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Political Themes

in

English Renaissance Drama

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Political Themes
in
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Preface

This thesis attempts to elucidate the treatment of political themes in several Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, most of them well-known, with reference to the political thought of the Renaissance. I am particularly concerned with a political attitude which I have termed "humanist", and with plays which I believe reflect this attitude. Renaissance political humanism, I argue, is best regarded as a manner of approach to politics, rather than a fixed corpus of doctrine, an approach based on the belief that political harmony is not only possible in a fallen world but part of the natural order of things, and that the customary relationships of rule and obedience, far from being a mere state of bondage, may prove a mutually enriching experience for sovereign and subject alike.

My interest in drama with a humanist orientation has dictated both the choice of dramatists (to which I shall come shortly) and the choice of individual plays within a dramatist's total work. Chapman's Byron, for example, is perhaps the least representative of his tragedies, and yet I believe the closest in spirit to the humanist political tragedies of Jonson and Shakespeare discussed in Chapters Four to Six. Two plays with anti-humanist elements have also been discussed to throw the main emphases of the others into greater relief. These are Chapman's Caesar and Pompey, which employs many of the ideas and images found in Byron to a quite different end (and consequently illustrates how careful one must be in distinguishing between the political implications of superficially similar plays); and Greville's Mustapha, which on account of its rhetorical form helps to define the ideological issues with great detail and clarity.

I would emphasise that this study is concerned with only one current, though I believe the major current, of Renaissance thought and drama, and does not claim to be comprehensive. My choice of dramatists can only be justified by the account of them in the following pages. One or two omissions, however, call for an explanation. Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger, while not specifically anti-humanist dramatists, exhibit what I would prefer to call a post-humanist sensibility which differentiates them from the authors discussed here. The most notable omission, however, is that of Marlowe. The points at which Marlowe might have entered into the present discussion are numerous, but his commitment to humanist political ideals is far too doubtful and qualified for him to be included without considerably widening the scope of the discussion.

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Abbreviations

E in C	Essays in Criticism
ES	English Studies
HLQ	Huntingdon Library Quarterly
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
JWCI	Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes
MLN	Modern Language Notes
MLQ	Modern Language Quarterly
MLR	Modern Language Review
N&Q	Notes and Queries
PBA	Proceedings of the British Academy
PQ	Philological Quarterly
RES	Review of English Studies
SEL	Studies in English Literature
ShakS	Shakespeare Studies
ShS	Shakespeare Survey
SP	Studies in Philology
SQ	Shakespeare Quarterly
UTQ	University of Toronto Quarterly
YR	Yale Review

Contents

1	Introduction: Political Themes in the Drama and the use of Contemporary Political Literature	1
2	Renaissance Political Thought	23
3	Classical Senecan Drama and Fulke Greville's <u>Mustapha</u> (c. 1604-14)	65
4	Ben Jonson: <u>Poetaster</u> (1601), <u>Sejanus</u> (1603), <u>Catiline</u> (1611)	94
5	Shakespeare's Histories: <u>Richard II</u> (c. 1595), <u>Henry IV</u> (c. 1596-97)	152
6	Shakespeare's Tragedies: <u>Macbeth</u> (c. 1606), <u>Coriolanus</u> (c. 1608)	204
7	George Chapman: <u>The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Byron</u> (1608), <u>Caesar and Pompey</u> (c. 1612-13)	250
8	Cyril Tourneur: <u>The Revenger's Tragedy</u> (c. 1605-06); John Webster: <u>The Duchess of Malfi</u> (1613)	300
	Conclusion	332
	Bibliography	341

Chapter One

Introduction: Political Themes in the Drama
and the Use of Contemporary Political Literature

I

"In Playes," wrote Thomas Nashe, "all coosonages, all cunning drifts over-guylded with outward holinesse, all stratagemes of warre, all the cankerwormes that breede on the ruste of peace, are most lively anatomiz'd: they shew the ill successe of treason, the fall of hastie climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the miserie of civill dissention, and how just God is evermore in punishing of murther. . . . no Play they have, encourageth any man to tumults or rebellion, but layes before such the halter and the gallowes." Pierce Penilesse, from which this passage is taken, appeared in 1592, five years before the publication of Richard II, the earliest play in this study. At the latter end of our chosen period, in 1612, when Webster was writing The Duchess of Malfi and Chapman Caesar and Pompey, Thomas Heywood pleads for the utility of drama in similar terms: "playes are writ with this ayme, and carryed with this methode, to teach their subjects obedience to their king, to shew the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing state of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to alleageance, dehorting them from all trayterous and fellonious stratagemes."¹ The assumption that

1 The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. R. B. McKerrow, I (London, 1904), 213-14; Thomas Heywood, An Apology for Actors (1612; rpt. London: Shakespeare Society, 1841), p.53. Richard II is first heard of in 1597, the year of its publication. For the approximate date of The Duchess of Malfi, see the edition by John Russell Brown, The Revels Plays (London, 1964), pp.xvii-xviii; and for Caesar and Pompey, The Plays and Poems of George Chapman: The Tragedies, ed. T. M. Parrott (London, 1910), p.655. All subsequent references to The Duchess of Malfi and Chapman's tragedies are to these editions.

drama may deal with political problems and teach political morality was widely accepted in the years that witnessed the production of the greatest Renaissance drama, at least, we may assume, among playwrights and their audiences.²

Shakespearean criticism of the last half century has produced abundant evidence to support the arguments of Nashe and Heywood. The work of R. W. Chambers, Tillyard, Rossiter and others reveals Shakespeare's use of contemporary political and historical thought not only in incidental detail, but in the basic design of many of his plays.³ Other dramatists have enjoyed much less attention in this field. A number of essays have appeared on political aspects of the tragedies of Jonson and Chapman,⁴ while many general accounts of the drama exhibit an awareness of the importance for the Renaissance of the subject of

- 2 A different opinion is expressed by Patrick Cruttwell, "Shakespeare is not our Contemporary," YR, LIX (1969), 33-49, who argues that the "overwhelming weight of respectable opinion" in Shakespeare's age would scorn the idea that popular drama had anything serious to offer on important subjects, and that Shakespeare shows no signs of overstepping this humble conception of the dramatist's art.
- 3 The most important pioneering studies of political themes in Renaissance drama, particularly Shakespeare, are R. W. Chambers, "The Expression of Ideas, Particularly Political Ideas, in the Three Pages and in Shakespeare," in Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More, ed. A. W. Pollard (Cambridge, 1923), pp.142-87; J. E. Phillips, The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman Plays (New York, 1940); E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1944); A. P. Rossiter's introduction to his edition of Woodstock (London, 1946); and L. B. Campbell, Shakespeare's 'Histories', Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (San Marino, Cal., 1947).
- 4 See for example Charles W. Kennedy, "Political Theory in the Plays of George Chapman," in Essays in Dramatic Literature: the Parrott Presentation Volume, ed. Hardin Craig (1935; rpt. New York 1967), pp.73-86; K. M. Burton, "The Political Tragedies of Chapman and Ben Jonson," E in C, II (1952), 397-412; Daniel C. Boughner, "Sejanus and Machiavelli," SEL 1500-1900, I (1961), 81-100; Jacob I. de Villiers, "Ben Jonson's Tragedies," ES, XLV (1964), 433-442; Edward D. Kennedy, "James I and Chapman's Byron Plays," JEGP, LXIV (1965), 677-90.

"policy". No discussion of political themes in a wide range of Renaissance drama, both Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean, has yet been attempted. The inherent dangers of such a discussion are such as any comparative discussion of Shakespeare and his contemporary dramatists may encounter: namely, that the comparison of works widely differing in merit may tend to revolve around the lowest common denominators of political insight and dramatic excellence, and thus do less than justice to Shakespeare's towering superiority. But this superiority is, I suggest, one of degree, not of kind. This thesis is based on the conviction that such apparently disparate writers as Shakespeare, Jonson, Chapman, Greville, Tourneur, and Webster display a common interest in certain recurring political themes, and that a comparative discussion of their treatment of such themes may be helpful in interpreting individual plays, and in building up a comprehensive picture of the political element in the drama.

In seeking to define the limits of this study, I have been guided by Renaissance rather than modern notions on the proper range and objects of political thought. Of these guiding notions, one of the most important is the Renaissance axiom that the mutual rights and duties of sovereign and subject cannot be thought of in separation from one another: "The just commaundement of the prince, and the just obedience of the subjects, are answerable either to other, and cannot be separated."⁵ The art of obedience is therefore of no less importance than the art of rule, and in most of the plays discussed, both matters occupy the foreground. In certain Jacobean plays, however, notably

5 Jacques Hurault, Politicke, Moral, and Martial Discourses, tr. Arthur Golding (London, 1595), pp.10-11.

The Revenger's Tragedy, The Duchess of Malfi, and to a certain extent Caesar and Pompey, the art of rule claims very little of our attention. Instead, the author concentrates on the difficulty for the subject of knowing and rightly performing his duty when those in political authority are irremediably corrupt.

Furthermore, even the most systematic political philosophy never lost itself in the realms of abstraction. It was not enough, for example, to assert that tyranny violates laws both positive and natural, brings chaos at home, and opens the threat of foreign invasion. The political writer would feel it part of his duty to evoke the experience of actually being a tyrant. Castiglione follows his account of the methods and fruits of tyranny with anecdotes of tyrants who were induced by fear of their innumerable enemies to sleep shut fast in a chest, or in a tiny room hanging from the ceiling accessible only by a ladder which was removed each night.⁶ The frequent stress on the religious nature of obedience, and indeed on the religious basis of all political bonds and allegiances, further tended to direct political thought towards the individual. What mattered was not simply the interactions of groups of men, but the relation of each to a God who was the final arbiter of political order. The case of Sir Thomas More is sufficient indication of the political function of the individual conscience prior to the advent of religious toleration.

The tendency of Renaissance political thought to express itself partly through anecdote, and to refer broad processes to the thoughts and feelings of individuals is one reason why drama was particularly

6 Baldassare Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, tr. Sir Thomas Hoby, Tudor Translations XXIII (London, 1900), pp.315-16.

suites to mirror the political preoccupations of those times. Indeed, Shakespeare's much admired ability to hold fast to the complexities of individual existence in his investigation of public affairs - what Professor L. C. Knights calls his "personalist approach to politics"⁷ - is in perfect accord with the best of Renaissance political thought. There was a logical connection between ethics, concerned with the behaviour of the individual, and politics, concerned with the health of the entire body politic, which was more than the platitude that only a good man can rule justly. Particular qualities, especially when found in a person of authority, were held to be capable of generating their equivalent in the community at large. La Primaudaye, discussing the qualities necessary in a prince if he is to judge properly, states that the correct combination in the prince of such complementary virtues as gentleness and severity, bounty and rigour, facility and austerity, will produce a "harmonically justice" in his faculties, which will enable him to execute justice - distributing uprightly that which pertains to each man - in his realm. Elsewhere he argues that the breaking of faith, apart from being a heinous deed in itself, is the root of treason. For a man who breaks his word is betraying himself, as well as others, and it is but a few steps from this to the betrayal of one's country.⁸

7 L. C. Knights, "Historical Scholarship and the Interpretation of Shakespeare," in Further Explorations (London, 1965), p.154.

8 Pierre de la Primaudaye, The French Academie, tr. T. Bowes, 4th ed. (London 1602), pp.622, 394. It is worth recalling in this connection that the word "government" had a personal as well as a political connotation.

Even in those plays which dramatise the fate of a whole society, the personal and specific always has the greatest claim on our attention. Shakespeare's English history plays have been described as "political" on the grounds that the real centre of interest in them is not any one character or group of characters, but England itself.⁹ But though the idea of England achieves a continuous existence throughout the histories by means of such images as the body politic and the garden, it cannot properly be conceived of in separation from the men whose actions we see on stage. It may be regarded as an immortal body politic consisting of all its past members - those representatives of "Christian service and true chivalry" recalled by John of Gaunt and others in Richard II - as well as the "future ages" evoked in the same play by Carlisle (II.i.54, IV.i.136-49); and the men who people the history plays are its living components.¹⁰ A similar sense of Rome as consisting of its present members in relation to their predecessors and descendents pervades Jonson's Roman tragedies. The impersonal concept of a nation would be scarcely comprehensible to Shakespeare's contemporaries. We might say that they thought not about 'politics' - with its implications of doctrinaire abstraction - but about how a ruler should perform his task, and how his subjects should obey him. A habit of political

9 See H. B. Charlton, Shakespeare, Politics, and Politicians, The English Association, Pamphlet no. 72 (Oxford, 1929), p.11; Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p.160 (who advances this idea in connection with the first tetralogy only).

10 The concept of the body politic as a corporation consisting of all its present, past, and future members is discussed by Ernst H. Kantorowicz in Ch.6, "On Continuity and Corporations", of The King's Two Bodies (Princeton, 1957).

All references to Richard II are to the edition by Peter Ure, The Arden Shakespeare, 5th ed. (London, 1961).

thinking so inclusive, and centred thus on individual motive and action would find a play like Macbeth no less politically important and instructive because the emphasis is primarily on what Macbeth does to himself, and only secondarily on what he does to his kingdom.¹¹

II

The fundamental concern for the mutually interdependent arts of ruling and obeying which unites these plays gives rise to a number of inter-related themes which may now be specified in greater detail. The true king was supposed never to rule alone by his own will or whim. A number of traditions, both legal and religious, combined to emphasise the co-operative nature of rule. One such was the mediaeval tradition of the king as a judge, whose task it was to apply and interpret, but not to alter law, which still survived in theory if not always in practice.¹² The king, moreover, like any other man, was subject to error and sin, which made the advice of others a necessary restraint; the common idea of the realm as a body politic with the sovereign at its head emphasised

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- 11 Cf. Arthur Sewall, Character and Society in Shakespeare (Oxford, 1951), p.76: "The great Shakespearian tragedies, however, are what they are just because social and political judgements (though never wholly abrogated) tend to break down. . . . In other words vision . . . seeks, as it were, to transcend society, to judge the social judgement, to bring society and its judgements sub specie aeternitatis. So - Macbeth is a villain; but when Duncan lies dead in the next room we think not of the murder but of the horror of Macbeth's realization that he shall sleep no more. . . . These tragedies, then, all imply a metaphysical world in which what matters is not what men do to society, but what they do to themselves."
- 12 The continuity of late mediaeval and Tudor ideas on the relation of the King to the law is emphasised by Franklin Le van Baumer in Ch.5, "The King and the Law", of The Early Tudor Theory of Kingship (New York, 1940; rpt. 1966).

both his superiority over others and his dependence on them. The exploration of the art of rule, therefore, inevitably leads to an investigation of the relationship between the sovereign, his counsellors, and the law. While Shakespeare and Chapman are most concerned with the nature of law as the basis of social order, the misuse of law as a symptom of political corruption is an idea found in all of the plays in this study, and is afforded vivid dramatic realisation in Richard II, Sejanus, and The Revenger's Tragedy.

Disregard for law and counsel may, as in Richard II, be interpreted as one sign of a tyrant or a potential tyrant. But the ways in which these dramatists approach the subject of perverted rule are many and varied. Indeed, tyranny in its various forms and with its multitude of causes appears to be the most persistent political theme in the first decade of James's reign. It may take the form of a detailed depiction of the workings of tyranny as in Sejanus, or an intimate revelation of the tyrant's inner self as in Macbeth, or an investigation of the effects of tyranny on the moral lives of those who suffer from it as in The Duchess of Malfi.

Whatever the approach, the complementary theme of the obedience owed by oppressed subjects is usually prominent, and more specifically, whether subjects have a right to rebel against or resist a tyrannical or usurping sovereign. The question of rebellion or resistance appears in various forms according to the parties involved. It may appear in the form of the relationship between master and servant, for instance with Bosola and Ferdinand in The Duchess of Malfi, Sejanus and Tiberius in Sejanus, or Byron and King Henry in the Byron plays; or as a struggle between factions, as in Richard II, Catiline, or Caesar and Pompey, where rebellion is synonymous with civil war; or it may be a

rebellion of the multitude, as in Coriolanus. Different historical settings, and the differing duties of the various social ranks give rise to a different emphasis in each case, but the fundamental problem - the nature of the bond between sovereign and subject - is always the same.

The emphasis on political conduct which this brief survey reveals might be expected in an art form constructed of the speech and actions of men and women. Abstract models of society did, however, exist, usually derived from metaphysical ideas of the nature of the universe. Society as a body, as a system of hierarchies or "chain of being", or as a musical harmony or dance are the best known examples of such models. These ideas might be drawn on to defend an existing and generally accepted state of affairs. Pierre Charron, for instance, in a discussion of the natural basis of social inequality, points out that "Harmonie consisteth not of like sounds, but different and well according."¹³ But it is hardly likely that they had any independent influence on Renaissance political thinking, and for this reason it would be wrong to overemphasise their relevance for the drama. They may well be used as an ideal contrast to the imperfections of the actual, or as a source of imagery for local effect, but their very abstraction prevents them from dominating the political significance of any one play. The one notable exception to this rule is the very common idea of the body politic, which may be dramatically grounded in images

13 Pierre Charron, Of Wisdome, tr. Samson Lennard ([1608]; facsimile rpt. New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), p.218. The same metaphor is employed by Innocent Gentillet, A Discourse upon the Meanes of Wel Governing . . . Against Nicholas Machiavell, tr. Simon Patericke (London, 1602), p.322, to describe differences of opinion in counsel all of which tend towards a good end.

of the human body, and in the actual deportment of the actors on stage. But as I hope to show in Chapter 6, once this idea becomes a political debating point as in Coriolanus, and not a means of affirming and celebrating an accepted order as in Macbeth, its relevance to the dramatic situation is rendered deliberately suspect.

There were, moreover, some areas of political thought with which the drama did not concern itself at all. The problems which vexed most of Western Europe in the era of the Reformation - the use and abuses of sovereign authority, and the limits of obedience - were grappled with by dramatist and thinker alike. Renaissance political thought, however, was typically derivative, basing itself particularly on Aristotle and Cicero. This frequently resulted in an exposition of doctrine which had little or no relevance to the writer's own predicament, and which might be no more than a direct copy from Aristotle himself. A case in point is the discussion, to be found in virtually every systematic political thinker, of the relative merits of the three kinds of government, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, with their corresponding corrupt forms, derived mainly from the third book of Aristotle's Politics. Much blood as well as ink was spilled in sixteenth century Europe over questions of succession, of who was the rightful sovereign, but generally speaking the question of forms of government was not a living issue. Not surprisingly, the matter is not treated of in the drama, although attempts have been made to foist it on to plays depicting corrupt republics, for example Julius Caesar or Coriolanus.¹⁴ The

14 See for example J. E. Phillips, Ch.9; George W. Keeton, Shakespeare's Legal and Political Background (London, 1967), pp.354-63; Roy W. Battenhouse, Shakespearian Tragedy, its Art and Christian Premises (Bloomington, Ind., 1969), pp.341-55. L. C. Knights rejects such interpretations in "Personality and Politics in Julius Caesar," Further Explorations, p.35.

learned Gonzalo can conjure up an imaginary Utopia with "no sovereignty"; Jack Cade's communistic society, on the other hand, is not complete without kingship.¹⁵ It was the only form of government which he, together with most sixteenth century Englishmen, could seriously envisage as a contemporary possibility in England.

III

It will be observed that none of the writers so far cited as evidence of the basic orientation of Renaissance political thought is English. As Alfred Hart has observed, very few works containing pure political philosophy were written in sixteenth century England.¹⁶ Most writers were concerned with what is more properly called political theology, the debate between Catholics, Puritans, and supporters of the Established Church on the relationship of Church to State, and the position in it of the sovereign. Even the work generally assumed to represent the essence of Elizabethan political thought, Hooker's Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, is primarily a polemical tract against the Puritans. The example of Hooker is sufficient indication that such works may contain incidental political matter valid beyond its immediate theological context. But political theology as such has little relevance to the major Renaissance drama. The reign of King John was the most

15 The Tempest, II.i.150; 2 Henry VI, IV.ii.66-72.

All references to Shakespeare, excepting the plays discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, are to the one volume Tudor edition by Peter Alexander (London, 1951).

16 Alfred Hart, Shakespeare and the Homilies (Melbourne, 1934), p.71. J. W. Allen makes a similar point about the limited nature of Tudor political thought, A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (London, 1928), p.249.

consistent source for plays on this subject, whether turned into crude Tudor propaganda by Bale in King Johan, or used more subtly by Shakespeare. Unless Webster's Machiavellian Cardinals be taken as the Englishman's idea of the typical popish churchman, nothing of this subject enters our plays at all.

Non-theological political thought may be found in a miscellaneous variety of writings: in Sir Thomas Elyot's The Boke named the Governour, a work in the de regimine principum tradition; in occasional tracts against rebellion such as Sir Richard Morison's A Remedy for Seditio (1536), Sir John Cheke's The Hurt of Seditio (1549), and the Homilies of 1547 and 1574; in Sir Thomas Smith's constitutional tract, De Republica Anglorum (1583); in specific discussions of the nature and limits of sovereignty, for example John Ponet's A Short Treatise of Politike Power (1556), Charles Merbury's A Briefe Discourse of Royall Monarchie (1581), and The Trew Law of Free Monarchies (1598) by James VI of Scotland; and finally in A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England (1594), written by the Jesuit Robert Parsons under the pseudonym "R. Doleman" - a tract on the royal succession which bases its arguments on a coherently stated political philosophy. The list could be extended to include derivative works of lesser merit, or broader discussions of social philosophy (such as More's Utopia). But the works cited constitute virtually the entire significant output of English political thought pure and simple in the sixteenth century, and therefore indicate the lack of any organised and coherent tradition of political writing as such.

Of these by far the most important, both in itself and in its relevance to the drama, is The Boke named the Governour, written before the shadow of religious strife fell across English political thought,

and well described by a modern historian as "the political testament of English humanism".¹⁷ The change of direction in English life and thought occasioned by the Reformation fixed a deep gulf between Elyot and most later writers. Only occasionally later in the century - in Sir Thomas Smith, Thomas Bilson, Richard Hooker - do we hear again the voice of humanism untouched by the dogmatism which characterises Protestant political thought.¹⁸ Yet although pure humanism passed away early from England, many works were produced on the continent throughout the sixteenth century devoted wholly or in part to a discussion of political ideas and untrammelled by religious issues, several of which were translated into English. They generally exhibit a more systematic method of presentation, a clearer notion of the aims and scope of political thought, and a greater comprehensiveness than any of the comparable English works, and it is a reasonable conjecture that books of this sort would form the literary basis of the mature political thinking of Englishmen in the later sixteenth century. They may be divided roughly into two categories. Firstly, there are the compendia of all the knowledge necessary for a ruler to govern well, often including ethical and military as well as purely political matters: Castiglione's The Courtier (tr. Sir Thomas Hoby, 1561), La Primaudaye's The French Academie (tr. Thomas Bowes, 1586), La Perrière's The Mirrour of Policie (tr. anon., 1598), Jacques Hurault's Politicke, Moral, and Martial Discourses (tr. Arthur Golding, 1595), and Louis le Roy's translation

17 Christopher Morris, Political Thought in England: Tyndale to Hooker (London, 1953), p.23.

18 The shift from the "rational and utilitarian" outlook on government of the humanists to the "mystical and theocratic" views of the Protestant reformers is described by Morris, pp.25-26.

and massive commentary on Aristotle's Politics entitled Aristotles Politiques or Discourses of Government (tr. John Dickenson, 1598). Thomas Floyd's Picture of a perfit Common wealth (1600) is an English attempt to imitate this type of comprehensive political treatise. Secondly, there are the more restricted discussions of the art of rule and of particular problems encountered, for example Patrizi's A Moral Method of Civil Policie (tr. Rycharde Robinson, 1576), or the Institution and first beginning of Christian Princes of Chelidonius Tigurinus (tr. James Chillester, 1571), while Gentillet's famous attack on Machiavelli, A Discourse upon the Meanes of Wel Governing (tr. Simon Patericke, 1602) forms an interesting parallel to Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity as an occasional tract grown to encyclopaedic dimensions. If some of the finest Renaissance drama seems closer in spirit to Elyot than to any subsequent English political writing, this is not simply because his book shines like a beacon across the intervening years, but because Englishmen in the Elizabethan age were continually exposed to political writings such as these, springing from the same classical roots which nourished Elyot, and forming a continuous tradition with his work.

Since our immediate concern is not political writing as such, but possible formative influences on the political content of the drama, other forms of writing, perhaps reaching a wider audience than the learned treatises cited above, should not be neglected. The homilies and catechisms of the Church of England express ideas which we can be sure would be grasped by all social classes, at least in their practical essentials. In this sense they are undoubtedly useful, but precisely because they are for popular consumption, should not necessarily be assumed to epitomise the political thought of that time.

Historical writing in its various forms was the most consistent repository of political wisdom. It is a well established fact that the Renaissance approached history primarily for the moral and political lessons which could be drawn from it; the proliferation of works dealing with English mediaeval history suggests that Elizabeth's subjects saw their own preoccupations mirrored in the deeds of their ancestors. A sentence from Robert Parson's notorious dialogue attacking the Earl of Leicester, The Copie of a Leter, Wryten by a Master of Art of Cambridge (1584), suggests one reason why this was so. One of the participants, a Cambridge scholar, asks the lawyer to "open unto me the ground of thes controversies, so long now quiet between York and Lancaster: seing they are now like to be raised againe."¹⁹ Richard II and Henry IV dramatise stages in a conflict not finally ended until the accession of James.

The relation of homiletic and historical works (such as the prose histories of Halle and Holinshed, Daniel's historical poem The Civil Wars, The Mirror for Magistrates, and the book of homilies designed to be read in churches) to the contemporary drama, particularly that of Shakespeare, has been amply demonstrated. Often, as in the case of Halle and Holinshed, the relation is of a very direct kind. Similarly direct relations between the continental treatises cited above and the drama can rarely be proved with any degree of certainty, and indeed any such attempt is superfluous. For originality was not one of the virtues of sixteenth-century political thought, and a basic stock of ideas, continually drawn on by the dramatists, may be found in one work after another. Thus the opening speech of Antonio in The Duchess of Malfi

19 The Copie of a Leter, Wryten by a Master of Art of Cambridge ([Antwerp], 1584), p.127. The work is anonymous, but the ascription to Parson, though not conclusive, is generally accepted as most probable.

may, as John Russell Brown suggests in his note to this passage, be derived from Elyot's Image of Governace (1541). But whether or not this is so tells us nothing of Webster's intellectual proclivities, since Antonio's ideas might have been formulated by anyone with the most rudimentary grasp of Renaissance political commonplaces. Similarly in Jonson's Discoveries and Greville's Life of Sidney, A Letter to an Honourable Lady, and A Treatise of Monarchy - the only non-dramatic works dealing with political ideas by dramatists discussed in this study - we find an intimate knowledge of humanist political thought, but no orientation towards any particular authors, apart from Jonson's liking for Hooker and his dispraise of Machiavelli (which was itself a commonplace). The foremost justification for the use of humanist political treatises in studying the drama is not in any definite literary relations, but rather in their manifestation of certain habits of thought and expression readily translatable into dramatic terms - habits which are less evident in the more polemical, unsophisticated works of native growth that have hitherto claimed most critical attention.

IV

The plays I have chosen to discuss have been selected primarily on account of their merit; there are a number of dreary political moralities written in this period more thoroughly and explicitly political in content, but with little or no dramatic merit. Furthermore, they are all (with the exception of Poetaster, which is discussed for the parallels it affords with Jonson's tragedies) concerned with a body politic profoundly diseased or threatened with destruction. Several of

them seek to define the exact nature of the forces which threaten social harmony, while an interest in how the virtuous man should act amid the apparently conflicting allegiances generated by this disharmony is common to all of them. Of all the plays discussed, only Henry IV and Poetaster are not tragedies, and it might be argued that the widespread interest in the breakdown of order is primarily a question of genre. But most Renaissance plays in which political themes are prominent are either tragedies, histories cast in a tragic mould, or satirical comedies of a type akin to tragedy (such as Poetaster, Troilus and Cressida, The Malcontent). This conforms broadly with the humanist theory, derived from Aristotle, that the deeds and destruction of those in high estate, drawn from history and not from the poet's own invention, are the proper subject of this genre.²⁰ Such a limited selection of plays may be an insufficient basis confidently to generalise about the treatment of political themes in Renaissance drama, but certainly no distortion is occasioned by the almost exclusive concentration on tragedy.

V

"All the world's a stage." The political world as a theatrical display - with good or bad connotations - was a metaphor constantly in the Tudor mind; this is further reason why the Renaissance would consider the stage eminently suited to mirror its political preoccupations. The equation of Queen Elizabeth and Richard II, or Buckingham and Sejanus are well known, but quite apart from the merely topical import of

20 See J. E. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, 2nd ed. (New York, 1908), pp.61-74, 283-87.

particular plays or characters, the finest drama is frequently reminiscent or even prophetic of conditions at court or in the realm as these can be gathered from contemporary accounts. Dudley Carleton's account of the last-minute reprieve of the Lords Grey and Cobham and Sir Griffin Markham, condemned to death for high treason in 1603, serves to illustrate this point.

Now all the actors being together on the stage, as use is at the end of a play, the sheriff made a short speech unto them, by way of interrogatory of the heinousness of their offences, the justness of their trials, their lawful condemnation, and due execution then to be performed; to all which they assented. "Then," saith the sheriff, "see the mercy of your prince, who of himself hath sent hither a countermand, and given you your lives." ... But one thing had like to have marred the play, for the letter was closed, and delivered him unsigned; which the king remembered himself, and called for him back again.²¹

King James might well have taken a lesson from the author of The Spanish Tragedy, in which Pedringano waits in vain for "pardon from the king" which he had been deceived into hoping for, and dies trusting in an empty box.²² Or a spectator at The Revenger's Tragedy might have recalled this incident of a few years previous as he watched the confusion which leads to the mistaken execution of Junior Brother and the release of Lussurioso. Indeed, the feeling that the impersonal execution of justice is being perverted into a sort of flippant play lies behind Carleton's narrative as much as the corresponding scenes in The Revenger's Tragedy, however much as a faithful servant of the court he would have

21 Letter to John Chamberlain, Dec. 11, 1603, printed in The Court and Times of James I, comp. Thomas Birch (London, 1849), I, 31-32.

22 Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy, ed. Philip Edwards, The Revels Plays (London, 1959; rpt. 1969), III.vi.

denied this. The ironical identification of drama and real life, nicely caught in the pun on "stage", reveals its full, disturbing significance in the final sentence, as we grasp that what to the author and stage manager of this would be a mere dramatic faux pas in fact involves the lives of three men.

It is not my intention to trace the social matrix of particular political themes in the drama. The point is simply that, beneath the diversity of settings of the various plays, the Elizabethans would recognise the forms of political life to be essentially the same as their own. An awareness of this should check any tendency to explain political themes purely in terms of contemporary theory, or to interpret plays set in mediaeval England or ancient Rome, for instance, as purely historical studies. It is generally agreed that in many respects, the real setting of the tavern scenes in Henry IV or the mob scenes in Coriolanus is the London of Shakespeare's day, and that the characters in them are not historical portraits but sketches from life.²³ But even this contemporaneity is not sought by all dramatists. The setting of Sejanus is not Elizabethan London. Jonson labours to exclude from his portrait of Imperial Rome all typically Shakespearian anachronisms, and to attain the maximum of historical accuracy. In a more impressionistic manner, Webster strives in The Duchess of Malfi to create the distinctive, un-English atmosphere of a small Italian duchy by the use of Catholic ritual - the Cardinal's assumption of arms - and other details of social life. But even Jonson's stringent historicity did not save him from being called before Star Chamber on account of supposedly

23 See T. J. B. Spencer, "Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans," ShS, X (1957), 27-38.

treasonable matter in Sejanus. Constant fear of a suspicious censorship discouraged dramatists from dealing directly with the political life of their own times, and several plays contain a formal or implicit disavowal of any such intent. Chapman, for example, compares the ideal English court with the imperfect French court (where the action of his play occurs) in both Bussy d'Ambois and The Conspiracy of Byron. The introduction to Thomas Hughes' classical play The Misfortunes of Arthur, performed before the Queen in 1588 and now thought to be a topical comment on the recent execution of Mary Queen of Scots, argues that a tragedy is particularly suited to that time, for

since your sacred Maiestie
In gracious hands the regall Scepter held
All Tragedies are fled from State, to stadge.²⁴

But such conventions were hardly to be taken at face value. The depiction of political corruption and disorder would be interpreted as at best a warning, at worst an actual description of the state of contemporary England.

All the same, different historical settings do have an importance for the political significance of plays apart from their concealment of contemporary, national relevance. This applies to the Rome of Shakespeare, for example, as well as the more historically concrete Rome of Jonson. Macbeth alone of the plays in this study has an entirely neutral setting, and examines the fundamental nature of social and personal bonds apart from any cultural form that these take. In

24 Early English Classical Tragedies, ed. J. W. Cunliffe (Oxford, 1912), p.223. The topicality of this play is discussed by Gertrude Reese, "Political Import of The Misfortunes of Arthur," RES, XXI (1945), 81-91; and William A. Armstrong, "The Topicality of The Misfortunes of Arthur," N&Q, CC (1955), 371-73.

some cases, a dramatist will use a particular setting to create an expectation of a distinctive political climate and system of allegiances. Greville's use of an Asian Sultanate as the setting for Mustapha should immediately suggest to us a tyrannical or absolutist regime. The Renaissance Italy of Webster and Tourneur should prepare us for a play in which deception, self-seeking, murder, disregard for law - all, in short, that the Elizabethans saw enshrined in the name of Machiavelli - are the norm of conduct. Interpretations of Roman history were more diverse, but were usually informed by an idea of Rome as the guardian of civic liberty and of the use of reason and eloquence in the conduct of state affairs, which clearly informs Sejanus, Catiline, and Caesar and Pompey (Coriolanus does not really fit into this pattern). Different historical settings, moreover, may present in various guises essentially the same theme. The problem of knowing where true allegiance lies in a time of uncertainty appears differently in practical terms to York in Richard II, the feudal lord bound by his oath to serve the one true king, and Cato in Caesar and Pompey, the Stoic sage freed by his wisdom and virtue from the necessity of giving heed to public authority. The range of dramatic possibilities is accordingly different in each case.

Most of the early work on political themes in Renaissance drama was concerned with Shakespeare's English history plays and their antecedents, and in such cases the choice of relevant secondary material to provide a context for the drama posed no great problem. In seeking to discuss such a wide range of plays on a comparative basis while attempting to do justice to the distinctive individuality of each one, the use of contemporary literature on government is less straightforward. If there are indeed areas of common interest in these very different plays, these must be sought not only in specific ideas and doctrines,

but also in the more basic political assumptions and habits of thinking which precede them, and which might have been shared by the playwright and his audience. This calls for an understanding of the universal and fundamental elements in Renaissance political thought as distinct from the local and particular, and to this distinction we now turn.

Chapter Two

Renaissance Political Thought

I

Renaissance theories concerning the ideal structure of society and the functions of its various members have been so fully described by Tillyard, Phillips and others as to make a detailed exposition unnecessary. But even a casual acquaintance with political writing of the sixteenth century is sufficient to reveal that it is scarcely so orderly and monolithic as Tillyard and Phillips appear (perhaps unintentionally) to suggest. The fact is that political writers were almost universally agreed upon many of the basic ideas to which these two authors draw attention, but might apply them in totally different ways, and so come to opposite conclusions about the same problem. Several examples of such diverse application are discussed by E. W. Talbert in his book The Problem of Order, in which he draws a distinction between political theory and political thought, and emphasises the "thoroughly chameleonic" nature of the latter.¹ It will be readily appreciated that in a dramatic context one finds not political theory in a pure form, but political thought which moulds general theory to immediate circumstance, and which may exploit its latent contradictions.

The theories liable to undergo the most curious metamorphoses were, not surprisingly, those which were accepted without question, which

1 E. W. Talbert, The Problem of Order (Chapel Hill, 1962), p.3. Though Talbert discusses only two plays, Richard II and Daniel's Philotas, his book is the most important contribution to the study of political themes in Renaissance drama since the pioneering work of the nineteen-forties.

had to be used to buttress an argument at whatever cost. The best example of this is to be found in the various strands of political thought interwoven with the widely used concept of the body politic. This was generally used to inculcate obedience. The sovereign was the head of the body politic, and to depose or kill him meant sure destruction for the whole of society. Two sixteenth century writers, however, for quite different practical ends, seek to prove just the opposite. John Ponet, attempting to create a climate favourable for the deposition of Mary Tudor, boldly asserts:

Common wealthes and realmes may live, whan the head is cut of, and may put on a newe head, that is, make them a newe governour, whan they see their olde head seke to muche his owne will and not the wealthes of the hole body, for the which he was only ordained.²

This might easily be dismissed as a naive blunder, or a facetious misuse of an orthodox idea, but in fact Ponet is appealing to a positive aspect of the idea of the body politic, the sense in which it refers to the mutual harmony and well-being of ruler and subject, "the wealthes of the hole body", on which he discourses at length in this section of the book. This evidently had more importance for him than the specific corollary of non-resistance. His failure to neutralise this latter implication may be deliberately provocative, but his main intention is certainly not to discredit the metaphor as such.

Robert Parsons, whose task it was to foster Catholic subversion towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, argues in similar terms:

2 John Ponet, A Short Treatise of politike power (1556; facsimile rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), sig. D7.

As the whole body is of more authority then the only head if it be out of tune, so may the wealpublicque cure or cutt of their heades, if they infect the rest, seing that a body civil may have divers heades, by succession, and is not bound ever to one, as a body natural is.³

Parsons, with his usual fondness for exploiting the apparent inconsistencies of orthodox positions, here implies the inappropriateness of the idea of the body politic to the problem of succession, with rather more obvious irony than Ponet. His use of the concept, however, still depends on an appeal to the same ideas of collective well-being and the pursuit by the entire community of its own good. Elizabethan orthodoxy would have replied that the head of the body politic is not the king in person, but the kingly office or Crown, which never dies;⁴ and whoever raises his hand against a king, however good his intentions, attacks his sacred office. This, however, would not amount to a logical destruction of Parsons's position, but simply an appeal to a different aspect of the same concept.

The use of this concept, therefore, to buttress opposing arguments testifies to its fundamental importance to the Renaissance mind, as though it were designed to give the stamp of orthodoxy to otherwise dubious opinions. The body politic was, however, simply one of a considerable number of ideas and assumptions inherited by the Renaissance from mediaeval and classical thought. Such ideas as the distinction

3 R. Doleman [Robert Parsons], A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of England ([Antwerp], 1594), p.38. My emphasis on the positive aspect of the "misuse" of this idea distinguishes my discussion of the body politic and the right of resistance from that of D. G. Hale, "The Body Politic: A Political Metaphor in Renaissance English Literature", DD, Duke University (1965), pp.111-12.

4 See Kantorowicz, Ch.7, "The King Never Dies".



between the person and office of the king, justice as the end of rule, the need for positive laws to conform to natural law, the sacred nature of one's oath to the sovereign and indeed of all oaths, and above all, the dependence of the health of the body politic on the moral and spiritual health (often in drama symbolised by the bodily health) of the sovereign, were of similar antiquity, and commanded universal assent. It was, however, not always easy to relate these to political experience. Justice, for example, may be the end of rule, but by whom may justice be defined if not by those in authority? Or who indeed may define natural law? And if all oaths are sacred, may it not sometimes be necessary to break one's oath to man in order to keep faith with God? The dramatists were quick to exploit the potential of such an interplay between political ideals and actualities, and of the consequent shifting uncertainty of what constitutes political right. Chapman and the late Shakespeare in particular often compare conflicting claims on a man's allegiance. Chabot suffers judicial punishment for pursuing true justice in defiance of royal authority. Camillo in The Winter's Tale, Kent in King Lear, and the Scottish nobles in Macbeth all decide that, in disobeying their respective sovereigns, they are fulfilling a more fundamental duty. T. 10?

The existence of a body of undisputed ideals had several implications for the dramatic presentation of a political action, particularly an action tending towards disorder and strife. Firstly, it meant that any attempt to undermine the order in which these ideals were embodied could not advertise itself as such. Rather it would claim to be a defence of that order against parasitic or subversive elements. The appeal to a higher law then becomes at best self-deception, at worst hypocrisy. The pleas of York in 2 Henry VI (V.i.35-37) and Northumberland

in Richard II (II.i.238-45, 291-96) that their sole aim is to purge the state of rotten elements, and not to attack the sovereign, were echoed by Essex as he attempted in vain to gain the support of the City of London for his uprising. The Queen, he claimed, was being misled by the treachery of Cecil and Raleigh, who were planning to sell England to the Spaniards on her death; and to create a favourable intellectual climate for his rebellion, the Puritan preachers at Essex House resuscitated the arguments of such as Ponet that the superior magistrates of a realm had the right to restrain the sovereign.⁵

Secondly, it meant that the occasions on which a character attempts to justify himself without reference to accepted ideals, or in defiance of them, become immensely significant. It is just such a disregard for accepted norms of conduct - in expressions of intent or self-justification as well as action - that gives to Henry IV its peculiar tone of cynicism and disillusion, manifest in King Henry's casual acceptance of the principle that might is right in the question of royal succession, Northumberland's diabolic utterance "Let order die", and the confused and half-hearted apologies of the Archbishop at Gaultree forest.⁶ One of the consequences of a successful rebellion in which the rebels subsequently fight among themselves, Shakespeare suggests, is that it becomes less pressing for anyone to appear politically orthodox and respectable.

5 See G. B. Harrison, The Life and Death of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (London, 1937), pp.276-78.

6 1 Henry IV, III.ii.98-105; 2 Henry IV, I.i.154, IV.i.53-129. For both plays I have used the Arden edition by A. R. Humphreys, Part One, 6th ed. (London, 1960); Part Two, revised ed. (London, 1966).

Finally, if the justice of the existing political structure is generally accepted (however defective its magistrates may be), the rebel, unless an avowedly demonic creature, would normally repent when defeated and brought to the point of death; for there can be no worthwhile defence of an opportunistic attempt to seize power unfounded on principle. Jonson's Caesar epitomises the moral bankruptcy of almost every rebel of Renaissance drama when he defends Catiline's conspiracy with the words, "Let 'hem call it mischief; / When it is past, and prosper'd, 'twill be vertue."⁷ The Mirror for Magistrates is built on the assumption that, once separated from their self-seeking aims by death, even the worst rebels and traitors will be able to moralise on their wickedness.

II

It may appear strange that a belief in the wickedness of rebellion is not cited as one of the fundamental axioms to which all men would assent. For even those who advocated the overthrow of a wicked monarch would never admit that they were fomenting rebellion. Indeed, popular restraint on the sovereign might be seen as a means of preserving true order, as is evident from the title of the eleventh chapter of How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed (1558), a Puritan tract by Christopher Goodman, who like Ponet advocated the overthrow of Queen Mary: "It apperteyneth not onely to the Magistrates and al other inferior officers to see that their Princes be subject to Gods Lawes, but to the comon people also:

7 Catiline, III.504-05. All references to Jonson are to the edition by C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1925-52). I cite act, scene (where appropriate), and line of plays, and in all other cases volume and page numbers.

wherby the tyrannie of the Princes and rebellion of subjects may be avoyded." The contention of the seditious Puritan that he was not committing rebellion but merely resisting evil, is an extension of the orthodox idea that the wicked commands of a Prince should be disobeyed and passively resisted. But for Ponet and Goodman, man's primary duty to God demanded that the resistance be active.

The apparent agreement on the wickedness of rebellion, therefore, conceals the more difficult problem of how precisely to define it. The problem of the limits of obedience was only brought to the forefront of political thought by the religious struggles of the Reformation,⁸ and the ideas expressed on this point in any particular state were largely dependent on the balance of religious and political forces within it. The Tudor regime in England assiduously fostered the doctrine of passive obedience,⁹ but the belief that, in certain extreme cases, collective resistance to the ruinous designs of a wicked monarch is justified, was never effectively challenged.¹⁰ This indeed was partly because such an idea was hardly ever stated. The general feeling prevailed, at least during the reigns of Henry, Edward, and Elizabeth, that since England was governed by a just and godly monarch, the question

8 See George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, 3rd ed. (London, 1963), pp.356-58.

9 See Baumer, Ch.4, "The Cult of Authority".

10 Cf. J. W. Allen, A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century, p.123: "The question was whether forcible resistance is not in some cases justified. But if the authority you have to obey was in no sense created by you and if its right to command be altogether independent of your will and your desires, then no need or desire of yours can diminish that right or give you a right to rebel. The door is slammed in the face of the question. This did not happen in England. In England at the end of the century the door is still open and the questioning had begun."

of resistance was simply irrelevant. During the reign of Mary, a true doctrine of resistance was formulated by the Protestant exiles, Ponet and Goodman. This, however, was simply a reaction to immediate pressures and not a new departure in political philosophy; this is evident from the lack of influence which either of their works had in England prior to the Civil War and from the fact that Goodman appears prudently to have repudiated his views on the accession of Elizabeth, as Thomas Bilson explains in his tract entitled The True Difference betweene Christian Subjection and Unchristian Rebellion.¹¹

Yet it is Bilson himself, the impeccably orthodox defender of the Elizabethan settlement, who demonstrates both how English political thought left open the possibility of rebellion or resistance of a kind, and why the matter was so rarely discussed in England. Bilson's tract takes the form of a dialogue between Theophilus, a "Christian", that is to say, an orthodox Elizabethan, and Philander, a Jesuit. Despite the somewhat weighted names, Bilson does not use the dialogue form to parody his opponent. He is writing a polemical tract, and we are never in doubt as to who is in the right, but the questions and criticisms of Philander are not always easy to answer. Bilson is second only to Hooker in making his task difficult by his intellectual honesty and thoroughness. His argument on the complexities of resistance is therefore worth presenting in some detail.

In his attempt to refute Theophilus's fundamental contention that Princes may not be deposed, even though they break covenants and transgress the law of God, Philander cites a number of Protestant authors

11 Thomas Bilson, The True Difference betweene Christian Subjection and Unchristian Rebellion (Oxford, 1585), pp.515-16.

who, he maintains, have held just the opposite, thereby attempting to tar Theophilus with the same brush. (In this respect he anticipates Parsons's appropriation of Ponet's arguments for his own ends.)

Theophilus replies that there is nothing seditious in Luther, Calvin, or Beza; that Zwingli's argument that magistrates may be deposed by those that have power to do it refers to elective and limited, not successive and absolute monarchies; and that Goodman's opinion was a private one which he has long since repudiated. Philander then switches from authority to example, and cites the resistance of Protestants to Popish tyranny in Scotland, Flanders, France, and Germany as proof of the right to rebel. Theophilus's answer is instructive:

I busie not my selfe in other mens common-wealthes as you doe, neither will I rashly pronounce all that resist to bee rebels: cases may fall out even in christian kingdoms where the people may plead their right against the Prince, and not be charged with rebellion. Phil. As when for example? Theo. If a Prince shoulde goe about to subject his kingdome to a forraine Realme, or change the forme of the common wealth, from imperie to tyrannie: or neglect the Lawes established by common consent of the Prince and people, to execute his owne pleasure: In these and other cases, which might be named, if the Nobles and commons joyne together to defend their auncient and accustomed libertie, regiment, and lawes, they may not well be counted rebels . . . [Philander now objects that this is a retreat from his earlier position that subjects may in no wise resist Princes, to which Theophilus replies:] As I sayde then, so I say now, the Law of God giveth no man leave to resist his Prince: but I never said that kingdoms and commonwealthes might not proportion their States as they thought best by their Publike lawes, which afterward the princes themselves may not violate. By superior powers ordained of God we understand not only Princes, but al politicke states and regiments, somewhere the Nobles, having the same interest to the sword, that Princes have in their kingdoms: and in kingdoms where princes beare rule, by the sword we do not meane the princes private wil against his lawes: but his precept derived from his lawes, and agreeing in his lawes: which, though it be wicked, yet may it not be resisted of any subject with armed violence. Mary when Princes offer their subjects not Justice, but force: and despise all Lawes to practise their lustes: not every, nor any private man may take the sworde to

redress the Prince: but if the lawes of the land appoint the nobles as next the king to assist him in doing right, and withhold him from doing wrong, then be they licensed by man's law, and so not prohibited by God's to interpose themselves for the safeguard of equitie and innocencie: and by lawfull and needefull meanes to procure the Prince to bee reformed, but in no case deprived where the scepter is inherited.¹²

Bilson's definition of "Christian Subjection" depends on the assumption that not the prince in person, or even the princely office is the object of men's obedience, but rather the entire body politic, or "politicke state and regiment". Where the prince is hereditary, he represents the entire body politic, and therefore may not be deposed; this is Bilson's substantial point of disagreement with the Puritans. In other respects, the emphasis on the health of the entire body politic, the suggestion that the nobles and commons may serve as a check on the sovereign, the insistence that only resistance (to the will of an evil monarch) and not rebellion (against the state) is being advocated show that he has much in common with Ponet and Goodman.

In practical terms it is impossible to draw any hard and fast line between lawful resistance and unlawful rebellion. Rebellion was distinguished by being directed - whether consciously or not - at the very roots of all social order. Where individual writers differed is in the extent to which they identify the sovereign with the body politic, and hence whether resistance to the powers that be is in all cases destructive of society. Ponet and Goodman drive a wedge between the

12 Bilson, pp.520-21. An interesting parallel to Bilson's apparent unwillingness to discuss this question on account of its irrelevance to English affairs is provided by an English translation of Marsiglio of Padua's Defensor Pacis which appeared in 1535, and omitted the chapter on ways of restraining a wicked prince as not "pertaining to this realm of England" (cited in John Neville Figgis, The Divine Right of Kings, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1922), p.97).

sovereign and the body politic, and attack one in defence of the other. The Homilies, on the other hand, insist that order in the body politic is absolutely dependent on the sovereign, so that "it is not lawful for inferiors and subjects, in any case, to resist or stand against the superior powers".¹³ Bilson stands somewhere in between. A great deal of heat was generated by Tudor propaganda on the subject of rebellion, partly by appealing to people's sense of security, which would surely be destroyed by rebellion, partly by casting the argument into a religious mould with Lucifer as the archetypal rebel. Bilson's discussion of the matter is particularly interesting in that an approach characterised by such moderation and humanist good sense was rare in Elizabethan England.

An understanding of the "true difference" between obedience and rebellion helps to explain the apparent anomaly of Woodstock. A. P. Rossiter brought out his edition of this play when serious work on the relation of Elizabethan political thought to the drama was in its early stages, and he was impressed by the seeming unorthodoxy of a play which "shows a revolt succeeding, against a king who is himself in arms, all without a line of condemnation from anyone for whom the audience could feel much sympathy." He cites Goodman as a possible parallel to the ideas advanced in Woodstock, and argues that the play is "sharply conflicting with the political principles fully accepted by most dramatists, Shakespeare among them."¹⁴

13 Sermons or Homilies, appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1814), p.90.

14 Woodstock, Introduction, pp.14, 32. Irving Ribner, The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare, revised ed. (London, 1965), pp.140-41, similarly notes that the play "contains some political doctrine quite unusual in the Tudor history play and far from orthodox."

Rossiter's simple contrast between the wickedness of the king and his minions, and the virtue of the dissident nobles, perhaps does less than justice to the author's complex treatment of the problem of true allegiance, for Woodstock and his supporters continually make mistakes of excess or omission in their basically well-intentioned attempts to right the realm. Woodstock himself is usually the most restrained of the king's uncles, but it is his inability to retain discreet humour in counsel during the ceremony of welcome to Anne a Beame (I.iii) that urges Richard to heap further honour on his favourites as a means of petty revenge for his uncle's plain speaking. The revolt in the final act might similarly be regarded as an inevitable but unfortunate excess precipitated by the loss of Woodstock's moderating influence over his companions. But the overall moral authority of the Dukes and Earls is unquestioned, and depends on the clear idea that they stand for the good of the whole realm, that they are appointed by the laws of the land "as next the king to assist him in doing right, and withhold him from doing wrong". Hence their resistance to Richard's evil government does not make them "underminers of his sacred state" (II.i.34), as Tresilian claims it does. When Richard deprives his uncles of office, banishes them from the court, and opens the doors to "strange fashions" and equally "strange shifts for money" (II.iii.88-97), England is symbolically banished from the court, and now resides not only with the absent nobles, but also with the Farmer, the Butcher, the Grazier, and other representatives of rural England who people this section of the play. When the fantastical courtier arrives at Plashey to command Woodstock to the King's presence, the Duke's refusal may remind us of the similar, and treasonable, refusal of Byron in The Tragedy of Byron. But Woodstock's defiance is justified for, as he says, "My English plainness

will not suit that place" (III.ii.228). Instead he will stay in the country to "quench the fire/Those blanks have made" (ll.230-231), that is, quell the disturbances occasioned by the King's misgovernment.

Woodstock allows more scope for the independent action of the nobility to "procure the prince to be reformed" than any other Elizabethan historical drama, but for all that the author keeps within the limits of orthodoxy defined by Bilson. The value of Woodstock lies not so much in its apparent unorthodoxy, as in its bold dramatisation of the fundamental principles underlying the more conventional, homiletic insistence on the wickedness of rebellion.

III

The dramatic force of Woodstock consists in its portrayal of an active conflict in which both parties have some measure of right: despite Richard's misrule, we are never led to doubt his right to be King. A political attitude which places more stress on passive obedience and on the virtue of patience as the only legitimate response to tyranny may give rise to dramatic problems. A failure to keep within the bounds of duty, or the internal conflict which leads to such a failure - like that of York in Richard II - may well be a source of dramatic interest. But passive obedience when properly practised tends to manifest itself as simple inaction, with the result that a model of patience - Gaunt in Richard II, Lepidus in Sejanus, Antonio and Vindice's dead father in The Revenger's Tragedy - may be marginal to the action although at the moral centre of the play. It is for this reason that the existence of positive values in Sejanus and The Revenger's Tragedy has been frequently overlooked. In critical discussion, therefore, we need to recognise

that what a character refrains from doing may be just as important as what he does.

The doctrine of passive obedience was generally supported by the argument that time is the author of justice. It could scarcely be denied that "the cosener, the hipocrit, & the dissembler, do comonly sooner dispatch his businesse, than he that is open, plaine, honest, and faithfull."¹⁵ But the success of the wicked man was no more than one stage in a larger providential design. Passive obedience to an evil sovereign was not merely a negative, quietist reaction, but a co-operation with the vengeful God who would not suffer tyrants to reign forever unchecked. Gentillet ridicules Machiavelli's argument that a prince ought sometimes to use wicked actions because they succeed well: "if Machiavell and all his favourites would judge of the successe of all things by their end (as they ought to judge) they should find, that those glorious and goodly successes that happen to the wicked, are but meanes, wherewith God serves himselfe to bring them into ruin and utter overthrow."¹⁶

The implications of these ideas for constructing a drama are likewise considerable. Yeats pointed out in an essay written in 1901 that it was a mistake to regard Shakespeare as a "vulgar worshipper of success",¹⁷ probably without realising that he was touching on a crucial aspect of Renaissance political thought. The tendency persists in much

15 Hurault, p.91. The familiarity of humanist circles with the idea of time as the author of justice is established by Ronald Broude, "Time, Truth, and Right in The Spanish Tragedy," SP, LXVIII (1971), 130-45.

16 Gentillet, p.174.

17 W. B. Yeats, "At Stratford-on-Avon", in Essays and Introductions (London, 1961), p.103.

critical discussion, however, to colour plays with modern assumptions. Typical of such assumptions are the belief that action which achieves its desired end most promptly and effectively is most to be commended, that delay or passivity is a sign of weakness, or that a course of action which admits its own inability fully to erase evil is inadequate. Above all, the importance of time as the author of justice, and of the larger, providential design in human affairs which may render a single action or course of events difficult to comprehend, should make us hesitate to regard each play as an Aristotelian action complete in itself. It is generally, though not universally agreed that Shakespeare's English history plays can be fully understood only when viewed as a whole; each play is one stage in an emerging historical pattern.¹⁸ A similar principle is at work in Jonson's tragedies, where the pattern is completed not by subsequent plays, but by the actual histories which Jonson was so careful to incorporate into them. Greville's Mustapha and Chapman's Caesar and Pompey both dramatise a breakdown of order the ultimate outcome of which we are allowed only to guess at.

IV

Mature Tudor attitudes to obedience and rebellion were, I have suggested, conditioned by the ideal of a harmonious commonwealth, rather than by any narrow conception of the rights and duties of rulers. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, the emphasis of the discussion gradually shifted onto the latter. Early Tudor

18 A recent disagreement with this view is that of James Winny, The Player King (London, 1968), pp.18ff.

writings constantly appeal to a vision of what Thomas Starkey called a "very and true commonweal".¹⁹ Merbury's Briefe Discourse of Royall Monarchie (1581) marks the beginning of a shift towards the discussion of monarchy with little reference to its social framework. By the latter years of James's reign, the rights and prerogatives of the monarch had become the main subject of political discussion.

In the years which saw production of the greatest Renaissance drama, discussions of sovereignty had been complicated by the influx of continental, notably French, ideas, but had not yet degenerated into the dogmatic bickering, unrelated to any broader political vision, which characterises the debate between James and his supporters, and Parliament. There is no need to give an account of all the positions held, since the drama does not reflect the contemporary debate in any exact way. But two points of cardinal importance, namely the relationship of the sovereign to the law, and the sense in which the sovereign was analogous to God, do require elucidation, particularly since the terms "absolutism" and "divine right" tend to be employed far too loosely in critical discussion.²⁰

One of the main divisions in Renaissance political thought was between the trend which regarded kings as creations of their subjects, bound by the laws of the realm and their coronation oath, and thus subject to deposition and punishment for misuse of their office; and the trend which stressed the God-given nature of sovereign power, saw the king as limited only by natural law and his own conscience, but not

19 The "very and true commonweal" is discussed by J. W. Allen, pp.134-56.

20 The following discussion of sovereignty is indebted to the extremely penetrating general remarks of J. W. Allen (pp.121-24), and the Introduction to Maynard Mack Jr., Killing the King (New Haven, 1973), as well as the standard historical studies of Baumer, Figgis, and Kantorowicz.

positive law, and never in any circumstances liable to deposition or correction by his own subjects. During the sixteenth century, elements of these two positions were usually mixed in individual writers, and it was not until well into the seventeenth century that they crystallised into definite political positions, represented by the advocates of Divine Right on the one hand, and by the Parliamentary pamphleteers on the other.

The earlier humanist thinkers such as Castiglione, Erasmus, and Elyot stressed not the privileges, but the enormous responsibilities of rule. Elyot, for example, justifies his defence of monarchy as the best form of government with the traditional analogy of God as sole ruler of the universe. But this does not imply any God-given power or superiority in the sovereign. Indeed, Elyot warns princes to chasten themselves with the thought that "every man taketh with thee equal benefit of the spirit of life, nor hast thou any more of the dew of heaven, or the brightness of the sun, than any other person. Thy dignity or authority wherein thou only differest from other is (as it were) but a weighty or heavy cloak, freshly glittering in the eyes of them that be purblind, where unto thee it is painful, if thou wear him in his right fashion, and as it shall best become thee. . . . in nothing but only in virtue ye are better than another inferior person."²¹

The religious veneration which the Tudor monarchy cultivated for itself following the Reformation was such that any emphasis on the limitations of sovereign dignity and power would now be less favourably regarded. Therefore when Christopher Goodman nearly thirty years later put forward ideas comparable to those of Elyot, they had become part of

21 Sir Thomas Elyot, The Book named the Governor, ed. S. E. Lehmberg (London, 1962), pp.7, 155.

a wholly unorthodox argument in favour of resistance to an ungodly monarch. "Princes therefore," writes Goodman, "and all powers upon the earth, are not to be compared unto God, whose lieutenants onelie they should be, and are no longer than he wil, in whose handes, their hartes are, to move and turne at his pleasure. And for that cause it is their duetie to seke all means possible, wherbie the glorie of God might be advanced, by whom they are them selves highlie exalted above their brethren, and in no cause to minister occasion of rebellion agaynst his mightie Maiestie."²² The fearful responsibility of the governor had no implications for the problem of obedience from Elyot's point of view. For Goodman, the responsibility of the ruler is still primarily a responsibility to God, not to man. But it only needed the conviction, expressed in the first two chapters of his book, that he and his fellow Puritans were the chosen people of God, to form the conclusion that under certain circumstances resistance is a religious and moral imperative.

It might be thought that a stress on the human origin of power would lead to an argument in favour of resistance - since what man has given man can surely take away - and that, on the other hand, power given by God is His alone to take away, and should not be resisted under any circumstances. In the words of Richard II:

show us the hand of God
That hath dismiss'd us from our stewardship;
For well we know no hand of blood and bone
Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre,
Unless he do profane, steal, or usurp.

(III.iii.77-81)

22 Christopher Goodman, How Superior Powers Oght to be Obeyed (1558; facsimile rpt. New York, 1931), pp.47-48.

But this was not always the case. Had Mary Tudor challenged the Protestant exiles with Richard's arguments, they would have answered that they were the hand of God. Goodman is quite definite that it is God who chooses princes, not man, and for this very reason, those princes who transgress God's law should be punished. On the other hand, Elyot's account of the human, contractual basis of aristocratic and sovereign power contains no implication that such a contract may be revoked, while Hooker, writing to refute Puritan theories of resistance, is at pains to stress what in Elyot could be taken for granted.²³

An emphasis on the God-given nature of sovereign power, therefore, does not of itself imply a specific attitude to obedience and resistance. Nor did the belief that rulers were chosen directly by God completely replace the humanist theory of the origin of sovereignty in popular consent, at least during the Tudor period. The deification of the Tudor monarchy was more a matter of poetry and propaganda than of definite theory, though this might be pursued for hard practical ends since, as E. C. Wilson points out, "for cunning Renaissance politicians, of whom Elizabeth was truly queen, the idealization of her was a good device for strengthening the place of the prince who is to rule."²⁴

The final stage is represented by the theory of Divine Right proper, whereby the king actually becomes a God on earth in a way that would probably have shocked Elyot. "For if you will consider the

23 Elyot, pp.103-06; Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, I.x, in The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker, ed. John Keble, 7th ed. revised by R. W. Church and F. Paget, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1888). E. W. Talbert, Ch.2, discusses Hooker's attempts to embrace such doctrines as the contractual basis of sovereignty or the superiority of the mixed state, and at the same time to "block off their radical conclusions" (p.52).

24 E. C. Wilson, England's Eliza (London, 1966), p.409.

Attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a King. God hath power to create, or destroy, make, or unmake at his pleasure, to give life, or send death, to judge all, and to be judged nor accomptable to none: To raise low things, and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both soul and body due. And the like power have Kings".²⁵

The detailed doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings is not relevant to our purpose, but two general points may be made. Firstly, Divine Right becomes for the first time the prerogative of the king alone, and not something which can be claimed by the whole social order. As a result of this, much less stress is placed on the responsibilities of kingship, still less on the rights of subjects. Secondly, King James and his theorists were in many respects only giving definite, theoretical form to what had been a vague, generalised feeling about the divinity of the monarch under Elizabeth. It is generally recognised that James's theories were not simply innovations, but rather a selective and idiosyncratic emphasis on certain aspects of English political and constitutional thought.²⁶ It is just this question of the true and the false ways in which a ruler may be compared to God, and the frequently narrow dividing line between the two, which so occupies both Jonson (in each of the three plays we are concerned with here), and Shakespeare (particularly in Richard II).

The debate on the relation of the sovereign to the law runs roughly parallel to that on the divine nature and origins of sovereign power,

25 James I, "A Speach to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at White-Hall," 21st March, 1609, in The Political Works of James I, ed. C. H. McIlwain (New York, 1918; rpt. 1965), pp.307-08.

26 See J. W. Allen, p.252; Oscar Jaszi and John D. Lewis, Against the Tyrant: the Tradition and Theory of Tyrannicide (Glencoe, Ill., 1957), p.78.

though its course is rather less complicated. If we define absolutism as the right of the sovereign to retain absolute discretionary control over legal and political processes, without hindrance from the law or the wishes of his subjects, then however absolutist the Tudor monarchy aspired to be, it was certainly not so in theory. The political writers of Henry's reign, like those of the Middle Ages, emphasised the King's subordination to positive and natural law, and his considerable moral responsibility to rule well.²⁷

Englishmen would usually first come into contact with absolutist ideas from French political writings. Bodin's classic definition of absolutism - "to bee of power to give lawes to all his subjects in generall, and to everie one of them in particular, (yet that is not enough, but that we must joyne thereunto) without consent of any other greater, equall, or lesser than himselfe" - is found in Six Livres de la République, which did not appear in an English translation until 1606, though an identical definition could be found in La Primaudaye.²⁸

La Primaudaye and other French humanists of this time, however, while allowing that the sovereign might disregard with impunity the positive law of which he himself was the author, stressed that good government was dependent on the sovereign himself acting as an exemplary, law-abiding citizen, as Hurault explains:

For the prince being the defender, maintainer, and upholder of the law, cannot doe any thing against law, without doing wrong to the state, and without giving an evill example to his people. And for as much as hee hath none above him but onely God, and therefore may transgresse

27 Baumer, Chs.1, 5.

28 Jean Bodin, The Six Bookes of a Commonweale, tr. Richard Knolles (1606; facsimile rpt. Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p.159; La Primaudaye, 561, 582.

the law without punishment, and without feare of man, hee ought to have the bridle of reason and vertue before his eies, as well to keepe the lawes himselve, as to make them to be kept of the people.²⁹

Hurault was attempting to describe the conditions for a well-ordered and harmonious body politic, which were more important to him than the abstract rights or duties of the sovereign. King James in The Trew Law of Free Monarchies uses arguments which are formally very similar to these. Written, however, with the intent of exalting the prerogatives of monarchy, they are absolutist in spirit in a way that those of Hurault are not. James, in fact, does not even claim to make law according to the definition of Bodin, but only that "generall lawes, made publikely in Parliament, may upon knowen respects to the King by his authoritie bee mitigated, and suspended upon causes only knowen to him." The shift in emphasis is apparent in his insistence on what Pope called, not without justification, "The Right Divine of kings to govern wrong": "As likewise, although I have said, a good king will frame all his actions to be according to the Law; yet is hee not bound thereto but of his good will, and for good example-giving to his subjects".³⁰ The argument is as significant for what it admits as for its lip-service to the notion of a law-abiding sovereign. The king was indeed "not bound" to observe the law insofar as no writ could run against him - and this is about all that James means. For Hurault, the sovereign was "bound" in a very real way, by the sacred bonds between king and subject, and between both of these and God.

29 Hurault, p.64; cf. La Primaudaye, p.207: "The Kings and Magistrates of those so happie times, were the principall observers of their owne lawes and edicts, reforming themselves before all others, and living so austerely, that their example constrained their subjects more to follow them, than all the punishments which they could have devised to propound unto them."

30 The Political Works of James I, p.63.

The differences between the various theories of sovereignty and its relation to the law current in sixteenth and early seventeenth century England were, in practical terms, very small. Even the theory that the sovereign was subject to the laws of the realm did not contain the implication that he was subject to judicial punishment like any ordinary citizen, except, that is, in the works of such as Ponet and Goodman.³¹ Where the subject is raised in the drama, we should not look for clear-cut theories set in opposition to one another, but rather consider how a particular notion of sovereignty relates to the character and situation in the context of which it appears, and enquire whether it is part of a broader vision of order in society.

More important than any doctrinal differences was the general agreement that the sovereign was the most important member of society because of his immense power for good or evil. It was to be expected that a work like The Mirror for Magistrates, written to urge magistrates to rule justly, should remind them of their responsibility by stating that "the goodnes or badnes of any realme lyeth in the goodnes or badnes of the rulers."³² But exactly the same ideas can be found in the "Homily against Disobedience and wilful Rebellion":

For it is indeed evident, both by the Scriptures and by daily experience, that the maintenance of all virtue and godliness, and consequently of the wealth and prosperity of a kingdom and people, doth stand and rest more in a wise and good prince on the one part, than in great multitudes of other men being subjects: and, on the contrary part, the overthrow of all virtue and godliness, and consequently the decay and utter ruin of a realm and people doth grow and come more by an indiscreet and evil governor, than by many thousands of other men being subjects.³³

31 See Ponet, sig. G8; Christopher Goodman, Ch.10.

32 The Mirror for Magistrates, ed. Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge, 1938; rpt. New York, 1960), p.64.

33 Sermons or Homilies, p.472.

It may seem strange that a writer attempting to school subjects in obedience should apparently absolve them of responsibility by stating that civil chaos as well as harmony is caused by rulers, and it is only partly explained by the common idea, referred to shortly after, that "God . . . maketh a wicked man to raigne for the sinnes of the people". In fact, a belief in the sovereign as the natural and irreplaceable primum mobile of the whole social order was so deeply engrained in the Elizabethan mind, that an emphasis on his power for evil was calculated to inspire fear and respect in the subject, rather than an urge to rebel. In orthodox political thought, therefore, there was no contradiction between the abhorrence of tyranny and the abhorrence of rebellion. They were both dependent on a belief in the fixed and unalterable functions of ruler and subject in a political hierarchy.

Virtually all Renaissance political thinkers would further have agreed that sovereignty, the right to rule, in some way depends upon the pursuit of justice. This does not necessarily mean that the sovereign's failure to rule justly takes away all necessity of obedience in the subject, although Goodman and Ponet show how easily such a conclusion could be reached. What these writers erected into a theory of resistance was recognised by most others simply as a fact of political life, namely that the "just obedience" of subjects, as Hurault suggests, is dependent on the "just commaundement" of the prince.

Hurault was writing in 1588. Only a few years later in 1601, in a France which seemed at last to have gained some respite from the religious strife which had torn it for so long, Charron attempted to enforce men's obedience in quite different terms.

Lawes and customes are maintained in credit, not because they are just and good, but because they are lawes and customes; this is the mysticall foundation of their authoritie, they have no other, and so it is with superiours, because they are superiours, quia supra Cathedram sedent, not because they are vertuous and honest, quia faciunt, nolite facere. Hee that obeyeth them for any other cause, obeyeth them not because hee should, this is an evill and dangerous subject, it is not true obedience, which must be pure and simple.³⁴

It is not hard to understand why such an emphasis should have arisen in a country where an appeal to obedience on the basis of the justice and good faith of the rulers was bound to appear hollow, and where the sovereign, the King Henry who appears in Chapman's Byron plays, had even changed his religion in order to secure peace. In England, no such theory of the sacrosanctity of authority divorced from justice was ever spelt out in so unequivocal a fashion, either during Elizabeth's reign, or even in the ten years after James came to the throne. This, indeed, was because such a theory was not needed. Clearly, the doctrines of non-resistance extensively propagated in England from the time of the Reformation must, if taken to their logical conclusion, lead to the sort of position adopted by Charron. Perhaps King James, had he read these words, would have passed over them as nothing strange, or assented with less uneasiness than one more deeply in touch with humanist traditions of political thought. For in his writings the emphasis on the king's moral responsibility to govern well and to act according to the law are more a concession to deeply rooted attitudes than an integral part of his political vision. But such concessions had to be made precisely because English political thought was so deeply imbued with the idea of sovereignty as the pursuit of justice, and dependent on the good will of subjects. Dr. Godfrey Goodman, writing in the early

34 Charron, p.313.

sixteen fifties, by which time theories of unlimited sovereignty as proposed by Charron were common currency in England, emphatically dissociates King James from any such doctrine.³⁵ He outlines a purely humanist theory of sovereignty such as is found in Hooker. Government, he claims, is the natural outcome of man's instinct of self-preservation, and so "the right of government is in mankind, which is transferred upon others in trust." The other opinion is represented by certain flattering subjects of King James, who assert that "kings receive their regality wholly from God, that the church and the people confer nothing to their power" and that "if princes should intend to destroy their subjects, yet their subjects were bound to obey them; yea, further, if they should destroy all religion and labour as much as they could to bring in atheism, yet their subjects had no other way to resist them but with their prayers and tears unto God." Goodman gives no more concrete evidence of James's rejection of such propositions than his motto, "salus populi suprema lex". He certainly is correct, however, in suggesting that such a theory - although he does not mention any names - was only truly formulated in James's reign, and that it was connected with the increasing opposition to the Crown and the desire "to be governed by a representative body".

But the history of an idea does not begin when it first attains clear, theoretical formulation, although accounts of the development of political thought, which must rely on definite documentary evidence,

35 Dr. Godfrey Goodman, The Court of King James I (London, 1839), I, 267-69. (All quotations in the ensuing paragraph are taken from these pages.) Nothing could better demonstrate the need to look behind and beyond explicit doctrinal statements when dealing with Renaissance political thought than the fact that Goodman, an Anglican Royalist Bishop, is elaborating a theory of sovereignty in many ways identical to that employed in Parliamentary propaganda.

often tend to drift into this assumption. Drama of the first decade of James's reign exhibits a continual interest in the ultimate sanctions of sovereignty which suggests that the old faith in the necessary alliance of sovereignty, justice, and the voluntary obedience of subjects was becoming harder to sustain. Yet this was before any considerable debate on this subject had developed, as it definitely had in France. Because it is less designed to serve a particular political aim, and because it is less explicit and open to attack, drama may occasionally serve as a more responsive indicator of political feeling than political writings as such.

V

If men differed somewhat in their conceptions of the true sovereign, they were unanimous in their definition of a tyrant as one who governs without the consent of the people or regard for the law, and on behalf of himself or his faction, not for the good of the people as a whole.³⁶ There was a similar agreement, at least in orthodox humanist political thought, about the meaning of "Machiavellianism", which has long been recognised as an important element in the drama.³⁷ Some recent critical writings, however, have come to regard deviousness or even simple political skill and flexibility as the essential traits of the Machiavel, so that

36 See W. A. Armstrong, "The Elizabethan Conception of the Tyrant," RES, XXII (1946), 161-81.

37 See for example E. Meyer, Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama (Weimar, 1897); Mario Praz, "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans," PBA, XIV (1928), 49-97; U. Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama (London, 1936), pp.11-16; Irving Ribner, "The Significance of Gentillet's Contre Machiavel," MLQ, X (1940), 153-57; W. A. Armstrong, "The Influence of Seneca and Machiavelli on the Elizabethan Tyrant," RES, XXIV (1948), 19-35.

Hal in Henry IV, Malcolm in Macbeth, Cicero in Catiline, and King Henry in the Byron plays come to be cast in this role.³⁸ Such a definition is not merely so broad as to be almost useless, but in fact wrongly locates the crux of Machiavellianism, which can be gathered from an anonymous Catholic treatise dating from 1572:

And that it is, that I cal a Machiavellian State and Regiment, where Religion is put behind in the second and last place wher the civil Policie, I meane, is preferred before it, and not limited by any rules of Religion, but the Religion framed to serve the time and policy: wher both by word and example of the Rulers, the ruled are taught with every change of Religion: where in apparence and shew only, a Religion is pretended, now one, now an other, they force not greatly which, so that at hart there be none at al: where neither by hope nor feare of ought after this life, men are restrained from any maner vice, not moved to any vertue what so ever: but where it is free to slander, to belie, to forswear, to accuse, to corrupt, to oppresse, to robbe, to invade, to depose, to imprison, to murther, and to commit every other outrage, never so barbarous (that promiseth to advance the present Policie in hand) without scruple, feare, or conscience of hel or heaven, or God or Divel: and where no restraint, nor allurement is left in the hart of man, to bridle him from evil, nor to invite him to good: but for vaine fame only & feare of lay lawes, that reache no further than to this body and life: that call I properly a Machiavellian State and Governance.³⁹

The writer is alluding to the Machiavellian attempts by the Puritan faction headed by Leicester to divert Queen Elizabeth from the Catholic faith of her forefathers; but by religion we should understand not merely outward sectarian observances, but the entire fabric of natural and divine law on which "lay lawes" no less than the forms of religion

38 See John Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature, 2nd ed. (London, 1961), pp.89-90; Maynard Mack Jr., Killing the King, p.155; Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison, 1960), pp.68, 100-02.

39 A Treatise of Treasons against Queen Elizabeth and the Crowne of England ([Antwerp], 1572), sig. A5.

were supposed to rest. Renaissance political thinkers never tired of repeating the maxim that religion is the cornerstone of society, and Machiavellianism was to them the removal of this cornerstone. All the particulars of corruption, oath-breaking, murder, rebellion, and so on stem from this fact. Gentillet, the most famous of the anti-Machiavellian polemicists, argues similarly that Machiavellians are wicked precisely because they are atheists.⁴⁰ In the depiction of the stage Machiavel certain traits were bound to become exaggerated, owing to their dramatic potential, particularly when this tended towards caricature and melodrama; such were the devilish skill in political intrigue, and connoisseurship in the art of murder. But these are chiefly literary emphases, and even the ludicrous stage-Machiavel did not wholly lose touch with the image of Machiavelli in contemporary political thought. The ultimate ambition of Piero in Marston's Antonio's Revenge is significant:

I'll conquer Rome,
Pop out the light of bright religion;
And then, helter-skelter, all cocksure!⁴¹

Piero's designs on the papacy or on religion in general do not figure elsewhere in the play. These lines are spoken simply because disregard for religion, and the desire to fulfil one's ambition freed from religious restraint, were taken to be the essential traits of the Machiavel. His political insight and cunning were not condemned in themselves, but with reference to the end sought, since "all knowledge severed from justice ought rather to be called craft and malice than science and prudence."⁴²

40 Gentillet, p.94.

41 John Marston, Antonio's Revenge, ed. G. K. Hunter, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (London, 1966), IV.i.266-68.

42 La Primaudaye, p.117.

The tendency to locate the essence of Machiavellianism in political cunning might appear to gain support from the fact that the word "policy" had become weighted with evil connotations for the Elizabethans, who would not find it difficult to conclude that effective government must rely on a certain amount of force and fraud. But there were continual attempts to rescue the word, and the idea of the dignity of the art of government, from the disrepute into which they were liable to fall. In the preface to the first part of his treatise attacking Machiavelli, Gentillet claims that he "understood nothing or little in this Politicke science whereof we speake: and that he hath taken Maximes and rules altogether wicked, and hath builded upon them not a Politicke, but a Tyrannicall science."⁴³ Christopher Lever, in his short treatise entitled Heaven and Earth: Religion and Policy, which repeats many of the ideas found in A Treatise of Treasons concerning the religious basis of true policy, admits that the word is generally understood in a bad sense, but strives to renew its respectable connotations by arguing that "a Christian common weale . . . hath often times very needfull use of Policie: the which may most lawfully be used, the Policie being lawfull and proportionable to the rules of Religion."⁴⁴ The finest defence of the art of government, however, is to be found in Le Roy's preface to Aristotles Politiques. He begins by lamenting the fact that, whereas all the other arts and sciences have reached a supreme stage of development, "the skill of governement, being the worthiest, the behoofullest, and the needfullest of all others, is left alone behind." Other branches of knowledge have but limited application, but "as for

43 Gentillet, sig. A2.

44 Christopher Lever, Heaven and Earth, Religion and Policy (London, 1608), p.9. The word "policy" is discussed by N. Orsini, "'Policy' or the Language of Elizabethan Machiavellianism," JWCI, IX (1946), 122-34.

Government, it is the principall rule of all Liberall sciences and handicraftes, the orderer of all worldly exercises, the mother of discipline, the mistres of manners; behooveful for schooles, behoovefull for occupations; beneficiall to the field, beneficiall to the town; needfull on sea, needfull on land; profitable for warre and profitable for peace.⁴⁵ The magnificent closing paragraph of Le Roy's affirmation of the dignity of government, of which I have quoted only the first sentence, is fit to stand beside Ulysses speech on "degree" in Troilus and Cressida as an expression of the belief that all manner of activity, down to smallest details of personal conduct and social intercourse, is dependent on the proper exercise of rule. This is one reason why the Renaissance stage is peopled with kings and magistrates.

VI

If Renaissance thinkers were emphatic on the need for sound political doctrine, they were not so naive as to imagine that the application of such doctrine to actual situations was a simple matter. Greville was expressing a common assumption when he stated, apropos the duties of a subject suffering under tyranny, that "no man can govern his life wholly by precepts: 'Humane Wisdome it selfe varying with circumstance of

45 Aristotles Politiques or Discourses of Government, translated out of Greek into French by Loys le Roy, and out of French into English by J. D. [John Dickenson] (London, 1598), sigs. B1, C3. In future citations, I refer to the text of the translation as "Aristotles Politiques", and to Le Roy's own commentary as "Le Roy".

Cf. Guillaume de la Perrière, The Mirrour of Policie, tr. anon. (London, 1598), fols. 1-2: ". . . the good order in housekeeping profiteth only the master of the houshold, or his particular family, but the politike ordering of a Cittie is availeable to all: so that it may be concluded, that amongst all the precepts of Morall Philosophie, politick doctrine ought deservedly to holde the most cheefe and worthy place."

occasion, place, time, and nature; and so neither the same in all things, nor still the same in any'.⁴⁶ Popular English political writings such as the Homilies or the Mirror for Magistrates, those works in fact which are most usually cited as source material for political themes in the drama, do set forth their arguments in a dogmatic fashion, and draw a fixed and absolute line between right and wrong. But the impression they give of a monolithic, inflexible attitude coupled with a Hebraic intimation of the dread punishment awaiting those that pass the bounds of obedience is quite alien to the spirit of humanist political writing, the best of which exhibits a constant awareness of the limitation of precept or general rule. It is in this sphere in particular that continental works may be a surer guide than the categorical imperatives of the Homilies and the Mirror to delicate questions of political conduct in the drama.

The model of political conduct most admired by the humanists was not the unswerving pursuit of an ideal, but rather a flexible adaptation to circumstance which kept the ideal in view while recognising that its realization was not always possible. The classic statement of this is in the first book of More's Utopia; the speaker is More himself, and it is typical of the author's humanistic habit of mind that he inserts such a crucial point merely as his own interpolated comment, and follows

46 Fulke Greville, "A Letter to an Honourable Lady," in Certain Learned and Elegant Workes (London, 1633), p.274. Cf. Hooker, Ecclesiastical Polity, V, ix, 2: "So that general rules, till their limits be fully known (especially in matters of public and ecclesiastical affairs), are, by reason of the manifold secret exceptions which lie hidden in them, no other to the eye of man's understanding than cloudy mists cast before the eye of common sense. They that walk in darkness know not whither they go. And even as little is their certainty, whose opinions generalities only do guide. With gross and popular capacities nothing doth more prevail than unlimited generalities, because of their plainness at the first sight: nothing less with men of exact judgment, because such rules are not safe to be trusted over far."

it up by a vigorous denial from the main speaker, Hythlodaye. In reply to the latter's contention that "there is no room for philosophy with rulers", More argues as follows:

"Right," I declared, "that is true - not for this academic philosophy which thinks that everything is suitable to every place. But there is another philosophy, more practical for the statesman, which knows its stage, adapts itself to the play in hand, and performs its role neatly and appropriately. This is the philosophy which you must employ. . . .

"So it is in the commonwealth. So it is in the deliberations of monarchs. If you cannot pluck up wrong-headed opinions by the root, if you cannot cure according to your heart's desire vices of long standing, yet you must not on that account desert the commonwealth. You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the winds."⁴⁷

More's use of good acting as an image of the ability to adapt to circumstance in political affairs draws on the Renaissance belief in life as a play written by Divine Providence, in which each man should play the role allotted to him as "neatly and appropriately" as possible. In the previous chapter, we saw how the falsity of the political world might be expressed through a dramatic metaphor, but the analogy between drama and life is usually employed in a more favourable sense: a duty well performed is a role well acted. Acting, both in life and on the stage, was thought to be a true revelation of the self: "the garments of the body, the countenance and gesture, do give sufficient understanding what the man is."⁴⁸ If we recall in this connection Elyot's description of

47 Utopia, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter, in the Yale edition of The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, IV (New Haven and London, 1965), 99. The best known source of this image is a passage in Plato's Republic (6.488-89), which Jonson evidently had in mind when composing Cato's speech on the guidance of the ship of state in Catiline (see below, pp.143-44).

48 Chelidonius Tigurinus, A most excellent Historie of the Institution and first beginning of Christian Princes, and the Originall of Kingdomes, tr. James Chillester (London, 1571), p.141.

authority as "a weighty or heavy cloak" which should be worn "in his right fashion", then it becomes clear that not only speech but style of acting and costume may properly contribute to the presentation of a play's political significance.

But it may often be difficult to distinguish between true acting - a principled flexibility of conduct - and a Machiavellian deceitfulness or inconstancy which conceals its true motives and feelings to seek an immediate gain, or to avoid a difficult situation. A passage from William Fulbecke, a legal and historical writer of Elizabeth's reign, defines this distinction in striking terms. He is quoting from a letter supposed to have been written by Brutus to Cassius during the turbulent times following the assassination of Caesar, and which criticises Cicero's preference for an unjust peace before a just war. Cicero, explains Brutus, "is fortune's page, and favoureth them most who have most favourers. A wise man, though by oportunitie he do alter his pace, yet still keepeth his way, serveth time for advantage not to feare, and as the sunne setteth to rise againe, so he changeth his course to continue his purpose: but to an unconstant man everie accident is a constellation, by the which he is diversified and driven from the center of his thoughts."⁴⁹ Fulbecke's choice of metaphor is not fortuitous. The comparison of the wise man

49 William Fulbecke, An Historicall Collection of the Continuall Factions, Tumults, and Massacres of the Romans and Italians (London, 1601; written 1586), pp.181-82. This is the same William Fulbecke whose book The Pandectes of the Laws of Nations (London, 1602) is frequently cited in discussions of the drama, particularly in connection with Coriolanus, as an example of the prevalence of anti-plebeian and anti-democratic sentiments in the early years of the seventeenth century. Indeed, the Pandectes appears to be very much a product of its time, since the Historicall Collection, written sixteen years earlier, evinces considerable sympathy with representative and popular trends in the government of ancient Rome, and overall displays a more mature, undogmatic approach to political and historical questions than the better-known later work.

with the sun suggests that true flexibility lies in conformity to nature; it may also obliquely suggest that such a one is able to hold to his resolve during the night of adversity as well as the daylight of good fortune. The metaphor of the sun, moreover - which alters its course though it maintains the same pace - reverses the initial metaphor of the traveller who changes his pace but keeps to his course. Fulbecke's discussion of this matter is itself a witty lesson in the controlled and purposeful change of course in a man's life.

The model of political conduct described by More, at once adaptable and constant, is therefore a mean between deceit or inconstancy, and obstinate idealism, the inability to adapt, or as the Elizabethans would say, to "frame" oneself to circumstance. The idea of flexibility in the art of government is, in fact, one manifestation of a principle fundamental to Renaissance ethical thought, namely that all virtue is "in the midst of two vices", and that the attainment of the proper mean is a difficult task: "For as it is a harde matter in a circle to finde out the pricke in the centre, which is the middle, so it is hard to find out the pricke of vertue placed in the middle between two extreme vyces."⁵⁰

The doctrine of the mean might occasionally be given a specifically political application. Le Roy, for instance, uses it to support his argument for limited monarchy and a type of mixed state. The power of the King of France, he claims, is severely limited by the Chancellor's veto - which is the cause of so much trouble in Chapman's Chabot - and various other restraints, "by the which moderation, his power is nothing

50 La Primaudaye, p.109; Castiglione, p.330. The whole of this section is indebted to the discussion, in a more general social and aesthetic context, of the Renaissance doctrines of decorum and the mean in Ch.1, "Words, Deeds, and Decorum", of T. McAlindon, Shakespeare and Decorum (London, 1973).

lessened and abated, but made more assured and constant."⁵¹ The rebels could just as easily turn the doctrine to their own purposes. Ponet, discussing the conditions for a healthy body politic, states that "if Obedience be to muche or to litell in a common wealthe, it causeth muche evil and disordre."⁵²

A belief in the essence of virtue as moderation, and a due consideration of "circumstance of occasion, place, time, and nature" should ideally have been a check against the misuse of political doctrine to serve immediate ends with which Elizabethan political literature abounds. The use of orthodox assumptions and concepts such as the body politic or the sovereign's direct responsibility to God to develop a heterodox argument in favour of deposing a wicked monarch could well be criticised as the misapplication of precept to circumstance, or failure to hold the moderate course between disorderly zeal and faint-hearted servility. An interesting exchange between John Knox and Henry Bullinger epitomises the difference between the narrow dogmatism of the typically Protestant thinker - that of the Homilies against rebellion no less than Knox, despite their practical disagreement on the issues raised here - and the more sensitive, reserved outlook which makes Bullinger the most congenial of radical Protestant churchmen, and testifies to his absorption of humanist habits of thought. The exchange consists of certain questions which Knox put to Bullinger in 1554 on such matters as whether women may rule over a kingdom, whether obedience is due to an idolatrous king, and whether it is permitted to support a religious nobility in

51 Le Roy, pp.170-71.

52 Ponet, sig. C8.

overthrowing such a one.⁵³ Knox was to give his own strident answer to these questions in later works, and even here, the form of the questions leave us in no doubt as to which way his mind was tending. Bullinger's answers are altogether more cautious, and formulated not as moral absolutes, but as if in response to an actual situation. In reply to the question on feminine rule, he follows a Puritan blast of the trumpet - "The law of God ordains the woman to be in subjection, and not to rule" - with a more muted admission that "if a woman in compliance with, or in obedience to the laws and customs of the realm, is acknowledged as Queen, and, in maintenance of the hereditary right of government, is married to a Husband, or in the meantime holds the reins of government by means of her councillors, it is a hazardous thing for godly persons to set themselves in opposition to political regulations; especially as the gospel does not seem to unsettle or abrogate hereditary rights, and the political laws of kingdoms." And in his discussion of the question of obedience to an idolatrous magistrate, we find the very same lack of dogmatism which led Sir Thomas Smith, considering the question of rebellion against an evil monarch, not to repeat the usual arguments about the wickedness of any such attempt, but to suggest that, while ignorant men judge according to the "event and successe", learned men will judge such cases "according to the purpose of the doers, and the estate of the time then present."⁵⁴ Having argued, as do Ponet and Goodman, that "the Holy Scriptures not only permits, but even enjoins upon the magistrate a just and necessary defence", Bullinger continues: "But as other objects are often aimed at under the pretext of a just and necessary assertion or maintenance of right, and the worst characters mix themselves

53 The Works of John Knox, ed. David Laing, III (Edinburgh, 1854), 217-26.

54 Sir Thomas Smith, De Republica Anglorum (1583; facsimile rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), p.5.

with the good, and the times too are full of danger; it is very difficult to pronounce upon every particular case." The fact that Bullinger and Smith, from a purely dogmatic point of view, came to opposite conclusions on the right of subjects to resist their monarch, makes their similarity of tone and approach even more significant.

If precepts and general rules are not in themselves a sure guide to conduct, then it is clear that their use in interpreting the drama is far from straightforward. The scene in Woodstock to which we have already referred - the ceremony of welcome to Anne a Beame - affords a simple illustration of this point. Humanist political doctrine repeatedly stressed the importance of honest and truthful counsel. Woodstock, like Gaunt in Richard II, is noted for his fearless plain speaking, a virtue which is conspicuously displayed here. Woodstock's overall moral authority throughout the play until his death, and the justice of the charges which he brings against the king - burdensome taxes on the Commons, courtly extravagance, the promotion of flattering upstarts over noble and worthy counsellors - might further incline us to agree with him that "my allegiance stands excused / In justice of the cause" (I.iii. 170-71). But the style of his counselling changes drastically in the course of the scene. His initial remarks about Richard's "unsettled" nature, delicately introduced into his speech of welcome to Anne, and his grotesque suggestion that his horse trod slowly because of the "hundred oaks" and the "Ten acres of good land" stitched up in his brave costume - implying the wastefulness of courtly extravagance - are perfectly in accord with the tone of rejoicing and light-hearted banter which opens the scene. At "Hear me, King Richard", a querulous note enters; Woodstock effectively advertises his intention to deliver a sermon, and despite Anne's brave attempts to avert the impending quarrel, he refuses to be

ruled. His retreat into self-righteous obstinacy forces Richard into a similar attitude, and he now seems to be defending the good name of himself and his companions as much as giving wholesome counsel. Ironically, he is the one to call attention to the principle of conformity with time and circumstance in the very moment of its violation:

Pardon my speech my lord . . . Since now we're all so brave,
To grace Queen Anne, this day we'll spend in sport.
But in my tother hose, I'll tickle them for't. (11.131-33)

But even this fails to check further and increasingly discourteous outbursts of indignation. At this crucial point in the play, Woodstock forgets - with evil consequences - what he alone of the "rebel" lords truly grasps, that "it is the office of a good Courtier to knowe the nature and inclination of his Prince, and so accordynge to the busynesse and as occasion serveth with slightnesse to entre into favour with him (as we have said) by those wayes that make him a sure entrey, and afterward bend him to vertue."⁵⁵

VII

The old debate on whether or not Shakespeare was a proto-Jacobin has been replaced by the more historical investigation of whether he concurs with the political orthodoxies of his own age. In one of the most recent protests against the prevailing tendency to interpret his English history plays as embodiments of Tudor doctrine, Robert Ornstein asks: "Can we believe, however, that he dedicated nine plays - the weightier part of all the drama he wrote before Hamlet - to the claims of orthodoxy?"⁵⁶

55 Castiglione, p.338.

56 Robert Ornstein, A Kingdom for a Stage: the Achievement of Shakespeare's History Plays (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), p.3.

But if we cast our net much wider to include not only Shakespeare's historical plays read in the light of Tudor homiletic and historical literature, but a varied selection of plays viewed against a broad spectrum of Renaissance political thought, then political "orthodoxy" is not only far more difficult to determine, but also loses its connotations of narrow, unimaginative dogmatism which make it so distasteful to Ornstein and other critics of the approach suggested by Tillyard. For the varied approaches to a particular problem may often be more telling than the actual conclusion reached. Knox and the composer of the Exhortation concerning Good Order might have thundered disagreement with one another over the question of obedience to an evil sovereign, and yet still have more in common with each other than with Bullinger and Sir Thomas Smith respectively, who could have disagreed amicably on the same point. The spiritual affinity of the dramatists is, I suggest, with Bullinger and Smith and an earlier generation of humanist thinkers, rather than with the dogma of the homilies and the Protestant reformers. Freed from the necessity, or even the possibility of combining political with religious thinking, they helped to preserve a humanist tradition of political thought which had been dealt a heavy blow by the Reformation.

Humanist orthodoxy is to be found, not so much in a definite set of doctrines, although there was a general agreement on a number of fundamental points, as in an approach based on the belief that to live in harmony with one's fellow-men is the supreme virtue, but that the conditions of such harmony may, in different circumstances, be quite diverse. The difficulties of achieving such a harmony were universally recognised to be considerable. Not least of these was the often tragic discontinuity between individual and social virtue. Reading Hooker's words on this subject, we may grasp why the great Renaissance political

plays are also intensely personal tragedies: "It is both commonly said, and truly, that the best men otherwise are not always the best in regard of society. The reason whereof is, for that the law of men's actions is one, if they be respected only as men; and another, when they are considered as parts of a politic body. Many men there are, than whom nothing is more commendable when they are single; and yet in society with others none less fit to answer the duties which are looked for at their hands."⁵⁷

The flexibility and lack of dogmatism which, I have suggested, is of the very essence of humanist political thought, bears obvious implications for a study of political themes in the drama. Gentillet's admonition concerning the function of general rules in the exercise of government might well be translated into a caution to be adopted in critical discussion: "Yet although the Maximes and general rules of the Politicke art, may something serve to know well to guide and governe a publicke estate (whether it bee principalitie or free cittie:) yet can they not bee so certaine as the Maximes of the Mathematicians, but are rules rather very dangerous, yea, pernicious, if men cannot make them serve and apply them to affaires, as they happen to come; and not to apply the affaires unto these Maximes and rules."⁵⁸ A proper appreciation of political themes in Renaissance drama does indeed need more than a thorough grasp of contemporary political doctrine, as many recent critics sceptical of the historical approach have insisted. But a recognition of this fact does not necessarily imply a rejection of the historical approach, or a belief that the artist necessarily

57 Ecclesiastical Polity, I, xvi, 6.

58 Gentillet, Preface, sig. A1.

supersedes the limited insight of the political theorist. Just such a recognition is implicit in the humanists' own approach to the problem of government.

Chapter Three

Classical Senecan Drama and Fulke Greville's Mustapha

I

Polonius's announcement to Hamlet of the arrival of the players reminds us that an Elizabethan play could be either tragical, comical, historical or pastoral, or a combination of these genres. There was no such thing as a 'political play', and even plays like Coriolanus or Sejanus, focussed continuously on matters of state, will bear such a descriptive term only if we recall the characteristic range of humanist political thought.

Such a generalisation, however, should be modified with reference to that small body of classical Senecan or 'Senecal' drama,¹ comprising early plays produced at court or in the Inns such as Gorboduc (1562) and The Misfortunes of Arthur (1588) - to name the two almost exclusively concerned with matters of state - as well as the closet drama written under the guidance of the Countess of Pembroke, and comprising plays by Kyd, Daniel, and Greville among others. Many of these are political plays in a narrow sense, concerned with the prerogatives and abuses of sovereignty, which are set out in a series of rhetorical expositions

1 I adopt the suggestion of Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, p.21, that the term "Senecal" be employed to describe plays which owe to Seneca their classical form, as distinct from the "Senecan" drama of the popular stage, distinguished for its sensationalism, and the appearance of certain stock motifs and characters. This divergence in the influence of Seneca on Renaissance drama is fully described by H. B. Charlton in his Introduction to The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, ed. L. E. Kastner and H. B. Charlton, vol. 1, The Dramatic Works (Manchester, 1921), reissued as The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy (Manchester, 1946).

and confrontations draped onto a minimal dramatic framework. It is a curious fact that the most tedious and unremittingly didactic of this generally dreary collection, namely the "Monarchick Tragedies" of Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, appear to be the only plays of this period to proclaim their political subject matter in their title.

Quite apart from their dramatic lifelessness, none of these Senecal plays has any literary merit, with the exception of the contributions by Daniel and Greville, and therefore they do not warrant extended treatment here. But we cannot afford entirely to neglect a group of plays more exclusively political in content than any in this period. The Senecal form, moreover, is largely adopted by Jonson in his Roman tragedies, and also left its mark on Chapman, while even such an unclassical writer as Webster took a number of his most memorable sententiae from Alexander.² The true extent of the influence of Senecal drama is therefore worthy of consideration.

II

T. S. Eliot observed in his essay on Elizabethan translations of Seneca that the translators sometimes appear to add a political innuendo to the Senecan moralising on the vanity of place and power.³ Further evidence that Seneca's plays were read with a political slant is afforded by Sir William Cornwallis's curious tract entitled Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian, published in 1601.⁴ This is not, as the title would

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- 2 These are listed in R. W. Dent, John Webster's Borrowing (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960).
- 3 T. S. Eliot, "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," in Selected Essays, 3rd ed. (London, 1951), p.104.
- 4 Sir William Cornwallis, Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian (1601; facsimile rpt. Gainesville, Florida, 1952).

appear to suggest, a discussion of Seneca's plays, but a moral and political discourse which uses various maxims culled from Seneca as the starting points for widely ranging discussions on a variety of topics. Cornwallis begins with a characterisation of ideal kingship, then moves on to more practical questions concerning the running of states, such as the dangers of rebellion when the people are treated merely as the foil of the king's magnificence, or the use of power and fear in keeping order where persuasion and example are no longer effective. His preoccupations are precisely those of Alexander and other Senecal dramatists, namely the privileges of monarchy and its abuses, and how a king's power may most surely be upheld.

Seneca, it appears, stimulated the political imagination of Elizabethan England, and in this respect influenced the content as well as the form of the drama.⁵ Indeed, the example of Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian points to the intimate connection between Senecal drama and Tudor political thought as a whole. Both Cornwallis and the dramatists use Seneca as an occasion for moral discourses on the art of rule and the necessity of obedience closely akin to those found in the Homilies or the Mirror for Magistrates. Such works as these, which I have suggested are not always an adequate background for an understanding of the political vision of the best plays of the period, find their true literary counterparts in Senecal drama; the narrowly political focus, the tendency to see moral choices in absolute terms, the generally

5 Further discussion of Seneca's influence on the treatment of political themes can be found in A. H. Gilbert, "Seneca and the Criticism of Elizabethan Tragedy," PQ, XIII (1934), 370-81. Senecan influence has been questioned by Howard Baker, Induction to Tragedy (New York, 1939; rpt. 1965); and by G. K. Hunter, "Seneca and the Elizabethans: a Case-Study in 'Influence'," ShS, XX (1967), 17-26.

dogmatic and forbidding tone is common to both. In addition, there are a number of direct links between Senecal drama and contemporary English political thought, such as are lacking with the popular drama. Thomas Sackville, one of the authors of Gorboduc, also contributed to the Mirror for Magistrates, while both Bacon and William Fulbecke had a hand in The Misfortunes of Arthur. Greville and Jonson, the two dramatists with whom we are directly concerned who wrote plays that adhere to at least some of the Senecal conventions, were the only ones to write on political matters outside the drama.

In view of the political orientation of Senecal drama, it is not surprising that it should have had some influence on the other plays we are considering. Jonson turned to this form partly for the opportunities it afforded for the detailed analysis of state affairs and a moral commentary on the action, while several of Webster's borrowings from Alexander are in the nature of political aphorisms.⁶ More especially, the influence of Senecal drama can be traced in the use of certain typical situations and rhetorical confrontations, many of which appear in Seneca himself, but which in Senecal drama are specifically directed towards investigation of the problems of government. Such, for example, is the argument between the tyrant, self-consciously vaunting his own wickedness, and a second character whose orthodox sentiments serve as his foil. The scene between Modred and Conan in the first act of The Misfortunes of Arthur is a typical example, while the meeting of Malcolm and Macduff at the English court in Macbeth may be an original reworking of this traditional dramatic

6 See for example The White Devil, ed. John Russell Brown, The Revels Plays (London, 1960), II.ii.56-57, V.iii.201-04, V.vi.261-62; The Duchess of Malfi, III.v.96-97.

usage.⁷ Discussions between a sovereign and his counsellors, particularly in a critical situation, afford excellent opportunity for emphasising the principles of sound government. With the exception of the brief opening scene, the whole of the first and second acts of Gorboduc is taken up with such exchanges,⁸ while a similar formal debate accompanies Henry's decision to punish Byron "by law's usual course" (The Tragedy of Byron, IV.ii.18-47).

In view of the generally low quality of Senecal drama, it is natural to assume that the partial success in this genre of Daniel's Philotas, Greville's Mustapha, and Sejanus is due to the intellectual vigour which enabled these authors to overcome the disadvantages of a moribund form. But if the influence of Senecal drama on the popular stage was very small, the greater part of this influence was in the presentation of political ideas. Senecal drama was designed to illustrate universally accepted moral and political commonplaces without the complications of ambiguous character or mixed motive ubiquitous on the popular stage; and the form was suited to such an end. Its techniques of rhetorical exposition and juxtaposition of incompatible ideas and principles became an essential component in the art of greater dramatists, who were able to mould them to their more flexible purposes.

III

A proclamation of Queen Elizabeth in 1559 forbade the production of plays in which "matters of religion or of the governaunce of the estate of the

7 See W. A. Armstrong, "The Influence of Seneca and Machiavelli on the Elizabethan Tyrant," RES, XXIV (1948), 22.

8 I have used the edition of Gorboduc in Cunliffe's Early English Classical Tragedies.

common weale shalbe handled or treated, beyng no meete matters to be written or treated upon, but by menne of authoritie, learning, and wisdome, nor to be handled before any audience, but of grave and discreet persons."⁹ Early Senecal plays, intended for learned and aristocratic audiences, appear to have escaped this prohibition. Gorboduc lectures the Queen on the matter of the royal succession, The Misfortunes of Arthur points out the dangers of excessive clemency (with implied reference to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots), yet both plays were acted before Elizabeth herself, Gorboduc in 1562 only three years after this proclamation.¹⁰ The closet-dramatists, writing as an academic elite in the fifteen-nineties and early sixteen-hundreds, would appear to have enjoyed an even greater artistic freedom. In general, however, the Senecal dramatists not only keep within the strict bounds of orthodoxy when dealing with political matters, but are lacking in that capacity - or desire - to present heterodox positions in cogent terms, which has led most popular dramatists of the period to be pronounced unorthodox or prematurely republican at one time or another.¹¹

The two outstanding exceptions to the rule are Daniel's Philotas

9 Quoted in E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage (Oxford, 1923; rpt. 1965), IV, 263.

10 For the topicality of Gorboduc, see L. H. Courtney, "The Tragedy of 'Ferrex and Porrex'," N&Q, 2nd series, X (1860), 261-63; for The Misfortunes of Arthur, see above p.20, n.24.

11 Sara Ruth Watson argues in "Gorboduc and the Theory of Tyrannicide," MLR, XXXIV (1939), 355-66, that parts of the play written by Norton justify the theories of Ponet, Goodman, and Knox that rebellion against a wicked monarch is permissible, but her quotations suggest merely that Norton had a keener sense of kings' responsibility than his co-author Sackville. For example, I.ii.19-24 mean not that bad kings "forfeit the right to receive obedience from their subjects", but that they are liable to bring on themselves the wrath of God; these lines are quite irrelevant to any theory of obedience.

(1605), the only later Senecal play to be produced on the stage,¹² and Greville's Mustapha, which forms the subject of the rest of this chapter. It is fitting that Philotas alone should have found its way onto the stage, since, although an essentially rhetorical and intellectual play, the main outlines of its thought are never too complicated to be immediately grasped, and develop simultaneously with the conflict between Philotas and Alexander. Mustapha is less successful dramatically. The trouble is not, as with an early Senecal play like Gorboduc, that the moral is very simple, and that the author takes so long to say so little, but rather that the thought is very complicated, and is more than the skeletal action will bear. Greville was probably aware of this when he emphasised that Mustapha and Alaham were "no plaies for the Stage".¹³ Nevertheless, on reading the play the quality of some of its verse, and the considerable interest of the political ideas expressed in it compensate for much of the dramatic awkwardness. Most important is the light it casts on more central works of Renaissance drama. Greville was writing for an exclusive audience, and, in the case of the later version of Mustapha, not even for publication in his own lifetime. He therefore enjoyed a freedom which popular dramatists could use only at their peril. Mustapha helps to define the limits of the popular drama by taking us into those areas where it could venture rarely or not at all.¹⁴

12 E. W. Talbert, The Problem of Order, pp.143-44, describes Philotas as a play which stimulates the audience's interest "in the equivocal nature of conventional precepts and in the way in which they could be turned, especially in the process of an oration or a debate, first in one direction, and then in another." It is partly Talbert's excellent account of this play which has determined my choice of Mustapha for discussion.

13 Fulke Greville, Life of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Nowell Smith (Oxford, 1907), p.224.

14 A sympathetic and balanced account of Mustapha is given by Joan Rees in Ch.7 of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, 1554-1628: A Critical Biography (London, 1971). Peter Ure's excellent article, "Fulke Greville's Dramatic Characters," RES, N.S. I (1950), 308-328, may also be mentioned here, although this is concerned with the religious and philosophical, rather than the political aspects of his plays.

The first version of Mustapha was written before 1600 and published in 1609, while the second version, printed in the Certaine Learned and Elegant Workes of 1633, was probably composed between 1604 and 1614 during the period of Greville's temporary retirement from public life. The main differences between the two versions are described by Geoffrey Bullough in his edition of the plays,¹⁵ and indeed a comparison between the political and dramatic qualities of both is in itself a fascinating study. It is impossible to make any overall generalisations concerning the difference between the two versions. In the earlier, there are several 'subversive' statements which are omitted or toned down in the later,¹⁶ but only this one contains the stirring call to rebellion at the close of the fourth act, to which we shall return later. In some respects, the later version is an improvement in dramatic terms. The re-arrangement of scenes ensures a steadier progression towards a climax in the final act, while individual characters are more firmly and subtly drawn as credible human beings rather than inflated caricatures; and this change is accompanied by a more moderate, living style of speech. Solyman, for example, is less the diabolical Senecan tyrant:

Since Mustapha will therefore dye or kill,
I gave him life, and give him death I will.

and more the well-meaning, but none the less ill-informed and suspicious ruler:

15 See the Introduction to Poems and Dramas of Fulke Greville, First Lord Brooke, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (Edinburgh, 1939), II, 25-40. Bullough prints the later version in full, while the earlier version can be found in his notes and appendices, which give all variants.

16 See for example I.i.80-81, II.ii.55-56, IV.iv.32-55, V.i.2, and notes.

For since he strives to undermine my Crowne,
I will as firmly watch to keep him downe. (I.i.21-22)

In the earlier version, however, the choruses are an integral part of the play; it is in the later version that we find the vastly involved choric comments on the dramatic action and analyses of the Turkish state which severely damage the play's coherence.

A detailed discussion of these various differences is not intended here, but this brief sketch has been undertaken simply to demonstrate that one cannot regard one version as the true Mustapha, of which the other is a preliminary trial or a detrimental expansion, as the case may be. I will take the second version as the basis for discussion, firstly because, on balance, its presentation of ideas is more subtle and comprehensive, and secondly because it was probably written in the same years as most of the plays I am concerned with in this study.

IV

Despite its title, the play is about Mustapha least of all. Although the only character who is wholly endorsed, he appears only once, and not till the end of the fourth act. His importance is chiefly instrumental, in that he serves as a focus for the desires and ambitions of others, as well as the immediate occasion for the action. In Philotas, the titular hero is the central character mainly because the extent of his guilt or innocence is the point at issue. But if the opening dialogue of Mustapha between Solyman and Rossa raises any doubt as to the loyalty of their son, these doubts are soon dispelled. The integrity of Camena and Achmat, who speak in his favour, is contrasted with the selfish ambition of Rossa, who urges his death, while even the treacherous

Beglerbie acknowledges Mustapha's innocence, and describes to Solyman his son's scrupulously correct conduct in public affairs (I.ii.9, 102-207). Early in the play, therefore, Mustapha is established as a moral yardstick, the test whereby other characters reveal their own worth.

The first two acts show Solyman wavering over the decision whether to condemn or spare his son under the successive influence of Rossa, Achmat, and Camena. The exact process of his indecision is of no particular interest, since it is not related to any external dramatic development. Lacking the true dramatist's ability to depict inner conflict as a single but ambiguous state of mind, Greville, in common with other dramatists writing in this genre, offers a succession of sharply conflicting resolves between which there is no psychologically plausible transition. A similarly mechanical presentation of inner conflict is employed with Achmat in his troubled loyalty towards Solyman both in this act (II.i.58-70) and at the end of the play (V.iii.65-120).

The positive side of this polarity, that aspect of Solyman's character confident of his son's loyalty and his own worth, deserves some notice. At the end of the first act, Beglerbie replies to Solyman's questions concerning Mustapha's conduct with an account of his reception of the foreign ambassadors and subsequent return home that on the surface appears adulatory, but which contains implications that could be weighted against him. He hints that Mustapha's popularity may be a cause for concern, that a prophecy spread by the Mufti suggests that the "Unperfect times" of Solyman are coming to an end, and that Mustapha is the perfect sovereign who will shortly inaugurate a new era. To the unprincipled Beglerbie, it matters not who rules so long as he can continue to serve - an attitude that he later cynically justifies with the respectable

doctrine of rex non moritur:

The Saint we worship is Authoritie;
Which lives in Kings, and cannot with them die. (IV.iv.17-18)

So his account of Mustapha's behaviour, which could bring grist to Rossa's mill, is designed to test Solyman's real inclinations, and put the onus of responsibility back onto him. With admirable insight, Solyman rejects any suggestion that his son is plotting against him, and reveals his grasp of the moral principle on which the play is built, namely that men's attitudes towards Mustapha are a sure sign of their own worth. However much the common people set in motion "inferior wheels of practice" in their enthusiastic support for him, his superior worth is untainted:

His worth rests constant, and yet works this motion,
They to him, for him, sacrifice at randome
All which they have, and have not, in devotion.
He is the Glasse, in which their light affections
Come to behold what image they shall take. (I.ii.211-14)

Solyman implicitly extends this recognition to himself, and thereby sketches the only sound basis on which his government can rest:

This throne grew not by delicate alliance,
Combining State with State, all States to Lawes,
Of idle Princes, and base subjects cause.
We grew by curious improving all;
Our selves to people, people unto us;
Worth, through our selves, in them we planted thus.
And shall I helpe to make succession lesse,
Blasting the births of Nature and Example,
In narrow feares of selfe-unworthinesse?
No, No: The art of Monarchie is more:
Princes must strength by such succession gather. (11.224-34)

The implications of setting the play in Turkey, namely that we are to witness a display of tyranny or absolutism, are amply borne out by the

lengthy political analyses of the choruses and numerous other suggestions in the play itself. Lines such as these, demonstrating Solyman's thorough awareness of the basis of sound kingship exactly as humanist writers described them, are therefore worthy of emphasis. The art of rule, he acknowledges, is no mere process of military conquest and self-indulgent legislation, but a laboured process of self-discipline, and, arising from this, discipline of others. Greville uses an extended image of organic growth to describe this process of mutual development - uncommonly for him, since his political world is usually expressed in mechanical imagery, while the more traditional organic metaphors that pervade the work of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Chapman are in his work the significant exceptions. Solyman grasps that only inferior rulers, afraid of their "self-unworthiness", have anything to fear from the abilities and popularity of their greatest subjects. At this stage in the play, Solyman is one of those rare spirits who, like Duncan in Macbeth, feel themselves not diminished but increased by a subject's surpassing virtue. He would have understood Banquo's words to Duncan: "There if I grow, / The harvest is your own" (I.iv.32-33).

The Chorus Primus of "Basha's or Caddies" generalises the conflict already apparent in Solyman by contrasting a tyrannical and a well-ordered state, and describing their own function in both. In their evocation of tyranny, the same rhetorically patterned and emphatic style, which lends weight to Solyman's utterances, takes on a finely satirical, almost Augustan bite:

Lawes the next pillars be, with which we deale,
 As Sophistries of every Common-weale;
 Or rather Nets, which people doe aske leave,
 That they, to catch their Freedomes in, may weave,
 And still adde more unto the Sultans Power,
 By making their owne frames themselves devoure.

(Chorus Primus, 57-62)

Two general points are to be made. Firstly, the chorus here is, uniquely in Senecal drama, admitting its own complicity in the corruption which the play depicts, and is thus far from the usual detached and objective moral commentator. Secondly, although the perversion of law to serve the unscrupulous ends of power was perhaps the most commonly recognized symptom of tyranny, Greville gives this idea - and the proverbial comparison of the law to a cobweb - an original twist by suggesting that people willingly destroy their own freedom. It is not the tyrant using the law for his own ends who is the devourer, as in Sejanus, but rather the people themselves.

The Chorus of Bashas has no doubt as to the nature of the regime presided over by Solyman:

Lastly, thus doe we suffer God to wayne,
Under the Humors of a Sultans raigne.
And in the fatall ruine of his Sonne
Cut off our owne lives, on a lesse threed spunne.

(11.219-22)

The image of the net in which people weave their own destruction, which has already been repeated with a slightly different emphasis (11.166-67), is once again recalled, this time as the thread of life spun by the three fates which the Bashas themselves will sever. Greville's characteristic method is to employ a wide variety of metaphors which he repeats with subtle shifts of emphasis, so as to tease out a number of possible implications. The same technique is seen in Solyman's use of an organic metaphor quoted above: worth can only be "planted", as in a garden; "Blasting the births" shifts from vegetable to human growth, and reminds us of the literal context of this speech, since Solyman is talking about his own son; the final assertion that "Princes must strength by such succession gather" fuses these ideas by implying a parallel

between the succession of human generations, and the gathering of the earth's fruits which is itself an occasion for renewed strength. The various strands of imagery are mainly local in function, since Greville does not weave them into the sort of unified and significant pattern evident to at least some extent in all the remaining plays in this discussion. But his distinctive use of imagery effectively achieves its function of supporting or extending an argument constructed primarily on a logical, rhetorical basis.

The Bashas' fears concerning the fate of Mustapha are confirmed at the opening of the second act, in which Solyman suddenly switches from a mature recognition of the nature of his mutual obligations as King and Father:

These two, being Relatives, have mutuall bonds;
Neglect in either, all in question brings. (II.ii.16-17)

to an exactly opposite view that "This Father-language fits not Kings" (1.38). Mustapha is no longer a fixed orb of virtue, untouched by the movement of the lesser spheres, but a genuine threat to Solyman's own influence, "Ascending by the ballance we descend" (1.27). Paternal love thus becomes a "Chaine, tyed to my Crowne, / Either to helpe him up, or pull me downe" (11.36-37). The image of the balance, which is likewise used in Richard II (III.iv.84-89; IV.i.184-89) in describing the conflict between Bolingbroke and Richard, implies a situation in which the success of one man inevitably entails the ruin of another, and which thus violates the principle of the mutually enriching growth of sovereign and subject defined earlier by Solyman himself.

Solyman, therefore, is far more than the vacillating petty tyrant, a constant prey to the importunities of his family. The traditional

Senecan tyrant, or even the more subtly Machiavellian villain, defies the natural order because he does not understand its all-embracing power, and genuinely but mistakenly believes that his schemes will meet with ultimate success. But Solyman possesses, fitfully at least, the insight that the Senecan tyrant lacks. His inner conflict concerns not merely whether or not he should have his son put to death, but, more fundamentally, two contrasting attitudes towards power and rule, the one built on a humanist recognition of the mutual duties of sovereign and subject, and of the basis of outward order in inner worth, the other grounded on a jealousy of others' worth and ability, and seeing self-interest as the driving force of political change.

Solyman's final decision to have Mustapha executed is therefore presented as a conscious yet inevitable act of tyranny. Although the immediate implementation of this decision is hastened by Rossa's murder of Camena (to which she confesses in IV.iii), the crucial step is effectively taken at the close of his soliloquy in IV.i. Unable to follow the dictates of his own maturer conscience and wisdom, Solyman compares himself to those kings who

believe themselves, their strength, occasion;
 Make wisdom conscience; and the world their skie:
 So have all Tyrants done; and so must I. (IV.i.41-43)

The ease with which the antitheses - wisdom/conscience, strength/occasion, world/skie - are evoked and reconciled, and the calm resignation with which Solyman opts for the wrong course knowing what the right one is may appear puzzling until we realise that once again Greville is not so much evoking an inner conflict as describing it from the outside; this explains the psychological implausibility even if it does not excuse it from a dramatic point of view. But Solyman's lines are not merely a

moralisation on his own wickedness. Only his knowledge of what true kingship is can force him into a reluctant admission of failure. Like Macbeth, he is a tyrant in spite of himself, driven into a crime which is felt as an "appalling duty",¹⁷ as Bradley remarked concerning Macbeth's murder of Duncan. The sense of compulsion in Macbeth's crimes partly arises from his committing them with the burning knowledge that

This even-handed justice
Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips. (I.vii.10-12)

And in this respect Macbeth also departs radically from the model of the traditional Senecan tyrant.

The comparison cannot, of course, be pushed too far, for while Macbeth plunges swiftly into evil early in the play, and claims our attention through all the stages of his degradation and ultimate death, Solyman rather drifts into evil under the influence of harrowing suspicion, and after he has given the order for Mustapha's execution we see no more of him. Once Greville has made his point about the origins and inception of tyranny, the vehicle of this idea no longer concerns him. But Mustapha can certainly take its place with Macbeth as one of several Jacobean plays which investigate more subtle and dangerous forms of misrule than that represented by the conventional Elizabethan tyrant. Such a figure, evil from his inception and exulting in his wickedness, appears in a great play like Richard III no less than in inferior productions, whether a popular tragedy like Cambises, or a courtly drama like The Misfortunes of Arthur. The more human and complicated tyrant of the Jacobean stage is likewise not confined to the work of superior

17 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 2nd ed. (London, 1905; rpt. 1963), p.300.

dramatists, but may appear in works so widely differing in style and merit as Mustapha and Macbeth.

V

The scene following Solyman's final departure introduces Mustapha for the first and last time, and shifts the thematic focus onto the question of resistance, which up till now has only been developed in a minor key. The danger of rebellion or resistance is a constant fear of Solyman; it is fuelled too by Rossa, and confirmed by the Chorus Primus. In their description of the dynamics of tyrannical rule, the Bashas point out that the excesses of absolutism must lead to a crisis in which "Princes must be ours, or we their Tombe." (Chorus Primus, 189). Taken by itself, this is no more than a neutral statement of fact, but the seditious inference which obviously lurks beneath such a recognition is suggested more strongly in the final paragraph of the Chorus. The man who relies on the dispensation of royal grace, one of the "smooth bewitching bayts" of tyranny (1.196), is, they suggest, offering "Nature's freedom up to Place" (1.216). The subsequent mention of Solyman and the "fatall ruine of his sonne" steers the practical implications of this round to the present situation, and opens the possibility of Mustapha's ruin being prevented.

Achmat takes the same road to a different conclusion. Like the Bashas (he is in fact one of them), he is faced with a choice of evils, either to "destroy Succession, / Or suffer ruine to preserve Succession" (11.24-25). He likewise insists that obedience has its limits. He is sworn to "my King, and to his Honor", but not his "Humors", since those who obey without question "Wade in a Sea, wherein themselves are lost"

(11.58-60); similarly the Bashas had warned against the "merciless, enticing floods" of tyranny (Chorus Primus, 1.192). The two closing paragraphs, however, indicate Achmat's divergence from his fellow Bashas. He too is first "Nature's subject, then my Princes" (1.75); but his Nature is not that of the Bashas, a 'natural' equality of all men, upon which social hierarchy is an unnatural imposition. The clue to its character is given two lines later: "Whose Heaven is earth, let them believe in Princes." Achmat's 'Nature' points towards the natural order of Hooker and of Renaissance humanism in general, a system of law backed by supernatural sanction. A purely mundane perspective on state affairs leads to a false deification of Princes in the same way that Solyman's inability to respond to the beckoning of infinity when "The Earth draws one way, and the skie another" (IV.i.38) will precipitate his lapse into tyranny. Achmat's practical conclusion is as orthodox as his premises. Not resistance but good counsel is the answer: "Solyman shall know the truth: I look no further" (II.i.79).

The Chorus Secundus of Mahometan priests restates the analysis of tyranny offered by the Chorus of Bashas and significantly extends it. In their final paragraph, they argue that Mustapha's passive submission to his father's will arises from the same "dreames of the heart" (1.189) which are the occasion of Solyman's stupid suspicions. Mustapha, they imply, is a typical example of the very credulous obedience, or, in their own words, "misplac'd duties" (1.192) which Achmat had criticised. Although Achmat had never suggested that Mustapha's passivity was culpable, the priests force this question upon us by suggesting that resistance to tyranny is a moral duty, rather in the manner of Christopher Goodman, who argues in the sixth chapter of How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed that the godly man is shirking his duty by simply refusing to obey evil commands, and should actively pursue the opposite course.

This chorus of Mahometan priests, together with the arguments of the priest Heli in his encounter with Mustapha in the fourth act, are the only occasions on which we are required to take seriously any adverse criticism of Mustapha - and such criticism comes, ironically, from those who wish to save him, not destroy him. Indeed, both the Bashas and priests appear to speak from the authority achieved by an unerring insight into tyranny, an insight which may seem to lend weight to their practical conclusions. But these conclusions, while logically sound in their own terms are only reached (Greville implies) through an utter blindness to the notion that cataclysmic political change is ultimately the work of God, not man alone, that man is not the final arbiter of his political destiny. Although most Renaissance thinkers would have agreed that God "chastiseth Kings, Princes, and Heads of Common-welths, that have no care to obey his commandements, and to cause others to keepe them, by the rebellion of their owne subjects,"¹⁸ such rebellion, while part of God's ultimate providential plan, was not justified with respect to its instigators and participants. So, at any rate, Elizabethan orthodoxy would argue, though the ease with which the Puritan exiles could justify their intended rebellion against Queen Mary by posing as God's elect is apparent. The orthodox corollary to this idea from the subject's point of view was that the punishment of tyrants, as of whole nations, was in the hands of God, and could not be usurped by man. This is the position that Greville adopts in parts of the Treatise of Monarchy, which, together with the other verse treatises, was originally intended to serve as choruses for his tragedies.¹⁹ Much of the analysis

18 La Primaudaye, p.654.

19 Life of Sir Philip Sidney, p.150.

of tyranny in this poem parallels that of the Bashas and Mahometan priests. The second section entitled "Declination of Monarchy to Violence" recounts how men through their "credulous obedience" willingly surrender their freedom to tyrants, and become merely "blankes where power doth write her lust".²⁰ But Greville carefully steers clear of any seditious implications:

But if pow're will exceed, then lett mankinde
 Receave oppression, as frutes of their error;
 Let them againe live in their duties shrinde,
 As their safe haven from the winds of terror,
 Till he that rais'd powre, to mowe mans synnes downe,
 Please, for pow'rs owne synnes, to pluck of her Crowne.

(stanza 191)

These lines repeat the idea that people are responsible for their own sufferings under tyranny, but only in the conventional sense that God punishes men by sending them a wicked ruler. In Mustapha, however, as in the second section of the Treatise of Monarchy, Greville offers a detailed empirical account of exactly how men enslave themselves which is quite different in emphasis from the conventional sense, and is indeed one of Greville's more interesting idiosyncrasies. It is formally possible to reconcile the two by pointing out that the doings of man are ultimately the work of God. But taken separately, the two accounts of the rise of tyranny lead to opposite practical conclusions: on the one hand, patient suffering till God be pleased to restore peace and order, on the other, active resistance to regain the liberty which men have wrongfully squandered.

This opposition is brought into play in the crucial scene between Mustapha and the priest Heli. Heli shows himself the true brother of

20 A Treatise of Monarchy, sts. 51, 55, in Fulke Greville, The Remains: Being Poems of Monarchy and Religion, ed. G. A. Wilkes (London, 1965).

the priests in the Chorus Secundus by arguing that they are "spirituall forges under Tyrants might" (IV.iv.46), and that he himself is "the Evills friend, Hells mediator" (1.54). But while the Mahometan priests, and also the Bashas, deliver their account of the Turkish state and their own function in it in a tone of cool, almost cynical detachment, Heli's guilt fills him with anguish. Questioned by Mustapha on the reason for his passionate outburst, he affords us a glimpse into a mind which has become, like that of Marlowe's Mephistophilis, a hell of its own making:

If thou have felt the selfe-accusing Warre,
Where knowledge is the endless hell of thought,
The ruines of my Soule there figured are. (11.60-62)

Heli's speeches in this scene are perhaps the only lines in the play, apart from the famous Chorus Sacerdotum, which are suffused with a genuinely human passion. This is not to say that they are the only good poetry in the play, but that their quality is something other than the intellectual, analytical vein of the verse treatises in which most of it is written. We catch here the tone of wearied self-disgust that suffuses many of the poems in the latter part of Greville's "Caelica", a disgust that Heli attempts to expiate by urging Mustapha to rebel against the tyranny he himself has wrongfully upheld.

Heli's arguments echo those frequently used in the sixteenth century to attack ungodly sovereigns, namely that since kings were made by men to serve their own good, a tyrant deserves no allegiance, and that it is worth taking a risk to "preserve the State" (IV.iv.154). Mustapha refutes him with the predictable arguments that "Our Gods they are, their God remains above" (1.150) - thereby demonstrating how easily the Mahometan priests could mistake his principled stand for feeble

idolatry - and that "Sedition wounds what should preserved be " (1.155). But the series of terse, stichomythic exchanges in which Mustapha attempts to counter Heli on his own ground is essentially a diversion from the real basis of his passivity, which is purely a matter of personal salvation:

Shall we, to languish in this brittle Jayle,
 Seeke, by ill deeds, to shunne ill destinie?
 And so, for toyes, lose immortalitye? (11.137-39)

Drawn into argument by Heli, he suddenly cuts short his attempt to justify himself in worldly terms with the Christ-like imperative, "Tempt me no more" (1.169), whereby Heli's role as "the Evill's friend, Hell's Mediator" is startlingly confirmed. Mustapha's victory, if it can be called that, is achieved by translating the argument to an entirely different sphere, where matters like the preservation of succession or even of the state itself are as nothing in the context of personal salvation. Neither Heli nor Mustapha truly see the question of rebellion in relation to the entire body politic. Heli wants to save Mustapha's skin, the latter his own soul.

But Mustapha does not have the last word. After his departure as a lamb led to the slaughter, Heli launches into a fresh invective against those men who willingly submit to the ravages of tyranny. What follows is perhaps the most powerful defence of the right to rebel against tyrants in the whole of Renaissance drama, and deserves to stand beside the better known Chorus Sacerdotum as some of the finest lines that Greville wrote:

Then let them stirre, and teare away this veyle
 Of pride from Power; that our great Lord may see
 Unmiracled, his owne Humanity.
 People! Looke up above this Divan's name;

This vent of Error; snare of Libertie;
 Where punishment is Tyrants tax, and fame.
 Abolish these false Oracles of might,
 Courts subalterne, which bearing Tyrants seale,
 Oppresse the People, and make vaine, Appeale.
 Ruine these specious maskes of Tyrannie,
 These Crowne-payd Caddies of their makers fashion:
 Which, Power-like, for Right distribute Passion.
 Confound Degrees, the Artifice of Thrones
 To beare downe Nature; while they raise up Art
 With gilded Titles, to deceive the heart.
 The Church absolves you: Truth approves your worke.
 Craft, and oppression everywhere God hates.
 Besides, where Order is not, Change is free,
 And gives all rights to Popularitie. (11.205-223)

Powerful though these lines are, the context inevitably qualifies our reaction to them. Heli's clamour for social justice is partly the outcome of his burning sense of guilt; while for a Church which is the prop of tyranny to turn round and absolve the rebel merely reveals the reverse side of its unprincipled nature. Granted that, it is remarkable that Greville, by no means the chameleonic dramatist able to project himself into a wide variety of thoughts and feelings, should be able to afford levelling sentiments so emphatic an expression. Whereas the Bashas and Mahometan priests present the bare facts of tyranny, and offer the possibility of rebellion as an implied conclusion, Heli's speech is constructed round a series of imperatives - "Looke up . . . Abolish . . . Ruine . . . Confound" - which set the polemical tone, and command assent not only to the practical matter of rebellion, but to the extremely radical political philosophy on which this rests. For what he advocates is not merely a purging of rotten elements in the state, a weeding of the disordered garden, or even the removal of one sovereign that a better might take his place, but rather a dismantling of the entire hierarchical social fabric on which monarchical power rests, and the return of "all rights to Popularitie." It is only because Heli

questions the validity of degree itself that he can so effectively challenge the simultaneous abhorrence of tyranny and abhorrence of rebellion, in which orthodox thinkers saw no contradiction. The rebels of Renaissance drama, if they honestly admit their intentions and are not clever opportunists like the Bolingbroke of Richard II, are for the most part either thoroughly diabolic Machiavels with no moral stature whatever, or ignorant self-seekers like Jack Cade in 2 Henry VI. Heli's speech is something unique; we will not meet any comparable figure elsewhere.

The theme of rebellion is fully played out in this scene; the presentation of Achmat's attempt to grapple with the same problem in the final act is disappointing and inconclusive. Whereas Mustapha and Heli approach the matter from the point of view of personal salvation and popular freedom respectively, Achmat exhibits a more traditionally humanist concern for saving the state. The possibility of helping the people to punish Solyman is suggested by the consideration that

States trespassed not: Tyrants they be that swarve,
And bring upon all Empires age, or death,
By making Truth but only Princes breath. (V.iii.68-70)

Such a split between state and sovereign is dangerous: it is exactly this idea that Beglerbie uses to justify his time-serving. After rehearsing several of the arguments for rebellion already advanced in the course of the play, he draws back from the brink, recognising that the resultant disorder would produce a "statelesse State" (1.110). But his resolve to "save this high rais'd Soveraignitie" immediately runs up against the question, "But how?" (11.113, 115). This is a question neither he nor anyone else in the play can answer, and there the matter is dropped. The preservation of the state, which was the

starting point for virtually all sixteenth century thinking on obedience and rebellion, is given in this play no more than a hasty glance.

VI

The early seventeenth century dramatist who took as his subject tyranny, and the possibility of resisting it, was treading on delicate ground. The combination in Greville of an ability to approach political ideas in an original way, the capacity to expound them in rhetorically impressive verse, and the knowledge that he was not writing for publication produced in the second Mustapha a play which confronts these matters with greater openness and deals with them in more detail than any other outside of Shakespeare. The brief treatment afforded this play, which has hardly done justice to the range and complexity of its ideas, has been dictated by its inferiority as drama. Greville shares with Daniel an ability to infuse genuine vigour into discursive, analytical verse, a vigour which lifts Mustapha far above the stylistic dulness common to most Senecal drama. This may partly compensate for the dramatic lifelessness, but it does not make Mustapha into a great play. Greville found his true form elsewhere.

The chief importance of Mustapha from our point of view is its implicit departure from the normal emphases of humanist political thinking. The traditional belief that rebellion prospers neither in this world nor the next, that it runs against the current of time and history, as well as the eternal will of God, is only sketchily suggested, mainly through the person of Achmat. The burden of Greville's investigation rests on Heli and Mustapha in conjunction with the choruses. The thoroughly naturalistic argument in favour of resistance to tyranny, based on a

recognition of man as the defender of his natural rights and the author of his own destiny, and developed consistently up to the climax of Heli's stirring call to arms, is denied and transcended, but not effectively answered by the position of non-resistance based on a contemptus mundi most fully expounded by the Chorus Tertius, "Of Time: Eternitie", and subsequently by Mustapha himself.

Greville's departure from humanist assumptions is explicit in several of his other works. In the "Letter to an Honourable Lady", for example, he argues against resistance to adulterous husbands - and by implication to tyrannical rulers - as follows:

Venture not; for besides that this fortune is in it selfe misfortune, Power being too hard for right, the very Multitude who judge of actions by the whorish conduct of effects, will by and by censure them that undertake, and prosper not either vainely to have fixed impossible ends to themselves, or foolishly neglected the means: and from these grounds ever conclude adversity in the wrong, and prosperity in the right.

and later in the same work:

That Obedience is just the Customes of Nations, and Lawes of Nature will assure you: who give the mightier, Praeeminence, and the stronger, Rule.²¹

Greville's Law of Nature is a curious one by Renaissance standards, almost Hobbesian in its lack of any assumption that power rests on an ultimate, cosmic justice. While it was usually argued that the apparent success of tyrants is partial and temporary, Greville asserts that the sure success of strong tyrants makes resistance pointless, and that the common people will wrongly interpret the conspicuous failure of the

21 Certaine Learned and Elegant Workes, pp.277, 284.

injured parties as grounded in the tyrant's right. Sir Thomas Smith, we recall, had the same low opinion of the common people, who judge of such actions merely by their "event and successe". But for Smith, to whom the safety and integrity of the body politic was the prime concern, this is anything but an argument against resistance, which should always be assessed "according to the purpose of the doers, and the estate of the time then present."²² Greville, to whom the state of the body politic is scarcely a relevant question, reaches a superficially more orthodox conclusion - against any form of rebellion - from highly idiosyncratic premises.

This attitude to rebellion is one symptom of his general loss of faith in the humanist vision of society as ordered by men for their common ends. For Greville (as for St. Augustine), it is no more than a result of the fall, a perpetual tyranny:

Ever since the curse of bondage, which God breathed out upon the first sinne, each degree of life in it is onely a change, and variety of servitude. . . . Man under man, his faults under lawes, rewards under will; nothing constant but the inconstancy of evil, and her appearance of liberty the extremest of all bondage.²³

Whereas the central tradition of mediaeval and Renaissance political thought strove to reconcile the idea that bondage was a result of the fall with the classical idea of the state as the instrument of human needs, Greville puts the entire emphasis on the former. In such a pessimistic view of politics, time is no longer the author of justice, but the school for self-denial and self-control; those men who feed

22 De Republica Anglorum, p.5.

23 Certaine Learned and Elegant Workes, p.270.

themselves with "muddy visions of Hope" that tyranny cannot endure forever merely bind themselves faster, and "sleeping away their liberties, doe vainely make Authority their heires."²⁴

The significance of Greville's assumption that society is a state of bondage, ruled over by the strong, whether good or evil, is firstly that the humanist ideal of the masterful, adaptable politician has very little place in his thinking: Mustapha might well have been labelled by More as the academic philosopher who deserted the ship because he could not control the winds. Secondly, he is compelled to reach the traditionally orthodox conclusions by a different road; this, and not the political radicalism which a number of critics have seen in him, marks him off from most of his contemporaries. In the conservative atmosphere of the Restoration, Richard Baxter could describe the Treatise of Monarchy as "a poem . . . for Subjects Liberty, which I greatly wonder this Age would bear",²⁵ while if one reads Mustapha as a comment on the incipient debate between King James and Parliament concerning their respective prerogatives, one might easily come to the conclusion reached by R. M. Cushman, that the play is "a polemic against the Stuart doctrine of the divine right of kings."²⁶ But Greville is careful to steer away from radical conclusions, however forcefully they are implied, and however inevitable they may appear in a purely naturalist perspective.

Greville was not alone in his feeling that the orthodox arguments in favour of obedience and non-resistance could no longer be presented

24 Ibid., p.279.

25 Richard Baxter, "Epistle to the Reader" in Poetical Fragments (1681), quoted by Joan Rees, p.134.

26 R. M. Cushman, "Concerning Fulke Greville's (Lord Brooke's) tragedies Alaham and Mustapha," MLN, XXIV (1909), 180.

in self-validating terms. The signs of disillusion can be read earlier in France. La Primaudaye, whose French Academie was first published in French in 1577, regrets that it is difficult to persuade men of the doctrine of non-resistance, since a hatred of tyranny is inherent in human nature;²⁷ English political thought denied any such contradiction. The practical implications of this are spelled out by Charron when he argues that authority is to be obeyed not because it is good but because it is authority (see above p.47), a position very close to that of Greville. In England at a later date, James Ussher, an advocate of the divine right of kings, admits that non-resistance cannot be justified empirically, but only on the basis of Scriptural authority: "He that consults with flesh and blood will hardly be induced to admit this Doctrine of Passive Obedience: and therefore if he will learn this Lesson, he must make choice of better Masters."²⁸ These words were not written until the reign of Charles I, and indeed Greville is a very early example in England of this trend. Several of the plays in this study are concerned in a positive way with the question to which Greville gave a predominantly negative answer, namely how far can the traditional assumptions concerning the nature of a well-ordered state and the mutual duties of sovereign and subject be endorsed not merely as religious imperatives, but as historical and natural necessities.

27 La Primaudaye, pp.575-76.

28 James Ussher, Of the Power communicated by God to the Prince, and the Obedience required of the Subject, 3rd ed. (London, 1710), p.151. The work was not published until after the Restoration.

Chapter Four

Ben Jonson: Poetaster, Sejanus, Catiline

I

Greville was the only considerable dramatist of this period to hold high office in government, and the eclipse he suffered at the accession of James may have helped to strengthen his disillusion with the political world. For Jonson, on the other hand, the new monarch was the occasion of a spectacular rise in his favour at court. The last years of Elizabeth's reign, during which he tried unsuccessfully to gain the approbation of the old queen, saw the production of Cynthia's Revels (1600) and Poetaster (1601), which emphasise the need for the court to be nourished by true knowledge, poetry, and manners. In Sejanus (1603) and Catiline (1611), the social and artistic themes of the comical satires broaden into an exploration of the nature and function of truth at court, in the state, and in human affairs in general. The recurrence in all these plays of outspoken moralists and writers, particularly those who, like Horace in Poetaster or Cicero in Catiline, have been raised from comparatively humble origins, and owe their position solely to merit, is a clear reflection of Jonson's aspirations and, later, his actual experience. While this is not crucial to an understanding of his political vision in relation to contemporary attitudes, it does help to explain his characteristically forthright tone and manner of approach to matters of state. For example, his famous assertion that "He never esteemed of a man for the name of a Lord"¹ is formally an

1 Conversations with Drummond, Herford and Simpson, I, 141.

expression of humanist doctrine comparable to Elyot's insistence that "the name of a sovereign or ruler without actual governance is but a shadow";² but we react to it more immediately as an expression of that irreverent temperament which is evident throughout the Conversations with Drummond, and which contrasts sharply with the customary obsequiousness practised at the Jacobean court.

Jonson's fearless honesty in approaching his social superiors - recorded in his life as well as evident in his writings - is a corollary of his belief that "without truth all the Actions of mankind, are craft, malice, or what you will, rather than Wisdome."³ The concern for genuine poetry in Poetaster, for historical accuracy in Sejanus - evident both in the role of Cordus, and the "truth of Argument" of the entire play - for a proper appreciation of the trials of statesmanship in Catiline, all stem from this fundamental attitude. While Jonson has many points of contact with his contemporary fellow-dramatists and with the political thought of his age, his work is distinguished by a greater artistic self-awareness in the treatment of political themes, springing from a recognition of the importance for the health of the body politic of seeing and describing things as they really are.

II

Political themes are only marginal to Poetaster, which deals with the connection between good or bad art, and a wide variety of social and personal relations. In the final act, however, set in Augustus's court,

2 Elyot, p.165.

3 Discoveries, Herford and Simpson, VIII, 580.

Jonson develops the implications of his belief in the poet as one who tells the truth for the relationship between the sovereign and his courtiers. The bond between Augustus, Mecoenas, and the poets is more than simple deference to a given social hierarchy. Rather it is formed and strengthened by mutual esteem for each others' virtue and abilities. In this respect, Augustus's mere title is irrelevant. Horace boldly censures his sovereign for speaking "after common men" in suggesting that his social inferiority would make him envious of Virgil - not suspecting, as we do, that Augustus has deliberately and playfully provoked him - and protests that "for my soule, it is as free, as Caesars" (V.i.79, 90). As a complement to this, Augustus humbles himself before Virgil on the principle that

"Vertue, without presumption, place may take
 "Above best Kings, whom onely she should make. (V.ii.26-27)

At the same time, Augustus's "high grace to poesie", his ability to kindle poetic fire in others (V.i.33, 43) ensures him a place among the gods. The mutual respect of sovereign and subject is paralleled by the mutual worship of Augustus and Phoebus, who "himselfe shall kneele at Caesars shrine, / . . . To quite the worship Caesar does to him" (11.44-46). The emperor's supra-divine exaltation is humorously anticipated in the scene in which he surprises the revellers, disguised as gods, who kneel to him and humbly submit to his commands as he proceeds to banish the supreme god, Jupiter, in the name of the gods themselves. What makes man akin to god, he implies, is something more than mere dress and painting, the external trappings of authority:

If you think gods but fain'd and virtue painted,
 Know, we sustain an actuall residence;
 And, with the title of an Emperour,
 Retaine his spirit, and imperiall power. (IV.vi.48-51)

Jonson takes advantage of the pagan setting of the play to employ the conventional idea of the godlike nature of the king in a striking fashion; the portrait of Augustus combines the poetic deification of the sovereign customary in Elizabethan literature with the more sober humanist insistence that "in nothing but only in virtue ye are better than another inferior person".⁴

In these final scenes, Jonson's chief concern is with the conditions beneficial to the production of good poetry. Occasionally, however, he appears to push the investigation into more broadly political areas. Commenting on Augustus's punishment of the player and Lupus, Virgil remarks that

'Tis not the wholesome sharp moralitie,
Or modest anger of a satyricke spirit,
That hurts, or wounds the bodie of a state;
But the sinister application
Of the malicious, ignorant, and base
Interpreter: . . . (V.ii.137-42)

It is hard to see how Lupus's attempt to see treason in the emblem which Horace was devising actually wounds the body of the state, while Crispinus and Demetrius, who are just about to be put on mock trial for malicious, ignorant, and base interpretation, are even more laughably harmless. Virgil is generalising the effects of such activity onto a political level which is not embodied in the play itself. His lines point forward to the more truly "sinister application" of Silius's accusers in Sejanus, who can procure his conviction only by subjecting the law to

Furious enforcing, most unjust presuming,
Malicious, and manifold applying,
Foule wresting, and impossible construction. (III.227-29)

4 Elyot, p.166.

But Horace's reply to Lupus is even more strikingly reminiscent of the style of Silius's final speech; the just man, he claims, cannot fear,

Not, though the malice of traducing tongues,
 The open vastnesse of a tyrannes eare,
 The senselesse rigour of the wrested lawes,
 Or the red eyes of strain'd authoritie
 Should, in a point, meet all to take his life. (V.iii.62-66)

It is strange to find such a vivid evocation of tyranny in a play which is concerned only to sketch the qualities of a good ruler in the abstract, and does not permit them to engage with the real political forces encountered by Cicero in Catiline. It is as if Sejanus were already forming in Jonson's mind as he wrote the final act of Poetaster. His picture of an ideal court, and of the human qualities which comprise its excellence, points towards his later concern for the survival and operation of those qualities in a hostile situation which tests their worth.

III

Although Jonson's three Roman plays do not form a continuous sequence in the manner of Shakespeare's English histories, the fact that they span less than a hundred years of history suggests that they might profitably be considered as the records of a single, unified attempt to portray Roman society at a crucial stage in its development. Sejanus is full of references to the past, not only the more remotely heroic, republican past admired by Arruntius and Cordus, but the golden years of Augustus, which are in the living memory of many of the present characters. Sejanus reminds the emperor that he began his service at

court under his father Augustus (III.504), while Arruntius evokes the catastrophic suddenness of Rome's degradation under Tiberius when he recalls how

Augustus well foresaw, what we should suffer,
Under Tiberius, when he did pronounce
The Roman race most wretched, that should live
Between so slow jawes, and so long a bruising. (III.484-87)

Early in the play, Silius defines in detail the nature and causes of Rome's decline while commenting on the flattery practised by even the most eminent citizens:

Well, all is worthy of us, were it more,
Who with our ryots, pride, and civill hate,
Have so provok'd the justice of the gods.
We, that (within these fourescore yeeres) were borne
Free, equall lords of the triumphed world,
And knew no masters, but affections,
To which betraying first our liberties,
We since became the slave to one mans lusts;
And now to many: . . . (I.56-64)

These lines point to the connection - central to Renaissance political thought - between self-control and civic liberty, between the individual and history. Silius's assertion that men are responsible for their own servitude recalls the similar beliefs of the Mahometan priests and of Heli in Mustapha. In this case, however, the fault lies not with an idolatrous attitude to power (as in Greville), but in men's inability to master their affections. Jonson, moreover, echoing Tacitus, affirms this servitude to be the punishment of God,⁵ an attitude afforded only casual expression in Greville's play by Mustapha himself. Jonson's investigation of how men may resist or adapt themselves to tyranny and political corruption is accordingly quite different from that of Greville.

5 See Tacitus, Annals, IV.i, ii. Quoted in Herford and Simpson, IX, 601.

The simultaneously divine and human origin of Rome's sickness is such that disorder appears as a collective burden of guilt to be expiated, rather than an external condition of society more or less subject to remedy. Before questioning their rulers, men should question themselves.

This precise account of the rise of barbarism, and its implications for the problem of living under a tyrannical regime, is one of several ways in which Sejanus differs from the conventional dramatisation of the rise and fall of a favourite or a potential tyrant, though to interpret it as such is understandable in view of the predominantly Senecal form.⁶ The uniqueness of this play may best be approached through a consideration of the characters critical of Sejanus, notably Arruntius, Sabinus, Silius, and later Lepidus, who are usually said to fulfil the function of the chorus in a normal Senecal play, standing apart from the action and commenting on it objectively. That this is part of their function is undeniable, but the differences between their own role and that of the conventional chorus are at least as important as the similarities.

Sabinus and Silius are from the outset at pains to emphasise their isolation from the corruption which they describe. They are able to speak the truth, and at the same time are excluded from the sphere of courtly preferment, by their lack of the "fine arts" of flattery (I.5) - the first of many references to the theme of "art", which may be the corrupt art of Sejanus's favourites and Tiberius, or the true art practised by Lepidus of preserving oneself and if possible others from

6 I am in substantial agreement with Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr., "The Nature of the Conflict in Jonson's Sejanus," Vanderbilt Studies in the Humanities, I (1951), 197-219, who emphasises the importance of several subordinate strands in the dramatic conflict overlooked in previous commentaries.

the jaws of tyranny. Their innocence will also, Sabinus indicates, grant them immunity from courtly intrigue, since they possess "no black secrets, which can make / Us deare to the authors" (II.15-16). The ultimate fate of both men is sufficient comment on their supposed immunity, which Arruntius is still counting on just before the trial of Silius: "Our ignorance may, perchance, help us be sav'd / From whips, and furies" (III.20-21). It is only after Arruntius has seen both his companions go to their deaths that he turns to Lepidus for advice on the "arts" which serve as protection against tyranny, and which innocence has failed to provide.

An important subsidiary dramatic movement is therefore provided by the successive involvement in the action of characters who originally appear simply as satirical expositors of the imaginative setting in which the action will take place. But even in this first scene, Jonson unobtrusively reveals a different apprehension of evil in each character in such a way that it is impossible to regard them as disembodied commentators expressing a single authorial voice. Silius's first lengthy speech initiates a strain of dismemberment imagery which is central to the entire play.⁷ He draws attention to Satrius and Natta, "the great Sejanus clients",

whose close breasts
Were they rip'd up to light, it would be found
A poore, and idle sinne, to which their trunkes
Had not been made fit organs. (I.23-27)

The incongruence between a man's inner self and outer appearance, between his words and deeds, or, as Arruntius puts it referring to Tiberius, "the space / Betweene the brest, and lips" (III.96-97) is an image used

7 Cf. Christopher Ricks, "Sejanus and Dismemberment," MLN, LXXVI (1961), 301-08.

repeatedly to express the moral disintegration and untruthfulness afflicting Roman public life. It is a denial of that spiritual and physical integrity which, as Silius himself explains, was perfectly embodied in Germanicus, a man

of a body' as faire
As was his mind; and no lesse reverend
In face, then fame: . . . (I.126-28)

The breasts "rip'd up to light", therefore, intersect with a pattern of imagery which establishes its own moral import quite distinct from any particular character. But it might also be seen as a manifestation of Silius's tendency to dwell on grotesque, obscene, even horrifying physical detail, and on the outward forms of flattery, far more than does his companion. Flatterers, he claims, are

ready to praise
His lordship, if he spit, or but pisse faire,
Have an indifferent stoole, or breake winde well, . . . (I.38-40)

Sejanus's reference, when speaking to Eudemus, of the private habits of his patients (I.304-10) may recall these words to mind, and suggest that Silius is infected with the satirist's perennial tendency to become morbidly involved in the object of his scorn, a tendency of which Elizabethan writers were keenly aware.⁸

It is no accident that Sabinus, shifting the emphasis onto the flattery which has corrupted the process of government, asserts that the sort of abject grovellings to which Silius has drawn attention "Deserve no note, confer'd with other vile, / And filthier flatteries, that corrupt the times" (11.42-43). Sabinus's cautious, inquiring spirit

⁸ See Alvin Kernan, The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance (New Haven, 1959), pp.14-30 and Chapter 3 passim.

searches out the realities of public life often hidden from his less incisive companions, and it is he who first grasps that Tiberius, not Sejanus, is the greatest menace. The first of his many aphoristic comments on the nature of rule summarises the entire action:

"Tyrannes artes
 "Are to give flatterers, grace; accusers, power;
 "That those may seem to kill whom they devoure.

(11.126-28)⁹

Arruntius is, of all Sejanus's opponents, the one most thoroughly disorientated by his apprehension of evil. His loss of mental balance is continually evident from his highly emotional, often disjointed manner of speech, which is carefully distinguished from Sabinus's moderate, grieving tone, and Silius's more passionate but still controlled invective. If Silius's imaginative dismemberment of Satrius and Natta was originally accepted as legitimate moral indignation, a more disquieting light is cast back on his lines by Arruntius's more extreme resolve that, should Sejanus attempt to usurp the emperor's place,

My sword should cleave him downe from head to heart,
 But I would find it out: and with my hand
 I'd hurle his panting braine about the ayre,
 In mites, as small as atomi, to'undoe
 The knotted bed - . . .

(I.254-58)

This is precisely the horrid fate which Sejanus suffers at the close of the play. Arruntius and Silius, though able to recognise and commend the virtues of bodily and spiritual wholeness represented in particular by Germanicus, also anticipate their ultimate violation in the destruction of Sejanus and his family. No less a villain than Macro, the

9 For other comments of this sort, see I.159-166, 396-97, 433-34.

engineer of the final dismemberment, utters in the moment of his triumph words similar to those of Arruntius:

Thus 'tis fit,
 (And no man take compassion of thy state)
 To use th'ingratefull viper, tread his braines
 Into the earth. (V.676-79)

Macro's cynical affirmation of the fitness of such violent remedies also recalls a remark made by Sosia, Silius's wife, who commends as "A fit reward for spies" the punishment proposed by Nero for the informers lurking in Agrippina's house: "'Twere best rip forth their tongues, seare out their eies" (II.477-78). Sejanus was right when he warned Tiberius that Sosia "hath a furie in her brest, / More, then hell ever knew" (II.301-02). We may recall Sosia's vehemence when we hear of the dismemberment of Sejanus described as "Deeds done by men, beyond the acts of furies" (V.758).

Jonson's ability to reinforce or extend a particular theme in the most trivial snatches of dialogue is well illustrated by this brief exchange of Nero and Sosia, which suggests that such violent imaginings are not merely the personal traits of Arruntius and Silius, but something which breeds naturally in the discontented followers of Agrippina. The savage attitude to reward and punishment bred by this discontent, and most clearly evident in Sosia and Arruntius, will be discussed more fully in connection with the destruction of Sejanus. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that Jonson's characterisation of the supporters of Agrippina, in particular Arruntius, Sabinus, and Silius, is far from straightforward. Although in a general sense they are contrasted, morally and dramatically, with Sejanus and his followers, they are neither simply choric, nor representative of any clearly defined positive

values. The disease which afflicts Rome is more insidious and dangerous than perhaps any of them realises, since they are involved in the evil they describe in more ways than becoming its physical victims.

IV

The fall of Sejanus, therefore, although the dramatic focal point, is not an isolated exemplum, but the record of one of a number of very different characters caught in the toils of tyranny. Jonson insistently underlines the obtuseness which accompanies Sejanus's huge power, his blindness to the forces which created him; Swinburne erred only through exaggeration when he wrote that "the great minister of Tiberius is never for an instant throughout the whole course of the action represented as a man of any genuine strength or solid intelligence."¹⁰ Sejanus himself continually evokes the realities of political intrigue on which he will eventually founder, and one need quote only one such instance, his remark to Tiberius apropos Agrippina and her followers, that "All power's to be fear'd, where 'tis too much" (II.209), to show how staggering is his lack of self-awareness. Even when the inherent weakness of the system of dishonesty on which his influence rests is virtually spelled out to him by Eudemus, he is too blind to see it. Eudemus inquires, perhaps fearing for his own safety, what Sejanus will think of his good faith, seeing that he is being asked to betray the confidence of his patients. Sejanus's hasty answer seals his own faith in a pact of treachery: "Only the best, I sweare" (II.337).

10 A Study of Ben Jonson in The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, ed. E. Gosse and T. J. Wise, XII (London, 1926), 23.

Sejanus's lack of a finer astuteness, however he may be endowed with cunning, indicates Jonson's awareness (which he shares with Greville) of the fact that personal power always depends on the support of others; the humanist theory that sovereignty is delegated by the whole community is a fact of political life. But such delegation may proceed according to the traditional ideal alluded to by Sabinus (IV.167-68), or it may, as in Sejanus, be the outcome of ignorance and sloth, of flattery and greed, of the betrayal of life and liberty for "the emptie circumstance of life" (I.200). Drusus points out that, for the man who has begun to climb the ladder of sovereignty, "there never wants or meanes, / Or ministers, to helpe th'aspirer on" (I.555-56). The two-edged nature of such power, however, becomes apparent in the final act when Sejanus descends the ladder with precipitate swiftness, his means and ministers dropping away from him as the import of Tiberius's letters becomes clear. The vulnerability of his enormous influence is beautifully conveyed when, recognising the danger of Macro, he still places confidence in his control over the Senate, which has "sate an idle looker on, / And witness of my power" (V.257-58). Shortly afterwards, Sejanus is condemned by the same Senate, whose passive acquiescence in his designs is easily moulded to the will of another. Thereupon Arruntius, in one of his rare moments of insight, prophecies "out of this Senates flatterie" (V.750) that Macro will become even more powerful than Sejanus. In the tyrannical regime of Tiberius it is still, paradoxically, the Senate which is the decisive power.

Tiberius, unlike Sejanus, is keenly aware of the close dependence of his rule on the good will - or flattery - of others, and it is his ability to use this which enables him to keep a firm grip on the helm of state. As his letters, now seeming to criticise, now to exalt Sejanus,

reach the ears of the latter's minions, Lepidus delivers an unerring account of the emperor's apparently mysterious intentions. The soldiers and the Senate, he points out, are all under Sejanus's thumb, Tiberius has "Quite disarm'd / Himselfe of love" (IV.462-63), and therefore while holding Sejanus in check, he will endeavour to make him

odious
 Unto the staggering route whose aide (in fine)
 He hopes to use, as sure, who (when they sway)
 Beare downe, ore-turne all objects in their way.
 (11.469-72)

By making the mob into the main actor in the final catastrophic dismemberment, Jonson gives it greater prominence than it is allowed in any other Senecal play. In Gorboduc and Mustapha, for example, the power of popular rage is only sketchily outlined at the close as the nemesis awaiting the authors of misrule. At the same time, Jonson is not prepared to break the bounds of classical decorum by bringing his mob onstage as a collection of articulate individuals, as Shakespeare does frequently. The role of the mob, which acts as judge, jury, and executioner on the strength of counsel presented by Tiberius, is crucial in the imaginative design of Sejanus, but it is doubtful whether this importance is matched dramatically by its existence merely in the words of Lepidus, and in the reports of Terentius and the Nuntius at the close of the play.

Arruntius, with his uncomplicated attitude towards the exercise of power, refuses to believe Lepidus's clever analysis, and sees no reason why Tiberius could not have "fain'd honest, and come home / To cut his throte, by law" (11.476-77). This is one of several instances in which Tiberius's enigmatic role is misunderstood, not only by Arruntius. Whereas the descriptions by Silius and Sabinus of Sejanus and his minions

are borne out by their early appearance, so that we feel ready to trust what is said of them in future, Tiberius is introduced more obliquely. Before his first entry he is mentioned by name only twice, significantly by Sabinus, who draws attention to his hatred of servility - rather darkly linked with his hatred of public liberty - and his responsibility for removing Germanicus. But in view of the controlling moral ideas which have been evoked by Sabinus, Silius, and Arruntius concerning the iniquity of flattery, his initial insistence that "Wee not endure these flatteries" (I.375), seconded by his reply to the Senate in which he outlines with seemingly perfect modesty, clarity, and responsibility his own duties, and the reward he expects in the praise of posterity, is impressive in a way that does not appear to be undercut by any damaging hollowness or insincerity. Doubts obviously arise at his exaltation of Sejanus, and his insistence that no man "aske the causes of our praise" (I.536), but such is the skill and poise of his performance that Arruntius's complaints seem to be biting the air.

Silius attempts to direct our reactions with more discrimination, while grudgingly admitting the power of Tiberius's oratory:

If this man
Had but a minde allied unto his words,
How blest a fate were it to us, and Rome? (II.400-02)

His assertion that in fact "The strokes, and stripes of flatterers . . . / Are lechery unto him" (II.413-14) plausibly connects with Arruntius's later description of the emperor's sexual vices (IV.373-409), and conveys the simultaneously soothing and baneful nature of flattery, which we recognise to be eminently applicable in the case of Sejanus. But for all this it misses the mark. It is Sejanus who revels in the attention of his flatterers, and is sensitive, for example, to Eudemus's initial

lack of obsequiousness. Sabinus's belief, quite contrary to that of Silius, that Tiberius detests "flat servilitie" (I.55) is decisively confirmed by his interview with Macro, in which he cuts short the latter's obsequious approaches with a curt "Leave our courtings" (IV.668).

Nothing could better indicate the profound difference in style between the two men than this contrast between Sejanus's insistence on the due rites of flattery as the necessary prelude to any serious business, and Tiberius's decision to put his trust in a man with whom he can set aside such odious forms. Silius goes on to suggest that the emperor is completely controlled by Sejanus, "carried like a pitcher, by the eares, / To every act of vice" (I.417-18), and that flatterers and whisperers with "the time, / The place, the power, to make all men offenders" (II.423-24) will excite Tiberius's rage and precipitate him into tyranny. That he has fathomed Sejanus's intentions with unerring accuracy is proved by the latter's confession following his first interview with the emperor:

The way, to put
A prince in bloud, is to present the shapes
Of dangers, greater than they are (like late,
Or early shadowes) and, sometimes, to faine
Where there are none, onely, to make him feare;
His feare will make him cruell: And once entred
He doth not easily learne to stop, or spare
Where he may doubt. (II.383-90)

But once again Silius's guess is only half correct, since he fails to recognise how thoroughly Tiberius has penetrated the designs of his favourite, enabling him to turn back onto Sejanus the latter's intention to make him "the publike sacrifice" (I.404).

This is not to say that Tiberius's victory is easy or inevitable. One of Jonson's finer touches is to show how real a threat Sejanus is to the emperor's mastery, on how very slender a basis the latter's

control rests. This is not only apparent from his own admission in his crucial soliloquy in the third act, and from Lepidus's account of his position and intentions already remarked upon. Even the supposedly "dilate, and absolute a power" (I.442) conferred on Tiberius by the Senate is so subject to the jealousies of courtly intrigue that his conference with Macro "Cannot be long without suspicion" (III.715), and he must further invent a reason for the interview "If't be enquir'd, / Wherefore we call'd you" (II.710-11).

Tiberius is dangerous, therefore, not because he is a slave to flattery, but because he can use it while secretly abhorring it. His professed humility before the grovelling Senate, which stands in superficial contrast to Sejanus's contempt for it, assumes a deeper irony than the obvious one as the play proceeds, when we come to realise, as does Tiberius himself, that he can topple Sejanus only by turning the Senate against him. But the failure of Arruntius and Silius adequately to grasp his subtle designs at this early stage is not surprising, since even the audience is not fully informed as to the precise nature of his precarious yet dominating position until the third act; and the uncertain nature of Tiberius's role up till this point is bound to put a certain strain (perhaps deliberately so) on the audience's understanding of what is said about him by other characters.

Tiberius is at his most enigmatic in his first interview with Sejanus, when he ostentatiously strips off one disguise, only to reveal another one underneath. The early part of this scene, during which the emperor assumes a "masque" of virtue, takes the form of the conventional Senecal dialogue between the true king and the evil counsellor; the brief, pithy exchanges, the use of rhyme, the commonplace nature of the sentiments all suggest that Jonson was consciously writing within

this tradition. But its transposition into the politically sophisticated world of Sejanus invests the dialogue with layers of irony quite foreign to its conventional use as mere revelation of character. Sejanus's role as evil counsellor is, as he later explains, assumed for tactical reasons to "thrust Tiberius into tyrannie" (II.391). It is also a true index of the lack of sophistication in his own exercise of power, a lack which is emphasised by several remarks that anticipate his own as well as his enemies' destruction, for example his comment on the dangerous power of Agrippina's children (cited above, p.105), or his advice of condemning opponents without scruple, since "State is inough to make th'act just, them guilty" (I.173). Tiberius, however, is fully in control of his use of irony. He begins by uttering orthodox sentiments to draw Sejanus on, thus making the latter a victim of his own devices. But at a deeper level his remarks are both true and closely relevant to the subsequent action. He rejects Sejanus's proposition to gain his ends by barefaced power on the grounds that "Long hate pursues such acts" (I.174). The likelihood of a tyrant's misdeeds leading to his subjects' hatred and his eventual overthrow was frequently cited in Renaissance political writings as a warning to potential tyrants. Tiberius is genuinely aware of this menace, but instead of accepting it as an incitement to virtue, avoids disaster by turning the hate owing to him onto the head of another.

Such ironies, however, only fully yield themselves as we come to realise the full extent of Tiberius's mastery, which at this point is difficult to gauge. His intellectual command is implicit in his parody of Sejanus's Senecan bombast, perhaps the nearest approach to humour in the play:

We would not kill, if we knew how to save;
 Yet, then a throne, 'tis cheaper give a grave.

(11.270-71)

But it is Sejanus who produces a comprehensive plan for the initial killings, who rejects any idea of destroying Sabinus at this stage (for only Tiberius recognises how dangerous the insight of Sabinus is to his own position), and who brushes aside the emperor's plan for further consultation.

The third act is the most important insofar as it answers the question raised by this interview - where does the real power, ability, and influence lie? - and shows the first steps taken towards Sejanus's destruction. Tiberius suddenly becomes the dominating figure, indeed he is on stage through most of this act, and he retains a shadowy domination during the rest of the play after he has left the stage for the last time. Moreover it is his tyranny, rather than the flattery of Sejanus and his minions, which moves more clearly into focus as the target of moral criticism.

The dramatic sequence of this act clarifies the already implicit contrast between Sejanus's enormous power, and Tiberius's less spectacular but more sure control. The first scene in the Senate, in which Nero and Drusus are honoured by Tiberius, and Silius and Cordus arraigned, brings to fruition the first part of Sejanus's plan, and shows him at the height of his power. In the subsequent interview with Tiberius, he appears to be even more surely in command, once again checking the emperor's suggestions with his own designs against Sabinus. His failure to gain Tiberius's consent for marriage to Livia is the first check to his advancing fortune, but the emperor does consent to his advice to leave Rome; and his subsequent soliloquy, with its mocking contempt

of "Dull, heavie Caesar" contains the most lucid statement of his aims and tactics anywhere in the play. Immediately following this, Tiberius's soliloquy reveals beyond all doubt his sure grasp of the situation, and resolves all the uncertainties which have built up around him. Sejanus's self-aggrandising rhetoric collapses like a house of cards; the new Sejanus, Macro, is forthwith summoned, and the wheels of his destruction set in motion.

The style and content of Tiberius's soliloquy lay bare the self-conscious and artful, though still immoral nature of his government, and thereby expose far more effectively than can any of Sejanus's opponents the essential crudity of the latter's lust for power. The emperor's use of rhymed couplets, his ironical sententiousness, his exploitation of proverbial and commonplace ideas all reveal a mind holding its own thoughts and feelings at arm's length and carefully scrutinising them. So sure is his grasp of political realities, so little is he obsessed with his own office, that he admits that his minion has, apparently, made himself indispensable; but in resolving to use Sejanus only "with caution, and fit care" (III.628), he exhibits the very qualities which enable him to overcome even so formidable an opponent. Tiberius, in fact, here and elsewhere draws repeatedly on the ideas of fitness, decorum, and timeliness, which humanist political theory saw as the necessary guides of all a prince's actions. His subtly perverted use of them, in contrast to the more crude distortion of the other villains, is a telling indication of the special nature of his power.

We have already encountered the use of the idea of fitness by Sosia and Macro to mean a grotesquely poetic type of justice. Elsewhere it is distorted to signify a mere mechanical usefulness, in a political world where people have become no more than instruments of

power. In the conference between Sejanus, Livia, and Eudemus concerning the murder of Drusus, Livia expresses her wish that Eudemus should receive a "fit, and full reward, for his large merit", and, having decided on poison as the method to dispatch her husband, is faced with the choice of "the most apt, and abled instrument, / To minister it to him" (II.8, 11-12). Tiberius, on the other hand, can draw on the principle of decorum as a rule of public conduct with superb nonchalance. Following the death of Drusus, he chides the Senate's mourning:

Wherefore sit
 Romes Consuls thus dissolv'd, as they had lost
 All the remembrance both of stile, and place?
 It not becomes. No woes are of fit waight,
 To make the honour of the empire stoope: . . . (III.36-40)

Instead, the Senate should think on Nero and the young Drusus, who may be able to give "timely succour to these present ills" (1.56).

But this is not a mere public pose, which Tiberius sloughs off in private to reveal the same unthinking attitude towards his instruments as Livia and Sejanus. Rather, the principle of decorum has become part of his natural process of thought, though subordinated to the overriding consideration of necessity. Doubt and fear, for example, though unbecoming to a sovereign, "have their excuse, / Where princes states plead necessarie use" (III.633-34). His decision to use Macro against Sejanus is, Tiberius admits, enforced by necessity against the recognition that there is none "less apt for trust" (1.650). Tiberius evidently recognises the desirability of honesty in his instruments in a way that Sejanus and Livia do not, and it is a fine stroke of irony that he alone can recognise the dangers of a system of intrigue based on teachery, and yet is forced himself to use it. Macro's successful overtures to Caligula, who will eventually replace Tiberius as emperor,

are a measure of the vulnerability which the latter cannot escape, for all his acute political insight and skill.

Tiberius is, like all tyrants, a lonely man, but unlike Macbeth or Henry IV, for example, he never hints that his loneliness is a wearisome burden brought on by his methods of rule. It is instead a deliberate choice, a manifestation of his

supreme skill, to grace
 No man too much; but hold a certain space
 Betweene th'ascenders rise, and thine own flat,
 Lest, when all rounds be reach'd, his aime be that.

(III.643-46)

Tiberius is isolated not primarily because he is a moral outcast, but because he is more skilful and self-assured than the other seekers after power.

In all these respects - his acceptance of necessity as the guiding rule of political conduct, his attitudes to decorum and the good faith of his instruments, his loneliness - Tiberius is both consistent with, and at the same time subtly distinct from the traditional notion of a tyrant. What makes him perhaps more formidable than even any of Shakespeare's tyrants is his apparently innate grasp of the proper style of kingship, of the sure consequences of vicious methods of rule, indeed of all the traditionally accepted ideas concerning the duties of a sovereign, which he can repeat, use, or disregard as he sees fit. Tiberius is Jonson's most original contribution to Renaissance political drama, distinct as he is from both the stock Senecan tyrant, who defies the laws of nature through blind ignorance of the consequences, and the sovereign with more acute self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, like Macbeth, who takes to evil courses and is destroyed by the inherent

contradictions in his exercise of rule, and by his own personal breakdown. It would be wrong to put too much emphasis on the fact that, while Sejanus meets the fate we expect for the wicked politician, Tiberius and Macro survive unscathed. This can scarcely be read as Jonson's loss of faith in the ability of the body politic to right itself, since he is after all bound by his fidelity to history, while the hint of Caligula's later rise to power on the ruins of Tiberius suggests that no tyrant is unassailable, even though he may only be succeeded by one worse than himself. But nowhere else in Renaissance drama, except in The White Devil, which closely imitates Sejanus in this respect,¹¹ do we find a tyrant who, through sheer tactical brilliance, can divert the nemesis awaiting him onto another's head. Renaissance moralists claimed that tyrants were walking a tightrope over disaster. Jonson agreed, but in this instance he emphasised the skill of the tightrope-walker.

V

As Tiberius moves to the centre of the political arena, the characters who have reserved most of their indignation for the growing power of Sejanus begin to turn their attention towards him. Silius is the first openly to criticise Tiberius. Setting out for the Senate where he will be arrested and tried, he expresses with unwitting irony a fear that Sejanus "hath plots on all" (II.499); but, unlike Arruntius, he is not deceived by the emperor's show of neutrality at his trial, and defiantly answers his accuser's insults:

11 The resemblances between Sejanus and The White Devil are discussed by Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy, p.134.

Thou durst not tell me so,
 Had'st thou not Caesars warrant. I can see
 Whose power condemnes me. (III.230-32)

Our reaction to Silius's counter-indictment is bound to be mixed. On a purely factual level he is mistaken; it is Sejanus who has engineered his condemnation, although the latter creates the impression, talking to the accusers, that Tiberius himself was responsible (II.9-11). Silius's attempt to blame Tiberius functions as an ironical confirmation of Sejanus's desire to place responsibility on his sovereign for ulterior motives. Nevertheless, his general description of the bitter fruits of virtue under Tiberius's rule is unerring:

Since I have done thee that great service, Caesar,
 Thou still hast fear'd me; and, in place of grace,
 Return'd me hatred: so soone, all best turnes,
 With doubtfull Princes, turne deepe injuries
 In estimation, when they greater rise,
 Then can be answer'd. (III.300-05)

This might well be an anticipatory comment on Tiberius's own admission that the secret of his power is "to grace / No man too much" (III.643-44). He must stint his bounty not only with the likes of Sejanus, who may aspire to the throne, but also with men whose virtue is beyond reward, and creates a bond of gratitude inimical to a tyrant whose nature it is "to have all men slaves / To you, but you acknowledging to none" (II.309-10). Tiberius, like Greville's *Rossa*, recognises that virtue by its very existence is a threat to the equilibrium of tyranny.

If Silius rises in the end to an insight worthy of Sabinus, the latter is dragged off to his death on the strength of an expression of moral disgust at Tiberius, "Bogg'd in his filthy lusts" (IV.217), which is more reminiscent of Arruntius. This uncharacteristic remark is but the final and fatal sign of Sabinus's loss of that sure insight

which distinguished him from his companions in the first act. His Stoic self-control enables him to reject both Latiaris's complaints of the gods' negligence, and his suggestion that the bright flame of Roman liberty might be redeemed by "active valour". But his rejection of rebellion is accompanied by the disturbing thought that

when the Romanes first did yeeld themselves
 To one mans power, they did not mean their lives,
 Their fortunes, and their liberties, should be
 His absolute spoile, as purchas'd by the sword. (IV.167-70)

As we observed in the second chapter, a recognition of the contractual origin of sovereignty such as is advanced here might or might not lead to a defence of the right to rebel against tyranny. Sabinus is not actually contradicting himself, however he may appear confused and troubled. The important point is that he gives Latiaris the cue to develop an argument which provokes Sabinus into dropping - with disastrous consequences - his usual reserve. Moreover, Sabinus for once directs his criticism against Sejanus, whom he now sees as "a master in his mysterie", completely dominating the emperor. He delivers a detailed and accurate account of Sejanus's aims and tactics, the missing element being Tiberius's knowledge of all these, and the steps he has taken to block them.

But Sabinus's aberrant account of the situation is as much a reflection of Tiberius's skill as of his own misjudgment, for the previous scene in which Macro reminds us of the return to Rome of Sejanus "renew'd in trust, and grace" (IV.77) demonstrates how all appearances confirm Sabinus's belief. Indeed, when he suggests to Latiaris that in removing Tiberius to Rome, Sejanus "shewes his arte, / As well as power" (IV.178-9), he inadvertently underlines the very nature of the skill which

ensures the emperor's mastery. For throughout the play, the twin terms "art" and "power" are set off against each other to suggest exactly how sovereignty is maintained. Sabinus himself first introduces the theme of art in speaking of the "fine arts" of flatterers (I.5), and later of the "Tyranne artes", which are "to give flatterers, grace; accusers, power" (I.70-71): real power can only survive by artfully surrendering part of itself to others. Sabinus's definition of the relation of art to power serves as an implied comment on future uses of these terms, so that when Arruntius, for example, laments that the emperor has "foregone / The dignitie and power" (I.245-46), he unwittingly puts his finger on the secret of his continuing control. Nothing could better demonstrate the supremacy of Tiberius's art, an art which conceals art, than the fact that Sabinus erroneously sees in Sejanus not only power, but the art which he (Sejanus) has so unjustifiably claimed for himself: "Worke then, my art, on Caesar's feares" (II.399).

If one of Sabinus's moral stature can be reduced to such a bewildered disgust, it is perhaps with some misgiving that we observe the reactions of Arruntius, whose appearance on stage is delayed only by the meeting between Macro and Caligula, suggesting that even Tiberius's art is now being outstripped. Arruntius begins by accusing the gods of negligence, as did Latiaris in his attempt to ensnare Sabinus, and this similarity may alert us to an even more revealing resemblance between the two characters. Arruntius's opening speech in the first act evoked the spirit of the heroes of the republic, but went on to lament that this spirit was absent from contemporary Rome:

Those mightie spirits
Lye rak'd up, with their ashes, in their urnes,
And not a sparke of their eternall fire
Glowes in a present bosome. All's but blaze,

Flashes, and smoke, wherewith we labour so,
 There's nothing Romane in us; . . . (I.97-102)

The answer to this cry of despair is given by Latiaris in his attempt to incite Sabinus to treason:

Me thinkes, the Genius of the Romane race
 Should not be so extinct, but that bright flame
 Of libertie might be reviv'd againe, . . . (IV.142-44)

The profound difference between Latiaris's cruel hypocrisy, and Arruntius's honest desire for a renaissance of public spirit need hardly be stressed. The point of this parallel is its indication of how easily Arruntius may be led towards the sort of seditious republicanism which Sabinus was able to reject. His accusation of the gods, which is in pointed contrast to the attitudes of both Silius (III.250-52) and Sabinus (IV.127), and his sentimental attachment to the republican past, are both symptoms of his shrinking from a responsible engagement with a situation created not by divine malice but by men (although the fact that Rome's suffering may be seen as the gods' punishment makes his protest against them doubly inappropriate). In Drusus he saw a god on earth, a deliverer from the present hell, and it is typical of his inconstancy that his initial distrust of the "riotous youth" (I.106) - corrected by the cautious admiration of Sabinus - is converted into wild adulation as soon as Drusus expresses his discontent with the power yielded to Sejanus. Jonson had more faith than Greville in the possibilities of constructive action under tyranny, but he was equally critical of the weakness which leads to a reliance on "muddy visions of Hope".

The deaths of Sabinus and Silius have left Arruntius in no doubt as to the danger he is in. Inspired by Lepidus's timely intervention following the death of Silius, which secured a larger share of treasure

for the dead man's children, he turns for counsel to the one man who appears able to remain both honest and safe. The bringing together of Arruntius and Lepidus for the final two acts is in itself a hopeful sign. It is one indication that the virtuous always have the advantage of being able to draw strength and comfort from each other, untroubled by the "still-waking jealousies" (I.17) which incessantly pursue the wicked and ambitious. Lepidus, moreover, takes over Sabinus's role of restraining Arruntius's rashness, which continually threatens his safety. At the same time, it underlines even more strongly Arruntius's inadequacies by contrasting them with Lepidus's unflinching Stoicism, a Stoicism which has nothing to do with insensitivity or withdrawal, but which is based on a thorough insight into the character and enormity of the besetting dangers.

The contrast between them is first made explicit in their differing reactions to the arrest of Nero, who passes over the stage under guard. Lepidus's level-headed ability to extract as much information as possible from his captor is interrupted by Arruntius's impassioned summons to the gods to revenge a deed for which "all the armorie / Of heaven is too little" (IV.338-39). Lepidus's puzzled admission that "This turne is strange" (1.344) is answered by his companion's confident assertion that Sejanus is completely in control of the emperor, who is now no more than

our monster: forfeited to vice
 So far, as no rack'd vertue can redeeme him.
 His lothed person fouler then all crimes:
 An Emp'rour, only in his lusts. (IV.373-76)

These lines pick up Latiaris's hint, in his reference to Tiberius's "ulcerous and anointed face" and his "balde crowne" (IV.174, 175), of the incongruity between the emperor's sovereignty and his physical deformity; and in the context of the physical perfection which was a

part of Germanicus's natural sovereignty this suggestion carries a great deal of emotional weight. Arruntius is further reminiscent of Sabinus, both in his erroneous belief in Sejanus's mastery, and in his hatred of the emperor's "filthy lusts", which he expresses in a devastating invective of nearly forty lines (IV.373-409).

There is no doubt of the emotional appeal of Arruntius's speech. His belief in the irredeemable nature of Tiberius's vice draws on a common Jonsonian idea that some natures are so "dry'd, and hardned in their ill" that it is impossible to reform them; and we might gloss his disregard for Tiberius's sovereign status, on which Lepidus insists, with Jonson's own declared principle of being "at fewd / With sinne and vice, though with a throne endew'd".¹² What prevents us from giving it that complete assent which so many of the guiding moral ideas in the play seem to command is not merely its implicitly seditious suggestions,¹³ but the fact that its moral fervour depends partly on a completely false estimate of Tiberius's real power and capabilities. He may be an emperor in his lusts - we are not meant to question the truth of Arruntius's accusations - but he is an emperor in much more besides. Arruntius's indictment of Tiberius and Latiaris's appeal for liberty contain some of the most persuasive rhetoric in Jonson's tragedies, and yet they are both, in their different ways, mistaken. Within the apparent constriction of the Senecal form, Jonson's moral exploration is still

12 Discoveries, Herford and Simpson, VIII, 581; "Epistle. To Katherine, Lady Aubigny," *ibid.*, p.116.

13 These are oddly indefinite. His assertion that he is not begging for the overthrow of Tiberius appears designed to excuse his relish in the possibility of such an event. Should it occur, his eyes "must not winke" (1.370), that is either they must not connive at it, or they must not flinch with horror. And the trunk which Arruntius wishes might be riven by Jove's thunder (1.409) could belong to either Sejanus or Tiberius.

sufficiently subtle and controlled for him to use false or misleading eloquence with a boldness more naturally associated with the popular drama.

The most effective answer to Arruntius comes a few lines later when Lepidus, the exponent of the art of honest survival, delivers his account of "Tiberius arte" (IV.453) in checking Sejanus's ambition. If Arruntius echoes Sabinus's ultimate failure, Lepidus realizes and extends his original virtues. His acute insight into Tiberius is complemented by his patient willingness

To suffer, and be silent; never stretch
 These armes, against the torrent; live at home,
 With my owne thoughts, and innocence about me,
 Not tempting the wolves jawes; . . . (IV.295-98)

Exactly what this means in practical terms is suggested by the brief but revealing glimpses of Lepidus during the first three acts. He does not appear among the "discontented list" of those who openly profess their support for Agrippina (II.218-22, 337-39). He is willing to participate in public affairs as far as "repayring the Aemilian palace" (I.512) - which gives point to his disagreement with Arruntius over whether "a man / Our state employes" (IV.360-61) might be honest. While these are in themselves no disparagement of the deliberate isolation chosen by Arruntius, Sabinus, and Silius, they do enable him to retain sufficient favour with Tiberius to win a substantial concession from the jaws of tyranny in the matter of Silius's estate; and the case of Gallus is sufficient indication that Tiberius is not taken in by the mere outward forms of flattery. Jonson is sufficiently unsentimental to suggest that even one of Lepidus's tact and courage cannot act constructively in such a situation without a slight moral compromise: for in diverting Silius's

treasure to its rightful owners, he is forced to admit the reality of "their parents trespassed" (III.364), which he knows to be untrue. But this seems a small price to pay. Lepidus's image of the torrent - suggesting comparison with the "rough torrent of occasion" in 2 Henry IV (IV.i.72) - powerfully evokes the violent, inescapable force of history which dwarfs individual effort. But if one man cannot stay the torrent, he can divert a corner of its current by the right sort of action - Lepidus's timely intervention, Sabinus's cautious cough which puts Agrippina on her guard (II.342-46); such opportunities are few and limited, but they demonstrate that even the combined art of Tiberius and the power of Sejanus are not irresistible.

Few critics have been happy about Jonson's treatment of the questions of republicanism versus monarchism, and the related matter of rebellion in defence of liberty, as these appear in Sejanus. Most have been content to echo or expand on Coleridge's comment on Arruntius: "This anachronic mixture of the Roman Republican, to whom Tiberius must have appeared as much a Tyrant as Sejanus, with the James-and-Charles-the 1st Zeal for legitimacy of Descent, is amusing."¹⁴ These questions only appear as the ways in which various characters attempt to adjust themselves to tyranny; they are not the central, practical issues as in the Shakespearean plays we will consider. But the attitudes of Lepidus, Arruntius, Silius, and Sabinus to Tiberius, both as person and sovereign, are in each case linked with their understanding of the political situation and his role in it; political theory is firmly wedded to dramatic development. It may be that Jonson has not entirely concealed the workmanship in his generally successful attempt to compel

14 Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, ed. R. F. Brinkley (Duke University Press, 1955), p.643.

historical material into his own dramatic design. There is something slightly forced, for example, about Silius's insistence that the liberty which they so prize is best under a "vertuous prince" (I.408), implicitly countering Arruntius's republican sentiments. But the odd mixture in Arruntius is surely a result of his own confusion, not that of Jonson. His sentimental and moral attachment to the republic can naturally co-exist with a violent disgust at such a one as Sejanus attempting to usurp the crown. As the succession of events renders Tiberius ever more detestable, he can later contemplate the same thing with equanimity, aided by the intellectual subterfuge that not Sejanus himself but "the fates" would really be responsible for Tiberius's overthrow. His transfer of the epithet "monster" from Caesar, struck down by the brave hand of Brutus (I.93-96), to Tiberius (IV.373) implies that his republicanism is now more concretely political. While Greville's most astute moralists - the priests and bashas in Mustapha - also put the case for rebellion, for Jonson political discontent is a symptom of individual ignorance and inability to suffer with equanimity. Arruntius wants to take the beam out of Rome's eye without seeing the mote in his own. There is not so much difference between his hasty judgements and lack of self-knowledge, and the ignorant, ill-informed moral fervour of Justice Overdo in Bartholomew Fair.

The fall of Sejanus, as it is presented through the reports and reactions of various characters, further develops this distinction between an unselfconscious and pitiless moral attitude, and one based on a more imaginative humility. Jonson's emphasis on pity is, I suggest, in flat contradiction to the common assumption that he deliberately withholds our sympathy from the fallen Sejanus, that his technique of moral and political instruction deliberately eschews the complex response we more

readily associate with Shakespearean drama.¹⁵

The first to reject any thought of pity at the final catastrophe is Arruntius, who interprets Latiaris's arrest as the just recompense for his treatment of Sabinus:

O, the spie!
The reverend spie is caught, who pitties him?
Reward, sir, for your service: . . . (V.650-52)

Such a feeling is understandable with the loss of Sabinus still fresh in his mind, but a more disturbing light is cast on Arruntius's lines by Macro's similar attitude to the punishment "fit" for Sejanus, his command that "no man take compassion of thy state" (1.677) which follows almost immediately; this is one further link binding Macro and Arruntius. Lepidus's attitude to the swift recriminations is more reserved, one of shock and surprise at the sort of faith which can, in the morning, worship Sejanus as a god, and in the same day refuse to "lend so much / Of vaine reliefe, to his chang'd state, as pittie!" (11.719-20).

Sejanus's ultimate fate is reported by Terentius, who approaches Lepidus and Arruntius, now left alone on stage, and makes a direct appeal to their (and the audience's) sympathy:

O you, whose minds are good,
And have not forc'd all mankind, from your brests;
That yet have so much stock of vertue left,
To pittie guiltie states, when they are wretched:
Lend your soft eares to heare, and eyes to weepe
Deedes done by men, beyond the acts of furies. (V.753-58)

15 Jacob I. de Villiers, "Ben Jonson's Tragedies," *ES*, XLV (1964), 439, notes the motif of pity, but concludes that "these explicit attempts to direct our reactions are not accompanied by anything which would justify our responding as the dramatist would have us do."

A preamble such as this establishes the speaker in the classical role of messenger who reports the catastrophe and provides morally authoritative comment. The fact that the speaker is Terentius, a former minion of Sejanus, jolted out of moral insentience by the horror of what he has seen, adds further weight to the appeal. The conversion of Terentius, affording further evidence that the virtuous or potentially virtuous will always tend to draw together, is one more glimmer of hope in Jonson's black picture of evil.

Terentius's appeal for pity springs from a recognition that Sejanus's suffering is out of all proportion to his deserving, a recognition which implicitly contradicts the ideas of rough justice cherished by Arruntius, Macro, and Sosia. Lepidus echoes his horror at the rage of the people, who "hate men condemn'd, / Guiltie, or not" (V.799-800). The emphasis is steered away from Sejanus's guilt to his role as a pure victim; he has indeed become - as he prophesied for Tiberius - a "publike sacrifice" (II.404). The sacrificial nature of his death, a horrible expiation for the still living evil of Tiberius, is underlined by a bold allusion to the Crucifixion: the enraged mob enquires after the garments of its victim.¹⁶ This is indeed a bitter twist to Sejanus's character as the "court-god", while the virtual devouring by the mob of Sejanus's body, followed by a gathering of the precious relics, which they wish were "created new", is a grotesque parody of the religious devotion afforded him while still alive.

The Nuntius who brings news of the "farder sacrifice" (V.842) of Sejanus's children reinforces Terentius's appeal for pity; no slave,

16 V.791-92. This detail is Jonson's own addition to the passage of Juvenal from which these lines are translated. See Herford and Simpson, IX, 633.

he suggests, could be so evil but that "tyrannie, / In torturing him, would make him worth lamenting" (11.837-38). Arruntius, however, does not learn. At the close of the final act, he utters the conventional warning to those in power not to "boast your slippery height"; their fall is violent and irreversible, and "he that lends you pitty is not wise" (11.896-97). These lines may appear, on account of their position at the close of the play, to be simple authorial comment. But the very last words, spoken by Terentius, while appearing to echo Arruntius, significantly shift the emphasis:

Let this example move th'insolent man,
Not to grow proud, and careless of the gods:
It is an odious wisdom, to blaspheme,
Much more to slighthen, or denie their powers. (11.898-901)

The insolent man who has defied the power of the gods is, of course, Sejanus, and in this respect these lines simply reinforce Arruntius's conventional moral. But Arruntius also has been guilty of denying their powers, and this is but one of the many defects which question his right to appear in the role of concluding moralist. To assume that a particular character or speech directly expresses Jonson's own thoughts and feelings may be as misleading as the same all too common assumption in Shakespearean criticism. Even in the final lines of his play, Jonson does not abate the intellectual complexity which demands constant critical vigilance.

VI

However remote Sejanus may appear in tone and style from Poetaster, in several respects it dramatises the same corruption; whereas in the earlier play, this festered beneath the surface of Rome, here it has

broken out into an open sore. Harmless follies have now turned into deadly evil.¹⁷ The ridiculous construction put on the works of Horace by Laco can be diverted by Augustus to ridicule; a similar attempt in the trial of Cordus threatens the defendant's liberty and perhaps his life. Tucca urges Lupus, in pressing his charges against Horace and Mecoenas, to "begge their land betimes; before some of these hungrie court-hounds sent it out" (Poetaster, V.ii.52-53). The image of "court-hounds", ludicrously inapplicable to Horace's colleagues, is a telling anticipation of Sejanus, in which the hounds of Sejanus are only just thwarted in their greed for Silius's possessions by the timely action of Lepidus.

It is fitting that the spread of corruption from a handful of poets and malcontents to an entire society should be marked by a transition from satirical comedy to tragedy, and considering Jonson's lack of experience in this latter genre, it is remarkable how much life he breathed into the usually dull Senecal form. The many-faceted development of the dramatic conflict; the sympathetic yet critical attitude towards the supporters of Agrippina; the unexpected yet wholly unsentimental direction of our sympathy towards the fallen Sejanus; the curious role of Tiberius - all these are marks of the originality of vision and technique which distinguishes this play from the conventional Senecal dramatisation of the fall of an ambitious man. All the same, one cannot claim for this form any advantages over a more flexible non-classical technique, and its limitations are particularly apparent at the close

17 A similar point is made by J. A. Barish in the Introduction to his edition of Sejanus (New Haven, 1965), p.23, though I would disagree with his inference that, in Poetaster, Sejanus, and Catiline, "the personality of the ruler takes on the attributes of fate."

of Sejanus. After the tense and exciting defeat of Sejanus in the Senate, the final two hundred lines spoken by Lepidus, Arruntius, Terentius, and the Nuntius, discussing the moral issues raised by Sejanus's fall and recounting his death, would almost inevitably fall flat in performance. Jonson's political vision was sufficiently comprehensive to include the populace as the indispensable tool of power, but his relegation of the Roman mob to the report of other characters prevents this aspect of Sejanus from carrying the dramatic conviction achieved by his vivid representation of high intrigue.

Jonson's refusal to write a simple moral fable should be seen in connection with his striving after detailed historical accuracy, which goes further than the normal humanist requirement for tragedy of historical verisimilitude.¹⁸ Chapman's answer to Jonson's prescriptions for tragedy set out in the prefatory note "To the Readers" of Sejanus may be found in his dedication to The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois, and helps to define Jonson's distance from moralistic tragedy: "And for the autenticall truth of either person or action, who (worth the respecting) will expect it in a poem, whose subject is not truth, but things like truth? Poor envious souls they are that cavil at truth's want in these natural fictions; material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary, being the soul, limbs, and limits of an autenticall tragedy."¹⁹ For Chapman, the moral effectiveness of a tragedy depended on its dispensing if necessary with literal truth, and ordering its material to the end of moral suasion. Jonson,

18 Cf. Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr., "The Significance of Ben Jonson's First Requirement for Tragedy: 'Truth of Argument'," SP, XLIX (1952), 195-213.

19 T. M. Parrott, p.77.

on the other hand, makes no mention of moral suasion - except in the final sentence of The Argument in the 1605 Quarto, excised in later editions when Jonson was no longer threatened by Star Chamber. This different prescription is complemented by a different method of presenting their respective insights. The main fictional element in Chapman's Revenge is Clermont, who frequently delivers moral comments which the author clearly endorses. Jonson, however, never allows us to place total, unhesitating confidence in any one character. The moral commentary supplied by the "good" characters is constantly checked against the truth of history and found to be now accurate, now false or inadequate. The passage from history to moral insight is not an easy one in Sejanus.

VII

The history dramatised in Catiline is that indicated by Silius when he recalls the "ryots, pride, and civill hate" which have reduced Romans from their position as "Free, equall lords of the triumphed world". The first chorus of Catiline begins by recalling the tremendous wealth and power of Rome, which is being destroyed from within by extravagance, avarice, ambition, riot, and political corruption. The emphasis is placed, even more insistently than in Sejanus, upon the responsibility of the entire city for its own degradation and enslavement:

Such ruine of her manners Rome
Doth suffer now, as shee's become
(Without the gods it soone gaine-say)
Both her owne spoiler, and owne prey. (I.583-86)

Unlike Sejanus, where the state of Rome is first mediated through apparently detached commentators, Catiline opens with an entire act

devoted to its titular villain and his fellow-conspirators. But in the use of Sylla's ghost, which breathes the spirit of chaos into Catiline, Jonson emphasises from the very beginning that Catiline's conspiracy is not merely the expression of personal wickedness, but one manifestation of a more elusive and latent evil which, as Cicero comes to realise, is "enclos'd / Deepe, in the veines, and bowells of the state" (IV.420-421). Sylla's ghost's speech is full of images of anti-nature, monstrosity, darkness, and destruction. The repetition of these motifs throughout the play as an accompaniment to Catiline's conspiratorial ambitions serves to place his titanic self-vauntings by reminding us that his boasted individuality and freedom is as illusory as that of Sejanus. Catiline is the vehicle of a spirit of destruction which has reposed at different times, as Sylla's ghost indicates, in the Gracchi, Cinna, Marius (I.21), in Sulla himself, and which will eventually issue in the fall of the Republic.

The emphasis on civic decadence rather than on one man's bid for power is heightened by the depiction of Catiline himself not so much as a single, unified character, but as a symbol of the multifarious forces making for Rome's destruction. In order to accomplish his designs, he is forced to draw on the support of every type of malcontent, and as he explains to his wife, this necessitates his playing a variety of roles:

I must pray my love, shee will put on
Like habites with my selfe. I have to doe
With many men, and many natures. (I.130-132)

But it is hinted in the first act, and becomes increasingly clear in the course of the play, that Catiline himself is many men and many natures. This is most clearly shown when his own words reflect back onto himself. Following his early dialogue with Cethegus, in which the

two men envisage a fantastic orgy of destruction incompatible with any realistic political aims, he poses before all the conspirators as a defender of the commonwealth - the well-worn justification for rebellion - against the "giants of the state, that doe, by turnes, / Enjoy her, and defile her" (I.348-49), in terms which anticipate the criticism of ill-used wealth and power by the first chorus. The real giants of the state, however, are Catiline and his companions, whose conspiracy is repeatedly compared with the giants' war against heaven.²⁰ An even more striking self-indictment is implied in his resentment of the wealthy Romans' "planing of hills with valleyes; / And raysing vallies above hills" (I.379-380). For this closely echoes the determination expressed in his opening soliloquy to assault Rome "Though hills were set on hills, / And seas met seas, to guard thee" (I.74-75), which itself is an anticipatory allusion to the gigantomachy motif.

Catiline himself, therefore, embodies the forces of destruction which he affects to see in the present leaders of Rome. His fellow-conspirators he regards with almost as much contempt as his political opponents, as we gather both from the initial dialogue with his wife, and the soliloquy in Act Three: "What ministers men must, for practise, use!" (III.714ff). Yet his own syncretic personality is virtually composed of traits taken from the men he so despises. This is not only apparent in the way he can in the first act appear equally at home in the roles of a victim of a pathological lust for violence, the upholder of the pristine Roman virtues, the Mammon-like sensualist promising his followers "A field, to exercise your longings in" (I.480), or the practical strategist with an accurate knowledge of the distribution of

20 See III.204, 459, 842-43, V.677-83.

Rome's military forces. Like Curius, Catiline has been disappointed in his attempt to gain public office, and will be again when he is defeated in the elections to the consulship by Cicero. He himself displays exactly the same "envy to the state" (I.147) which he sees in some of his followers. He boasts that he has turned Cethegus's "valour . . . into his poison" (I.141), but the same could be said of himself, to whom even Cato pays tribute when fallen:

A brave bad death.
Had this been honest now, and for his countrey,
As 'twas against it, who had ere fallen greater? (V.688-90)

Moreover, the discontented poverty which Catiline hopes to use to his own ends we find to be shared by him also, when Cicero describes him as "bred up in's fathers needy fortunes" (IV.122).

By repeated echoes and hints such as these, Jonson builds up Catiline's personality as an abstract of the aims and characteristics he sees in others. But if he is more a part of his companions than he realises, his ability to change roles with perfect ease does not desert him in public. Following Cicero's election as Consul, Catiline arrives at the Senate and exhibits a perfect grace and humility in accepting defeat. In answer to Antonius's wish that Catiline might have been his fellow-consul, the latter observes:

It did not please the gods; who'instruct the people:
And their unquestion'd pleasures must be serv'd.
They know what's fitter for us, then our selves;
And 'twere impietie, to think against them. (III.120-24)

This echoes Cato's belief, expressed prior to Catiline's entry, and strongly endorsed by the play as a whole, that Cicero's election is the work of the gods: "The voice of Rome is the consent of heaven! / And

that hath plac'd thee, Cicero, at the helme" (III.61-63). But while Catiline's ability to utter correct sentiments where this serves his immediate purpose may remind us of Tiberius, such acting is for him, unlike the emperor, a strain on his real self. Disgusted with Catulus's admiration of his display of "that nothing / Which he calls vertuous", he aches to appear in his true colours:

O my breast, breake quickly:
 And shew my friends my in-parts, lest they thinke
 I have betraid 'hem. (III.151-53)

But we can never be sure where to look for his "in-parts", whether in the grotesque rituals and fantasies of the conspirators, or in the more worldly atmosphere of Roman political life. Catiline moves with ease between these two spheres in a way that Cethegus, for example, when it comes to the killing of Cicero, manifestly cannot. He is both the diabolic spirit of destruction and the realistic, calculating rebel, at least in intention. The fact that neither of these predominates creates a void at the centre of his character which shifts our attention from what he is to what he represents. Petreius aptly remarks that, in the final battle, Catiline advanced "not with the face / Of any man, but of a publique ruine" (V.642-43).

This curious depiction of the protagonist corresponds in part to that in the classical sources available to Jonson. Fulbecke in his compilation of Roman history similarly describes Catiline as "In all his actions . . . a perfect Protean, framing and composing himselfe to all sides and sects".²¹ Furthermore, his role as a symbol rather than a plausible character functions in various ways apart from emphasising

21 William Fulbecke, An Historicall Collection, p.86.

the broad theme of civic decadence. It points up by contrast, for example, the more limited but more realistic ambition of Caesar and Crassus. The diabolic strain in his conspiracy complements Cicero's divine mission, while its more worldly element provides the latter with a substantial opponent. The heroic nature of Cicero's task is further emphasised by making Catiline into an amalgam of all manner of destructive forces, political and cosmic. All the same, the strain on the comprehension of an audience, which is subjected to such abrupt changes of style in one character without any unifying link, would probably detract from the effectiveness of the play in performance. We cannot be certain that it was on this account that Jonson, in the preface "To the Reader in Ordinarie", stated his opinion that the first two acts were "the worst". But certainly there is a solidity, an immediate cogency in the character of Cicero and in the action centred on him, which makes the final three acts far more compelling than the first. Jonson does not have Shakespeare's profound interest in the causes of rebellion and the motives of the rebel. Catiline is perhaps best understood as a means whereby the truly central character, Cicero, can display his own virtues and limitations. It is on Cicero that the burden of the play's political implications rests, and to him accordingly we now turn.

VIII

Cicero's central importance arises from his being the only character who understands and engages with all the forces threatening Rome's destruction. In an excellent article on Catiline, Joseph Allen Bryant argues that the play is not so much a "simple story of the discovery and suppression of one man's plot" as "a study of the complex struggle

between such forces as make for disintegration in a state and those forces which tend to preserve its integrity."²² The threat of Catiline is followed by the greater threat of Caesar and Crassus, overshadowing Cicero's Pyrrhic victory over his ostensible opponent.

But the "complex struggle" which the action unfolds contains one further element, apart from these central characters, neglected in previous commentaries. After a night of dreadful portents, Cicero warns the Senate that

the voyce

Of heav'n, this morning, hath spoke loud inough,
 T'instruct you with a feeling of the horror;
 And wake you from a sleepe, as starke, as death.
 I have, of late, spoke often in this Senate,
 Touching this argument, but still have wanted
 Either your eares, or faith: so'incredible
 Their plots have seem'd. (IV.70-77)

Cicero's most formidable, because most impersonal and elusive opponent, is the Senate's careless ignorance of the besetting dangers. His task is not simply to unravel Catiline's conspiracy, and see that the offenders are punished, but to fight an indifference which is as deadly as the declared evil. His handling of the conspiracy is largely dictated by this crucial factor. Catiline may, he argues, merit death from a juridical point of view, but it is far better to set him free to join his troops, since

22 Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr., "Catiline and the Nature of Jonson's Tragic Fable," PMLA, LXIX (1954), 265-77, reprinted in Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J. A. Barish (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), pp.147-59. Bryant, although the best critic of Catiline as of Sejanus, appears to me wrong in seeing Cato as the most far-sighted character, and Cicero as "naively comforted at the destruction of Catiline."

when there are in this grave order, some,
 Who, with soft censures, still do nource his hopes;
 Some, that with not beleaving, have confirm'd
 His designes more, and whose authoritie
 The weaker, as the worst men, too, have follow'd:
 I would now send him, where they all should see
 Cleere, as the light, his heart shine; . . . (IV.402-08)

Cicero, the head of the Senate, defeats Catiline in spite of that same Senate, and this may serve as a dramatic gloss on Jonson's observation in Discoveries that "Suffrages in Parliament are numbred, not weigh'd: nor can it bee otherwise in those publike Councels, where nothing is so unequall, as the equality: for there, how odde soever mens braines, or wisdomes are, their power is alwayes even, and the same."²³

Against the general lethargy of Rome is set the vigilance of the gods, who "wake for thee, though thou snore to thy selfe" (III.446), and of Cicero himself; indeed, he never fails to warn his enemies or potential enemies of the futility of trying to by-pass his watchfulness.²⁴ But despite his god-like qualities, and the divine sanction of his position as consul, Cicero is certainly not Jonson's attempt to construct a hypothetically ideal magistrate, a deus ex machina who miraculously solves the ills of the commonwealth. Quite apart from the fact that the still living menace of Caesar and Crassus makes his victory over Catiline appear somewhat hollow, even this is only achieved through a difficult and painful process of self-mastery. On hearing Fulvia's account of the conspiracy, he exclaims:

Is there a heaven? and gods? and can it be
 They should so slowly heare, so slowly see!
 Hath Jove no thunder? or is Jove become
 Stupide as thou art? o neere wretched Rome,
 When both thy Senate, and thy gods doe sleepe,
 And neither thine, nor their owne states doe keepe!

(III.235-40)

23 Herford and Simpson, VIII, 579.

24 See III.818; IV.178, 230-34, 258, 647-50; V.123-25.

The trauma induced by such a revelation - and this trauma would not be credible had the nature of Catiline's evil not been exaggerated and diversified in the way it is - temporarily forces Cicero into a blasphemous denial of the gods' power of a sort already encountered in Arruntius. But while Arruntius's wild ejaculations record a maladjusted sensibility, behind Cicero's words can be detected an insistent desire to comprehend, and a recognition of his own internal disorder; he confesses himself "lost" in Fulvia's story, for "to think it true / Tempteth my reason" (III.257-58). After Fulvia and Curius have departed, he retracts his irreverent blaming of the gods, who have made the "common strumpet" Fulvia the saviour of Rome in order to "make / A scornfull difference 'twixt their power, and thee" (III.462-63). But the initial blasphemous horror is none the less genuine, and is underlined by the contrastingly false, affected agitation of Fulvia:

The extreme horror of it almost turn'd me
To aire, when first I heard it; I was all
A vapor, when 'twas told me: . . . (III.288-90)

Cicero does not allow us to forget that, however superior to the Senators in intelligence and political skill, he has only shaken himself by supreme effort out of the same incredulity which afflicts them:

I found his mischiefs, sooner, with mine eyes,
Than with my thought; and with these hands of mine,
Before they touch'd, at my suspicion. (IV.130-32)

In this respect he is a far more human, credible figure than the conceited prig seen by Caesar and Crassus. His shocked reaction to the conspiracy recalls the similar disbelief which afflicts Henry V when confronted with the treason of Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey: "though the truth of it stands off as gross, / As black and white, my eye will

scarcely see it" (Henry V, II.ii.103-04). Both men testify to the enormous burden placed on the conscientious ruler, spiritually oppressed by the weight of evil which it is his task to resist.

If we recognise that Cicero's struggle is as much against the Senate's ignorance as Catiline's conspiracy, his long oration in the fourth act, translated directly from In Catilinam, becomes more significant than is generally allowed. It is probable that not even the most energetic delivery could make this effective on stage, that for once Jonson's enthusiastic fidelity to his sources has outrun his dramatic sense. But it is not simply a rather pointless annihilation of Catiline's already shaken self-confidence. Cicero's real aim is to batter down the Senate's tardiness in condemning Catiline by sheer rhetorical vigour. If we read behind the indictment of Catiline the almost equally damning indictment of the Senate, then the dramatic tension is not removed by the former's speedy moral collapse: for only half way through the speech, Caesar mutters to Crassus that "His spirits have forsooke him" (IV.300). The source of Cicero's disgust is the fact that "This the Consul sees, / The Senate understands, yet this man lives!" (IV.190-91). His famous judicial speech is in effect a devastating comment on the decline of Roman justice, and indeed of Roman civilization. Although "There was that vertue, once, in Rome" (1.197) which would have ensured Catiline's speedy punishment, he must now omit the mention of some of his crimes

lest, in a civill state,
So monstrous facts should either appeare to be,
Or not to be reveng'd. (11.328-30)

The final act shows Cicero's attempt to educate the Senate to have been largely unsuccessful; the waste of his effort to this end

leaves more bitterness than his tragic inability to challenge Caesar and Crassus. Although, on producing the letters which conclusively incriminate Catiline, he expresses confidence that he has now exposed the conspirators

in that light,
Where, when you met their treason, with your eyes,
Your minds, at length, would think for your owne safetie.

(V.126-28)

this is a persuasive wish rather than an accomplished fact. For he still finds it necessary to labour the enormity of the destruction they have narrowly escaped: "Lay but the thought of it, before you, Fathers, / Thinke but with me . . ." (V.258-59). And we cannot but react with misgiving to the apparent complacency of "I now see, yo' have sense of your owne safety" (1.324) which comes in response to a chorus of praise for his achievement swelled most insistently by Caesar and Crassus. (Indeed the presence of these two men, whose complicity in the conspiracy Cicero both knows about and resolutely conceals from the Senate, introduces an undercurrent of irony into the whole of this final act.)

Any suspicion this scene may have raised that Cicero's pretended confidence in the Senate had any substantial basis is decisively quashed by the final scene of the play. While up till this point the Senate as a body has been virtually silent, here it speaks out on the matter of the punishment to be meted out to Catiline's followers, but only to applaud each speaker in turn, no matter how contradictory their separate proposals. They admit the justice of Cato's forthright contempt for their cowardly vacillation - "We are all fearefull" (V.568) - and finally profess their lame assistance for the "worthy Counsul", whose ability to carry the motion for Catiline's death owes nothing to their

help. Cicero and Cato are still fighting their battle alone, the most they have done being to neutralise a Senate whose indifference to good is little better than the open flattery of the Senate in Sejanus.

But they are not quite alone. One man, Syllanus, who is "Consul next design'd" (V.437), though distinguished only by a handful of lines in the final act, is witness to the fact that Cicero's labours have not all fallen on stony ground. In this final meeting of the Senate, Syllanus is the first to deliver the verdict of death on the conspirators, later seconded by Cato, and he pays tribute to Cicero by pointing out to the quaking Senate that they "had been base, had not his vertue rais'd us" (V.569). Syllanus's role is comparable to that of Terentius in Sejanus, both in the way that Jonson makes an important point through such a minor character, and in that they both attest the auspicious power of virtue to waken its own potential in others.

IX

The role of the Senate is such that Cicero's exercise of his oratorical skill is not merely a conventional tribute to a Renaissance hero, but an integral part of the drama. But he has more enemies than the Senate's inertia, and uses other weapons besides words, crucial though these be. If Cicero's oratory has been censured as a clog on the dramatic movement, his skill in political manoeuvring has been found equally distasteful. Robert Ornstein, for example, argues that "His Machiavellian means of intelligencing and bribery qualify the moral ends; and, as in Byron's Tragedy, the preservation of the state against unlawful conspiracy is tainted by moral compromise."²⁵

25 The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy, p.102.

If this is true, then Jonson's portrait of Cicero is either confused or deliberately contradictory, since the repeated insistence on his heroic virtue is beyond question. The Chorus, who are well-meaning and honest, however slow to understand, offer up a prayer after the second act for the election of a suitable consul, setting forth their idea of how such a one should conduct himself. Their prayer is answered in the election of Cicero, and Jonson painstakingly shows how each quality they sought in their ideal candidate has been realised in him. In his opening speech to the Senate, for example, Cicero vows to serve the commonwealth "not for my yeere, / But for my life" (III.76-77), just as the consuls of old, whom the Chorus picture to us, "would not live, / As men, good, only for a yeere" (II.393-94). These men "neither practis'd force, nor formes" (II.404), and similarly Cicero preserves the commonwealth "without tumult, / Slaughter, or bloud, or scarce raising a force" (V.306-07). The Chorus pray for one who will "studie conscience, above fame" (II.378), and their prayer is answered by Cicero in the very last lines of the play. Echoes such as these may be missed by the most attentive spectator seeing the play for the first time, but they are a sure indication of Jonson's intention.

Most important of all, however, is the combination of adaptability and tenacity which enables Cicero, like the consuls of old, not to "leave the helme, in stormes!" (II.405). Jonson returns to this image of the ruler as skilful pilot, central to humanist political thought, on Cicero's first appearance as Consul. Cato, affirming that the gods have placed Cicero "at the helme", describes the qualities required in a magistrate at a time of crisis. His emphasis is on the vulnerability of the ship of state to the numerous dangers which beset her. The good pilot, therefore, will know the limits of his ability, "What she will beare in

foule, what in fair weathers", and how to "shift his sailes" when the wind changes (III.67, 68). Like the masterful horseman, whom Shakespeare, Chapman, and Webster employ as an image of competent rule, the pilot must have the ability to understand a strength potentially far greater than his own, and the skill to control it.²⁶ The rarity of such qualities is demonstrated, ironically, by Cato himself, who lacks the firm grasp of political realities which he commends in Cicero. Moved by an unthinking zeal for truth and right, he urges his friend to challenge Caesar and Crassus, since

What honest act is that,
The Roman Senate should not dare, and doe? (IV.526-27)

Only Cicero's tactful recognition that the Roman state will bear very little in foul weathers averts a disastrous confrontation.

But it is not enough simply to point to the general terms within which Cicero's actions are presented; this still leaves the actual substance of his conduct open to consideration. His two greatest triumphs of policy are his use of Fulvia and Curius, and subsequently of the Allobroges, and there is an apparently minor but significant parallel in his reception of both parties. In each case, he delays inviting his guests to take a seat, on the first occasion because he is "lost" in Fulvia's story, while in the second instance he pitches straight into the business at hand, only remembering the due rites of hospitality in the middle of a sentence. This detail beautifully sums up the single-mindedness with which Cicero pursues his wearisome task, and which causes him to ride roughshod over social convention. Cicero's

26 Jonson in fact links the two images in his discussion of the prince in Discoveries (Herford and Simpson, VIII, 601-02, "Illiteratus Princeps").

first words - "Great honours are great burdens" (III.1) - introduces the dominant motif in his characterisation. Like Henry V, Catiline is a play about "the strain of rule".²⁷

The details of Cicero's manoeuvring which we may find most distasteful - the speed with which he sets Curius to work as an informer, his fulsome praise of the "common strumpet" Fulvia, his shrewd bargaining with the Allobroges who, we feel, have a right to redress of their injuries anyway - are balanced not only by the importance and difficulty of his task, but also by the fact that the means which the gods have put into his hands are a reflection of the very decadence which he is attempting to avert. The "virtue" of Fulvia is a contrasting witness to Rome's "foule neglect" of the gods (III.455) - just as the height of virtue in Sejanus's Rome is paradoxically represented by Sabinus's faithful dog - while it is the Senate who are responsible for the sufferings of the Allobroges, as both they themselves and Catiline inform us (IV.12-16, 575-80). In his interview with the Allobroges, Cicero warns them of the folly of siding with Catiline by asserting that

the Senate,
 And people of Rome, of their accustom'd greatness,
 Will sharply, and severely vindicate,
 Not onely any fact, but any practice,
 Or purpose, 'gainst the state. (IV.650-54)

Cicero, unlike Cato, is painfully aware of the untruth of his words. But this reflects less on his own honesty than on the failings of the Senate, and on the civic decadence which has enabled Caesar and Crassus to gain power such as it is dangerous to challenge. Indeed, it is an

27 The phrase is that used by Michael Goldman in his account of Henry V in Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama (Princeton, 1972), pp.58-73. Many of his acute insights into Henry V would be equally applicable to Catiline.

irony which runs throughout the play that Cicero, as consul, must speak in the name of a Senate which hinders his own exercise of rule. The Allobroges, on seeing Cicero, Catulus, and Cato amidst the crowd of "quaking and trembling" Senators, aptly remark that "these men / Seeme of another race" (IV.O.1, 35-36).

Cicero's capacity as a ruler, therefore, cannot be understood apart from the material on which it is set to work, and as the Chorus suggest after the fourth act, to disparage his efforts is itself a symptom of disease. Their lines are a direct and moving appeal to the audience not to indulge in the sort of indiscriminating criticism of him which much comment on the play suggests is so easy:

What age is this, where honest men,
 Plac'd at the helme,
 A sea of some foule mouth, or pen,
 Shall over-whelme?
 And call their diligence, deceit;
 Their vertue, vice;
 Their watchfulnesse, but lying in wait;
 And bloud, the price.
 O, let us pluck this evill seede
 Out of our spirits;
 And give, to every noble deede,
 The name it merits.
 Lest we seeme falne (if this endures)
 Into those times,
 To love disease: and brooke the cures
 Worse, then the crimes. (IV.879-94)

But the Chorus, despite their worthy attempt to give praise where it is due, still know very much less than Cicero. Their opening question calls for an ambiguous answer:

Now, do our eares, before our eyes,
 Like men in mists,
 Discover, who'd the state surprise,
 And who resists? (IV.843-46)

They have at last seen the danger of Catiline, but not that of Caesar and Crassus, and their praise of Cicero consequently by-passes his treatment of them. This is less easy to accept than his handling of the conspiracy. Urged by his brother Quintus to press charges against the two men, Cicero refuses, but insists that if any incriminating circumstance were to "reveale it selfe, I would not spare / You, brother, if it pointed at you, trust me" (V.97-98). Three times he is forced to eat his words, first when confronted with a man arrested carrying a message from Crassus to Catiline, secondly when presented with an accusation of Caesar's complicity confirmed by Curius - which Caesar even goes so far as to use to Cicero's discredit - and thirdly when letters from the conspirators to Caesar are brought to the Senate. But Cicero does not simply have to suppress evidence. In the first of these instances, the unfortunate informer Tarquinius is branded as a "lying varlet" and packed off to prison, even though Cicero knows this to be an injustice. This is an even more emphatic indication than the admission by Lepidus of Silius's guilt that the virtuous man in a position of responsibility must sometimes choose between the greater and the lesser evil.

But if Cicero's distasteful compromise qualifies the Chorus's praise it does not overturn it, and it would be a facile reduction of the play's complexity to suggest that Jonson explicitly presents an attitude to him which is drastically undercut by the actual dramatisation of his conduct. The presentation of Cicero is neither idealized nor ironical; he is neither an Augustus nor a Machiavel, but something more difficult to define.

The nature and limitations of his virtue can perhaps be defined by once again returning to the parallel with Henry V. Both characters testify to the personal strain, the over-simplifications, the equivocations,

the slight injustices which are inseparable from even the most dedicated exercise of rule. It was commonly accepted in the Renaissance that sovereignty was as a crucible, testing a man's moral strength to the utmost; La Primaudaye, in fact, uses the example of Tiberius, and his moral decline on assuming the imperial power, to show how it has the "propertie to make him that seemed good to become wicked: the humble to be arrogant: the pitifull, cruell: the valiant, a coward."²⁸ The fact that even men with the abilities of Henry V and Cicero can only partly measure up to its immense demands should make us slow to disparage their efforts. Indeed, the widespread contempt in this period for the political ignorance of the common people, "alwayes grudging against their Governours",²⁹ is based not simply on class prejudice (although in certain writers it might be no more than that) but on a sensitive recognition of the difficulties of rule, as Hooker makes clear in the opening passage of the fifth book of his Ecclesiastical Polity, which is complementary to the fourth Chorus of Catiline in this respect.

Few there are of so weak capacity, but public evils they easily espy; fewer so patient, as not to complain, when the grievous inconveniences thereof work sensible smart. Howbeit to see wherein the harm which they feel consisteth, the seeds from which it sprang, and the method of curing it, belongeth to a skill, the study whereof is so full of toil, and the practise so beset with difficulties, that wary and respective men had rather quietly seek their own, and wish that the world may go well, so it be not long of them, than with pain and hazard make themselves advisers for the common good.

Shakespeare and Jonson as dramatists place rather more faith in popular insight than Hooker the practical polemicist. Henry V's soldiers can hold their own in a debate with their royal master on the responsibilities

28 La Primaudaye, pp.117-18.

29 Discoveries, Herford and Simpson, VIII, 593.

of king and subject, while Cicero's virtually one-man rule is coupled with a persistent attempt to educate the nominal possessors of authority. But both King Henry and Cicero are touched by a certain aloofness from most of their fellow men which is a mark of their moral and intellectual superiority. And at the same time, both of them can pity the men who attempt to destroy them. Henry will weep for his condemned nobles (II.ii.140), just as Cicero, unlike the sternly moralistic Cato, can find compassion for the conspirators who come to murder him (III.814), and for Catiline himself (IV.350-52).

X

Sejanus and Catiline may appear to be outside the mainstream of Jonson's dramatic output, and of the greatest Renaissance tragedy, both in their rigid adherence to history, and their construction on classical principles. But the foregoing analysis has attempted to indicate something of the range and complexity of vision, and more important their truly dramatic character, which distinguishes them from virtually the entire corpus of Senecal plays, including those of Greville. The minor detail of Cicero's initial failure to request first Fulvia, later the Allobroges, to take a seat, is one of many indications that these plays were conceived as a union of speech and action: in each a case mere half line both acts as a stage-direction, and as a revealing comment on the speaker's state of mind. Quite apart from such details, many of the more general features of both plays could become truly effective only in the theatre. The Senate, for example, is silent through most of Sejanus and Catiline, and yet repeatedly on stage, playing a vague though important role in the struggles of state. The alternation of

hurried, secretive intrigue, with scenes of public oratory, particularly in Sejanus, is a measure of Jonson's awareness that a state can be run neither by a conspiracy of great men alone, nor by the often tardy and inadequate processes of public deliberation: here again the alternate crowding and emptying of the stage would convey this impression more immediately than the most attentive reading.

The dramatic qualities of these two tragedies are a measure of the realistic and undoctrinaire character of Jonson's political thinking, another point on which he stands in complete contrast to the Senecal dramatists. This is particularly evident in the way that Jonson never develops a particular character or incident merely as an illustration of some moral or political virtue (as Chapman occasionally does). Jonson's virtuous characters operate within the context of realistically conceived political forces, which circumscribe or thwart their potential for action. Hence the real heroes of his tragedies are those men who can understand these forces and act accordingly (Lepidus, Cicero), rather than those whose moral fervour is not matched by a corresponding insight (Arruntius, Cato); those, in short, who illustrate the humanist axiom that wisdom is evident in action rather than words.³⁰

But if Jonson achieved a victory over the constrictions of the Senecal form, it was not gained without cost. In the course of this chapter, I have indicated two instances where the adherence to Senecal convention detracts from the dramatic effectiveness, namely the refusal

30 This emphasis originates in Aristotle: see especially Ethics, tr. J. A. K. Thomson (Penguin Books, 1955), p.57. Thomas Bowes, in the dedicatory epistle to his translation of The Franch Academie, correctly maintains that La Primaudaye's intention was "the same that Aristotle had in writing his Ethicks or booke of Manners: namely, The practise of vertue in life, and not the bare knowledge and contemplation thereof in braine" (fol. A2).

to match the political importance of the mob in Sejanus by a corresponding dramatic role, and Cicero's invective against Catiline which, though stylistically vigorous and sustained, invites Polonius's comment on the player's speech: "This is too long." A more serious defect in both plays is their extremely intricate and often obscure construction, a product not so much of the Senecal form, as of Jonson's contempt for popular acclaim. So many important implications are dependent on details not immediately apparent - remote verbal echoes, delayed ironies, parallelisms of character which contradict the ostensible dramatic grouping - that the richness of meaning which yields itself on close study (for which closet drama was written) could probably be only imperfectly expressed in the theatre; the contemporary audiences which found Sejanus and Catiline tedious can scarcely be convicted of insensitivity. One school of critical thought would deny that there can be any division between the artistic merit and the historical significance of a work of literature. But in their exploration of political themes, Jonson's tragedies are second in importance only to the plays of Shakespeare; and this importance arises not only from their being the product of a great intellect, but also from the essentially dramatic nature of this exploration, whatever may be justly objected to certain details of its execution.

Chapter Five

Shakespeare's Histories: King Richard II, King Henry IV

I

Richard II and Henry IV are the earliest plays discussed in this study, and arguably the first truly great political plays of the Elizabethan stage.¹ Yet the range of ideas they bring into play and the breadth of their political implications are unmatched in any later work save that of Shakespeare himself. Early in his career, he had evidently absorbed humanist thinking on the subject of government with great thoroughness, and approached English history equipped with far more than the commonplace notions of the homilies against disobedience.

The national setting and patriotic element in these plays necessarily results in a few emphases which cannot readily be paralleled in, for example, the dramatisation of Roman history by Jonson, or of contemporary French history by Chapman. Though Shakespeare's attitude to the rights and duties of sovereignty has much in common with that of his contemporaries, his presentation of the English kingship, with its commitment to crusading chivalry and its attendant ceremonies, bears a unique character. Inextricably bound up with the Crown, moreover, is the English land, a feeling for which manifests itself in various ways. It is evident in Richard's concern for his "dear earth", wounded by the usurping steps of Bolingbroke's armies. On a more practical level, the

1 Richard II was first published in 1597, having been composed probably in 1595: see King Richard II, ed. Peter Ure, pp.xxix-xx. Both parts of Henry IV were, according to the Arden editor A. R. Humphreys, probably first produced during the winter season of 1596-97: see Part One, pp.xi-xv; Part Two, pp.xiv-xvii.

ownership of land is of the utmost importance, and is one of the factors which precipitates Bolingbroke's rebellion. The plans put forward by the rebels of 1 Henry IV for a division of the realm include an "improvement" of the landscape by redirecting the course of the Trent, while on a later occasion, Justice Shallow blithely discusses the running of a farm which civil war so nearly reduced (in the words of Falstaff) to the value of "stinking mackerel" (1 Henry IV, II.iv.356).

Such emphases, however, indicate not Shakespeare's lack of shared interests with those of his contemporaries who were not concerned with English history (since the comparison of Shakespeare's English histories with those of other authors is of course commonplace) but rather his ability to range more widely from a common centre. The English land, for example, may be seen as a special version of that supra-personal body politic which Jonson, Chapman, and even Greville recognise as the true object of men's allegiance, though it is also far more than that. The historical "myth" underlying all of Shakespeare's plays covering English history from Richard II to Henry VII might also seem to mark them off as unique, particularly since this theme - the division of York and Lancaster - was seen to have a pressing relevance in the last years of an old and heirless queen (see above p.15). But the lapse into disorder and barbarism of a previously civilised society, which is a central aspect of the historical division and eventual reconciliation dramatised in Shakespeare's histories, may, I suggest, be profitably compared with the decline of liberty in ancient Rome which forms the subject of Sejanus, Catiline, and Caesar and Pompey. Richard's petty injustices do not approach the tyranny of Tiberius, while Bolingbroke's almost painless assumption of power is less obviously a sign of decay than the desperate revolt of Catiline, or even the bloody victory of

Chapman's Caesar. This is partly because Shakespeare is more interested in the mingling of civilisation and barbarism, in the way that corrupt and tyrannous power tends to dress itself in the forms and ceremonies which it in fact violates. But beyond this significant difference, these several plays reveal a number of comparable dramatic situations.

In both Richard II and Sejanus, the unfitness of the lawful sovereign for his task, his violation of the very principles which form the basis of English or of Roman greatness, render the problem of obedience particularly acute. While it is not of immediate practical importance in Sejanus (since no one seriously takes up Latiaris's suggestion to Sabinus that they should rise in arms against the emperor), the obedience due to an unjust sovereign is the question most insistently raised by the action of Richard II. Closely linked to the question of obedience, in Shakespeare as in Jonson, is the question of counsel, and of the sort of criticism levelled at the sovereign: it is not necessarily those who most clearly see his faults that are readiest to rebel.

The conflict between de jure and de facto power, and the dilemma of the individual who must choose between them, is another characteristic of this type of play, in particular of Richard II and Caesar and Pompey. One may frequently discern a definite gradation of characters from those who are swept along unprotesting by the tide of barbarism, and may attempt to harness it to their personal advantage; to those who remain the last bulwarks of civilisation, uncompromising in their integrity; and, often the most human and sympathetic group, those whose loyalties are painfully divided, or whose integrity is put to an impossible test. The dramatisation of profound social change, in which allegiances waver and convictions falter, is above all productive of moral ambiguity and uncertainty.

Catiline, Sejanus, and Caesar and Pompey all end, either implicitly or explicitly, on a note of pessimism, offering little prospect but the ever hastening decline of civic liberty. Shakespeare's English histories are peculiar in that the process of disintegration is halted and apparently reversed by Hal. At the centre of this historical process - from the deposition of the true but erring king to the restoration of true majesty in the usurper's son - is the question of lawful succession, both in the sense of one king to the next, and also from father to son. By following this process over three plays (and indeed it is still a living issue in Henry V), Shakespeare was able to work out in detail what Jonson in Sejanus could only hint at. One of the main threats to Tiberius, in moral if not practical terms, is the sons of Germanicus, whose virtuous father, murdered by order of Tiberius, "Lives in their lookes, their gate, their forme" (Sejanus, II.193). Past history is continually present in Sejanus, informing or upbraiding the actions of characters seen on stage, but it is a past which can be recreated only by report and reminiscence, while the future is left to conjecture. The vanished heroic past is likewise alluded to in Richard II in the recollections by York and Gaunt of Edward III and the Black Prince. In Henry IV, however, the repeated appeals to past events refer to a history recreated in the previous play, while Carlisle's prophecy of civil war (Richard II, IV.i.136-49) would gain immediate assent from an audience which already knew Henry VI and Richard III. The series of interconnected historical plays formed the perfect medium for Shakespeare's exploration of the decay of civilised order, a subject foremost in the minds of the leading Renaissance dramatists.

II

Every play in Shakespeare's two historical tetralogies, with the exception of Henry V, dramatises a continuing quarrel among the English nobility, fought with both words and swords, concerning the rightful occupant of the throne. Bolingbroke's rebellion in Richard II initiates this long process of strife, of "tumultuous wars / . . . Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny" (IV.i.140, 142) which the Bishop of Carlisle lays before the conscience of the usurper. But by a curious contrast, the actual deposition is achieved without any more than a threat of force, with the usurper protesting his loyal submission to the king in the moment of his triumph (III.iii.35-61, 187-89, 198-99), and later packing his "fair cousin" off to the Tower as if granting him an especial favour. The cardinal sin of rebellion, the "whole puddle and sink of all sins against God and man", is presented as an operation performed painlessly under anaesthetic, its ill effects preserved until later:

The woe's to come; the children yet unborn
Shall feel this day as sharp to them as thorn. (IV.i.322-23)

Shakespeare's treatment of the theme of obedience, therefore, is centred on an act of rebellion which does not appear to be at all motivated by the defiant ambition one would normally associate with those who violate law and allegiance in pursuit of power. This is, up to a point, a product of the need which every rebel appreciates, even the diabolic Catiline, for him to disguise his true intentions at least until his seizure of power could itself be presented as just and lawful. The ambition of York in 2 Henry VI, whose situation is similar to that of Bolingbroke, provides a classic example of such equivocation. Arriving in England at the head of an army to "pluck the crown from

feeble Henry's head" (V.i.2), he is challenged by the King's deputy, Buckingham, and replies:

[Aside] I am far better born than is the King,
 More like a king, more kingly in my thoughts;
 But I must make fair weather yet awhile,
 Till Henry be more weak and I more strong. - . . .
 The cause why I have brought this army hither
 Is to remove proud Somerset from the King,
 Seditious to his Grace and to the state. (11.28-37)

Bolingbroke likewise returns unbidden to England at the head of an army, and, when challenged by York, asserts not only the selfish motive of recovering his estates, but also the desire to defend King and state from

Bushy, Bagot, and their complices,
 The caterpillars of the commonwealth,
 Which I have sworn to weed and pluck away. (II.iii.164-66)

But Bolingbroke, unlike the York of 2 Henry VI, gives no clear indication of the serpent of rebellion concealed beneath the innocent flower of pretended loyalty. His aspirations are concealed not only from others, but also from himself, and are revealed not in secret asides but in unwitting verbal ambiguities.² Thus behind his determination to oust Bushy, Bagot, and their complices lurks the hint that he will in fact uproot the commonwealth itself - since one can scarcely weed a caterpillar. This confused and covert ambition is further apparent in his meeting with Richard at Flint Castle. The possible application of "ruin'd ears" (III.iii.34) to both the castle and Richard himself (as Coleridge noted), his clumsy handling of the image of the meeting of fire and water (11.54-60), culminating in an infelicitous pun on the

2 Bolingbroke's silent opportunism is discussed by Brents Stirling, "Bolingbroke's 'Decision'," SQ, II (1951), 27-34.

word "rain" (reign), hint that Bolingbroke is already thinking of himself as king, almost without being aware of it. His refusal to admit what he is doing, culminating in the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of responsibility for the death of Richard, looks forward to the agonized self-division of another usurper: "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (Macbeth, II.ii.73).

Bolingbroke's silence, therefore, is not only a mark of the opportunism necessary to the artful politician, but also an indication of his quite genuine scruples, which eventually surface in the agonized reminiscences of the ageing King Henry IV. In order to seize and retain power, however, he must occasionally rely on the more thorough unscrupulousness of Northumberland, who is aptly described by Richard as the "ladder wherewithal / The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne" (V.i.55-56). The situation of a ruler or aspiring ruler who seeks to avoid calumny by entrusting the most odious tasks to a willing henchman would be familiar to an audience which saw devious and vicious methods of rule go hand in hand with denunciations of the very same practices. Some spectators might be familiar with Machiavelli's account in the seventh chapter of The Prince of how Cesare Borgia won and pacified the Romagna by this method.³ Whereas Bolingbroke's almost accidental usurpation leads inevitably to his ever increasing remorse, the trebly perjured Northumberland of Henry IV (to King Richard, to King Henry, and finally to his own fellow-rebels) is the true descendent of the man who willingly shoulders the responsibility for Richard's sufferings,

3 Irving Ribner, "Bolingbroke, a True Machiavellian," MLQ, IX (1948), 177-84, compares Bolingbroke's use of Northumberland with Machiavelli's discussion in Chapter 4 of The Prince of the advantages - and subsequent difficulties - of invading a kingdom with the help of discontented barons.

since guilt has no real meaning for him: "My guilt be upon my head, and there an end" (V.i.69).

Northumberland, whose disobedience to his sovereign is more overt both in word and deed than that of Bolingbroke, is nevertheless capable of assuming the accents of humble submission when delivering Bolingbroke's message to Richard at Flint Castle; though even here he fails to acknowledge the King's royalty by kneeling, as he did earlier in the scene by omitting his title "only to be brief" (III.iii.10), while his trite and jingling recitation of oaths reveals him less gifted with natural control over this formal idiom than his leader. His most important contribution to Bolingbroke's success is his prompt arrest of Carlisle when the latter lays before the usurper and his supporters the inevitable implications of their actions in a way that Bolingbroke cannot (we suspect) contradict, and the truth of which becomes increasingly obvious as his reign advances. Bolingbroke's pardon of Carlisle is, more than a public gesture of princely mercy, an attempted expiation built on a recognition of his enemy's rightness, just as his pardoning of Aumerle contains the tacit recognition that he is himself the "treacherous son" of a "loyal father" (V.iii.58).

Bolingbroke's artful pragmatism and Northumberland's callous disregard of law and conscience, therefore, both contribute to the former's rise to power. The weapon which neither Bolingbroke nor, with few significant exceptions, Northumberland uses is direct criticism of Richard's misgovernment. Instead this is left to the impeccably orthodox Gaunt, who steadfastly refuses to take revenge against "God's substitute, / His deputy anointed in his sight" (I.ii.37-38), and to the well-meaning York who, though unable to administer correction to Bolingbroke, fully realises that his return in arms is an act of "gross

rebellion and detested treason" (II.iii.108). In the crucial scene of Gaunt's death, both characters criticise Richard's misgovernment in terms probably familiar to Shakespeare's audience from Woodstock, which appears to have been written within the five years preceding Shakespeare's play.⁴ The king is a prey to flatterers and to strange modern fashions in dress and music; the extravagance of his court has wasted the riches of his realm, and forced him to resort to illegal and demeaning tricks to raise money; he has violated justice and the bonds of kinship by his murder of Gloucester and his banishment of Bolingbroke; and in a more general sense, he has interrupted the "fair sequence and succession" (II.i.199) of the family, of hereditary monarchy, and of Time itself. But whereas similar charges are directly dramatised in Woodstock, and initiate the conflict between the King and dissident nobles, in Richard II they scarcely appear outside the accusations of Gaunt and York (which we are indeed meant to accept as justified), and Richard's own admission that his "too great a court / And liberal largess" has compelled him to "farm our royal realm" (I.iv.42-45). Rossiter argues that Shakespeare was assuming a knowledge of Woodstock in his audience instead of taking the trouble to dramatise Richard's failures, and that the artistic unity of the play consequently suffers.⁵ The point is surely, however, that these are omitted from the action because they are neither the cause nor the immediate pretext of Bolingbroke's rebellion. In announcing his grievances to York, Bolingbroke artfully employs the passive voice to avoid pointing the finger directly at the King, and shortly after announces

4 Cf. Rossiter's comparison of the two plays in his Introduction to Woodstock, pp.47-53.

5 A. P. Rossiter, Angel with Horns (London, 1961), p.29.

his intention to oust "Bushy, Bagot, and their complices". Two scenes later, he places the blame for Richard's misdeeds and his own sufferings entirely on the shoulders of Bushy and Greene. It is a mark of Shakespeare's departure from the pattern set by Woodstock that Richard's favourites are here quite unlike the scheming rogues of the earlier play. Bolingbroke wilfully sacrifices the lives of two of them on the basis of dubious charges which should properly be laid at the door of the king whom he is shortly to depose.

Bolingbroke's failure to criticise the King's abuse of his position is an indirect testimony to the coherence and cogency of the political doctrine advanced by Gaunt and York, in which criticism of Richard's misgovernment is inseparably bound up with the recognition that this cannot be remedied by attacking the King himself. The doctrine of obedience advanced by Richard II and the histories in general is not in the least a dogmatic assertion, but an essential part of the idea of commonwealth which these plays so richly develop. Gaunt's loyalty (in line with orthodox humanist thinking) is to the entire body politic rather than to the King in person, the beauty and integrity of which is celebrated in his famous panegyric on "This royal throne of kings" (II.i.40); this may be a lament for a lost England, but it is also the basis of a continuing political allegiance. Like Jonson's Cicero, he is the tireless overseer of a land sunk into lethargy: "For sleeping England long time have I watched" (1.77), a land which, again like Jonson's Rome, "Hath made a shameful conquest of itself" (1.66). Here as in Jonson's play, the disease from which the land suffers may be easy to describe in general terms. Catiline or Northumberland can echo the genuine care of Cicero and Cato or Gaunt with a specious show of concern for the commonwealth; but a full knowledge of how the disease

manifests itself and how it may best be cured is a formidable task. Hooker's emphasis on the "pain and hazard" which accompanies such an undertaking is a relevant gloss on Richard II no less than on Catiline.⁶

But if the body politic is more than the King, neither are the two separable, a point which Gaunt makes through a wealth of word-play:

A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown
Whose compass is no bigger than thy head,
And yet, incaged in so small a verge,
The waste is no whit lesser than thy land. (II.i.100-03)

Renaissance political theorists turned most frequently to the comparison between the bodies natural and politic to assert the organic link between a sovereign and his realm, as does Shakespeare in Macbeth and Coriolanus. In Richard II, however, the central image in this context is that of the garden. England's destruction of itself is paralleled by Richard's loss of his own identity (II.i.198, 241), while he himself is the fairest flower, "Anointed, crowned, planted many years" (IV.i.127) in a garden stained both by his neglect, and the hewing down of the Duke of Gloucester by "murder's bloody axe" (I.ii.21). The plucking down of Richard, however, far from curing the ills of the body politic, increases the disorderly violence of Richard's garden to the point where Carlisle threatens that "The blood of English shall manure the ground" (IV.i.137). Bolingbroke tacitly assents to Carlisle's vision of the destruction of England in his regret that "blood should sprinkle me to make me grow" (V.vi.46), while in the opening lines of Henry IV, he is still hopelessly striving to set aside the heritage of a deed which has made a mockery of the natural processes of growth:

6 Ecclesiastical Polity, V.i.1; cf. above p.148.

No more the thirsty entrance of this soil,
 Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood,
 No more shall trenching war channel her fields,
 Nor bruise her flow'rets with the armed hoofs
 Of hostile paces: . . . (1 Henry IV, I.i.5-9)

Bolingbroke himself, therefore, provides the most telling endorsement of the ideal of commonwealth which he so grossly violates. Northumberland also assents to this ideal in his own opportunistic way. Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby had evidently been listening intently to the criticisms of Richard advanced by Gaunt and York, since after Gaunt's death and the departure of the King, they repeat exactly the same points. Their ostensible concern for the commonwealth is, however, balanced by their self-seeking aim, less to set things to rights, than to seek "shelter to avoid the storm" (II.i.264) - just as the flatterers Bushy, Bagot, and Greene whom they reproach are later to do. Northumberland displays the initial caution which inevitably characterises the shrewd man's confession of evil, or at least formally treasonable intent: we may recall Tiberius's reserve at the beginning of his first interview with Sejanus, or the verbal hedging between Lenox and the other lord, or Malcolm and Macduff in Macbeth (III.vi; IV.iii). Urged on by his companions, however, he reveals the nigh approach of Bolingbroke to England, delayed only by the King's departure for Ireland, and outlines a curiously abstract plan:

If then we shall shake off our slavish yoke,
 Imp out our drooping country's broken wing,
 Redeem from broking pawn the blemish'd crown,
 Wipe off the dust that hides our sceptre's gilt,
 And make high majesty look like itself,
 Away with me in post to Ravenspurgh; . . . (II.i.291-96)

These lines could be construed as revealing an honest, and perhaps quite permissible intent to reform the King, and to repair the damage done by

his followers (after the manner of the dissident lords in Woodstock). But for him to do this by waiting till the true King has left the realm and joining the ranks of a banished man casts a quite different light on his words, and implicates him in Bolingbroke's "gross rebellion and detested treason", even though we cannot be sure at this stage that making high majesty look like itself will necessarily involve Bolingbroke's seizure of the crown. The point is that, even with fellow-conspirators whom he now knows he can trust, Northumberland announces his half-formulated plan of rebellion with words which in another context might have been spoken by Gaunt. The treasonable attitude lurking behind these lines becomes explicit when Northumberland attempts to force Richard during the deposition scene to read out a list of the

grievous crimes
Committed by your person and your followers
Against the state and profit of this land;
That, by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily depos'd. (IV.i.223-27)

This is a direct indictment of Richard and an assertion of the right to depose an unjust king such as we never hear from Bolingbroke, and which the latter suppresses when Richard proves intractable. Northumberland's retort that "The commons will not then be satisfied" (1.272) is a nice comment on the consequences of Bolingbroke's "courtship to the common people" (I.iv.24). The popular feeling against Richard which Bolingbroke has skilfully exploited demands revenge against its fallen master far less bloody, but in essence comparable to that of the mob in Sejanus.

In the second chapter, we saw how unorthodox and subversive political arguments in Elizabethan England would naturally reason from a universally accepted idea, and the treatment of the theme of obedience in Richard II is a reflection of this tendency in contemporary thought.

The idea of the English commonwealth, expounded at certain key points in the play such as Gaunt's deathbed speech or the scene in the royal garden, and constantly alluded to in its attendant patterns of imagery, particularly that of natural and humanly ordered growth, informs the speech and actions of both the king's critical but loyal supporters and the rebels.⁷ As in Sejanus, it is those who are most keenly aware of what true civil order is, and how it is being violated - Shakespeare's Gaunt, Jonson's Sabinus and Lepidus - who recognise the pointlessness of rash disobedience. There is one further group of characters, namely Richard's favourites, whose obedience to their sovereign has nothing to do with the broader idea of commonwealth. When set against the hypocritical deference of Bolingbroke, or Northumberland's politic appeals to the good of the realm, the straightforward allegiance of Bushy, Bagot, and Greene to Richard in person - including his faults - cannot but appear favourable by contrast, even though we know it to be allegiance of the wrong kind. Indeed Shakespeare goes so far as to emphasise their capacity for feeling in their attempts to comfort the Queen and their pity for the hopeless predicament of York. But their sympathy for him is uttered from the security of a refusal to give the requested aid in raising a force to combat Bolingbroke. Such assistance is out of the question, since their support of Richard's oppressive extortions means that the commons will do little for them except "tear us all to pieces" (II.ii.138). Having placed themselves, by their blind allegiance to

7 Though my interpretation of Richard II, both in this and other aspects, is indebted to the context of ideas developed by E. W. Talbert in the earlier chapters of The Problem of Order, my emphasis on the pervasive idea of commonwealth is quite different from his account of the play which sees Shakespeare developing antithetical ideas of kingship and English history ("Lancastrian", "Yorkist", and "Richardian").

Richard, in a position where they cannot act to save him, Bushy and Greene regain through the courage with which they face an unmerited death some of the dignity they have squandered in life.

III

Many of the rebels of Renaissance drama - Sejanus, Catiline, Byron, the rebels of Henry IV - are ranged against formidable opponents. Bolingbroke, on the other hand, confronts a King whose steadiness under fire soon collapses into self-pity. Shakespeare's refusal to locate the motive of Bolingbroke's return in a definite ambition towards the crown, in marked opposition to his sources,⁸ emphasises the extent to which Richard is responsible for his own downfall. The formal ceremony of unkinging himself sets the seal on an exercise of rule which has consistently violated the principles of true kingship and the rights of his subjects, and thus revealed Richard as a man "possess'd now to depose" himself (II.i.108). Thence arises the contradictory feeling that his downfall is the inevitable outcome of a historical process (often specified in critical discussion as the transition from Mediaeval to Renaissance ideals of sovereignty), since Bolingbroke ascends the throne with hardly a blow being struck or a harsh word exchanged; and, equally

8 Holinshed writes that a large number of English nobles, churchmen, and leading citizens invited the banished Bolingbroke to return to England, promising him "all their aid, power, and assistance, if he, expelling King Richard, as a man not meet for the office he bare, would take upon him the scepter, rule, and diademe of his native land and region." W. G. Boswell-Stone, Shakespeare's Holinshed (New York, 1896; rpt. 1966), p.96. Cf. Edward Halle, The Union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre and Yorke (1550; facsimile rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), fol. 4b.

important, that it could so easily have been prevented by the firm and timely action which his followers urge on the errant King. Richard II is, in fact, one of the few Elizabethan or Jacobean plays in which a king's undisputed hereditary right to rule is set against his equally clear inability to hold onto his power, even by unprincipled methods. It is this combination of circumstances which generates Richard's extremely elaborate and evolving attitude towards his position.

During the first act, Richard shows himself acutely conscious of his royalty, and of the grand style which befits it: "lions make leopards tame"; "We were not born to sue but to command" (I.i.174, 196). But he is equally blind to the responsibilities his position entails, and the "thousand dangers" he will pluck on his head by neglecting them. His discourteous treatment of Gaunt and the seizure of his estate is less an act of wilful tyranny than a blunder committed in sheer ignorance of its consequences. When challenged by York in a later scene, Bolingbroke's request to "let me know my fault" (II.iii.105) bears the mark of pretended innocence. Richard, however, asks a similar question quite genuinely, reacting to York's forceful rebuke like an innocent child: "Why, uncle, what's the matter?" (II.i.186).

But it is the imminent loss of his power in the third act which calls forth Richard's most exaggerated ideas of his own authority (just as the waning power of the Stuart kings was later to elicit an increasing insistence on the royal prerogative). Conversely it is the confident tyrant like Tiberius who is so little obsessed with the dignity of his position, or natural sovereigns like Duncan or Jonson's Augustus who readily assume fellowship and equality with their subjects. When approached by Northumberland at Flint Castle, Richard comments on his failure to perform the customary obeisance: "how dare thy joints forget /

To pay their awful duty to our presence?" (III.iii.75-76). Richard's curious and frequent use of synecdoche - in this case it is not Northumberland but his joints which forget to do their duty - implies a system of allegiance based not on conscious and responsible choice, but one in which each member naturally and involuntarily fulfils its proper function. Threatening Gaunt with execution in the previous act, he states that were the old man not his uncle:

This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head
Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders. (II.i.122-23)

Again it is Gaunt's shoulders which are at fault, and the slick word-play suggests the ease with which the disrespectful man should reap the reward of his ill-timed words. A similar attitude is implicit in his appeal to his native earth to join the fight against Bolingbroke with venomous creatures and stinging nettles which will annoy the "treacherous feet, / Which with usurping steps do trample thee" (III.ii.16-17). Before the rightful king can be overcome by rebellion, he claims, "This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones / Prove armed soldiers" (II.23-24). Even the usurper will be unable to resist the force of this cosmic hypnotism. When Bolingbroke sees Richard reasserting his power, "His treasons will sit blushing in his face, / Not able to endure the sight of day" (II.51-52). Bolingbroke's complexion will demonstrate its sympathetic response to the natural order in spite of itself (just as Gaunt's stern counsel had chased Richard's blood from the "native residence" of his cheeks), and he will thus be "self-affrighted".

Richard's attitude is not mere fantasy, but truth misunderstood and misapplied. Macbeth, for example, is set in a more directly

metaphysical world in which the entire cosmos reacts against a disturbance of order in just the way that Richard envisages. "Stones have been known to move and trees to speak" to reveal the "secret'st man of blood" (III.iv.122, 125), while the self-affrighted Macbeth trembles at his own bloody deed. But in the world of history, the natural tendency of order to reassert itself is subject to the operation of time, or may be temporarily thwarted by human agency. Bolingbroke eventually suffers from the personal disintegration which overtakes Macbeth with precipitate suddenness, and which Richard thinks his own presence will be sufficient to induce. The commonwealth will slowly but surely cast up the foreign body it has swallowed in ignorant haste.

There is similarly a kernel of distorted truth in his confident reliance on heavenly protection, on the grounds that "if angels fight, / Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right" (III.ii.61-62). Richard is claiming for himself a divine right which more traditional thinking would grant to the entire social order. Renaissance authors, moreover, could cite numerous instances of unsuccessful rebels as proof of "how just the Heavens are in pourcing and thundering downe a weighty vengeance on their unnatural intents, even to the worst Princes: Much more to those, for guard of whose Piety and Vertue, the Angels are in continuall watch, and God himself miraculously working."⁹ But Richard makes the classic - fatalistic - error of failing to recognise that "The means that heaven yields must be imbrac'd / And not neglected" (11.29-30).

It is an almost invariable rule in Renaissance drama that the sovereign who discourses volubly on his own right and power, or (and this

9 Sejanus, "The Argument" (1605 Quarto ed.), Herford and Simpson, IV, 353.

does not only apply to sovereigns) who confidently claims divine sanction for his actions is - either wilfully or ignorantly - disguising a lack of them. This is a corollary of the deep-seated assumption that a good ruler's actions are closely circumscribed both by the needs and rights of his subjects, and by the laws of a God whose support could not be counted on, and whose designs were often inscrutable. Though Richard's self-aggrandisement would have found an echo in the hearts of contemporary audiences, who were steeped in a culture glorifying the power, wisdom, and near infallibility of their own monarch, Shakespeare's emphasis on his unfitness to rule, on the self-imposed nature of the disasters which overtake him (which is not to say that Bolingbroke's rebellion is justified), draws on a more serious and fundamental tradition of humanist thought.

IV

Richard's failure to rule properly is interpreted by both Gaunt and York as a shameful degeneration from the glory of his ancestors. The kinship of the central characters, both with each other and with past and future generations, is a crucial part of Shakespeare's depiction of the rise of barbarism and the widespread disorder occasioned by misrule. Tourneur similarly employs the idea of the degeneration from father to son in The Revenger's Tragedy, while Germanicus in Sejanus has a function comparable to that of Edward III and the Black Prince in Richard II as the embodiment of ancestral virtue.¹⁰ But no other dramatist displays so consistent and profound an interest as Shakespeare in the correlation

10 Cf. Peter G. Phialas, "The Mediaeval in Richard II," SQ, XII (1961), 305-10.

of politics and kinship. This, however, is less a mark of his singularity, than of his response to the contemporary assumption that the family and the state were comparable forms of social organisation, an assumption most readily apparent in the idea of a king as the father of his people.

The destruction wreaked on personal and kindred bonds by political strife is central to Richard II. The King himself, having spilled the blood of his uncle Gloucester, banished his cousin, and thereby caused the death of his uncle Gaunt, suffers a similarly cruel severance:

Bad men, you violate
A two-fold marriage - 'twixt my crown and me,
And then betwixt me and my married wife. (V.i.71-73)

In its simplest form, this idea is present in even so unsophisticated a play as Gorboduc, and was already in Shakespeare's mind when, in the battle of Towton in 3 Henry VI, he dramatised the mutual breakdown of order in the family and the state by the appearance of a "Son that hath kill'd his Father", followed by a "Father that hath kill'd his Son". Essentially the same idea is still present in Macbeth's awareness of the "double trust" he is violating in killing his kinsman, king, and guest. In Richard II, the main emphasis is on the difficulty of balancing conflicting claims, a difficulty which increases as the action progresses. Gaunt has no trouble in recognising that his duty to the King prevents him from taking the revenge for his brother Gloucester's death which the laws of kind, according to the dead man's widow, would seem to demand. But when it comes to the sentence of banishment on Bolingbroke, Gaunt admits that his attempted impartiality has in fact done an injustice both to himself and to his son:

O, had it been a stranger, not my child.
 To smooth his fault I should have been more mild,
 A partial slander sought I to avoid,
 And in the sentence my own life destroy'd. (I.iii.239-42)

York's difficulties are still more acute. The news of Bolingbroke's return places him in a dilemma similar to that of Gaunt over the murder of Gloucester. For while he is uncle to both of them, "conscience and my kindred" (II.ii.115) bid him right Bolingbroke's wrongs, while "my oath / And duty" (II.ii.112-13) argue in favour of Richard. This is, moreover, a conflict in which York is personally involved as the King's lieutenant, with the duty of opposing the de facto power of Bolingbroke. After an initial stern rebuke of his nephew, which York admits he cannot second with blows, he drifts into a weary neutrality which is, practically speaking, support for the King's enemy; and it is eventually he who first proclaims King Henry IV. But this is not the end of his troubles. On discovering his son's plot to murder the new King, York pleads for the sternest punishment possible, thus taking to an extreme the false impartiality of which Gaunt willingly accused himself. His excess is, however, not a simple error of judgement, but a reflection of his own false position. Sensing that Aumerle's treachery implicitly upbraids his own (albeit unwilling) desertion of the king, he insists that "Thou kill'st me in his life" (V.iii.70). The multiple ironies of this scene, in which the "loyal father of a treacherous son" (1.58) - a phrase in which the epithets might with justice be reversed - pleads for the death of his son to another treacherous son of a loyal father,¹¹ are an implicit refutation of York's assertion that "This fester'd joint

11 These ironies are untangled by James Winny, The Player King, pp.75-78.

cut off, the rest rest sound" (1.83). The widespread and increasing malignity of the disease afflicting England, imaginatively conveyed by the degeneration from father to son, is such that it is now even less possible to heal the body politic by a simple amputation than it was for Bolingbroke to exterminate the caterpillars of the commonwealth without uprooting the garden itself. Whereas the degeneration of Jonson's Rome in Sejanus and Catiline is described solely in general terms by ostensibly objective observers of the present barbarism (Silius, Sabinus, the Choruses), in Richard II a comparable historical process is further brought home to the audience by its embodiment in an image - the treacherous son - which is central to the action.

V

Richard himself is the most conspicuously treacherous son of a loyal father, sadly lacking in the "Christian service and true chivalry" (II.i.54) represented by the Black Prince and his father Edward III, which now lives only in the memories of Gaunt and York and, appropriately, in a man who has been forever banished from England, namely Mowbray. But his position as rightful though erring king adds a further dimension to this theme. Shakespeare makes use of the peculiar aptness in the analogy between the "fair sequence and succession" of the family and of the state; for while a man may shame the glory of his ancestors in such a way as effectively to deny his kin, in a straightforward sense he can never be anything but his father's son. So Richard can effectively depose himself by his exercise of rule, can reverse the ceremony of his coronation and renounce the cares and responsibilities of kingship. Nevertheless, his royalty will never leave him, since

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
 Can wash the balm off an anointed king;
 The breath of worldly men cannot depose
 The deputy elected by the Lord; . . . (III.ii.54-57)

One might retort that while sea-water or the breath of worldly men cannot depose Richard, his own misgovernment and Bolingbroke's artful opportunism can. But there is a deeper truth behind the unwarranted confidence of these lines. The final act shows Richard recovering a form of royalty while reconciling himself - albeit hesitantly and incompletely - to his actual loss of power and status. The dramatic situation of a ruler, bereft of authority and liberty, asserting his own invincible nobility of character, is an effective device for conveying the genuine debasement and imprisonment of the politically ascendant world which has defeated him. Webster drew on this aspect of Richard II for The Duchess of Malfi. A similar function is performed by the Cato of the final two acts of Caesar and Pompey, in which the rise to power of Caesar in several respects parallels that of Bolingbroke. Richard, however, far from retreating into a Stoic preservation of those virtues which have been thwarted and defeated in the world, is in effect asserting a royalty which had previously been his only in name.

The first scene of this final act, in which Richard takes leave of his wife on the way to captivity, finds the deposed king at his lowest ebb. The Queen chides him for his tame submissiveness, urging him to remember that he is still "a lion and the king of beasts" (V.i.34); but Richard, addressing her as "Good sometimes queen", desires no further existence than as the subject of a "lamentable tale" which will "send the hearers weeping to their beds / . . . For the deposing of a rightful king" (11.44, 50). The plot to reinstate Richard, which is the main subject of the two scenes following, reminds us that

to some at least he is still the rightful king in more than mere sentiment. Then in the brief scene in which he plans Richard's murder, Exton refers to both Richard and Bolingbroke as "the king" within the space of a few lines. When therefore he asserts "I am the king's friend, and will rid his foe" (V.iv.11), he implicitly anticipates that confusion of friends and foes which characterises both Richard's murder and - looking forward to Henry IV - the whole of the new king's reign. Exton is Bolingbroke's "friend" whom the latter rejects as an enemy (as he will later find himself in even more bitter opposition to Northumberland); Bolingbroke wishes Richard dead, and yet can "love him murdered" (V.vi.40).

During the scene of his imprisonment and death, Richard confirms and extends these hints of his continuing royalty. The poor groom who comes to look on his "sometimes royal master's face" (V.v.75) reproduces Exton's confusion of titles in a slightly comical form: "I was a poor groom of thy stable, king, / When thou wert king" (ll.72-73). On this occasion, Richard does not deny his royalty outright, as he did to his wife, but rather with humorous irony by dubbing the groom a "noble peer", his "gentle friend" (ll.67, 81). The sense in which these epithets are merited, the true nobility of the groom's courageous and touching allegiance, may remind us of Richard's wry observation to his wife that the men who now enjoy his power are mere "beasts" (V.i.35). Musing on Bolingbroke's usurpation of his horse Barbary, he exhibits an awareness, such as might have saved him in the past, that his inherited position may effectively be negated by his actions: he was not born a horse, and yet is now condemned to "bear a burden like an ass, / Spurr'd, gall'd, and tir'd by jauncing Bolingbroke" (V.v.93-94). Richard does not have to wait long to test this insight in deeds. By courageously defending his life, he echoes the valour of his ancestors, and dies

affirming the identity of his own person with the England which, by this act above all, is being transformed into the bloody garden prophesied by Carlisle: "Exton, thy fierce hand / Hath with the king's blood stain'd the king's own land" (11.109-10).

VI

The opening lines of Henry IV, which was written shortly after Richard II, clearly establish this as a continuation of the earlier play. Henry is still determined to purge his guilt by a crusade, the ideal embodiment of that "Christian service and true chivalry" which he above all men has violated, and his resolution is still balked by the unceasing "civil butchery" which daubs the lips of the field of England with her own children's blood. The pattern of degeneration from father to son is, moreover, apparently to be repeated by the "riot and dishonour" (I.i.84) of Hal - previously mentioned in Richard II - which Henry ruefully contrasts with the valour of "so blest a son" as Hotspur.

The father-son relationship is, in Henry IV even more so than Richard II, the central image around which revolves Shakespeare's exploration of kingship, and more particularly, of who is best fitted to rule over England. Since Henry's claim to the throne is not based on hereditary right, this is a more doubtful question than during the reign of Richard II, whose right to rule the present king had never openly challenged. In both parts of Henry IV, the King is ostensibly the loyal father of a treacherous son, the conscientious sovereign striving to heal the wounds of his country, which Hal's apparent wildness will tear open afresh. But Henry's usurpation has itself ruptured the "fair sequence and succession" of hereditary kingship, and it is therefore

appropriate that he himself virtually disowns his offspring by wishing that Hotspur were his son and heir to the throne, both in this first scene, and (more obliquely) in his later interview with Hal. "Even as I was then," he claims, "is Percy now" (A, III.ii.96), while Hal is "almost an alien to the hearts / Of all the court and princes of my blood" (ll.34-35), and stands in the "very line" (i.e. rank and lineage) of King Richard. Hal's doubtful parentage, moreover, is both the form and subject matter of the extemporal play in the tavern; as so often in Shakespeare, the play within the play presents in immediate physical terms a metaphorical truth about the play as a whole.

Such imaginary confusion of fathers and sons is a mark of the distance travelled by England on the road to chaos from Richard II, in which sons merely failed to live up to the pattern of excellence set by their acknowledged fathers. But the seeds of confusion may be found in the earlier play, sown by Bolingbroke when, on returning to England, he sets up York as his father in order to gain his support (Richard II, II.iii.116-27). On a later occasion, Richard points out that his cession of the crown to Bolingbroke cannot be even imaginatively equated with a natural succession:

Cousin, I am too young to be your father,
Though you are old enough to be my heir; . . . (III.iii.204-05)

In Henry IV, however, such anomalies have become the norm, and it is Hal's task in Part One to reverse this uncertainty by proving to his father the truth of his contention, "I am your son" (A, III.ii.134). In the moment of his death by Hal's sword, Hotspur confesses that the bitterness of defeat lies most in the loss of "those proud titles thou hast won of me" (A, V.iv.78). It is Henry, himself continually associated

in Richard II with the sin of pride, who has bestowed on Hotspur these "proud titles" most lavishly: "the theme of honour's tongue, / Amongst a grove the very straightest plant", "sweet Fortune's minion and her pride", "so blest a son" (A, I.i.79-82). Hal's acquisition of these titles is an implicit affirmation of the bond which his father had denied.

As the strongest tribute to Hotspur comes from his enemy the King (backed up by Hal as he challenges his rival to single combat), so it is a rebel, Sir Richard Vernon, who is most eloquent in praise of the chivalry displayed by Hal, whom he has seen "witch the world with noble horsemanship" (A, IV.i.110). The image of horsemanship - symbolising the skill required in the governor to direct brute strength to a fruitful end - is also of central importance in the question of who is most fit to be king, and runs parallel to the father-son idea. The noble horseman Hal is up to a point the heir of Bolingbroke, whose victory over Richard is consummated by his triumphant ride into London on the King's own horse. But while we recognise the noble qualities which enable Bolingbroke to control his "hot and fiery steed" (Richard II, V.ii.8) - whereas Richard is "Wanting the manage of unruly jades" (III.iii.179) - we are insistently reminded that it is not his proper place. The horse seems aware that he is bearing an "aspiring rider" (V.ii.10). The royal groom tells the imprisoned Richard of his grief in seeing Bolingbroke astride "That horse that thou so often hast bestrid, / That horse that I so carefully have dress'd!" (V.v.79-80). And in greeting his virtual subjects "Bare headed, lower than his proud steed's neck" (V.ii.19), Bolingbroke displays some of that exaggerated deference which Sabinus found so ominous:

When power, that may command, so much descends,
Their bondage, whom it stoupes to, it intends.

(Sejanus, I.396-97)

The political implications of the image of horsemanship are re-established early in Henry IV by Hotspur: "That roan shall be my throne" (A, II.iii.71); we are perhaps meant to recall that the royal horse which passed from Richard to Bolingbroke was a roan. But Hotspur's horsemanship is, as his name implies, the image of that

harsh rage,
Defect of manners, want of government,
Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain (A, III.i.177-79)

which makes him even less fit to rule than Henry. In this respect Hotspur is, moreso than Hal, the true son of his father, who sped frantically on horseback to join the returning Bolingbroke in Richard II (II.i.296-300).

Hal's "noble horsemanship", by contrast, exhibits not only those qualities of skilful control which are so lacking in Hotspur, but a super-human, angelic grace which his usurping father could not attain. He vaults into the seat of princely chivalry - and, by anticipation, the throne itself - with "such ease" as suggests that this is his proper and natural role. In a later scene, Vernon again, reporting Hal's challenge to Hotspur, draws attention to a particular quality already implicit in his equestrian skill, namely "a double spirit / Of teaching and of learning instantly" (A, V.ii.63-64), which he says - and humanist political writers would be in unanimous agreement - "became him like a prince indeed" (1.60). These qualities of chivalry, command, and self-control, while allowing Hal to claim the title of his father's son, set him in implicit opposition to Henry almost as much as to Hotspur; indeed

he is the first true prince (in historical terms) of the English history plays. The affirmation of his right to be king, therefore, entails a drawing away from his father, which forms the substance of his development in the second part of Henry IV, and culminates in his adoption of the Lord Chief Justice as "a father to my youth" (B, V.ii.118).

Shakespeare's use of the father-son idea to define both Hal's kinship with and difference from his father, both his position as true heir to the throne by succession of blood and virtue, and his dissociation from the lawless strife which has characterised his father's reign, may appear sophistical when defined in such abstract terms. But it is rendered dramatically credible by a repeated emphasis on the difficulty of Hal's position, not least the pain he must cause his father by seeming, through his preparation for a life of misrule, to render worthless Henry's efforts to secure peace. As the King ruefully remarks on hearing news of the defeat of his former friend Northumberland, Fortune writes "her fair words still in foulest letters" (B, IV.iv.104); and the bitterest stroke of this even-handed justice is that Hal can only prepare for a reign of peace and order by seeming to reject his father (as in the end he actually does), and to embrace the riot and dishonour which Henry has vainly tried to disown. But on his first appearance as King, Hal obliquely suggests that his sudden reformation itself amounts to a rejection of all that his father stands for: this scene in fact forms an anticipatory parallel to the more overt rejection of Falstaff. The dead king, he claims, is "gone wild into his grave, / For in his tomb lie my affections" (B, V.ii.123-24). The riot and dishonour associated with Hal more properly belong to his father, and in thus casting off "the soil of the achievement" (B, IV.v.189), the new King effectively ruptures the succession of inherited guilt, putting both himself and

the realm under the guidance of Law. To drive home this redefinition of both himself and his father, Hal employs a singular application of the conventional image of the king as the fount of honour: "The tide of blood in me / Hath proudly flow'd in vanity till now" (B, V.ii.132-33). The word-play on "blood" (riotous spirits, lineage, the blood which has stained his father), coupled with the allusion to Henry's pride, enables Hal to make a clean sweep of his immediate past, of the guilt inherited from his father, of Henry himself.

Both Henry and Hotspur are tried and found wanting. Hal, on the other hand, abundantly demonstrates his fitness for rule. At the close of Henry IV, we are left with nothing less than the ideal Renaissance prince who appears to have stepped straight out of the pages of a humanist political treatise. The testing of this ideal is still in the future, and what distinguishes Hal in these plays is the studied ease with which he slides into a role defined by all the most important images and ideas habitually used to characterise the office of a king: the supreme importance of chivalry, the basis of just rule in self-mastery, the rule by and under the law, the burdensome cloak of majesty (B, V.ii.44-5), the ordering of the "great body of our state" with "limbs of noble counsel" (11.135-36). Hal, like many monarchs of Renaissance drama, is a lonely man; at the close of Henry IV, we catch only the first hint of that close bond among the "band of brothers" which is so intensely realised in Henry V. But his loneliness is neither that of the tyrant who, like Macbeth and up to a point Henry, has banished from himself "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends" (Macbeth, V.iii.25), nor that of the good ruler who, like Cicero and indeed Henry V, takes on himself alone the appalling burden of his subjects' guilt. It is rather the isolation of one who miraculously escapes from and turns back the broken promises,

the shattered hopes, and the wasted time which hitherto had been presented as virtually the defining processes of history.

VII

Hal is a man who keeps his faith as befits a prince, who "never promiseth but he means to pay" (A, V.iv.42). Whereas in Richard II, the virtues of faithfulness and trust are, as the opening lines of the play indicate, enshrined in the verbal commitment of oaths and bonds, in Henry IV these are more usually described in terms of honest commercial transaction. Commercial images pervade both parts of the play at least as thoroughly as the image of the garden informs Richard II, and have a unifying function within various patterns of imagery, and indeed in relation to the action itself. The incident of Hotspur's prisoners, which precipitates the dramatic conflict, arises from both his own and King Henry's desire to drive a hard bargain. The King fails to close the deal, and the goods are sent back without payment as a sound investment. The rebels of Part One eventually find themselves haggling over the division of a kingdom they have not yet purchased. The sub-plot centred on Falstaff shows the fat knight running up debt after debt until, with breathtaking impudence, he refuses to return the thousand pounds lent him by Shallow when his credit collapses. Through Falstaff in particular, the idea of commercial exchange is linked with the consumption of food and drink, and with the images of fatness and leanness, surfeit and disease, which are recurrent in Shakespeare's histories.¹²

12 See R. J. Dorius, "A Little More than a Little," SQ, XI (1960), 13-26.

Images of true or counterfeit currency, fine or base metal, form part of the theme of the true and false king already discussed: on a personal level this theme manifests itself as a problem of identity, of appearance and reality. Finally, the all-pervasive theme of Time¹³ is linked to commercial metaphors particularly through the word "redeem", which is further used to describe Hal's personal regeneration. Perhaps the most frequently exacted debt in these plays is the one which Time ultimately demands of all men, and which Hal lays before Falstaff prior to the battle of Shrewsbury: "thou owest God a death" (A, V.i.126).

The origin of these commercial metaphors, as of the father-son idea and the image of horsemanship, is to be found in Richard II, where Richard's debasement of the office of king into that of mere landlord is met by Northumberland's exhortation to "Redeem from broking pawn the blemish'd crown" (II.i.293). It is the difficulty of effecting this redemption, far greater than either he or Bolingbroke anticipated, that occasions the peculiar appropriateness of this pattern of imagery to the situation in Henry IV. For the attempt to cancel the increasing burden of debt consequent on Bolingbroke's usurpation necessarily involves - on the part of both Henry and the rebels - either an ever greater and more hazardous expenditure of men and moral credibility, in the hope of a reward which never seems to materialise; or, when this fails, dishonest and treacherous practices.

Henry, for example, finds himself in the position of bankrupt debtor to the Percies; his only asset, the crown, he cannot consider parting with. Hotspur fears that the debt Henry owes to himself,

13 The theme of Time is discussed by L. C. Knights in Ch. 3, "Time's Subjects. The Sonnets and 2 Henry IV," of Some Shakespearean Themes (London, 1959).

Northumberland, and Worcester will be settled only by the "bloody payment" of their deaths (A, I.iii.183-84); and later, in confronting Blunt with the rebels' demands, he asserts that Henry is a trickster who "Knows at what time to promise, when to pay" (A, IV.iii.53). This clear anticipation of Hal's description of himself as one who "never promiseth but he means to pay" points to a recurring contrast between Henry as the counterfeit king and Hal as the true prince - the "true piece of gold" as Falstaff refers to him (A, II.iv.485) - a contrast which culminates dramatically in the three-cornered combat between themselves and Douglas at Shrewsbury. Henry is accused of counterfeiting the person of a king by a man whose true mettle as a warrior is attested by both Falstaff (A, II.iv.345) and Hotspur (A, IV.i.1-5); and we may surmise that it is a recognition of this true mettle which induces Hal to pardon Douglas, just as his father once pardoned Carlisle. Henry, however, asserts his royalty, and determines to "assay" his enemy (A, V.iv.33). But it is he who is put to the trial, and only Hal's intervention prevents Douglas in his resolve to "win" the King. In so doing, the prince not only redeems his own "lost opinion" (1.47), but, as the pun on "tender" (1.48) indicates,¹⁴ begins to pay off the accumulated debt of Henry's misdeeds such as the King himself is powerless to effect.

The link established between Hotspur and Henry by the appearance of the father-son theme in the first scene of Part One is strengthened by the suggestion that Hotspur too is a counterfeit. For though his accusations of Henry's falsity and unfitness for the office of king contain some truth, he himself stands condemned on the same terms as

14 See N.E.D., Tender, sb.², 1b, "An offer of money, or the like, in discharge of a debt or liability".

one who seeks to "have bloody noses and crack'd crowns, / And pass them current too" (A, II.iii.94-95). Hotspur, moreover, is the rash leader of a rebellion which fails partly through its lack of the caution indispensable to a commercial enterprise. On their arrival at Shrewsbury, the rebels receive news of Northumberland's sickness, upon which Worcester, Hotspur, and Douglas debate whether to give battle in a scene which anticipates the Trojan council of war in Troilus and Cressida (II.ii) as a display of artful eloquence in the service of passion. Hotspur denies that Northumberland's absence will be fatal to them, since it would be unwise to "set the exact wealth of all our states / All at one cast" (A, IV.i.46-47). But far from being a counsel of wise caution, this merely forces them - like Falstaff - to "spend / Upon the hope of what is to come in" (II.54-55). The rebel armies are led to destruction by the alchemical imagination of a man who

lin'd himself with hope,
 Eating the air and promise of supply,
 Flatt'ring himself in project of a power
 Much smaller than the smallest of his thoughts,
 And so, with great imagination
 Proper to madmen, led his powers to death
 And winking leap'd into destruction. (B, I.iii.27-33)

These lines are the verdict on Hotspur delivered by Lord Bardolph in Part Two, and are a mark of the more realistic caution which characterises the second rebellion. Lord Bardolph himself describes their attempt in terms of a commercial project in which possible gains and losses must be carefully calculated (B, I.i.180-85; cf. I.iii.41-62), while a spirit of shrewd mercantile assessment lurks behind the Archbishop's ostensibly legal metaphor of the "equal balance" in which he has "justly weigh'd / What wrong our arms may do, what wrongs we suffer" (B, IV.i.67-68). It is therefore fitting that the rebels are defeated not by

the force of arms, but by the guile of Westmoreland and Prince John who, in seeming to break the terms of an agreement, point to the small print and argue that they have not broken faith because they have "pawn'd" none (B, IV.ii.112).

In the first part of Henry IV, the counterfeit Hotspur is defeated by the counterfeit Henry, assisted by the true piece of gold Hal; in the second part, a band of skilful projectors are outwitted by even more skilful examples of their own kind. Hal is set apart from this vicious and thankless world not only by dealing honestly and paying according to his promises, but also by paying "the debt I never promised" (A, I.ii.204). His princely bounty is most clearly apparent in such public gestures as his granting Falstaff credit for the death of Hotspur, or his release of Douglas "ransomless and free" (A, V.v.28), whereas Hotspur had done the same thing for his own gain. But in one of the many reminders during the tavern scene in Part One that he has not forgotten the role for which he is preparing himself, Hal unobtrusively displays the same gratuitousness in his promise to repay the money stolen at Gadshill "with advantage" (A, II.iv.540-41).

The pervasive commercial metaphor in Henry IV, therefore, defines an ideal of political conduct by which all the central characters but Hal are found wanting, and which is characterised by truth and good faith, by caution and foresight - not spending "Upon the hope of what is to come in" - by fulfilling or even exceeding one's obligations, qualities necessary in good government as in honest and prudent business. But a further important strand in this web of imagery, namely the crown itself as a commodity to be passed from hand to hand or to be sold to the highest bidder, cannot easily be assimilated to the same pattern of implication. Central to Richard II is the idea that not only the crown

of England, but the rights and property of its nobles can neither be seized by another nor alienated by their owners - who thus are not so much owners as guardians or stewards - without violating that "fair sequence and succession" which is the basis of continuing social order. Henry's usurpation has, however, debased the crown into just such a tradeable object, and Hotspur shows himself eager to exploit this fact when he complains to Blunt that the Percies "Did give him [Henry] that same royalty he wears" and that the supposed heir apparent Mortimer would be, "if every owner were well plac'd / Indeed his King" (A, IV. iii.55, 94-95). Henry hopes that the succession of his son will do something to reverse this situation: "what in me was purchas'd / Falls upon thee in a more fairer sort" (B, IV.v.199-200). But though the final act of the play draws a clear contrast between Hal's sober truthfulness and Henry's 'wildness', in the scene of Henry's death there is little indication that Hal moves beyond his father's prosaic attitude towards the office of king, which can always rely on physical strength to gloss over its moral weakness. Thinking himself alone with the dead Henry, Hal effects an exchange between the "imperial crown" and the "tears and heavy sorrows of the blood" which he will, so he promises his father, "pay thee plenteously" (B, IV.v.36-42). Later when Henry has uttered his last words of counsel, Hal exhibits none of his father's uneasiness concerning his irregular "purchase" of the crown:

You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me;
 Then plain and right must my possession be,
 Which I with more than with a common pain
 'Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain. (ll.221-24)

One cannot help wondering what sort of a right it is that would have to be maintained "'Gainst all the world". There is a revealing parallel

to Hal's mourning for his supposedly dead father in Henry V's mourning for the dead King Richard before the battle of Agincourt:

I Richard's body have interred new,
 And on it have bestow'd more contrite tears
 Than from it issued forced drops of blood;
 Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
 Who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up
 Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
 Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
 Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do;
 Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
 Since that my penitence comes after all,
 Imploring pardon. (Henry V, IV.i.291-301)

The genuine sorrow which Hal will pay to his dead father is more nobly motivated than the "contrite tears" for the death of Richard, designed to avert divine displeasure from his rule. But the underlying idea - Hal's purchase of the crown - is similar. In Henry V, the new king has begun to realise that true royalty can be bought by neither tears nor wealth.

VIII

The rebellion of Part Two, as we have seen, is contrasted with that of Part One as a more cautious and well-planned affair, executed in the spirit of shrewd commercialism. This, however, is only one aspect of a more general distinction between the two attempts to overthrow Henry, and between the moral characters of their respective leaders, a distinction which epitomises the increasing degradation of Bolingbroke's England. By dramatising two successive uprisings against a King who is himself a usurper, Shakespeare was able to explore more fully than any of his contemporaries the range of motives and methods apparent in quite diverse forms of rebellion. The slightly comparable example of Catiline,

in which Caesar and Crassus use Catiline as their stalking horse, is sufficient indication of how much greater a scope is afforded by Shakespeare's extended historical perspective.

In Richard II, the throne is seized from the rightful king with scarcely any attempt at self-justification either by the usurper himself or his supporters. Henry IV, however, is full of discussions, both among the rebels themselves, and between the rebels and the king or his emissaries, concerning, in the words of the Archbishop, "the occasion of our arms" (B, I.iii.86). This is chiefly because the rebels are able to affect a plausible show of moral probity in chiding a usurper and an oath-breaker, though the exact nature of their complaints vary. Worcester, for example, thinks mainly in terms of family honour, and of having failed to secure a large enough share of the spoils consequent on Bolingbroke's rise to power, as his very first words indicate:

Our house, my sovereign liege, little deserves
The scourge of greatness to be us'd on it,
And that same greatness too which our own hands
Have help to make so portly. (A, I.iii.10-13)

Similar charges are repeated shortly before the battle of Shrewsbury, when Worcester reminds Henry of his ingratitude and faithlessness to "myself, and all our house" (A, V.i.31). Worcester's selfish and calculating cynicism allies him more with the rebels of Part Two than with his fellow-kinsmen. It is he who plans the rebellion, urges its execution with alacrity, but attempts to restrain Hotspur in his foolhardy haste in desiring to give battle. And it is his suspicious concealment of the "liberal and kind offer of the King" (A, V.ii.2) which precipitates a conflict that might have been avoided.

Hotspur and his father are in truth driven by similar motives of personal and family honour, but are lacking in Worcester's dispassionate

bluntness. At their first appearance, they have already canonized "Richard that dead is" (Worcester's words) as "the unhappy King" and "Richard, that sweet lovely rose" (A, I.iii.144, 146, 173), while their glib and parenthetical contrition for his death (ll.147, 172) suggests that such sentimentality has passed from open self-deception to become engrained in their very way of thinking. So when Hotspur is eventually challenged by Sir Walter Blunt, he anticipates Worcester's charge of Henry's ingratitude, but goes much further by objecting to Richard's deposition, putting forward Mortimer as the true heir, and questioning Henry's title as "Too indirect for long continuance" (A, IV.iii.105). The depth of his sincerity has been sounded in advance by the appearance of Mortimer, a mere pawn in the hands of the Percies, who is forced to share 'his' kingdom with Hotspur and Glendower, even to the extent of ceding part of his land to Hotspur by a proposed redirection of the River Trent - a more terrible trenching of the fair face of England than was ever effected by the civil wars attendant on Bolingbroke's usurpation; and the lack of concern at Mortimer's failure to appear at Shrewsbury confirms that Hotspur's point about the succession is in reality a mere bargaining counter.

But it is probably just because Northumberland and Hotspur have half convinced themselves - as their references to Richard in private indicate - that they are the restorers of true inheritance, that they fail to use this as an effective means of gaining support. If we are to believe Morton in the first scene of Part Two, Henry was able successfully to brand his enemies as rebels, with disastrous consequences for their fighting capacity:

For that same word "rebellion" did divide
 The action of their bodies from their souls,
 And they did fight with queasiness, constrain'd,
 As men drink potions, that their weapons only
 Seem'd on our side; but, for their spirits and souls,
 This word "rebellion" - it had froze them up
 As fish are in a pond. (B, I.i.194-200)

This is not a fanciful excuse for the failure of Hotspur's armies, but a genuine indication of the problem facing any rebel who, in order to be successful, must convince some or all of his followers - as did Bolingbroke - that he "did nothing purpose 'gainst the state" (A, V.i.43). By the same token, Macbeth's soldiers facing the armies of Malcolm "on both sides do fight" (Macbeth, V.vii.25). The second rebellion will take account of this fact, and will be accordingly more formidable. Morton continues:

But now the Bishop
 Turns insurrection to religion;
 Suppos'd sincere and holy in his thoughts,
 He's follow'd both with body and with mind,
 And doth enlarge his rising with the blood
 Of fair King Richard, scrap'd from Pomfret stones;
 Derives from heaven his quarrel and his cause;
 Tells them he doth bestride a bleeding land,
 Gasping for life under great Bolingbroke; . . . (11.200-08)

The Archbishop, who is the equal of Worcester in his unsentimental grasp of the political situation, nevertheless echoes the canonisation by Northumberland and Hotspur of the martyr-king Richard; but his is the more effective in that it is - we suspect - more deliberately contrived. These lines would have had a particular resonance for an Elizabethan audience accustomed to arguments for rebellion in defence of a "bleeding land", derived from either a puritan or a papist heaven. The religious pretext of this second rebellion, moreover, makes it not only doubly dangerous but doubly heinous, since religion was held to be the basis

and guarantor of political concord, as both Westmoreland and Prince John remind the rebel Archbishop (B, IV.i.32-52; IV.ii.4-30). Worcester is accused by King Henry at the close of Part One of failing to bear "like a Christian . . . / Betwixt our armies true intelligence" (A, V.v.9-10). The Archbishop, though implicitly contrasted with Worcester in his sincere desire for peace on the redress of their grievances, is guilty of an even more evil rupture of communication, not between man and man, but between man and God, by misusing his office as

The very opener and intelligencer
 Between the grace, the sanctities of heaven,
 And our dull workings. (B, IV.ii.20-22)

But there is nothing in Morton's speech which definitely refutes the notion that the Archbishop is "sincere and holy in his thoughts", and it is not until he reveals, during the first meeting of the rebels (I.iii), his utter contempt for the people whose yearning for Richard will be the mainstay of his rebellion, that doubts begin to arise. Most of this scene is occupied by a clear-headed discussion of practicalities, such as was never seen among the rebels of Part One; but at the close of this scene, the Archbishop muses on the forces which make and unmake kings. He draws attention to the fickleness of the common people, who greedily devour and then vomit forth their rulers, thus taking to its obscene conclusion King Henry's image of the people becoming "glutted, gorg'd, and full" with the presence of Richard (A, III.ii.84). The men for whose benefit he has supposedly scraped the blood of Richard from Pomfret stones regard their erstwhile king merely as the "dead vomit" which they would now eat up. Moreover in suggesting that rebellion is an outcome of the self-defeating discontent of men for whom "Past and to come seems best; things present, worst" (B, I.iii.108), the Archbishop

lays his finger on that failure to live in the present which is an attribute of many rebels of the Renaissance stage. His insight into the lack of trust in "these times", and into the base motives of the popular opposition to Henry, is divorced from any suggestion that he or his colleagues are somehow exempted from his own corrosive cynicism (as Hotspur desired to exonerate himself from the charges he laid upon the King). The Archbishop will also violate trust, and build "An habitation giddy and unsure / . . . on the vulgar heart" (1.90). It is a mark of the moral bankruptcy of Henry's England that an Archbishop can speak his own condemnation - perhaps knowingly - with such honesty.

The Archbishop's directness of speech in this scene is contrasted with the inconsequential confusion of his attempt to justify himself before Westmoreland. They are, he claims "all diseas'd" and must bleed for it, but he is not there as a physician, simply to "purge th'obstructions which begin to stop / Our very veins of life" (B, IV.i.54-56). He is no enemy to peace, but rather resolves to "show awhile like fearful war" (1.64); and, having observed the bloodshed recently occasioned by taking arms against the King, they themselves are in arms "Not to break peace, or any branch of it, / But to establish here a peace indeed" (11.84-85). Such contradiction from a man of the Archbishop's eloquence suggests that his concern for the sufferings of a "bleeding land" is scarcely held with any great conviction. In view of Prince John's behaviour in the following scene, his charge that they have been unable to approach the King with their complaints appears perfectly plausible; while his willingness to accept peace on the redress of their grievances suggests that these are indeed the true motive of the rebellion. But what the written "schedule" contains we do not know. While he may rely on the superstitions of the vulgar to gain their support, before his

equals the Archbishop is unable or unwilling to produce the sort of indignant self-justification employed by Hotspur. With surer insight, he relies on the inherent weakness of the usurper, which he understands better than does Henry himself:

Full well he knows
 He cannot so precisely weed this land
 As his misdoubts present occasion.
 His foes are so enrooted with his friends
 That plucking to unfix an enemy
 He doth unfasten so and shake a friend. (11.204-09)

That Henry cannot weed the garden of England as precisely as he would wish was made abundantly clear in Richard II, which showed the commonwealth being "pluck'd up root and all by Bolingbroke" (Richard II, III.iv.52). Prince John's arrest of the rebels means that the truth of these lines cannot be tested against those of Mowbray who (like Worcester in Part One) argues that they would be forever in danger from the King's suspicion. But the Archbishop fails to realise that, having begun his course of desperate remedies, Henry cannot but continue to destroy his enemies in the bitter knowledge that he will also unshake those who have been (like Northumberland) or perhaps still are his friends. It is a fine irony that one of the most calculating rebels in Shakespeare's histories attributes to his enemy a debilitating moral sensibility; but Henry's remorse has destroyed his peace of body and mind, not his dogged determination.

The Archbishop's freedom from self-deception when talking with his fellow-rebels, a quality pointedly absent in most rebels of the Renaissance stage, is a mark of how easily good faith and obedience may now be disregarded, even as values demanding lip-service. We are now far removed from the moral climate in which Northumberland could only

hint to his fellow-conspirators of a rebellion against King Richard by talking of the need to "make high majesty look like itself". The increasingly malignant disease afflicting England is likewise apparent in the illogical character of political strife, one aspect of which is the confusion of friends and enemies mentioned by the Archbishop himself. This confusion originated, as we have seen, in the murder of Richard. Bolingbroke's reign cannot but lead to ever greater disorder of this sort as a necessary result of the fact that (as Richard prophetically observed) "The love of wicked men converts to fear, / That fear to hate" (Richard II, V.i.66-67). The complement to this increasing enmity is the high praise or true estimation afforded several characters by their ostensible foes. The most conspicuous example is Vernon's eloquent praise of Hal on two occasions; and the alliance, both in life and death, of two men so utterly opposed in virtue and truthfulness (though alike in prudence) as Worcester and Vernon is sufficient indication that the dividing line between rebels and true subjects has no clear moral import. Shortly after their condemnation, moreover, Hal, almost as if in defiance of this judgement, proceeds to pardon the "vile Scot" who has almost killed his father. Even in Sejanus, where the division between 'good' and 'evil' characters is superficially so clear, we found Jonson suggesting covert links between the two. Perhaps nowhere in Renaissance drama is the grouping so significantly blurred as in Henry IV.

Even the most scrupulous and perceptive of the King's counsellors (leaving aside the Lord Chief Justice), namely Warwick, is not immune from such ironies. Warwick is the only one of the King's close associates who guesses at Hal's proposed reformation (B, IV.iv.67-68), and, like Hal in the tavern scene in Part One, he is wisely aware of the time

which has overtaken Henry unawares (B, III.i.32-35; cf. A, II.iv.516-18) Nevertheless, when Henry shows himself aware of "what rank diseases grow, / And with what danger, near the heart" of his kingdom, Warwick answers what he must know to be untrue, that it "may be restor'd / With good advice and little medicine" (B, III.i.39-43). Henry's entire reign has been a bitter demonstration of the impossibility of restoring political order by a simple amputation of the one festering joint, a plucking forth of the weeds, a decapitation of what the Archbishop most aptly terms "this Hydra son of war" (B, IV.ii.38). Only a few lines later, speaking in reply to Henry's recollection of Richard's prophecy concerning Northumberland, Warwick, the King's true friend, utters the truth which damns his King more than anything else in the play. He draws attention to the self-perpetuating nature of treachery, and observes that

by the necessary form of this
King Richard might create a perfect guess
That great Northumberland, then false to him,
Would of that seed grow to a greater falseness,
Which should not find a ground to root upon
Unless on you. (B, III.i.87-92)

It scarcely taxes one's powers of deduction to see how this is as much a condemnation of Henry as Northumberland. Warwick's startling honesty corresponds to that with which the Archbishop reveals the moral bankruptcy of his rebellion. But it is doubtful whether Henry can make this simple deduction. By recalling Warwick's reference to necessity, but with a crucial shift in its connotation - "Are these things then necessities? / Then let us meet them like necessities" (II.92-93) - Henry implies that the guilt of his original treachery can only be ceaselessly and pointlessly expiated by a dogged engagement with the

tasks that have flowed in its wake. Recalling his own rise to power, Henry had stated that "necessity so bow'd the state / That I and greatness were compell'd to kiss" (11.73-74); he is now learning that the iron hand of necessity never looses its grip. Warwick is in the unenviable position of counsellor to a man to whom the plain unvarnished truth, if fully grasped, would be all but a counsel of despair. His lapse into comfortable half-truths is an indication, comparable with Lepidus's admission of Silius's guilt, of the virtual impossibility of complete integrity under a ruler so deeply compromised as Henry.

IX

Though Shakespeare's dramatisation of the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV emphasises the ever increasing chaos, both moral and political, consequent on Richard's misrule and Bolingbroke's usurpation, the sense of impending disaster this would normally arouse is effectively neutralised by Hal's proposed reformation which is announced early in Henry IV, continually recalled in both parts of the play, and achieved on his coronation. The replacement of Hotspur by the Archbishop as leader of the rebel forces does not, therefore, have the same ominous force as, for example, the replacement of Sejanus by Macro as the chief power in Rome. But there has been much dispute as to whether Hal's regeneration, and in particular the rejection of Falstaff which this involves, is really as commendable as the explicit moral norms developed in the play suggest; or whether the rejection of Falstaff is not the clearest of many indications that Hal represents an ethic of cold and manipulative authority which Shakespeare deliberately renders distasteful. This distinction is simply a rough indication of the critical problem involved,

not intended to suggest that all the discussions of this question may be readily divided into two camps, and my own answer is one of compromise. Hal's role as the true prince, the only man able to cancel the accumulated burden of Henry's sin, and to restore peace, unity, and justice to a ravaged England, is, I believe, deliberately and effectively sustained. From a purely political point of view - without any of the distasteful connotations of 'policy' - Hal is an unequivocally heroic figure.

But the ideal of sovereignty which he represents is notable for its lack of a more rich and comprehensive ideal of civility, which is an integral part of the England of Richard II, however marred and defaced. One of the functions of Glendower, for example, is to suggest how the courtly graces of music and poetry, which he learned as a young man at the court of Richard (A, III.i.118-19), have now been ironically banished to a barbarous tribal society, borne there by a man in whom courtesy mingles with the superstition which Hotspur quite justifiably lampoons. Carlisle prophesied that should Henry become king, "Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels" (Richard II, IV.i.139). Glendower's learning and musical skill, inherited in part by a daughter who is quite divorced from English language and culture, is a comparable example of civilised values being displaced from their proper home. The whole of this episode in which Hotspur and Mortimer are seen with their wives before going to war is in fact a curious and isolated reminder of a world of social and domestic bonds of which Hal no less than Henry has no part. Though Hal restores the rule of Law, moreover, there is no suggestion that he recultivates the garden of England - apart, that is, from Falstaff's jocular reference to his drinking habits: "the cold blood he did naturally inherit of his father he hath like lean, sterile, and bare land manured,

husbanded, and tilled, with excellent endeavour of drinking good and good store of fertile sherris" (B, IV.iii.116-20). Though we are constantly reminded that England under Henry IV is a monstrous weed-choked garden drenched with blood, a positive use of the garden image as a representation of order in the home and in the state, of good husbandry, of sound education and civilisation such as might be restored by appropriate measures, does not reappear until the moving plea by Burgundy in Henry V (V.ii.23-67) for a recultivation of the garden of France ravaged by war. King Henry's reply is an indication of how little he has changed from the honest broker of his younger days, except insofar as he now drives a harder bargain:

If, Duke of Burgundy, you would the peace
Whose want gives growth to th'imperfections
Which you have cited, you must buy that peace
With full accord to all our just demands;
Whose tenours and particular effects
You have, enschedul'd briefly, in your hands. (11.68-73)

In Henry IV, the ideal of political conduct enshrined in images of commercial transaction, and the ideal of commonwealth embodied in the garden are never thus explicitly opposed. This is the clearest of many indications in Henry V that Shakespeare was alive to the shortcomings of Henry's heroic and military royalty. In the light of this exchange between Henry and Burgundy, it is difficult to resist the inference that Prince John's closing lines in 2 Henry IV are to be taken more literally than at first appears:

I will lay odds that, ere this year expire,
We bear our civil swords and native fire
As far as France. (B, V.v.105-07)

The unruly energies which have issued in the anarchy and barbarism of civil strife will not now march in "mutual well-beseeming ranks" (A, I.i.14) in a just cause, but will produce merely the same results elsewhere.

The difficulty is that such ambiguities tend to produce not a complex picture of Hal's rule, but quite contrary evaluations depending on which interpretation one follows (in this case, whether the conquest of France is a completion of the peace established in England, or an exportation of its civil war). In Malcolm, we shall see repeated several of the qualities which indicate Hal's fitness for rule, only in this case forming part of a much richer and more coherent idea of order, ranging from the little world of man to the entire universe, and including political order as an integral part. But if the curtain falls on Henry IV leaving us with a sense of questions unanswered, of slightly hollow ideals, Shakespeare is ready with his defence. For in the Epilogue he implies (with characteristic self-deprecation?) that if Hal, who pays according to his promise, is an unsatisfactory hero, he is nevertheless more than adequate to the play:

Be it known to you, as it is very well, I was lately here in the end of a displeasing play, to pray your patience for it, and to promise you a better. I meant indeed to pay you with this; which if like an ill venture it come unluckily home, I break, and you, my gentle creditors, lose. Here I promised you I would be, and I commit my body to your mercies. Bate me some, and I will pay you some, and, as most debtors do, promise you infinitely.

X

I began this chapter by suggesting a comparison between Richard II and Henry IV, and the Roman tragedies of Jonson and Chapman, as plays

concerned with the lapse into disorder and barbarism of previously civilised societies. Shakespeare's political thinking as revealed in these plays is, like that of Jonson, conditioned by a primary concern for the health of an entire society over a long period of time, in contrast to Greville's overriding concern for personal morality in political affairs. His treatment of the theme of historical degeneration, however, achieves a more sustained coherence than that of Jonson for several reasons. The moral decline of England, for example, is evident in the contrast of styles between the various rebellions. Many of the singular aspects of Bolingbroke's rebellion spring from the fact that Richard's right to be king is almost universally accepted, formally at least, so that any disobedience must be disguised by a display of submissiveness and ceremony. In Henry IV, on the other hand, the increasing desperation and loss of moral credibility of both king and rebels generate both a strident self-assertiveness (such as appears even more insistently in Coriolanus), and a disregard, in either word or deed, of accepted canons of political behaviour, which signals the decline of civility not only as a reality but even as an ideal to be sought after. The image of the treacherous son, with its shifting implications in the course of these plays, is a further aspect of this degeneration, one which indicates how Shakespeare's treatment of this theme is so much more closely knit to character and action than is that of Jonson, who relies mainly on a general comparison between the ancient virtue of Rome and its present sickness, uttered by choric or semi-choric characters.

Most important of all in this context is the idea of commonwealth expressed through the images of the garden, to a lesser extent of the body politic, and (linking the two) of the disease which seems only to increase with each desperate attempt at its extirpation. The organic

link between the sovereign and his realm implied in these images (a link which is much less evident in the case of Cicero the elective consul or even Tiberius the emperor) is such that the state of the entire commonwealth is closely linked to the moral stature of the sovereign, and indeed to the behaviour of all its constituent members. In his development of the idea of commonwealth, an idea still central to Macbeth and Coriolanus, Shakespeare gave dramatic substance to the humanist assumption that rule and obedience are inseparable and interdependent parts of the same process.

In their respective treatments of kingship, Richard II and Henry IV exhibit rather different approaches, stemming from the fact that in the first instance the throne is occupied by a rightful but erring king, while in the second it is occupied by a usurper and subsequently by his son. Richard's hereditary right prevents the question of who is most fit to be king from being raised openly except on very rare occasions. Instead, Shakespeare shows how both Richard and Bolingbroke degenerate from the standard of kingship and chivalry embodied in their common ancestor Edward III, and how the deposed King Richard attains shortly before his death a royalty as impressive as any he displayed while king in name. In Henry IV, the question of who is most fit to be king is pursued on a more empirical basis, chiefly because the hereditary claim no longer strictly applies (although hereditary claim of a kind is part of Hal's title to rule), so that the various aspirants to the throne and the other enemies of Henry can all argue their cases in more or less plausible terms. The succession from father to son; the ruler as a skilful horseman; commercial metaphors, such as true and counterfeit currency, or paying one's debts according to promise - all these ideas are developed in a comparison and contrast of the relative claims to

rule of Henry, Hotspur, and Hal.

Hal emerges as the most complete and deliberate portrait in Renaissance drama of the ideal prince. Other wise and just rulers there certainly are in the plays discussed in this study - Cicero, Duncan, King Henry of the Byron plays, and Antonio in The Revenger's Tragedy. But all these sovereigns are beset by difficulties or disappointments which prompt them to testify to the burdensome nature of rule. This is a burden which will eventually fall upon Henry V, and which he formally acknowledges on his first words as King, but which is scarcely relevant to the process of his preparation before assuming office. The education of the prince was at least as frequent a subject of Renaissance political literature as the actual process of rule. Yet it may readily be seen why the difficulties of rule, and the moral pressures borne by the conscientious ruler in an adverse situation, were treated in the drama far more frequently than the progress of an aspirant ruler towards perfection, which was liable to lapse into mere undramatic eulogy. Shakespeare solved this problem by making his ideal prince into a tactical scapegrace, who is thus the reverse image of the outwardly respectable but inwardly diseased commonwealth which it is his task to reform. His "wild Prince Hal" has therefore the familiar appeal of popular legend, and the unique stamp of his creator's own artistic design. Shakespeare's ability to construct a two-part play around the education of an ideal prince is a mark not only of his interest in the political thought of his day, but of his singular dramatic genius.

Chapter Six

Shakespeare's Tragedies: Macbeth, Coriolanus

I

Shakespeare's interest in political themes is evident throughout his dramatic career, and two works alone can scarcely be taken to represent the whole of his thinking in this field subsequent to the English histories. Macbeth and Coriolanus, however, which were written within two or three years of one another,¹ do indicate the continuity of Shakespeare's political concerns from his earlier work, and afford a number of interesting parallels with other plays discussed in this study. Macbeth, like Henry IV, dramatises the rupture of royal succession by a usurper whose inner decay matches the disorder in his realm. The sustained comparison between the moral health of the sovereign and of an entire society attains greater dramatic immediacy in the later play from the use of the body (both in the text itself and, implicitly, in the very process of acting) rather than the garden as the primary image of commonwealth. Such a comparison, moreover, links Macbeth not only with Henry IV but also with Sejanus and with The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Byron. Coriolanus recalls Henry IV in its dramatisation of a civil conflict in which right and wrong are frequently confused or obscured, and in its emphasis on the difficulty of healing the wounds of strife

1 Macbeth was written and first performed probably in 1606. See Macbeth, ed. Kenneth Muir, *The Arden Shakespeare*, 9th ed. (London, 1962), pp.xiv-xxiv. John Dover Wilson, editor of *The New Shakespeare* edition of Coriolanus (Cambridge, 1960), pp.ix-xi, dates the composition of the play early in 1608. All subsequent references are to these editions.

when both parties lack the humility which (as Jonson's Cicero, Hal, and Malcolm testify) is the basis of just rule no less than of true obedience. If the images of disease and dismemberment in Sejanus invite comparison with Macbeth, the images of devouring look forward to Coriolanus. The Rome of Shakespeare, like that of Jonson, destroys itself from within.

Macbeth and Coriolanus could scarcely be more unlike in their immediate impact. This profound difference in style and feeling, however, is a mark of complementary rather than contrasting visions. Macbeth is as much a record of the struggle of spiritual forces - in man himself, in the state, in the entire cosmos - as an account of the rise and fall of a tyrant. This comprehensiveness of vision is achieved through a rich and varied use of symbolism which defines in greater depth than hitherto in Shakespeare the fundamental qualities necessary to a healthy social order. In no play of Shakespeare, on the other hand, is the numinous less evident than in Coriolanus, which focusses on the mundane, often sordid business of political and military strife, and its effect on the social and domestic lives of the participants. The only gods in this play are (not without some irony) Coriolanus and his fellow-patricians. In Macbeth, the symbolic pattern is developed to a certain extent independently of the characters' thoughts and actions, and directly conveys much of the play's meaning. In Coriolanus, several more casually related symbols (the body politic, god and beast, the flour and the bran, the garb of humility) are tied to their immediate contexts of word or action and, far from combining into precise and complex symbolic statement, are frequently rendered dubious by the starkly contrasting applications afforded them by different characters. Macbeth, in short, is one of Shakespeare's richest explorations of social order; Macbeth's tyranny and defiance of nature is developed in contrast to a norm which is not only defined

through image and idea but realised in action. Coriolanus is his most unrelieved depiction of disorder in the state, a disorder conceived in more practical and realistic terms than the chaos of Macbeth's Scotland, but informed by similar political principles.

II

The political implications of Macbeth are of a quite different sort from those of the histories, and call for a different critical approach. Both Richard II and Henry IV are pervaded by a sense of the enormous complexity of moral and political issues and of the perplexing entanglement of right and wrong, which generates a continuous and all-embracing irony, and repeatedly divides and shifts the sympathies of the audience. This is not the case with Macbeth, in which there is a clear contrast between Macbeth and his wife as the agents of evil and chaos, and the forces led by Malcolm as the bringers of peace and order. As De Quincey points out in his essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth", we may sympathise with the protagonist (in the sense of participate in his feelings) but not feel pity for him. Lenox describes the war against Macbeth as an attempt to "dew the sovereign flower, and drown the weeds" (V.ii.30). Whereas Richard II and Henry IV imply through a similar pattern of imagery the impossibility of healing the body politic in such a straightforward fashion, Lenox's words are to be taken as a true summary of the final act of Macbeth. The action is simple, set as it is within a metaphysical framework freed from the limitations of the actual historical world, and from the complications of a specific cultural context. This does not indicate Shakespeare's turning away from matters of state. Rather it permits an approach to similar problems

from a different angle, a more selective and sustained investigation of certain aspects of political behaviour.

The moral intelligibility of Macbeth is worth emphasising as a caution against interpretations which employ various aspects of Renaissance political thought to introduce complications and ambiguities not borne out by the play as a whole; Macbeth has suffered more in this respect than perhaps any other play of Shakespeare. It has been argued, for example, that Duncan himself is responsible for fuelling Macbeth's ambition, since "by excessive praise the King has upset the scale of values, that rightful relationship of things existing under the bond of King and Thane, and with that the proper expectations of subordinates"; or that, in line with the theory expressed in King James's The Trew Law of Free Monarchies concerning the duties of a subject to give allegiance to the true heir and expel the usurper, "Banquo ought not to have awaited Malcolm's invasion of Scotland before taking any steps against the usurper: he should have defended the son's title to the throne on the death of Duncan"; or even that one symptom of the disorder with which Macbeth has afflicted Scotland is the conversation of Lenox and the Other Lord (III.vi), which shows them committing the "sin of rebellion".² Such interpretations possess varying degrees of credibility, but all spring from an attempt to expound the action in the light of ideas which the text itself does not bring into play, a tendency which, carried to extremes, interprets Othello as a warning to young wives to take good care of their personal linen.

2 Edwin Thumboo, "Macbeth and the Generous Duncan," SQ, XXII (1971), 185-86; Macbeth, ed. Kenneth Muir, p.lxvi; J. W. Draper, "Political Themes in Shakespeare's Late Plays," JEGP, XXXV (1936), 80.

In one respect, however, Macbeth clearly invites comparison with a central aspect of Renaissance political thought, and indeed with several other plays in this study: as W. A. Armstrong has shown, its protagonist is in many ways the conventional Elizabethan tyrant.³ Macbeth's descent into evil is dramatised with the utmost economy by the successive murders of Duncan (and his grooms), of Banquo, and of Macduff's family and household, which suggest how tyranny can sustain itself only with ever greater and evermore futile violence. At the same time, this process is extended and generalised by Macbeth's own admission that he has established spies in all the nobles' households (III.iv.130-31), Macduff's report that "Each new morn / New widows howl, new orphans cry" (IV.iii.4-5), and Angus's mention of Macbeth's "secret murders" (V.ii.17). In view of these suggestions that the evil of which Macbeth is both the cause and symbol is far greater than what is presented on stage or directly related, it should come as no surprise when Malcolm, in the most important of these general accounts of his tyranny, calls him "Luxurious", "avaricious", and indeed "smacking of every sin / That has a name" (IV.iii.58-60), which is more than the Macbeth we have seen. There is no need to by-pass this by arguing (as does Kenneth Muir in his note to this passage) that Malcolm "only grants that Macbeth has these vices for the sake of argument." By formally investing Macbeth with qualities which a contemporary audience would recognise as proper to a tyrant, Malcolm accelerates the process of shrinking and dehumanisation which reduces his enemy to a monstrous caricature of mankind, fit only to be gazed at in curiosity or disbelief: "Here you may see the tyrant" (V.ix.27).

3 W. A. Armstrong, "The Elizabethan Conception of the Tyrant," RES, XXII (1946), 161-81.

But Macbeth, unlike Shakespeare's earlier study in tyranny Richard of Gloucester, was not born with teeth. Instead he is impelled into a tyrannical course of action against his acute - albeit incomplete - sense of what is right. Whereas the dramatic tyrant is normally driven on by an unquenchable ambition, expressed with the greatest rhetorical virtuosity at his command, Macbeth confesses his slavery to "Vaulting ambition" (I.vii.27) in a weary epilogue to a soliloquy which rises to rhetorical heights to describe the utter horror of the murder he is planning. He has none of the tyrant's amoral ethic of 'might is right'. He cannot justify his deeds, either to himself or others, so that they "must be acted, ere they may be scann'd" (III.iv.139); this is Bolingbroke's tacit alacrity taken to an extreme. Finally, Macbeth is more profoundly alone than any other tyrant of the Renaissance stage. Not only does he, like all tyrants, lose his friends and followers. Following the murder of Duncan he also realises that he can only live by hiding from himself - as his wife ultimately fails to do: "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (II.ii.72).

III

Yet to see Macbeth as a singular and extended version of the conventional Elizabethan tyrant by no means exhausts his political significance. To define the nature of his failure in greater detail, we must look at the ideal of rule and obedience implicit above all in Duncan, also in Banquo and Macduff, and later in the play in Malcolm. In most of the plays hitherto discussed, an ideal of political and social order is embodied to a supreme degree in a dead hero (Edward III, Germanicus, the consuls of former days in Catiline) and only partially or obliquely in any of

the living characters. Duncan, however, is the perfect ruler: not in the rather abstract way in which Hal is invested with the conventional attributes of kingship at the close of 2 Henry IV, but rather in that his few brief appearances exhibit to perfection those human qualities which make the peace and order, so narrowly won by the valour of Macbeth and Banquo, rich and valuable. Duncan's treatment of his kinsmen and Thanes is rooted in a mutual liberality which comprehends and transcends conventional notions of degree and duty, and which is beautifully manifested in his initial reception of Macbeth and Banquo following their return from the war. The King dwells on his inability to reward Macbeth according to his just deserts: "More is thy due than more than all can pay" (I.iv.21). To the tyrant, jealous of his own superiority, such worth in a subject surpassing that of the sovereign is a cause for concern - as Mustapha and Silius learn to their cost. Duncan, however, goes out of his way to humble himself, speaking of the "sin of my ingratitude" (1.15) in a way that might seem like fulsome hyperbole (Macbeth has after all been granted the Thaneship of Cawdor) did not the ingenuous warmth of his greeting testify to his sincerity. But the joy of liberality transforms the humble recognition of its own insufficiency in such a way that Duncan can wish Macbeth had "less deserv'd, / That the proportion both of thanks and payment / Might have been mine" (11.18-20), though we are in no doubt that it is the boundlessness of Macbeth's worth, surpassing his own ability to reward it, that fills him with such happiness.

Duncan's speeches are full of the rich paradox arising from his recognition that the performance and acceptance of duty is, in the words of Macduff, "a joyful trouble" (II.iii.49):

The love that follows us sometimes is our trouble,
 Which still we thank as love. Herein I teach you,
 How you shall bid God 'ild us for your pains,
 And thank us for your trouble. (I.vi.11-14)

Macbeth, however, appears unable to respond to such bounteous and self-delighting gratitude, and asserts that the King is obliged merely to "receive our duties" (I.iv.24); he has, as Coleridge remarked, only "the commonplaces of loyalty" to counterpose Duncan's "plenteous joys".⁴ It is rather Banquo who appropriates Duncan's promise to Macbeth, "I have begun to plant thee, and will labour / To make thee full of growing" (I.iv.28-29). Macbeth's unwitting response to this is revealed in his belief that "labour" is not fitting for the King (1.44). Banquo's concise answer to Duncan's greeting - "There if I grow, / The harvest is your own" (11.32-33) - establishes his grasp both of the mutually rewarding nature of the King's bounty, and of the fact that social and personal harmony, while a 'natural' growth, requires laboured care for its nurture.

This emphasis on "labour" resists any suggestion that Duncan is "a character representing an essentially nostalgic, idealizing view of the world".⁵ In this respect, Macbeth is the sequel to Richard II, where the same imagery of growth and harvest, particularly in the garden scene (III.iv), indicates the care and discipline essential to a healthy functioning of the body politic. Northrop Frye has pointed out the fallacy of interpreting the garden of England in Richard II as an image of prelapsarian paradise; the gardener is addressed as "old Adam's

4 S. T. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, ed. T. M. Raysor (London, 1930), I, 70.

5 Maynard Mack, Jr., Killing the King, p.150.

likeness" (III.iv.73) since "the garden is not the garden of Eden; it is the garden that 'old' Adam was forced to cultivate after his fall, a garden requiring constant effort and vigilance."⁶ The scene of Macbeth is likewise a fallen world, but one which contains the possibility of renewed grace: "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell" (IV.iii.22). The man to whom these words are addressed, Macduff, is indeed the "holy Angel" whom Lenox hoped would travel before Macduff to the English court, bearing news of Scotland's suffering "Under a hand accurs'd" (III.vi.45-49). But in swearing vengeance on "this fiend of Scotland" (IV.iii.233), Macduff acknowledges the guilt which he shares with all men: "if he 'scape, / Heaven forgive him too" (II.234-35). In the following scene, the Doctor tending on Macbeth's "fiend-like Queen" similarly avows the universal guilt of mankind: "God, God forgive us all" (V.i.72).

Duncan is no less an inhabitant of this fallen world, fully aware of its inherent treachery. Malcolm's explicitly religious recognition that "Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace, / Yet Grace must still look so" (IV.iii.23-24) is anticipated in more human, social terms by his father's admission that "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face" (I.iv.11-12). This in no way implies that a true bond of allegiance may be built on anything but an element of faith which is unavoidably incalculable and dangerous. There is no sure recipe for political stability. Having been deceived in the "absolute trust" which he built on the Thane of Cawdor, Duncan proceeds to build an equally absolute trust on Macbeth. His situation may well be compared

6 Northrop Frye, Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy (Toronto and London, 1967), p.14.

with that of Henry V, confronted with the treason of his most trusted subjects, who combine against him with an enemy power. But their crime, which seems to Henry like "Another fall of man" (Henry V, II.ii.142), is forcing on him for the first time the realisation that this is a fallen world in which the brows of grace may conceal foulness. His lengthy expressions of shock and dismay chart the painful process of learning what is already implicit in Duncan's terse, rueful comments on the treachery of Cawdor, namely that concord is a finely tuned instrument which may be set out of harmony with tragic ease.

IV

The cornerstones of Duncan's rule, therefore, are bounty (in which gratitude is necessarily implied), trust, and the laboured cultivation of self and others necessary in a fallen world. Duncan's death may appear to have banished these qualities from Scotland irrevocably. There is an obvious truth in Macbeth's words beyond their function as a feigned lament:

from this instant,
 There's nothing serious in mortality;
 All is but toys: renown, and grace, is dead;
 The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
 Is left this vault to brag of. (II.iii.91-96)

But the behaviour of Duncan's son and heir Malcolm and of Macbeth's other opponents gradually unfolds the extent to which this statement is incomplete, the sense in which Macbeth wholly fails to destroy the royal qualities which did not belong to Duncan alone. The attitude of suspicion, for example, with which Malcolm greets Macduff at the English court may seem to imply that Macbeth's perfidy has banished Duncan's trustfulness

even from the intercourse of good men; but his careful choice of words precludes such a simple inference. Malcolm prefaces the testing of his fellow-countryman with an expression of respect for his true character: "That which you are, my thoughts cannot transpose" (IV.iii.21); and his only criticism of Macduff, that he left his wife and child unprotected (which the latter cannot answer) is similarly accompanied by a plea that his suspicions should be construed not as "your dishonours, / But mine own safeties" (11.29-30). He then proceeds to test Macduff by self-detraction precisely because of his respect for the other's possible innocence, and his unwillingness to sully it through conjectural accusation. W. A. Armstrong has suggested that this episode is a variant of the conventional Senecan debate between a tyrant and his honest subordinate,⁷ and certainly Malcolm's formal recitation of all his "particulars of vice" and the contrasting "king-becoming graces" (11.51, 91) suggests the influence of this tradition. Yet despite this formal strain, these lines are not simply a choric comment, largely independent of Malcolm's character, on the ills which have overtaken Scotland, but rather the most startling expression of that spirit of self-detraction, of the inversion of justice as a prelude to its proper restoration, which is the key both to Malcolm himself and to the entire movement against Macbeth in the latter part of the play. Malcolm shares with Hal the king-becoming grace which the latter exhibited when he "chid his truant youth with such a grace".

This central image of the paradoxical inversion of justice - which links up with the comparable images of the sick patient ministering to

7 W. A. Armstrong, "The Influence of Seneca and Machiavelli on the Elizabethan Tyrant," RES, XXIV (1948), 22.

himself, and of the natural order restored by the unnatural agency of the uprooted trees of Birnam wood and the man "Untimely ripp'd" (V.viii. 16) from his mother's womb - is first introduced by Malcolm as he prepares to flee Macbeth's castle following the murder of Duncan: "There's warrant in that theft / Which steals itself, when there's no mercy left" (II.iv.145-46). Having satisfied himself of Macduff's honesty, Malcolm suggests through a verbal echo of these lines that justice may now stand on its own two feet, since they may now pursue their "warranted quarrel" (IV.iii.137). His union with Macduff is thus effectively a reversal of his parting from Donalbain. But the "modest wisdom" which prevents him from "over-credulous haste" (II.119-20) in his reception of Macduff is still apparent in his willingness to put himself to the "direction" of the older, more experienced man; with a princely humility which recalls Duncan's determination to be Macbeth's "purveyor" (I.vi.22), Malcolm reasserts his banished royalty by offering himself to Macduff as "thine, and my poor country's, to command" (IV.iii.132).

This "modest wisdom", which is the complement rather than the antithesis of Duncan's trustfulness, is a quality shared by several of Macbeth's opponents. Lenox, in his conversation with the nameless Lord, suggests that Macbeth's summons to Macduff should "Advise him to a caution, t'hold what distance / His wisdom can provide" (III.vi.45). But it is in Banquo that we see most clearly the connection of such wise caution with the qualities that go to make Duncan's greatness as a King. Macbeth's distrust of his former comrade-in-arms is more than a fear that Banquo will expose him, or even that Banquo's descendents will inherit the throne for which he has thrown away peace in this world and the next. Just as Iago's professed reasons for his hatred of Cassio - failure to gain the lieutenantcy, fear of being made a cuckold -

mask the deeper motive that "He hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly" (Othello, V.i.19-20); so Macbeth's practical, political motives for doing away with Banquo are less important than a profound antipathy of being: "under him / My Genius is rebuk'd" (III.i.54-55). The quality which prompts this self-detraction, namely his opponent's "wisdom that doth guide his valour / To act in safety" (III.i.52-53), he refers to as a "royalty of nature" (1.49). "Royal" is an epithet which has hitherto been applied almost exclusively to Duncan, and the transference of it to Banquo by the King himself is a sure indication that, however much Macbeth has temporarily disrupted the natural succession of sovereignty, the bond of virtue on which this depends cannot be destroyed, and is already preparing to reassert itself. The consistent application of the term "royal" to Macbeth during the banquet scene (and in this scene alone) in which he is haunted by true royalty, serves as a diabolically mocking confirmation of his own words.

In calling attention to the simultaneous daring and caution which characterises Banquo, Macbeth recollects his display of these qualities on their meeting the witches, when he "chid the Sisters, / . . . And bade them speak to him" (11.56-58). The immediate reaction of both men to this strange encounter may in retrospect be seen to contain the key to their respective destinies. Banquo's blunt and fearless questioning of the witches manifests an inner strength and resilience which has no need to take refuge in a self-denying wish to avoid temptation, and yet cannot be subjugated by their possibly deceitful promises. His initial urge is to know who or what they are, and only secondarily to know "which grain will grow, and which will not" (1.59): Banquo will leave the future to the natural development of time and the hour. His attitude is perfectly summarised by Coleridge, who draws attention to "the

unpossessedness of Banquo's mind, wholly present to the present object - an unsullied, unscarified mirror."⁸ Macbeth's reaction is a complete contrast. His start of fear at hearing "things that do sound so fair" (1.52); his self-centred desire to know more about his own future: "Stay, you imperfect speakers", "Would they had stay'd!" (1.70, 82); and the swarm of hopes and memories which their riddles arouse in him betray a dislocated nature wholly unable to remain "present to the present object", which is summed up in the word "rapt", used both by Banquo (1.57, 143) and later by Macbeth himself (I.v.6). Macbeth, like Sejanus, Catiline, Byron, and most rebels of the Renaissance stage, is unable to keep his feet planted on the solid ground of the everyday world.

If we grasp, therefore, the ideal of royalty represented by Duncan, Banquo, and Malcolm, the shortcomings of Macbeth as a man and later as a ruler are seen to be apparent as early as his first meeting with the witches, or his replies to Duncan following the latter's warm commendations of his valour. The question of royal succession, of the true and false king, though not so neatly and logically expounded as in the histories, is equally important in this play. The royalty of Duncan lives on in his heir Malcolm, and in Banquo, the "father to a line of kings" (III.i.59). Macbeth, on the other hand, isolates himself from the society of the king and his followers in a way that recalls - with very different implications - Hal's loss of his place both in the king's Council and in the affections of the court. In view of Macbeth's departure from the banqueting hall in which Duncan is feasting (I.vii.29), it is only natural that he should be unable on a later occasion to

8 S. T. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, I, 68.

enter a similar feast of human mirth and social concord, his seat taken by the royal Banquo whose descendants will sit on the throne he now occupies.

V

Much of the political significance of Macbeth is conveyed through the intuitive apprehension of the world displayed by the major characters, their 'conversation' in the broader Elizabethan sense. In the latter part of the play, however, beginning at the scene in the English court, the ills of the body politic are brought more explicitly into focus, and linked to the dislocation of Macbeth's body and spirit. Rosse, newly arrived from Scotland, where he had observed to Lady Macduff that the times are cruel "when we are traitors, / And do not know ourselves" (IV.ii.18-19), delivers to Malcolm and Macduff an account of the suffering of their "poor country" which is "Almost afraid to know itself" (IV.iii.165): Macbeth's fearful stifling of introspection following the murder of Duncan - "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" - has infected his realm. This connection between the ruler and his realm is repeatedly emphasised through the image of a diseased body (both natural and politic) and focussed in a brief scene in which the Scottish lords are seen approaching the English army (V.ii). This scene is worth considering in some detail, since besides illustrating Shakespeare's highly complex and suggestive use of a political commonplace, it will serve to draw together several strands of the foregoing argument.

In seeking to overthrow Macbeth and regain their proper places in Scotland, Malcolm and his army are acting the parts both of patient and physician. They are members of the "sickly weal" no less than its

present inhabitants, including Macbeth, and their "dear causes" (signifying diseases as well as the legal and moral cause they are fighting for) must be cured by methods which themselves partake of sickness and even death: by the revenges which "burn in them" like a fever, by "the bleeding and the grim alarm", by shedding their last drop of blood in their "country's purge". This last implies both that the curative actions of bleeding and purging are applied to themselves, and also that (as Kenneth Muir glosses this passage) the blood which they shed will be absorbed by and thus purge their native earth - a telling contrast to the histories, where the sprinkling of blood on the garden of England produced nothing but sterility.

This medical image is afforded dramatic embodiment in the following scene. Macbeth, inquiring of the physician attending his wife whether he cannot "minister to a mind diseas'd", receives the extremely apt reply that "Therein the patient / Must minister to himself" (V.iii.40, 45-46); for this is a precise description of the activity of the armies now marching to overthrow the tyrant. Macbeth is an incurably sick man desperately trying to assert his health by throwing "physic to the dogs" (1.47), yet in spite of himself craving for the "purgative drug" which might "scour these English hence" (11.55-56), not recognising that the loss of control over his kingdom is to be sought in the personal disorder to which he is powerless to minister: "He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause / Within the belt of rule" (V.iii.15-16).

This image of Macbeth's swollen belly is a startling contrast to the images of shrinkage or confinement in which his moral decay is usually presented, as in the succeeding speech, where Angus tells us that Macbeth feels his title "Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief" (V.ii.21-22). Both have essentially the

same function, however, of drawing attention to the unfitness of Macbeth's dress to his person. The king's robe and title do not belong to him, just as he cannot properly buckle on the armour which it is fitting for a king (like the "gallantly arm'd" Hal) to wear, as the frantic donning and putting off of his armour in the following scene confirms. The suggestion that the thief Macbeth is wearing a judge's robes (since the contrast of giant and dwarf is implicitly extended into judge and thief) is a further instance of that paradoxical inversion of justice already worked out in relation to Malcolm, and clearly parallel with the latter's role as both patient and physician. But Macbeth's judgement on himself, unlike the humble self-accusation of Malcolm which initiates his renewal, is final and damning:

Who then shall blame
His pester'd senses to recoil and start,
When all that is within him does condemn
Itself, for being there? (11.22-25)

This might be extended to his own subjects; those who revolt from him, who move "only in command, / Nothing in love" (11.19-20), or the soldiers who fight "on both sides" (V.vii.25) similarly condemn themselves for serving the tyrant. Macbeth's "pester'd senses", moreover, are one link in a chain of images concerned with bodily posture and deportment, and the relation of the senses to the outside world, which, apart from their moral import, are obviously suggestive of the style of acting appropriate to each character. The "start" of fear with which Macbeth greets the witches (I.iii.51) signals the beginning of a disintegration which is now complete, while his vision of the dagger is conjured up when his "eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses" (II.i.44). The "gentle senses" (I.vi.1) with which, by contrast, Duncan (and Banquo)

greet Macbeth's castle indicate the personal integrity, the minds "present to the present object" which are wholly at one with the bounteous and fruitful nature which they evoke. Banquo has "observ'd" that where the martlet most breeds and haunts, "The air is delicate" (11.9-10). Banquo and Fleance display the same powers of observation several scenes later when they note the failure of the clock to strike simultaneous with the moon's setting, thus alerting us to the disturbance of time occasioned by the coming murder of Duncan. One symptom of the failure of Macbeth and his wife to live in the present world is their attempt to force time into their own pattern.

The image of the diseased bodies, politic and natural, employed by Menteith and Cathness in this brief scene reaches out into all corners of the play's highly varied patterns of thought and imagery. Its main import, however, is to assert the connection between political order and personal deportment, the foundations of social health in a certain disciplined integrity, and a willingness to acknowledge and work with one's own weaknesses and limitations. We have met before the idea that political disorder is as much a condition of each individual, a sin to be expiated, as an external condition of society which may be manipulated. Like almost any aspect of Renaissance political thought, it may be used to attack established authority, as it is by the Archbishop of 2 Henry IV: "we are all diseas'd" (IV.1.54). It is, on the other hand, a serious part of Jonson's depiction of a barbaric Rome. But nowhere outside Macbeth is it explored so fully, or with such a rich and startling use of paradox.

VI

Early in 1 Henry IV, Hal explains how his reformation will "falsify men's hopes" (I.ii.206), and thus introduces the theme of reversed expectations and thwarted ambitions central to both parts of the play. Hope is also an important aspect of Macbeth, naturally so in a play which, like Henry IV, deals with the severance and eventual restoration of royal succession. Hope is, together with the allied idea of trust, frequently used to denote Macbeth's insane grasping after the future. The antithesis of Duncan's "absolute trust" is in fact the trust which Macbeth places in the witches, since it is granted to inherently untrustworthy beings, and is based not on wisdom and bounty, but on a self-centred hope of gain. Banquo recognises that the witches, if agents of the devil, may "betray's / In deepest consequence" (I.iii.125-26). Macbeth realises too late the value of his companion's caution when he wishes "damn'd all those that trust them" (IV.i.139), and, confronted by his executioner, curses the "juggling fiends" that "keep the word of promise to our ear, / And break it to our hope" (V.viii.19, 21-22).

Banquo is not immune to the witches' prophecies, and following Macbeth's coronation, he wonders whether they may not also "set me up in hope" (III.i.10). Yet his succeeding words, "But hush; no more", while they may be simply a prudent checking of his dangerous words on the approach of the King, would seem rather to indicate (since a soliloquy was supposedly silent musing and therefore never overheard) that characteristic moral caution, that stubborn defence against "the cursed thoughts that nature / Gives way to in repose" (II.i.8-9) which enables Banquo to keep his "bosom franchis'd and allegiance clear" (II.i.28). Both Macbeth and Banquo, therefore, implicitly confirm Bacon's attitude to hope, namely that "by how much purer is the sense of things present,

without infection or tincture of the imagination, by so much wiser and better is the soul."⁹ But hope need not always be deceptive, and is as much the spur of those striving to overthrow Macbeth as of the tyrant himself. On finding a cold reception from Malcolm, Macduff laments: "I have lost my hopes"; "O my breast, thy hope ends here" (IV.iii.24, 113-14). The need for such hope to be restrained within due bounds is clarified in the scene where Malcolm's army approaches Birnam wood. Malcolm is full of hope that "the days are near at hand / That chambers will be safe" (V.iv.1-2). Macduff, in a mild but effective rebuke, suggests that their "just censures" should await the outcome of the battle, which can only be decided by "industrious soldiership" (11.14, 16). Siward clinches the argument with the authority of a rhymed couplet:

Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate,
But certain issue strokes must arbitrate; . . . (11.19-20)

The restoration of true royalty at the close of Macbeth indicates that the sort of hope which animates Macduff and Malcolm, based on a collaboration with the processes of time and nature, and tempered by the recognition of possible failure, may in certain instances be appropriate. But Shakespeare is at one with Greville and Jonson in his implicitly critical depiction of hope generated by a refusal or an inability to live in the present.

The unwillingness of Macduff and Old Siward to be naively confident concerning the outcome of the battle is the last of many reminders that

9 "Of Earthly Hope", in the "Meditationes Sacrae", The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath, VII (London, 1879), 248. The whole of this section forms an interesting gloss on Macbeth.

even true and virtuous royalty is anything but invulnerable and invincible. The reminder is particularly timely in that the final two acts have increasingly stressed the self-defeating nature of Macbeth's attempt to hold on to his power, the ever more consistent operation of that "even-handed Justice" (I.vii.10) which, as Macbeth recognises even before the murder of Duncan, is bound to visit the evil-doer with his own devices. Malcolm moreover has been presented as a man wholly capable of restoring Duncan's royalty, despite the comparative immaturity apparent in his misplaced optimism prior to the battle, and in his inability to understand either the depths of Macduff's grief (IV.iii.207-35) or Siward's refusal to mourn unctuously over his dead son (V.ix.5-19). His first and only speech as King shows him beginning to fulfil this promise with a Duncan-like expression of gratitude for the "several loves" of his kinsmen and Thanes, and a determination to "make us even with you" (11.27-28); their growth will be his harvest. But this sense of the inevitability of Macbeth's overthrow and of the restoration of order under Malcolm is significantly qualified by the unassuming resolution of Macduff and Siward, by the nameless Lord's hope that Scotland will be restored to peace and prosperity "with Him above / To ratify the work" (III.vi.32-33), and by Malcolm's own recognition that his tasks will be performed only "by the grace of Grace" (V.ix.38); it is thus emphasised that no man may arrogate to himself the divine approbation essential to the success of any human effort, however justly motivated. Richard II, with his naive confidence in an army of angels, might well have taken a lesson from the "industrious soldiership" of those who overthrow Macbeth.

VII

We have noted in passing a number of parallels and contrasts between Macbeth and the histories. It is a mark of Shakespeare's complex and undogmatic response to political matters that the rebellion of Bolingbroke and the restoration of Malcolm have several features in common. Scroope reports Bolingbroke's reception on returning to England in the following manner:

boys, with women's voices,
Strive to speak big, and clap their female joints
In stiff unwieldy arms against thy crown;
Thy very beadsmen learn to bend their bows
Of double-fatal yew against thy state;
Yea, distaff-women manage rusty bills
Against thy seat: . . .

(Richard II, III.ii.
113-19)

The emphasis here is clearly on Bolingbroke's ability to divert people from the dress and behaviour proper to their age, sex, and occupation. But it is equally clear, though Scroope can scarcely be expected to emphasise this before the King, that such perversions tell us a great deal about Bolingbroke's personal magnetism and qualities as a leader, as well as the malaise induced by Richard's misgovernment. Rosse's strikingly similar vision of Malcolm's return to Scotland, which would "create soldiers, make our women fight, / To doff their dire distresses" (IV.iii.186-88) likewise indicates the desperation induced by a tyranny far worse than that of Richard. It is indeed remarkable that such similar processes should be part of, in one case a healing of the body politic, and in the other an attempted healing which aggravates the disease. Whereas the disturbance of nature, the casting up by the body politic of the ruler with which it is "glutted, gorged, and full" leads in Richard II - and Henry IV - to an ever greater spiral of discontent,

an ever more raging fever, in Macbeth the inversion of nature and justice, the purging of the diseased body politic, is a prelude to their proper restoration. Equivocation is an essential part of the rebellion against Richard as of that against Macbeth. Both Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby, conversing after the death of Gaunt, and Lenox and the other Lord, are forced to speak their thoughts hesitantly and equivocally, since their words are in both cases treasonable. But while Lenox's companion speaks clearly when he recognises his cue, Northumberland's confession of intent is deliberately vague, and is the prelude to further bewildering lies and silences.

VIII

The exploration of the nature of kingship and of the due relation of king and subject in the histories leans heavily on widely accepted contemporary political ideas. Such conventional ideas are less explicit in Macbeth. The ordered social hierarchy implicit in Macbeth's fable of the dogs (III.i.91-100) and in the seating arrangements at the feast (III.iv.1), the necessity of obedience, and the sanctified nature of the true king, are the unobtrusive and unquestioned terms of reference within which the action moves. What Macbeth investigates is the nature of the fundamental order of trust and bounty on the basis of which such accepted relationships must rest, and what happens when this order is disturbed. Perhaps taking his cue from The Spanish Tragedy, Shakespeare opens his play by showing a conclusion of peace (after vividly described bloodshed) which prepares for even more terrible internal disorders:¹⁰

10 Three verbal echoes reinforce the suggestion that Shakespeare had Kyd's play in mind: compare The Spanish Tragedy I.ii.72 and Macbeth I.ii.15-16; The Spanish Tragedy I.ii.86-87 and Macbeth I.iii.104-05; The Spanish Tragedy I.ii.95 and Macbeth I.ii.44.

"Malice domestic" follows "foreign levy". As several critics have observed, Macbeth's valour in war is an ominous prefiguration of his later blood-shedding, the suggested confusion of himself and Macdonwald a pointer to his own rebellion. But though the distinction between proper valour and violence is narrow, it is never blurred. Blood may become a man, as it does the Sergeant, fighting against Malcolm's captivity. Initially, Macbeth determines to keep within the bounds of "all that may become a man" (I.vii.46). Consequently, when Rosse refers to Duncan's murder as a "more than bloody deed" (II.iv.22), he implies that its most horrific aspect is its opening of a "breach in nature" (II.iii.113) which will readmit chaos and darkness. Valour, if not employed in the pursuit of justice and guided with wisdom may become, as in Lady Macbeth's conception, a pitifully stunted and "bear-like" courage to do violence to everything - including oneself - and a manliness which fails to recognise its relation or "kindness" to other men. There is an analogy here with Coriolanus, in which the Roman patrician code prizes a narrow and perhaps destructive form of valour, a valour which in the case of Coriolanus himself is linked with an impoverished domestic life, and an eventual attempt to deny his kindred. Macbeth invites comparison with contemporary political thinking less in its echo of specific doctrines, than in its recognition that right political action depends above all on a proper balance of qualities, and that the greatest virtues can be turned to evil if carried to excess, or not exercised in relation to a comprehensive vision of what is right and natural: such are the fundamental assumptions underlying the whole discussion of ethical and political behaviour in for example The Courtier or The French Academie. The pervasive irony is not, as in Richard II and Henry IV, occasioned by the distortion in the image of the present

when viewed in the mirror of past history. It arises rather from the confrontation of the processes of time and nature with Macbeth's desperate and doomed attempt to outwit them, an attempt which is itself set in motion by a verbal ambiguity: "th'equivocation of the fiend, / That lies like truth" (V.v.43-44).

IX

In Coriolanus, Shakespeare returns to the morally obscure world of the histories. The play is full of debates, usually between patricians and plebeians, in which the only certainty is the difficulty in locating the truth, and the limitless opportunity for deception and self-deception in spoken discourse. As in Henry IV, words are continually reflected back onto their speakers with damaging irony, while one of the play's central images, namely the belly and the rebellious members (appearing in this pure form only once, but pointing forward to later images of eating, and of the bodies natural and politic) is, by its shifting multiplicity of implication, a prime example of that consistent ambiguity which prevents us from taking sides in the political conflict, as we are clearly meant to in plays like Macbeth or Catiline.

Though Coriolanus is one of the most astringently political plays of Shakespeare, it is set in a community which has little to do with the civic liberty and the honourable conduct of state affairs which form the cornerstones of the Roman republican ideal as expounded in Sejanus and Catiline. It is a community not only organised primarily for war, and dominated by the belief that "valour is the chiefest virtue" (II.ii.82), but also - in respect of its patrician members at least - characterised by a pervasive spirit of gross and thoughtless brutality.

A similar violence is found in the Rome of Sejanus, but whereas there it is one aspect of an all too obvious decadence and barbarism, in Coriolanus it dovetails with shocking ease into the qualities of gentility and courtesy, of personal friendship and familial affection which form the basis of a superficially more civilised way of life. Volumnia's reflections on her son's martial exploits, and Valeria's tale of Coriolanus's son mammoocking the butterfly indicate how such violence is nourished by successive generations of domestic training in which the passion for war usurps the place of tenderness and love: "if my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love" (I.iii.2-5). Coriolanus is the most culpable of the patricians in this respect, and his solution to the problem of plebeian discontent, namely to "make a quarry / Of these quartered slaves" with his sword (I.i.197-98), is sufficient comment on his fitness as a political leader. But Cominius and Menenius, although more courteous and tolerant in their dealings with the citizens, are not free from such brutality. Cominius accedes to Coriolanus's request for the release of a poor Volscian prisoner with a curiously barbarous generosity: "Were he the butcher of my son, he should / Be free as is the wind" (I.ix.88-89); and, reporting Coriolanus's heroic deeds earlier in the same scene, he both describes and exemplifies the abnormal appetite for tales of violence found even in the Roman ladies who, listening to him, "shall be frightened, / And, gladly quaked, hear more" (11.5-6). Menenius attempts to induce a rather less welcome terror in the hapless Volscian guards as he gloats over the punishment to be meted out for their refusal to grant him access to Coriolanus: "Guess but by my entertainment with him if thou stand'st not i' th' state of hanging, or of some death more long in

spectatorship and crueller in suffering; behold now presently, and swoon for what's to come on thee" (V.ii.62-66).

The conflict between the patricians and plebeians is infected by the mentality and actualities of war in more ways than Coriolanus's impulse to slaughter the citizens wholesale. Menenius concludes his recital of the belly fable, urging obedience and social harmony, with the warning that "Rome and her rats are at the point of battle" (I.i.161), while to the discontented First Citizen there is little to choose between war and the deprivations of the patricians, since "If the wars eat us not up, they will" (II.83-84). Military prowess is a prerequisite of any candidate for the consulship; yet when Rome's greatest warrior, who receives the wholehearted support of his fellow-countrymen of all classes only on the battlefield, is called upon to show his war wounds to the citizens to support his candidacy, he succeeds only in showing how utterly incapable he is of moving "From th' casque to th' cushion" (IV.vii.43).

Coriolanus, therefore, presents us with a militaristic community whose attention is forced unwillingly onto problems of internal peace and order. The early republican Rome of this play is quite unlike the late republican or imperial world power of other Roman plays by Shakespeare, Jonson, and Chapman. Its political institutions are still in an embryonic stage, and, in contrast to all the plays we have hitherto discussed, there is no clear set of rules or fixed system of allegiances to serve as a guide in matters of political conduct. Coriolanus is rudely shocked into an awareness that he can no longer, like his mother, treat the citizens as mere "woollen vassals, things created / To buy and sell with groats" (III.ii.9-10), while their leaders pose as the most august and exalted defenders of law and order against a man guilty of "Opposing

laws with strokes, and here defying / Those whose great power must try him" (III.iii.79-80). Such fundamental disagreements on what is proper to particular persons or social degrees are a constant refrain.

Coriolanus is more truly described as a political play than most plays of Shakespeare, but it is a play about a community which reveals its characteristic self-expression, its deepest instincts and desires, in anything but the sphere of government.

X

Though Coriolanus is unable and unwilling to cope with political office, he is in certain respects a natural leader. His deportment on stage should never allow the audience to forget the supremely commanding physical presence of which we are occasionally reminded in the text itself, as when Aufidius speaks of his "sovereignty of nature" (which is rather different from the "royalty of nature" possessed by Banquo), of the "merit" which appears to override his faults (IV.vii.35, 48). Coriolanus is of heroic stature in life, and in death "the most noble corse" (V.ii.144), and is therefore the antithesis of the diseased Henry IV or the shrunken Macbeth. Aufidius's grudging recognition of his enemy's personal magnetism - "All places yield to him ere he sits down, / And the nobility of Rome are his" (IV.vii.28-29) - closely echoes an earlier tribute from his foremost antagonist in Rome, the tribune Brutus:

All tongues speak of him, and the bleared sights
 Are spectacled to see him. Your prattling nurse
 Into a rapture lets her baby cry
 While she chats him: the kitchen malkin pins
 Her richest lockram 'bout her reechy neck,
 Clamb'ring the walls to eye him: stalls, bulks, windows,

Are smothered up, leads filled and ridged horsed
 With variable complexions, all agreeing
 In earnestness to see him: seld-shown flamens
 Do press among the popular throngs, and puff
 To win a vulgar station: our veiled dames
 Commit the war of white and damask in
 Their nicely guarded cheeks to th'wanton spoil
 Of Phoebus' burning kisses: such a pothor
 As if that whatsoever god who leads him
 Were slily crept into his human powers,
 And gave him graceful posture. (II.i.202-18)

The artificiality of political and military conflict is attested in Coriolanus, as in Henry IV, by the frequency with which men praise their enemies, and even more so, in this later play, by Coriolanus's actual transfer of his allegiance. His enormous popularity as described by Brutus may further remind us of the ability of Bolingbroke and Malcolm to gather people of every age, sex, or occupation in support of them. Gentle and base, flamens and plebeians press together to catch sight of Coriolanus; but such is the rigid hostility towards one another of the various social degrees, that this functions as one of the few genuine images of social harmony, all manner of men and women "agreeing / In earnestness" to catch sight of the man who will shortly precipitate a violent conflict.

If Coriolanus's entry into Rome in some ways recalls Bolingbroke's reception into London (though he never, unlike Bolingbroke, courts the people's favour), in himself Coriolanus, with his super-human "graceful posture" recalls the divinity displayed in Hal's "noble horsemanship". But the divinity of Coriolanus, like so much in the play, is disturbingly ambivalent. As Rome waits for news of the reception of his family at Corioli, Menenius supplies the tribunes with a description of the man who "wants nothing of a god but eternity and a heaven to throne in" that reveals anything but the graceful ease with which Hal leaps into the seat of sovereignty:

The tartness of his face sours ripe grapes; when he walks, he moves like an engine and the ground shrinks before his treading. He is able to pierce a corselet with his eye, talks like a knell, and his hum is a battery. He sits in his state as a thing made for Alexander. What he bids be done is finished with his bidding.

(V.iv.17-24)

If Hal is a "feather'd Mercury", Coriolanus is a Moloch. Whereas his "graceful posture" sets him apart from and above his fellow-patricians, this darker side of his godliness marks him as very much one of their kind. His brutally mechanical efficiency is at one with the irresistible and supposedly divine power of the patricians and the state, described once again by Menenius in the opening scene, when he replies to the citizens' complaints over lack of corn:

you may as well
Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them
Against the Roman state, whose course will on
The way it takes; cracking ten thousand curbs
Of more strong link asunder than can ever
Appear in your impediment. For the dearth
The gods, not the patricians, make it, and
Your knees to them (not arms) must help. (I.i.66-73)

The implicit identification of "heaven" and "the Roman state" is strengthened by the confusion of gods and patricians in the "them" of the final line. Menenius is advocating a divine right of patrician rule based on force. Brutus is therefore not entirely without justification when he chides the man whose godlike deportment he had previously extolled for speaking to the people "As if you were a god, to punish; not / A man of their infirmity" (III.i.81-82).

XI

Coriolanus is similar to the histories in its exploitation of the ironies arising from the inextricable entanglement of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, baseness and nobility; but these ironies are generated less by the light cast on the present by past or even future events, than by an ambivalence inherent in present gestures, words, and actions.¹¹

And a central aspect of this ambivalence is the godliness of Coriolanus with its starkly differing connotations, his natural qualities of leadership which so conspicuously fail to realise themselves in affairs of state. This tendency for everything in the play to avoid a fixed and definite significance is particularly conspicuous in the constant debate, initiated in the opening lines of the first scene, on power, sovereignty, and the nature of social harmony, which is carried on with such fervour and occasional clarity, and yet is finally inconclusive.

The initial exchange between the two citizens raises more questions than it answers. In Plutarch's Life of Martius Coriolanus, the motive for the citizens' revolt is quite plain: "there grew sedition in the city because the Senate did favour the rich against the people".¹²

Shakespeare does not allow us to be so sure. The specious logic of the First Citizen may arise from no more than a hungry belly: "You are all resolved to die rather than famish? . . . First, you know

11 John Holloway, in an essay on "Dramatic Irony in Shakespeare" (in The Charted Mirror (London, 1960), pp.25-39), argues that irony works primarily by "sharpening the contour of what is happening" rather than by casting our minds into the past or future. Coriolanus affords even better support for his case than the two plays he concentrates on, Macbeth and Hamlet.

12 Shakespeare's Plutarch, ed. T. J. B. Spencer (Penguin Books, 1964), pp.300-01.

Caius Marcius is chief enemy to the people. . . . Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?" (I.i.4-11). This might be compared with the simple ignorance of economics displayed by Jack Cade in 2 Henry VI when he commands that "the pissing-conduit run nothing but claret wine this first year of our reign" (IV.vi.3-4). But, as the moderate Second Citizen points out without contradiction from his companion, Coriolanus is in no way covetous - any more than he is, as the tribunes deceitfully claim, attempting to seize "a power tyrannical" (III.iii.65). The First Citizen seals the hint that his opposition to Coriolanus arises from more than a lack of corn by the blatant contradiction in his call to arms: "Let us revenge this with our pikes ere we become rakes; for the gods know I speak this in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge" (I.i.22-24).

Though the citizens are usually discussed as an undifferentiated mass, these opening lines draw an important distinction, of a sort that will reappear, between the dispassionate tolerance of the Second, and the impatient deceitfulness of the First Citizen. Yet it is the latter who sees to the heart of Coriolanus with sure insight. Coriolanus's entire behaviour is a confirmation of the First Citizen's assertion with regard to his deeds in battle that "though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it partly to please his mother and to be proud" (11.32-38). Moreover, despite his verbal blunder over their intended "revenge", the First Citizen can also employ ambiguity to expose with fine irony the amoral, complacent power of the patricians, as when, in reply to the Second Citizen's epithet "good citizens", he draws attention to the contrast between "poor" (impoverished, base, wretched) citizens and "good" patricians; or when he points out to Menenius that while the Senate "say poor suitors have strong breaths:

they shall know we have strong arms too" (11.58-60).

The incisive brevity of the First Citizen forms a complete contrast to the long-winded and inconsequential prolixity of Menenius in his recital of the belly fable. In Plutarch and Livy, Shakespeare's sources for this episode, and also in Sidney's Defence of Poesie, the fable is used as a serious illustration of the mutually beneficial nature of a hierarchical social structure, and all three writers state that the fable had the desired effect. A common interpretation sees Shakespeare agreeing with these writers in all essential respects; the belly fable then becomes the political ideal against which the chaos of Rome is measured, in the manner of Ulysses' speech on "the specialty of rule" in Troilus and Cressida. But Menenius is entirely lacking in Ulysses' earnest eloquence. Some recent criticism has drawn attention to elements in his narrative which tend to work against its intended application, and imply, for example, that the belly, alias the Senators, is "self-satisfied and complacent in the security of its position", or that "In Rome, belly and womb govern because neither the soul nor the total body of man is given its proper due."¹³ But quite apart from such shifting implications, it appears that Menenius scarcely takes his own fable seriously, or expects his listeners to do so. He apologises for presuming to "stale" a tale which they must have heard before, implying that the patricians are accustomed to produce this in self-justification - a Roman equivalent of the Homily on Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion. Even so, he is at a loss for words. The persistent interpolations of the First Citizen are not to be construed as interruptions; it is only the dishonest

13 Derek Traversi, Shakespeare: the Roman Plays (London, 1963), p.209; Roy W. Battenhouse, Shakespearean Tragedy, its Art and Christian Premises, p.354.

opportunism of the Tribunes which on later occasions must prevent their opponents from stating their case without hindrance.¹⁴ They are simply honest attempts to elicit the belly's answer to the discontented members - the crucial justification of patrician behaviour towards the citizens that might avert further strife - which Menenius's halting incoherence is unable to provide. This inability he attempts to conceal, with excessive reliance on the dull-wittedness of his listeners, by a portentous and spurious gesture of finality:

it tauntingly replied
 To th' discontented members, the mutinous parts
 That envied his receipt; even so most fitly
 As you malign our senators for that
 They are not such as you. (11.109-113)

Dover Wilson glosses the "most fitly" in these lines as "Ironical", presumably on the grounds that the plebeians' criticism of the senators is not just. But if that were the case, "most fitly" would have to be ironical, strictly speaking, with reference to the belly's reply also (which is not recounted), and this cannot possibly be Menenius's intent. In fact this is an exquisite example of the verbal blunder typical of Menenius, indicative of a mental confusion which need not be explained away by ingenious textual exposition. The First Citizen, however, is not fooled, and his opponent's hesitation enables him to present another version of the body politic. The incongruity of his mention of the "kingly crowned head" (1.114) cannot have gone unnoticed by an audience educated in a version of Roman history which emphasised that "much discord was ever in the city [of Rome] for lack of one governor."¹⁵

14 See III.i.306ff.; III.iii.116ff.

15 Elyot, p.11.

The point is not that Shakespeare sees the disorders of Rome as dependent on its republican form of government, for nowhere does the play encourage us to make such historical speculations, but rather that the belly fable has no essential and comprehensive relevance to the immediate situation. It may be used to condemn the "cormorant" greed of the patricians (despite the incongruous presence of the kingly head) with as much glib plausibility as it can be drawn upon to defend their position as the "storehouse and shop" which serves the entire community. Menenius's assertion that the gods, not the patricians, are responsible for the dearth may seem to us like a mere avoidance of responsibility, but to a seventeenth century audience, accustomed to believe that the production of wealth was ultimately the work of God (who of His bounty gave more to some than to others), his words would carry more literal weight. But just as the ruler's position as God's deputy contained the implication of his immense responsibility as well as the respect and obedience due to him, so this attitude to wealth could be justly employed to criticise aristocratic greed - not using God's gifts in the best manner - as well as social levelling, which was an attempt to frustrate the divine plan.¹⁶ On all its subsequent appearances, the image of the body politic is employed with similar unscrupulousness, and is entirely lacking in the serious relevance to the political situation which it possessed in Macbeth. When Sicinius asserts that Coriolanus is "a disease that must be cut away", and Menenius retorts that he is "a limb that has but a disease; / Mortal, to cut it off; to cure it, easy"

16 Renaissance attitudes to the proper use of wealth are discussed by Helen C. White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century (New York, 1965), pp.262-65 et passim.

(III.i.293-95), they further illustrate their capacity for petty and fruitless argument, but tell us nothing about either Coriolanus or Rome.

One can scarcely avoid the conclusion that in his use of the belly fable, Shakespeare was glancing critically at the numerous political arguments, particularly in favour of resistance or tyrannicide like those of Ponet and Parsons, which depended on a devious use of the metaphor of the body politic.¹⁷ The most intelligent exponents of this concept were well aware of the limits of its applicability and the dangers of its misuse. Edward Forset, author of A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique, who himself defends King James's favourites as "the fantasies of the Soule, wherewith he sporteth and delighteth himselfe" in terms to which a conservative Tudor moralist might well have taken exception, nevertheless prefaces his work by a plea that "it be not exacted or expected of me, so mincingly to manage this matter, as that unto every particular part or facultie of our humane nature, I must need find out in the States bodie some severall members or braunches entirely matchable to the same."¹⁸ The argument on power and sovereignty in Coriolanus often appears to gather its own momentum, and the image of the body politic through which it is expressed becomes opaque, so that we see on either side merely a process of barren reasoning, divorced from any comprehensive vision of social harmony.

17 My interpretation of the function of the body politic metaphor in Coriolanus is in certain respects similar to that of D. G. Hale, "The Body Politic," pp.137-55 and "Coriolanus: the Death of a Political Metaphor," SQ, XXII (1971), 197-202, who likewise argues that it fails to engage with the actual situation in Rome; but I see no reason to accept his conclusion that Shakespeare thereby "shows us the inherent futility of trying to comprehend a complex political situation by a simple analogy."

18 Edward Forset, A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique (London, 1606), p.15, "To the Reader".

Menenius is introduced by the Second Citizen as "one that hath always loved the people" (I.i.50-51), and however much this is contradicted by his nonchalant contempt for them, he does at least, unlike Coriolanus, display his grasp of the sound principle that "when the people are too far enraged, it is no time to punish, but rather to reconcile and appease."¹⁹ Such a willingness to appease, however, should always, it was believed, be built on unshakeable principle, on a willingness to make an ultimate stand for truth and justice. Just such a flexible constancy, as advocated in More's own writings, is embodied in the titular hero of The Book of Sir Thomas More, in which he can calm the enraged populace, and yet not mince his words in laying before them the heinousness of their commotion. Menenius, however, merely drifts with the tide of events. At the beginning of the second act, with the threat of insurrection over for the time being, and news expected of Coriolanus's success in war, his love to the citizens is not at all apparent. Having thrown a great deal of petulant abuse at the tribunes - whose brief replies show up the foolishness of their opponent in the same way as the First Citizen's answer to Coriolanus's shrill abuse: "We have ever your good word" (I.i.165) - he takes his leave with a remark worthy of Coriolanus himself: "more of your conversation would infect my brain, being the herdsmen of the beastly plebeians" (II.i.91-94). When, at the instigation of the tribunes, Coriolanus is banished, he becomes "most kind" to them (IV.vi.12), only to reassume his disdainful spirit later in the same scene, when the news of Coriolanus's advance on Rome enhances patrician prestige. Desperately in need of a telling insult his own weak brain cannot provide, he latches onto

19 Hurault, p.195.

Cominius's "O, you have made good work" (1.81), repeats it ad nauseam, and is still using it two scenes later.

Coriolanus, on the other hand, cannot but impress us by the honesty and courage with which he speaks boldly of the dangers of plebeian power, which "bereaves the state / Of that integrity which should becom't" (III.i.158-59). What he fails to grasp is that Rome is already lacking in such integrity in more ways than he can understand, since he as much as anyone else is implicated in this disintegration. Menenius, after delivering a fable which is supposed to emphasise this very integrity, as well as the differentiation of social function, reveals how in fact Rome means to him merely the patricians, as distinct from the plebeian "rats". In a Rome thus split into two hostile and irreconcilable camps, it is with a certain fitness that the First Citizen speaks of the common people as if they themselves constitute a politic body, in which the tribunes become patricians: "The noble tribunes are the people's mouths / And we their hands" (III.i.270-71). The epithet "noble" - one of the most frequent words in the play - is employed in this scene with particular irony. In the first few lines, its primary use to denote patrician rank (as distinct from a more loose moral usage) is firmly established by the contrast between "The tongues o' th'common mouth" and "noble sufferance" (11.22, 24), "the noble and the common" (1.29). But the ennobling of the tribunes is not simply the work of plebeian arrogance. The First Senator, attempting to appease the citizens' wrath, appeals to the "Noble tribunes" (1.324) that Menenius may be allowed to fetch Coriolanus back, whereupon Sicinius with obvious sarcasm institutes the "Noble Menenius" as "the people's officer" (11.327-28).

Coriolanus's refusal to compromise is commended in the opening lines of the following scene by a fellow-patrician; "You do the nobler"

(III.ii.6). The implication, which Coriolanus would certainly affirm, is that his behaviour affirms a true nobility which is degraded by such as the First Senator and Menenius. On hearing of Coriolanus's return from the wars, Menenius casts his cap up with plebeian abandon, and anticipates the citizens' shouts of "Hoo" on Coriolanus's banishment (II.i.103-04; cf. III.iii.138). But though Coriolanus fiercely asserts a nobility of speech and behaviour in an attempt to ratify the rigid social distinction which he sees as essential - "You are plebeians, / If they be senators" (III.i.101-02) - various patterns of imagery gradually build up the implication that Coriolanus himself participates in this unnatural social inversion. The "beastly plebeians", for example, are scorned by a man who is himself "a very dog to the commonalty" (I.i.27-28). In recounting the belly fable, Menenius draws a distinction between the plebeians who receive the "flour of all", and the senators who are left with "but the bran" (I.i.144-45). Forgetting his earlier usage, however, he later attempts to excuse Coriolanus's inability to use refined language when addressing the citizens, since "meal and bran together / He throws without distinction" (III.i.320-21); and Cominius in the final act reports Coriolanus's refusal to spare Rome for the sake of his friends since "He could not stay to pick them in a pile / Of noisome musty chaff" (V.i.25-26). Again, Menenius accuses the "hungry plebeians" of wanting to "devour" Coriolanus (II.i.9; cf. III.i.288-92); but the same accusation is levelled against the patricians by the First Citizen: "If the wars eat us not up, they will" (I.i.83-84). The cannibalistic nature of war is associated with Coriolanus in particular, who is both a monstrous consumer of men and himself a victim.²⁰

20 See I.i.257, I.ix.10-11, I.x.7-10, IV.v.194-95, 220-23.

Whereas in Sejanus, the image of devouring is confined to Tiberius alone, slowly grinding the whole of Rome between his wolf-like jaws, in Coriolanus the same image summarises the activity of all Rome both in war and government. In both plays, the noble integrity of the human body is employed as an image of moral stature. While in Jonson's play, the moral and physical perfection of Germanicus is contrasted with the dismemberment in which almost all the characters partake to some degree, Coriolanus himself embodies both these extremes; he is at once a godlike hero and a "thing of blood" (II.ii.107).

The essential contrast in this play, therefore, is not so much between an ideal of political conduct and the actual behaviour of the characters (as in Troilus and Cressida), as between the clamorous self-justification of virtually all the characters, their own notion of how Rome should be constituted, and the bitter strife and confusion of degree which actually obtains in the city. All the main patterns of thought and imagery, beginning with the belly fable, are each used in different ways with starkly contrasting implications, such that those images in particular which are intended to emphasise social distinction (the flour and the bran, god and beast, nobility and baseness) in fact reveal the fundamental identity of patrician and plebeian.

XII

The contrast between Coriolanus and Menenius in their relative willingness to appease the enraged populace merely conceals the identity of their common contempt for the plebeians, a contempt which offers little prospect for the cessation of strife. Only on one occasion, the scene in which the citizens give Coriolanus their vote of confidence for the consulship,

is this vicious circle of pride and self-seeking temporarily broken. The prior discussion among the citizens, and particularly the Third Citizen's plea for a responsible use of their power, indicate the origin of Rome's sickness in a lack of those qualities of bounty and gratitude which form the basis of Duncan's treatment of his Thanes:

We have power in ourselves to do it [i.e. refuse our voices], but it is a power that we have no power to do: for if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them; so, if he tell us his noble deeds, we must tell him our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous: and for the multitude to be ingrateful, were to make a monster of the multitude; of the which we being members, should bring ourselves to be monstrous members.

(II.iii.4-12)

None of the patricians ever formulates such a responsible attitude towards his own obligations. The citizens' exercise of such gratitude would make them truly "noble", just as the royal groom is ennobled by his allegiance to the deposed king in the final act of Richard II. Such nobility, based on the bounty and gratitude which in Macbeth are seen to transcend degree, would be quite different from that arrogated to themselves by the tribunes in the subsequent scene. And it is the tribunes who quash this tentative move towards reconciliation when they stir up the supposedly "ancient malice" of the citizens (II.i.225). But the First Citizen's comment on his companion's reference to themselves as "monstrous members" implies how thoroughly uncongenial a soil Rome is, quite apart from the deviousness of the tribunes, for the nurturing of such moral and political awareness:

And to make us no better thought of, a little help will serve; for once we stood up about the corn, he himself stuck not to call us the many-headed multitude.

(II.iii.13-16)

This reference to the revolt over corn directs our attention to the opening scene, in which there was a similar contrast between the patient reasoning of the Second Citizen, and the less scrupulous but also more discerning attitude of the First. The citizen body is monstrous, not so much through its own actions, but because Coriolanus expects it to be so. The Third Citizen is making a noble but hopeless plea for gratitude towards a man who is unable either to give or to receive, as we have already seen in his refusal of the thanks and rewards granted him by Cominius for his success in war, and his blundering attempt to release from imprisonment a Volscian at whose house he once stayed. Healing the wounds of strife cannot be such a one-sided affair; the harmony built on bounty and gratitude calls for the reciprocal fulfilment of obligations, a point which Macbeth, who thinks that it is his sovereign's part merely to "receive our duties", so conspicuously fails to understand. Once again it is the less charitable attitude of the First Citizen which clearly grasps the near hopelessness of the situation.

Coriolanus's refusal - or inability - to respond to the citizens' vote of confidence is, however, cleverly defended by one of the officers laying cushions in the Senate House, when he replies to his companion's charge that Coriolanus "loves not the common people":

For Coriolanus neither to care whether they love or hate him manifests the true knowledge he has in their disposition; and out of his noble carelessness lets them plainly see it.

(II.ii.11-14)

Coriolanus's "noble carelessness" would have found a sympathetic response in many a Renaissance mind in the opening years of the seventeenth century, when the dangers of popular power were becoming a frequent

subject of political debate.²¹ A passage from William Fulbecke - in his more haughty patrician mood - who himself cites Coriolanus in connection with the iniquity of democracy, indicates how the conduct of Shakespeare's character is, or appears to be, wholly in accord with this tendency of Renaissance political thought:

they that are not vertuous, can not judge of them that be vertuous, & if they can not judge of them, how can they with conscience praise them: and if not them, how can they with safe conscience praise others. Is it not therefore a madness to gape for their suffrage, which are incompetent judges, and to care for their controlment which are insensible censors?²²

But it is, the First Officer claims, a carelessness in appearance only. Coriolanus, he argues,

seeks their hate with greater devotion than they can render it him, and leaves nothing undone that may fully discover him their opposite. Now, to seem to affect the malice and displeasure of the people is as bad as that which he dislikes, to flatter them for their love.

(11.17-22)

The First Officer recognises that Coriolanus's effort to differentiate himself from the people has in moral terms the exact opposite effect. Of the patricians, Volumnia alone reveals her grasp of the contrived

21 Cf. W. G. Zeeveld, "Coriolanus and Jacobean Politics," MLR, LVII (1962), 321-34.

22 William Fulbecke, The Pandectes of the Laws of Nations, p.30; Coriolanus is mentioned on the succeeding page.

Cf. Bacon, "Of Praise", The Works of Francis Bacon, VI (London, 1878) 501-02: "If it be from the common people, it is commonly false and naught; and rather followeth vain persons then virtuous. For the common people understand not many excellent virtues. The lowest virtues draw praises from them; the middle virtues work in them astonishment or admiration; but of the highest virtues they have no sense of perceiving at all." This essay was first published in 1612.

nature of her son's "noble carelessness": "You might have been enough the man you are, / With striving less to be so" (III.ii.19-20). Insofar as there is any resolution at all in the play it occurs not in the political fortunes of the city, but in the character of the protagonist, who in the final two acts reveals a nature diametrically opposed to the proud image of himself encouraged by Volumnia. On the most general level, this reversal is evident in his going over to the enemies of Rome. On leaving the city, he endorses the citizens' belief that "The people are the city" (III.i.199), a belief which he above all men had hitherto denied: "Despising / For you the city, thus I turn my back" (III.iii.134-35). The "mean attire" in which he appears before Aufidius (IV.iv.0.1) echoes the "garb of humility" (II.iii.38.1) in which he appeared before the citizens, and to which he thought himself so ill-suited. In acceding to his mother's pleas for him to spare Rome he is, as Aufidius mockingly points out, a "boy of tears" (V.vi.101), and thus utterly unable to

stand
 As if a man were author of himself
 And knew no other kin. (V.iii.35-37)

XIII

Coriolanus makes greater use of Renaissance thinking on order in the state and the relationship of different social classes than any other play of Shakespeare. It is therefore not surprising that, ever since Hazlitt's celebrated essay, in which Coriolanus is offered as an adequate substitute for Burke's Reflections, Paine's Rights of Man, and the parliamentary debates from the time of Civil War, the comparative merits

of the ideas on sovereignty, obedience, and the ideal constitution of a state advanced variously by the patricians, the citizens, and the tribunes have been hotly debated as though this were settled in the play itself. I hope that my emphasis on the lack of any definite answer to these questions does not seem like simple evasion of a critical problem which others have been willing to face; and I certainly do not mean to imply that this is evidence of a political agnosticism on Shakespeare's part, but rather that the deliberate uncertainty and lack of resolution precludes our full endorsement of either party, and directs our attention to the social confusion and individual self-assertiveness which generates this debate. Even on so fundamental a matter as whether the tribunes have a right to exist (as distinct from the use they make of their office) there are in the play profound and unresolved disagreements which are reflected in critical discussion.²³ The point about the political convictions advanced by the various characters, however, is not their abstract truth or falsity, but their patent irrelevance to the conduct of both parties. Coriolanus's emphasis on rigid social hierarchy is undercut by the confusion of degree promoted by patricians as well as plebeians, just as the tribunes are the first to violate the "ceremony" on which Sicinius insists (II.ii.137-38).

Coriolanus and Macbeth, therefore, when considered in relation to one another, suggest a kind of inverse relation between the eagerness

23 J. E. Phillips, The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman Plays, pp.150-59, argues that Shakespeare endorses Coriolanus's view that the creation of tribunes damages the integrity of the state, which may only be restored by their abolition. Kenneth Muir, on the other hand, argues that "Coriolanus makes the counter-revolutionary suggestion that the office of tribune should be abolished, and he strikes the aediles. Both the proposal and the act are treasonable, and the Tribunes with unwise leniency commute the death-sentence to one of banishment." "In Defence of the Tribunes," E in C, IV (1954), 332.

with which a character proclaims his political rights and privileges, and his actual possession of the qualities which make for social harmony. In Macbeth, conventional ideas of social order and the royal qualities which enrich this order are an unobtrusive basis for social behaviour, unquestioned even by those who violate them. The strident political debates in Coriolanus, on the other hand, serve to underline the fragility of a social order entirely lacking in those human qualities defined in the earlier play. Coriolanus is a play of violent contrasts rather than even development, in its language, its characterisation, its dramatic action. The protagonist's lack of an inner self which might provide a psychologically plausible account of his sudden decision to return to the market-place, or to join with Aufidius, emphasises the element of absurdity and incoherence in men's behaviour, occasioned by a complete divorce between ostensible motives and the latent springs of action which turn men into a reverse of their public selves. In a world of such "slippery turns" in which "fellest foes . . . grow dear friends / And interjoin their issues" (IV.iv.12, 18-22), it is inevitable that the intermittent civil strife in Rome should be curiously suspended. After the harmonious rejoicing which greets the news of the successful mission of Coriolanus's family and the consequent Volscian retreat, we witness the death of Coriolanus, and are left waiting for the return swing of the pendulum towards a fresh outbreak of strife. Coriolanus is concerned with the nature and causes of social disharmony in a community so constituted that the fitful moves towards healing and integration are necessarily quashed at birth. It leaves us, as do Sejanus and Catiline, with a prospect of continuing disorder, but without any glimpse of the qualities embodied in Lepidus and Terentius, Cicero and Syllanus, such as set a limit to this disorder and imply the possibility of its ultimate reversal.

Chapter Seven

George Chapman: The Conspiracy and Tragedy of
Charles, Duke of Byron; Caesar and Pompey

I

The plays of Jonson and Shakespeare discussed in the foregoing chapters suggest a rough division of the rebels and usurpers of Renaissance drama into two main types. There are the calculating seekers after power, capable men with few illusions and an ability to defer to established authority when it suits them. Such are Bolingbroke in Richard II, Worcester and the Archbishop in Henry IV, and Caesar in Catiline. Then there are those for whom the conquest of power is merely the ultimate means of fulfilling their insatiable craving for glory or infamy, and is rarely planned or executed with any degree of competence. Into this category we may admit Catiline, Hotspur, and (with some qualifications) Sejanus.

Chapman also was interested in both kinds of threat to the established order. In Caesar and Pompey,¹ the main threat to the peace and order of Rome comes from a Caesar who is the equal to his counterpart in Catiline for his skill in political manoeuvre and his recognition of the need to appear honest and patriotic. The titular hero of Byron² expresses the

1 The date of Caesar and Pompey is tentatively conjectured by Parrott (p.655) as 1612-13. The argument for a much earlier date of 1605 at the latest is presented by Ennis Rees, The Tragedies of George Chapman (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp.126-32.

2 The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron was first acted in the Spring of 1608, and a truncated version, our only surviving text, published the same year (Parrott, pp.591-92). I refer to the entire two part play as Byron, and to each separate part as Conspiracy and Tragedy. The dramatic character "Byron" is to be distinguished from the historical person "Biron".

hope that the enemies of France will "toss me up / Into the affected compass of a throne" (Conspiracy, III.iii.35-36; cf. Tragedy, III.i.54-56). But this aim is never pursued with the energy which Caesar devotes to the conquest of Rome. Byron is more at home boasting of his military exploits than planning the overthrow of Henry. His real goal is not to gain power but rather (like Catiline) to "hit the starres", or (like Hotspur) to "pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon".

But Chapman's dramatic depiction of this type in Byron is in one important respect different from that of Shakespeare or Jonson. Catiline, Sejanus, and Hotspur all seek for power within a system which is corrupt or lawless, and their rebellions may be seen as symptomatic of the rottenness of society. Byron, on the other hand, sets himself against the justice of King Henry which is both flawless and (unlike that of Cicero in Catiline) executed without hindrance. The deeds and aspirations of the rebel are, as in no other play in this study, directed against a sovereign and a state whose exercise of power is not qualified by any moral failing. This is, one suspects, just the sort of play of which a contemporary moralist - for example Nashe or Heywood, whose conceptions of drama were quoted at the beginning of Chapter One - would have approved.

Whatever artistic reasons led Chapman to develop this simple contrast between royal justice and politic treason, the historical context of this play would have made any other treatment potentially dangerous. The Duke of Biron had been sent as ambassador to England by the French King Henry IV in 1601. The news of his execution in July of the following year must have come as a shock to the English court, following so closely as it did upon the execution of the Earl of Essex, and would be engraved in the minds of many members of the audience at the first performance of Chapman's play only six years later. If Sejanus and Philotas, plays

set in remote epochs, could bring their authors before Star Chamber, the dramatisation of a rebellion against a king who was still living and an ally of England, a rebellion which is explicitly compared with Essex's rebellion by Byron himself (Tragedy, IV.i.130-33), was inevitably limited in the scope it could give to heterodox sentiment.

Byron, therefore, was written under the pressure of contemporary political event and opinion like no other play of this period. Chapman leaned heavily on a single written source, Edward Grimestone's translation from several French historians entitled A General Inventorie of the Historie of France (1607), which supplied him not only with plot and character, but numerous phrases and even whole speeches. Even so, this book cannot have had the same formative role as, for example, North's Plutarch in the writing of Coriolanus, or Tacitus in the writing of Sejanus, since Chapman did not have to wait for the appearance of the General Inventorie to react to the fate of Biron. The contemporary account of Biron's downfall by John Chamberlain, generally a reliable barometer of English court opinion, indicates how closely in certain respects Chapman echoed not only his written source, but the contemporary feeling which was anterior to this. Chamberlain wrote to his friend Dudley Carleton on June 17, 1602, expressing disbelief in the reports of Biron's treason and impending execution: "I cannot perswade myself that so fowle a canker could breed in an open souldierlike breast."³ Though no ambiguity is intended in these words (as though doubting the integrity of Biron rather than his impending execution), it could easily be read back into them on the strength of another letter written

3 Letters written by John Chamberlain during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, ed. Sarah Williams, Camden Society Publms. LXXIX (London, 1861), p.139.

after the execution, in which Chamberlain has a very different story to tell: "Let the French twaddle what they list of his dieing en soldat. I cannot perceve by ought that I have seen or heard but that he died very timerously and childishly, which shewes that his valour was rather a French furie, then true fortitude."⁴ Chamberlain goes on to allude to the executions of the Earls of Gowrie and Essex as comparable to that of Biron, and returns to the question of their real worth. "Theire persons and services," he claims, were "so magnified that a great part of the world rests unsatisfied in their deaths, and will not be perswaded against their deserts by any undeservings; but mundus vult decipi, and so let it go."

The parallels with Chapman's play are obvious: Henry's virtual disbelief in Byron's treachery, particularly at the beginning of the Tragedy; the ambivalent dramatisation of Byron's death, which appears to show both ignorance and insight, courage and fear; Byron's greatness as the creation of others' admiration or flattery, rather than true worth; and finally the question as to whether "deserts" may be nullified by later misdeeds. The exact process of the formation of Byron in Chapman's mind is irrelevant to the understanding of it as a play, but the unique historical circumstances of its production are offered as a possible explanation of the departure of this play from the usual pattern of Chapman's tragedies. In each of these, an individual of great virtue or virtu (Bussy, Clermont, Byron, Chabot, Cato) sets himself against law or authority in pursuit of a higher law. Byron expresses the matter in classic Aristotelian terms:

4 Ibid., p.159.

There is no danger to a man that knows
 What life and death is; there's not any law
 Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
 That he should stoop to any other law.
 He goes before them, and commands them all,
 That to himself is a law rational.

(Conspiracy, III.iii.140-45)⁵

Though it might be argued that the "native noblesse" of Bussy is treated ironically, in Byron alone is such an appeal to a higher law presented as complete illusion. The concept of prelapsarian "royal man", living a life of self-regulated virtue independent of the strictures of society, which figures large in the work of Chapman as of no other contemporary dramatist, did not necessarily pose a threat to humanist ideals of social order. But the case of Chabot demonstrates how easily it might be drawn into the service of a defiance of royal authority. Chabot's refusal to carry out an unjust command of his king, and his consequent submission to trial and condemnation is in strict accord with Tudor principles of honest service. But his later assertion "I need no pardon" (Chabot, IV.i.240) is at least a gesture towards a more radical and subversive individualism, since it implicitly denies the validity of the judicial process which condemned him, or its inferiority to his own private law. It is highly probable that Chapman's refusal to give any scope to such supra-legal virtue in Byron alone was partly due to the discipline exacted by the dramatisation of such inflammable

5 Cf. Aristotles Politiques, p.162: "Therefore it is likely such a man [i.e. of great virtue] to be as a god amongst men: from whence it appeareth, both the constitution of lawes to be necessary among equals; both in kind and power: but according to such there is no law, for they themselves are a law unto themselves: and he were ridiculous which should go about to decree lawes against them." The relevance of this passage to Chapman's tragedies was first noted by Charles W. Kennedy, "Political Theory in the Plays of George Chapman", Essays in Dramatic Literature: the Parrott Presentation Volume, pp.77-82.

material. While in Bussy, Clermont, Chabot, and Cato Chapman depicts an ideally virtuous character whose virtue is thwarted or perverted by contact with a fallen world, Byron is treated (like Coriolanus or Hotspur) as one of those men "than whom nothing is more commendable when they are singled; and yet in society with others none less fit to answer the duties which are looked for at their hands."⁶

II

The dramatic structure of Byron is best seen as consisting of three components. At the centre stands Byron, whose fate in the balance provides the only dramatic tension. Then on either side of him, secure in their uncomplicated commitment to either good or evil, are ranged on the one hand the Archduke, Savoy, and their agents, attempting to lure him to treason, and on the other Henry and his counsellors, striving to win him back to the fold of loyalty. The Conspiracy shows the former in the ascendant, conceiving and successfully executing their designs on Byron despite Henry's warnings, while in the Tragedy, Henry's justice and capability as a ruler is emphasised, despite his failure to induce Byron to repent. The transfer of La Fin's allegiance from Savoy in the Conspiracy to Henry in the Tragedy epitomises this change of focus.

The contention of the powers of good and evil for the loyalty of the protagonist suggests the technique of the Morality play, and indeed the religious dimension of the action, clearly relevant to the common belief in religion as the foundation of policy, is apparent from the outset. King Henry asserts his sterling moral character in the

6 Hooker, Ecclesiastical Polity, I, xvi, 6.

first scene of the Conspiracy by banishing the devilish La Fin with Christ-like resolution: "Away, and tempt me not" (Conspiracy, I.i.62). Byron, on the other hand, is unable to resist the advances of his "tempter" Picoté (Conspiracy, I.ii.13), and later falls victim to the lure of La Fin, who promises, like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, to "creep / Upon my bosom in your princely service" (Conspiracy, III.i.80-81).

The casting of the main characters in a clearly structured religious drama is only one of several ways in which the ethical and political norms governing the action are given continual emphasis. On many occasions the flow of action or dialogue is interrupted by an explicit statement of doctrine which may only tenuously be related to the immediate situation. Byron's affirmation of the religious basis of true policy affords an example:

Religion is a branch, first set and blest
By Heaven's high finger in the hearts of kings,
Which whilom grew into a goodly tree;
Bright angels sat and sang upon the twigs,
And royal branches for the heads of kings
Were twisted of them; . . .

(Tragedy, III.i.25-30)

Byron is ostensibly arguing that this tree is now decayed, that kings keep themselves in power by villainy, and that his own treachery may be justified on the basis that "we must not be more true to kings / Than kings are to their subjects" (II.1-2). But there is no real coherence of feeling to support his argument. The literary archaism of these lines tends to detach them from their immediate context, and make them serve as a yardstick for the entire action, and for the second half of the Tragedy in particular, where just such religious terms of reference are evoked as an endorsement of Henry.

Several incidents are, moreover, presented or related with an explicitly moralistic intent. The sole function of D'Aumale is as an exemplary warning to Byron - which the latter is quick to perceive - of the dishonour and ruin consequent on "mortal enmity against the King" (Conspiracy, I.ii.55). The sight of Byron sitting on his horse is interpreted by Savoy as "A doctrinal and witty hieroglyphic / Of a blest kingdom" (Conspiracy, II.ii.78-79), ironically of course, since Savoy knows that the steed was given to him by an enemy of France who has promised to lift Byron into the seat of sovereignty, and that besides Byron is (like Hotspur) quite incapable of the control and self-control proper to a ruler. The scene in which Byron's visit to England is recounted is full of such moral-political aphorisms; indeed the presentation of this episode entirely through report, though probably less dramatically interesting than was the direct presentation of the original acting version, enables us to concentrate fully on its exploration of just rule and the bond between sovereign and subject. Finally, we may note how the discursive, moralistic tone of many speeches is enhanced by the use of historical parallels, some of which, like the association of Byron with Catiline early in the Conspiracy (I.ii.15), immediately cast a character in a clearly recognisable role.⁷

III

The effect of this moralistic technique is to emphasise exclusively the defects of Byron as a man and as a servant of the king - an emphasis

7 Further historical parallels may be found at Conspiracy, II.i.157-72, III.ii.65-73, V.ii.51-57; Tragedy, I.ii.36-37, III.i.14-24, IV.ii.29-30.

which runs counter to the usual critical affirmation of his heroism; in *Coriolanus* and to a lesser extent *Hotspur*, we see the heroism and the defects at the same time. Byron's capability as a military leader is depicted in glowing terms in the Prologus, and is again recalled by Henry at the beginning of the Tragedy, but scarcely appears in the play itself, except as an implicit ideal against which is measured the folly and weakness of the Byron we see.

"Unless we accept the greatness," writes Janet Spens, "he is merely ridiculous."⁸ But ridicule is one of the foremost devices Chapman deliberately uses to demonstrate the hollowness of Byron's pretended greatness. There is true comic potential in the way that Byron, at his first appearance at the Archduke's court in the second scene of the Conspiracy, is shuffled back and forth in the midst of his vacuous musings by the politic Picoté, in order to meet the right people at the right time: the potential is only fully grasped if we imagine the actual presentation of this episode on stage. Picoté's stage-management is perfectly successful, and indeed virtually the entire plot of the Conspiracy is contrived by Savoy and the Archduke, as not only Byron but even Henry (in II.ii) react to their promptings exactly as planned. The incident of Byron's picture (III.ii), where he acts with a predictability which assumes almost farcical proportions, symbolises how the "art" of Savoy - a false art criticised by Henry later in this scene (III.ii.247-62) - is constantly working on Byron while the latter is obsessed with a false belief in his glorious self-subsistence, which should, he thinks, be expressed by "a statuary of mine own" (1.142).

8 Janet Spens, "Chapman's Ethical Thought," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, XI (1925), 155.

In this respect the relation of Byron to Savoy is akin to that of Sejanus to Tiberius. It is not until the final scene of the Conspiracy that the tables are turned on Savoy, and he himself is the victim of a farcical situation contrived by the three ladies.

Byron's ignorant acquiescence in the manipulations of Savoy and the Archduke are the inevitable outcome of his living not in the world of men, but in the heady atmosphere of his own self-esteem. On his first appearance, he is completely captivated by the sensual allurements contrived by Picoté, in a way that would be quite foreign to the blunt, soldierly natures of Hotspur or Coriolanus:

The blood turns in my veins; I stand on change
And shall dissolve in changing; 'tis so full
Of pleasure not to be contained in flesh: . . .

(Conspiracy, I.ii.27-29)

The ironical comment on his first phrase is provided by Byron himself when he considers later in this scene how dangerous it is to "trust our blood in others' veins" (1.140); and by Henry in the scene of Byron's repentance, who urges him to leave those who have lured him by "swelling / Your veins with empty hope of much" (Conspiracy, V.ii.69-70). Right at the beginning of the play, Byron is already in that state of dangerous detachment from the world which only appears in Sejanus, for example, shortly before his final destruction by the "art" of Tiberius:

My roofe receives me not; 'tis aire I tread:
And, at each step, I feel my' advanced head
Knock out a starre in heav'n!

(Sejanus, V.7-9)

Byron's ambition is repeatedly expressed in images of aspiring to the heavens, of mountain summits which "pierce into purest air" (Conspiracy, I.ii.106). These images are first introduced in the Prologus,

where Byron is a "bright star" who outshines all others, and is said to have "touch'd heaven with his lance". Such aspiration could have genuinely heroic connotations for Chapman, as the dying speech of Bussy as well as the Prologus to Byron demonstrate. But early in the play itself, it becomes associated with Byron's treachery, which, like that of Catiline, Sejanus, and Hotspur, partly arises from his failure to keep both feet firmly planted on the ground of wisdom and prudence. Byron himself recognises the folly of treason:

O, 'tis a dangerous and a dreadful thing
 To steal prey from a lion, or to hide
 A head distrustful in his open'd jaws;
 To trust our blood in others' veins, and hang
 'Twixt heaven and earth in vapours of their breaths;
 To leave a sure pace on continue earth,
 And force a gate in jumps from tower to tower,
 As they do that aspire from height to height: . . .

(Conspiracy, I.ii.137-44)

Henry, he realises at this stage, is a lion. It is only the repeated flatteries of Henry's enemies that delude him into thinking that the King dare not grant him the citadel of Bourg, or could not have brought him to court without "A power beyond my knowledge" (Tragedy, III.ii.108), despite the warnings of both Janin (Tragedy, III.i.182-83) and his own friend D'Auvergne (Conspiracy, V.i.52-55). Byron is allured to treachery by the very excitement it promises, similar to that of storming a fort. He is akin to many soldiers of Renaissance drama, among them Coriolanus, Hotspur and Chapman's own Caesar, in his inability to find fulfilment except in warlike activity, whether true warfare, or "the giantlike and politic wars / Of barbarous greatness, raging still in peace" (Conspiracy, II.ii.167-68). It is only natural that he should find a conspirator in La Fin, who is "at peace with nothing but with war" (Conspiracy,

I.i.151), and that he should complain, on being deprived of his sword, that he might as well have been robbed of his soul (Tragedy, IV.ii.280-82).

Byron's one considerable virtue, therefore, his military prowess, is itself associated with that imprudent boldness which drives him to the folly of treason. Yet even his skill as a soldier has, as Henry informs Savoy (Conspiracy II.ii), been excessively magnified at the expense of others, while in the Tragedy he tells his counsellors of an occasion when Byron was

So wounded, and so amaz'd with blows,
That, as I play'd the soldier in his rescue,
I was enforc'd to play the Marshal
To order the retreat, because he said
He was not fit to do it, not to serve me.

(Tragedy, IV.ii.13-17)

Byron's failure to sustain his role as a soldier is paralleled metaphorically by his failure to defend the citadel of his own loyalty. In the first scene of the play, Roncas follows a glowing account of Byron's valour (and his ambition) with the expressed hope that La Fin may prove "Of the yet taintless fortress of Byron / A quick expugner, and a strong abider" (Conspiracy, I.i.104-05). While Byron hopes to extend his military skill and daring into a treacherous enterprise against the King, he is himself the victim of a military conquest, "the richest prize in Europe, / Were he but taken in affection" (Conspiracy, I.ii.165-66). In implying here that Byron is a woman to be wooed as well as an enemy to be captured, the Archduke unites the two dominant strains of imagery which describe his submission to the enemies of France. In the Prològus, it had been Byron himself who took France by the hand like a gallant knight, "Pluck'd her from under

her unnatural press, / And set her shining in the height of peace" (11.6-9). In his most extreme fit of boasting following his rebuff by the King over the question of the fort of Bourg, this image is afforded fantastic extension. He alone, so Byron claims, "Took Amiens in these arms", and

(married to victory)
 Did people Artois, Douai, Picardy,
 Béthune and Saint-Paul, Bapaume and Courcelles,
 With her triumphant issue.
 (Conspiracy, V.i.147-55)

But this boast comes after an accumulation of hints that Byron is more properly regarded as the victim of courtship both by the Archduke, in whose court he was "woo'd and worshipp'd" (Conspiracy, II.ii.9), and later by Savoy, who welcomes him "as if my marquisate / Were circled with you in these amorous arms" (Conspiracy, III.ii.25-26).

If Byron is so utterly lacking in capability and shrewdness as I have argued, so completely dominated by the designs of others, it might be objected that there is nothing tragic in his downfall: an objection which some critics have tried to meet by making a spiritual struggle in Byron the centre of the play. Catiline has been described as "the decline and fall of an obviously bad man and . . . the rise of an all-too-obviously good one",⁹ and though this description applies less obviously to Byron, both Byron and Catiline inhabit a dream-world of aspiration which scarcely seems to endanger the practical sagacity of Henry or Cicero. But the political threat posed by both characters is not in anything they themselves might achieve, but rather in their function as a magnet for those forces which do spell real danger to a

9 Jacob I. de Villiers, "Ben Jonson's Tragedies," ES, XLV (1964), 441.

state: the Catholic princes attempting to infiltrate the French court, impoverished Roman aristocrats, the rising power of Caesar and Crassus. King Henry knows that Spain is not powerful enough to attack France "without treason bred in our own breasts" (Tragedy, I.i.46). But if Byron is the agent of this treason, he is more than willing to pardon him on confession, knowing as he does that he is no menace except when in league with foreign enemies; Byron's treachery is, as Henry tells him, "no disease bred in yourself, / But whispered in by others" (Conspiracy, V.ii.68-69). In Byron as in Catiline, the sly politician and the gullible rebel are natural though unequal allies.

IV

Though Byron is never overshadowed by Henry in the same way that Catiline is by Cicero, his own moral defects are developed partly in order to throw into relief the qualities which enable his King to rule justly. Byron's failing might be characterised as the lack of a stable moral centre, the need for which received particular emphasis from the Stoic ethics to which Chapman was attracted, and which in this play is seen to form the basis not only of true kingship, but of the health of an entire society. Following Byron's arrest, to which he reacts by the desperate assertion of his now tainted virtue, and immediately before Henry's reception of the Spanish ambassador, which reminds us of the threat to the safety of France, Epernon observes that "his state still is best / That hath most inward worth" (Tragedy, IV.ii.309-10). The pun on "state" as both personal and political, though not intended by Epernon, points to a connection sustained throughout the play. In Byron, Chapman offers his distinctive interpretation of the humanist

commonplace that the health of an entire society and of its magistrates are inseparable.

Byron's lack of moral stability is developed in a group of images one of which, that of the fortress, has already been noted. Henry's refusal to grant the keeping of the citadel of Bourg to one who cannot even defend his own citadel of loyalty from assault, and his later decision not to disarm his frontiers (Tragedy, V.i.37), are evidence of the prudence so conspicuously lacking in his servant. Two further images, the great, well-rooted tree and the well-built house symbolise not only individual worth, but - as in the social verse of Ben Jonson - the coherence and permanence of the entire aristocratic order. Sejanus, we recall, boasted of having felled many members of the Imperial family, as well as many leading nobles;¹⁰ it is just such a fate which overtakes D'Aumale for his treason to the King:

His goodly house at Annet raz'd to th'earth,
And (for a strange reproach to his foul treason)
His trees about it cut off by their waists; . . .

(Conspiracy, I.ii.151-53)

In the previous scene, Savoy had seconded Henry's wish that attempts against his crown should cease with the expressed hope that the "whole estates" of traitors should "fly, rooted up, / To ignominy and oblivion" (Conspiracy, I.i.204-05). The fate of D'Aumale is the first answer to this prayer, while Byron's musings on the instability of great men when he goes to learn his fortune from La Brosse presages his own similar destruction: "like trees that broadest sprout, / Their own top-heavy state grubs up their root" (Conspiracy, III.iii.29-30). The English

10 Sejanus, V.241-52.

counsellor who advises Byron on the dangers of ambition develops these ideas at length, comparing unstable greatness to a statue in which the base has not been matched by a "conformed structure" (Conspiracy, IV.i.189), a house with poor foundations, or a promontory which has been eroded more than is safe for its "hanging brows" (1.192).¹¹ Men will therefore shun "all ground / That lies within his shadow" (11.193-94) - the truth of which remark Byron and D'Auvergne learn when they find a cold reception on returning to the French court in the Tragedy; for they are men who, as Henry points out, "contend / To cast up rampires to you in the sea, / And strive to stop the waves that run before you" (Tragedy, IV.ii.191-93). Henry, on the other hand, is a man whose shadow no one need fear (the idea of the well-rooted tree is implicit in these lines):

Though I am grown, by right of birth and arms,
 Into a greater kingdom, I will spread
 With no more shade than may admit that kingdom
 Her proper, natural, and wonted fruits; . . .

(Conspiracy, I.i.118-21)

But Henry is not only the tree which provides shade for the growth of his kingdom's fruits. He is also the sun-king who casts "but a little

11 The ethical criteria defined here and elsewhere in the play recall Castiglione's comparison of great men to "the Colosses that were made in Roome the last yeere upon the feast day of the place of Agone, which outwardlye declared a likenesse of great men and horses of triumph, and inwardly were full of towe and ragges. But the Princis of this sort are so muche woorse, as the Colosses by their owne waightye pese stand upright of them selves, and they because they be yll counterpesed and without line or levell placed upon unequall grounde, throughe their owne waightinesse overthrowe them selves, and from one errour renn into infinit" (The Courtier, p.300). Henry's description of Byron as a crooked staff, "which to rectify / Must twice as much be bow'd another way" (Conspiracy, II.ii.30-31) also echoes Castiglione's discussion of how extremities might be avoided and the "centre of vertue" attained (pp.330-31).

or no shade at all" (Tragedy, V.i.143) when settled at the zenith of his power by the defeat of Byron's conspiracy. Henry's sun-like majesty ensures his victory over the heavenly aspirations of Byron, who resembles a cloud which mounts towards the sun until it suddenly "Stoops in a puddle, or consumes in air" (Tragedy, III.i.211; cf. V.iii.41-50).

This contrast between well-rooted moral worth and ostentatious instability provides the key to the theme of Fortune and Virtue. In the first scene of the Tragedy, Henry places the sword of justice into the hands of the infant Dauphin, and prays that with it he may cut off "from Fortune / Her feather'd shoulders and her winged shoes" (Tragedy, I.i.141-42), and "from thy tree of rule all trait'rous branches / That strive to shadow and eclipse thy glories" (ll.113-14); the latter recalls the image of just rule advanced by the gardener in Richard II, in which the good king is said to lop away "Superfluous branches / . . . that bearing boughs may live" (III.iv.63-64). Henry hopes that his own resolute and sun-like virtue will be reproduced in his son, who will thus be able to deprive Fortune of her power to play havoc with human affairs. But the opposite view that Fortune is the real ruler of worldly affairs and that she is able to frustrate the operation of Virtue, that Nature is in fact divided against herself, is more than once afforded forceful expression. Such a view clearly limits the scope for constructive political action, and Greville's adherence to it, most clearly evident in the celebrated final chorus of Mustapha, lies behind his peculiar defence of non-resistance. It has been argued, notably by Hardin Craig and Roy Battenhouse, that Chapman's tragedies

illustrate this belief,¹² but with regard to Byron at any rate this is, I believe, mistaken.

Such an attitude is first expressed by, appropriately enough, the astrologer La Brosse, who laments that "while we live / Our good parts take away, the more they give" (Conspiracy, III.iii.18-19). Byron seems to echo this in stating that prosperity is "the fount and handle of calamity" (1.26), but the prosperity to which he refers is the precarious building of men such as himself, who sooner or later

prostrate on the grounds of Fortune lie;
And being great, like trees that broadest sprout,
Their own top-heavy state grubs up their root. (11.28-30)

Unable to accept the astrologer's prediction of his coming doom, Byron staggers to his feet off the grounds of Fortune and determines to "stretch" himself "for greatness and for height" (1.131). But in affirming his independence from the stars Byron displays those very qualities of imprudence and instability which will make him their slave. In questioning whether the stars are "better" because they are "bigger", Byron alludes to the contrast between goodness and greatness (first introduced in the Prologus) whereby he stands condemned. He then proceeds to reverse the proper precedence of reason over the will and, alluding to the imagery of sound and well-knit construction, determines to "piece-meal pull the frame of all my thoughts" (1.117), while the celebrated image of the adventurous spirit on "life's rough sea" (11.135-39) again points to the unstable man whose "keel plows air."

12 Hardin Craig, "Ethics in the Jacobean Drama: the Case of Chapman", Essays in Dramatic Literature: the Parrott Presentation Volume, pp.25-46; Roy W. Battenhouse, "Chapman and the Nature of Man," ELH, XII (1945), 87-107, reprinted in Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Ralph J. Kaufman (New York, 1961), pp.134-52.

A belief in the ability of Fortune or contrarious Nature to frustrate the operation of Virtue is further expressed by the French nobles after the announcement to Byron of his condemnation. They would appear to possess more moral authority than either Byron or La Brosse, and yet they are sufficiently out of tune with Henry's justice to refuse to appear at Byron's trial. It is possible that Chapman means us to equate their dissatisfaction at Byron's trial with their misunderstanding of the cause of his fall, though he does not develop the hint. For Epernon's lines again clearly indicate, by drawing on several accumulated strains of imagery, that the perversity which he sees in Nature itself ensnares only the man of precarious greatness who is crushed into air by sun-like majesty, who is overloaded with ornaments too burdensome for the supporting structure, who has laid the foundations of his house by Virtue, but put the roof to Fortune in a way that the English counsellor had expressly warned Byron against:

Oh of what contraries consists a man!
 Of what impossible mixtures! Vice and virtue,
 Corruption, and eternnesse, at one time,
 And in one subject, let together loose!
 We have not any strength but weakens us,
 No greatness but doth crush us into air.
 Our knowledges do light us but to err,
 Our ornaments are burthens, our delights
 Are our tormentors, fiends that, rais'd in fears,
 At parting shake our roofs about our ears.

(Tragedy, V.iii.189-98)

This may be a just comment on Byron's failure to reconcile the discordant elements in his own nature, but not, Chapman implies, on man as a whole.

V

The genuine moral strength which, far from being vulnerable to the storms of Fortune, may be made the basis of a sound and enduring political order, is most perfectly realized in the England of Elizabeth,

Where Nature keeps her state, and State her Court,
Wisdom her study, Contenance her fort; . . .

(Conspiracy, III.ii.278-79)

In describing the source of her country's strength, Elizabeth takes the fortress imagery a stage further. England, she claims, boasts "no walled cities; for that Crystal / Sheds, with his light, his hardness and his height" (Conspiracy, IV.i.41), while any merit she may possess is bestowed by her subjects, "some in counsel, / In action some, and in obedience all" (II.126-27). This is precisely the sort of security aimed at by Henry, who has taken care to show his subjects "how I never sought to build / More forts for me than were within their hearts" (Tragedy, III.ii.45-46). His effort has been partly successful, and France is blessed with "triumphant peace" (1.54); but he still has need of military caution, and observes Elizabeth to imitate her government, as Byron tells her, by "standing on his turrets" (Conspiracy, IV.i.117) - of which her inwardly defended kingdom has no need.

All the more impressive, therefore, is Henry's willingness to allow Spanish troops through his territory according to treaty, although he knows that, despite their ostensible motive of marching to Flanders, they intend to seize the French throne with the help of Byron (who has just been arrested) should the opportunity arise. Henry's refusal to disarm his frontiers, and his doubts about the King of Spain's good faith are copied from Grimestone, but his lecture on the duties of kings

and subjects (Tragedy, V.i.48-65) is Chapman's own addition, and constitutes the core of the doctrine of kingship advanced by the play. If kings do not keep within the confines of heavenly justice, they cannot expect their subjects to observe the human laws derived from thence,

and this breach
 Made in the forts of all society,
 Of all celestial and humane respects,
 Makes no strengths of our bounties, counsels, arms,
 Hold out against their treasons; and the rapes
 Made of humanity and religion,
 In all men's more than Pagan liberties,
 Atheisms and slaveries, will derive their springs
 From their base precedents, copied out of kings.
 But all this shall not make me break the commerce
 Authoris'd by our treaties; let your army
 Take the directest pass; it shall go safe.

(Tragedy, V.i.57-68)

Henry is ostensibly criticising the King of Spain for his own breach of faith, but he is also elucidating the basis on which he finally agrees to let hostile troops pass over his territory; for the greatest military strength and skill in government is of no avail if the forts of society are already breached by refusal to honour an agreement. In doing so he implicitly answers the accusation of Elizabeth, who complained to Byron of his King's refusal to pay her a visit:

all our worth is made
 The common stock and bank, from whence are serv'd
 All men's occasions; yet, thanks to Heaven,
 Their gratitudes are drawn dry, not our bounties.

(Conspiracy, IV.i.49-52)

Henry repays treachery with good faith, just as Elizabeth repays apparent ingratitude with unstinting bounty.

There is fine irony in Byron's defence of his sovereign, when criticised by Elizabeth, on the grounds that Henry's state is not yet

secure enough to risk a journey to England, since Byron himself is the main cause of this insecurity. In fact the whole of Elizabeth's first reported speech, though ostensibly directed towards Henry, functions implicitly as an indictment of Byron himself. Her dissatisfaction with Henry bears a striking similarity to Byron's complaints about the king's "politic and thankless royalty" (Tragedy, V.ii.183), his contrast between "faithful" and "courtly" friends (Conspiracy, V.i.3), his belief that his services are not properly rewarded:

And you shall tell your King that he neglects
 Old friends for new, and sets his soothed ease
 Above his honour; marshals policy
 In rank before his justice, and his profit
 Before his royalty; his humanity gone
 To make me no repayment of mine own.

(Conspiracy, IV.i.53-58)

The difference is not simply that Elizabeth's intentions are honest, and that she is speaking of one who is her equal in rank, while Byron's accusations are both utterly unfounded and impudent. Byron is wholly lacking in the truly royal generosity which repays ingratitude or faithlessness with further trust and bounty. But even his quite opposite principle that "we must not be more true to kings / Than kings are to their subjects" (Tragedy, III.i.1-2) supplies no excuse for his repayment of good faith with treachery, of mercy with stubbornness.

The concept of kingship elucidated in Byron is remarkably similar to that of Shakespeare, though not so variously and richly developed as in the persons of Hal, Duncan, or Malcolm. Beyond the conventional notions of degree and duty, it recognises the essential equality of king and subject. It is not Byron but Henry who fulfils Savoy's

doctrinal and witty hieroglyphic
 Of a blest kingdom: to express and teach
 Kings to command as they could serve, and subjects
 To serve as if they had power to command.

(Conspiracy, II.ii.78-81)

The ability of a king to obey - so fundamental to the success of Hal and Malcolm - is linked with another important quality found in Henry, the ability to "fit / Our government to men, as men to it" (11.33-34). This quality of adaptability, of refusing to apply law and government in a dogmatic fashion, is comparable to that displayed by Cicero in Catiline, though its practical manifestations - when the danger is not a thoroughly rotten society but rather a single erring subject - are quite different. But just as Cicero suffers initially (as the chorus informs us) from charges of scare-mongering and making false accusations, even though he prudently treats Crassus and Caesar with more leniency than abstract justice would require; so Henry, despite his long tolerance of Byron's misdeeds, is accused by many of his neighbouring countries of having fabricated the conspiracy for politic ends. His comment on this bears comparison with the plea for a true understanding of state affairs by the fourth chorus of Catiline:

Such shut their eyes to truth; we can but set
 His lights before them, and his trumpet sound
 Close to their ears; their partial wilfulness,
 In resting blind and deaf, or in perverting
 What their most certain senses apprehend,
 Shall nought discomfort our impartial justice,
 Nor clear the desperate fault that doth enforce it.

(Tragedy, V.i.83-89)

This comment might well apply to the misunderstanding or deliberate perversion of Henry's speech and actions by Savoy and Byron in particular. Even the most dedicated exercise of rule is subject to the perverse

interpretation of its intentions as well as the more overt obstruction of its actions, and there is thus a peculiar irony in the fact that Henry and his counsellors have, like Cicero, been branded as disciples of Machiavelli.¹³ Byron's harping on his master's "politic and thankless royalty" recalls Hotspur's attitude to another Henry, and like Hotspur Byron is accustomed to heed no man but himself: witness his conversion of Henry's "white beard" into a "grey beard" in their argument at the close of the Conspiracy (V.i.95, 101), or his ridiculous parody in prison of the judges at his trial, which he insists on continuing despite the embarrassed protests of his listeners. But there is another, subtler kind of misrepresentation practised by Savoy. A brief consideration of the use of the river-sea imagery will serve to make the distinction.

The common image of the king as the fount of honour or the sea of majesty, which Hal applies to himself on assuming the kingship (2 Henry IV, V.ii.129-33), is used only once in its orthodox sense in Byron. Elizabeth complains to Byron of the fact that Henry should, "being a sea, be sparing of his streams" (Conspiracy, IV.i.30), then goes on to add that though men's gratitudes are "drawn dry", her bounties are not (1.52): Elizabeth is truly the image of virtuous rule as in the final stanza of the introduction to Book Six of The Faerie Queene:

So from the Ocean all rivers spring,
And tribute backe repay as to their King.
Right so from you all goodly vertues well
Into the rest, which round about you ring,

Savoy, commenting on Henry's dismissal of La Fin, is the first to use this image, but with an implication markedly different from the norm:

13 See Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy, pp.68-69.

When little rivers by their greedy currents
 (Far far extended from their mother springs)
 Drink up the foreign brooks still as they run,
 And force their greatness, when they come to sea,
 And jostle with the ocean for a room,
 O how he roars, and takes them in his mouth,
 Digesting them so to his proper streams
 That they are no more seen, he nothing rais'd
 Above his usual bonds, yet they devour'd
 That of themselves were pleasant, goodly floods.

(Conspiracy, I.i.183-92)

Savoy's commendatory tone thinly conceals the sarcasm with which he refers to the supposedly devouring absolutism of Henry's power, which swallows up the "pleasant, goodly floods" of his tributary servants. Henry's rule is not of this kind, as Savoy probably realises; he "would do best for both" (1.193). But in a later scene Byron echoes Savoy's usage with perfect seriousness. His alliance with La Fin, achieved by the latter's ability to "wind about" Byron "like a subtle river" (Conspiracy, III.i.68) - despite Byron's belief that it is he who has circumvented La Fin - is consolidated by Byron's invitation to him to "join our streams" (1.75); while in the following scene, Savoy greets Byron with the cryptic remark that "All honours flow to me, in you their ocean" (Conspiracy, III.ii.24-26). Such an accumulation of images emphasising Byron's easy manipulation by his pretended allies underlines the absurd distortion evident in his use of the same strain of imagery to denounce Henry's ingratitude. Savoy's report of the praise given by Henry to the English soldiers Norris and Williams stings Byron to resentment at the king's devouring of his services, thus to "drown such good in such ingratitude" (1.78), while in formulating his fantastic plan for an image of himself to be carved out of a mountain, he determines that

from my right
 I'll pour an endless flood into the sea
 Raging beneath me, which shall intimate
 My ceaseless service drunk up by the King, . . . (11.169-72)

The idea of tyranny as a devourer of men and merit is justly applied to Tiberius in Sejanus, while Greville, in discussing the same topic in the "Letter to an Honourable Lady", employs the river-sea image exactly as distorted by Savoy and Byron: "as many Rivers must lose their names, to make up one sea, so Absoluteness must winne, and keepe above, with the losse of all, or at least many branches of universall Freedome."¹⁴

Greville invests a conventional image with thoroughly unorthodox implications because for him, unlike traditional humanist writers, such absolutism was the inevitable state of monarchy in a fallen world. This is precisely the perverse interpretation which Byron and Savoy attempt to lay on Henry's conduct, and on kingship in general: Byron on a later occasion locates the origin of the decline of true kingship not in the Fall, but in the rise of Machiavellian doctrine (Tragedy, III.i.2-9). But there is no doubt that Byron's cynical attitude to kingship is as false as his slanders on Henry. A well-ordered body politic in which the rule of a sovereign and the obedience of a subject could be mutually enriching experiences - kings commanding as they could serve, and subjects serving as if they had power to command - was a real possibility for Chapman, as for Shakespeare, in a way that it no longer could be for the Greville who wrote Mustapha.

14 Certaine Learned and Elegant Workes, p.275.

VI

This interpretation of Byron as a transparent political morality in which the protagonist is brought low simply by the lack of those moral qualities which constitute the strength of Henry, Elizabeth, and their respective realms, allows little scope for the complexity which has been read into this play as (with justice) into Bussy D'Ambois. But so clearly is the plot structured and the imagery ordered towards a set of explicit moral parallels and contrasts, that Byron's assumed role of a noble victim of fate or a scourge of wickedness is never allowed to take on substance. The final scene of the Tragedy in which Byron goes to his death is the only episode which may cast doubt on this argument. His compelling rhetoric fills virtually the entire scene with nothing to qualify its impact, and he tries hard to universalise his own fall from a precarious height into the inevitable experience of all statesmen:

They tread no ground, but ride in air on storms
That follow state, and hunt their empty forms; . . .

(Tragedy, V.iv.146-47)

But his repeated hope that a reprieve will be granted at the last minute sorts ill with his pretended joyful embracement of death as an escape from the life which is "but a dark and stormy night / Of senseless dreams, terrors, and broken sleeps" (11.39-40). The curious mixture of contemptus mundi and "Horror of death" (1.26) suggests that Byron's deportment is, like that of the historical Biron, "rather a French furie, then true fortitude", in the words of Chamberlain. The soldier who affirms both the justice of Byron's execution and at the same time his merit far surpassing any of the King's minions confirms the condemned man's unshakeable confidence in his own deserts, and enables him to reconcile this with the fact of his death, for

danger haunts desert when he is greatest;
His hearty ills are proved out of his glances,
And kings' suspicions needs no balances; . . . (11.226-28)

This would probably have been endorsed by Greville, but Henry's insistence on using "the decent ceremonies of my laws" (Tragedy, IV.ii.45), and only after considerable reluctance, is sufficient indication of how mistaken is Byron's cynical attitude to kingship.

In a fine essay on Chapman's tragedies, Edwin Muir describes his tragic heroes as men who "wander about, like Chapman himself, enclosed in a dream of greatness and breathing the air of that dream."¹⁵ In Byron, however, Chapman is definitely outside the dream, and concerned to show the disaster which can overtake those who are enclosed in it. Against this insubstantial world of brittle greatness, he sets an ideal of personal and political strength and solidity which might well be summed up by a passage from Tourneur's funeral poem on the death of Sir Francis Vere:

And as that Empire of his minde was good;
So was her state as strong wherein she stood.
Her scituation most entirely lay
Within it selfe; admitting not a way,
Nor any open place, infirme or weake,
By which offensive purposes might breake
Into her government; or have accesse
Thorough the most familiar passages
That led upon him, under faire pretence,
Without discovering they ment offence,
Before it was too late to give retreat
To their proceedings. Nor could any heate
Or violence of such invasion, make
His passions mutin'; or his pow'rs forsake
Their proper places. Nothing could disband
The strength and order of his minds commaund. ¹⁶

15 Edwin Muir, "Royal Man: Notes on the Tragedies of George Chapman," in Essays on Literature and Society (London, 1949), p.21.

16 The Works of Cyril Tourneur, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (London, 1929), p.159. All references to Tourneur, apart from The Revenger's Tragedy, are to this edition. Since the authorship of The Revenger's Tragedy is uncertain, we cannot be sure that the same person wrote that play and the lines quoted here.

VII

At the beginning of the final act of Caesar and Pompey, Cornelia, awaiting the arrival of Pompey following the battle of Pharsalia, compares his as yet doubtful fortunes with her own location at Lesbos:

O may this isle of Lesbos, compass'd in
 With the Aegaeon sea, that doth divide
 Europe from Asia (the sweet literate world
 From the barbarian), from my barbarous dreams
 Divide my dearest husband and his fortunes. (V.i.32-36)

It is not only Cornelia and Pompey who are poised between the sweet literate world and the barbarian. The transition from civilisation to barbarism is the subject both of this play, and, as we have already noted, of much Renaissance political drama, in particular Jonson's tragedies and Richard II. Jonson is primarily concerned with the general characteristics of this transition - a disregard for law, the replacement of true counsel by flattery, and the attack on learning and eloquence being the most obvious marks of a barbarised society. Chapman is more interested in the moral and political pressures borne by the individual, and indeed this play is best approached through the attempts of Cato, Caesar, and Pompey to deal with their respective situations. It is the struggle of the individual to retain his integrity, to live according to his personal ideals in spite of the rough torrent of occasion, which generates the ironies and ambiguities characteristic of this type of play. Caesar and Pompey is far removed from the morally simple world of Byron.

The gathering storm of barbarism, "Civil and natural wild and barbarous turning" (I.i.6), is heralded in the opening lines of the play by Cato, one of the few remaining bulwarks of civilisation. As in Sejanus, the moral norms which we might expect to govern the action are advanced at the outset. Cato outlines the corrupt state of Rome,

inveighs against the "paddocks, toads, and water snakes" (1.19) that gather round Caesar (like the monstrous snails that stick to Sejanus), and affirms his own fearlessness in the face of intimidation. But whereas Sabinus, Silius, and Arruntius are drawn inexorably into the stream of events against their will, Cato deliberately plunges into the thick of political conflict. The telling comparison shifts from Sejanus to Catiline. Like Cicero, Cato is faced with the task of opposing Rome's drift towards barbarism with little help, of harnessing the fierce integrity displayed in this opening scene to do "what is fit / For our poor city's safety" (11.85-86). Cato agrees with his friend Minutius that the task is almost impossible, but urges him to "do like ourselves" (1.95). The precise nature of this truth to oneself and its practical implications, which Cato's role gradually unfolds, constitutes Chapman's answer to the problem of living in a barbarised community.

The ensuing debate in the Forum is far removed from the stately Senecal decorum of the opening scene. Jonson's tragedies show him unwilling to mingle tragedy and comedy. Chapman's classical scruples were not so strict, and while this willingness to introduce comedy resulted in the disastrous scene between Fronto and Ophioneus (II.i), it also produced the amusing interchange which occurs when Cato, with the help of loyal citizens, forces his way onto the Senate benches between Metellus and Caesar, who are plotting mischief together. As with the scene in the Conspiracy in which Picoté ushers Byron round the Archduke's court, we must imagine the actual presentation of this episode on stage to recognise its comic potential. Caesar and Metellus are now forced to whisper their hurried and confused consultations round the back or over the head of the man they aimed to keep out at all costs. And the confusion of argument which deepens as this scene progresses is

repeatedly emphasised as we hear motions for the entry of Pompey's army (from Metellus; but of course his ulterior aim is to gain the same concession for Caesar), against such an entry (rather half-heartedly from Caesar), and against both their proposals (from Cato) coming not from separate parts of the house, but from three men crammed together on one bench. This whole scene is in fact a fine example of how skillfully Chapman could handle a lengthy debate without lapsing into the tedium which characterises Cato's disquisition on suicide and the immortality of the soul later in this play, or Cicero's lengthy speech to the Senate in the fourth act of Catiline. The excitement of this debate springs partly from its importance in the development of the action (as with the debate among the Trojan leaders in Troilus and Cressida, II.ii); partly from the fact that (like Silius's death speech) it issues in violence, as a war of words erupts into a general drawing of weapons; but chiefly from the subtle interplay between overt statement and real intention, as the argument develops spontaneously under the quick cross-fire of accusation and counter-accusation. Chapman was as keenly aware as Jonson and Shakespeare of the need for rational eloquence in civilised politics, and equally aware of how vulnerable was such an ideal to the deceptive eloquence or artful silence of the corrupt statist.

Indeed, such is the confusion spread by Metellus's counterfeit motion, that all the participants in this debate appear to act or speak contrary to their real natures. Cato's prompt refutation of Metellus is followed by Caesar's rambling and confused oration, in which he boasts of the "wild kingdoms / . . . Which I dissavag'd and made nobly civil" (I.ii.102-04), scarcely an appropriate claim for the author of barbarism. When the Senate express their clear wish that Caesar but not Pompey should be disarmed, Antony, who later appears as Caesar's most brutal

and cynical henchman, momentarily usurps Cato's role and bids them "yield to this clear equity, that both / May leave their arms" (11.200-01). At this point Cato, the upholder of law against violence, snatches the bill from Metellus's hands and proposes to stop his mouth rather than hear him speak it by memory; whereupon Caesar urges them to restrain this "Author of factions" Cato, with some apparent degree of justification. Pompey's attempt to turn this incident against Caesar by emphasizing the inferiority of both to the virtuous Cato is deftly avoided by Caesar's refusal to admit any of the ambition which Pompey, he remarks, appears so willing to confess.

Reason and eloquence have been utterly confounded. The debate degenerates into personal bickering between Caesar and Pompey, and the latter's call to arms as a peal of thunder heralds the oncoming storm of barbarism. The close of this scene would appear to call for the separation on stage of the opposing parties, Pompey followed by the Senate and people crying for peace, Caesar surrounded by "The Ruffians" clamouring for war. Cato has been almost silent during the latter part of the debate, and a producer would have to decide whether his position as the true representative of Rome should set him with Pompey, or isolate him from both parties. This very question of the nature of Cato's impartiality is raised by his next appearance with Pompey's army (II.iv), the last time we see him actively engaged in the political conflict. Cato has been rightly interpreted as the embodiment of a Stoic ideal which Chapman wholly endorses. But this scene forces us to consider whether he is not seriously compromising his integrity by appearing with the army of a man who is motivated chiefly by a desire for personal glory, however much the Senate and people see him as their saviour; nor does he acknowledge that Pompey's triumph would merely be the lesser

of two evils which might lead to ultimate good.¹⁷ After the Senate's somewhat abject alliance with Pompey, one cannot but view with some irony his dogged assertion, "I am commanded by our powerful Senate" (II.iv.63); while his resolve to act as a one-man police force "which side / Soever conquer" (II.65-66) exhibits a self-confidence which is unrealistic if courageous. Cato is in the unenviable position of York in Richard II, struggling to "remain as neuter" when the pressure of events renders this virtually impossible, doggedly asserting the lawfully constituted power which has all but ceased to exist.

The ironies in the position of Cato, a man of peace, in the midst of such a bloody conflict, are particularly apparent in the handling of Caesar's proffered truce. Pompey's initial victory could (according to Gabinius) have been crushing, were it not for Cato's counsel of restraint, a restraint which, though resulting in "much saved blood", must eventually "cost more", as Pompey later realises (II.iv.35-37; III.i.112-13). The invaluable respite afforded Caesar, which he correctly guesses was given by Cato's desire for "prevention of our Roman blood" (II.iii.60), enables him to send Pompey an offer of peace by the prisoner Vibius, whom he frees with princely magnanimity. Antony, lacking his master's smooth deceit, interprets this as a deliberate attempt to goad Pompey into rash and hasty battle. Caesar's sudden rebuke indicates how easy it is to suspect him of hypocrisy, and yet (as with Bolingbroke) how difficult to point to any statement which

17 La Primaudaye argues that the "burning affection" of the ancients towards their country was perfectly epitomised in the support given to Pompey by Cato, who claimed that "men ought to choose a lesse evill to meete with and to redresse greater mischiefes: and that it were better willingly to bring in a kind of monarchie, than to deferre it so long, untill the issue of present seditions should by force and constraint establish one" (p.94). Chapman's Pompey produces no such sophisticated defence of his role.

would clearly brand him as such:

I try no such conclusion, but desire
 Directly peace. In mean space, I'll prepare
 For other issue in my utmost means; . . . (11.82-84)

Caesar obliquely instigates the battle which will mark the final destruction of Roman liberty with a professed desire for reconciliation, just as Bolingbroke greets King Richard with "fair duty" (Richard II, III.iii. 187-89) at the very moment when he silently but surely wrests power from his hands.

Cato is right, therefore, when he surmises that there will come "humble offer on his part / Of honour'd peace" for Pompey (II.iv.51-52), but he can scarcely have fathomed Caesar's devious motives. When the offer finally arrives, Pompey falls into the trap exactly as Antony had conjectured. The beautiful irony of this situation is worth emphasizing, perhaps at the risk of expounding the obvious. Pompey correctly recognises the offer of peace as "a snare" (III.i.107), but of course fails to understand that Caesar is counting on the very pride and suspicion which enables him to smell danger. Urged by his counsellors to give battle in spite of Cato's advice to accept any proffered truce, Pompey unexpectedly expresses his grief at their decision, "Because I rather wish to err with Cato / Than with the truth go of the world besides" (11.116-17).. Had Pompey followed the promptings of Cato, Caesar's bluff would have been called, and peace appeared as a real possibility. But in view of Cato's doubtful worth as a military adviser, their arguments for war might indeed seem to be founded on truth. Pompey is in fact recalling a celebrated remark by Cicero in the Orator, where he defends his admiration for Isocrates, since in doing thus he may be said to "err with Socrates and Plato", while

Castiglione, echoing this remark, professes himself willing "to err with Plato, Xenophon, and M. Tullius" in depicting an ideal (of courtliness) which could not be realised in its entirety.¹⁸ By alluding to this maxim, Chapman emphasises that the principled advice of Cato is worth more than all the expertise of Pompey's military counsellors. Cato's straightforward desire for peace could, it is suggested, have outmanoeuvred the most skilfully laid plan of Caesar, even without recognising the nature of the trap which had been laid. But Pompey decides to go with the truth of the world.

Cato's role during the first three acts, therefore, emphasises primarily the difficulties experienced by a truly selfless seeker after the public good of adjusting to a situation in which peace and order have broken down, but also the unexpected strength contained in such an unswerving adherence to principle, were it only to be preferred before more worldly counsels. Having failed in his efforts to avert disaster, Cato retires to his home at Utica, sadly reflecting that to act in accordance with sound political and moral principles is no guarantee of success:

When Pompey
 Did all things out of course, past right, past reason
 He stood invincible against the world:
 Yet now his cares grew pious, and his powers
 Set all up for his country, he is conquered. (V.ii.65-69)

This is as much a reflection on his own "too tender shunning innocent blood" (III.i.112), which checked Pompey's advantage over Caesar, as on Pompey himself. His political zeal chastened by this recognition

18 Cicero, *Orator*, tr. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1939), xiii.41-42, p.337; Castiglione, p.22.

of a rift between successful public action and moral principle, Cato advises his son

not to touch
 At any action of the public weal,
 Nor any rule bear near her politic stern:
 For, to be upright and sincere therein
 Like Cato's son, the time's corruption
 Will never bear it; . . .

(11.108-13)

If we may invoke again the principle of political flexibility advocated by Thomas More, Cato is here urging Portius to desert the ship because he cannot control the winds. The gulf between Cato and Jonson's Cicero, for whom the preservation of the state is the overriding concern, is now clearly apparent. The reason for this is less an overt difference of principle than a disparate focus of interest. Chapman is concerned with the point at which individual moral integrity must take precedence over the sacrifices demanded by a corrupt body politic. Cato does not, unlike Mustapha, acquiesce in the advent of tyranny without a struggle. But Chapman's affinities are with Greville rather than Jonson in his endorsement of a withdrawn Stoicism and a welcome acceptance of death as the final answer to barbarism.

VIII

The flexible application of principle to circumstance, pre-eminently the mark of Jonson's Cicero, is therefore advocated in Caesar and Pompey not by Cato, but by the villain Caesar. His ready adjustment to occasion, however, is really no more than a complete lack of scruple in political conduct:

With defects, defects
Must serve proportion; justice never can
Be else restor'd, nor right the wrongs of man.

(II.iii.115-17)

Not only Caesar's means, but also his end, the "justice" which he seeks to restore, is open to question. Unlike the mere power-hungry Machiavel he is driven by a genuine political ideal, a vision of Rome as an earthly paradise over which he will be supreme ruler. Chapman impresses upon us the grandeur of his conception while simultaneously indicating its violent, destructive nature. For Caesar's aspirations are most fully expounded during the storm that "threats the wrack of nature" (II.v.40), symbolising the barbarism with which he is identified. His "civilisation" would in fact be a barbaric temple with himself as the chief idol, in pursuit of which he has

ransack'd all the world for worth
To form in man the image of the gods, . . . (II.12-13)

Caesar is one of those "politic devisers" described by Hooker, "able to create God in man by art."¹⁹

There is little indication of the complexity of Caesar's motives during the first act, where he is indeed depicted as a thoroughly factious and unscrupulous Machiavel. But the separation of the two opposing parties, and even more so the withdrawal of Cato from effective action, enable him to gain an illusory moral stature. Not only is he able to expound his grandiose designs both in soliloquy (II.v) and in his fine speech before the battle of Pharsalia (III.ii.109-38), but he is continually contrasted with Pompey, often to the latter's detriment.

19 Ecclesiastical Polity, V, ii, 4.

Pompey is admittedly lacking in Caesar's latent destructive urge. The ordered cultivation of his faculties, which

like so many bees, have brought me home
The sweet of whatsoever flowers have grown
In all the meads and gardens of the world (III.i.12-14)

compares favourably with his enemy's ransacking the whole world. But in the immediate crush of events Caesar's cool, magnanimous self-assurance, his willingness to admit and rectify an error, his spirit which

despiseth fear,
Commands in either fortune, knows, and arms
Against the worst of fate . . . (III.ii.124-26)

outshines Pompey's inconstancy, his bursts of petulance (notably on hearing Vibius's report of Caesar's generosity), and his uncertain attitude to Fortune, whose power he alternately affirms and denies, according to the state of his own fortunes.

Caesar's air of confident mastery is itself an oblique indication of his moral taint. He is truly fulfilled in war alone, like many a villain or corrupt hero of the Renaissance stage, whereas in the Senate he is a mere rabble-rouser. But unlike other soldiers unfitted for government, such as Coriolanus, Hotspur, or Byron, Caesar is genuinely possessed by a desire to rule, rather than a vague, unformulated ambition, and he has the skill and energy to fulfil his desire. Prior to the debate in the Forum, one of the citizens draws the conventional contrast between Cato as one who seeks "the people's good" and Caesar's mob who seek merely "their own" (I.ii.24). Caesar, however, manages to convince himself that he is in fact "fautor of my country" (III.ii.116), and his tragedy is the stunning recognition following the battle of Pharsalia that this conviction is illusory, and that he is therefore, as

"The Argument" explains, "without his victory victor." His awareness that "Roman blood / Perverts th'event" (IV.iv.1-2) not only gives the lie to his confident rebuke of Pompey at the close of the debate in the Forum, when branded as an enemy of Rome: "Th'event will fall out contrary, my lords" (I.ii.296). It also affords implicit confirmation of Cato's warning to Pompey to kill no more Roman citizens than is unavoidable, since "Their loss is yours" (II.iv.6). Caesar's "victory" brings him face to face with the missing element in his grandiose plans for Rome, namely the lives of its citizens. The courageous act of the consuls in taking their own lives is both an indictment and a defiance of tyranny as surely as the suicide of Silius.

There is, therefore, not the least trace of hypocrisy in Caesar's assertion that the arrival of Brutus (the man who will eventually murder him) is "A more welcome fortune / . . . than my conquest" (IV.iv.22-23); the support of Brutus restores some of the self-esteem badly damaged by his bloody victory, and enables him, by pardoning a man of acknowledged public spirit, to reassert his concern for the good of Rome. Hoping to gain a richer prize than Brutus, Caesar sets out to seek the good will of the one man whom formerly he had attempted to stifle at all costs, namely Cato.

Cato's reappearance restores the firm moral perspective on Caesar's actions which obtained earlier in the play. He clearly understands the process of inner dissolution suffered by Caesar, haunted as he is by "the ambition he till now denied" (IV.v.33). If Brutus is prepared to "enjoy life in the good of Caesar" (IV.iv.31), Cato is not, since it would be wrong to accept life of a man "when death / Is tenfold due to his most tyrannous self" (IV.v.34-35). The ironies of Caesar's Pyrrhic victory are sealed as he enters only a moment after the death of Cato:

All my late conquest, and my life's whole acts,
 Most crown'd, most beautified, are blasted all
 With thy grave life's expiring in their scorn.
 Thy life was rule to all lives; and thy death
 (Thus forcibly despising life) the quench
 Of all lives' glories.

(V.ii.180-85)

Caesar himself provides the negative answer to his earlier prayer that Nature might, through his victory, "in a masterpiece of hers be serv'd / With tops and state fit for his virtuous crown" (II.v.20-21). This weary elegy on thwarted aspirations is reminiscent of Macbeth's feigned reaction to the murder of Duncan, when he concludes that "There's nothing serious in mortality" (II.iii.93). Behind Macbeth's deceit lies the profound truth that Duncan's death has in a sense banished goodness from the world, but this is a truth which Macbeth does not come to understand till later. There is, however, no deception in Caesar's words. He immediately grasps that the death of his greatest enemy is his own loss, and suffers the despair which overtakes Macbeth only in time.

Caesar's final tribute to his enemies - his torture of the murderers of Pompey, and his order for a tomb and statue to be erected for Cato - suggests comparison with another Shakespearean usurper: Bolingbroke similarly repudiates the murderer of Richard, and promises honours to the dead king. Once again, Shakespeare gives a detailed psychological account - in this case spread over three plays - of an inner dissolution which Chapman presents in an abrupt, moralised fashion. At the close of Richard II the exact import of Bolingbroke's words and action, the relative quantities of genuine remorse and artfully contrived humility, are impossible to gauge. Caesar's sudden outburst of rage against Pompey's murderers, however, is produced simply by the bitterness of defeat; for in Pompey's severed head he sees an emblem of the paradise

he has lost, and a decisive confirmation of his own role as the agent of tyranny and barbarism:

far as noblesse
The den of barbarism flies, and bliss
The bitterest curse of vex'd and tyranniz'd nature,
Transfer it from me.

(V.ii.191-94)

Caesar, like Byron, strives to the uttermost height, only to see his efforts "vanish . . . in smoke and shame" (II.v.23). Chapman recognised that unlawful power and ambition may well triumph over right, but, like Shakespeare, he sees an insurance against this in the madness or despair of the tyrant or usurper. Such a one is forced to pay deference to accepted ideas concerning the good of the entire body politic in his bid for power, often to such an extent that, as in the cases of Bolingbroke and Caesar, this deference becomes almost genuine, the real but ultimately deceptive motive for their rebellions. Such men are destroyed, in body or in spirit, because they cannot be unscrupulous enough.

IX

Pompey, like Cato, responds to worldly defeat by a withdrawal into Stoic self-sufficiency, but for him this is a journey into a new area of experience. His retreat from public affairs is no more a sign of weakness than that of Cato, as the conversation with his followers prior to the battle of Pharsalia makes clear. Pompey resolves to pour all his accumulated energies into the battle, and begs his followers' forgiveness should he be defeated, since his failure should be regarded as "my fortune's shame, / Not mine, nor my fault" (III.i.26-27). These are the accents of a man who already suspects he is facing defeat, since victory

goes to the man who, after an earlier setback, had insisted that "It was not Fortune's fault, but mine, Acilius" (II.iii.10). But in ratifying his words, Pompey's companions twist them into a true defeatism, a mere inability to cope with the buffets of the world:

Thes. Leave him the worst whose best is left undone,
 He only conquers whose mind still is one.
Ep. Free minds, like dice, fall square whate'er the cast.
Iber. Who on himself sole stands, stands solely fast.
Thrace. He's never down whose mind still fights aloft.
Cic. Who cares for up or down, when all's but thought?
Gab. To things' events doth no man's power extend.
Dem. Since gods rule all, who anything would mend?

(III.i.31-41)

The use of stichomythia in the middle of comparatively naturalistic dialogue emphasises the triteness of the sentiments. The thought drifts away from Pompey's idea that the man who strives to the utmost cannot be blamed for failure, to the notion that any attempt to right injustice is doomed, since injustice must be the will of God: a peculiar inversion of Richard II's belief that since God rules all, he need not lift a finger to save his kingship. The final three lines of this passage might well have been endorsed by Greville's Mustapha (see for example Mustapha, IV.iv.153, 179-81), but the Stoicism of Pompey (and Cato) is of a more robust kind than that commended by Greville. The practical outcome of this discussion is apparent in the battle of Pharsalia as the five kings fly over the stage crying that "the day was lost before 'twas fought" (IV.ii.1); not so for Pompey, however, who enters fighting with Caesar.

The scene following Pompey's defeat, in which he and Demetrius change their clothes both literally and spiritually, shows him beginning to slough off the impatient conceit which so disastrously goaded him

into battle. The transition is nicely caught in his reaction to Demetrius's inquest on the battle: "Upbraid me not; go to, go on!" (IV.iii.34). With his characteristic moral explicitness, Chapman underlines the distinction between the earlier and the later Pompey, and more generally between a self-willed ambition and a self-sufficient Stoicism (evident in Cato and his followers as well as the later Pompey) by a series of verbal parallels. The earlier Pompey, for example, rejects Caesar's offer of peace partly through irritation at being thought the benefactor of his enemy's magnanimity:

I rest in Caesar's shades, walk his strow'd paths,
Sleep in his quiet waves? I'll sooner trust
Hibernian bogs and quicksands, . . . (III.i.100-02)

Cato, on the other hand, who knows that he has "Ever been in every justice / Better than Caesar" (IV.v.27-28), can justly offer a very similar protest to the suggestion that he should beg life of Caesar:

My fame affirm my life receiv'd from him!
I'll rather make a beast my second father. (IV.v.43-44)

Pompey's disclaimer of responsibility prior to the battle of Pharsalia - "Not mine, nor my fault" (III.i.27) - is closely echoed in his answer to the two Lentuli, on arriving at Lesbos, as to whether he has been conquered: "Not I, but mine army. / No fault in me in it; no conquest of me" (V.i.166-67). His personal victory in defeat, which complements Caesar's arid conquest, is built on a loss of that desire for public approbation which his earlier excuses made all too plain. On this occasion, his victory has no need of applause: "'Tis enough for me / That Pompey knows it" (V.i.202-03). In the same scene, he recounts the story of Empedocles who banished a plague from his country by blocking

up a crack in a hill which exhaled unwholesome vapours, and points out that the poison-belching crack may be compared to "any king, given over to his lusts" (1.222). Pompey, like Empedocles, has stopped the crack, and purged the "diseas'd affections" which are "Harmful to human freedom, and storm-like, / Inferring darkness to th'infected mind, / Oppress our comforts" (11.227-30). But he also has been the bearer of pestilence, the king given over to his stormy and barbaric lusts, as he confesses before the battle of Pharsalia:

The poison, steep'd in every vein of empire
 In all the world, meet now in only me,
 Thunder and lighten me to death, and make
 My senses feed the flame, my soul the crack. (IV.i.1-4)

The change of character which these parallels indicate is essentially a discovery on Pompey's part of a real identity which public life, condemning him to be "toss'd / With others' breath to any coast they please" (I.ii.146-47), could not but stifle. The idea of a private self necessarily distorted or suppressed by the exigencies of public duty, which has little relevance to the criticism of Shakespeare's plays,²⁰ did however appeal to Chapman. Pompey describes his defeat at Pharsalia - in terms similar to those used to describe the fall of Byron - as the work of the gods, who "drew me like a vapour up to heaven, / To dash me like a tempest 'gainst the earth" (IV.iii.4-5). Byron's destruction by the beams of Henry's majesty leaves him bereft of inward strength, unable to make good his boast, "I build not outward, nor depend on props" (Conspiracy, III.ii.229). Pompey, on the other hand, is able to counter

20 The common assumption that Shakespeare in fact endorses this idea is challenged by Philip Edwards, "Person and Office in Shakespeare's Plays," PBA, LVI (1970), 93-109.

his worldly defeat by an affirmation of his solid integrity and strength:

I will stand no more
 On others' legs, nor build one joy without me.
 If ever I be worth a house again
 I'll build all inward; . . .

(V.i.203-06)

The whole of this moving scene in which Pompey returns to his wife and is killed by the soldiers of Ptolemy closely echoes the ethical criteria employed in Byron. The contrast between insubstantial greatness, and a true greatness built on goodness, elucidated to Byron by the English counsellor, is here developed in a discussion between Pompey, Demetrius, and Cornelia, in which Pompey finally affirms that he and his wife are now "greater far / In every solid grace than when the tumour / And bile of rotten observation swell'd us" (II.182-84). Similarly Byron's supposed greatness had been created merely by the flattery of others, "swelling / Your veins with empty hope of much" (Conspiracy, V.ii.69-70), as Henry tells him. In Byron, Chapman draws a clear contrast between false praise, and the moderate, merited praise which Henry gives to General Norris and Colonel Williams, and even (at the appropriate time, when his worth has been unduly slighted) to himself. Pompey, however, recognises that in such corrupt times, worldly opinion is almost invariably worthless. Every true soul, he tells Demetrius, should sever himself from "love of such men as here drown their souls / As all the world does, Cato sole [excepted]" (IV.iii.83-84). Pompey finally has the courage to reject the truth of the world and to err with Cato, who, in musing on the "foul . . . fact" of his impending suicide, reveals a similar contempt for worldly judgement: "for so are call'd / In common mouths, men's fairest acts of all" (V.ii.154-55). The public-spirited Senator of the first two acts, employing the same image used to express Byron's

passivity before his enemies' flattery, refuses to be

rack'd out of my veins to live in others,
As so I must, if others rule my life,
And public power keep all the right of death; . . . (11.11-13)

The integrity which both Pompey and Cato display in the final act, therefore, while conceived in terms similar to that which Byron falsely claimed for himself, is quite different in its contempt of the world and its despair of constructive public action. In Byron, the solid personal strength, akin to a firmly rooted tree or a well built house, which is most fully realised in Henry, is the necessary basis of a secure and well ordered state. Pompey's plain and rude house, on the other hand, will be "a rampier / Against the false society of men" (V.i.209-10). This important distinction between the two plays points to a general divergence in Renaissance literature in the use of the analogy of the bodies natural and politic, and in the belief in the political significance of individual virtue. Traditional humanist thinkers insisted on the moral character of the sovereign as the basis of just rule; both Shakespeare and Jonson explore this idea by developing the analogy between the physical and moral being of the sovereign, and the health of the body politic. A belief in the irredeemable corruption of the political world, however, would lead to a quite different use of this analogy, as the following lines spoken by Charlemont in The Atheist's Tragedie make clear:

I've lost a Signorie,
That was confin'd within a piece of earth;
A Wart upon the body of the world.
But now I am an Emp'rour of a world.
This little world of Man. My passions are
My Subjects; . . .

(III.iii.43-48)

In Caesar and Pompey there is no Hal or Cicero to stem or reverse the tide of corruption, no Lepidus or Sabinus to snatch a concession from the jaws of tyranny. The fate of Rome seems well nigh hopeless, so it is not surprising that Chapman turns to an affirmation of the purely private value of spiritual integrity, which can preserve inviolate its own kingdom in despite of the siege of ill fortune. It might be argued that as a result the final two acts of Caesar and Pompey exhibit a disappointing narrowing of focus, that Chapman abandons interest in the fate of Rome sustained during the first three acts. There is some truth in this view; but this is no more than to admit that, in failing to achieve the sustained investigation of the possibilities of constructive action under a tyrannical or unjust regime, evident in Shakespeare's histories and Jonson's Sejanus, Chapman was avoiding one of the most thorny problems of Renaissance political thought, for theorist and dramatist alike.

X

All five of Chapman's tragedies (counting Byron as one play) are relevant to his political vision, and a discussion of each one would reveal new perspectives. Yet these two plays taken in conjunction are sufficient to indicate that Chapman's technical range is considerable, that he does not simply produce variations on several easily definable themes, and that any attempt to summarise the political element in his plays in relation to his contemporaries must therefore be governed by caution. Much criticism of the tragedies has tended either to side exclusively with the Stoic heroes (Clermont, Cato, Chabot) and to see Bussy and Byron as degenerate victims of their own passion, or else to suggest

that Chapman sees admirable qualities in all these figures, perhaps in accordance with his evolving conceptions of heroism and moral worth. But Chapman was more deeply divided within himself than either of these interpretations would suggest.²¹ My account of Byron has emphasised those aspects of the play which link it with Shakespeare and Jonson. Henry, in his flexible approach to the difficulties of rule, and in his dogged pursuit of justice in the face of public disapprobation and slander, recalls Jonson's Cicero; while in his ability to command as though willing to obey, and in his insistence on the paramount importance of keeping one's oath, he is the equal of Hal, Duncan, and Malcolm. The sustained comparison between the moral health of the sovereign and the health of his realm (though in Byron the medical metaphor is not used) recalls Macbeth. Byron's unstable personality is depicted in terms similar to those used with Hotspur, Catiline, and Sejanus. Such emphases were, I suggest, Chapman's overt intention. But in reading the play with his other tragedies in mind, one cannot but be struck by the similarity of Byron's bogus and disorderly heroism to the genuine heroism of Bussy, which is qualified but not extinguished by his moral failings, and is a far more positive quality in the world of mean Machiavellianism presided over by Monsieur and the Guise. In Byron, therefore, Chapman appears to be exposing the political danger inherent in a type of heroism of which he himself had felt the attraction. Peter Ure, in an article devoted to Byron, suggests that in the final scene of the Tragedy, the protagonist changes from a rebellious noble into the archetypal tragic

21 A notable attempt to come to terms with this division, and one of the best accounts of Chapman's tragedies, is that of Peter Ure, "Chapman's Tragedies," in Jacobean Theatre, ed. J. R. Brown and Bernard Harris, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 1 (London, 1960), pp.227-47.

hero, and that (with reference to Byron's final speeches) "this final moral of the play, if final moral it be, lies outside, or above, the play as a 'political testament'."²² Such an argument is perfectly tenable, even though this final scene appears to defy conclusive interpretation. But such a curious reversal or change of direction would be nigh impossible to convey theatrically. Whatever doubts one might have concerning the absolute philosophical consistency of this play, it can be understood in dramatic terms only as a deliberately executed political morality, which explicitly confirms many of the basic humanist assumptions on the subject of obedience and rule.

Caesar and Pompey was also written from within the same general vision which informs the work of Jonson and Shakespeare. The parallel between the rise to power and moral disintegration of Caesar and Shakespeare's Bolingbroke, or the general similarity in Chapman's depiction of Roman barbarism to that of Jonson afford indications of this, although in one important respect, namely the implication that no compromise of moral integrity is permissible in the interests of preserving order in the state, Chapman aligns himself rather with Greville. The essentially dramatic quality of this play, as of Jonson's tragedies, is also worthy of emphasis. Cato's discussions of suicide and the immortality of the soul in the final two acts, like Cicero's speech against Catiline, may be cited as evidence of Chapman's doctrinaire, undramatic approach, but these are not truly representative of the play as a whole. One of the finest aspects of Caesar and Pompey is its acutely realistic representation of how men actually behave under the stress of political conflict: for example the debate in the forum; the subtle dialogues between Caesar and his followers, in which his

22 Peter Ure, "The Main Outline of Chapman's Byron," SP, XLVII (1950), 587.

cheerful magnanimity is finely balanced by an undertone of hard pragmatism; or Pompey's helpless lurching from one wrong decision to the next at the instigation of pride and fear of public scorn, then the wholly new evenness and surety of tone when he finally puts aside thoughts of worldly success or defeat. Chapman's dramatic sense is, as with Jonson, a measure of his undogmatic approach to politics. The difficulties and weaknesses of Cato the Stoic sage as well as his strengths are probed in the first three acts. The deformed but alluring grandeur of Caesar's vision of Rome and his qualities as a leader clearly distinguish him from the thoroughly abhorrent tyrant. The charge of an undramatic technique might justly be applied to The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois or Chabot. But it is only the odd scene and a handful of isolated passages in Caesar and Pompey that detract from a dramatic power comparable to that found in Bussy D'Ambois or Byron.

Chapter Eight

Cyril Tourneur: The Revenger's Tragedy;John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi

I

The depiction of a society declining into barbarism in the Roman tragedies of Jonson and Chapman or the English history plays of Shakespeare gains much of its point from the fact that Rome or England ideally embody a concept of civilised order which implicitly comments on the entire action. Both The Revenger's Tragedy and The Duchess of Malfi,¹ however, are set in Italy, which, as Byron reminds us, might be regarded as the cradle of political corruption (Tragedy, III.i.1-9). Though Tourneur's grotesque Italianate court is quite different from Webster's socially and historically realistic depiction of a collection of petty states, the popular image of Italy is relevant to both plays. In the course of this chapter, I hope to indicate how their treatment of political themes compares with that of their contemporaries who are more generally recognised to be interested in problems of rule and obedience; and in particular, how the dramatisation of political virtue is affected by the fact that such virtue exists in a thoroughly hostile environment, and cannot affirm its descent from a historically realised ideal.

In neither play is much attention given to the actual process of government of the corrupt rulers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, or

1 The Revenger's Tragedy is described by R. A. Foakes, the editor of the Revels edition (London, 1966), p.lxix, as "a play conceived and staged in the early years of the reign of James I." The Duchess of Malfi was written in 1613 and performed in the same or the following year (see the Revels edition, pp.xvii-xviii).

Tourneur's Duke. The emphasis is rather on how the various characters adjust to living, or dying, in the face of tyranny and injustice. It is only at the close of both plays that the entire body politic is brought more clearly into the picture, at least by implication, and the pattern of individual sin and punishment extended into the restoration of social order by the establishment of the Duchess of Malfi's son and of Antonio in The Revenger's Tragedy. But in neither case is this preceded by the feeling, widespread in the tragedies of Shakespeare, Jonson, and to a lesser extent Chapman, that the fate of the characters on stage embraces that of an entire society. Relationships of power are less interesting in themselves than in their effects on the moral lives of the participants. With this recognition of the genuine though limited interest in political themes shown by Tourneur and Webster, we may turn to a consideration of The Revenger's Tragedy.

II

Vindice starts out by vowing personal revenge on the Duke for the murder of his mistress. His targets multiply, as do his followers, so that the death of the Duke, far from completing his designs, is merely the prelude to a riot of tyrannicide:

The dukedom wants a head, though yet unknown;
As fast as they peep up, let's cut 'em down. (III.v.225-26)

As two recent critics have commented, his murder of Lussurioso "has more the look of armed rebellion than revenge."²

2 Arthur L. Kistner and M. K. Kistner, "Morality and Inevitability in The Revenger's Tragedy," JEGP, LXXI (1972), 42.

It is not until he appears at the head of a band of nobles in the final act, and urges them to "blast this villainous dukedom, vex'd with sin" (V.ii.6), that Vindice's reformatory zeal extends to the entire realm. But this is a logical development from the assumption that he is the instrument of an impersonal retributive force, an assumption already evident in his opening speech when he calls on vengeance to "keep thy day, hour, minute, I beseech, / For those thou hast determin'd!" (I.i.41-42). Such an appeal is understandable when there is no hope of redress from the impersonal justice of the law, and consequently when the lawful condemnation of Junior Brother is deferred following the Duke's intervention, Hippolito determines on a plan to piece out the defects of earthly justice, and "let his soul out which long since was found / Guilty in heaven" (I.iv.63-64). Vindice, although not present at the swearing of this oath, swiftly adopts the assumption that heaven is or should be implicated in his revenge. In the scene following, Gratiana's attempt to act as bawd to Castiza evokes the question: "Why does not Heaven turn black, or with a frown / Undo the world?" (II.i.254-55), while a similar outburst is occasioned by Lussurioso's false account of his treatment of Piato: "Has not Heaven an ear? / Is all the lightning wasted?" (IV.ii.158-59). The answer to these questions appears to be given by the thunder which sounds both when Lussurioso leaves the stage in this scene, and later at his death: "When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy" (V.iii.47).

Vindice's temporary belief in the demise of heavenly justice recalls Arruntius's reaction to the impudence of Sejanus (Sejanus, IV.259-71). In both characters it indicates a powerful commitment to a moral ideal - in the case of Arruntius, civic liberty, in that of Vindice, chastity - with a corresponding lack of a personal stability

and wisdom which would enable them to endure its violation without being goaded into hasty and misdirected protest, either in word or deed. But Vindice, unlike Arruntius, is no mere spectator of an action over which he has no control, and a more consistently relevant comparison would be with the typical self-righteous politician of the Renaissance stage (and of Renaissance history), who confidently assumes divine approval and assistance when he decides to be "his own carver, and cut out his way, / To find out right with wrong" (Richard II, II.iii.143-44). A belief in one's role as a divine instrument is an attitude found in many of those characters on the Renaissance stage who break the laws of either God or man, though there is great diversity in the degree of sincerity of those who exhibit it. The attempt of the Archbishop in 2 Henry IV to turn "insurrection to religion" (I.i.201) is, if not plain hypocrisy, scarcely argued with much conviction, and he is defeated by a man whose sanctimony is far more self-assured: "God, and not we, hath safely fought today" (IV.ii.121). Chapman's Caesar, on the other hand, genuinely believes in his divine mission, and vows to the gods to increase the glory and splendour of Rome "By all my good, acknowledg'd given by you" (Caesar and Pompey, III.ii.138), but this self-confidence collapses following the battle of Pharsalia. Vindice, however, never reveals any doubt in his role first as the instrument of impersonal vengeance, later as the scourge of an entire dukedom, and it is therefore appropriate that in his final word he commends his judges to God.

It is Vindice's genuine belief that his revenge is an act of impersonal justice that generates his obsession with the fitness of his murders, an obsession which is even more extreme than the comparable relish for wild justice displayed in Sejanus by Arruntius, Macro, and Sosia. The Duke will be poisoned by the skull of a lady whom he has

himself poisoned, and to whom he is thus "suited" (III.v.31), while the burning out of his tongue should remind him of Vindice's father, who "had his tongue, yet grief made him die speechless" (1.173). Then in planning the death of Lussurioso, Vindice laments that he may lose "the sweetest occasion, the fittest hour" (V.i.16) to murder him over the Duke's body. Tourneur does not develop as fully as Jonson the opposite attitude of pity for even deserved suffering, but Antonio's expression of sorrow for the deaths of both Lussurioso (V.iii.60-61) and the old Duke (11.104-05) is in pointed contrast to Vindice's murderous zeal. Yet another angle on this question is provided by the Duke, who admits that "It well becomes that judge to nod at crimes, / That does commit greater himself and lives" (II.iii.124-25). The Duke's notion of the necessary proportion of crime and punishment is more subtly perverse than Vindice's patent ruthlessness, and recalls the self-conscious irony with which Tiberius acknowledges and justifies his wrongdoing.

Though Sejanus and The Revenger's Tragedy are most likely to be linked for their predominantly moralistic, satirical character, their similar emphasis on pity, whether for murdered tyrants or a fallen favourite, is equally important, and in both plays is most closely associated with the characters best fitted to live under tyranny, namely Antonio and Lepidus. But the importance of Antonio will be discussed later. In Vindice himself, Tourneur develops the moral and psychological character of the rebellious malcontent far more fully than does Jonson in the followers of Agrippina, whose disloyalty to their emperor never goes beyond words. Though Vindice imagines himself to be co-operating with an impersonal justice, the increasing extravagance of his revenge progressively isolates him within his fantastic designs. It cuts him off from common humanity and the everyday world in a way that recalls

Byron and Catiline. Like them, Vindice employs the image of heavenward aspiration to convey the other-worldly ecstasy generated by his anticipation of revenge: his plan to murder the Duke is, he claims, enough "To make a man spring up and knock his forehead / Against yon silver ceiling" (III.v.3-4). One of the functions of the more earthbound Hippolito is to indicate, both by contrast and direct statement, Vindice's increasing self-absorption. On first appearing in disguise, Vindice imaginatively identifies himself with the corruption of the court with such fervour that Hippolito is prompted to warn him he is beginning to "reach out o' th' verge" (I.iii.18). Ever mindful of the practical execution of their plans rather than their exquisite appropriateness, Hippolito fears that when Vindice is hired by Lussurioso to kill himself (as Piato) they are beginning to "lose" themselves (IV.ii.200), while Vindice's musings on the projected death of Lussurioso are likewise checked by his brother's counsel of prudence: "You fetch about well, but let's talk in present" (1.21).

Vindice's obsession with the manner of his revenge is one form of that maladjustment to the world, that failure to live in the present, which is one of the most widespread traits of the rebels and political malcontents of the Renaissance stage. This failure to keep a firm hold on present reality is complemented by Vindice's denial of the bonds of kinship, which serves to strengthen the sense in which he is beyond the pale of human society, and also forms part of the exploration of the allegiance due to an unjust ruler. The dramatic exploitation of the tension between political and familial ties recalls Richard II and Shakespeare's histories in general; indeed The Revenger's Tragedy is one of the few Renaissance tragedies outside Shakespeare to make use of the blood relationship of the central characters in this way, though

clearly with nothing approaching the latter's richness and subtlety.

Vindice's denial of his kin is associated with his assumption of disguise, on both a practical and a symbolic level. On first appearing as Piato, he enquires whether he is "far enough" from himself, and receives the assurance from Hippolito:

As if another man had been sent whole
Into the world, and none wist how he came. (I.iii.1-3)

The suggestion of Piato's obscure, other-worldly origin has several functions. It indicates how thoroughly unkind (in both senses) he must become in order to lay such a plot on his mother and sister, an unkindness which he seals with unwitting self-condemnation when he brands Gratiana as an "unnatural parent" who but usurps the title of mother (IV.iv.1-10). It is, moreover, one of the several ways in which he is alike in evil to those whose sins he decries: he partakes in the general riot of misconception exemplified and commented on by Spurio, who suggests that in the corrupt atmosphere of the court, many besides himself may be found with doubtful parentage (I.ii.178-204). But most important for the purposes of this discussion, it gives dramatic substance (visually reinforced by the disguise) to the implication in the first scene that Vindice is not, metaphorically speaking, the true son of his father: Vindice is, in a sense, another "treacherous son" of a "loyal father" (Richard II, V.iii.58).

Vindice's father is introduced in conversation between Gratiana and Vindice after the latter has announced his intention of "speedy travel" (I.i.116), ostensibly out of grief for his father's death, but in fact to take revenge on the Duke for the death of his mistress. Like Vindice himself, his father had suffered at the hands of the Duke;

but far from taking revenge, he had eventually died of "discontent, the nobleman's consumption" (1.127), without even venting his grief to his wife, having been as Gratiana says "too wise to trust me with his thoughts" (1.130). The final line of this scene, in which Vindice announces his intention to "turn into another", drives home the implication that by going to court to seek revenge he is failing to act according to his father's example of caution and patient forbearance.

Thereafter Vindice's father is mentioned only once again, and that when his son gloats over the dying Duke, thus serving as a reminder how thoroughly Vindice has degenerated. At the end of the first act, however, we are introduced (in a stage direction) to the "discontented Lord Antonio" (I.iv.0.1). It is only if we are reading the play that the connection between Antonio and Vindice's father, who died of discontent, will be immediately apparent in this verbal echo; but it soon becomes clear that Antonio's loss of his wife following her rape by Junior Brother puts him in a similar situation to Vindice, so that their differing reactions to the grief and bitterness of bereavement implicitly comment on one another. Antonio's part in the revenge oath, and the consequent justice of his condemnation of Vindice and Hippolito at the close of the play have been variously interpreted. But Piero's words appear to exclude him from the execution of the oath:

No doubt our grief and yours may one day court it,
When we are more familiar with revenge. (I.iv.72-73)

whereas Antonio himself merely thanks them while overcome by "ire". The dispute has partly arisen because Antonio drops out of the play at this point, only to reappear in the final scene to send the murderers off to a deserved punishment. But this disappearance is itself the

significant fact, since by refusing to become involved in any of the revenge plots, Antonio appears as the true successor of Vindice's father. His patient and long-suffering allegiance under tyranny is akin to that of Lepidus, and even moreso to that of Gaunt in Richard II, who likewise refuses to revenge the death of a relative on royalty. But these comparisons are sufficient to indicate how muted is Tourneur's presentation of the virtue of non-resistance. Neither Gaunt nor Lepidus have any substantial influence on the action of their respective plays, but they both attain short-lived prominence as moral commentators, and spell out the principles whereby they refuse to resist an unjust sovereign. In The Revenger's Tragedy, however, the role of moral commentator is assigned to Vindice, and the importance of Antonio in Tourneur's moral design is likely to be overlooked. He is relegated to the margins of the action, as a man of integrity must necessarily be relegated to the margins of a corrupt society.

III

Only when the Duke and his successors have been killed can Antonio reappear to exercise a rule which is in perfect accord with his hitherto passive role. What distinguishes his approach to the task not only from the ambition of the Duke's sons, but also from the evident pride of Vindice and Hippolito in having paved his road to power, is his insistence on the impersonality of true government. In a few brief comments, he lays emphasis on the very principles which form the basis of Cicero's rule in Catiline - namely the burdensome nature of sovereignty, which demands a humble recognition by the ruler of the limits of his own power, so that "heaven may keep the crown" (V.iii.89). In contrast to

Vindice's confident assumption of divine co-operation in his revenge, an assumption which we see to be short-sighted when the finger of divine wrath points at him also, Antonio's confidence in the restoration of order is no stronger than a prayer that "their blood [of Vindice and Hippolito] may wash away all treason" (1.128).

The installation of Antonio, therefore, and the condemnation of those involved in the revenge masque opens at least the possibility, God willing, of the establishment of a regime of justice and order. But even Vindice only expects him to restore the "silver age" (1.86) - after the iron age which has been alluded to several times in the course of the play - and not the golden. That his reign will not necessarily banish the ironies of justice which have become all too familiar under the old Duke has already been confirmed when he sends off to "bitter execution" (1.73) the Fourth Noble who, though guilty only of the murder of Spurio, is successfully accused by Vindice of the murder of Lussurioso and all his followers. But even this incident, in which justice is done though in an oblique fashion, and which is followed shortly after by Vindice's departure to "speedy execution" (1.102), implies that Antonio's rule, however defective in personal judgement, is - like that of Cicero - redeemed by the divine co-operation for which he so fervently prays. For on one previous occasion, Vindice had successfully saved his own skin by diverting the blame for the death of the old Duke onto the First Noble. Lussurioso's command to "bear him straight / To execution" (V.i.127-28) clearly anticipates the condemnation of the Fourth Noble and Vindice himself by Antonio, and his feigned grief and humility in accepting the title of Duke at the instigation of his followers provide an anticipatory parody of Antonio's genuine diffidence in accepting the office. The fact that justice is definitely not done in

this instance, since the First Noble is entirely innocent and Vindice escapes detection, is an indication not of Lussurioso's inadequacy as a judge (for the condemned man's guilt appears perfectly plausible) but of his overall failure to harmonise with the obscure impersonal justice which throughout disposes the action often counter to men's wills. This whole scene is, in fact, an improper installation before the true installation of Antonio two scenes later, and Vindice's comment on the First Noble's condemnation not only conveys how thoroughly he is suited to the unjust regime of Lussurioso, but also in retrospect how, exactly in the manner of Sejanus, the nets he weaves for others will eventually entangle himself: "Who would not lie, when men are hang'd for truth?" (1.132).

The respective installations of Lussurioso and Antonio are separated by a brief scene in which Vindice and Hippolito urge their followers to "Wind up your souls to their full height again" (V.ii.7) and to shake off the yoke of "those few nobles that have long suppress'd you" (1.11). There is nothing to substantiate Vindice's accusations against Lussurioso's nobles, and we must assume that they are contrived for his own ends, just as Macbeth is forced to invent acts of injustice by Banquo against his hired murderers. It is in fact a curious paradox that whereas Antonio's path to a just rule is cleared by villains, Lussurioso is waited on by nobles who, though partaking to some degree in the flattery of the Duke's court, might nevertheless have taught Vindice a lesson in duty and honesty. It is true that they acquiesce in Lussurioso's suggestion that his father's caprices, which in other men would "appear light, in him seem virtuous" (IV.i.87), and that following news of the old Duke's death, their flattery becomes evermore gross and excessive, particularly during Lussurioso's coronation feast. But the picture is

not altogether black. The earlier petition to the Duke from two of Lussurioso's followers for his release from prison indicates that honest allegiance may bear fruit, even in the Duke's court. Their "loves and honours" (II.iii.119) gain their mark, while the ill-concealed ambition of Ambizioso and Supervacuo goes awry. Then at the discovery of the Duke's death, there is a pointed contrast between the truthfulness of the First Noble which sends him to an unmerited death for the murder of the Duke, and Vindice's smug and murderous silence. Vindice's accusation that the nobles "flatter" Lussurioso is scarcely a just description of their desire - initially at any rate - simply to "know our duty" (V.i. 138, 148); while his sneers at the Third Noble's gallant attempts to comfort the Duchess by the incidentally truthful remark that "time / Will make the murderer bring forth himself" (II.156-57) show him indifferent to both common civility and to a law of retribution which he is eventually forced to acknowledge (V.iii.111-12).

It is, in fact, Vindice and Hippolito, not Lussurioso's nobles, who practise flattery most consistently and unashamedly. Hippolito, who owes his continued position at court to his ability to "hold by th' duchess' skirt" (I.i.63), admits that it is "part of my allegiance to stand bare / To the Duke's concubine" (III.v.41-42), and later greets Lussurioso obsequiously with the words, "My lord, has your good lordship aught / To command me in?" (IV.i.1-2). Vindice provides a perfect concise definition of flattery when he determines to "suit my tongue to his [Lussurioso's] desires, / What colour soe'er they be" (IV.ii.10-11). The brothers' condemnation of courtly corruption clashes with their cynical acquiescence in the system of court patronage and their use of flattery to gain their ends. Lussurioso's nobles, on the other hand, indicate the survival at court of a genuine if intermittent and tarnished

decency which implicitly emphasises the deceitful allegiance of the revengers, just as the honest though misguided loyalty to Richard II of Bushy, Bagot, and Greene contrasts with the pretended "fair duty" of Bolingbroke, who like Vindice attempts to brand his enemies as flatterers.

IV

While many of the political emphases of The Revenger's Tragedy parallel those in the plays of Tourneur's contemporaries, particularly the tragedies of Jonson, it is clear that the presentation of lust and extravagance in this play is more intense and unrelieved than in the tragedies of Jonson (and arguably than in any other tragedy of this period), and accounts for its unique tone and style. But to argue that "the loathing and horror of life itself"³ is not only a feeling vividly realised in the play, but the attitude of Tourneur himself, ignores firstly the way in which the distortion in the moral and psychological character of Vindice, the chief proponent of this loathing and horror, is gradually exposed; and secondly the development of an idea of truthful and patient allegiance in Vindice's father, in - to some extent - the followers of Lussurioso, and finally in the establishment of justice and order under Antonio. This latter is a process to which Vindice is thoroughly alien, though an instrument of its fulfilment, and one which he conspicuously fails to understand. Vindice is unlike most rebels in that he is not himself seeking power, and is genuinely convinced of the moral necessity of tyrannicide, which for most rebels is merely the mask of ambition. It is for this reason that he is in certain respects closer to the equally moralistic but more principled malcontent Arruntius. In both characters

3 T. S. Eliot, "Cyril Tourneur," Selected Essays, p.190.

it is a similar lack of moral stability, of a capacity to endure the present - those positive qualities exhibited by Lepidus and Antonio - which generates their presumptuous and merciless concept of human and divine justice, a concept which Vindice promptly translates into action. The political actions of the two plays, however, move in quite different directions. Jonson's comprehensive vision of the corruption of an entire society, a corruption with its roots deep in history, leads not to any decisive ending, but to a contemplation both of the prospect of greater evil to come, and of the existence of human qualities which stand in muted opposition to it. The amputation of the single festering limb, the uprooting of the weeds without damaging the garden is no more possible than in Richard II and Henry IV. The restoration of order at the close of The Revenger's Tragedy is not necessarily an indication of Tourneur's greater confidence in the ability of the corrupt body politic to cure itself, but is rendered dramatically possible by the play's formal character as a self-enclosed moral fable, in which respect it is more comparable with Macbeth. Though in this latter play we are told of the disease afflicting the whole of Scotland, akin to the sickness of Macbeth himself, the action moves always on a personal level, and hence the death of the tyrant signals the decisive turn towards recovery. In The Revenger's Tragedy, the Duke's realm is even less in evidence, and the focus throughout is on the interaction of individuals: on Vindice, whose reckless pursuit of justice precipitates the destruction of the entire royal family; on the Duke, Lussurioso, and his brothers as men unfit to rule; on Antonio as the one person able to fill the office.

V

The first two hundred lines of The Duchess of Malfi function in the same way as Vindice's opening speech, introducing as they do the main characters through the relation of a partly detached observer. In the use of brief, naturalistic vignettes, however, interspersed with the explanatory comments of Antonio and Delio, and in the greater emphasis on specifically political matters, particularly the iniquity of flattery, The Duchess of Malfi is more reminiscent of the opening of Sejanus. Indeed, though this play is not so closely related to Sejanus as is The White Devil, either in its general political implications or individual verbal echoes, it is quite probable that Webster had Jonson's play in mind when composing this first scene, and drew on the presentation of courtly corruption by Sabinus and Silius. But whereas these latter criticise the court of Tiberius from a standpoint of honesty and civic liberty which is itself truly Roman, Antonio imports his ideals of courtly behaviour (and his dress, visually distinguishing him from the other characters) from the court of France, which exhibits the virtues Renaissance moralists would all have agreed form the basis of good government, namely a just and exemplary king, who has purged his court of rogues and flatterers, and is guided by a "most provident Council" (I.i.17).

The immediate purpose of this description is to indicate how flagrantly Ferdinand and the Cardinal, the truly Italianate villains, abuse their positions. Ferdinand, though later compelled to recognise the value of Bosola's unflattering bluntness (III.i.92-93), at this stage peremptorily demands flattery from his courtiers, who are required to "take fire when I take fire; that is, laugh when I laugh, were the subject never so witty" (I.i.123-25), just like Sejanus's clients, who

must "laugh, when their patron laughs; sweat, when he sweats; /
 Be hot and cold with him" (Sejanus, I.33-34). He deals out reward and
 punishment by "information" and "hearsay" (11.175-76), while the law is
 to him, as to the Turkish monarchs in Mustapha,

like a foul black cobweb to a spider -
 He makes it his dwelling, and a prison
 To entangle those shall feed him.

(11.178-80; cf. Mustapha, Chorus Primus,
 57-60, 167-68)

Antonio is too modest explicitly to contrast his own virtues with
 the corruption he describes, in the manner of Sabinus and Silius, and
 it is ironically Ferdinand who is moved to speak warmly of the equestrian
 skill of "Our sister duchess' great master of her household" (11.90, 140).
 Required to say what he thinks of the "good horsemanship" in which he
 has shown such skill, Antonio directs our attention to its moral
 significance:

Nobly, my lord - as out of the Grecian horse issued
 many famous princes, so, out of brave horsemanship,
 arise the first sparks of growing resolution, that
 raise the mind to noble action.

(11.143-46)

Antonio's "brave horsemanship", like that of Prince Hal, is both a part
 and a symbol of his acquired nobility, of those qualities which make
 him, in the words of the Duchess, "a complete man" (1.435). But the
 Grecian (or as we should say, Trojan) horse, which gained entrance to
 a well defended city by treachery, is a symbol of the politic guile used
 to entrap both himself and the Duchess. Antonio's unwittingly ambiguous
 image is the first instance of that confusion of virtue and dishonesty
 which, as we shall see, is the distinguishing feature of their marriage.

This brief exchange of Antonio and Ferdinand is counterpointed by the latter's interview with Bosola, in which one aspect of the image of horsemanship is developed. Bosola is granted the position of provisor of the Duchess's horse with the object of spying on her, and it is a mark of Ferdinand's blindness to true virtue, typical of the ruler nourished on flattery, that he had thought Antonio "far fitter" for this post, whereas the more acute cunning of the Cardinal had recognised him as being "too honest for such business" (11.229-30). The contrast between Antonio and Bosola as men of humble rank who take quite different roads to honour and advancement is firmly established in the first scene, and becomes particularly important again in the final act when Bosola decides to join with Antonio in revenge. In his interview with Ferdinand, Bosola effectively becomes the Trojan horse spoken of by Antonio, determined to undermine the Duchess's citadel of secrecy, and his newly won office is repeatedly associated with his treachery. His inclination to shed blood "rides post" before Ferdinand's plans for murder (1.250); his corruption "Grew out of horse-dung" (1.287), the horse-dung in which (Bosola later claims) were ripened the apricots he gives to the Duchess to ascertain whether she is pregnant.

VI

By the time that the Duchess and Antonio, together with Cariola, are left alone at the close of the first scene, all of the major characters have been clearly located on the spectrum of vice and virtue, and the decision of the two characters of most conspicuous integrity to unite in marriage is bound to attract our sympathy. However, the audience's knowledge of the web of intrigue which is already being woven around

the Duchess not only highlights the undertone of doubt and disaster which accompanies their ostensibly joyful union, but also prepares us for the suggestion that their secrecy is akin to the deceitfulness of Ferdinand and the Cardinal. This suggestion is initiated by Cariola's promise to keep the secret of this marriage "As warily as those that trade in poison / Keep poison from their children" (11.353-54). The most obvious application of her words is that she will guard the innocence, and perhaps the naivety, of the Duchess and Antonio, from the poison of the world's malice; but the implication is not excluded that there is something poisonous about their very marriage, linking it with the poisonous example of an evil ruler (1.14), the melancholy which will poison Bosola's goodness (1.77), and later with the poison which is the Cardinal's instrument of murder. Cariola then withdraws behind the arras, the first use of a dramatic image which on subsequent occasions is more clearly associated with cruel deception: firstly when Ferdinand steals in secret to the Duchess's room along a gallery, while Antonio and Cariola are in hiding (III.ii); later when Ferdinand reveals to the imprisoned Duchess "behind a traverse, the artificial figures of Antonio and his children, appearing as if they were dead" (IV.i.55, 1-2); and finally, when Bosola conceals himself in Julia's cabinet as part of the plan to learn the Cardinal's secret, which sends Julia to her death (V.ii).

But it is the Duchess herself, reflecting on the consequences of her superiority in rank to Antonio, who most clearly indicates the disturbing nature of their unorthodox union:

And as a tyrant doubles with his words,
 And fearfully equivocates, so we
 Are forc'd to express our violent passions
 In riddles, and in dreams, and leave the path
 Of simple virtue, which was never made
 To seem the thing it is not. (11.443-48)

The words 'tyrant' and 'tyranny' are subsequently used chiefly of Ferdinand and his methods of rule,⁴ while his attempts to ensnare Antonio by feigned letters of conciliation illustrate his capacity for "politic equivocation" (III.v.29). The initial association of tyranny and equivocation with the Duchess's wooing of Antonio therefore hints that she and Antonio have been forced into action comparable in its use of guile (and its potentially poisonous nature) to the tyranny which they are seeking to avoid.

The fact that Bosola has been set to spy on the Duchess, coupled with the accumulated suggestions that the attempts at secrecy of herself and Antonio implicitly link them with the methods of courtly intrigue, casts strong doubt on the Duchess's assurance that "All discord, without this circumference, / Is only to be pitied, and not fear'd" (II.469-70). The birth of her first child makes this fear a reality: "I fear I am undone" (II.i.159). At Antonio's command, her court is converted into a besieged city, with the court gates shut up and the officers locked in their rooms. But the invader, Bosola, is already within, and has (alluding to the idea of the Trojan horse) "undermined" at least part of Antonio's secret (II.iii.14). The latter attempts to evade Bosola by pretending to lay on him the theft of the Duchess's jewels, just as he will later be himself accused of a similar non-existent offence. His self-reproach for this deception is an indirect comment as well on the Duchess's 'banishment' of Antonio:

The great are like the base - nay, they are the same -
When they seek shameful ways, to avoid shame.

(II.51-52)

4 See III.v.77; IV.i.66; IV.ii.2-3, 60, 196, 329, 372.

Antonio's words affirm the identification of virtue and nobility (in contrast to the obsession of Ferdinand and the Cardinal with the purity of their royal blood), of which he himself is the living example; but in seeking to avoid suspicion through a false accusation, he temporarily reduces himself to the baseness of Bosola.

The final episode in the increasing spiral of deception into which the Duchess and Antonio have been unwillingly drawn is her dismissal of him, which enacts the abasement Antonio charged himself with, and further confounds his own role with that of Bosola. The Duchess's comment as her plan to avoid discovery takes shape alerts us to its kinship with all that she is trying to avoid - with the curtains which are devices of tyrannous deception, with the mask which Bosola assumes on going to arrest her and later when announcing her execution: "methinks unjust actions / Should wear these masks and curtains, and not we" (III.ii.158-59). Antonio is banished in the presence of the one man who deserves such treatment, and who then justly praises Antonio as "an excellent / Courtier, and most faithful" (11.250-51). Antonio reacts to his fate by reflecting on "the inconstant / And rotten ground of service" (11.198-99), much as Bosola complains of the lack of reward for his service to the Cardinal and later to Ferdinand, while Bosola takes a leaf out of Antonio's book by chiding the Duchess for judging men by their "pedigrees" rather than their "virtues" (1.260).

The Duchess's assertion in the first act that simple virtue was never made to seem the thing it is not is afforded bitter confirmation in the fatal revelation of her secret to Bosola. Her worldly downfall is a direct result of the ever greater difficulties created by her dissimulation, and she is eventually outwitted by a man in comparison with whom she is a mere novice in the art of lying. The extent to which

the Duchess has become trapped by her own devices is apparent in the readiness with which she permits Bosola to "lead [her] by the hand" (1.313) in the matter of her "feigned pilgrimage" to Lucca. Cariola's objection and the Duchess's rejoinder emphasise how fatally easy to her such actions have become.

VII

The first three acts, therefore, while drawing a general contrast between the politic deception of Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and Bosola, and the integrity of Antonio and the Duchess, show how the ever increasing deception of their marriage is actually akin to the evil which their secrecy is designed to escape. There is a tendency in critical discussion of this play to consider the rights and wrongs of the marriage of Antonio and the Duchess in isolation, often with reference to conventional Elizabethan ideas on the remarriage of widows outside the Church. But the point is that their course of action is a reflection of the moral climate created by Ferdinand's petty tyranny, and affords striking confirmation of Antonio's comment in his opening speech on the influence of an evil ruler:

but if't chance
Some curs'd example poison't near the head,
Death, and diseases through the whole land spread.

(I.i.13-15)

Webster's italics give for the reader aphoristic prominence to what a contemporary audience would recognise anyway as a commonplace political sentiment. But Antonio's words have a nearer application to himself than he could at this stage have imagined.

The discussion of the two pilgrims following the banishment by the Cardinal of the Duchess and Antonio - which incidentally realises the ruin and break-up of her household that the Duchess had just previously feigned - reinforces the feeling that the couple deserves our sympathy if not our wholehearted admiration. While their marriage was secret, Antonio had informed Delio that the common people considered the Duchess to be "a strumpet", while the "graver heads, / Which would be politic" observed that he himself grew

to infinite purchase
 The left-hand way, and all suppose the duchess
 Would amend it, if she could: . . . (III.i.26-30)

The Duchess therefore exploits this misunderstanding by pretending to dismiss Antonio in accordance with his wholly undeserved reputation. Their loss of temporal status and banishment following the exposure of their secret excites the pilgrims' compassion since, as they point out, the state of Ancona has no right "to determine of a free prince" (III.iv.29), while the seizure of her dukedom by the Pope was instigated by the Cardinal who (as we later learn) also confiscates Antonio's lands. All the same, the pilgrims do express doubts concerning the Duchess's marriage to "so mean a person" and the "looseness" evident in this (ll.26, 31). While we are not necessarily meant to endorse their judgements, particularly since Webster emphasises the importance of virtue over rank, their comments do indicate how completely the Duchess and Antonio have laid themselves open to misinterpretation in disregarding convention and public sentiment.

The destruction of their worldly fortunes and the imprisonment of the Duchess are at the same time a release from the toils of deceit, and the means to a new ennoblement. The Duchess's tale of the salmon

and the dogfish, recounted to the disguised Bosola in response to his disparagement of Antonio, suggests that the ill-treatment suffered at the hands of her brothers, though patently unjust, permits the operation of a virtue which had hitherto been compromised or thwarted by the necessity of concealment. The salmon's assertion that their worth can never be truly known until they are caught in the fisherman's net recalls Ferdinand's use of the law as a spider's web "To entangle those shall feed him" (I.i.180), and anticipates the Duchess's final message to her brothers that when she is dead, they may then "feed in quiet" (IV.ii.237). Whereas the virtue of Lepidus in Sejanus enables him to avoid the devouring jaws of tyranny, the true worth of the Duchess is only apparent when the jaws begin to close on her. Almost immediately after arresting the Duchess and listening to her tale, Bosola opens the fourth act by telling Ferdinand of his sister's behaviour in prison, "so noble, / As gives a majesty to adversity" (IV.i.5-6), while in the following scene the Duchess affirms that she is - in truth if not in the eyes of the world - "Duchess of Malfi still" (IV.ii.142). Like Shakespeare's royal martyr Richard II, who was probably in Webster's mind as he wrote this scene,⁵ the Duchess is at her greatest in death.

VIII

Having caught the Duchess in their toils, the two brothers begin to weave "nets to entrap" Antonio (V.i.5). His conciliatory but courageous

5 Dent, John Webster's Borrowing, p.239, notes the parallel between the Duchess's desire to die "any way, for heaven sake, / So I were out of your whispering" (IV.ii.222-23), and King Richard's request following his deposition to depart "Whither you will, so I were from your sights" (Richard II, IV.i.315). Cf. p.324 below.

response to this threat is contrasted with Bosola's plans for vengeance, and re-establishes the distinction between the two men which obtained in the first act. Bosola's decision to include Antonio as a partner in his plans displays not only an unshakeable belief in his own rightness, one of several attributes that links him with Vindice, but equally a failure to grasp the quite opposite character of the principles which inform Antonio's conduct, particularly in their respective attitudes to the Cardinal. Antonio decides to make a final desperate attempt for the Cardinal's friendship, to approach him "fraught with love and duty" and "in mine own shape" (he has wisely set aside all thoughts of subterfuge or concealment), in order to "draw the poison out of him" (V.ii. 69-71). His good intentions are afforded no chance of fulfilment, since he dies by the sword of the man who planned to join with him in "a most just revenge" (V.iii.343), uttering the identical counsel which Cato in Caesar and Pompey gave to his son: "And let my son fly the courts of princes" (V.iv.72).

The Cardinal is therefore left alone to face the wrath of Bosola. It is true that Bosola's remorse following the death of the Duchess, and his decision to turn against the men on whose behalf he has persecuted her, represents a genuine penitence on his part, and elicits at least a share of our sympathy and respect. But in Renaissance tragedy, the self-valuation of a character who commits a series of murders in the name of justice is always to be treated with caution, and the Bosola of Act V can scarcely be considered a truly regenerate character. Indeed in some respects he might be compared with Vindice as one who seeks to right injustice by methods which involve an increasing commitment to violence, till he ends his life a "wretched thing of blood" (V.v.92).

The accursed nature which is implicit in Vindice's function as both instrument and victim of divine wrath is openly stamped on Bosola when he accepts Ferdinand's bribe early in the play - after an initial demur, in which he shows himself fully aware of the nature of his impending degradation:

Take your devils
Which hell calls angels: these curs'd gifts would make
You a corrupter, me an impudent traitor,
And should I take these they'd take me to hell.

(I.i.263-66)

The contrast of angels and devils is taken up by the Duchess as she defies Bosola on his coming to arrest her as a "devil . . . that counterfeits heaven's thunder" (III.v.100), while the argument between Ferdinand and Bosola following the Duchess's death, and later Bosola's conscience-stricken monologue, are full of references to the hellish nature of their deed. The idea of a devilish action which masks itself in holiness recalls Exton's terrible realisation after murdering Richard II:

For now the devil that told me I did well
Says that this deed is chronicled in hell.

(Richard II, V.v.115-16)

These lines are perhaps deliberately recalled (although Dent does not note the echo) in Ferdinand's question: "Where shalt thou find this judgement register'd / Unless in hell?" (IV.ii.303-04). Such an accusation from the lips of Ferdinand, his expression of horror that "not the fear of him which binds the devils" (1.315) could instil in Bosola obedience (presumably to himself, but also perhaps to the Duchess) is of course even greater hypocrisy than Bolingbroke's rejection of Exton. But it is from an abstract point of view quite justified. Bosola's

supposed loyalty to Ferdinand, his boast that he has been a "true servant" at the expense of remaining an "honest man" (1.333) disregards the fact that his service was properly speaking due to the Duchess. Though Webster appears to have drawn on Shakespeare's dramatisation of divided and doubtful loyalties in Richard II, there is no doubt that in this case, Bosola is at fault not only as an "honest man", but as a servant owing duty to his sovereign.

His remorse following the Duchess's murder is, like that of Exton, quite genuine, even though quickened by the failure to obtain his hoped-for reward; and in determining to doff his "painted honour" (IV.ii.336), he also appears to be symbolically renouncing his commitment to disguise and concealment. But it is a remorse comparable to that of Heli in Mustapha, who having served a tyrant without scruple, and like Bosola come to recognise the diabolic nature of his task, advocates equally unscrupulous and destructive methods to overthrow that tyranny. Bosola's revenge on the Cardinal and Ferdinand is repeatedly associated with their own viciousness. His uncritical self-absorption, which blinds him to the frequent relevance of his moral condemnation of the two brothers to his own intended revenge, is epitomised in his reply to Ferdinand's threat of condemnation: "The office of justice is perverted quite / When one thief hangs another" (IV.ii.306-07). When the Cardinal hires him to murder Antonio, Bosola determines to follow his example in cunning, since "There cannot be a surer way to trace / Than that of an old fox" (V.ii.150-51). The first of his (unintended) victims is Julia, poisoned as a result of Bosola's plan to learn the Cardinal's secret, and in pointed contrast to Antonio's desire to "draw the poison out of him", Bosola rebukes the dying Julia for herself failing to poison the Cardinal. The Cardinal's very pertinent observation that they are now

fellow-murderers cuts no ice with Bosola, who again unwittingly speaks his own condemnation when he accuses the Cardinal of attempting to "lay fair marble colours / Upon your rotten purposes to me" (11.297-98). The identification of the two men is sealed, and the falsity of Bosola's justice clearly exposed, when he finally approaches the Cardinal to kill him, and, with his customary cynical sanctimony, urges him to say his prayers quickly, for

when thou kill'd'st thy sister
 Thou took'st from Justice her most equal balance,
 And left her naught but her sword. (V.v.39-41)

Bosola does indeed strike "With the sword of justice" (V.ii.345) as he had claimed, but his role in the final act reveals how thorough a self-condemnation this is. The confident belief in his self-appointed role as a scourge of wickedness, and his consequent blindness to the virtue of true allegiance, matches that of Vindice. Just as Vindice cynically acquiesces in the death of the First Noble, Bosola, with an even greater disregard for the life of an innocent, seals his repeated threat to the servant of Antonio by killing him "Cause you shall not unbarricade the door / To let in rescue" (V.v.35-36). Like Vindice, he dies rejoicing at his part in "so good a quarrel" (1.100).

IX

Bosola's revenge therefore, while clearing the way for the succession of Antonio's son, as Vindice prepares the way for the other Antonio, is in itself far from justified. In his final speech, he likens men to "dead walls, or vaulted graves, / That ruin'd, yields no echo" (V.v.97-98). The answer to his words is implicitly contained in Delio's

exhortation a few lines later to "make noble use / Of this great ruin" (11.110-11) in establishing Antonio's son in his mother's dukedom, wrested from her by her brothers. The image of ruin is an important one in the play, particularly in connection with the restoration of the rightful ruler at the close, since it is his father Antonio who has been the most conspicuous victim of a tendency towards destruction which is inherent in mankind and all its works: "Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men, / Must have like death that we have" (V.iii.19). Antonio is "undermined" by the "mole" Bosola (II.iii.14), who threatens that, should he himself be destroyed, "the ruin will crush you to pieces" (1.37). Then on noting Julia's successful petition for his forfeited land, Antonio observes "How they fortify / Themselves with my ruin" (V.i.37-38). But ruin may precede regeneration, and the grave may speak to those who listen. Following his interview with the Cardinal in which he agrees to kill Antonio, Bosola, commenting on the Cardinal's fearless pursuit of murderous ends, notes how "Security some men call the suburbs of hell, / Only a dead wall between" (V.ii.337-38). The "dead wall" is both the wall without an echo to which Bosola refers in his dying speech, and the grave which (particularly for himself) is on the way to hell. In accordance with this suggestion that the grave is a blank silence, that the dead are without meaning and guidance for those on earth, he dismisses a fleeting vision of the Duchess as "nothing but my melancholy" (1.347). The following scene, in which Antonio hears an echo from the Duchess's grave that gives him "good counsel" (V.iii.37), and sees a vision of her in "a clear light" (1.44), points up by contrast the limitations of Bosola's despondency. Antonio hears the echo in the ruins of an ancient abbey part of which has been rebuilt into a fortification. This episode is likewise for him

X

a kind of rebirth, as he resolves on the strength accorded him by this vision to risk his life in re-establishing the good name of himself and his son.

His attempt fails, but Delio's words indicate that the process of regeneration may be fulfilled by his son, and Antonio's dying wish is disregarded with good cause. While it is only the specifically political corollary of this pattern of ruin and regeneration which concerns us here, it may be noted in passing that the imagery of graves and ruins implies a more positive doctrine than the pessimism with which Webster is frequently credited. Bosola's final speech, like that of Byron, is a record of his own failure, not a summation of Webster's philosophy.

Antonio's son is announced and presented by the two men who have conspicuously retained their integrity and their loyalty, Delio, his "lov'd, and best friend" (V.i.77),⁶ and the Marquis of Pescara, whose "noble nature" is recognised by both men (V.i.7, 60). Pescara is comparable to Lepidus as a figure who never attains dramatic prominence, but whose occasional and unobtrusive presence indicates a possible course of duty and respect without slavish submission to tyranny. Thus he refuses to grant Delio the lands unlawfully seized from Antonio, since he will not soil with ill-gotten wealth one of "those followers I call my friends" (V.i.48) - an echo of Silius's portrait of the worthy Germanicus (Sejanus, I.123). His patient and courteous treatment of the insane Ferdinand is contrasted with the summary brutality of the Cardinal; while on hearing the latter's cries for help as he is attacked by Bosola, he is sufficiently courageous to disregard the promise not

6 I am unable to account for the curious episode in which Delio attempts to persuade Julia to become his mistress (II.iv).

to interfere, in order to try to save a life. Qualities of decency and nobility survive in the corrupt political atmosphere of Webster's Italy as they do in the Duke's court in The Revenger's Tragedy, even though their sphere of operation is restricted and often thwarted. The grounds for hope at the close of The Duchess of Malfi are genuine, though limited, as they are in Tourneur's play. Delio does not announce the immediate rebirth of justice and order, but urges those present to

join all our forces
To establish this young, hopeful gentleman
In's mother's right. (V.v.111-13)

Antonio's son has escaped the doom of an early and violent death prophesied in the nativity cast at his birth. Though Webster does not develop the hint, it appears that, whereas Bosola is one of the "star's tennis-balls, struck and banded / Which way please them" (V.iv.54), the young, hopeful gentleman has the power which Chapman's King Henry calls down on his son, namely to "[cut] off from Fortune / Her feather'd shoulders and her winged shoes" (Tragedy, I.i.141-42).⁷

X

Both Webster and Tourneur, therefore, reaffirm the belief of Shakespeare and Jonson in the possibility of striking a mean, even in the most corrupt of states, between the violent pursuit of justice which precipitates chaos, and a despairing withdrawal from public life. It is only

7 This interpretation of the survival of Antonio's son is suggested by J. W. Lever, The Tragedy of State (London, 1971), p.95. It is perhaps significant that on this point, Webster is at variance with his source, Painter's Palace of Pleasure, which tells of "the death of Bologna, and of all them which sprang of him" (Revels ed., p.208).

the Chapman of Caesar and Pompey, and perhaps the Greville of Mustapha (in which the role of Achmat as saviour of the state is uncertain and ill-sustained) who can see no alternative for the virtuous in a climate of utter corruption but departure from the public stage and perhaps from the world.

But the characters who demonstrate this possibility, notably Pescara and Tourneur's Antonio, are the isolated and (perhaps deliberately on the authors' part) almost unnoticed outsiders in a milieu in which evil is presented not as a degeneration from past excellence (except insofar as the whole world is seen in The Revenger's Tragedy to have degenerated from the golden age to the iron) but rather as the norm. It is worth looking more closely at Pescara's echo of Silius cited above. Silius's description of Germanicus - extended by Sabinus - as a man of perfect moral and physical integrity functions not only as a comment on the chaotic dismemberment of present-day Rome, but as an ideal which, though a thing of the past, is still shadowed in varying degrees in the opponents of Sejanus. Webster's echo of his words reinforces the implication that Pescara is to be seen as a similar ideal of nobility; but Pescara is merely himself, and does not similarly represent a tradition of political conduct perfectly realised in a particular society or historical period. Moreover the French court described by Antonio at the beginning of The Duchess of Malfi, while forming an immediate contrast to Italianate corruption, does not attain the central symbolic status of the English court in The Conspiracy of Byron. This point is made not to imply that Tourneur and Webster set out to do something they fail to achieve, for it merely indicates the limited nature of their political concerns; but rather to indicate one reason why historical drama (defined in broad terms) provided the most fertile

medium for the exploration of political themes on the Renaissance stage, and hence why all the plays discussed in this study, with the exception of the last two and Macbeth, have been of this type. As any reader of a Renaissance treatise knows, the use of historical example is the most frequent method of proving a particular point of political or ethical conduct. While drama is not political theory, and each play creates its own distinctive field of historical reference, a similar principle is at work. The placing of an action within a historical context, whose particular ethos (Roman republican liberty, mediaeval chivalry, Elizabethan bounty and splendour) necessarily influenced the author's doctrinal emphases, enabled him to define often in great detail the principles appropriate to an understanding of the play. The mechanical application of Renaissance political theory in elucidating the drama, which has drawn forth just protest, is itself not merely a symptom of bad critical principles, but a testimony to the intellectual richness of much Renaissance drama, its ability to stimulate and contribute to a political discussion which was carried on in learned treatises, in popular sermons and catechisms, or in historical romances, at court, from the pulpit, or on the stage itself.

Conclusion

The distinctive contribution of the drama to the literature of politics in Renaissance England is its exploration of the acute difficulties experienced by both ruler and subject in the conduct of public affairs and (as a corollary of this) of the frequently tragic discontinuity between the ideal and the actual condition of society. This general concern with the difficulties of politics is manifest in a number of particular emphases: in the immense strain placed on the character of the sovereign, particularly when his realm is threatened by rebellion, or by more insidious corruption; in the "pain and hazard" (in the words of Hooker) which accompany any attempt to reform public abuses; in the considerable skill and patience required in the subject if he is to survive with integrity under a tyrannical regime; and in the strong temptation encountered by characters in various situations to act on the basis of short-term gain, when prudence and the public good require a more difficult and hazardous strategy. There are in theoretical works of the sixteenth century many admissions of the difficulties encountered in public affairs, particularly by the conscientious ruler, but such admissions are rarely pursued beyond the realm of general statement. It is only natural that works of political and moral instruction should concentrate more on the ideal nature of society and the principles of right conduct in public affairs, and leave to imaginative literature the task of subjecting such ideals to the test of actuality. ✓
Drama, as the art form most immediately representative of the speech and actions of men and women, was best of all fitted for an empirical exploration of the defect or breakdown of the kind of social harmony

described by the humanist thinkers.

As the sovereign is the representative of the whole of society, so it is he, in the plays I have considered, who is most usually associated with the difficulties of politics, and who generally bears the greatest burden. Even those rulers who are not obsessed by the trials of office acknowledge that they do exist. Tiberius the supremely self-assured tyrant pretends that the burden of rule is too heavy for him to bear, and could be better sustained by some more able Roman. Hal, who vaults with "such ease" into the seat of sovereignty, asserts in his first words as King Henry V that his new office is not borne so easily as it might appear. Duncan is a king who has fully accepted the burden of rule, the treachery which may lurk beneath seeming good faith, and shoulders it with unperplexed resignation. For Shakespeare's Henry IV, Chapman's King Henry, and Jonson's Cicero, on the other hand, the strain of rule is a genuinely felt and painful experience.

The troubles of Shakespeare's Henry arise partly from his own violation of law and allegiance. But thoroughly conscientious rulers may likewise be severely taxed, particularly when they are called upon to oppose the whole tenor of their society. King Henry in Byron has to contend not only with the overt threat to his power, but with misrepresentation of his intentions and with passive opposition from his nobles. Cato in Caesar and Pompey opposes his fearless public spirit to the ambition of popular leaders and the armed might of an entire empire. But it is in Jonson's Cicero that the difficulties of a ruler attempting to arrest the decline of a civilisation almost single-handed are most fully and realistically dramatised. Not only is he forced to take on the work of the other consul and of the Senate in addition to his own, but he must also attempt to drag their inertia along with him. His

ceaseless attempt to educate the senators into their responsibilities may be contrasted with the intransigent attitude of Coriolanus towards the tribunes who, he claims, ought to be abolished, since they hinder the true wielders of authority. Both Jonson and Shakespeare were conscious of the difficulties created by representative institutions, particularly when they fail to execute their duties.

It is likewise Shakespeare and Jonson who most strongly emphasise the notion - implicit in much Renaissance political writing - of disorder as a sin to be expiated, rather than merely an external condition of society, more or less subject to remedy; this is only one of many religious overtones which colour the dramatists' political thinking. The self-questioning and individual regeneration of each member of society, as urged by the fourth chorus of Catiline, therefore becomes as important as practical reformatory measures. Such a process of regeneration, however, has particular relevance to the sovereign, who may (like Cicero or Hal) become a kind of redeemer, taking on himself the sins of the entire community. Cicero is burdened not only with the problem of saving the state from the multiple besetting dangers, but also with the spiritual oppression occasioned by his dismay at the lethargy of Rome which he himself has only escaped with effort. It is in line with his role as redeemer as well as judge (for the parallel with Christ though never overt is continually implicit) that he takes pity on the men who come to murder him. In Macbeth, where the religious overtones are more explicit, a clear division of the characters into good and evil (morally, spiritually, politically) is boldly and successfully united with the idea of all men, even the rightful sovereign Malcolm and his followers, as partaking in the sin and disease which afflicts Scotland.

Yet though it is the sovereign who is most usually beset by difficulties and disappointments, perhaps the most agonizing strain is suffered by those characters who, living in a corrupt or tyrannical society, are torn by the conflict between their wounded sense of justice and their lack of opportunity for constructive political action, and who may consequently be tempted to turn a blind eye to morality and prudence in the pursuit of what they see as a greater good. Those who do manage to retain their integrity in such a situation, for example Lepidus, or Antonio in The Revenger's Tragedy, are generally of marginal dramatic importance (although their moral significance may be considerable), and make little impression on the political scene; or else like Silius and Vindice's father, they pay for their integrity with their lives. The conflict is more than some characters can face without a loss of moral balance. York solves the seemingly impossible problem of his divided obligations to both Richard and Bolingbroke by a forced and insensitive loyalty to the new King Henry IV. Likewise Arruntius's frantic outbursts chart the mental disorientation of a man unable to consider the malaise of Roman public life without near panic. But while emphasising the importance of a self-disciplined and patient attitude towards the existence of injustice, the dramatists, particularly Jonson and Shakespeare, do not allow us to forget how difficult such a course of action may be rendered by the powerful pressures precipitating well-intentioned characters into wrong, and what a considerable triumph, therefore, is achieved by those who do manage to retain both their sensitivity and sanity. It is only by seeing the havoc wrought in a character of such fearless honesty as Arruntius that we can appreciate the true merit of Lepidus's wisdom and self-control, just as our appreciation of York's agonizing difficulties is sharpened by the knowledge

that Gaunt's courageous passivity in comparable circumstances drove him to his death.

But there are two means of escape for the subject in a corrupt society, if he can neither cope with this dilemma nor will allow himself to be broken by it. One is the way of Mustapha and Cato, namely philosophical withdrawal from the world into the inviolable kingdom of the mind. The other is that of Heli, of Bolingbroke, and of Vindice, namely rebellion. It is because he is often seen to be escaping from a situation which would place an appalling burden on even the strongest of men that the rebel of Renaissance drama may elicit so much sympathy. Frequently, moreover, the rebel is depicted not simply as an aberrant and destructive individualist, but as the creation and representative of his society. Such is the case with the three characters just cited; it is even more conspicuously so with Catiline, who epitomises the corruption in Roman society which he seeks to direct to his own ends, and Hotspur, who attacks a sovereign to whom he is in a certain sense more closely related than is the true heir Hal.

These factors contribute to a far more subtle and humane approach to the theme of rebellion than we expect from the polemical literature of the time and its counterparts in crude moralistic drama. All the dramatists, however, are in basic accord with the Tudor doctrine that rebellion attacks the very roots of social order and (particularly important for the drama) that it is a sign of the distorted character of its instigators. Whereas the idea of political disorder as a sin to be expiated necessitates the cultivation of self-awareness and penitence, the rebel - or usurper - thinks not of his possible faults, but of his desires, which he projects into a fantastic world of his own making, set apart from time present and from sober, earth-bound reality.

He thus reduces himself to a moral and psychological outcast: "He that is discontented wyth thynges that happeneth, and by cause he can not bere the misery of them, renteth hys heare, and teareth his skin, and mangleth his face, whyche easeth not his sorowe, but increaseth his misery, may he not justlie be called mad and phantastical, and worthy whose wysdome should be suspected?"¹ Sir John Cheke's words were written in response to a rebellion against Henry VIII half a century prior to the composition of the plays discussed here, and they undoubtedly bear the mark of polemical exaggeration. Nevertheless they characterise the essential flaw in the character of the rebel exactly as the Renaissance dramatists understood it. Those who are without such a distorted inner self, notably Worcester and the Archbishop in Henry IV, are the few and significant exceptions.

The philosophical background of both the emphasis on the difficulties of right political action and the treatment of rebellion and its harmful effects on the body politic is to be found in the notion of society as a complex organism (analogous, say, to a garden or the human body), subject like all living things to disease and death. Though there is a post-Renaissance tradition of the organic view of society, represented in this century notably by Yeats, it is this belief and its practical corollaries which distance the modern reader from the political vision of Renaissance drama even more, I would suggest, than the fact that it deals with obsolete political forms and institutions.

According to this view of society, man can work in co-operation with it and direct its growth towards a fruitful end, but cannot mould

1 John Cheke, The hurt of sedicion (1549; facsimile rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1971), sigs. B5-6.

it to his will in any way he sees fit, any more than he can conjure growth out of a barren soil or bring the dead back to life. It is precisely this fact which, the dramatists indicate, the rebel or the tyrant fails either to recognise or to act upon. In all the plays discussed in this study, doing violence to the fabric of society in whatever form is linked to a greater or lesser degree with a wider process of the disturbance of nature, time, and the providential design of history. This organic interrelation of politics and the whole of human life and activity finds its greatest expression in Macbeth.

The organic view of society, which emphasises the mutual interdependence of its members as well as the differentiation of social function, defines and controls the idea of hierarchy, which in Renaissance literature should not be interpreted in too rigid a fashion. Though a belief in the necessity of such a hierarchy and of dutiful submission to one's superiors was without doubt deeply engrained in the Renaissance mind, the dramatists are concerned less with a simple affirmation of these assumptions than with using them as a means of moral judgement, or with working beyond them to a more profound characterisation of social order. A favourite device with the dramatists, for example, based on the Renaissance doctrine that nobility properly consists in virtue rather than mere titles, is to imply a contrast (which in truth is only a superficial one) between actual relationships of power and a more fundamental moral hierarchy. In Poetaster, a great poet takes precedence over an emperor who himself receives worship from the gods. In Richard II, a base stable groom proves his innate nobility while the reigning king and his supporters have reduced themselves to the level of beasts. In Sejanus it is actually a beast - Sabinus's faithful dog - who, Arruntius suggests, represents the height of virtue.

The best sovereigns and political leaders are seen to be those whose natural exaltation is such that it need not be insisted on, and who are therefore ready (like Germanicus, Pescara, Duncan, and Malcolm) to call their followers their friends. Such characters draw their followers up to their own level of virtue and nobility. Against this we may set the contrasting examples of Bolingbroke and Tiberius who feign a self-abasement and humility in order to win the support of those whom they flatter. Perhaps this distinction can best be clarified by recalling that whereas the sovereign is in an obvious practical sense the ruler of his subjects and should maintain a deportment fitting his station, ideally speaking rule and obedience are not simply appropriate to sovereign and subject respectively, but rather appertain equally to both. This, if any one factor, may be singled out as the core of the humanist political vision of the dramatists. The best states are seen to be those in which there is a natural and easy interdependence of rule and obedience, just as the best sovereigns (Augustus, Chapman's Henry, Hal, Duncan, and Malcolm) are those who can master themselves and minister to the needs of their subjects in a true spirit of obedience. It is usually those characters, on the other hand, who are most unthinkingly confident about their own power or divine right that are most guilty of transgressing the divine will, and likely to bring disaster on themselves and others.

The contrast noted above between formal relationships of power and a moral hierarchy is related to the broader theme of the contrast between real and false civilisation, a contrast particularly well developed in the Roman plays of Jonson and Shakespeare's English histories. The Roman or English civilisation of these plays is really no more than reputation, a stock of past virtue the diminution of which is lamented

by its surviving representatives, and on which less honest men attempt to live parasitically. It is this idea which informs both Cicero's speech to the Senate in the fourth act of Catiline, and Carlisle's protest against the imminent deposition of Richard II, both central to their respective plays, however differing in dramatic viability. The ironic force of their speeches consists in the superficial assumption, adopted for both reasons of expedience and moral exhortation, that Rome or England is truly a civilised state, which, as their own words indicate and they are well aware, is plainly not the case. In Catiline and Henry IV, a perspective on the pretensions of Rome and England to civilisation is provided by the intrusion of foreigners, in the one case the Allobrogian ambassadors, in the other Glendower, who are in certain respects more civilised than members of the superior nation. Though it would perhaps be difficult to point to particular correspondences between the appearance of this theme in the drama and a general feeling in the country at large, it may be hazarded that it was this aspect of the political vision of these plays which came most nearly home to contemporary audiences.

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