CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The detailed analyses of the plays in the preceding chapters lead to the following few words by way of conclusion. The "problem comedies", as we have seen, may appear in a clearer light if they are seen as expressions of Shakespeare's double vision of human nature and human life. In a sense this was typical of Renaissance humanists who, very often, sought for "synthesis of contradictions" and "reconciliation of oppositions". Further, this double vision and ambivalent attitude towards human nature, as we have sought to demonstrate, seems to be the reflection of an age which was intellectually unstable and full of tensions. In fact, Shakespeare, responding to the controversial and conflicting ideas, thoughts and beliefs of the age regarding the nature of man and his position in the world, very often driven to depict man at once "noble in reason", "infinite in faculties", and "the quintessence of dust". And as a Renaissance writer he was perhaps happy to marry mutually opposite things such as blending of tragedy and comedy, romance and satire, and making the pervading tone of these plays consist of such contradictory elements as the sacred and the profane, the sublime and the ridiculous, the heroic
and the mock-heroic, the serious and the light and the dignified and the bawdy. It is, once again, important to note that this double image of human nature and human life and this blend of mutually contradictory things may be seen in many plays of Shakespeare and this seems to be one of the prominent features of Shakespeare's artistic impulse, but it seems to have found emphatic expression in these experimental plays written at the turn of the century. So, in these plays, we have double-featured characters who have both lovely and unlovely traits who display immense potentialities and pathetic vulnerabilities and who thrive in a peculiar romantic-satiric world.

This view of human nature as reflected in these plays not only seemed true to Shakespeare and his audience but, it may be said, it also reflects universal truth of life. We know from the findings of modern psychology and sociology that human nature is complex; it is compounded of contradictions and it cannot be reduced to a stable system. It is very often inconsistent and unpredictable and it is difficult to say how a particular person would behave in a particularly complex and baffling situation of life. So it now appears that realism rather than a taste for extravagance explains the peculiar characteristics of these plays. It has become easier to accept these contradictions in our time than in Victorian times. We have already noted in the introductory chapter that Shakespeare seems to have inherited this vision from the
baffling intellectual milieu of an unsettled age which was very much like our own. And hence Shakespeare has become "our contemporary" by presenting the double images of single human natures in the "problem comedies". This, in turn, enables us to conclude that Shakespeare's creative energy was not at a low ebb nor was he uncomfortable while he wrote these plays as some would like us to believe.

Of course, it is true that this approach often leads us to experience the feelings expressed in the following words:

Mathinks I see with parted eye
When everything seems double.

("A Midsummer" IV.1.186-187)

But it may be noted that Shakespeare achieved some sort of unity in duality not only by his great unifying imagination but also by the power of his verse. In fact, the contradictory elements are wedded so strongly that these plays look like chemical compounds and not mechanical mixtures and the characters do not seem to be patchworks though they display startling contradictory traits.

To conclude, we may be justified in saying that by virtue of these three dualities — duality in characterization, in genre and in tone, these three Shakespearean plays, which have long baffled the critics, have a family
likeness and they may be conveniently studied together as a group through this perspective. And much of the complexity and obscurity posed by their characters and genres may fall into focus. In fact, the "problem comedies" appear unpleasant and inferior if we have a single integrated approach to their characters and form. On the other hand, we may understand these baffling plays better if we take this ambivalence to be the heart of the matter.