

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.
