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# "the Rose Distilled": Virginitv, Fertility And Marriage In Shakespeare

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"THE ROSE DISTILLED": VIRGINITY,  
FERTILITY AND MARRIAGE IN  
SHAKESPEARE

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
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## ABSTRACT

From the beginning of his career as playwright, Shakespeare emphasizes the need to preserve prenuptial virginity as a pre-requisite for marriage. Other dramatists may also require premarital virginity, but Shakespeare's reasons for so doing are unique.

The uniqueness of Shakespeare's treatment of virginity is demonstrated by placing his plays within an historical perspective. The attitudes of pre-Christian societies toward temporary and permanent virginity, and the apotheosis of female virginity in the Bible, are examined in some detail.

The New Testament's idealization of virginity is reinforced in the writings of the Fathers, and, inevitably, the early Church began to treat sexual abstinence as if it were a form of purification. Eventually, a clear distinction was made between the sacred and the profane. Virginity became man's highest ideal and the need for marriage was regarded as a weakness in man.

Although a number of writers, notably Erasmus and Spenser, appreciated the state of matrimony and attempted

to establish its dignity and significance, the polarity between the sacred and the profane, virginity and marriage, persisted into the Renaissance. For Shakespeare there is no such polarity. While he is preoccupied with prenuptial virginity, he rejects permanent virginity from the very start of his dramatic career. He rejects the idealization of virginity at the expense of marriage. Nor does he believe that permanent virginity is the highest ideal man can achieve. Instead, he consistently defends the value and sacredness of marriage, and he believes that the proper exercise of virtue is participation in the world, not an ascetic withdrawal from the world.

Shakespeare's preoccupation with virginity comes to a climax in All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, and the final romances. These plays are therefore studied in detail. For Shakespeare the preservation of prenuptial virginity is not a sign of property received intact. Prenuptial virginity is valuable because he associates it with spiritual and physical fertility. Shakespeare believes that the preservation of premarital virginity as well as chastity of mind (revealed in the purity of one's life) are disciplines that help to bring about that order in society which stable marriage creates. Marriage, moreover, is a reflection of universal order, and without

order and discipline there can be no fertility.

Shakespeare explores the redemption of fallen man through the efficacy of marriage: the spiritual fecundity of the chaste female brings about a purgation in the sinner, but married love, not salvation, is the result of that redemption.

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout Shakespeare's canon there is considerable emphasis on the need to preserve premarital virginity as a precondition for a fruitful marriage. Lovers are not only required to observe physical continence before marriage: they must also observe chastity of mind. This is reflected in their fidelity to each other and in the purity of their lives. Purity, Silvius says in As You Like It, is an integral part of love: love is "All purity, all trial, all observance" (V.ii.93).<sup>1</sup>

Most dramatists tend to end their comedies with wedding bells. Shakespeare's comedies also end with marriages; but his comedy is unique because of his stress on the preservation of prenuptial virginity. Even the sarcastic Benedick, for all his sneering at women and love, requires a woman to be chaste before he can consider marrying her (Much Ado About Nothing, II.iii.28-29). "Comedy," R.G. Hunter says, "traditionally, is anything but dedicated to the preservation and exaltation of virginity."<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's comedy decidedly is. The

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<sup>1</sup>William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969). Unless otherwise indicated all references are to this edition of the collected works.

<sup>2</sup>R.G. Hunter, Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness (New York, 1965), p. 110.

significance of Shakespeare's treatment of virginity may be seen by setting it against Plautus and Terence's treatment of sex and virginity. Shakespeare's indebtedness to Roman comedy is well known. There are in his comedies characters and devices regularly found in Roman comedy.<sup>3</sup> But Shakespeare does not share Plautus and Terence's attitude toward sex, virginity and marriage. In Roman comedy, George Duckworth explains, "not many youths...fall in love with the daughters of their neighbors -- girls of the same social status -- and when they do the affair usually begins with an unfortunate episode of rape at a nocturnal religious festival." Marriage follows, Duckworth continues, "but only after a long delay caused by the youth's indecision or his fear of parental disapproval. Meanwhile a child is born."<sup>4</sup> In at least one of Terence's plays (Eunuchus) the dramatist seems to be treating sexual misconduct sympathetically. Of the raping of Pamphila in this play, Duckworth comments: "The off-stage raping of Pamphila by Chaerea...is a more serious affair and lacks the saving grace of humor."

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<sup>3</sup>See especially Cornelia Coulter, The Plautine Tradition in Shakespeare, JEGP, XIX (1920), 66-83.

<sup>4</sup>George E. Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy. (Princeton, 1952), p. 281.

Chaerea's callous treatment of the girl he claimed to love and his justification of the deed...make the whole episode somewhat more indecorous than usual."<sup>5</sup>

And Gilbert Norwood has shown that, Casina excepted, most of Plautus' works "rest on sexual irregularity that is at least condoned." Some, he adds, "are utterly depraved in temper."<sup>6</sup> Although Duckworth attempts to explain the sexual irregularity in terms of conventional stage devices, he does agree with Norwood's assessment.<sup>7</sup>

Marriage, too, was a conventional theme for jesting in Roman comedy. Apart from a few exceptions (Stichus and Phormio) married life "is consistently portrayed as unpleasant and disagreeable -- a state to be endured rather than enjoyed."<sup>8</sup> Throughout Shakespeare's canon, however, the sanctity of marriage is constantly emphasized. "In this attitude," G.B. Harrison comments, "Shakespeare differs noticeably from his contemporaries. Beaumont and Fletcher and others play with themes of love outside marriage, and regard infidelity as a natural topic for comedy. Shakespeare does not." Shakespeare, he adds,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>6</sup>Gilbert Norwood, Plautus and Terence (New York, 1963), pp. 65-66.

<sup>7</sup>Duckworth, Roman Comedy, p. 303.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 282-283.

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"has plenty of jokes about cuckold's horns, as have all Elizabethan dramatists, but he sees nothing comic in unfaithfulness or unchastity, which always bring disaster."<sup>9</sup> F.M. Dickey says that laughter directed towards illicit desire was apt to be astringent, and "jests on cuckoldry were part of an ancient tradition of antifeminism basically moral in its criticism of adultery."<sup>10</sup> In the action of Shakespeare's plays, however, "there are no happy illicit lovers, no 'innocent adulteries'."<sup>11</sup>

For Shakespeare the preservation of premarital virginity is a sign of positive virtue, and his treatment of virginity goes well beyond the conventional insistence upon the virginity of the bride which Aquinas, for example, claims must be present if the marriage is to be considered "regular" (III Supplement, Q.66, Art. 3). In pre-Christian societies the exercise of continence was not motivated by moral principles: continence was practised to achieve some practical end such as good luck or good health.<sup>12</sup> In the Old and New Testaments, however, the exercise of continence is a powerful weapon in the warfare

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<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed. G.B. Harrison (New York, 1948), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> F.M. Dickey, Not Wisely But Too Well (San Marino, 1957), p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> See James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough (New York, 1955), p. 27.

between the spirit and the flesh. In the Old Testament, especially, marriage is considered desirable because it is necessary to ensure the propagation of Abraham's children. Virginity, on the other hand, is treated in the New Testament as if it were intrinsically superior to marriage, and it is accordingly apotheosized. The Fathers, in their turn, reinforce this attitude. More than that, they tend to regard virginity as a pre-condition for salvation. At best, sexual intercourse is a necessary evil. It is essentially unclean.<sup>13</sup> Perfection is to be untouched by sexual pleasures, and sexual abstinence is a form of purification. It was only a matter of time before the Church began to make a clear distinction between the sacred and man's sexuality. The Church had important precedents for this distinction. Ancient religions sometimes required their priests to undergo periodic or total celibacy. Indeed, as Joseph Blenkinsopp points out, in some ancient Semitic cultures "the word 'eunuch' is synonymous with 'priest'."<sup>14</sup> We know from Leviticus that the candidate for the priesthood had to abstain from sexual activity for seven days prior to ordination. Blenkinsopp sums up the problem as follows:

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<sup>13</sup>See Saint Caesarius, Sermons, trans. Mary Mueller (New York, 1956), pp. 221-222.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp, Celibacy, Ministry, Church (New York, 1968), p. 21.

...the high priest had to abstain sexually for the seven days prior to Yom Kippur, and this no doubt was true of other great cultic occasions in the Jewish calendar. Once this habit had been formed of appealing to this practice, documented in the Old Testament, on the ground that what is demanded of priests in the Old Testament must, a fortiori, apply to Christian priests, it was inevitable that the celebrant of the eucharist could not approach this central act of Christian cult after having sexual relations with his wife. And once it had become the custom...to celebrate the eucharist daily the only logical conclusion was that the celebrant had to be totally abstinent.<sup>15</sup>

As the distinction between the sacred and the profane became more and more pronounced the clergy were inevitably required to abstain totally from sexual relations, and by the end of the twelfth century the rule of celibacy for the clergy was established. Sexuality became incompatible with sacramental ministry. Virginity, on the other hand, became man's highest estate, and marriage was a poor second best, a weakness in man. The life of a virgin is the life of angels, and once it is lost it is a treasure that can never be recovered.<sup>16</sup> The polarity between the sacred and the profane, virginity and marriage, persisted into the Renaissance. Because he was theologically conservative, Henry VIII, notwithstanding his other reforms, did not accept clerical

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Halil Meidenhad, ed. F.J. Furnivall (London, 1922), p. 14.

marriages, and Shakespeare's own Queen made clerical marriages as unpopular as she could.<sup>17</sup>

There inevitably grew out of this attitude a hostility toward marriage and women. Women were essentially inferior. They were, moreover, a threat to man's salvation because of their seductive powers. But marriage is necessary if only because without it the species would cease to exist. Besides, it is useful for the relief of man's appetites,<sup>18</sup> and it is a remedy for the disease of sexuality.

By insisting upon the integrity of her virginity the Shakespeare heroine, we may think, isolates herself. But in Shakespeare's view the preservation of premarital virginity is a discipline which helps to bring about that order in society which stable marriage creates. Marriage, moreover, is a reflection of universal order, and without order and discipline there can be no fertility. Eventually, therefore, the virginity of the Shakespeare heroine is converted into the fertility of marriage and ultimate self-realization.

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<sup>17</sup>See Chapter Two.

<sup>18</sup>See C. Pyrrye, The Praise and Dispraise of Woman (London, 1569), sig. B7<sup>v</sup>, and Henry Agrippa, The Commendation of Matrimony, trans. D. Clapham (London, 1540), sig. 3<sup>v</sup>.

But while Shakespeare insists upon premarital virginity, he rejects permanent virginity out of hand. He regards celibacy as a waste because it prevents the perpetuation of beauty through children. To practise celibacy is to "abuse/The bounteous largess given thee to give" (Sonnet 4), and in Twelfth Night Viola tells Olivia:

Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive,  
 If you will lead these graces to the grave,  
 And leave the world no copy. (I.v.227-229)

In the early Love's Labour's Lost Shakespeare tried to show the foolishness of a vow of celibacy taken by men in the full vigour of youth. He has Berowne say:

Necessity will make us all forsworn  
 Three thousand times within this three years' space;  
 For every man with his affects is born,  
 Not by might mastered, but by special grace.  
 (I.i.146-149)

If permanent virginity is man's highest estate then, Berowne's remark seems to imply, it is a virtually unattainable ideal. Human beings, Berowne is saying, cannot use their own strength to master their passions: they need the help of heavenly grace, and there is no guarantee of this. Soon after in Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare returned to the question of celibacy. The vow of celibacy is again treated negatively. Romeo is telling Benvolio about Rosaline and his love for her. Like the Duke in Measure For Measure, whose "complete bosom" (I.iii.3) could not be pierced by love, Rosaline cannot be "hit with Cupid's



arrow" (I.i.214-215). She is "well armed in strong proof of chastity" (I.i.216). Her vow of celibacy is a "sparing" that "makes huge waste" (I.i.224). As Romeo puts it:

For beauty, starved with her severity,  
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.  
She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,  
To merit bliss by making me despair.  
She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow  
Do I live dead, that live to tell it now.  
(I.i.225-230)

In A Midsummer Night's Dream permanent virginity is also rejected. When Hermia refuses to marry Demetrius, Duke Theseus gives her an important lecture on celibacy and marriage:

Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires.  
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,  
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,  
You can endure the livery of a nun --  
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,  
To live a barren sister all your life,  
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.  
Thrice blessed they that master so their blood,  
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;  
But earthlier happy is the rose distilled,  
Than that which withering on the virgin thorn,  
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.  
(I.i.65-78)

Although Theseus pays a tribute to those who can endure celibacy, his view of it is largely negative. To be celibate is to live like a caged creature, singing hymns to Diana. The goddess of chastity is depicted as cold and barren. The withering of the rose is an image of sterility, whereas the "rose distilled" evokes the very opposite: "distilled," in addition to suggesting procreation or the yielding of fruit, also points to the shedding of the rose's

essence on others. It is as if the rose finds fulfillment in the giving of its essence. The culmination of virginity is the yielding of it in married love. Virtue, Shakespeare seems to suggest, can be properly exercised only if it fully participates in the world. Eventually man must leave the idyllic forest of Arden or the enchanted island of The Tempest and return to the reality of life in the world.

Throughout the canon loss of prenuptial virginity is regarded as one of the most serious disasters that can befall a woman. This is a negative, but important, aspect of virginity, and Shakespeare is preoccupied with it as early as the second part of Henry VI. When Henry questions Salisbury about his sworn allegiance, he replies that it is sinful to keep a sinful oath, and he gives the king a list of despicable sins, one of which is loss of virginity (2 Henry VI, V.1.184-190). In the same play rape is considered to be one of the spoils of war: it is a reward for success. Once his rebellion succeeds Jack Cade will have access to every virgin (IV.vii.129-132).<sup>19</sup> In Timon of Athens the deflowering of virgins is also one of the spoils of war. The senators try to persuade Timon to help

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. Henry's threat about the deflowering of virgins in Henry V, III.iii.10-21; III.iv.19-21.

them drive back Alcibiades. This is part of his reply:

If Alcibiades kill my countrymen,  
 Let Alcibiades know this, of Timon,  
 That Timon cares not. But if he sack fair Athens  
 And take our goodly aged men by the beards,  
 Giving our holy virgins to the stain  
 Of contumelious, beastly, mad-brained war,  
 Then let him know...that I care not.....  
 (V.1.167-175)

Some of Timon's most scathing curses are about the loss of virginity and the sexual degeneracy of the young:

O thou wall,  
 That girdles in those wolves, dive in the earth  
 And fence not Athens! Matrons turn incontinent!  
 Obedience fail in children!... To general filths  
 Convert o'th' instant, green virginity!  
 Do't in your parents' eyes!... Maid, to thy master's  
 bed:  
 Thy mistress, is o'th' brothel... Lust and liberty  
 Creep in the minds and marrows of our youth,  
 That 'gainst the stream of virtue they may strive  
 And drown themselves in riot! (IV.1.1-28)

Later he asks Timandra to

Bring down rose-cheeked youth  
 To the tub-fast and the diet. (IV.111.87-88)

And when Alcibiades destroys Athens he is asked not to spare "the virgin's cheek" (IV.111.115-116).

In Titus Andronicus the rape of Lavinia is the hub around which the major issues of the play turn. The rape is treated in detail. Shakespeare's aim is to create an atmosphere of horror and revulsion for the grossness of the act, and he does so by juxtaposing it with the pastoral beauty of the scene. As Tamora and Aaron stroll through the forest, she talks at length about Nature's loveliness (II.111.10-29). The serenity of the scene, however, serves

to reinforce the brutal directness of Aaron's comment:

This is the day of doom for Bassianus.  
 His Philomel must lose her tongue today,  
 Thy sons make pillage of her chastity,  
 And wash their hands in Bassianus's blood.  
 (II.iii.42-45)

Lavinia has taken special pains to preserve her chastity,  
 and she would rather die than lose it (II.iii.173-178).

The rape of Lavinia is heinous because chastity is her  
 most important possession:

O villains, Chiron and Demetrius!  
 Here stands the spring whom you have stained with  
 mud,  
 This goodly summer with your winter mixed.  
 You killed her husband, and for that vile fault  
 Two of her brothers were condemned to death,  
 My hand cut off and made a merry jest,  
 Both her sweet hands, her tongue, and that more dear  
 Than hands or tongue, her spotless chastity,  
 Inhuman traitors, you have constrained and forced.<sup>20</sup>  
 (V.ii.169-177)

Even though this is an early play well-known for its  
 deficiencies, Shakespeare is already hinting at a theme he  
 will develop in detail in All's Well That Ends Well,  
Measure For Measure and the final romances: the association  
 of female virginity or chastity with fertility, and, con-  
 versely, the link between unchastity or lust and sterility.  
 Lavinia's father associates his daughter with the fertility  
 of summer and the lust of Tamora's sons with the sterility  
 of winter. Later in Hamlet Shakespeare has Laertes warn.

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<sup>20</sup>Cf. A Midsummer Night's Dream, III.1.198-201.

Ophelia about Hamlet's intentions. His description of her virginity as "chaste treasure" (I.iii.31) is worth noting because it is an image that recurs time and again throughout the canon. Laertes tells her about the canker that "galls the infants of the spring/Too oft before their buttons be disclosed," and, he adds, "in the morn and liquid dew of youth/Contagious blastments are most imminent" (I.iii.39-42). Laertes implies that the purity of the chaste female is often threatened by the disease of lust. More than that, his remark hints at an idea Shakespeare develops in the romances (Cymbeline especially): the potential fertility of the virgin thwarted by evil.

Since the loss of virginity is such a serious matter, Shakespeare's women are careful to preserve it. In the first part of Henry VI Suffolk tries to persuade Henry into making Margaret his Queen. Although she is a woman of rare beauty and charm, Margaret is prepared to humble herself before Henry, but only if his intentions are honourable (V.v.12-21). In the third part of Henry VI King Edward tries to blackmail Lady Grey into sleeping with him: if she refuses he will deprive her of her husband's lands (III.ii.71). But Lady Grey is determined to accept only honourable love from him: that "love which virtue begs and virtue grants" (III.ii.63). Rather than lie with Edward, she is prepared to "lie in prison" (III.ii.70), and as for her husband's lands, she will

never "purchase them" by losing her virtue (III.ii.73).

When Edward presses his suit Lady Grey sums up her attitude in a very succinct answer:

I know I am too mean to be your Queen,  
And yet too good to be your concubine.  
(III.ii.97-98)

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona Julia, who is about to undertake a journey to her loving Proteus, dares not dress like a woman because she wants to prevent "the loose encounters of lascivious men" (II.vii.41). Other heroines are similarly concerned about protecting their virginity as they set out on a journey. Rosalind is worried about the danger she and Celia might encounter in the forest of Arden (As You Like It, I.iii.104-106), and Demetrius warns Helena:

You do impeach your modesty too much,  
To leave the city, and commit yourself  
Into the hands of one that loves you not;  
To trust the opportunity of night  
And the ill counsel of a desert place  
With the rich worth of your virginity.  
(A Midsummer Night's Dream,  
II.i.214-219)

In the same play when Hermia and Lysander are going to rest, he suggests that "one turf shall serve as pillow for us both" (II.ii.41); but she regards his presence as a threat to her virginity, and asks him to keep a respectable distance (II.ii.56-60). Pretending to yield to her father's wishes, Juliet tells Capulet that she and Paris have had a meeting, but she took steps to preserve her reputation (IV.ii.25-27). Hero "died" only while "her

slander lived" (Much Ado, V.iv.66), and Cordelia pleads with Lear to make it known that

It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,  
No unchaste action or dishonoured step,  
That hath deprived me of your grace and favour.  
(I.i.227-229)

Not only does Shakespeare insist upon premarital virginity; he also insists upon chastity within marriage. This is so because of the value he gives to holy matrimony. Shakespeare consistently defends the sacredness of marriage. As Robert Sneath puts it: "the whole point of Shakespearean comedy was that marriages should be made, and made upon a Christian pattern."<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare gives early and prominent attention to the value and importance of marriage. The basis of holy matrimony is "perfect love," Suffolk says in 1 Henry VI. Marriage is not a business arrangement, and if it is forced it is hell, discord and strife.

If marriage is to be a "pattern of celestial peace," it presupposes the chastity of the wife. Shakespeare is preoccupied with this theme. For example, in The Comedy of Errors Adriana is outraged when she thinks that Dromio is accusing her of adultery (II.i.55-59). Balthazar, trying to stop Antipholus from breaking into Adriana's room, reminds him that his action would cast doubt upon his wife's honour (III.i.85-88). Having convinced herself that Antipholus has been unfaithful, Adriana sees herself as if infected with the disease of adultery, and laments

this with a passion that anticipates Hermione's and Imogen's vigorous self-defense:

How comes it now my husband...  
 That thou art then estranged from thyself?  
 Thyself I call it, being strange to me,  
 That undividable, incorporate,  
 Am better than thy dear self's better part.  
 ...as easy mayst thou fall  
 A drop of water in the breaking gulf,  
 And take unmingled thence that drop again  
 Without addition or diminishing,  
 As take from me thyself and not me too.  
 How dearly would it touch thee to the quick,  
 Shouldst thou but hear I were licentious,  
 And that this body, consecrate to thee,  
 By ruffian lust should be contaminate!...  
 I am possessed with an adulterate blot.  
 My blood is mingled with the crime of lust.  
 If we two be one, and thou play false,  
 I do digest the noison of thy flesh,  
 Being strumpeted by thy contagion.  
 Keep, then, fair league and truce with thy true bed.  
 I live distained, thou dishonoured.  
 (II.ii.118-145)

Adriana's lament is important not only because she is concerned about her honour and reputation. Her speech (although it is addressed to a man she mistakenly thinks is her husband) stresses the union of man and wife in a sacred bond. She speaks of the need for spiritual and psychological compatibility in marriage, and her lament emphasizes Shakespeare's appreciation of the importance of that union and compatibility.

In Romeo and Juliet the newly-married Juliet is prepared to have herself chained to "roaring bears," to suffer such things as being shut up "in a charnel house," entering "a new-made grave," hiding herself in a dead man's shroud as long as she can "live an unstained wife"



(IV.i.77-88). In The Merry Wives of Windsor a resuscitated Falstaff attempts to seduce Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford. It is at the center of the farce. Outraged by Falstaff's attempts, Mrs. Page exclaims:

Hang him, dishonest varlet, we cannot misuse  
 him enough.  
 We'll leave a proof by that which we will do,  
 Wives may be merry, and yet honest too.  
 (IV.ii.88-90)

In his introduction to the play G.B. Harrison remarks that "the episode of the fairies at the conclusion of the play is unnecessary." The fairies are introduced, he feels, "simply to give an opportunity for the small boys to sing and dance before the original courtly audience."<sup>22</sup> But the song and dance episode is exclusively concerned with Falstaff's attack upon the chastity of the wives, and he is punished for his "lust and luxury," his "unchaste desire," his "villainy" (V.v.94-106). The episode is directly related to the play's central concern, and it is therefore more than just a simple case of the dramatist catering to his audience's fondness for song and dance.

Shakespeare's insistence upon chastity within marriage reaches a dramatic climax in Hamlet when the hero, his temper almost out of control, reprimands his mother for

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<sup>22</sup>Harrison, p. 939.

her infidelity:

Such an act  
 That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,  
 Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose  
 From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
 And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows  
 As false as dicers' oaths. O, such a deed  
 As from the body of contraction plucks  
 The very soul, and sweet religion makes  
 A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face does glow,  
 And this solidity and compound mass,  
 With heated visage, as against the doom,  
 Is thought-sick at the act. (III.iv.42-52)

By violating the marriage contract Gertrude, Hamlet implies, has reduced herself to the status of a whore. When the sacred union of man and wife is violated by infidelity, the disease seems to infect untainted love as well as heaven and earth, and religious vows are reduced to meaningless words.

Whether it is treated in a robust farce such as The Merry Wives of Windsor, or is the nucleus of a tragedy such as Othello, Shakespeare consistently stresses the importance of female chastity. Even in Henry VIII he returns to the theme and gives it prominence. Although the legality of the marriage is the matter under discussion, Katharine defends her reputation (which was never in question<sup>23</sup>):

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<sup>23</sup>See, for example, Henry's comment, II.iv.132-141.

If, in the course  
 And process of this time, you can report,  
 And prove it too, against mine honour aught,  
 My bond to wedlock or my love and duty,  
 Against your sacred person, in God's name,  
 Turn me away, and let the foul'st contempt  
 Shut door upon me, and so give me up  
 To the sharp'st kind of justice. (II.iv.35-42)

And she goes to her death protesting her chastity:

When I am dead, good wench,  
 Let me be used with honour. Strew me over  
 With maiden flowers, that all the world may know  
 I was a chaste wife to my grave. (IV.ii.167-170)

In Aquinas' system, as we shall see, although marriage is good and is a source of grace, it is inferior to virginity. Shakespeare unequivocally rejects this attitude. Nor will one find in his plays the grudging Pauline concession that it is better to marry than to burn. On the contrary, "whatever Shakespeare's religion may have been," J.W. Lever writes, "the main body of his work from the early comedies to The Tempest suggests that in his view consecrated marriage signified not only the happy ending to a play but the gateway to man's fulfillment of his primary function in the natural world."<sup>24</sup>

Shakespeare's consistent defense of prenuptial virginity culminates in All's Well That Ends Well, Measure For Measure and the final romances. I have

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<sup>24</sup>The Arden Shakespeare: Measure For Measure, ed. J.W. Lever (London, 1965), p. xci.

therefore selected these plays for detailed study. From time to time in the earlier plays Shakespeare suggested a link between the chaste female's virtuousness and fecundity. In these plays this motif is given detailed treatment. In the early comedies the erring hero's change at the end of the play takes place when he recognizes that he has made mistakes, that he has been acting foolishly. Reunion with the heroine then follows. In All's Well, Measure For Measure and the romances, however, the guilty have to experience considerably more than mere recognition of error. They must suffer the pain of rebirth. It is worth noting that Shakespeare changed the sources of these plays (All's Well and The Winter's Tale, notably) in order to emphasize the regeneration of the guilty persons. In these plays Shakespeare focuses attention upon the virginity of the heroine as it is converted into the fertility of marriage and ultimate self-realization, and he emphasizes the integrity of his heroines' virginity and chastity and the part they play in the redemptive process. Shakespeare also explores in these plays the redemption of fallen man through the efficacy of marriage (directed by Providence). The spiritual (and potentially physical) fecundity of the female helps to bring about a purgation in the sinner. Like the Virgin, the chaste female plays a crucial role

in the sinner's redemption; but married love, not salvation, is the consequence of that redemption.

## CHAPTER ONE: VIRGINITY AND THE EARLY CHURCH

From the earliest times the preservation of female virginity has always been an extremely important matter. Sometimes virginity was permanently preserved for religious reasons. When this happened virginity was regarded as self-sufficient and complete. But sometimes a woman's virginity was her greatest bargaining asset, and she preserved it until she found a suitable husband. If we are to understand fully Shakespeare's complete rejection of both attitudes and the significance of his departure from the traditional treatment of virginity and marriage, we must become familiar with this tradition.

The practice of permanent or temporary celibacy for religious reasons is not specifically Christian. In pre-Christian times there was a definite connection between cultic observance and sexual abstinence.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, by some primitive peoples sexual intercourse was often practised in order to increase the fertility of nature. James Frazer cites this practice in Java: "at the season when the bloom will soon be on the rice, the husbandman and his wife visit their fields by night and there engage in sexual intercourse for the purpose of

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<sup>1</sup>See E. Schillebeeckx, Celibacy, trans. C.A.L. Jarrott (New York, 1968), pp. 51-52.

promoting the growth of the crop."<sup>2</sup> Conversely, the failure of the elephant-hunt in East Africa was associated with the unchastity or infidelity of the hunters' wives.<sup>3</sup> Among primitive races the association of sexual abstinence and some sort of purification or sanctification is widespread. Frazer describes the search for a special cactus, regarded by the Huichol Indians of Mexico as a holy plant, as follows:

During the whole of the time which elapses till the festival of the cactus is held, neither party washes except on certain occasions, and then only with water brought from the distant country where the holy plant grows. They also fast much, eat no salt, and are bound to strict continence. Any one who breaks this law is punished with illness, and, moreover, jeopardises the result which all are striving for. Health, luck, and life are to be gained by gathering the cactus, the gourd of the God of Fire; but inasmuch as the pure fire cannot benefit the impure, men and women must not only remain chaste for the time being, but must also purge themselves from the taint of past sin.<sup>4</sup>

While they are at war, the Creek Indians and kindred tribes do not engage in sexual intercourse: "they religiously abstain from every kind of intercourse even with their own wives, and so after they return home, because they are to

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<sup>2</sup>James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough (New York, 1955), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

sanctify themselves."<sup>5</sup> Frazer suggests that the motive for this abstinence "was a superstitious fear lest, on the principles of sympathetic magic, close contact with women should infect them with feminine weakness and cowardice."<sup>6</sup> At any rate, Frazer argues that the practice of continence among primitive races was in no way motivated by moral principles. If the savage refrained from sexual relations, it was "from no high idealism, no ethereal aspiration after moral purity, but for the sake of some ulterior yet perfectly definite and concrete object, to gain which he is prepared to sacrifice the immediate gratification of his senses."<sup>7</sup>

In many pre-Christian religions female virginity was highly esteemed chiefly because it was regarded as an emblem of freshness and purity. In the culture of a number of ancient peoples celibacy was given a sacred character, and from time to time temporary celibacy was imposed upon an individual as a form of corporal purification. Conventional Roman society decided, as a matter of course, that sexual intercourse for women was honourable only within marriage; at the same time, intercourse

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 245. See also Ernest Crawley, The Mystic Rose (New York, 1927), Vol. I, pp. 65-66, 227-228, 254-255.

<sup>6</sup>Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 246.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 160.



for men was permitted not only with wives, but with prostitutes as well. The "double standard" is also noticeable in the culture of Sparta, for while virgins were often consecrated to a female deity, the unmarried man actually lost his civic rights. Indeed, during the fifth century, especially after the time of Camillus, Roman bachelors were often taxed for that privilege.<sup>8</sup> The Romans seemed to have attached religious significance to both temporary and permanent female virginity. In Greco-Roman culture, for instance, the cult of the virgin goddesses Artemis and Athena attributed magic power and blessedness to the virginity of the goddesses. Athena, in particular, became the embodiment of wisdom and purity. The cult demanded at least temporary celibacy for both priests and priestesses. In Rome the sacred fire could be attended only by the vestal virgins, and their prayers were said to have miraculous power. The religious or moral significance associated with the celibacy of the Roman priests and priestesses is absent in Neoplatonic thought. The Pythagoreans disapproved of premarital intercourse, and together with the Neoplatonists they encouraged sexual abstinence not because they attributed

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<sup>8</sup> See the New Catholic Encyclopedia (Toronto, 1967), Vol. III, p. 369.

religious significance to virginity or celibacy, but in order to foster meditation and the cultivation of wisdom. And the Essenes, who considered that they were the best of men and thought evil of all women, derived their asceticism from their doctrine of the soul's pre-existence and its warfare with the body. The Essenes "rejected wealth, oaths, sensual enjoyment and slavery. Sex intercourse was so restricted that they could not fulfill the primary duties which the law laid on every man to beget children."<sup>9</sup>

It is in the Bible that the idea of sanctification through virginity is first given detailed treatment. It is, indeed, one of the most important messages in the Old and New Testaments. The belief in perfection through permanent virginity is easily noticed, and this particular bias will become a significant motif in the work of the Fathers. It will, moreover, dominate Catholic thought for centuries to come. The Old Testament does not, of course, ignore the importance of male virginity, but it emphasizes the value of female virginity. Once the husband discovers that his wife is not a virgin, she is to be "cast out of the doors of her father's house,

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<sup>9</sup>William Graham Sumner, Folkways (New York, 1960), p. 510.

and the men of the city shall stone her to death, and she shall die: because she hath done a wicked thing in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house."

(Deut. 22:20-21).<sup>10</sup> Marriage was considered to be the normal state for everyone in Israel; but the Old Testament is very emphatic about the preservation of premarital virginity. As Deuteronomy 22:14-29 makes very clear, the virginity of the bride was held in high esteem. "If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, who is not espoused," Deuteronomy states; "and taking her, lie with her, and the matter come to judgment: He that lay with her shall give to the father of the maid fifty sicles of silver, and shall have her to wife, because he hath humbled her: he may not put her away all the days of his life" (Deut. 22:28-29). Note the rigid insistence upon restoring the woman's honour, and the penalty in the final line of the prescription. The restoration of the virgin's honour is also important in Exodus. If a man seduces a virgin, he has to "endow her" and "have her to wife." If the woman's father refuses to give her in marriage, the seducer still has to "give money...which virgins are wont to receive" (Exodus 22:16-17). Leviticus 21:7 insists that because

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<sup>10</sup>All biblical references are to The Holy Bible, Douay Version.

priests "are consecrated to their God," they cannot marry a former prostitute or a woman who has lost her virginity. The same book prescribes: "If the daughter of a priest be taken in whoredom, and dishonour the name of her father, she shall be burnt with fire" (Lev. 21:9). Ezechiel forbids a priest to marry a divorced woman. He is allowed to marry only a virgin "of the seed of the house of Israel" or the widow of another priest (Ez. 44:22).

The widow Judith "was made great in Bethulia, and she was most renowned in all the land of Israel." Judith's chastity, the book relates, "was joined to her virtue, so that she knew no man all the days of her life, after the death of Manasses her husband" (Judith 16:25-26). There is a close connection between the Old Testament's philosophy of virginity and chastity of mind and its attitude toward the spirit and the flesh. The conflict between spirit and flesh is quite pervasive throughout the Old Testament, and the word "flesh" is often used to suggest man's fallen nature, which is in direct contrast with God or "spirit." The flesh also signifies man's dependence and incapacity. "And many a time did [God] turn away his anger," Psalm 77 relates, "and did not kindle all his wrath. And he remembered that they are flesh: a wind that goeth and returneth not" (Psalm 77:38-39). In Job, also, it is stated: "If he turn his heart to him, he

shall draw his spirit and breath unto himself. All flesh shall perish together, and man shall return into ashes" (Job 34:14-15). The one who puts his faith in man, Jeremias writes, "and maketh flesh of his arm...shall dwell in dryness in the desert in a salt land, and not inhabited." Instead, man should place his confidence in the Spirit and "he shall be as a tree that is planted by the waters...the leaf thereof shall be green...neither shall it cease at anytime to bring forth fruit" (Jeremias 17:5-8). This conflict notwithstanding, the Old Testament extolls temporary, not permanent, virginity. In the Canticle of Canticles, great value is placed upon the virgin state of the beloved (4:12; 8:8-10); but the relationship between man and woman ends in a bridal feast. "Rabbinic Judaism," writes Max Thurian, "considered marriage as a moral obligation."<sup>11</sup> Those who avoid marriage and procreation transgress God's commandment: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). The rabbis themselves were all married and considered matrimony as an absolute duty. But even though love could make a childless marriage meaningful (as in the case of Samuel's father and Hannah), there is something shameful about sterility and the unmarried state in the Old Testament

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<sup>11</sup>Max Thurian, Marriage and Celibacy (London, 1959), p. 45.

(Is. 4:1; Jeremias 16:9; Gen. 19; 30:1-13). Genesis implies that to be unmarried and childless is to be an object of reproach (Gen. 30:23). Isaias adopts a similar attitude (Is. 4:1; 54:4), and predicts barrenness as a punishment for sorceries (Is. 47:8-9). Jephthah's daughter wishes to go up to the mountains for two months to, "bewail" her virginity (Judges 11:37-38). The lamentations of the sterile can be heard throughout the Old Testament. In Genesis 15:2-3, for example, Abram laments the fact that God has not given him seed, that he will "go without children," and his servant will be his heir.<sup>12</sup> In Genesis, too, Rachel, "seeing herself without children, envied her sister, and said to her husband: Give me children, otherwise I shall die" (Gen. 30:1).<sup>13</sup> Every year Anna goes up to the temple of the Lord, and weeps because the Lord "had shut up her womb" (1 Kings 1:5-7). Other barren women, such as Tamar, Juda's daughter-in-law, are prepared to use deception in order to conceive (Gen. 38:14-18). The sterile Rachel is prepared to hire out her husband in return for the magic power of mandrakes which, she feels, will render her fertile (Gen. 30:14-15).

<sup>12</sup>See also Genesis 20:17-18.

<sup>13</sup>See also 2 Samuel 6:23; Leviticus 20:20-21; Amos 5:2; Joel 1:8; and Lamentations 1:15; 2:13.

The reason for the shame and dishonour associated with sterility and the unmarried state in the Old Testament is essentially the fear of failing in the duty of ensuring the propagation of the descendants of Abraham, and so of increasing the hope of Israel. "The welfare of the clan," E. Schillebeeckx remarks, "was fundamental to the Old Testament ethos of marriage."<sup>14</sup> As an institution belonging strictly to this world, marriage, Schillebeeckx points out, "was bound to be lived as something serving to strengthen tribal solidarity when it took place within the society of a clan. It is thus clear that childlessness and widowhood (without remarriage) were inevitably regarded as real calamities, making the childless wife or the unmarried widow 'as nothing' in the eyes of the tribe."<sup>15</sup> In the Old Testament fertility, therefore, was regarded as the greatest blessing that God could bestow on marriage. Happiness consisted of having a wife as fruitful as a vine, and children as olive plants round about the table (Psalm 127:3).<sup>16</sup> A man had had a happy

<sup>14</sup>E. Schillebeeckx, Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery (New York, 1965), p. 83.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 85. Cf. the attitude of the Chinese and other peoples of archaic culture. For the Chinese, to die without leaving a son to perpetuate the family cult is a great misfortune. See Edward Westermarck, A Short History of Marriage (New York, 1930), pp. 38, 41.

<sup>16</sup>See also Genesis 4:1; Ruth 4:11, 13; 1 Samuel 1:5-13.

life if he lived to see his children and his children's children to the fourth and fifth generation. The importance given to fecundity was closely linked to the conviction that the fruitfulness given to Eve and her descendants was not only a blessing, but a precondition for the future redemption of man under the new dispensation. But although disgrace is the lot of barren women, some are cherished by their husbands, indeed more so than fertile women. Some of the most important figures -- the Judges for instance -- were born of hitherto childless women. In fact Isaias sings the praises of the barren:

Give praise, O thou barren, that bearest not:  
sing forth praise, and make a joyful noise,  
thou that didst not travail with child: for  
many are the children of the desolate, more  
than of her that hath a husband, saith the  
Lord. (Is. 54:1)

The disgrace of sterility is replaced by blessing. More than that, the prophet is implying that there is a link between virginity and spiritual fertility. This association is to become an important motif in the New Testament and in the writings of the Fathers.

In the New Testament it is no longer necessary to ensure the propagation of Abraham's descendants. It is more important to spread Christ's kingdom on earth and prepare for the Parousia. The unmarried, according to St. Paul, can do so more effectively than the married. Accordingly, virginity (if it is espoused for supernatural



motives) is given a higher place than marriage. The New Testament, therefore, tends to disparage sexual relations and the married state.<sup>17</sup> Christ praises those who remain celibate for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19:10-12), and, as the examples of Mary and John the Baptist illustrate, the New Testament emphasizes the value of virginity as a means of serving God. Christ clearly states that the espousal of celibacy is a special vocation (Matthew 19:11-12); and in at least three of the Gospels (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:36) the life of the unmarried is compared with angelic life. Thus it is stated in Luke's Gospel:

And Jesus said to them: The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they that shall be accounted worthy of that world, and of the resurrection from the dead, shall neither be married, nor take wives. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. (Luke 20:34-36)

There is equal emphasis on the sacredness and moral ideal of chastity of mind. This chastity is essentially purity of life. It resides in those who reject the corrupt pleasures of the flesh; and it is also revealed in love between human beings. Matthew and Mark point out that chastity resides in the heart and spirit, and in his

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<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Matt. 19:9-12; 24:19; Mark 13:17; Luke 21:23; Apoc. 14:4:

Letter to the Philippians (4:8) Paul recommends that chastity ought to govern one's conduct. This type of chastity is also regarded as the fruit of the presence and action of God (Gal. 5:22-23). In Luke's Gospel heavy stress is placed on the value of permanent virginity: "And another said: I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" (Luke 14:20). Marriage is the excuse of those who reject union with Christ. We can regard the verse as a distillation of Luke's asceticism. The true disciple is the one who has rejected wife and children: "I say to you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive much more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:29-30). Just as the Cross symbolizes the ideal way of life for the Christian, the practice of permanent virginity is the Christian way of spiritual fecundity. In John's Gospel, as well, permanent virginity is treated as if it were an apotheosis. Those who give up the world and the flesh and follow Christ are sanctified: they are made one with the divine life (John 17:17-26).

But it is in Paul's writings, especially the two letters to the Corinthians, that the preeminence of permanent virginity is treated in considerable detail.

Katharine Rogers argues that "condemnation of sex, along with pure misogyny, is more pronounced in St. Paul than in any other writer in the Bible."<sup>18</sup> The more catastrophic the Fall was, the more important it became to exonerate Adam as much as possible by placing the major guilt on Eve, so St. Paul, "developing his doctrine of strict subjection of women, made the most of the Jahvistic account of woman's creation merely as an accessory to man."<sup>19</sup> Although Paul agrees that celibacy is a gift, Schillebeeckx notes, he nevertheless desires it as the state of life for all Christians.<sup>20</sup> Paul holds that permanent virginity is a more perfect state than matrimony because it is a preparation for the Beatific Vision. As Schillebeeckx puts it: Paul "regards Christian celibacy as in itself more desirable than marriage from the point of view of eschatological love, and places it above marriage because it is a state permitting complete and exclusive dedication to the kingdom of God and an affirmation of the transcendence of this kingdom over the world."<sup>21</sup> Paul's philosophy of the flesh, and his preference for celibacy has had, of course,

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<sup>18</sup> Katharine Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate (Seattle, 1966), p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Schillebeeckx, Marriage, p. 122.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

a profound impact on the thought of subsequent Christian writers; but, as we shall see, it is precisely this philosophy that Shakespeare unequivocally rejects. For Paul permanent virginity signifies a will determined to seek, find and belong to God exclusively (1 Cor. 7:34). As 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 suggests, the life in Christ is superior to the married state, and Paul advises the unmarried to remain so, not only because of the nearness of the Parousia but because of the greater freedom with which they can serve the Lord (1 Cor. 7:25-35).

Like many of the Fathers, Paul tended to regard the need for marriage as a decided weakness in man. Marriage to him "is no more than a reluctant concession to human frailty, merely a preferable alternative to burning with unsatisfied lust here or burning for fornication in the fires of Hell."<sup>22</sup> His attitude is firm and unambiguous: marriage is an acceptable outlet for those who cannot control concupiscence (1 Cor. 7:9). It is, he argues, eminently good for a man or woman to renounce the rights of marriage and remain celibate; it is equally desirable for a woman not to contract a second marriage after the death of her husband. Paul's response to marriage is

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<sup>22</sup>Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate, p. 9.

the direct result of his unsympathetic attitude toward sexual relations. He speaks of sexual relations between the married in terms of a debt: "Let the husband render the debt to his wife, and the wife also in like manner to the husband" (1 Cor. 7:3). The refusal by one partner to fulfill this debt is very much like a denial of justice, which deprives the other of a good of which he cannot be dispossessed. In his writings Paul preaches the complete victory of the spirit over the flesh. Paul's attitude toward this troublesome antagonism between flesh and spirit is summed up in his letter to the Galatians: "walk in the spirit," he advises, "and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another..... But if you are led by the spirit you are not under the law" (Gal. 5:16-18). Paul's preoccupation with the flesh is evident in the number of times the word appears in his writings. In Galatians, for instance, the flesh is associated with fornication, "luxury" and other "uncleanness" (Gal. 5:19), and in Ephesians it is linked with sin (Eph. 2:3). In the second letter to the Corinthians Paul speaks of the filthiness of the flesh (2 Cor. 7:1), and the letter to the Romans argues very strenuously against everything carnal: death and the flesh are equated "because the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God...And they who are in the flesh, cannot

please God" (Rom. 8:6-8). The same letter warns his audience to make no provision for the flesh and its concupiscences; instead, they are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14). To live by the flesh is to reject the Creator and to look for one's security in the creation which is ephemeral. As the flesh takes increasing hold upon a man, the power of the spirit is diminished. Conversely, Paul explains, the flesh gradually retires as the spirit triumphs. This conflict goes on without intermission until the final victory of the spirit. The kernel of Paul's thought on marriage and celibacy is perhaps located in the letter to the Romans: by dedicating the body to God, one is elevated to the sphere of the divine (Rom. 12:1).<sup>23</sup> The situation of the celibate is spiritually better than that of the married person (1 Cor. 7:32-34), and a father who keeps his daughter a virgin, "doth better" than if he gave her in marriage (1 Cor. 7:38). Such a father, Paul implies, procures a superior good for his daughter.

As the early Church developed it was increasingly influenced by the ideal of encratism and its belief that woman was a creation of the devil.<sup>23</sup> The Church placed Christian perfection in continence. Indeed, the struggle

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<sup>23</sup>See Schillebeeckx, Celibacy, p. 27.

to give marriage as well as chastity a legitimate place in the church produced a tension "between the ideal of chastity and the heterodox exclusivism of Enkratism."<sup>24</sup>

In many apocryphal writings (widely read in the fourth and fifth centuries) continence was overemphasized. Many of them expressed the belief that "for a married person who continues to have conjugal relations, salvation is out of the question."<sup>25</sup> Schillebeeckx also cites a second century work by Sextus which spread the Hellenistic notions that prayer and sexual intercourse are contradictory, and therefore even castration is to be recommended for the sake of contemplation.<sup>26</sup> Marriage was reduced to a second rate kind of Christian life on the ground that it is the vocation of every baptized member of the church to love God undividedly. Indeed, "it was not the existence of celibacy or continence that had to be defended," Schillebeeckx continues, "but the lawfulness of marriage for Christians."<sup>27</sup> The early Christians' hostility toward matrimony revealed itself in all kinds of excesses. The faithful refused to join with married persons in prayer.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

They were reluctant to receive the sacraments from married priests, and would not attend their eucharistic celebrations. "Women left their husbands, or dressed as men, or even deserted their children as a sign of their flight from the world."<sup>28</sup> This hostility eventually culminated in the absurd practice of permitting clerics to marry but requiring them to practise complete continence.

From the beginning of the second century, then, the church recognized permanent virginity as a particularly pre-eminent way of life, and together with voluntary poverty and asceticism it became an important aspect of religious life. More and more virgins assumed an important place in the life of the church. In 306 the Council of Elvira began to implement canonical sanctions against virgins who violated their pact with God: some were excommunicated, and even if they recanted, they were permitted to receive communion only at the end of their lives. In 314 the Council of Ancyra took the position that a virgin is the bride of Christ, and consequently she is not free to contract a second marriage. All consecrated virgins who had later married were therefore found guilty of bigamy. During this patristic age there was a noticeable tendency (especially in the work of Nyssa, Basil and Jerome) to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 33.



discredit sexual activity and exaggerate the hardships of marriage. At the same time permanent virginity was exalted, and the biblical theory of chastity as the sanctification of sexuality was constantly preached. The Eastern Fathers tended to stress the mystical and transcendent character of chastity, but their Western counterparts preferred to stress its practical aspects: chastity leads to purification from sensuality.

One of the early Fathers who flourished in fourth century Greece was Methodius, Bishop of Olympus in Lycia. He was the first to write a carefully reasoned treatise on the importance of virginity. Moreover, Methodius synthesized concepts which had occurred sporadically in the work of Origen and his predecessors. His book, The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity, is a platonic dialogue distinguished among patristic writings by having only women as its characters. Methodius' preference for chastity is unequivocally announced in the first section: "When a person makes a thorough examination and study of all things that happen to a man in the course of nature, he will learn not to despise procreation, but he will also learn to praise and to prefer chastity."<sup>29</sup> The superiority of permanent virginity over marriage is emphasized

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<sup>29</sup>Methodius, The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity, trans. H.A. Musurillo (London, 1958), pp. 56-57.

in the work of this very early Father. Methodius argues that permanent virginity is the highest form of perfection one can attain. By renouncing the corrupted flesh and espousing permanent virginity, one restores the first state of man before the Fall. He identifies virginity with the grace of the new dispensation: "none of the men of old were fully pleasing to the Lord," he writes, "for the Law was not at all adequate to free mankind from corruption, until virginity, succeeding the Law, held man in thrall to the commands of Christ."<sup>30</sup> Like the later Fathers, Methodius insists upon the necessity of virginity as a preparation for marriage with Christ: how can the incontinent "come to the feast with Christ if they have not decked their tabernacles with the branches of Chastity?"<sup>31</sup> Like Cyprian, Nyssa and Chrysostom, Methodius awards virgins the highest honour, ranking them "higher in the land of promise."<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, to practise incontinence is to alienate oneself from the "drama of truth." With this as kernel, Methodius sums up his philosophy of virginity:

Those who fulfill their irresistible longing for incontinence...will remain outside of the mysteries, uninitiated into the drama of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

truth, madly indulging the willful pleasures of love instead of living a chaste and temperate life as procreators of children. But those who are nimble and light of wing, soaring up into the, supramundane regions above this life, see from afar things that no mortal has gazed upon...and hence they care nothing for the things which the world thinks good -- riches and fame and family ties and marriage ties.<sup>33</sup>

Methodius' equation of permanent virginity and perfection is very important because it tends to dominate subsequent Catholic thought on virginity, marriage and sexuality. Such an equation is certainly the primary motive in the establishment of the Church rule of celibacy, as a sine qua non of the priesthood. This question ought to be considered in some detail since it sheds considerable light on the troublesome dichotomy between the exercise of sexuality and the practice of goodness.

The Old Testament tended to draw a sharp distinction between the two. Psalm 50 and Exodus 19, for instance, seem to imply that sexual intercourse, if not actually unholy, is certainly morally dubious: Having come down from the mountain and sanctified the people, Moses cautions them: "Be ready against the third day, and come not near your wives" (Exodus 19:15). Moses is asking his people to purify themselves for the Covenant, and they are specifically warned to abstain from licit

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

marital relations. In the Laws regulating purification (Leviticus 12, 15) there is a tendency to create in the people a horror of sexual impurity: "If a woman having received seed shall bear a man child, she shall be unclean seven days, according to the days of the separation of her flowers" (Lev. 12:2).<sup>34</sup> A significant fact emerges from all the detailed regulations governing sexual activity: whether it is legitimate or not, sexual activity constitutes a sort of religious impurity to the extent that it impedes man's approach to God. The implication is that sexuality and the worship of God are incompatible, and the temporary continence imposed upon priests before the celebration of the various liturgies is a foreshadowing of later clerical celibacy.

During the first four centuries the Church permitted the clergy to marry, but only under very specific conditions: the marriage had to be contracted before receiving the diaconate, and a second marriage was not permitted. Consequently, many clerics were single, and several of the married priests abandoned their wives once they were

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<sup>34</sup>In The Revised Standard Version the same verse reads as follows: "If a woman conceives, and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean." See also Lev. 15:2; 15:18-20; 1 Sam. 21:2-7.

consecrated bishop. Because of the diversity of practice, however, the Eastern church decided to draw up specific legislation. Priests were permitted to live with the spouses they married before ordination; but they were forbidden to remarry should the spouse die. If they did, the second marriage was held to be invalid, and the offspring declared illegitimate. In 692 the Trullan Synod ordered bishops to practise total celibacy, and in the case of married priests, it prohibited sexual relations before the celebration of the liturgy.<sup>35</sup> In the West, meanwhile, the Spanish Council of Elvira established at the beginning of the fourth century the first law on celibacy for western clergy: the Council required total celibacy for all clergy under pain of deposition. The Council implied that sexual intercourse was incompatible with the sacred ministry, and, citing Romans 8:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:29, it insisted that the clergy must obey Scripture, which indeed requires them to be celibate. It was also a question of heeding Paul's advice, "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences" (Romans 13:14).

Regulations of a similar tenor were established in

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<sup>35</sup> See the New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 371, and Jean-Paul Audet, Structures of Christian Priesthood, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York, 1968), pp. 9-10.

later years. As the Carolingian Empire declined, however, the clergy became increasingly secularized, and several of them ignored the regulations and married. To counteract this decline in clerical celibacy, many councils in the tenth and eleventh centuries (aided by the efforts of individual popes) repeated the earlier laws. In 1059, for example, Nicholas II deprived married priests of the right to administer the Sacraments. Should they choose to ignore his ruling, Nicholas ordered the laity not to attend Mass celebrated by a married priest. Finally, in 1123 and later in 1139 the first and second Councils of the Lateran took the ultimate step: clerical marriages, formerly considered illicit, were now declared to be invalid on the ground that the Sacrament of Holy Orders was itself an impediment to marriage. By the end of the twelfth century, then, the rule of clerical celibacy had been definitely established for the Latin Church. The law demanding continence for clergy who administered the sacraments was directly related to the conviction that the exercise of sexuality ought to be kept apart from the sacred. The sacred and the impure were mutually exclusive. Jean-Paul Audet sums it up: "The pastoral desire to honour the sacraments eventually reached such a point as to allow for only one possibility: the total exclusion of the exercise of sexuality, for by then it was hard to see how it could even be freed from

the shame of at least some degree of uncleanness."<sup>36</sup>

The dichotomy between the sacred and the impure is a noticeable motif in Tertullian's work, and if there is an unconscious Manichaeism in the writings of the Fathers, perhaps it cannot be better illustrated than in his treatises. Like Jerome, Tertullian regarded virginity as an end in itself. In An Exhortation to Chastity (212) and On Marriage and Remarriage (206) Tertullian takes up the cause of permanent virginity at the top of his voice. In the Exhortation, addressed to a widower urging him not to remarry, Tertullian denounces marriage. He feels that there is something unclean in sexual union, and he regrets its necessity. Marriage, indeed, is a sort of legitimate debauchery, a bad means justified by a good end. On the other hand, virgins, because of their integrity and purity, will look upon the face of God most closely. There is no proof, Tertullian claims; that God approves of second marriages. He therefore argues that marriage is to be contracted once.<sup>37</sup> A second marriage "is really nothing but a kind of fornication," and marriage and fornication are different, he continues, "only because laws appear

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<sup>36</sup> Audet, Christian Priesthood, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Tertullian, Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage, trans. William P. LeSaint (London, 1951), p. 49.

to make them so; they are not intrinsically different, but only in the degree of their illegitimacy."<sup>38</sup> He speaks of the need to "bury concupiscence of the flesh" by strenuously cultivating a love for things of the spirit.<sup>39</sup> Tertullian's philosophy of virginity and marriage is summed up in two admonitions: live a life of virginity from the time of one's birth; live a life of virginity from the time of one's second birth in Baptism.<sup>40</sup> Rogers points out that while Tertullian's attitude toward women was unusually vindictive, all of its elements -- a low opinion of woman's motives and functions, disparagement of motherhood, fear of female attractiveness, emphasis on her responsibility for the Fall -- can be found in his contemporaries and successors among the Fathers.<sup>41</sup> St. Jerome notes that "a woman drove the tiller of paradise from the garden that had been given him,"<sup>42</sup> and he certainly found motherhood repellent. Henry Lea remarks that Jerome's contempt for marriage was so extreme that "in spite of the recognized

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 56-57.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate, pp. 15-16.

<sup>42</sup> Select Letters of St. Jerome, trans. K.A. Wright (London, 1933), p. 203.



primacy of St. Peter, he considered that apostle as decidedly inferior to St. John, because the one had a wife and the other was a virgin -- apparently not observing that, as he denied the marriage of all the apostles save Peter, he was thus relegating the head of the Church to the last place among the holy twelve."<sup>43</sup>

In some of Augustine's writings we noticed the same preoccupation with the preeminence of virginity. During the pontificate of Pope Siricius, both Jerome and Augustine wrote treatises attacking Jovinian's alleged heresies on virginity and marriage. Augustine's first effort was the lengthy The Good of Marriage. He demonstrates with much cogency and detail the goodness of marriage; but he does so only after having unambiguously established its inferiority to the state of permanent virginity. His Holy Virginity (401) continues and culminates his battle with Jovinian. The treatise repeats many of Ambrose's ideas on virginity, but they are submitted to a deeper examination. In the opening Chapter Augustine clearly states his position: virginity is more perfect than marriage, and its superiority cannot be questioned. "By divine law," he writes, "continence is

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<sup>43</sup>Henry C. Lea, History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church (London, 1932), pp. 26-27.

preferred to matrimony and holy virginity to wedlock."<sup>44</sup> Like Jerome, Augustine regards the loss of virginity as an irredeemable disaster. He writes: "So, the physical fecundity, even of those who at the present time desire nothing in marriage except children whom they may hand over to Christ, must not be thought capable of making up for the loss of virginity."<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the virgin should not despise marriage: she should regard it as "a hill of inferior blessing."<sup>46</sup> Augustine describes virginity as a loving union with God, so that He becomes the center of thought and action: "In this union the soul finds its deepest satisfaction and noblest self-expression." It achieves, he adds, "a fruitfulness immeasurably superior to that of carnal generation."<sup>47</sup> Finally, like most of the Fathers, Augustine speaks of virginity as if it were a foreshadowing of incorruption in Heaven: "Virginal integrity and freedom from all carnal relation through holy chastity is an angelic lot and foretaste in the corruptible flesh of perpetual incorruption."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Augustine, Treatises on Marriage, trans. Charles T. Wilcox (New York, 1955), p. 143.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 161-162.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 161-162.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

Caesarius' hostility toward the flesh and the passions it generates in man is representative of most of the Fathers, and therefore his sermons on virginity are worth examining in some detail. In Sermon 43, "An admonition to observe Conjugal Chastity and not to keep Concubines," Caesarius implies that yielding to lust is not compatible with masculinity: "An exceedingly grave evil it is if a strong man who is not conquered by the sword is overpowered by lust; if soft, alluring things, ruin a man whom hard things could not overcome."<sup>49</sup> In sermon 44, based for the most part on Ezekiel 18:20, Caesarius stresses the need for premarital virginity in both men and women: "Young men and women who are going to be joined in marriage should observe virginity until their marriage,"<sup>50</sup> he advises. Should they be corrupted by adultery before their lawful union, then "they come to their wedding alive physically but evidently dead in soul."<sup>51</sup> Sermon 44 also underlines Caesarius' intransigent distrust of the sexual act. He feels that sexual relations are fundamentally unclean: "As often as you

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<sup>49</sup> Saint Caesarius, Sermons, trans. Mary Mueller (New York, 1956), p. 219.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

come to church and wish to receive the sacraments of Christ on a feast, observe chastity several days before it," he says, "so that you may be able to approach the Lord's altar with a peaceful conscience."<sup>52</sup> Like Augustine, who held that the sexual act was immoral if performed when there was no possibility of conception, Caesarius argues that a man "should never know his wife except from the desire for children."<sup>53</sup> And if, in spite of himself, a man becomes exhausted by assaults of the flesh and "is persuaded to know his wife without any desire for children," he is advised to give alms as a sort of sublimation and penance.<sup>54</sup> Caesarius' tendency to link even legitimate sexual activity with uncleanness, and his implicit separation of the sacred and the sexual, are clearly evident in the following extract:

Above all, no one should know his wife when Sunday or other feasts come around. Similar precautions should be taken as often as women menstruate, for the prophet says: "Do not come near to a menstruous woman" (Ex. 18:6). If a man is aware that his wife is in this condition but refuses to control himself on a Sunday or feast, the children who are then conceived will be born as lepers, or epileptics, or perhaps even demoniacs. Lepers are

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 222. Italics are mine. See also his remark about the newly-married woman, p. 223.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

commonly born, not of wise men who observe chastity on feasts...but especially of farmers who do not know how to control themselves. Truly, brethren, if animals without intellect do not touch each other except at a fixed and proper time, how much more should men who have been created according to God's image observe this? What is worse, there are some dissolute or drunken men who sometimes do not even spare their wives when they are pregnant. Therefore, if they do not amend their lives, we are to consider them worse than animals.<sup>55</sup>

None of the orthodox Fathers ever denied the goodness of marriage; to a man, however, they made it inferior to permanent virginity, and they stressed the propriety of making women subject to men. The excellence of virginity was a popular subject for moral tracts, and Rogers points out that "at least one discourse on this subject appears in the works of almost every prolific writer."<sup>56</sup> In their attempt to decry marriage, the Fathers stigmatised wedlock "as the means of transmitting and perpetuating original sin, an act which necessarily entailed sin on its participants, and one which at best could only look for mercy and pardon and be allowed only on sufferance."<sup>57</sup> By renouncing the world and the flesh, the virgin, according to the Fathers, establishes an intimate union with Christ: she becomes the bride of Christ. The

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>56</sup> Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate, p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> Lea, Sacerdotal Celibacy, p. 25.

Fathers believed that permanent virginity achieves what many of them predicated of Christ and the Church: the substance of the eternal marriage of the Soul and the Word. To this extent the virgin resembled Mary, whose assumption into Heaven was seen as the ultimate triumph of the spiritual marriage.

Nicolas Berdyaev believes that the Christian conception of marriage and the family "has always been opportunist and adapted to the herd-level."<sup>58</sup> The sole purpose and justification of marriage was declared by Christianity to be procreation, "dependent upon physical sexual intercourse, accompanied by loss of virginity." But Christianity regarded this loss "as a lower state and metaphysically despised it: the meaning and purpose of marriage proved to be physiological and necessitating the loss of virginity, i.e., of man's highest estate."<sup>59</sup> All of the major Christian writers from the first to the sixth centuries tended to disparage the body and the pleasures of the flesh. Augustine, for instance, claimed that the patriarchs had sexual intercourse only because they were obliged to procreate: Jacob would have preferred to

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<sup>58</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, trans. Natalie Duddington (New York, 1960), p. 241.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

abstain from procreation, and procreated only because his wives insisted.<sup>60</sup> The early Church's fear of and hostility toward human sexuality is well illustrated in a decree issued in the year 398 by the Council of Carthage. The decree enacted that after the benediction of bride and bridegroom, they shall refrain from sexual intercourse that night out of respect for the benediction. The enactment "was received into the Canon Law; and by subsequent enactments the period of chastity which married couples were required...to observe was extended from one to two or three nights."<sup>61</sup> And Henry Lea cites Gregory the Great's declaration "that connubial pleasures cannot possibly be free from sin," as an example of the early Church's Manichaeic tendencies.<sup>62</sup> The same pope asserted that monastic life is "the only possible mode of salvation for the greater portion of mankind."<sup>63</sup> Lea points out that the Penitential of Theodore was the inevitable outcome of such a philosophy. This Penitential commanded those who contracted a first marriage "to abstain from entering a church for thirty days, after which they are to perform

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<sup>60</sup> Augustine, City of God, trans. Gerald G. Walsh (New York, 1952), pp. 557-558.

<sup>61</sup> Westermarck, Short History, pp. 219-220.

<sup>62</sup> Lea, Sacerdotal Celibacy, p. 27.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

penance for forty more; a digamus was subjected to penance for a year, and a trigamus, or one oftener married, for seven years."<sup>64</sup>

The influence and importance of the early Church's philosophy of virginity, sex and marriage, which was to pervade medieval and Renaissance attitudes, are nowhere better illustrated than in their persistence into the modern Church's thought. In 1859, for example, Panzini, the Capuchin monk, was condemned to twelve years' incarceration because he had attributed the greater part of the evils under which the establishment laboured to celibacy and what he regarded as its attendant immorality. What is equally startling, however, is that the same monk was very careful to declare his measureless admiration for voluntary asceticism, and he believed that virginity is immensely superior to matrimony.<sup>65</sup> The early Church's belief in the superiority of virginity appears again in R.F. Trevett's book on the church and sex, written for The Twentieth-Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism: "The consecrated virgin is free to follow the dictates of the Spirit in ways impossible to the married."<sup>66</sup> Trevett also repeats

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 549.

<sup>66</sup> R.F. Trevett, The Church and Sex (New York, 1960), p. 42.



the early Church's stress on the hardships of marriage, pointing out at the same time that the monk and nun

- "image the transfigured Christ of Thabor, the Christ of glory, the bridegroom of the Church in the eternal freedom of a fully integrated humanity."<sup>67</sup> There is the same condescension toward the married. On the other hand, the sacrifice the religious makes "is greater since by it he indicates that total direct surrender of body and soul which all will make in the life to come."<sup>68</sup>

If the patristic period was a preeminently patriarchal age, so too was the Middle Ages. As Katharine Rogers has demonstrated, misogyny became increasingly prominent as a theme in the literature of the Middle Ages.<sup>69</sup> Roman cynicism about women seems to have been taken up enthusiastically in the Middle Ages. Rogers argues that "although the most intense medieval attacks on women were prompted by fear of their seductive powers inherited from the early Christian ascetics, the classical tradition contributed not only much illustrative material but precedents for attacks on marriage and especially for the ambivalence found in the courtly love tradition."<sup>70</sup> Because of their

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>69</sup> Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate, p. 56.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

fondness for authorities and ancient examples, medieval writers drew from the classical store-house of misogyny as much as they did from the Bible and the Fathers. During the ascetic and monastic phase of the Middle Ages the inferior status of women (fostered by the early Church) became even more pronounced. One of the most important aspects of this phase was the widespread belief in the subjection of women. "Women are to be patronized, wed and kept in their place. Eileen Power maintains that the idea of woman as an instrument of the Devil found expression very early in the history of the Church. Woman was "a thing at once inferior and evil."<sup>71</sup> The clergy, for the most part, were the only educated and articulate members of the community, and their theory about the essential inferiority of women would naturally be influential. "As the ascetic ideal rose and flourished and monasticism<sup>s</sup> became the refuge of many of the finest minds...who drew breath in the turmoil of the dying Empire and the invasions," Power writes, "there came into being as an inevitable consequence a conception of woman as the supreme temptress...the most dangerous of all obstacles in the way of salvation."<sup>72</sup> There was, consequently, a tendency to

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<sup>71</sup>Eileen Power, "The Position of Women," in The Legacy of the Middle Ages, ed. G.C. Crump and E.F. Jacob (Oxford, 1927), p. 402.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 402-403.

belittle marriage. John of Salisbury is a case in point. Marriage, he says, "is more fecund in worry than in joy."<sup>73</sup> Because it was instituted by God, marriage must be good; but it is, nevertheless, vexatious, and he asks the question, "who except one bereft of sense would approve sensual pleasure itself, which is illicit, wallows in filthiness, is something that men censure, and that God without doubt condemns?"<sup>74</sup> Some of John Audelay's fifteenth century carols are concerned with the alleged decadence of marriage. In one such carol two verses read as follows:

Now yif a womon mared schal be,  
 Anon heo schal be boght and solde,  
 Fore no loue of hert, truly,  
 Bot fore couetyse of lond ore gold,  
 Al day thou seest.

Bot now a lady wil take a page,  
 Fore no loue, bot fleshele lust,  
 And so here blod is disperage;  
 Thus lardus and lardchip al day ben lost,  
 Al day thou seest.<sup>75</sup>

The hostility toward marriage which we have been noticing is essentially of a piece with the medieval Church's distrust of the flesh. Writing about the Church's position on the matter, C.S. Lewis notes that of the sexual

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<sup>73</sup>John of Salisbury, Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers, trans. J.B. Pike (London, 1938), p. 355.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>75</sup>The Early English Carols, ed. Richard Greene (Oxford, 1935), p. 276.

act itself, "nobody ever asserted that the act was intrinsically sinful. On the other hand, all were agreed that some evil element was present in every concrete instance of this act since the Fall."<sup>76</sup> Nowhere is this disgust of sexuality and hostility toward marriage better illustrated than in the anonymous thirteenth century Hali Meidenhad. Wedlock, says the author, was "legalised in holy church, as a bed for the sick, to catch the unstrong, who cannot stand in the high hill, and so near to heaven, as the virtue of maidenhood."<sup>77</sup> Again and again the treatise emphasizes the filthiness of sexual union. Sex is to be "tolerated" in marriage. If the reader wonders why God created such a thing, the answer is: "God created it never such; but Adam and Eve turned it to be such by their sin, and marred our nature; so that is the house of immorality, and has greater misery."<sup>78</sup> The pleasure of wedlock is only carnal. The yielding up of virginity in marriage is a descent "from being Jesus Christs leman, from being a lady in heaven, into the filth of the flesh, into the manner of life of a beast, into the thraldom of a man, and into

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<sup>76</sup>C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford, 1936), p. 14.

<sup>77</sup>Hali Meidenhad, ed. F.J. Furnivall, EETS 18 (London, 1922), p. 28.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

the sorrows of the world."<sup>79</sup> Sexual intercourse is "that same indecent burning of the flesh, that same flaming itch of carnal lust...that loathsome act, that beastly copulation, that shameless coition, that fullness of stinking ordure and uncomely deed."<sup>80</sup> Having discredited sexual intercourse, the writer of Hali Meidenhad next attempts to discredit marriage by pointing out all of the hardships that accompany it. Children do not bring joy to the married: even the pains of pregnancy and childbirth are discussed in vivid detail:

Consider we what joy ariseth afterwards from gestation of children, when the offspring in thee quickeneth and groweth... Thy ruddy face shall turn lean, and grow green as grass... the giddiness of thy brain thy head shall ache sorely. Within thy belly, the uterus shall swell and strut out like a water bag; thy bowels shall have pains... The burden of thy breast on thy two paps, and the streams of milk which trickle out of thee. All thy beauty is overthrown with a withering. Thy mouth is bitter, and nauseous is all that thou chewest...<sup>81</sup>

Marriage, in short, is a descent into thralldom. Hali Meidenhad sings the praises of virginity time and again. The high tower of Sion "typifies the elevated state of virginity."<sup>82</sup> Virgins behold from on high "all widows

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 5. See also, pp. 13-14.

and wedded women, both of them beneath it."<sup>83</sup> The superiority of virginity is also the topic of several of John Audelay's carols. Maidens are asked to preserve their virginity in order to enjoy the bliss of heaven:

Therfare thai be in heven blis;  
Where nurth and melode ever ther ys,  
And soo shal all maydons, ywys,  
That kepon heore warder and here degre.<sup>84</sup>

Another carol speaks of the treasure of virginity, loss of which is a shameful disaster:

Of that tresour men ben fulfayne,  
And al here love on youe thai layne,  
And mone a pene for hit thai payne,  
Both selver and gold, lond and fe.<sup>85</sup>

The fourth verse continues:

Yif that tresoure ye don hit tame,  
When hit is knowyn, ye wil have chame;  
Oft therefore ye berne gret blame,  
Never on be other ware wil be.<sup>86</sup>

The Fathers, as we have seen, preached the complete victory of the spirit over the flesh, and, in fact, everything sensual. Aquinas, on the other hand, not only rejects any kind of total asensuality, he actually describes it in the Summa as an imperfection and, possibly,

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> The Early English Carols, p. 265.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

a moral defect. Aquinas maintains that love is an essential ingredient in the sexual act, and it is the root and source of the act's ultimate beneficial value for the married. And Fabian Parmisano has argued that of all the love relationships Aquinas examines, "at the pinnacle stands conjugal love."<sup>87</sup> This does not mean that he adopts a nice balance between marriage and virginity; on the contrary, the Summa very emphatically states that marriage is inferior to virginity. The state of virginity is worthier because of what the virgin or celibate aims at. In Aquinas' system the Beatific Vision after death is the supreme human felicity. In such a system virginity allows one "to enjoy the contemplation of truth more freely."<sup>88</sup>

Aquinas refuted the error of "holding virginity not to be preferable to marriage" by the examples of Christ and St. Paul. He points out that virginity, since it is "directed to the good of the soul," is superior to marriage, which "is directed to the good of the body" (Qu. 152, Art. 4). To be "untouched by sex pleasures" is one form of perfection, and although he recognizes

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<sup>87</sup> Fabian Parmisano, "Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages," New Blackfriars, 50 (September, 1969), 655.

<sup>88</sup> Summa Theologica, Part II, Second Part, Qu. 152, Art. 3.

the place of passion and pleasure in sexual relations, Aquinas maintains that pleasure should not be sought for its own sake (Suppl., 49, 6). He points a very concise comparison between chastity, widowhood and virginity: "chastity, in marriage is admirable, but only because it abstains from illicit pleasures" (Qu. 152, Art. 3). Holy widowhood, however, is distinctive, although it does not achieve the perfection of freedom from sex pleasure. This, Aquinas continues, "is proper to virginity, and is the reason why it is set down as a special virtue, surpassing chastity as magnificence does liberality" (Qu. 152, Art. 3). There are times, Aquinas says, when husband and wife ought to refrain from sexual relations: "on days that are set aside as being particularly for worship it is not lawful to ask for intercourse" (Suppl., 64, 5-7). We notice, once again, the dichotomy between the exercise of sexuality and the worship of God.<sup>89</sup> This is especially revealing since Aquinas argues that the sexual act is a gift of God, and, indeed, the act is actually meritorious if those performing it are in a state of grace.

The importance Aquinas gives to virginity can be seen in his belief that the sacrament of marriage is

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<sup>89</sup>Cf. William Harrington's separation of sex and the worship of God: see Chapter Two.



"irregular" if the bride is not a virgin (Suppl., 66, 3). The bride's virginity is a sign of her purity. It is a sign of property received intact, as it were. In an argument reminiscent of St. Paul, Aquinas concludes that virginity is to be esteemed more highly than married continence: "Virginity is for the soul's good in the life of contemplation, mindful of the things of God. Marriage is for the body's good, in the life of action, namely the growth of the human race. The men and women who embrace matrimony must needs think of the things of this world...and so without doubt virginity is to be esteemed more highly than conjugal continence" (Qu. 152, Art. 4). Aquinas, it is true, does regard marriage as an actual source of grace, but in a world in which some men will marry and procreate, virginity is the better course to follow, according to him, and the Christian who would be perfect is told to follow this course if he can. Carnal generation, he maintains, may, and should, be avoided for the higher good of spiritual propagation.

For Aquinas, Mary, the married virgin, was the exemplar of the superiority of virginity, and the elevation of virginity became closely associated with the cult of the Virgin Mary, already supreme by the eleventh century. Mary seems to have given women the sort of spiritual dignity no secularism could do. Eileen Power writes:

It is obvious that a theory which regarded the worship of a lady as next to that of God and conceived her as the mainspring of brave deeds, a creature half romantic, half divine, must have done something to counterbalance the dogma of subjection. The process of placing women upon a pedestal had begun, and whatever we may think of the ultimate value of such an elevation...it was at least better than placing them, as the Fathers of the Church had inclined to do, in the bottomless pit.<sup>90</sup>

At the height of the Marian devotion, Mary was celebrated in architecture, painting and in the Rose windows of the great European cathedrals. She was the ideal lady of courtly love. She was also the mystical rose of virginity, as several of the early carols attest.<sup>91</sup> James Ryman describes her as:

This roose so myelde, aye undefielde,  
Hath Borne a childe for man so wilde,  
By fraude begiled, from blis exiled,  
The whiche flour is moost pure and bright.<sup>92</sup>

The author of Hali Meidenhad repeatedly cites Mary as the greatest model for the maiden. She is to follow "the example of that maiden blessed beyond all others, Mary, the mother of God."<sup>93</sup> One of the most important aspects of the cult is Mary as a redemptive and intercessory figure. As we shall see, this is closely linked with the

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<sup>90</sup>Power, "The Position of Women," p. 406.

<sup>91</sup>See The Early English Carols, pp. 129-162.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>93</sup>Hali Meidenhad, p. 62.

heroines of Shakespeare's last plays. Henry Adams remarks that the medieval attachment to Mary rested on the instinct for self-preservation. "If there was to be a future life," he writes, "Mary was [man's] only hope. She alone represented Love. The Trinity were, or was, One, and could, by the nature of its essence, administer justice alone."<sup>94</sup>

Adams continues:

Under any conceivable form of religion, this duality must find embodiment somewhere, and the Middle Ages logically insisted that, as it could not be in the Trinity, either separately or together, it must be in the Mother. If the Trinity was in its essence Unity, the Mother alone could represent whatever was not Unity; whatever was irregular, exceptional, outlawed; and this was the whole human race. The saints alone were safe, after they were sainted. Everyone else was criminal, and men differed so little in degree of sin that, in Mary's eyes, all were subjects for her pity and help.<sup>95</sup>

In the eyes of sinful humanity, Christ seemed too just and terrible; but Mary was approachable because her attribute was humility, and her love and pity were infinite. Several of the medieval carols are about Mary's intercessory powers. In one of James Ryman's carols (c. 1492) we read:

This swete roose pray bothe nyght and day,  
 Withoute denay, that we come maye  
 To blys. foe ay the redy waye,  
 The which flour is moost pure and bright.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Henry Adams, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres (New York, 1905), p. 278.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>96</sup> The Early English Carols, p. 131.

In another carol Ryman writes:

This rose, of flourys she is flour;  
 She ne wole fade for no shoure;  
 To synful men she sent socour,  
 Mira plenitudine.<sup>97</sup>

Hali Meidenhad warns the virgin about the danger of falling,  
 at the same time stressing Mary's redemptive role:

The spiteful devil has his eyes on thee,  
 so high mounted up towards heaven,  
 through maidenhood's power, which to him,  
 is the most odious of virtues; for through  
 our Lady's maidenhood, who began it first,  
 the maiden Mary, he lost the dominion over  
 mankind on earth; and thus also hell was  
 robbed of its prey, and heaven will be  
 filled. She sees thee follow her steps,  
 maiden, and walk as she did, who offered her  
 maidenhood first to our Lord, when he chose  
 her among all women to be his mother, and  
 by her maidenhood redeem all mankind.<sup>98</sup>

Just as Christ became the new Adam by being born of her,  
 one goes to Mary to be reborn. Man is reborn in Christ  
 through Mary. The rebirth and redemption of fallen man  
 through the agency of the chaste virgin is a central theme  
 in All's Well, Measure for Measure and the final romances.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>98</sup> Hali Meidenhad, p. 19.

CHAPTER TWO: WOMAN, CELIBACY AND MARRIAGE  
IN THE RENAISSANCE

In spite of the cult of the Virgin Mary, medieval monasticism and the attitude of the Fathers were sufficiently strong to ensure the persistence into the Renaissance of diatribes against women. Katharine Rogers puts it this way:

[The] misogynistic attacks must have satisfied popular demands which persisted from the Middle Ages...The nature and frequency of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century charges against women suggest that the motives which prompted them are constant...The tone of the charges indicates that it was still not considered necessary to soften attacks on women.<sup>1</sup>

Pyrrye, for example, devotes more attention to women's failings in his The Praise and Dispraise of Women. When he does deal with their virtues, his tone is patronizing, and he points out that women are useful for the relief of man's body.<sup>2</sup> There is no escape from woman's snares:

From Deceite thou can not flee,  
her craftes thou can not shonne.<sup>3</sup>

Woman is also a shrew, and pain soon follows the first joys she gives.<sup>4</sup> Robert Copland also discourages those lovers who may be inclined to put themselves into the hands of

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<sup>1</sup>Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate, pp. 100-101.

<sup>2</sup>Pyrrye, The Praise and Dispraise of Women, sig. B7<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., sig. D11.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., sig. A3.

women and the bonds of marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Often Elizabethan writers stressed what they regarded as woman's most noticeable vice -- her insatiable lust. Women were depicted as lustful and indiscriminating, and Rogers notes that Renaissance poets observed that women "offer no more than sensual gratification, which is degrading."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, they felt that women should be used and discarded before they ruined their lovers. Francis Lee Utley's book gives a comprehensive list of the numerous misogynistic works produced in the Middle Ages, and suggests the traditions which spawned them. Utley notes that they continued to be produced in great abundance even when the Renaissance had taken firm root in England.<sup>7</sup> Women's alleged weaknesses were also preached from the pulpit. In the homily "Of the State of Matrimony," the preacher emphasizes women's lack of constancy. Women, he says, are "more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be." They are also "lighter" and vain "in their fantasies and opinions."<sup>8</sup> William Haller has shown

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<sup>5</sup>Robert Copland, A Complaint of them that be Sonne Maryed (London, 1535), sig. D11.

<sup>6</sup>Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate, p. 118.

<sup>7</sup>Francis Lee Utley, The Crooked Fib (Columbus, 1944), pp. 339-347.

<sup>8</sup>Certaine Sermons or Homilies, ed. Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup (Gainesville, Fla., 1968), p. 503.

that preachers often stressed woman's inferiority. A congenial theme for preachers was the woman most to be desired for a wife, and the preacher "frequently reminded his hearers that woman was the weaker vessel."<sup>9</sup>

Inevitably, misogyny led to attempts to negate sexuality and mock marriage. Antoine de La Sale's The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage was anonymously translated in 1509. The fourth joy is typical: "The fourth joye of maryage to tell is as to go frome purgatorye to hell."<sup>10</sup> The book laments the fact that when a "man of tender yeres" is flourishing in youth so that nothing can dismay him, he finds himself suddenly plunged into the pain of marriage.<sup>11</sup> Robert Copland's Complaint refers to the servitude of marriage, and the aggrieved woman remarks: "Cursed be the houre that I ne was made a none in some cloyster."<sup>12</sup> Distrust of sexuality, even in marriage, is also noticeable in some of Montaigne's writings. The pleasure husbands get from marriage should be "a restrained pleasure, serious, and

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<sup>9</sup>William and Malleville Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," HLQ, V (1942), 256.

<sup>10</sup>Antoine de La Sale, The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage (London, 1509), sig. D11.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., sig. D4.

<sup>12</sup>Copland, A Complaint, sig. B1.

mixed with some austerity." "It should be, Montaigne continues, "a somewhat discreet and conscientious voluptuousness." And since generation is its principal end, Montaigne seems doubtful about the desirability of husbands embracing wives "when we have no hope of such a fruit."<sup>13</sup> It is possible, Montaigne writes, "to err through licentiousness and debauchery, just as in an illicit affair." He condemns "those shameless excesses that our first heat suggests to us in this sport."<sup>14</sup> William Harrington also shares this distrust of sexuality. Of course, he stresses the sacredness of marriage, and he holds up the marriage of Mary and Joseph as the model to imitate. Marriage is a serious institution, and he warns of the need for chastity and fidelity within marriage. Adultery, he warns, is "a grete and a grevous synne and abominable bothe afore god and man."<sup>15</sup> Those who follow the rules of a good marriage "shall lyve here in grace and prosperity and bring forth gracious fruyte of suche matrymony."<sup>16</sup> But in spite of his praise of matrimony, in spite of his emphasis on its

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<sup>13</sup>Montaigne, The Complete Essays, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, 1958), p. 147.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>15</sup>William Harrington, The Comendacions of Matrymony (London, 1528), sig. B4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., sig. C4.



sacredness, Harrington also reveals his distaste for the sexual aspect of marriage. Sexual abstinence is for him (as it was for the Fathers) a form of purification, and he recommends that husband and wife ought to abstain at certain times of the year: "the holy tyme of Lent to the Octaves of Ester," and on all "holy dayes."<sup>17</sup> We notice the same distrust of sexuality in Calvin's Institutes.

He warns:

Now if married couples recognize that their association is blessed by the Lord, they are thereby admonished not to pollute it with uncontrolled and dissolute lust...Therefore let not married persons think that all things are permitted to them, but let each man have his own wife soberly.<sup>18</sup>

Calvin's distrust of the flesh is the same as St. Paul's. He pays special attention to fornication, which God "expressly forbids in order...to lead us to abominate all lust."<sup>19</sup>

But at least one, and certainly, very important voice did not join the chorus attacking human sexuality. Distrust of the pleasures of the flesh is absent, for the most part, from Erasmus' writings. In The Epicurean Erasmus discusses

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., sig. C4.

<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Vol. XX (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 407.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

sexual pleasure in candid detail,<sup>20</sup> and the Epistle to persuade a young gentleman to marriage treats the same topic with equal candor. The young gentleman is told about the pleasures of the body, which "greate witted men" hide from, and then "treat with contempt."<sup>21</sup> Of course, Erasmus carefully points out that "this pleasure of the body is the least parte of all those good thynges that are in wedlocke." Nevertheless, it is not to be despised: one would have to be "insensate" not to be moved with such pleasure. Those who are not moved, Erasmus says, are not men but stones, and the gentleman is advised not to "thinke it unworthy for man to use" the pleasures of sex.<sup>22</sup>

Several writers, however, continued to treat marriage negatively. Marriage was desirable, Dickey says, "not

<sup>20</sup>The Colloquies of Erasmus, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Chicago, 1965), p. 549.

<sup>21</sup>"An Epistle to persuade a young gentleman to marriage," in Thomas Wilson, The Arte of Rhetorique (Gainesville, Fla., 1962), p. 72.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 72. Cf. Nicole Oresme's ideas on the use of sex in his Le Livre De Yconomique D'Aristote, trans. Albert Douglas Menut, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 47 (December, 1957), 785-847. Oresme stresses the naturalness of sexual pleasure, and he even goes so far as to advise husbands about the best way to satisfy their wives sexually (p. 816). "Nature granted carnal pleasures to the animals," he says, "only for the purpose of reproduction; but it accorded the human species this pleasure not only for reproduction of its kind but also to enhance and maintain friendship between man and woman" (p. 813).

only because it kept men from falling into the burning desire of the flesh...but also because it kept men from falling into the melancholy adustion caused by an excessive and unrequited love."<sup>23</sup> Many writers point out that one of the most important functions of marriage is to help man avoid fornication. Agrippa, for example, states that matrimony "was ordeined for an helpe, for propagation, and to avoide fornication."<sup>24</sup> Heinrich Bullinger's book, The Christen State of Matrimonye, must have been a work of considerable importance and popularity because there were five editions of it.<sup>25</sup> Bullinger not only defends matrimony; he also offers rules and advice about every aspect, including the rearing of children. Nevertheless, he maintains that for those who cannot control concupiscence, "God hath given them the medicyne of mariage."<sup>26</sup> Marriage "was instituted," he writes, "to avoyde whordome."<sup>27</sup> In the sixteenth century whoredom and adultery, it seems, were regarded as the most heinous of sins. The homily

<sup>23</sup> Dickey, Not Wisely But Too Well, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Agrippa, The Commendation, sig. B3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, The Christen State of Matrimonye, trans. Miles Coverdale (London, 1541). There were other editions in 1543, 1546, 1552 and 1560.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., sig. D.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., sig. D11<sup>v</sup>.

"Of the State of Matrimony" says:

What sin or kind of sin is it that is not joined with fornication and whoredom. It is a monster of many heads. It receiveth all kinds of vices... If one several sin bringeth damnation, what is to be thought of that sin which is accompanied with all evils...? Great is the damnation that hangeth over the heads of fornicators and adulterers. What shall I speak of other incommodities which issue and flow out of this stinking puddle of whoredom?<sup>28</sup>

The cure for all of this is marriage, which

is instituted of God, to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendly fellowship... and to avoid fornication: by which means a good conscience might be preserved on both parties in bridling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh within the limits of honesty.<sup>29</sup>

Since human sexuality is regarded as if it were a sort of disease, Calvin naturally speaks of marriage as if it were a "cure" or "remedy" for that disease:

Now, through the condition of our nature, and by the lust aroused after the Fall, we, except for those whom God has released through special grace, are doubly subject to women's society... Those who are troubled with incontinence and cannot prevail in the struggle should turn to matrimony to help them preserve chastity... For those who do not receive this precept, if they do not have recourse to the remedy offered and conceded them for their intemperance, are striving against God and resisting his ordinance.<sup>30</sup>

If man's "power to tame lust fails him," Calvin warns, "ret

<sup>28</sup> Certain Sermons or Homilies, p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 502.

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, Institutes, p. 406.

him recognize that the Lord has now imposed the necessity of marriage upon him." And if the incontinent "neglect to cure their infirmity by this means, they sin in not obeying this command of the apostle."<sup>31</sup>

William Haller maintains that the Puritans believed that the Fall brought down the evils of the flesh upon the married, and therefore "celibacy came to be prized as it had not been before. But, except for the few who were gifted with continence, none was allowed to escape the call to marry and to fulfill the offices of marriage."<sup>32</sup> The Puritans regarded women with considerable distrust,<sup>33</sup> and while they assumed that marriage was the proper state of man, "they often described women in terms which would encourage male celibacy."<sup>34</sup> In their diaries the two Puritans Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward reveal this sort of grudging acceptance of marriage, and Ward's fear of the flesh shows itself in fearful dreams of adultery.<sup>35</sup> Rogers' entry for August 18, 1587, reads:

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 407

<sup>32</sup>Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," 246.

<sup>33</sup>See Harold V. Routh, "The Advent of Modern Thought in Popular Literature," in CHEL, VI, p. 387.

<sup>34</sup>Rogers, The Troublesome Helmsmate, p. 159

<sup>35</sup>Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward, Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries, ed. M.M. Knappen (Chicago, 1933), pp. 103, 111.

And the Apostle, 1 Cor. 7, hath taught us that as single men bestow all their care how they may please the lorde so the maryed have comonly their care without especial grace how they may growe on together and prosper, by meanes whereof much coldnes and negligence groweth upon them before they be aware. Besides we may observe by experience that even the most zealous doe somewhat in time decline and waxe remisse in careinge for the matters of god.<sup>36</sup>

The Puritans condemned celibacy and embraced marriage. But they did so, it seems, as a cure for the ills of the flesh.

Haller writes:

They conceded in deference to Paul that continence was a gift, but they held that it was a gift only rarely bestowed and no more often on preachers than on other men. Preachers were if anything more liable to the burning of the flesh because as Satan's special adversaries they were the more liable to his assaults. Consequently they condemned...the denial of marriage to the clergy as the doctrine of devils and of papists and with few exceptions embraced matrimony as their holy rule.<sup>37</sup>

Puritan instruction concerning the family began with the three traditional objects of marriage: the procreation of children, the relief of concupiscence, and the consolation of loneliness. The first two objects, Haller believes, "served the preachers chiefly as occasions for dilating not so much on marriage as on the rewards of virtue and evils of vice."<sup>38</sup> Louis B. Wright puts it this way:

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," 237-238.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 243.

If the Puritan possessed some of the asceticism of his medieval forebears, he regarded marriage as a God-given expedient for evading the damning sin of sexual indulgence. Thus he began to concentrate his interest upon preserving the purity of the married state rather than the physiological purity of the individual.<sup>39</sup>

The misogynists and those who attempted to discredit sexuality and marriage did not triumph. The sixteenth century, led, no doubt, by Erasmus' vigorous attacks, rejected monasticism and celibacy, and the age, for the most part, reassessed the states of virginity, celibacy and marriage. There was, as well, "the new ideal of civil life as opposed to the older ideal of the life of contemplation."<sup>40</sup> But virginity as an ideal was not necessarily replaced by marriage. "The disgust with virginity," Roche comments, "was not disgust with the ideal but with the practice of this ideal."<sup>41</sup> The sixteenth century still believed that virginity was a unique gift and chastity was a woman's greatest virtue. Both More and Erasmus emphasize the significance of virginity. In Utopia, for example, the penalty for prenuptial intercourse is particularly severe: "If before marriage a man or woman is convicted of secret

<sup>39</sup> Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (New York, 1935), p. 203.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas P. Roche, The Kindly Flame (Princeton, 1964), p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

intercourse, he or she is severely punished, and they are forbidden to marry altogether unless the governor's pardon remits their guilt. In addition, both father and mother of the family in whose house the offense was committed incur great disgrace as having been neglectful in doing their duties."<sup>42</sup>

Erasmus, for all his trenchant common sense about marriage, is not altogether free of the reverence the age gives to virginity. "Virgynte," he writes, "is a divyne thyng, an angelycall thyng." Marriage, on the other hand, is "an humane thyng."<sup>43</sup> God would have men see virginity as "a paterne, or rather a picture of that heavenly habitacion, where neither any shall be married, nor yet any shall geve theirs to marriage."<sup>44</sup> In his Enchiridion militis Christiani Erasmus suggests that the Holy Spirit "is never so delightedly at home as in the minds of virgins."<sup>45</sup> In The Comparation of a Vyrgyn and A Martyr, Erasmus emphasizes

<sup>42</sup>The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, ed. Edward Surtz and J.H. Hexter, Vol. 4 (New Haven, 1965), p. 187. See also Responsio Ad Lutherum, ed. John M. Headley, trans. Scholastica Mandeville (New Haven, 1969), p. 687.

<sup>43</sup>Erasmus, An Epistle in Prayse of Matrymony, trans. Richard Tavernour (London, 1532), sig. Clll.

<sup>44</sup>"An Epistle to persuade a young gentleman," p. 78. See also p. 68.

<sup>45</sup>The Enchiridion of Erasmus, trans. Raymond Himelick (Bloomington, 1963), p. 179.



the high esteem in which both virginity and martyrdom are held by the Church. Apart from Christ Himself, the Church holds no one in higher regard than those who "wyllyngly and gladly offred theyr bodies to be cruelly turmented, for the glorie of their soule," and those who "wyllyngly for the kyndome of god gave themselfe holly to lyve chaste."<sup>46</sup> A virgin, unlike a wife, "being free from the cares of this worlde, myndeth those thynges that perteyne to our lorde, howe she maye please hym."<sup>47</sup> Everyone extolls virginity, Erasmus says, even "the fierce and cruell ennemy forbeareth virginitie" in the midst of war.<sup>48</sup> In his treatise on the Nobilitie of Womankynde Agrippa constantly reminds his readers of the preciousness of virginity. "In al the hole heape of creatures," he writes, "there is noo thyng so wonderfull to see" as a virgin. Virgins, he adds, surpass "the children of men."<sup>49</sup>

Since chastity was a woman's greatest virtue,

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<sup>46</sup> The Comparation of A Vyrgin and A Martyr, trans. Thomas Paynell (Gainesville, Fla., 1970), p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 40. See also pp. 46, 51. Sir Thomas Elyot makes a similar comment in his Governor: see The Book named The Governor, ed. S.E. Lehmborg (London, 1962), p. 204.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Agrippa, A Treatise of the Nobilitie of Womankynde, trans. D. Clapham (London, 1542), sigs. B3-B4. See also A Handful of Pleasant Delights, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (New York, 1965), pp. 42-43.

Shakespeare's age believed that a woman's "honesty" (Shakespeare often uses the word to mean chastity) consisted, almost exclusively, in the preservation of her virginity as long as she was unmarried, and in her fidelity to her husband after marriage. Chastity, therefore, was the virtue most often extolled during the Renaissance. Giovanni Bruto's treatise, The Necessarie, Fit and Convenient Education of a Yong Gentlewoman consistently refers to the beauty of chastity: chastity is a great "ornament in a Ladie or Gentlewoman of honour," he writes.<sup>50</sup> In the Renaissance if a woman lacked chastity she lacked everything. For men honour meant a reputation for excellency in many things; for women it meant chastity. But the difference went further; according to Ruth Kelso, "for if a man's honor was impugned...he could seek redress in the duel, but a woman, though wrongly accused, could only hide her shame in perpetual seclusion."<sup>51</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that woman's education in the Renaissance seems to have been confined almost exclusively to the inculcation of the virtue of chastity.

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<sup>50</sup> Giovanni Bruto, The Necessarie, Fit and Convenient Education of a Yong Gentlewoman, trans. W.P. (London, 1598), sig. D2.

<sup>51</sup> Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana, 1956), p. 24.

There was considerable debate as to the best way to teach her; but all were agreed that the love of chastity was the important priority. The lives of chaste virgins were consistently recommended, while the lives of Cleopatra, Semiramis and other women of dubious virtue were to be eschewed. Bruto does not suggest that women should remain ignorant; but, we notice, he does argue that great learning is not conducive to the preservation of their chastity.<sup>52</sup> If a woman must read; then she ought to read the lives of women of renown. Bruto does not think it objectionable if the woman reads "treatises written by learned men" provided "shee be not suffered to peruse amorous and impudent verses...."<sup>53</sup> Her chastity is "the flower of manners...and splendour of the feminine sexe,"<sup>54</sup> and therefore she ought to preserve it. Later in the Renaissance Sir Thomas Overbury repeats a similar argument. A woman ought to have intelligence and common sense, certainly, but she ought to avoid too much learning. "Bookes," Overbury says, "are a part of mans prerogative."<sup>55</sup>

The chaste wife was accordingly venerated in the

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<sup>52</sup>Bruto, Education of a Yong Gentlewoman, sig. G2.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., sig. D4.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., sig. G4.

<sup>55</sup>Thomas Overbury, A Wife now the widdow of Sir Thomas Overbury (London, 1614), sig. 1.

sermons of the age. For instance, the Archbishop of Cologne, Herman V, adopts a position typical of the age. A wife, he remarks, ought to be "dyscrete, chaste...shame faste, good, meke, pacyent and sober."<sup>56</sup> The preservation of chastity within marriage, Ruth Kelso suggests, might even have been considered more serious than the preservation of prenuptial chastity, because if the married woman is unchaste "the offense multiplies not only against God and her parents, but against her husband and her children, her vows and the Church, the laws, society, and her country."<sup>57</sup> According to More, "the Antichrist", Luther has "taken away almost completely all sense of modesty," and he asks: "Who does not know...how strictly conjugal fidelity was commanded, how esteemed by the ancients the chastity of widows. 2 And all these things by the authority of Christ Himself."<sup>58</sup> In Utopia violators of conjugal fidelity are punished by the strictest form of slavery:

If both parties are married, the injured parties, provided they consent, are divorced from their adulterous mates and couple together, or else are allowed to marry whom they like. But if one of the injured parties continues to feel affection

<sup>56</sup> Herman V, A Breve and a Playne declaration of the Deuty of married folkes (London, 1553), sig. A5.

<sup>57</sup> Kelso, Doctrine, p. 97.

<sup>58</sup> Responsio Ad Lutherum, p. 687.

for so undeserving a mate, it is not forbidden to have the marriage continue in force on condition that the party is willing to accompany and share the labor of the other who has been condemned to slavery.<sup>59</sup>

The guilty person must forever lead a life of forced celibacy, and he has to suffer death if he commits adultery a second time.<sup>60</sup> Female adultery was considered to be so dastardly a crime that revenge for adultery, by the murder of both wife and adulterer, was tolerated in the early laws of every European country.<sup>61</sup>

While the sixteenth century continued to hold virginity and chastity in high regard, the age tended, nevertheless, to reject the early Church's stress on permanent virginity, and, increasingly, there was a shift from celibacy as an ideal to Christian marriage. Sir Thomas Elyot, for instance, recognizes the value of continence, but for him celibacy should only be temporary. He writes:

And this I suppose sufficeth to persuade men of good nature to embrace continence. I mean not to live ever chaste, but to honor matrimony, and to have good await, that they let not the sparks of concupiscence grow in great flames, wherewith the wits shall be dried up, and all noble virtues shall be devoured.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Utopia, p. 191.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>61</sup>See Curtis Brown Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor (Princeton, 1960), pp. 159-160.

<sup>62</sup>Elyot, The Book named The Governor, p. 205.

Medieval hostility toward marriage was diminishing.

Katharine Rogers notes that sweeping indictments of wives, and of women in general, remained acceptable even into the Renaissance, but they were gradually disappearing from the mainstream of literature.<sup>63</sup> In the Protestant Reformation "celibacy ceases to be the crown of virtue," F.M. Dickey writes. "The medieval ascetics' distrust of sexuality in marriage is lessened, and the concept of married love takes on new value."<sup>64</sup> There was a re-evaluation of woman's position in the Renaissance. This re-evaluation, Francis Utley believes, showed itself in "the strengthening of the monogamous ideal, a compromise which many reformers today feel has not gone far enough; but which seemed complete enough to the sixteenth century, and which with its unfriendliness to celibacy succeeded in placing a higher value on the sex without which the world could not be served."<sup>65</sup> Even a misogynist such as Joseph Swetnam, for all his railing at women's sins, was forced to point out that men simply cannot get along without women.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate, pp. 98-99.

<sup>64</sup>Dickey, Not Wisely But Too Well, p. 21.

<sup>65</sup>Utley, The Crooked Rib, p. 86.

<sup>66</sup>Joseph Swetnam, The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and unconstant Women (London, 1615), sigs. A2<sup>v</sup>, C2<sup>v</sup>.

The re-evaluation of women in the sixteenth century can partly be explained by the fact that they were beginning to encroach upon traditional male territory such as the economic and intellectual spheres. Louis B. Wright points out that "the average woman was becoming articulate in her own defense...and she was demanding social independence unknown in previous generations."<sup>67</sup> Women were advancing socially, and they were beginning to play an important part in the crafts and trades. Wright has shown that both middle-class and aristocratic writers demanded recognition of woman's equality with man.<sup>68</sup> Women were admitted to some guilds "on an equal footing with men... they often proved invaluable allies of their husbands in the conduct of many small businesses, and after the death of their husbands they...carried on alone the family calling."<sup>69</sup>

Several writers began to defend women against the attacks of the misogynists. Not the least of these was Erasmus. Christopher Hollis maintains that "women were of little or no interest to Erasmus. He neither spoke of them, wrote to them, nor in any other way had anything to do with

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<sup>67</sup>Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, p. 490.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 506.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

them."<sup>70</sup> But Erasmus does give women a very important place in his Colloquies. In The New Mother, for example, Fabulla argues very intelligently about education.<sup>71</sup> In the Adages, too, Erasmus defends women against their detractors. In France, he says, there may be idle women who devour the money their husbands earn; but in Holland there are innumerable women "who work to keep their idle and pleasure-loving men." Erasmus cites Hesiod's opinion that "a good wife is the best fate man ever had [but] nothing is more obnoxious than a bad one." Husbands, he says, are often "wickedly unjust to their wives as they are shamefully indulgent to themselves."<sup>72</sup> Men are responsible for the alleged evils of women, Erasmus writes:

They say that women have always been the bringers of calamity to men...But it would be better to ascribe these evils to the stupidity of men, who make such a fuss of women, and as if mad with love, follow them into any kind of mischief... For as the soul is to the body, so should the man be to the woman. But just as the ignorant attribute their vices to the body, when really they proceed from the soul, and stupid princes impute the wild excesses of war to the people, when they themselves are responsible for it, so men throw on women the responsibility for their own ravings.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Christopher Hollis, Erasmus (Milwaukee, 1933), pp. 33-34.

<sup>71</sup> The Colloquies, pp. 268-285. See also The Abbot and the Learned Lady, pp. 219-223.

<sup>72</sup> The Adages of Erasmus, trans. Margaret Mann Phillips (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 118-119.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 119.



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Robert Vaughan also defends women. Women are "In both tongues experte, the Latyne and the Greke,"<sup>74</sup> Men, he implies, are generally more unchaste than women, and there are few evil women.<sup>75</sup> John Lyly adopts a similar position. In his Entertainments at Sudeley Nisa tells Melibaeus that of the two sexes, men are the least chaste, and she feels that women are naturally chaste.<sup>76</sup> According to Jane Anger, the difficulties women experience are the result of their own kindness toward men. Indeed, a woman's greatest fault is her honesty.<sup>77</sup> In A Womans Woorth Anthony Gibson says that "women's society hath made Civill the moste outragious condition of mens lives."<sup>78</sup> Women's gifts and graces are infinite, he says, and her soul is "the treasure of celestiall and divine vertues." Virtuous men "have attributed all tittle of honour to Women...."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Robert Vaughan, A Dyalogue defensyve for women agaynst malycyous detractoures (London, 1542), sig. B2.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., sig. C3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> The Complete Works of John Lyly, ed. R. Warwick Bond, Vol. I (Oxford, 1902), p. 482.

<sup>77</sup> Jane Anger, Jane Anger her protection for women (London, 1589), sigs. B1-C3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> Anthony Gibson, A Womans Woorth (London, 1599), sig. C. See also Sir Thomas Elyot, The Defense of Good Women (London, 1545), sig. B5.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., sig. G10.

Apart from liberality and generosity,<sup>80</sup> women also possess the virtues of prudence, temperance, humility and modesty. Erasmus and Agrippa (and later Shakespeare) make much of this last virtue. Erasmus believes that "nothing more becomes [the female] sex than modesty."<sup>81</sup> Nature "hath given more shamfastnes to woman than to man," Agrippa writes, "wherefore it hath often chanced, that a woman grevously diseased in her private partes, hath chosen rather to dye than to abyde the sight and handlynge of the Surgian to be cured and healed."<sup>82</sup> A number of writers asserted that woman was actually man's superior in the original creation of mankind, and Carroll Camden notes that theological arguments were offered to support this thesis.<sup>83</sup> Some writers distinguished between two kinds of knowledge: one coming from nature, the other from study. Because woman reaches maturity earlier than man, she is his superior in the first type of knowledge.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Edward Gosynhill, The Prayse of all women (London, 1560), sigs. A3-A4, B3, and Thomas Bentley, The Monument of Matrones (London, 1582), sig. B2.

<sup>81</sup> The Enchiridion, p. 182.

<sup>82</sup> Agrippa, The Nobilitie of Womankynde, sig. B4.

<sup>83</sup> Carroll Camden, The Elizabethan Woman (New York, 1952), pp. 17-18.

<sup>84</sup> See Joannes Vives, The Instruction of a Christen woman (London, 1529), sig. C3<sup>v</sup>.

In the Renaissance, then, the importance of women was being established, and the state of matrimony was becoming increasingly honourable because it was brought out of rivalry with celibacy. Calvin and Luther argue that the gift of celibacy is confined to a limited number, and the ordinary man is being presumptuous if he aspires to this rare gift. Luther, indeed, believed that clerical celibacy might even serve to multiply the possibilities for sin. But Thomas More emphasized the need for clerical celibacy, and vigorously attacked Luther. "Nor do I doubt," More writes, "but that this fool of ours, now that priestly chastity has begun to gall him, will beget many fools for us."<sup>85</sup> Although More believed that celibacy is not an end in itself, he points out in Utopia that those who practise celibacy are held to be holier than those who marry. The celibates eschew all sexual activity and abstain from eating meat because they are prompted by religious reasons. They are accordingly revered.<sup>86</sup> More felt that perpetual chastity is more acceptable to God than wedlock, and Edward Surtz believes that when Utopia was being written, More "might have agreed with Erasmus on the advisability of marriage for priests and monks amid deplorable contemporary conditions." But, Surtz continues,

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<sup>85</sup>Responsio Ad Lutherum, p. 435.

<sup>86</sup>Utopia, p. 227.

"from what is known of More's lifelong spirit and attitude toward the discipline of the Western Church it would be immeasurably saner and safer to conclude that he favored celibacy."<sup>87</sup>

If married love became the ideal for Protestants as a result of the reformers' fight against celibacy, final victory was yet to be achieved, for neither Henry VIII nor Shakespeare's own Queen accepted the ideal of a married clergy. In their rejection (or grudging acceptance) of a married clergy there is implied the traditional separation of the sacred and the profane, the spirit and the flesh. Again, marriage is for the weak person. In his history of celibacy Henry Lea argues that Henry's rejection of clerical marriage was proof of the king's strength of will and intense individuality of character.<sup>88</sup> But Henry was theologically conservative, and this might well explain his attitude. Henry's proceedings against the Carthusians and Franciscans in 1534 involved a proclamation against priestly marriages. Priests who had married were deprived of their functions. Future transgressions "were threatened with the royal indignation and further punishment -- words of

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<sup>87</sup> Edward L. Surtz, The Praise of Wisdom (Chicago, 1957), pp. 136-137.

<sup>88</sup> Lea, Sacerdotal Celibacy, p. 395.

serious import at such a time and under such a monarch."<sup>89</sup> Two sections of Henry's "An Act for abolishing Diversity of opinions in certain Articles concerning Christian Religion" outlawed clerical marriage. Those who preached against the Act were to suffer death. Moreover, any opposition, in word or writing, subjected the offender to imprisonment during the King's pleasure. Priestly marriages "were declared void, and a priest persisting in living with his wife was to be executed as a felon."<sup>90</sup> While Elizabeth did not enforce any prohibitory regulations, and even promoted married men (Dr. Parker, for example), she very decidedly frowned upon clerical marriages. Her dislike of clerical marriages can be seen in her treatment of Richard Fletcher, who was asked by the Queen not to contract a second marriage. "But he would not be warned: he had no sooner got the see of London than he married a young widow, of dubious character. This was the end for the bright and promising Bishop: he was banished from court and suspended from his (spiritual) functions."<sup>91</sup> When she comes to speak of clerical marriage in her "Injunctions to the Clergy and Laity" Elizabeth, Lea comments, "carefully avoids the

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 396.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 401.

<sup>91</sup> A.L. Rowse, The England of Elizabeth (London, 1964), pp. 413-414.

responsibility of sanctioning it herself, but assumes that the law of Edward is still in force." The regulations promulgated "were degrading in the highest degree, and the reason assigned for permitting [clerical marriages] could only be regarded as affixing a stigma on every pastor who confessed the weakness of his flesh by seeking a wife."<sup>92</sup> From the temper of these regulations, Lea remarks, "it is manifest that if Elizabeth yielded to the advice of her counsellors and to the pressure of the times, she did not give up her private convictions or prejudices, and that she desired to make the marriage of her clergy as unpopular and disagreeable as possible."<sup>93</sup>

The significance and importance of marriage, nevertheless, were being firmly established in sixteenth century England. "Calvinism," Paul Siegel says, "invested married life with a new dignity. Both the cloistered life of the nun and the courtly love of the knight was for it an abomination."<sup>94</sup> The importance of marriage is repeatedly stressed by several influential writers. More, notwithstanding his praise of celibacy, carefully stresses the

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<sup>92</sup>Lea, Sacerdotal Celibacy, p. 419.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>94</sup>Paul N. Siegel, "Spenser and the Calvinist View of Life," SP, 41 (1944), 217.

naturalness of marriage. In Utopia the celibate and married lives are compared:

The other school is just as fond of hard labor but regards matrimony as preferable...thinking that their duty to nature requires them to perform the marital act and their duty to the country to beget children. They avoid no pleasure unless it interferes with their labor... The Utopians regard these men as the saner but the first-named [the celibates] as the holier.<sup>95</sup>

More insists that marriage "is a law of nature...deeply implanted in our souls. The individual disobedient to this law must be considered not even a human being, much less a good citizen."<sup>96</sup> Marriage and the family are given an honourable and fundamental role in Utopia, and Surtz points out that "instead of looking upon the family as an impediment to perfect care of the common welfare, More sees it even as the foundation of the state and the source of civil administration and political responsibility."<sup>97</sup>

In several of his writings Erasmus extolls the sanctity of marriage. In The Enchiridion, for example, he advises those who are married "to try as hard as you can to make your marriage resemble the most holy wedlock of Christ and His Church, whose likeness it bears."<sup>98</sup> Marriage

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<sup>95</sup>Utopia, p. 227.

<sup>96</sup>Surtz, The Praise of Wisdom, p. 135.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>98</sup>The Enchiridion, p. 182.



...from such rash vows and inhuman manner of life proceed many inconveniences, many diseases, many vices, mastupration, satyriasis, priapism, melancholy, madness, fornication, adultery, buggary, sodomy, theft, murder, and all manner of mischiefs.<sup>140</sup>

Priests must be allowed concubines, or one must "suffer them to marry, for scarce shall you find three priests of three thousand, in their prime that are not troubled with burning lust. Wherefore I conclude, it is an unnatural and impious thing to bar men of this Christian liberty."<sup>141</sup> We may wish to compare this with Erasmus' belief that since there are many incontinent priests, it is perhaps more expedient for them to marry.

There is "no joy, no comfort...in the world like to that of a good wife." Burton adds:

With what harmony, saith our Latin Homer, a loving wife and constant husband lead their lives; she is...his eyes, his hand...his partner at all times...not to be separated by any calamity, but ready to share all sorrow, discontent, and as the Indian women do, live and die with him, nay more, to die presently for him.<sup>142</sup>

Burton insists that no man "can live and die religiously, and as he ought, without a wife." If he does, "he is false, an enemy to the commonwealth...an apostate to nature,

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 810-811.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 811.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 815.

virginity, Erasmus reminds his readers that virginity should not be extolled at the expense of chaste marriage, and he suggests that Cyprian, Ambrose, Tertullian and Jerome may have gone too far in their praise of virginity.<sup>102</sup> Virginity is a laudable ideal for Erasmus, but it is not preferable to marriage. Indeed, in Courtship Pamphilus describes virginity as "a heavy burden."<sup>103</sup> Erasmus' appreciation of marriage anticipates Shakespeare's. In the "Epistle to persuade a young gentleman to marriage," he describes marriage as "an happie thyng." More than that, marriage is also intrinsically good. It is human beings who are at fault:

Thus I see you will remember all suche men, as by mariage have been undoen. Well, go to it... you shal finde all these were the faultes of the personnes, and not the faultes of mariage. For beleve me, none have evill wives, but suche as are evill men.<sup>104</sup>

Some of Erasmus' criticisms of monks and monasticism are closely related to his ideas about celibacy and marriage. His Epistle in Prayse of Matrymony attacks monasticism. It was written as a rhetorical exercise, but Thompson points out that "even though the rhetorical purpose and character of the work might warn us against attaching too much significance to this piece alone, we have more than enough

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-42.

<sup>103</sup> The Colloquies of Erasmus, p. 96.

<sup>104</sup> "An Epistle to persuade a young gentleman," p. 74.

writing on the same subject from his pen to assure us that he intended the main points of Encomium Matrimonii to be taken seriously."<sup>105</sup> Erasmus believed that celibacy is not intrinsically superior to marriage, nor is clerical celibacy conducive to a higher spiritual state than marriage. He believed, however, that bishops, by virtue of their position, ought to be free of the burdens of marriage. "It is lycenced them to be without wyves," he says, "to the entent they may the better attend to begette the more chylderne to Christ."<sup>106</sup> For the rest of the clergy marriage may well be the only sensible way of life. However desirable it might be to have the clergy free of the cares of marriage, it would be better to let them marry since it seems virtually impossible to conquer the rebellious flesh.

Hollis remarks that Erasmus "did not merely deny the virtues of particular religious. He denied the virtue of the religious life, and, in doing so, he joined issue with the mind of the Church, which has quite manifestly declared that such a life is for certain souls a life pleasing to God."<sup>107</sup> One of Erasmus' most important arguments is that

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<sup>105</sup> The Colloquies of Erasmus, p. 100.

<sup>106</sup> Prayse of Matrymony, sig. Cl.

<sup>107</sup> Hollis, Erasmus, p. 77.

the layman can lead as deep a spiritual life as the cloistered monk. In The Girl with No Interest in Marriage Eubulus tries to persuade Catharine not to enter a convent, and one of his most telling arguments is the remark: "You have Christ at home as well." Catharine's chastity, moreover, "is not impaired" even if she lives at home.<sup>108</sup> And if she is determined to enter the convent, she may discover that she has been "deceived by vain fancies." When you have "spent some time there and have seen it at closer range," Eubulus tells her, "perhaps everything won't dazzle in quite the same fashion it seemed to do earlier. All the veiled aren't virgins, believe me."<sup>109</sup> Merely abstaining from sexual intercourse is not a virtue, Pamphilus tells Maria in Courtship. If "it were a virtue per se not to have intercourse," he says, "intercourse would be a vice. Now it happens that it is a vice not to have intercourse, a virtue to have it."<sup>110</sup> Bachelorship "is a forme of lyving bothe barren and unnaturall," Erasmus writes.<sup>111</sup> Not only is celibacy unnatural, it can also be a threat to the commonwealth. In an argument recalling Parolles'

<sup>108</sup>The Colloquies of Erasmus, pp. 106, 110.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>111</sup>Prayse of Matrymony, sig. A4. See also "An Epistle to persuade a young gentleman," p. 55.

comment, "it is not politic in the commonwealth of nature to preserve virginity" (All's Well That Ends Well, I.i.129), Erasmus tells the young gentleman: "for if men comenly should begin to like it, what thing could be invented more perilous to a commune weale then virginitie."<sup>112</sup>

It is actually "unmanly," Erasmus advises the young gentleman, to frustrate the laws of mankind.<sup>113</sup> "What thynges," he asks, "is farder from all humanite than man to abhore from the lawes of manes estate?" Conversely, "what is more holy then that which the creatour of all thynges hath ordeyned?"<sup>114</sup> A maiden, Pamphilus says, "is something charming, but what's more naturally unnatural than an old maid?"<sup>115</sup> Eubulus refers to Catharine's wish to become a nun as "this fatal desire,"<sup>116</sup> and he also suggests that celibacy is a waste of youth and beauty.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>"An Epistle to persuade a young gentleman," p. 68. John Donne argues a similar position in his short essay, "That Virginitie is A Vertue" [Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward (London, 1949), pp. 346-349]. Donne's premise is that permanent virginity is "a most inhumane vice." It is therefore unnatural. "For surely nothing is more unprofitable in the Commonwealth of Nature, than they that dy old maids, because they refuse to be used to that end for which they were only made."

<sup>113</sup>"An Epistle to persuade a young gentleman," p. 56.

<sup>114</sup>Prayse of Matrymony, sigs. A-A<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>115</sup>The Colloquies of Erasmus, p. 95.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., pp. 104, 111. Cf. Sonnets 1, 4; Twelfth Night, I.v.227-229; Romeo and Juliet, I.i.224.

In Courtship we notice the same attitude, and Erasmus anticipates Shakespeare's use of the withering rose symbol and its connection with the sterility of celibacy. Pamphilus points to the fertility of nature to strengthen his argument against celibacy. An orchard of trees "heavy with ripe fruit" is more desirable than one with only blossoms. The "prettier sight" is a vine heavy with purple grapes rather than one "rotting on the ground."<sup>118</sup> Pamphilus sums up his argument as follows:

In my opinion the rose that withers in a man's hand, delighting his eyes and nostrils the while, is luckier than one that grows old on a bush. In the same way, wine is better if drunk before it sours. But a girl's flower doesn't fade the instant she marries. On the contrary, I see many girls who before marriage were pale, run-down, and as good as gone. The sexual side of marriage brightened them so much that they began to bloom at last.<sup>119</sup>

The inevitability of nature's fertility, the "naturalness" of the yielding of fruit, parallels the transition from virginity to its fulfillment in procreation, and Pamphilus' remarks point to a similar argument advanced by Lucio in Measure For Measure.<sup>120</sup>

If celibacy is barren and unnatural, matrimony is the very opposite. Time and again Erasmus emphasizes the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>120</sup> See Chapter Four.

naturalness of marriage.<sup>121</sup> "Whoso ever is not touched with desyre of wedlocke," he writes, "semeth to be no man, but a stone, an enemy to nature, a rebelle to God."<sup>122</sup>

The young gentleman is told:

for if to live well...is to folowe the course of Nature, what thinge is so agreynge with Nature as Matrimonye: for there is no thinge so naturall not onelye into mankinde, but also unto all other livinge creatures.<sup>123</sup>

He cites the example of Socrates, who tolerated his wife not only because he wanted to learn patience, "but because he wolde seme not to halt in the office of nature."<sup>124</sup> And marriage is also a holy institution. If the laws regulating human behaviour are holy, then "shall not the lawe of wedlocke be most holy whiche we have received of hym, of whom we have receyved lyfe."<sup>125</sup> The most holy kind of life, Erasmus insists, "is wedlocke puerly and chastly kept."<sup>126</sup>

Erasmus also makes much of the procreative function

<sup>121</sup>Cf. Oresme (p. 812) who remarks "that marriage is natural not of necessity in the manner that a fire burns, but rather that nature inclines to marriage and the human will accomplishes it."

<sup>122</sup>Prayse of Matrymony, sig. B<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>123</sup>"An Epistle to persuade a young gentleman," p. 62. See also pp. 55, 68.

<sup>124</sup>Prayse of Matrymony, sig. B4.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., sig. A5.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., sig. Eli<sup>v</sup>.

of marriage. "Everyone," he remarks, "shuld preserve his kynd from destruction (by propagation), which without carnall copulation...can not be brought to pas."<sup>127</sup> Marriage is therefore absolutely necessary: without it the world would be in grave danger.<sup>128</sup> The gentleman is reminded of Abraham's fecundity,<sup>129</sup> and when Maria objects that children bring several cares with them, Pamphilus replies: "But they bring countles delights and often repay the parents' devotion with interest many times over."<sup>130</sup> The procreative function of marriage not only ensures the continuation of the species; it is also, Erasmus believes, a sign of God's blessings.

Erasmus believed that marriage is the intelligent way of life for most people, and Thompson points out that he carries "to the utmost limits" the Pauline analogies between marriage and the relationship of Christ to the Church.<sup>131</sup> If the early Church tended to regard marriage as an institution designed only for weak persons, if the Fathers reduced it to an inferior position and the Middle Ages belittled

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., sig. B111.

<sup>128</sup> "An Epistle to persuade a young gentleman," p. 76.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>130</sup> The Colloquies of Erasmus, pp. 96-97.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 100.



it (and women), Erasmus attempted to establish its dignity. The dignity of marriage is implied in Courtship and treated in more detail in A Marriage in Name Only. When Shakespeare's Suffolk pleads for the dignity of marriage, stressing that it is not a business arrangement,

Marriage is a matter of more worth  
Than to be dealt in by attorneyship.  
(1 Henry VI, V.v.55-56),<sup>132</sup>

he is distilling Erasmus' attitude in the two Colloquies. Iphigenia's parents are forcing her to marry the loutish Pompilius because he has "the glorious title of knight."<sup>133</sup> Such a reason is degrading. In The Merry Wives of Windsor Fenton soundly reprimands Mrs. Page, who is forcing her daughter to marry someone she does not love:

You would have married her most shamefully  
Where there was no proportion held in love...  
The offense is holy that she hath committed,  
And this deceit loses the name of craft,  
Of disobedience, or unduteous title,  
Since therein she doth evitate and shun  
A thousand irreligious cursed hours  
Which forced marriage would have brought upon her.  
(V.v.234-243)

Marriage, Erasmus implies, should not be based exclusively on social, political or monetary considerations. Both spiritual and physical compatibility are essential. We know that the Enchiridion was written on behalf of an ill-

<sup>132</sup> See the Introduction, pp. 15-16.

<sup>133</sup> The Colloquies of Erasmus, p. 406.

treated wife who wanted to reform her dissolute husband.<sup>134</sup> In Courtship Pamphilus gives Maria reasons why they would have a successful marriage: they are compatible in age, parents, wealth, reputation, rank, and temperamentally they are suited to each other.<sup>135</sup> Iphigenia, "the flower of the age," has "a husband whose nose is broken, "one foot dragging after the other...scurvy hands, a breath that would knock you down...bloody matter exuding from nose and ears."<sup>136</sup>

Even though he adopts a patronizing attitude toward women,<sup>137</sup> Robert Burton attempts to establish the importance of marriage. He cites with approval Erasmus' sympathetic treatment of marriage,<sup>138</sup> and he states that the man who dies without a wife is accounted unfortunate in some countries: they "deplore his estate, and much lament him for it."<sup>139</sup> Burton condemns celibacy, which he links with all other "rash vows" of monks and friars:

<sup>134</sup>The Enchiridion, p. 14. See also Hollis, Erasmus, p. 72.

<sup>135</sup>The Colloquies of Erasmus, p. 94. Cf. Adriana's argument for spiritual compatibility in marriage in The Comedy of Errors, II.ii.112-148. See also Spenser's Epithalamion which stresses the love and equality of bride and bridegroom.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 405. See also p. 408.

<sup>137</sup>See Robert Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York, 1927), p. 815.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 816.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., p. 813.

...from such rash vows and inhuman manner of life proceed many inconveniences, many diseases, many vices, mastupration, satyriasis, priapism, melancholy, madness, fornication, adultery, buggary, sodomy, theft, murder, and all manner of mischiefs.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 810-811.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 811.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 815.

a rebel against Heaven and Earth."<sup>143</sup> Although marriage can become a burden, there are many things to "sweeten it," Burton says. He continues:

Say [women] are evils, yet they are necessary evils, and for our own ends we must make use of them to have issue, to give pleasure and restore the race, and to propagate the Church. For to what end is a man born? Why lives he, but to increase the world? And how shall he do that well, if he do not marry?<sup>144</sup>

In his Commendation of Matrimony Henry Agrippa, like Burton, denounces celibacy. He cites Lycurgus' punishment for those who do not marry:

they shoulde be kept backe from open plaies and sportes, from al pastime and mery sightes: and in the winter should be led bare round about the market place and jered with mockes, abhored and cried out upon all men...because they offended againste nature.<sup>145</sup>

A woman, according to Agrippa, "is the ende, perfection, felicitie, benediction and glorye of the man."<sup>146</sup> It therefore follows that if a man wishes to be "naturall and loving to the commonwe'lh," he should "entre the lawfull bonde of matrimony."<sup>147</sup>

More and Erasmus, we have seen, do not regard virginity as totally self-sufficient. Virginity is not an end.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 816. Cf. Erasmus' Prayse of Matrymony, sig. BV.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 816.

<sup>145</sup> Agrippa, The Commendation, sig. C.

<sup>146</sup> The Nobilitie of Womankynde, sig. C5.

<sup>147</sup> The Commendation, sig. C.

in itself. But it is for Spenser's Belphoebe. When Spenser decided to write an allegory of chastity, he "undertook a delicate task," F.M. Padelford comments, "for, on the one hand, the Renaissance ideal of chastity required a heroine who would accept the claims of love, but, on the other hand, the poet could not slight the Queen, who had repeatedly and successfully evaded matrimony and who flaunted her virginity." Spenser therefore had to create a character "who would be free from alliance and relieved of the unethical implications of her celibacy."<sup>148</sup> Spenser dramatized this ambivalence in Amoret and Belphoebe. Amoret is prepared for her role as wife and mother. But Belphoebe does not require any such preparation. Her virginity seems to be self-sufficient, and, as the following stanzas imply, she is the perfection of womanhood:

To youre faire selves a faire ensample frame,  
 Of this faire virgin, this Belphoebe faire,  
 To whom in perfect love, and spotlesse fame  
 Of chastitie, none living may compaire:  
 Ne poysnous Envy justly can empaire  
 The prayse of her fresh flowring Maidenhead;  
 For thy she standeth on the highest staire  
 Of th'honorable stage of womanhead,  
 That Ladies all may follow her ensample dead.  
 (III.v.54)

At her birth

The heavens so favourable were and free,  
 Looking with myld aspect upon the earth,  
 In th'Horoscope of her nativitee,

<sup>148</sup>F.M. Padelford, "The Allegory of Chastity in The Faerie Queene," SP, XXI (1925), 374-375.

That all the gifts of grace and chastitee  
 On her they poured forth of plenteous horne;  
 (III.vi.2)<sup>149</sup>

For Shakespeare virginity is never an end in itself. Nevertheless, Spenser's treatment of chastity, virginity, celibacy and marriage points (as Erasmus' did) to Shakespeare's.

In The Faerie Queene Britomart embodies the power of love. Chastity is another name for this love.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, as An Hymne in Honour of Beautie implies, there is no love without chastity:

Loath that foule blot, that hellish fierbrand,  
 Disloiall lust, faire beauties foulest blame,  
 That base affections, which your eares would bland,  
 Commend to you by loves abused name;  
 But is indeede the bondslave of defame,  
 Which will the garland of your glorie marre,  
 And quench the light of your bright shyning starre.

But gentle Love, that loiall is and trew,  
 Will more illumine your resplendent ray,  
 And adde more brightnesse to your goodly hew,  
 From light of his pure fire, which by like way  
 Kindled of yours, your likenesse doth display,  
 Like as two mirrours by opposd reflexion,  
 Doe both expresse the faces first impression.  
 (169-182)<sup>151</sup>

Chastity is also one and the same with holiness, and its function, according to Spenser, is to temper concupiscence.

<sup>149</sup> Spenser's Faerie Queene, ed. J.C. Smith (Oxford, 1909). See also III.v.51-53.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Silvius' remark in As You Like It: see the Introduction, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> Edmund Spenser's Poetry, ed. Hugh MacLean (New York, 1968).

It also teaches men and women to love at the human level. Chastity and friendship, Thomas Roche writes, "are merely Spenser's names for the proper use of love in individuals and between human beings."<sup>152</sup>

The magic, charm and beauty of Britomart recall the same qualities in the women of Shakespeare's final romances. And she shares with them the same dazzling purity of soul. Britomart is so secure in her chastity that no danger can assail her. Her desires are controlled by her reason which is in league with what Plato calls passion or spirit.<sup>153</sup> Britomart possesses the kind of love which

does always bring forth bounteous deeds,  
And in each gentle hart desire of honour breeds.  
(III.1.49)

Britomart's love has "true beautie" for its object. It is that

Most sacred fire, that burnest mightily  
In living brests, ykindled first above,  
Emongst th'eternall spheres and lamping sky,  
And thence pourd into men.... (III.111.1)

Unlike the impulses of Guyon, Britomart's feelings are always on the side of reason. She cannot be ruled by those "base affections" that "move/In brutish minds" (III.111.1).

Spenser not only emphasizes Britomart's purity; he

<sup>152</sup>Roche, The Kindly Flame, p. 200.

<sup>153</sup>See Mohimomohan Bhattacharjee, Platonic Ideas in Spenser (London, 1935), p. 52.

also suggests a link between her and the Virgin Mary:

But as it falleth, in the gentlest harts  
 Imperious Love hath highest set his throne,  
 And tyrannizeth in the bitter smarts  
 Of them, that to him buxome are and prone:  
 So thought this Mayd (as maydens use to done)  
 Whom fortune for her husband would allot,  
~~Not that she lusted after anyone;~~  
 For she was pure from blame of sinfull blot,  
 Yet wist her life at last must linke in that same knot.  
 (III.ii.23)

The Virgin's conception was free of sin, and Spenser may be making an oblique reference to this in the eighth line of the stanza. He also connects Belphoebe with the Immaculate Conception:

Her berth was of the wombe of Morning dew,  
 And her conception of the joyous prime,  
 And all her whole creation did her shew  
 Pure and unspotted from all loathly crime,  
 That is ingenerate in fleshly slime.<sup>154</sup>  
 (III.vi.3)

We also notice covert connections between the Virgin Mary and the virgin bride in Epithalamion. The bride's forehead is described as "yvory white," and her "snowie necke" is said to be "lyke to a marble towre."<sup>155</sup> The bride's description recalls that of the beloved spouse in Canticle of Canticles, especially vii.3 and 4. But Spenser may also be alluding to the Litany of Loreto in honour of the Virgin Mary. This Litany originated in the eleventh century, and most of the titles by which the Virgin is

<sup>154</sup>Cf. III.vi.6; III.vi.8.

<sup>155</sup>Edmund Spenser's Poetry, p. 438.



addressed are paralleled in the writings of the Fathers. The resplendent purity of Spenser's bride is matched in the Litany by the invocations: "Mother inviolate, Mother undefiled...Tower of David, Tower of Ivory."<sup>156</sup> In The Shepheardes Calender another virgin is described in terms suggesting the Virgin Mary's freedom from sin:

Of fayre Elisa be your silver song,  
That blessed wight:  
The flowre of Virgins, may shee florish long,  
In princely plight.  
For shee is Syrinx daughter without spotte,  
Which Pan the shepherds God of her begot:  
So sprang her grace  
Of heavenly race,  
No mortall blemishe may her blotte. (46-54)

As he had done in Epithalamion, Spenser makes much of the mysterious power of virginity in The Faerie Queene. The Red Cross Knight is safe only in the presence of Una, whose purity can protect him from harm. Florimell, who illustrates the principle of beauty and its evocative power,<sup>157</sup> can overwhelm as effectively as Imogen or Marina can those who encounter her. Britomart's virtue is sufficiently strong to overwhelm everyone in her presence: When she removes the visor of her helmet the effect is as follows:

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<sup>156</sup>See F.E. Lasance, Prayer Book for Religious (New York, 1904), pp. 146-147.

<sup>157</sup>A.S.P. Woodhouse, "Nature and Grace in The Faerie Queene," ELH, XVI (1949), 218.

As when faire Cynthia, in darkesome night,  
 Is in a noyous cloud enveloped,  
 Where she may find the substaunce thin and light,  
 Breakes forth her silver beames, and her bright hed  
 Discovers to the world discomfited;  
 Of the poore traveller, that went astray,  
 With thousand blessings she is heried;  
 Such was the beautie and the shining ray,  
 With which faire Britomart gave light vnto the day.  
 (III.1.43)

This can be set alongside the bride's "fayre eyes" which

shew theyre goodly beams  
 More bright then Hesperus his head doth rere.  
 (Epithalamion, 93-95)158

Arthegall, "thinking to worke on her his vtmost wracke,"  
 is conquered by Britomart's beauty, and his

cruell sword out of his fingers slacke  
 Fell downe to ground, as if the steele had sence,  
 And felt some ruth, or sence his hand did lacke,  
 Or both of them did thinke, obedience  
 To doe to so divine a beauties excellence.  
 (IV.vi.21)

Eventually Arthegall

At last fell humbly downe vpon his knee,  
 And of his wonder made religion,  
 Weening some heavenly goddesse he did see,  
 Or else vnweeting, what it else might bee.  
 (IV.vi.22)159

Shortly after Scudamour encounte's Britomart, "That  
 peerelesse paterne of Dame natures pride,/And heavenly  
 image of perfection," and

He blest himselfe, as one sore terrifide,  
 And turning his feare to faint devotion,  
 Did worship her as some celestiall vision.  
 (IV.vi.24)

<sup>158</sup> See also The Faerie Queene, II.111.23; III.v.35;  
 III.ix.20; IV.1.13.

<sup>159</sup> See also III.x11.43ff.

Spenser's association of light imagery with his chaste heroines is reflected in Cymbeline where the chaste Imogen,

like harmless lightning throws her eye  
On him, her brothers, me, her master, hitting  
Each object with a joy. (V.v.394-396)<sup>160</sup>

The chastity of his heroines is of great importance to Spenser, but he does not have any sort of Manichean hatred of the flesh. In the Epithalamion the bride and groom passionately desire the coming of night and the marriage bed (278-295), and Book III of The Faerie Queene depicts both spiritual and sexual love. "When portraying chastity," W.B.C. Watkins says, "Spenser kindles with imaginative fire like Milton in Comus; but Spenser's portrait of chastity is equivocal. No one in England more intensely desired Elizabeth's marriage; whenever he dared he spoke of it with the urgency of Shakespeare's recommendations to W.H."<sup>161</sup> His dilemma, according to Watkins, can be seen in the vicissitudes of Belphoebe and Timias (Elizabeth and Raleigh), whose reconciliation is ambiguous.<sup>162</sup> But Spenser's rejection of celibacy and the type of philosophy argued in Hali Meidenhad is unambiguous. "By her own choice of single life Elizabeth," Watkins

<sup>160</sup> See Chapter Five. Cf. An Hymne in Honour of Beautie, 176-182, and The Faerie Queene, III.i.43.

<sup>161</sup> W.B.C. Watkins, Shakespeare and Spenser (Princeton, 1950), p. 196.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

comments, "prolonged the celebration of chastity in the Faerie Queene -- not enough, however, to dislocate Spenser's belief that virgin love matures into married faithfulness according to natural law and the law of God."<sup>163</sup> There is nothing negative about Britomart's chastity. She is, in fact, a passionate lover. She has what B.E.C. Davis calls "a spiritual passion."<sup>164</sup> Britomart's chastity is not a renunciation. Instead, it is an essential part of her passion for the noble and beautiful. Her use of masculine dress does not symbolize the repression of sexual desire any more than Rosalind's assumption of masculine dress in As You Like It does. It tends to symbolize, instead, a "direction towards a laudable object."<sup>165</sup>

F.M. Padelford has sufficiently demonstrated that for Spenser chastity "does not mean the arid chastity of the self-appointed celibate, but the chastity of one who assigns to the body its legitimate claims."<sup>166</sup> As the Epithalamion makes quite clear, marriage is the reward of Spenser's lovers. The bride should arise with joy and

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>164</sup> B.E.C. Davis, Edmund Spenser: A Critical Study (New York, 1962), p. 117.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>166</sup> Padelford, "The Allegory of Chastity in The Faerie Queene," 370.

haste because

the wished day is come at last,  
That shall for all the paynes and sorrowes past,  
Pay to her usury of long delight.

(Epithalamion, 31-33)

The wedding day is the "joyfulst day that ever sunne did see," and the birds give witness to the day's joy in their singing (Epithalamion, 80-84; 116). The wedding day is a holy day, and the bride is to be brought home as a witness to "the triumph of our victory" (Epithalamion, 242-249). In The Faerie Queene marriage is regarded as the consummation of love. The union of Britomart and Arthegall tends to signify the union of the two feuding Houses of Lancaster and York. From this union Elizabeth, the flower of virginity, emerges. Merlin seems to be predicting this when he says:

Thenceforth eternall union shall be made  
Betweene the nations different afore,  
And sacred Peace shall lovingly perswade  
The warlike minds, to learne her goodly lore,  
And civile armes to exercise no more;  
Then shall a royall virgin raine, which shall  
Stretch her white rod over the Belgicke shore,  
And the great Castle smite so sore with all,  
That it shall make him shake, and shortly learne to

fall,  
(III.iii.49)<sup>167</sup>

Spenser's "particular concern with Elizabeth and her court," Watkins remarks, "disturbs and qualifies, but only temporarily impedes the triumphant current of his conception

<sup>167</sup> See also III.iii.3.

that married love is paramount in human relations.<sup>168</sup>

Medieval romance tended to distinguish between the husband and the lover, and courtly love encouraged the belief that passionate love had to be found outside of marriage.<sup>169</sup>

Spenser (and later Shakespeare) rejects this aspect of courtly love and focuses his attention upon the significance of marriage. Like Shakespeare, Spenser resolutely defends the state of marriage.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, Watkins believes that

Spenser's most concrete, persistent symbol is marriage.<sup>171</sup>

Spenser implies (notwithstanding the tribute he pays to Elizabeth's virginity) that permanent virginity is unnatural (as Erasmus had done) because he sees the transition from virginity to marriage as the realization of the natural law. For Spenser "the principle of generation common to the whole natural order reaches its appropriate human expression in wedded love, and here it meets and is harmoniously united with the specifically human virtue of chastity."<sup>172</sup> Spenser's rejection of permanent virginity

comes to a climax in the Garden of Adonis, with its emphasis on generation and fertility,<sup>173</sup> and in Epithalamion. The

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<sup>168</sup> Watkins, Shakespeare and Spenser, p. 193.

<sup>169</sup> See Lewis, The Allegory of Love, pp. 13, 35.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Samuel Rowlands, The Bride (London, 1617), sig. D4.

<sup>171</sup> Watkins, Shakespeare and Spenser, p. 197.

<sup>172</sup> Woodhouse, "Nature and Grace in The Faerie Queene," 217.

<sup>173</sup> See Chapter Five.

Garden is guarded by Genius (god of generation), and it is "the first seminarie/Of all things" (III.vi.30). In the Garden

There is continuall spring, and harvest there  
Continuall, both meeting at one time.  
(III.vi.42)<sup>174</sup>

The remarkable fertility (as well as the self-sufficiency) of the Garden is distilled in the following stanza:

Ne needs there Gardiner to set, or sow,  
To plant or prune: for of their owne accord  
All things, as they created were, doe grow,  
And yet remember well the mightie word,  
Which first was spoken by th'Almightie lord,  
That bad them to increase and multiply:  
Ne doe they need with water of the ford  
Or of the clouds to moysten their roots dry;  
For in themselves eternall moisture they imply.  
(III.vi.34)

Anticipating Shakespeare's betrothal scene in The Tempest, Spenser calls upon Juno and the god of generation to help transform the bride's virginity into the fertility of marriage. The bride's womb is to be informed "with timely seed/That may our comfort breed" (Epithalamion, 386-387). Genius is to aid the couple "Till they bring forth the fruitfull progeny" (402-403), and the gods are asked to

Poure out [their] blessing on us plentiously,  
And happy influence upon us raine,  
That we may raise a large posterity.<sup>175</sup>  
(415-417)

<sup>174</sup> Cf. the sheep-shearing scene of The Winter's Tale in which the lasting fecundity of Nature is linked with Perdita. See Chapter Five.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. The Tempest, III.i.75-76. See Chapter Five.

In All's Well That Ends Well, Measure For Measure, and the final romances Shakespeare locates the spiritual and potentially physical fertility of the heroine in her chastity.



CHAPTER THREE: VIRGINITY AND ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

In the opening scene of All's Well That Ends Well, Shakespeare confronts his audience with a sterile and dying world. There are at least eleven overt references to death or dying. The Countess is about to lose her son, and she describes this as if it were a burial: "In delivering my son from me I bury a second husband" (I.1.1-2). Bertram weeps over his "father's death anew" (I.1.3-4), and the King, having abandoned his physicians, "finds no other advantage in the process but only the losing of hope by time" (I.1.17-18). He is dying of an incurable disease which would have been cured, the Countess remarks, by the skill of Helena's father; but even his skill could not "be set up against mortality" (I.1.33), and the King mourns his death. The remembrance of her father never approaches Helena's heart "but the tyranny of her sorrows takes all livelihood from her cheek" (I.1.52-54). Shakespeare, however, counterbalances this funereal atmosphere by setting it against references to fertility and potential growth. The Countess speaks of "delivering" Bertram, and the equivocation immediately suggests a connection with the King who is to become a symbolic father to Bertram: Lafew says to the Countess and her son: "You shall find of the King a husband, madam; you, sir, a father" (I.1.6-7). Indeed, the sterility associated

with the King is counteracted by this symbolic fatherhood:

He that so generally is at all times good must  
of necessity hold his virtue to you, whose worth-  
iness would stir it up where it wanted, rather  
than lack it where there is such abundance.  
(I.1.8-11)

The dramatist introduces Helena into this decaying world, but he is careful not to link her with death or sterility. Of course, she grieves for her dead father; but it is a controlled sorrow, not the excessive kind of grief Lafew describes as "the enemy to the living" (I.1.60), or the kind of mourning for which Claudius reprimands Hamlet (I.11.92-97). This point is worth emphasizing, for Shakespeare is from the very outset associating Helena (whose virginity is to become of paramount importance) with life forces. Later in the scene she is also linked with the forces of vibrant love.

Before he leaves, Bertram is given a formal, Polonius-like blessing by his mother:

Be thou blessed, Bertram, and succeed  
thy father  
In manners as in shape! Thy blood and virtue  
Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness  
Share with thy birthright! Love all, trust a few,  
Do wrong to none; be able for thine enemy  
Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend  
Under thy own life's key. Be checked for silence,  
But never taxed for speech. What heaven more  
will,  
That thee may furnish and my prayers pluck down,  
Fall on thy head! Farewell. My lord,  
'Tis an unseasoned courtier; (I.1.65-75)

The Countess' blessing resembles a formal ritual<sup>1</sup> in which the possession and exercise of moral virtue and goodness are invoked on Bertram's behalf. He is expected to inherit not only his father's social position, but his moral virtues as well. The description of Bertram as an "unseasoned courtier" is important: it suggests, of course, that he has had little experience with the life and manners of the court; but it also suggests a potentiality or receptivity for growth. Whether or not Bertram realizes this potential is a question Shakespeare has shrewdly posed from the very start.

Meanwhile he begins to focus attention on Helena, who is being depicted in terms of a saint. Her unique quality is humility, and it is emphasized in her broodings about Bertram's social superiority. She thinks of him as "a bright particular star" (I.1.92) beyond her reach. She cannot be comforted in "his sphere," she says, but in "his bright radiance and collateral light" (I.1.94-95). Finally, Bertram is described as a saint whose relics are to be made holy by her "idolatrous fancy" (I.1.103). It seems to me that the dramatist, in stressing Helena's depiction of Bertram as an angelic creature, is already pointing to the future union of Bertram and

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. The Tempest, III.1.75-76; V.1.201-202.

Helena: she thinks of him as a sort of semi-divine creature, and later Shakespeare is going to identify her with Diana, whose union with the king of the Wood "was intended to make the earth gay with the blossoms of spring and the fruits of autumn, and to gladden the hearts of men and women with healthful offspring."<sup>2</sup> The strength of love implied in "idolatrous fancy" is also a reflection of Giletta's love for Beltramo. In Painter's Tale, Giletta falls "fervently in love with Beltramo, more than was meete for a maiden of her age."<sup>3</sup>

Helena's soliloquy is interrupted by the appearance of Parolles, who asks her with blunt directness: "Are you meditating on virginity?" (I.1.116). He immediately proceeds to attack permanent virginity, adopting a somewhat blase, but certainly, realistic attitude towards it. Parolles, surely, is one of Shakespeare's most unattractive characters, and the unsympathetic response his character has occasioned is thoroughly justified. Nevertheless, his argument that permanent virginity is sterile is precisely Shakespeare's position throughout the canon. Parolles calls it "a withered pear" (I.1.170), thereby

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<sup>2</sup>Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup>William Painter, The Palace of Pleasure (1575), in Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, II (London, 1958), p. 389.

suggesting associations with Theseus' image of virginity "withering on the virgin thorn" (A Midsummer Night's Dream, I.i.77). "There's little can be said in't," he tells Helena, because it is "against the rule of nature" (I.i.142-143). Like an old courtier, virginity "wears her cap out of fashion...just like the brooch and the toothpick, which wear not now" (I.i.163-165). Like the self-destructive quality of evil, permanent virginity "breeds mites...consumes itself to the very paring, and so dies with feeding his own stomach" (I.i.148-150).<sup>4</sup>

The Saints, as well as the Fathers, regarded permanent virginity consecrated to God as an ennobling act of selflessness. It signified future union with Christ in Heaven. Parolles, on the other hand, argues that it is "made of self-love which is the most inhibited sin in the Canon" (I.i.152-153). It is also "peevish, proud, idle" (I.i.151). He goes on to speak of the virgin as one who hoards her virginity, as a miser hoards his gold. Conversely, it is eminently intelligent to lose it: "Within ten year it will make itself ten, which is a goodly increase, and the principal itself not much the worse" (I.i:154-156). The preservation of virginity,

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. John Donne's argument ("That Virginity is a Vertue," p. 349) about the virgin who lets her "Fruit consume and rot to nothing." See Chapter Two.

therefore, is not conducive to the health of society:

It is not politic in the commonwealth of nature to preserve virginity. Loss of virginity is rational increase, and there was never virgin got till virginity was first lost. That you were made of is metal to make virgins. Virginity by being once lost may be ten times found; by being ever kept it is ever lost. 'Tis too cold a companion; away with't! (I.1.137-139)

It would seem that Parolles' advice -- Helena should lose her virginity -- is in no way related to marriage, for his apparent function in the play is to seduce Bertram away from the fertility of Helena's love.<sup>5</sup> Helena must lose her virginity "while 'tis vendible" (I.1.162). But Parolles brings the conversation to an end with the remark, "get thee a good husband, and use him as he uses thee" (I.1.221-222). The remark suggests that his later objection to the marriage of Helena and Bertram may not be an objection to marriage per se, but specifically to theirs.

Helena, however, seems to regard Parolles' attack on virginity as an attempt to seduce her into losing it without benefit of marriage, and she replies, "I will stand for't a little, though therefore I die a virgin" (I.1.140). Her desire to preserve premarital virginity is not simply a conventional female response. It is far too calculated

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<sup>5</sup>Parolles' influence upon Bertram's behaviour has been much debated. Bertram, it seems, does not need much "inducement." See, especially, II.1.30-33.

and militant, and she regards her virginity as the locus of her virtue. As she talks to Parolles, metaphors drawn from war dominate the discussion on virginity. "How may we barricado" virginity against its enemy? (I.i.119), she begins. Virgins need to learn "some warlike resistance" since their virginity, "though valiant, in the defense yet is weak" (I.i.121-122). A woman's virginity has to be protected "from underminers and blowers-up" (I.i.126-127). It must be emphasized that Helena does not identify virginity with celibacy, nor does she regard it as an end in itself. However vigorously she defends her virginity, it is not a sterile, unattractive denial of love and the flesh. On the contrary, her virginity will become an expression of love, a positive virtue, the source of a miraculous power. She does not believe in permanent virginity; instead, her intention is "to lose it to her own liking" (I.i.157). Like Perdita, who wants Florizel "quick and in mine arms" (The Winter's Tale, IV.iv.132), Helena has a legitimate desire for the flesh, but she is equally insistent about preserving premarital virginity. But at the moment losing her virginity to her own liking seems impossible. It is as though she is being condemned to a life of celibacy.

Before the entrance of Parolles, remember, Helena had been brooding about her love for Bertram. The short

soliloquy had stressed not only the strength and depth of her love for him, but also what she regarded as its hopelessness. As James Calderwood puts it, her lines before the discussion with Parolles "are an endorsement of passivity."<sup>6</sup> But as soon as Parolles leaves she begins a second soliloquy whose tenor is noticeably different from the first. The sense of hopelessness is no longer there. Nor are there any feelings of doubt and resignation. Instead, she speaks of her determination to fulfill her desire for Bertram. Instead of being discouraged, she recognizes that success or failure ultimately depends upon the individual and the strength of one's determination:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,  
Which we ascribe to heaven; the fated sky  
Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull  
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.  
(I.1.223-226)

In short, the winning of Bertram is in her hands, not in the hands of Fate or Destiny. Calderwood feels that Helena's decision "is a rejection of death in favor of a new mode of life,"<sup>7</sup> just as Bertram's departure from Rousillon was his birth into a new life. As we have suggested, Helena, before her talk with Parolles, seems to have had no choice

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<sup>6</sup> James L. Calderwood, "The Mingled Yarn of All's Well," JEGP, LXII (1963), 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 65.



but to accept an unwilling celibacy. Rather than a rejection of death, her decision is a rejection of celibacy. Moreover, the speech implies that Helena is beginning to sense within herself the presence of a power that is supernatural or miraculous:

Impossible be strange attempts to those  
That weigh their pains in sense, and do suppose  
What hath been cannot be. (I.i.231-233)

The dramatist will make much of this in later scenes. At the moment, however, Parolles' remarks, however blunt and crude they may have been, seem to be having a positive, encouraging result.

Shortly after, the audience meets Lavache, and Shakespeare gives him a prominent place on the stage. Shakespeare uses Lavache's attitude toward marriage and the flesh as a means of shedding light on Helena's own attitudes. Whereas Helena is thinking of losing her virginity in order to fulfill her love for Bertram in marriage, Lavache intends to use marriage in order to satisfy his sexual drives. Ostensibly, he wants to marry so that he can receive God's blessing: "I think I shall never have the blessing of God till I have issue o' my body; for they say barnes are blessings" (I.iii.24-26). Pressed by the Countess, however, Lavache confesses his real motives: "My poore body...requires it," he admits, "I am driven on by the flesh, and he must needs go that the devil drives"

(I.iii.28-30). He also has "other holy reasons" (I.iii.32) for marrying, and perhaps he is equivocating on the word "holy." Lavache's preoccupation with the flesh will be developed in later scenes, but meanwhile Shakespeare has presented him as a man whose primary purpose in marrying is to avoid concupiscence. His concept of marriage is hardly edifying: one reason for marrying, he remarks, is to repent (I.iii.35-37), and when he marries he does so with no delusions -- his wife's infidelity is inevitable: "Your marriage comes by destiny, your cockoo sings by kind" (I.iii.63-64). And he sums up his outlook by observing that "if men could be contented to be what they are [that is, cuckolds], there were no fear in marriage..." (I.iii.51-52).

This sort of bluntness is at once set against Helena's attitude when the Steward, reporting what he has overheard, provides additional insight into Helena's character. The report indicates that her change in mood -- from a feeling of doubt and hopelessness to a more positive response -- has taken increasing hold of Helena. She has begun, for example, to question the equity of Fortune and Love who, she complains, "would not extend his might only where qualities were level" (I.iii.114-115). She feels, too, that Diana, whose knight she is, has betrayed her by failing to rescue her "in the first assault" (I.iii.117),

and her bitterness about her inferior status seems to be increasing. But when the Countess presses Helena for the truth, she breaks down and confesses her love for Bertram. It is true that her relatives were poor, she explains, but they were also honest, and that is the essential ingredient in her love. At the same time, Helena fully understands that she has to rise above her inferior social status and deserve Bertram:

I follow him not  
By any token of presumptuous suit,  
Nor would I have him till I do deserve him;  
Yet never know how that desert should be.  
(I.iii.199-202)

Helena has not lost her humility, and it is being closely associated with her new-found determination to succeed: she may be striving against hope, but she will continue to "pour in the waters of [her] love" (I.iii.205). This comment is especially significant because it tends to crystallize Shakespeare's image of Helena's love as a generative, fertilizing force. Her confession ends with the plea:

My dearest Madam,  
Let not your hate encounter with my love.  
For loving where you do; but if yourself,  
Whose aged honour cites a virtuous youth,  
Did ever, in so true a flame of liking,  
Wish chastely, and love dearly that your Dian  
Was both herself and love, O, then give pity  
To her whose state is such that cannot choose  
But lend and give where she is sure to lose;  
That seeks not to find that her search implies,  
But, riddle-like, lives sweetly where she dies.  
(I.iii.209-219)

Helena is attempting to give equal value to virginity and married love, both of which involve a giving or yielding of the self in a generative act. The same fervour with which she regards her premarital virginity is equally noticeable in her chaste desire for Bertram. She conceives of married love as if ~~it~~ were the natural development of virginity, and she is attempting to unite Diana and Venus by losing her virginity in the chaste act of sexual consummation. The yielding of her virginity in marriage is not a loss; it is a creative act, for it is the giving of her fertile love.

The first step toward this goal is in the curing of the King, and Helena sounds out the Countess on this matter. The Countess' skepticism,

How shall they credit  
A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools,  
Emboweled of their doctrine, have left-off  
The danger to itself? (I.iii.241-243)

is quickly countered by Helena's:

There's something in't  
More than my father's skill, which was the greatest  
Of his profession, that his good receipt  
Shall for my legacy be sanctified  
By th' luckiest stars in heaven;  
(I.iii.244-248)

The dramatist has made an important connection between the medicine's efficacy and the power of Helena's virginity. Shakespeare explores this connection in the next scene.

The King's last conference with his Lords before they

leave for the Florentine wars is interrupted by Lafew who, apparently, has recently witnessed the power of Helena's medicine: "I have seen a medicine," he says,

That's able to breathe life into a stone,  
Quicken a rock, and make you dance canary  
With sprightly fire and motion, whose simple touch  
Is powerful to araise King Pippen, nay,  
To give great Charlemain a pen in's hand,  
And write to her a love-line. (II.1.74-81)

Stress falls on the intrinsic power of the medicine, especially as a restorative of physical health. Lafew is not yet linking it with Helena's virtue or goodness. But he adds,

I have spoke  
With one that, in her sex, her years, profession,  
Wisdom and constancy, hath amazed me more  
Than I dare blame my weakness. (II.1.84-87)

The old lord is impressed by a power he does not fully understand; but when he makes his exit he remarks, "I am Cressid's uncle, / That dare leave two together" (II.1.99-100). Helena's curing of the King's physical illness and spiritual lethargy is being conceived of in sexual terms. If by Pandarus's help Troilus' sickness is "cured" in the act of sexual consummation, then Lafew's figure points to the future curing of Bertram which Helena initiates by sleeping with him.

As Helena's conversation with the King continues, Shakespeare emphasizes the connection between the medicine's efficacy and Helena's virtue. Alexander Leggatt points

out that the King's cure "is not so much a medical achievement as an act of faith and grace...."<sup>8</sup> We notice that it is not simply a question of administering the medicine; her ministrations are to be accompanied by her treatment. In the story of Giletta and Beltramo, the strength of the medicine, not Giletta's virtue, is emphasized. Shakespeare, on the other hand, places considerable weight on Helena's virtue. The dying King rejects Helena's help because he is blind to the power of her virtue. The rejection is obviously a foreshadowing of Bertram's subsequent scorning of her. But Helena presses her case, stressing her collaboration with heaven:

He that of greatest works is finisher,  
Oft does them by the weakest minister.  
(II.i.138-139)

She adds, moreover, that

great floods have flown  
From simple sources; and great seas have dried  
When miracles have by the great'st been denied.  
(II.i.141-143)

When the King persists in his refusal of her help, Helena unequivocally states that she is inspired by heaven:

Inspired merit, so by breath is barred.  
It is not so with Him that all things knows,  
As 'tis with us that square our guess by shows;  
But most it is presumption in us when  
The help of heaven we count the act of men.

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<sup>8</sup>Alexander Leggatt, "All's Well That Ends Well: The Testing of Romance," MLQ, XXXII (1971), 27.

Dear Sir, to my endeavours give consent;  
 Of heaven, not me, make an experiment.  
 (II.1.150-156)

In the light of this recurring link between Helena, her medicine, her virginity and heaven, it is difficult to understand Bertrand Evans' curious position on this matter. Helena's practice "borders on witchery"; she charms the King into letting her treat his fistula "with a weird chant," and at the end of her incantation "it would seem quite in order," Evans writes, "if Helena should cry 'peace! the charm's wound up.'"<sup>9</sup> The medicine is considered to be miraculous, certainly, but throughout the scene there is the implication that it is so because Helena administers it. G. Wilson Knight probably has this in mind when he notes that Helena is presented as "a channel or medium for the divine or cosmic powers," an example of "renaissance sainthood."<sup>10</sup>

In the source story the King asks Helena's counterpart: "Damosel, if thou doest not heale me, but make me to breake my determination, what wilt thou shal folow thereof?" Giletta is prepared to suffer only one punishment if she fails: "Sir, said the maiden: { Let me be kept

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<sup>9</sup>Bertrand Evans, Shakespeare's Comedies (Oxford, 1960), p. 166.

<sup>10</sup>G. Wilson Knight, The Sovereign Flower (London, 1958), p. 156.

in what guard and keeping you list: and if I do not heale you within these eight dayes, let me be burnt...."<sup>11</sup>

Shakespeare makes some significant additions. Not only is his heroine prepared to offer her life as ransom; she would have herself branded unchaste if she fails to heal the King. The placing of equal emphasis on death and chastity further underlines the value Helena gives to the preservation of her premarital virginity. The punishments she expects are:

Tax of impudence,  
A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame,  
Traduced by odious ballads; my maiden's name  
Seared otherwise; ne worst of worst, extended  
With vilest torture, let my life be ended.  
(II.1.172-176)

Only then does the King recognize in Helena what Lafew has already sensed. The King says,

Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak  
His powerful sound within an organ weak.  
(II.1.177-178)

In this scene Shakespeare has been very carefully stressing Helena's connection with divine providence. Before this, he had stressed her modesty and humility, thereby tenuously linking her with the Virgin Mary. Now he brings the scene to an end by enhancing this association. Augustine, as we noted in an earlier chapter, believed that virginity and

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<sup>11</sup>Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, pp. 390-391.



humility could not be separated. Virgins are warned that their virginity is a gift from God, and they are to avoid the sin of pride.<sup>12</sup> The sanctity of the virgin is the source of her spiritual fruitfulness, and the Virgin Mary embodies the perfection of this sanctity. Helena shows her humility when, in selecting a husband, she wishes to be exempted from the arrogance,

To choose from forth the royal blood of France  
 My low and humble name to propagate  
 With any branch or image of thy state;  
 But such a one, thy vassal, whom I know  
 Is free for me to ask, thee to bestow.  
 (II.1.198-202)

The lowliness and self-effacing attitude of Helena recall the Virgin Mary's response in the Magnificat. Mary's attitude is that God "hath regarded the humility of his handmaid," and He "hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble" (Luke, 1:48, 52).

The exaltation of the lowly, humble Helena by Heaven has been an important motif in the scene, and Mary's redemptive fecundity is hinted at in Helena's image of propagation. Her collaboration with Heaven culminates in the healing of the King. As far as Lafew is concerned, she has performed a miracle. Man has a tendency, Lafew observes, to explain away supernatural events; but we

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<sup>12</sup>Augustine, Treatises on Marriage, p. 195.

ought, instead, to "submit ourselves to an unknown fear" (II.iii.5), and acknowledge the existence of miracles. Even the sneering Parolles and Bertram, for all their cynicism, are impressed by the healing of the King. It is now clear that Heaven has been working through Helena, and her faith in this has been vindicated. She can now say firmly, without arrogance, "Heaven hath through me restored the King to health" (II.iii.65).

As this scene develops, stress falls rather heavily on Helena's fecundity. She has accomplished more than just the physical healing of the King; his "banished sense...hast been repealed" (II.iii.49-50), he says, and there is in the remark the implication that he has experienced a restoration of the spirit as well, for the King, we recall, had allied himself with Bertram's father, and shared his desire not to become "the snuff/Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses/All but new things disdain" (I.ii.59-61). Helena has restored the King's "apprehensive senses." Her fertility begins in the flesh (as it will do when she sleeps with Bertram); but eventually it acts upon the spirit. Helena associates her curing of the King with the fact that she is "a simple maid and therein wealthiest/That I protest I simply am a maid" (II.iii.67-68). Her virginity, she seems to be suggesting, is the source of her fecundity.

But Helena is now ready to lose her virginity "to her own liking." Her spiritual fecundity is being transformed into sexual fecundity. There are, for instance, repeated references to her sexual power: the King enters with Helena "lustig, as the Dutchman says" (II.iii.41), and, Lafew adds, "I'll like a maid the better whilst I have a tooth in my head" (II.iii.41-42). Lafew, as a matter of fact, wants to join the group of bachelors, one of whom she will choose (II.iii.60-62). Just before she begins the ritual of selecting a husband, Helena once again rejects celibacy in her remark,

Now, Dian, from thy altar do I fly,  
And to imperial Love, that God most high,  
Do my sighs stream. (II.iii.75-77)

And she says to one of the Lords:

You are too young, too happy, and too good,  
To make yourself a son out of my blood.  
(II.iii.97-98)

So far as Lafew can determine, the bachelors are rejecting her, and he thinks that the rejection of the nubile Helena deserves the punishments of whipping and castration (II.iii.87-88). But it is she who is rejecting them; it is Helena who is denying them the fertility of her love, the very fertility Bertram rejects with such disdain:

I know her well;  
She had her breeding at my father's charge:  
A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain  
Rather corrupt me ever! (II.iii.114-117)

At precisely this point, Shakespeare makes a significant

change in his source. The French King, the story relates, is loath to give Beltramo to Giletta; he does so only because he does not want to break his promise to her:

And when the King perceived himself whole he said unto her: "Thou hast well deserved a husbände (Giletta) even such a one as thy selfe shalt chose." "I have then my Lord (quoth she) deserved the Countie Beltramo of Rossiglione, whom I have loved from my youth." The King was very loth to graunt him unto her: but for that he had made a promise which he was loth to breake, he caused him to be called forth, and said unto him: "Sir Countie, knowing full well that you are a gentleman of great honour, oure pleasure is, that you returne home to your owne house to order your estate according to your degree: and that you take with you a Damosell which I have appointed to be your wife."<sup>13</sup>

But Shakespeare's King recognizes Helena's immense value, and soundly reprimands Bertram:

If she be  
All that is virtuous, save what thou dislik'st --  
A poor physician's daughter -- thou dislik'st  
Of virtue for the name. (II.iii.122-125)

"Good alone," he reminds him, "Is good without a name" (II.iii.129-130), and at the end of the speech the King says to Bertram:

Virtue and she  
Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me.  
(II.iii.144-145)

Bertram's immaturity has made him obtuse, his judgment is corrupted, and he fails to understand that true nobility

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<sup>13</sup>Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, p. 391.

is in the exercise of virtue. He cannot grasp the truth of the King's comment:

Honours thrive  
When rather from our acts we them derive  
Than our foregoers. (II.iii.136-138)

In the second act Bertram must choose, Carl Dennis notes, "either to affirm or deny the intrinsic excellence of Helena, and he proves too superficial to choose rightly."<sup>14</sup> And Alexander Leggatt points out that Shakespeare "has drawn a realistic portrait of a shallow, immature young man whose values are crass and earthbound, and whose two most important actions in the play -- the refusal of Helena and the assault on Diana -- spring, the first from snobbery, and the second from sensuality."<sup>15</sup> Bertram's objection to Helena's social status is stupid because, as the King implies, rank and position are merely superficial things, and honour is a "mere word...deboshed on every tomb" (II.iii.138-139). His "vile misprision" (II.iii.153) has unfortunately blinded him to Helena's worthiness, and like the King's physical disease, Bertram's diseased judgment has to be cured. Before the scene ends, Shakespeare points to this future cure in the King's remark:

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<sup>14</sup> Carl Dennis, "All's Well That Ends Well and the Meaning of Agape," PQ, 50 (1971), 75.

<sup>15</sup> Leggatt, "All's Well: The Testing of Romance," 29.

It is in us to plant thine honour where  
We please to have it grow. (II.iii.157-158)

Ostensibly, the King is saying that he has the power to decide Bertram's future position. But the dramatist has deliberately stated this in a plant and growth metaphor, thereby inviting the audience to see in the figure a hidden reference to the future uniting of Bertram and Helena, and the young man's subsequent growth in maturity. The beginning of Bertram's "cure" or redemption is in the planting of his seed in Helena's womb. Thus, the progress from premarital virginity to its ultimate realization in the fertility of married love is obliquely stated in the King's metaphor. Shakespeare has twice suggested links between Helena and the goddess Diana (I.iii.210ff; II.iii.75-77), and we have been emphasizing Helena's redemptive fecundity and the fertilizing, generative symbolism connected with her. In II.iii.75-77 she speaks of abandoning Diana, goddess of perpetual chastity, in favour of married love. But II.iii also stresses Helena's powerful sexuality, and indeed, we cannot separate her virginity from its sexual significance. The dramatist, it seems, has suggested this by deliberately associating his heroine with Diana. This goddess, usually seen as the embodiment of chastity, was, as James Frazer has shown, a symbol of fertility as well. Diana "appears to have developed into a personification of the teeming life of nature, both

animal and vegetable."<sup>16</sup> As the yellow harvest moon "she filled the farmer's grange with goodly fruits...and in her sacred grove at Nemi...she was worshipped as a goddess of childbirth, who bestowed offspring on men and women." But as goddess of fertility, Diana must herself be fertile: she had to be sexually united with a mate, whom Frazer identifies as Virbius, King of the Wood at Nemi. The aim of their union "would be to promote the fruitfulness of the earth, of animals, and of mankind...."<sup>17</sup>

After the marriage which Bertram refuses to consummate -- thus temporarily thwarting the working of Helena's fecundity -- Shakespeare continues to emphasize the foolishness of his behaviour by setting it against the bride's worthiness. "I have wedded her, not bedded her," he writes his mother, "and sworn to make the 'not' eternal" (III.ii.22-23). But Bertram has despised "a maid too virtuous/For the contempt of empire" (III.ii.32-33). And his "dreadful sentence" (Helena will never call him husband until he fathers her child) is matched by the Countess' comment,

There's nothing here that is too good for him  
But only she, and she deserves a lord  
That twenty such rude boys might tend upon  
And call her, hourly, mistress.. (III.ii.83-85)

<sup>16</sup> Frazer, Golden Bough, p. 162.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 163-164.

This constant juxtaposition between Bertram's lack of judgment and Helena's fecund goodness, is distilled in her pathetic soliloquy which she delivers upon reading Bertram's letter. Helena's connection with the Virgin Mary's humility is again apparent in the soliloquy; but just as important is her selflessness, a quality noticeably different from Bertram's blunt scorning of her. She regrets that she is responsible for exposing him to the "leaden messengers, / That ride upon the violent speed of fire" (III.ii.113-114), and she is prepared to suffer "all the miseries which nature owes" (III.ii.124). On the other hand, the union in her of a palpable sexuality and engaging innocence is closely linked with her humility. This is probably what James Calderwood has in mind when he writes: "there is an unmistakably sensual quality about Helena's love, a pressing concern with the sexual act itself, which is, though on a much lower level of intensity, analogous to Venus' 'sweating lust'."<sup>18</sup> In the very first scene of the play, she had expressed her desire for Bertram in terms of a hind and lion metaphor:

The hind that would be mated by the lion  
Must die for love. (I.i.97-98)

Now, arguing that if he were to die she would be responsible

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<sup>18</sup>James L. Calderwood, "Styles of knowing in All's Well," MLQ, XXV (1964), 278.



for his death, she concludes:

Better 'twere  
I met the ravin lion when he roared  
With sharp constraint of hunger.  
(III.ii.121-123)

Her chaste love for Bertram is imaged in the first metaphor in terms of the "death" of sexual consummation, and this present desire for death in the jaws of a ravenous lion, although it is ostensibly intended as an act of reparation for what she thinks she has done to Bertram, is really a disguised version of her earlier sexual wishes.

Much of the fourth scene in this third act enhances and reinforces the themes treated in III.ii. The rejected Helena becomes a pilgrim, and leaves for the shrine of St. James. Shakespeare continues to emphasize her humility, and depicts her in terms of the suffering saint. She sees her love for Bertram as an offense to him, and so she must make reparation by performing a penance (III.iv.5-7). The sin she is guilty of, she thinks, is "ambitious love" (III.iv.5), but this can be expiated by sanctifying Bertram's name "with zealous fervour" (III.iv.11). Again, the dramatist has invited the audience to associate Helena with the self-debasement of the Virgin Mary (III.iv.16), at the same time repeating Helena's willingness to suffer death in order to set Bertram free (III.iv.17). This recurring link with the Virgin Mary is strengthened by the Countess, who implies that Helena's power resides in her

chaste goodness: "He cannot thrive," she says of Bertram,

Unless her prayers, whom heaven delights to hear  
And loves to grant, relieve him from the wrath  
Of greatest justice. (III.iv:26-29)

The Virgin's (and Helena's) intercessionary function is suggested in the Countess' comment. Helena's function in the play, R.G. Hunter remarks, is similar to that of the Virgin Mary: both "serve as means through which the grace of God can be communicated to man."<sup>19</sup> Also, Helena's worthiness is again strengthened by contrasting it with Bertram's unworthiness (III.iv.26,30,31). Shakespeare's choice of the verb "thrive" is important. In the Two Gentlemen of Verona (I.i.9-10), for instance, he used this verb in association with the growth and fertility of love, and in Henry V (I.i.60-62) Ely also uses it to connote growth and fertility.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, "thrive" is being used to distill Helena's fertilizing power without which Bertram cannot be saved. Moreover, the Countess is suggesting that this power, which she receives from God, is the result of Helena's unique goodness. That goodness, we have seen, is an essential part of her virginity.

In the next scene, Shakespeare continues to develop

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<sup>19</sup>Hunter, Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness, pp., 129-130.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. The Merchant of Venice, I.iii.90, and Timon of Athens, III.i.60-62.

the theme of Helena's humility as well as the Bertram - Parolles relationship. Mariana mentions that Bertram is being misled by Parolles, and at this particular point in the play such a reminder by the dramatist seems to be a deliberate preparation for the very next scene which is to be an important discussion of Bertram's failure to see through Parolles. The old Widow and Mariana are especially concerned about Bertram's solicitations of Diana, and she is given a stern warning about the danger to her virginity (III.v.18-28). The women have replaced the honour that comes from social position and wealth (so dear to Bertram's heart) with the honour of a maid's chastity (III.v.12), and the dramatist's preoccupation with this theme is further reinforced by Helena's equation of wealth and virginity. The preservation of her virginity is of paramount importance to her: she considers herself Bertram's social inferior; but she is very careful to point out that no one has ever questioned her chastity:

O, I believe with him,  
 In argument of praise, or to the worth  
 Of the great Count himself, she is too mean  
 To have her name repeated; all her deserving  
 Is a reserved honesty; and that  
 I have not heard examined. (III.v.58-63)

In the Florentine camp, Bertram and two Lords are discussing Parolles. Those who know Parolles (Bertram excepted) have no difficulty seeing through him. The Second Lord recognizes that he is "a most notable coward,

an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise-breaker, the owner of no one good quality worthy your lordship's entertainment" (III.vi.9-11). Bertram, though, finds it difficult to believe that he is "deceived in him" (III.vi.6), and this is a remarkable instance of the kind of obtuseness Shakespeare has been continually noting in Bertram. The crucial word in the scene is "know." It is necessary for Bertram to "know" Parolles as he really is, the Second Lord says. Bertram's blindness to Helena's virtue is matched by his "reposing too far in [Parolles'] virtue which he hath not." Consequently, the same Lord observes, "he might at some great and trusty business in a main danger fail you" (III.vi.13-15). "You do not know him, my lord, as we do," he is told; Bertram does not know that Parolles "will steal himself into a man's favour and for a week escape a great deal of discoveries" (III.vi.92-94). But in spite of his companions' protestations, Bertram is still skeptical about Parolles' hollowness and cowardice: Parolles' determination to recover the lost drum cannot be a mere sham: "Why, do you think he will make no deed at all of this that so seriously he does address himself unto?" (III.vi.96-97). A plot to expose Parolles is therefore planned. Two important aspects of this plot should be noticed: when the truth about Parolles is revealed, it will be paralleled by Bertram's slow, but definite, growth in self-knowledge. Secondly, the plot is being planned for

the very night Bertram is to sleep with Helena, for even as the two Lords and Bertram are plotting the exposure of Parolles, Helena and the Widow are setting a trap for Bertram. This short scene gives Shakespeare the opportunity of returning to his preoccupation with the theme of premarital virginity, a theme not at all confined to the play's central character, for the other women share Helena's firm commitment to premarital virginity. They are scandalized at Bertram's pursuit of Diana: "Every night he comes," the Widow says with much annoyance, "With musics of all sorts, and songs composed/To her unworthiness" (III.vii.39-41). The Widow, who insists that she "was well born" (III.vii.4), has now fallen on evil days; nevertheless, she is determined not to have her reputation stained:

Though my estate be fall'n, I was well born,  
 Nothing acquainted with these businesses,  
 And would not put my reputation now  
 In any staining act. (III.vii.4-7)

Diana, too, even though she is the daughter of a woman fallen on bad times, was armed for Bertram's advances, and is presently keeping her guard "in honestest defense" (III.v.74).

Shakespeare writes a short scene in which Parolles is captured by the "enemy," and then turns his attention to Bertram's wooing of Diana. His initial attack is to try and convince her that she is too cold and stern. More than that, he implies that she is dead to passion (IV.ii.7-8).

If she is unwilling to allow "the quick fire of youth" to possess her, then she is a cold monument and not a woman (IV.ii.5-6).<sup>21</sup> But the passion Bertram thinks Diana lacks and is trying to arouse, is lust. Diana easily understands this: Bertram having asked her to be "as your mother was/When your sweet self was got" (IV.ii.9-10), Diana replies, "shè then was honest" (IV.ii.11). Such a deceptively simple answer is a reminder to Bertram that sexual passion is chaste when exercised within the legitimate bounds of marriage. Since she reminds Bertram of the duty he owes his wife, the implication of her rejoinder is that sexual passion without the intention of fertility is merely lust. Outside of marriage, the exercise of sexual passion is a sterile act, for Diana proceeds to describe her virginity as a rose, loss of which she regards as a sterile act:

Ay, so you serve us  
Till we serve you; but when you have our roses,  
You barely leave our thorns to prick ourselves,  
And mock us with our bareness. (IV.ii.18-21)

Diana's image of the rose of virginity ought to be compared with Theseus' metaphor of the "rose distilled" in A Midsummer Night's Dream (I.i.74-78).<sup>22</sup> Diana and Helena both have in mind Theseus' idea of the yielding of virginity

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<sup>21</sup>This should be compared with Angelo's argument to Isabella in Measure For Measure, II.iv.133-137.

<sup>22</sup>See the Introduction, pp. 9-10.

in married love. Shakespeare returns to the image of the rose as an emblem of virginity, which has to be protected against the impatience of masculine passion, in The Two Noble Kinsmen:

It is the very emblem of a maid.  
 For when the west wind courts her gently  
 How modestly she blows, and paints the sun  
 With her chaste blushes! When the north comes near  
 her,  
 Rude and impatient, then like chastity  
 She locks her beauties in her bud again,  
 And leaves him to base briers. (II.i.196-202)

It is ironic that Bertram sees himself as a sick man who has to be cured. Now that his lust for Diana is beginning to stifle reason, his pleading invites interesting parallels with Angelo's in Measure For Measure. Having lost control, Angelo speaks of his "sharp appetite" and "sensual race" (II.iv.159-163) with ruthless candour. One notices a similar urgency in Bertram's,

Stand no more off,  
 But give thyself unto my sick desires,  
 Who then recovers. (IV.ii.34-36)

The sickness of Bertram's lust is meant to be set along side his diseased judgment, which will shortly be placed on the road to recovery. Meanwhile, he has given Diana the important ring, and she agrees to meet him at midnight. Bertram's rejection of his wife has disillusioned Diana, so that at the end of the scene she vows to live a life of celibacy:

He had sworn to marry me  
 When his wife's dead; therefore I'll lie with him  
 When I am buried. Since French men are so braid,  
 Marry that will, I live and die a maid.  
 (IV.ii.71-74)

It is an important decision, and the dramatist will return to it later in the play.

Shakespeare begins the exposing of Parolles by pointing to incipient changes in Bertram. His mother's letter, which he has just received, "stings his nature" (IV.iii.3), and the Second Lord notes that "he changed almost into another man" (IV.iii.4). If Bertram can experience guilt, then he can be regenerated. This point is worth stressing because some scholars have been consistently hostile toward Bertram, whom they regard as an essentially unredeemable cad, unworthy of Helena's love and devotion. For example, although he thinks that Bertram is sincerely contrite at the end of the play, Carl Dennis sees little change in him, and maintains that "his rejection of Parolles does not lead to any rejection in himself of the values that Parolles embodies."<sup>23</sup> And Bertrand Evans denies that the unmasking of Parolles is the turning point in Bertram's development.<sup>24</sup> But if Bertram is compared with, say,

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<sup>23</sup>Carl Dennis, "All's Well and Agape", 76.

<sup>24</sup>Evans, Shakespeare's Comedies, p. 161. See also Chap. VI of Joseph G. Price, The Unfortunate Comedy: A Study of All's Well That Ends Well and Its Critics (University of Toronto Press, 1968), pp. 87-109.



Proteus, it is clear that Shakespeare has changed his emphasis from simple reunion to regeneration. This is a very significant change. Bertram's judgement, for the moment, is still perverted: that night "he fleshes his will in the spoil of [Diana's] honour, and thinks himself made in the unchaste composition" (IV.iii.17-19). To do so is to become a traitor to himself, for he will betray the nobility he inherited from his father as well as his "father's moral parts" (I.ii.21). Shakespeare therefore depicts him as a man drowning in the relentless flow of his own lust (IV.iii.25-26).

The First Lord is very carefully preparing the audience for Bertram's eventual self-discovery: he is to witness the anatomizing of Parolles, and in so doing "he might take a measure of his own judgements" (IV.iii.35). Meanwhile, Bertram has received news of Helena's "death" at the Shrine of Saint Jaques LeGrand. From time to time, Shakespeare tends to link chastity rituals of one kind or another with the simulated death of the chaste heroine. In Much Ado About Nothing, for instance, the device of concealing the grossly maligned female is first used. The Friar suggests that Hero's "death" should be published abroad, one of his purposes being to bring Claudio to his senses:

When he shall hear she died upon his words,  
 Th' idea of her life shall sweetly creep  
 Into his study of imagination,  
 And every lovely organ of her life  
 Shall come appareled in more precious habit.  
 (Much Ado, IV.1.222-226)

If things do not turn out well, the Friar proposes to conceal Hero in "some reclusive and religious life" (IV.1.241). The aim of this sort of device is to force the "dead" woman's calumniators to reconsider their assessment of her virtues, and, presumably, this will happen in Bertram's case. But Helena's earlier, cryptic comment, "the hind that would be mated by the lion must die for love" (I.4.97-98), has now been given additional significance: Bertram learns of her death, and speaks of burying a wife (IV.111.93) on the very night Helena, by sleeping with him, experiences the "death" of sexual consummation.

As the scene progresses, Bertram begins to understand the treachery of the man he had such faith in: Parolles is prepared to "take the Sacrament" (IV.111.146) as confirmation of his betrayal of the Duke's troops. The man whose advice he usually sought, the "gallant militarist" (IV.111.151), is now "a past-saving slave" (IV.111.149). But Parolles does not confine his confession to military matters; he makes pungent and, surely for Bertram, soul-searching remarks. The Count Rousillon is "a foolish idle boy, but for all that very ruttish" (IV.111.227-228).

Bertram is also "a dangerous, and lascivious boy, who is a whale to virginity, and devours up all the fry it finds" (IV.iii.232-233). It is not surprising that Bertram identifies Parolles three times in the scene with a cat, the one animal he heartily detests. Whatever doubts he has had about Parolles' integrity are dispelled when he flatly admits that if necessary he would betray Bertram himself (IV.iii.309). When Parolles is unmuffled, Bertram does not indulge in recriminations, nor does he have him "whipped through the army with this rhyme in's forehead" (IV.iii.246-247), as he had originally planned. Instead, Bertram's response is the eloquently tart remark: "good morrow, noble captain" (IV.iii.329). He need say no more. For his part, Parolles has made an important discovery: he must now accept himself for what he is, and learn to live with, and make the best of that reality. "Who knows himself a braggart," he notes, ought to know that sooner or later "every braggart will be found an ass" (IV.iii.349-351). Now that he knows the worthlessness of the man he held in high esteem, it is possible for Bertram to come to recognize his own serious deficiencies.

Shakespeare had emphasized the importance of heaven's role in Helena's affairs in II.iii, during which the healed King fulfilled his promise to her. Now, with the army disbanded and Bertram on the way home, Shakespeare returns

to this motif again. As she sets out for Marseilles to see the King, Helena places more emphasis on the aid of heaven in bringing her plans to fruition. The dramatist reinforces the link between heaven and Helena, no longer a virgin, but chaste: heaven is to aid her, the Widow and Diana in their speedy journey upon which so much depends. Not only has heaven helped her in the restoration of the king; she has also been used as the instrument of Diana's future welfare, and Diana herself has been used to acquire a husband for Helena:

Doubt not but heaven  
Hath brought me up to be your daughter's dower,  
As it hath fated her to be my motive  
And helper to a husband. (IV.iv.18-21)

In the middle of her conversation with the Widow, Helena turns aside and muses,

But, O strange men,  
That can such sweet use make of what they hate,  
When saucy trusting of the cozened thoughts  
Defiles the pitchy night! (IV.iv.21-24)

Blinded by his supercilious attitude, Bertram could not see the "real" Helena, just as the "pitchy night" has deceived him into thinking that he is sleeping with Diana. While they are being sexually united, Helena's lack of suitable social status is utterly irrelevant. The blending of opposites in Helena's speech culminates in her image of the coming of summer, which can be interpreted as symbolizing the fruition of her plans:

But with the word the time will bring on summer,  
 When briars shall have leaves as well as thorns,  
 And be as sweet as sharp. (IV.iv.31-33)

The fruition of Helena's plans in consummated marriage involves the loss of virginity (previously imaged by Diana as the loss of the rose with the thorns remaining) and the fertility represented by new life (the fragrant leaves of the rosebush). It is a blending of fertility and symbolic death, sweetness and tartness, and as such it is a particularly concise metaphor embodying the First Lord's reconciling of opposites: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together; our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not, and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues" (IV.iii.74-77). This union of goodness and evil, darkness and light, is the essential ingredient in human existence, and it is one of the important discoveries Bertram must make, because his assessment of people is notoriously one-dimensional.

In the next scene (IV.v.) Lafew and the Countess are awaiting the arrival of the King, and this gives them an opportunity to discuss the "dead" Helena. They were always aware of Helena's rare qualities, but these are given more weight now that she is "dead". It is the natural outcome of the device initiated in IV.iii. At the same time, Shakespeare returns to the earlier technique of enhancing Helena's qualities by juxtaposing them with the

Clown's candid vulgarity and preoccupation with the flesh: Lavache "would cozen the man of his wife and do his service." "I would give his wife my bauble...to do her service," he also remarks (IV.v.29-31). Meanwhile, the "Decayed, ingenious, foolish, rascally knave" (V.ii.24-25) has fallen into fortune's displeasure. Fortune has "cruelly scratched" Parolles, and he appeals to Lafew for help. This is a much chastened Parolles: his cynical arrogance is gone, and his recent disgrace has humbled and even made him a more tolerable person. There is certainly a softening in Lafew's attitude toward him, and he is going to help Parolles (V.ii.55-57). If Bertram's mentor can be returned to grace, then Bertram himself can be redeemed.

Bertram's return to grace takes place in the final scene. Robert Turner says of this scene: "The fact that Helena does not appear immediately to clarify the charges, as psychological realism would demand of her, and the fact that the scene is the longest in the comedy indicate that Shakespeare was stretching Bertram's discomfort to provide the audience with a sense of sufficient punishment."<sup>25</sup> We also notice that Shakespeare changed his source so that

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<sup>25</sup>Robert Y. Turner, "Dramatic Conventions in All's Well That Ends Well", PMLA, LXXV (December, 1960), 500.

Bertram's exposure is more humiliating.<sup>26</sup> The play's central issue is contained in the King's opening remarks: Helena is compared to a jewel of inestimable worth (V.iii.1), loss of which has made the King and his kingdom poorer. Bertram "lacked the sense to know/Her estimation home" because he was "mad in folly" (V.iii.3-4). The Countess, who has always criticized her son for this folly, explains his conduct as the "rebellion" of a young man too immature to realize the foolishness of his conduct (V.iii.5-8). Bertram has offended the King and Helena, but his most serious offense was his self-betrayal. He is like the base Indian who threw a pearl away, richer than all his tribe. Lafew enlarges upon the King's description of Helena:

He lost a wife  
Whose beauty did astonish the survey  
Of richest eyes; whose words all ears took captive,  
Whose dear perfection hearts that scorned to serve  
Humbly called mistress. (V.iii.15-19)

By failing to recognize the value of the jewel, Bertram has placed his chances for self-fulfillment in jeopardy.

But we have been noticing subtle signs of change in Bertram. Now that the King has forgiven him, he is willing to submit himself to the King's wishes: "All that he is:

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<sup>26</sup> See Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, p. 396.

hath reference to your Highness" (V.iii.30). Bertram's earlier discontent and insubordination have vanished, and he asks for pardon (V.iii.37,38). Immediately, he tries to explain his failure to appreciate Helena. He had, he says, first chosen Lafew's daughter, but he could not declare his love. The contempt he developed for other women tended to distort their value and attractiveness, so that Helena offended him like a speck of dust in the eye. The point, however, is that Bertram recognizes his love for Helena now that she is "dead":<sup>27</sup>

At first  
 I stuck my choice upon her, ere my heart  
 Durst make too bold a herald of my tongue;  
 Where, the impression of mine eye infixing,  
 Contempt his scornful perspective did lend me,  
 Which warped the line of every other favour,  
 Scorned a fair colour or expressed it stol'n,  
 Extended or contracted all proportions  
 To a most hideous object. Thence it came  
 That she whom all men praised and whom myself,  
 Since I have lost, have loved, was in mine eye  
 The dust that did offend it. (V.iii.44-54)

We ought to regard this as the sincere confession of a man who has come to appreciate the wisdom of the King's comment:

Our rash faults  
 Make triual price of serious things we have,  
 Not knowing them, until we know their grave.  
 (V.iii.60-62)

Nevertheless, Bertram, like Angelo in the final scene of Measure For Measure, struggles to save face. He tries to

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Claudio's change of heart after the "death" of Hero in Much Ado, V.1.252-253.



extricate himself from the affair with Diana by discrediting her. He describes her as "a common gamester to the camp" (V.iii.188); she is also "a fond and desperate creature" with whom he sometimes laughed (V.iii.178-179). At the same time, Parolles is called in to give evidence in the case, and once again Shakespeare rather unobtrusively points to a change for the better in Parolles. At first he equivocates, but eventually he tells the truth about the affair, certainly remarkable, since he has been consistently given the character of a liar. On the other hand, he refuses to speak about those "things which would derive me ill to speak of" (V.iii.264,265). Parolles is anxious, it seems, to win everyone's good opinion. With Helena's formal presentation of the ring, the chastened Bertram can only ask for her forgiveness (V.iii.108). This, too, is a very sincere response, and his final words in the play confirm it: "I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly" (V.iii.316). Once you discover the truth about Parolles, the Second Lord once told Bertram (III.vi.95), then there is no possibility for future doubt or disillusionment about the man. The certainty of Bertram's knowledge of his former mentor is matched by the certainty of his self-knowledge. The First Lord's comment about Parolles, "'A will betray us all unto ourselves" (IV.i.95), has certainly been prophetic. Moreover, his submission to Helena is to be regarded as an unmistakable sign of his ever-increasing

maturity. His confession of love expresses the acceptance of his responsibilities as a husband and imminent father.

From-time to time, some critics have had reservations about the marriage of Helena and Bertram. They have questioned its future stability, and, of course, Helena's wisdom in choosing Bertram in the first place.<sup>28</sup> It is worth pointing out, however, that Bertram's recantation is only seemingly sudden: there has been a gradual but definite preparation for it. The Mariana-Angelo relationship in Measure For Measure can shed some light on the problematic union of Helena and Bertram. Mariana's simple, but persistent, motivation,

They say best men are moulded out of faults,  
And, for the most, become much more the better  
For being a little bad, (V.1.444-446)

may well be at work in Helena's love for Bertram. His life, like everyone else's, is "of a mingled yarn, good and ill together." He can therefore be redeemed.

Roger Warren maintains that G. Wilson Knight is incorrect when he suggests (on the basis of the play's gnomic passages) that Helena functions almost as Christ. "Surely nothing else in the play," Warren argues, "suggests

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Donald A. Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images (New York, 1949), p. 122, and Joseph G. Price, The Unfortunate Comedy, pp. 88, 91, 96.

that Helena has so symbolic a role,"<sup>29</sup> The fact is, Shakespeare has gone out of his way to suggest that his heroine is a surrogate for Christ. The most obvious parallel with Christ is in her apparent "resurrection" through which Bertram (representative of unredeemed man) is redeemed. Nor is this all. As a demonstration that she is heaven-sent, Helena performs a Christ-like miracle -- she heals the sick. Her unceasing pursuit of Bertram, Carl Dennis notes, "becomes a metaphor for Christ's irresistible pursuit of everyman's salvation."<sup>30</sup> She resembles Christ, too, in that she demonstrates the kind of love that is not based on the worth of the recipient. "By some miracle of faith Bertram remains untarnished in her eyes."<sup>31</sup> Helena, in short, gives agape, the kind of love Christ gave to man:

Bertram must be presented as vice-ridden in order to make clear the unconditional nature of Helena's love; and he must remain so for his final transformation to be seen not as the result of his own moral exertion but of her fidelity. Only by the delaying of Bertram's growth until he is stunned by the constancy of Helena's belief can the redemptive power of agápe be fully celebrated.<sup>32</sup>

Most of Helena's actions have been directed toward the regeneration of Bertram. In this she has been aided by

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<sup>29</sup>Roger Warren, "Why Does it End Well? Helena, Bertram, and the Sonnets," *ShS*, XXII (1969), 79.

<sup>30</sup>Carl Dennis, "All's Well and Agape," 82.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 80.

divine providence. Her character, we have seen, has been consistently linked with saintliness and outstanding virtue, and her association with the Virgin Mary has been noted. Shakespeare added new characters (the Countess and Lafew) to his source, and although each one is highly individualized, one of their functions is to lend further weight to Helena's miraculous power.

Union with Helena will increase the self-knowledge Bertram has been acquiring. If Helena is seen as a redemptive figure through whom divine grace works, then one of her miracles is the conversion of Bertram. Just as Mariana had helped to bring about the redemption of Angelo, so too does Helena place Bertram on the road to regeneration. The importance of this regeneration cannot be overemphasized, if only because Shakespeare changed his source significantly. At the end of The Palace of Pleasure Painter suggests that a change has taken place in Beltramo. The change, however, is certainly not as profound as Bertram's, and Beltramo undergoes no purgation whatever. Giletta presents Beltramo with twin sons and prostrates herself before him:

The Counte hearing this, was greatly astonned, and knewe the Ryng, and the children also, they were so like hym. 'But tell me (quod he) howe is this come to passe?' The Countesse to the great admiration of the Counte, and of all those that were in presence, rehersed unto them in order all that whiche had bene done, and the whole discourse thereof. For which cause the Counte knowing the thinges she had spoken to be true, (and perceiving her constant minde and good witte, and the twoo

faire young boyes) to kepe his promise made, and to please his subjectes, and the Ladies that made sute unto him to accept her from that tyme foorth as his lawefull wyfe, and to honour her, abjected his obstinate rigour, causing her to rise up, and imbraced and kissed her, acknowledging her againe for his lawefull wyfe. And after he had apparelled her according to her estate, to the great pleasure and contentation of those that were there, and of al his other frendes, not onely that daye, but many others he kept great chere, and from that time forth hee loved and honoured her as his dere spouse and wyfe.<sup>33</sup>

In All's Well That Ends Well the dramatist emphasizes the fecund quality of the heroine's love for the seemingly irredeemable hero. This particular aspect of her love is finally manifested in her pregnancy. As Diana puts it, "one that's dead is quick" (V.iii.303). The riddle, of course, plays upon Helena's supposed death; but it is also an oblique reference to the loss of her virginity (the "death" of sexual consummation) and the resulting fertility. The fecundity of the virgin brings about a redemption or purgation in the sinner. But this purgation does not prepare the sinner for heaven: it prepares him for the fertility of married love. Shakespeare will continue to explore this theme in some depth in Measure For Measure and especially in the final romances.

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<sup>33</sup>Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, p. 396.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: CELIBACY AND MEASURE FOR MEASURE

In Measure For Measure Shakespeare examines a shift on the part of the major characters from a position that is actually an acceptance of celibacy to its rejection in marriage. His treatment of this theme is closely associated with the polarity between fertility and sterility, and in the first scene of the play the dramatist begins his exploration. The Duke chooses the word "pregnant" to describe Escalus' knowledge of the people and Vienna's laws and institutions (I.1.9-11).<sup>1</sup> By associating Escalus with the word "pregnant," Shakespeare is clearly inviting the audience to associate Escalus with some sort of fertility. Escalus' personality is only being hinted at in this opening scene, but in the second act when his mercy and patience are exercised with the sort of Christian virtue demanded of the spiritually fertile person, the audience will recall this early image. At the same time, the Duke implies that Angelo's virtues are being wasted because they are being kept within the self:

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do;  
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not. (I.1.32-35)

The dramatist is very early in the play creating a particular

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<sup>1</sup>The Arden Shakespeare: Measure For Measure, ed. J.W. Lever. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition of the play.

bias toward Angelo, for he is being linked with something stagnant or sterile, and this image of Angelo is enhanced somewhat when the dramatist, with some irony, has the Duke remark, "We have with a leaven'd and prepared choice/ Proceeded to you" (I.1.51-52). A "leaven'd choice" may suggest a carefully-reasoned choice, but since leaven can signify an agency producing profound change by progressive inward operation (and recalls the spiritual leaven of Matthew 13:33 and 16:6), it also calls to mind associations with fertility which are themselves set against the image of the Duke as the shy, retiring man:

I love the people,  
But do not like to stage me to their eyes:  
Though it do well, I do not relish well  
Their loud applause and Aves vehement;  
Nor do I think the man of safe discretion  
That does affect it. (I.1.67-72)

The audience is being introduced to Duke Vincentio's asceticism, one aspect of which is his own acceptance of celibacy. It is interesting, too, that the withdrawal within the self, which he condemns in Angelo, is somewhat similar to his abdication from his responsibilities. Vincentio, after all, has failed as an administrator, and now Angelo is being asked to do all of the dirty work while the Duke's reputation remains untarnished:

I have on Angelo impos'd the office;  
Who may in th' ambush of my name strike home,  
And yet my nature never in the fight  
To do in slander. (I.1.11.40-43)

The Duke has withdrawn from the immediate realities of

life. He has denied the world and the flesh:

No. Holy father, throw away that thought;  
Believe not that the dribbling dart of love  
Can pierce a complete bosom. Why I desire thee  
To give me secret harbour hath a purpose  
More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends  
Of burning youth. (I.iii.1-6)

Like Longaville in Love's Labour's Lost he might well say:

"The mind shall banquet though the body pine" (I.i.25).

As Rolf Soellner explains, Vincentio's reluctance to stage himself to the eyes of the people, "good absolutist theory as it may be, yet may also be taken to corroborate his distrust of all emotional commitments."<sup>2</sup> Like Angelo, Vincentio takes pride in his self-control, and Soellner points out that both men "suffer from a Puritanical suppression accompanied by the compensatory intellectual complaisance against which the skeptics warned."<sup>3</sup>

One of the serious consequences of Duke Vincentio's abdication is immediately brought home to the audience in the very next scene. We meet Lucio and his cronies, and the scene emphasizes the sterility of another extreme form of behavior -- profligacy. Because of the Duke's culpable laxity, his city has deteriorated morally and venereal disease is now, apparently, widespread. Brothels

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<sup>2</sup>Rolf Soellner, Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge (Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 232.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 232.



have arisen, but now they are to "stand for seed" (I.ii.91). Images of decay and sterility are carefully written into the idiom of the scene: one of the gentlemen talks of being treated for venereal disease, and another one is "tainted" (I.ii.40); Lucio says bluntly that he has "purchased...many diseases" under Mistress Overdone's roof (I.ii.42), at the same time remarking that his crony's bones are hollow because "impiety has made a feast of thee" (I.ii.53-54); yet another profligate has "sciatica" (I.ii.55), and Mistress Overdone complains that the "sweat" has almost put her out of business (I.ii.75-76). But Shakespeare, interestingly enough, has linked Claudio with these lechers: Lucio is waiting for him to keep an appointment, and Mistress Overdone apparently knows him very well. Claudio's association with these fellows may, perhaps, have led the Arden editor to speak of "his sensual disposition,"<sup>4</sup> but in this scene Claudio does not emerge as the hardened sensualist Pompey and Lucio are. Indeed, Mistress Overdone points out that he "was worth five thousand of you all" (I.ii.57). When Lucio asks the arrested Claudio if his offense is lechery, his answer is, "Call it so" (I.ii.129), thus making clear the uncertainty in his own mind. Claudio's subsequent explanation suggests that his contract with Juliet was the type English Common Law regarded as a

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<sup>4</sup>Lever, p. lxxv.

Sponsalia de praesenti contract which, as J.W. Lever has shown,<sup>5</sup> amounted to full marriage, and, consequently, Claudio was entitled to Juliet's bed.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the dramatist carefully points out the mutual consent of both parties (I.ii.143). Rather than an act of lechery, Claudio implies that he has not exercised moderation, and has done only what it was perfectly natural for two lovers in the given circumstances to do. Shakespeare is setting Claudio's attitude against the hardened profligates, stressing, as he does so, the fact of Juliet's pregnancy. The fertility of their love is thus contrasted with the sterility of the others' lechery.

At the close of the scene the despairing Claudio asks Lucio to visit Isabella and inform her of his danger. It is a good opportunity for the dramatist to lay the foundation of a theme he is to develop in more detail later on: along with Helena and the women of the final romances, Isabella possesses the power to "move men" (I.ii.174). This power is an essential part of their purity and without a doubt it is of a piece with their virginity. Sometimes it is the capacity for bringing about union and reconciliation;

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. liii-liv.

<sup>6</sup> For a good discussion of marriage contracts and Measure For Measure see Davis P. Harding, "Elizabethan Betrothals and Measure For Measure," JEGP, XLIX (1950), 139-158.

and sometimes, as in the case of Marina or Helena, it is given magical or miraculous overtones. Like many of the saints, these women seem to have the power of converting others. Shakespeare is beginning to place stress on this power in Isabella. She is to visit Angelo and "assay him" (I.ii.171). Claudio has chosen an apt verb, for "assay" as well as suggesting "persuade," also suggests "tempt," and it is precisely Isabella's goodness which will tempt Angelo. Claudio continues,

For in her youth  
 There is a prone and speechless dialect  
 Such as move men; beside, she hath prosperous art  
 When she will play with reason and discourse,  
 And well she can persuade. (I.ii.172-176)

The Arden editor notes that there is an undercurrent of irony in the equivocal words "prone," "move," and "play," since they are "capable of suggesting sexual provocation."<sup>7</sup> It is possible, too, that Claudio, like Lucio in a later scene, may even be half-thinking of Isabella's latent sexuality; but the tenor of Claudio's remarks serves to underline Isabella's ability, as a young virgin, to exercise power, not necessarily sexual, over others.

In the third scene of the play, the dramatist reinforces and develops themes previously announced in the opening scene. The Duke's withdrawal from the world and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

acceptance of celibacy are now treated in more detail. The Duke believes (somewhat like Angelo's smug confidence in his ability to resist temptation), that he cannot be affected by the desires of "burning youth" (I.iii.6). His preference for the cloistered life appears in his remark,

I have ever lov'd the life remov'd,  
And held in idle price to haunt assemblies,  
Where youth, and cost, witless bravery keeps.  
(I.iii.8-10)

At the same time, the Duke sheds more light on Angelo's asceticism. The sterility of his life, merely hinted at in the opening scene, is now given more emphasis. Angelo, the Duke says, is a "man of stricture and firm abstinence" (I.iii.12); he is a puritan who

scarce confesses  
That his blood flows; or that his appetite  
Is more to bread than stone.  
(I.iii.51-53)

In All's Well That Ends Well Parolles argued that the person who practised celibacy tended to live within the confines of the self. He saw celibacy as a form of selfishness, therefore, and Shakespeare seems to be suggesting a similar idea in his treatment of Angelo and Vincentio. Angelo and Vincentio, like Prospero, have withdrawn from the world to study and meditate. But Prospero neglected his "worldly ends" (I.ii.89), and the growth of Antonio's ambition was the result of Prospero's negligence. In Pericles Cerimon spends much time in study and contemplation:

he believes that "virtue and cunning [are] endowments greater/Than nobleness and riches" (III.ii.28-29), and therefore his virtue, unlike Angelo's and the Duke's, reaches out to others. Cerimon has not kept it within the prison of the self:

Your honour has through Ephesus poured forth  
Your charity, and hundreds call themselves  
Your creatures, who by you have been restored.  
(Pericles, III.ii.43-45)

Both Angelo and Vincentio have been pursuing the sort of monastic life Erasmus rejected. Erasmus, as we have seen, consistently maintained that in itself monastic celibacy was not productive of a higher spiritual good. Duke Vincentio's own ascetic life has had negative and disastrous consequences in Vienna. This had been brought to our attention in the previous scene, and now Vincentio frankly admits it:

And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose,  
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart  
Goes all decorum. (I.iii.29-31)

The Duke's rejection of the world and the flesh is immediately followed, interestingly enough, by a scene which opens with Isabella's controversial remark:

I speak not as desiring more,  
But rather wishing a more strict restraint  
Upon the sisters stopt, the votarists of Saint Clare.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>In most editions of Measure For Measure "Sisterstood" (F) is emended to "Sisterhood". (F<sub>2</sub>).

Rather than desiring more privileges for the order of Saint Clare, Isabella actually wants a reduction of the existing ones. This rejection of the world and the flesh has generated much heated debate among scholars,<sup>9</sup> most of whom treat her very unsympathetically. We notice her acute awareness of the frailty of human beings (II.iv.124-129) and her contempt for the body (II.ii.88; II.iv.181-182). One should consider, however, that at this stage in her life Isabella is a very young woman fired by her recent commitment to permanent virginity. She has a tendency, moreover, to adopt an idealistic attitude toward life, and she is undoubtedly ignorant of the rigors of cloistered life. But Shakespeare uses part of the scene to set Isabella's idealism against the trenchant common sense of Lucio, the play's arch-realist. He condemns permanent virginity as something unnatural, at the same time paying a tribute to the uniqueness (in Vienna) of Isabella's virginity<sup>10</sup> when he remarks:

I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted,  
By your renouncement, an immortal spirit;  
And to be talked with in sincerity,  
As with a saint. (I.iv.34-37)

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<sup>9</sup>See, for example, C.K. Stead, ed., Measure For Measure: A Selection of Critical Essays (London, 1971), pp. 41, 47.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Theseus' contrast between celibacy and the fertility of marriage (A Midsummer Night's Dream, I.i.67-78).

Claudio and Juliet have embraced, he tells Isabella, and so

As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time  
That from the seedness the bare fallow brings  
To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb  
Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

(I.iv.41-44)

And Claudio, he had previously said, had done something for which he "should receive his punishment in thanks" (I.iv.28). Lucio, to be sure, is one of the city's profligates; but in associating Juliet's pregnancy with the fertility of teeming nature, he is stressing the naturalness and inevitability of procreation. He envisages Claudio, not as a licentious person, but as a gardener whose "full tilth and husbandry" has created life. It is an image Shakespeare will repeat in Antony and Cleopatra (II.vii.21-23). Lucio's speech invites comparison with Claudio's assessment of his situation in the second scene. Claudio spoke of man pursuing a "thirsty evil," like "rats that ravin down their proper bane" (I.ii.120-122). Commenting on Lucio's speech, Ernest Schanzer writes; with Claudio's remarks in mind, "the simile of feeding is used, but here it is shown to lead not to death but to life, not to self-destruction but to self-fulfillment."<sup>11</sup> The embrace of the lovers is clearly seen as natural as nature coming to "teeming foison," and sterility, by implication, is seen as unnatural.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ernest Schanzer, The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (London, 1963), p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Venus' condemnation of celibacy in Venus and Adonis, 751-755.

Shakespeare also uses the scene to develop further two important themes. Lucio's remarks about Angelo, which we may be tempted to regard as biased -- given the circumstances of his life -- nevertheless support the audience's previous image of Angelo. Lucio stresses Angelo's asceticism:

a man whose blood  
Is very snow-broth; one who never feels  
The wanton stings and motions of the sense;  
But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge  
With profits of the mind, study and fast.  
(I.iv.57-61)

And, of course, Lucio's opinion of Angelo lends further weight to his acceptance of the naturalness and potential creativeness of the sexual life. In an earlier scene Claudio had suggested that Isabella should go to Angelo and "assay" her power. Lucio, too, uses the same verb (I.iv.77), and his words of encouragement ought to be read with Claudio's appeal in mind. When she hesitates Lucio says,

Our doubts are traitors,  
And makes us lose the good we oft might win  
By fearing to attempt. Go to Lord Angelo,  
And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,  
Men give like gods; but when they weep and kneel,  
All their petitions are as freely theirs  
As they themselves would owe them. (I.iv.77-83)

It is possible to give this speech a sexual interpretation; its tenor, however, suggests a power that is not at all sexual but essentially spiritual. It is important to bear in mind that Lucio tends to treat the "sainted" Isabella



(I.iv.34) with uncharacteristic awe and respect. Isabella, of course, has not converted him; but neither has she "moved" him sexually. Her influence, indeed, is somewhat reminiscent of Imogen's overwhelming of Iachimo in Cymbeline, and the source of this response is clearly in the virginal purity of the woman.

At this stage in the play Shakespeare is ready to develop and enhance his audience's earlier image of Escalus, for in the opening scene of Act Two we are invited to compare Escalus' and Angelo's discussion of Claudio's case as well as their examination of Pompey and Froth. Once again Angelo's hardness and smugness are emphasized. Earlier in the play the dramatist had tenuously linked Escalus with spiritual fertility. This is now being expressed in his charity, mercy and patience. We ought to "be keen, and... cut a little," he tells Angelo, rather "Than fall, and bruise to death" (II.1.5-6). Moreover, he appeals to the Christian principle of examining one's conscience before condemning another: why might not Angelo have committed fornication if circumstances were conducive to it? Escalus' treatment of Pompey and Froth is firm, but noticeably humane. He goes so far as to advise both Froth and Pompey. We hear no more of Froth, and Pompey, surely, is a case of invincible recalcitrance. Angelo's conduct in the scene (especially his attitude toward Claudio) illustrates

the consequences of his asceticism. His response to Escalus' common sense appeal is the rather smug, "'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, / Another thing to fall" (II.i.17-18). Angelo's puritanism, his "profits of the mind, study and fast" (I.iv.61), have not enhanced his spiritual growth. Instead, they have produced a repulsive self-righteousness and an unwarranted confidence in his ability to resist temptation. His attitude toward the law is essentially punitive, for while Escalus is prepared to hear out the culprits with admirable patience, Angelo takes his leave, "Hoping you'll find good cause to whip them all" (II.i.136). Shakespeare will return to Angelo's philosophy of the Law in a later scene; meanwhile, he establishes a very subtle link between Angelo and Froth and Pompey. Angelo had been called "precise" (I.iii.50), and now Elbow refers to his prisoners as "precise villains" (II.i.54). This may be one of Elbow's "misplacings," but Pompey and Froth are being associated with the sterility of lust, and the sterility of Angelo's precisianism is becoming increasingly clear. In fact, Shakespeare brings the scene to an end on this very note: "Lord Angelo," the Justice says, "is severe" (II.i.278), and Shakespeare may very well have in mind "cruel" -- one meaning the sixteenth century gave to the word "severe." It is fairly obvious that this is the meaning Isabella has in mind when she remarks, "O

just but severe law!" (II.ii.42).

In the scene following, Shakespeare confronts Angelo with Isabella for the first time, and our insight into Angelo's severity is deepened. She begins the interview with Angelo calmly and almost methodically:

There is a vice that most I do abhor,  
And most desire should meet the blow of justice;  
For which I would not plead, but that I must;  
For which I must not plead, but that I am  
At war 'twixt will and will not. (II.ii.29-33)

Commenting on this speech, Stephen A. Reid remarks that "the very idea of sexuality is painful to Isabella because it associates itself too easily with her old incestuous wishes, and must therefore be denied."<sup>13</sup> While it is an interesting argument, it is essentially untenable since Isabella's only reference to incest is the result of hysteria, and is not a manifestation of a subconscious problem:

O, you beast!  
O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!  
Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?  
Is't not a kind of incest, to take life  
From thine own sister's shame?  
(III.i.135-139)

If Isabella does have a problem, it clearly resides in her intransigent attitude toward celibacy, and this is precisely

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<sup>13</sup>Stephen A. Reid, "A Psychoanalytic Reading of Troilus and Cressida and Measure For Measure," Psychoanalytic Review, 57 (1970), 279.

the focus of Shakespeare's interest. Shakespeare tends to link Isabella with images suggesting sainthood (in this scene, and her opening speech prepares the audience for this. At Isabella's suggestion that she will bribe him, Angelo is startled. "Not with fond sickles of the tested gold," she quickly answers,

Or stones, whose rate are either rich or poor  
As fancy values them: but with true prayers,  
That shall be up at heaven and enter there  
Ere sunrise: prayers from preserved souls,  
From fasting maids, whose minds are dedicate  
To nothing temporal. (II.ii.151-156)

The speech is an unequivocal statement of her belief in the power of a virgin's prayers, and it is paralleled by a speech of similar tenor in Cymbeline when Imogen is presented in terms of an interceding saint.<sup>14</sup> Isabella has the saint's total commitment to chastity. She has the saint's desire for self-denial, the saint's horror of unchastity and contempt of death as well. Certainly, her opening speech implies that she is ambivalent only because her brother's involved. This hardness, however, is matched by Angelo's cold-blooded severity. He cannot, he says, condemn the crime without condemning the perpetrator, and Isabella's appeal to mercy (an ironic foreshadowing, incidentally, of Angelo's partial redemption through Isabella's mercy) receives this reply: "It is the law, not I, condemn

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. the Countess' comment about Helena in All's Well, III.iv.26-28.

your brother" (II.11.80). Ostensibly, it is a very good argument, and for a moment or two Isabella seems convinced by it, for her next tactic is to ask Angelo for time to prepare Claudio for death (II.11.84-88). Angelo's argument, however, is a specious camouflage behind which he can hide his hardness, for the Duke, we recall, had given him the power to "enforce or qualify the laws/As to your soul seems good" (I.1.65-66). The mitigating circumstances of Claudio's case are obvious to everyone except Angelo. He is intransigent because his basic attitude toward the law is punitive. The law, he says, "hath not been dead, though it hath slept":

Those many had not dar'd to do that evil  
 If the first that did th'edict infringe  
 Had answer'd for his deed. Now 'tis awake,  
 Takes note of what is done, and like a prophet  
 Looks in a glass that shows what future evils,  
 Either new, or by remissness new conceiv'd,  
 And so in progress to be hatch'd and born,  
 Are now to have no successive degrees,  
 But ere they live, to end. (II.11.91-100)

The law is to be implemented as if it were a preventive measure.<sup>15</sup> Notice, also, that stress falls on the destructive, not the creative nature of the law. Moreover, the images of conception and birth he uses are associated with evil (Isabella, too, will cause his sense to "breed" the sterile fruit of lust), in deliberate contrast to the conception Claudio has brought about by violating the very

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Brutus' desire to kill Caesar "in the shell" (Julius Caesar, II.1.10-34):

law Angelo wishes to implement.

Stephen Reid claims that the "inaccessible woman, because she is 'safe,' and because she is the essential reminder of his past desires, arouses him,"<sup>16</sup> and there is some truth in this assessment. On the other hand, in the lives of some of the saints one notices a curious phenomenon: the saint's purity is the very stimulus which arouses evil in others. It is as if the purity of the saint challenges someone to destroy it.<sup>17</sup> Instead of enhancing his virtue, Isabella, Angelo discovers, has aroused his lust:

but it is I  
That, lying by the violet in the sun,  
Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,  
Corrupt with virtuous season. (II.ii.165-168)

The strumpet, with "all her double vigour, art and nature" (II.ii.184), could not once stir him; but the chaste Isabella is now doing it. Until this moment, he concludes, the behavior of men under the pressure of sexual drives was unintelligible to him. Angelo, thanks to Isabella, has taken the first step toward meaningful self-discovery.

Complete self-knowledge, however, is far away in the

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<sup>16</sup>Reid, "A Psychoanalytic Reading of Troilus and Cressida and Measure For Measure," 278.

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, the life of St. Columba: Omer Englebert, The Lives of the Saints, trans. Christopher Fremantle (New York, 1951), p. 496.

distance, and in his second conversation with Isabella, Angelo's hardness and negative attitude to the law persist. But Shakespeare postpones the second confrontation by inserting a short but important scene between the two interviews. The scene reinforces the sterility of Vienna's destructive law as it is being implemented by Angelo. By implication, the naturalness of Claudio and Juliet's sexual union is set against the hard celibacy of both Angelo and Isabella. This does not mean that Shakespeare approves of the lovers' sexual union, notwithstanding his sympathetic treatment of them. It is true that Juliet is regarded as the case of a gentlewoman "falling in the flaws of her own youth" (II.iii.11), and the honest and constant Provost describes Claudio as

a young man  
 More fit to do another such offense  
 Than die for this. (II.iii.13-15)

Claudio and Juliet cohabited because they were in love, and he, unlike Angelo, was faithful to his contract. But however impeccable his motive, Claudio's act must be seen as part of Vienna's sexual license, and, indeed, he does not deny that he is guilty of lechery:

Lucio. What's thy offence, Claudio?  
 Cla. What but to speak of would offend again.  
 Lucio. What, is't murder?  
 Cla. No.  
 Lucio. Lechery?  
 Cla. Call it so.  
 (I.ii.126-129)

Moreover, at the end of the play Claudio has to "restore" Juliet by marrying her (V.1.522).

Just before his second meeting with Isabella, Angelo tries to express the gnawing agony of his thoughts in soliloquy. It is an attempt, too, to understand the ambivalence of his responses. His attempts at prayer have been futile for, as he says, "Heaven hath my empty words, / Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue, / Anchors on Isabel" (II.iv.2-4).

The Arden editor mentions that there is "the suggestion of a sacrilegious communion" in "Heaven in my mouth, / As if I did but only chew his name" (II.iv.4-5).<sup>18</sup>

If Shakespeare did intend to give this hint to an audience, then the idea of a sacrilegious communion would tend to enhance the sterility with which he has surrounded Angelo. The sacrilegious drinking of Christ's blood, according to St. Paul, is the symbolic drinking of God's angry judgment upon the guilty one (1 Cor. 11:27,29). Angelo's pithy comment, "Blood, thou art blood" (II.iv.15), is partly his way of expressing the reality of his sexual awakening; it is also his recognition of the evil he has engendered.

This blood is not the fertile, life-giving blood of Christ. Angelo, the Duke remarked quite early in the play, has more "appetite" for stone than bread, and Vincentio may well

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<sup>18</sup>Lever, p. 54.



be making a covert reference to the Eucharist. Claudio and Juliet fell "by prompture of the blood" (II.iv.177), but in their case it was a fertile, life-giving act. Angelo, too, has conceived; but in his case it is a "strong and swelling evil" (II.iv.6).

Angelo's puritanism and what he calls his "gravity" are negative qualities which mask a potentiality for corruption, as he himself recognizes. The sterility of his life has manifested itself, we have noted, in his philosophy of the law, and Ernest Schanzer's assessment of Angelo is essentially correct: his function, he writes, is "to deal out death, to destroy is his dominant function in the play, above all, to destroy those who create life, such as Claudio and Juliet."<sup>19</sup> This second interview with Isabella reinforces all of these negative qualities in Angelo. The law, he fails to understand, must relate to the existential situation, and, moreover, it must be consistent. The fact that Angelo links fornication with murder is especially bizarre:

It were as good  
To pardon him that hath from nature stolen  
A man already made, as to remit  
Their saucy sweetness that do coin heaven's image  
In stamps that are forbid. (II.iv.42-46)

His association of the two sins is more than adequate

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<sup>19</sup>Schanzer, The Problem Plays, p. 95.

testimony of the sterility of his philosophy of the world and the flesh, and one of Shakespeare's purposes is to expose the stupidity of a law that prescribes capital punishment for fornication but, as Pompey puts it, of two usuries, the merrier is put down, "and the worser allowed by order of law" (III.ii.6-7). This is not to say that Shakespeare agrees with Pompey, for he represents the debasement of human sexuality. Pompey's assessment of Vienna's laws, however, does show that something is fundamentally wrong in a society that either rigorously enforces laws without regard to mercy or mitigating circumstances, or tolerates (as Vincentio did) unbridled licentiousness.

Having decided that Isabella's failure to comprehend his proposal is the result of her ignorance or clever coyness, Angelo comes directly to the point: either yield your body or let your brother die. Isabella's reply, passion bursting from her words, is immediate:

were I under the terms of death,  
Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,  
And strip myself to death as to a bed  
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield  
My body up to shame. (II.iv.100-104)

The speech reveals an unconscious fear of and unusual hostility toward the flesh. It also reveals the unbridled enthusiasm of the novice fired by an ideal. In the lives of the saints the indefatigable preoccupation with virginity and the urge to defend it even unto death are prominent.

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motifs.<sup>20</sup> This is precisely Isabella's attitude when she says, "More than our brother is our chastity" (II.1y.184),<sup>21</sup> and her hatred of the body is closely associated with her contempt of death. A.P. Rossiter feels, however, that Isabella's statement "need trouble no one. The line makes sense," he says, "if you see that Isabella is just as terrified as Claudio is....As he fears death, so she fears the unknown violence and violation of lust."<sup>22</sup> When Angelo flatly tells her, "Then must your brother die," she replies, "Better it were a brother died at once,/Than that a sister, by redeeming him,/Should die forever" (II.1y.104-108). If Isabella's response seems excessively harsh, it is so because it is being made by a woman whose commitment to celibacy and hatred of the flesh are, at this stage in her life, all-consuming impulses. Nor indeed would her yielding to Angelo really solve the problems Shakespeare raises in the play. At the same time, however, the fact that she believes a single act of fornication will bring about her damnation tends to reinforce the sterility of her own celibacy, which Shakespeare has shrewdly paralleled by Angelo's

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, the life of St. Agnes, in Englebert, The Lives of the Saints, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Ernest Schanzer (The Problem Plays, p. 98) points out that she has the "Saint's eagerness for self-sacrifice in the cause of her ideals."

<sup>22</sup> A.P. Rossiter, Angels with Horns, ed. Graham Storey (New York, 1961), p. 160.

equation of murder and fornication.

When Isabella threatens to expose Angelo, he turns upon her, repeating his proposal, but this time with brutal directness. It is a very important tirade for, ironically enough, the sterility of his asceticism is bearing fruit in the lust now in full control. Angelo's attempts to stifle the flesh have turned against him. The very passions which he has tried to suppress are now controlling his will. He speaks of his desire for Isabella as if it were a wild animal he can no longer control. Words such as "nicety" and "prolixious" (suggesting delaying tactics) point to the breakdown of rational behavior. Significantly, too, Angelo threatens to draw out Claudio's death "To ling'ring sufferance" (II.iv.165-166), a cruelty none of his counterparts in the sources is guilty of. Alone on the stage, a stunned Isabella repeats her determination to preserve her virginity, this time stressing her horror of the flesh by describing fornication as "abhorr'd pollution" (II.iv.182). Isabella's decision has an important connection with the sources of Measure For Measure. We know from the detailed source studies that have been done<sup>23</sup> that the play was influenced by three sources: Cinthio's Hecatommithi (1565), Cinthio's posthumous play Epitia (1583), and Whetstone's

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<sup>23</sup>See, for example, Mary Lascelles, Shakespeare's Measure For Measure (London, 1953), pp. 6-42.

History of Promos and Cassandra (1578). Shakespeare made three basic changes in the original story: Isabella becomes a novice; the Duke is disguised as a friar, and the betrothed is substituted for Isabella. The last change is crucial because in every version of the original story Isabella's counterpart yields to the blackmailer. More than that, her surrender is considered blameless. In his essay on the play, Ernest Schanzer sympathizes with those critics who feel that Cinthio's Epitia and Whetstone's Cassandra made the more admirable choice by yielding to her blackmailer. "The manner in which Shakespeare manipulates his material," he writes, "as well as the evidence of his other plays, suggest to me strongly that he, too, preferred Cassandra's choice."<sup>24</sup> He goes on to say:

I do not believe that, had it suited his dramatic conception, Shakespeare would have hesitated to let Isabel follow Cassandra's choice. But the whole conception for which I have argued, his desire to make us question Isabel's choice and to turn Measure For Measure into a problem play, demanded that she should persist in her refusal, and therefore a substitute had to be found if Angelo was fully to act out his villainy and yet a happy ending was to be contrived.<sup>25</sup>

If I understand Schanzer correctly, what he is saying is that Shakespeare allowed Isabella to persist in her

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<sup>24</sup>Schanzer, The Problem Plays, p. 105.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

refusal, and found a substitute for her simply in order to turn Measure For Measure into a problem play. This reading is further supported by his contention that "whereas Whetstone keeps his heroine divided and wavering but his audience single-minded and free from doubts, Shakespeare keeps his heroine single-minded and free from doubts but his audience divided and wavering." Measure For Measure, therefore, "is a problem-play, whereas Promos and Cassandra is not."<sup>26</sup> It seems unlikely that Shakespeare would change his source simply to create problems for audience and critics. W.W. Lawrence says that Shakespeare "radically modified the plot in making the heroine refuse to surrender her honor at the price of her brother's life, on the ground that her personal purity is of greater importance,"<sup>27</sup> and Schanzer, as we have noted, claims that the evidence of his other plays suggests that Shakespeare preferred Cassandra's choice. The evidence of the plays suggests the very opposite: Shakespeare is insistent upon the preservation of premarital virginity, and by substituting Mariana for Isabella, he has quite deliberately taken the step of preserving Isabella's premarital virginity. This does not mean that Shakespeare has accepted the heroine's desire for permanent virginity, which is to be eventually

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 108-109.

<sup>27</sup> W.W. Lawrence, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies (New York, 1931), p. 93.

rejected; instead, he has ensured the preservation of her virginity as a precondition for marriage.

Meanwhile the Duke visits the condemned Claudio in prison, and gives him a longish sermon on life and death. The Duke is at some pains to convince Claudio that he ought to resign himself to the inevitability of a death he himself will have to prevent sooner or later. The stress on the contempt of life and the acceptance of the reality of death is probably an attempt by the Duke to chasten Claudio, who has abused "liberty" and is guilty of immoderation (I.ii.117-122). To this extent his action is the inevitable result of Vienna's rampant licentiousness, but, as we have seen, Claudio's behaviour is not motivated by lust or selfishness. We may also regard Vincentio's speech, dominated as it is by joylessness and contempt for the body and the world, as the inevitable result of his own monastic ideals. Claudio's immediate response to the sermon is perhaps exactly what the Duke would have wished for: he accepts the arguments, and adopts a specifically Christian attitude toward death, paraphrasing Matthew 16:25 in his remark, "To sue to live, I find I seek to die, / And seeking death, find life" (III.i.43-44). But not too long after her arrival, Isabella notices the first signs of a wavering Claudio (III.i.69-73). It is a crucial moment for Isabella because she had been quite sure of him:



Yet hath he in him such a mind of honour,  
 That had he twenty heads to tender down  
 On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up  
 Before his sister should her body stoop  
 To such abhorr'd pollution. (II.iv.178-182)

The fact that he is beginning to waver elicits from her a response the vigor of which indicates that she is well on the road to that hysterical outburst that has upset so many critics:

O, I do fear thee, Claudio, and I quake  
 Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain,  
 And six or seven winters more respect  
 Than a perpetual honour. Dar'st thou die?  
 The sense of death is most in apprehension;  
 And the poor beetle that we tread upon  
 In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great  
 As when a giant dies. (III.1.73-79)

It is only when she questions his courage and perhaps his readiness to accept dishonor rather than face death, that he reaffirms his determination: "If I must die," he says, "I will encounter darkness as a bride/And hug it in mine arms" (III.1.82-84). Derek Traversi makes an interesting observation about this speech: "The resolution that expresses itself in the phrase 'I will encounter darkness as a bride,' is really a rhetorical effort to force himself to accept a fate which he regards as inevitable."<sup>28</sup>

Claudio's quick reply impresses Isabella, so she informs him of the precise proposal Angelo has made, and

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<sup>28</sup>Derek Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare (London, 1969), p. 80.

his response is just as immediate: "Thou shalt not do't" (III.1.103). To which she answers, "O, were it but my life, /I'd throw it down for your deliverance/As frankly as a pin" (III.1.104-106). It is the sort of response we expect from her, for the dramatist has prepared us for it by emphasizing Isabella's contempt for death and her abhorrence of fornication. At the same time, however, we note the hardness in her, a hardness Claudio unwittingly hints at when in his desperation he pleads,

If it were damnable, he being so wise,  
Why would he for the momentary trick  
Be perdurably fin'd? -- O Isabel!  
(III.1.112-114)

It is a subtle reminder of the inflexibility of the kind of celibacy that expects damnation from a single act (II.iv.106-108). But Claudio's acceptance of the Duke's arguments was only temporary, as his speech on death clearly demonstrates. A vibrant young man, in the full vigor of life, is about to be executed for what is essentially an act of love. He can no longer stifle his real feelings, and all of his panic emerges in a pathetic outcry:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
To bath in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;  
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world: or to be worse than worst

Of those that lawless and incertain thought  
 Imagine howling, -- 'tis too horrible.  
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
 That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
 Can lay on nature, is a paradise  
 To what we fear of death. (III.1.117-131)

But the speech is more than just a lament on the horrors of death; it is also rich in images suggesting sterility and decay: the vigor of the young, healthy body, for instance, will soon become a "kneaded clod," and Claudio's desire for life, even the most loathsome life, is stated very effectively indeed at the end of the speech. The tenor of the speech is significant, too, because the dramatist had previously associated Claudio with fertility, and the young man must reject death, just as Angelo, determined to implement his sterile vision of the law, must necessarily emerge as a symbol of death. And indeed the sterility suggested in the "delighted spirit" residing in "thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice" establishes a definite link with Angelo, "whose blood is very show-broth" (I.iv.57-58) and urine "congealed ice" (III.11.106-107).

When Claudio begs for his life, Isabella hysterically denounces him:

O, you beast!  
 O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!  
 Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?  
 Is't not a kind of incest, to take life  
 From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?

Heaven shield my mother play'd my father fair:  
 For such a warped slip of wilderness  
 Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance,  
 Die, perish! Might but my bending down  
 Reprive thee from thy fate, it should proceed.  
 I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death;  
 No word to save thee. (III.1.135-146)

And she even goes so far as to link Claudio's sin with the kind of licentiousness represented by Pompey and Mistress Overdone:

Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade;  
 Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd;  
 'Tis best that thou diest quickly.  
 (III.1.149-151)

J.W. Lever describes her outburst as "a half-coherent hysterical diatribe in which her brother is transfigured into a subhuman lecher impelled by the monstrous urges of the brothel."<sup>29</sup> But David L. Stevenson thinks that we have been prepared for Isabella's rejection of Claudio by her self-righteousness. "We are prepared for the anger of her denial," he writes, "by the temper of her previous rejection of Angelo's offer."<sup>30</sup> He feels that "an Isabella who surrendered to an Angelo would be as violently improbable as a Cressida who refused to surrender to her Troilus. In either case, the main balance of the play

<sup>29</sup>Lever, p. lxxx.

<sup>30</sup>David L. Stevenson, "Design and Structure in Measure For Measure," in A Selection of Critical Essays, ed. C.K. Stead (London, 1971), p. 229.

would be broken."<sup>31</sup> And Ernest Schanzer, who is not particularly sympathetic toward Isabella, is forced to see her denunciation as part of the whole. He, too, adopts a position similar to Stevenson's.<sup>32</sup> The "treasures" of her body which Angelo is asking Isabella to "lay down" (II.iv.96) are more important to her than life itself. There is, moreover, nothing particularly unusual about her insistence on the importance of her virginity, for this is something she shares with several of Shakespeare's women. This is worth emphasizing, because several critics tend to discuss Isabella's desire to preserve her virginity as if it were an oddity in the canon. What is unusual, of course, is the vehemence of her denunciation of her brother. Even so, while some of Shakespeare's heroines are spared Isabella's dilemma, they are, nevertheless, very belligerent when their virginity is threatened, and, as a matter of fact, adopt an attitude that is only slightly less intransigent than Isabella's. We have only to think of Marina in the brothel at Mytilene or Imogen accosted by Iachimo.

Angelo's and Isabella's outbursts in II.iv. and Isabella's denunciation of Claudio in the very next scene,

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>32</sup>Schanzer, The Problem Plays, p. 97.

show that they are both guilty of hardness of heart. Their denial of the flesh and the other forms of mortification they practise, have not made them sympathetic and compassionate human beings. Nevertheless, at no point in the play does Shakespeare suggest that Isabella ought to have yielded to Angelo's blackmail. Angelo's pride in his asceticism, however, is matched by Isabella's pride when she rejects him. The same pride, reinforced by her sense of family honour, is evident in her denunciation of Claudio. Both Angelo and Isabella are guilty of self-love. Robert Speaight puts it this way: Angelo and Isabella "lack self-knowledge; but their chief deficiency is that they are unloving; therefore, they are only arrayed in virtue - it cannot shine forth as spiritual power."<sup>33</sup>

The rejection of Claudio is interrupted by Vincentio (III.i.149ff.), who now emerges from the shadows and begins to take increasing control of the situation. It marks the first stage of a change that will eventually transform Isabella from the hardened celibate she appears to be in this scene to a woman for whom mercy and marriage are important. Vincentio, of course, has overheard Isabella's outburst: but instead of giving her a stern

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<sup>33</sup>Speaight, Christian Theatre, p. 78

reprimand, he speaks of the "truth of honour in her" (II.1.163), and reminds Claudio that there is no hope whatever for him. Indeed, the Duke is very sensitive about the preservation of Isabella's reputation (as he is, too, of Mariana's). This is quite important because Shakespeare repeats it at least four times in the scene: "Leave me a while with the maid," Vincentio asks the Provost, adding very quickly, "my mind promises with my habit no loss shall touch her by my company" (III.1.175-177). If she does what he suggests, she will save her brother and "do no stain to [her] own gracious person" (III.1.201); and "the cure of it not only saves your brother," he adds, "but keeps you from dishonour in doing it" (III.1.235). If the scheme works, Claudio will be saved and her "Honour untainted" (III.1.254). "How will you do to content this substitute, and to save your brother?" (III.1.186-187), the Duke asks her. Since he has overheard Isabella's tirade, the question seems superfluous; but perhaps the Duke is hoping for a change in Isabella. His hope, however, is defeated by her prompt answer: "I had rather my brother die by the law, than my son should be unlawfully born" (III.1.188-190). Vincentio, to be sure, would not have approved of an Isabella who yielded to Angelo (nor does Shakespeare, as we have noted in his treatment of the sources). Indeed, he speaks of Isabella's decision as "that gracious denial" (III.1.164). On the

other hand, her answer reveals the same sense of irrevocability we noticed in her equation of damnation and fornication. It is the sort of harshness Isabella will eventually have to temper. It is only when the Duke speaks of redeeming Claudio "from the angry law" (III.1.201); a law she herself wanted upheld (II.11.30,42), that the first signs of change appear in Isabella. The Duke's choice of adjective is crucial because it emphasizes what he obviously regards as the irrational nature of the law, its destructiveness as well as its sterility. Almost immediately Isabella becomes more flexible: "Let me hear you speak farther," she says; "I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit" (III.1.205-206). Of course Isabella is still resisting anything "foul" (as indeed Shakespeare would have her do), but the important thing is that she is prepared to at least listen to the Duke, consider his proposition, and later in the play (V.1.101) she actually lies. We did not notice this growing flexibility in her conversation with Claudio when his two attempts to interrupt her were stifled by an hysterical outburst (III.1.149-151).

Meanwhile, Vincentio gives Isabella necessary information about the Angelo-Mariana betrothal, and it is worth noting that Angelo, whose asceticism ought to have made him more charitable, did not relent but was "a marble to her



tears" (III.1.229). Moreover, just as he had done in the case of Helena, Shakespeare depicts Isabella as a sort of physician who is to heal Angelo's spiritual disease: "It is a rupture that you may easily heal," the Duke tells her, "and the cure of it not only saves your brother, but keeps you from dishonour in doing it" (III.1.235-237). Mariana's redemptive role in the play is also hinted at. Hal Gelb is puzzled by the Angelo-Mariana relationship. He feels that Mariana's love for Angelo is "never really explained."<sup>34</sup> Mariana's simple but persistent motivation ("They say best men are molded out of faults; / And, for the most, become much more the better For being a little bad") has helped her to thrive on a love that has saved her from despair, and Vincentio describes her love for Angelo as "violent and unruly" (III.1.243). This is interesting, for "violent and unruly" suggest emotional frustration, love denied natural fulfillment. "Unruly" may also connote *misrule*, so that Mariana's emotional state becomes analogous to the situation in Vienna. But, as in the case of Claudio, her *misrule* is not the unbridled lust corrupting society. Like Claudio's, her love is selfless, and like Christ's it is not based on the worth of the recipient. We notice, too, that at this point in his explanation the Duke may be subtly reprimanding Isabella by contrasting Mariana's

<sup>34</sup> Hal Gelb, "Duke Vincentio and the Illusion of Comedy or All's Not Well That Ends Well," *SQ*, XXII (1971), 27.

recalcitrant love with Isabella's equally intransigent  
celibacy.

The success of the substitution of Mariana for Isabella, the Duke makes very clear (III.1.262), is in her hands, and the fact that Isabella is so willing to bring this about -- "The image of it gives me content already, and I trust it will grow to a most prosperous perfection" (III.1.260-261) -- is further evidence of her growing flexibility and change. In her choice of words -- "grow," "prosperous" -- there are covert references to the future restoration of fertility. When the scene ends, she thanks the Duke "for this comfort" (III.1.270), and once again there is the suggestion of a change from her former hardness to the first signs of an internal peace. We may say, then, that Isabella seems to be progressing from a pre-occupation with her chastity to a reassessment of the nature of virtue. It is as if she had overheard Vincentio saying to Angelo,

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~~for if our virtues~~  
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not. (I.1.33-35),

and is now beginning to reconsider her position.

But before the Duke's plan is implemented, Shakespeare returns to Pompey and the licentious element in Vienna, inviting the audience to draw parallels between them and Angelo. The scene is full of the horror, the stink and

decay of lechery. Pompey and the others are constantly linked with animals: they "buy and sell men and women like beasts" (III.ii.2), Elbow says; the Duke calls Pompey a "rude beast" (III.ii.32), and Lucio speaks of him as if he were a dog (III.ii.82). Meanwhile, Mistress Overdone is receiving treatment for venereal disease (III.ii.55). The revulsion the Duke feels is perhaps a good summary of the moral disintegration taking place:

Fie, sirrah, a bawd, a wicked bawd;  
 The evil that thou caus'est to be done,  
 That is thy means to live. Do thou but think  
 What 'tis to cram a maw or clothe a back  
 From such a filthy vice. Say to thyself,  
 From their abominable and beastly touches  
 I drink, I eat, array myself, and live.  
 Canst' thou believe thy living is a life,  
 So stinkingly depending? (III.ii.18-26)

But the animal imagery is not confined to Mistress Overdone and her bawd; Angelo is linked with them: "They say this Angelo was not made by man and woman, after this downright way of creation" (III.ii.100-101), Lucio remarks. There is a rumour, Lucio adds, that "a sea-maid spawned him. Some [say] that he was begot between two stockfishes.

But it is certain that when he makes water, his urine is congealed ice..." (III.ii.104-107). Lucio, of course, is being facetious; but when he says of Angelo: "he is a motion ungenerative; that's infallible" (III.ii.108), and "this ungenitured agent will unpeople the province with continency" (III.ii.168), Lucio, notwithstanding his own attraction for promiscuity, is emphasizing in his

characteristically blunt manner the sterility of Angelo's celibacy, a sterility as repulsive as that of unbridled promiscuity.

Earlier on (I.iv.77-79) the dramatist had used Lucio to express the sterility that results from fear and cowardice. Now he is being used again to expose the failure of the law to relate to the existential situation. The failure of the law is embodied in Angelo, and it is commented upon in this scene by Lucio who, again with crude directness, remarks that you cannot execute a man "for filling a bottle with a tun-dish" (III.ii.166). Claudio, he adds, "is condemned for untrussing" (III.ii.173), and he is to die, moreover, "for the rebellion of a codbpiece" (III.ii.111). But while Lucio's sardonically sane remarks are exposing, by implication, the failure of Angelo's asceticism, Shakespeare very shrewdly returns to the question of the Duke's celibacy. As a sensualist, it is perhaps natural for Lucio to assume that all men, even the Duke, are devoted to the flesh: "Ere he would have . . . hanged a man for the getting a hundred bastards," he says of the Duke, "he would have paid for the nursing a thousand. He had some feeling of the sport; he knew the service; and that instructed him to mercy" (III.ii.113-116). The Duke is also associated with prostitutes when Lucio adds, "The Duke, I say to thee again, would eat

mutton on Fridays" (III.ii.175). Vincentio defends his celibacy with angry vigor, attributing Lucio's attack to malice (III.ii.144), envy and "Back-wounding calumny" which strikes "the whitest virtue" (III.ii.180-181). Lucio's attack, however, seems to have created some misgiving in the Duke's mind, for Lucio has hardly departed when he asks Escalus, "I pray you, sir, of what disposition was the Duke?" (III.ii.224-225). The Duke's question underlines his concern with his public image. In the play Shakespeare emphasizes the ruler's obligation to present himself as a model to his people. Vincentio has singularly failed as an object of imitation. Escalus' answer, "one that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself...a gentleman of all temperance" (III.ii.234-238), may have confirmed the sort of complacency we noticed in his earlier meeting with Friar Thomas. At the same time, the questions raised by Lucio may have created in Vincentio's mind serious doubts about the value of his own celibacy.

Isabella, meanwhile, has made final arrangements with Angelo, and in the next scene she and the Duke prepare Mariana for the midnight encounter with Angelo. This is to take place at his garden-house. In Whetstone's version of the story the King does nothing to save Andrugio (Claudio) or Promos (Angelo). Nor is the Mariana episode

in the play. This significant change in the source gives Shakespeare the means of saving and redeeming the fallen men. For Shakespeare (The Taming of the Shrew, I.1.3-4 comes to mind) a garden is often suggestive of a region of fertility, so that when he deliberately encloses Angelo's garden with a wall of brick he invites parallels with the wall of egocentricity Angelo has built around himself. Moreover, it suggests a parallel with Angelo's ascetic isolation. But Mariana is also isolated, for her grange is moated. Her isolation, however, is not the same as Angelo's; indeed, it may be a covert identification of Mariana with the Virgin Mary in that Mariana's enclosed grange can be set alongside the traditional emblem of the Virgin -- the "garden enclosed" of Canticle of Canticles (4:12).<sup>35</sup> Angelo's garden "circummur'd with brick" (IV.1.28) is set against Mariana's grange which, though isolated, evokes images of potential abundance and fertility. And it is not at all surprising that Shakespeare should associate her with a grange because the fertility of nature is paralleled with the creative, fertile, unselfish and (soon to become) redemptive love of Mariana. Like Mary, whose active participation in the salvation of the individual soul begins at the Annunciation, Mariana

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<sup>35</sup>See also Stanley Stewart, The Enclosed Garden (Madison, 1966), pp. 37-38.

sets Angelo on the road to redemption by piercing the hard, selfish wall he has built around himself, and consummating their union. If the Arden editor is correct, "the heavy middle of the night" (IV.1.35) when Mariana sleeps with Angelo carries suggestions of pregnancy, figurative or actual.<sup>36</sup> But Shakespeare uses an important image to foreshadow the fertility of Mariana's redemption of Angelo: at the very end of the scene the Duke remarks, "Our Corn's to reap, for yet our tithe's to sow" (IV.1.76). Through this imagery the dramatist links spiritual and physical fertility, thereby suggesting the resolution of the conflict between celibacy and licentiousness, spirit and flesh.

The first consequence of Mariana and Angelo's sexual union, however, is not a rebirth in Angelo, for he believes he has deflowered Isabella. Instead, the "deed unshapes" him, and Shakespeare communicates Angelo's growing torment in images suggesting sterility. Throughout the play the dramatist has been connecting sterility with the uncontrolled expression of passion. That sterility is now being underlined again in Angelo's soliloquy. The deed makes him "unpregnant and dull to all proceedings" (IV.iv.18-19), and both sterility and the destructiveness constantly associated with Angelo are suggested in his

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<sup>36</sup>Lever, p. 98.

reference to a "deflower'd maid" (IV.iv.19). But the importance of the soliloquy is in its ambivalence. Isabella, he says, cannot discredit him by revealing his blackmail because his

authority bears so credent bulk  
That no particular scandal once can touch,  
But it confounds the breather. (IV.iv.24-26)

He is still preoccupied with his own importance. We are reminded of his remark,

'Tis one thing to be tempted Escalus,  
Another thing to fall, (II.i.17-18)

and his vision of himself as a saint being tempted by another saint (II.ii.180-181). On the other hand, not only is his sense of guilt very apparent (IV.iv.19,21); the soliloquy also reveals signs of an incipient repentance in Angelo. The time would come, Angelo feels, when Claudio would have taken revenge for "so receiving a dishonour'd life/With ransom of such shame" (IV.iv.29-30); nevertheless, "Would yet he had lived" (IV.iv.30), Angelo says, adding, "when once our grace we have forgot,/Nothing

goes right" (IV.iv.31-32). Angelo's loss of "grace" is the loss of rational control of his passions. More than that, it is the loss of divine grace without which there is no redemption for him. The fact that he is admitting this to himself is one more sign of his growing self-knowledge. It also means that he is capable of repenting.

That redemption is effected in the final scene which



begins with the Duke disarming Angelo, and thus giving him a false sense of security:

We have made enquiry of you, and we hear  
Such goodness of your justice that our soul  
Cannot but yield you forth to public thanks,  
Forerunning more requital. (V.1.5-8)

But even while he is doing this, his irony marks a return to his much earlier, tacit condemnation of Angelo's way of life:

O, but your desert speaks loud, and I should wrong it  
To lock it in the wards of covert bosom,  
When it deserves with characters of brass  
A fortified residence 'gainst the tooth of time  
And rasure of oblivion. (V.1.10-14)

The comment contains covert references to Angelo's hardness of heart as well as the physical isolation of his brick-enclosed garden, which, we have suggested, symbolizes the isolation of his asceticism. When Isabella emerges from the crowd and demands justice for Angelo's crime, she is interrupted by Duke Vincentio:

It imports no reason  
That with such vehemency he should pursue  
Faults proper to himself. If he had so offended,  
~~He would have weigh'd thy brother by himself,~~  
And not have cut him off. (V.1.111-115)

By persecuting the sins of the flesh so vigorously Angelo was protecting himself from the very passions whose potency he recognized in himself and which he tried, unsuccessfully of course, to stifle. Persecuting these sins had given him a false sense of security, and it may well be that the Duke's pithy remark is meant to give Angelo much

food for thought, at the same time helping to deepen his self-knowledge. And Isabella herself is perhaps unconsciously pointing to the eventual understanding of the self when she implies a link between the operation of Providence and the resolution which is marked by redemption, forgiveness and self-discovery:

O you blessed ministers above,  
Keep me in patience, and with ripened time  
Unfold the evil which is here wrapped up  
In countenance. (V.1.118-121)

Angelo's redemption by Mariana in his "garden-house," adumbrated in IV.1., is now implied in Mariana's formal announcement of their sexual consummation. The fertility of her love for Angelo and the Duke's earlier harvest image (IV.1.76) are drawn together, as it were, into the sexual act which cements and fulfills their interrupted union. Shortly after Mariana's revelation, Angelo's guilt emerges with complete clarity, and he makes a public confession:

O my dread lord,  
I should be guiltier than my guiltiness  
To think I can be undiscernible,  
When I perceive your Grace, like power divine,  
Hath looked upon my passes. Then, good prince,  
No longer session hold upon my shame,  
But let my trial be mine own confession.  
Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death  
Is all the grace I beg. (V.1.364-372)

A few minutes later he adds,

I am sorry that such sorrow I procure,  
And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart

That I crave death more willingly than mercy;  
 'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.  
 (V.1.472-475)

Angelo, to his credit, has kept his word:

When I that censure him do so offend,  
 Let mine own judgement pattern out my death,  
 And nothing come in partial. (II.1.29-31)

Angelo's self-debasement, therefore, should not be regarded as a ploy designed to bring him forgiveness now that he knows he has been found out; rather, this new-found humility and desire for death are utterly sincere. He is convinced that he has deflowered Isabel and executed Claudio, and the urgency of his plea for death suggests that he regards it as an appropriate expiation for his crime. It is, moreover, the culmination of the growth of repentance whose seed we detected in an earlier soliloquy. But the Duke's chastening of Angelo is not complete. Just as Angelo had equated fornication and murder, so too does the Duke equate, ironically enough, murder and the violation of "sacred chastity" (V.1.402-403). The Duke's sentencing of Angelo "to the very block/where Claudio stoop'd to death" (V.1.412-413), which he has no intention of carrying out, is meant to consolidate Angelo's repentance and eventual restoration to grace by impressing upon him the gravity of his actions. At the same time, in order to protect her honor and reputation, he makes sure that Mariana is canonically married before executing the sentence upon Angelo (V.1.417-420).

When Mariana pleads for her husband's life, she asks Isabella to join her. It should be emphasized at this point that both Mariana and Isabella are indispensable to Angelo's redemption. The Duke's response to Mariana's plea is important:

Against all sense you do importune her.  
Should she kneel down in mercy of this fact,  
Her brother's ghost his paved bed would break,  
And ~~take~~ her hence in horror. (V.1.431-434)

But Isabella does kneel down and plead Angelo's case in spite of the fact that as far as she knows he has killed her brother. This is indeed a remarkable change, and Isabella is no longer "the neurotic virgin" Wylie Sypher thinks she is.<sup>37</sup> Rossiter criticizes Isabella's forgiveness of Angelo because he feels that her plea for him "comes too suddenly, too like a Beaumont and Fletcher switch-over-without thought."<sup>38</sup> Shakespeare's treatment of Cinthio's Epitia will shed some light on this question. In that play Epitia refuses to forgive Juriste, even though the villain's sister pleads with her to do so.

"The clemency which I shall proffer him," she says, "Will be to lift his head within my hands."<sup>39</sup> Epitia forgives

<sup>37</sup>"Shakespeare as Casuist: Measure For Measure," in Essays in Shakespearean Criticism, ed. James L. Calderwood and Harold E. Toliver (Englewood Cliffs, 1970), p. 325.

<sup>38</sup>Rossiter, Angel With Horns, p. 162. Rossiter's italics.

<sup>39</sup>Bullough, p. 440.

Juriste only after the Captain reveals that he has managed to save her brother's life. Epitia says:

I pray that now the cruel cause is moved  
For which he was condemned, he may remain  
In life by your great clemency. I pardon  
Him all offence....<sup>40</sup>

Isabella's forgiveness of Angelo is unconditional. When we first met Isabella her commitment to permanent virginity seemed irrevocable and profound, so profound that, had it not been for Lucio's encouragement, she would have given up the fight for Claudio's life, so repellent does she find illicit sexual activity. Now she is pleading for mercy, understanding, tolerance and forgiveness -- all of which she lacked before:

Most bounteous sir:

Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd  
As if my brother liv'd. I partly think  
A due sincerity govern'd his deeds  
Till he did look on me. Since it is so,  
Let him not die. My brother had but justice,  
In that he did the thing for which he died:  
For Angelo,  
His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,  
~~And must be buried but as an intent~~  
That perish'd by the way. Thoughts are no subjects;  
Intent, but merely thoughts. (V.1.440-452)

This change in Isabella is not altogether sudden, and Dr. Johnson's opinion that "women think ill of nothing that raises the credit of their beauty, and are ready, however virtuous, to pardon any act they think incited by their

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 441

charms,"<sup>41</sup> is a misinterpretation of Isabella's motive. We have been noticing subtle signs of change in Isabella long before this. Bertrand Evans points out that both Angelo and Isabella's veins are filled with snow-broth at first; but when "Angelo's ice gives way in the heat of lust and Isabella's in the heat of anger," this is a step in the right direction: "the involuntary surrender of this 'saintliness' to a frailty of humanity is thus, in a sense, a step forward for both Angelo and Isabella."<sup>42</sup> And Harold S. Wilson believes that she has learned the Christian virtue of charity: Isabella's "newly awakened charity can find an excuse for Angelo where in fact there is none."<sup>43</sup>

Isabella's plea for Angelo reveals remarkable control of thought in a woman often close to the edge of hysteria. She has lost her former desire for revenge (IV.iii.119ff.), and her hardness is gone. Nor is this all: she is no longer thinking and reacting emotionally. Isabella can now reason with calmness, her remarks governed by the very sense of mercy she so brutally denied Claudio in III.i. Isabella is losing what Rolf Soellner accuses her of:

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<sup>41</sup>Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. W. Raleigh (London, 1908), p. 80.

<sup>42</sup>Evans, Shakespeare's Comedies, p. 196.

<sup>43</sup>Harold S. Wilson, "Action and Symbol in Measure For Measure and The Tempest," SQ, IV (1953), 378.

"absolutism of standards."<sup>44</sup> Isabella, of course, had always been a virtuous woman; but her virtue hardened into intransigence and it resembled Angelo's in its selfishness. Like Angelo's, it was also the kind of virtue that withdrew from the world. Her willingness to marry Vincentio is a rejection of her former misdirected virtue and an acceptance of the world and the flesh. Isabella's movement from the cloister to marriage implies a rejection of the monastic ideals accepted by the early Church and the Middle Ages. As the Duke's partner in government the torch of her virtue will be lit for others:

Rossiter believes that "there is no need for either Duke or Cloistress to marry to end the play,"<sup>45</sup> and Norman Nathan regards the marriage of Vincentio and Isabella as mere flattery to James I.<sup>46</sup> The Duke's offer of marriage to Isabella, J.W. Lever claims, "is a formal decision rather than a change of heart," and he adds, Vincentio "never stoops to inquire into himself." Also, the Duke "undergoes no inner development of character and achieves no added self-knowledge."<sup>47</sup> But the Duke, like Isabella, does in fact change considerably. Like Isabella he is

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<sup>44</sup> Soellner, Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge, p. 231.

<sup>45</sup> Rossiter, Angel With Horns, p. 162.

<sup>46</sup> Norman Nathan, "The Marriage of Duke Vincentio and Isabella," SQ, VI (1956), 43-45.

<sup>47</sup> Lever, p. xcv.

deeply and sincerely committed to moral virtue, but again like her, his virtue has not been properly exercised. It has been misdirected: it manifested itself in withdrawal from the world and the flesh. Vincentio's abdication from his duties as a ruler has had, as we have noted, disastrous consequences. Like Prospero, who neglected his "worldly ends" (I.ii.89), and had to learn his lesson the hard way, the Duke has had to learn from the mistakes of the past. Just before Lucio pulls off his disguise, Vincentio says with disguised self-recrimination:

My business in this state  
 Made me a looker-on here in Vienna,  
 Where I have seen corruption boil and bubble  
 Till it o'errun the stew: laws for all faults,  
 But faults so countenanc'd that the strong statutes  
 Stand like the forfeits in a barber's shop,  
 As much in mock as mark. (V.i.314-320)

Vincentio's disguise has been an excellent help in his experiment. It has helped him to assess the virtue of his people: it has made him intimately familiar with the characters of Claudio, Isabella, Mariana (he already knew about Angelo's callous treatment of Mariana). The disguise, however, has forced him to assess the value of his own virtue. We know that the disguise is connected with his plan for restoring Vienna. We may wish to compare this with Leonarchus' motives for disguising himself in Barnaby Riche's The Adventures of Brusanus (1592). Leonarchus disguises himself as a merchant and travels about his kingdom "to see the demeanures of [his] subjects"



so that he might "reforme a common mischiefe." The disguise has also helped him "to learne the follies of...the Court," and, he confesses: "I have bettered my experience."<sup>48</sup>

If Vienna is to be restored there must be, ironically enough, a dramatic change in its ruler. Riche tells us that Leonarchus (like Vincentio) was "a prince renowned for his vertue." He was also "fortunate for his peacable government." He seems to have been a competent ruler. He was "honored for his liberalitie," and he administered "justice with such sinceritie, yet tempering the extremitie of the lawe with such limmite, as he gained the good wil of strangers in hearing his vertue and wonne the heartes of his subjectes in feeling his bountie." Leonarchus believed that that man is "unworthy to beare the name of a soveraigne which knew not...both to cherishe and chastise his subjectes."<sup>49</sup> As Duke, Vincentio was also a "looker-on." He "let slip" the needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades" (I.iii.20-21); and it was he who gave "the people scope" (I.iii.35). In Riche's story several reasons are given to explain Leonarchus' sudden absence from the Court. One of these may have given Shakespeare an important hint: some of the people think that he may have "secretly vowed" himself "to some monastery or other

<sup>48</sup> Bullough, p. 530.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 525.

religious house."<sup>50</sup> The dramatist, following Riche, could have disguised Vincentio as a merchant. When he changed his source and disguised Vincentio as a friar, Shakespeare was carefully reinforcing the Duke's tendency to withdraw from the world, and the removal of the friar's habit is a symbolic rejection of that withdrawal from the sober realities of the world. The Duke has come to understand that as a ruler (and indeed as a private citizen) he cannot be simply a "looker-on." He has discovered that to exercise virtue is to participate fully in the world, that fertility resides in this participation. He has been forced to take the very advice he gave to Angelo:

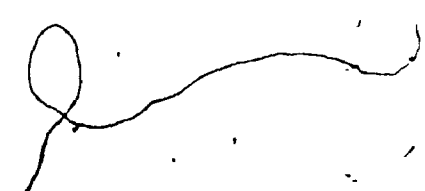
for if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not. (I.1.33-35)

But the Duke has undergone other important changes: he seems to have lost his moral complacency. He now understands that "the dribbling dart of love" can pierce "a complete bosom" (I.111.2-3), simply because it is not really complete or perfect. He too is subject to "the aims and ends/Of burning youth" (I.111.5-6), and his decision to marry Isabella is a rejection not only of the "life remov'd" (I.111.9), but of the celibacy he once espoused.

In radically changing his sources Shakespeare, we

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 527.



recall, secured Isabella's virginity as a precondition for marriage. This precondition Shakespeare will stress again in The Tempest, and it recalls Erasmus' colloquy The Young Man and the Harlot, in which the need for young people to safeguard their premarital virginity and chastity is stressed.<sup>51</sup> Erasmus maintained that true spirituality can be achieved in the vocation of a pious layman just as surely as in a cloister. As The Girl with no Interest in Marriage tries to show, celibacy and virginity are praiseworthy if motivated by spiritual reasons; but they are not preferable to marriage. Isabella's hard contempt for the world is to be replaced by the vocation of matrimony. As the play draws to an end, Lucio, who has become the symbol of the licentious element in Vienna, is made to marry the woman he wronged. With Angelo's marriage a fait accompli, Shakespeare in Measure For Measure unequivocally rejects both extremes: total withdrawal from the world and the flesh, and total, undisciplined immersion in the world and the flesh. Rampant sexuality leads to disorder and chaos not only within the body politic, but within man himself. The discipline of prenuptial virginity is a safeguard of order in man and society.

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<sup>51</sup>The Colloquies of Erasmus, p. 629.

CHAPTER FIVE: VIRGINITY, MARRIAGE AND THE FINAL  
ROMANCES

In the final romances Shakespeare explores in detail the progress from female virginity and its connection with fertility to holy marriage, a progress through which the renewal or regenerative process works. The romance has always tended to depict an idealized world. That world, as Northrop Frye has shown, is often set against an evil parody of it.<sup>1</sup> Heroism and purity seem to be the most idealized of the virtues, and therefore Shakespeare must have found the romance genre especially conducive to his treatment of chastity and virginity.. Indeed Pericles, perhaps the first of the romances, announces a theme that is to remain prominent throughout the succeeding plays: the mystique of female virginity. In the opening scene of the play Antiochus' daughter is presented as the embodiment of virgin purity, fit for "the embracements even of Jove himself" (I.1.8). Her beauty and seeming purity overwhelm Pericles:

You gods that made me man, and sway in love;  
That have enflamed desire in my breast  
To taste the fruit of yon celestial tree  
Or die in th'adventure, be my helps,  
As I am son and servant to your will,  
To compass such a boundless happiness!  
(I.1.20-25)

But when he interprets the riddle he is stunned by the

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<sup>1</sup>Northrop Frye, A Natural Perspective (New York, 1965), p. 110.

distance between the ideal of virginity and the fall from that ideal:

You are a fair viol, and your sense the strings;  
 Who, fingered to make man his lawful music,  
 Would draw heaven down, and all the gods to hearken;  
 But being played upon before your time,  
 Hell only danceth at so harsh a chime.  
 (I.1.82-86)

In his study of the romance tradition, E.C. Pettet points out that a distinguishing characteristic of the genre is its concern with evil, an "evil that is, within limits, destructive."<sup>2</sup> The heroines of Shakespeare's romances are placed in situations that threaten the integrity of their chastity. In some cases, their lives are threatened. This fact leads Northrop Frye to the belief that by putting his heroines in an exposed position where their chastity is threatened, Shakespeare makes the heroine of his later comedies and the romances an Andromeda figure.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, the brothel scene in Pericles can be regarded as the distillation of this motif. But no matter how severe the attack is, the heroine's chastity is always triumphant. This is so because of the unique atmosphere surrounding the heroine's chastity. That atmosphere is part of the general unnaturalness of event and character that characterizes the romance. The atmosphere is such that a miracle "is

<sup>2</sup>E.C. Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition (London, 1949), p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Frye, A Natural Perspective, p. 90.

constantly possible and finally occurs."<sup>4</sup> Again, this atmosphere is created for the first time in Pericles. The romance, Frye tells us, "peoples the world with fantastic, normally invisible personalities or powers; angels, demons, fairies, ghosts, enchanted animals...."<sup>5</sup> When the Shakespearean romance does not have the supernatural creatures we meet in The Tempest, it has heroines (Marina notably) whose power seems superhuman. The heroine's chastity triumphs partly because Shakespeare attributes miraculous qualities to it. Once again Pericles announces this theme. So powerful is the heroine that "she would make a puritan of the Devil, if he should cheapen a kiss of her" (IV.vi. 9-10).

Pettet observes that "early romance sets a high price on chastity and often makes a virtue of abstinence."<sup>6</sup> Shakespeare, as we have been noticing, also sets a high price on chastity, but he does not make a virtue of abstinence. He prefers to follow Erasmus: mere abstinence (witness Angelo in Measure For Measure) is worth nothing. Abstinence is worthwhile only to the extent that it is a disciplined preparation for the fertility of married love.

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<sup>4</sup>Hunter, Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness, p. 137.

<sup>5</sup>Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), p. 64.

<sup>6</sup>Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition, p. 16.

exquisite perfection could not be found in any mortal creature."<sup>16</sup> Perdita impresses Camillo so profoundly that he thinks "she seems a mistress/To most that teach" (IV.iv.586-587), and "were I of your flock," he tells her, I would "only live by gazing" (IV.iv.108-109). When Fawnia arrives at Pandosto's court the king is amazed at the singular perfection of Fawnia: he stands "half astonished, viewing her beauty."<sup>17</sup> Polixenes is equally impressed by Perdita:

This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever  
 Ran on the greensward; nothing she does or seems  
 But smacks of something greater than herself,  
 Too noble for this place. (IV.iv.156-159)

Until the final act of the play, Shakespeare had treated Hermione's and Perdita's perfections independently of each other. Now, even before the statue-scene, he unites mother and daughter in climactic images emphasizing their perfection of beauty and soul. Compared with the eyes of other women, Hermione's are "stars," and theirs "dead coals" (V.i.68-69); if Leontes were to extract something good from all women—so as to make a perfect woman, "she you killed," Paulina remarks, "would be unparalleled" (V.i.15-16); Perdita, says a servant, is the "fairest I have yet beheld" (V.i.87); she is "the most peerless piece of

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

Early in the romances Shakespeare clearly establishes the physical and moral beauty of the heroine. Having done so, he can then proceed to show the heroine's singular qualities manifesting themselves in a variety of ways, not the least of which is the heroine's ability to alter the character of others.

The heroines of the final plays are creatures of moral and physical perfection, and time and again Shakespeare emphasizes this point. He treats them as if they were the perfection and embodiment of all the virtues. Nevertheless, they are human and therefore subject to temptation. It is as if Shakespeare has transformed them "into virtually sacred figures who yet remain persons."<sup>10</sup> Or, as Theodore Spencer puts it, the heroines are symbols of humanity at its best.<sup>11</sup> At the lists organized by King Simonides, his daughter Thaisa

Sits here like Beauty's child, whom Nature gat  
For men to see and seeing wonder at.  
(II.1.6-7)

Marina, Thaisa's daughter, becomes "both the heart and place of general wonder" (IV. Chorus, 10-11). She is

<sup>10</sup>C.L. Barber, "Thou That Beget's Him That Did Thee Beget: Transformation in Pericles and The Winter's Tale," ShS, 22 (1969), 59.

<sup>11</sup>Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York, 1958), p. 197.



"absolute Marina" (IV. Chorus, 31), a "paragon" (IV.1.36), a "princess to equal any single crown o' the earth/ I' the justice of compare!" (IV.iii.7-9), a "piece of virtue" (IV.vi.118), and "Modest as Justice" (V.1.122). Indeed, Marina "seem'st a palace/For the crowned truth to dwell in" (V.1.122-123).

Imogen is also a paragon. Posthumus describes her as "the gift of the gods" (Cymbeline, I.iv.90), and his comment sums up Shakespeare's attitude toward her. The dramatist has paid close attention to his sources. In the Ninth Tale, Second Day, of Boccaccio's Decameron, Bernabo (Posthumus' counterpart), who has just spoken of his wife as if she were the paragon of women, is asked by Ambrogiuolo if the emperor has distinguished him of all men by giving him such a wife. Bernabo praises Zinevra (Imogen) in lavish detail. She possessed "all the virtues which a woman or even, to a great extent, a knight or a young man should possess, so that perhaps in all Italy there was not another like her." One could not find a more chaste or modest woman anywhere.<sup>12</sup> As the play develops, Shakespeare invests Imogen with most of Zinevra's gifts, especially chastity and fidelity to her husband, and he makes of her an emblem of all the

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<sup>12</sup>Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, trans. Richard Aldington (New York, 1930), pp. 151-152.

virtues. Even more pertinently, the dramatist locates Imogen's singular qualities in her chastity, as, we will later see, he does in the case of Marina. The old lord Belarius is awed by her:

By Jupiter, an angel; or, if not,  
An earthly paragon. Behold diviness  
No elder than a boy. (III.vi.43-45)

And even an idiot such as Cloten appreciates her singular qualities:

I love and hate her, for she's fair and royal,  
And that she hath all courtly parts more exquisite  
Than lady, ladies, woman. From every one  
The best she hath, and she, of all compounded,  
Outsells them all. (III.v.70-74)

Shakespeare ends the first act of The Winter's Tale with Polixenes speaking of Hermione as if she were the emblem of perfection (I.ii.452-454). This image of Hermione persists throughout the play. Antigonus depicts her as the embodiment of chastity (II.i.137-139). "No court in Europe is too good" for Hermione (II.ii.3), says Paulina, who goes on to speak of her as if she were an emblem of the virtues of honesty and honour. Paulina tells Leontes:

If one by one you wedded all the world,  
Or from the all that are took something good  
To make a perfect woman, she you killed  
Would be unparalleled. (V.i.13-18)

Time as chorus prepares the audience for the emergence of Perdita in the sheep-shearing scene as an emblem of perfection: she is "now grown in grace/Equal with wond'ring" (IV.i.24-25). And Camillo, just before he and Polixenes

prepare to visit the festival incognito, describes Perdita as "a daughter of most rare note" (IV.ii.45).

Throughout the sheep-shearing scene Shakespeare reinforces this image of Perdita. In fact it is one of the scene's dominant motifs. She is "goddess like" (IV.iv.10), and, Florizel tells her, none of the gods ever transformed himself "for a piece of beauty rarer" than she (IV.iv.32). Again, the dramatist is following his source very carefully. From the moment the shepherd in Greene's Pandosto finds Fawnia (Perdita) and thinks that it is "some little god,"<sup>13</sup> this image is continually repeated. "Whoso saw her," Greene writes, "would have thought she had been some heavenly nymph and not a mortal creature...."<sup>14</sup> Fawnia "increased with exquisite perfection both of body and mind" and the people are "amazed at her beauty and wit; yea, she won such favour and commendations in every man's eye, as her beauty was not only praised in the country, but also spoken of in the court; yet such was her submiss modesty, that although her praise daily increased, her mind was no whit puffed up with pride...."<sup>15</sup> Dorastus (Florizel) thinks that he has seen Diana, "for he thought such

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<sup>13</sup>Robert Greene, Pandosto, ed. P.G. Thomas (London, 1957), p. 33.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-38.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

earth.../That e'er the sun shoné bright on" (V.1.93-94),  
and she is the "rarest of all women" (V.1.112).

The supernatural beauty of the heroines, introduced for the first time in Pericles, culminates in Ferdinand's rapturous comments about Miranda:

Admir'd Miranda!  
Indeed the top of admiration! worth  
What's dearest to the world! Full many a lady  
I have ey'd with best regard, and many a time  
Th' harmony of their tongues hath into bondage  
Brought my too diligent ears for several virtues  
Have I lik'd several women; never any  
With so full soul, but some defect in her  
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she ow'd,  
And put it to the foil: but you, O you,  
So perfect and so peerless, are created  
Of every creature's best!

(The Tempest, III.1.37-48)

Sometimes, too, the beauty and virtue of the heroines are associated with the miraculous and the divine. In Cymbeline Arviragus describes Imogen as "so divine a temple" (IV.11.55) and the Second Lord describes her as "divine Imogen" (II.1.57). Her power is clearly beyond Arviragus' comprehension:

I know not why  
I love this youth, and I have heard you say  
Love's reason's without reason. The bier at door,  
And a demand who is't shall die, I'd say  
"My father, not this youth." (IV.11.20-24)

To which Belarius responds, depicting this power as if it were a miracle: "Yet who this should be/Doth miracle itself, loved before me" (IV.11.28-29). And in The Winter's Tale Perdita presides over the sheep-shearing as the goddess

Flora. In fact she is the Queen of all the gods (IV.iv. 2-5). Just as Spenser's Squire had mistaken Belphoebe for a goddess,<sup>18</sup> so too Ferdinand thinks that Miranda is surely "the goddess/On whom these airs attend!". (I.ii.424-425), and it seems perfectly natural for him to address her in the language of prayer:

Vouchsafe my prayer  
 May know if you remain upon this island;  
 And that you will some good instruction give  
 How I may bear me here. (I.ii.425-428)

The women of the final romances are given the power to charm, to convert, to influence. Indeed this is one of their remarkable gifts, and Shakespeare makes much of it. Marina is capable of stealing "The eyes of young and old" (IV.1.41-42), and Dionyza, suspecting that her henchman may yield before the full force of Marina's charm, warns him to remain "a soldier" to his purpose (IV.1.8). In all of the romances the heroine's virtue is very clearly expressed in terms of chastity or virginity. This is particularly so in Pericles, where the magic of Marina's virtue overwhelms all of the brothel's clients. One of them remarks: "I'll do anything now that is virtuous, but I am out of the road of rutting for ever" (IV.v.8-9). Even the hardened Bawd says that "she's able to freeze the god Priapus, and

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<sup>18</sup> See The Faerie Queene, III.v.35-36.

undo a whole generation" (IV.vi.3-4). More than that, she is capable of turning all of the swearers into priests (IV.vi.12). In Gower's Confessio Amantis Athenagoras, Governor of Mytilene, is a rather insignificant, pallid character who sends Thaisa to comfort Appolinus.<sup>19</sup>

Shakespeare's Governor of Mytilene is much more important.

For one thing, Lysimachus is a believable whoremonger.

But Shakespeare's most significant addition is in bringing Lysimachus to the brothel as a prospective client for Marina.

His conversation with Marina, it should be noted, is not in Gower's tale. The Governor is won by the enchantment of Marina's virtue. So complete is his conversion that he curses Boult's place, once his favourite haunt:

Avaunt, thou damned doorkeeper!  
Your house, but for this virgin that doth prop it,  
Would sink and overwhelm you. (IV.vi.126-128)

E.C. Pettet, writing about the unconvincing motivation of Leontes' jealousy, observes that it can be paralleled by "the sudden reform of Lysimachus in the brothel scene of Pericles and the strange acquiescence of Marina later in accepting this reformed whoremonger as her husband...."<sup>20</sup> Like Traversi, who thinks that the brothel scenes are

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<sup>19</sup> Bullough, p. 413.

<sup>20</sup> Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition, p. 167.

"excessively facile and sentimental,"<sup>21</sup> Pettet misses the point Shakespeare is making: the sudden, unexpected conversion of Lysimachus (and the others) is not meant to be considered in terms of plausible motivation. His conversion is the direct result of that mysterious power which Shakespeare has been emphasizing throughout the play.

Marina is also an accomplished musician and poet, so accomplished that she wins the hatred of Dionyza, whose daughter is only a pallid satellite within Marina's orbit (IV. Chorus, 25-28). She sings, we are told, "like one immortal," and she dances "As goddess like to her admired lays" (V. Chorus, 3-4). Marina's skills, it is important to note, are Shakespeare's invention. In Gower's tale, it is Appolinus who sings like an angel.<sup>22</sup> Marina puts learned scholars to silence (V. Chorus, 4), and the splendor and enchantment of her needlework is a match for Nature herself (V. Chorus, 4-8). It would be just as futile for Philoten to compete with Marina as it would be for the crow to "vie feathers" with the dove of Paphos (IV. Chorus, 32). Marina is indeed "absolute Marina" (IV. Chorus, 31). Shakespeare suggests that the source of Marina's perfection is in her magical chastity, and this will be developed later

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<sup>21</sup>Derek Traversi, Shakespeare: The Last Phase (Stanford, 1965), pp. 32-33.

<sup>22</sup>Bullough, p. 389.



Polixenes' advice:

Old sir, I know  
 She prizes not such trifles as these are;  
 The gifts she looks from me are packed and locked  
 Up in my heart, which I have given already,  
 But not delivered. (IV.iv.359-363)

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Once he has established the heroine's moral perfection, and located this specifically in her chastity, Shakespeare links her virtue with fertility,<sup>28</sup> which is emphasized by setting it against symbols of sterility or death. The heroine's moral fertility is to play a crucial role in the restoration of fertility to the waste land within man.

Most of the heroines in Shakespeare's comedies, from Adriana to Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, are beautiful and virtuous. But the heroines of the final romances are uniquely so. Their beauty and virtue, unlike those of the earlier women, are quite deliberately associated with spiritual and physical fertility. In Pericles Shakespeare introduces Thaisa with the same ceremonious formality with which he had presented Antiochus' daughter. But the difference between the women is remarkable: Thaisa is "Beauty's child," her father says, "whom Nature gat/For men to see, and seeing,

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<sup>28</sup>Cf. the fertility of Spenser's Garden of Adonis and Shakespeare's association of this garden with the virgin Joan La Pucelle in 1 Henry VI. Joan's promises "are like Adonis' gardens/That one day bloomed and fruitful were the next" (I.vi.6-7). Notice, however, that this remark is quite ironic.

humbled, "and when he sees the beautiful one he is ready to die of fear." From that time "the soul of the lover follows the beloved in modesty and holy fear" (Phaedrus, 254).<sup>24</sup> Shakespeare's treatment of Imogen's power is peculiarly reminiscent of Plato's chaste woman. Imogen's chastity and goodness are allied with that unique and magical quality we have noticed in Marina and in Helena as well. It is the power to convert, to overcome evil, to enchant. We may wish to compare this with a somewhat similar power in Spenser's Britomart. For example, in the encounter with Ollyphant, the mere presence of Britomart is enough to drive him away (The Faerie Queene, III.xi.6), and in the castle of Malbecco those who behold her "With wonder of her beauty fed their hungry vew" (III.ix.23). Britomart's influence is so potent that her admirers

seeing still the more desired to see,  
And ever firmly fixed did abide  
In contemplation of divinitie.  
(III.ix.24)

Nowhere is Imogen's power to enchant better illustrated than in the overwhelming of Iachimo. Shakespeare changed his source quite significantly. Having accepted Bernabo's wager, Ambrogiuolo proceeds to Genoa and promptly begins to reconnoitre Zinevra's house: "He remained there a few days cautiously enquiring about the street where the lady lived

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<sup>24</sup>The Dialogues of Plato, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Chicago, 1952), p. 128.

"and about her behaviour." On the basis of what he hears, Ambrogiuolo decides that he has come on a fool's errand: Zinevra is unassailable. He bribes a poor woman, who has access to the house, to carry him hidden in a chest in Zinevra's bedroom. He spends two nights in the chest "without the lady noticing anything unusual." On the third day the chest is removed.<sup>25</sup> We notice, first of all, that Ambrogiuolo has no meeting with Zinevra. Secondly, he is convinced of the futility of his efforts before he has actually seen Zinevra, and, indeed, he does not try to seduce her. Shakespeare not only changes these details, he devotes an entire scene (I.vi) to the conversation between Imogen and Iachimo. He confronts Iachimo, with Imogen, and the experienced villain is overwhelmed:

All of her that is out of door most rich!  
 If she be furnished with a mind so rare,  
 She is alone th'Arabian bird, and I  
 Have lost the wager. (I.vi.15-18)

When Iachimo speaks to her, his words, though chosen to win her confidence, betray the enchantment he feels in her presence, an enchantment that is to be climaxed in her bedroom later that evening.

In his introduction to The Winter's Tale J.H.P. Pafford observes that Perdita's "very appearance captivates young

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<sup>25</sup>The Decameron, pp. 154-155.

and old, and throughout the play her grace and loveliness are felt to be a remarkable power."<sup>26</sup> "This is a creature," the Servant says about Perdita,

Would she begin a sect, might quench the zeal.  
Of all professors else; make proselytes  
Of who she but bid follow.

(V.i.106-109)

Perdita's power, which exercises so much influence in the sheep-shearing scene, and is to have a profound effect upon Leontes' redemption, is something she shares with Imogen, Marina and Miranda. It is more than just her physical beauty, although, of course, this is an essential part of it. Perdita's power is the power of chastity, and it is sufficiently strong to give Florizel spiritual strength. Nor is this all: it enhances the purity of his own love for her. The dramatist tries to underscore this at the betrothal when Florizel formally declares:

...were I crowned the most imperial monarch,  
Thereof most worthy; were I the fairest youth  
That ever made eye swerve; had force and knowledge  
More than was ever man's, I would not prize them  
Without her love; for her, employ them all,  
Commend them, and condemn them to her service,  
Or to their own perdition. (IV.iv.376-382)

Once again Shakespeare makes a significant change in the source. In Green's tale Dorastus, somewhat like Florizel, is struck "with an envenomed shaft" once in the presence of

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<sup>26</sup>The Winter's Tale, ed. J.H.P. Pafford (London, 1963), p. Lxxvi.

Fawnia's beauty. Soon after, however, Dorastus "lost his liberty and became a slave to love."<sup>27</sup> Eventually his sexual slavery leads to the seduction of Fawnia. For his part Shakespeare gives much importance to the purity of Florizel's love for Perdita, and, above all, his rational control of his passions. To this extent he resembles Ferdinand:

Jupiter

Became a bull, and bellowed; the green Neptune  
 A ram, and bleated; and the fire-robed god,  
 Golden Apollo; a poor humble swain,  
 As I seem now. Their transformations  
 Were never for a piece of beauty rarer,  
 Nor in a way so chaste, since my desires  
 Run not before mine honour, nor my lusts  
 Burn hotter than my faith. (IV.iv.27-35)

We may set this alongside Ferdinand's remark when Prospero warns him about the preservation of Miranda's prenuptial virginity: "The white cold virgin snow upon my heart/Abates the ardour of my liver" (IV.i.55-56). It is worth noting that Miranda's virtue also inspires virtuous behaviour in Ferdinand. Florizel, Polixenes thinks, is being backward in courting Perdita. When he was young, he says,

I was wont  
 To load my she with knacks; I would have ransacked  
 The peddler's silken treasury, and have poured it  
 To her acceptance. (IV.iv.351-354)

The young man is perhaps thinking about what seems to be the inherently seductive power of gifts, and he rejects

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<sup>27</sup> Pandosto, p. 43.

Polixenes' advice:

Old sir, I know  
She prizes not such trifles as these are;  
The gifts she looks from me are packed and locked  
Up in my heart, which I have given already,  
But not delivered. (IV.iv.359-363)

ii

Once he has established the heroine's moral perfection, and located this specifically in her chastity, Shakespeare links her virtue with fertility,<sup>28</sup> which is emphasized by setting it against symbols of sterility or death. The heroine's moral fertility is to play a crucial role in the restoration of fertility to the waste land within man.

Most of the heroines in Shakespeare's comedies, from Adriana to Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, are beautiful and virtuous. But the heroines of the final romances are uniquely so. Their beauty and virtue, unlike those of the earlier women, are quite deliberately associated with spiritual and physical fertility. In Pericles Shakespeare introduces Thaisa with the same ceremonious formality with which he had presented Antiochus' daughter. But the difference between the women is remarkable: Thaisa is "Beauty's child," her father says, "whom Nature gat/For men to see, and seeing,

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<sup>28</sup>Cf. the fertility of Spenser's Garden of Adonis and Shakespeare's association of this garden with the virgin Joan La Pucelle in 1 Henry VI. Joan's promises "are like Adonis' gardens/That one day bloomed and fruitful were the next" (I.vi.6-7). Notice, however, that this remark is quite ironic.

wonder at" (II.ii.6-7); but her beauty, unlike the sterility of Antiochus' daughter,<sup>29</sup> is associated with humility (II.ii.9). Hers is not the kind of beauty that "can as well inflame as it can kill" (II.ii.35). Of all the knights' mottoes, Pericles' is perhaps the least ostentatious: "In this hope I live" (II.ii.44). His motto, however, is associated with "A withered branch, that's only green at top" (II.ii.43). The withered branch indicates Pericles' declining fortunes; but the green at the top, which points to an incipient fertility, he hopes to have nurtured by Thaisa. She, indeed, is being depicted as the source of Pericles' life. The dramatist emphasizes this in II.v. The purity of their love is transformed into the consummation of marriage with its implication of fertility (II.v.89-93). Almost immediately, the implication of fertility becomes a reality:

Hymen hath brought the bride to bed,  
Where, by the loss of maidenhead,  
A babe is moulded. (III. Chorus, 9-11)

Shakespeare even uses a fertility image to describe Thaisa's "resurrection" from the dead: "See how she 'gins to blow/ Into life's flower again!" (III.ii.95-96), Cerimon remarks.

Shakespeare treats the union of Antiochus and his daughter in detail. It seems to be a critical commonplace

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<sup>29</sup>See I, Chorus, 39-40; I.i.28-29; 39-40; 64-65; 130; 132-133.

that the first two acts of Pericles are rather pedestrian, and therefore Shakespeare did not write them.<sup>30</sup> But these early acts are full of references to Antiochus' relationship with his daughter, and they are therefore thematically important. By focusing attention on the relationship, Shakespeare is contrasting the sterility of the union with the fertility of Thaisa and Marina. Gower speaks of Antiochus' daughter as a woman of rare beauty and charm (I. Chorus, 24-25). Her beauty has enticed many princes to seek her hand in marriage. But the girl's dazzling beauty is set against the incest that very beauty provoked. The essential quality of this incestuous union is its sterility, which has destructive consequences:

So for her many a wight did die,  
As yon grim looks do testify.  
(I. Chorus, 39-40)

At one point her beauty is actually presented in images suggesting fertility. She is, for instance, "appareled like the spring" (I.1.12), and Pericles is overwhelmed by the desire "To taste the fruit of yon celestial tree" (I.1.21). But Shakespeare has been careful to counteract this spurious

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<sup>30</sup> See Ernest Schanzer's edition of Pericles in The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York, 1972), p. 1409; Northrop Frye, A Natural Perspective, p. 38; Philip Edwards, "An Approach to the Problem of Pericles," ShS, 5 (1952), 25-49; John F. Danby, Poets on Fortune's Hill (London, 1952), pp. 91-92; Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare as Collaborator (London, 1960), pp. 56-76.



fertility by repeatedly linking her with death and destructiveness: that magnificent fruit is also "dangerous to be touched" (I.1.28). Antiochus warns that "deathlike dragons" surround her (I.1.29), and her dead suitors are a dreadful warning to all future ones (I.1.39-40).<sup>31</sup> The sterility repeatedly linked with the daughter is distilled in the opening lines of Antiochus' rather transparent riddle:

I am no viper, yet I feed  
On mother's flesh which did me breed.  
(I.1.64-65).

Cannibalism and the sterility of incest are combined as well in Pericles' remark, "And she an eater of her mother's flesh" (I.1.130). She is like the serpent which, although it feeds on flowers, breeds poison (I.1.132-133). Father and daughter have given birth to death and evil.

Shakespeare also uses the famine in Tarsus to shed light on the fertility-sterility antithesis. In Laurence Twine's The Patterne of Painefull Adventures poverty is the only cause of the famine. Stranguillio tells Apollonius (Pericles):

My lord Apollonius, our citie at this present is verie poore, and not able to sustaine the greatnesse of Your dignitie: and even now we suffer great penurie and want of vittell, insomuch that there remaineth small hope of comfort unto our citizens,

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. Spenser's Acrasia (II.xii.72ff.) whose seductive beauty hides her destructive nature. See also Cymbeline's Queen, I.v and V.v.62-66.

but that we shall all perish by extreme famine:  
and now certes there resteth nothing but the  
fearefull image of ghastly death before our eyes.<sup>32</sup>

In Pericles a great deal more than poverty is responsible for the famine in Tarsus. The city was once a place of prosperity and abundance (I.iv.22-23); but the people scorned poverty, and their pride and wealth made them smug:

Their tables were stored full to glad the sight,  
And not so much to feed on as delight.  
All poverty was scorned, and pride so great,  
The name of help grew odious to repeat.  
(I.iv.28-31)

Increasingly, the city's prosperity was being perverted; food was to be admired, and although nature provided the people with this abundance their greed became insatiable and they began to demand "inventions to delight the taste" (I.iv.40). The famine seems to have been inflicted upon Tarsus as a punishment for the people's "superfluous riots" (I.iv.54). There is a link between the loss of fertility and plenty by the citizens of Tarsus and the perversion of potential fertility in Antiochus' daughter. She, we remember, was seen as an eater of her mother's flesh (I.i.64-65), and the mothers of Tarsus are ready to eat their children (I.iv.42-44).

In The Winter's Tale the promise of renewal and fertility is in Leontes' son; but the king will destroy this in an

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<sup>32</sup>Bullough, p. 432.

act of insanity. Cymbeline thinks of Imogen in pretty much the same terms as Leontes does of Mamillius. The exile of Posthumus and the retention of Imogen under house arrest is not merely the separation of husband and wife. The king, the First Gentleman says,

takes the babe  
To his protection, calls him Posthumus Leonatus,  
Breeds him and makes him of his bedchamber,  
Puts to him all the learnings that his time  
Could make him the receiver of, which he took  
As we do air, fast as 'twas minist' red,  
And in's spring became a harvest.  
(I.1.40-46)

The promise of fertility, which the First Gentleman's words suggest, is shattered by Cymbeline's act. The king has interrupted the natural fertility of a marriage<sup>33</sup> which, Shakespeare will later emphasize, is a union founded on the value of chastity. In the Trunk Scene Imogen is presented as the "fresh lily" of chastity (II.1.15). For a time, as Guiderius implies (IV.1.202-204), the lily was growing to maturity. When she is discovered "dead," however, Imogen is said to be a flower now "withered" (IV.1.286). The dramatist uses the symbolic death of Imogen to depict her as the flower of chastity withering on winter

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<sup>33</sup>In Richard II the king describes the forced separation from his wife in a figure suggesting the spring-winter antithesis. Richard says: "My wife to France, from whence, set forth in pomp, / She came adorned hither like Sweet May, / Sent back like Hallowmas, or short'st of day" (V.1.78-80). See also Cymbeline, I.1.36-37.

ground,<sup>34</sup> her fertility thwarted by Cymbeline's act and Posthumus' belief in her adultery. Imogen recognizes that the accusation of adultery has destroyed what was potentially fertile in her union with Posthumus. Her heart is "empty of all things but grief" (III.iv.70); Posthumus no longer abides there, and he, she says, was the "riches of it" (III.iv.72). "Riches," with its meaning of abundance, is a particularly felicitous word for Imogen to have chosen.

As he had done in Pericles, Shakespeare gives additional emphasis to the potential fertility of the heroine by contrasting her with a symbol of sterility and death. Cymbeline's Queen is the focus of the ubiquitous evil surrounding Imogen. The Queen should be seen as an emblem of sterility, and this is exactly how she is presented toward the close of the first act. First of all, she is depicted as a symbol of death, experimenting with "strange ling'ring poisons" (I.v. 84). Cornelius knows her spirit and does not "trust one of her malice" (I.v.35), and she is actually plotting the murder of Pisanio and Imogen. Stress falls on her hardness of heart. "Your highness," says the Doctor, "shall from this practice but make hard your heart" (I.v.23-24). The remark is significant because at the start of the scene we

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<sup>34</sup>Cf. The Rape of Lucrece: "No man inveigh against the withered flower, / But chide rough winter that the flower hath kill'd" (1254-1255). Cf. also Titus Andronicus, V.ii.169-177. See the Introduction, pp. 12-13.

were given a rather charming picture of the Queen and her ladies innocently gathering flowers, and even as the scene ends Shakespeare re-creates this picture. But the gathering of flowers, which in The Winter's Tale is a fertility ritual, here masks a hidden viciousness and the hardness of spiritual sterility. Shakespeare also uses the banishment of Belarius to shed further light on his fertility-sterility antithesis. One of the most crucial facts about this banishment is that the dramatist treats it (as he had treated Posthumus and Imogen's divorce) as a movement from fertility to sterility. When he was needed Belarius was loved by Cymbeline:

Then was I as a tree  
Whose boughs did bend with fruit. But in one night  
A storm or robbery, call it what you will,  
Shook down my mellow hangings, nay, my leaves,  
And left me bare to weather. (III.iii.60-64)

When he stole Cymbeline's sons, however, Belarius himself destroyed a family union. He tries to convince the young men of the superiority of their rustic life over court life. The art of the court is "as hard to leave as keep, whose top to climb/Is certain falling..." (III.iii.47-48). In spite of these claims, images of sterility or retarded growth are carefully written into the scene's idiom.

Belarius says of the "rock" they live in:

This gate  
Instructs you how t'adore the heavens and bows you  
To a morning's holy office. (III.iii.2-4)

But Arviragus' blunt attitude nicely sums up the prosaic

reality of their home:

How  
 In this our pinching cave shall we discourse  
 The freezing hours away? (III.iii.37-39)

The reality of their existence is expressed by Guiderius in a speech full of images suggesting sterility and retarded growth:

We poor unfledged  
 Have never winged from the view o' th' nest nor know not  
 What air's from home. Haply this life is best  
 If quiet life be best, sweeter to you  
 That have a sharper known, well corresponding  
 With your stiff age; but unto us it is  
 A cell of ignorance, traveling abed,  
 A prison, or a debtor that not dares  
 To stride a limit. (III.iii.27-35)

Sterility also follows the destruction of a family union in The Winter's Tale. Leontes' irrational jealousy, which causes him to accuse Hermione of unchastity, destroys the fertility of their union. As a result, destruction and death follow. D.J. Enright is mistaken, surely, when he argues that "Mamillius' death is not crucial."<sup>35</sup> In the opening scene of the play a little less than half of the dialogue between Camillo and Archidamus is about Prince Mamillius. The dramatist is giving early importance to Leontes' heir. He is more than just the apple of his parents' eyes: Mamillius is a symbol of unity for the people. He symbolizes

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<sup>35</sup>D.J. Enright, Shakespeare and the Students (London, 1970), p. 181.

growth and harmony as well. The promise embodied in Mamillius is the direct result of the fertile love that united Leontes and Hermione in the first place. He is a sort of fertile principle of regeneration (I.i.35ff.). He will not, however, fulfill his regenerative promise: his death will be the direct result of Leontes' questioning of his mother's chastity. Leontes' jealousy has threatened to destroy the fertility centered within the nuclear family. But, of course, the fulfilling of Apollo's oracle will put the King on the road to redemption, and it is only through redemption that fertility can be restored.

Act three opens with the dialogue of Cleomenes and Dion on their way back to court. They are carrying the Oracle's words with them, and their description of Delphi stresses the island's fertility. We notice that the description of the island is not in Greene's Pandosto. Shakespeare must have thought it highly significant because he inserts it into his play and gives it additional importance by treating it in a separate scene. "The climate is delicate," Cleomenes says (III.i.1), and "the air most sweet, / Fertile the isle" (III.i.1-2). In a later scene Shakespeare links the fertility of Delphi with the fertility so persistently associated with the chaste lovers. When Perdita and Florizel arrive at Leontes' court, bringing with them the promise of regeneration and renewal, the King addresses them: "The

blessed gods purge all infection from our air whilst you/  
Do climate here!" (V.i.168-170). Dion ends the dialogue  
with the comment, "and gracious be the issue!" (III.i.22).  
Superficially, it is a commonplace remark; but if we keep  
in mind Hermione's use of the word "grace" with its suggestion  
of spiritual fertility (II.i.121-122), then the comment points  
to the regenerative process which is to take place. When  
Ferdinand and Miranda pledge their love and loyalty to each  
other Prospero, invisible in the background and serving as a  
controlling High Priest, intones over the lovers:

Fair encounter  
Of two most rare affections! Heavens rain grace  
On that which breeds between 'em! (III.i.74-76)

In these lines Shakespeare is suggesting more than just the  
blessings of Heaven upon their love. In Measure For Measure  
Angelo's lust for Isabella breeds a "swelling evil" (II.iv.  
6). Here, however, both "rain" and "breeds" point to both  
the spiritual and physical fertility of consummated love:  
what is merely suggested in this scene will be given later  
emphasis at the lovers' formal betrothal, where it will  
emerge as a central theme of the play.

The infant Perdita was abandoned to the storm and  
roaming bears of the "deserts of Bohemia" (III.iii.2) where  
Antigonus' ship ran aground. We may say that the deserts  
of Bohemia are meant to be an extension of the barren world  
Leontes' disease has brought about and in which the babe



now finds herself. It is worth noting that as he lays down the babe, Antigonus refers to Perdita as "blossom" (III.iii.45). Even then Perdita is being depicted as a symbol of fertility, for her discovery by the shepherds guarantees her survival and the fulfilling of the oracle. "Thou met'st with things dying," says the old shepherd, "I with things new born" (III.iii.112-113). Antigonus died believing that Hermione was dead. Nor did he know about the oracle. We may therefore say that allegorically, he dies under the Old Law (surrounded by symbols of divine wrath), without benefit of revelation. The shepherds, however, are part of the new dispensation, nurturing the infant Perdita who is to bring about rebirth and spiritual fertility. The image of Perdita as blossom culminates in the sheep-shearing scene where the blossom becomes the flower of fertility. Shakespeare locates the sheep-shearing festival at the peak of harvest time, and Perdita presides over this time of fertile abundance: she is dressed up as Flora, mistress of the feast and Queen of the harvest (IV.iv.2-5). In her role as Flora, Perdita dispenses "flowers of middle summer" (IV.iv.108),<sup>36</sup> and she is repeatedly linked with the idea of permanence. Some

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. the stage direction of *Pericles*, IV.1: "Enter Marina with a basket of flowers." This stage direction, printed by most modern editors, is from the bad Quarto of 1609. This symbol of fertility should be set against the flower-gathering scene in *Cymbeline*.

of the flowers she gives to Camillo and Polixenes (rosemary and rue) "keep/Seeming and savour all the winter long" (IV.iv.74-75). She is associated with perpetual motion. There is no sterility, no winter. There is only summer, harvest and lasting fecundity. Florizel suggests something very much like this when he says to Perdita:

When you do dance, I wish you  
A wave o'th'sea, that you might ever do  
Nothing but that -- move still, still so,  
And own no other function. Each your doing,  
So singular in each particular,  
Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,  
That all your acts are queens. (IV.iv.140-146)

Later in Henry VIII Shakespeare draws another parallel between music and lasting fertility. To the music of Orpheus

plants and flowers  
Ever sprung, as sun and showers<sup>37</sup>  
There had made a lasting spring.  
(III.1.6-8)

iii

Before the heroine's potential fertility can come to fruition, however, her chastity (the source of her moral strength) must withstand the evil that attacks it. Because her chastity is a positive virtue, it defeats evil, and its integrity remains intact.

Fertility is not the only quality associated with the

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. Marina's song and the music of the spheres, so intimately connected with the restoration of Pericles (V.1).

heroines' chastity. Their chastity is not a negative, unproductive denial of the flesh. To illustrate this Shakespeare announces in Pericles a theme which he will develop and explore in the romances that follow: the defeat of evil by the positive virtue of chastity. He deliberately puts his heroines in an hostile environment where their chastity is attacked. Most of them have to suffer a great deal. Sometimes the heroine has to withstand the stupidity and viciousness of a parent (Imogen is victimized by both parents). Sometimes, as in the case of Marina, the unbridled forces of Nature almost destroy the victim. But the attack upon their chastity is by far the most significant assault the heroines must withstand. Their beauty and chastity stimulate lust. It is not a coincidence that three of the four women, Marina, Imogen and Miranda, are almost raped. Not only does Imogen narrowly escape being raped by Cloten; Shakespeare also places her in a situation conducive to rape when he conceals a randy Iachimo in her bedroom.

In Pericles the bawd, fed up with Marina's persistent refusal to become a practising member of her establishment, orders Boult to "crack the glass of her virginity, and make the rest malleable" (IV.vi.151). We ought to bear in mind that the men who attack the heroines of the final plays are not (like Proteus or Claudio, for example) creatures experiencing a temporary aberration; they are unprincipled

savages who set out to achieve their end, with cold premeditation. Even the "salvage and deformed slave" Caliban seems to have planned the rape of Miranda. Certainly, his detailed instructions to Stephano and Trinculo about the murder of Prospero and the possession of Miranda show careful planning (III.ii.85-101). The sense of isolation and victimization so prominent in the lives of the heroines is summed up by Marina, who, to this extent, we can regard as a spokesman for the group:

Aye me! poor maid,  
Born in a tempest when my mother died,  
This world to me is like a lasting storm,  
Whirring me from my friends. (IV.i.18-21)

In The Tempest the isolation of the heroine reaches, so to speak, its culmination, for the insularity of the island brings about both the literal and symbolic isolation of Miranda. But even though their lives and their chastity are threatened, all of the women emerge triumphant. Again, we may consider Marina as the representative of the group. Her magic goodness and chastity are sufficiently powerful to transcend and emerge untainted from the evil of her environment. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in her experiences in the brothel. The brothel and the confrontations it forces upon Marina are a microcosm of the universe the women are placed in. Derek Traversi thinks that the brothel scenes are weak because of "the excessive

clarity of the contrast."<sup>38</sup> But the contrast between Marina and her environment is precisely what Shakespeare wishes to emphasize. It should be noted, for example, that while Shakespeare's interventions in the source of Pericles are few, he deliberately enlarges the brothel scenes. The miraculous power of Marina's chastity is given full scope in the brothel. Although she is not blackmailed into sleeping with someone, Marina's commitment to prenuptial virginity is just as implacable and vigorous as Isabella's. There are times when her denunciation of things unchaste has the accent of Isabella, although she lacks Isabella's hardness. She says to the degenerate Boult, trying to convert him:

Do anything but this thou doest. Empty  
 Old receptacles, or common shores, of filth;  
 Serve by indenture to the common hangman.  
 Any of these ways are yet better than this.  
 For what thou professest, a baboon, could he speak,  
 Would own a name too dear. Oh, that the gods  
 Would safely deliver me from this place!  
 (IV.vi.185-191)

The future assailing of Imogen's chastity is quickly introduced in Cymbeline. Shakespeare develops Cloten's character (merely hinted at in the opening scene) by devoting an entire scene to him. Cloten's behaviour in the second scene points to a great deal more than just a simple, harmless stupidity. He is a dangerous psychopath,

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<sup>38</sup> Traversi, Shakespeare: The Last Phase, p. 33.

with all of Caliban's gross sensuality. He even speaks like Caliban at times (II.iii.134). When his attack upon Imogen comes, there is no question of its seriousness. As we have noted in Pericles, the chaste woman is a symbol of purity and at the same time an incitement to lust.<sup>39</sup> Cloten broods about Imogen:

I love and hate her, for she's fair and royal,  
 And that she hath all courtly parts more exquisite  
 Than lady, ladies, woman. From every one  
 The best she hath, and she, of all compounded,  
 Outsells them all. (III.v.70-74)

Because he has been rejected in favour of a man he feels is his social inferior, Cloten is planning an ingenious revenge. It will be a just revenge, he feels, to ravish Imogen in Posthumus' garments (having first killed him) -- the very garments she held in more esteem than his "noble and natural person" (III.v.137). His masculinity will be recovered by possessing her sexually.

The plotting of Imogen's murder follows naturally upon Posthumus' moral collapse in II.v. Imogen lives in a dismal, bleak and seemingly hopeless world. It is world characterized by instability and uncertainty, and she is quite lost in it:

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<sup>39</sup>Cf. The Rape of Lucrece: "Haply that name of "chaste" unhapp'ly set/This bateless edge on his keen appetite" (8-9). This union of purity and sexuality (Diana and Venus), which we have noted in Helena and Isabella, can also be found in Britomart (III.i.46). A similar union characterizes the lady of the Amoretti: see Amoretti, XXI.

I see before me, man. Nor here, nor here,  
Nor what ensues, but have a fog in them  
That I cannot look through. (III.ii.79-81)

"She's punished for her truth," Pisanio says,

and undergoes,  
More goddesslike than wifelike, such assaults  
As would take in some virtue. (III.ii.8-10)

A lesser woman would have bent under the strain; but Imogen endures her suffering with the patience of a saint. Like Hermione's, the integrity of her fidelity and chastity is the source of her moral strength. Imogen is also a victim of slander, "Whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue/Outvenoms all the worms of Nile..." (III.iv.35-36). Granville-Barker is displeased by this speech, which he thinks is a lapse in dramatic integrity.<sup>40</sup> He blames the dramatist for letting Imogen simply stand there while Pisanio gives us a description of the nature of slander.<sup>41</sup> It is true that the passage resembles a set speech; but far from being a lapse in dramatic integrity, it demonstrates Shakespeare's stress on slander as an additional evil the chaste woman has to withstand. Slander is important in The Winter's Tale, too, and it will appear again in the play (IV.ii.272).

"Calumny will sear Virtue itself" (II.i.73-74), Leontes' remarks in The Winter's Tale. Paulina says that slander's "sting is sharper than the sword's" (II.iii.85). Leontes'

<sup>40</sup> Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, Vol. 1 (Princeton, 1946); p. 500.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 499.

accusation is so irrational and precipitate that Hermione can only conclude that "there's some ill planet reigns" (II.i.105). Whatever regenerative power Hermione possesses will suffer a temporary setback while this evil planet reigns. And heaven's frown is the same for mother and daughter. The mariner says to Antigonus, who is carrying the infant Perdita:

We have landed in ill time; the skies look grimly,  
And threaten present blusters. In my conscience,  
The heavens with that we have in hand are angry  
And frown upon's. (III.iii.3-6)

Miranda's life, like that of Perdita or Marina, was in grave danger from infancy itself. Leontes ordered the babe to be taken to "some remote and desert place" (II.iii.74) where she will survive or perish as fate dictates. Miranda and Prospero were put into "a rotten carcass of a butt" (I:ii.46), and set adrift to fend for themselves. Prospero has had to protect her ever since. The island itself is an hostile environment.<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare is not responsible, it seems,

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<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare may have taken this hint from William Strachey's description of the "Still Vexed Bermoothes" (1610). He describes the Bermuda islands as "dangerous and dreaded," and he adds: "they be so terrible to all that ever touched on them, and such tempests, thunders, and other fearful objects are seen and heard about them, that they be called commonly the Devil's Islands and are feared and avoided of all sea travellers alive above any other place in the world." But Silvester Jourdain in his A Discovery of the Bermudas (1610) writes: "Wherefore my opinion sincerely of this island is that whereas it hath been and is still accounted the most dangerous, infortunate, and most forlorn place of the world, it is in truth the richest, healthfullest, and pleasing land...as ever man set foot upon." Both accounts can be found in The Elizabethans' America, ed. Louis B. Wright (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), pp. 188-201.



for the impression some scholars have of the island as a sort of idyllic paradise.<sup>43</sup> Caliban does hear "sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not" (III.ii.136), but on the island violence is often threatened or actually inflicted. Sycorax, "in her most unmitigable rage," confines Ariel "into a cloven pine" (I.ii.274-277), and Prospero warns Ariel:

If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,  
And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till  
Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters.  
(I.ii.294-296)<sup>44</sup>

Far from being a paradise, the island is "desolate" (III.iii.80), and "bare" (Epilogue, 8). Gonzalo thinks that it is a "fearful country" (V.i.106), and the general impression is that the island is a prison one must be released from.

In The Tempest, too, the chaste woman is at once an image of chastity and a stimulus to lust. Shakespeare had introduced this theme as early as Titus Andronicus. In this play Lavinia's chastity is itself an incitement to lust, as Aaron implies (II.i.108ff.). Later, just before he rapes Lavinia, Demetrius speaks of the importance she gives to her chastity (II.iii.124-128). To Caliban Miranda's beauty is the thing "most deeply to consider" (III.ii.101).

<sup>43</sup>See, for example, John Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 136-137.

<sup>44</sup>See also I.ii.323-332.

She is "a non pareil":

I never saw a woman,  
But only Sycorax my dam and she;  
But she as far surpasseth Sycorax  
As great'st does least. (III.ii.98-101)

Miranda, he tells Stephano, "will become thy bed" (III.ii.102), and later on Caliban, who has fallen from Stephano's good graces, tries to regain his favour by reminding him that "the prize I'll bring thee to/ Shall hbowdink this mischance..." (IV.i.205-206). The plot to possess Miranda, then, should not be regarded merely as an after-thought in the plan to murder Prospero. The possession of Miranda is an important element in the conspirators' entire design.

The dramatist places the Heroines in environments that are physically and spiritually hostile in order to test the muscle of their virtue. What Shakespeare emphasizes throughout the final romances is the integrity and importance of the heroines' chastity, especially the part it plays in the redemptive process. Iachimo is the first to discover the firmness of Imogen's chastity. Derek Traversi questions Imogen's stability during the interview with Iachimo. He refers to Iachimo's "prevailing animality" being "on the point of turning her otherwise serene utterance into unbalance...."<sup>45</sup> Traversi's claim has no foundation in the

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<sup>45</sup>Traversi, Shakespeare: The Last Phase, p. 54.

text. At the start of the conversation Imogen, it is true, listens to Iachimo with some bewilderment: her innocence prevents her from immediately comprehending the exact drift of Iachimo's words.<sup>46</sup> But once the nature of his proposal is clear to her ("I dedicate myself to your sweet pleasure"), her response is immediate, unwavering and unequivocal:

Away, I do condemn mine ears that have  
So long attended thee. If thou wert honorable,  
Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue, not  
For such an end thou seek'st, as base as strange.  
Thou wrong'st a gentleman who is as far  
From thy report as thou from honor, and  
Solicits here a lady that disdains  
Thee and the devil alike. (I.vi.141-148)

Imogen's chastity bears some resemblance to Britomart's militant chastity. If it is assaulted, Britomart will attack. Her chastity is not the negative virtue of Amoret or Florimell. Nor is Imogen's. Her chastity has all of the passion of Britomart's. Imogen's defense of her chastity also recalls Hermione's in Cymbeline. It is a fiery and vigorous rejection of Iachimo. Words and phrases such as "disdains", "Romish stew", "bestly mind," all express her horror and contempt of Iachimo, and the fire of Imogen's

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<sup>46</sup> Imogen's vulnerability ought to be compared with Britomart's susceptibility to "faire semblaunce." The bird "that knowes not the false fowlers call," Spenser says, "Into his hidden net full easily doth fall" (III.i. 54). Marina fails to see through Dionyza (IV.i.), and Lucrece's innocence prevents her from suspecting Tarquin: "For unstained thoughts do seldom dream on evil" (The Rape of Lucrece, 85-91).

speech is not altogether unlike Isabella's passionate speeches to Angelo in Measure, For Measure. III.iv. of Cymbeline reinforces the supreme value Imogen places on her chastity. For example, she will take whatever course Pisanio suggests provided that her chastity will not be in jeopardy (III.iv.152-154). In Boccaccio's Ninth Tale Pisanio's counterpart tells Zinevra, "how you have offended your husband I do not know, but he bade me kill you on this road without any pity; and if I did not do it, he threatened to hang me up by the neck." To which Zinevra replies: "God, Who knoweth all things, knows that I never did anything for which my husband should thus reward me," and she pleads for her life.<sup>47</sup> The reason she is to be murdered is made crystal clear to Imogen, and rather than plead for her life, she actually pleads for death:

I have heard I am a strumpet and mine ear,  
Therein false struck, can take no greater wound,  
Nor tent to bottom that. (III.iv.115-117)

Now that her chastity has been questioned she is ready to go to her death as if she were a sacrificial lamb (III.iv. 98-100). So valuable is her chastity that had God not forbidden it, she would have taken her life (III.iv.77-79).<sup>48</sup>

In Robert Greene's Pandosto the King has enough

<sup>47</sup>The Decameron, p. 156.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. The Rape of Lucrece, 1184-1185; 1723-1729.

"evidence" to suspect Bellaria of infidelity. She proceeds to use Egistus "likewise so familiarly that her countenance betrayed how ~~her~~ mind was affected towards him, -often-times coming herself into his bed-chamber to see that nothing should be amiss to dislike him." Further, "this honest familiarity increased daily more and more betwixt them." Like Hermione, Bellaria wants to please her husband by entertaining his guest as lavishly as courtesy permits; but as time passes "there grew such a secret uniting of their affections, that the one could not well be without the company of the other." Pandosto concludes that "it was hard to put fire and flax together without burning."<sup>49</sup> Eventually Bellaria's pregnancy forces Pandosto to think that "surely by computation of time...Egistus and not he was the father to the child,"<sup>50</sup> When he came to write The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare gave Leontes no evidence whatever of Hermione's "infidelity." None of the acts he raves about ("meeting noses, Kissing with inside lip, Skulking in corners") has taken place, and what we are listening to are the rantings of Leontes' "weak-hinged fancy" (II.iii.117). In short, Leontes, as Banquo had wondered of Macbeth and himself, has eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner. By eliminating all of the circumstantial

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<sup>49</sup>Pandosto; pp. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

evidence Greene had given Pandosto, Shakespeare has also eliminated any doubt about Hermione, and has therefore emphasized the integrity of her chastity. At her trial Hermione defends herself with spirit and dignity. She is principally concerned about her honour and reputation, and she shares with Imogen the same feeling of despair now that her chastity and fidelity have been questioned:

Myself on every post  
Proclaimed a strumpet; with immodest hatred  
The childbed privilege denied, which 'longs  
To women of all fashion. Lastly, hurried  
Here to this place, i' th' open air, before  
I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,  
Tell me, what blessings I have here alive,  
That I should fear to die. (III.ii.99-106)

Shakespeare establishes another link with Imogen; the preservation of her life is not important to Hermione: "The bug which you would fright me with," she tells Leontes, "I seek" (III.ii.90). What both women find detestable is that they have been proclaimed strumpets, and Hermione reminds everyone that her past life "hath been as continent, as chaste, as true" as she is now unhappy (III.ii.33-34). Earlier in the play the value of her chastity had been emphasized by others. At her trial she struggles to communicate its importance. If she is guilty of the charge then

hardened be the hearts  
Of all that hear me, and my near'st of kin  
Cry fie upon my grave! (III.ii.51-53)

In the sheep-shearing scene Shakespeare keeps the value

of Perdita's chastity constantly in his audience's mind. Florizel makes it clear to Perdita's supposed father that his daughter's virtue is by far her most important dowry (IV.iv.390-394). To reinforce the integrity of his heroine's chastity, Shakespeare makes an important change in Greene's tale. Greene's Dorastus laments the choice of what he regards as a low-born girl. Fawnia, who knows that he is above her station, nevertheless refuses to become his mistress. But when Dorastus comes to her dressed as a shepherd and begins to woo her, she yields and becomes pregnant.<sup>51</sup> Such an outcome for Perdita and Florizel is inconceivable, and the purity of their relationship, stressed throughout the scene (IV.iv.31-34; 45-46; 360-364; 374-382), is summed up in Perdita's remark, "By th' pattern of mine own thoughts I cut out/The purity of his" (IV.iv.386-387). Equal stress falls on the value of Miranda's chastity. She is in love with Ferdinand, but she is very careful to point out to him that her chastity, which, like Diana's in All's Well (IV.11.46) and Lucrece's (1191), she thinks of as a "jewel" (III.1.54), is the most important part of her dowry. If Miranda's remark is meant to be a warning to Ferdinand, it is unnecessary: the innocence and purity of the lovers (especially when set against the corruption of Caliban and the courtly characters) are kept clearly before the audience.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

The triumph of the heroine's chastity (or virginity) over the forces of evil is not meant to be its ultimate fulfillment. That fulfillment is in marriage, which has to be prepared for by some sort of disciplined novitiate.

Virginity in Shakespeare is not, as it is in the Fathers and ~~St.~~ Paul, a self-sufficient state. In the final plays celibacy is rejected, just as it was in All's Well and Measure For Measure. In Pericles Thaisa assumed that she would never see Pericles again, and she takes a vow of perpetual celibacy. Once she recovers her husband, however, she gives up her vow. This is quite important. In Twine's story (as well as Wilkins' The Painfull Adventures of Pericles) Thaisa's counterpart willingly accepts celibacy; Cerimon adopts her, and then

she with many tears requiring that she might not be touched by any man, for that intent her placed in the temple of Diana...to be preserved there inviolably among the religious women.<sup>52</sup>

In the sources husband and wife are joyfully reunited, but there is no formal rejection of celibacy such as we notice in Shakespeare's play.

The rejection of celibacy by Thaisa (and Marina) is

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<sup>52</sup>Bullough, p. 450.



dramatized in the ritualistic final scene of Pericles. The ritual is worth comparing with similar scenes in The Comedy of Errors and The Two Noble Kinsmen. Pericles' discovery of Thaisa, her recovery of Marina, Thaisa's rejection of celibacy and the formal betrothal of Marina and Lysimachus -- all of these events take place at Ephesus in Diana's temple. Diana is the presiding deity at what is essentially a formal, ritualistic movement from pre-nuptial virginity to marriage. The stage directions for this final scene, though added by the editor, are well warranted, for they capture the religious atmosphere of the scene. They read as follows:

The temple of Diana at Ephesus;  
Thaisa standing near the altar,  
As high priestess; a number of  
Virgins on each side; Cerimon  
And other inhabitants of Ephesus attending.<sup>53</sup>

In the concluding scene of The Comedy of Errors Aegeon recovers Aemilia, who had embraced celibacy by becoming an abbess, before the priory. The priory is analogous to Diana's temple in Pericles. Aemilia's fortunes have not been unlike Thaisa's, and her speech is interesting:

Renowned Duke, vouchsafe to take the pains  
To go with us into the abbey here  
And hear at large discoursed all our fortunes...  
Thirty three years have I gone in travail  
Of you, my sons, and till this present hour  
My heavy burden ne'er delivered.

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<sup>53</sup>Harrison, p. 1380.

The Duke, my husband, and my children both,  
 And you, the Calendars of their nativity,  
 Go to a gossips' feast, and go with me,  
 After so long grief, such nativity!

(The Comedy of Errors, V.1.392-405)<sup>54</sup>

Kittredge notes the religious flavour of this scene of discovery. Aemilia's reference to "a gossips' feast" suggests the rite of baptism. It is a good phrase because the characters, having discovered their true identities, are to be symbolically new-baptized.

In the final act of The Two Noble Kinsmen Emilia, one of Diana's knights of chastity (like Helena in All's Well), performs a religious ceremony before Diana's altar, now that she is betrothed. Once again the stage directions are important:

Still music of records. Enter Emilia in white, her hair about her shoulders, a wheaten wreath; one in white holding up her train, her hair stuck with flowers; one before her carrying a silver hind, in which is conveyed incense and sweet odors, which being set upon the altar of Diana, her maids standing aloof, she sets fire to it; then they curtsy and kneel.<sup>55</sup>

(V.1. s.d.)

The looseness of Emilia's hair<sup>56</sup> and the wheaten wreath are emblems of virginity and fertility. The burning of the

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<sup>54</sup>The Comedy of Errors, ed. George Kittredge (London, 1936).

<sup>55</sup>The Two Noble Kinsmen, ed. Clifford Leech (Toronto, 1966).

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Henry VIII, IV.1. The Order of the Coronation, 8.

silver hind, also an emblem of virginity and sacred to Diana, represents the symbolic rejection of virginity. Emilia addresses Diana in incantatory verse.<sup>57</sup> Her choice of words, "cold green", "mute contemplative" (V.1.137-138), all tend to enhance the rejection of celibacy. This rejection is made more explicit when Emilia says:

He of the two pretenders that best loves me  
And has the truest title in't, let him  
Take off my wheaten garland.

(V.1.158-160)

The goddess' answer is the miraculous appearance of a rose tree bearing a solitary flower. Emilia interprets this sign negatively: "I a virgin flow'r/Must grow alone unplucked" (V.1.167-168). But suddenly "is heard a twang of instruments, and the rose falls from the tree" (V.1.s.d.). In the Orlando Furioso Medoro had gathered Angelica's fragrant rose, while Spenser's Belpheobe had refused to yield "that dainty rose." This is how Emilia interprets this new sign:

'The flow'r is fall'n, the tree descends. O mistress,  
Thou here dischargest me, I shall be gathered.  
(V.1.169-170)<sup>57</sup>

Like Emilia, Marina undergoes a rite of passage in the final scene of Pericles. She is presented before the altar of Diana as a virgin soon to be married. She is still wearing Diana's "silver livery," which she will exchange

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<sup>57</sup>Cf. Venus and Adonis: "Fair flowers that are not gather'd in their prime/Rot, and consume themselves in little time" (131-132).

for a bridal gown. Lysimachus has done his sacrifice "As Dian bade" and his marriage to Marina is formally announced. Pericles is now free to clip his hair after fourteen years of ritual penance.

We have noticed Shakespeare emphasizing the purity of the lovers in The Winter's Tale. But, Perdita is not the cold, passionless figure of chastity Coriolanus thinks Valeria is,

The noble sister of Publicola,  
The moon of Rome, chaste as the icicle  
That's curdied by the frost from purest snow,  
And hangs on Dian's temple -- dear Valeria!  
(Coriolanus, V.iii.64-67)

The love of Perdita and Florizel involves the body as well as the mind. She wants him "quick and in mine arms" (IV.iv.132). Their love is a union of the spirit and the flesh, the sensual as well as the chaste. The dramatist communicates the rejection of permanent celibacy in a particularly suggestive figure: while she is distributing flowers, Perdita speaks of

Pale primroses,  
That die unmarried ere they can behold  
Bright Phoebus in his strength (a malady  
Most incident to maids). (IV.iv.122-125)

The flower does not survive into the full fruition of summer. In the same way the consummation of virginity is in the fertility of marriage. In the same play Paulina wishes to deny herself the exultation everyone is sharing. "I an old turtle," she says in a statement making clear the

sterility of the life she wishes to live, will

Wing me to some withered bough, and there  
My mate, that's never to be found again,  
Lament till I am lost. (V.iii.132-135)

But notice Shakespeare's familiar rejection of celibacy:

O peace, Paulina!  
Thou shouldst a husband take by my consent,  
As I by thine a wife...I'll not seek far,  
For him, I partly know his mind, to find thee  
An honourable husband. (V.iii.136-144)

Shakespeare's repeated emphasis on the preparation for marriage is an important and unique feature of his comedy. Marriage, he implies, requires a novitiate. This belief can be found throughout the canon. In the early Love's Labour's Lost, for instance, Berowne must deserve Rosaline by exercising charity and patience. A similar novitiate is required of the other lovers. Before he can marry the Princess, for example, the King is required to undergo a year of trial and hardship: he must go

To some forlorn and naked hermitage,  
Remote from all the pleasures of the world.  
(V.ii.793-794)

This preparation for marriage frequently takes the form of a rite of purification, or the exercise of disciplined restraint.<sup>58</sup> In The Winter's Tale Shakespeare will have Leontes (and Hermione) accept celibacy as if it were a

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<sup>58</sup>Cf. the concealing of the maligned female in Much Ado: see Chapter Three, pp. 153-154.

purifying experience until the oracle is fulfilled, and in All's Well the virtuous and rejected Helena is reported dead. When he comes to Tarsus, Pericles gives the infant Marina into the keeping of Cleon and Dionyza, and then swears by Diana (significantly enough) to undergo what is definitely a ritual of penance and sorrow by way of preparation for the later marriage of Marina. It is, as well, a preparation for his own future reunion with Thaisa:

Till she be married, madam,  
By bright Diana, whom we honor, all  
Unscissored shall this hair of mine remain,  
Though I show ill in't. (III.iv.27-30)

The ritual is completed on Marina's wedding day: his shaggy, unkempt hair and beard which, he says,

Makes me look dismal will I clip to form,  
And what this fourteen years no razor touched,  
To grace thy marriage day, I'll beautify.  
(V.iii.73-76)

Earlier in the play Thaisa had sworn a vow of perpetual celibacy. In Pentapolis Simonides discourages all of her suitors by informing them of this vow. This, we know, is merely an excuse to get rid of Pericles' rivals, and Simonides eventually arranges the marriage. This false vow, however, is a foreshadowing of her vow at Ephesus (III.iv.8-11). Before Lysimachus is married to Marina, he has to perform a rite of purification in Diana's temple at Ephesus:

So he thrived  
 That he is promised to be wived  
 To fair Marina, but in no wise  
 Till he had done his sacrifice,  
 As Dian bade. (V.ii.Chorus, 9-13)

These rites of purification recall Moses' admonition to the people to purify themselves in preparation for the Covenant by practising continence (Exodus 19:15). But in Shakespeare the rite prepares the unworthy bridegroom for marriage, not for union with God. The marriage, however, receives the blessings of higher powers and is part of the cosmic harmony.<sup>59</sup>

In both Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale purification is brought about through suffering and anguish. Posthumus recognizes that his bondage is the way "to liberty" (V.iv.1-2), and is prepared to give up his life for Imogen's sake. Jupiter makes it clear to Posthumus' relatives that suffering has been inflicted upon him so as to make him worthy of Imogen. "Whom best I love I cross," Jupiter says, "to make my gift, / The more delayed, delighted" (V.iv.77-78). The Arden editor of The Winter's Tale believes that the young men of the romances "are not called upon to suffer." They "have no real suffering," he says.<sup>60</sup> This argument becomes untenable once we take Shakespeare's

<sup>59</sup> See the final scene of Pericles, Cymbeline, V.v.466-485, The Winter's Tale, V.iii.122ff., The Tempest, V.i.201-204.

<sup>60</sup> Pafford, pp. xlv-xlvi.

treatment of his sources into account. Just as Florizel is overcome by Perdita's beauty, Greene's Dorastus is overwhelmed by Fawnia. But there is a significant difference: Dorastus becomes a slave to love and, as we recall, this eventually leads to the seduction of Fawnia. Shakespeare stresses the disciplined control of Florizel's love for Perdita. Like Ferdinand in The Tempest, he has to suffer the pain of restraint. His desires, he says,

Run not before mine honour, nor my lusts  
Burn hotter than my faith. (IV.iv.33-34)

After he has received Perdita and Florizel and agreed to help bring about their marriage, Leontes carefully remarks:

Your honour not o'er thrown by your desires,  
I am friend to them and you. (V.i.230-231)

The keeping of premarital virginity by Perdita and Florizel has been a sacrificial act of self-denial or purification leading to marriage and the redemption which this helps to bring about.

Prospero's insistence upon the integrity of Miranda's prenuptial virginity and his admonitions to Ferdinand about it have been misunderstood by several critics of The Tempest. In the first place Prospero expects Miranda to be virtuous because she is the daughter of noble parents (I.ii.56-59). But this is not enough. Once they are established on the island he educates Miranda, and even boasts that he has given her a better education than that of other



princesses:

Here in this island we arriv'd, and here  
 Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit  
 Than other princes can, that have more time  
 For vainer hours, and tutors not so careful.  
 (I.ii.171-174)

During the Renaissance, as Ruth Kelso has shown, writers of conduct literature were agreed that the value of chastity was the first lesson to be taught the little girl. The girl was to value her virginity as her chief jewel until such time as she would surrender it to a husband.<sup>61</sup> This, in essence, is what Prospero has been doing. In the betrothal scene (IV.1) the charge to maintain pre-nuptial virginity is made three times: twice by Prospero and once by Iris. Prospero formally gives Miranda to Ferdinand:

Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition  
 Worthily purchas'd, take my daughter: but  
 If thou dost break her virgin-knot before  
 All sanctimonious ceremonies may  
 With full and holy rite be minister'd,  
 No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall  
 To make this contract grow; but barren hate,  
 Sour-ey'd disdain and discord shall bestrew  
 The union of your bed with weeds so loathly  
 That you shall hate it both: therefore take heed,  
 As Hymen's lamps shall light you.  
 (IV.1.13-23)

Later he warns the ardent Ferdinand:

Look thou be true, do not give dalliance  
 Too much the rein: The strongest oaths are straw  
 To th' fire in th' blood: be more abstemious,  
 Or else, good night your vow! (IV.1.51-54)

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<sup>61</sup>Kelso, Doctrine For the Lady of the Renaissance, pp. 41-43.

Barbara Melchiori speaks of "the incestuous love of Prospero for his daughter," and adds that "the very union he had planned for her can bring no joy to Prospero."<sup>62</sup> This incestuous relationship, according to Melchiori, explains why signs of dalliance between the lovers make Prospero so restive. That Prospero is, in fact, looking forward to the marriage is clear from his remarks when Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love under his direction (I.ii.420-422; 443-445). D.R.C. Marsh makes much of Prospero's reference to discord and hatred, and concludes that his attitude is "consistent with what amounts almost to a dread of the physical."<sup>63</sup> Northrop Frye speaks of Prospero's "nervous strain," and claims that Prospero's actions resemble those of a "busy-body."<sup>64</sup> Clifford Leech, who detects a "puritanic strain" in Shakespeare's later plays, argues that The Tempest "gave the fullest and most ordered expression of the Puritan impulse in Shakespeare." This impulse, he feels, is located in Prospero's warnings.<sup>65</sup> "No behavior," Leech writes, "could be more impertinent, in the full sense of the term, than Prospero's here, and it cannot be understood other

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<sup>62</sup> Barbara Melchiori, "Still Harping on My Daughter," in English Miscellany, ed. Mario Praz (Rome, 1960), pp. 69-70.

<sup>63</sup> D.R.C. March, The Recurring Miracle (Lincoln, 1962), p. 179.

<sup>64</sup> The Tempest, ed. Northrop Frye, in The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969), p. 1370.

<sup>65</sup> Clifford Leech, Shakespeare's Tragedies (London, 1950), p. 155.

than pathologically."<sup>66</sup> Prospero's alleged testiness is not peculiar to him alone. In Pericles, for example, Simonides does not want Pericles to think of his daughter as an easy prize (II.v.40ff.), and Polonius and Laertes caution Ophelia about Hamlet's "unmastered importunity" (Hamlet, I.iii.32).<sup>67</sup>

In The Tempest the future fertility of the lovers' union, physical as well as spiritual, is at stake. In Prospero's warning some of his most significant words ("aspersion," "grow," "barren," "weeds") call up images of fertility or sterility. "Aspersion" is especially important. It suggests the sprinkling of water (OED), and this immediately establishes a connection with the Asperges of the Mass, during which ceremony, the congregation is sprinkled with holy water.<sup>68</sup> The ceremony

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>67</sup> In Romeo and Juliet, too, Friar Lawrence seems very anxious to safeguard the chastity of the lovers: "You shall not stay alone," he says, "Till holy church incorporate two in one" (II.vi.36-37). Cf. Rosalind's remark: "and in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage, which they will climb incontinent, or else be incontinent before marriage" (As You Like It, V.ii.38-39).

<sup>68</sup> In The Book of Common Prayer Psalm 51:7 reads as follows: "With hyssop purge me, Lord, and so I clean shall be; I shall with snow in whiteness vie, when purified by thee." In The Psalms Explained (New York, 1929), p. 187, the authors (Callan and McHugh) point out that hyssop was used in such liturgical rites as the cleansing of the leper and the purifying of the unclean.

symbolizes a rite of purification before the celebration of the Eucharist. Purification by water is also suggested in Prospero's earlier remark: "Heavens rain grace/On that which breeds between 'em!" (III.i.75-76). Shakespeare is drawing a parallel between this rite of purification and the preservation of premarital virginity before union in the sacrament of matrimony. Moreover, the sprinkling with water also symbolizes the need for spiritual growth: "No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall," Prospero carefully points out, "To make this contract grow." If Miranda's virginity is violated before "all sanctimonious ceremonies" are administered, then spiritual and physical sterility as well as hate and discord will follow. The physical and spiritual growth of the marriage is directly dependent upon the blessings of heaven, and this is itself dependent upon the preservation of Miranda's prenuptial virginity. What Prospero's speech emphasizes, therefore, is the intrinsic value of virginity temporarily preserved as a discipline or purification before its fulfillment in marriage.

The rest of the betrothal scene, full of images and ideas suggesting fertility, reinforces the connection between prenuptial virginity and fertility. Ferdinand has disciplined his passions to guarantee "quiet days, fair issue and long life" (IV.1.24), and Shakespeare uses Juno and other

deities to strengthen the theme. Venus and Cupid's attempt to frustrate the lovers' vow of premarital virginity is important, and their failure is noted by Iris:

Mars' hot minion is return'd again;  
Her waspish-headed son has broke his arrows,  
Swears he will shoot no more, but play with sparrows,  
And be a boy right out. (IV.1.90-101)

Shakespeare changes the character of Juno somewhat. Although she was the goddess of marriage, Juno aroused dislike rather than affection.<sup>69</sup> Shakespeare's Juno, however, is attractively presented and she invokes blessings of fertility upon the couple. Her role is to pronounce those blessings which are linked with peace, harmony, tranquil days, the very things Ferdinand had wished for, and together with Ceres (symbol of physical fertility), Juno brings the betrothal to a climax in a song, which in its central image of uninterrupted abundance, clearly crystallizes the theme Shakespeare has been examining:

Honour, riches, marriage-blessing,  
Long continuance, and increasing,  
Hourly joys be still upon you!  
Juno sings her blessings on you.  
Earth's increase, foison plenty,  
Barns and garners never empty;  
Vines with clust'ring bunches growing;  
Plants with goodly burthen bowing;  
Spring come to you at the farthest  
In the very end of harvest!

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<sup>69</sup>See, for example, Virgil, The Aeneid, trans. Rolfe Humphries (New York, 1951), p. 3.

Scarcity and want shall shun you;  
 Ceres' blessing so is on you.  
 (IV.1.106-117)<sup>70</sup>

Throughout The Tempest Caliban has been the embodiment of a will directed toward violence and destruction and the gratification of the sensual appetites. He ought to be regarded, therefore, as a principle of disorder. Caliban's anarchism underscores, by contrast, the discipline of the lovers who, by refraining from sexual intercourse before marriage, are contributing to the preservation of that order of things Prospero insists upon.

In the early church, and indeed in the mediæval period, the disciplining of the flesh by the exercise of continence prepared the candidate for heaven. Aquinas, we have seen, regarded virginity as the best preparation for the Beatific Vision. In the plays we have been examining, the denial of the flesh and the purification rites prepare the candidate, not for heaven, but for union with the virgin in married love. No longer is marriage distrusted, no longer is it an outlet for those who cannot control concupiscence. It is a positive value predicated on the virginity of the heroine with whom spiritual and physical fertility are associated. In Measure For Measure Angelo has to suffer

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<sup>70</sup>Cf. The Winter's Tale, IV.iv.140-146 and Henry VIII, III.1.6-8.

mental anguish and humiliation (inflicted upon him by the Duke, Providence's surrogate) before Mariana's love can redeem him. Bertram's self-discovery and union with Helena follow after his exposure and humiliation, and we have seen Lysimachus, Pericles and Posthumus undergoing rites of purgation before union with the chaste female. Leontes' "saint-like sorrow" and penitence over the years (V.1.1-4) are preparations for union with Hermione, and Ferdinand has to abate the ardour of his liver (IV.1.56). Prospero also punishes Ferdinand by forcing him to do what he regards as a degrading task (III.1.2-5). By successfully completing it, he proves himself worthy of Miranda. "All thy vexations," Prospero tells him,

Were but my trials of thy love, and thou  
Hast strangely stood the test.  
(IV.1.5-7)<sup>71</sup>

v.

When the marriage novitiate is successfully completed, the chaste lovers can be united. Their union (and the outcome of events) is brought about either directly by providence or by providence's agents. Once union in marriage is achieved, the regenerative process is set in

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<sup>71</sup>The rituals of suffering and purgation in the final romances (as well as All's Well and Measure For Measure) explain why the finales of these plays are deeper in meaning than those of the earlier comedies.

motion.

One of the most important aspects of the marriages that take place in All's Well, Measure For Measure and the final romances is that they have been brought about by the aid of providence, which protects the chastity of the heroine as a precondition for marriage. In each case the happy outcome is brought about through a combination of fortuitous "accidents" and the virtue of the characters. Providence and human virtue cooperate, one being as necessary as the other.

In Pericles, for instance, Marina is the instrument of divine providence. Though she has been "assailed with fortune fierce and keen" her virtue has been miraculously protected "from fell destruction's blast" (Epilogue). From the very beginning Heaven seems to be directing the outcome of events. Heaven has had a hand in the punishments inflicted upon the people of Tarsus, as Cleon himself recognizes (I.iv.33). This initiates a chain of events that begins with the arrival of Pericles, who relieves their suffering and later leaves Marina in the keeping of Cleon and Dionyza. Pericles' fortunes are "ordered/By Lady Fortune" (IV.iv.47-48), and he is always aware of the role played by supernatural forces in his life. He decides to sojourn at Tarsus until "our stars that frown lend us



a smile" (I.iv.108). He is aware of the intervention of the gods (III.i.22-26), and he knows he has to obey them (III.iii.9-10). He also has to obey the "angry stars of Heaven" and the forces of the sea:

Yet cease your ire, you angry stars of Heaven!  
 Wind, rain, and thunder, remember earthly man  
 Is but a substance that must yield to you,  
 And I, as fits my nature, do obey you.  
(II.i.1-4)

Frank Kermode points out that the sea is used to represent what seems to be the chaotic activity of Fortune but is really the action of Providence.<sup>72</sup> What is equally important is that the sea is also the agent of purgation for Pericles. The recovery of his armor (the rough seas that took it, "have given't again") is attributed not merely to good luck, but to Fortune, who is identified with supernatural forces (II.i.126-127). The armor, significantly enough, has magic qualities (II.i.132-135), and it aids in the winning of Thaisa.

But again Fortune intervenes in the life of Pericles: Fortune interrupts his return to Tyre with Thaisa (III. Chorus, 45-50), and eventually robs him of his wife. The same Fortune brings Thaisa's coffin to Cerimon (III.ii.55), who restores her to life. Cerimon, Shakespeare carefully emphasizes, is heaven's agent in the restoration of

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<sup>72</sup>Frank Kermode, Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne (New York, 1971), p. 228.

Thaisa: "The Heavens," one gentleman remarks, "Through you increase our wonder, and set up/Your fame for ever" (III.ii.97-99). At the end of the play Thaisa refers to Cerimon as "This man,/Through whom the gods have shown their power..." (V.iii.59-60). The reunion of Pericles and Marina (and his subsequent restoration to health) is the work of providence (V.i.200-201). Pericles himself confirms this:

She at Tarsus  
Was nursed by Cleon; whom at fourteen years  
He sought to murder; but her better stars  
Brought her to Mytilene; 'gainst whose shore  
Riding, her fortunes brought the maid aboard us,  
Where, by her most clear remembrance, she  
Made known herself my daughter.

(V.iii.7-13)

Later Pericles gives thanks to the gods (V.iii.40-41),<sup>73</sup> and in case there is any mistake about providence's role (and the cooperation of human virtue), Shakespeare lets Gower have the last word on it:

In Pericles, his Queen and daughter, seen,  
Although assailed with fortune fierce and keen  
Virtue preserved from fell destruction's blast,  
Led on by Heaven and crowned with joy at last.

(V.iii.87-90)

In both Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale the role of providence in directing the affairs of the characters is again pronounced. At least three characters in the play

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<sup>73</sup>Cf. Cymbeline's thanks to the gods: V.v.477-479.

invoke the protection and blessings of Heaven upon the assailed Imogen (I.i.129-130; II.i.62-65; III.v.162-164).

Their prayers are answered, because in Cymbeline, as Pisanio recognizes, "The heavens still must work" (IV.iii.41). Providence also takes a hand in Posthumus' life, not only punishing him as a preparation for rebirth (V.iv.71-78); but protecting him from death, as if by magic, and preserving him for the regeneration which Imogen will help to bring about:

Today how many would have given their honours  
To have saved their carcasses, took heel to do't  
And yet died too! I, in mine own woe charmed,  
Could not find Death where I did hear him groan  
Nor feel him where he struck. (V.iii.66-70)

The peace and union established at the end of Cymbeline is the work of providence. "The fingers of the pow'rs above," says the Soothsayer, "do tune/The harmony of this peace" (V.v.466-467).<sup>74</sup> Providence has helped in the restoration of unity by protecting and strengthening Imogen, the unifying force or nucleus around which all gather. In The Winter's Tale the influence of the gods in shaping the outcome of events can be seen not only in the role played by Apollo in the exoneration of Hermione, but in the characters' belief in that influence. Both Paulina and Perdita are aware of the role of the gods in shaping destiny.

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<sup>74</sup>Cf. the King's remark at the end of Mucedorus (xviii. 103-104): "A happier planet never reigned than that/ Which governs at this hour."

Paulina believes that Leontes' penance cannot satisfy the gods:

A thousand knees,  
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,  
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter  
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods  
To look that way thou wert. (III.ii.208-212),

and Perdita speaks of the interference of heaven in her contract with Florizel (V.i.204-205). In her infancy Perdita had been transported to a desert place "where chance may nurse or end" her (II.iii.181); but the heavens "are angry" at Antigonus and the Mariner for doing so (III.iii.4-6), and Fate is on Perdita's side. Hermione, more than any other character in the play, is particularly sensitive to the part played by providence in her affairs. She has to accept her hardship until "the heavens look/ With an aspect more favourable" (II.i.106-107). Her trials are designed by a power beyond her comprehension, but she knows that she will benefit from them: "this action I now go on/ Is for my better grace" (II.i.121-122), she feels. More than that, she is convinced that "powers divine" will eventually vindicate her:

if powers divine  
Behold our human actions -- as they do --  
I doubt not then, but Innocence shall make  
False Accusation blush, and Tyranny  
Tremble at Patience. (III.ii.27-31)

As he had done in Pericles, Shakespeare leaves no doubt whatever about the shaping influence of providence. Leontes presents Florizel to Hermione as,

is symbolically suggested in Pericles' hearing of the music of the spheres which the Elizabethans believed revealed the harmony in the universe. J.M. Nosworthy has underestimated the importance of music in Pericles. Such music as the play contains, he says, "is a separable element whose total omission would make little or no essential difference."<sup>76</sup> But Marina, we notice, begins the transformation of her father by singing to him. That transformation is climaxed when Pericles hears the music of the spheres. It is worth noting that in The Tempest Prospero also uses music to help him in the cleansing of his enemies. Having brought them into the enchanted circle with the aid of "solemn music," Prospero comments:

The charm dissolves apace;  
And as the morning steals upon the night,  
Melting the darkness, so their rising senses  
Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle  
Their clearer reason.

(V.1.64-68)<sup>77</sup>

Throughout Pericles one dominant image of Marina emerges: she is "absolute Marina" (IV. Chorus, 31). She is "a

<sup>76</sup>J.M. Nosworthy, "Music and its Function in the Romances of Shakespeare," ShS, 11 (1958), 66.

<sup>77</sup>See also V.1.58-60. The power of music, especially as a spiritual restorative or solace is important in Shakespeare's plays. In The Merchant of Venice, for example, Lorenzo says that music can tame wild beasts, and the absence of music in a man's life makes him less human (V.1. 70-88). Cf. the spiritual power of music in Utopia: "All their music...so renders and expresses the natural feelings...and so represents the meaning by the form of the melody that it wonderfully affects, penetrates, and inflames the souls of the hearers" (p. 237).

Your son-in-law,  
 And son unto the King; whom, heavens directing,  
 Is troth-plight to your daughter.

(V.iii.149-151)

In the early scenes of The Tempest (and in V.i.187) Shakespeare associates Miranda with the divine (I.ii.424-429), at the same time stressing the role of heaven in the preservation of Prospero and his daughter. Shakespeare implies that their preservation was miraculous. They had been expelled "by foul play" but "blessedly help hither" (I.ii.63-64). Father and daughter survived the "rotten carcass of a butt" (I.ii.146), and came ashore by "providence divine" (I.ii.159). Heaven also used Gonzalo (appropriately described as "holy Gonzalo" later in the play) as one of its instruments in the survival of Prospero and Miranda. Shakespeare makes it clear that Prospero's preservation is the result of Miranda's special status as a quasi-divine creature:

O, a cherubin  
 Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile,  
 Infused with a fortitude from heaven,  
 When I have deck'd the sea with drops full salt,  
 Under my burthen groan'd; which rais'd in me  
 As undergoing stomach, to bear up  
 Against what should ensue. (I.ii.152-158)

Like Pericles, Prospero discovered the evil in man, and, presumably, the evil in the universe. In this passage Shakespeare is underlining Prospero's physical as well as his spiritual anguish. It was Miranda who saved him from despair, and gave him the strength and courage to withstand

his spiritual pain. The part played by providence in the lives of father and daughter, the providential meeting of Ferdinand and Miranda, are given final emphasis in their marriage, for, as Ferdinand states, divine providence has brought about his union with Miranda:

Sir, she is mortal;  
But by immortal providence she's mine.  
(V.1.188-189)

Providence has used Prospero to bring about this union. The same providence that shaped the ends of Ferdinand and Miranda has been at work in the lives of all the other characters, as Gonzalo clearly states in his invocation:

I have inly wept,  
Or should have spoke ere this. Look down, you gods,  
And on this couple drop a blessed crown!  
For it is you that have chalk'd forth the way  
Which brought us hither. (V.1.200-204)

Frank Kermode points out that "the sense of a mysterious movement of providence, which achieves its ends, in spite of, and even through the agency of human wickedness and the chances of life, is very strong in Gonzalo's rejoicing at the end."<sup>75</sup> Shakespeare had pointedly established Gonzalo's goodness early in the play. Now, he is given an hieratic function as he sums up the role of providence. At the same time he consecrates, as it were, the union of the lovers, thereby climaxing what Prospero had begun in I.11.

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

The rebirth and redemption of fallen man through the agency of the chaste virgin is at the center of All's Well, Measure For Measure and the final romances. The regeneration or renewal of others comes about as the direct result of marriage directed by providence and based on the preservation of prenuptial virginity and chastity. The most important characteristic of Mariana, Isabella, Helena, Marina, Imogen, Perdita, Hermione and Miranda is that they are redemptive figures. The spiritual sickness of someone is transformed into spiritual health as the direct result of the heroine's redemptive power which, to repeat, is to become operative within marriage.

All of the heroines, we have been noticing, resemble the Virgin Mary in purity, saintliness, miraculous qualities and beauty. The Virgin's part in man's redemption is also reflected in the women's regenerative powers. But there is an important difference: the rebirth of man in Christ through the agency of the Virgin is a preparation for marriage with Christ in Heaven; Shakespeare's heroines bring about a rebirth in fallen man, too, but this is a preparation for human marriage. Ultimately, Shakespeare conceives of marriage as an emblem of the renewal of life in diseased man and society. Mariana, Isabella, Helena and the women of the romances are symbols of renewal: they renew life, they regenerate the unworthy and they bring or help to



bring about renewal in a diseased society. Helena's restoration of the sick king (and hence the state) to health, and her regeneration of Bertram crystallize the central theme of the six plays we have been examining.

In the last act of Pericles spiritual death and asceticism are replaced by renewal and the marriage ceremony. Like Helena, Marina has enchanted everyone with the power of her chastity. Like Helena, too, religious and divine images surround Marina. When she cured the king, Helena, everyone agreed, had performed a miracle. Marina uses "sacred physic" (V.1.74) in the restoration of her father. The dramatist has consistently linked Marina with miraculous power. Lysimachus remarks that Marina,

with her sweet harmony  
And other chosen attractions, would allure,  
And make a' battery through his deafened parts,  
Which now are midway stopped. (V.1.45-48)

She herself reminds Pericles that she has "been gazed on like a comet" (V.1.87), and we are told that she enriches the very endowments she possesses (V.1.118-119). Before she is presented to Pericles, Lysimachus tells Marina:

If that thy prosperous and artificial feat  
Can draw him but to answer thee in aught,  
Thy sacred physic shall receive such pay  
As thy desires can wish. (V.1.72-75)

Shakespeare has drawn together those qualities in Marina he has been consistently emphasizing: fertility ("prosperous"), artistic skill ("artificial feat") and miraculous,

divine power ("sacred physic").

In Pericles Marina is the instrument of the divine power that brings about a providential resolution. Diana is the actual divinity presiding, but her close association with Marina at the end of the play is rather striking: both goddess and maid are clearly linked with silver and its derivatives (V.1.251; V.iii.6-7). Because of her virtue Marina, gazing like patience on kings' graves, can smile "extremity out of act" (V.1.140). Specifically, what Marina has done "with her sweet harmony/And other chosen attractions" (V.1.45-46) is to bring about a spiritual rebirth in Pericles who is convinced that the universe is his enemy. Pericles' complete withdrawal from the world is implied in Helicanus' comment:

Behold him. This was a goodly person  
Till the disaster that, one mortal night,  
Drove him to this. (V.1.36-38)

Pericles' remark, "thou that beget'st him that did thee beget" (V.1.197), is a particularly concise statement of Marina's redemptive role in the play. His desire for "fresh garments" (V.1.216) is a symbol of this rebirth after his penitential fourteen years.

The restoration of an ordered, harmonious society (initiated by Cerimon in the "resurrection" of Thaisa) is effected through the agency of the virgin Marina, and it

is symbolically suggested in Pericles' hearing of the music of the spheres which the Elizabethans believed revealed the harmony in the universe. J.M. Nosworthy has underestimated the importance of music in Pericles. Such music as the play contains, he says, "is a separable element whose total omission would make little or no essential difference."<sup>76</sup> But Marina, we notice, begins the transformation of her father by singing to him. That transformation is climaxed when Pericles hears the music of the spheres. It is worth noting that in The Tempest Prospero also uses music to help him in the cleansing of his enemies. Having brought them into the enchanted circle with the aid of "solemn music," Prospero comments:

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palace/For the crowned Truth to dwell in" (V.i.122-123). Marina's power of conversion, the very power that conquers Boult and Lysimachus, is the quintessential Marina. This power, so closely linked with her virginity, brings about reconciliation and harmony. Redemption is transferred from Marina to the older generation. Despite his unsympathetic treatment of Pericles, Derek Traversi gives a good account of Marina's role:

Marina, recently described in terms that confer a certain status of divinity upon the human, has brought her father the intuition of a new and deeper life; and this she has been able to do as a result of her own experience; the pattern of which involved her birth in tempest, her death and burial, her exposure to human malevolence, and finally her triumphant resurrection...as a symbol of a reintegrated and regenerated humanity.<sup>78</sup>

In the opening scene of Cymbeline Shakespeare unobtrusively presents the chaste woman as the redemptive figure, and prepares the audience for the future redemption of Posthumus. He is an eagle, Imogen says, and Cloten is a puttock (I.i.139-140). This is true enough in the light of Cloten's characterization, but, she adds, Posthumus is "A man worth any woman; overbuys me/Almost the sum he pays" (I.i.146-147). The First Gentleman is even more flattering. Posthumus, he says,

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<sup>78</sup>Traversi, Shakespeare: The Last Phase, p. 40.

taper/Bows toward her..." (II.ii.19).<sup>83</sup>

In The Winter's Tale Shakespeare depicts Perdita as an emblem of fertility and associates this with her virginity. Perdita also emerges as a redemptive figure in the sheep-shearing scene. We may envisage her as the daffodil that charms the winds of March with beauty (IV.iv.119-120). Just as the daffodil is the harbinger of the rebirth of Nature, so too Perdita's beauty and virtue, united to Florizel's purity, will bring final destruction to the barren winter of Leontes' jealousy, and replace it with redemption and rebirth. We can therefore see this particular image of the daffodil as the natural culmination of Paulina's earlier comment: "The silence often of pure innocence/Persuades when speaking fails" (II.ii.40-41). But before we witness Perdita's redemptive power bringing regeneration to Leontes, Shakespeare prepares the audience for this by once again drawing to a climax earlier image.

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advises Bertram to meet her at midnight, at which time she will yield to him, and Angelo consummates his broken contract with Mariana at midnight also.<sup>80</sup> Both encounters foreshadow the unworthy male's regeneration, and the dramatist is probably suggesting a tenuous parallel with Posthumus. Posthumus' letter to Imogen, although it is intended as a lure, contains, in spite of himself, a revealing comment: "Justice and your father's wrath," he writes, "should he take me in his dominion, could not be so cruel to me as you, O the dearest of creatures, would even renew me with your eyes" (III.ii.40-43). What is here sarcasm (the letter is meant to lure Imogen to her death) will become Posthumus' salvation in the play's finale, where part of the renewal process takes place by the casting of Imogen's eyes on others.

In the short scenes that precede the play's finale, Shakespeare treats the consequences of the slandering of Imogen, and it is Posthumus who is given most of the attention in these late scenes. Shakespeare treats his despair and agony, his emotional anguish and pain in some detail, but we are assured by Jupiter that he is to be made much happier by his affliction (V.iv.78). As one of

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<sup>80</sup>Cf. A Midsummer Night's Dream, V.1.365-366: "The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve./Lovers, to bed."

his soliloquies makes clear (V.i.9-11), Posthumus still believes in Imogen's adultery; but he is becoming increasingly selfless -- the first step on the road to regeneration. "Gods, if you/Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults," he says, "I never/Had lived to put on this" (V.i.7-9). "Imogen is your own," he adds, "Do your best wills,/ And make me blest to obey" (V.i.16-17). This emerging selflessness is also revealed in his repeated desire for death. The Jailer says of him, "unless a man would marry a gallows and beget young gibbets, I never saw one so prone" (V.iv.197-198). He would exchange Imogen's life for his (V.iv.22), and his ransom is his death (V.iii.81). He considers death to be the just atonement:

Must I repent,  
 I cannot do it better than in gyves,  
 Desired more than constrained. To satisfy,  
 If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take  
 • No stricter render of me than my all.  
 (V.iv.13-17)

Posthumus' imprisonment parallels the "bondage" Ferdinand must experience before he can gain his freedom. The death he is seeking is really the fire of purgation which he must suffer so that he can be reborn. That is why he has been preserved, miraculously, as he thinks (V.iii.68).

The early image of the Queen as symbol of destruction and sterility is climaxed in a passage which Shakespeare uses to point a contrast between her marriage and that of Imogen and Posthumus. Like Antiochus' daughter in Pericles,

her external beauty masks an inner corruption:

She did confess she had  
 For you a mortal mineral, which, being took,  
 Should by the minute feed on life and, ling'ring,  
 By inches waste you. In which time she purposed,  
 By watching, weeping, tendance, kissing, to  
 O'er come you with her show, and, in time,  
 When she had filled you with her craft, to work  
 Her son into th'adoption of the crown;  
 But failing of her, end by his strange absence,  
 Grew shameless desperate, opened, in despite  
 Of heaven and men, her purposes, repented  
 The evils she hatched were not effected, so  
 Despairing died. (V.v.49-61)

Words connoting death and sterility dominate the passage.

Notice, too, that once again the normal fertility of a marriage has been perverted into the hatching of evil.

Cymbeline, on the other hand, is about to give birth after his baptism of suffering, tears of repentance and joy.

His tears are said to be "holy water" (V.v.269) which, like Prospero's "sweet asperston," are meant to fall on Imogen's head (V.v.268-269), thus fertilizing, as it were, her union with Posthumus.<sup>81</sup> After the purification by water, the king becomes a "mother to the birth of three" (V.v.369),

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<sup>81</sup>Cf. Prospero's prayer, "Heavens rain grace/On that which breeds between 'em!" There are other interesting parallels. Orsino loves Olivia with "fertile tears" (Twelfth Night, I.v.241), and Hermione asks the gods to look down and "from your sacred vials pour your graces/ Upon my daughter's head!" (V.iii.122-124). Cordelia's tears are to replenish and regenerate Lear: "All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth,/Spring with my tears! be aidant and remediate/In the good man's distress!" (IV.iv.16-18). "Unpublish'd virtues," according to Kittredge, refer to medicinal plants: see Sixteen Plays of Shakespeare, ed. George Kittredge (New York, 1946).



and Cymbeline's "lopped branches" are rejoined to the tree. The rejoining serves as a useful symbol for the political and spiritual reunion of everyone. Moreover, it looks forward to the kind of peace which is itself a promise of physical and spiritual fertility. "The lofty cedar, royal Cymbeline," the Soothsayer comments,

Personates thee, and thy lopped branches point  
Thy two sons forth; who, by Belarius stol'n,  
For many years thought dead, are now revived,  
To the majestic cedar joined, whose issue  
Promises Britain peace and plenty.  
(V.v.453-458)

Cymbeline's restored sons, emblems of restored fertility, are presented in a ritual at the heart of which is a blessing with water: "The/ benediction of these covering heavens/Fall on their heads like dew," Belarius says, "For they are worthy/To inlay heaven with stars" (V.v.350-352). Posthumus, meanwhile, has come to understand the value of Imogen's chastity, which he speaks of as if it were a symbol of moral virtue: Their reunion is treated as a return to the fertility Cymbeline destroyed. "Think that you are upon a rock," Imogen says, "and now/Throw me again" (V.v.262-263). Posthumus replies:

Hang there like fruit, my soul,  
Till the tree die! (V.v.264-265)

The chaste female is the stable foundation upon which the future fertility of the union rests. Shakespeare consolidates the image when Posthumus "anchors upon Imogen"

(V.v.393).

"In the first section of the play, Cymbeline and his Queen destroyed budding or potential fertility, and so created a winter of sterility. Cymbeline resembles the "canker that eats up love's tender spring."<sup>82</sup> Before she can seal her love for Posthumus with a kiss, Cymbeline enters, Imogen remarks,

And like the tyrannous breathing of the north  
Shakes all our buds from growing.  
(I.iii.36-37)

In the second part of the play the fertility of spring is restored specifically through the agency of the chaste female. Earlier in the play Posthumus had sought renewal through Imogen's eyes. Now, with the final lines of the play close at hand, Shakespeare presents the chaste female as the embodiment of the unifying, regenerating impulse:

See,  
Posthumus anchors upon Imogen,  
And she like harmless lightning throws her eye  
On him, her brothers, me, her master, hitting  
Each object with a joy; the counterchange  
Is severally in all. (V.v.392-397)

In these lines Cymbeline uses a light image to crystallize all of the qualities Shakespeare gives to Imogen. It therefore climaxes, as it were, the enchantment Iachimo felt in the presence of Imogen. Her beauty and dazzling chastity seem to be summed up in Iachimo's comment: "The flame o'th'

<sup>82</sup>See Venus and Adonis, 656.

taper/Bows toward her..." (II.ii.19).<sup>83</sup>

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that had suggested this power: "This is a creature,"  
says the servant,

Would she begin a sect, might quench the zeal  
Of all professors else; make proselytes<sup>84</sup>  
Of who she did bid follow. (V.1.106-109)

For at least sixteen years Leontes has performed a saint-  
like sorrow:

No fault could you make  
Which you have not redeemed; indeed paid down  
More penitence than done trespass. At the last,  
Do as the heavens have done: forget your evil;  
With them forgive yourself. (V.1.1-6)

But Leontes cannot forgive himself:

Whilst I remember  
Her and her virtues, I cannot forget  
My blemishes in them, and so still think of  
The wrong I did myself; which was so much,  
That heirless it hath made my kingdom, and  
Destroyed the sweet'st companion that e'er man  
Bred his hopes out of. (V.1.7-13)

The dramatist's use of "bred" is important. Leontes destroyed  
the natural fertility in his union with Hermione. The  
restoration of that fertility is now in the hands of mother  
and daughter. This is worth emphasizing because some  
scholars have tended to underestimate Perdita's role in the  
play.<sup>85</sup> Immediately Shakespeare draws together all of the

<sup>84</sup>Cf. Marina's power, IV.v-vi.

<sup>85</sup>See, for example, Thomas M. Parrott, Shakespearean  
Comedy (New York, 1962). The "love story of Perdita," he  
writes, "is only an idyllic interlude between the tragedy  
of the Queen's trial and her final happy reunion with a  
once lost husband and daughter" (p. 387).

images of fertility previously associated with Perdita. "Welcome hither," Leontes tells Perdita and Florizel, "As is the spring to th'earth!" (V.i.151-152). They are the spiritual spring renewing fallen man.<sup>86</sup> Leontes prays for the gods to "Purge all infection from our air whilst you/ Do climate here!" (V.i.168-170).

The arrival of Perdita as giver of grace and agent of regeneration is a promise that all infection will be purged. The fertile isle of Delphi comes to mind, and the early link between Perdita and the fertility of Delphi, origin of the oracle (and hence the fertile seed of regeneration), is more firmly established. The keeping of prenuptial virginity by the lovers is a sacrificial act of self-denial leading to the redemptive process. Early in the play the boyhood of Leontes and Polixenes had been treated in detail. As the play closes these years assume considerable importance. Both kings were linked with unfallen men (I.ii.68-75). The transition from Innocence to Experience which they undergo, is a transition from grace to sin, and like Christ redeeming fallen man, Perdita must redeem the kings. Redemption is symbolically enacted offstage and reported

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. the young lovers in Mucedorus, who emerge from the forest bringing peace and happiness to the older people: see Mucedorus, xviii, in Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, ed. Charles Baskervill and others (New York, 1957).

in the penultimate scene. Paulina's earlier comment, as she presents the infant Perdita to Leontes, is indeed prophetic:

[I]  
 Do come with words as medicinal as true,  
 Honest as either, to purge him of that humour  
 That presses him from sleep.  
 (II.iii.36-39)

The restoration of Leontes to spiritual health is an essential ingredient in the exultation at the end of the play. It is therefore difficult to accept the Arden editor's position on this matter. Leontes "shows little sign of spiritual growth," he writes.<sup>87</sup> Barbara Mowat is also sceptical about Leontes' suffering. His suffering, she says, "comes across as a shallow thing..." and he "does not appear to feel his situation deeply."<sup>88</sup> At the beginning of the play Leontes has few admirable qualities. Towards the close of the play Shakespeare stresses the profound change that has taken place in Leontes. His speeches and behaviour in V.i demonstrate that he has indeed acquired considerable humility, trust and self-knowledge (all of them signs of spiritual growth). While he remembers Hermione's virtues, he tells Clegmenes,

<sup>87</sup> Pafford, p. lxx.

<sup>88</sup> Barbara Mowat, "A Tale of Sprights and Goblins," SQ, XX (Winter, 1969), 45.

I cannot forget  
 My blemishes in them; and so still think of  
 The wrong I did myself; which was so much,  
 That heirless it hath made my kingdom, and  
 Destroyed the sweet'st companion that e'er man  
 Bred his hopes out of. (V.1.7-13)<sup>89</sup>

The importance of the chaste female's redemptive role can be seen in Shakespeare's handling of his source. In Pandosto Leontes' counterpart commits suicide, so overwhelming is his guilt. Shakespeare deliberately spares Leontes so that he can be redeemed. The meeting of Hermione and Polixenes would, one might expect, occasion some embarrassment; but the journey between Leontes' remarks,

Be it concluded,  
 No barricado for a belly. Know't  
 It will let in and out the enemy,  
 With bag and baggage. Many thousand on's  
 Have the disease, and feel't not,  
 (I.ii.203-207)

and

What! Look upon my brother. Both your pardons,  
 That e'er I put between your holy looks  
 My ill suspicion, (V.iii.147-149)

has been long and painful. Leontes' suffering has been fertile. For fallen man the movement from innocence to Experience is not reversible, but regenerative grace has been specifically brought about by the union of Perdita and Florizel. There are two important facts to be noted about this impending marriage: like the betrothal of Ferdinand

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<sup>89</sup>See also V.1.124-138; 148-151; 170-174.

and Miranda, it has been founded on the value of pre-nuptial virginity, and, moreover, spiritual and physical fertility are closely linked with the chastity of the lovers. Secondly, the union of the lovers (like that of those in The Tempest) has been directed all along by divine providence. Apollo's oracle is finally fulfilled; and Shakespeare has brought to fruition the process of spiritual regeneration begun when the shepherd found Perdita in the deserts of Bohemia.

Miranda's redemptive role is hinted at early in The Tempest. In Pericles Marina brought about a spiritual rebirth in her father who had fallen out of love with the universe. Prospero's disillusionment and despair are the inevitable result of Antonio's betrayal, but he attributes his preservation from total despair to the infant Miranda, who is given the status of a divine, somewhat miraculous creature (I.ii.152-158). The regeneration of fallen man through the agency of the chaste female is celebrated in the final reconciliation scene. In the Masque the Naiads, who are described as "temperate nymphs" (IV.i.132), join the Reapers in a symbolic dance. The dance symbolizes the union of chastity with the fertility that follows inevitably when that chastity has been the basis of marriage. Redemption of fallen man is one of the effects of the lovers' union. In the final romances evil is depicted as the



destroyer of the established order. In The Tempest the renewal of society's afflicted order is brought about by the union of Ferdinand and Miranda. Throughout the final scene Shakespeare emphasizes the internal changes taking place in those who have wronged Prospero. Prospero himself has had to temper the urge for vengeance with mercy and forgiveness:

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th'  
 quick,  
 Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
 Do I take part: the rarer action is  
 In virtue than in vengeance. (V.1.25-28)

Prospero's enemies are now "penitent" (V.1.28). Alonzo, Sebastian and Antonio are "distracted" and "brimful of sorrow and dismay" (V.1.11-13), and the king speaks of the affliction of his mind (V.1.115), and asks for forgiveness. Antonio and Sebastian are experiencing "inward pinches" of conscience (V.1.77), and Gonzalo implies that Prospero's enemies have finally arrived at the end of their journey of self-discovery:

~~Was Milan thrust from Milan, that his issue  
 Should become Kings of Naples? O, rejoice  
 Beyond a common joy, and set it down  
 With gold on lasting pillars: in one voyage  
 Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,  
 And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wife  
 Where he himself was lost, Prospero his dukedom  
 In a poor isle, and all of us ourselves,<sup>90</sup>  
 When no man was his own. (V.1.205-213)~~

<sup>90</sup>Cf. Dante's Inferno, I.1-3: "In the middle of the Journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost." See the Carlyle-Okey-Wicksteed Translation of The Divine Comedy (New York, 1951).

This movement toward repentance is the beginning of reconciliation, a reconciliation which depends upon the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand. Of course the final paradise has not yet been achieved: Prospero anticipates his death, and he will have to keep an eye on Antonio. But the characters have been restored to their original positions and a new political order has been established through the union of Milan and Naples.<sup>91</sup> The "brave new world" (V.1.184) Miranda refers to is internal.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians (4:26ff.) the church is seen as a barren woman who becomes a mother under the new dispensation. In Apocalypse 21:1-2 and 22:17 the church is imaged as a virgin encountered by the Spirit. As a result of this encounter the virgin becomes the locus of the new creation. Miranda is the virgin in whose womb the new Adam is to be conceived. At the end of The Tempest a recreation has taken place. Even Caliban, the "thing of darkness" (V.1.275), on whose nature "nature can never stick" (IV.1.189), Prospero once said, has decided to "seek for grace" (V.1.295). Even Caliban discovers what "a three-double ass" he was (V.1.295). The order which was

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<sup>91</sup>Cf. the establishment of true identities when Ephesus and Syracuse are united in marriage at the end of The Comedy of Errors.

upset by Antonio (but aided by Prospero's negligence) is now restored. So that life may be properly ordered certain disciplines have to be maintained. The preservation of prenuptial virginity is one such discipline.

By preserving order within man himself virginity, as Shakespeare conceives of it, creates a necessary precondition for the realization of man's ultimate fulfillment.

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