measure does indeed have a satisfactory comic conclusion: with the exercise of superior knowledge, the Duke has brought his citizens to a renewed appreciation of the value of mercy in dealing with one another; and mercy is, as a type of social leveller, an exemplary comic virtue. There can be no question, at this level of the play, that the Duke's authority is revitalized by the power his knowledge has enabled him to display.

And yet there is something hurried and contrived about the Duke's concluding remarks, as though he takes advantage of his mesmerized audience prematurely to tie up loose ends. And there is another voice sounding at the play's conclusion, that of the incorrigible Lucio, who accepts the Duke's reduction of his sentence with far too little gratitude: "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, / Whipping, and hanging" (V.i.520-21). More generally, this is the voice of the play's indelible subtext, the version which the Duke's comedy overwrites but which is detectable with only a minor adjustment of the viewer's perspective. To re-read the play in this light is to discover another whole complex of meanings and associations, a version of the play in which the Duke's behaviour and exercise of authority become the subject of scrutiny.

In the substratum of the play, the Duke's departure from Vienna in a time of near-crisis and his deputizing of Angelo are, at best, ill-considered. He opens with a generous statement of Escalus's unsurpassed wisdom, one whose sincerity must make us wonder why Escalus is not given control. Then, the Duke's almost self-congratulatory, impatient seeking of Escalus's opinion regarding the choice of deputy sounds out of key, as though he were inventing a game for an unsuspecting player rather than making a considered political appointment:

> What figure of us, think you, he will bear?
> For you must know, we have with special soul
> Elected him our absence to supply;
> Lent him our terror, drest him with our love,
> And given his deputation all the organs
> Of our own power. What think you of it?
>
> (I.i.16-21)

Escalus's reply is non-committal, and his hesitation to endorse the Duke's choice could conceivably be conveyed by a short pause:

> If any in Vienna be of worth
> To undergo such ample grace and honour,
> It is Lord Angelo.
>
> (I.i.22-24)

This is an important conditional statement. Is anyone worthy of such an honour? Is worth really the issue? The underside of the Duke's motives begins to show more clearly when Angelo appears. Greeting the Duke with exaggerated humility, Angelo is told that "There is a kind of character in thy life" (I.i.27) which betokens his future behaviour. Though the Duke is seemingly referring here to Angelo's virtue and potential leadership, the remark also suggests that, at this early stage of the play, the Duke already suspects the outcome of Angelo's new capacity. If this is the case, the Duke is abusing his position of authority; and the logical necessity of his long-standing, covert relationship with Mariana further undermines the sincerity of his announced motives. Moreover, Angelo's own discomfort with his deputation undercuts the Duke's good judgement:

> Now, good my lord,
> Let there be some more test made of my metal,
> Before so noble and so great a figure
> Be stamp'd upon it. (I.i.47-50)

The Duke's dismissal of Angelo's "evasion" and the brief though important acknowledgement that "[o]ur haste / . . . leaves unquestion'd / Matters of needful value" (I.i.53-55) makes furtive intentions more than likely.

Our misgivings about the Duke as an exemplary authority figure continue to develop in his next appearance, where he secures the help of Friar Peter in supplying him with the garments and rules of conduct which will enable him to cloak his identity. He justifies his deception of Angelo and "the common ear" by acknowledging that the rampant corruption and chaos in Vienna, nourished by fourteen years of neglect and incompetence, can only be rebated by "A man of stricture and firm abstinence" (I.iii.12). But the Friar detects the warped reasoning of the Duke, correctly pointing out that

> It rested in your Grace
> To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleas'd;
> And it in you more dreadful would have seem'd
> Than in Lord Angelo.
>
> (I.iii.31-34)

This objection unexpectedly puts the Duke in a defensive position and forces him to show his true colours:

> my father,
> I have on Angelo impos'd the office;
> Who may in th'ambush of my name strike home,
> And yet my nature never in the fight
> To do in slander.
>
> (I.iii.39-43)

Fearful of slander and his subjects' ill-will, the Duke has shirked his responsibility as a just ruler, passed a dirty job over to his deputy. But the Duke's rationale is more complex than this. Sensing perhaps that the Friar is not entirely satisfied with his explanation, he promises to render additional reasons for his action, and his hint confirms our initial

suspicion:

> Lord Angelo is precise;
> Stands at a guard with Envy; scarce confesses
> That his blood flows; or that his appetite
> Is more to bread than stone. Hence shall we see
> If power change purpose, what our seemers be.
>
> (I.iii.50-54)

The Duke's two purposes, the delegation of authority to re-order his mess and the testing of Angelo, do not sit well together. The nature of the contradiction is evident in the Duke's equivocal use of Angelo's severity: it is both a commendable and a reprehensible quality. Furthermore, the Duke's self-caricature early in this scene, where he states as fact (though the Friar's lack of response leaves the matter open-ended) that he is not enamoured of the jovial life, serves to link him with Angelo in more ways than one:

> Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
> Can pierce a complete bosom.
>
> . . .
>
> My holy sir, none better knows than you
> How I have ever lov'd the life remov'd,
> And held in idle price to haunt assemblies,
> Where youth, and cost, witless bravery keeps.
>
> (I.iii.2-10)

The affinity between the Duke's avowed "complete bosom" and Angelo's "firm abstinence" renders the mimetic value of the Duke's self-portrait questionable indeed. And his subsequent castigation of Angelo for this very quality admits

a hoodwinked self-knowledge. Taken together with the Duke's injudicious departure from Vienna, this slipped self-exposure suggests that, in the substratum of Measure for Measure, it is the Duke's misuse of authority which forms the play's comic impasse. It is he who must be brought to a new self-awareness and his exercise of authority that needs to be redefined.

But the Duke's self-subverting presence in the remainder of the play--self-subverting because he seeks to teach others the very self-knowledge he himself lacks--serves only further to emphasize his inadequacies as a figure of authority. Most obviously, he over-extends the power his cover lends him, and uses it to manipulate--as a real friar might--the inner lives of his subjects. Unlike King Henry V, who analogously mingles with his unwitting soldiers, the Duke fails to realize that, while "Every subject's duty is the King's, . . . every subject's soul is his own" (Henry V IV.i.176-77). He prepares Claudio to face a fictional death with a conventional consolatio speech so lacking personal conviction that it sounds like an uninspired rehearsal of a friar's role;[224] he simply lies to Isabella about Claudio's execution and unnecessarily makes her lament both his loss and the vicious injustice of Angelo; he has had so much sway over the conscience of the dejected Mariana that she feels guilty about enjoying innocent musical entertainment; and he arranges a sexual liaison whose ethical value is highly dubious.[225] In all of these cases, the Duke has used his superior knowledge to deceive his subjects, to inflict pain and fear; and his supporters are by no means convincing that he does so in order to bring Vienna to a moral awakening.[226] Little changes by the concluding scene.

The strongest challenge to the Duke's authority comes from the Viennese underworld, and especially from Lucio. Significantly, the Lucio character is

not part of Shakespeare's source materials, and the large role he plays in Measure for Measure would seem to suggest an important new addition. Lucio is usually best remembered for his "slander" of the Duke, but his role actually involves more than being the scapegoat rebel in need of reform. Before he encounters the friar-Duke, Lucio has positioned himself--perhaps somewhat excessively--on the side of the comic values which are under attack by the tyrannous Angelo:

> if myself might be [Claudio's] judge,
> He should receive his punishment in thanks:
> He hath got his friend with child.
>
> (I.iv.27-29)

Furthermore, Lucio alone is genuinely concerned about Claudio's welfare, and is given the play's only positive version of Julietta's pregnancy:

> Your brother and his lover have embrac'd;
> As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time
> That from the seedness the bare fallow brings
> To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb
> Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.
>
> (I.iv.40-44)

It is Lucio who coaches Isabella in her persuasion of Angelo, and throughout the barbarous reign of the deputy, he keeps reminding his neighbours that sending after and appealing to the Duke will fix everything.

Ironically, it is this very confidence in the mercy of the Duke that leads Lucio to offend. Like Isabella and Escalus, Lucio assumes that mercy is only possible where the judge has some firsthand experience of the crime he is

trying. Isabella denounces Claudio's crime as he calls her back:

> Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade;
> Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd;
> 'Tis best that thou diest quickly.
>
> (III.i.148-50)

Similarly, Escalus denounces Mistress Overdone's plea for a pardon with a personification of the kind of vice which alone would be moved by her crimes: "Double and treble admonition, and still forfeit in the same kind! This would make mercy swear and play the tyrant" (III.ii.187-89). In his first encounter with the Duke, Lucio makes just such a connection between the Duke's erstwhile merciful dealings and his own sensuous activities:

> Would the Duke that is absent have done this?
> Ere he would have hanged a man for the getting
> a hundred bastards, he would have paid for the
> nursing a thousand. He had some feeling of the
> sport; he knew the service; and that instructed
> him to mercy. (III.ii.112-17)

The Duke, of course, jumps in with a self-defence, but Lucio insists--in a manner reminiscent of the Duke's own tactics in winning the trust of his subjects--that "I was an inward of his" (III.ii.127), and that he therefore has inside information regarding the Duke's behaviour. When he turns from the Duke's lasciviousness to his duping of the "common ear" into thinking him wise, Lucio pushes the Duke into the precarious position of proclaiming his own virtue:

> The very stream of his life, and the business he hath
> helmed, must upon a warranted need give him a better

> proclamation. Let him be but testimonied in his own bringings-forth, and he shall appear to the envious a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier. Therefore you speak unskilfully: or, if your knowledge be more, it is much darkened in your malice.
>
> (III.ii.137-44)

What is notable about this passage is that the Duke claims, according to Renaissance political theory, private virtue on the basis of his public actions, but his public actions are not the reliable indicators of inner worth he would like them to be. True, we never learn whether Lucio's suspicions are well-founded, but his next statement, "Sir, I know him and I love him" (III.ii.145), has the ring of authenticity, and the angry threats of the Duke betray a weakness hastily-disguised:

> O, you hope the Duke will return no more; or you imagine me too unhurtful an opposite. But indeed, I can do you little harm.
>
> (III.ii.159-61)

Only as an afterthought does the Duke recover his role. Indeed, throughout the play, in moments of tension and self-doubt, he variously invokes his own authority, as though unable to remain hidden under his chosen cloak.

In solitude, the Duke moralizes this blow from Lucio and recoils into a discomfitting self-righteousness:

> No might nor greatness in mortality
> Can censure 'scape. Back-wounding calumny
> The whitest virtue strikes.
>
> (III.ii.179-81)

As a general observation, this statement need not refer to the speaker. But as commentary on a series of accusations which have revealed at least a susceptibility to if not an actual crime, the statement endows its speaker with "greatness" and "the whitest virtue" in a manner inviting of a scornful laugh. That the Duke anxiously seeks Escalus's opinion of his absent self at his earliest opportunity exposes the wound Lucio has opened. Lamenting the condition of the world in rather conspicuous terms, "There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure" (III.ii.220-21), the Duke enquires, "I pray you, sir, of what disposition was the Duke?" (III.ii.224-25). Escalus's response has often been understood as a statement of fact regarding the Duke's character. Actually, his judgement mentions only that the Duke "contended especially to know himself" (III.ii.226-27; emphasis added), but whether he was successful or not is unspecified. Similarly, his statement that the Duke was "a gentleman of all temperance" (III.ii.231) is incomplete, based as it is only upon a public assessment of his behaviour, and in any event Escalus seems to be preoccupied as he quickly moves on to more important issues. The scene ends with the Duke's choral soliloquy, in which he is thought to be commenting upon the false authority of Angelo. Following as it does upon his debilitating meeting with Lucio, it is likely that the speech also bears the weight of self-reference:

> He who the sword of heaven will bear
> Should be as holy as severe:
> Pattern in himself to know,
> Grace to stand, and virtue, go:
> More nor less to others paying
> Than by self-offences weighing. (III.ii.254-59)

An additional subversion of the Duke's omniscience and omnipotence occurs in his meeting with Barnardine, for whose head he has made far too confident a plan:

> Call your executioner, and off with Barnardine's head.
> I will give him a present shrift, and advise him for
> a better place.
>
> (IV.ii.205-07)[227]

Barnardine, however, is not so easily pliable. He is the most recalcitrant sort of criminal, one whose system of values has been inverted so that the threats of authority are simply ineffectual. We learn that he prefers the restraint of the prison to freedom, and see him rebuff the Duke with astonishing alacrity:

> Barn. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.
>
> Duke O sir, you must; and therefore I beseech you
> Look forward on the journey you shall go.
>
> Barn. I swear I will not die today for any man's persuasion.
>
> Duke But hear you--
>
> Barn. Not a word. If you have anything to say to me, come
> to my ward: for thence will not I today.
>
> (IV.iii.54-62)

The Duke's insistence that "to transport him in the mind he is / Were damnable" (IV.iii.67-68) sounds, in view of Barnardine's resolve, like a face-saving manoeuvre. One may expect the Duke to be suitably relieved when "heaven" auspiciously arranges Ragozine's death. Furthermore, the continued well-being of Pompey--who insists upon the affinity of his new lawful career

and his old--may be understood as a mark of the Duke's additional failure significantly to reform the licentiousness of the underworld.

Much as he would like to be renowned as the ideal Christian ruler, the Duke actually reveals failings which he shares with most of his subjects.[228] Most importantly, he lacks the kind of self-knowledge upon which true authority is based. In the fifth act of the play's substratum, the Duke's failings in his exercise of authority are foregrounded. Thinking his plotting has brought about a satisfactory solution to his subjects' difficulties, the Duke stages--literally--an elaborate revelation scene in which he is director and key player. This theatrical manner is not per se a sign of bad rulership; but the extent to which the Duke plays out his dual role--exaggerating his praise of Angelo, responding to Isabella's plea with cynicism and aloofness, introducing his own alter-ego in suspecting a "practice" behind her suit, and directing a cast of well-rehearsed assistants--suggests that his pleasure in Angelo's exposure is excessive. The pleasure stems, of course, from his superior knowledge in this scene, and it is appropriate that Friar Peter introduce the absent Friar Lodowick as a man capable of unravelling truth and falsehood "[w]hensoever he's convented" (V.i.160). When the Duke does re-enter in his former habit, he has the additional pleasure of exposing Lucio, who had irreverently interrupted the development of his playlet. This part of the scene works steadily toward a crescendo, with Lucio's accusations and the anger of Angelo and Escalus rising slowly towards a pitch, the unveiling of the Duke, and then immediately falling off to a deadening silence. If his power is based upon knowledge, then this is the moment of the Duke's greatest supremacy. As he is unhooded, his subjects realize the extent of his influence among them, and rightly fear his judgement. But the Duke does not

take the opportunity to exercise justice; rather, after an additional theatrical move in which he knowingly maintains his subjects in ignorance regarding the fate of Claudio, the Duke metes out mercy in much the same measure, presumably, as he had been doing for the past fourteen years. If the play's predominant conception of mercy as an act of empathy is recalled, then the good will of the Duke's merciful judgements is under scrutiny--not because mercy is to be scorned, but because its basis in an awareness of shared human weakness is unrecognized by the Duke. As he himself has remarked:

> When vice makes mercy, mercy's so extended
> That for the fault's love is th'offender friended.
>
> (IV.ii.110-11)

Does vice make mercy in the fifth act of Measure for Measure? Earlier in the play, the Duke has referred, at different times, to his weaknesses and to those of Angelo as "vice." It is not inconceivable that his failings continue into the play's final scene; certainly, the Duke seems not to have changed over the course of the play: he continues to rule single-handedly and does not participate in the levelling which he imposes upon the others.[229] The inequity of his judgement may also be gauged by the response of his subjects. Mariana presumably clings to Angelo, but how does the repentant Angelo--who is admirably willing to accept his due punishment--respond to his enforced marriage? How does Isabella, surely by now stunned by the Duke's series of revelations, take his proposal of marriage? The only oral response to the Duke's judgement is that of Lucio, whose boisterous exit leaves behind an echo defying even an inexplicably lightened sentence. The others presumably stand in amazement as the Duke orders them back into their proper motions and ushers them offstage with a promise to reveal what "you all should

know" (V.i.536).

The comic structure of Measure for Measure appears, then, to be double-edged. To return to the palimpsest metaphor, the play is made up of two complementary movements, one of which may be seen to proceed steadily towards a standard comic conclusion, while the other calls that process into question at every point. This is not to suggest, however, that the comedy itself is in question.[230] Rather, the play reveals that the comic structure accommodates itself to the measure of success with which authority is redefined. In the surface text of the play, one false authority is reformed by the subversive presence of an omniscient superior; in the substratum, another false authority is not reformed because of an ethically uninformed deployment of this same omniscience. This layered exploration of authority and concomitant expansion of the comic form make Measure for Measure Shakespeare's most complex study in the comic representation of power relations.

Conclusion

With the exception of The Taming of the Shrew and Measure for Measure, Shakespeare's comedies are not patently about authority. They more generally tend to dramatize the continually precarious balance between order and disorder, between the inclination to social stability and the ever-present threat of self-interest that is activated as soon as a number of individuals find themselves in a shared space. In their depiction of the difficulty of achieving community, however, the comedies necessarily investigate the nature of authority, for authority is--at all points of the social spectrum--the bond between unequal persons capable of preserving social order. The representation of authority in Shakespeare's comedies is, then, integral to their aesthetic form, so much so, in fact, that a community's success or failure to redefine its degenerate authoritative structures is concomitant with the measure of its ability to achieve traditional comic closure.

Tracing the representation of authority over the course of entire plays rather than limiting analysis to particularly suitable excerpts, and considering the impact of generic requirements on that representation makes possible a more complete understanding of Renaissance authority than that suggested by the New Historicists. When the representation of authority is understood as in some sense influenced by genre as well as being affected by the playwright's engagement with his society's dominant discourses, the field of investigation is considerably enlarged and complicated. This is not to deny that significant points of contact between playscripts and such texts as royal proclamations, religious treatises, personal correspondence, or sermons do not exist. Yet to take such connections as a license for glossing over the

significance of generic variations, for neglecting to define the manner in which the form of expression accounts for what gets said is dangerously to minimize, if not altogether to exclude, the possibility of deliberate, controlled, intentional acts of composition. The nature of genre as rhetorical strategy, as a principle of formal order deployed for its unique capacity to convey specific modes of expression or interpretation, must be considered before one settles on the meaning of a text. While crossing indiscriminately from one genre to the next, tracing patterns of thought and expression across texts only loosely related by historical position certainly has the advantage of highlighting shared or contested epistemologies, ideologies, or systems of faith, it is also attended by the temptation to overlook variations, to underplay individual compositional choices, and hence to risk diminishing both an individual text's potentia significans and the complexity of the cultural pattern to which it is thought to conform. Attending to genre in Shakespeare's comic conceptualization of authority liberates the plays from a narrow commitment to the interests of the ruling class, and this liberation enables a variety of perspectives on the nature of authority and power to emerge. It is this multiplicity, especially as it articulates a distinction between coercion and just rule, which makes social change possible in the worlds of Shakespeare's comedies; it may also suggest the existence of similar possibilities in Shakespeare's world.

But why, after all, is it important to know how Shakespeare or any of his contemporaries viewed authority? New Historicists have scarcely ventured to answer this question, to justify their interpretive choice, and when they do they unhesitatingly point to the authoritarian social and political organization of Renaissance England firmly convinced that the ideology of a

given society determines the extent to which power is operative in both governmental and cultural practices. Not only is this commitment to exposing the ideological underpinnings of a society's poetics an interpretative containment of the richness and variety of a period's cultural remains, but it is also informed by a self-serving and narrowly political rationale for the study of authority: the representation of authority in an absolutist and emergent capitalist state deserves study so that one's own political interests in promoting socialist ideals may find expression. As the New Historicists have been quick to point out about their own predecessors, the critic's political leanings invariably find confirmation in the object of study.

If the study of authority is to gain any kind of long-standing scholarly respectability, its justification must turn elsewhere, away from narrowly political academic concerns and towards an attempt fully to understand the significance of the New Historicists' own emphasis on the fact that speaking about power is empowering. What many of these critics have failed to consider is that the same principle applies to critical discourse on authority. As Annabel Patterson has observed, "Power is real, however imprecisely reality can be known or spoken of; and power therefore carries serious implications for those who elect to talk about it, not all of which are caused by the demands of a rigorous logic" (92). By studying authority in a period ostensibly safely removed from the present--a distance which is paradoxically emphasized in the repeated assertions of the impossibility of recovering anything like an accurate portrayal of the past--critics speaking publicly about power enter the political structures which operate in their own societies. What they are doing, at least in part, is articulating the kind of continuity between the past and the present which much recent critical theory

has laboured to subvert, a continuity which could, in light of the present study, suggest that the will to cooperation and community might not be altogether irrelevant to the functioning of authority in the late twentieth century.

Notes

1. Although there are many more New Historicist studies of authority than it would be practicable to list here, several key works may be singled out as by now standard examples of the approach. While scholars such as Stephen Orgel and Louis Adrian Montrose were "doing" New Historicism several years before anyone thought to give it a name, the term was not coined until Stephen Greenblatt used the label to identify the common thread of the essays collected in a special issue of Genre (15.1-2; 1982), and it is he who has spearheaded the entire movement, especially with his Renaissance Self-Fashioning (1980) which gave the nascent approach an entrée into the world of academic respectability. Greenblatt's most recent work is collected in Shakespearean Negotiations (1988) whose leading essay explicitly lays out the theoretical foundations of the approach and explains why he now prefers to call it the "poetics of culture." Other notable Shakespearean scholars who practice this kind of criticism are Leonard Tennenhouse (Power on Display, 1986) and Jonathan Goldberg (James I and the Politics of Literature, 1983). In England, a related approach has developed under the banner of "cultural materialism," and its most important proponent is Jonathan Dollimore (Radical Tragedy, 1984). For a study of the relationship between the two approaches see Don E. Wayne. In response to the rapid growth (and growth to esteem) of both approaches, many excellent overviews of recent studies have appeared, and these may be consulted for more complete assessments. Particularly useful are Howard and Montrose, both of whom welcome the new directions promised by the work they review, and Pechter whose reservations are a salutary counter-voice to what often sounds like a critical tidal wave of applause.

2. See also Neely, "Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourses."

3. This is the phrase used by Walter Cohen to describe the methodological weaknesses of New Historicism ("Political Criticism of Shakespeare" 34).

4. For an implicit critique of this very shortcoming, see Barroll's article on the tenuous connections between a performance of Richard II and the Essex plot, a connection that has become something of a locus classicus of New Historicism. Fletcher and Stevenson review the methodological difficulties of assessing the degree of disorder for all historians on pages 26-31.

5. As, for example, Greenblatt's construction of a model of all Renaissance authority on the basis of "the production and containment of subversion and disorder" in Thomas Harriot's report on religious conformity in the colony of Virginia and similar practices in Shakespeare's history plays ("Invisible Bullets," 1988). More generally, the trademark opening of a New Historicist study is the quotation of a date and narration of an apparently trivial incident which is eventually advanced as evidence of a pervasive cultural phenomenon.

6. See especially Dollimore (1984), Goldberg (1983), and Tennenhouse.

7. For a closely-related view of the relationship between authority and the physical conditions of the theatre, see Mullaney. The major exception to this trend in New Historicist studies of authority is Michael Bristol who has examined the real subversive value of popular culture and so has helped to expose the limitations of the totalizing conceptions of authority advanced by such critics as Dollimore and Greenblatt: "the larger issue of authority and

its allocation between the centers of political power and exceptional individual subjects, such as Shakespeare, has been, even in the most strongly revisionist critical texts, analyzed primarily in light of the image power has of itself as an infinitely resourceful center of initiative, surveillance and control" (6).

8. Foucault extends this view in "The Subject and Power."

9. Assessments of New Historicist studies of the individual plays may be found in their respective sections below. The more important studies of The Tempest (not included in the dissertation) are Barker and Hulme, Paul Brown, Cartelli, Leininger, and Skura.

10. See, also, her article "The Comedies in Historical Context" for a compelling argument in favour of historical criticism of the comedies.

11. Strier is one of the few New Historicists to cite Arendt (109).

12. The distinction is, of course, familiar enough from other Renaissance plays, and was, as Armstrong has argued, so pervasive a concern in the period that the contrast between tyrants and kings became a "definitive dramatic convention" (170).

13. In the dissertation, "comedies" refers to plays in which the value system attaches to the society rather than to the individual, plays whose dramatic structure accordingly transforms (or attempts to transform) social dissolution into resolution. The study is based on the first twelve of Shakespeare's comedies (The Comedy of Errors to Measure for Measure), though its thesis could usefully be extended to the four "romances." These plays have been

omitted in order to keep the dissertation to a reasonable length. Troilus and Cressida, on the other hand, has been omitted because its generic status is still in dispute.

14. See especially Dollimore, Goldberg (Voice Terminal Echo), Greenblatt (Self-Fashioning), and Heller and Wellbery.

15. See Cox (68 ff.) for a study of the difference between an Augustinian notion of "vulnerable" selfhood and the emergent theories of personal power in the Renaissance.

16. On mutuality as the ideal human relationship in Shakespeare's comedies, see Novy (1976).

17. I take issue, then, with Kirby Farrell's suggestion that, because there is no model of reasoned resistance to authority in the plays, characters react to authoritarian pressures by annihilating themselves, specifically by staging "play deaths" and by adopting disguises. This un-identity then enables them to act in the world and eventually to re-emerge in harmony with the community. I argue, on the contrary, that the dynamics of power relations in the comedies necessitate the reform of unjust authority and make room for a real subversive power of action on the part of individuals who act in the interest of comic restoration.

18. It is important to stress, in connection with the ultimate curbing of the power of action, that the words "individual" and "self" do not occur in the Shakespeare canon in their current usage.

19. Several critics have given considerable attention to this structural matter. Baldwin traces in the play an orthodox five-act structure; Harold Brooks views it more broadly as "harmonic" (56); Salgado suggests that the play is composed of inner and outer actions which are distinguished in terms of the working of time within them; and Freedman (1980) proposes a psychoanalytic solution: "The confusion of identity is . . . a necessary step in the recreation of [Egeon's] identity, a problem-solving device through which the frame plot is fulfilled" (363). Cox has most recently proposed that the style of the frame plot, derived from the native dramatic tradition, "creates problems for its characters that diminish the problems of the classic plot by comparison and italicize their artifice" (65), and that this arrangement constitutes a political statement: "one of the consistent qualifications of socially differentiated style in Shakespeare's early comedies is their openness to vestiges of medieval dramaturgy. If the well-made comedy was a sign of power, then Shakespeare's early comedies deconstruct not only the well-structured play but the social assumptions that gave rise to the ruling idea of such a play in the first place" (61).

20. As Dorsch has put it, "no producer in his senses would put on the stage two pairs of actors who could not be told apart" (12). The 1927 production at the Old Vic, for instance, had the twins wearing false noses, "two turned up and two turned down" (Dorsch 32, Foakes [1962] liii).

21. Harold Brooks, for instance, notices the difference in the Antipholi's personalities implied by the one-sided distribution of soliloquies (58).

22. The point is, of course, not that the characters take falsehood for truth (unlike the characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream, they are not manipulated by mischievous sprites), but that they fail to imagine an alternative truth. In this connection, Barber (1963-64) makes useful comments on the manner in which the levelling of individual perspectives creates a kind of pluralism in the play as a whole. In a different key, Crewe observes that the characters' faulty (because partial) perceptions set them all equally against the will of the playwright.

23. The importance of interpretation in the play is emphasized in the inordinately high proportion of reported lines: some 700 of an estimated total of 1700, according to Salgado (82). For an additional consideration of the reporting of events, see von Rosader, who argues that it is a structural technique meant to counteract the mechanization of the plotting.

24. For a lengthy comment on the critical dispute surrounding this stage direction, see Foakes (1962) 86.

25. This difference of temperament doubles as an implicit link between the twins and their parents: Antipholus of Syracuse's self-diminishment echoes that of his father at the beginning of the play, while Antipholus of Ephesus's forcefulness recalls the energy and assertiveness with which his mother has reportedly conducted herself in the face of tragedy, and looks ahead to her confident management of affairs in the play's concluding scene.

26. This would include the ironic report that Antipholus of Ephesus "preaches patience" to Dr. Pinch while Dromio "with scissors nicks him like a fool" (V.i.174-75). For a detailed discussion of patience in the play, see Sanderson.

27. This simple compositional fact receives various interpretations. Gwyn Williams, for example, suggests that the change is intended "to save the play as comedy" (64). Arthos studies Shakespeare's alteration of Plautus's Menaechmi in full.

28. As images and instruments of connectedness, the rope and chain fairly obviously function as counters to incipient individualism. This point is amply made in Henze's study of the function of the chain as a representation of requisite societal bonds. Henze ("The Comedy of Errors") writes that it "symbolizes the cohesion of society as it asserts its orderly supremacy over prostitutes, wayward husbands, shrewish wives, and lost brothers" (35).

29. Incidentally, Parker (1983) has proposed an intriguing solution to the apparent textual contradiction involving the grouping of parents and sons on the mast in Egeon's narrative: the chiasmus of I.i.84, she argues, "suggests a placing of the family members on the mast in such a way that a kind of crossing takes place there, too--each parent, bound to one end of the horizontal mast, gazing upon the twin most `cared' for, on the opposite half of the mast" (325).

30. The play's interest in the irritations of marriage as opposed to the rituals of courtship is pointed out by Barber (1963-64, 497).

31. For a full study of the relationship between Kate and Adriana, see Charles Brooks.

32. Harold Brooks also traces a link to the plight of Egeon: "It is to claim a sinking of identity in the marriage-relation, with the emergence of a new identity, where each is also the other, that Adriana uses the closely similar image in II.ii. In the play's harmonic structure, while [Antipholus of Syracuse's] soliloquy is thus recalled at that point, in its own place it recalls the situation of Egeon, who on virtually the same quest as Antipholus, has so risked his mortal identity that it is forfeit to the executioner" (58-59).

33. Adriana's three versions of marriage form a neat triptych, with the central panel (II.ii.119-29) harmoniously combining elements of exaggerated independence (II.i.10-41) and complete self-abnegation (II.ii.174-76).

34. See his highly original reading of The Comedy of Errors in terms of the playwright's function as either God or the "good physician."

35. William O. Scott also looks at identity in the play, though his discussion is restricted to Proteus. Scott suggests that by considering the Vertumnus myth as an additional source for the figure of Proteus, we may read his transformations as oscillations between a true and false self. But the explanation as to what constitutes each of the versions of the self is unsatisfactory: "The basic distinction is between Proteus's true self, defined by his commitment to Julia, and his false one, which arises from his attempt to force his attentions on Silvia" (288). The two selves are not so easily distinguished primarily because the play gives little in the way of standards for evaluating the truth and falsehood of a character's identity. Further, labelling certain conflicting behaviours "true" and "false" diminishes the complexity of Proteus's identity. A more satisfactory explanation may be taken from Goldberg (1986), who argues that "[t]he being of characters is their

textuality" (77). According to this conception, Proteus's "true" and "false" selves would really be equal components of a textually-bound identity, artificially separable only in the critical intelligence.

36. Robert Weimann's (1969) competing suggestion that it is Launce who descends from the medieval Vice, and whose production of shared laughter between audience and actor constitutes a critique of the aristocratic ideals enacted in the main plot, is less satisfactory. Support for Cox's argument may be found in Janette Dillon's study of solitude in Shakespeare where she writes that the morally autonomous, self-asserting, and self-defining protagonist of Renaissance drama descends from the Vice (44-45). One would be hard pressed, I think, to argue that Launce meets these criteria.

37. See, for example, Weller (1982) who writes that Proteus and Valentine "provide patterns for each other's actions and emotions, so that their progress through the play is not so much mirrored, as filled with echoes and syncopated repetitions" (350).

38. The confusion in the play about locales is only one of many "minor oddities" which have led Leech (1969) to conclude that "the play was finally put together in some haste" (xxxv). For the sake of consistency, I take the home of Proteus and Valentine to be Verona and their imperial destination Milan.

39. It should not surprise us that his primary means of deception later in the play will be verbal, and that words constitute his punishment at play's end.

40. For an illuminating discussion of the flurry of paper in this play and its connection to the protean nature of the language of love, see Kiefer.

41. I disagree, then, with Goldberg (1986) who considers voicelessness a mark of inferiority. Writing about Silvia's way of communicating her love, one which echoes Julia's self-negating tactics throughout, Goldberg argues that "Silvia is barred from discourse because of the limits that patriarchy enforces; but she is also barred because the language of love puts her in the position of mastery in which her beloved must be treated as servant" (74). But the effects of Silvia's strategy are made clear by the play: the next time we meet Silvia and Valentine, they are betrothed and have already planned an elopement. Given Valentine's obtuseness in the letter exchanging episode, we can assume that Silvia has been instrumental in advancing the relationship, that she has effectively mastered the situation and enforced her desire in spite of (or because of?) "the limits that patriarchy enforces." For an extension of Goldberg's argument regarding voice and power, see his "Shakespearean Inscriptions: The Voicing of Power." See also Farrell for a discussion of self-effacement as a strategy of self-empowerment.

42. The importance of balancing self and society is advanced, in a different way, by Slights (1983) in his study of the courtesy book tradition in The Two Gentlemen of Verona: "If the play hints darkly that pursuit of an external standard of perfection and lawless self-will both destroy social cohesion and civilized life, it also celebrates the communal happiness possible when people combine idealism with realistic understanding of human imperfection and join self-cultivation and self-assertion with respect for other people" (29).

43. There have been several recent socio-historical studies of authority in The Merchant of Venice. Engle sees the play's ubiquitous and impersonal power of exchange as a reflection of the emerging capitalist economy; Novy ("Giving") finds in the play evidence of Renaissance ambivalence towards the new individualism; Whigham looks at the play's embodiment of Elizabethan anxiety about social mobility; Tennenhouse argues that the play enacts Elizabethan investment of power in the patriarchal female; and Walter Cohen (1982) looks more generally at the critical problems involved in interpreting a work so obviously based in its socio-economic world.

44. In recent years, critical discussion of Portia has been polarized between a consideration of her submission to or rebellion against a constricting patriarchal society. For example, Hamill argues that the harmonious outcomes of the three major actions of the play depend, respectively, upon Portia's submission to her father's will, to civil law, and to the ring-bond, and Donow draws a moral distinction between Portia who observes her filial duty and Jessica who does not. In opposition to these views of Portia's generically-determined submission are the views of Berger (1981) and Cantor who understand Portia's role in the male lineage system as one of subtle subversion. For Berger, Portia "sink[s] hooks of gratitude and obligation deep into the beneficiary's bowels" (161) and so wrests power from her unsuspecting male associates; for Cantor, she defeats "all the various forms of law and custom which inhibit the lovers" (256).

45. Tennenhouse offers a helpful answer to the difficulty of reconciling the critical opposition outlined in note 40 (above) by proposing that Portia's power derives from her embodiment of--rather than submission to or rebellion against--patriarchal values. In a similar key, Moisan suggests that because the play itself, and not just any individual character, both participates in and separates itself from current economic discourse, its subversive force is effectively recovered by the onstage and offstage patriarchies.

46. Bellringer's study of Portia's flexibility as the play's answer to tensions between rigid controls and real human emotion, and Novy's look at the coexistence of otherness and self-assertion partially anticipate my reading. But these critics are in dialogue with those specifically interested in difference and identity in the play (for example, Cantor, Girard [1980], Howard ["Difficulties of Closure"], and Oz, in addition to the whole controversy surrounding the Christian/Jewish dichotomy [see note 50, below]), and do not concern themselves with flexibility as a source of power. Further, none of the studies of the play's collapsing binary oppositions connect that feature with its implicit valorizing of individual flexibility. On the importance of bonds in the play, see Danson, Fortin, Hinely (1980), and Sisk.

47. Among such readings is that of Carlson who generalizes Portia's situation into an emblem of "most comic heroines": "When we first meet her in The Merchant of Venice, Portia laments her powerlessness to choose--`O me, the word `choose'! I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike . . . Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse none?' (I.ii.21-25). Though Portia is as little a complainer as Rosalind is, she speaks for most comic heroines who find--as she does--lack of choice an overwhelming barrier"

(167). Carlson's premature closing of the quotation silences Nerissa's response, and so predictably supports the deduction that Portia is severely restrained. Such a limited view is of course limiting, and fails to appreciate the full rhythm of Portia's role. Likewise, Carlson's reading of Rosalind's ultimate marital subservience precludes consideration of all but the most obviously gubernatorial manifestations of her power. See my section on As You Like It.

48. Richard Levin (1985), too, observes that Portia is anything but helpless in this scene and throughout the play. In his study of the comedies as celebrations of self-serving and exclusive aristocratic societies, Levin's Portia is an ambitious, intelligent woman who "succeeds not because of her preeminent moral position, but rather because she successfully exploits opportunities that her privileges open up for her" (84).

49. Hence the obvious fallacy of the widespread notion that Portia must somehow overcome her father's will: according to Cantor, "[f]athers represent the power of convention and have to be defeated for the spirit of comedy to prevail" (251).

50. In the present context, the implicit connection between Portia, her father, and Bassanio, as revealed by his success, renders superfluous extended commentary on the procedure of choosing. I assume that Bassanio, having fulfilled the father's and the daughter's requirements, invites neither reproach nor exoneration.

51. The traditional hierarchical arrangement of husband and wife and its correspondence to political subjection is thought by many feminist critics to be an index of the complete subordination of women in marriage. See, for example, Williamson (1986).

52. Onions gives "[to] appropriate" as the current equivalent of "converted" in this line, but it is not inconceivable that the word also carries the more frequent sense of "[to] change into something else" (59).

53. In a related way, Bryant reads the entire play as a study of self-centredness in which Portia alone escapes the universal flaw. But he argues that, in saving Antonio, Portia actually works against her own interest. My analysis finds quite the opposite.

54. On the disturbing resemblances between Shylock and his Christian counterparts, see Bronstein, Landa, and Moody; and, in a broader sense, Girard (1980) and Howard ("The Difficulties of Closure").

55. Goldberg ("Shakespearean Inscriptions") attributes Portia's power in the trial scene not to her individual person nor to her understanding of the necessary balance between freedom and restriction of desire, but rather to her (unexceptional) management of an impersonal and ubiquitously available law: that Portia has a voice within the law means "not that it constricts and denies her, not that she must submit to the father, but that she becomes the father precisely because the law is not the father's and not exclusively a male territory" (120-21). On the whole, this makes very good sense, and frees critical debate about Portia from an undue (and largely fruitless) emphasis upon gender. Still, Goldberg casts the net too widely. Portia speaks not

because legal discourse is equally available to all, but because she enjoys the sanction of the cloak of (male) Doctor of Laws (a cloak, however, which she has actively solicited and which represents the consent of at least one widely-revered and learned man). And Portia does more than merely voice the law: she successfully internalizes the legal discourse and adds to it her own spontaneous resourcefulness; this combination enables her not only to voice but effectively to expand that discourse by inscribing within it its own countervoice, mercy.

56. The matter of bonds in the play is certainly more complex than the present analysis allows. The whole question of competing benevolent bonds, which brings into play additional elements of individual flexibility, is beyond the scope of the dissertation as it does not concern the adjustment of hierarchical relationships. The subject of the love/friendship conflict in The Merchant of Venice is, therefore, not treated here; it is treated at length by Geary, and, in a psychoanalytic reading, by Kahn ("The Cuckoo's Note"). In more general terms, Hinely ("Bond Priorities") discusses the manner in which all characters "are caught in the tensions generated by the play's effort to wring a festive resolution from the diverse impulses radiating from . . . conflicting human bonds" (218).

57. Parten (1982) and Williamson (1986) both read Portia's second surrender of the ring as a diffusion of the power of cuckoldry, her only source of influence in a patriarchal society. I argue that such a reading slights Portia and, more significantly, overlooks the value of her constructive contribution to curbing and reforming false authority.

58. The concept of balance enters into most critical discussions of the play. For Barber (1959), it is a balance between romantic and antiromantic structures; for Farrell, between individualism and authoritarianism; for Frye (1965), between the court and the forest; for Hayles, between self and other; for Hieatt, between pastoral and antipastoral; for Iser, between the latent and manifest meanings of words; and for Montrose (1981), between social process and comic form. Jenkins (1955) sees in the play's oppositions the creation of a pluralistic all-embracing view larger and more satisfying than any single one of its components. The pervasiveness of this critical pattern testifies to the play's attempt at achieving the harmony expected of the comic genre (pace Berry).

59. For additional views on authority in As You Like It, see Berry who identifies the desire for power as the play's driving force, and Montrose (1981) who studies the social tensions surrounding primogeniture.

60. In a related way, both Farrell and Hayles are aware of the requisite balance between individual and communal desires if social order is to be established. In a broader extra-textual context, Farrell, for example, suggests that Rosalind's "doubleness" (her relinquishing of self and her witty self-assertion at V.iv) "reflects the authoritarian and yet incipiently individualistic nature of contemporary culture" (83).

61. Bracher's article is pertinent to this discussion of division and unity. He posits that the major conflicts of the play are fuelled by the opposition between a view of the self as monolithic and as monadic (228), and that the play resolves the conflict by privileging the inclusive self which is characterized by plurality. In general terms, this division between notions of identity accords with my depiction of the court as a place where bonds are

sundered and Arden as a place where they are valued.

62. For the parallel in Rosalynde, see Bullough 2:168.

63. It is notable, in this respect, that the play's conclusion is initiated by the reconciliation of Oliver and Orlando. More particularly, Orlando's subduing of the snake is foreshadowed by Rosalind's observation to Silvius, "love hath made thee a tame snake" (IV.iii.69-70). The connection between authority and love is evidently an undercurrent of the play.

64. Thus Carlson and Erickson (Patriarchal Structures).

65. Frequently overlooked is the fact that it is Celia who always invokes the bond, and that she does so in anxious response to impending division between herself and her cousin.

66. Bullough 2:178.

67. The revision of Frederick's banishment of his daughter, and his subsequent motivation in seeking Oliver (to recover Celia rather than simply to line his pockets), also helps to buttress the justice of his (peripheral) inclusion in the play's comic closure.

68. Ironically, the meeting of Rosalind and Orlando, strictly speaking, is made possible by Oliver's betrayal of brotherly bonds. While this connection may be dismissed as merely accidental, it does, however obliquely, suggest the underlying connectedness between abusive and just authority I have been trying to document: abusive authority always contains the seeds of justice within itself. Rather than being overthrown or subverted, the abusive authority is restored to its own proper (legitimate) definition.

69. Bullough 2:172.

70. For the former view, see Barber (1959), Charlton, and Frye (1965), and, less ceremoniously, Bamber, and Nevo. For the latter, see Bono, Carlson, Erickson (Patriarchal Structures), Park, and Williamson (1986). Park reduces Shakespeare's treatment of Rosalind (and other comic heroines) to a trite formula: "Invent a girl of charm and intellect; allow her ego a brief premarital flourishing; make clear that it is soon to subside into voluntarily assumed subordination; make sure that this is mediated by love" (112). The tone of determinism and hopelessness here is characteristic of most of the second group of critics. Bono, however, does suggest that the play's metadramatic quality (specifically the magical elements and Rosalind's epilogue) offers a possibility for real inversion of female submissiveness.

71. To cite just two examples: Erickson too easily assumes that Orlando is mastered in love and that Rosalind uses her power "to disabuse Orlando of his stock notions of male and female roles in love" (Patriarchal Structures 69); and Garber goes even further, suggesting that Rosalind has successfully "transformed Orlando from a tongue-tied boy to an articulate and (relatively) self-knowledgeable husband" (112), a feat which Garber considers so integral to the play that it ought to be subtitled "The Education of Orlando" (104).

72. In this paragraph, I intentionally refer to Rosalind as Ganymede, and substitute for Ganymede the male personal pronoun, in order to highlight Orlando's point of view. Except for the prompted oblique reference at V.iv.28-29, Orlando always takes Ganymede as a boy, and their game, presumably, as a spontaneous and entirely voluntary amusement.

73. Curiously, it is often a feminist voice which exaggerates Rosalind's power: "Rosalind's decisions control the progress of As You Like It, and it is by her agency that the four couples assemble in the concluding nuptial dance" (Park 107). When this illusory power of Rosalind's is seen to be reinscribed by the patriarchy, one may expect the critic to lament its loss.

74. In The Merchant of Venice, Portia's personal and political sphere of influence created an excess of individual power which the comic conclusion could not absorb. Here, because Rosalind's role is more symbolic (as the power of love banished from the political sphere) than real, the communal harmony at the play's end is not threatened by residual individualism. Even Jaques, who has been pursuing connections with others throughout the play, departs to seek Frederick and the hermit, with whom he hopes to discover affinities. For an interesting study of Jaques in the context of Renaissance notions of solitude which bears out my reading of the play's valuation of human connections, see Kronenfeld.

75. It is significant, however, that Rosalind's countervoice here is Touchstone, who may well be the single most powerful character in the entire play. His self-sufficiency and sobering self-knowledge enable him to exploit the pretensions and blindnesses of his associates and so mark him out as the antithesis of the selflessness Rosalind labours to establish. His sardonic participation in the concluding nuptials is, then, something of a challenge to the idealistic order restored at play's end. For an interesting though overly optimistic study of Touchstone's and Rosalind's contrasting manipulative strategies, see Priest.

76. Beckman goes further, suggesting that Rosalind is a veritable concordia discors, reconciler of all of the play's oppositions.

77. Shakespeare makes the conjunction of these gender roles difficult to untangle by diminishing Rosalynd's response to Alinda's admonishment of her anti-feminine opinions in Rosalynde: "Thus (quoth Ganimede) I keepe decorum, I speake now as I am Alienas page, not as I am Gerismonds daughter: for put me but into a peticoate, and I will stand in defiance to the uttermost that women are courteous, constant, vertuous, and what not" (Bullough 2:181).

78. According to Carlson (who locates her reading in the tradition of Erickson and Park), "[t]he multiple marriages, ritual male-voiced pronouncements, women's silence, and return to order of [Shakespeare's comedies'] endings are signs of a return to a norm suspended during the middle of the play," a norm which means "an end to female freedom" (152). But male/female power relations are not an issue in As You Like It: nowhere in the play are power relations between genders rendered problematic and they are not, therefore, required to be resolved at play's end. The obvious parallelism between Orlando's and Rosalind's experiences in court, for example, shows that Shakespeare is more interested in the divisive power of abusive authority than in the struggle for power between genders. Patriarchal gender arrangements may not suit our tastes, but they are a given both at the beginning and at the end of As You Like It. Even if gender-based power relations were an issue in the play, Rosalind's surrender, such as it may be, would need to be located at the beginning of the play: her "power" over Orlando is a direct result of (and not a prelude to) her "submission."

79. Erickson, for instance, speaks of the paradox of a "benevolent patriarchy [which] still requires women to be subordinate" (Patriarchal Structures 32), and is happier with the disharmonious ending of Love's Labour's Lost in which women remain powerful and "patriarchal authority is presented as weak or nonexistent" (33).

80. Many critics have commented upon identity in the play. The strongest case for the centrality of this theme is made in psychoanalytic studies, for example, Freedman (1987), Huston, Moglen, and Porter Williams.

81. The general dimensions of this movement form the nexus of Slights's very useful study of the concept of recompense in the play: "In Twelfth Night, then, the comic movement from disorder to harmony is more particularly the transformation of isolation and fragmentation into mutuality and cohesion " (538).

82. The twinship of Viola and Sebastian is only the most obvious manifestation of this leitmotiv. In addition to the many verbal echoes among characters, others include the fundamental connection underlying the apparent impasse of Olivia and Viola's relationship; the eventual collapse of Feste's oscillation between himself and Sir Topas; the underlying similarity of Toby's and Malvolio's self-centred exercise of control which engages them in a veritable battle for supremacy; the substitution of Maria's handwriting for that of her mistress; and Antonio's insistent desire to become Sebastian's shadow.

83. See, for instance, Hollander who views them both as self-indulgent; Porter Williams's identification of their shared self-deception (193); and Summers who points out their shared confusion of literary motifs and social realities (129).

84. In Jenkins's formulation, "[i]t is her role to draw Orsino and Olivia from their insubstantial passions and win them to reality" (1965, 79).

85. For a look at the role of comic providence as the primary driving force of the play, see Hartwig. On the whole, her argument is sound: the ultimate resolution of the play's growing complexities is achieved by the opportune appearance of Sebastian. Still, if we trace the causal chain which leads to Sebastian's entry in V.i, we shall discover that Olivia, while in no way the prime mover of the plot, is the most instrumental character in the play.

86. On Orsino's absolute disregard for Olivia (a characteristic shared by the infatuated Malvolio), see Moglen, who concludes that "[a]s with many courtly lovers before him, Orsino is delighted by his own reflection--discovered in his mistress's eyes" (14).

87. Douglas Parker has more recently noticed that most critics bracket Olivia with Orsino and then condemn both for whatever fault they are seen to share. By contrast, Parker, by "dissociating her from Orsino and aligning her with a much truer soul mate," endeavours "to re-create her in the more positive image of the admirable Viola" (24). But even in this reading, Olivia's dramatic importance is still linked to that of another character. Writing about three recent productions of Twelfth Night in West Germany, however, Maik Hamburger reports that "[t]he central character in every case was Olivia, whose courage to enter human relationships was seen as the most important statement of the play, although in two of the three productions she suffered dire disappointment as a consequence" (240).

88. The obvious irony of this speech should be set alongside Olivia's busy conducting of affairs to qualify the pattern of her power.

89. See Slights's excellent analysis of this scene's two-part structure (537-38).

90. According to Reed, dark-room treatment, medieval in origin, was one of the chief methods of treatment in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (11).

91. See Jenkins (1965), p. 79.

92. The line of argument in this chapter implicitly refutes theories of power and language that view discourse as a closed system of domination into which certain groups of individuals have no means of access. Julia Kristeva's work on discourse offers a useful approach to countering such essentialist and static conceptions of language. As Toril Moi has explained Kristeva's understanding of discourse, "The meaning of the sign is thrown open--the sign becomes `polysemic' rather than `univocal'--and though it is true to say that the dominant power group at any given time will dominate the intertextual production of meaning, this is not to suggest that the opposition has been reduced to total silence" (158). As Ann Rosalind Jones has shown, this view is easily applicable to some Renaissance female authors. Writing at a time when silence was the cardinal female virtue, these women adopted the discourses of ideal femininity and diverted them "into channels for their survival through literary self-representation" (67). The influential verbal activity of Shakespeare's comic women and lower class characters also suggests that discursive structures, however oppressive they may seem to be, are far more malleable than their guardians imagine.

93. It is, of course, extremely difficult to read The Taming of the Shrew on the level of the play only. Its overt ties with the savage literary tradition from which the title derives demand no less than an insistence on the cultural discourses with which it interacts. Because my analysis focuses primarily on aesthetic form, it can underline these political realities in only the most general ways. I would, however, refer the reader to Linda Woodbridge's comprehensive discussion of shrew-taming tales within their literary and political contexts (201-07). See also Underdown for more detailed historical and economic evidence.

94. For an illustration of this frightful contraption see Valerie Wayne, p. 160.

95. The epithet "curst" is often applied to the shrew both in Shakespeare's play and in the shrew-taming tradition in general, and implies an unregenerate, sinful use of speech (Valerie Wayne 161).

96. See Lochrie. It should be noted, however, that Katherine is effectively isolated from any traditions of female authority; she is even bereft of the advantages enjoyed by the Wife of Bath who, although she advances the authority of experience against literary auctoritas for her actions, does acknowledge that "I folwed ay my dames loore" (Chaucer 81; line 583). On the systematic dissolution of female bonds in Shakespeare's comedies as a hallmark of patriarchal insecurities, see Erickson (Patriarchal Structures).

97. The evolution of the term "shrew" (and the cognate "shrewd") over the centuries registers the different value which succeeding generations have attached to verbal cunning. That the term acquired a generally positive connotation soon after the Renaissance may explain why Katherine has never been lacking admirers.

98. Gascoigne's Supposes (1566) is, of course, the principal source for The Taming of the Shrew's subplot, and its title refers to "a mystaking or imagination of one thing for an other" (Bullough 1:112), a motif emulated by the many role reversals and inversions typical of all three of Shakespeare's plots.

99. For a related view, see Fineman, who explores the nature of the linguistic contest between Katherine and Petruchio in terms of gender: "the words and actions of The Taming of the Shrew rehearse a familiar antagonism, not simply the battle between the sexes but, more specifically, though still rather generally, the battle between the determinate, literal language traditionally spoken by man and the figurative, indeterminate language traditionally spoken by woman" (143).

100. This connection is particularly significant. Katherine comes off worst in the scene where she is needlessly brutal to her sister, where she is least justified in enforcing her will. But the dynamics of their relationship reveal that the fissure between the sisters is caused by the same societal codes which provoke Katherine's rebellion elsewhere: because Bianca has so successfully internalized the stereotype of submissive maiden, she is able to turn it to her own advantage, to the enragement of Katherine whose open rejection of silence and obedience has earned her virtual ostracization. The two scenes of beating are, then, inverse testimonies to the violent divisiveness which an abusive

patriarchy harbours. Petruchio's rejection of Katherine's proffered corporal submission in the final scene may, in this connection, signal a resignation of the physical abuse characteristic of his behaviour early in the play.

101. In an important footnote, Valerie Wayne points out that "the word [shrew] seems to have evolved from denoting an evil person to characterizing one who was evil in a particular manner, but like "scold" and like the word "termagant," it was used to refer almost exclusively to women after the late Middle Ages. . . . Since the word was once a term used to designate either spouse in a marital dispute, its later, more particular application to women represents a masculine linguistic victory" (183, note 4).

102. It should be noted, however, that animal-taming analogies had essentially positive semantic values in Renaissance marriage manuals. See Ranald.

103. The notion that Katherine and Petruchio learn to play a private "game" of marriage has been a helpful way of construing a relationship which otherwise shows little sign of mutuality. See Berry, Huston, Leggatt (1974), and Novy ("Patriarchy and Play"). For Burt, however, the same idea of game signals Petruchio's fragile exercise of charismatic authority (in that it needs continually to be re-enacted) and Katherine's compulsory participation.

104. All commentaries on the play must decide whether Katherine's submission is sincere, and that decision will depend heavily upon the generic conventions--whether farcical, comical, or satirical--which are seen to control the movement of the play. In fact, much of the play's residual difficulty is explained in precisely these terms, as a clash of genres, an imperfect rewriting of an essentially farcical plot into a romantic comedy which is

marked by an uncertain wavering between the two. Tillyard was among the first to propose this explanation, and it has recently been taken up--most convincingly--by Bean.

105. I would disagree, then, with Burt who posits that The Taming of the Shrew conforms to a Greenblattian model of authority: "Shakespeare does not stage the subversion of patriarchy but stages a subversive threat to patriarchy--the unruly and insubordinate woman--in order to contain it" (307). The "containment," however, is not unilateral, nor is it the kind of containment desired by the men whom Katherine initially threatens: Katherine's rebellion succeeds in so far as it specifies the terms of its own containment, terms--while arrived at through Petruchio's teaching--which include a husband who exercises "right" supremacy. The inadequacy of Greenblatt's static model of authority to the dynamic genre of comedy stems, then, from its inability to chronicle, let alone explain, change.

106. Though David silently supplies the Folio "simplicity" for the Quarto's "sinplicitie," the latter is arguably another of Costard's meaningful slips. Bevington, for instance, retains the Quarto reading and glosses it as "Costard's appropriate malapropism for simplicity" (127); according to its mandate, the Oxford Shakespeare gives the Folio reading but notes that "Q's reading is defended by some as a joke" (Wells and Taylor 272). "Sinplicitie" here is a useful qualification of the men's actions as not only misled but indeed culpable, a reading which the play itself bears out.

107. The movement of the play may be described as "difficult" in that it seems to alternate between progressive and regressive impulses, and the denouement at which it finally does arrive is self-consciously unsatisfactory. In connection with this structural feature, see Godshalk on competing patterns of symmetry and dissonance in Love's Labour's Lost.

108. "Bis coctus," or "twice-cooked" is the delightful proverbial epithet used by Holofernes to disparage Dull's repeated insistence that "the deer was not a haud credo; 'twas a pricket" (see IV.ii.21 and n.).

109. Many critical studies of Love's Labour's Lost focus on its overt thematic interest in language. Malcolm Evans (1975) and Hawkes argue that the play works out the valorization of the spoken rather than written word; Berry divides the play's characters into personifications of various conceptions of the relationship between words and things; Barton (1971), Calderwood (1971), Carroll, and Radbill all suggest, though with varying emphases, that the play instances Shakespeare's distrust of language; De Grazia and Montrose (1977) qualify this argument with a corrective historical perspective; and Greene (1971) studies the important connection between language and civility in the play. See also Ellis and Matthews.

110. In a more charming vein, Costard's utterance of "honorificabilitudini-tatibus" as he takes the actual physical measure of Moth's head may be the play's most extravagant instance of the transparent relationship between language and reality (V.i.39-40).

111. On Shakespeare's use of Petrarchism in Love's Labour's Lost generally, see Goldstien, and, for a more strictly topical argument, Yates.

112. Dumain and Longaville do, however, doubt the efficacy of their verse, at least for a while (IV.iii.52, 118). From the women's subsequent criticisms, we learn that the men have apparently overcome their misgivings.

113. The OED cites Titus Andronicus II.i.77 as an instance of the alternative usage: "They . . . cannot brooke Competitors in love" (OED 1).

114. In a more general sense, Agnew writes that for the men "demeaning others or putting them down turns out to be inseparable from the practice of enhancing a threatened self through verbal dexterity" (45).

115. It is interesting that the OED defines "to recreate" as "to relieve (an occupation, state, etc.) by means of something of a contrary nature." The courtiers could defend themselves, then, by juxtaposing Armado's fabulous lies with their own earnest search for truth; but this argument has already been anticipated by Ascham, who writes in Toxophilus (1545) that "Ernest studie must be recreated with honest pastime" (OED 5; emphasis added).

116. Costard's crime may not be the first breach of the Academy's prohibition of female company; it is not inconceivable that Armado himself has already been smitten. This prior transgression may account for the tone of outrage (jealousy?) in his letter of accusation and for his momentary loss of words: "Costard . . . sorted and consorted, contrary to thy established proclaimed edict and continent canon, which with--O! with--but with this I passion to say wherewith,--" (I.i.250-55). Armado's severity with Costard, if it is fuelled by his own guilty love (as his eagerness to be Jaquenetta's keeper further suggests), would fit into the pattern of personal supremacy as self-defence exhibited by the men in their wooing and in their behaviour at the Pageant.

117. Power relations in the play have received little critical attention. The only such treatment is that of Erickson (1982) who studies the contest between the men and women and takes heart in what he reads as a thoroughgoing subversion of patriarchy in the play's anti-comic conclusion: "Because the unqualified control possessed by the women throughout the play has implicitly endangered patriarchal power, the climactic announcement about the father serves as a reassertion of patriarchal authority, and as a warning and protest against its demise. But, at the same time, the father's death symbolically confirms this demise" (79). However, as my own analysis aims to show, the women exercise power over the men only so long as the men deserve to be "put down." The play gives no indication of continued female superiority; indeed, it prefigures--in the political levelling implied by the death of the father-king--a non-hierarchical arrangement of gender in which the men's previous folly alone meets with demise.

118. On the shortcomings of each of the character's linguistic habits, see Carroll.

119. Erickson (1982) similarly notices that "[t]he women's action is legitimate because it involves turning back on the men their own pathetic subservience: the men are given what they deserve" (75).

120. Elsewhere in the play, a manifestation of vexation indicates some kind of defeat: see Armado's anger at Moth's circuitous language (I.ii.29-30), and Berowne's tirade against Boyet (V.ii.315-34) for having "put Armado's page out of his part" (V.ii.336).

121. This is also the tactic used by Moth to subvert Armado. He respects the boundaries which Armado sets up for their interaction and so appropriates the means of control. His own eventual supremacy is made clear in his gulling of Armado into following rather than leading the game of supplying the "envoy" to a "moral":

Arm. I will example it:

The fox, the ape, and the humble-bee,

Were still at odds, being but three.

There's the moral: now the l'envoy.

Moth. I will add the l'envoy. Say the moral again.

Arm. The fox, the ape, and the humble-bee,

Were still at odds, being but three.

Moth. Until the goose came out of door,

And stay'd the odds by adding four.

Now I will begin your moral, and do you follow with my l'envoy. (III.i.81-91)

Not surprisingly, Armado bungles the "l'envoy." For an inverse example of this kind of subversion from within, see Dull's failed attempt to stump Holofernes and Nathaniel with a riddle (IV.ii.33-46).

122. David suggests a topical reference for lines 30-33 above. But the passage does not depend upon external sources for meaning, fitting as it does into the play's interest in power relationships and the attendant moral problem of aligning word and deed. Love's Labour's Lost has, of course, long been mined for topical references. For the various historical contexts that have been proposed as "sources" for the play, see Bradbrook (1936), Gray, Hassel, Phelps, Proudfoot, Wickham, and Yates. Lamb provides both an excellent summary

of the entire issue and a well-taken caveat; and Montrose (1977) adds to the play's topicality a new historicist shading.

123. In connection with the theme of self-awareness, see Hoy and Parsons. Agnew offers a useful distinction between the Princess's admirable self-awareness and Berowne's culpable self-consciousness.

124. This action of the women may be another instance of the not inconsiderable power of silence and withdrawal. See Goldberg ("Shakespearean").

125. A miniature version of the utter hopelessness of such amorous advances has already been given in Jaquenetta's deft obstruction of Armado's course in I.ii.124-35.

126. It may, then, be a measure of Dull's much-maligned role in the play that he happily takes part in a dance (and joins for dinner) a group whom he scarcely understands (V.i.143-45).

127. The play may also have a lesson for the audience about the possibility of making absolute judgements of even the most seemingly-absurd rhetorical figures. The linguistic hallmark of the play's most hilarious statements is the reduplication of epithets; but the same figure which strikes us as laughable and excessive throughout the play shapes the play's most moving line: "This is not generous, not gentle, not humble" (V.ii.623).

128. On the songs as models of the kind of language which the play values, see Carroll, Greene (1971), and Montrose (1977).

129. The most detailed analysis of the web of plots in The Merry Wives of Windsor is given by Bertrand Evans, who has identified no fewer than "[e]leven distinct practices" (99).

130. In many ways, though, The Merry Wives of Windsor is closely related to other comedies Shakespeare was writing between 1595-1600 (1596-97 is now generally accepted as the date; see Green, Oliver, and Roberts), and especially A Midsummer Night's Dream and As You Like It, all of which Roberts groups together (with the earlier The Two Gentlemen of Verona) as "forest comedies" (Ch. 6). Roberts is also strongly opposed to classifying the play as a farce, and suggests that the beneficent forces at work in the play evidence a comic universe (83).

131. The nature of the "comic community" is dealt with by Barton ("Falstaff"). Following Barber's lead, she argues that the villagers' incorrigible habit of plotting is largely innocuous, and that it is Falstaff alone who poses any kind of danger. Such a view seems to side unfairly with the villagers and casts a blind eye to the play's construction which persistently undermines, as my analysis aims to show, one-directional guilt. Erickson ("The Order of the Garter") has directly challenged Barton's version of the comic community and exposed (even over-exposed) the power struggles and evasions she has glossed over: "The constant off-hand recourse to `sport' and `jest' as catch-all terms to describe the handling of such sensitive topics as money, courtship, violence, and deception puts on display a terminology so thin that it becomes conspicuously inadequate" (119).

132. Shallow's wistful references to his advanced age and Evans's mock-duel with Caius suggest that in their solicitation on behalf of Slender both men engage in vicarious wooing.

133. The failure of Falstaff's mirroring strategy (a manner of securing personal supremacy typical of most deceptions in the play) is made clear in III.iii, where his proffered image of Mrs. Ford as an "absolute courtier" is met with a curt rebuff: "Believe me, there's no such thing in me" (56, 61), a hint of her superior awareness which Falstaff, to his detriment, fails to detect.

134. The figure of the pharmakos is defined by Frye (1957) as the "sacrificed victim, who has to be killed to strengthen the others" (148). The victimization of Falstaff may also be an instance of the ritualistic defeat of winter known as "carrying out Death," a suggestion first made by Frye (183) and recently developed by Bryant. Bryant's thesis, however, seems to be rather heavy-handed as it overlooks the real menace Falstaff presents to Windsor society. More helpful are the approaches of Hinely (1982) and Roberts, both of whom detect the ambivalence of Falstaff's role as villain and victim and articulate the hint of injustice in the play's concluding scene.

135. On this point, see Parten's excellent discussion of the wives' intentional vindication of female mirth and honesty (1985). Such a use of subversive power is, in the opinion of Erickson, a mark of the play's "conservative valence" ("The Order of the Garter" 118), as it defends what is in effect a tenet of a male value system. Erickson links this essential failure of feminine power with Shakespeare's "patriarchal anxiety" (135) and Queen Elizabeth's own endorsement of patriarchal values: "The Queen used the

concept of chastity to insure that she would not become subordinate to any individual man, but the concept itself originated in and remained beholden to male cultural discourse" (135) This pattern of female (verbal) power being used in the service of a male cultural system is treated at length in Beilin's fascinating study of the aims and achievements of female authors of the English Renaissance.

136. Parten (1985) discusses with great persuasiveness the important connections between Ford and Falstaff as "brothers in error" (191), particularly their competing claims to the "cuckold" tag. Developing Steadman's well-known study of Actaeon as a popular figure of the adulterer, Parten argues that, both in The Merry Wives of Windsor and in the Renaissance as a whole, the horned Actaeon was also the figure of the cuckold, and the term "cuckold" performed the general duty of denoting a man who, regardless of his marital status, had forfeited male supremacy (194-96).

137. On the alternative, restorative wit possessed by women in Shakespeare's comedies, see Clark who quotes this line in her title.

138. It is also notable that Ford's repentance is presented in spiritual terms: "Pardon me, wife. . . . [n]ow doth thy honour stand, / In him that was of late an heretic, / As firm as faith" (IV.iv.6-9).

139. The mercenary motive also seems to have been forgotten by Shakespeare. Falstaff's role shifts with little visible cause from a predilection for robbery to an ill-defined, though widely-reputed, lechery, and his search for funds seems to disappear altogether by the play's concluding scene. Berry's conviction that The Merry Wives of Windsor was dashed off by Shakespeare "without inner commitment" (146) may be a possible explanation for this (and other) re-routings, and could certainly be corroborated by the reports that Shakespeare wrote the play in a fortnight at royal command (Oliver xliv-xlv). But the reason for such textual incongruity must remain conjectural; in any event, it would seem that interest in economically-based social injustice transfers from Falstaff to the Pages, both of whom conduct marital negotiations in strictly financial terms, while Falstaff becomes the crossroads of Windsor sexual politics.

140. All four have also been involved in intentional, self-enhancing deceptions elsewhere in the play, and it is appropriate that all are duped in turn before the play ends.

141. The play itself seems to make rather an issue of Falstaff's inveterate credulity, a sore point with his admirers across the centuries (see Roberts, Ch. 5). Following their second duping of Falstaff, the women are convinced that their jest is up: "The spirit of wantonness is sure scar'd out of him; if the devil have him not in fee-simple, with fine and recovery, he will never, I think, in the way of waste, attempt us again" (IV.ii.196-99). Then, as they reveal plans for yet another coup, the wives are met with some doubt. "Fie, fie, he'll never come," claims Page, and Evans, in rather unnecessary detail, concurs: "You say he has been thrown in the rivers, and has been grievously

peaten, as an old 'oman: methinks there should be terrors in him that he should not come" (IV.iv.19-24). That Mistress Quickly delivers the wives' apologies and invitation offstage may, then, contribute to the play's intentional generation of incredulity regarding Falstaff's willingness to participate in what is sure to be a hoax.

142. Fitting, that is, to his disguise as Herne the Hunt(ed).

143. For a discussion of the play's connection with celebrations surrounding the Garter Feast of 1597, see Oliver (xlv-xlvi), and, for the discovery of more broadly historical fossils, Erickson ("The Order of the Garter").

144. Erickson argues that Fenton here "enacts the rehabilitation and vindication of true aristocracy" ("The Order of the Garter" 124), but his lesson to the Pages expresses a value behind which the entire (bourgeois) Windsor community is now willing to stand:

> You would have married her most shamefully,
> Where there was no proportion held in love.
> . . .
> Th' offence is holy that she hath committed,
> And this deceit loses the name of craft,
> Of disobedience, or unduteous title,
> Since therein she doth evitate and shun
> A thousand irreligious cursed hours
> Which forced marriage would have brought upon her.
>
> (V.v.218-27)

It is difficult to see how Fenton's rebuke constitutes a particularly aristocratic vindication; the justification of his and Anne's subversion of

abusive parental authority seems rather to be a non class-specific vindication of charitable human interaction endorsed by many of Shakespeare's comic endings and of comedy's wish-fulfilment in general.

145. Even in the seventeenth century, King Charles was not alone in his judgement. In 1613 The Lord Chamberlain's accounts record payment to John Heminge for "Benedicte and Betteris," almost certainly an alternative title for "Much Adoe abowte Nothinge," which is also mentioned (Humphreys 34). In 1640 Leonard Digges deemed the characters capable of filling the theatres, and Sir William Davenant's hybridisation of Much Ado About Nothing and Measure for Measure into The Law Against Lovers (1662), omits the Hero and Claudio plot altogether (Mares 10-11).

146. Cook and Howard ("Renaissance Antitheatricality") devote considerable attention to the main characters in their studies of patriarchal power structures. See also Hays, who makes Claudio the central figure in a psychoanalytic reading of the play's dramatization of the growth to psychic maturity.

147. Though he does not deal directly with authority, Traugott studies the relationship of Much Ado About Nothing's plots in a similar fashion, proposing that the Hero-Claudio plot is a tragicomedy whose comic potential is underscored by the Beatrice-Benedick plot. Traugott also sees the latter as dominant and redemptive.

148. Jorgensen was the first to deal at length with the title's pun on "noting," and was soon followed by Hockey. Since then, referring to the pun has become something of a commonplace. Ormerod treats extensively the use and function of the word "fashion" in Much Ado About Nothing, and points out that the play has the highest concentration of the word in the whole of Shakespeare's canon (94). The connection between "fashioning" and the pun on "nothing" has, of course, to do with the play's interest in the production and interpretation of linguistic meaning. This topic is studied, in three widely varying contexts, by Cook, Dawson (1982), and Elliot Krieger. More broadly, nearly all critics make note of the associated prevalence of the appearance/reality theme, eminently summed up by Rossiter: "Deception by appearances in love is patently what most of Much Ado is `about'" (67).

149. The play's overt interest in theatrical practices is given an historicist reading by Howard, who finds its regulation of dramatic scenarios closely resembling the ideological dimensions of Elizabethan antitheatrical tracts: "Much Ado . . . participates in the process by which a historically specific understanding of a patriarchal and hierarchical social order is both secured against threats to itself and also laid open to their demystifying power" ("Renaissance Antitheatricality" 164).

150. That ill-fashioning has harmful, material dimensions is reinforced by the play's frequent use of violent imagery to express the power of words. For instance, not only do Beatrice and Benedick fight a "merry war," but Benedick also views his position as that of a "man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks poniards, and every word stabs" (II.i.230-32). The same may be said of many other verbal exchanges in the play. According to Cook, this

real power of language is a male prerogative: the act of reading is an act of supremacy reserved for male initiates, while being read is emasculating. But Cook fails to trace the full pattern of interpretation in the play. Each of the characters is, at some point, both read and reading, both acted upon and acting against, and it is the measure of difference between characters' motivations as they read--rather than simply their gender--which reveals the dramatist's moral appraisal of their action. Arguably, all acts of reading in the play are acts of supremacy; this is not, however, to say that all acts of reading are the same. For an analogous argument, see Henze on right and wrong deception in the play.

151. Leonato here questions the credibility of a "fellow," whereas in the church scene he is easily persuaded of Hero's guilt by the authority of "two princes" (IV.i.152).

152. For instance, Benedick's images of himself as a married man obviously strip him of subjectivity and make him a sign of the entire institution; and Beatrice derides, above all, female subordination in marriage: "Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust, to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?" (II.i.56-58). Neely (1985) usefully locates a point of contact between the play's two plots in this very fear: "The witty verbal skirmishes comprising Beatrice's and Benedick's `merry wars' explicitly express the anxieties about loss of power through sexuality, love, and marriage that lie beneath Claudio's and Hero's silent romanticism" (45).

153. Still, this most explicit of Beatrice's verbal subversions of the patriarchy is double-edged. While her mockery expresses the supremacy of the daughter's desire over the father's will, the very tone and manner of her challenge reinforce the ultimate supremacy of the patriarchy. In broader terms, Neely (1985) finds much the same paradoxical pattern in the development of female characters in Shakespeare's comedies: "by attaining verbal superiority, and taking themselves off the pedestal, by asserting their desires and acting on them, Shakespeare's maids are moving toward and necessitating their subordination as wives--their domestication by silence, by removal of disguise, and by giving themselves, their possessions, and their sexuality to the husbands" (6).

154. This early mutual regard for their respective sexes may foreshadow the representative, communal roles Beatrice and Benedick take on as their love surfaces: Claudio says of Benedick that "If he be not in love with some woman, there is no believing old signs" (III.ii.37-38), and Ursula to Beatrice that "methinks you look with your eyes as other women do" (III.iv.85-86).

155. I disagree, then, with Dennis who reads a parallel movement of both plots from one way of knowing (wit) to another (wisdom). Given the inverse relationship of the two plots, the decline of one and the rise of the other (in terms of comic value), tracing any parallel movement would seem to be mistaken. Certainly the terms in which Dennis sets up his argument fail to account for the complex meaning of "knowing" in the play: rather than moving on a single axis from wit to wisdom, the play seems to combine the two modes by endorsing, finally, the love (i.e., wisdom) of the play's ineducable wits. A similarly erroneous pattern is traced by Ormerod, whose terms of reference are "fashion"

and "faith," with comic value being invested ultimately in the latter at the expense of the former. I would maintain, however, that neither "faith and fashion" nor "wit and wisdom" are mutually exclusive terms in Much Ado About Nothing; the play seems rather to explore their commingling in the feebleness of human vision.

156. For a neoplatonic reading of the reformative value of love as a basis for reliable knowledge of reality, see Lewalski.

157. Hero's attitude toward her cousin is ably treated by Berger (1982), who argues that in her simultaneous approval and rejection of Beatrice's verbal challenges, Hero "not only reflects the limitations of her culture but also betrays a dim awareness of them" (305). In this connection, Berger gives an excellent reading of Hero's striking simile at III.i.7-11 (306).

158. In fact, Don Pedro actually approves of Beatrice's outspokenness. As she apologizes for her habit of speaking "all mirth and no matter," he answers that "Your silence most offends me, and to be merry best becomes you, for out o' question, you were born in a merry hour" (II.i.312-14).

159. See especially Berger (1982), Cook, and Howard ("Renaissance Antitheatricality"), all of whom, significantly, find the play's concluding harmony less than resounding.

160. But one may be tempted to speculate on the authority of the Friar, given the possibility that Shakespeare himself played the part (Mares 19).

161. It is difficult to see, with most feminist critics, how Beatrice's admission of love constitutes a submission when it is she who imposes the conditions upon which the relationship will proceed.

162. And following the challenge to Claudio, Benedick's announcement to Don Pedro that "I must discontinue your company" (V.i.186-87) explicitly sets him apart from Messina's censured "Men's Club." (The phrase is borrowed from Berger [1982, 305].)

163. Though some critics have favoured Claudio in the past (see especially Craik and Prouty), it is now generally accepted that his character is more despicable than need be, and that the excess represents a deliberate dramaturgical move. Even Shakespeare's use of his sources points in this direction, for all of Claudio's counterparts were invested with more motivation and more honourable behaviour in the matter of the challenge against Hero. "It seems unlikely," writes Mares, "in view of this systematic departure from the tendency of well-known analogues, that Claudio was intended as a particularly admirable or sympathetic character" (5-6). But see the opinion of Neill, who instances Shakespeare's removal of carnality from the character and the addition of Borachio's false confession as indications of Claudio's blamelessness.

164. But, as Cook points out, even in the tomb scene, with Claudio presumably seeing the error of his ways, Hero is maintained in a position of voicelessness and Messina's old order is reestablished: "Claudio's placement of the epitaph on her tomb explicitly dramatizes the silencing of the woman's voice, the substitution of the man's" (199).

165. Curiously, Claudio's unexpiated guilt does not seem to concern his fellow characters nearly as much as his audience. Ursula brings news that "the Prince and Claudio [have been] mightily abused, and Don John is the author of all" (V.ii.90-91), and Leonato decides that while Margaret "was in some fault for this," Claudio and Don Pedro are innocent because they "accus'd her / Upon the error that you heard debated" (V.iv.2-4).

166. Though it is (mistakenly, I think) extended into the play's subplot, this kind of circularity is precisely what leads Cook to denounce the ostentatious harmony of the play's conclusion:

> whatever conversion or movement the play offers is notably incomplete, for while the sexual conflict points in an illuminating way to the question of gender differences and what is at stake in them, their relation to subjectivity and authority, the play cannot resolve its contradictions from within its own structures of meaning. . . . what is at stake in these differences is a masculine prerogative in language, which the play itself sustains. I argue that the play masks, as well as exposes, the mechanisms of masculine power and that insofar as it avoids what is crucial to its conflicts, the explicitly offered comic resolution is something of an artful dodge. (186)

However, what Cook defines as "crucial" to the play's conflict need not be identical with Shakespeare's artistic interest.

167. Though they do not figure prominently in my analysis, the sub-subplot characters obviously participate--at a parodic level--in the linguistic atmosphere of Messina. More extensive treatment of Dogberry, who certainly merits study--though his utter ineffectuality has excluded him from my look at power relations--may be found in Allen. The linguistic habits of the Watch do, however, point out the largely independent capacity of language to convey truth even where its transmission is hopelessly bungled.

168. That the dance dramatizes the restoration of social order no longer goes without saying. The play's other mention of dance is not auspicious (though Beatrice's metaphor for marriage is given during her tenure as a social rebel), and if the masquing episode also represents social harmony, its promise for the future is ominous indeed. In general, the reassessment of the meaning of dance--and often of Shakespeare's comic closure as a whole--has been carried out by critics wanting to expose (rather than explore) Shakespeare's patriarchal investiture. In connection with Much Ado About Nothing, see Berger (1982), Cook, and Howard ("Renaissance Antitheatricality").

169. For readings which reinforce the value of Beatrice's love in the play's conclusion, see Crick, Everett, and Hays; for counter-positions, Berger (1982) and Cook.

170. This thematic and dramatic symmetrical inversion of the two plots has been noted, among others, by Bullough:

> The plots relating to the two pairs are parallel and antithetical: whereas Hero and Claudio are brought together at the beginning with almost excessive ease, and are then almost fatally separated by mistrust, deception and false

> report, Beatrice and Benedick, separated at first by mistrust, are brought together by deception and false report. (II.74)

The plots intersect and reverse directions in the play's crucial scene, IV.i.

171. Cook's argument that Beatrice and Benedick do not "represent a challenge or an alternative to Messina's limitations," that "even their irony cannot create [another world], for it participates in the assumptions that shape Messina" (200), is based on a circular reading of the play, and so fails to acknowledge that, at least on the level of the subplot, a commendable change has been achieved.

172. On Shakespeare as a pre-Cartesian skeptic, see Cavell.

173. See D'Amico, Chapter I.

174. The phrase, by now infamous, is that of McFarland (78). It should be noted, however, that McFarland was reacting against the equally distorted reading of Kott.

175. Weil (1969) usefully points out that open-ended interpretation is required by all of Shakespeare's comedies. Perhaps A Midsummer Night's Dream differs in degree from the romantic comedies with which it has traditionally been associated, and belongs more easily with All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure.

176. A Midsummer Night's Dream, he writes, is the only comedy in which "the participants' level [of awareness] is not raised to equal ours at the end" (41).

177. The play's oppositions, especially between (male) rationality and (female) imagination, have long been noticed, though they are usually fitted into dialectic structures with the synthesis emphasizing the critic's favoured component. Among those who argue that the play is resolved in favour of rationality are Fisher, Olson, and Schanzer (1954-55). In contrast, Calderwood (1971), Dent, Poirier, Weiner, and Young would like to see in the play Shakespeare's defence of poetry (the link with Sidney is made explicitly by Poirier and Weiner) in which poetic imagination triumphs over reason as the only faculty capable of truthfully representing human experience. Fewer critics have ventured to argue that A Midsummer Night's Dream does not reach a perfectly harmonious conclusion, and on the whole I find these latter positions more credible. Montrose (1983) argues that the restitution of patriarchy only reveals Shakespeare's cultural anxiety as a male artist about a female monarch; Leinwand articulates the class struggle underlying the play's treatment of the proletarian mechanicals; Garner analyzes the typically repressive gender relations in the play; Girard ("Myth and Ritual") notes more generally the play's representation of the need to overcome, its participation in the creation of myths; and Taylor finds he cannot do away with the play's darker elements.

178. Berry has identified a similar ambivalence in Theseus's management of the charge against Hermia: "The Janus face of Theseus--strong for the laws in public, ready to try techniques of conciliation in private--is of a piece with the poise of the play" (92).

179. For an up-to-date account of the play's stage history, see Foakes (1984), pp. 12-24.

180. Allan Lewis, "A Midsummer Night's Dream--Fairy Fantasy or Erotic Nightmare?" Educational Theatre Journal 21 (1969): 251. This most unusual piece of stage business is cited by Garner (62, note 9).

181. And beyond the text, the figure of Theseus, as D'Orsay has argued, by no means had an entirely positive association in Shakespeare's time. The more ominous side of his character would apparently have been uppermost in the mind of an Elizabethan playgoer, a fact not to be overlooked in a reconstruction of the play's web of meaning.

182. See Garner.

183. Marshall notices that "both Hermia and Hippolyta are in effect tongue-tied in the same way: their fate is to have others dictate their sentiments while they are silent or silenced" (551).

184. All the more surprising, then, that Theseus is traditionally considered the champion of rationality.

185. Similarly, Bertrand Evans writes that "the juice of this extraordinary pansy is the ultimate source--subtler than disguise, eavesdropping, or plain falsehood--of discrepancies which make possible the main action and comic effects of the play" (34).

186. Not only Helena's verbal dexterity but Demetrius's own "let me go" would seem to reveal the balance of power in their relationship. Furthermore, Helena's reversal of the Daphne and Apollo image indicates that "whatever the disadvantages of her situation she has wrested the male power of transformation from the pursuing god and vested it in herself" (Weller [1985] 72).

187. See especially Garner and Marshall.

188. In Shakespeare's other comedies and romances, the play ends with the promised disclosure of seemingly fantastical occurrences, a kind of post-textual levelling of awareness.

189. Marshall asks a pertinent question: "Is it asking too much of an antique fable and a fairy toy to be skeptical about the `gentle concord' created by the sudden reconciliation and rearrangement of the lovers at the end of the play?" (547).

190. "Mongrel" is also the term Sidney gives to contemporary tragicomedy in his Defence of Poetry (67).

191. The 1575 version of the tale is reprinted in Hunter's New Arden edition of the play (145-52). Subsequent references are to this text.

192. In an important cultural study, Jardine writes of Helena's (medical) knowledge and (sexual) know-how and suggests that the combination of these qualities reenacts in All's Well That Ends Well the "cultural confusion" felt toward the knowledgeable female in the Renaissance. My own use of knowledge (as wisdom) and knowing (as cunning) differs from Jardine's, though the overlapping of the two is also found to be at the core of the play's problematic representation of gender and power.

193. Stanley Wells concludes, after tabulating the number of occurrences of each of the forms ("Helena" four times; "Helen" twenty-five), "that Shakespeare was initially rather inconsistent but that he eventually abandoned the long form" (47).

194. The juxtaposition, albeit in different terms, is also observed by Hodgdon, who traces Helena's paradoxical significance to Helen of Troy and Helena of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Unlike Hodgdon, I find the earlier Helena something of a prototype of her namesake in All's Well That Ends Well, especially in her close ties to the play's major authority figure and in her "knowing" exploitation of information in the pursuit of a resistant beloved. See my reading of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

195. The precise dates of the two plays are matters of some dispute. In dating All's Well That Ends Well after Troilus and Cressida I follow the conclusions of Palmer (who gives 1602 for Troilus and Cressida) and Hunter (who assigns All's Well That Ends Well to 1603-04).

196. Originally, "one" referred to Paris, Priam's single bad son (I.iii.77n.). Hunter also notes that "[t]he comparison with Helen of Troy (especially in the decade of Troilus and Cressida) can hardly be complimentary, but whether this reflects more on Helena (so Clifford Leech) or on the clown (so W. W. Lawrence) remains doubtful" (I.iii.67-76n.).

197. Cox argues that from this point on Helena jeopardizes her value as a redemptive figure by forming an alliance with an abusive monarchy (147-48). I discuss the alliance below, and read it somewhat differently (see also n. 200).

198. Cf. Bertrand Evans 146.

199. On the "cultural confusion" surrounding learned women in the Renaissance, see Jardine.

200. The nature of Helena's role in the play--whether actively seeking self-satisfaction or humbly following divine providence--has been the locus of much critical contention. In recent years, it has become impossible to read Helena without some sense of her mastery in the play, though the interpretation of her activity continues to range widely. Both Bertrand Evans and Richard Levin (1980) read Helena as thoroughly scheming and in control of her dramatic surroundings; but while Evans speaks of her unchallenged superior awareness with some disappointment, Levin seems to praise the extent of her power. Kastan reads the same superiority from a more strictly formal view (and is joined by Cartelli [1983]), arguing that the extent of Helena's contrivance precludes the audience's participation in the drive toward comic closure and so implies a deliberate authorial refutation of the formal demands of the genre. In the feminist studies of Hodgdon, Neely (1985), and Snyder, Helena is a laudable, self-controlling female who brings about a balanced comic conclusion which stresses the importance of compromise in human relationships.

201. Interestingly, Cox has noticed that this is the very strategy adopted by the figure of the benign trickster in both patristic teaching and in medieval drama: "borrowing the tactics of the enemy to undo the enemy, using deception and disguise to fulfil a loving purpose, appearing to lose in order to win" (130).

202. I follow Lawrence (and many subsequent commentators) in reading the play as a two-part structure.

203. See, especially, Richard Levin (1980).

204. This alliance, incidentally, may help to explain why Helena, surely the most powerful female character Shakespeare invented (she is often ranked with Oberon, Duke Vincentio, and Prospero), has received so little feminist attention: her embodiment and wholesale reinforcement of the patriarchal value system makes her a difficult and dangerous subject for feminist analysis.

205. Cf. Hermia's analogous line: "I would my father looked but with my eyes" (I.i.56).

206. And in historical terms, the King's action is far from a neutral plot device; at the time of All's Well That Ends Well, the abuse of wardship, specifically in arranging degenerate marriages, was under attack (Cole [1981] 95-96).

207. However, in strictly dramatic terms--since Shakespeare seems deliberately to have blackened the Bertram character--Bertram's moral vicissitudes make Helena's victory even more problematic.

208. This speech and Helena's incipient pilgrimage are the loci of a new phase in Helena's career for those critics who find in the play a satisfactory comic conclusion. But Helena's relinquishment of control is short-lived: following her opportune encounter with the Widow and Diana, she is even more manipulative and self-indulgent than in her winning of Bertram.

209. Helena differs in this respect from Painter's Giletta who sets out with a firm plan in mind.

210. Nor is it, as Bertrand Evans argues, a structural flaw.

211. The legal contexts of Measure for Measure are studied by Dickinson and Dunkel, both of whom pay particular attention to the concept of equity but disagree as to its valorization in the play. McGinn draws the contrast between Mosaic and Christian law in terms of the contemporary Anglican-Puritan controversy.

212. In general terms, this is the pattern observed by Siegel, who sees retribution worked out rather than overcome in the play.

213. In fact, the Duke is so obviously at the intersection of the play's many thematic alleys that one's assessment of his character is concomitant with an assessment of the entire play. For those critics who view Measure for Measure as a (sometimes self-conscious) work of unresolved tensions, the Duke is an inveterate manipulator sporting an array of unrecognized personal faults (Riefer's and Sundelson's feminist readings are good examples of the most recent incarnation of this approach). On the other hand, if the play is thought to arrive at a satisfactory resolution of its difficulties, the Duke metamorphoses into an irreproachable, if comic, authority figure (for example, Mansell, Moore, and Schleiner). As with studies of genre in Measure for Measure, the most satisfactory readings are those which maintain a balance between these two poles. Bawcutt and Leech (1950) are exemplary in this regard.

214. On this and the significance of a further distinction between Shakespeare's Duke and his counterparts in Marston's The Malcontent and Middleton's The Phoenix, see Pendleton.

215. I refer to the text reprinted in Lever's New Arden edition of Measure for Measure, 155.

216. Boas has traditionally been considered the first critic to group Measure for Measure with three other "problem plays" (All's Well That Ends Well, Troilus and Cressida, Hamlet), though Thomas has recently extended the idea, if not the actual term, back to Dowden who referred to the three comedies of the group as "serious, dark and ironical" (1). Following Boas, Lawrence adopted and refined the term into a description of plays (Troilus and Cressida, All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Cymbeline) in which "a perplexing and distressing complication in human life is presented in a spirit of high seriousness" (4), though he finally argues that the "problem" is really only such for a modern audience unschooled in the folkloristic conventions which underpin Shakespeare's plots. In 1957, Tillyard admitted openly that he used the term "equivocally" (1) flexing it to suit the particular analysis of the plays thought to "display interesting problems" (Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida) or those that "are problems" (All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure) (2). Several years later, Schanzer (1963) rearranged the grouping yet again to fit his new definition of problem play: "A play in which we find a concern with a moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable" (6). More recently, the problem comedies have been psychoanalyzed by Wheeler and the grouping defended by Thomas. After nearly a century of debate regarding the membership of the group, in which it often seems that the group is freely appropriated and re-defined by critics in search of a suitable rubric for persistently recalcitrant plays, the dust has settled and the claim of the three comedies is secure. It may be a tribute to its exceptional difficulty that only Measure for Measure has been part of the group from Dowden to Thomas.

217. A popular explanation for the many incoherencies of Measure for Measure is that Shakespeare was deliberately undermining the comic genre, that he was making a statement about the inadequacy of comedy to a portrayal of the full complexity of the human condition (see Gelb, Hammond, Howard [1983], and Hubert). Howard has recently expanded this argument to a general theory about all of Shakespeare's (deliberately) problematic comic closures ("The Difficulties of Closure"). I find this kind of solution, which could logically extend into a justification of all problematic passages as deliberately contrived, unacceptable on two related counts: first, because it precludes any kind of artistic failure on the part of Shakespeare, and, second, because it seems to constrict his notion of genre within the boundaries of our own imperfect understanding of comic norms. I would suggest that, if a metadramatic level must be admitted, Shakespeare was saying not "Look at what comedy cannot do," but "Look at what I can make it do." Certainly that Measure for Measure was chosen to grace the Christmas festivities at court in 1604 says much about its success, at least for its first audience, as comedy. (The fullest account of Measure for Measure's occasional context is given by Bennett.)

218. This is the tack taken by the critics who consider, with the help of various explanatory apparati, that Measure for Measure is a flawless comic creation. See Gless, Leavis, and Miles. With our increasing sensitivity to gaps and fractures in literary texts, this kind of reading is becoming more difficult to sustain, though it has appeared, in however unpersuasive a form, as recently as 1987 (see Rappaport).

219. On asceticism and flagellation in the play as subversions of religious practices, see Carolyn E. Brown.

220. Oddly, Claudio's assessment of Isabella's oratory has been adopted by many critics as authoritative. Most recently, Desmet has observed that Isabella, like Helena in All's Well That Ends Well, uses rhetoric to advance both personal and communal aims, and the ambiguity surrounding this practice is indicative of Renaissance attitudes towards articulate women and towards rhetoric itself. But the character of Isabella, too, contributes to the ambiguity, and not only because she is a female speaking in a male world. Her rhetoric is double-edged because she is not fully in control of it, and she is not fully in control of it because she has not resolved fundamental internal tensions. She differs widely, then, from Helena, and it is difficult to see how she "guide[s] [her] play to [a] satisfying conclusion" (51).

221. Editors of Measure for Measure usually suggest a corruption of the text at this passage, since Isabella seems so obviously to say the opposite of what she intends. But such a conjecture is unnecessary; the passage is part and parcel of her verbal insufficiency throughout the play.

222. Since Tillyard's ground-breaking analysis, the re-entry of the Duke and the concomitant metrical shift has generally been thought both the pivotal and most problematic moment of the play, an unexplained, inappropriate structural and thematic fissure which undermines any sense of aesthetic coherence. But see Weil (1970) for an effective rebuttal based on a study of the play's dramaturgy.

223. On the comic value of the bed-trick as a means of using "carnal knowledge to effect compassion and knowledge of the spirit" (176), see Eileen Cohen. Neely (1985), however, gives a counter-interpretation.

224. For further discussion of consolatio elements in Measure for Measure, see Hunt and Spinrad.

225. Critics have been arguing about the ethics of the bed-trick for years. Schanzer (1960) tried to resolve the issue by drawing upon the legalities of Elizabethan betrothals and arguing, finally, that the ethical difficulties are a twentieth-century projection and that in any event they are not presented as problematic in the play (Hawkins has also argued along these lines). He succeeded, however, only in setting off a round of counter-studies which proved, using identical evidence, that, on the contrary, the bed-trick is legally unacceptable (Nuttall), that its ethical significance is given by the play itself (Nagarajan), and that at the very least the issue is not to be dismissed (Harding, Wentersdorf).

226. Thus those who read the play through the grid of Christian typology in which the Duke is the figure of God, Christ, or, more generally, providential will (see Battenhouse, Bradbrook [1941], Chambers, Coghill, and Kirsch). Cole (1965), Hawkins, and Scouten have, to my mind, more than adequately contested such readings.

227. For some extremely useful observations on the preponderance of imperfect substitutions in Measure for Measure as a sign of the play's difficult genesis, see Leggatt (1988). In a related way, Neely (1985) comments upon the interchangeability of death and sexuality as a contributor to the play's dark resoluti

228. For this reason, I find it difficult to read the Duke as a flattering portrait of King James I. Admittedly, the play echoes the advice to rulers given in the King's hugely popular Basilikon Doron, and may even allude to the new monarch's own self-dramatizing tendencies; but to posit a strict one-to-one relationship between the Duke and the King is, if one heeds the play, really anything but flattering. More satisfying than such historical allegorization (as for example, Bennett, Pope, and Stevenson), are the more recent attempts to reposition the play within a broader inter-textual canvas of history, and shift attention from the identity of the Duke to the examination of political authority in the play. The work of Aers and Kress, Dollimore ("Transgression"), Smith, and Tennenhouse collectively suggests that Measure for Measure dramatizes the supremacy of what is fundamentally an abusive authority reflective of Jacobean patriarchal power structures. But even these studies fail to account for the full complexity of the play's interest in authority. Most recently, Dawson (1988) and Swann have usefully complicated the whole idea by emphasizing the successful subversions of the Duke's authority and the concomitant challenge Measure for Measure poses to the supremacy of the royal audience. See also Cox, p. 154.

229. But for an account of the Duke's moral evolution, see Hamilton and Lewis.

230. Sensing that Measure for Measure does not sit easily under the generic rubric given it by the Folio editors, many critics have studied the play with a view to re(de)fining its form. Pendleton and Tennenhouse usefully label Measure for Measure a "disguised ruler play," Lanier groups it with contemporary tragicomedy, Murray Krieger traces an unhappy and largely unsuccessful commingling of realistic, Jonsonian qualities and romantic,

Shakespearean modes, Winston prefers to read the play as morality, and Altieri highlights its satiric content. On the other hand, Partee, Sale, and Weil (1970) have explicitly devoted their attention to the play's success as a "straight" comedy.

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