

THE THEME OF SUPPOSED UNCHASTITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

A Study Of MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, CYMBELINE and THE WINTER'S TALE

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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THESIS
SUBMITTED
IN

PART FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

To



NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG

DECEMBER, 1988

Eng

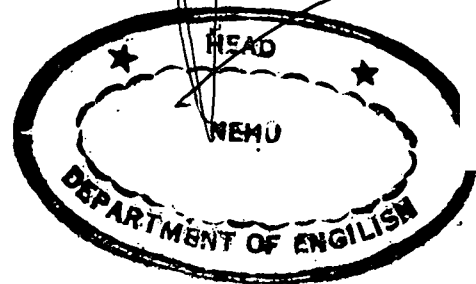
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Certified that the present dissertation entitled "The
Theme of Supposed Unchastity in Shakespeare's Comedies:
A Study of Much Ado About Nothing, Cymbeline and The
Winter's Tale" written under my supervision is worthy
of being presented for ^{The} award of M.Phil degree of
this University.

(S.Honchaudhuri)



FOREWARD

It is a welcome opportunity for me to record my gratefulness for the patient and sympathetic endurance displayed by Prof. S. Homchaudhuri while supervising the work that I have completed. Without his sustained encouragement and active stimulation I am certain that I would not have been able to do what I have done.

I would also like to thank Ritimon Wanshong whose patient cheerfulness I have tried and who showed every bit of it as the sun melts the morning dew and freshens leaves and flowers.

And last but not the least, I would like to mention my parents who bore the burden of all my expenses with such love and kindness as one can only receive from one's Parents.

Shillong
the 19th December 1988.

Lalhriata
(Lalhriata)

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INTRODUCTION

"...We have not the same wholeness as Shakespeare, but a share in the same wholeness; we go to him still for new elucidations of our being."¹

Indeed Shakespeare's plays embody a most comprehensive vision of the total personality of man as he is in himself and in his complex and multi-faceted relationship with his fellow-men in the world and even with what is beyond the visible world. They attempt an elucidation of our whole being, of our place and status in a totality of perspectives.

With an unexampled insight into the human situation where a fairly stable structure of an old world view coexisted with the stirrings of the birth of a new order, Shakespeare provides an integrated picture of a whole range of problems - the problems of perception, of knowledge, of the limitations and capabilities of the human mind in a fluid and dynamic world.

Shakespeare's age was obsessed with the newly experienced problems of truth and error, of appearance and reality, of the ambiguity of experience and of an ambiguous and changing self. It was very much an age of revolution in the sense that the medieval way was collapsing and modernism was taking place in every

1. Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature,
(A Study of King Lear), p.222.

John F. Danby.

Faber paper cover edition.

sphere of life. Although there was prosperity at home and peace with the rest of the world under the reign of Elizabeth I, yet there worked a profound and agonised unrest in the individual mind of man which is vividly mirrored in the plays of Shakespeare and even in those of his immediate successor or contemporary, Ben Jonson.

" Theologically, in the later sixteenth century, divine providence seemed increasingly to be questioned, or at least to be regarded as more bafflingly inscrutable. New orientations between man and the heavenly power, disintegrating the medieval sense of security, were in the process of formation. " 2

The old certainties about man's status and his knowledge guaranteed by ^{The} medieval world view which was governed by Ptolemy who saw a fixed earth created by God for man, his chosen creature, were badly disturbed by the new philosophy which saw the earth moving as any other heavenly body, and visualised a plurality of worlds where the earlier comfortable relationship between man and God, was replaced by a dubious one of near unintelligibility. With this distancing of man and God, the very basis of human knowledge became open to question. To what extent, if at all, could man know himself, his fellow-men, the world around him and the divine ? Doubt, questioning, cynicism, even pessimism began to gain ground. Where there had been certi-

2. A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies, p.188

Ed., K.Muir and S.Schoenbaum.

Cambridge University Press. 1974

tude, there was a nagging uncertainty.

" While the Copernican revolution was only gradually accepted in England, its implications regarding man's conception of his status could not have been ignored in the Shakespearian climate. " 3

Absolutism of belief gave way to a relativism of perception and knowledge. The new Renaissance relativism followed the transformation of the traditional geo-centric and well-enclosed Ptolemaic Universe.

" The Renaissance epistemological crisis emphasised the notion of the relativity of perception recalling the appearance-versus-reality motif recurrent through Renaissance drama. " 4

It is therefore not strange that Shakespeare wrote such a number of plays based on the theme of appearance and reality. The theme of supposed unchastity, our main concern, is only one version of that broader theme of seeming where a character, in his mistaken confidence takes the appearance of a thing to be the reality of it. The problem of appearance and reality in itself is unique only to human beings. There are no animals apart from human beings capable of deceptive outward appearance. Shakespeare knew only too well that a man can laugh and laugh while nurturing evil thoughts.

3. Ibid. p.195.

4. Ibid. p.190.

He also knew that if one could deceive others, one could be as easily deceived by others.

Of central importance is man's clouded reason. He is prone to error, to wrong judgement, wrong perception and wrong action. This is partly because of some privation or some other form of evil which is ever at work in the human psyche. Evil is innate in man and the operation of evil creates havoc in society as well as in the individual. Even more to the point was the increasingly realised dissociation between man and his world; between the human and the divine. If we are to know why Claudio temporarily seals the fate of Hero in the Church, we need to know what made him or prompted him to do so. In the play Don John is the villain and it is through his machination that Claudio judges Hero wrongly. Don John indeed ^{executes} ~~plans~~ his evil design cleverly and takes advantage of a natural phenomenon (darkness) to assist him. He, as a result, succeeds in casting a shadow on the chastity of Hero for a while, but since we are in the world of comedy, death has not been allowed to take a hand in the framework of the drama. The problem therefore is resolved without blood being shed.

Shakespeare is ever at work to emphasise the peculiarly fallible character of human knowledge,

and the nearly fatal contribution made towards it by the operation of evil. As we have said before, our main concern in this study is the problem of the supposed unchastity of Shakespeare's comic heroines. Three plays have been chosen for this purpose. These plays are: Much Ado About Nothing, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale.

In the following chapters we will try to show how the ^emachanism of supposed unchastity is an integral part of the dramatic scheme. We have already mentioned how Claudio is duped into believing that Hero is involved in a clandestine affair with someone. It is here and from this point onwards that the action of the drama ^{gets under way} ~~begins~~. Every little action of the drama emanates from this point. And later on when the problem is resolved and Hero reinstated in her true stature, every other action of the drama subsides. There is no doubt therefore as to how the comedy arises from the theme of the supposed unchastity of Hero. Hero, it is true, has to suffer before the truth dawns. This is needed from the point of view of dramatic interest, and the complications arise solely from the point of view of heightening the final comic effect when the crisis is finally resolved through a burst of illumination.

Evil which is a dominant force in the

human society has also been highlighted. This, as we have said before, is innate in human beings and it is accentuated by the new spirit of cynicism arising from the philosophic and religious distemper of the times. The operation of evil in the human situation creates havoc, and as a result not only the deserving but the undeserving also suffers. The theme of supposed unchastity in the three comedies chosen for our study is a dramatisation of a sense of perplexed precariousness and of the spirit of Machiavellian cynicism operating in the human situation. These heroines are not unchaste but they have been framed to appear so.

Although the stories of the three comedies differ, yet the theme of supposed unchastity is common to all of them. In Cymbeline, Imogen a chaste woman and the heroine of the drama, is made to appear what she is not. In the first place, there is the queen who is a study in appearance and reality. Although her sole aim is to secure the throne for his son Cloten, ^{cunningly} she plays the role of the faithful wife and dutiful step-mother. By her cunning she wins the confidence of the king and thereupon succeeds in separating Imogen from Posthumus. Then we have Iachimo who also succeeds in convincing Posthumus, by parading an apparently incontrovertible proof, of Imogen's unchastity (although

he has stolen the bracelet by treacherous means). It is at this point again that the drama gathers momentum. The battle between the Roman conquerors and the Britons is also symbolic of the treachery by which Iachimo supposedly violates Imogen's chastity.

Cymbeline is more true to life because of the fact that the agents of evil are allowed to die. On the other hand these deaths are symbolic of the regeneration of a new and more blissful life. The supposedly 'lost' princes are restored to their rightful places along with Imogen. The deaths of the queen and Cloten do not inspire pity as in the tragedies. They themselves are the cause of their own destruction. The comic effect, on the contrary, is heightened by these disposals. The presence of these deaths might incline one to think that the play cannot exactly be grouped among the comedies. However, the point to be noted is that these deaths do not raise awe and pity. The deaths come in an unobtrusive manner and can be seen to be very much in their place.

In the case of Posthumus, he is the target of evil in the form of villainy - in the person of Iachimo. The fact of seeming plays a vital role in convincing Posthumus of the supposed seduction of Imogen by

Iachimo. For Posthumus there is nothing more to do but believe Iachimo who has returned from Britain with the proof (the bracelet) of his having seduced Imogen. Posthumus, in his mad fury, even goes to the extent of ordering Pisanio to execute Imogen. This is the technique Shakespeare uses to heighten or prolong the comic effect to follow afterwards. The Shakespearian vision of life is highly complex, and the theme in question can be seen as a necessary element in this vision.

"...The close kinship of Shakespearian Comedy with Tragedy is apparent to every reader..." 5
This statement is the central core of every Shakespearian drama. The Shakespearian vision is as complex as life itself, for Shakespeare brings into his plays the varied complexities of life. Life is a mixture of both the tragic and the comic. And because of this most of the Shakespearian comedies have elements of the tragic in them. But the master mind of Shakespeare is ever at work to cleanse these elements at the end of each play and especially the plays we are dealing with so that the plays end happily. Even if some characters are allowed to perish, this does not in any way clash with the impregnated comic spirit. " It would seem difficult to resist the conclusion that, as Dogberry illustrates the ridiculous, and Benedick and Beatrice the shallow aspect of Messina society, so Don John is sketched in to suggest - in a comedy no more than a suggestion would be fitting - the tragedy it involves. Even the

5. Shakespearian Comedies and Other Studies.

George Gordon.

Ch. I. p.12

Oxford University Press.

soundest and justest of societies rest ultimately on the exclusion, and if necessary the elimination of those who refuse to conform..." 6

Shakespeare is not a strict disciplinarian where ^{the} stage craft is concerned. It is obvious that he does not conform to the dramatic rules laid down by the classical scholars. " Shakespeare always had a keen eye for theatrical fashion, but there is no evidence that he ever knuckled under to it. He took advantage of it rather to do it in a new way what he wanted to do anyway." 7 On the other hand, we have Ben Jonson who is the opposite of Shakespeare. His adhering to the 'unities' has rendered his plays devoid of that striking lifelikeness and variety that are the hallmark of Shakespeare's world. The complexities we spoke of earlier have made Shakespeare the contrary of Ben Jonson. The Winter's Tale is an example of this. "...It is a fairy tale - it is fact. It is romantic - it is realistic. It is tragic - it is comic. It is Christian - it is pagan. It is harsh and crabbed - it is simple and idyllic. It is this - it is that. It is a welter of anachronism." 8

This play is very different from the other two plays we have mentioned earlier. It is no doubt true that this play is also a study of the universal theme of

6. Shakespearian and Other Essays, Ch., II. p.42

James Smith.
Cambridge University Press.

7. The Meaning of Shakespeare, Vol. II.

Ch., 34.(Cymbeline) p. 244.
Arnold G. Goddard.
Phoenix Books.

8. Ibid. Ch., 35. (The Winter's Tale). p.263.

evil innate in man. But in The Winter's Tale the important point of difference is that the evil emanates from Leontes himself, the king of Sicily, who accuses his queen of unchastity. Unlike Claudio and Posthumus, the king here is self-deceived.

The Winter's Tale is, among other things, a psychological study of evil innate in man. In man, both good and evil are present simultaneously. And the human constitution is such that one never knows when there will be an eruption of evil i.e. the passion within. And this is what underscores the precariousness of the human situation. And this is what exactly happens in The Winter's Tale. Hell is let loose and the innocent queen suffers. And not only she; but her young son who dies and her daughter who in her infancy is an exile.

" The Shakespearian play shows a texture of personal thinking - woven with some objective and pre-existent story. Philosophy is entwined with action and event. Shakespeare's philosophy is infinitely variable not static, as Dante's; King Lear may be Senecan, but Macbeth is Christian. His philosophy may vary with each play, we cannot find by abstraction Shakespeare's own philosophy of life: his massed statement includes many philosophies, but is subject to none." 9 We are not exactly dealing with the philosophy of Shakespeare in our study of the three comedies. Although our interest

9. Shakespearian Production, G.Wilson Knight.

With Especial Reference To the Tragedies.

Ch., I. (The Shakespearian Play), p.28.

Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

is focussed upon the theme of the supposed unchastity of the heroines of the three comedies we cannot overlook the layers of themes imbedded in them just as varied philosophy is.

The Winter's Tale is highly philosophical but, as G. Wilson Knight says, the philosophy is not static but varied. It is on the whole a psychological study of evil innate in man who is hypnotised and madly possessed by it and of its ultimate destructive power. The master genius of Shakespeare is again seen at work in this play. With varied themes all brought together, the play among other things, deals with the suspected faithlessness of Hermione. This problem is the direct outcome of evil in the form of jealousy in Leontes. He himself is the one who asks Hermione to persuade Polixenes to prolong his stay. But when she succeeds in her task, the king is angry and charges her with disloyalty. For the action that ^{Leontes} he commits, Polixenes has to suffer for some sixteen years, along with Hermione who has been branded unchaste. The action of the king has far reaching effects. He loses his best friend, his only son, and his daughter who is exiled.

The crisis is resolved only after Perdita the daughter of Leontes, has grown up. She is the instru-

ment that brings about the resolution of the crisis in the end. Almost one third of the play is clouded with fear and apprehension. But Shakespeare ^{manoeuvres} ~~manoeuvres~~ the action in such a way that the comic spirit is there all the while lurking in the background and enlarged and enhanced at the end of the play.

Thus, as we have pointed out earlier, the object of this study will be to bring out how Shakespeare makes use of the theme to show, how even within the framework of comedy, human happiness can be clouded, however temporarily, through the clouding of reason and the operation of evil, whether within or without. This becomes a potent means of unveiling character and situation and also of deepening the realisation and vision that the characters are blessed with at the end. From this angle, the theme in question can be seen as a necessary element in Shakespeare's highly complex vision of life. In his hands, the manipulation of this theme also serves the all too important purpose of cleansing the turbid atmosphere engendered, by the frailties, so unforeseen and so inevitable, to which man is subject. Victims of distorted vision or insufficient knowledge or complete ignorance, the dramatic characters often look most assured when there is least assurance for their attitudes and behaviour and make a muddle of their

situation from where they emerge not by their wits for they have none but by a merciful providence acting through the least likely individuals and situations. This reminds one of Isabella's summing up of life at the higher levels of society.

"...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."

(Measure for Measure. II.ii.)

Every Shakespearian comedy is an imaginative exercise in social reconstruction. To begin with and for quite a while society is bogged down in a morass and it is the men rather than the women who by their blunderings born of lack of knowledge and a preponderant measure of arrogance ~~who~~ bring society on to the brink of an abyss. When things have reached the climax, it is some near miracle that brings about a change in the situation where much of the accumulated evil is purged. Knowledge dawns and there is the emerging picture of a relatively cleansed society.

Again and again, Shakespeare exploits the motif of appearance and reality; exhibits the working

out of the forces of evil, and shows how by an unexpected turn of events (mostly, thanks to the people who would not be much thought of) follies are exposed and bonds of understanding are freshly and more enduringly cemented. In the process, he sheds an illumination on the nature of the mingled drama that is this sub-lunary life.

As stated earlier, our object will be to analyse this process in the three comedies in question.

It must be pointed out that the reason why we have chosen not to include Othello for a detailed study is our basic concern which is to see how the alarm caused and dark shadows cast by the working of human ignorance and follies are countered and finally absorbed in a deeper understanding of life which brings joy and illumination.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Claudio: O, what men dare do! What men may do!
What men daily do! not knowing what
they do!

(Much Ado About Nothing, IV.i.)

Claudio's exclamation, quoted above, although arising from an abused mind, can be passed as Shakespeare's general commentary on man's existential situation in this world. More often than not, he is not his true self, being either self-deluded or deceived by others.

He is without knowledge although he speaks and acts as though he were possessed of knowledge and certitude.

Now what Claudio says above is ironically true of himself as it is true of a number of other characters in Much Ado About Nothing. It is certainly true of the two wit-crackers, Benedick and Beatrice, who do not suspect the stratagems employed by others and believe the conversations they are meant to overhear to have been conducted in a serious vein. And it is true of Leonato himself, Hero's father, who persuades himself to believe Claudio's revolting accusation against his daughter and joins in the cruel denunciation of slandered innocence.

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As will appear gradually from our detailed analysis of the play, the theme of the supposed unchastity of Hero takes into account and operates through the forces of violence and evil (omnipresent both in Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies), the basic inability to tell apart truth and error, reality and appearance, and the dramatist's faith in an unpredictable turn of events where truth is stumbled upon by the ignorant when it has eluded the 'wise'.

The two plots that are worked into the design of the play are the Claudio-Hero plot and the Beatrice-Benedick plot. While the latter plot is Shakespeare's own, the former one is borrowed from Baudello and Ariosto. The Dogberry-Verges episodes are also Shakespeare's own.

Even though the Claudio-Hero plot is borrowed, Shakespeare uses it to enact his own singular vision. The two plots are brought together and so dovetailed into each other as to create a tangled web of characters, incidents and situations where comedy is not very far from the shadows of tragedy.

The 'Unchastity' of Hero in Much Ado comes about by the machination of Don John, the bastard

brother of Don Pedro. The opening scene introduces all the important characters of the play. It also tells us about the rebellion of Don John and how this is put down and a reconciliation brought about. This scene also introduces the love-note out of which emanates the various problems of the play. Shakespeare has indeed very cleverly introduced a 'go-between' in the character of Don Pedro. We are told how Don Pedro has 'bestowed much honour' upon Claudio and taken him into his confidence. This in turn makes Don John malignant even towards Claudio. Don Pedro succeeds in winning the hand of Hero for Claudio. It is at this point that the complications in the play arise. Evil which has so long been dormant in the person of Don John suddenly erupts. The endemic human vulnerability to error and deception also makes its terrible presence felt.

Shakespeare has taken care to introduce such characters as Borachio and Margaret who are given to the ways of the flesh, and would do anything for the right price (especially Borachio). Don John has been aligned to Borachio who in turn had clandestine sexual relation with Margaret. The bringing together of these three characters proves disastrous but adds to the interest of the play by sealing the fate of Hero at least for sometime.

As we have said, Borachio's hold on Margaret provided food to the displeasure of Don John. The scene in which Margaret looks out of the window in the guise of Hero, supposed to be having a secret love affair, has indeed been conceived very cleverly. The scene takes place in the middle of the night when visibility is low, so that the 'viewers', Don Pedro and Claudio, would be deceived by their eyes while their ears would hear Margaret being addressed ~~to~~ as Hero by Borachio. The outcome of this scene brings about the final crisis of the play. Hero is supposed to be seen where she is not, and the marriage scheduled to take place between her and Claudio is foiled at least for the time being.

The play indeed is a comment on the insecurity of man's knowledge. While, the mind of man is infinite, he simultaneously is prone to error, and to wrong judgement. As we saw in the preceding chapter, Shakespeare's age was obsessed, pervasively and pronouncedly with the problem of knowledge and error. This was so because the age was an age of discovery and new knowledge of the workings of nature. Hitherto man's mind was limited to the limits of the small world he lived in. But with new discoveries being made, the ideas which he had taken for granted were shaken to the very roots.

The Copernican revolution with the resultant transformation of the geo-centric and well-enclosed Ptolemaic universe had a telling effect on man's ideas about himself, his place in the scheme of things, the foundation of his knowledge, its nature, extent and reliability. The medieval certainty about man's status and knowledge gave way to an uncertainty about them. Faith and belief gave way to a nagging awareness about undependable the nature and scope of knowledge.

Shakespeare has taken care to show how little Claudio knows of Hero:

O, my lord,
When you went onward on this ended action,
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,
That lik'd but had a rougher task in hand...

(I.i.)

The above quoted passage shows that Claudio has seen Hero but beyond that nothing is said of any kind of acquaintance between the two. Claudio thus does not know her well enough. It is not surprising therefore, although it is interesting, that whenever there is a suggestion that she is not to be trusted or that Don Pedro might misappropriate her to his loss, Claudio is not only willing to listen but is prepared to believe the contrary of what he had thought

of her; ("...the sweetest lady that I look'd on," and
"Can the world buy such a jewel?/ I.i.)

Thus when Don John feigning goodwill, comes
to report that Hero is faithless and that he can provide
ocular proof of it, Claudio, far from contesting the
suggestion, is swayed into exclaiming:

" If I see her to-night why I should
not marry her, to-morrow in the
congregation where I should wed,
there will I shame her."

(III.ii.)

Earlier on, when the same villain had come
to report that Don Pedro had intended to marry Hero ,
Claudio showed an equal measure of gullibility and
thought that, that was the end of his affair with Hero.

" Thus answer I in the name of Benedick,
But hear these ill news in the ears of
Claudio.
'Tis certain so: the Prince woos for
himself.
Friendship is constant in all other
things
Save in the office and affairs of love;
....
Farewell therefore, Hero.

(II.i.)

These indeed are some instances of the playwright's suggesting that Claudio has no certain know-

ledge and is therefore at the mercy of tale-bearers.

The 'reconciliation' between Don Pedro and Don John is also another important piece of action that serves to comment on the insecurity of man's knowledge. Don Pedro does not seem to be sufficiently aware that his bastard brother nurtures active malevolence towards him and Claudio.

The introduction of the 'middle man' between Claudio and Hero plays an important part in the structure of the drama itself. We have stated earlier that Claudio's knowledge of Hero is very meagre indeed and therefore it necessitates Don Pedro's proxy-wooing. From then on Shakespeare purposely does not bring Claudio and Hero together. They are not allowed the chance to get to know each other intimately. This particular fact opens the ground wide for Claudio to doubt Hero's integrity at the slightest possible chance. And this he does when duped by Don John into believing Margaret to be Hero.

Human beings are prone to error and wrong judgement. This is especially more so when evil forces are at work against what a man has taken to be the truth. In Othello, the hero and the heroine have been

proves fatal in the end for Othello and Desdemona. Evil which is manifested in the person of Iago works upon the very weaknesses we have mentioned.

Thus even between man and ~~his~~ wife evil finds a place and slowly but decidedly works to the destruction of both. In Much Ado About Nothing the situation develops differently because it is a comedy. The 'reconciliation' between Don Pedro and Don John is an important factor in this play. This is to bring about the crisis of the play, although noted indirectly. Here too Shakespeare has taken care to comment indirectly on the insecurity of human knowledge. Upon being reconciled, Don Pedro takes Don John into his confidence. Don Pedro and Don John are half brothers. And this explains why Don Pedro never for once doubted Don John's truthfulness until Borachio has been captured and the mischief has come to light.

In this connection, the parallelism between Iago and Don John can hardly escape notice. Their motivations seem so strikingly alike. Both are disgruntled and both nurture a strange grudge against their superiors. If Cassio is an eye-sore to Iago, so is Claudio to Don John. And their idioms are so alike.

This is how Iago refers to Cassio:

at the very chastity of Hero, who like a lamb before a shearer takes every blow. She has been defamed by the very person she is to marry, who with his spurious knowledge and the promptings of evil has been led to believe the reverse of the true nature of Hero.

Evil is a dominant feature in human situation. This is so because every human being is capable of doing evil not only to himself but to others too. Needless to say, evil is present in each and every human being. It is only a matter of suppressing it or letting it out that decides whether a man is good or bad. In the play we are dealing with, evil has been presented in the person of Don John.

I had rather be a canker in a hedge than
a rose in his grace; and it better fits
my blood to be disdain'd of all than to
fashion a carriage to rob love from any.
In this, though I cannot be said to be
a flattering honest man, it must not be
denied but I am a plain-dealing villain.
I am trusted with a muzzle and enfranchis'd
with a clog; therefore I have decreed not
to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth, I
would bite; in the meantime let me be that
I am, and seek not to alter me.

(I.iii.)

It is obvious that the action of the drama rests, on the whole, upon the machination of Don John, the very instrument to comment upon the fallible

nature of human knowledge and its proneness to error, wrong judgement and wrong action. Don John sets out to foil every step taken by Claudio and Don Pedro. As we have have stated earlier, he succeeds in deceiving them by imposing Margaret as Hero in the 'Window Scene'. Thereafter, the decision is left open to Claudio and Don Pedro, who ironically do exactly what Don John intended them to do, although Don John remains quiet after he has led them into his desired trap. But the machination of Don John does not come all of a sudden. A breezy superciliousness divorced from a stable insight into men and things is infused into the very main stream of the drama, so that the catastrophe in the action of the play comes as a result of the grave flaws working in the characters of Don Pedro and Claudio. Evil in the play is given the chance of creating turmoil but since it is a comedy, it is exposed in due course.

The outburst of Claudio in the church can be attributed to the presence of a near-fatal cognitive and moral blindness afflicting him without his knowing it. Otherwise, why should he doubt Hero at all when Don John is the prime factor in bringing them to witness the clandestine meeting between Borachio and Margaret(posing as Hero). Let us at this point see how

Borachio, Don John's man, gloatingly describes the scene that carried a sort of religious conviction to the wise prince and his favourite (Claudio) that the girl whom Claudio once described as a 'gem' and whom the other courted on his behalf, was not what she had been thought to be.

Borachio: ...but know that I have to-night wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the name of Hero; she leans out at her mistress' chamber-window, bids me a thousand times goodnight - I tell this tale vilely. I should first tell how the Prince, Claudio, and my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this encounter.

Conrade: And thought they Margaret was Hero?

Borachio: Two of them did, the Prince and Claudio; but the devil my master knew she was Margaret; and partly by his oaths, which first posse'd 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, away went Claudio enrag'd; swore he would meet her, as he was appointed, the next morning at the temple, and there, before the whole congregation, shame her with what he saw o'er night, and send her home again without a husband.

(III.iii.)

for Borachio

Indeed, it is ironical that the very moment of triumphant gloating turns out to be the moment of nemesis overtaking him. He has given himself away, without his knowing it, to the officers of the state.

He has been fatally overheard.

IInd Watch : We charge you in the Prince's name,
stand.

Ist Watch : Call up the right Master Constable;
we have here recover'd the most
dangerous piece of lechery that
ever was known in the commonwealth.

(III.iii.)

This is Shakespeare's technique of presenting his moral vision of a world where we do wrong, then give ourselves airs, chuckle over the fate of our victims, and then, when feeling so secure inside our 'invulnerable' armour, we are most unexpectedly tripped up. Don Pedro and Claudio are gulled, Hero is defamed but Borachio has his share of misfortune too.

To return to Don John, he has already planted the seed of suspicion in Claudio's mind when he said:

Signior, you are very near my
brother in his love; he is ena-
mour'd on Hero; I pray you dis-
suade him from her; she is no
equal for his birth. You may do
the part of an honest man in it.

(II.i.)

However, this suspicion was soon forgotten when Don Pedro told him of his true intention;

...Here, Claudio, I have wooed in thy name,
and fair Hero is won. I have broke with her
father, and his good will obtained. Name
the day of marriage, and God give thee joy!

(II.i.)

This particular act of Don John, although seemingly a trifle, has bearing upon the final crisis of the play. He succeeds in planting doubt in Claudio, a seedling that is to be nursed by him. Don John knows beforehand of the intended wooing of Hero by Don Pedro for Claudio. Moreover knowingly he has addressed Claudio as Signior Benedick. Now, the seed of doubt which had been planted in Claudio bears fruit when he witnesses the meeting between Borachio and Margaret (posing as Hero).

The introduction of Dogberry, Verges and the Watch is of ^{the} utmost importance in the final resolution of the play. In fact they serve as the saving gods who finally put things into their respective places. When these characters are introduced in Act. III., Sc., iii., one is led to think of why Shakespeare has taken pains in introducing such characters. We use the word 'pains' deliberately because they are among the "wittiest" of Shakespeare's lowly characters, But Shakespeare never introduces characters without purpose in the dramatic structure. Their indulging in 'wits' also serve to com-

plicate the play. If they had been straight forward in their speech the crisis in the play would have been resolved without the complications in the 'Church Scene.'

Dogberry : One word sir: our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspicious persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

(III.iv.)

Some bits of conversation had gone before Verges told Leonato of the apprehension of the rogues. But even now there is no mention of the calumination of Hero. Had they even mentioned Hero's name Leonato might have taken interest in the captives. The overall spirit of the play before Claudio's outburst in the Church has been created in such a way that there is no place for suspicion and mistrust. Don John who is to create havoc in the play is taken as one who has indeed repented his past misdeeds. One therefore is led to believe that two moods have been created in the play. The festive mood dominates, while running parallel to this is the more serious mood which ultimately overrides the former mood for a while. Leonato who is so far dominated by the former mood (his daughter ^{about to get} ~~being~~ married) puts aside the case brought to him by Dogberry and Verges.

Take their examination yourself, and
bring it me; I am now in great haste,
as it may appear unto you.

(III.v.)

Leonato is, 'in great haste' to see his daughter married and this is very ironical. It is ironical because he is confronted with something whose implications do not reach his mind, since he is ⁱⁿ no mood to address himself to it. Shakespeare has used this device to add to the crisis and thereby ^ehighten the final comic effect. This scene though short is very important in that it helps to complicate the plot.

The complication of the plot is of vital importance to attain the final comic effect. The Church-Scene is the turning point of the play. Hitherto the atmosphere ^{has been} ~~as~~ one of merriment. It is no doubt true that plotting has already been underway, affecting the course of the play. Hero is all set to marry Claudio and Leonato is 'in great haste' to see his daughter wed. In the Church Scene the plot against all the major characters of the play, devised by Don John, finally hatches through Claudio. The atmosphere abruptly changes from one of merriment to that of grief.

The final resolution of the crisis is

brought about by the lowly characters; Dogberry, Verges and the Watch. They are the saving gods of the play. This shows clearly how Shakespeare ^{subtly} ~~can not~~ differentiate between the 'higher ups' and the 'lower down' of society. The final illumination of the characters serves to heighten the final comic effect. Don John is denuded and his true self is revealed. Hero is reinstated in her true position. And the play concludes in an atmosphere in which it began. Don John is also taken captive but his trial is postponed until the next day. The concluding lines of the play serve to bring about the atmosphere of merriment in which it ends.

Think not on him till to-morrow.
I'll devise thee brave punishments for him.
Strike up, pipers.

(V.iv.)

Thus we see how Shakespeare makes use of the theme to show how even within the framework of Comedy, the tragic note can be brought about by the clouding of reason through the basic instability of man and the work of evil. The instrument we have in this study is Don John, the bastard brother of Don Pedro. He is the evil-incarnate, a necessity in the comic structure of the play. A necessity because Shakespeare has imitated life and in life evil is necessarily there.

But the more important point, perhaps, is that evil can operate so successfully and to such an alarming effect only because the mind is not anchored in the certainty of faith and reason and because it can be a victim of delusion and self-delusion.

It must be noted that Shakespeare has so designed the dove-tailing of the two plots that the defaming of Hero is not only the means of organically relating the Dogberry-Verges episode to the main plot and of finally unmasking Don John and Borachio, but also of bringing Benedick and Beatrice to wedlock. In fact, Hero's defamation brings out the best in the two wit-crackers. Both are shocked beyond belief, for they are instinctively convinced of Hero's innocence. Their reaction is therefore instinctive and immediate and they rush to take up her cause. Benedick decides to challenge Claudio to a duel to avenge the wrong done to Hero who is supposed to have died from the shock, And he has the support of Beatrice in this. In fact, the wronged and supposedly dead Hero has been given the role of bridging the gulf between them, thus quickening the pace of their eventual union.

Yet another happy feature of the otherwise atrocious affair is the discovery of a saviour in

the friar who plays the same role as Pisanio in Cymbeline and Paulina in The Winter's Tale. Even though it is a dramatic necessity, the friar's role is a testimony to the unsuspected presence and assertion of good in a world of evil when the rest of humanity appears benighted and lost to reason and grace. Into the graceless world of erring mortals, the Friar looks like a heaven-sent angel who, in the process, turns out to be instrumental in the symbolic passage from death to resurrection. Hero dies and is to acquire a new life. It is significant that the same symbolism is at work in Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale.

CYMBELINE

Even Shakespeare has not written many plays where flawed or near opaque perception draws such a veil between one character and another or between one set of personages and another as in Cymbeline. Shared perception or mutability^{ua} of knowledge which is the basic necessary condition for any measure of meaningful functioning of society seems to have withdrawn in favour of an alarming solipsism which serves to build up a number of exclusive personal worlds accounting for an almost fatal fragmentation of society. The king is unaware of the general response of his subjects to Imogen's secret marriage to Posthumus; his annoyance and grief are only outwardly shared by his court. He, is, besides, a complete alien to the private world of the queen whose every single act of deception is cunningly contrived to secure the glad approval of the king.

Posthumus is understandably alien to the Italian Iachimo's sly ways but shows a lamentable ignorance of the steely integrity of Imogen with whom he had grown up and whom he is expected to have known thoroughly unlike Claudio who had had only a semblance of a knowledge of Hero before he married her. Arviragus and Guiderius are ignorant of their true identity and of their true relationship with Belarius. Neither the two brothers on the one hand nor Imogen on the other know

who they are in relation to each other. Lucius is unaware of his page's true identity. Posthumus is now a Roman, now a Briton, keeping his identity only to himself. Iachimo is denied the knowledge that he is fighting Posthumus. Posthumus on the ^{one}~~other~~ hand, and the three heroes of the battle, viz, the old man and his ^{on the other} supposed sons, have, by their incredible feats of bravery, caused excited speculations about their true identity. Earlier on, Imogen had mistaken the headless trunk of Cloten for that of Posthumus.

There is, thus, an enormous measure of confusion, of muddled thinking and action. Frailty of knowledge and active evil ironically combine to befoul the atmosphere as the action progresses and nothing short of the hand of providence can be believed to guide the erring mortals on to self-knowledge and light. Indeed, some invisible supernatural beneficence is referred to repeatedly to explain the miraculous discoveries and reunion at the end.

When one looks closely at the play, we can recognise that two crucial episodes, later to have their necessary bearing on the plot, have already taken place before the drama opens. These are the marriage of Imogen and Posthumus and the abduction of Cymbeline's

sons by Belarius.

The abduction took place some twenty years before and, inspite of the trauma caused then, seems now almost forgotten. What is of immediate relevance and profound concern is the princess's secret marriage in total disregard of the king's wishes.

It would therefore be appropriate to say that the play begins after a crisis has already overtaken the house of Cymbeline, the king of Britain. This crisis which has been omitted from the action of the play is the decisive factor in the complicated development of the plot. The action emanates from this crisis and hence one would be justified to see it both within and outside the play. The disorder portrayed in the general structure of the play comes about because of it and our study would be directed specifically to how this disorder moves to order or how mutual ignorance of frightful proportions is eventually resolved into a stable vision.

The secret marriage of Leonatus and Imogen is the immediate cause of the troubled note the play introduces. And the ^{Sinuous} ~~sinus~~ and diverse movements of a deepening crisis which overtakes society can be

seen to arise out of or be connected with that 'original sin.'

It is Posthumus's conviction that Imogen is faithless that makes him write those two letters - one to Pisanio and the other to Imogen herself. And it is these two letters that take Pisanio and Imogen to Milford Haven where Imogen disguised as a boy, ^{called} ~~call~~ Fidele, first meets Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus who take care of her and later, after her supposed death and revival, meets Lucius, the Roman general, who engages her in his service as a page. This is how Imogen is enabled to be present at Cymbeline's tent after the Roman rout where the recognition scene takes place. It is again Posthumus's belief that Imogen has been killed by Pisanio according to his instructions, that makes him, in a mood of repentance, leave the Romans and fight for Britain whose princess was his wife. The final British victory thus finds Posthumus at Cymbeline's tent.

Cloten would not have come to Milford ^{Haven} and met with his death but for Pisanio having told him that Imogen had gone there. And the queen would not have died the way she did but for Cloten's 'strange absence' from the court. Besides, the central role played by Iachimo both in Imogen's calumniation and in

the final scene in clearing the mist thus helping in her rehabilitation to the joy and amazement of all, takes us at once to the heart of the theme of supposed unchastity and the final resolution of the plot bringing knowledge where there was none.

It can thus be seen how Imogen's ordeal consequent upon Iachimo's presenting her as a false woman to her husband is a device used both to project a spreading crisis, at once social and political, and to resolve it, bringing order out of disorder and in the process shedding an illumination upon the human situation abounding in error, misconception and evil.

The note on which the play opens is one of disorder and dissention.

You do not meet a man but frowns...

(I.i.)

His daughter, and the heir of's kingdom, whom
He purpos'd to his wife's sole son - a widow
That late he married-bath referr'd herself
Unto a poor but worthy gentleman. She's wedded;

All

Is outward sorrow, though I think the King
Be touch'd at very heart.

(I.i.)

Like most Shakespearian comedies, then, Cymbeline opens

on a note of disquiet

Cymbeline's family which by assumption represents the social fabric is visibly disturbed and in the throes of disruption. And, as the opening dialogue spells out, the disturbance or disorder is traceable to the secret marriage of the princess to Posthumus in the face of opposition and to the displeasure of the king.

It is clear then that the play begins after a crisis has already taken place in the house of Cymbeline, the king of Britain. This crisis which has been omitted from the action of the play is however the decisive factor in the development of the action. For the action emanates from this crisis and one would be justified to see it as much within as outside the structure of the play.

The initial dialogue not only tells us of the clandestine marriage, but also of a number of other important things. Other things apart, it introduces the note of seeming and being, of appearance and reality. The pithy phrase 'outward sorrow' is a pointer to this. The general appearance of sorrow and displeasure put on to please the king does nothing to give the

lie to the genuine approval and approbation of the princess's act.

...But not a courtier,
Although they wear their faces to the bent
Of the King's looks, hath a heart that is not
Glad at the thing they scowl at.

(I.i.)

We are also told how worthy both Imogen and Posthumus are and how Imogen has, in public estimation, confirmed her inherent worth by her choice of Posthumus though she has alienated and enraged her father in the bargain. And there is ^{the} further vital bit of information about the infant princes having been stolen from their nursery in mysterious circumstances about twenty years ago.

...He had two sons - if this be worth your hearing,
Mark it - the eldest of them at three years old,
I' th' swathing clothes the other, from their
nursery
Were stol'n and to this hour no guess in knowledge
Which way they went.

(I.i.)

The actual abduction of the princes about the circumstances of which complete ignorance prevails looks forward to the supposed seduction of Imogen and the spiriting away of her bracelet by the scheming Iachimo. The fraud on the infant princes anticipates the fraud on the married princess. The metaphorical assault on the prin-

ces and the princess glances at the actual assault on Britain. In each case, it is a criminal violation of rights, of honour. It is an assault, direct or indirect, on sovereignty - actual sovereignty in the case of the state and a personal, delicate form of it in the other cases. The network of anticipations, echoes and the reverberations includes the censorial observation on the slackness of vigilance which made possible the abduction of the princes.

That a king's children should be so convey'd,
So slackly guarded... .

(I.i.)

This deplorable slackness anticipates the fatal remissness that resulted in the entry of Iachimo into the princess's chamber and in the success of his designs. And as in the case of the stolen infants, there is 'no guess in knowledge' how the bracelet went. In fact, until the final discovery, Imogen has had no correct guess as to how Posthumus came to believe that she was faithless.

It is not hard to see now how the entire story is conceived of and arranged in terms of anticipations, hints and half-hints with their realised implications of points and counter-points, making up

mosaic of incidents strung together by an artistic skill and a moral vision of a remarkable order.

The secret marriage of Imogen and Posthumus cannot just be conceived of as only the immediate cause of a disorder that can pass off without causing further ado. Both morally and from the viewpoint of artistic necessity, it cannot but have far-reaching ramifications which Shakespeare exploits to great dramatic effect. The tumultuous marriage of Othello and Desdemona was not without its effect on the complication of the plot. Nor were the impetuous proceedings of the lovers in A Midsummer Night's Dream without any implications in terms of the prolonged spell of mystification in the forest.

In fact, there is much in Cymbeline that reminds one of Othello. The disparity of the lovers' social status, the ecstasy of mutual love, its heady utterance suggesting a form of hubris and pregnant with tragic forebodings, the dreadfully insinuating workings of evil - such elements as these bring the two plays close together and provide an interesting study.

The impetuous secrecy of their proceedings almost makes it morally necessary that the marriage of

Imogen and Posthumus be subjected to the ways of the world. That is how it can prove its strength and ability to withstand any cunning and devious assault. It would also be a means of dramatically demonstrating how unguarded, over-trusting, even gullible man and woman united in wedlock can be.

To be secure in one's knowledge of the loved one's fidelity is one thing, but to be boastful in public about the pricelessness and invulnerability of her integrity is another. Such a vaunt can only tempt one's fate by exposing one's unawareness of the accidents of life, of the potential topsyturviness of the human situation.

Posthumus's defiance of Iachimo ironically reveals his ignorance, his fatal blindness to the incalculable and unpredictable potential for mischief imbedded in the human psyche. And in his blindness he does Imogen wrong in exposing her to the unfathomable wiles of a Machiavellian character.

Iachimo's assault brings out the chinks in their armours of mutual faith. Contrary to their profession, they are liable to suspect each other's loyalty. Revealingly, it is Philario who has to point

On the eve of his departure for Rome, when Posthumus had put on the ring given by Imogen to be kept "till you woo another wife, / When Imogen is dead," he had said addressing the gift:

...Remain, remain thou here
While the sense can keep it on.

(I.i.)

Obviously, Posthumus has now lost his 'sense.' He has fallen ^avictim to Iachimo's 'arithmetic'. He has allowed himself to be a prisoner of 'consecutive reasoning,' having lost his faith.

Significantly, it is Pisanio who sees the truth.

...What false Italian -
As poisonous- tongu'd as handed - hath prevail'd
On thy too ready hearing ?

.....

O my master!
Thy mind to her is now as low as were
Thy fortunes.

(III.i.)

As we saw in the preceeding chapter, Shakespeare seems to be making the point that while those who are privileged in society run into errors holding proudly to their armour of self-sufficiency, it is the lesser ones who retain a clarity of perception and ^aof perspicacity

of judgement which eventually turn out to be a sure basis for society to return to sanity and health.

As for Imogen, on the other hand, it is again significant that after having asked her women to 'search for a jewel that too casually/Hath left mine arm', she seems to forget all about it. She would not be inclined to connect the disappearance of the bracelet with the dubious visit of the Italian. Her complacency is indeed astonishing in the context of her steely integrity. And later when she learn^s, to her horror and dismay, of her husband's accusation, she can only think of blaming some Italian women who must have corrupted his mind.

...Some jay of Italy,
Whose mother was her painting, hath betray'd
him.

(III.iv.)

Like her husband, she too is too ready to believe the worst of him.

Now if Iachimo, by the triumph of his insolence and cunning, has brought the couple to this sorry pass, it must be recognised that he would have had no opportunity to enter the scene if it were not for

the queen who, in her self-aggrandisement, has brought about a complete estrangement between the king and his daughter. The king does not see the evil that she is. A victim of appearances, he does everything at the instance of the queen who is hell-bent on promoting the interests of her foolish son, Cloten. She has got the king to banish Posthumus with the hope of seeing Cloten gain the attention and win the favour of Imogen who is now separated from her husband. Pisanio, Posthumus' man and Cornelius, the physician, know the evil she is and would not trust her, even though they are outwardly deferential. She reminds one of Lady Macbeth, of Goneril and Regan and dies of despair when Cloten, putting on the clothes of Posthumus, rushes out towards Milford Haven in search of Imogen hoping to take forcible possession of her and never return. As Cornelius is to put it in the final scene of the play:

First, she confess'd she never lov'd you; only
Affected greatness got by you, not you;

(V.v.)

Your daughter, whom she bore in hand of lov
With such integrity, she did confess
Was as a scorpion to her sight; whose life,
But that her flight prevented it, she had
Ta'en off by poison.

(V.v.)

...She did confess she had

in the belief that she would be meeting her husband learns to her horror what he intends to be done to her. The solicitous and clear-eyed Pisanio gets her to put on the guise of a boy, gives her a potion believed to bring her relief should she ever be taken unwell and advising her to seek employment with Lucius, takes leave of her (May the gods/ Direct you to the best!).

It so happens that she runs into Belarius and his two boys whose hospitality she enjoys for a while. It is significant that Belarius is the banished lord much like her banished husband and that the two boys are her long-lost brothers whom she obviously cannot recognise and who do not recognise her. Imogen and the boys are drawn towards each other although they are denied the knowledge of their true identity. There she falls sick and taking some of the drug that Pisanio had given her she swoons. The comatose Imogen is taken as dead and is given a sort of burial with flowers heaped over her body. She soon revives, sees the beheaded body of Cloten clothed in Posthumus' garment and jumps to the conclusion that Pisanio had forged the letters and treacherously killed Posthumus.

Imogen thus can be seen to go through error to further error with the accentuation of the motif of

appearance and reality.

Weeping on the supposed dead body of Posthumus she is met with by Lucius, who, as had been so correctly predicted by Pisanio, proves to be a welcome benefactor and takes her, of course, as the boy Fidele, into his service. It is as Lucius' page that Imogen will finally arrive at the British camp.

Although Lucius is a good soul and proves to be a god send for her, she is, to all appearances, in a quandary for she can have no notion as to her future. She believes that Posthumus has been foully murdered and this can only mean an uncertain future for her with no hope of happiness left. She has misread Pisanio's action and intention and is in a mist. She ironically proves the truth of her own words spoken on reviving from her death-seeming slumber.

...Our very eyes
Are sometimes, like our judgements, blind,

(IV.ii.)

Now if Imogen is in error about her perception of Posthumus in Cloten and believes him dead, so is Posthumus in error in his interpretation of the

bloody handkerchief.

Yea, bloody cloth, I'll keep thee;
 for I wish'd
Thou shouldst be colour'd thus.

(V.i.)

He believes that Imogen is dead thanks to his own instruction, to Pisanio who without much judgement has carried them out loyally. Both are victims of appearance and both find themselves in the vortex of ^{the} ensuing battle.

It is important to remember that Posthumus has had no occasion yet to have any doubts about Iachimo's persuasions. However, in the face of the seemingly incontrovertible proof of Imogen's death, his heart softens and he now is led to take a lenient view of her disloyalty which now appears as a "little fault" ("You snatch some hence for little faults.") He refers to her as "noble Imogen". Resolving to atone for his conduct, he now decides to change sides and not to inflict wounds on his lady's kingdom.

...I am brought hither
Among th' Italian gentry, and to fight
Against my lady's kingdom. 'Tis enough
That, Britain, I have kill'd thy mistress;
 peace!
I'll give no wound to thee. Therefore, good
 heavens,

Hear paitenently my purpose. I'll disrobe
me
Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself
As does a Britain peasant. So I'll fight
Against the part I come with; so I'll die
For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life
Is every breath a death. And thus unknown
More valour in me than my habits show.
Gods, put the strength o' th' Leonati in
me!
To shame the guise o' th' world, I will
begin
The fashion - less without and more within."

(V.i.)

We have quoted at length the speech to make a few points. To begin with, Shakespeare here lets us have a necessary glimpse of Posthumus's agonised and chastened soul. If his earlier mistaken belief about her death nearly bridges the chasm that had yawned between himself and his actions and repairs his damaged faith in her and this inspite of there being no occasion or need to question Iachimo's proceedings, Imogen's supposed death can be said to triumph over her supposed unchastity by renewing the flame of her husband's love and reinstating her in his heart and esteem.

And without an awareness of the full implication of what he is doing, he sets himself in opposition to the ways (the 'guise') of the world which values more the outer than the inner, more the

appearance than the reality. His motto " less without and more within " points to the spirit of inwardisation that has set in and which is calculated, in terms of the dramatic design, to put him on the path to an incredible union with his resurrected bride.

We can now turn to what happens to Iachimo who was responsible for the ascription of infidelity to Imogen who, as we have seen, is now caught up as a consequence in a frightful mess. The Romans are on the British soil consequent upon Britain's refusal to pay the tributes demanded. Iachimo as the Roman general fights the British forces when Posthumus, in the guise of a poor British peasant, gets the better of the Roman and disarms him. This is a moment of humiliation for Iachimo who pities and curses himself. The stricken conscience for having maligned Imogen and wronged both her and Posthumus weighs heavily upon him. He's not himself. As Horatio puts it in a different context, he is only a piece of himself. Shakespeare's perception of the moral universe is such that for having deceived Posthumus, Iachimo now is now unmanned and made to pay the penalty in being overwhelmed and beaten by Posthumus who, unrecognised by the Italian, fights as a British peasant.

The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
Takes off my manhood. I have belied a lady,

The Princess of this country, and the air on't
Revengingly enfeebles me; or could Carl
A very drudge of nature's, subdu'd me
In my profession ?

(V.ii.)

If, thanks to Iachimo's knavery, Posthumus had been taken in by the so-called evidence of Imogen's disloyalty, it is ironically now the deceiver's turn, to be taken in by Posthumus's appearance.

When in the same scene Belarius cries out:
" Nothing routs us but the villaincy of our fears", ^{he,} without his knowing it, would seem to be laying an unerring finger on the basic truth about the human situation, which is that, in whatever situation man falls, ^{he} is defeated by his ignorance, by his mistaken notion of things which he considers sure knowledge. In our mistaken self-assurance we forget that we do not know enough, that our knowledge is hopelessly flawed and cannot guarantee a safe conduct through life unless we bare our bosom to the graces from above.

With his increasing reliance upon the powers of the unseen, upon a beneficent providence, Posthumus seems to be coming every moment closer to the truth, to the essential reality of the situation.

....for all was lost,

But that the heavens fought.

It is only when the well-meaning actors in the drama have begun to realise their insufficiency and the inscrutable will of the divine while giving of their best in the given situation, that the resolution of the complex plot seems near at hand.

The supreme irony is that it is the wronged characters (viz, Belarius and Posthumus, both unjustly exiled) who turn the tide of the battle and bring about the victory for the benighted king.

In this context, the following dialogue between the two British captains is significant:

Ist Captain : Great Jupiter be praised! Lucius is
taken.

'Tis thought the old man and his sons
were angels.

IInd Captain : There was a fourth man, in a silly
habit,
That gave th' affront with them.

(V.iii.)

While they are being so excitedly talked about, none on the British side knows who they are, what their true identity is. On the other hand, they know what they have done and what they have done it for. The complete ignorance on the part of ^{the} victorious

side about the identity of the heroes has a double meaning. For one thing, it is a telling commentary on the presumptuousness of human knowledge. For another, it works for dramatic suspense, the final removal of which in the scene of recognition and reconciliation at the end brings about an electrifying illumination.

When ^{we} reach the last scene of the play (V.v.), we hear Cymbeline speak:

Stand by my side, you whom the gods have made
Preservers of my throne. Woe is my heart
That the poor soldier that so richly fought
..... cannot be found.

To his query : " No tidings of him ? "

Pisanio replies : He hath been search'd among the dead
and living
But no trace of him.

We know that Posthumus is very much alive and making his appearance soon. ^{in the eyes of} But ~~for~~ the king and others he has mysteriously disappeared. The king shares the others' ignorance about him, about his whereabouts. Nor does he know that among the people standing in front of him now, are the exiled lord and the two missing princes. It is they who have proved to be the preservers of his throne. He sees them and yet does not know their true identity. He speaks to them in a state of ignorance and he does not know it. Answering to the supposed infidelity of

Imogen, we have the supposed absence or non-existence of Belarius, Arviragus and Posthumus even when they are there. Cymbeline is still denied the knowledge that he needs must have to be truly himself and happy. But he is not at the very moment far from it either. Lucius's commendation of Fidele (" Never master had/
A page so kind, so duteous, diligent,/ So tender over his occasions, true,/ So feat, so nurse-like ") touches a responsive chord in Cymbeline who has already taken to the boy and would like to grant him whatever boon he may ask for. The best in Lucius meets with the best in Cymbeline who is fast approaching the shores of knowledge.

When Lucius thought that Fidele who had already won the king's favour would now work for his master's release, Imogen's (Fidele) attention was suddenly and understandably drawn towards Iachimo among the Roman prisoners. Iachimo was wearing the diamond ring he had won off Posthumus. She has a quick word with the king who demands to know how the prisoner had come by that ring. Imogen's distraction is misconstrued by Lucius.

The boy disdains me,
He leaves me, scornes me. Briefly die their
iova

That place them on the truth of girls and
boys.
Why stands he so perplex'd ?

He cannot make out why Imogen is 'perplexed' and he is himself perplexed, He does her wrong to think that she scorns him. The truth of the matter is that her eyes are rivetted on the ring which she had given Posthumus under oath never to part with it. Lucius' misreading of the situation is of a piece with the essential temper of the play where almost everybody gets everybody else wrong. Now Cymbeline's accosting Iachimo is a means of glancing at the crucial episode of the play (namely, the ascription of faithlessness to Imogen) and serves at once for revelation and reunion.

Iachimo, already a victim of self-laceration, is truly his penitent self and sorrowfully recounts the entire episode in which, to win the bet, he had made Imogen appear unchaste and thus damned her in her exiled husband's eyes.

The peasant-looking Posthumus can hardly contain his revulsion and grief. Imogen, not able to recognise her husband, makes fun of his grief whereupon Posthumus strikes her without realising that he has struck Imogen.

Shall's have a play of this ? Thou scornful
page,
There lie thy part.(Strikes her. She falls).

The clear-eyed Pisanio is the voice of truth:

O gentlemen, help !
Mine and your mistress ! O,my lord Posthumus !
You ne'er kill'd Imogen till now.

(V.v.)

The veil of ignorance that had separated the couple and fouled their relationship is withdrawn and with a shock of illumination they come to know themselves and each other. Imogen's appearance of a serving boy and Posthumus's peasant garb are only the outer symbols of the alienation and ignorance they have suffered from so long. They are now revealed to themselves and to each other in their true selves.

Nor is the moment of knowledge far off for
Cymbeline.

If this be so, the gods do mean to strike me
To death with mortal joy.

(V.v.)

As part of the same movement of the dawning of self-knowledge and mutual recognition, Iachimo confronts himself and is revealed to others and so are Belarius, Guidarius and Arvirragus restored to themselves and to

the king.

The blinding fog of ignorance and evil takes leave to give way to ^atide of knowledge and rejoicing. The wounds are healed.

What Posthumus says to the restored Imogen is symbolic of the Shakespearian view of the final situation in its entirety. It is the view of a restored or resurrected organism following a course of near disaster and death.

Hang there like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die.

Cymbeline's grateful acknowledgement of the role of providence in shaping things towards the desired end is an acknowledgement of the peculiar fallibility of man and his knowledge which, more often than not, misguides.

Laud we the gods.

(V.v.)

Indeed, the supposed unchastity of Imogen is only one expressions of the supposed sufficiency of human knowledge which is more error than truth, more mirage than a true haven.

THE WINTER'S TALE

" Though Antony and Cleopatra - with Coriolanus - is the last of Shakespeare's great tragedies, it does not represent the last stage in the artist's development. It was followed by a series of plays, written apparently between 1608 and 1612 (Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest), which represent an effort to give artistic form to a new symbolic conception. At the heart of each of these plays lies an organic relationship between breakdown and reconstruction, the division created in the most intimate human bonds (and more especially in the unity of the family) by the action of time and passion and the final healing of these divisions. Near the opening of each play - even in Cymbeline, where the treatment of these central theme is partially obscured - a father loses his offspring through the excess of his own passion-driven folly or through his involvement in a corrupt world. The main action is devoted to the suffering and remorse which follow from this estrangement, and at the end of the play the lost child (.....), is restored to her father's blessing and becomes an instrument of reconciliation." 10

What we have quoted above points to the heart of The Winter's Tale which is about the breakdown of the house of Leontes and the final healing of this breakdown. At any rate, this constitutes one among the many dramatic themes of the play. Shakespearean plays, we must note here, rest not upon one theme but they represent a cohesive or integrated structuring of diversified themes and this is so because Shakespeare holds a mirror to life and life is so diversified. The situation in The Winter's Tale differs from what we came across in the two plays we have studied hitherto. In each of those plays the action revolved round men and women with no off-springs and not holding the key-position in the dominion in which they live, or, to

10. The Age of Shakespeare in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 2 p.257

ed., Boris Ford

Pelican Books, 1973

This very closeness, we can take for granted, is the reason why Leontes' jealousy comes to the forefront and takes hold of him. He has already tried to persuade Polixenes to stay but, as we can see, his persuasions have failed. On the other hand, at the request of Hermione (Leontes has given her leave : "Tongue-tied, our queen ? speak you") Polixenes changes his mind and decides to stay longer. Herein lies the starting point of the action in the play. Two things can be seen to emanate from the action of Polixenes. The first is that he is "soft" where the feminine sex is concerned and the second, it fans the flame of jealousy already burning within Leontes (he having failed, his wife has succeeded and he and Polixenes being what they were in the past). From this time onwards every little gesture of Polixenes and Hermione serves to confirm what has already been suspected or imagined to be true by Leontes.

"...(Aside) I am angling now,
Though you perceive me not how I give line.
Go to, go to !
How she holds up the neb, the bill to him !
And arms her with the boldness of a wife
To her allowing husband ! "

(I.ii.)

The final confirmation comes when ^{the} news of Polixenes and Camillo's flight is ^{conveyed} ~~told~~ to Leontes.

"How blest am I
In my just censure, in my true opinion!
Alack, for lesser knowledge! How accurs'd
In being so blest!.,.

(II.i.)

The ensuing reaction to this is the imprisonment of Hermione. Her fate is sealed and she has thereby become an unchaste woman (as far as Leontes is concerned) and even the child she bears is taken to be a bastard.

The Winter's Tale, is among other things, a psychological study of the problem of evil innate in man. This particular problem has been directed towards Leontes who is a victim of the passion of jealousy, which in itself is evil. Evil is necessarily there in the human situation, it is present in everybody and everyone is capable of doing evil. In Leontes' case the most probable cause of his jealousy is the remembrance of the childhood tie between himself and Polixenes. The exchange of "innocence for innocence" which is only possible where there is no sexual awareness is still prominent in Leontes. With the awakening of sexual awareness and the opening up of the mind to the vast complexities of human existence the exchange of "innocence for innocence" is no longer possible. Leontes is blind to this fact and thereby his mind is turned the other way

when Hermione succeeds in making Polixenes change his mind. He is jealous of his friend, because where he has failed as his friend, his wife succeeds.

It has been said man is a social animal and he needs to love and be loved. The need for love is realised through companionship and union with woman, and the outcome thereof. We see in the Book of Genesis how God wants the man he has created to have company and how he creates the woman for his company. We also see how the woman becomes the temptress and leads to his fall. So ~~we see~~ even in ^{the} religious accounts of the creation of man, ^{we see} the role woman plays in man's life. As a matter of fact, even the most robust and energetic of men needs the company of women. Moreover, the matrimonial tie binds the relationship between a man and a woman more closely and the object of love is also the object of hatred. This is so because of the fear which is a dominant characteristic of human beings. The fear in the case of Leontes pertains to his wife, Hermione, giving out her love to Polixenes. This fear turns into jealousy the moment Polixenes accepts the invitation of Hermione. Moreover the fleeing of Polixenes and Camillo (who is ordered to poison Polixenes) serves to strengthen what has already been accepted to be true by Leontes.

Man has likeness to God. He is capable of doing good. This capability of doing good is however simultaneously counteracted by the desire or the power to do ill. Thus we see how man is a created contradiction in himself. The power of the mind of man is infinite and thereby he is capable of infinite good or ill. In the case of Leontes, since he lets jealousy overrule his good sense the outcome is devastating. Hermione is ordered to be imprisoned, and her issue, the king's own daughter, is abandoned to die in the desert of Bohemia. The outcome of his jealous disposition is felt by all his household and by his subjects. We have seen how Camillo is obliged to flee. This is not all - Antigonus who has taken charge to consign the child " to some remote and desert place," too suffers death.

The sending for the oracle of Apollo is also of significance from the point of view of the monstrosity of heights Leontes' jealousy has risen to. In the court of justice we see Hermione tried. The contents of the oracle are also unfolded here;

'Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes a jealous tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten; and the King shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found.' - but the reaction of Leontes is contrary to the general belief.

There is no truth at all i' th' oracle.
The sessions shall proceed. This is mere
falsehood.

(III.ii.)

Here we witness how man tends to stay firm in his own belief even when the truth is let known to him. In fact it ^exemplifies the pitiable insecurity of man's knowledge, and the stubborn clinging to it. One would not be wrong to suggest that Leontes sends for the oracle to aid him in his conviction. When the oracle turns out to be ~~the~~ otherwise, he even goes to the extent of condemning it as mere falsehood.

Evil which is necessarily there in the human situation disrupts the smooth running of normal human life. As it is, human knowledge is very insecure where a fellow human being is concerned. There is no "I know him very well," between any two persons. We have hitherto hinted how infinite the human mind can be but with evil taking possession of it, it becomes very hard indeed for one to know another thoroughly or very well. If the reverse were the case, no drama would have been conceived in terms of such husband-wife relationship as we find in The Winter's Tale. Leontes would have known the truth had his eyes and good sense been not blinded by evil. Between Act I and Act II the

the passage of time is not mentioned. Act I ends with the flight of Polixenes and Camillo. In Act II Scene I we are told of how the pregnancy of Hermione has started showing physically.

She is spread of late
Into a goodly bulk. Good time encounter her!

(II.i.)

We can see how impossible the situation is for the child to be a bastard. Nevertheless, Leontes' conviction is that the child has been born of adultery.

...Take up the bastard;
Take't up, I say; give't to thy crone.

(II.iii.)

Shakespeare has indeed tried to show how man's reasoning and commonsense can be clouded by the operation of evil and how he can be blinded by his false persuasion. On the one hand, he has given enough hints that the child could not have been born of adultery. On the other hand, there is evil operating in Leontes and clouding his reasoning and in his fatal sense of self-sufficiency, he takes to be true what is patently false. The triumphing of evil is devastating. The child is left to die in the desert of Bohemia and in the process Antigonus and all those ~~aboard~~ the ship lose their lives. Mamillius in the

meantime has died of grief. The death of Mamillius is the turning point in the action of the play. Hitherto Leontes^{has} only believes^d himself without paying heed to others. Mamillius' death lifts the cloud surrounding his reasoning and he awakes to the truth of the matter.

Apollo's angry; and the heavens themselves
Do strike at my injustice.

(III.ii.)

Shakespeare has diverged from the earlier comedies in which only the lighter and relatively trivial side of life is portrayed without bringing in the explosive and alarming aspects of it. As it is, life is a compound of both. This divergence is to be seen in The Winter's Tale where evil is allowed to play its part in the household of Leontes. Evil has time and again been dramatised by the greatest of dramatists. Christopher Marlow^e, the greatest among the forerunners of Shakespeare, has dramatised the force of evil in Dr. Faustus. Evil has been personified in the character of Mephistophilis who ultimately leads Faustus to his own destruction. The primary theme of this play is omnipotence which Faustus seeks to attain through black magic. We see how after he has secured Mephistophilis to aid him, all his endeavours to do good, turn the other way. This is because he has sought the powers of evil and not

of good. Echoes of hell resound throughout the play which dramatises the power of evil,

In The Winter's Tale the situation is no doubt different, but still it pertains to the dramatisation of evil. The action in the play emanates from the presence of evil in the human situation. Evil has a hold on Leontes and it has been presented in the form of the passion of jealousy - insane and unaccountable. The Leontes and Hermione story constitutes the main plot. We then have the sub-plot constituted by the Perdita and Florizel story. These two stories have been intertwined in such a way as to dramatise life's complexities, to shed light on the tremendous ambiguity of the human situation and to bring about harmony at the end.

Perdita who has been abandoned to die is rescued by a shepherd. She is taken to be the daughter of that shepherd. Shakespeare no doubt has created the situation in such a way that her true identity when revealed will have perceptible physical proof to it. The sub-plot or the Perdita story serves to complicate the main plot. It sustains the main plot and paves the way for the final reconciliation. Before the reconciliation is effected, a string of incidents follow paving the

way for it. These incidents serve to complicate the plot. Moreover, we have seen how Hermione at the suggestion and with the aid of Paulina feigns death. This is also an important device used by Shakespeare to dramatise the motif of seeming and being, of appearance and reality. The audience (because the play is primarily meant for acting) is left wondering how the complications are ^{going} to be resolved in the final reconciliation.

The Perdita-Florizel relation has been imbalanced in the sense that Perdita, until the final resolution of the crisis, is apparently the daughter of the shepherd. This brings in the complication in the sub-plot. The love between her and Florizel cannot be approved by Polixenes, for it is against the practice prevalent among the royal families. In Perdita traces of her royal birth can be discerned but it lacks the refinement of the civilized cultured bourgeois. The contrast between court sophistication and simple life can be seen very powerfully in pastoral Bohemia. This contrast aids in complicating the sub-plot and also in paving the way for the final reconciliation.

In the sheep-shearing ceremony organized by the supposed father of Perdita there ensues a debate between Polixenes and Perdita on the familiar Renaissance topic on the relationship between nature and nur-

ture, natural simplicity and human civilizing improvement, initial nature and completing grace.

The debate indeed has ^a direct bearing on the evil which ^{breaks out} ~~comes~~ in Leontes. Shakespeare brings out the fact that evil is necessarily there in the human situation. Leontes is the King of Sicilia and he is supposed to have that "completing" grace but on the contrary we find that he is capable of thinking and doing evil. The same can, in a different way, be applied in the case of Polixenes. He symbolizes civilizing improvement without the grace of nature. He confuses ^e love with the apparent civilizing improvement of Court life. Innocence that is possible only in infancy is confused by both Leontes and Polixenes.

On the other hand, we have the relation between Perdita and Florizel. This relation acts as a counterpoise to the relation between Leontes and Hermione. The presence of Polixenes in the sheep-shearing ceremony brings this out very vividly. He is a representative of the older generation and also of the Court. The relation that he sees between a man and a woman is based upon rank in the social set up. This belief is counteracted or repudiated by the Perdita-Florizel relation, which is based not upon social rank but upon

all other things. Even the verdict of the oracle is put aside because it does not aid in confirming what he has already elevated to the status of certain knowledge.

The Perdita-Florizel relation dramatically suggests what the Leontes-Hermione relationship has lost and what it should have continued to retain. As we have said before, the former is based upon mutual understanding or "agape."

Thou dearest Perdita,
With these forc'd thoughts, I prithee,
 darken not
The mirth o' th' feast. Or I'll be thine, my fair,
Or not my father's; for I cannot be
Mine own, nor anything to any, if
I be not thine. To this I am most constant,
Though destiny say no.
.....
Lift up your countenance, as it were the day
Of celebration of that nuptial which
We two have sworn shall come.

(IV.iv.)

The steadfastness of this love is brought to light by the above passage. The concluding three lines are remarkable in the sense that they bring about an atmosphere of positiveness in what ever Florizel has said before. Upon the love of Perdita and Florizel an external force impinges in the person of Polixenes (Florizel's father). The intervention of Polixenes in the affairs of Florizel marks the climax of the

Polixenes is of vital importance in bringing about the final resolution in the drama. This act makes them flee Bohemia and the scene shifts back to Sicilia.

Now, coming back to ^{The} Leontes-Hermione story, we have seen how the death of Mamillius brings Leontes back to his senses. But the plot demands that the complications be not resolved then and there, for that which is lost has not been found. Moreover, the feigned death of Hermione serves to complicate the plot all the more. We see how Leontes repents:

Apollo, pardon
My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle.
I'll reconcile me to Polixenes,
New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo -
Whom I proclaim a man of truth, of mercy.

(III.ii.)

But this reconciliation is not to come about until the passage of sixteen years.

Turning back to the Perdita-Florizel story we see how they escape to Sicilia. In this act they are helped by Camillo who in turn helps himself, for he shall "tell the king

Of this escape, and wither they are bound;
wherein my hope is I shall so prevail
To force him after; in whose company
I shall re-view Sicilia, for whose sight
I have a woman's longing.

(IV.iv.)

Camillo's act can be seen as one of enlightened selfishness. He thinks not only of himself and how he can best avail ^{himself} of the circumstance but also of how the troubled and bewildered prince and princess could be restored to their estranged parents in an atmosphere of joy and thanksgiving. The occasion presents him with the rare opportunity of combining his self-interest with the security and well-being of the hapless lovers.

At this point we come to the last movement of the drama. Everything is ready for the final resolution. Perdita and Florizel present themselves before Leontes with their "make-believe" greetings from Polixenes. Here too Shakespeare uses another dramatic technique to heighten the final reconciliation. He introduces Polixenes and Camillo as a dramatic counterpoint to Perdita and Florizel. This in turn helps to clarify the true status of Perdita. "That which is lost" has been found. Hermione who has so long feigned death is restored to Leontes.

Thus we have come a long way from a violent disruption to a blessed union, from folly to knowledge. We have been introduced to and conducted through a saga of human experience spanning the whole gamut of error and blunderings, of self-correction and self-knowledge, of egotism and altruism leading finally up to

a healing of sickness and an open-eyed recognition of the need for the direction of the heavens to rescue man from the pit of error into the sunshine of truth and fulfilment.

This whole idea comes through clearly in the final speech of Leontes who now functions to his full potential.

...Let's from this place.
What! look upon my brother. Both your pardons,
That e'er I put between your holy looks
My ill suspicion. This your son-in-law,
And son unto the King, whom heavens directing,
Is troth-plight to your daughter. Good Paulina,
Lead us from hence where we may leisurely
Each one demand and answer to his part
Perform'd in this wide gap of time since first
We were dissever'd. Hastily lead away.

It should be clear, that, the human drama with its grim tragic potential and actual tragic happenings (namely, the deaths of Mamillius and Antigonus) issues from the one single act of Leontes' attribution of unchastity to Hermione, from his insane perception of an evil in her when the evil lay in him, took possession of him and distorted his vision and action.

Alienated from himself, Leontes does not recognise his true self. He projects his evil on the world around him and sees evil where there is none, while remaining blind to the evil within himself.

Thus, the appearance becomes the reality for him. Reason proves fragile and passion overtakes and supplants it. And this triggers the whole chain of events that the play spans within its ambit.

The Leontes-Hermione story gives rise to the Florizel-Perdita story. One necessitates the other. The supposed unchastity of Hermione leads on to her supposed death, to the actual death of her son, to the flight of Camillo and Polixenes, the supposed identity of Perdita, the death of Antigonus, the commotion in Bohemia, the flight of Florizel and Perdita, as fleeing outlaws, to Sicily and the eventual resolution of errors.

The insolence that makes Leontes mistake seeming for being causes him first to condemn ^{his} ~~her~~ queen as unchaste, then to take her as dead and finally as a statue. His dangerous solipsism and alienation from knowledge causes waves of uncontrollable upheaval not only in his own kingdom but even in Bohemia. His insecurity of knowledge turns out to be the author not only of his own insecurity of happiness but also of the mounting insecurity of another royal household, in other words, of the rest of the world.

What needs to be equally recognised is that within this framework created by the enormity

of benighted human insolence, Shakespeare dramatises a whole range of human experience bringing into play the forces of good and evil, the workings of motives and intentions, of loyalty, selfishness and deceit, of nature and nurture, of human follies and divine providence. In the event, through a masterly and comprehensive exploitation of the motif of appearance and reality, Shakespeare pulls off a profound illumination of the eternal human situation, complex and many-faceted and ever tragedy-prone because of the potential for error and evil within and outside man.

CONCLUSION

"Shakespeare's last works are written from a consciousness of the eternal which reflects itself into a new emphasis on arts of designs, such as embroidery, carvings, and Hermione's living statue, with religious impressions of oracles, chapels, temples, sacrifice, and incense; and, too, an especially sacramental approach, to nature, as in the emphasis on the 'fire robed god' (IV.iii.29) Apollo and his plot directing oracle, together with the fertility-festival, in The Winter's Tale, and the pagan sun-worship of Guiderius and Arviragus in Cymbeline. To withhold the mystical sympathies demanded is to shirk the first duty of interpretation. Eventually the resurrection of Hermione must be considered the most strikingly conceived, and profoundly penetrating, moment in English Literature." 12

Indeed, an inward integration of life nature, art and the supernatural which secures an assured transition from error to truth, from blunderings and ignorance to knowledge is true not only of plays like Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale but also a play like Much Ado About Nothing where the Church as a representation of art and an aspiration for the aid and guidance of the supernatural plays a key role. It is in the supra-rational, mystical aura of the Church and through the intervention of the priest that a death turns into rebirth or resurrection and a dead faith is rekindled. Hero faints and supposedly dies and finally revives. Her revival not only coincides with but is prepared for by Claudio's revived faith.

Indeed, it is important to recognise that in each of the three plays we have discussed, the final

12. The Shakespearian Integrity G. Wilson Knight, in Shakespeare Criticism (1935-60) pp. 198-99 ed., Anne Ridler, Oxford Paperbacks, 1970.

reunion is made possible by remorse and inner suffering on the part of the man who, in a state of ignorance, was guilty of false attribution of faithlessness to his woman.

Caught up in the externals of life man errs in his judgement and gets caught up in a whole chain of wrong-headed and suicidal actions. Without his knowing it, he lets his reason be obfuscated. It is only when by a yet-to-be understood providential beckoning, he is set on a course of inwardisation, of looking deeper and deeper into life, of developing an ever-growing insight from an integrated vision of life and nature and the mystical over-arching scheme of things that his reason is cleansed of its erroneousness. The clouds lift and the truth that had been concealed behind them comes to light again.

This is precisely what Shakespeare has sought to dramatise in Much Ado About Nothing, Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale. And he does it with such spectacular effectiveness by seizing upon a variation of the broad motif of appearance and reality. Now this variation is the inability to see faithfulness where it is there, and to misconstrue it as unfaithfulness.

In the Introduction we noticed how the early Renaissance belief in the sovereignty and invulne-

rability of reason gave way to a growing realisation of its vulnerability and precariousness. It came to be realised how flawed reason was. And this realisation was hastened and accentuated by a revolutionary change in man's conception of his world and of the universe of which his world was a miniscule part. The new world-view as heralded by Galileo and Copernicus displacing Ptolemy's geo-centric world-view served to throw man's ideas about himself and his world into utter confusion. The security stemming from the sense of his being placed on an earth specially created for his well-being and the consequent feeling of his being looked after by his solicitous maker disappeared giving rise to a painful insecurity of his status, his knowledge and his bearing.

The comfortable and snug feeling of being close to God who ensured man's much-needed security was replaced by an im^amesurable sense of being whirled round in a void where God was hardly visible and the earlier God-man relationship was a thing of the past.

This altered scheme of things generated scepticism, pessimism, a nagging sense of the relativity dubiousness and ambiguity of perception and knowledge. It explains the ubiquity of a sense of the unstable and undependable ^{character} status of human status and knowledge that colours much of Shakespearian drama. It is this phenome-

non that can be seen to inform and inspire such observations as that of Gloucester in King Lear: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods/ They kill us for their sports."

It might be pointed out that man is basically imperfect, which means that his knowledge is imperfect too. And this imperfection explains man's frequent blunderings and waywardnesses. While this is true, the fact that stares us in the face while examining the Shakespearian intellectual climate is that the changed world-view, although not officially accepted yet, had bred an unprecedented nature of unrest and uncertainty in man's mind because of the altered perception of his place and status consequent upon the displacement of the earth from its earlier primacy and centrality of position in a limitless universe where it is now seen as just one among the innumerable heavenly bodies going round and round. There is neither the Calvinistic determinism or an epicureanism which is another brand of animalism. Not that the medieval world-view had ceased to have any influence. The fact is that they existed side by side and that the earlier complacency was substantially modified by a newly-sprung and powerful scepticism. And as the most sensitive literary artist of the age, Shakespeare could not but have responded to and reflected the

complex spirit of the times.

Thus the notion that man is often in a 'mist' in a quandary, in a blind alley, that he is so vulnerable to the assault of unreason and error got peculiarly intensified.

And this perhaps explains, as we have suggested earlier on in our discussion, why Shakespeare again and again exploits the motif of seeming and being. This motif is worked powerfully in the dramatisation of the worlds of Hamlet, Othello, Lear and Macbeth and it provides the pith and substance of Measure for Measure, among other plays.

Benedick says: "...for man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion." (Much Ado About Nothing, V.iv.) and Puck exclaims in A Midsummer Night's Dream : "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (III.ii.)

Thus by a profoundly insightful exploitation of the theme of supposed unchastity, ^{in the plays under discussion} Shakespeare simultaneously brings out the agonisingly unstable character of man's knowledge and underlines the indispensable aid of the divine order in bringing order out of chaos, effecting a joyous restoration of relationships and shedding illumination upon the human situation.

In the course of our analysis of the

theme within the plays' framework, we have noticed how while the major characters give evidence of an all too easy susceptibility to error and to be led by appearances thereby bringing on a crisis and gradually deepening it, there stand out some lesser characters who remain clear-eyed and who by active good will and dynamism help to retain our faith in human goodness and assist in the process of reconciliation and reclamation. Such ~~are~~ the Friar and Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing when Hero's integrity is in question and such ~~are~~ Pisanio and Cornelius in Cymbeline and Paulina and Camillo in The Winter's Tale. They form a precious fraternity in Shakespeare along with such other characters as Kent in King Lear and redeem our faith in humanity. Constituting the bedrock of unwavering loyalty and altruism, they are a reminder that as long as they are there, man has a future as a social being however befouled the relations may have been because of follies.

And this apart, there are the chances ^{apparently} or accidents /so, but essentially providential, when truly understood, which assist in the process of reunion by stripping the blinkers off the face of the blundering man and confronting him with the truth about himself and his situation.

Such are some of the characteristic

attributes of Shakespeare's sovereign art as it operates in demonstrating how fallible and self-opⁿⁱonated we are, how we work to our near-destruction and how we can be eventually restored to reason and good sense by some mortals whom we neglected or ignored in our sense of self-sufficiency and self-importance and also by an over-arching providence we had lost sight of.

L.C.Knights says:

"Love is that without which life is a meaningless chaos of competing egotisms; it is the condition of intellectual clarity, the energising centre from which personality may grow unhampered by the need for self-assertion or evasive subterfuge; it is the sole ground of a genuinely self-affirming life and energy." ¹³

And ~~also~~ Wilson Knight observes:

"In making women strongest in love and men in action, Shakespeare is the voice for a deep truth." ¹⁴

How penetrating and true these statements are can be easily seen when we realise how chaotic and obtuse the lives of Posthumus, Leontes and to a lesser extent of Claudio turned out to be when evil had entered their world and rendered it empty of true love. An insane egotism and self-assertion, a blind rage made a travesty of love. Besides, in the face of the passionate blunderings of their men, the women remain steadfast making it possi-

13. Some Shakespearian Themes, Chatto and Windus 1966. p.118.

14. Shakespearian Integrity in Shakespeare Criticism (1935-1960)
G.Wilson Knight,
ed. Anne Ridler, Oxford University Press
p.178. 1970

ble for the benighted men to realise their errors, to be themselves again in a freshly sane climate of restored and deepened love. The treatment of the theme under review thus brings into sharp focus the importance of love as "the sole ground of a genuienly^{ne} self-affirming life and energy," man's proneness to near-fatal error of perception and action where love has been displaced and the iron integrity of the maligned women and of some not-so-important characters eventually succeeding in clearing man's mind of unreason. The role of a directing, though unseen, providence is of even greater relevance.

It can thus be argued that the theme of supposed unchastity is taken advantage of to work out this plenary vision.

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