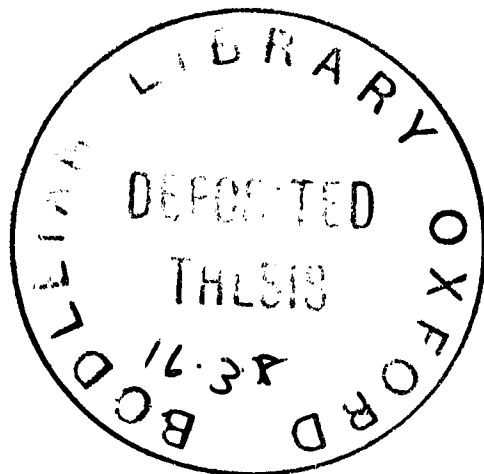




SHAKESPEARE AND A CULT OF SOLITUDE

by

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The argument of the thesis is that there was a gradual change in attitudes towards solitude during the sixteenth century, which reached its most extreme towards the end of the century, giving rise to a cult of solitude. These attitudes, and the cult itself, became a crucial formative element in the work of Shakespeare.

Part One describes the evidence for and motivations behind the search for solitude, and considers the history of ideas on solitude, placing the climactic period, between about 1570 and 1630, within the context of earlier and later ideology. Writers of the period are shown to have used the solitude debate as a vehicle for more abstract ideas about the duty to self and to society, individual preference and communal morality, and the inward and the presented self. Whereas the social ideal valued the individual as part of a greater whole, the solitary ideal saw him as an absolute in himself, defined from within. The persistence of medieval habits of thought alongside new sixteenth-century perspectives resulted in an omnipresent dualism, a balancing of opposites based on an unwillingness for unequivocal commitment to either extreme.

Part Two demonstrates the centrality of this preoccupation with solitude and the definition of the self in Shakespeare's work, comparing and contrasting the development of his ideas with that of his contemporaries. The thesis considers Shakespeare's sympathies, moral judgements, and ideals through the changing perspectives on the solitary from play to play. Despite his sensitivity to the deepest levels of the contemporary cult of solitude, Shakespeare finally keeps faith with the essentially medieval ideal of the social bond. Solitude, for him, fails as an ideal, and is acceptable only where the social ideal is irreparably corrupted.

PREFACE

In attempting to cover the attitudes to solitude in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in this thesis, the most notable omission is any consideration of the influence of the Reformation. There is no doubt that the Reformation was very influential on ideas about solitude and the inward self, but reasons of space have made it impossible to deal with these influences. Rather than distort the perspective by a superficial look at the Reformers, I have chosen to omit them from this survey altogether, with the exception of one or two qualifications or quotations. In the main, any generalisations should be taken as applying only outside this sphere, and 'religious' solitude, where it occurs, should be understood in a fairly wide sense, as implying contemplation and dedication to God, not any particular religion (although in practice, the religious solitude most often referred to will be that of the medieval mystics or seventeenth-century Anglicans).

Secondly, although Shakespeare's works are considered in broadly chronological sequence, in order that they may be compared with the temporal progress of ideas described in Part One, I am not concerned with different theories as to the exact date of composition, as these do not affect my argument. It does not matter for the purposes of this thesis, for example, whether Timon was written before or after Lear, or whether most of the Sonnets were written before or after Richard II. I have followed Alfred Harbage's Annals of English Drama 975-1700, revised by S. Schoenbaum (London, 1964) for the chronology of the plays, and have placed the Sonnets fairly arbitrarily between Richard III and Richard II, but it matters only whether individual works were composed early or late in Shakespeare's career for the kind of wide changes in emphasis which the thesis describes.

I am very grateful to Dr. Penry Williams, who gave me invaluable help, particularly with the historical issues raised by the thesis, and to Mrs Katherine Wilson, for her unfailing encouragement and support. My greatest debt is to Dr. Anne Barton, who gave direction and shape to an amoebic mass of ideas.

Notes on Presentation

I have retained the original spelling and punctuation in quoting from unedited sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, except in modernising obsolete letters and abbreviations. I have also corrected obvious typographical errors, such as turned letters.

The titles of Shakespeare's plays are abbreviated in accordance with the practice now adopted by leading Shakespeare journals, and can be found listed in PMLA, 85 (1970), 322. Titles of familiar periodicals and series are abbreviated according to the practice of the MLA International Bibliography. The text for all quotations from Shakespeare, unless otherwise stated, is taken from The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. Peter Alexander (London and Glasgow, 1951). Reference to separate editions of Shakespeare's plays is included where relevant, but I have not thought it necessary to list all the editions I have consulted in the bibliography.

Quotations from classical works are taken, except where otherwise stated, from the editions in the Loeb Classical Library series. Again, I have not listed these in my bibliography.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

Any definition of the meaning of solitude with reference to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will be of necessity vague and expansive. The reason for this lies in the way this word and other closely related words, such as 'privacy', 'retirement', and 'withdrawal', were used by writers of the period. Their deliberate blurring of definition by continual qualification, and by emotive rather than precise usage, must cast an appearance of vagueness over the terminology of a critical survey of their work, such as this, as well as over the original works themselves.

The main argument of Part One of this thesis is that there was a change in men's preferences during this period from fellowship and sociability to solitude and the inner life, and a resulting change in moral emphasis from communal duty to truth to oneself. The change in preference naturally became established before the change in morality, and this is demonstrated by two linguistic characteristics widely shared by writers who show a preference for solitude. The first is the increased use of words relating to the criterion of pleasure, words like 'pleasant', 'sweet', 'delightsome', or, on the other side, 'irksome', 'heart-eating', and 'tedious'. Examples of nouns occurring more frequently, which also imply a judgement according to what is best and most pleasant for the individual, rather than what is best as a general principle for society, are 'quiet', 'libertie', 'meditation', and 'humour'.

The second, less obvious characteristic is the tendency to disguise new arguments, based on a new morality, in old words, the stock vocabulary, in fact, of the old morality which exalted the communal good and condemned solitude as inhuman. Writers in favour of solitude took over such words as 'nature', 'order', 'law', 'reason', and modified the meanings of the words themselves by placing them in unfamiliar contexts, rather than use

words which more precisely expressed their arguments, and which would make explicit the challenge to the beliefs traditionally evoked by the stock words above. Their method of persuasion was to make the terms of the new argument resemble those of the old, rather than to defend the new argument by openly attacking the old. The same words were therefore used on either side of the debate, and lost all precision, expanding to accommodate senses which actually contradicted each other.

The word 'nature' is the most glaring example of this, changing as it does from meaning universal nature, the law of God which binds men together and defines their humanity, to meaning individual nature, the inward uniqueness of each man which defines his separateness from the rest of humanity, and which may deviate from the principles established by general nature.¹ (There will be cause to return to this word again as a point of reference in this thesis, since its semantic development mirrors the moral transition which is expressed in the movement from society to solitude and from external to internal authority.) Raleigh and Donne are two writers who complain about the ill-defined state of 'nature'. Raleigh looks in vain for a definition of it among medieval writers: 'Of the law of Nature as it is taken in generall, I finde no definition among the Schoolemen';² and Donne cannot ascertain its meaning even when he considers its subjective use by individuals, instead of a single, absolute definition: 'This terme the law of Nature, is so variously and unconstantly deliver'd, as I confesse I read it a hun-

¹Both meanings existed long before the sixteenth century: the 'change' posited is in which meaning was the more frequently intended and the more readily inferred.

²The History of the World (London, 1614), II.iv.6.

dred times before I understand it once, or can conclude it to signify that which the author should at that time meane.¹

The word 'solitude' can be used in senses so far apart as to contradict one another, and the words 'privacy', 'withdrawal', and 'retirement' can be used as synonyms for whichever meaning the writer is choosing to impute to solitude (although that can itself vary from sentence to sentence), rather than as the different modifications of absolute solitude which they now represent. All of these words can range in meaning, even within the same treatise, from the absolute physical and spiritual enclosure of a hermit's cell to the preference for invited over uninvited guests.

It is common for treatises on solitude to begin by using 'solitude' in its absolute sense (in the way Jerome Cardan intends it, for example, when he writes quite simply in his autobiography, 'I prefer solitude to companions'²), and then to qualify it during the course of the treatise to something weaker and less well-defined. Montaigne is exceptional in his forthright confession of this compulsion in him to qualify extremes:

I am drawnen to hate likely things, when men goe about to set them downe as infallible. I love these words or phrases, which mollifie and moderate the temerity of our propositions: 'It may be': 'Peradventure': 'In some sort': 'Some': 'It is said': 'I thinke,' and such like.³

Ironically, writers on solitude seem to define it, but define it in such a way as to be in fact meaningless. Petrarch, the earliest defender

¹Biathanatos, ed. J. William Hebel, The Facsimile Text Society, 1 (New York, 1930), I.i.7.

²The Book of My Life, trans. Jean Stoner (London, 1931), p. 72.

³The Essays of Montaigne, trans. John Florio, The Tudor Translations, 1-3 (London, 1892), III.xi.288.

of the desirability of secular solitude, is more influenced by the moderate classical traditions of the happy husbandman and the Stoic sage than by the uncompromising religious asceticism of medieval tradition; the solitude he loves is a withdrawal, not from company, but from crowds and cities. He defines the solitude about which he is writing in his De Vita Solitaria as 'eam...solitudinem...non que unum etiam sed que turbas fugit',¹ and declares elsewhere in the treatise that 'nulla...solitudo tam profunda, nulla tam parva domus, nullum tam obstrusum limen, ut non pateat amico.'²

Roger Baynes, in one of the earliest treatises on solitude written in England, portrays one of the participants in the dialogue, Lysippus, as making explicit the capacity of the word 'solitude' to be interpreted in contradictory ways. Addressing his opponent, Eudoxus, he speculates as to

whether you intend Solitarinesse to consist in that, that a man withdrawing himselfe from company, seeketh rather to liue in the voide and desolate places of the earth, and there, playing the Philosopher in the open wilderness, doth seeme alone to contente hymselfe: or that you deeme, the substance thereof to remayne in the common societie of man, notwithstanding, to be conuersaunt but with few.³

Lodowyck Bryskett, in his Discourse of Civill Life (1606), also considers solitude to include conversation with friends; and Sir John Harington, most outrageously of all, actually defines solitude as a middle way be-

¹De Vita Solitaria, in Prose, ed. G. Martellotti et al. (Milan and Naples, 1955), II.xv.588. I quote Petrarch in Latin or Italian (and also in translation, where the quotation is long or difficult), partly because translations are not all easily accessible, and partly because Petrarch's thought is so central to the issues discussed in this thesis, and his ideas so original, that the reader may find consideration of his actual words desirable.

²Ibid., II.xiii.558.

³The Praise of Solitarinesse (London, 1577), p.4.

tween absolutes:

Therefore concludinge we saye that such a solytude as we com-
mende, is neyther to mingle with the multytude, nor be so re-
tyred as to deserve the name of inhumayne...For whoe so exclud-
eth all companie, shall finde solitude extreamly sower and irk-
some. My solitude therefore shall not be troubled with the com-
panie of frendes but rather comforted. Fynally, yf needes I
must forgoe all companie, then had I rather forsake solytude,
then be left all alone.¹

Solitude is a relative term reflecting the context of the discussion. In a debate about the relative merits of the city and the country, solitude means the country life; in a discussion about government and civil life, solitude means non-participation in government or public office; in a religious tract, solitude means the contemplative life; in a physiological treatise, solitude means melancholy. There are certain inherent ambivalences in the word 'solitude' which help to account for its manipulability. First, it can refer to a temporary state or to a permanent way of life. Second, it can be voluntary or involuntary, and can thereby be associated with either freedom (to please oneself, to cultivate oneself, to follow one's own nature) or imprisonment. Stefano Guazzo describes the danger of solitude as enclosure in 'voluntarie prisons';² but only Burton really investigates this distinction at length, contrasting the torment of enforced solitude with the attraction, but moral danger, of voluntary solitude.³

¹The Prayse of Private Life, in The Letters and Epigrams of Sir John Harington together with 'The Prayse of Private Life', ed. Norman Egbert McClure (Philadelphia, 1930), I.xxiii.348. This unfinished work is inspired by, and widely paraphrased from, Petrarch's De Vita Solitaria.

²The 'Civile Conversation' of M. Steeven Guazzo, trans. George Pettie and Barth. Young, The Tudor Translations, 2nd series, 7-8 (London and New York, 1925), I.20.

³The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. Holbrook Jackson, Everyman's Library (London and New York, 1932), Part 1.II.ii.6.

The religious usage most nearly approaches a consistent absolute, but, even so, Western tradition has nearly always allowed for exceptions to the rule of solitude, and has frequently placed the mixed life above the contemplative life in value.¹ The quality of solitude is another of its aspects which forces a modification on its apparent simplicity as an ideal. Richard Rolle, who berates his times for not valuing the solitary life of the hermit highly enough, is still forced to distinguish between good and bad solitude, which he defines according to whether it brings the solitary closer to God, or locks him within the prison of self. In Rolle's view, those who use Scriptural quotations to justify a higher value for company than for solitude, do so through a misunderstanding of the meaning of 'alone'. They are misguided in quoting the passage from Ecclesiastes which centres on the warning, 'wo vnto him that is alone' (4.10)² as evidence for the condemnation of religious enclosure, since, Rolle writes, 'they do not define "alone" as being "without God", but understand it to mean "without company". A man is alone indeed if God is not with him.'³

Another way in which the seeming absolute of solitude is qualified by religious writers is in their distinction between physical and spiritual solitude, or what Father Augustine Baker in the early seventeenth

¹See Cuthbert Butler, Western Mysticism (London, 1922).

²All quotations from the Bible are taken from an edition of the Geneva version (1560) published in 1594.

³The Fire of Love, trans. Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.82.

century called 'internal' and 'external' solitude.¹ Secular writers took the division further and classified solitude in three ways, as being of time, place, and the mind, complicating the issue also by quoting classical authority as well as scriptural example for these divisions. Innumerable treatises in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries quote Scipio's dictum expressing this central paradox about solitude in its briefest form, 'numquam minus solus quam cum solus'. Donne's 'Not alone / My liveness is'² is an English paraphrase of the same paradox, a paradox which enables writers to evade an absolute line, as they so frequently prefer to do, and to justify solitude and society simultaneously, since internal solitude is usually seen as the higher aim, and physical solitude simply as one path towards it.

The manipulability of scriptural references, which Rolle expounded above, is frequently in evidence in the debate on solitude. Just as the same words are used on opposite sides, so the same scriptural examples can be exploited to contradictory ends. The solitude of John the Baptist, the Psalmist, Christ in the wilderness, in prayer, or on the cross, are only a few of many examples which could be interpreted either as literal encouragements towards physical solitude, or as allegorical examples of various kinds of internal solitude, such as the solitude of the soul to which one withdraws to speak to God,³ or the solitude of uniqueness in

¹Secretum sive Mysticum, in 'The Cloud of Unknowing' and other Treatises, ed. Justin McCann, 6th ed. (London, 1952), p.184.

²Satire 4, in The Complete English Poems, ed. A.J. Smith (Harmondsworth, 1971).

³The Sermons of John Donne, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1953-62), IV.viii.228.

being free from sin.¹ Adam and Eve are the commonest source of wrangling over the interpretation of scriptural solitude, since Adam's initial solitude and God's later creation of Eve offer justification for either solitude or company as man's natural state. The actual text from Genesis which is most frequently quoted is 2.18: 'Also the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be himself alone: I wil make him an helpe meete for him.' Traditional morality interpreted this as a defence of society, an official confirmation of its rightfulness by God himself. The Mirror for Magistrates, with its highly conservative morality, characteristically interprets it in this way, quoting it at the culmination of a long eulogy of social order and procreation:

The only ende why god ordayned thys,
Was for the encreasyng of that blessed number
For whome he hath prepared eternall blysse.
They that refuse it for the care or cumbre
Beyng apt therto, are in a synful slumber:
No fonde respect, no vayne devised vowes
Can quit or bar what God in charge allowes.

It is not good for man to lyve alone
Sayd God: and therefore made he hym a make:
Sole lyfe sayd Chryste is graunted few or none,²
All seedsheders are bound lyke wyues to take.

This is the commonest way in which the text is interpreted, but many other writers find alternatives in order to justify solitude. Guazzo allows the character Guazzo in his dialogue to argue that Adam 'was as happie while hee lived in solitarinesse, as hee was after miserable and griefefull when hee was in companie';³ and Sir George Mackenzie argues

¹Guazzo, I.30.

²The Mirror for Magistrates, ed. Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge, 1938), p. 249.

³Guazzo, I.25.

similarly that the dangers of company are exemplified by Adam's loss of purity after the creation of Eve and her temptation of him.¹ Marvell refers to the intrusion of Eve with witty irony:

But 'twas beyond a Mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two Paradises 'twere in one,²
To live in Paradise alone.

Milton, on the other hand, finds the idea of solitude the most tragic aspect of the story of Adam and Eve. For him, however, the true solitude at issue is not Adam's solitude in the garden before the creation of Eve, but the solitude condemned by Rolle, which descends on them both as they leave the garden, the solitude of being without God. The final couplet of Paradise Lost is heavy with the horror, shared by classical and Christian traditions alike, of absolute solitude:

They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

Some of the ambiguity of the word 'nature' also stems from this scriptural source, and is strongly associated with the ambiguous attitude towards solitude. Just as solitude can be interpreted as moral purity or the desolation of a sense of sin, according to whether one refers to the solitude of Adam before Eve, or of both after the expulsion from Paradise, so 'natural' can imply the highest or the lowest elements in man's moral being, according to whether it is used in its original or its 'fallen' sense. This lends an ambiguity to all arguments which defend or condemn either society or solitude on the grounds of being natural or unnatural,

¹ A Moral Essay, Preferring Solitude to Publick Employment (London, 1685), p.53.

² 'The Garden', in The Poems of Andrew Marvell, ed. Hugh MacDonald, The Muses Library, 2nd ed. (London, 1956).

since either can be argued natural according to one's definition of nature. As shown above, however, writers rarely defined their usage. La Mothe le Vayer, some of whose work was known in England,¹ is the only writer I have noted who uses the Fall to distinguish between his arguments for and against the naturalness of solitude.²

There are other stock Biblical quotations used in different ways by writers on both sides of the debate: the text forbidding a man to hide his candle under a bushel (Matthew 5.15-16, Mark 4.21, Luke 11.33);³ the assertion that man is made in God's image (Genesis 1.26-27);⁴ the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10.38-39).⁵

Solitude was perpetually modified even in the course of its transition towards becoming an ideal; but the tendency towards compromise and qualification became more marked as the ideal came to be taken for granted as such during the course of the seventeenth century. Mackenzie's Moral Essay is exceptional for its date (1665) in continuing to use

¹It is indicative of the preoccupation with solitude that his treatise on solitude was translated into English in 1678, under the title The Great Prerogative of a Private Life.

²'Problème: Un homme d'esprit doit-il préférer la solitude à la conversation?', in Oeuvres, [ed. F. de la Mothe le Vayer the younger], New ed. (Paris, 1669), XIII.241-42.

³Compare e.g. Shakespeare, MM, I.i.33-36; Richard Brathwait, The English Gentleman (London, 1630), p.407; and Mackenzie, p.145.

⁴Compare e.g. Thomas Starkey, A Dialogue between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset, ed. Kathleen M. Burton (London, 1948), p.26; Donne, Sermons, IX.i.47-67; and Mackenzie, Epistle Dedicatory, sig. A2^r.

⁵Compare e.g. Donne, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, ed. William H. Draper (London, 1926), V.33; Brathwait, p.135; and Edward Benlowes, Theophila, in Minor Poets of the Caroline Period, ed. George Saintsbury (Oxford, 1905-21), I.448.

'solitude' in the sense of remaining totally without company.¹ Generally, by this time, the ideal of solitude had been modified into one of polite retirement, entirely compatible with friendship, and even with an active business life. Both those who praised it and those who condemned it had ceased to present it as an absolute, although it was now far more widely praised than condemned. Even those writers who wrote opposing defences of both the public and the retired life did not set them as far apart from each other as they had stood earlier. Jean Gailhard, for example, wrote Two Discourses on private retirement and public employment in 1682 which almost overlap, since retirement seems to have been a financial concept for him, more than a way of life. So long as a man lives on his own estate, almost anything he does can be included in this so-called private life:

whether a man minds his Grounds, Walks, Gardens, Hunting, Fishing, &c. in the Country, or peruses his Books, Converses with his Friends, or follows his ordinary business in the City, he may well be said to lead the Private and retired manner of Life I am now about to discourse upon.²

The decadence of the ideal is also clear in Evelyn's 'definition' of solitude in writing in reply to Mackenzie to condemn it. He ends his treatise by presenting a gallery of solitaires for our scorn, yet it is

¹Maren-Sofie Røstvig, The Happy Man, Vol.I 1600-1700, 2nd ed., Oslo Studies in English, 2 (Oslo, 1962), p.235. This book contains a very full summary of the modifications of the ideal of solitude during the seventeenth century. M.C.Braddbrook, 'Marvell and the Poetry of Rural Solitude', RES, 17 (1941), 37-46, and Herbert G.Wright, 'The Theme of Solitude and Retirement in Seventeenth Century Literature', EA, 7 (1954), 22-35 also provide illuminating discussions of the development of this topic over a period slightly later than, although overlapping with, that of this thesis.

²Two Discourses (London, 1682), p.5.

noticeable that, even here, at the climax of his indictment, he emphasises other absurdities in their characters, not their actual solitariness, in order to provoke the reader's disgust. Although he includes an anchorite in his list, the anchorite is not singled out as more despicable than, or different from the rest, because of the more extreme nature of his solitude. Indeed, it is clear that what Evelyn despises is not solitude per se (a suspicion confirmed by the marked preference for it which he shows in his diaries),¹ but the idleness which accompanies it in those particular examples he selects, who are picking their teeth, sleeping, sighing, reading, 'picking daisies', or 'playing at push-pin'.²

The Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter cited as O.E.D.) notes the commonness of the word 'solitariness' between about 1575 and 1700; but while it is true that one reason for this is the preoccupation with solitude at the time, it is also true that another reason for the recurrence of this particular word is that it is doing the work of so many other words. Instead of expanding their vocabulary as the question of solitude became more complex, writers expanded the limits defining this single word, allowing it to enclose a variety of other words from which it had once been differentiated, and allowing the writers to avoid committing themselves finally to any absolute view.

¹See below, pp. 79-80.

²Publick Employment and an Active Life prefer'd to Solitude (London, 1667), p. 117.

CHAPTER I

The Historical Background

(i) The Ancients

Four main lines of classical thought can be distinguished in ideas about solitude in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. These are (1) the writings on the city-state and the individual citizen; (2) the Stoic reaction against this ideal of public life; (3) the poetic tradition of the happy husbandman; and (4) the concept of the hero as formed jointly by history, epic, and drama.

Plato and Aristotle were the two main exponents of the ideal of the city-state, and Cicero their truest Roman inheritor. Although they consider the individual within the state as well as the structure of the state itself, the implied value of the state is higher, since the individual's first duty is to it. Pericles' pronouncement to the Athenians, as recorded by Thucydides, may be extreme: that it is better 'for individuals themselves that the citizens should suffer and the state flourish than that the citizens should flourish and the state suffer.'¹ But Plato also places the state first when he writes in the Republic that the philosophers (that is, the solitaries) must put their duty to the state above their individual desire and leave their contemplative solitude in order to participate in the government of the state if called upon.² Like Pericles, Plato believes that it is also better for the philosopher as well as for the state if he participates in society, since 'in a State which is suitable

¹Quoted in Herschel Baker, The Dignity of Man (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), p.17.

²The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett, 4th ed. (Oxford, 1964), Vol. II, VII.520-21, 540.

to him, he will have a larger growth and be the saviour of his country, as well as of himself.'¹

Aristotle too, though elsewhere he seems to value the solitude of the contemplative life highest, writes in the Politics that 'the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part',² adding that man's lack of self-sufficiency in isolation is proof of this priority. Yet he too presumes that the good of the state must also be best for the individual, since he states explicitly that there can be no doubt that the happiness of the individual is the same as that of the state (Politics, VII.2).

Cicero is less sweeping, and sees the coincidence of the goods of individual and state as an ideal rather than an actual state of affairs, urging in his Offices that 'the chief end of all men' ought to be 'to make the interest of each individual and of the whole body politic identical' (III.vi.26). But he is if anything even more emphatic about the supremacy of man's duty to the state over all other duties, and continually extols the value of fellowship, of duties depending on the social instinct, and of practical rather than purely speculative knowledge.

The relative emphasis on duty and desire varies, however, according to what each believes to have been the origins of the state. Plato

¹Republic, VI.497.

²Politics, trans. B. Jowett, rev. ed., in The Works of Aristotle, ed. W.D.Ross (Oxford, 1910-52), Vol.X, I.2. All subsequent references to the Politics are to this edition.

considers it to have arisen only out of material need, the lack of self-sufficiency (Republic, II.369). Aristotle argues that although it originates in 'the bare needs of life', it continues 'for the sake of a good life' (Politics, I.2), a corollary also implied in Plato's belief that the individual leads the best possible life in the state. Aristotle sees the state as rooted in man's nature and instincts as well as in his material needs, however, and believes 'that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal' (Politics, I.2). By this standard, the solitary is then seen as unnatural and inhuman:

And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the 'Tribeless, lawless, hearthless one', whom Homer denounces--the natural outcast is forthwith a lover of war; he may be compared to an isolated piece at draughts.

Perhaps the single most frequently quoted pronouncement of any classical author by Renaissance writers is Aristotle's restatement of this a few sentences later, that 'he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god; he is no part of a state.'

Cicero identifies natural instinct as the first cause of the state. He denies any such base origins as material need: 'And it is not true, as certain people maintain, that the bonds of union in human society were instituted in order to provide for the needs of daily life.' Even if our wants were supplied by magic, he maintains, the able man would not withdraw to solitary contemplation, 'he would seek to escape from his loneliness and to find someone to share his studies; he would wish to teach, as well as to learn; to hear, as well as to speak' (Offices, I.xliv.158). Cicero and Aristotle share a deep-seated fear of and revulsion from solitude, which does not derive from Plato, but which was very influential on later thought. Aristotle calls 'friendlessness and solitude a very terrible thing, because

the whole of life and voluntary association is with friends' (Eudemian Ethics, VII.i.5), and Cicero believes that if a wise man had every comfort and perfect peace in which to study, 'still, if the solitude were so complete that he could never see a human being, he would die' (Offices, I.xliii.153).

The most difficult paradox arising out of this horror of solitude and the correspondingly high value placed on friendship is the apparently contradictory ideal of self-sufficiency. Aristotle tries to reconcile the ideals of friendship and self-sufficiency in various, but unconvincing, ways. In the Politics, he states uncompromisingly that 'the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best' (I.2), but in the Nicomachean Ethics, he tries to suggest that 'self' can be extended as far as one desires, affirming:

The term self-sufficient, however, we employ with reference not to oneself alone, living a life of isolation, but also to one's parents and children and wife, and one's friends and fellow citizens in general since man is by nature a social² being,

(I.vii.6)

although he himself sees the absurdity of the infinite extension of this qualification. Later, in Book IX, he debates whether the happy (that is, self-sufficient) man will need friends, 'the greatest of external goods', and tries to justify the need for friends for such a man by considering them 'as the objects of his beneficence' (IX.ix.2). He goes to great lengths to try to prove that self-sufficiency does not imply solitude, since he believes self-sufficiency to be the basis of happiness, and cannot conceive of happiness in solitude. Solitude, as Aristotle sees it, must either be an unhappy accident or an indication of inhumanity; it can never be anything but undesirable to the reasonable man. The incompatibility of solitude with happiness is his final justification for permitting the self-sufficient man to have friends:

Also perhaps it would be strange to represent the supremely happy man as a recluse. Nobody would choose to have all possible good things on the condition that he must enjoy them alone; for man is a social being, and designed by nature to live with others.

(IX.ix.3)

For Aristotle, the notion of a conflict between a desire for solitude and a duty to society does not exist, because both duty and desire are united in the direction of society.

The reaction against the Athenian ideal of public life came shortly after Aristotle's death, with the emergence of Stoicism. Duty and desire in Stoic thought become sharply opposed. Public service to the state is imposed as a duty, but the Stoic's personal desire is for privacy in which to cultivate the inner life. Stoicism destroys the delicate balance of the inner and outer lives, of contemplation and action, which Plato and Aristotle had striven to reconcile, and inflates the value of the inner life beyond the point where it is easily compatible with public life, even while continuing to insist on the necessity for the latter, at least intermittently with retirement. As a result, the self-contradiction noticed in Aristotle becomes more sharply defined.

Seneca, the most famous of the Stoics, and certainly the greatest single influence among the ancients on the late sixteenth century, sought many devious arguments by which to justify withdrawal and reconcile it with the duty of living for others. His alternation between praise and condemnation of solitude, as well as his attempts to define it in terms of its opposite (his insistence on contemplation as a form of action, for example) foreshadow the self-division of sixteenth-century writers remarkably closely. Donne contradicts himself and betrays himself in just the ways Seneca does, revealing his true preference most frequently in his terminology of necessity and pleasure in relation to society and solitude respectively.

Seneca's letters to Lucilius, who was obviously contemplating withdrawal from public life, are full of contradictory advice. In one letter Seneca advises him to avoid crowds (Epistulae Morales, I.vii.29); in another he tells him to 'avoid the many, avoid the few, avoid even the individual' (I.x.57); in one letter he justifies his withdrawal into physical solitude as being for the good of other men: 'my object in shutting myself up and locking the door is to be able to help a greater number' (I.viii.37); in another he implies that his withdrawal is purely metaphorical and inward, so that the sage can retreat into his mind and, even with a wife, children and friends, remain self-sufficient, hating external solitude and craving company (I.ix.53). His attitude towards solitude changes from letter to letter, from seeing it as the necessary condition of the sage to seeing it as a dangerous and undesirable condition for any man.

Ironically, however, the sixteenth century saw in him only what it wanted to see: the praise of solitude. Sixteenth-century debates almost invariably quote the Athenian writers on the side of an active public life, and the Stoic writers on the side of contemplative retirement. This was surely because they saw in the transition from the ideal of the city-state to the ideal of the solitary sage a reflection of their own times, of the sequence of ideas from the early to the late sixteenth century. One critic, appropriately enough in an introduction to his translation of Petrarch's De Vita Solitaria, the harbinger of the Renaissance cult of solitude, uses the term 'cult' to describe the Senecan period. After recounting some of Seneca's arguments justifying withdrawal, he writes:

But there is an additional reason alleged by Seneca to justify a man's withdrawal from public life, which not only marks a weakening of the patriotic tie but is a symptom of that world-weariness which was already beginning to infect a large part

of European civilization and making the pursuit of solitude a cult. A man has good reason for retiring, says Seneca, when the state is so rotten as to be past helping.¹

The law of nature is an important concept in both the Athenian and the Stoic philosophies; but whereas the earlier writers tend to see this law of nature as a principle of external order, a set of instincts and values common to all, and on which the civil laws are based, the later writers allow for distinctive inner orders within this law, the only one to which the individual is bound. Thus, whereas Aristotle states quite simply that the state is natural because man is naturally gregarious, and that solitude can only be unnatural, Seneca writes in his essay 'On Leisure': 'We are fond of saying that the highest good is to live according to Nature. Nature has begotten us for both purposes—for contemplation and for action' (Moral Essays, II.189), but considers the individual nature as the deciding element within universal nature, adding in his essay 'On Tranquillity of Mind': 'You must consider whether your nature is better adapted to active affairs or to leisurely study and contemplation, and you must turn towards that course to which the bent of your genius shall direct you' (II.237). This change in the concept of nature again prefigures the sixteenth-century sequence of ideas, and the quotation of Seneca's advice to follow one's individual nature becomes as commonplace among writers as Aristotle's condemnation of the solitary as either a beast or a god.

The Stoic's ethic proceeded from himself, from his own nature, not from laws imposed by the state, intended to unite men. He saw himself as allied to the universal order rather than to civic order, and experienced

¹Jacob Zeitlin introd., The Life of Solitude (Urbana, 1924), p.33.

a unity with his fellow men through this sympathy between his mind and the cosmos rather than through actual participation in the social order. This is the reason why the man who withdraws is not set apart from the world, since 'he has abandoned only one little corner thereof and has passed over into greater and wider regions' (Seneca, Ep. Mor., II.lxviii. 45).

Quite separate from this philosophical debate over participation and withdrawal is the poetic exaltation of the relative solitude of the country life. Its influence is seen in England from the earliest satires against the court to the early seventeenth-century poetry of hospitality and the country house, and the retirement poetry written during and after the civil war. Maren-Sofie Røstvig demonstrates in The Happy Man that the two main sources of this tradition in classical poetry were Horace's Second Epode and a short passage in Virgil's Georgics at II. 458. (The influence of pastoral, a much earlier genre, which idealises the rural and withdrawn life of a complete society, but intersects at points with this lyric tradition, will not be discussed here. Chapter VII below on As You Like It contains a brief consideration of the implications of pastoral for the Renaissance cult of solitude.) These passages are important because they place the country life morally above the city life, thereby changing the association of solitude with inhumanity or moral uncertainty to an association with innocence and moral purity.

The solitude of the farmer is, of course, not absolute, but it is a life withdrawn from public activity, in which the farmer has time to enjoy periods of solitude which refresh him. He is, in Virgil's conception, remote from 'the clash of arms', undisturbed by 'a tide of visitors', and can sleep in beautiful vales, disturbed only by beasts. His moral superiority lies in his freedom from the vain sophistication of dress

and ornament found in the city, his guilelessness, his humility, his tranquillity of mind, and, more unusually, his reverence for justice.

Horace's farmer has all these qualities and more. His happiness also lies first in that he is 'from all Businesse cleere',¹ far from war, the courts and subservience to the proud. His life is considered more 'natural', and this is surely the root of his moral superiority, since the law of nature had been considered the prime moral law since Plato's time. Horace equates life in the country with naturalness mainly because it is less refined: food is wholesome, more health-giving than city delicacies, work is real enough to be tiring, and family life is chaste, simple, and happy. The farmer is relatively self-sufficient (he has his own oxen, though he may till his master's fields) and relatively isolated (although the family rather than the individual is the solitary unit of self-sufficiency, as in Aristotle's ideal). He may not be so dedicated to solitude that he is averse to company, but company is not cited as one of his pleasures (apart from the company of his family), and his work in the fields is solitary. Duty and desire coincide in his retired life, and there is no suggestion that he is neglecting a duty to his fellow-men, or being unnatural in choosing a fairly isolated life. On the contrary, his life is considered more natural than, and hence superior to, the gregarious life in the vain bustle of the city.

Finally, since drama is the medium through which the development of the solitary in Shakespeare's thought must be considered, the influence of the classical hero must be examined. Greek drama did little to form

¹I follow Ben Jonson's translation of Horace's Second Epode. See Ben Jonson, ed. C.H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford, 1925-52), VIII.289.

Renaissance English drama, although Sophocles and Euripides were performed at the universities.¹ Of the two, however, Euripides more closely resembles the English dramatists in his depiction of a tragic hero who is metaphysically solitary. John Jones judges that he is by this token also distanced from the original spirit of Greek drama as expressed in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles and, in theoretical form, in Aristotle's Poetics.² Even so, as F.L.Lucas sums up, 'on the whole, Euripides' individual influence on the Elizabethans, except vicariously through Seneca, remains slight.'³

The Elizabethan concept of the tragic hero as inward, self-divided, and self-conscious, drew mainly on three classical genres: Seneca's plays, epic poetry (especially the Aeneid), and history. The popularity of history would seem at first sight to indicate a preference for action and event rather than the inward life. Yet David Riggs shows⁴ that the classical approach (and, by derivation, the approach of Renaissance grammar schools) to history was through a central character, a hero. The "action" of Renaissance histories, based on classical precedent, Riggs writes,

will ordinarily depict a central character in the process of realizing his own identity through a series of exemplary deeds.

¹See F.L.Lucas, Euripides and his Influence (London, 1924).

²See On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy (London, 1962). Jones questions the assumption that tragedy 'grew up around the doings of various grand solitaries' (p.17) and demonstrates the supremacy of action in Greek tragedy, and the accompanying concept of character as revealed only through action. Several times, Jones uses Hamlet to measure the distance between the Greek and the Shakespearean concepts of the hero, emphasising how Hamlet's sense of a breach between his inner self and his actions is totally alien to the 'characterful action' (p.33) of Greek tragedy.

³Lucas, p.107.

⁴Shakespeare's Heroical Histories (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

The characters themselves do not change, however; rather the audience's sense of who they are moves towards that lofty, 'categorical' moment in which 'Antony is himself' once and for all.¹

The importance of this concept of the hero as aspiring through his deeds towards self-definition will be discussed in more detail in its contemporary context (see below, pp.109-12). One would not normally think of the heroes of histories as solitaires, although the rhetorical methods of the genre do set them somewhat above and apart from lesser men, but one can see Renaissance writers finding what they want to find in them, and highlighting their potentially solitary aspects. Shakespeare's borrowings from Plutarch may even perhaps be influenced by a principle of selection based on capacity for solitude (see Appendix).

The popularity of Seneca and Virgil is a more explicit indication of a preference for the solitary, meditative hero, of a stronger interest in actor than in action. Reuben Brower has discussed the influence of this inward hero on Shakespeare and the English Renaissance,² showing how the Elizabethans seized on and exaggerated these particular qualities of self-consciousness and a sense of spiritual solitude in creating their own heroes. Brower notes how Chapman distorts the emphasis of his Homeric originals in this direction, making his Achilles more meditative than Homer's, and playing down feats of physical heroism.³ Virgil's Aeneas comes closer than Achilles to the Elizabethan ideal, com-

¹Ibid., p.40.

²Reuben A. Brower, Hero and Saint (Oxford, 1971).

³Odysseus is more readily assimilable than Achilles into Elizabethan concepts of the hero as solitary and introspective, since there is an inherent solitude in the tradition of him as a wanderer, and he is traditionally described as a dissimulator, not fully sociable. See W.B. Stanford, The Ulysses Theme, Rev. ed. (Oxford, 1963).

binning, as he does, action with contemplation. Aeneas has a private self which is revealed in solitude rather than in company, whereas the Homeric hero has a stronger sense of fellowship with his men. As Brower points out, Odysseus and his men weep together for the loss of friends, but Aeneas grieves for others in silence and alone.¹

The Senecan heroes, on whom the Renaissance heroes are more closely modelled, are distinguished from the epic heroes by their 'immense sense of self'.² Much of their action is internal, and their battles are as much against passion or suffering as against physical enemies. In tragedy, the hero is by definition alienated from his society in some way, as a scape-goat, an outcast, or a martyr; and the Stoic hero in particular seems created to be at odds with his society. In the works of Renaissance imitators, this very isolation became glorified into an ardent individualism, and the hero's heroic quality was seen to lie in the defiance with which he struggled against the accepted order of good and evil in order to define his own values and assert his individual autonomy.

It is impossible in this restricted space to do justice to the influence of the classics on literary genres as varied as the prose treatise, drama, satire, pastoral, epic, and the lyric, but the object of scanning so much material in so little detail has been rather to suggest the pervasiveness and variety of classical debts in the Renaissance, than to describe the complexities of those correspondences. It is due to classical tradition that the main genres through which solitude is examined and portrayed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are the philosophical

¹Brower, p. 88.

²Ibid., p. 169.

treatise, the dialogue, the lyric poem in praise of the country life, and tragedy (although some of these genres had also been adopted from the classics in the Middle Ages, thus reaching the Renaissance through two streams).

In moving on to discuss medieval influences on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debate on solitude, it should be made clear that much that is now and was then considered as characteristically medieval, also had its origins in classical thought. The praise of order and unity, the system of correspondences between microcosm and macrocosm, the insistence on considering the relationship between the individual and the state as a relationship between part and whole, to mention a few of the familiar points that will be raised in discussing medieval theory, can all be found in classical literature, although they have come to be considered almost as clichés of medievalism. As with the classical vocabulary pouring into the language in the sixteenth century, these thoughts were not so much new, as recently re-borrowed, and hence appearing in a different garb from that of their first borrowing.

(ii) The Middle Ages

From the Anglo-Saxon lyrics to Malory's Morte Darthur, the general attitude expressed by medieval writers to the solitary was, above all, one of pity. The exile, the rootless man severed from the bonds of society, represented for them not freedom and individualism, but the utter meaninglessness and despair of a part cut loose from its whole. Solitude was voluntarily chosen only for religious reasons; any other form of solitude was imagined by writers to be an accident of fate, a disaster inflicted on a man, not a state he would ever desire or choose. The wanderer in the Anglo-Saxon lyric of that name feels nothing but loneliness and sorrow in his solitude, a yearning for the bonds of fellowship, service and kinship. Far from feeling his past loyalties and obligations as restrictive to his self-fulfilment, he feels a fragment, an incomplete and unfulfilled self without them.

The praise of fellowship is everywhere evident in Chaucer's work. He revels in The Canterbury Tales in depicting a whole microcosmic society, in which each individual has his function and his bonds with others, and is defined in relation to them, through his social class and occupation, and the extent to which he fulfils his function in the social order, not by standards of unattached selfhood. Even the narrator congratulates himself on his own sociability:

So hadde I spoken with hem everichon
That I was of hir felaweshipe anon.

(General Prologue, 31-32)

The only prominent solitary in Chaucer's work, the man in black in The Book of the Duchess, is a tragic figure, and the word most often repeated to describe the narrator's reaction to him is 'pitee'.

In Malory's work, although the same ideals of fellowship, loyalty, service, and mutual obligation are praised, a nostalgic tone is evident,

suggesting that these are already a reality of the past. The most emotive word in the whole book, perhaps, is 'togydirs', which occurs most frequently in laments. Arthur's sorrow when the knights depart in the quest of the Holy Grail is for the breaking of the fellowship: 'I am sure at this quest of the Sankegreall shall all ye of the Rownde Table departe, and nevyr shall I se you agayne holé togydirs, therefore ones shall I se you togydir in the medow, all holé togydirs...' ¹ His greatest grief after he has lost Gwenyvere and is engaged in civil war with his own knights is not the loss of Gwenyvere, but the disintegration of the fellowship of the Round Table: 'And much more I am soryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company.'²

Mark Lambert, in his recent book on Malory,³ demonstrates how the fellowship and unity of the knights is expressed in stylistic ways (some of which are shared by other medieval prose writings). Collective discourse, in which a group of knights speak in unison, so that 'we' becomes the central pronoun, shows the superior value attached to the bond between knights as compared with any individual 'I'; and devices of 'confirmation' (the same truth corroborated by two speakers, by a speaker and the narrator, by extended repetition of a command in describing its performance, or by ^{ti}repetition of a stock vocabulary in describing different events of the same category) give the same impression of unity and shared response. Lambert sees Malory as erecting through these devices a system of values which

¹Works, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd ed., Oxford Standard Authors (Oxford, 1971), XIII.i.520.

²Ibid., XX.ii.685.

³Malory: Style and Vision in 'Le Morte Darthur' (New Haven and London, 1975).

is absolute within the book, not relative according to point of view, since individuality is never explored to that degree:

Certainly, fifteenth-century dialogue does not sound like an ideal medium for dramatizing faint nuances of character or hints of subconscious motivations and conflicts. On the other hand, it has obvious possibilities—obvious, that is, after we have read Malory—for thematic emphasis, for a presentation of reality not as a range of truths and possibilities, but as a truth, a possibility, for the celebration of one set of values as the set of values. It has great possibilities for a Hebraic but not a Hellenic vision.¹

The values which are made absolute by Malory in Morte Darthur are the chivalric values, and every knight is judged according to them. Religious values impinge, however, on the last three books, where solitude emerges as an alternative ideal (although the metaphorical solitude of the saintly and the physical solitude of the quest, both of which can be combined with an active life, are valued higher than the contemplative solitude of the hermitage). Religious solitude in some form is the path finally followed by Launcelot, Gwennyvere, Bors, Bedwere, and seven more of the former knights of the Round Table, as well as by Galahad and Percival; yet there is not the same element of choice in all their decisions. Whereas Galahad and Percival choose from the beginning the active religious life, accepting the element of solitude it involves in setting them above and apart from the fellowship of worldly knights, Launcelot and the others enter a hermitage only when they have fought to the last breath for the worldly ideal, only when the fellowship is irreparably broken, the king dead, and love embittered. Up to the very moment at which he enters on the contemplative life, Launcelot would exchange it for worldly love if Gwenny-

¹Lambert, p.23.

vere would accept him. His withdrawal from the world is not a rejection of the values of worldly fellowship, but a recognition that the bonds which held that fellowship together have been finally broken.

Political writings, in which we might expect to find the solitary discussed in a theoretical way, are uncommon during this period, and, in any case, do not in fact have much to say about the solitary. The notion of voluntary solitude is never seriously considered, except for religious reasons, so that it is mainly in religious treatises that discussions of solitude are to be found. Religion is not simply set apart in a separate sphere, however, for the contemplative life is only one way of living according to God's commands. Hooker's faith in church and commonwealth as one society¹ is a continuation of the medieval view of all life as contained within the framework of divine law, a view described in detail by R.H.Tawney,² among others. This continual reference of the immediate particulars of social life to a moral absolute characterises political writers of the period, who tend to attribute all social evils to man's moral corruption, or to the original Fall, rather than to immediate and identifiable aspects of the social structure.³ Langland, for example, is a typical 'social critic': he describes the faults in the commonwealth, but analyses their causes not in the same practical terms,

¹Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, VIII.i.2.

²Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (Harmondsworth, 1938). See esp. 1(i) 'The Social Organism'.

³See e.g. Arthur B.Ferguson, The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance (Durham, N.C., 1965) and J.W.Blench, Preaching in England in the late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries (Oxford, 1964).

but in the terms of moral judgement, through allegory and symbolism. The dreamer's very name, Will, is a moral judgement on him, which can be cited as the cause of any wrong he does.

In choosing particular treatises to examine with reference to their implications about the individual in society and in solitude, it seems more appropriate to select them on the grounds of their importance and their wide currency at the time, rather than to insist on treatises written by English writers, especially since so much was written in Latin that the country of origin did not necessarily determine the country of widest currency. Probably the three most important medieval writers on the state and the place of the individual within it (although only one deals explicitly with solitude in any detail) are John of Salisbury, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Dante. John of Salisbury is chosen because he is an English writer, because his Policraticus is the earliest elaborate medieval treatise on politics, and because it is the only one written before the rediscovery of Aristotle's works (although John does mention Plato's and Cicero's writings on the republic and Virgil's description of the political constitution of the bees in the Georgics). Aquinas is an obvious choice, since he was probably the greatest single influence on later political thought; and Dante is chosen because he was a popular writer of international fame, and because he was so close in time to Petrarch and yet so distinctly medieval, at least in his political thought. (Petrarch, although living in the fourteenth century, will not be discussed in this medieval context, but at the beginning of the description of the changes in late sixteenth-century England. The anomaly in chronology can be explained by the considerable time-lag between the beginnings of the Renaissance in Italy and in England, and by the extreme originality of Petrarch himself. Although Chaucer and Wyatt, for example, knew some of

Petrarch's work, there is no evidence of the real impact of his thought on England, and in particular his thought on solitude, until the latter part of the sixteenth century.)

It is noticeable that, although these writers are separated by centuries (John was writing in the eleventh century, Aquinas in the thirteenth, and Dante in the fourteenth), the same problems bother them, and they frequently use the same arguments, the same terminology, and the same analogies, and all approach politics in a way which relates it closely to both the divine and the personal spheres. They demonstrate collectively the strong continuity of medieval thought—at points they scarcely differ from Augustine's beliefs as expressed in The City of God in the fifth century—a continuity which compares interestingly with the relative brevity of the period from about 1570 to about 1630, when the changes described in this thesis were so rapidly taking place.

All three of them accept a hierarchy of degree as the foundation of order, both in human society and in the universe. Perfection is the fulfilment of one's appointed place in this order, the enactment of one's bonds, social, legal, and moral, not the cultivation of an individuality which can be separated from occupation and social class. It is the duty of every occupation, in John's words:

that in their exercise they should not transgress the limits of the law, and should in all things observe constant reference to the public utility. For inferiors owe it to their superiors to provide them with service, just as the superiors in their turn owe it to their inferiors to provide them with all things needful for their protection and succor.¹

¹The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury, trans. John Dickinson (New York, 1927), VI.xx.243-44. All further references are to this translation.

This implies in turn an appreciation of man as essentially a part in a greater whole to which he is bound (though the word 'bound' did not imply to medieval men a necessary separation between duty and desire: nature and law were at one in this). Nothing that occurs in the part is without reference to the whole or without a purpose which helps to fulfil that of the whole. Aquinas quotes Augustine's Confessions as an authority for the ultimatum that men must contribute to society:

The goodness of any part is considered in comparison with the whole; hence Augustine says (Conf. iii.) that unseemly is the part that harmonizes not with the whole. Since then every man is a part of the state, it is impossible that a man be good, unless he be well proportionate to the common good: nor can the whole be well consistent unless its parts be proportionate to it.¹

Dante also argues that 'the order within a part has as its end the order of the whole, which brings it to perfection',² and that the goodness of the total order surpasses that of the parts.

The implied relevance of this for the solitary is that he is denying both order in himself and order in the whole by refusing to play his part within the whole. In severing himself from society, he becomes meaningless, since his meaning is as a particular part of a greater order: he commits a destructive act towards both himself and the greater order. Whether the whole referred to by each writer is the state (as John intends) or mankind (as Dante intends), the implication is the same, since the order is one of concentric circles, in which the individual belongs first to the family, then to the city, the country, mankind, and the universe, all of which

¹The 'Summa Theologica' of St. Thomas Aquinas, literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, 1911-25), Part II (First Part), Qu.92, Art.1.

²De Monarchia, in 'Monarchy' and Three Political Letters, trans. Donald Nicholl and Colin Hardie (London, 1954), I.vi.11. All further quotations from Dante refer to this translation of the De Monarchia.

are frequently used as analogies for one another, so that just as membership in one implies membership in the others, so non-membership in one implies non-membership in the others.¹

The apex of the cosmic order is God and the Christian faith. By a further analogy, the commonwealth is modelled on the celestial state, as Augustine's The City of God makes clear, and its laws are the expression of absolute moral law, or, as the writers of the period prefer to call it, the law of nature. This means that if the monarch either breaks these laws or tries to institute civil laws which are not in accord with moral law, the subjects may be right to disobey him. Duty to God comes before duty to monarch or state. As John says, a man must 'keep inviolate the faith which he owes first to God and afterwards to the prince and to the commonwealth' (VI.ix.201). Aquinas also places the duty to God first, believing that the individual is in any case not completely absorbed in the state, because a part of him is reserved for God. This, presumably, is the justification for religious solitude. Aquinas holds the speculative, contemplative happiness of the next life in view in considering this life, and allows that some of the individual's actions are related to a sphere which is distinct from that of the social whole.²

Another problem which all three consider, either indirectly or explicitly, is the problem of whether the individual and the common good are the same, as Aristotle claimed they were, and Cicero believed they ideally should be. Dante believes that the ends of the individual, the family, the village, the city, the kingdom, and the human race are dif-

¹Cf. the late classical view, which used these analogies against one another. The Stoic sage used his sense of oneness with the universe to excuse his non-participation in human society (see pp.19-20 above).

²Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics, trans. C.I.Litzinger, Library of Living Catholic Thought, 1,2 (Chicago, 1964), I.i.5.

ferent (I.iii.6). In being different, however, they are not unconnected, but related by the order of part and whole, which demands that the individual contribute also to the greater ends: 'Let there be no doubt in the mind of the man who has benefited from the common heritage but does not trouble to contribute to the common good that he is failing sadly in his duty' (I.i.3). It is finally in the individual's own interest in any case, according to John, to fulfil this duty, as he will then find his own life made happier and easier by a beneficial community:

Then and then only will the health of the commonwealth be sound and flourishing when the higher members shield the lower, and the lower respond faithfully and fully in like measure to the just demands of their superiors, so that each and all are as it were members one of another by a sort of reciprocity, and each regards his own interest as best served by that which he knows to be most advantageous for the others.

(VI.xx.244)

Aquinas also believes that the ends of the individual and of the community are different, which is why a principle of government is necessary in society,¹ but he too is able to reconcile them in an ideal of mutual benefit. He sees the individual as instrumental to the community and to the achievement of the common good,² but at the same time sees the purpose of the ideal community as the enabling of the individual to lead a virtuous life,³ so that the end is alternately the community and the individual. The perfect state and the perfect individual are not contradictory, but complementary aims.

Aquinas follows Aristotle in basing the origins of the state in need and nature. The state is necessary to fulfil man's material needs, that is, to maintain life itself, but it is also necessary to fulfil him

¹On Kingship to the King of Cyprus, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, rev. I. Th. Eschmann (Toronto, 1949), I.i.8.

²See p.32 above.

³On Kingship, II.iii.106.

spiritually, to enable him to lead a good life. 'Men form a group', he writes, 'for the purpose of living well together, a thing which the individual man living alone could not attain, and good life is virtuous life.'¹ But he feels compelled to qualify these statements by the consideration of religious solitude, while at the same time emphasising the exceptional quality of the men chosen for this kind of life. Like Aristotle, he considers them somehow outside the sphere of purely human nature:

If any man should be such that he is not a political being by nature, he is either wicked--as when this happens through the corruption of human nature--or he is better than man--in that he has a nature more perfect than that of other men in general, so that he is able to be sufficient to himself without the society of men, as were John the Baptist and St. Anthony the hermit.²

Generally, the state is the entirely natural expression of man's nature, and Dante and John of Salisbury can be assumed to accept the naturalness of the state by the fact that they do not question or discuss it. It is a preconception on which the formulation of the ideal state rests, and the values these writers place highest are by definition social values, not achievable by solitary individuals, the values of justice, order, and unity.

Aquinas, as shown above, is the only one of these three to mention religious solitude as an exception to the rule of nature which demanded social participation; but if we turn to the writings of religious contemplatives themselves, we find that the contemplative ideal is generally valued higher than the active life throughout Western tradition. There is nevertheless some reluctance towards total commitment to such an absolute, and some writers do place the mixed life higher than either extreme, or

¹On Kingship, II.iii.106. See p.34 above.

²Commentary on the 'Politics', quoted in A.P.D'Entreves, introd., Selected Political Writings (Oxford, 1948), pp.xvii-xviii.

at least take care to make clear when exceptions to both are necessary (see p.6 above). The early Church Fathers were generally more moderate in their recommendations than the later medieval religious writers, who were frequently monks or hermits themselves. Hilton is closest in spirit to early tradition in recognising physical solitude as a means rather than an end, the end being the inner solitude which is receptive to God. Hilton tells his readers, presumably men or women in religious orders themselves, 'thou shouldst know that the cause of thy bodily enclosing is that thou mightest the better come to ghostly enclosing',¹ but urges them to make use of any practice which helps them turn away from the world in spirit, 'whether it be praying or thinking, stillness or speaking, reading or hearing, onliness or communing, going or sitting; keep it for the time and work therein as long as savour lasteth.'²

For the most part, however, medieval writers are less open-minded than this, and see physical solitude as absolutely necessary for the contemplative life. Ancrene Wisse gives eight reasons for keeping solitary, and quotes innumerable examples and teachings from Scripture to reinforce the point.³ Rolle favours the most absolute solitude above the communal or mixed life,⁴ and Abelard denounces monks for transforming monasteries, which were founded in solitude, into small commun-

¹The Scale of Perfection, ed. Evelyn Underhill (London, 1923), I.i.2.

²Ibid., II.xxiii.317.

³Ancrene Wisse, ed. J.R.R.Tolkien, EETS, 249 (London, New York and Toronto. 1962), pp.74-76.

⁴The Fire of Love, pp.82-91.

ities, urging:

Let us therefore set up huts for ourselves in the wilderness, so that we may be better able to stand before the Lord and, being prepared, take part in serving him, and so that the society of men will not jolt the bed of our repose, disturb our rest, breed temptations, and distract our minds from our holy calling.¹

This quotation from Abelard draws attention to a difference in approach between religious and secular writers: whereas secular writers justify their praise of society through reference to an ideal cosmic hierarchy, which links the different spheres of man's action concentrically, religious writers justify their recommendation of solitude through reference to a reality which undercuts this ideal by supposing the different spheres to be more distracting to one another than unified by analogy.

The Middle Ages formulated the two extremes in ideals: the ideal of an active life involving full participation, uniting duty and desire in the twin conception of contribution to and fulfilment from society; and a contemplative life involving complete withdrawal from society, both physically and mentally, total dedication to God without the distractions of worldly commitments. The sixteenth century hence took over the debate on solitude at the time when the active and contemplative ideals were at their most absolute and their most irreconcilable.

¹The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth, 1974), p.192.

(iii) The Early Sixteenth Century

The ideal of the perfect commonwealth remained static in the transition from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century. The changes within the treatment of that ideal were basically three: 1) the sheer volume of political literature both written and read; 2) the kind of men writing it; 3) their attitude towards how to achieve that ideal. The sixteenth century saw a marked increase in the number of political tracts and in their popularity. All the writers considered here are more or less contemporary. This presents a sharp contrast with the medieval period, where, although religious solitude was described as the exception to the rule of participation, writings on solitude abounded, whereas it was necessary to span centuries in order to find political writings of any impact. The fact that so many sixteenth-century works are written in the vernacular is in itself evidence both of the greater demand for such literature, and of the greater concern on the part of writers that their work should be widely accessible. Starkey was not published in his lifetime, but Elyot's Boke named The Governour (1531) went through eight editions before 1600, More's Utopia went through several Latin editions published abroad and three editions of the English translation by the same date, and the prolific works of Erasmus went through innumerable editions and translations. Gabriel Harvey, writing to Spenser slightly later in the century, between 1573 and 1580, confirms this impression: 'You can not stepp into a schollars studye but (ten to on) you shall litely finde open ether Bodin de Republica or Le Royes Exposition vppon Aristotles Politiques or sum other like French or Italian Politique Discourses',¹ although Harvey is also making the point of the preference

¹The Works of Gabriel Harvey, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Privately printed, 1884-85), I.137-38.

for foreign works in the latter part of the century.

The writers of these works were in the main men in public life, often in high offices of state, unlike the medieval political writers, who were largely theorists, men in religious orders (although John of Salisbury combined his religious life with a diplomatic career), preoccupied by the notion of the ideal state as a mirror of the celestial city, and with the moral qualities necessary to create it. More became High Chancellor of the realm; Elyot held various public and diplomatic offices, including that of ambassador to Germany; Thomas Starkey was chaplain to Henry VIII; and Sir Thomas Smith (author of De Republica Anglorum, and now generally considered also to have written A Discourse of this Common Weal of this Realm of England) was Elizabeth's Secretary of State for a time. Although Starkey and Smith were ordained, religion seems to have been for them a necessary step on the ladder of political advancement. This is not to suggest that they were irreligious, but rather that the emphasis of their lives was different from that of medieval political writers: unlike St. Thomas Aquinas and John, Bishop of Salisbury, they were statesmen first and clergymen second.

Only in More's case is there evidence remaining of a conflict between religious and political impulses. More long considered becoming a priest, spending four years in religious contemplation, and even after he finally chose the law as his occupation, he continued to display a devotion and an asceticism reminiscent of medieval religious solitaries, even wearing a hair-shirt under his clothes.

The different political attitudes of medieval and Tudor writers, then, ^{are} ~~is~~ directly linked with their different occupations, since obviously men whose occupation is the administration of the commonwealth will be more concerned with immediate and practical problems than men whose religion is their occupation, and who meditate on the nature of the state in relation to

divine absolutes. Sixteenth-century writers were concerned with their particular commonwealth and how it could be reformed to approach the ideal, rather than with the abstract description of that ideal. They analysed particular defects and their causes in social terms, and suggested practical alternatives, instead of attributing all flaws to the ultimate causes of man's moral nature and God's inscrutable plan. The moral absolutes were still acknowledged, but, within this framework, men were beginning to see the relativity of the individual state to time and place, and to the activities and policies of particular men. The sixteenth century is distinguished from the Middle Ages by its ability 'to separate the eternal and absolute from the contingent and changing, to distinguish those things that constitute the unalterable, "natural" circumstances of human life from those that are subject to adjustment by human effort.'¹ Civil law, although formed in imitation of the divine laws, could be altered to express the moral law more faithfully as the time and circumstances changed, or, as Starkey expresses it, civil law is

in every country...diverse and variable, yea almost in every city and town. This law taketh effect of the opinion of man; it resteth wholly in his consent, and varieth according to the place and time, insomuch that in diverse time and place contrary laws are both good and both convenient to the politic life. Whereas the law of nature is ever one, in all countries, firm and stable, and never for the time varieth.²

The latter parts of both More's Utopia and Starkey's Dialogue put just this point into effect by following the theoretical definitions and

¹Ferguson, The Articulate Citizen, p.xvi.

²Dialogue, p.32. Page numbers appearing in the text are all to Burton's edition.

exhortations to an active life of the first part with particular and practical descriptions of reform, More in an ideal state (which naturally resembles England in many points), Starkey explicitly in the England of Henry VIII's reign. They see the state as subject to improvement by men's reason as well as by their morality, and reason is everywhere included in their definitions of the ideal state. Elyot defines a commonwealth on the first page of The Governour: 'A publike weale is a body lyuyng, compacte or made of sondry astates and degrees of men, whiche is disposed by the ordre of equite and gouerned by the rule and moderation of reason.'¹

Yet, given these differences in approach, the sixteenth-century writers continued to consider the problems of the commonwealth through many of the same topics as their medieval predecessors, and with many of the same preconceptions, although with more awareness of the classical origins of these ideas. The ideas of order, justice, and unity remained the basis of the 'veray and true commonweal', as did the faith in the basic social hierarchy of degree. Certain revolutionary ideas crept in, under the influence of the Reformation, to the effect that men were equal, as shown in More's discussion with Raphael of the relative equality of the Utopians, but generally a conservative attitude was adopted.

The familiar topic of whether the individual and the common good are the same was still debated. More seems to suggest that they can only be one when private good is, as it were, obliterated, for Raphael's view of English society, or any other society which is not Utopia, is that

¹The Booke named The Governour, ed. Henry Herbert Stephen Croft (London, 1880), I.i.1. Future references are to this edition.

there 'men talk freely of the public welfare—but look after their private interests only. In Utopia, where nothing is private, they seriously concern themselves with public affairs.'¹ Only when possession and financial independence are taken away can the conflict between private and public disappear. Starkey, on the other hand, believes that they can be the same in moderation, but are in conflict when one becomes excessive: 'Overmuch regard of private and particular weal ever destroyeth the common, as mean and convenient regard thereof maintaineth the same' (p.46).

There is uniform agreement on the naturalness of society, 'without which', Elyot writes, 'mannes lyfe is unpleasaunt and full of anguisshe' (III.iii.202). Starkey actually defines the law of nature as the social impulse: 'this inclination and rule of living, by these virtues stabled and confirmed, is called, as I said, the law of nature, which, though all men follow not, yet all men approve' (p.31). This extreme in the early part of the century of not merely defining society as natural, but defining nature as society, finds its complementary extreme in Calvin's view (which, although expressed very close in time to Starkey's, did not have much influence on secular thought until the seventeenth century) that nature, since the Fall, 'is such that every man would be a lord and master over his neighbors and no man by his good will would be a subject',² and hence that society is not so much a natural issuing of man's instinct as an order of repression instituted by God and imposed by those in power, his deputies on earth, on man, in order to keep his anti-social instinct in

¹Utopia, in The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, ed. Edward Surtz and J.H.Hexter (New Haven and London, 1963-), IV. 239. Page numbers in the text refer to this edition.

²Quoted in Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints (London, 1966), p.31.

check.

But whether society is regarded as natural or imposed, it is consistently regarded as an expression of order; and from this external order derives man's inner order, which is equivalent to a virtuous life. Lupset's reply to Pole's condemnation of the disorder and vice in cities in Starkey's Dialogue is that it is not the formation of a community among men which causes this 'misorder' (p.28), but the fleeing of wise men, who might keep it in order, from authority: that is, not the social impulse of the many, but the anti-social impulse of the few. Order, reason, and nature are the three abstracts by which society is most commonly defined by early sixteenth-century writers; so that, in their view, order is not so much a potential element in civil life as a precondition of it.

The ancient debate on the relative superiority of the active and contemplative lives continues, but in a newly-restricted secular sphere. The sixteenth-century contemplative is a scholar, not a monk, and his contemplation is of an intellectual rather than a spiritual nature. The medieval monastic ideal becomes discredited, partly due to the influence of the Reformation, and partly to the Humanist revival of classical ideals, with their strong emphasis on public duty. Religious withdrawal is no longer admired as the most arduous life, for which only the few are strong enough, but becomes scorned as the easy retreat from the duties and hardships of public life. Every man, without exception, writes Laud, 'must live in the body of the Commonwealth and in the body of the Church.'¹ Starkey condemns the man who, out of fear of the dangers of worldly life,

¹Quoted in Tawney, p.140.

'runneth into a religious house, there as in a haven quietly to rest, without so much trouble and disquietness' (p.53).

Yet the transition from a religious to a secular ideal was not quite so simple as such statements would suggest. Evidence of a conflict between the continuing medieval impulse towards contemplative enclosure side by side with the public-spiritedness which demanded full participation in this world, is furnished by Erasmus and More. Erasmus, who himself had been a monk, frequently ridiculed and inveighed against monks and nuns in his work, yet towards the end of his life he changed this opinion to one of admiration.¹ More's conflict (see p. 39 above) has led critics to read Utopia both as a commendation and as a condemnation of the monastic life. Yet although the similarity between the Utopian and monastic regimes, coupled with More's own bent towards the contemplative life, might lead one to suppose that More was in favour of religious withdrawal, More's explicit comments, both in Utopia itself and elsewhere, do not corroborate this reading. In Book I of Utopia he complains of the idle life of the European religious, and he creates a new religious élite in Book II, who are notable for the intensely active and public-spirited nature of their lives, the few 'who for religious motives eschew learning and scientific pursuit and yet allow themselves no leisure. It is only by keeping busy and by all good offices that they are determined to merit the happiness coming after death' (p.225).

Humanism, with its emphasis on education and the fashioning of the individual and its reverence for pagan antiquity, helps to account for

¹See e.g. The Complaint of Peace, trans. T. Paynell, ed. William James Hirten, SF&R (New York, 1946), sig. Biiii^r, and editor's note, which quotes Erasmus expressing the opposite view to the one he offers here.

the increased regard for the intellect. The spread of education in the fifteenth century had meant the rise of a comparatively new figure, the lay intellectual, who combined knowledge and study with action, virtue being now defined as knowledge issuing in action. Both knowledge without deeds and deeds without knowledge were considered sterile and incomplete, and the ideals of the active and contemplative lives, which had seemed so far apart to most medieval thinkers, began to come closer in this new ideal of virtue.

Another conflict arises, however, to take the place of the medieval active-contemplative polarity. This is the conflict between Christian and classical values, between the implicit self-abasement and humility of the one and the self-cultivation and pride of the other. England's strongly traditionalist attitude can be seen by comparison with Italy, which embraced the classical ideal in its development of the courtier, the man who does all things well. Italian attitudes went even beyond classical limits in equating 'l'uomo universale' with 'l'uomo singolare', the individualist who cultivates his talents for the sake of his own self-esteem, who sees his value primarily in terms of self and not in terms of his relations with other men and with the state. The value of man as an isolated self to the Italians is shown in their exaltation of inwardness, an attitude associated not with the early classical creed of the Republic, but with the Stoics. Pico expresses this view at its most extreme: 'Man by retiring from all Externals and withdrawing into Him self, in the centre of his own Unity becometh most like unto GOD.'¹

¹Quoted in Louis Martz, The Paradise Within (New Haven and London, 1964), p.100.

English imitations of Italian models, even Elyot's Governour, which draws so heavily on Castiglione's Courtier, temper this aggressive impulse towards self-perfection with a stronger emphasis on duty than on desire, a concern for the usefulness of the individual's talents to others besides himself.¹ Starkey, in direct opposition to Pico, affirms man to be at his most God-like in applying his talents to the common benefit, since God's goodness 'is by this chiefly declared and opened to the world, that to every thing and creature He giveth part thereof according to their nature and capacity' (p.24). This emphasis on public usefulness was strengthened by the fact that it had authority in both Christian and early classical traditions. The dictum, 'no man is born for himself alone', is an obsessively recurring phrase in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works dealing with the problem of solitude or participation, and it has its roots both in classical writings on the republic and in Scripture, notably in the New Testament commandment to charity, in the parable of the talents,² and in St. Paul's words to the Romans: 'For none of vs liueth to himselfe, neither doeth any die to himselfe' (Romans, 14.7).

Yet despite the narrowing of the gap between the active and contemplative lives, there was still a choice to be made for the intellectual.² The conflict between the personal impulse towards withdrawal and the sense of duty towards society (described with reference to More above, pp.39, 44) is again in evidence in the dual urge of the intellectual towards channeling his study into civic usefulness or merely self-improvement. The choice was admittedly no longer as extreme for the sixteenth-

¹See Ruth Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century, University of Illinois Studies, 14 (Urbana, 1929), pp.51-52; 84-85.

²See Ferguson, Ch.7.

century scholar as for the medieval religious contemplative: the intellectual did not need to choose between company and solitude, but only between active participation in affairs of state and 'passive' involvement in the community at a non-political level. The compromise between cloistering one's learning and cheapening it in an official position amid the worldliness of the court was counsel. Both More and Starkey begin their treatises with an intellectual being urged to benefit others with his learning by offering his counsel to princes. The contrast with the Continent in the conclusion reached in these debates is again illustrated through a comparison of More and Starkey with Erasmus and Pico. Erasmus was notoriously aloof in his own life, despite holding nominal public offices, and urging individual commitment to the public good in his writings. He has been suggested as the model for Raphael, the scholar in More's Utopia who is unwilling to sacrifice his retirement in order to counsel any prince. There is also a letter of Pico's extant, translated, significantly, by More, in which Pico gives his reasons for refusing to become the counsellor to some king, as the recipient of the letter has urged him to do. It is perhaps possible that More used this letter (which he translated before writing Utopia) as a source for Raphael, since the arguments are very similar, arguments of personal feeling and individual liberty, rather than of duty or the common good. Pico values 'my little house, my study, the pleasure of my books, the rest and peace of my mynde',¹ above any moral arguments. The difference between Pico and More is that More, although he feels the same personal preference as Pico, places his sense of duty higher. If any confirmation is needed of where

¹Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: His Life by his Nephew...Also Three of his Letters..., trans. Sir Thomas More, ed. J.M.Rigg (London, 1890), p.40.

More takes his final stand in the debate on counsel, it is that two years after the publication of Utopia, after much hesitation, he gave up his intellectual unattachment to take his place in the King's council. Critics have argued over whether More speaks through the character More or the character Raphael; but the answer is surely that he is both of them, and that they enact the psychomachia within More's own conscience between his sense of duty and his personal desire. In his own life, More finally followed his sense of duty, as expressed in More's rebuke to Raphael in Utopia:

it seems to me you will do what is worthy of you and of this generous and truly philosophic spirit of yours if you so order your life as to apply your talent and industry to the public interest, even if it involves some personal disadvantages to yourself.

(p.57)

More's letter to Peter Giles, written while he was still an unattached intellectual, shows how even then his sense of public duty was stronger in some respects than his personal tastes. He offers this fact of his life as an excuse for his delay in finishing the book: 'I devote almost the whole day in public to other men's affairs and the remainder to my own. I leave to myself, that is to learning, nothing at all' (p.39).

The debate on counsel, then, the sixteenth-century continuation of the medieval debate on the active and contemplative lives, was pertinent all over Europe at this time; but the emphasis and the conclusions most commonly reached in England were different from those elsewhere. So strong was the English emphasis on the commonwealth, that some critics, in discussing England at this time, have seen the perfect state as the end to which the individual contributed, as opposed to the state being used as a vehicle for the individual's self-aggrandisement, as in Italy.¹ This,

¹See e.g. Fritz Caspari, Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England (Chicago, 1954), Ch.8, note 30, pp.277-78.

however, is quite contrary to the explicit statements of the writers considered here, who idealised the perfect state only as providing the conditions for a virtuous life for the individual. In Starkey's words, 'the end of all politic rule is to induce the multitude to virtuous living, according to the dignity of the nature of man' (p.61). Neither the perfect individual nor the perfect state was valued to the detriment of the other; writers retained the medieval ideal of a perfect balance between the two, the mutual fulfilment of one through the other.

What singles out early sixteenth-century England from the rest of contemporary Europe and from medieval and later England, is the faith in the state as the only possible vehicle through which the individual could achieve the end of a virtuous life. No longer were any exceptions to this rule gladly tolerated, even for religious reasons. The bond between the individual and the state was absolute for these writers. Possibly the most famous passage in the whole of Elyot's Governour is his vision of a world bereft of social order:

More ouer take away ordre from all thynges what shulde than remayne? Certes nothyng finally, except some man wolde imagine eftsones Chaos: which of some is expounde a confuse mixture. Also where there is any lacke of ordre nedes must be perpetuall conflicte: and in thynges subiecte to Nature nothyng of hym selfe onely may be norisshed; but whan he hath destroyed that where with he dothe participate by the ordre of his creation, he hym selfe of necessite muste than perisshe, whereof ensueth the uniuersall dissolution.

(I.i.3-4)

CHAPTER II

Changing Attitudes towards Solitude in the Later Sixteenth
and Early Seventeenth Centuries

(i) The Change Described: Petrarch

The general change in attitude towards solitude in later sixteenth-century England is from one of general condemnation to one of general approbation and even admiration. The kind of solitude which is praised is no longer the religious solitude of contemplatives, but the solitude of a secular contemplative, the philosopher. The monastic life remains out of favour, as in the earlier part of the century, and the religious attitude, to judge by the tone of sermons, changes to a stress on the necessity for an active life, counterbalancing the now more general secular praise of withdrawal. Even Donne, who shows a strong personal inclination towards solitude, only condemns it in a religious context. He denounces religious withdrawal as a shirking of duty and an expression of weakness: those 'which dye the Allegoricall death of entring into Religion', he affirms, are 'a soft and supple metall, made onely for Cowardly solitarinesse.'¹ No-one should fear 'the loss of good company' if he seeks Christ: 'Religion is no sullen thing, it is not a melancholly, there is not so sociable a thing as the love of Christ Jesus.'²

The secular solitude which only now begins to be sought out in England was discovered as a pleasure at an earlier date in many Continental countries. The earliest English printed books dealing with the subject

¹ 'That only Cowards dare dye', in John Donne: Selected Prose, chosen by Evelyn Simpson, ed. Helen Gardner and Timothy Healey (Oxford, 1967), p.15.

² Sermons, I.v.246.

at any length are translations from writers such as Guevara in Spain, Guazzo in Italy, and Montaigne in France. The earliest full-length treatise composed in English on solitude which I have found, and which predates even the translations of Guazzo and Montaigne, is Roger Baynes' The Praise of Solitarinesse, first published in 1577; but, with this exception, the preoccupation with solitude was only shown incidentally in essays, discourses, and other genres, until the seventeenth century, when longer discussions began to appear.

No English writer unites so many of the implications of this change in attitude, nor is so crucial to the understanding of the change, which affected all Europe, as Petrarch. Petrarch, although his life (1304-74) falls within the period which was, in England at least, still resolutely medieval, is the single most influential figure on these developing ideas. His innovations cannot be overstated. The praise of solitary places, or satire against the court can be found in earlier literature, but Petrarch was the first to write a book, De Vita Solitaria, devoted entirely to the subject of secular solitude. He was also the first to consider himself as a suitable subject for his writing, not for any great deeds he had performed, but merely for the interest inherent in him as an individual, his particular feelings, tastes, and character. Introspection reached an unprecedented level in his Secretum: the association of solitude with the inward, self-analytical character was clearly established.

His ascent of Mount Ventoux gives some indication of the striking originality of both his life and his thought. Climbing a mountain for its own sake, in order to see the view and experience the challenge, was unheard of in Petrarch's time, as the shepherd who acts as the guide confirms, saying that since his own attempt 'se...nec unquam aut ante illud

tempus aut postea auditum apud eos quenquam ausum esse similia'¹ ('Never, [he said,] had he heard that anyone else either before or after had ventured to do the same'²).

Petrarch took his brother, clearly choosing him as the companion who would least intrude on his inner spiritual life. He describes his ascent as an allegory of his spiritual life, and clearly used the expedition as an opportunity for introspection. Opening his copy of Augustine's Confessions at random at the top, he tells us, he was rebuked to find this passage:

'Et eunt homines admirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus maris et latissimos lapsus fluminum et oceani ambitum et giros siderum, et relinquunt se ipsos'.

('Men go to admire the high mountains and the great flood of the seas and the wide-rolling rivers and the ring of Ocean and the movements of the stars; and they abandon themselves!')

From then on, his solitude deepened by his sense of sin, he was scarcely aware of his brother's presence:

Tunc vero montem satis vidisse contentus, in me ipsum interiores oculos reflexi, et ex illa hora non fuit qui me loquentem audiret donec ad ima pervenimus.

(Then, sated with sight of the mountain, I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time no one heard me utter a word until we got to the bottom.)

Even when they returned to the inn, Petrarch retired to a private room to write the letter quoted above before returning to company and conversation.

Above all, Petrarch was the first figure of any importance to put the life of solitude into practice by withdrawing from the city to the

¹Familiarum Rerum Libri, vols X-XIII of Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Francesco Petrarca, ed. Vittorio Rossi [and Umberto Bosco] (Florence, 1926-), IV.i.154. All quotations on this page are from the same letter.

²Letters from Petrarch, sel. and trans. Morris Bishop (Bloomington and London, 1966), p.46.

relative hardship of a secluded country life at Vacluse. The utter incomprehensibility and strangeness of such an act to Petrarch's contemporaries, to whom he was a public figure, possessed of all the pleasures that accompany fame and wealth in the city, can scarcely be imagined now. Literary retirement became a cliché after Petrarch; but Petrarch marked the turning point between the poet who wrote for his audience, aiming to please and teach them (a theory which Sidney was still propounding in the Defence of Poesie in England) and the poet who writes for himself, aiming to express the truth about himself (a notion not really established in England until the seventeenth century).

The originality of Petrarch's life and work can perhaps best be imagined by comparing him with Chaucer, his English contemporary, a statesman and a courtier, who drew material for his poetry from the very bustling crowds and cities that Petrarch abhorred. Whereas Petrarch constantly referred his work back to his own nature as the determining creative factor, Chaucer pointed to his audience, inserting references to them which make it clear that he intended his poetry to be read aloud, and thus to offer some expression of collective experience. Probably the most famous contemporary picture of Chaucer is the one which shows him as a public figure, reading his work aloud to a courtly audience.¹

Petrarch was well aware of the novelty of his own views, and of the minority of men to whom they would appeal, but it is easy to see how just this acknowledgement of exclusiveness could later develop into a cult. Indeed, 'cult' is a word which seems to attach itself to critical comment-

¹This picture survives in a fifteenth-century manuscript (MS Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, no.61), but is quite probably a copy of a late fourteenth-century original. See Aage Brusendorff, The Chaucer Tradition (London and Copenhagen, 1925), pp.21-23.

ary on Petrarch as inevitably as 'first'.¹ Petrarch himself seems to anticipate a cult of followers when he writes: 'paucos quibus loquor, affuturos scio preter numerum superiores rebus omnibus atque victores'² ('I know that the chosen few to whom I address myself will be on my side and they are in all respects but numbers superior and triumphant over the rest'³).

There is, however, a certain self-contradiction in Petrarch's views. Occasionally, he writes of his compulsion to return to the city,⁴ or insists that he could endure life at Vaucluse only temporarily.⁵ Jerrold E. Seigel has taken this alternation between civic and solitary lives as justification for presenting Petrarch as balanced between the two, but committed to neither. 'These contradictions', he writes,

must be understood within the context of Petrarch's Ciceronianism. It is entirely incorrect to interpret them as the result of an internal struggle between traditional medieval ascetic ideals and a modern affirmation of the material world.⁶

(By 'Ciceronianism', he means that Petrarch imitated Cicero's attempt to combine the active life of the orator with the contemplative life of the philosopher.) Seigel may be right in saying that Petrarch's self-contradiction

¹ e.g. Zeitlin (see p.19 above); A. Buck, quoted in Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London, 1960), p.26.

² De Vita Solitaria (hereafter cited as Vita), II.xv.588.

³ Zeitlin, p.315.

⁴ Epistolarum Variarum Liber, in Francisci Petrarchae...opera omnia (Basle, 1581), xxxiii.1022.

⁵ Familiarum, VIII.iii.159.

⁶ "Civic Humanism" or Ciceronian Rhetoric: The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni', Past and Present, 34 (1966), p.36.

diction does not represent the struggle between medieval and modern ideals, especially since, by medieval, Seigel intends to convey the solitary ideal, which is exactly where Petrarch seems most in advance of his time, since the solitude he seeks is not religious, but secular. Yet to see Petrarch's self-contradiction therefore as not a matter of internal struggle, but as an expression of the conscious combination of two classical types, surely exaggerates the extent to which Petrarch modelled himself on Cicero, if in fact he did at all. If one considers the sonnets and the letters as well as the prose works, it is clear that Petrarch experienced self-division in many forms, and that he viewed it as an aspect of his own nature, not as a conflict between two pre-formed ideals external to himself. Indeed, he seems to have seen his self-division not as a conflict within him between the social and the solitary impulses, so much as as a division inherent in solitude alone, which forced him into self-scrutiny, thus dividing him into two selves, the observer and the observed.¹

Many of the sonnets take the form of dialogues between different parts of the self, and the language is full of reflexive actions done by the self to the self, actions and states rendered almost compulsively by English translators by compounds of 'self'.² He writes of being divided from 'me stesso'³ ('my proper self'⁴) and frequently implies a self split in two by his use of the imagery of Narcissus and the mirror. Although

¹Robert H. Deming has discussed this self-division in relation to English poetry in 'Love and Knowledge in the Renaissance Lyric', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 16 (1974), 389-410.

²See e.g. Joseph Auslander, trans., The Sonnets of Petrarch (London, New York, and Toronto, 1931), sonnets I.i, I.xl, I.lxi. L.lxviii.

³The Italian text of the sonnets is cited from Rime, Trionfi e Poesie Latine, ed. F. Neri et al., La Letteratura Italiana Storia e Testi, 6 (Milan and Naples, [1951]), ccxxxiv.

⁴Auslander's translation. He numbers I.lvi.

love can frequently be cited as the explanation for his self-division in the Sonnets, there is no doubt that his tendency towards self-examination, in which the self splits into the examiner and the examined, led him to regard the self, and in particular the solitary self, as inherently divided. His Secretum, probably his most famous prose work, and certainly his most explicitly introspective one, takes the form of a dialogue between two participants named Petrarch and St. Augustine, but necessarily, of course, both are aspects of Petrarch himself, the single mind behind the work.

Petrarch's recognition of his own inconsistency can be seen as yet another quality distancing him from the medieval world, with its depiction of character as static type.¹ Despite his love of the classics, Petrarch prefigures the decline of the tradition of art as rhetoric and the beginning of the tradition of art as self-expression. His description of self-division is part of that striving towards inward truth, not towards the imitation of classical types.

The strongest evidence to support Seigel's view of a balanced and reasoned alternation between two opposing classical traditions, although he does not quote it, is the suggestion that Petrarch planned to write a treatise on the active life to balance his De Vita Solitaria.² Yet it is surely indicative of one subject being more congenial to his nature than the other that he never wrote this, but wrote instead two treatises on solitude, the De Vita Solitaria on secular solitude and the De Otio

¹Thomas Greene, 'The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature', in The Disciplines of Criticism, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene and Lowry Nelson Jr. (New Haven and London, 1968), p.246.

²Morris Bishop, Petrarch and his World (London, 1964), p.349. But Bishop does not give a reference to any source for this claim.

Religioso on religious solitude. Indeed, in the letter to Philip, Bishop of Cavaillon, with which he introduces the former, he implies that the subject of solitude is something of an obsession with him:

Quid vero nunc prius ex me speres, quam quod et in ore et in corde semper habui, et ipse qui modo sub oculis est locus hortatur? solitarie scilicet otioseque vite preconium¹

(What now do you expect of me other than what I have always had in my mouth and in my heart, and what is preached by the very place I am now looking on—the celebration of a life of solitude and leisure²).

In a letter, he also makes explicit the connection between the emphasis of his literary output and his personal feelings:

Ceterum quid michi in his quantislibet vite mortalis angustiis sepius repetendum veniat, quam quod nunquam ex animo nisi cum anima discedet? Is est autem otii ac solitudinis appetitus, de quibus hactenus singulos tractatus edidi non tam aliis quam michi, ne forte silentium oblivio consecuta novis animum implicaret affectibus, a quo metu iam procul esse videor; sic mea mecum crevit opinio iamque induruit atque percalluit et in habitum versa est.³

(In these distresses of mortal existence I must constantly repeat my obsessing theme: the quest for peace and solitude. I have already written two treatises on the subject, not so much for others' profit as for my own, for fear that new cares might induce forgetfulness. That does not seem likely to happen. My conviction has increased with time; it has become so hard and tough that it is a rooted habit⁴).

Although Seigel writes as though the alternation between the civic and solitary ideals were equal in Petrarch's writings, it is clear from the above quotations and from innumerable other references in the letters and prose works that Petrarch saw himself as solitary by nature, not as assuming a temporary classical pose. He portrays Augustine rebuking him

¹Vita, p.290, 'Ad Philippum Cavallicensem Episcopum'.

²Zeitlin, p.100.

³Familiarum, XVII.v.248.

⁴Letters, trans. Bishop, p.150.

in the Secretum for false pride in deviating, as a solitary, from the common path. He refers to himself in his letters as 'michi solitudinis avido',¹ 'silentii ac solitudinis amatorem',² writes of his 'otii ac solitudinis appetitus',³ his 'amor...non rei alterius nisi solitudinis et quietis',⁴ his 'amor libertatis',⁵ his 'fastidium atque odium' for all cities,⁶ and admits to having avoided 'reipublicae muneribus'.⁷ He describes the fountain of the Sorgue as 'naturae meae locus aptissimus',⁸ and explicitly draws the distinction between the life that is alien and the life that is natural to him: 'ego...prope alius rure michi videor, alius in urbibus; nempe ibi naturam sequor, hic exempla'.⁹ Donne later inscribed on the title pages of his books Petrarch's admission, according to the traditional exegesis, of having lived the contemplative life to the exclusion of the active: 'Per Rachel ò servito e non per Lia'.¹⁰

¹Familiarum, VIII.v.171.

²Ibid., I.i.6.

³Ibid., see p.57 above.

⁴Ibid., XI.xii.351.

⁵'Posteritati', in Prose, p.4.

⁶Ibid., p.12.

⁷Familiarum, I.i.6.

⁸Epistolarum de Rebus Senilibus, Libri XVI, in Opera omnia, X.ii.869.

⁹Familiarum, XXI.xiii.90.

¹⁰Rime, ccvi. Also quoted in R.C.Bald, John Donne: A Life, completed and ed. W.Milgate (Oxford, 1970), p.122.

Three aspects in particular of Petrarch's view of solitude separated him from the medieval perspective: 1) his search for motivation primarily in his own nature and only intermittently in external causes; 2) his valuing of personal preference and individual nature above absolute morality and general nature; 3) the purely secular nature of the solitude he sought. All three of these differences are aspects of a single change: the movement inwards from the external world to the self.

As regards motivation, the medieval view was that solitude had to be motivated by some accident of fortune or by some special state of mind, such as love, grief, madness, or religious fervour. Even Burton, in his Anatomy of Melancholy, as late as 1621, still uses the notion of external motivation simultaneously with his recognition of the possibility that solitude could be considered desirable purely for its own sake. Petrarch is the first to write about solitude as desirable simply in itself, although the solitude of the sonnets can to some extent be considered as motivated by love. Even in the sonnets, however, he sometimes betrays a longing which is more characteristically a longing for solitude primarily for the pleasures it offers, and only incidentally as a state appropriate to unsatisfied love. Sonnet cclix, for example, makes clear that solitude is a consciously chosen state, not an unwilling necessity enforced by love:

Cercato ò sempre solitaria vita,
le rive il sanno e le campagne e i boschi,
per fuggir questi ingegni sordi e loschi,
che la strada del cielo ànno smarrita'

(I seek a life remote and solitary,
As the wild rivers, fields and forests know,
To escape the blind, to shun the sordid so,
Whereof the wise and virtuous are wary¹).

¹Auslander, I.ccxxi.

In his letters we also learn that exile from Italy motivated his retirement, although it was in fact Avignon he left for Vaucluse, through disgust with the city itself, having left Italy years before because of civil unrest. Even while conflating the two for poetic effect, however, Petrarch admits also to an impulse in his own nature towards the solitary life, conflicting with his sorrow at exile: 'Huc subii partimque volens partimque coactus.'¹ He then describes the natural beauty of the place, suggesting a new 'motivation' which was replacing the classic one of love, grief, and so on: the desire to experience the joys of nature in the peace of solitude (although this was not so much new as a revival of the classical topos of the happy husbandman).

Judging by Petrarch's letters, his correspondents often asked him about his reasons for choosing solitude. From his answers it is clear that Petrarch experienced the desire first and only after tried to rationalise it. Yet his rationalisations are based on an analysis of his own character rather than on a consideration of external circumstances. He writes of being compelled towards solitude by 'latens animo calcar'² ('some inward spur'³) and frequently muses over the nature of that 'inward spur':

vel amore literarum amicum otio et literis locum amo, vel
fortasse odio quodam ex dissimilitudine morum orto populum
fugio, et fortasse conscientia vite mee multiloquum testem
vito⁴

¹Epistola Prima, 'Philippo Cardinali', in Francisci Petrarcae Poëmata Minora quae exstant omnia, [ed. Domenico Rossetti] (Milan, 1829-34), II.60.

²Familiarum, XI.xii.351.

³Letters, trans. Bishop, p.106.

⁴Vita, I.vi.354.

(My love of a spot favourable to literary leisure springs no doubt from my love of books, or perhaps I seek to escape from the crowd because of an aversion arising from a discrepancy in our tastes, or it may even be that from a squeamishness of conscience I like to avoid a many-tongued witness of my life¹).

Although study was one of the accepted standard motivations compelling solitude, Petrarch distinguishes between the two impulses towards study and towards solitude in himself, and does not see them linked as cause and effect. Indeed, he judges the solitary impulse to be more essential to his nature, replying to a friend who has asked him for an account of his state: 'Quid ergo? Scholasticus, & ne id quidem, sed syluicola, soliuagus'.²

The motivations Petrarch finds for his solitude are always those of character and personal taste. He revolutionises the terminology of the debate on solitude, replacing the terminology of right and wrong, morally superior or inferior, more or less pleasing to God, familiar in the medieval debate over the active and contemplative lives, with a new terminology of personal will and individual character, the promptings of the single, unique nature, rather than the absolute morality of the law of nature. He leaves the reader in no doubt in the De Vita Solitaria that his aim in choosing the solitary life is personal happiness, not moral righteousness, and that, if by some miracle happiness should attach itself to cities for him, he would join the crowds. 'Nec me tam vacui recessus et silentium delectant, quam que in his habitant otium et libertas'³ ('And it is not so much the solitary recesses and the silence that delight me as the leisure and freedom that dwell within them'⁴), he claims,

¹Zeitlin, p.148.

²Senilibus, I.v.745.

³Vita, I.i.300.

⁴Zeitlin, p.108.

thereby making the association of solitude with personal freedom, the freedom to be and please oneself, which is so important for the continuing association of solitude with sincerity and the true self in later literature.

The transition from arguments of duty and absolute morality to arguments of pleasure and individual conscience both echoes the transition in classical times from Plato and Aristotle to the Stoics (see p.17 above), and prefigures the transition from the early to the late sixteenth century in England. It is noticeable that the same principle of individuality as the determining factor in a man's life is upheld by Petrarch, the Stoics, and late sixteenth-century England. In Petrarch's words:

nos de nobis libret unusquisque quid preferat; impossibile est enim, etsi unum omnes finem ultimum intendamus, ut unam omnibus vite viam expediat sequi. Qua in re cuique acriter cogitandum erit qualem eum natura, qualem ipse se fecerit.

(let each man decide according to his own preference, for it is impossible that it should suit all men to follow a single road in life, even if they were all bound for the same ultimate destination. In this connection each man must seriously take into account the disposition with which nature has endowed him and the bent which by habit or training he has developed.²).

The valuing of personal preference and particular character above a notional absolute of what is right for all men leads naturally to a secularism which locates truth within the inner man rather than in a God outside him. Hitherto, solitude had been associated with the search for God, but Petrarch now offered the self not as a means, but as an alternative, to God, a justifiable end in itself. Although he makes occasional gestures in religious directions, the solitude he values is quite clearly secular, an opportunity for self-cultivation, not an analogy for self-fulfilment in

¹Vita, I.iii.328.-30.

²Zeitlin, p.131.

God. The first words of De Vita Solitaria formulate the challenge:

Credo ego generosum animum, preter Deum ubi finis est noster,
preter seipsum et archanas curas suas, aut preter aliquem
multa similitudine sibi coniunctum animum, nusquam acquiescere¹

(I believe that a noble spirit will never find repose save in
God, in whom is our end, or in himself and his private thoughts,
or in some intellect united by a close sympathy with his own²).

Withdrawal is then affirmed to be the only way of achieving each one of
these quests.

Petrarch's personal withdrawal is more closely allied to that of the
classical countryman and the Stoic sage than to that of the religious mystic
of his own time. If he takes anything from the mystics, it is only that
he acknowledges the right of laymen to participate in introspection, which
had previously been considered primarily the province of the religious.
Anything he takes, he transforms into secular terms, so that the allegorical
interpretations of enclosure offered by the mystics, for example (pp.6-7
above), become for Petrarch a way of enduring necessary visits to the city,
by retaining his inward solitude.³ His physical solitude is not the solitude
of enclosure and asceticism, but of nature, books, and the cultivation of
the mind. In ideal at least, this is closer to the solitude of the ideal
Stoic, seeking self-knowledge, self-control, and self-sufficiency, impassive
to human affairs and free in the highest sense. What sets him most
clearly apart from either tradition, however, and sets the pattern for
the later Renaissance, is his affirmation that, whatever he is, he is not
thus through a desire to emulate any tradition, but through the fulfilment
of the purely personal impulses of his own self.

¹Vita, I.i.296.

²Zeitlin, p.105.

³See e.g. Vita, I.iv.336.

(ii) The English Literary World

By the year 1605, according to Bacon, the praise of solitude in England was already a well-worn theme in literature, and, much to Bacon's scorn, solitude was also widely approved by the contemporary audience:

And as for the privateness or obscureness (as it may be in vulgar estimation accounted) of life of contemplative men; it is a theme so common to extol a private life, not taxed with sensuality and sloth, in comparison and to the disadvantage of a civil life, for safety, liberty, pleasure, and dignity, or at least freedom from indignity, as no man handleth it but handleth it well; such a consonancy it hath to men's conceits in the expressing and to men's consents in the allowing.¹

Yet although Bacon, looking back over his own lifetime, implies that the subject is almost exhausted, having been merely one more transitory fashion, this was not the case: more than sixty years later, Evelyn, writing in favour of the active life, jokes about the solitude of so doing when the mass of past writers have chosen to praise solitude.² Both Bacon and Evelyn use the same evidence to deduce that the main current of opinion in their times is in favour of solitude as against public life: the sheer volume of writing on the subject.

In assessing the beginning of this change in attitude over a period roughly between 1570 and 1620, the earliest evidence of pressure on the established attitude, even before the obvious swing towards the praise of solitude, is the very preoccupation with it in literature from both sides. So overwhelming is this preoccupation that ancient and classic works are re-interpreted during the Renaissance as allegories of the active-contemplative polarity. Tasso, after expounding the allegory of his

¹ The Two Bookes of Francis Bacon of the Proficiencie and Advancement of Learning Divine and Human, in The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London, 1857-74), III.276.

² 'To the Reader', Publick Employment.

own poem, Godfrey of Bulloigne, or The Recouerie of Ierusalem, as Edward Fairefax translates the title, as just such an opposition between active and contemplative lives, then goes on to find ingenious parallels with the greatest poetry of the past, in which he sees this same theme reiterated:

Of the life of the Contemplatiue Man, the Comedie of Dantes and the Odyssees are (as it were) in euerie part thereof a figure: but the ciuill life is seene to be shadowed throughout the Iliads, and Aeneids also, although in this there be rather set out a mixture of Action and Contemplation. But since the Contemplatiue Man is solitarie; and the Man of Action liueth in ciuill companie, thence it commeth that Dantes & Ulysses in their departure from Calipso are fained not to be accompanied of the armie, or of a multitude of soldiers, but to depart alone; whereas Agamemnon and Achilles are described, the one Generall of the Grecian Armie, the other leader of many troupes of Mirmidons, and Aeneas is seene to be accompanied when he fighteth, or doth other ciuill actes; but when he goeth to hell and the Elisian fields, he leaues his followers, accompanied onely with his most faithfull friend Achates, who neuer departed from his side. Neither doth the Poet at randon faine that he went alone, for that in his voiage there is signified this onely Contemplation of these paines and rewardes which in another world are reserued for good or guiltie soules.¹

The compulsion to discuss solitude, more than the conclusions reached, provides evidence of a changing perspective and emphasis at the beginning of this transitional period.

Inconsistency is the hallmark of this conflict, not only in the form of absolute views expressed as though they were irrefutable platitudes by different writers, but also in the impulses within individual writers to refute the case for solitude as strongly as to defend it. Self-contradiction and conscious self-division have been shown to be associated with a movement towards solitude and self-awareness in Petrarch, and earlier in Sen-

¹Godfrey of Bulloigne, or The Recouerie of Ierusalem, trans. Edward Fairefax (London, 1600), sigs. A2^v-[A3^r].

eca. In the same way, self-contradiction stamps those writers in England who clearly incline, in will if not in reason, towards solitude. Bacon, although he would appear to despise the fashion for solitude from the quotation at the head of this chapter, repeatedly expresses in his letters the sense that his nature is more suited to the contemplative life than to the life of public service which he actually leads. In a letter to Lord Burghley written between 1590 and 1592 he confesses that 'the contemplative planet carrieth me away wholly'¹ and, writing to his brother, he wishes his brother's physical disabilities on himself, so that 'I mought be with excuse confined to these contemplations & studies for which I am fittest'.² Numerous other men in high public office, Essex, Raleigh, and Sidney, to name three of the most prominent, for example, exhibit this same division between the life they lead and the life they express a yearning for in writing.

Yet, if there is contradiction between life and literature, the contradiction between different parts of the same literary work is even more striking. Spenser displays the characteristic conflict between traditional medieval and sixteenth-century attitudes in his treatment of solitude in The Faerie Queene. His pity for the solitude of the virtuous, which is forced on them, not desired by them,³ is medieval, as is his picture of the voluntary solitary as inhuman, an evil and destructive witch;⁴ but his

¹Spedding, VIII.108.

²Epistle Dedicatorie to 1st ed. of Essays, Spedding VI, Appendix II, p.524.

³See e.g. Una at I.iii.3; Belge at V.x.19.

⁴e.g. at III.vii.6.

praise of the pastoral life and the withdrawal to the inner order of the mind in Book VI, and his admiration for Meliboeë,¹ indicate the more modern attraction of secular solitude.

Montaigne too alternates between admitting a love and need for solitude and affirming himself to be excessively sociable, although he is at least quite disillusioned about his inconsistency: 'We float and waver between divers opinions: we will nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly'.² Even Burton, as late as 1621, still shows this conflict, confessing in his preface to the solitariness of his own life, but warning others away from it throughout his book. The verse abstract of melancholy which precedes the prose discussion pinpoints the conflict in its alternating refrains:

All my joys to this are folly,
Naught so sweet as melancholy

and

All my griefs to this are jolly,
Naught so sad as melancholy

and in the equally paradoxical attitude towards solitude:

'Tis my desire to be alone;

'Tis my sole plague to be alone.

Burton's self-division is also mirrored in his style, as in the style of many of his contemporaries, in the way his authorial self divides into examiner and examined, like Petrarch's in his Secretum. The profusion in this period generally of imagery concerning civil war, mirrors, and Nar-

¹See esp. Canto ix.

²Montaigne, II.i.7.

cissus¹ indicates that writers were aware of this tendency towards division and fragmentation; indeed, they were tormented by it. Ironically, the notion of the divided self is even taken by some as a device for reconciling contradictions.² Donne, who was himself the one to coin the labels of 'Jack Donne' and 'Dr Donne' to describe his own duality, refers to duality as the inherent condition of man through many images, notably the one from which Joan Webber takes the title for her book on Donne:³ 'how shall we raise this Salamander and this Serpent, when this Serpent and this Salamander is all one person, and must have contrary musique to charme him, contrary physick to cure him?'⁴ Browne too finds comfort for his own inner conflict in the notion of the divided self as natural and inevitable: 'Thus is man that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live not onely like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds'.⁵

Bacon erects a scientific principle out of this dualism in nature, classifying the two natures according to solitary and social impulses: 'There is formed in every thing a double nature of good: the one, as every thing is a total or substantive in itself; the other, as it is a part or member of a greater body'.⁶ Here Bacon clearly shows one difference between medieval and sixteenth-century thought: whereas the medieval political philosophers took the notion of the individual as a part in a whole, and

¹See below, pp.98-99.

²See M.M.Mahood, Poetry and Humanism (London, 1950), p.160.

³Contrary Music (Madison, 1963).

⁴Sermons, IV.xiii.327.

⁵Religio Medici, in The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, New ed. (London, 1964), I.xxxiv.34., p.45.

⁶Advancement of Learning, p.420.

used this as a basis from which to develop a principle of unity in nature (both the inner nature of the individual and the greater natural order), Bacon affirms instead that this truth is only one side of a double-edged, contradictory truth, thereby establishing a principle of division in nature. He brings this empirical principle even closer to the moral issue of the individual's duty to self and to society by actually passing moral judgment on the two natures, commending the general nature as 'in degree the greater and the worthier, because it tendeth to the conservation of a more general form'.¹ This creates a strange contradiction in terms, since the word 'individual', which is so frequently considered a key to the thought of this period, was in fact in a paradoxical semantic state at this time: its literal meaning of 'undividable', and hence 'oneness', was being eroded by the view of the 'individual' as inherently divided in nature.

At its simplest level, the existence of division within as well as among individuals over the issue of solitude is shown by the characteristic form of dialogue, which prose discussions of the subject were apt to take. This form enabled the writer to express two or more views without committing himself to either. Indeed, the characteristic progress of these debates was from two simple and opposite positions, one for and one against solitude, through a series of modifications of both these absolutes by considerations raised by each, to the point where they almost met in the middle. A Dialogue entitled Cyuite and vncyuite Life (1579) is a perfect example of this non-committal approach to the subject in the early part of the period. The writer maintains the balance right up to the conclusion between the arguments for and against the city and country lives, and in

¹Ibid.

the preface he informs the reader that although he plans to support the city life in this treatise, he finds no fault in the country life. 'It shall therefore please me,' he continues, 'that euery man please him selfe, vsinge the liberty and will of his owne minde: and though it be farre diuerse from mine, yet I know not why his opinion should trouble mee, or mine offende him'.¹

Guazzo's Civile Conversation is another case in point. At the particular point in the book where the theoretical debate for and against civil life, as put respectively by Annibal and Guazzo, ends, Annibal has technically won, having persuaded Guazzo to confess the necessity for participation in civil life. But the section closes, not with the re-statement of the conclusion in emphatic terms, as one might expect, but with the agreed list of exceptions to this general rule, that is, with a list of the acceptable kinds of solitude. The reader's final impression is therefore of the united approval of solitude, rather than the united approval of civil life, which was presented as the verdict several pages before.

Writers deliberately use terminology designed to blur the differences between opposing sides of the argument (see pp.1-2 above). The only guide to a writer's personal opinion remains the coupling of arguments of pleasure with one side, and of duty with the other. It is partly this confusion of what are really two separate debates on desirability and moral superiority which leads writers to embrace both sides of the solitude debate simultaneously, or to use one argument to puncture another which is dealing in quite different terms. Not until the seventeenth century do writers recognise and

¹'The Aucthor, to the Gentlemen Readers', sig. Aiii^v.

make explicit the fact that duty and desire are quite separate and do not necessarily contradict each other in recommending different ways to an individual. Bacon actually defines 'that good of man which respecteth and beholdeth society' as 'Duty',¹ and Lodowick Bryskett, in the debate on retirement which begins his Discourse on Civill Life (1606), admits his desire for seclusion and study, 'yet', he continues,

do I not therin contradict the reasonable and iust disposition
I haue to employ my selfe for the seruice of her Maiestie, when
occasion serueth: neither doth my endeouour in that behalf any
way oppose it selfe to my desire,² of retiring from a painefull
employment to a more quiet life.

Bryskett is in fact in advance of his times in recognising this distinction, since, although his treatise was not published until the seventeenth century, he had actually written it a good twenty years earlier.

Evelyn and Mackenzie separate duty from desire (or in Mackenzie's terminology, 'what is lawful in it self' from 'what is convenient for us',³) quite clearly in their arguments, and they could equally well be debating which of these two should be valued higher, as which of solitude and sociability should. It is noticeable that solitude is increasingly rarely dismissed in this period as undesirable, only as morally wrong, which suggests that Bryskett rightly judges the opinion of the majority when he claims that

were it but in regard of that same contentment, I know not

¹Advancement of Learning, p.428.

²A Discourse on Civill Life (London, 1606), pp.20-21.

³Mackenzie, p.50. Judging by the contrasting of 'convenient' with 'lawful', and by the qualification of 'convenient' by 'for us', I think Mackenzie is using 'convenient' in the sense defined by O.E.D. as 'Agreeing with or consonant to the nature or character of; in accordance with; in keeping with; befitting, becoming (to or for a thing or person)', which is clearly in line with the Petrarchan standard of personal taste.

what man of reasonable sense and vnderstanding, would not esteeme the purchase¹ thereof at a farre higher rate then any office...whatsoeuer.

Other genres besides the formal theoretical debate on solitude indicate a growing preference for solitude and an increasing withdrawal into the self also at a less conscious level. Innumerable lyrics praise solitude overtly: Sidney's 'O sweet woods, how I do love your solitariness' compares interestingly with some of Petrarch's sonnets, in that it shows the same combination of solitude with the natural setting, which was to become so familiar, and also in that it places the same emphasis as Petrarch in seeing the beauty of nature as instrumental to the appreciation of solitude, rather than vice versa.

Petrarch's depiction of the solitary self as inward-looking finds its reflection in the development of autobiography during the late sixteenth century and the seventeenth century in England.² The self-analytical essays of Montaigne had more direct impact than Petrarch, however, on the development of self-awareness in England; and Montaigne considers himself an innovator in writing about the self for its inherent interest alone:

I have presented my selfe unto my selfe for a subject to write, and argument to descant upon. It is the only booke in the world of this kinde, and of a wilde extravagant designe. Moreover, there is nothing in it worthy the marking but this fantasticalnesse.³

¹Bryskett, p.21.

²Since this thesis limits itself to the growing preference for secular solitude at this time, Puritan autobiographies will not be considered here. They constitute a special case, and in them self-examination is not pursued for its inherent interest alone, but with the end of self-improvement, although they intersect at many points with the characteristics of secular autobiographies. Owen C. Watkins' book on the Puritan autobiography, The Puritan Experience (London, 1972) and Michael Walzer's book on the Puritan attitude to society, The Revolution of the Saints (London, 1966), both suggest some of the parallels and influences between Puritan solitude and secular solitude.

³Montaigne, II.viii.66.

This is not to say, of course, that self-examination was an invention of the sixteenth century. In medieval times, however, it tended to be more strongly linked to the soul and to man as a religious being, and it was not the isolating, self-enclosing movement that it became in the sixteenth century, but an outward movement, which examined the self by perceiving it in relation to its various contexts, through analogies and correspondences. Psychology was closer to physiology, as the lingering theories of the microcosm, the humours, and the elements in the Elizabethan period demonstrate. What was new about the perspective of self-examination towards the end of the Elizabethan period, and more pronouncedly in the seventeenth century, was the description of the self purely in terms of itself, through its inward faculties, the tendency to isolate it as an object, rather than to place it within the living organism of the universe, in order to understand it.

As late as 1643, Kenelm Digby still seems to marvel at the notion of writing merely to describe the self for its own sake and without didactic purpose. Commenting on Browne's Religio Medici, he writes:

What should I say of his making so particular a narrative of personall things, and private thoughts of his owne; the knowledge whereof cannot much conduce to any mans betterment? (which I account is the chiefe end of his writing this discourse).¹

Yet Digby understood the impulse better than he pretends, since he wrote his own autobiography. Moreover, his acknowledgement of it as having been 'begun only for my own recreation, and then continued and since preserved only for my own private content'² explicitly endorses the motivation of self rather than audience, personal pleasure rather than the improvement

¹Quoted in Margaret Bottrall, Every Man a Phoenix (London, 1958), p.32.

²Loose Fantasies, ed. Vittorio Gabrieli, *Temi e Testi*, 14 (Rome, 1968), 'Postscript, or Advertisement to the Reader', p.173.

of mankind. Browne's personal motive in writing, which Digby pretends to ignore in criticising his book, is confirmed by his genuine unwillingness to publish until forced to by a pirated edition full of errors.

The self rather than the audience is increasingly offered as a motive for writing in this period, especially by autobiographers. It is difficult to tell, however, how far disclaimers of the intention to publish, particularly in the sixteenth century, are sincere or are an assumed modesty designed to forestall criticism through the claim never to have considered an audience.¹ Yet it is true that much of the poetry written by fashionable men was not published in their lifetimes, and circulated in manuscript only among a chosen few. This may have been to some extent an indication of class (courtly writers not wishing to appear to be dependent on an income from their writing for a living), but a contemporary, Michael Drayton, is one who implies that there is also a certain elitism stemming from a sense of possessiveness about the works themselves in writers

whose poems, be they nere so rare,
In priuate chambers, that incloistered are,
And by transcription daintily must goe;
As though the world vnworthy were to know
Their rich composures.²

There can be little doubt about the genuineness of autobiographers in claiming that their autobiographies were written only for their own sakes, since most of these were not published in the authors' lifetimes. Autobiographers also substantiate the supposition that such introspectiveness and spiritual aloofness is linked with physical solitude, since they almost without exception claim to live or desire to live retired lives.

¹ Consider e.g. Daniel's Dedication to Delia (1592).

² Quoted in Bald, John Donne, p.121.

Sir Thomas Bodley writes of 'my retired course of Life, which is now me-thinks to me, as the greatest Preferment that the State can afford';¹ the Duchess of Newcastle admits to 'being addicted from my childhood to contemplation rather than conversation, to solitariness rather than society';² Lord Herbert of Cherbury confesses: 'I ever loved my book, and a private life, more than any busy preferments';³ and Digby affirms his resolution to accept public employment when he may be of service 'although I must confess that retiredness would afford me much more solid content, especially in these depraved times!'.⁴

Autobiography exemplifies the change in the emphasis of literary theory from art as artifice to art also as self-expression, a change already outlined in Petrarch's writings (see esp. p.53 above). Writers now defend their work on the grounds of its sincerity as opposed to its artfulness, and claim to write with a factual rather than an aesthetic purpose. The Duchess of Newcastle warns her reader that she has written her life 'not to please the fancy, but to tell the truth';⁵ and Lord Herbert of Cherbury asserts a dual purpose behind his principle of selection: 'I have thought fit to relate to my posterity those passages of my life, which I conceive may best declare me, and be most useful to them', but it is the first which he is at pains to stress: 'In the delivery of which, I

¹Life, in Reliquiae Bodleianae [ed. Thomas Hearne] (London, 1703), p.13.

²A True Relation of the Birth, Breeding, and Life, of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, ed. Egerton Brydges (Kent, 1814), p.27.

³The Autobiography of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, ed. Sidney Lee, 2nd ed. (London, 1906), p.132.

⁴Digby, p.283.

⁵Duchess of Newcastle, p.36.

profess to write with all truth and sincerity, as scorning ever to deceive or speak false to any'.¹

Although the revelation of self through style is pre-eminently a characteristic of works written from the seventeenth century onwards, some sixteenth-century works, such as Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, or Raleigh's The Ocean's Love to Cynthia, demonstrate how a work of art was coming to be built around selfhood, around inward events and a state of mind, rather than around heroic deeds or social events. It now remains to examine in what ways this withdrawal and inwardness of texture in style and genre was paralleled in the social life of the times.

¹Herbert of Cherbury, p.1.

(iii) The Cult of Solitude

Having looked at solitude with reference to what Bacon called 'men's conceits in the expressing', we must now follow it through 'men's consents in the allowing' and the accompanying changes in value. It was noted above (p.70) that arguments in favour of solitude in the literature of this period are characterised by their derivation from the criteria of will and pleasure and their opposition to duty and moral rectitude, at least in the early stages. Arguments of the will rather than the reason easily develop into a cult, challenging the values of the establishment, as they do, with the amoral desires of the individual. It is clear from the expression of the desire for solitude by men in public life, as well as in retirement, that solitude was becoming a fashionable state, which increased the status of the individual who appeared to indulge in it. Those unable to cultivate solitude in their lives took care to cultivate the appearance of pining for it; and it is the public image which men desire to project which provides evidence of a cult.

Evidence that a number of men really did retire has already been presented, but not all those praising the retirement in which they find themselves can be supposed to be confirming a personal choice. There is reason to suspect more than an element of 'sour-grapes', as Tillyard says,¹ in poems written against the court from an unwilling retirement, such as Wyatt's satires or Spenser's 'Colin Clout's Come Home Again'. Even writings more positive in their praise of retirement than negative in their denunciation of the court are suspect when written by banished courtiers such

¹E.M.W.Tillyard, Some Mythical Elements in English Literature (London, 1961), p.74.

as Sir John Harington, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the Earl of Essex.¹ But, as Mackenzie was later to point out, the praise of solitude being used as a pretext by those who fail in public life is in itself proof of the increasing status of solitude, 'for the excellentest things are onely used, and can onely serve as Pretexts'.²

Despite these qualifications as regards the division between life and literature, however, the high status of solitude is shown both in the lives of individuals and in general trends in social life, as well as in literary byplay. Cornwallis, Bodley, Burton, Evelyn, Cowley, Edward Fairfax, Thomas Fairfax, Marvell, Milton, and many more, all indulged from choice in either temporary or prolonged retirement. The Civil War undoubtedly accounts in part for the withdrawal to country estates from 1642 and slightly before; but increased privacy in everyday life had been in evidence since the turn of the century. The design of country houses, for example, provides evidence of the decline of communal living (largely deduced from the degeneration of the Hall, once the central room of the house, where the Lord, his family, and all the servants dined, into a mere vestibule) and the growing search for solitude (shown in the advent of chambers assigned to a single member of the household).³ Rooms generally tended to become

¹See e.g. Harington, The Prayse of Private Life; Raleigh's poems, 'A Description of the Country's Recreations', 'His Pilgrimage', 'Like Hermit Poor', 'Farewell to the Court'; Essex's poem 'Happy were he...' (in Elizabethan Lyrics, ed. Norman Ault, 3rd ed. (London, 1949), p.276) and his letter to Anthony Bacon (in Walter Bouchier Devereux, Lives and Letters of the Devereux, Earls of Essex (London, 1853), I.485).

²Mackenzie, p.12.

³See Olive Cook, The English Country House (London, 1974); Oliver Hill and John Crompton, English Country Houses: Caroline 1625-1685 (London, 1966); N.B.L.Pevsner, 'The Planning of the Elizabethan Country House', Inaugural Lecture at Birkbeck College (London, 1960).

smaller and more specific, being set aside for a particular person or purpose. The names 'closet', 'study', and 'library' appearing on house plans from the turn of the century indicate a pleasure in study and solitary pursuits. Angel Day makes the connection explicit:

we do call the most secrete place in the house, appropriate vnto our owne priuate studies, and wherein we repose and deliberate by deep consideration of all our waightiest affaires, a Closet, in true intendment & meaning, a place where our dealings of importance are shut vp, a room proper & peculiar onley to our selues. And whereas into each other place of the house, it is ordinarie for euery neere attendant about vs to haue accesse: in this place we do solitary and alone shut vp our selues, of this we keepe the key our selues,¹ and the vse thereof alone doe only appropriate vnto our selues.

The coining of the word 'apartment' slightly later in the period² also suggests a tendency to think of a room increasingly as cut off from the surrounding space, as a place in which to be private or 'apart'.

Evelyn's diary frequently provides evidence of the fashionableness of solitude as well as of Evelyn's own personal inclination towards it. (His treatise in defence of Publick Employment is an anomaly in his writing; most of the time, and notably in personal documents, such as his diary and letters, he admits to a pronounced preference for a private, even cloistered life.³) It is seen to be desirable both outdoors and in, although out of doors it is no longer sought in deserts, or even in forests, but is carefully enclosed in gardens or country estates, in accordance with the very modified version of the absolute current by Evelyn's time (see pp.10-12

¹The English Secreterie (London, 1595), II.102-03.

²The first recorded usage cited by the O.E.D. is by Evelyn in 1641.

³He planned at one time to found a society in retirement, dedicated to study, meditation, and prayer. See his letter to the Hon. Robert Boyle, Sept. 3, 1659, quoted in Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn, ed. William Bray (London and New York, 1906), pp.590-92.

above). Evelyn describes himself as having 'built...a study, made a fish-pond, Iland and some other solitudes & retirements at Wotton'¹ and he frequently admires the 'solitudes' in the grounds of houses he visits. Visiting Euston, Suffolk, Evelyn remarks on the extension of privacy even to servants and strangers,² a fact which indicates both that it was fashionable to own a house with such resources for solitude, and that the need for privacy was recognised as a natural human feeling, even among servants.

Signs of a dwindling recognition of the naturalness of the social order and of the necessity of maintaining it, were in evidence from far earlier than architecture indicates. Ironically, it was a movement away from country houses, as compared with the seventeenth-century movement towards them, which indicated the valuing of self above society in the sixteenth century. Preachers and government alike deplored the flocking of the rural gentry to London for their private pleasure, and urged them to return to their country houses and revive the hospitality which had made the manor a focus for the sense of community. Many writers, especially of courtesy books, lament, like Gascoigne, the contemporary decline:

The stately lord, which woonted was to kepe
A court at home, is now come up to courte,
And leaves the country for a common prey,
To pilling, polling, brybing, and deceit:
(Al which his presence might have pacified,
Or else have made offenders smel the smoke.)³

Although this sixteenth-century movement towards the court seems to oppose the seventeenth-century movement towards retirement in the country house,

¹The Diary of John Evelyn, ed. E.S.de Beer (London, 1959), May 17, 1643.

²Ibid., September 10, 1677.

³The Steele Glas (1576), in Complete Works of George Gascoigne, ed. John W.Cunliffe (Cambridge, 1907, 1910), II.154.

both mark the decline of the social sense and the fragmenting of the medieval hierarchical community, based on the mutual recognition of bonds and obligations, into a mass of unattached, uncommitted, isolated individuals, abandoning communal duty for personal ends.

The evidence for the existence of solitude in the form of an affectation or cult, however, is found not so much in serious diatribes, as in satirical and humorous literature, in the way solitude is associated with other recognised cults of the period, such as melancholy, travel, Machiavellianism, and revenge. Marston's verse satires show him adopting the pose of the malcontent, the social critic, standing outside society to describe it, as if it were an alien thing. Nashe's Pierce Penniless his Supplication to the Devil describes the deliberate cultivation of singularity by more than one social type. His Upstart, for example, affects discontent, writes sonnets, scatters his speech with foreign phrases, and generally 'will be humorous, forsooth, and have a brood of fashions by himself.'¹ Greene describes his own cultivation of melancholy and its accompanying poses in his Repentance for his own youth.² Webster alludes to the fashionableness of solitude through the self-conscious topicality of a conversation between Flamineo and Lodovico in The White Devil, which begins 'Let's be unsociably sociable'.³ Jonson satirises contemporary cults throughout his work, but nowhere more relentlessly than in the Humour comedies, which take affectations (or 'humours') for their subject.

¹Thomas Nashe, 'The Unfortunate Traveller' and other Works, ed. J.B.Steane, (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.64.

²The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Privately printed, 1881-83); XII.172.

³John Webster, The White Devil, ed. John Russell Brown, 2nd ed. (London, 1966) III.iii.76-83.

Solitude and unsociability are quite clearly cultivated, and are strongly related to melancholy and discontent. Solitude is linked with melancholy in Hermogenes' request to be left alone because he feels melancholy,¹ and is insisted on in Clerimont's reminder: 'Nay, you must walk alone, if you bee right melancholique, sir Iohn.'²

Solitude may be seen as a metaphor for all the Elizabethan cults, which were characterised by being cults of the individual rather than of the group elite. Although there might be a host of malcontents, or melancholics, or whatever, they did not form groups with each other any more than with the rest of society, but remained defiantly solitary. One definition of the omnipresent 'individualism', which is vaguely invoked as a characteristic of the Renaissance, describes it as yet another form of cult. Individuality, variously defined, writes Arnold Hauser, can be said to have existed in all ages, 'but it is only since the Renaissance that there have been individuals who were not just aware of their individuality, but deliberately cultivated or sought to cultivate it. Previously there had merely been individuals; henceforward there was individualism.'³

The cult of solitude is a literal expression of just that quality. It is a cult which focusses the anti-establishment and individualistic tendencies of any cult. It enacts the anti-social nature of affectation itself, which precludes spontaneous communication by fixing the cult-figure in a set pose dictated by the cult. Affectation was condemned on

¹The Poetaster, II.ii.97, Herford and Simpson, Vol.IV.

²Epicoene, II.iv.147-48, Herford and Simpson, Vol.V.

³Mannerism, trans. Eric Mosbacher (London, 1965), I.33.

exactly these grounds of unsociableness by contemporary writers. James Cleland, in 1607, closely echoes Montaigne, whether by accident or design, in recommending that a young nobleman should be taught to be 'free from al kinde of strangnes and particular humors, as enemies of conuersation',¹ and in condemning affectation as a sign of self-love. He also follows Montaigne in selecting the affectation of solitude for particular disapproval, warning that the young man should not be allowed to become too attached to his book 'by a solitarie and melancholike complexion', lest it render him 'vnapt for conuersation'.² Above all, Castiglione, the acknowledged authority in matters of social conduct, warns that a gentleman should 'eschew as much as a man may, and as a sharp and daungerous rock, Affectation or curiosity'.³ There is another aspect of self-division, of course, in the inconsistency of presenting inwardness and a desire for solitude through the public self-display and audience-seeking of cult.⁴

All cult-figures were regarded as inherently anti-social, and as a threat to the social harmony of others. The purging of Macilente's humour at the end of Every Man out of his Humour is significantly marked by his increased sociability, as Mitis remarks. So too, Romeo, on becoming cured of his cult-love for Rosaline by a real love for Juliet, is welcomed back to the group by Mercutio: 'Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo' (Rom., II.iv.86). The relationship in Elizabethan minds between at least one cult and potentially destructive unsociability is confirmed

¹The Institution of a Young Noble Man (Oxford, 1607), p.63. Cf. Montaigne, I.xx.176.

²Ibid., p.73. Cf. Montaigne I.xx.174.

³The Book of the Courtier, trans. Thomas Hoby, The Tudor Translations, 23 (London, 1900), p.59.

⁴See Bridget Gellert Lyons, Voices of Melancholy (London, 1971), p.34.

by the fact that the word 'malcontent' was first used almost interchangeably with the word 'rebel'.¹

The attraction of a cult for the individual who practises it, and the fear of it by the majority who do not, lie equally in its inherent anti-establishment tendencies. A cult by definition challenges accepted standards with a new and morally suspect stance, and it is this very danger and moral uncertainty which make a cult appear exciting and attractive. Any cult is the cult of the individual in tension with his society; so that the individual's expression of new ideas about his individuality through a cult of physical solitude is a metaphor made literal. The cult of solitude is the physical counterpart of the cult of the inward self; and for this reason it also has a strong connection with the reverence for the intellect at this time.

Lawrence Babb has discussed in detail the divided attitude towards melancholy which made men clamour to assert that they suffered from it on the one hand, while condemning it as unendurable on the other. The Duchess of Newcastle in 1656 distinguishes between attractive and blameworthy melancholy, when she describes herself as 'more inclining to be melancholy than merry, but not crabbed or peevishly melancholy, but soft, melting, solitary, and contemplating melancholy',² and it is worth remarking that she links solitude with the more desirable melancholy. Father Augustine Baker, however, putting forward the religious view in a treatise published in 1657, but written between about 1624 and 1633, warns against such willing solitariness:

¹Bridget Lyons draws attention to the evidence of the O.E.D. on this point, p.18.

²Duchess of Newcastle, p.31.

As touching those that are naturally of melancholic dispositions, they ought to be exceedingly watchful over themselves that they give not way to so pestilent a humour. Nature will incline them to avoid all recreations and diversions, and being very subtle, it will suggest pretences to justify a froward loneliness, and a humour not able to support innocent conversation, as if this were done out of a love to a religious solitude and recollection.¹

This may account in part for the increasingly religious slant given during the seventeenth century² to a solitude derived from secular interests.

Melancholy had the reputation, from Aristotle onwards, of being the malady of great minds, which was one reason why men so eagerly affected it. It is no surprise, then, having seen how closely the different cults were linked with one another, to find solitude linked with intellectual superiority by contemporary writers. Nashe tells us explicitly that men cultivated solitude for just this reason:

Some think to be counted rare politicians and statesmen by being solitary; as who should say, 'I am a wise man, a brave man, Sec-reta mea mihi; Frustra sapit, qui sibi non sapit, and there is no man worthy of my company or friendship'.³

The association of secular solitude with the intellect was a natural development from the linking of religious solitude with spiritual contemplation. Contemplation continued to be regarded as the natural occupation of solitude, only with man's own self rather than God as the focus for this new contemplation. The substitution of intellectual for spiritual contemplation can be seen in the widespread religious scepticism among intellectuals at this time, and in the tendency to place God within the individual, rather than outside and above him, so that God and the mind practically became one. The increased admiration for the mind can truly be called worship. Pico, who

¹Holy Wisdom, compiled by Serenus Cressy, introd. Gerard Sitwell (London, 1964), Second Treatise, I.vii.201.

²See pp.90-91 below.

³Pierce Penniless, p.65.

praised man's inward self as godlike (p.45 above), took the further step of praising the intellect as God itself: 'intellectus agens nihil aliud est quam Deus'.¹ Enno van Gelder describes this erection of the intellect into a principle as a second Reformation, more radical in its deviation from orthodox religion than Protestantism was, because it viewed religion in an entirely new perspective, as a philosophy rather than a theology.² It was a movement which had its greatest influence in England during the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century, not in the earlier period from the late fifteenth century on, when it was establishing its hold on the Continent.

Contemplation became the magic element which justified secular solitude, as it had justified religious solitude. Numerous writers make it clear that only contemplative solitude is praiseworthy, and that idleness or leisure without study are sterile and reprehensible. As Cowley says, building on Aristotle's ancient dictum: 'Cogitation is the thing which distinguishes the Solitude of a God from a wild Beast.'³

But 'cogitation' was also used as a direct argument for rejecting society, for making a cult of the intellect and of a solitude which was the aloofness of snobbery rather than the withdrawal of the philosopher. The intellectual rejected not company as such, but society in general, because it contained few of his intellectual level. As Guazzo argues, 'if the learned and students love solitarinesse for lack of their like, yet

¹Quoted in H.A.Enno van Gelder, The Two Reformations in the 16th Century, trans. Jan F.Finlay (The Hague, 1961), p.21.

²Ibid.

³Abraham Cowley, 'Of Solitude', in Essays, Plays and Sundry Verses, ed. A.R.Waller (Cambridge, 1906), p.394.

they naturally love the companie of those which are their like'.¹ This quotation is an example of the way in which each side of the debate on solitude tends to present its arguments without sufficient regard for the arguments offered by the other side. The argument offered by solitaries that they do not wish to participate in society because most men are their intellectual inferiors in no way answers the most common argument of those in favour of society, which is based on neither intellect nor a belief in equality, but also on a recognition of inequality, which demands that men serve, help, and protect one another in their different functions.²

The change in attitude towards solitude and the accompanying change in emphasis from nature and social necessity to intellect and individual good can be seen by comparing three 'Characters' of the solitary, published in 1614, 1628, and 1631. They are entitled 'A Melancholy Man', 'A Contemplative Man', and 'A Melancholy Man', and written by Sir Thomas Overbury, John Earle, and Wye Saltonstall respectively.³ All present archetypal solitaries. The first, although published in 1614, should be regarded as representative of the establishment view in the late sixteenth century, as it was already unfashionable by the time of publication. It begins with the fact of solitude. The melancholy man is 'a strayer from the drove: one that nature made sociable, because she made him man, and a crazed disposition hath altered.' Overbury ridicules him for his contemplativeness: 'strag-

¹Guazzo, I.31.

²See John of Salisbury, for example, p.31 above.

³Thomas Overbury, The Overburian Characters, ed. W.J. Paylor, The Percy Reprints, 13 (Oxford, 1936); John Earle, Microcosmography, ed. Philip Bliss (London, 1811); Wye Saltonstall, Picturae Loquentes, Luttrell Reprints, 1 (Oxford, 1946).

ling thoughts are his content, they make him dreame waking, there's his pleasure...He thinks busines, but never does any: he is all contemplation, no action.' Overbury follows Aristotle in judging him finally to be less than a man, 'a man onely in shew, but comes short of the better part; a whole reasonable soule, which is mans chiefe preheminance, and sole mark from creatures senceable.'

Earle, by contrast, is fulsome in his praise of contemplation and his acceptance of withdrawal from the world as an indication of intellectual superiority. His contemplative is 'a scholar in this great university the world; and the same his book and study. He cloysters not his meditations in the narrow darkness of a room'. Whereas Overbury scorns unsociableness as a sign of unnaturalness, Earle sees it as justified by the solitary's scorn of mere natural man: 'He looks upon man from a high tower, and sees him trulier at this distance in his infirmities and poorness. He scorns to mix himselfe in men's actions, as he would to act upon a stage; but sits aloft on the scaffold a censuring spectator.' He is above, not below Nature: 'Nature admits him as a partaker of her sports, and asks his approbation as it were of her own works and variety.' His solitariness is a mark of self-sufficiency; yet his final end is God, and his perfection leads him to heaven.

Saltonstall's Character is closest of all to the Elizabethan caricature in his physical characteristics: only Saltonstall's emphasis of and admiration for his inward virtues show the separation in time. This character's greatest single virtue is, like Earle's, his intellect. He is not so absolute in his rejection of company, but shuns extreme sociability. His solitude is an indication of sincerity, and of a refusal to present himself fully in company: 'When other men strive to seeme what they are not, hee alone is

what he seemes not, being content in the knowledge of himselfe, and not waying his owne worth in the ballance of other mens opinions.' His anti-social manner is the natural effect of great intellect: 'If he walke and see you not, 'tis because his mind being busied in some serious contemplation, the common sense has no time to judge of any sensuall object.' His very exaggerated appearance, which was a source of ridicule to the Elizabethans, is evidence of his preoccupation with spiritual matters.

The progress of these characters and the changing emphases mark not only the rise of the intellect in status, but also the passing of the cult. The cult is clearly visible in Overbury's Character, in the sense of the deliberate cultivation of distinctiveness for distinctiveness's sake, and in the opposition between the affectation and Overbury's idea of nature. Earle's and Saltonstall's, however, both show the solitary being taken absolutely seriously, and being judged as morally superior, rather than morally dangerous. The religious element also creeps back to confirm the orthodoxy of these two, and the secular novelty and defiance of cult disappears. A cult can no longer survive as such when the status it champions gains respectability, since there then ceases to be any conflict between desire and duty, or between the values of the individual and those of his society.

Solitude was actually beginning to be out of fashion in the cult sense by the time of Overbury's Character. Bosola is described in The Duchess of Malfi (acted 1612-14)¹ as affecting 'an out of fashion melan-

¹I follow Alfred Harbage, Annals of English Drama 975-1700, rev. S. Schoenbaum (London, 1964) in the dating of individual plays.

choly'.¹ The anonymous Leycesters Common-wealth (conjectured to have been written by Robert Parsons, the Jesuit) dates the fashion for melancholy and sudden retirement as beginning in the second decade of Queen Elizabeth's reign (i.e. in the 1570's), and this is borne out by contemporary descriptions and the period in which they are concentrated. Even before the end of the century, in 1598, Everard Guilpin suggests that the heyday of the cult of solitude is already over:

But see yonder,
One like the vnfrequented Theater
Walkes in darke silence, and vast solitude,
Suited to those blacke fancies which intrude,
Vpon possession of his troubled breast:
But for blacks sake he would looke like a ieast,
For hee's cleane out of fashion.

By the middle of the seventeenth century solitude was re-established as a moral and religious state.³ Izaak Walton praises the angler (contemplative, though only solitary by the most emaciated of definitions) as morally pure in The Complete Angler; Owin Felltham considers 'retirednesse' as morally safer than 'businessse';⁴ Katherine Philips sees the country life as 'sacred and...innocent'.⁵ So morally acceptable does the solitary, contemplative life become, that it is interesting to speculate as to whether it might not have become as religious as in medieval times, if the social context had not ceased to exist. Although the asceticism and uncompromising

¹ John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, ed. John Russell Brown (London, 1964), II.i.85-86.

² Skialetheia, Shakespeare Association Facsimiles, 2 (London, 1931), Satyra Quinta, sig. [D6]^r.

³ See W. Lee Ustick, 'Changing Ideals of Aristocratic Character and Conduct in Seventeenth-Century England', MP, 30 (1932), 147-66.

⁴ Resolues Diuine, Morall, Politicall (London, 1623), LXVII.218.

⁵ 'A Country-life', in Minor Poets of the Caroline Period, ed. Saintsbury, p.558.

nature of medieval enclosure had long disappeared, the appeal of withdrawal to a closed community remained. Evelyn's plans for such a community have already been mentioned (p.79, note 3 above), and John Aubrey, in notes towards his own Life, leaves us with these enigmatic thoughts:

Monastery.

I wished monastrys had not been putt downe, that the reformers would have been more moderate as to that point. Nay, the Turkes have monasteries. Why should our reformers be so severe? Convenience of religious houses—Sir Christopher Wren—fitt there should be receptacles and provision for contemplative men.¹

Moral superiority, then, not moral uncertainty, is what the mid-seventeenth-century poets, Marvell, Milton, Benlowes, Fairfax, Mildmay Fane, Katherine Philips, and a host of others celebrate when they sing of solitude.

¹'Brief Lives', chiefly of Contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the Years 1669 & 1696, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford, 1898), I.41.

CHAPTER III

The Individual and Society: A Changing Relationship

(i) Secular Enclosure

It was noted above (p.7) that writers of the late sixteenth century classified solitude in three ways: as relating to time, place, and the mind. Chapter II examined temporal, physical solitude, and Chapter III now turns to the solitude of mind which has been so frequently implied in the other two kinds of solitude. Solitude of mind, not retirement to the country, increased privacy, or the poses of cult, is in many ways the true sixteenth-century counterpart of medieval religious enclosure. Both solitude of mind and religious enclosure torment as well as fulfil the soul, both involve a recognition of the inescapability of the self, both have contradictory elements of choice and enforcement. Solitude of mind is defined, unlike physical solitude, not by what it stands apart from, but by what it encloses. Its only context is itself. Physical surroundings ideally should not affect the inner state, which is the only refuge from the evils of country, court, and city alike:

The country is a desert, where no good,
Gained (as habits, not born,) is understood.
There men become beasts, and prone to more evils;
In cities blocks, and in a lewd Court, devils...
Be then thine own home, and in thyself dwell;
Inn anywhere, continuance maketh hell.¹

Whereas the physical solitary has in one sense a fairly close relationship with society through his studied repudiation of it, the inward solitary is

¹ Donne, Verse Letter 'To Sir Henry Wotton', in Poems, ed. Smith.

detached from it by its irrelevance to his purely self-defined solitude.

But sixteenth-century solitude loses the unity of the medieval contemplative life, and finds its own characteristic duality in being secular, divorced from the context of eternity, and subject to temporal interruption and the intrusion of the physical, social world. The medieval anchorite was encouraged to cultivate the two permanent solitudes, of place and the mind, to the exclusion of temporal considerations, and to see physical and metaphysical solitude as mirrors of each other, aspects of the same state. In the sixteenth century, however, the possibility of division between these two was more clearly felt in the absence of the religious alternative. Not all spiritually detached men chose to live in solitude, nor could all those eager to do so fulfil their desire, so that the sixteenth-century solitary faced the inevitable self-division of having to live simultaneously in society and in solitude. This may help to account for a number of anomalies in both logic and desires.

Physical solitude was often justified in its early stages by social motivations: the solitary claimed to love men too much to endure the sight of their vices, or studied in private in order to benefit men by his knowledge. Bryskett draws attention to this paradox, by allowing Mr. Dormer to chastise the character Bryskett for withdrawing from public office, where there are ample opportunities for serving, friends, Prince and country, while at the same time, Dormer tells him,

you seeme neuertheles to direct your studies to such an end, as aimeth not onely at the knowledge of vertue, but also at the practise thereof, whereby a man is made fit and enabled for such employments as the Prince or State shall lay vpon him.¹

¹Discourse of Civill Life, p.19.

Ironically, given his frequently expressed inclination for solitude and his encouragement of spiritual self-enclosure above, Donne's most famous utterance perhaps is his affirmation of the necessity for spiritual involvement in society:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells [sic] tolls; it tolls for thee.¹

This finds a grim echo, however, in a later defence (published 1652) of barricading the self within private property by a Calvinist writer known as L.S.: 'every man is an island; and hath somewhat which he may call his own, and which he not only lawfully may, but also out of duty to God ought to defend...against all other men'.² These quotations, separated by nearly thirty years, represent the movement from a period which sought to justify solitude by its retention of the spirit of involvement to one which found that society itself needed justification, and sought to justify it as an arbitrary order necessarily imposed on men whose natural spiritual state was one of isolation and self-interest. This movement from the justification of solitude to the justification of society depicts the transition from hesitation to recalcitrance, the deeper entrenchment of isolation as physical solitude is reinforced by mental aloofness. Seventeenth-century poems in praise of retirement continually praise the Lucretian indifference to the world which was heresy in the sixteenth century.³

The extent of the change can be seen in the way two men use the same metaphor, as Donne and L.S. use the island, to totally opposite purposes.

¹Devotions, XVII.108-9.

²Quoted in Mervyn James, Family, Lineage, and Civil Society (Oxford, 1974), p.189.

³e.g.Katherine Philips, Edward Benlowes, Mildmay Fane.

Bacon, writing at the beginning of the century, condemns detachment as inhuman, affirming 'that in this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and Angels to be lookers on';¹ But Mackenzie, writing about sixty years later, commends it from an entirely selfish viewpoint, considering the good of the individual before the common good:

The World is a Comedy, where every man acts that part which providence hath assigned him; and as it is esteemed more noble to look on, than to act; so really, I know no securer box, from which to behold it, than a safe Solitude, and it is easier to feel than to express the pleasure which may be taken in standing aloof and in contemplating the reelings of the multitude.²

A different solitude of mind, however, a solitude which tormented rather than satisfied the individual who experienced it, pervaded the early period, side by side with the sense of involvement. Both the sense of solitude and the sense of involvement are, in fact, two sides of the same awareness, merely seen from different perspectives: the awareness of consciousness. The increased reverence for the mind from the early sixteenth century onwards resulted in a gradual expansion of the microcosm beyond the point where it could be contained within a simple hierarchical structure. The analogy between microcosm and macrocosm could no longer work in a simple way once it was emphasised that the microcosm could contain the macrocosm by the faculty of consciousness. Even as the awareness of the size of the

¹ Advancement of Learning, p.421. Although Bacon actually quotes Lucretius with approval in his essay 'Of Truth', the emphasis of his approval is important. Lucretius writes that 'no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of Truth...and to see the errors, and wanderings, and mists, and tempests, in the vale below'; but it is Lucretius' pleasure in truth, rather than in aloofness, which Bacon commends, adding the proviso that such pleasure should be tempered with pity (Spedding, VI.378).

² Mackenzie, pp.107-8.

universe expanded in the seventeenth century with new discoveries about cosmic structure, the mind could always expand beyond it by virtue of making and understanding the discovery. As Pascal said, 'By virtue of space I am comprehended and engulfed in the universe as a mere point; but by virtue of thought I comprehend it.'¹

This expanding self-awareness evoked feelings of both involvement and isolation. Innumerable writers begin to comment on the inadequacy of the microcosm image:

Man is no Microcosme, and they detract
From his dimensions, who apply
This narrow terme to his immensitye.
Heaven, Earth, and Hell in him are pack't.²

Donne reverses the traditional significance of the image to show the limitless potential and freedom of man:

It is too little to call man a little world; except God, man is a diminutive to nothing. Man consists of more pieces, more parts, than the world; than the world doth, nay, than the world is. And if those pieces were extended, and stretched out in man as they are in the world, man would be the giant, and the world the dwarf; the world but the map, and the man the world.³

Browne uses a similar analogy, that of the globe, to convey the restrictiveness of the microcosm image, and at the same time makes explicit the sense of involvement in the world resulting from this ability to contain it: 'There is no man alone, because every man is a Microcosme, and carries the whole world about him.'⁴

How then can this be reconciled with the fact that Donne and Browne

¹Quoted in Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p.127.

²Ralph Knevet, quoted in Mahood, Poetry and Humanism, p.298.

³Devotions, IV.23.

⁴Religio Medici, II.x.86.

are two of the key-witnesses to the desirability and inevitability of solitude? The truth is that both of them manifest the characteristically divided response of their times, in finding this ability to contain all within the self simultaneously liberating and claustrophobic, an experience which allows the self to expand, while yet enclosing it within itself. Both Donne and Browne see the world revealed through their own consciousness as more real than the world itself, and they make their observations on the world from within this circle of subjective apprehension, from imagination rather than direct observation. Bacon pours scorn on this disproportionate inflation of the microcosm, and tries in his own empirical scientific method to redress the balance between the objective world and the subjective apprehension of it. He condemns the overvaluing of the mind, which has led men to withdraw themselves from 'the contemplation of nature and the observations of experience' and to tumble 'up and down in their own reason and conceits',¹ and describes at length, as what he calls 'idols of the cave', the limitations of the subjective self:

The Idols of the Cave are the idols of the individual man. For every one (besides the errors common to human nature in general) has a cave or den of his own, which refracts and discolours the light of nature; owing either to his own proper and peculiar nature; to his education and conversation with others; or to the reading of books, and the authority of those whom he esteems and admires; or to the differences of impressions, accordingly as they take place in a mind preoccupied and predisposed or in a mind indifferent and settled; or the like. So that the spirit of man (according as it is meted out to different individuals) is in fact a thing variable and full of perturbation, and governed as it were by chance. Whence it was well observed by Heraclitus that men look for sciences in their own lesser worlds, and not in the greater or common world.²

¹Advancement of Learning, p. 292.

²The New Organon, Spedding, Vol. IV, I.xlii.54.

Yet men were aware of this self-enclosure and felt it suffocating them. As the whole world became recognised as a purely subjective experience, and previously stable absolutes became merely relative to the perceiving mind, so every experience became simultaneously an experience of self, every vision a mirror-image of self, so that the self seemed an inescapable prison. Images of mirrors and imprisonment at this time illustrate the double sense of liberation and claustrophobia. These mirrors differed from medieval mirrors in that they led inwards rather than outwards. Medieval mirrors led outward from individuals and particulars to general truths, either by warning or example, like The Mirror for Magistrates, or by a system of analogies and types. Nature itself could be regarded as a mirror leading outwards towards the state of man:

Omnis mundi creatura
quasi liber et pictura
nobis est et speculum:
nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis,
nostri status, nostrae sortis
fidele signaculum.¹

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mirrors, however, led inwards, as the contemporary obsession with the Narcissus myth confirms. Not only did this myth have traditional associations with self-love, vanity, and other such self-absorbed qualities, but it was also regarded in this period as having a comment to make on the conflict between the impulses towards solitude and towards society. In Bacon's view, self-love is inevitably associated with solitariness, as he writes in his explication of the Narcissus myth:

For with this state of mind there is commonly joined an indispos-

¹ Alanus de Insulis, quoted in Mario Praz, Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery, 2nd ed. Sussidi Eruditi, 16 (Rome, 1964), p.18. Inward-looking mirrors can also be found in medieval literature, of course (see p.159, note 1 below). The difference between the two periods is one of proportion, internal mirrors only beginning to outnumber external ones in the sixteenth century.

ition to appear much in public or engage in business; because business would expose them to many neglects and scorns, by which their minds would be dejected and troubled. Therefore they commonly live a solitary, private, and shadowed life.¹

The mirror is thus associated with solitude, both through self-love and through the claustrophobia of inwardness, but also, ironically, with infinite expansion, since the number of reflections within reflections is endless.

The prison, too, is used in these two ways: to highlight the infiniteness of the mind, or to describe its subjective restrictiveness. Lovelace, in his most famous poem, uses the notion of literal imprisonment in order to show that the mind is not bound by it ('Stone Walls doe not a Prison make...'); whereas Sir John Davies shows within a single stanza the conflict in him between feeling the self as prison and as infinite vastness:

Thus by the Organs of the Eye and Eare,
The Soule with knowledge doth her selfe endewe;
'Thus she her prison may with pleasure beare,²
'Having such prospects All the world to view.

This, then, is yet another aspect of the movement towards solitude which embodies a divided response, in which both extremes nevertheless overlap as well as contradict each other. The next section moves on from the conflicting attitudes towards the self to the conflicting attitudes towards society. It examines the same overall impulse in the general direction of solitude and individualism, side by side with the paradoxes which continue to qualify it at every point.

¹Of the Wisdom of the Ancients, Spedding, VI.705.

²Nosce Teipsum, in The Poems of Sir John Davies, ed. Robert Krueger (Oxford, 1975), p.39.

(ii) The Moving Balance

'Individualism', variously defined, or even not defined at all, has been noted (p.82 above) to be a compulsive critical term in describing the distinctiveness of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England. Jacob Burckhardt set in motion the idea of individualism as rising like Venus out of the waves in the Renaissance;¹ but since then many critics have pointed out the kinds of individualism in existence before then. The individual was sacred in feudal and scholastic philosophy. We have already observed, from the work of medieval political writers, that the state was not considered as an end in itself, but as capable of producing the conditions most likely to enable the individual to lead a good life and, finally, to enter the celestial state. The individual sought his end in himself, or was, in the scholastic phrase, 'propter seipsum existens'.²

Yet, despite the reaction against Burckhardt, the sense that there was something different about the way the individual regarded himself in the Renaissance remains. Hauser defines it as self-cultivation (p. 82 above); Ernst Cassirer sees it as the interest in the particularities of the self, as opposed to the way it conforms to a type;³ Norman Nelson sees it as egoism.⁴ In other words, what recent critics are reacting against is not so much Burckhardt's theory of where the originality of the Renaissance lay, as the rather naive and open-ended terminology he used to describe it.

¹The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, trans. S.G.C.Middlemore (London, 1929).

²See Maurice DeWulf, Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages (Princeton, 1922), p.34.

³'Some Remarks on the Question of the Originality of the Renaissance', JHI, 4 (1943), p.54.

⁴'Individualism as a Criterion of the Renaissance', JEGP, 32 (1933), p.333.

No-one denies that there are differences in the medieval and the Renaissance world-views; what the constant urge to redefine 'individualism', and to set its limits ever farther back in time, signifies is a sense that it represents not so much a new set of values as a change of emphasis in existing values.

A consideration of the changing usage of the word 'individual' may shed light on this change of emphasis. The individual for whom the state created the conditions for a good life in medieval and early sixteenth-century England was a representative man; when writers theorised about what was best for the state and for the individual, they meant every individual, any member of society considered in isolation. But when later sixteenth-century writers talked of individuals, they more frequently meant separate, distinct men, each of whom had different needs and desires, and for each of whom a different condition might be considered best. The word 'identity' followed a similar pattern, developing from its root meaning of 'the quality of being the same', to meaning the sameness, or consistency, of a particular individual, and hence also that which is his 'differentness', the quality which distinguishes him from other individuals. Nature, of course, also narrowed from a general to a more frequently individual reference (see p.2 above).

The sense of the separateness of the particular and the common good widens during the sixteenth century, and the maxim which resolved them earlier in the century—that the public good must be placed before the private good—is no longer universally accepted. The change of direction incorporates a change in moral values, which recognises the duty to the self as equal, and on occasion prior to the duty to society. Seneca's precept, 'Follow your own nature', becomes the truism of the new literature. Donne

uses the opposition between the two natures to describe the tension between the individual and society, and to justify the new morality, which places the individual good above the common good.¹ It is significant that he chooses the issue of solitude as an exemplary problem through which to discuss this moral question:

For we know that (a) [some things are naturall to the species, and other things to the particular person] and that the latter may correct the first. And therefore when (b) Cicero consulted the oracle at Delphos, he had this answer, [Follow your owne nature] And so certainly that place, (c) [It is not good for the man to be alone] is meant there, because if he were alone, Gods purpose of multiplying mankind had beene frustrate. Yet though this be ill for conservation of our species in generall, yet it may be very fit for some particular man, to abstaine from all such² conversation of marriage or men, and retire to a solitude.

Thus, he reasons, natural law can only be defined in the widest terms as a command to do good and avoid evil. No law is so simple that it is not subject to alteration as the circumstances under which it was first formulated change; 'in which case', as Donne realises, 'a private man is Emperor of himselfe'.³

This passage is an example of how the increased emphasis on the individual in isolation from society or any external context leads to an increased tendency to reject standards based originally on social principles and on the principle of a representative, theoretical man, whose needs could be presumed to stand for the needs of every individual. Instead,

¹Cf. Bacon (pp.68-69 above) who draws the same distinction between the two natures, but to opposite purpose, in order to commend general nature above individual nature.

²Biathanatos, I.ii.2.

³Ibid.

the individual now turns inwards for authority and tries to develop principles of right and wrong which are true for him alone. The state becomes only one of several means of self-fulfilment, which the individual can accept or reject. That decision must come from the authority of his own selfhood; relativity thus invades the old absolutes of medieval law and religion.

This new relativity applied to old absolutes helps to account for the semantic flux invading language at this time, when certain words became so far transformed as to denote their former opposites. Bacon complains about the unreliability of words, or, as he calls them, 'Idols of the Market-place';¹ and by Hobbes' time the words which once seemed unshakably linked with a value commonly accepted and understood have dissipated into meaninglessness through the increased awareness of subjectivity on the part of both speaker and listener:

And therefore in reasoning, a man must take heed of words; which besides the signification of what we imagine of their nature, have a signification also of the nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker; such as are the names of Vertues, and Vices; For one man calleth Wisdome, what another calleth feare; and one cruelty, what another justice; one prodigality, what another magnanimity; and one gravity, what another stupidity, &c. And therefore such names can never be true grounds of any ratiocination.²

Social flux, too, can be seen as related to this turning inwards for a new source of authority, although both sixteenth-century writers and modern historians argue as to which was cause and which effect. Whether

¹The New Organon, Spedding, IV.60-61.

²Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. A.R.Waller (Cambridge, 1904), I.v.21.

or not society actually was in any extraordinary state of flux at this time is secondary to the fact that the men of the time believed that it was. The only alternative to the view of nature as inherently dualistic (see pp.68-69 above) was the view that dualism was a condition of the times. Characteristically, writers expressed their own sympathetic duality in embracing both views, so that the same writer can be quoted to illustrate either view. John Carey, in a recent unpublished lecture, suggested another provocative perspective on the relationship between literary self-contradiction and social flux. The opposing tendencies in literature, sometimes co-existing within a single work, towards lavishness and towards order, may be seen as two responses to social chaos and excess: the first makes it acceptable by celebrating and imitating its lavishness, the second by reducing it through structure and style to an order and rationality which cannot be imposed on the experience itself.

The literature of the late sixteenth century is full of diatribes against change, against anything new, against the very fact of mutability. It is Spenser's great theme: the world has been set in a fragile balance, and 'All change is perillous, and all chaunce vnsound.'¹ Spenser interpolates this belief with reference to his own times in the Prologue to Book V of The Faerie Queene:

For that which all men then did vertue call,
Is now cald vice; and that which vice was hight,
Is now hight vertue, and so vs'd of all:
Right now is wrong, and wrong that was is right,
As all things else in time are chaunged quight.

Harvey, in a letter to Spenser, laments at much greater length the passion

¹Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, in Poetical Works, ed. J.C.Smith and E. de Selincourt, Oxford Standard Authors (London, 1969), V.ii.36.

for all things new and the overturning of old values.¹ Donne's lament from 'The First Anniversary', "'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone', has been quoted so often as to have become an epitaph of his times.

Mutability was not simply a literary theme, but a fear very close to men's hearts. Prose writers frequently point to particular examples in their own contemporary world of the kind of disintegration they mean, one of the commonest being the disruption of the social hierarchy, due to the ambition of the newly wealthy to become gentlemen, to exceed their allotted places in the social order. The new emphasis on inward qualities as determining the individual was fuel to the fire which was burning down the order of aristocracy, to replace it with a supposed meritocracy.

A strongly pessimistic tone pervades these laments for the times. The ideals of the past are evoked in order to chastise the rebelliousness and unnaturalness of the present, and to forecast the social disintegration of the future. The famous Homilie against disobedience and wilfull rebellion (1571) contains a particularly threatening prophecy of the outcome of rebellion, in the loss of peace, the disruption of the family, and the weakening of the country to the point where it becomes an easy prey for invaders. The homiletic vision of chaos:

the brother to seeke, and often to woorke the death of his brother, the sonne of the father, the father to seeke or procure the death of his sonnes, being at mans age, and by their faultes to disherite their innocent children and kinsemen their heyres for euer²

is reminiscent of scriptural threats against the sinful, and in particular

¹Works, ed. Grosart, I.69-71.

²Certaine Sermons appointed by the Queenes Maiestie... (London, 1582), sig. Aaa2¹.

of one text in Matthew, where Christ prophesies the unnaturalness to which the Apostles will arouse men who hate Christ: 'And the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the sonne, and the children shall rise against their parents, and shal cause them to die' (10.21).¹ This vision was echoed in many contemporary sermons, and in more frivolous literature too. There was a fear prevalent that the world was decaying and coming to an end, and men saw this decay prefigured in the breaking of the strongest natural bonds. Charles Pynner, for example, in the first of two sermons on the text of 1 Peter 2.17, 'Honour all men: Loue brotherly felowship',² quotes many other prophecies of unnaturalness among men from the scriptures, and warns his audience:

Thus the father, oweth more to the childe; the husband, to the wife; the brother, to his brother; yea, the friende to his friende; (because hee hath bounde him by a speciall band) then to any other. And if these will not honor these, protect and defend, helpe, comfort, and nourish these, (as too often we may see this honor wanting) it is because we are fallen into the last times; of which the Apostle forewarned they should bee greeuous.³

This resemblance between sixteenth-century prose and the Scriptures may serve as a reminder that the reason why sixteenth-century men found it so hard to accept change was that they still felt compelled by medieval habit to judge the changes morally, and to see them in relation to an absolute pattern divinely ordained. Inevitably, since religion itself was losing its former strength, those who judged their times in these already

¹There is a parallel with Seneca as well as with the Bible here. Cf. Seneca His Tenne Tragedies Translated into English, ed. Thomas Newton, The Tudor Translations, 2nd series, 11-12 (London and New York, 1927), Thyestes, I.56; Hippolytus, II.154.

²Here I quote from Pynner's title rather than the Geneva Bible.

³Two Sermons... (London, 1597), pp.24-25.

less relevant terms were bound to see them as a falling-off. Sermons, which above all embody the compulsion to describe social change in terms of moral nature, almost uniformly compare the present unfavourably with the past, although that is also a feature common in sermons of any date. Yet sixteenth-century sermons are exceptionally strongly concerned with contemporary issues. Although they condemn the perennial sins of pride, worldliness, greed, and so on, they also begin to condemn other sins which are revealing about the kinds of social change that were taking place.¹

Rebellion and the decay of hospitality are two unusually specific sins condemned in sermons of this period. Both of these embody a threat to the social order expressed through the placing of individual impulses higher than the duty to the common good. A third sin which becomes almost obsessively denounced both in sermons and in secular literature, the sin of self-love, increases this sense of individuals' as becoming increasingly self-enclosed. Parolles, in All's Well That Ends Well, confirms self-love to be 'the most inhibited sin in the canon' (I.i.136-37).

Blench lists three new topics of complaint arising in Elizabeth's reign: 1) that classical learning is taking the place of knowledge of the Christian faith; 2) the evil of romances, novels, and plays; 3) Machiavellian dissembling and cunning. All three of these demonstrate the way in which any change was felt as a threat. Machiavellianism, in its peculiarly Elizabethan distortions, focusses in particular the fear of society disintegrating. The preoccupation of the Elizabethans with the Machiavellian villain, their virtual identification of good with sincerity and evil with dissembling, is indicative of the sense widely shared, not only by preachers,

¹I am indebted to J.W.Blench, Preaching in England in the late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries in my consideration of the changing themes of sermons.

that individuals were becoming increasingly isolated, increasingly cut off from one another either by their own detachment and dissimulation, or by their vulnerability to it in others. The Machiavellian in literature is the solitary par excellence. He is not merely passively anti-social, but an actively disruptive element in society. He undermines the social bonds by his manipulation of appearances and his defiance of the foundations of truth and frankness which make communication, and hence a community, as opposed to a random collection of individuals, possible. There can be no stronger evidence of the lingering medieval compulsion to judge social change in moral terms than this casting of the solitary in the role of villain.

Elizabethan and Jacobean drama insist on the necessity for truth as a basis for society. The Duke in Measure for Measure expresses it in a bitter pun: 'There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure; but security enough to make fellowships accurst. Much upon this riddle runs the wisdom of the world' (III.ii.213-15). But Measure ^{for} of Measure also introduces the Jacobean perspective on society which renders the medieval judgement on the solitary dissembler void, by presenting solitude as the general rule in a corrupt society. Solitude, in a society where the majority are uncommitted, uninvolved, and self-interested, ceases to be an exceptional state confined to the dissembler. Tragedy and comedy alike can portray society in this fragmenting decline. Jonson's Humour comedies, for example, illustrate it very clearly by portraying individuals as fragments, disembodied humours, not complex and integrated members of society.

But the modification of the medieval view of society as the ideal and the solitary as an object of pity is not only shown in the declining

faith in society: it is also present in the ambivalent presentation of the solitary. The villain is a complex character not confined within the limitations of his evil purpose, but raised above them by those aspects of his solitude which he shares with heroes: his tendency to speculate on himself and his nature, his higher level of self-awareness, his aspiration towards self-definition. In the same way the hero ceases to be conventionally virtuous and becomes morally questionable.¹ Villains and heroes are separated by a very thin line in Elizabethan, and even more so in Jacobean literature, although their creators do not make explicit any recognition they may have of the resemblance.

Marlowe is among the first to celebrate the hero whose solitude is to see himself as essentially in conflict with the world.² He breaks faith with the Middle Ages in that for him a man now proves himself, fulfils himself, through being at odds with his society and cultivating himself in direct contravention of its laws. Tamburlaine and Faustus, in their desires and their ruthless self-dedication, are not so different from Barabas, although by technical standards of plot they are respectively heroes and villain. The solitary, who was a simplified type, a beast or a god, for Aristotle, Aquinas, and most writers before the late sixteenth century, now becomes a man, a complex self, with the potential to be either hero or villain. Man, once measured as a part by his contribution to the social whole, and rendered meaningless in severance from that whole, is now evaluated by his very apartness, his aspiration to be a self-contained whole in himself.

¹Cf. the discussion on p. 84 above of the link between moral uncertainty and the cult of solitude.

²Hamlet is the first dramatic hero to seek out physical solitude as the expression of his metaphysical isolation. See Ch.VIII below.

The aspiration towards self-definition had been the tag of the villain in medieval drama. Only the Vice or the sinner would utter the blasphemies of self-satisfied pride which are metamorphosed into the admirable quality of truth to self in the Renaissance hero or heroine as well as remaining the characteristic of the villain. It becomes impossible to separate admiration from condemnation for characters such as De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna, Vindice and Hippolito, Subtle and Face, and many more of the self-bound deceivers of tragedy and comedy alike. Other genres also show this moral ambivalence as regards truth to self. Even Sidney's Pamela, a heroine most conventionally virtuous in other ways, has a motto which she shares with Shakespeare's Richard III and innumerable other heroic villains and flawed heroes, 'yet still my selfe'.¹

Both heroes and villains come to be defined by their attitude to themselves, where once they were defined by their attitude to the commonwealth. The transition can be clearly seen in the proximity in time of The Mirror for Magistrates, which carries forward the values of the old order, and the Elizabethan dramatists. The good and the evil in the Mirror are defined respectively as lovers of the commonwealth and as self-lovers; those who fall beneath the forces of law and social order in the Mirror are the future heroes of Marlowe and Chapman—proud, ambitious, and self-seeking. Whereas the good in the Mirror embody duty and the necessities of law, Marlowe's and Chapman's heroes embody will and personal choice. The new law, for Chapman's Byron and Bussy (his Clermont stands somewhat apart here in his recognition of man as a part in a divine whole²) binds the individual to

¹The Countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia, in The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. A. Feuillerat (Cambridge, 1912-26), I. 90.

²The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, in The Plays and Poems of George Chapman, ed. Thomas Marc Parrott (London, 1910, 1914), Vol. I, III.iv.58-75.

himself alone:

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.¹

Marston shows more clearly the moral uncertainty of self-definition, since the satirist is less clearly a hero than the protagonists of Marlowe and Chapman. The satirist retains many of the qualities of the Vice: he is aloof, misanthropic, and revels in human vanity and sinfulness. He is a lecherous hypocrite, who condemns others for sins of which he is also guilty, but he is not a dissembler in the true sense, since he does not actually disguise these qualities or deceive men. Although he is something of a cult-figure in his melancholy, his discontent, and his resolute solitude, he condemns the cult-figures he sees around him on the grounds that they are not enacting their true selves, and excuses his own unpleasantness and anti-social humour on the grounds that in him this is no affectation, but the unashamed presentation of the distasteful truth. His rather dubious, self-appointed virtue is that 'I am my selfe'.² He opts for pleasing himself rather than the world, and parts with the fashion of dedicating literary works to a noble patron in order to dedicate his to his 'most esteemed and best beloued Selfe'.³

Webster makes the moral ambivalence of self-definition even more explicit, by presenting it as a characteristic of both his heroes and his villains. Heroism becomes even more debatable than in most contemporary

¹ Byron's Conspiracy, III.iii.140-45.

² The Scourge of Villanie, in The Poems of John Marston, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool, 1961), Presentation.

³ Ibid., Dedication.

literature, since Webster clearly admires defiance, whether it be in a good or a bad cause. The Duchess of Malfi's defiance before death: 'I am Duchess of Malfi still',¹ puts her momentarily on a level, despite her generally superior virtue, with Flamineo, in The White Devil, who refuses to 'die, as I was born, in whining',² and expresses his scorn for Vittoria's fear thus:

I have held it
A wretched and most miserable life,
Which is not able to die.³

Vittoria shows the same defiance of death earlier in the play, however, at her trial:

Find me but guilty, sever head from body:
We'll part good friends: I scorn to hold my life
At yours or any man's entreaty, sir.⁴

Webster blurs the distinctions between virtue and vice, mediievally judged, by allowing to both the faculty of self-consciousness. Greatly influenced by Montaigne, Webster makes his most cruel characters feel conscience and compassion and speculate on the significance of their own thoughts. Those characters most conventionally virtuous in the old sense, like the faithful Isabella and the gullible Antonio, seem flat and uninteresting, because they lack the inward complexity to contemplate their own natures and the purpose of their existence.

But no two books show the moral ambivalence of solitude more clearly than The Courtier and The Prince, responsible as they are for the models of one type of hero and the most common type of villain in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The following section attempts to show

¹The Duchess of Malfi, IV.ii.142.

²V.vi.195.

³V.vi.79-81.

⁴III.ii.137-39.

how these two books overlap, despite their apparent opposition, and how, while seeming to celebrate social and solitary ideals respectively, both indicate a definite movement in the direction of 'solitude of mind', and both celebrate in fact the same solitary qualities in different moral disguises.

(iii) Courtier and Prince

Castiglione's The Courtier and Machiavelli's The Prince have been singled out by later ages as two of the most influential and representative books of the Renaissance. Both are Italian, both were written in the early sixteenth century, both had an immeasurable effect on later English literature. Both the Courtier and the Prince became cult-figures in England, and came to represent, more than any English literary characters, the extremes of perfection and corruption respectively.

The English re-creations of them in the ideal courtier of the fashionable courtesy books and the Machiavellian villain of drama could not be more opposite to each other. The one is sociable, loyal, considerate; the other solitary, treacherous, and completely egotistical. The one strives towards an ideal of virtue, while the other calculates how to cultivate the appearance of virtue to cloak his vice, and exploits his knowledge of how far men in fact fall short of the ideal. Where one embodies the social virtues, the ideals on which the social order rests, the other undermines the social fabric by appearing to be sociable, but covering his true self by a social mask, and retaining his inward detachment and self-love.

The originals of these types are not quite so simple or extreme, but it is easy to see how extreme and highly moral interpretations of them developed. At first sight, they do seem to embody the two sides of the debate on society and solitude. The most fundamental difference, however, is between the writers' intentions. Whereas Castiglione is formulating an ideal, Machiavelli is describing 'what men do and not what they ought to do'.¹ Machiavelli works from the observation that no men live up to their ideals, and

¹Bacon, Advancement of Learning, p.430.

suggests practical alternatives to idealism. Given that men are less than ideal, the prince must accommodate himself to this fact of life merely to survive:

soe greate is the difference betwene the lyves wee doe leade,
and the lives wee shoulde leade: that he which respectes not what
is doon, but studies onlie to learne that which shoulde be doon,
is liker by his knowledge to purchasē his owne subversion, then
by his conninge to provide for his safetie; for he that in everie
respect will needes be a good man cannot choose but be overthrowne
emonge soe many that are ill. It is necessarie therefore for a
prince, yf he have regarde to his owne securitie, to knowe howe
to be good and badd, and vse both as the occasion of his accidentes,
and necessitie of his causes shall require.¹

Machiavelli distinguishes here quite clearly between the moral ideal and the political expedient: it is possible that, if his intention had been to describe the moral ideal, he might have depicted a man like Castiglione's Courtier. It is also possible that Castiglione might have admitted that more real men were as Machiavelli portrayed them than as he himself did.

In any case, the ideal and the actual are not so far apart as they at first seem, a fact masked initially by Castiglione's relative evasiveness. The Courtier and the Prince are not simply a social man and a solitary; both are in fact moving towards inward solitude in their attitudes towards themselves and society. Only the Prince shows signs of physical aloofness, a state which is to some degree forced on him by his position, as it is forced on Shakespeare's kings. Even Castiglione recognises the right of the Prince to privacy, although he does not encourage solitariness in his Courtier. In adapting himself to others, the Courtier is instructed to respect the Prince's periods of solitude, and not to 'covet to presse into

¹Machiavelli's 'The Prince': An Elizabethan Translation, ed. Hardin Craig, Chapel Hill, 1944, Ch.xv, p.66-67. All quotations are from this translation.

the chamber or other secrete places where his Lord is withdrawen'.¹

The inward solitude of the Prince, who might well share the motto of Petrarch and the Elizabethan cult-hero of solitude, 'secretum meum mihi', needs no exemplifying, since it is explicit. Machiavelli openly states that the primary motivation for all the Prince's actions is self-interest. The Courtier shares many of the qualities which isolate the Prince within himself, but Castiglione blurs the issue by presenting them in a social context. Castiglione describes the Courtier from outside, as others see him, rather than from within, and uses the vocabulary of relationships, advising him to cultivate duty, service, tact, and decorum. In fact, the emphasis is really more on the cultivation than on the qualities cultivated, since the Courtier's motive in pleasing others is not altruistic, but selfish: he values the self-satisfaction and advancement that will come to him through his good reputation. Burckhardt, in his famous evaluation of Castiglione's Courtier,² emphasises his total self-dedication, and his view of the court as existing for him, rather than he for the court. These priorities in the Courtier show Castiglione placing self-interest in an even more focal position than Machiavelli, since Machiavelli's advice to his Prince to be egotistical and tyrannical is based on the patriotic hope that such forcefulness is the way to achieve order and unity again in Italy. Where the Courtier exploits the court for his individual end, the Prince exploits his power for the end of a common good.

The most striking difference between Machiavelli and Castiglione is their degree of explicitness. Machiavelli describes motives; Castiglione

¹ The Book of the Courtier, trans. Thomas Hoby, p.125. All quotations are from this edition in The Tudor Translations series.

² Burckhardt, p.382. Also quoted in Henley's introduction to the above edition of The Courtier.

leaves motives to be inferred from actions and effects. Machiavelli describes amorality as such; Castiglione appears not to recognise it. Castiglione's real distance from his contemporaries in England, and their ideal of the true commonwealth, is established only by what he does not say in comparison with them. Nowhere does he utter their characteristic maxim that the public good must come before the private, or that 'Overmuch regard of private and particular weal ever destroyeth the common.'¹ Nowhere does he imply that the Courtier contributes to other men's good, or that he should. Nowhere does he generalise about the courtier's inward state, about the feelings he ought to have towards society as a whole; he asks only that he should amuse the individuals present at a given time, counsel his Prince, and perfect particular skills. The difference between this individually-motivated courtesy of the Italian Renaissance² and the chivalry of the Middle Ages can be seen quite clearly by contrasting Castiglione's Courtier and his attitudes with the ideal knight described by Caxton in The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry:

To a knyght apperteyneth/ that he be a lover of the comyn wele/
For by the comynalte of the people was the chyualrye founden and
establyssed/ And the comyn wele is gretter and more necessary
than propre good and specyall/³

Where medieval chivalry is based on an attitude of mind, Castiglione's courtesy is based on the cultivation of arts and skills and a polished performance.

Both the Courtier and the Prince cultivate particular qualities, and

¹See p.42 above.

²See p.46 above.

³William Caxton, trans., The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry, ed. Alfred T.P.Byles, EETS, 168 (London, 1926), p.113.

present a calculated, rather than a spontaneous, self to society. They make their own fortunes and determine the course of their lives by their own efforts. Again, where this is implicit in Castiglione's constant urging towards self-cultivation, the creation of a desired self rather than the mere expression of an existing self, Machiavelli makes it explicit:

fortune is a wooman, and he that will raigne over her, must of force be fayne both to maister her, and quicken her with a Cudgell.

And all men see shee yeeldeth more willinglie to them that vse her roughlie and severelie then to those that intreate her coldlie and fayntelie.

(Ch.25, pp.114-15)

With such a heritage, it is easy to see why the self-defining individualists of Elizabethan drama (see pp.109-12 above) were poised so uncertainly between the roles of hero and villain.

Both the Courtier and the Prince are self-assertive showmen, more interested in the impression they make on their audience than in the coordination between that impression and their inward feelings. If truth and openness are the basis of communication, relationships, and hence society, the Courtier is as anti-social as the Prince. He is required to speak the truth to his Prince, but Machiavelli's Prince demands as much from his courtiers. More frequently, he must dissemble his real feelings, like the Prince, and adapt himself according to the considerations of decorum, the time, place, and persons. No matter what his mood, he must 'keepe companye pleasauntlye with every man'(p.55) and 'consider wel what the thing is he doth or speaketh, the place wher it is done, in what presence of whom, in what time, the cause why he doeth it' (p.112) and so on. If he feels melancholy, he must dissemble for the sake of his Prince, and of his own standing in the Prince's estimation, for he is never to be 'sad befor his prince nor melancholy' (p.124). He is no more spontaneous or natural than Machiavelli's

Prince, then, in his social conduct; indeed, Castiglione goes one step beyond Machiavelli in insisting that the Courtier should cultivate the appearance of spontaneity, by adopting 'a certain Reckelesness, to cover art withall, and seeme whatsoever he doth and sayeth to do it wythout pain, and (as it were) not myndyng it' (p.59). The difference again is only that, whereas Machiavelli openly recognises that dissembling is a political necessity rather than a morally acceptable act, Castiglione appears not to notice any doubtfulness about the morality of the dissembling he prescribes.

Both the Courtier and the Prince measure the effect their actions will have before performing them. Indeed, performance is the very word to describe the premeditated way in which they assume public personae which are out of harmony with their inner feelings. The measure they take of time, place, and persons, though one calls it decorum and the other necessity, is also the measure of their disengagement from society. However much they may appear to participate in an active civil life (and both hold prominent public positions), they have no sense of commitment to other men, and in that sense remain apart from them and self-enclosed. They view other men as a commodity, an audience, or a set of objects to be manipulated, not as equals to whom they are bound by ties of love. Machiavelli openly expresses his contempt for ties of love as opposed to ties of fear, 'for love', he writes, 'is conteyned vnder dutie, which for verie lighte occasion wicked men will violate, abusinge all meanes of pietie for anie kynde of proffitte' (Ch.17, pp.72-73). The only real bonds are the superficial ones of class and rank. The Courtier too, though he is told to acquire friends (rather as though they were a purchasable commodity), needs them for his particular use, not as recipients of his own love and obligation.

Like Castiglione, the Elizabethans either did not see, or chose to

ignore, the moral ambivalence of the Courtier's actions, and remained characteristically self-divided, admiring in him the same qualities that they damned in Machiavelli's Prince. The inward solitude of the Courtier was made to seem acceptable by being presented in a context of external sociability, of medieval faithfulness to bonds, and of self-fulfilment through the collective medium of the court. The Prince's solitude, on the other hand, was unacceptable to the Elizabethans because it rejected society absolutely, except as a merely artificial order, and regarded bonds as breakable when political expediency demanded. Not until the middle of the seventeenth century was the Prince regarded with a more realistic and sympathetic eye.

The histories of both these books in England make clear that the moral acceptability of The Prince came later than that of The Courtier. Both were translated during Elizabeth's reign, but translations of Machiavelli remained in manuscript, and probably circulated secretly, whereas Hoby's translation of The Courtier was published and openly recommended as a book of moral excellence by men of such high standing as Roger Ascham,¹ once Elizabeth's own tutor. No translation of Machiavelli was published until that of Dacres in 1640. By this time Machiavelli's view of natural man as solitary, unsociable, self-interested, and only kept in relative order by the restraint of an imposed and artificial set of laws, which constituted 'society', was widespread, even among the most moral.

Whether this 'natural'² propensity in man towards solitude was judged

¹The Scholemaster, ed. Edward Arber, English Reprints. (London, 1870), p.66.

²The potential of the word 'natural' to convey either approval or disapproval has been discussed above, p.9.

deplorable, as by Hobbes or the Calvinists, or praiseworthy, as by the retirement poets and the majority of secular¹ writers, the difference is that it had ceased to be either condemned or sought after on the grounds of its unnaturalness or immorality. The distance in time between the open acceptance of The Courtier and of The Prince reveals, like the rise and decline of the cult of solitude, the transition of solitude from a morally uncertain state, in which it had to be presented in disguised or exaggerated forms appropriate to its status of unnaturalness, to a state of moral acceptability, in which it became acknowledged as the natural state of man.

¹By 'secular', I do not mean to imply that religious themes are entirely absent from their work, only that the motivating force behind it is not religious.

POSTSCRIPT

Drama

'It is surely no accident that the idea of sincerity, of the own self and the difficulty of knowing and showing it, should have arisen to vex men's minds in the epoch that saw the sudden efflorescence of the theatre.'¹ So Lionel Trilling writes in relation to the late sixteenth century. In so doing, he singles out the preoccupation which links drama, essentially a social medium, to the cult of solitude. Drama is social both in its existence as a communal event and in its assumption that character is revealed through the social modes of rank, occupation, relationship, and communication. Terence Hawkes, discussing social interaction as the basis of drama, draws attention to the fact that Shakespeare himself makes the distinction between men who read and men who love plays, with the implication that men who read stand somewhat apart from society, while those who love plays are involved and sociable. Cassius, according to Caesar,

reads much,
He is a great observer, and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays,
As thou dost, Antony.²

(JC, I.ii.201-3)

Hamlet's love of both reading and plays, considered in the light of these implications, provides interesting grounds for speculation as to the relationship between the sociable man that observers report he has been and the introverted solitary who is presented throughout most of the play (except in the scenes where he first meets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the play-

¹Sincerity and Authenticity, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1974), p.10.

²Shakespeare's Talking Animals (London, 1973), p.219.

ers).

The public nature of drama is one of the qualities which relate it most closely to cults, whether of solitude or anything else, since both show in exaggerated form the desire to project the self, or to project a considered mask which hides the true self. The question of sincerity is central to cult and to drama, since the very attempt to project one's sincerity can itself falsify the truth of that presentation, or, to quote Trilling again, 'we play the role of being ourselves, we sincerely act the part of the sincere person, with the result that a judgement may be passed upon our sincerity that it is not authentic.'¹ Sixteenth-century dramatists, while presenting the self through social media, also recognised the impossibility of a complete and honest projection of the self, of the essential solitude of the self. The dramatic medium, which conveys truth through the externalisation and overt communication of it, also began to express a recognition of the incommunicability and inwardness of individual truth. In this sense the development of new dramatic techniques at this time was also the development of paradox, of contradictions between form and content, of conflict within the very artifices of a genre which traditionally structures its plot on conflicts.

Before these more intricate expressions of the parallel paradoxes in cult and drama of the self in solitude and in society are discussed, the simplest level of the relationship between drama and the cult of solitude must be considered. They were essentially bound together in their own time by their common topicality and their mutual influence. Both were registers of contemporary preoccupations and affectations, and drama is the source

¹Trilling, p.11.

of much of the evidence for the existence of various cults (see e.g. pp. 81-82 and 109-12 above). Not only did the various cults influence the formation of type characters in drama, but the explicit description and hardening of those types in drama must also have been an influence on the definition and continuance of the cult itself.

A cult by its nature portrays an individual challenging society and his traditional relationship with it; and so drama, as a communal and public art, is equally concerned with the relationship between the individual and society, and the division, if there is a division, between the private and public self.

A comparison with medieval drama shows the conviction that there was a division increasing in the sixteenth century. Medieval dramatists used their medium in a relatively straightforward way, showing a character exclusively through his public, presented self. 'Character' is itself something of a misnomer in relation to medieval drama, since character, in the complex sense in which we now understand it, was largely a creation of the sixteenth century. Medieval 'characters' were defined by their actions and, in particular, by the moral quality of their actions. They tended to be representative, often allegorical, so that the moral message of the play was readily comprehensible. In the moralities, the figures took on names indicative of their representative quality ('Everyman' or 'Mankind') or the names of particular characteristics ('Magnificence', 'Mercy', and so on). The characters of the miracle plays, too, were either representatives of common humanity, or so remote for it to be blasphemy to attempt to 'characterise' them. Apart from God and Christ, most scriptural figures were presented in a down-to-earth way which enabled the audience to identify with them.

The purpose of medieval soliloquy was most often to outline events, not to express the self of the speaker. The most characterful speeches in medieval drama occur in the plays of the Wakefield Master, in the mouths of such persons as Cain and Mak; but the Wakefield Master was both late in time and exceptional in dramatic skill, and most miracle plays were more exclusively centred on dialogue and event per se, not on individual character or singularity. In accordance with Aristotle's dictum (quoted p.15 above), the ordinary man was portrayed through relationship, action, and communication; God (or Christ) and the Vice were the solitaires. Other characters might speak occasional soliloquies, or hold the stage alone for brief periods, but only these two stood inherently and naturally apart. Emrys Jones has vividly described the impact of Christ's solitude in the Crucifixion scenes of the miracle plays,¹ and several critics have traced the ancestry of the sixteenth-century villain and his solitude to the Vice of the moralities, with his detachment, dissimulation, manipulation, aggressive showmanship, and monstrous egoism.²

The movement of soliloquy towards a self-revelatory function is the achievement of the sixteenth century.³ Inevitably linked with the development of the soliloquy is the development of the solitary, and of the expressed recognition of a certain inward solitude inherent in every man. Two innovations in particular show the solitary impulse beginning to undercut the social medium of drama in the sixteenth century: the formulation of certain solitary types in tragedy (the revenger, the malcontent, the dissembler,

¹The Origins of Shakespeare (Oxford, 1977), pp.49-50.

²esp. Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil (New York and London, 1958).

³See Wolfgang Clemen, English Tragedy before Shakespeare, trans. T.S. Dorsch (London, 1961) for a description of the crucial innovations of Kyd and Marlowe in turning the soliloquy inwards.

the madman, and, of course, the tragic hero) and of the outsider in comedy.¹ On stage, the impact of the solitary is tremendous, since he rejects the dramatic conventions of speech and relationship. His relationships are manipulated, he wears a mask in front of other men.² He sits apart, is either silent or ironical in company, and speaks his deepest feelings in asides or in soliloquy. The dramatic tradition of dressing certain solitaires such as the malcontents, or the grief-stricken, in black, emphasises their apartness from the other characters and from the dramatic mode itself. Their conflict with society is made visual by presenting them as observers of the dramatic action of the other characters, thus making the familiar tools of drama: speech, interaction, self-confession through public role, and so on, seem artificial, like a play-within-a-play (another novel device incorporated into the drama during this period).

The soliloquy is not the only change in dramatic speech which indicates a movement towards solitude in drama. Speech, the vehicle of communication, is itself perverted in the deliberate use of words as barriers to, rather than emblems of, truth. Like soliloquy and aside, this misuse of words and

¹Shakespeare occupies a unique position as regards both these innovations. He introduces new tragic solitaires of his own: the king and the fool (who, although they exist in other plays, are only treated as inherently solitary by Shakespeare); and his comic outsider is detached in a deeper and more socially threatening way than the humorous solitary types of, say, Jonson's comedies. In this sense, the comic outsider, as typified by Jaques, and varied through such figures as Don John, Malvolio, and Caliban, is Shakespeare's own innovation.

²This assumption of social masks is yet another example of dramatic forms turning on themselves. The old masks of Greek drama were integral to the theatrical experience, having an expository, symbolic function. The replacement of these in the sixteenth century by masks which conceal rather than reveal, and which open up a gap between the self and the actor presenting this self to the public, is a challenging of traditional dramatic method inherent in the portrayal of the solitary through this social medium.

play on double meanings was a characteristic particularly strongly associated with the Vice in medieval drama, but comes in the sixteenth century to be used by heroes as well as by villainous dissemblers. Words become barriers enclosing a character in his isolation, instead of ways out of himself into relationship, again showing the medium in conflict with itself and its own forms. Hamlet is of course the archetypal manipulator of words as barriers against others (see p.223 below); but private languages, deliberate nonsense, or, conversely, the meaningful apparent nonsense of madmen, are characteristic of heroes and villains alike in the work of other dramatists too.

Although drama would seem to be the most explicit of forms, the one in which the private self would have to be presumed to be the same as the self presented in action, the sixteenth-century drama is characterised by its working against its own forms, its deliberate cultivation of the art of implicitness, unspoken truth, 'closed' characters, and the dissociation of speech, action, and self. It makes heroes out of the men who are not truly expressed by these outward forms, who live in the chasm between social role and private self, who may be either struggling to communicate themselves sincerely, or so disillusioned with society that they are deliberately withholding their true selves from its contamination. Drama becomes, in fact, a medium for non-communication, for the self-enclosure of the solitary, a contradiction in terms.

Content as well as form illustrates this conflict between inwardness and explicitness, between the individual and communal motivations, which Bacon and Donne propose (pp.68 and 102 above) as the two poles in the nature of all things. These are what a modern critic, Robert B. Heilman, has called, in relation to tragic conflict, 'imperative' and 'impulse'. 'In general', he

writes,

imperative is the overriding obligation, the discipline of self that cannot be rejected without penalty, whether it is felt as divine law, moral law, civil law, or in a less codified but no less powerful way as tradition, duty, honor, 'principle,' or 'voice of conscience.' Imperative reflects communal consciousness or higher law; impulse is open to challenge, judgment, or replacement in a way that imperative is not. Impulse originates in, is rooted in, or is identified with the individual personality; though the specific feelings that impel the individual may be of the widest occurrence in human kind, they are felt as a need, a satisfaction, a fulfillment, or an aggrandizement of the individual.¹

Heilman restricts the use of these terms to tragedy, which is right, in so far as they are terms describing inward states. The conflict between impulse and imperative can be extended to comedy, or at least to Shakespearean comedy, however, if we regard them as being externalised as the respective attributes of the outsider and the group, instead of as motivations within the individual. The conflict between social and anti-social characters in comedy is essentially the same conflict as that between the social and solitary instincts within the tragic hero.

This conflict is made more explicit in Shakespeare's plays than in those of most of his contemporaries. The chronology of his work follows the general movement towards solitude, in moving away from comedy, the externalised conflict in which imperative triumphs, and increasingly towards tragedy and the celebration of the individual. Shakespeare takes a uniquely conscious interest in the problems of the solitary and of the individual's relationship with society. The concern for solitude among his contemporaries can probably be attributed partly to his influence. No other dramatist of the time examines the solitary mind in such depth, nor is so self-aware about the equivocation between his sympathy for the solitary and his moral judgement of solitude.

¹Tragedy and Melodrama (Seattle, 1968), p.13.

Nearly all Shakespeare's plays have some bearing on the question of solitude, but the necessity for some limits, and for variety and a wide time-span within those limits, dictates the choice of the works discussed in Part Two. All are considered in direct relation to the argument that solitude was becoming increasingly a preoccupation, increasingly sought after, and increasingly acceptable in Shakespeare's lifetime. It is hoped that this will suggest the mutual influence between Shakespeare and contemporary movements in thought and expression, and will show the great extent to which the problem of solitude is crucial to our understanding of his plays in their historical context.

PART TWO

PROLOGUE

Shakespeare's Language

Semantic changes in particular words have already been noted to illuminate the changing ideologies of the time.¹ The examination of Shakespeare's attitude towards solitude begins, then, by considering his approach to language in general terms, before restricting the discussion to individual works.

The fluid state of the language during the sixteenth century offered all writers an opportunity to create new words, or new meanings for familiar words, and Shakespeare took unique advantage of this. He is cited innumerable times by the O.E.D. as responsible for the first recorded use of a given word,² and is so far in the forefront of linguistic change that it is impossible to tell in most instances whether he himself was the instigator of the change, or was simply hyper-sensitive to change in the spoken language he heard round about him. That Shakespeare both influenced and was influenced by his contemporaries is certain; the difficulty is to distinguish between the two. The sheer frequency with which his works are quoted by the O.E.D., however, necessitates the conclusion that he was a linguistic innovator.

Language is one of the strongest sources of evidence of a preoccupation with solitude among Shakespeare and his contemporaries. We have already seen how the word 'solitariness' itself became more common (p.12 above);

¹See esp. Introduction above.

²Such evidence must not be regarded uncritically, however. The O.E.D. is not wholly reliable in the matter of dating first occurrences, nor could total accuracy in this matter reasonably be expected. See W.S.Mackie, 'Shakespeare's English: and how far it can be investigated with the help of the "New English Dictionary"', MLR, 31 (1936), 1-10. In addition, most of the words considered here occur at the end of the alphabet, and hence still rely on the original O.E.D., since the supplement has only reached 'N' at the time of writing.

and Herbert Wright notes the frequency of words like 'retirement', 'recess', 'secess', and 'secession' in the seventeenth century,¹ all of which show the absolute expressed by 'solitariness' becoming refined into the ironically more socially acceptable ideal of polite and moderate privacy. Shakespeare himself is cited by the O.E.D. as the first to use the word 'lonely'.

The word 'self' first came to be used as an autonomous noun in the sixteenth century. The beginnings of its autonomy can be seen in the repetition of the reflexive in the writings of Petrarch and Montaigne, although 'self' did not become an autonomous noun in their languages. Shakespeare's preoccupation with the circularities and indefinabilities of the self is illustrated by his use of the mirror image and, more abstractly, in the Sonnets, where the word 'self' is repeated more frequently than in any one of Shakespeare's other works.² Reflexives, which were the only context in which 'self' occurred before the sixteenth century, are doubled and repeated in the Sonnets, in such a way as to explore new implications about the nature of the self, and to make its emergence as an autonomous grammatical element inevitable, following the deeper sense of its actual autonomy. The boundaries between the reflexive and autonomous usages are broken down in such lines as:

To give away your self keeps your self still
(16)

and

For having traffic with thyself alone,
Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.
(4)

Variations between different editions of the Sonnets in printing 'your self'

¹ 'The Theme of Solitude and Retirement in Seventeenth Century Literature', p.24

² See Chapter V below for a full discussion of the Sonnets and their conception of the self.

or 'yourself' in any given case confirm how fluid the boundary is felt to be.

Shakespeare coins many compound adjectives using 'self' ('self-substantial' (1), 'self-kill'd' (6), 'self-will'd' (6)); and this form, with its exposure of self-division, becomes almost as characteristic of the period as the repetition of 'self' standing alone. With respect to the linking of ideas on solitude and the self at this time, it is notable that two frequently-occurring compounds coined during the sixteenth century were 'self-love'¹ (which Shakespeare also uses) and 'self-sufficiency' (F.R.U. 1623).

The word 'sincere' changed in meaning at this time in a way which further demonstrates the increased interest in the inwardness of the self. It was borrowed at the beginning of the sixteenth century (F.R.U. 1536) with the meaning 'genuine' or 'pure', and had changed by Shakespeare's time through continued metaphorical usage to its present association with the concept of a true self, thus indicating the current preoccupations with both the self and with dissimulation. As Lionel Trilling points out: 'Shakespeare uses the word only in this latter sense, with no apparent awareness of its ever having been used metaphorically.'²

'Reflection' is another word which also came to be associated primarily with the inward self. This progress of a word from a meaning of external description to one of internal description is characteristic of late sixteenth-century semantic change; and 'reflection' is a particularly interesting case, as here there seem to be valid grounds for speculation about Shakespeare's own semantic innovativeness. Like 'sincere', the word comes

¹First recorded by the O.E.D. as occurring in 1563. The abbreviation F.R.U. will be adopted subsequently to indicate the first recorded use.

²Trilling, p.13.

to be used in a particular metaphorical context so frequently that it ceases to be felt as a metaphor and becomes merely denotative in that context; but, unlike 'sincere', it was just beginning rather than finishing that transition in Shakespeare's lifetime. The passage of the word 'reflection' from its literal external context of the mirror to its more abstract meaning of 'meditation' is related to the repeated use of the mirror as an image in sixteenth-century literature, and in particular to Shakespeare's uniquely complex and sensitive manipulation of this image. It was probably largely due to Shakespeare's usage that the image of the mirror came to be almost automatically associated with the inward self in all its aspects, not merely with self-love, vanity, or its other medieval associations.

When Chaucer uses the image to describe his Troilus meditating, 'Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde',¹ it is clearly felt to be a metaphor. During the sixteenth century it became hackneyed, however, and the O.E.D. gives 1605 as the first use of 'reflect' meaning 'meditate'. Shakespeare seems to pre-date this, however, in using 'reflect' in this sense. In Act I, scene ii of Julius Caesar there is a passage which must be considered as a crux in the development of the sense of 'reflection'. The whole passage from line 51 to line 70, though too long to quote in full, is relevant, but the O.E.D. singles out the lines

the eye sees not itself
But by reflection, by some other things
(52-53)

as an instance of 'reflection' used in the sense of reproducing an image. In the context of Cassius' urging of Brutus to self-analysis, however,

¹Troilus and Criseyde, I.365.

(the mirror being an ancient instrument of self-examination¹), and his use of an entire vocabulary of externals, 'see', 'face', 'eyes' and so on as a continuing metaphor for 'understand', 'self', 'mind', the inward processes, the word 'reflection' might equally well be considered as a pun influential in the semantic development of the word subsequently. The line between image, automatic association and denotation is thinly drawn, but it seems clear that the abstract sense of 'reflection' is already developing in such a passage as this, or in a similar passage in Act III, scene iii of Troilus and Cressida, where the word 'speculation' in line 109 is used in the same double sense of literal mirroring (from 'speculum') and contemplation.

The words on the other side of the solitude debate, 'society', 'sociable', 'unsociable', 'state', are obviously also important in the development of a changing set of implications for both solitude and hence, necessarily, society. Shakespeare's individual concern with these words is again in evidence. He even goes so far as to let Touchstone define 'society' as that 'which in the boorish is company' (AYL, V.i.45). The word 'society' was changing at this time, however, developing away from this sense of immediate fellowship, friendly intercourse, to the meaning it now has of a great impersonal abstract, a body composed of men, yet apart from them, a political, not a personal, unit, anonymous and imposing. The O.E.D. records its first occurrence in this latter sense of 'the aggregate of persons living together in a more or less ordered community' as 1639,

¹Petrarch, in his Secretum, quotes Seneca as saying: 'Ad hoc enim inuenta sunt specula, ut homo ipse se nosceret' (Opera omnia, p.363); and La Primaudaye repeats the information in his address 'To the Christian Reader' in Part II of The French Academie (London, 1618): 'Seneca the Philosopher reporteth (gentle Reader) that the looking glasse was first inuented to this end, that man might vse it as a meane to know himself the better by.'

but this only sets the seal on an attitude which was hardening from the late sixteenth century onwards.

The same movement from a personal to an abstract reference took place in the word 'state'. Its primary sense of the condition, temporary or permanent, of an individual, continued alongside a newly developing impersonal and collective sense of the political commonwealth, the commonwealth seen as the embodiment of a principle of government rather than as a group of individuals and their 'estates'. This latter sense does not appear with any frequency until the sixteenth century, when it reflects the changing attitudes towards the commonwealth also revealed in the word 'society'. As J.H.Hexter says, after a consideration of what Machiavelli means by 'lo stato', 'the emergence of the actual historical phenomenon of the modern state therefore roughly coincides with the emergence of the term universally applied to it.'¹

Shakespeare always uses 'society', and most commonly uses 'state', in their primary and personal senses rather than in their abstract senses. But although his language does not reflect the political changes around him in these two instances, his awareness of those changes is quite clearly shown in the second tetralogy of History plays, which embody just this transition from a society based on personal relationships to one where there is no fellowship, but contracts, manipulation and politics.²

Shakespeare's attitude towards sociability changes, however. Although

¹The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation (London, 1973), p.152.

²See Ch.VI below. See also Alvin Kernan, 'The Henriad: Shakespeare's Major History Plays', Yale Review, 59 (1969), 3-32.

he does not waver in regarding it as ideally right and natural, he chooses protagonists who find it increasingly difficult to be naturally sociable. Mercutio heralds Romeo's return to sociability on abandoning Rosaline for Juliet as a return to his natural self (see p.83 above), and later in the play, Paris offers the opinion that Juliet's grief, 'too much minded by herself alone,/ May be put from her by society' (Rom., IV.i.13-14). In the later plays, however, Shakespeare increasingly chooses protagonists who find the easy sociability of the comedies impossible. Macbeth has to make a deliberate effort to 'mingle with society' (Mac., III.iv.3); Timon abhors 'all feasts, societies' (Tim., IV.iii.21) after they have betrayed his trust in them; and Imogen utters the truism which comes to replace the truism of the natural desirability of society, the cancelling view that 'society is no comfort/ To one not sociable' (Cym., IV.ii.12-13).

'Sociable' is another word first recorded in the sixteenth century, in 1553, although 'sociability' is recorded as early as 1475. ('Sociably' and 'sociableness' are also first recorded in the late sixteenth century.) The first recorded use of 'sociable' in the sense of seeking and enjoying company and being affable in company, rather than merely being 'naturally inclined or disposed to be in company with others of the same species' (O.E.D.), is in Harvey's letter-book in 1573, when he writes: 'This is he that accuseth me of not being sociable, him self so sociable as you se.' This quotation is important, because it makes clear that the question of sociability was already becoming a moral issue, a characteristic by which men were judged.

Shakespeare is again individually important in the development of the word 'insociable', the modern 'unsociable' (F.R.U. 1600). He uses it twice, both times in Love's Labour's Lost, in which the question of sociability is a central issue. Not only does the plot deal with the self-enclosure of affectation, the absurdly artificial solitude vowed by four young men, who

quickly find that it is against nature and impossible to maintain, but the language itself reveals the solitude of affectation, for it is so recherché as to prevent communication or understanding, thus perverting the very function of words. The fringe characters are notable for their inability to communicate, yet they speak lines which embody perhaps the main argument of the play:

Holofernes. I beseech your society.

Nathaniel. And thank you too; for society, saith the text, is the happiness of life.

Hol. And certes, the text most infallibly concludes it.

(IV.ii.150-54)

The text referred to may be the familiar Genesis text quoted in the Introduction above (p.8), an inevitable authority in sixteenth-century sermons and treatises on the value of society.

The word 'insociable' occurs first when Holofernes condemns Armado for his affected language: 'He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument. I abhor such fanatical phantasimes, such insociable and point-devise companions' (V.i.14-16); and again in the next scene, when the Princess refers to the 'austere insociable life' (V.ii.787) she is now imposing as a reality, not a game, on the King. Richard David, the Arden editor, follows the O.E.D. in affirming that the word is used with the modern meaning of 'unsociable' only in the second context, and first acquired this meaning here, thus again suggesting Shakespeare's individual linguistic innovativeness. In the first context, David takes it to mean 'impossible to associate with, intolerable', a meaning which carries in any case the same implications of a destructive stance towards society.

Shakespeare's changing use of language and changing attitude towards words follow the general transition around him from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. The progress is away from an enthusiasm for words

and for their infinite semantic potential to a distrust of words because of this same chameleon refusal to be tied down to a single definition. Shakespeare's early plays are full of linguistic affectation and experiment, new words, wordplay that reaches outwards from one meaning to many; his middle plays from the problem plays onwards continue this repetition of words, but not so much to exploit their variety of meanings as to try to define them and restore them to an essential and integral meaning; and his last plays replace fickle words at climactic moments with silence, gesture, tableau, and music. The expansiveness of words which so fascinates Shakespeare in his early work comes to seem a barrier to communication, a violation of the bond between word and truth, since words can expand to the point where they have so many meanings as to be almost meaningless, and useless as vehicles of communication, because the speaker can have no certainty that the listener will attach the same one of these meanings to a given word at a given time as he does. As Viola says, 'they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton' (TN, III.i.13-14). Troilus, faced with the discrepancy between the Cressida he has seen and the Cressida who writes to him is filled with disgust for the potential falsity of words:

Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart;
Th'effect doth operate another way.

(Tro., V.iii.108-9)

Hamlet himself exploits his recognition of the division between words and meaning, showing quite clearly how it is possible to talk more and communicate less the more words he uses. Words become as empty as he indicates in his sophisticated reply to Polonius:

Pol. What do you read, my lord?

Ham. Words, words, words.

(Ham., II.ii.190-91)

By the time of the last plays, the language, although paradoxically so

beautiful, is also curiously separate from the characters who pronounce it, issuing from them as in a dream, and leaving them self-enclosed and uncommunicated, separated from each other by their individual self-consciousness.¹ Communication appears as only a brief piercing of these enclosing webs at the end of the plays, and then it is achieved not through words, but through the metaphors of motion after stillness and music after silence.

¹See Anne Barton, 'Shakespeare and the Limits of Language', ShS, 24 (1971), 19-30.

Prologues apart, Richard III is the only one of Shakespeare's plays which opens with a soliloquy. It is also one of the few which open with the words of the central character. The stage direction reads 'Enter Richard, Duke of Gloucester, solus', and this 'solus' comes to seem emblematic as the play progresses. The soliloquy continues the disillusioned self-presentation which Richard began in his first soliloquy in 3 Henry VI. There he outlined his ambition, his ruthlessness, his total egoism, his skill in dissembling, and his absolute determination to have his will. His famous comparison of himself to

(III.ii.174-78)

Just as this image and the opening of Richard III are emblems of Richard's solitude, so he carries his own emblem with him: his physical deformity. This sets him apart from other men, gives him a superficial cause for misanthropy, and also marks him as a moral outlaw. Holinshed, More, and Halle all describe Richard's monstrous appearance, and the first two his portentous birth also, only using these as images to the extent that they see them as prophecies of his evil deeds. Shakespeare manipulates these sources skilfully, extending the deformity, through the dramatic structure and through Richard's own self-awareness, into an image of his voluntary separation of himself from other men and of the unnaturalness of this destructive form of solitude. Richard embodies the aggressive will and self-

assertive 'pride of intellect' that Marlowe admires in his characters,¹ but, at this stage, Shakespeare unhesitatingly condemns it. Although Richard may elicit an awe akin to admiration by the very pureness of his egoism, there is no doubt of what the audience's final moral judgement on him must be. The whole structure of the play demands it.²

Richard's deformity marks him as unnatural, and unnaturalness is exactly the ground on which solitude was condemned in the sixteenth century, with Aristotle's authority. The bestial imagery consistently used of Richard by other characters is a clear indicator of which of Aristotle's inhuman alternatives he embodies. When the superhuman is fleetingly suggested, in Catesby's description of Richard at Bosworth: 'The King enacts more wonders than a man' (V.iv.2), it is quickly reversed by the facts themselves and by the imagery Richmond uses to describe them: 'The day is ours, the bloody dog is dead' (V.v.2). The characteristic imagery is of beasts—especially the boar—and the devil.

Richard deliberately places himself outside both divine and human laws, and therefore outside nature itself, by his refusal to acknowledge any bond other than to himself. Anne pronounces the conventional moral judgement on this: 'Villain, thou knowest nor law of God nor man' (I.ii.70), words which evoke many an Elizabethan sermon or treatise against solitude or self-love. The greatest villain society had to fear was the individualist

Whom neither dread of God, that deuils bindes,
Nor lawes of men, that common weales containe,
Nor bands of nature, that wilde beastes restraine,
Can keepe from outrage, and from doing wrong,³

¹Riggs, Shakespeare's Heroical Histories, p.146.

²See pp.151-52 below.

³Spenser, The Faerie Queene, V.xii.1.

particularly when such a man aspired to the throne of the kingdom. Yet this same valuing of the self higher than any external laws was simultaneously presented as a virtue by some, and Shakespeare himself presents it in quite a different light in the person of Hamlet.

In dramatic form, Richard's rejection of social bonds and his dedication to self is shown through the role of observer which he adopts. Although he appears to participate in the commonwealth alongside his fellow-men, he remains spiritually uncommitted, a stance which was anathema to the sixteenth century, with a few exceptions, although acceptable by the middle of the seventeenth century (see pp.93-95 above). Again, the imagery makes Shakespeare's standpoint clear. Order is defined only in terms of social groups and relationships, as Shakespeare's comedies confirm, and the outsider can have no definition, no inner order, except by analogy with the macrocosmic order. The breakdown of relationships among all men would constitute chaos (see e.g. Elyot, quoted on p.49 above); it is therefore chaos to which the anarchic and solitary individual corresponds. Ironically, the otherwise self-aware Richard describes his outer form in just these terms, as 'Like to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear-whelp' (3H6, III.ii.161), not recognising (at least not explicitly) that his inward self, which he attempts to keep so distinct from his public appearance, is clearly mirrored by the disproportion and disorder of his body. Once again, Shakespeare is drawing on a whole tradition in using the imagery of disorder to describe the solitude of self-interest. Robert Crowley, for example, describes contemporary London as

An hell with out order...
Where every man is for him selfe,
And no manne for all,¹

¹Quoted in Robert Weimann, 'The Soul of the Age: Towards a Historical

and Sir John Eliot describes at greater length the chaos that would arise out of men withdrawing into themselves and their own interests, ending with the assurance that 'the parts withdrawing from the whole, both the whole & parts must perish.'¹

Shakespeare is in effect expressing the medieval belief that Richard is meaningless, that the part severed from the whole can have no definition; Richard himself calls it self-definition. He rejects relationships and claims to be self-defining in his final soliloquy in 3 Henry VI:

Then, since the heavens have shap'd my body so,
Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.
I have no brother, I am like no brother;
And this word 'love', which greybeards call divine,
Be resident in men like one another,
And not in me! I am myself alone.

(V.vi.78-83)

The sterile circularity of such self-enclosure is imitated by the circle formed by this statement at the end of 3 Henry VI and the re-statement of the same at the end of Richard III:

Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.

(V.iii.183)

Even the grammar forms circles in this last utterance, enclosing the verb, Richard's being, within the names of the self, its limitation.

This statement echoes throughout Shakespeare's work, most frequently the affirmation of villains: 'I follow but myself' (Iago, Oth., I.i.59); 'Simply the thing I am/ Shall make me live' (Parolles, AWW, IV.iii.310-11); 'I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing' (Edmund, Lr., I.ii.125-27). It takes on a

Approach to Shakespeare', in Shakespeare in a Changing World, ed. Arnold Kettle (London, 1964), p.30.

¹The Monarchie of Man, ed. Alexander B.Grosart (Privately printed, 1879), II.210.

different cast in the Sonnets, however (see Ch.V below), and is expanded, with greater complexity, into 'I am not what I am', as uttered by both Viola, a heroine (TN, III.i.138) and Iago, a villain (Oth., I.i.66).

This self-definition has a grammatical emblem in the phrase 'myself myself', which comes to sound threateningly self-satisfied. Sometimes the two words are in immediate juxtaposition, and sometimes separated. The pattern is anticipated in the first soliloquy by the pairings of self and reflection and self and shadow, both of which are visual representations of the doubleness of 'myself myself'. The verbal repetition begins after Richard's first triumph of dissembling, the wooing of Anne, thus becoming associated both with Richard's self-love and with the discrepancy between his inner and outer selves. It is a different self that Anne and Richard see when Richard says that because Anne finds 'Myself to be a marv'llous proper man' (I.ii.254), he is 'crept in favour with myself' (258). His resolve to buy a mirror following this is an ironical recognition on his part of his own self-love and self-division.

The 'myself myself' repetition is most prominent again in the next wooing scene, the wooing of Elizabeth's daughter through Elizabeth;¹ but here Elizabeth turns the verbal patterns of 'self' back on Richard, and he is no longer in control of the two myselfs. Richard and Elizabeth confuse each other by dissembling and verbal dexterity, and the 'myself myself' pattern comes to represent this confusion, in direct contrast ~~to~~ to Richard's absolute control on the previous occasion. Richard's last use of it in this scene is in the significant phrase, 'Myself myself con-

¹I disagree with those critics who take Elizabeth to be fooled by Richard at this point, only changing her mind later. Indeed, the linguistic patterns seem to me to reinforce the view that Elizabeth is in control and is deluding Richard throughout the scene.

found!' (IV.iv.399), and Elizabeth's is a question, which hides her real triumph over Richard in dissembling so that he believes her: 'Shall I forget myself to be myself?' (420). The climax of confusion between self and self-image, between controlled and uncontrolled self, is reached in Richard's last soliloquy, after he has seen uncontrollable images of himself issuing in ghosts and dreams and in conscience. 'Myself' is repeated twelve times, but now it takes the form of questions, replacing the previous absolute and assured statements:

Is there a murderer here? No—yes, I am.
Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why—
Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself!
Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O, no! Alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself!...
I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
And if I die no soul will pity me:
And wherefore should they, since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself?
(V.iii.184-90; 200-03)

Richard's self-definition would be associated in the minds of a contemporary audience with evil, because his phrasing, 'I am myself alone'¹ and 'I am I', was calculated to remind them that the only legitimate self-definition was God's:

Then Moses sayd vnto God, Beholde, when I shall come vnto the children of Israel, and shall say vnto them, The God of your fathers hath sent mee vnto you: If they say vnto mee, What is his Name? what shall I say vnto them?
And God answered Moses, I AM THAT I AM. Also he said, Thus shalt thou say vnto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me vnto you.
(Exodus 3.13-14)

As Sir Thomas Browne wrote, even in an age when individualism was more

¹This passage directly echoes the Geneva Bible, which phrases God's decree thus: 'It is not good that the man should be himself alone' (see p.8 above). The Bishops' Bible, the Great Bible, and the Authorised Version all have simply 'alone', not 'himself alone'. Richard's echoing of this familiar text illustrates his blasphemous presumption in assuming God's voice to reverse the decree.

morally acceptable: 'God...only is, all others have an existence with dependency and are something but by a distinction.'¹

It is odd, that, in his introduction to the Penguin edition of this play, E.A.J.Honigmann does not quote this passage among the various distortions of scripture he assembles as evidence of a link between Richard III and Marlowe's cult of 'witty profanity'.² In any case, Honigmann compiles much evidence linking the play with contemporary cults; and this in turn provides grounds for calling the obsession with solitude at this early stage in Shakespeare's work evidence of a cult, since so many of the cults of this period were linked with one another. The established cults of melancholy, travel, and affected love, for example, are frequently linked with each other, and with the proposed cult of solitude, both in Shakespeare (particularly in As You Like It—see Ch.VII below) and in numerous other Elizabethan writings of any genre. Lodge's Character of 'Scandal & Detraction'³ for example, combines melancholy, solitude, Machiavellianism, atheism, travel, and rebellion under this single heading. The cult of Machiavelli can be shown to have had links with the cult of the malcontent (in Revenge tragedy, for instance), as well as with the cult of profanity and with solitude. Marlowe did much to associate the different cults with one another in the minds of his contemporaries, for his central figures are always isolated, always in conflict with their society, and often dissemblers, atheists, malcontents, aspirers towards self-sufficiency, or a combination of these.

¹Religio Medici, I.xxxv.46.

²Introduction to Richard III (Harmondsworth, 1968), p.22.

³Thomas Lodge, Wits Miserie (London, 1596), pp.17-18.

Richard's solitude is not only expressed in the cult-forms of self-definition, dissembling, and atheism, but in the very structure of the play. Richard is never fully incorporated into the plot, because he operates on two levels through his self-division, participating with his visible self, but manipulating, observing, and ridiculing the action with his true self. His characteristic modes of speech are soliloquy and aside; he seems to stand before the curtain drawing attention to points within the dramatic framework, including points about his apparent self. In traditional terms, he is an element from the old medieval morality plays, who does not fit into the new dramatic form, but he combines this with a persona which fits so well into the new dramatic form that it can participate in it with only half itself, leaving the other half free to explain the contradiction. In medieval terms, he is the Vice, the personification of evil; in Elizabethan terms he is the Machiavellian villain, the new man, a realist and a manipulator. Thus he is both villain within the play and interpreter outside it, even to the extent of instructing the audience in his formal relationship with the Vice:

Thus, like the formal vice, Iniquity,
I moralize two meanings in one word.

(III.i.82-83)

Richard's self-division, his ironic humour, his evil intentions, even his physical deformity, all have roots in the Vice of the morality play and, before that, in the Devil of the miracle play.¹

Richard's statements of self-definition seem to assert an unchanging oneness about the self; yet there is both a fragmented and a fragmenting aspect to such uncompromising solitude of mind. It is fragmented in that

¹See Robert Withington, 'The Development of the "Vice"', in Essays in Memory of Barrett Wendell by his Assistants (Cambridge, Mass., 1926), 153-67, and Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil.

it keeps its wholeness inward and separate from its projected social mask, and it fragments social order in turn through the threat to it incorporated in this conscious separation of the true from the social self. Whereas the later tragic heroes are unwillingly divided from their true selves and from the community in a similar way, and are tortured by this division, and long for wholeness,¹ Richard proves his unnaturalness by deliberately cultivating this disintegration both within himself and in the community. The way in which he threatens the integrity of the community is to inculcate in it exactly this fear of inner disorder in the individual, the fear that men are not one but two, that appearance does not necessarily correspond to reality. Richard tries to corrupt even the most innocent child by telling him that this division is a general truth, not an isolated deviation:

Sweet Prince, the untainted virtue of your years
Hath not yet div'd into the world's deceit;
Nor more can you distinguish of a man
Than of his outward show; which, God He knows,
Seldom or never jumpeth with the heart.

(III.i.7-11)

The issue which Richard III raises without examining is the association of the true self with solitude, and of the social persona with a false mask. In all his earliest work, Shakespeare makes this easy linking of solitude and the true self, both in dissemblers, and in characters in less sinister disguises:

Tranio. When I am alone, why, then I am Tranio;
But in all places else your master Lucentio.

(Shr., I.i.237-38)

He does not seem to notice, or perhaps deliberately avoids exploring² the

¹Macbeth becomes a tragic hero in the sense that Richard III never could, because he retains his natural humanity, one expression of which is his longing for wholeness (see Mac., III.iv.21-25).

²Cf. the Elizabethan response to The Courtier generally (pp.119-20 above).

anomaly between this automatic association of solitude with the true self and the condemnation of the solitary as unnatural and destructive of the accepted good of 'mutual participation'.¹

The simple point made in the early plays that the true self exists only in solitude for dissemblers and the consciously disguised is to lead Shakespeare into far greater complexities. Questions inevitably arise as to whether the self is inherently and involuntarily divided; whether, of the division, one is a 'true' and one a 'false' self; and, if so, whether the true self is expressed in solitude or in social participation.² Thus the whole nature of identity and fulfillment becomes inextricably bound up with this question of solitude and social engagement.

The self-awareness within Richard of his own division and the unnaturalness of his desire for division are shown by the twist with which the image of the mirror is applied. This is the first play in which Shakespeare develops the image beyond its automatic contemporary associations with self-love, flattery, and warning, although, of course, he draws on these too. The correspondence which Shakespeare makes here, and which is to become so familiar in his work as to be almost automatic in the work of later writers influenced by him, is that between the mirror and the self. The themes of self-division, self-consciousness, man as actor, and the unstable, brittle nature of the fragmented self, which are so much more fully explored in Richard II and later plays, have their origins in Richard III and the Sonnets.

The mirror is an image which Richard uses about himself, unlike the

¹Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, I.x.12.

²Cf. p.256 below, where the view that the only real existence of the self, and the only way in which it can apprehend itself, is in society.

animal or devil imagery, which others use about him. This makes the point that he is self-aware about the qualities he has which are connoted by the glass. Yet Richard's glass is not as true as it at first seems. Although he sees his deformity and villainy, he does not see them truly in a moral sense: he admires them for their very degradation, using the mirror, generally associated with Narcissistic love of one's own physical beauty, to describe his ugliness and his love of his own image for its foulness. He describes himself through this image in his first soliloquy:

But I—that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass—...
I—that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time...
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity.

(I.i.14-15;18-20;25-27)

The image returns after his most perverted exhibition of moral deformity, the wooing of Anne, when he gloats even more over the realisation that he has forced another besides himself to love his unnaturalness:

I'll be at charges for a looking-glass...
Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass,
That I may see my shadow as I pass.

(I.ii.255,262-63)

Another familiar context, both in Shakespeare's own early work and in other contemporary literature, was that of the parent's image continuing in the child. This traditional locus for the mirror is also twisted in Richard III, where Richard's mother draws on the mirror to indicate Richard's un-likeness to his father and brothers, to dissociate his hideousness from the ties of relationship. She mourns the death of her other two sons, the true mirrors of generation, and the survival of Richard, the false glass:

But now two mirrors of his princely semblance
Are crack'd in pieces by malignant death,
And I for comfort have but one false glass,
That grieves me when I see my shame in him.

(II.ii.51-54)

This imagery turns ironically against Richard at the end of the play, as it moves subtly from the controlled images of studied reflection to the involuntary shadows and reflections of conscience, which turn his self-division into something uncontrollable and destructive to himself. The mirror described Richard's rise to power through supreme self-control and self-assurance; now it enacts its fickle multiplicity by revealing another image, the eroding of Richard's self-control by guilt. The shadows which he deliberately and mockingly cultivated in Act I are replaced by the shadows of the unconscious, and his end is one of shadows turned against him, as he himself says:

By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night
Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers.
(V.iii.216-18)

His death is described as an all-enveloping shadow, an unnatural refusal of the sun to rise (one of Shakespeare's significant departures from Holinshed). The circle which opened with Richard's challenge to the sun to shine so that he could see his shadow after his triumphant manipulation of Anne closes with the defeat of his self-control by conscience and his physical death on a day when the sun mocks his challenge and mimics his unnaturalness by refusing to shine.

This is the final example of how the structure works against Richard and superimposes its judgements on his at every point. The circle, which is so recurrent a structural device in this play, has a double function: it shows the sterile self-consumption of Richard's monstrous egoism, but at the same time shows that he is unwillingly enclosed by a larger circle, the circle of society which he attempts to reject, its laws, its values, and its judgement on him.¹ The ending shows these values imposing them-

¹Emrys Jones describes the gradual impingement of this circle from Act I onwards in The Origins of Shakespeare, pp.203-04.

selves, despite Richard's claim to autonomy, through the strong element of psychomachia in the last battle, through Richmond's victory and Richard's death, through the response of nature itself, and through our knowledge that society will re-integrate now that Richard is dead. Mere will, Shakespeare seems to say, is not enough to make the self autonomous; its bonds with society are deeper than that, and assert themselves in one direction if not in the other. That is to say, though Richard, the individual, may pull away from society and from everything in nature that binds men together, nature and the social bond also pull Richard and are finally stronger than he.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard as evil is also an affirmation of his subjection to the absolute values of his society; the need to judge Richard morally, by absolute standards rather than inward, self-created ones, is in itself a clinging to the medieval world-view, which compulsively judged all humanity in accordance with moral absolutes forming a divine pattern. The emblematic quality of the play and the strong elements of medieval dramatic tradition lingering in it seem to be a formal echo of this spirit.

Later in his work, Shakespeare's presentation of solitude and self-division becomes more inward, and therefore more relative and subjective. The emphasis changes so that we are more conscious of how it feels to be solitary than of whether it is right or wrong to be so. Yet even as his sympathy widens, Shakespeare never allows the individual to transcend the perspective of society and nature. Natural law is not discredited by individual uniqueness. Even Falstaff's glorious, anarchic chaos, his claim to be 'out of all order, out of all compass' (1H4, III.iii.20), the climax of Shakespeare's sympathetic presentation of a tendency condemned in Richard with only a grudging admiration, is finally crushed and killed by

the social order in the person of Henry V. Though the social order may be questioned and discovered to be less than perfect, it is none the less greater than the individual who rebels against it. Unlike Chapman and Webster, who glorify 'individuality at the expense of the general order of life',¹ Shakespeare maintains a balance between sympathy for the individual and respect for the world that contains him.

¹Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1950), p.38.

CHAPTER V

Division: The Sonnets

In the Sonnets, solitude is treated with a less moral approach. Indeed, the poet becomes increasingly isolated himself as the sequence progresses. In the early sonnets, he speaks with the voice of society, urging the young man to leave his selfish unattachment and become involved in the world and the continuing social order by begetting a son. Gradually, however, the poet becomes alienated from society by love for the young man and by his bitter self-appraisal. From acting as society's spokesman, he progresses to a silent dissension from the general voice, expressed in the familiar phrase of defiant isolation, 'myself alone':

Yet, in good faith, some say that thee behold
Thy face hath not the power to make love groan.
To say they err I dare not be so bold,
Although I swear it to myself alone.

(131)

He can no longer speak for the world against his lover, for his lover is the whole world:

For nothing this wide universe I call
Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all.

(109)

He ceases to see society as a harmonious order of unity and continuity, and begins to represent it as an enemy threatening to destroy his love, in the form of individuals like the rival poet and the dark lady, and in the form of universals like time and mutability.

Shakespeare's approach to self-division also becomes less judgemental, as the boy's Narcissistic self-division comes to fragment the poet himself in his response to him:

When thou shalt be dispos'd to set me light,
And place my merit in the eye of scorn,
Upon thy side against myself I'll fight,
And prove thee virtuous, though thou art forsworn.

(88)

For thee, against myself I'll vow debate,
For I must ne'er love him whom thou dost hate.

(89)

Shakespeare the writer (as distinct from the first person of the sonnets) exhibits the characteristic duality of his times in his divided response towards the very problem of division itself, in being compelled towards moral judgement on the one hand and towards self-aware and amoral description on the other.

Shakespeare draws on commonplace imagery of self-division and reinforces it with new complexity. He uses the familiar image of civil war, for example, in sonnets 35 and 46, but the mirror image, already used so distinctively in Richard III, is exploited even more expertly here. (see below, pp.165-66). Many of the motifs which seem so characteristically Shakespearean in the tragedies are first developed in the Sonnets. He begins here, for example, the complex interweaving of the notions of one self as two people and two people as one self, which take so many different forms in his later work (for example, in the tragic hero's description of himself in the third person, or explicit reference to himself as two men, or in the complementary relationships between Touchstone and Jaques, Brutus and Cassius, Othello and Iago, Ariel and Caliban¹).

The primary source of self-division in the Sonnets is the boy, in love with his own image. He is two people in that all his actions are enacted within the circle of self, so that he divides into both the active and the passive persons in the deed. He is also divided on a more superficial level by the disparity between his beautiful appearance and his treacherous soul, and between the feminine quality of his beauty and his

¹See Thomas F. Connolly, 'Shakespeare and the Double Man', SQ, 1 (1950), 30-35.

actual maleness. Shakespeare plays on the ideas of the boy's multiple selves at both a frivolous and a serious level, sometimes forcing a conceit, sometimes striking a bitter parallel. On the absurd level, he imagines in sonnet 53 that his love has 'millions of strange shadows' where ordinary men have one, because he is the Platonic idea of beauty, to whom all other beauties are mere shadows. On the level of bitter reality, he is many selves because he is fickle and elusive. The consistent punning on 'single' in the first sonnets contrasts his marital status, which is single, with the ironically multiple stream of images linked to one who is as self-enclosed and as much in love with his glass as he is. These sonnets consistently oppose the immortality gained in reproducing a living image of the self through generation with the sterility and self-consumption of a preoccupation with the insubstantial multiple selves of self-love.

When the 'dark lady' appears in this network of love, self-love, and the loss of one self and becoming of another through love, the situation becomes both more simple and more complex. The simplicity, which is the simplicity of linguistic artifice, not an actual simplicity, is that the boy and the woman can be considered, not as selves, but as personifications, as in a medieval morality play, representing the good and the evil potential of a single self. In sonnet 144, Shakespeare simplifies the conflict himself by externalising it as a psychomachia between the good and evil impulses in him, played respectively by the boy, now seen as one with his fair exterior, and the woman, in the emblematic darkness of her appearance:

Two loves I have, of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still;
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.

Shakespeare here describes in emblematic terms another duality characteristic of his times, the inherent duality in the concept of man, with his

potential to be either angel or beast, a potential described at length by Pico della Mirandola in his Oration on the Dignity of Man and meditated on by Hamlet.

The complexity that the woman brings is in further dividing Shakespeare's already divided self. He moves from the division which is his response to the boy's fickleness to a division which involves him in fickleness himself, because he has two loves, and which is further complicated by the love of those two for each other. Thus each simple duality is made to dissolve and overlap with other singlenesses and dualities to the point where any assertion seems to fragment into multiple implications.

The self-division of the lover is not an innovation of Shakespeare's, but familiar to English sonneteers through their knowledge of Petrarch's sonnets to Laura. Whether or not Shakespeare knew Petrarch, the conventions set by him would be familiar to Shakespeare through the work of his English imitators. Both Petrarch and Shakespeare use the notions of self-division and alienation from self through love, the imagery of Narcissus and the mirror, the vocabulary of self and reflexiveness; but Shakespeare alters the emphasis and juxtaposes his language and imagery in such a way that his sonnets are as much about the nature of the self as about the nature of love. Thus the solitude which follows from such self-division comes to be seen as in the nature of self-consciousness, not merely as part of the cult of Petrarchan love.

One of the inherent divisions of the self, in love or otherwise, which Shakespeare explores throughout his work (and particularly through the figure of the king) is the division between private and public. The dissociation of private from public self had been the characteristic of the villain, the calculating dissembler, in medieval drama. It is also a characteristic of Shakespeare's villains generally, and is portrayed

with this medieval judgement in Richard III; but the Sonnets reveal self-division which is not calculated, but involuntary. The very artificiality with which the sonnet-form parades a private world serves to remind the reader of the inevitability of some degree of contradiction, division, and falsification. The sonnets simultaneously reveal and distort private truth, confessing the experience, yet tailoring it to the rigorous demands of the sonnet-form, forcing the progress of argument, the logic of conceit, the conclusion of the final couplet, on chaotic, inconclusive feelings. Sonnet 42, for example, is one of many which force an unacceptable experience into acceptability through the logic of conceit. His mistress and the boy have betrayed him with each other,

But here's the joy: my friend and I are one;
Sweet flattery! then she loves but me alone.

It is perhaps this balancing of impersonal artifice and intimate self-revelation that has driven critics into the contradiction of hunting for real-life counterparts to the characters of the sonnets, while simultaneously claiming that Elizabethan poetry was not hindered by the necessity for sincerity. Even to call the first person of the sonnets Shakespeare, though it is a convenient abbreviation, is presumption. It matters less for the purpose of this chapter, however, than in source-hunting, since the truth of Shakespeare's portrayal of the nature of selfhood is not called into question by the possible falsity of the particular selves and their actions and relationships, in which he embodies these perceptions.

The sonnets describe endless variations of self-division and the response to fragmentation, but what unites them, perhaps inevitably, is the longing for unity and continuity; and this longing is as characteristic of the Elizabethan age generally as division. The conceit of the lover as a second self is one expression of this, since it is the logical reverse of the self-division of the single self, representing the uniting of two

in one, as against the splitting of one into two. Shakespeare uses this imagined unity as a device for concluding and resolving the torments of the facts in several sonnets. He consoles himself for the inconstancy of his mistress in sonnet 42 (quoted p.158 above) and justifies what he calls in the first line of sonnet 62 the 'sin of self-love' through this same conceit, addressing the boy:

'Tis thee, my self, that for myself I praise,
Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

The notion of the lover as a second self is a variation on the classical motif of the friend as a second self, but Shakespeare employs it with a new irony, to comment on the nature of love. The second self image ceases to be an image of the ideal unity and selflessness of friendship, and becomes in Shakespeare's sonnets an image of the non-ideal selfishness of love, implying that what one person really loves in another is the image of himself. This means that love is then not a means of breaking out of the enclosed and lonely circle of the self, but of reinforcing it. The image of the mirror, which is so closely associated with self-love, is used ironically of love to make the same point, in the familiar Elizabethan image of 'looking babies'. This makes clear that love is as self-obsessed as any other feeling, and that even its apparent movement outward from the self is in fact turned inwards back into the self.¹ The irony is at its strongest in Venus and Adonis, probably written concurrently with some of the sonnets. Adonis is a boy like the boy in the Sonnets, not ready to commit himself to anyone else, loving only his own image, and experiencing everything as an aspect of self. When he dies, however, his eyes reflect

¹ See pp.97-99 above for a description of the pervasiveness of this sense of outward movements being forced inwards among the Elizabethans. The image of the mirror to express self-consciousness in love was not new, however, having been very popular in the twelfth century (see Frederick Goldin, The Mirror of Narcissus in the Courtly Love Lyric (Ithaca, N.Y., 1967)).

not the fading of his own image, but Venus' loss of her image in them.

She can describe the beautiful eyes of the dead Adonis only with reference to herself, as

Two glasses where herself herself beheld
A thousand times, and now no more reflect,
Their virtue lost wherein they late excell'd,
And every beauty robb'd of his effect,

(1129-32)

thus neatly demonstrating that she, who appears to love outside herself, is in fact as egotistical as Adonis was.

The linguistic pattern of 'herself herself' is carried over even more strongly than the visual image into the 'thysself thysself' and 'yourself yourself' variations of the Sonnets. They are also, of course, a development of Richard III's 'myself myself', and, as in that play, the two words are sometimes in immediate juxtaposition and sometimes separated in the Sonnets. Giorgio Melchiori, in his recent examination of the Sonnets through statistics, notes how often the second person occurs in Shakespeare's sonnets, by contrast with other sonnet-sequences of the time. He sees this as an indication that Shakespeare's love takes the form of a real dialogue between equals, rather than a distant reverence, and claims that 'the characteristic feature of Shakespeare's Sonnets as compared with those of his contemporaries is the balanced predominance of I and thou rather than the distance between I and she.'¹ This is true in one sense and distorting in another; for the use of the second person often seems to convey Shakespeare's very sense of distance from his cold and disengaged love. The circular repetition of the verbal pattern indicates, as we have already seen in Richard III, self-enclosure, and self-enclosure is exactly what maintains an enforced distance

¹Shakespeare's Dramatic Meditations (Oxford, 1976), p.16.

between the lover and the beloved. The pattern is begun even in the first sonnet:

Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel

and is repeated almost obsessively in the earliest group of sonnets, which encourage the young man to move beyond himself in order to propagate himself:

For having traffic with thyself alone,
Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.
(4)

O, that you were yourself! But, love, you are
No longer yours than you your self here live.
Against this coming end you should prepare,
And your sweet semblance to some other give.
So should that beauty which you hold in lease
Find no determination; then you were
Your self again, after your self's decease.
(13)

The Adonis figure is present in several of the early plays, as well as in the poems, and the linguistic pattern then becomes even further extended to become 'himself himself', again an indicator of self-absorption and non-commitment.¹ This pattern in the Sonnets is another expression of the longing for unity, the longing to break down the boy's closed remoteness, and to become one with his inward being; yet it expresses an awe of the self's separateness simultaneously with the longing to overcome that separateness. In the characteristic sixteenth-century manner, one truth is balanced by the equal truth of its opposite, and Shakespeare's contradictory longings for fusion and for separateness are reminiscent of the contradictory longings for society and solitude expressed side by side in the prose treatises. The apartness of the boy is both a barrier to fully engaged love, and yet the very reason for which he is loved. With-

¹Michael Goldman, in his book Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama (Princeton, 1972) discusses what he calls 'the theme of the "unsounded self"' (p.19) at length with reference to the early plays. His Appendix A, '"Self" in Shakespeare and the OED' (pp.153-58) is also of special interest.

out it, love, which is a movement between two separate beings, would be impossible. In sonnet 36, Shakespeare tries to separate the notion of love from the notion of selfhood, in order to allow the lovers to be one in love but two in their natures:

Let me confess that we two must be twain,
Although our undivided loves are one.

At the same time he acknowledges in sonnet 39 that part of the joy of love is the separateness of the two selves, which enables one to praise the other, to love his uniqueness, and which makes possible the act of giving, or indeed any reciprocal act:

O, how thy worth with manners may I sing,
When thou art all the better part of me?...
Even for this let us divided live,
And our dear love lose name of single one,
That by this separation I may give
That due to thee which thou deserv'st alone.

The richest praise the lover can offer, as Shakespeare realises, is 'that you alone are you' (84), and Shakespeare the lover can be equally defiant about his own unique self-definition: 'No; I am that I am' (121). The words cast the mind back to Richard III's blasphemous perversion of Jehovah's 'I am', yet it has wider echoes than Richard's self-assertion. Because it is not spoken by a villain, it also evokes St. Paul's legitimate, because qualified, self-definition, 'by the grace of God I am that I am' (1 Cor. 15.10), and Pico's notion of man's capacity to fashion himself because God has first allowed him this freedom. It may also be intended as a rejection of the sonnet convention of the lover's transformation and loss of self in love used by contemporary writers.

Whereas Richard III's self-definition was condemned as unnatural and destructive, the sonnets point the way to the positive praise of truth to self in Hamlet.¹ The criterion of nature which condemned Richard III

¹Melchiori notes the exceptionally high recurrence of the word 'self'

was the essentially medieval, universal nature, manifested in the bonds which keep men together, but nature is extended in the Sonnets to include self-awareness, which necessarily entails the awareness of the limits of self, of what separates and distinguishes the self from others. Sir Walter Raleigh's praise of nature in 1614 as an element which defines and separates, as well as unites individuality to kind, describes the same expansion of awareness as Shakespeare's Sonnets:

But such is the multiplying and extensiuue vertue of dead Earth,
and of that breath-giuing life which GOD hath cast vpon Slime
and Dust: as that...euey one hath receiued a seuerall picture
of face, and euerie one a diuerse picture of minde; euey one
a forme apart, euey one a fancy and cogitation differing: there
being nothing wherein Nature so much triumpheth, as in dissimil-
itude.¹

He also parallels the progress of the sonnets in that, in moving away from generality towards individuality, he moves to a stronger emphasis on internal than on external reality: 'For', he continues,

it is not the visible fashion and shape of plants, and of reason-
able Creatures, that makes the difference, of working in² the one,
and of condition in the other; but the forme internall.

Shakespeare distinguishes, however, between the cultivated and man-
nered solitude of affectation and egocentricity, which he condemns in his
lover throughout, and the less voluntary, even inevitable, solitude of
self-awareness, uniqueness, and truth to self, which he affirms increas-
ingly strongly to be part of his own nature. The condemnation of affect-

in Shakespeare's sonnets, as compared with the sonnets of Sidney, Daniel, Drayton, and Spenser. He notes also the frequency of the word 'truth', asserting that it takes on in the Sonnets 'a new ethical quality, over and beyond its Renaissance usage which is essentially aesthetic' (p.18).

¹The History of the World, Preface, sig. A^v.

²Ibid.

ation as anti-social has been shown to be a contemporary commonplace (pp. 82-83 above). Shakespeare is echoing this condemnation in his presentation in the Sonnets of the boy's affectedness as revealing a deep and calculated disengagement from society. His refusal to commit himself wholly to any love is only one manifestation of his rejection of all social commitment and relationship. Towards this solitude of voluntary disengagement, as in Richard III, Shakespeare takes a strongly critical attitude, although less calculated solitude is treated with amoral subjectivity both here and in Hamlet.

Detachment from all committed relationship is not merely a neutral or even sterile state, but a positively self-consuming and self-destructive one, as the imagery of the Sonnets conveys. The first really bitter invective against the boy's self-contained world is also the first point at which the poet makes clear the extent of his own involvement, bringing in the first person pronoun for the first time:

Grant, if thou wilt, thou art belov'd of many,
But that thou none lov'st is most evident;
For thou art so possess'd with murd'rous hate
That 'gainst thyself thou stick'st not to conspire,
Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate
Which to repair should be thy chief desire.
O, change thy thought, that I may change my mind!
(10)

But the most vicious indictment of those who do not give themselves fully to others is sonnet 94, which both admires and is repelled by those who, like the boy,

have power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow

and ends again with the imagery of rotting self-consumption:

Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

In the same sonnet he makes the point with which he continually contrasts

his own involvement, that such men

are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence,

whereas his own being is totally committed to his love, and can in no way
be voluntarily disengaged from the lover:

As easy might I from my self depart
As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie
(109)

Me from my self thy cruel eye hath taken,
And my next self thou harder hast engrossed;
Of him, my self, and thee, I am forsaken...
I, being pent in thee,
Perforce am thine, and all that is in me.
(133)

Shakespeare portrays the self-consuming power of this total self-commitment, both through imagery, particularly the image of Narcissus, and through self-consuming patterns in language. There is no direct reference to Narcissus by name in the Sonnets, although there are in both the longer poems, Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece; but his presence is there by implication in the dominant imagery of mirrors and flowers. Petrarch used the myth of Narcissus to convey the notion of beauty which is limited to the mere outward envelope, but for Shakespeare it has the associations also with sterility, solitariness, and mortality, so pronounced in Bacon's interpretation (see pp.98-99 above). Bacon ends his account with the association of the flower Narcissus with impermanence and death:

The fact too that this flower is sacred to the infernal deities contains an allusion to the same thing [the disappointing of early promise in maturity]. For men of this disposition turn out utterly useless and good for nothing whatever; and anything that yields no fruit, but like the way of a ship in the sea passes and leaves no trace, was by the ancients held sacred to the shades and infernal gods.¹

¹The Wisdom of the Ancients, p.705.

The air of mortality about such self-enclosure is present from Shakespeare's opening sonnet:

But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel...
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

The image of the glass is prominent in three more of the first group of six sonnets, 3, 5, and 6, and Shakespeare puns on its meanings of 'mirror' and 'vial', both emphasising the enclosure of the young man. Mirrors and flowers, especially fading flowers, pervade the Sonnets, not only as images, but as actual elements in the 'events' of the Sonnets. Two familiar tableaux are that of Shakespeare looking in the glass and seeing either his own image or the boy's, and that of the boy looking in the glass and being either chastised for seeing his own image or urged to see the image of his future child.

The terminology of shadows, so prominent in both Richard III and the Sonnets, as well as in so many other Shakespearean contexts, is probably also meant to evoke the weakness of the Narcissus figure, since both Ovid's original account of Narcissus and Golding's translation of it in 1567 use the word 'shadow' (or 'umbra') either interchangeably with 'reflection' ('imago'), or to mean a reflection of a reflection. 'Shadow' is always used to suggest a distance from reality, as opposed to 'the thing', in Golding; and this in turn suggests that Shakespeare's use of 'shadow' might profitably be examined in relation not only to 'substance', his most familiar term for its opposite, but also to the climactic phrase in King Lear, 'the thing itself' (III.iv.105), where Shakespeare is indeed distinguishing a deeper level of reality.¹

¹The influence of Platonic terminology, in which 'shadows' describe the manifestations of this world as a pale imitation of essential reality.

Just as shadows overcome Richard III once his selfhood has been weakened by the impingement of external morality on him in the shape of conscience, so the imagery of shadows, both in Golding's description of Narcissus, and in Shakespeare's depiction of the young man, suggests 'a weakened being whose activity is crippled',¹ a character stunted inwardly, as Richard III is also physically. As in Richard III, Shakespeare does not accept the value the individual rates himself at, but measures him by the touchstone of the world beyond him. Shakespeare judges the boy's self-love in the wider context of mortality and the transition from one generation to the next. His sterility and weakness are shown by Shakespeare's placing of him within a framework of universals, such as death, immortality, and above all, time.²

The very structures of language echo this condemnation of the solitude of self-imprisonment as destructive. Compound adjectives with 'self' (see p.132 above), combined with the precise use of reflexives and repetition, show how a creative action becomes reversed, or 'uncreated', when it is done to the self rather than to another. Actions performed within the circle of the self are made passive, frustrating the possibility of fulfillment offered by reciprocal action. The poet, because he is committed outside himself, knows the happiness of creative reciprocity:

Then happy I, that love and am beloved
Where I may not remove nor be removed,

(25)

and indeed the poems themselves stand as witnesses to the poet's creativity.

¹Louise Vinge, The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century, trans. Robert Dewsnap et al. (Lund, 1967), p.183. This book contains a full account of traditional interpretations of the myth.

²An interesting note in the Cambridge edition of The Winter's Tale sees 'the attribute of Jehovah' referred to in Time's speech in the Prologue to Act IV, when Time says: 'The same I am, ere ancient'st order was...'. If this is intentional, it contrasts neatly with the 'I am' of the individualist, which is punctured by being set in the perspective of Time's universal 'I am'.

The boy's actions, conversely, turn back on him and consume him:

... thou consum'st thyself in single life...
beauty's waste hath in the world an end,
And, kept unus'd, the user so destroy's it.
(9)

... to you it doth belong
Your self to pardon of self-doing crime.
(58)

The only action which would reverse itself to his advantage is the one which moves outside the self:

To give away your self keeps your self still.
(16)

The inwardness of the boy, as expressed through the circularity of language and imagery, is a mirror of the times, in their generally increasing emphasis on the inner world of the individual at the expense of the external world. Melchiori considers that Shakespeare is at one with this movement towards the placing of truth within the individual, and says that the affirmation 'I am that I am' (see p.162 above), in echoing God's self-description, reveals that 'Shakespeare's God is the man within'.¹ But Shakespeare's placing of this statement and all the other transient expressions of the self firmly within the 'I am' of Time and mortality in the Sonnets forbids the acceptance of this statement as Shakespeare's unqualified view. He has certainly moved beyond Richard III in his sympathy for the individualist values of the duty to self and the relativity of the external world to inward truth, but that he never accepts them as substitutes for moral absolutes beyond and enclosing the individual is made clear by his constant refusal to abandon a social context framing this inwardness. The context and its relative importance beside the self are of course

¹Melchiori, p.101.

easier to define in a play, with a considered structure, than in a series of sonnets, of which the order, if there was one, cannot now be determined.¹ Yet the language and imagery, as well as the form of individual sonnets, do much of the work performed by the structure in a play; and of the two ways of viewing inwardness, as liberating or restricting (see pp.96-99 above), the Sonnets clearly indicate the second. The inevitability of experiencing the self simultaneously with the experience itself seemed to Shakespeare stifling as well as enlightening, and this sense of claustrophobia becomes stronger in Richard II and Hamlet, even though the awe of the inward mind grows with it.

The worship of inwardness was both a source of and a solution to the conflicts of the age, a source in that it made the individual feel that he had outgrown the hierarchical world-view which had enabled him to feel a part in a greater whole, and a solution in that it could offer him an artificial way of resolving the conflict, absorbing it into himself and solving it with thoughts and words when it could no longer be resolved satisfactorily by social changes. This is exactly what the Sonnets do. First, the conflict is narrowed into the basic dualism of the tension between lovers (although the woman complicates this dualism further), and the poet then proceeds to resolve the tensions which are unresolvable in life by means of formal structure, conceit, and word order. The sonnet form itself, by its rigid artifice, conveys a deluding impression of logical development, which Shakespeare reinforces by seeming to form an argument on the basis of analogy and wordplay (see p.158 above). In this

¹It seems to me, however, that the present order (with the exception of the last two sonnets) is likely to be more or less right, and I have worked on this assumption in describing the progress of the sequence at the beginning of this chapter.

way, language is substituted for the experience itself, and it is this that makes the question of sincerity or real-life counterparts meaningless. The artifice of the sonnet is the experience which is concluded in the final couplet. The counterpart of the circular self to whom most of the sonnets are addressed is not Southampton or Pembroke so much as the closed form of the sonnet itself. The sonnet is a perfect form, as the mirror is a perfect image, for expressing the closed inwardness of the conflict which is elsewhere externalised in dramatic form.

CHAPTER VI

The Prison of Kingship: Richard II

The king suffers a very specialised kind of solitude and self-division. He is set apart from other men by his kingship, yet is at the same time, as king, symbolically representative of other men. Paradoxically, his representational function alienates him from other men as much as his uniqueness in being king, since a symbol exists by definition on a different level of reality from ordinary men. In drama, a symbolic character also has a different relationship to the dramatic action from those who merely enact it, and Richard II's isolation is shown formally by his standing somewhat apart from the dramatic structure, as Richard III did, and as Jaques does (see Ch.VII below). But Richard II does not stand outside the structure in the sense that these two do, making us conscious of the play as a play by standing as it were before the curtain as an audience to the rest of the action, mocking it, deflating it, placing it in a context relative to themselves. Rather he makes us aware of the increased sense of acting a role that he is burdened with as king, so that he is isolated from the structure by being in that sense further within it, enclosed in the play-within-a-play of his own private and histrionic world.

The close association of self-division with isolation, which has already been demonstrated in Richard III and the Sonnets, is conveyed with strong dramatic effect through the figure of the king. This very coexistence of uniqueness and a representational quality divides him both from other men and within himself. Even his symbolic function, one half of one duality, subdivides: it seems to reconcile the two levels of human and divine, while at the same time drawing attention to the chasm between symbolic ideal and actuality, in the person of an inadequate

king who is cut off from men and falls short of God.

The king, according to medieval theory, had two bodies, a divine body and a human body, the first immortal, passing from successive kings as they died, the second mortal, the body of the individual king, subject to time.¹ As such, the king was the image of God as well as of man: as head of the kingdom, he was a symbol of God on earth and of the divine potential within man, a vehicle through which God could show himself on earth by analogy, and through which men could fulfil themselves, transferring their potential in imagination on to the person of the king, since 'the King is in act what everyman is only in potency.'² But this theory is based on the premise of an ideal king, and as such is an emblem of unity, of the reconciling of disparate worlds, an ideal inherent in much medieval theory. It is also tempting, Philip Edwards writes, 'to think of true kingship as a metaphor for a harmony of the personality, the unity of being and doing when private person and public office are one.'³ Richard II's relation to Shakespeare's sixteenth-century world, however, is judged by how far he falls short of the ideal and becomes an ironical emblem of division rather than unity, and in particular of the division between person and office, in his attempts to fulfil the demands of the two bodies. In his representational function as king, he thus becomes a focus for the general sense of division which was becoming widespread, both as an external and as an internal experience, at this

¹I am indebted to Ernst H. Kantorowicz's book The King's Two Bodies (Princeton, 1957) in all my references to the theory of the two bodies.

²John F. Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature (London, 1949), p.170. Danby's discussion of what kingship meant to Shakespeare and his contemporaries is very relevant to this consideration of the isolation of the king.

³'Person and Office in Shakespeare's Plays', Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy (London, 1970), pp.11-12.

time (see pp.65-69 above).

The archetypal apartness of the king was magnified from early Tudor times onwards for political reasons, reaching a climax of absolute power in James I's formulation of the Divine Right of Kings, which placed the king above human law (to which he had been subject in medieval times) and made him responsible only to God. King James reminded his son of the double obligation of the king towards God and man 'first, for that he made you a man, and next, for that he made you a little God to sit on his Throne, & rule ouer other men';¹ and the phrase 'a little God' indicates how inflated that side of the doctrine had become, placing the king further and further from the real world of men, and thereby distancing him further from the ability to fulfil the mystical union of his two bodies.

Richard II is not an ideal king symbolic of unity, but an actual king torn by responsibility to an impossible and theoretical ideal, conscious above all of division and alienation. Richard's fear that his embodying of division instead of unity will be his destruction underlies his constant attempts to bolster his own security by reminding others of the sacred inviolability and divine anointment of the king. It also underlies his obsession with death, which is the final separation of the two bodies.

A comparison of his self-conscious analogies between himself and Christ and the use of the same analogy by medieval political theorists with reference to kingship also reveals his incomplete embodying of the ideal. Whereas the medieval theorists used the analogy in order to

¹Basilicon Doron, Scolar Press Facsimile (Menston, 1969), I.4.

expound the mystical union of human and divine elements within a single being, Richard significantly refers to only one of Christ's bodies, the mortal body, in his comparisons. Nearly all his parallels are with the events of the Crucifixion, and none at all with the Resurrection, the ultimate revelation of the divine body. In limiting Christ thus in his parallels, Richard is expressing his own limitations, his disproportionate attachment to his private self.

Self-division in the king, again according to medieval correspondences, must produce social division (although it is debatable here whether Richard's sense of division is cause or effect of civil war in his kingdom). The civil war which was a fact of Richard III and an image of the Sonnets is again made fact in Richard II. The prophetic tone characteristic of the sense of society fragmenting (see pp.105-06 above) also informs Richard II, most notably in Carlisle's vision of the breaking of bonds:

tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;
Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny,
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
O, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woofullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth.

(IV.i.140-47)

The tragedy of this play is as much the tragedy of social order as of Richard himself. The disintegration of society at the same time isolates Richard even further and hastens his personal tragedy, since from his point of view, civil war is rebellion, the turning of men against him as an individual.

If Richard's subjects transfer loyalties from king and state to themselves as individuals in rebelling, Richard displays exactly the same destructive valuing of self above society in his Narcissism. Rebel-

lion and self-love, two of the sins indicated above (p.107) as most frequently condemned by Elizabethan preachers, are set against one another in this play, and yet both are ironically moving in the same direction, towards the inward solitude of placing impulse above imperative.

The likely coincidence in time between the composition of Richard II and some of the Sonnets is shown most clearly through the common Narcissism of Richard and the boy of the Sonnets. Richard's self-enclosure derives only in part from his kingship; it is also the result of his particular, egocentric character as a man. Both as king and as Narcissus-type, Richard has a heightened sense of the chasm between private and public. His devotion to his private world results in his own political downfall, and that in turn destroys the private world, which is left meaningless, based as it was on images of his ideal public self. He appears to be involved in the world outside himself, but fails to understand its objective relevance, because he transposes it into his private terminology and forces it to become part of his internal world. On his return from Ireland, for example, his description of his feelings for his kingdom makes clear that it is a closed, private relationship that he has with it, rather than a political one, one of emotion rather than responsibility:

I weep for joy
To stand upon my kingdom once again.
Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,
Though rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs.
As a long-parted mother with her child
Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,
So weeping-smiling greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favours with my royal hands.
(III.ii.4-11)

Slightly later in the same scene, he proves the disparateness of his kingship from his humanity, by addressing one half with the other:

I had forgot myself; am I not King?
Awake, thou coward majesty! thou sleepest.
(83-84)

This ability to separate his two bodies is the measure of his failure as a king, for whom the fusion should be absolute:

he has not a Body natural distinct and divided by itself from the Office and Dignity royal, but a Body natural and a Body politic together indivisible; and these two Bodies are incorporated in one Person, and make one Body and not divers.¹

The logical conclusion of these beginnings of a sense of division in Richard is reached in Henry V, Shakespeare's strongest king, yet a usurper, neither wholly king nor purely man. As the son of a usurper, his claim to kingship is dubious, to say the least, and he cannot feel himself to be king with the same sense of inevitability that Richard II did. The image of kingship as a garment runs through Henry IV and Henry V as a reminder to the audience that they are not kings by blood, but by power and will. A true king, like Lear, finds to his cost that a king is a king in nature, not merely by occupation, and that the casting off of kingship is a loss of identity. Henry V, on the other hand, though politically a good king, has no sense of the two bodies, and thinks of himself as a mere man underneath the trappings of office: 'I think the King is but a man as I am' (Henry V, IV.i.101-02). The irony is that he has lost his right to be an ordinary man by his office, as his attempt to mingle with the army, and William's rebuke of the tastelessness and injustice of his attempt afterwards, show all too clearly.² His self-div-

¹Quoted Kantorowicz, p.9.

²See Anne Barton, 'The King Disguised: Shakespeare's Henry V and the Comical History', in The Triple Bond, ed. Joseph G.Price (University Park and London, 1975), 92-117.

ision is not the traditional division of the king into the body natural and the body politic, but a division created by his alienation of the right to be 'but a man' in assuming the right, which is not his, to be king.

It is only through the division between the man and the occupation, however, through the failure to embody ideal fusion, that drama can show the inward self.¹ Unless a different self is expressed in solitude and soliloquy from the one which others see, there is no real justification for portraying it in this way, since if a character is fully and truly expressed through his social role, he is at one with his actions. Yet, despite the fact that Shakespeare's most sympathetic and complex heroes are self-divided, Shakespeare's view of it as a torment is made clear by genre: characters fully expressed in action and conversation participate in his comedies, but those characters who are divided between a solitary and a social self are the protagonists of tragedy.

Richard's enclosure in a private world is expressed through the same images of garden, prison, and mirror, which express self-enclosure in the Sonnets and the early comedies. Not only do they appear in the language of this play, but they are also set up in a literal way within the action, in scenes III.iv, V.v, and IV.i, respectively. In these scenes, the images take physical shape and have their traditional interpretations remoulded into a new complexity. The customary associations of each are self-consciously evoked, only to be then shattered to reveal a new depth. Correspondences are desecrated, and expanded by their desecration to include the revolutionary development of ideas in Shakespeare's own times. All these images

¹See Peter Ure, 'Character and Role from Richard III to Hamlet', in Hamlet, Stratford upon Avon Studies, 5 (London, 1963), p.10.

share the characteristic of being absent from Shakespeare's sources and introduced by him, a fact which should alert the reader, if not the audience, to the possibility of their symbolic importance;¹ and all have associations, both in tradition and elsewhere in Shakespeare, with the state of solitude.

The image of the garden has many connotations arising out of its two main biblical loci, the Garden of Eden, and the garden of the Song of Solomon; but in his book on the enclosed garden as a literary device, Stanley Stewart suggests that its particular associations with solitude and introspection arose through the linking of the enclosed garden from the medieval period onwards with the monastic life.² Shakespeare does not use the garden as an image of religious solitude, but he does associate it above all with some kind of enclosed, private world, either physical or in the mind.

His first significant introduction of a garden scene is in the incident of Alexander Iden's capture of Cade the Rebel in 2 Henry VI. The incident is greatly expanded by Shakespeare, bearing a mainly symbolic relation, in his treatment of it, to the play as a whole. Its only relevance to the plot is the fact that Cade is captured; but Shakespeare's creation of a sense of privacy in Iden sheds light on his characterisation of Henry VI and his longing for privacy and the pastoral life. The garden scenes in both 2 Henry VI and Richard II portray the longing to be private men in both these kings, which is part of their political weak-

¹Both the garden and the mirror are wholly Shakespeare's additions. The prison has origins in the literal imprisonment recorded by Holinshed and other chroniclers, but the creation of a prison scene, and the manipulation of the prison both as a visual setting and as an image, are Shakespeare's.

²The Enclosed Garden (Madison, Milwaukee and London, 1966), pp.112-15.

ness as kings.

In Halle (Holinshed does not include the incident), the wording is such that the garden need not even be considered to be Iden's own, and the issue is given the degree of prominence required by the plot, a mere phrase. Halle says of Cade:

many sought for hym, but few espied hym, til one Alexander Iden, esquire of Kent, found hym in a garden, and there in hys defence manfully slewe the caitife Cade, & brought his ded body to London, whose hed was set on London bridge.¹

But Shakespeare makes the garden Iden's, and has Iden kill Cade, not because he recognises him as the rebel, but because Cade infringes his privacy by climbing over his garden walls. The opening of the scene, with Iden's praise of solitude and dispraise of the court, is perhaps Shakespeare's earliest introduction of the theme of solitude, and resembles the prose debates and other non-dramatic genres in its discursive, formal quality.

In later plays, the walled garden develops away from these associations of peaceful quiet, becoming an image of affected and unnatural solitude, made explicit in the mannered language of its occupants.² The walled garden of Navarre is a place of this destructive and affected solitude³ until it is laughingly discarded for the pleasures of full engagement and participation in society. The walled orchard of Romeo and Juliet, however, leads to tragedy, for the lovers try to remain in a private

¹W.G.Boswell-Stone, Shakspeare's Holinshed (London, 1896), p.284. .

²I owe this linking of the walled garden with mannered language and a private world to an illuminating lecture given by Dr. John Wilders in Autumn, 1973.

³Although it encloses a solitary society of four men, not an individual, Navarre is still very much in the tradition of the walled garden of affectation, and not in the pastoral tradition which seals off a whole society (see Ch.VII below).

world by keeping their love secret, and end by being destroyed by the pressures of the society from which they have disengaged themselves.

In Richard II, the gardener makes explicit the traditional linking of the garden with the state. The correspondence between the state and the King's state of mind leads us to see the garden as an image of Richard's mind, and of its self-enclosure. Its rottenness seems not just an image of the corruption of the state, but of the linked corruption within the King, whose destructive influence on the state is directly due to his disengagement from it. As with the boy in the Sonnets, his disengagement is described as a self-consuming festering within, destroying both the self and others. Just as the patterned language of the Sonnets and their substitution of language for direct experience imitated this self-consumption, so Richard's self-consumption finds expression in the same highly self-conscious and formal use of language, and in the tendency to substitute language for action, more marked after Bolingbroke's return from exile.

Richard's tendency to use iconic images (the sun rising (III.ii.37-53); the sun setting (III.iii.178-79); the two buckets (IV.i.184-89); the ladder (V.i.55-56)) shows him attempting to fix events in symbolic poses, rather than actively to change their significance. These images, although they contain some movement, share a quality of tableau; and this same tension between change and fixity characterises the action of the play. The image of the two buckets, for example, depicts the chiasmus of the play's structure, Bolingbroke's rise to power and Richard's fall. Yet the image also has a static quality, in that the two buckets remain the same two buckets, and in that the motion is arrested, as a still picture of one bucket higher than the other, rather than continuing. If the movement of the image represents the movement of events in the play, the

static quality represents the essential absence of change in Richard and Bolingbroke, whose political positions alter with complete predictability according to the characters they display unchanged from the beginning.

The only way Richard changes things, and then only to his own satisfaction, is by distorting their significance through the images he uses to describe them, inflating his self-image through imaginative and poetic language. He is defeated before he has ever taken action, while he is still describing his emotions in words:

Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let's choose executors and talk of wills...
For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.
(III.ii.145-48, 155-56)

Carlisle has to remind him that words are no answer to another's actions:

My lord, wise men ne'er sit and wail their woes,
But presently prevent the ways to wail.
(178-79)

The word 'tongue' occurs more frequently in this play than in any other of Shakespeare's plays, and the related words, 'mouth', 'speech', and 'word' are also repeated throughout.¹

The prison, the second of this group of three images outlined on p.177 above, demonstrates self-enclosure even more explicitly. The traditional application of this image, that of the body as a prison to the mind, is made even more claustrophobic by Richard's exposition of the mind itself as a prison, an enclosed world peopled by thoughts (V.v.1-22). Kingship too is seen as a prison, suggested by the enclosing and physical nature of 'the hollow crown/ That rounds the mortal temples of a king' (III.

¹See Richard D. Altick, 'Symphonic Imagery in Richard II', reprinted in Shakespeare: 'Richard II': A Casebook, ed. Nicholas Brooke (London and Basingstoke, 1973), p.112.

ii.160-61). So imprisoned is he within his role that he feels that he does not exist outside its circle:

I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
And straight am nothing.

(V.v.37-38)

Kingship is his appointed role, and as such should be indistinguishable from his very being, yet the threatening of it by the mere will of another can rupture Richard's precarious integrity with a sense of self-division which imprisons him in the chasm between role and self, preventing him escaping from either. Living in this chasm, he feels as though only the moment defines his existence.

His love of dramatisation, of ceremonies, of passing moments arrested and fashioned into formal icons, changes with the loss of his throne into a desperate sense that self-consciousness is not reconcilable with sincerity, and that all parts of himself are mere acts:

Thus play I in one person many people,
And none contented.

(V.v.31-32)

Although Shakespeare does see a special link between the actor and the king,¹ a link which King James I recognised in warning his son that 'a King is as one set on a skaffold, whose smallest actions & gestures al the people gazingly do behold',² Richard is expressing a fear shared by more than only kings in the sixteenth century. The preoccupation with sincerity has been suggested above (e.g. at pp.108, 122-23), not least in its link

¹See Anne Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (Harmondsworth, 1967), Ch.5, 'The Player King'.

²Basilicon Doron, III.121. James is probably quoting a speech of Queen Elizabeth's on considering whether to execute Queen Mary: 'We princes, she told Parliament, are set on a stage in the sight of all the world; a spot is soon spied in our garments, a blemish quickly noted in our doings' (J.E. Neale, Queen Elizabeth (London, 1934), pp.277-78).

with the interest in drama as a genre, and in particular in a drama full of dissembling, disguise, and self-divided heroes. Men were tormented by the fear that the self-consciousness of an act in some way negated the possibility of its being sincere, or, in the words of their most popular moralist:

with no faint heart I am making ready for the day when, putting aside all stage artifice and actor's rouge, I am to pass judgment upon myself,—whether I am merely declaiming brave sentiments, or whether I really feel them; whether all the bold threats I have uttered against fortune are a pretence and a farce.¹

The last of the three images, the mirror, is also the most central. Its associations with the self come, through Shakespearean contexts, to be almost as automatic as the associations with self-love, vanity, and so on, which it had acquired over hundreds of years.² But its classically simple dualism expands in Shakespeare's usage to correspond with any number of dualisms inherent in the self: self-consciousness, self-division, the contradictory sense of claustrophobia and of liberation, and more. Its very versatility as an image mimics another correspondence with the self: fickleness. Other qualities besides its capacity for reflection have parallels, both direct and paradoxical, with the self: its facility, the transient quality of its image, even its physical characteristics, its smooth surface, its shining clarity, its brittleness.

The ambiguity of its more familiar sixteenth-century synonym, 'glass',

¹Seneca, Epistulae Morales, I.189.

²Cf. pp.98-99, 132-34, 149-51, 165-66. Peter Ure, in 'The Looking Glass of Richard II', PQ, 34 (1955), 219-24, assembles many of the traditional contexts and interpretations of the mirror, and Ernst Robert Curtius, in European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask (London, 1953), p.336, has a valuable footnote on the classical treatment of this image. Louise Vinge's book on the specific variation of the Narcissus myth (quoted on p.167 above) is also a valuable summary of parallels and developments.

may begin to suggest some of its diversity. Glass can be looked through, at what lies beyond, or into, that is, back, at one's own image. In this way the glass can represent the depth beyond the surface or superficiality itself (or, in terms of the self, the inner, unrevealed self, or the outward social mask veiling it). It can also represent the facts of divisibility and self-awareness about the self, by presenting it as two, observer and observed. The facility with which the glass reverses an outward movement (looking beyond the confines of the self) to an inward one (looking back at the self, the starting-point)¹ is in itself symbolic of the Elizabethan recognition of perception as reflecting the perceiving self as much as the supposed object of its perception. It neatly makes the point that the movement outwards in the sixteenth century towards new knowledge, discovery, and experience was in fact the same movement as the movement inwards into the microcosm, towards the cultivation of the mind and imaginative vision, since the self conditioned every form of apprehension (see pp.97-98 above). Bacon chooses the glass as an image through which to draw the contrast between objective truth and individual perception:

For the mind of man is far from the nature of a clear and equal glass, wherein the beams of things should reflect according to their true incidence; nay, it is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture, if it be not delivered and reduced.²

Shakespeare re-affirms the same awareness that 'men may construe things after their fashion,/ Clean from the purpose of the things themselves' (JC, I.iii.34-35) in Theseus' speech on imagination (MND, V.i.19-22),

¹Cf. the implications of the common Elizabethan image of 'looking babies' about the nature of love, p.159 above.

²The Advancement of Learning, pp.394-95.

in Hamlet's conjuring of different shapes in the clouds (Ham., III.ii. 366-72), and in Antony's similar discourse on the subjective interpretation of clouds (Ant., IV.xiv.2-11). It is evident throughout his work in the subjection of a single character's vision to an external context, or another's vision, but the set-piece theoretical expositions of this awareness cited above emphasise his preoccupation with it.

The materialisation of the mirror as an actual stage-property in Richard II is similar to its appearance in the 'events' of the Sonnets as well as in the imagery. It takes physical shape at the point of crisis in Richard's sense of self. Richard asks for the glass at the point where he is at his most self-aware and critical of his subjectivity, and yet also at his most subjective. His enclosure within his own vision at this point is well described by a review of an actual performance of Richard II with F.R.Benson, in which C.E.Montague asserted that 'nothing in Mr. Benson's performance was finer than the King's air, during the mirror soliloquy, as of a man going about his mind's engrossing business in a solitude of its own making.'¹

His kingship, which up to now he has regarded as part of himself, is about to be taken from him by a mere man, and this threatens his sense of his own reality. Since the permanent role of king is being taken from him, he tries to recognise himself through the reality of temporary, self-appointed roles; in this case, the grief which is the immediate replacement for his usurped kingship. He looks in the glass for confirmation that he is real through his grief, but the glass shows him only the division between

¹ 'F.R.Benson's Richard II', in Casebook, ed. Nicholas Brooke, p.67.

appearance and reality, a merely superficial image which contradicts the truth of his inner feelings. It is through the rejection of its image that the glass fulfils for Richard its purpose of bringing self-knowledge, not through its representation of truth.¹ The truth Richard sees about himself through this false image is his own facility in assuming false images, and the fragility of such illusions. The mirror deludes him in the same way as his flatterers have deluded him and he has deluded himself; and in allowing itself to be so easily smashed, it shows him the brittleness of the king when the two bodies are divided. Smashing the glass is simultaneously an act of strength, since Richard thus rejects the flattery he has accepted before and the roles he has facilely assumed, and an enactment of brittleness, as Richard himself sees:

A brittle glory shineth in this face;
As brittle as the glory is the face.

(IV.i.287-88)

The brittleness of the self is made more poignant by the irony that that self has also been king, and has thought himself sacred and invulnerable by reason of his anointment, whereas he is as subject to delusion, self-division, and death as any man. In Donne's words: 'A glass is not the less brittle, because a king's face is represented in it; nor a king the less brittle, because God is represented in him.'²

The smashing of the glass seems even more ironic when one considers the image which Richard is rejecting in smashing (that of a self which appears other than it is, an actor) alongside the gesture of smashing,

¹See Ure, 'The Looking Glass of Richard II', p.223.

²Devotions, VIII.50-51.

which is purely histrionic. Richard's self-knowledge is not something which really changes him: in smashing the multiple self and the love of self-dramatisation, he is also enacting them. Bolingbroke's dry comment on Richard's moralising of his own gesture:

Rich. Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport—
How soon my sorrow hath destroy'd my face.

Bol. The shadow of your sorrow hath destroy'd
The shadow of your face

(IV.i.290-93)

exposes the self-inflation of the gesture by calling its whole reality into question, thus striking at the very root of Richard's fear. The double relationship of the glass with truth is the image of the different ways Richard and Bolingbroke have of viewing the same event. The glass has a morally reversible significance, since its image can be either the archetypal ideal, the perfect representation of truth, or it can be valueless by the fact that it is only a representation, a copy, a mere appearance of truth, and either a pale shadow or an actual distortion of the truth. 'Shadow', as discussed above (p.166) is a synonym for 'reflection' which carries overtones of unreality. To Bolingbroke, Richard's behaviour is unreal, a mere playing with appearances, but to Richard shadows offer a way of reaching the truth through the very recognition of their inadequacy:

The shadow of my sorrow? Há! let's see.
'Tis very true: my grief lies all within;
And these external manner of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul.

(IV.i.294-98)

To Bolingbroke, shadows are the denial of reality, but to Richard they are an aspect of it. Shakespeare consistently uses the mirror in contexts of speculation¹ about the relationship between appearance and reality,

¹Cf. the derivations of 'speculation' and 'reflection', pp.132-34 above.

particularly as regards the nature of the self.

Division, whether of the self, or of external appearance and inward truth, is carried over into speech-styles. The habit of describing the self in the third person, introduced in Richard III, is here extended into a separation between name and self. Names had a magical quality for the Elizabethans, and Richard uses his title of King in an incantatory way, as if he were trying to bewitch himself into wholeness by the singleness of the image evoked by his name. He feels torn between his actual and private grief and his public and threatened kingship:

O that I were as great
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!
Or that I could forget what I have been!
Or not remember what I must be now!

(III.iii.136-39)

and tries to annihilate his sense of division by reconciling the two through his title, used in the third person:

What must the King do now? Must he submit?
The King shall do it. Must he be depos'd?
The King shall be contented.

(III.iii.143-45)

He is in fact stating the paradox of his self-division, however, by this resolution to abdicate in a kingly way, to continue to be king in renouncing kingship. The impossibility of this is revealed in his next words, which express a desire for the most private and solitary life possible, the life of a hermit, where the possibility of this tormenting division between inner self and public role is ruled out by the fact that a hermit has no public life, and his inner life can also be his role.

Richard does not recognise his self-division until he is threatened with forcible division by outside forces, in the person of Bolingbroke. Then, with Bolingbroke's destruction of Richard's illusions, Richard's nature,

a thing inseparate
Divides more wider than the sky and earth;

And yet the spacious breadth of this division
Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.

(Tro., V.ii.146-50)

Richard constantly cites his grief as the source of his fragmenting. This is anticipated outside the circle of his consciousness by Bushy, in his attempt to comfort the Queen in her grief. He associates grief both with self-division and with the sense that the world is similarly multiple and divided to a self-divided observer:

Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
Which shows like grief itself, but is not so;
For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects,
Like perspectives which, rightly gaz'd upon,
Show nothing but confusion—ey'd awry,
Distinguish form.

(II.ii.14-21)

The glazed eye of sorrow is a variation of the glass image, an anticipation of Richard's perception of his own multiplicity of roles through the glass at IV.i.

In a sense the progress from Richard II through the rest of the tetralogy to Henry V is a progress from singleness of being to dualism and multiple fragmentation of being. Shakespeare is in the forefront of his times in recognising the possibility of conceiving being as existential rather than essential.¹ Philip Edwards, in distinguishing the two types of being as a continuum between person and office and as a plastic self which adapts itself to any role, wonders 'how far...these two views of

¹The frequency with which Shakespeare questions notions of being is very marked in the plays written from the turn of the century onwards: Hamlet's famous soliloquy, 'To be or not to be...' (III.i.56ff.) is about quality of being as well as mere existence; Troilus and Cressida opposes concepts of being as essential and unchanging against realisation of inconsistency ('Troilus is Troilus', 'He is himself', 'no, he's not himself. Would 'a were himself!' (I.ii.65,68,73); Macbeth comes to feel by the unnaturalness of his own imaginings that 'nothing is but what is not' (I.iii.141), and, once he is king and a murderer several times over, 'all that is within him', Menteith affirms, 'does condemn/ Itself for being there' (V.ii.24-25).

man represent Shakespeare's recognition of an historical change in the nature of the relation between the individual and society'.¹ I have already suggested (Ch.III above) that there was a change in this relation, as shown in a growing preference for solitude over society, for inward over external truth, for individual will over social duty. To suggest that this also incorporated a change in the nature of being is absurd; but there is a change in the nature of being as presented in literature, from type to greater ambivalence and complexity. This implies a change in the mode of conceiving being, a change which it does not seem far-fetched to relate to the similar change in the conception of society, which moves from being apprehended as a stable order to being condemned as a constant flux. Montaigne is the most unflinching exponent of this new apprehension of the self as flux rather than stasis, as the sum of its changing experiences, rather than of its unchanging moral qualities:

I describe not the essence, but the passage...My history must be fitted to the present, I may soone change, not onely fortune, but intention. It is a counter-roule of divers and variable accidents, and irresolute imaginations, and sometimes contrary: whether it be that my selfe am other, or that I apprehend subjects, by other circumstances and considerations. Howsoever, I may perhaps gaine-say my selfe, but truth (as Demades said) I never gaine-say: Were my mind settled, I would not essay, but resolve my selfe.²

The progress from Richard II to Henry IV is from the resistance to the acceptance of this view. Richard is shown to be fragmented, inconstant, given to adopting different roles, but he is constantly trying to freeze each pose and present himself as the static emblem of his feelings (see p.180 above). Henry IV and Henry V, by contrast, cultivate the ability to

¹'Person and Office', p.16.

²Montaigne, III.ii.21-22.

fragment themselves, to keep their inward selves private and manipulate their public roles to best advantage. They cultivate solitude, Henry IV by keeping public appearances to a minimum, and never revealing his deepest feelings (except briefly to his son), Hal by withholding any sense of commitment from what Henry IV calls his 'vile participation' (1H4, III. ii:87). Falstaff perhaps recognises Hal's spiritual disengagement when he chastises him, as if in jest, thus: 'There's neither honesty, manhood, nor good fellowship in thee' (1H4, I.ii.134-35), a complaint which epitomises what Malory and others felt had been lost in the transition from the Middle Ages.

That Shakespeare does see the progress of the history plays partly as condensing the movement from the medieval era to his own (although the transition is virtually complete by the end of Richard II) is shown in various ways. E.M.W.Tillyard quotes images from Richard II to show their resemblance in precision and colourful detail to medieval illuminations, and contrasts them with the Renaissance spirit of the imagery of Henry IV and Henry V.¹ Richard's attempt to fix his being in emblematic poses is also reminiscent of static medieval analogy and typology. His cult of ceremony, his ritualising of common gestures, indicate his efforts to mould fluctuating reality into static symbols. Even his desecration of ceremony has to be ceremonial, and he unking himself by carefully reversing the rituals of coronation:

Now mark me how I will undo myself:
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand... (IV.i.203-05)

in a speech which continues at great length.

¹ 'Richard II in the Second Tetralogy', in Casebook, ed. Brooke, pp.144-45.

Yet his wish to express his actions ceremonially does not make Richard a simple symbol of the medieval ideal, for he comes at the end of an era, and the ideal is already disintegrating in him before being finally discarded by the usurpers. His devotion to ceremony is also indicative of a preoccupation with forms and appearances, which in itself implies a hardening of the spirit which first found expression in these forms. His care for form is an indication of the fossilising of the ideal, just as the codification of courtesy into rules by the Elizabethans represents the staleness of the chivalric ideal, and as the inflation of urban ceremonies in the sixteenth century indicates the need for increased formality to take the place of the ideals they were supposed to embody.

In this sense Richard II manifests a quality of the Elizabethan era, its nostalgia for the imagined Middle Ages, not the Middle Ages themselves. Elizabeth's recognition of a parallel between herself and Richard II is famous, and Shakespeare, in depicting Richard's histrionic love of form, may have had in mind, not medieval ceremony, but the inflated ceremony of Elizabeth's court or her summer progresses.

It is possible therefore to see Richard II and Bolingbroke/ Henry IV, not as playing out the conflict between medieval and Renaissance ideals, but as examples of two Elizabethan attitudes, the over-precious nostalgia for the past, and the eager exploitation of the new for personal profit. Both Richard and Bolingbroke are sixteenth-century solitaires. Richard is closed off from reality and relationships by his excessive and self-obsessed flow of words, Bolingbroke by his silence. Both play roles, both are self-conscious, both value themselves higher than any social ideal. They are contemporaries, just as the Machiavel and the Narcissus were contemporary cult-figures in Shakespeare's lifetime. Both the types of solitude they embody are present from Shakespeare's early to his late plays. Bolingbroke's type may be the 'new' solitude, in that he is the pragmatist, the

adaptable self who refuses to be a type in the old sense, but he is also a very ancient type, as his resemblance to Richard III, and through him to the Vice, confirms. Yet the self-division and Narcissism of Richard were also considered by late sixteenth-century writers as a 'new' kind of self, one not superseded by Machiavellianism, but coincident with it.

The medieval world is evoked in Richard II by the play's acknowledgment of its own past, through older figures like Gaunt and York, and through language¹ and imagery. The older men try to restrain both Richard and Bolingbroke by reminding them of their natural bonds, whether of cousin to cousin, subject to king, or king to subjects and state. Far from seeing Bolingbroke as the modern man and Richard as the champion of the old order, they see both as equally destructive of it in their allowing of self-interest to supersede these feudal duties. Both Richard and Bolingbroke, in their mutual devotion to private before public good, reject the social bond as an absolute, and are imprisoned and tormented, in Shakespeare's terms, by peculiarly sixteenth-century solitudes.

¹Joan Webber has written an article, 'The Renewal of the King's Symbolic Role: From Richard II to Henry V', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 4 (1963), 530-38, excellently describing the changing concept of kingship through language in the second tetralogy.

CHAPTER VII

Contemplation—Social or Solitary? As You Like It

Pastoral is a genre which clearly expresses the divided response of the period. Like the prose debates, it shows the attempt to reconcile opposites, or modify them to a point of similarity, offering an aesthetic resolution of the tension between sociability and solitude, between the active and contemplative lives. Pastoral portrays a way of life associated with the contemplative ideal, with retirement, privacy, reflectiveness, and simplicity; but it presents this contemplative ideal in a social context, showing a microcosmic society, instead of an individual, retiring from public life to the woods. In this way the absolutes of contemplative solitude and active social life are qualified to a point where they meet in the middle, in the ethos of an introspective society, withdrawn from the world of affairs, free both to enjoy the pleasures of company and to substitute meditation and self-examination for an active civil life. Sidney expresses the ability of pastoral to lessen the distance between extremes in terms of actual physical distance, when he describes the houses in Arcadia as being 'all scattered, no two being one by th'other, & yet not so far off as that it barred mutual succour: a shew, as it were, of an accompanable solitarines & of a civil wildnes.'¹ Oxymorons emphasise the convergence of opposites.

Both pastoral and its theoretical counterpart, the treatise praising the life of the country and dispraising that of the court, have their origins in classical texts, and only their prevalence at this time, not their originality as forms, indicates their particular association with the six-

¹Arcadia, pp.13-14.

teenth and early seventeenth centuries. The preoccupation with this question, however, is shown in retrospect by the importance of this period in the semantic development of such words as 'country', 'rural', 'rustic', 'farm', and 'pastoral' itself.¹

Renato Poggioli distinguishes three forms of pastoral: the pastoral of innocence, which is based on the community; the pastoral of happiness, based on the couple; and the pastoral of the self, based on the individual conceived in solitude.² He devotes an essay to the subject of this last pastoral of solitude, and finds it to be one of the latest forms of pastoral:

Contrary to one's expectations, bucolic poetry was not predestined to sing the praises of solitude. It was only toward the end of its long historical life that the pastoral ever fulfilled what may well be the most congenial of its many tasks. The theme of solitude is almost totally absent from Theocritus' Idylls and Vergil's Eclogues, and it is never central in the pastorals of the Renaissance. Its appearances before the seventeenth century are fleeting; the role that solitude plays up to then on the pastoral stage is only that of an extra or, at the most, of a minor character.³

Shakespeare's As You Like It plays a major part in the development of pastoral towards this solitary mode. It carefully balances the claims of solitude (equated here with melancholy) against those of love and union with another (equated with happiness) through the personae of Jaques and Orlando (the latter as representative of his whole society in this respect). Poggioli quotes their parting:

Jaq. I'll tarry no longer with you; farewell, good Signior Love.
Orl. I am glad of your departure; adieu, good Monsieur Melanbholly.
(III.ii.274-77)

¹See Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (London, 1973), Appendix.

²'The Oaten Flute', in The Oaten Flute (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), pp.21-22.

³'Pastoral and Soledad', Ibid., p.182.

as a clear statement of this antithesis.¹ Jaques and the pastoral of solitude which he embodies are Shakespeare's own additions to his source, his own innovations in a received tradition. The self-analytical nature of Jaques and of the play as a whole clearly anticipates the seventeenth-century pastoral of solitude, 'where the retreat into Arcadia is in reality a retreat into the soul, with no company except the self.'²

As You Like It is self-conscious about its style, its conventions, its times, and its genre, and expresses this self-awareness through different levels of self-awareness in its individual characters. Even the classical origins of its genre are ostentatiously paraded in the term 'golden world', which Charles uses to describe Duke Senior's life in the forest:

They say he is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world.
(I.i.105-09)

The reference to Robin Hood also reminds us that the nostalgia of Renaissance England was more frequently for its immediate medieval past than for the golden age of the ancients. The medieval ideal is clearly invoked in the appearance of a religious hermit and in the attraction of the contemplative life throughout the play, scarcely to be found elsewhere in Shakespeare.³ This is the only one of Shakespeare's plays which ends with the decision of two characters, Jaques and Duke Frederick, to withdraw from the life of mutual participation to which the others are returning, in favour of a life of absolute solitude and contemplation. In this sense, the

¹'The Oaten Flute', Ibid., p.22.

²'Pastoral Love', Ibid., p.58.

³Isabella, in Measure for Measure, is the only other character in Shakespeare to express a desire for the contemplative life in the strictly medieval sense of religious withdrawal.

play returns very much to reality at its close, not only in the return of Rosalind to her non-dramatic self in the Epilogue, but also in the rejection of the artificial solution of pastoral. By turning away from the reconciliation of the two lives which pastoral offers, and splitting the two again into opposite and irreconcilable absolutes, Shakespeare recognises the reality of the conflict between the solitary and social lives, which was obsessing his contemporaries, and the artificiality and impracticability of merely literary and sophistical resolutions.

Only Duke Frederick, however, chooses the contemplative life in the true medieval spirit, seeking penitence and devotion in reparation for his evil worldly life. Jaques chooses it in the sixteenth-century spirit of sceptical inquiry, the wish to observe and experiment. His stance is characteristically uncommitted, in direct opposition to the absolute commitment demanded by the medieval religious ideal. Whereas Duke Frederick is actually 'converted...from the world' (V.iv.155-56), Jaques wants to examine the converts, not become one himself:

To him will I. Out of these convertites
There is much matter to be heard and learn'd.
(V.iv.178-79)

Nevertheless, both the choices followed at the end of the play, for whatever motives, are medieval, both the movement of the group back to the ties and responsibilities of family life and social rank, to 'better days', where church and commonwealth are one and men are united in fellowship and mutual compassion (II.vii.120-23), and the movement of those individuals who are 'for other than for dancing measures' (V.iv.187) towards the inner order of contemplation and self-knowledge. The happy co-existence of these two choices expresses the nostalgia for a time when the solitary was the exception, and society was stable enough to support him without feeling his anti-social tendency as a threat to its own order.

But the ending has a complacency which belies the ambivalence of the rest of the play. Jaques, with his questionable motives for solitude, his threatening of society in asking it questions which it is increasingly strained to answer, is not a medieval ascetic, but a sixteenth-century, secular solitary, melancholy, abusive, fragmented himself and fragmenting society by his exposure of its hypocrisies. He is a figure whom society does not support and revere, but fears and tries to forget. Alvin Kernan's description of the Elizabethan satirist shows that Jaques shares many of the tendencies of this very unmedieval figure:

The satirist is above all harsh, honest, frank, and filled with indignation at the sight of the evil world where the fools and villains prosper by masquerading as virtuous men...although he is the inveterate foe of vice, he himself has dark twists in his character: he is sadistic and enjoys his rough work; he is filled with envy of those same fools he despises and castigates; he has a taste for the sensational and delights in exposing those sins of which he is himself guilty; he is a sick man, his nature unbalanced by melancholy, whose perspective of the world is distorted by his malady.¹

Pastoral can accommodate the topicality of Jaques, because it is potentially a highly self-conscious genre, and was at the time a notorious medium for topical allusions and private jokes. The pastoral life is traditionally the image of a state of mind, so the action is minimal, and the characters are very much given to analysing themselves and their situations. In this way, pastoral can show, as it were, the mind of the community examining and criticising itself by juxtaposing the views of individuals. Hence the play, like the pastoral life, acts like a mind, self-aware and introverted.

This tendency towards self-examination in As You Like It is shown in the first place by its proliferation of set speeches, which meditate rather than perform any expository function as regards action. Duke Senior's

¹ The Cankered Muse, Yale Studies in English, 142 (New Haven and London, 1959), pp.116-17.

speech on the pastoral life itself is self-consciously traditional in its careful recapitulation of the familiar themes: comparison with the court, freedom from envy and ambition, the life in tune with nature, the escape from flattery, the moral purity of the retired life. Jaques' speech on the seven ages shows this same unhurried theorising, although not with such self-conscious reference to the theme of the play. Touchstone's speech on the pastoral life shows the finely ironical self-appreciation of the play most clearly. Whereas the simultaneous admiration for and mockery of the pastoral life is normally demonstrated through the juxtaposition of the views of more than one character, Touchstone speaks both parts of the dialogue, like the writers of the prose treatises, thereby expressing his own humorous detachment. He is another invention of Shakespeare's, not to be found in Lodge, and his name tells the audience that he participates on a somewhat less involved level than the characters of the main plot. He acts as an evaluator of their genuineness, not consciously, but automatically, by his presence. He mimics the style of the prose debates exactly, scarcely needing to exaggerate their terms in order to expose the absurdity of the compulsion to qualify and balance every statement to the point of reversal:

Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is nought. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach. Hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?

(III.ii.13-21)

The shepherd's answer mocks the pastoral ideal more crudely by deflating the literary and affected nature of such a debate with a steadfastly literal reference to sheep and the weather. Such realism exposes

the pastoral life of the others as a mere courtly game, far removed from the necessities of country life. This is perhaps a jibe by Shakespeare at the constant expression of a longing for the country life by his contemporaries in higher classes.

Shakespeare juxtaposes the literary ideal and the actual facts of a country life through Silvius and Phebe on the one hand and Audrey and William on the other, as well as through the courtiers of the main plot and the comments on them. Just as Shakespeare invents Jaques to question the validity of the main characters and their ethos of love, marriage, and fellowship (an ethos presented unquestioned by Lodge), so he invents Audrey and William to cast a different light on the stances of Silvius and Phebe. Silvius and Phebe are the literary types of pastoral, and talk and act like characters out of a pastoral less self-aware about its conventions than As You Like It. They play their parts with the exaggerated and affected attention to detail and the self-conscious conformity to type characteristic of the adherents of a cult in actual Elizabethan life. Silvius plays to the last detail the part of the cult-lover, a part which Rosalind appears to lament Orlando's refusal to play (III.ii.346ff.).¹ Silvius enumerates the marks of love in the usual formal list that draws attention to its absurdity (and its topicality), ending with the climactic mark of solitude, which seems to participate in most cults:

Or if thou hast not broke from company
Abruptly, as my passion now makes me,
Thou hast not lov'd.
O Phebe, Phebe, Phebe!

(II.iv.37-40)

¹The details of the role of cult-lover are also listed by Speed the clown in Two Gentlemen of Verona, II.i.16-28.

'Abruptly' exposes precisely the affectation of Silvius' poses by letting him betray his own absurdity in anticipating a supposedly uncontrollable impulse.

Phebe's letter to Ganymede (Rosalind) shows this same mixture of self-consciousness (in following convention to the letter) and lack of self-consciousness (in failing to realise the absurdity of this). Rosalind undercuts her literary stance of the cruel fair, offering her a more realistic reason for accepting Silvius than the conventional pity:

Down on your knees,
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love;
For I must tell you friendly in your ear:
Sell when you can; you are not for all markets.
(III.v.57-60)

Audrey and William are characterised by their inability to understand the literary attitudinising of the courtiers, thereby making both themselves and the attitudinisers look stupid. They embody the other side of the unrealistic adulation of country people as innocent, meditative, and wise, the notion that they are instead dull-witted, coarse, and evil-smelling. Their co-existence with Silvius and Phebe in the forest makes the same point as the title of the play, which is the subjectivity of point of view. Even the very words surrounding country and court have entirely subjective meanings. As L.C.Knights notes, 'natural' can mean 'either "adequately human" or "close down to the life of instinct"', and 'civilised' can mean 'either "well nurtured" or "artificial"'.¹ Shakespeare is among the first of his contemporaries to emphasise this realisation that

There's nothing simply good, nor ill alone,
Of every quality comparison,

¹Explorations 3 (London, 1976), p.119.

The only measure is, and judge, opinion,¹

but it was to become a commonplace of the early seventeenth century.

As You Like It juxtaposes not reality and unreality, but different perspectives on reality. Audrey and William are no more real than Silvius and Phebe; spontaneity is not inherently more real than affectation. The forest is a place of malleable shape, 'constant in its imaginary character and changeable in each contact with a separate imagination'.² Shakespeare clearly accepts the idea that truth is relative, while the majority of his contemporaries exhibit it without accepting it; that is, they merely utter self-contradictory statements as if they were undeniably true, without trying to reconcile their co-existence with a single theory of truth. Only the greatest writers, like Cervantes and Montaigne, carry dualism to its logical conclusion and perceive it as relativism rather than a static contradiction of absolutes. While Cervantes presents it through the 'madness' of Don Quixote, Montaigne tests it philosophically by empirical observation of his own consciousness:

Constancy it selfe is nothing but a languishing and wavering dance. I cannot settle my object; it goeth so unquietly and staggering, with a naturall drunkennesse. I take it in this plight, as it is at th'instant I amuse my selfe about it.³

He concludes that, not only are objects relative to the subject perceiving them and to the moment in time, but the subject himself is equally fluctuating and relative to time and the viewpoints of others. This perception of truth as relative to the time, the place, the circumstances, and the subject perceiving is also the basic assumption behind Machiavelli's The

¹ Donne, 'The Progress of the Soul'.

² David Young, The Heart's Forest (New Haven and London, 1972), p.50.

³ Montaigne, III.ii.21.

Prince, which the Elizabethans found so unacceptable, mistaking Machiavelli's statements of fact to be simultaneously a statement of moral approval, or rather, of amorality.

Shakespeare makes clear from the title onwards that the reader has the same freedom as the characters within the play to see things as he likes, to judge the play as he likes, or not to judge it at all. In As You Like It, Shakespeare moves outside the medieval compulsion towards a single and absolute moral judgement, as shown in Richard III, and offers us instead various judgements from which to choose. But this does not mean that everything in the play is an impenetrable flux of relativity. Shakespeare has a judgement to make, though it is not a moral one. Rather it is one of norms, by which affectations and eccentricities can be judged as such. The ending is one kind of norm (see pp.196-97 above); but Rosalind is the most reliable norm continuing through the play, consistently exposing its literariness and its 'type' qualities by subjecting them to her own more mundane viewpoint. She punctures Phebe's attitude with a piece of unromantic realism (p.201 above), and even with Orlando, when her romantic side is most aroused, she can be briskly down-to-earth. She assures him that the tales of lovers dying for love 'are all lies; men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love' (IV.i.93-95). Indeed, her whole ruse of making him woo her in the person of Ganymede places her closer to reality than him.

She deflates the seriousness with which Jaques takes himself as a moral critic by turning him into a type (though of course he also deliberately plays the type) and anticipating his different poses:

look you lisp and wear strange suits, disable all the benefits
of your own country, be out of love with your nativity, and
almost chide God for making you that countenance you are; or
I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola.

(IV.i.30-34)

But Jaques, who is the most important figure of the play from the perspective of Shakespeare's development of the solitary, is also another kind of 'touchstone' amid the relativity, as is the fool of that name. Jaques is allowed to sum up the other characters in his last speech before leaving them, and here gives a less cynical judgement than usual, which recognises their merits and deserts. More often he has the last word in a way which questions the value of any social pleasure. He is allowed to sing his song along^e after the communal song is over, and when Amiens questions him about a word in it, 'What's that "dūcdame"?', Jaques mocks the group gathered round him, 'Tis a Greek invocation, to call fools into a circle' (II.v.54-55). Only his last summing-up can be taken as a norm, however, and his other moralisings, with their less balanced tone, must be understood as relative to his position as an outsider in relation to the social group, and to his exaggerated self-presentation.

Jaques is allowed to question the means by which the group prepares its feasts, the expression of its solidarity, when he sees the wounded deer, but the sarcastic contempt with which the others describe him moralising the spectacle 'into a thousand similes' (II.i.45) also dispenses with any notion we may have had of Jaques' judgement as absolute. His questionable sexual life also undercuts the value of his moralising, for the imagery of sterility and sexual corruption in the drama at this time is usually an indication of the moral condemnation of that character by the writer.¹

¹It is noticeable that several of the outsiders in Shakespeare's comedies are sexually suspect in a potentially socially threatening way. Antonio in The Merchant of Venice and Antonio in Twelfth Night have frequently been considered by critics to be homosexual; Malvolio's lewd imaginings in Twelfth Night revolt the eavesdroppers; and Don John, in Much Ado, though his own life is scarcely suggested, wreaks havoc by perverting the appearance of Hero's sexual life.

Comedy celebrates the ideals of fertility and procreation, the propagation of the social order, ending as it does with multiple marriages and the prospect of children. Marriage is the smallest social unit, the image of society, because 'without this societie of man, and woman, the kinde of man coulde not long endure.'¹ Jaques' libertinism, as the Duke sees it, produces only the sores of disease, which are his contribution to society:

Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin;
For thou thyself hast been a libertine,
As sensual as the brutish sting itself;
And all th'embossed sores and headed evils
That thou with licence of free foot hast caught
Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world.
(II.vii.64-69)

The outsider is thus positively anti-social rather than merely apathetic, from the point of view of society, in that his sterility and corruption threaten to destroy it, not merely stand apart from its continuation.

Jaques' wish for self-definition, expressed through his rejection of relationship and his exaggerated self-presentation in the forms of cult, link him with Richard III and the early villains. But like Richard III he is not allowed to achieve this absolute, and is deflated by society just as he deflates it, through mockery and wit. Although Jaques withdraws from the final dance:

So to your pleasures:
I am for other than for dancing measures,
(V.iv.186-87)

he must still be judged in relation to it, since the play is structurally a comedy, in which the dance is the image both of plot-patterns and artifice and of the moral values of fellowship and relationship. Jaques cannot be judged from within, because he is situated in a comedy, not a tragedy, and as such is seen above all as an outsider. Comedy places action in the perspective of the group rather than of the individual. It

¹ Thomas Smith, De Republica Anglorum, ed. L. Alston and F. W. Maitland (Cambridge, 1906), p. 22.

shows the individual finding his identity fulfilled through social role and relationships, finding freedom within the limitations of social and cosmic order. Thus Jaques as seen from the comic perspective corresponds to the sixteenth-century individualist as seen from the medieval perspective. In terms of the old ideals of fulfilment in participation and identity in context, Jaques is a mere fragment without meaning, because severed from context. His existence is curtailed by his self-imprisonment, by his refusal, like the boy of the Sonnets, to commit or communicate himself.

The image of the mirror, so familiar in relation to solitary and self-enclosed individualism, is turned against Jaques by Orlando:

Jaq. By my troth, I was seeking for a fool when I found you.

Orl. He is drown'd in the brook; look but in, and you shall see him.

Jaq. There shall I see mine own figure.

Orl. Which I take to be either a fool or a cipher.

(III.ii.268-73)

For Orlando, the man who refuses to become engaged in the life of the community is, as he says, either a fool or a mere absence of being. The term 'fool' also alerts the audience to Jaques' strangely cerebral relationship with the professional fool. It was mentioned above (p.204) that both are touchstones, in that both stand somewhat apart from the social group and the dramatic structure, and as such are separated to some extent from the flux that lies within those. They see reality with a more critical and cruel eye than those who are more immersed in it, and their own reality is also more static than the reality of those who are fully engaged in relationships and adapt accordingly. It is in fact just this uncompromising view of reality and an uncompromising presentation of the self, without moderating it according to time, place and person, the principles of decorum, that make Jaques unacceptable to the other characters. The

fool compromises rather more by adopting folly as a mask through which to project his view of life in a more socially acceptable way, and behind which to hide his own identity. As the Duke remarks, 'he uses his folly like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit' (V.iv.100-01).

The relationship between the fool and the malcontent is not a relationship in the same sense as the other relationships in the play. First, only Jaques is aware of it, and second, his awareness is a purely symbolic and intellectual recognition of kinship, not a feeling of friendship or caring. The two are linked by a common alienation, cynicism, and self-awareness. They are at odds with the world and also at odds with themselves, in that both present a social self which is separate from their inner selves, the fool his folly, and Jaques his cult-poses.

It is into these two outsiders that the self-divided personality present in the preceding chapters passes. In the artificial world of comedy, where division is shown among characters rather than within them, as an aspect of plot rather than character, Jaques and Touchstone are emblematic of that division, and are thus excluded from the comic harmony by existing on a different level from the others. Roger Ellis, in an essay on the alienation of the fool, says that Touchstone and Jaques 'express the conscience of a divided world, not by being the victims of its tensions, but by expressing those tensions in their own characters.'¹

Although individually self-divided, they are also like the two halves of a single self, and seem to complete one another.² Traditionally,

¹'The Fool in Shakespeare: A Study in Alienation', CritQ, 10 (1968), p.260.

²See p.155 above.

they may be said to be descended from a single figure, the Vice, who combined elements of devilry, foolery, wit, and villainy in himself, although, of course, both have other sources elsewhere also. Jaques expresses his sense of incompleteness by constantly seeking out the fool's company. He is literally looking for the fool when the mirror image quoted above (p.206) shows him that he too is the fool, that the fool is part of himself. He also expresses conscious longing to become the fool:

O noble fool!
A worthy fool! Motley's the only wear...
O that I were a fool!
I am ambitious for a motley coat.

(II.vii.33-34, 42-43)

He is aware that the fool's purpose is the same as his own, to 'cleanse the foul body of th'infected world' (II.vii.60), although the fool does so in a more socially acceptable way than Jaques, disguising his censure in 'mangled forms' (II.vii.42). Like Jaques, he is 'deep contemplative' (II.vii.31), yet is the only one who can crack Jaques' own mask of melancholy and make him laugh.

Jaques' mask, and the self-consciousness with which he affects it, and through which we realise it is a mask, are the strongest evidence in Shakespeare's work for the existence of a contemporary cult of solitude. There is evidence from many other literary sources for cults of melancholy, discontent, and world-weariness after travel, and it is Jaques' linking of these with his solitude in treating it in the same affected way, that provides grounds for believing that solitude was also a recognised cult in the real world of the 1590s. The association of one cult with another has already been demonstrated through Richard III; but the topicality of As You Like It is increased by the self-consciousness of the play itself as well as of characters within it.

The affectation of solitude by Silvius, according to cult-love, has already been described, but even more overt topical reference to a cult of solitude is found in the following conversation between Orlando the lover and Jaques the melancholic, both of whom must affect solitude, according to contemporary definitions of these types:

Jaq. I thank you for your company; but, good faith, I had as lief have been myself alone.

Orl. And so had I; but yet for fashion sake, I thank you too for your society.

Jaq. God buy you; let's meet as little as we can.

Orl. I do desire we may be better strangers.

(III.ii.238-43)

The tone of ironical self-satire and the reference to fashion, although to the polite fashion of sociability which they are agreeing to reject, show their fashion-consciousness, and Jaques' clear attempt to be even more fashionable by rejecting established fashion.

The self-consciousness with which the solitary rejects society is shared by comic outsiders, villains, and tragic heroes alike. All three play social roles as a disguise and see their true selves as defined from within, not by external contexts. Jaques shows his self-consciousness in his incessant reference to his own solitude and melancholy. He draws attention to his melancholy in company and freely admits to cultivating it deliberately, begging Amiens to indulge this: 'More, I prithee, more. I can suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs. More, I prithee, more' (II.v.11-13), and admitting to Rosalind, 'I do love it better than laughing' (IV.i.4). The others acknowledge him as a stereotype of cult by labelling him as 'melancholy Jaques' (II.i.26,41) and 'Monsieur Melancholy' (III.ii.276-77). He seems to mock his own affectation in his exaggeration of it, in insisting that he be the model not simply for one cult, but for them all. His own description of his melancholy draws on various contemporary cults:

it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels; in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

(IV.i.14-18)

Jaques exhibits precisely the characteristic self-contradiction inherent in the Elizabethan desire for solitude, that is, the presentation of it through exaggerated public display. The malcontent is repeatedly described in Elizabethan literature almost as an emblem of self-division. Marston writes of his malcontent in the play of that name: 'the Elements struggle within him; his owne soule is at variance: (within her selfe), his speach is halter-worthy at all howers'.¹ The inner division of the malcontent mirrors his division from society. He is a man at odds with himself and with the natural order. A society which has re-established its natural rhythms in the forest cannot accommodate such a man, since his division would reproduce itself, as Duke Senior says:

If he, compact of jars, grow musical,
We shall have shortly discord in the spheres.

(II.vii.5-6)

As You Like It only remains comedy by keeping Jaques firmly on the fringe (though his prominence is given disproportionate importance in this chapter, since he is the solitary, and the figure who focusses the subject of this thesis most strongly) and by treating solitude in its cult-form, its most light-hearted and trivial expression. Yet although Jaques is structurally an outsider and, judged from the comic perspective, an incomplete, sterile being in his solitude, the very grace of his withdrawal (p.205 above) forces the audience to remember him with affection as a real self, whose absence will impoverish the re-grouping society,

¹The Malcontent, in The Plays of John Marston, ed. H. Harvey Wood, (Edinburgh and London, 1934, 1939), I.ii.146.

and not simply as a type or a cipher. He threatens the comic structure as much as it threatens him; it is in As You Like It that the tragic element begins to assert itself beyond the limitations of comedy, as the outsider asserts a reality beyond the perspective given him by comic externals. This focus becomes even more insistent, and more pressing on the comic structure, in Twelfth Night, where Malvolio withdraws, not gracefully, but vindictively, so that his threat, 'I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you' (TN, V.i.364), and the injustice of the way he has been treated, strike a discordant note loud enough to resound after the comic harmony of the reintegrated social order.

The insistence of this solitary and potentially tragic figure in comedy leads Shakespeare to turn away from comedy and the celebration of society and increasingly to tragedy, in order to focus on the individual and the torment of the inner world. The movement from Jaques to Hamlet is a shifting of focus from the outside to the inside; and in changing focus, Shakespeare also changes genre, as if he felt the rise of the solitary to be necessarily tragic.

CHAPTER VIII

The Mystery of Loneliness: Hamlet

In Hamlet, the outsider becomes the hero of the play, both structurally and morally. Solitude, which has been the attribute of the amoral atheist, the self-enclosed Narcissus, the king, and the socially unacceptable cult-figure in preceding chapters, now comes to seem, if only temporarily, the inevitable state of the hero who values the inner life and truth to self above all things.

Yet to determine whether Hamlet is a natural, voluntary solitary is more problematical than with the previous solitaires examined. There is much in the play to suggest that he has been a sociable, spontaneous man: his welcome of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a recognition of past fellowship and trust, and his continuing friendship with Horatio only confirms his need for company and a relationship of mutual trust. The Hamlet whom Ophelia remembers as 'th'observ'd of all observers' (III.i.154) whom Gertrude finds 'too much changed' (II.ii.36), of whom even Claudius can see that 'nor th'exterior nor the inward man/ Resembles that it was' (II.ii.6-7) was clearly less mystifying and withdrawn than the one they see in the play. Hamlet too is unhappy with the solitude forced on him by his father's death, his mother's 'o'erhasty marriage' (II.ii.57), and the imposed task of revenge, so alien to his nature. His pleasure in seeing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his warm welcome of the players, his reliance on Horatio, reveal not unsociability but loneliness.

But there is clearly another side to Hamlet which is naturally solitary, delighting in its own privacy. His sense of his 'mystery' (III.ii.357), his uncommunicated and incommunicable selfhood, implies a cherishing of inward isolation, and a tendency to value highest those parts of his nature which are private. His self-awareness and his sense of imprisonment

in his own thoughts are part of his intellectual nature, not characteristics developed purely by events.

Hamlet has become a cult-figure for every kind of alienation in the ages following his own, which suggests that audiences perceive his solitude as his most striking feature, despite all references within the play to a sociable self. His possession of all the causes and characteristics of cult-solitude of the Elizabethan period (melancholy, travel, study, grief, rejected love, general discontent and world-weariness) also suggests that he was probably regarded as an archetype of solitude in his own age. Although Hamlet possesses the same familiar trappings of cult-solitude as Jaques, they are presented as involuntary and unaffected in him, not as a frivolous pretence. If both Jaques and Hamlet can be taken as pointing to the existence of an Elizabethan cult of solitude, then Shakespeare mocks through Jaques the fashionable courtiers who followed the cult, and identifies through Hamlet with the real and unavoidable sense of solitude in which the cult originated.

Certainly Hamlet's solitariness is the first thing any audience must notice in performance. The first scene in which he appears (I.ii) presents in strongly visual terms the isolation which Hamlet in his soliloquies expresses as a more complex spiritual state. Hamlet is dressed in 'solemn black' (I.ii.78), and although he says this is because he is in mourning, the cult-association of black with the malcontent would not have gone unheeded by an Elizabethan audience. He sits apart from the rest of the court, his silence emblematic of his solitude. When he does speak, it is more to himself than to the King, who first addresses him, and he adopts the Vice's characteristic of speaking in an aside with a double meaning. He insists on his inward solitude, on retaining 'that within which passes show' (I.ii.85); and in insisting on this isolation, he also insists on

the division between his 'true' and his presented self.

The contrast between his short and uncommunicative answers in reply to public questions and his outpouring of himself in soliloquy at the end of the scene establishes soliloquy as his natural medium, another characteristic previously associated with the Vice, who also reveals his true self only in soliloquy and aside. Despite the references to a previously sanguine Hamlet, it is impossible to believe that soliloquy, or introspection, has not always been a part of his nature. Throughout the scene he has deliberately held himself aloof, observing rather than participating; throughout the play he will demonstrate his difficulty in committing himself to any public gesture, in engaging himself. In his torment, he exemplifies the paradox which William Leigh Godshalk describes as 'Shakespeare's perennial concern: man forever bound, forever desiring his freedom, and yet finding true happiness and fulfilment only in acknowledging the bondage which links him to other men.'¹

Numerous men in public life have been shown to express a desire for contemplative retirement (e.g. pp.77-78 above). Montaigne, who so frequently seems to speak for the age, exhibits this same division in his claim to be the most solitary of men, while striving to make public this retiring quality of his through the written word. Even his writings contradict themselves: he describes himself in one essay as 'overmuch tied unto the world, and fastned unto life',² but confesses in another: 'I engage myself with difficulty. As much as I can, I employ my selfe wholly to my selfe.'³

¹Patterning in Shakespearean Drama (The Hague and Paris, 1973), p.178.

²Montaigne, III.ix.252.

³Montaigne, III.x.257.

This same paradox is also the paradox of the cult of solitude, which labours to publicise its celebration of privacy (see pp.83, 123 above). It is a paradox inherent in the natures of the boy of the Sonnets, Richard II, Jaques, and Hamlet, all of whom combine some form of solitude with a concern for how they present themselves in public.

Hamlet is frustrated by excessive self-awareness, prevented from spontaneous communication by circles of premeditation and introversion enclosing him. His speech is on a different level of inwardness from that of others, which can confuse even those closest to him:

Ham. My father—methinks I see my father.

Hor. Where, my lord?

Ham. In my mind's eye, Horatio.

(I.ii.183-85)

Hamlet is only too aware that judgement depends on individual perspective and that he is imprisoned by 'Idols of the Cave' (see p.97 above). He distinguishes quite clearly between the world per se, and his personal world. The beauty of the world that he describes so poignantly is 'no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' (II. ii.300-02), 'To me it is a prison' (II.ii.250). The whole world is tinged for him by his personal vision, and he finds it therefore as claustrophobic as his mind. The 'enchanted glass' of individual vision distorts forms into endless mirrors of itself. Even more explicitly than in Richard II, the images of mirror, prison, and garden become images of states of mind, of the relativity of object to subject. As Hamlet says, 'there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so' (II.ii.248-49).¹ Physical space becomes insignificant beside the space of thoughts, so that all

¹Cf. Montaigne, I.xix.86: 'Life in it selfe is neither good nor evill: it is the place of good or evill, according as you prepare it for them.'

scenes in which Hamlet participates seem closed-in. Hamlet realises that there is no escape from such enclosure: 'O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams' (II.ii.253-55).

Hamlet is obsessed by his own nature, and his communication with others is impaired by this self-dedication. The self-definition which marked Richard III as a villain becomes admirable in Hamlet, with his jealous guarding of 'the heart of my mystery' (III.ii.356-57). He refuses to be measured by external, social contexts, insisting that, in Browne's words, 'no man can justly censure or condemne another, because indeed no man truly knowes another.'¹ Hamlet follows his own nature, like Petrarch and Seneca, not social conventions or collective moral principles. But such egoism was recognised by Shakespeare's contemporaries as one cause of the breakdown of relationships and social order. Donne's famous lament (see p.105 above) should now be quoted at more length as showing Donne singling out this worship of the inward mystery as the destroyer of bonds external to the self:

'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
All just supply, and all relation:
Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot,
For every man alone thinks he hath got
To be a phoenix, and that then can be
None of that kind, of which he is, but he.²

Hamlet follows the changing morality of Shakespeare's times in placing his duty to self before his duty to society. According to Montaigne, solitude is the logical physical state accompanying such moral priorities:

¹Religio Medici, II.iv.76-77.

²'The First Anniversary'.

Nature hath endowed us with a large faculty to entertaine our selves apart, and often calleth us unto it: To teach us, that partly wee owe our selves unto society, but in the better part unto our selves.¹

These two duties are found in Hamlet to be in conflict rather than complementary. Polonius' advice to Laertes:

to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,²
Thou canst not then be false to any man,
(I.iii.78-80)

which is so often quoted approvingly out of context, is proved to be quite the opposite of what Hamlet finds. For him, being true to himself demands that he be false to others, if he is to retain his integrity in a corrupt society. Indeed, it is his only justification for the anti-social stance he adopts. For him, sincerity equals solitude. In society he is as cunning a dissembler as Richard III, using the same techniques of wordplay and assumed roles. His refusal to frame himself in the normal dramatic modes of sincere speech and open relationships is a refusal to be defined by a social context. Not only his principle of truth to self, but his resulting refusal to participate in society, seem admirable in him, only because social values themselves have become so twisted by those around him.

Northrop Frye writes:

In Shakespearean tragedy, man is not really man until he has

¹Montaigne, II.xviii.401.

²Cf. Bacon, 'Of Wisdom for a Man's Self'. The echoing of this phrase in both Bacon and Shakespeare suggests, not that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays, but that this was a piece of proverbial wisdom, a truism which Shakespeare quotes only to question in Hamlet, especially since it comes out of the mouth of Polonius. I differ here from Trilling's reading of this crucial passage (Sincerity and Authenticity, pp.3-4).

entered what is called a social contract, when he ceases to be a 'subject' in the philosophical sense and becomes a subject in the political one, essentially related to his society.¹

But this is just what Hamlet does not do until the last scene, when he kills the King, the centre of corruption in this society. For the rest of the play he has used that corruption as an excuse for refusing to become involved. He remains too conscious of his existence as a philosophical 'subject', because he has isolated himself in that existence by rejecting the bonds of social order. As Frye elsewhere points out, with reference to Richard III, in fact, 'for a philosopher, isolation is the first act of consciousness';² and Hamlet remains in that primary isolation and awareness of consciousness throughout the play.

In insisting on the ultimate incommunicability of selfhood, Hamlet self-consciously draws attention to the problem of drama as a genre, the problem of externalising inward truth. In Hamlet, this problem is presented in one form through the withdrawn nature of the hero. Hamlet's self-awareness, reticence, deliberate 'acting', and simultaneous fear of committing himself to action, must all be shown through a medium which normally works through the portrayal of relationships, action, and verbal communication, from all of which Hamlet holds back. Yet another characteristic of the Vice, his structural detachment from the world of the play, is made acceptable in this hero, and loses its implicit moral condemnation. Hamlet's detachment from his society is shown through the formal metaphor of his detachment from the play, through his topical references, his discourse on the nature of acting, his construction of a play within the play, imitating the play itself, and his deliberate assumption of false masks in

¹Fools of Time (Toronto, 1967), p.29.

²Ibid., p.99.

public. His aloofness from the dramatic form and his refusal to be fully expressed by it is the structural mirror of his first speech on 'seems', which is really a complaint that the Danish court offers no forms which can express him, or, as David Pirie writes, quoting Eliot's famous phrase, no "'objective correlative"'¹ for his inner state.

This preoccupation of Hamlet's and the play's with form is conveyed partly through the repetition of the word 'form' itself.² Hamlet's torment is the disparity he feels in himself between form and inner truth, especially since, as Ophelia and others imply, there was a time when they were one, when Hamlet was 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form', 'that unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth' (III.i.153, 159). Even Claudius speaks of Hamlet's 'transformation' (II.ii.5), and both he and Gertrude consistently divide the present Hamlet into the 'exterior' and the 'inward' man in their talk of him. Hamlet's own hatred of self-division and his admiration for unity of form and substance is clearly expressed in his praise of his father as

A combination and a form indeed
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man,
(III.iv.60-62)

and in his praise of man in general: 'What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable!' (II.ii.302-04).

Hamlet sacrifices harmony between form and inward truth in himself by deliberate dissembling and by devotion to his inner life at the expense

¹'Hamlet without the Prince', CritQ, 14 (1972), p. 301.

²'In Hamlet, the problem of lost and false identity is virtually identified with the loss or abuse of "form"' (T. McAlindon, Shakespeare and Decorum (London and Basingstoke, 1973), p.44).

of, and in recompense for, these 'mangled forms' (AYL,II.vii.42). Like all Shakespeare's characters discussed in detail so far, he is self-divided, but he is so not because he believes that to be a desirable state in itself, but because he believes that it is the only way to retain his inner integrity in a hypocritical society. His division is the classic one between private and public, solitary and social.

The image of the mirror, so strongly associated with solitude and self-division in Shakespeare's work, is incorporated into the structure rather than the language of this play. It also takes material shape briefly in Gertrude's self-examination (where the parallels with Richard II are obvious). Hamlet's solitude is mirrored in the different solitudes of Ophelia, closed off in the world of her own madness, Claudius, isolated in the awareness of guilt and the fear of damnation, Gertrude, also torn by guilt and rejected by Hamlet, and Laertes, with a father dead, a sister mad, and at the mercy of Claudius' clever schemes.

Nor is solitude the only state which is mirrored. There are three young men with fathers killed, two women who betray Hamlet, a substitute-father and a ghost-father for Hamlet. There are parallels explicitly noted by Hamlet in the play-within-the-play, its dumb show, and the extract of Trojan tragedy performed when the players first arrive.¹ Hamlet sees every event as a comment on his own situation, and feels the world to be closing in on him with its criticism. Wherever he looks he sees his own reflection. These structural mirrors become a hallmark of Shakespearean tragedy, and in Hamlet their function is to emphasise the fragmentation

¹See Peter L. McNamara, 'Hamlet's Mirrors', Ariel, 4 (1973), 3-16.

of the hero into discordant selves and the distortion of his vision by self-consciousness.

Hamlet's highly-developed self-consciousness prevents him from putting his thoughts into the objective reality of action. With the exception of the murder of Polonius, nearly all the 'deeds' of the play are confined to the last act. Hamlet, like Richard II, is not a play about doing, but about being and not being, as the crucial soliloquy, 'To be or not to be', reminds us. Hamlet in fact takes up the familiar debate on the relative merits of action and contemplation, already posed by Shakespeare in As You Like It. He lives in the chasm between the two, naturally contemplative, but committed by oath to action. He recognises his inability to act as due to 'some craven scruple/ Of thinking too precisely on th'event' (IV.iv.40-41). 'Conscience',¹ as he notes earlier, 'does make cowards of us all' (III.i.83). He cannot even conceive of action except in terms of thought. When the ghost commands him to revenge, Hamlet vows to fulfil the command 'with wings as swift/ As meditation or the thoughts of love' (I.v.29-30), and by the end of Act IV he is still renewing his vow in the same terms: 'O, from this time forth,/ My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!' (IV.iv.65-66).

Action is a public commitment of the self, and Hamlet's compulsive sense of himself as merely role-playing in public prevents him making such a commitment. There was a sense in the sixteenth century, as now, that inaction was somehow weak and unmanly. Shakespeare's plays from Hamlet onwards strive towards a definition of man, but distinguish clear-

¹In the sense of 'consciousness'. See C.T.Onions, A Shakespeare Glossary, 2nd ed.(Oxford, 1941); John Dover Wilson's note in the Cambridge edition of the play; and Edward Hubler's note in the Signet edition.

ly between manhood, in the sense of strength, even brutality,¹ and humanity, which may resemble weakness in the eyes of those who believe in the first conception of manhood.

Hamlet characteristically attempts to define man from within, by the faculties of reason and contemplation, not from outside, as a socially expressed being. He sees man as Pico does, "as a chameleon who makes his own shape, but who comes closest to God in his most inward qualities:

What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more!
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unus'd.

(IV.iv.33-39)

His speech, 'What a piece of work is a man...' affirms his belief in the infinite potential of man simultaneously with his bitterness against those around him for their actual failings.

The definition of man in complete isolation from other men, from within himself only, is just one aspect of the violation of the medieval system of order based on correspondences, which is repeatedly desecrated in the play. The King, who should be the figure of order in the commonwealth, is in fact a source of disorder; the harmony between the inner order of the microcosm and the greater order of the universe is perverted into a mutual disorder, a sterile garden; life itself is violently cut off. Bonds of relationship, love, and loyalty are violated by incest, betrayal, and murder. Hamlet's revenge of his father is his attempt to honour one bond of nature.

¹See Robert B. Heilman, 'Manliness in the Tragedies: Dramatic Variations', in Shakespeare 1564-1964, ed. Edward A. Bloom (Providence, R.I., 1964), 89-98.

Not only the bonds between men, but the bonds between word and deed, even between word and thought, are broken. Montaigne is again relevant to the moral judgements of this play:

Our intelligence being onely conducted by the way of the Word:
Who so falsifieth the same, betraieth publik society. It is
the onely instrument, by meanes whereof our wils and thoughts
are communicated: it is the interpretour of our soules: If
that faile us we hold our selves no more, we enter-know one
another no longer. If it deceive us, it¹ breaketh al our commerce,
and dissolveth al bonds of our policie.

The paradox whereby language, the vehicle of communication, becomes the measure of the anti-social impulse, repeats the paradox (p.215 above) embodied in the solitary self striving to publicise its privacy, in the cult of solitude, and in sixteenth-century drama.

The value of words in this play is summed up in the empty resonance of Hamlet's 'words, words, words' (II.ii.191). Trust and spontaneity are almost non-existent (except between Hamlet and Horatio); words are deliberately erected as barriers to, rather than vehicles of, communication:

Ros. I understand you² not, my lord.
Ham. I am glad of it.

(IV.ii.21-22)

Only at the end does Hamlet return to the desire for words as the expression of truth. Although for him 'the rest is silence' (V.ii.350), freedom from the hypocrisies of words, his last request is that Horatio should survive to tell his story. Like the seventeenth-century autobiographers, although withdrawing from the world, he is concerned that the world should know the truth about him.

¹Montaigne, II.xviii.402-03.

²See Terence Hawkes, Shakespeare's Talking Animals, for further discussion of the conflict between language and communication in Hamlet.

The violation of the bond between word and truth is the image of a universal violation of decorum and moral values in the play. The universal absolutes which should define and justify society—justice, honesty, order, the reverence for bonds—deteriorate into the subjective values placed on them by each individual. The loss of any absolute sense in words, so much are they manipulated and distorted, mirrors the loss of any absolute value to anything. 'For Hamlet, the dilemma is the difficulty of forming absolute values based upon absolute truth in a world where absolute truth is inaccessible.'¹ Hamlet's own subjectivity and scepticism eat at the root of all absolute collective values.

Shakespeare seems divided between admiration for the inward solitude which Hamlet so proudly defends in a false society, and condemnation of the individualism which is linked to the disintegration of social values in the first place. The division arises partly out of Shakespeare's refusal to judge in this play: he portrays a degenerate society and the hero's reaction to it, but he does not condemn one as the cause of the other. Although solitude and the decay of the society are obviously linked, there is no finality as to which is cause and which effect. We are left only with a sense that, admirable as Hamlet's defiant solitude may be under the circumstances, it is neither right nor desirable in absolute terms, but tragic. Hamlet's solitude is the source both of his nobility, within the terms of the play, and of his tragedy. Although some poetic justice re-distributes good and evil at the end, society never restores itself for Hamlet individually. He remains himself his only absolute, and society remains for him not a consummation, but a compromise, of that absolute selfhood.

¹Bernard McElroy, Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies (Princeton, 1973), p.23.

CHAPTER IX

The Bonds of Nature: King Lear

King Lear is, from the first scene, a play of solitaries. Lear alienates those dearest to him by his proud stubbornness and rage; Cordelia's equal stubbornness earns her rejection and exile; Kent is banished; Edgar is forced to flee in the most solitary of disguises, as a Bedlam beggar; Edmund brings destruction on himself and others by his ruthless and solitary self-dedication. But the difference between these solitaries (with the exception of Edmund) and Hamlet is that solitude is against their natures, and they are unfit to cope with it. They are unwilling solitaries, lonely, seeking out human company. The voluntary, or 'natural', solitary reverts to the role of villain which he played in Richard III.

Although solitude is the actuality depicted in different forms throughout the play, the motivating ideal is the medieval one of social unity based on mutual obligation and loyalty. King Lear moves against the general direction of contemporary values, by showing duty and desire as once more united in directing good men towards society. Shakespeare returns to the affirmation of Richard III that the social bond is a bond of nature, too strong to be severed by mere individual will: 'Existence is tragic in King Lear because existence is inseparable from relation; we are born from and to it.'¹ The play is an indictment of the solitary impulse and its destructive effect on the bonds between men. It portrays the full suffering of the social outcast: 'Who alone suffers suffers most i'th'mind' (III. vi.104). The central scenes on the heath show four solitaries seeking and finding the comfort of company.

¹Maynard Mack, 'King Lear' in Our Time (London, 1966), p.110.

Frequent parallels between King Lear and medieval writings confirm its adherence to the traditional social ideal. Lear's concern for his fool and his one hundred knights, his protectiveness towards those who serve him, is reminiscent of the values described by Malory at King Arthur's court, or remembered by the Wanderer in the anonymous Anglo-Saxon lyric.¹ So too are the loyalty of his servants to him, his estimation of others by how well they fulfil their appointed roles, and their estimation of him by his quality of authority. Each man is in fact judged according to his bond, to paraphrase Cordelia, and judgement according to any other criterion is usually an indication of the speaker's own depravity. Oswald's villainy in valuing Lear as 'my lady's father' (I.iv.78), even although Lear has renounced his kingship, can be appreciated by comparing his insolence with Kent's respectfulness in giving his reason (in his disguise) for wishing to serve Lear:

Kent. . . . you have that in your countenance which I would fain
 call master.

Lear. What's that?

Kent. Authority.

(I.iv.27-30)

The desecration of the medieval ideal by the new order takes shape in the paring of Lear's train and the claims of Goneril that Lear's knights are debauched. In stripping him of his attendants in this way, Lear's daughters are trying to strip him of the sense that he is King, since, although he has renounced his kingship in name, he finds himself unable to renounce it in nature. Like the true medieval king described in Chapter VI above, kingship for him is not an assumed role separable from the self, but inherent in it. One of Lear's supposedly riotous knights gives expres-

¹See also John of Salisbury, p.31 above.

sion to this new attitude in those around Lear:

To my judgment, your Highness is not entertain'd with that ceremonious affection as you were wont; there's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the Duke himself also and your daughter.

(I.iv.57-61)

By such plain speaking, the knight fulfils his duty to Lear, as Kent did in the first scene, and as Shakespeare is at pains to emphasise: 'my duty cannot be silent when I think your Highness wrong'd' (64-65). The rightness of this master-servant relationship is highlighted by the contrasts elsewhere in the play: the sickly, fawning loyalty of Oswald to Goneril, or Cornwall's vicious murder of the servant who tries to perform his duty by warning his master that he does wrong to injure Gloucester.

The whole notion of dismissing Lear's followers by calculating exactly how many he needs is a contradiction of feudal values, which rest on mutual need, not merely whether the king needs so many servants, but also whether the servants need him. The point is that this petty reckoning is designed by Lear's daughters to destroy his sense of himself as a feudal lord, and of the rights and duties attached to such a position. They try to reduce him to a useless old man, repeatedly addressing him thus until Lear is humbled to the point where he also describes himself in this way.

Lear in no way exemplifies the late sixteenth-century individualism, which seeks to define selfhood from within, in the isolation of subjectivity; he is defined in the medieval way by his roles and relationships, as the obsessive repetition of the words 'king' and 'father' throughout the play confirms.¹ Evil is defined as such in this play by its working towards the undermining of relationships and towards the isolation of the

¹The final definition is as a man, but as a man among men, not conceived purely from within. See pp. 240-41 below.

individual in himself alone, severed from the bonds of society and kinship. This destruction of bonds and infliction of solitude threatens the existence of society as a whole, for

there is no Society found without Bond, nor Bond without Society, either reall or rationall, that is, with tearmes and fellowes really and apparent, or at least distinct in the works of the minde and vnderstanding...Wherefore the bond or duty, is no other thing then the habitude respect or custome which the associats haue together, which is an impulsie beginning to labour for their common good, as their only end.¹

Lear appeals to both bonds, the duties owed to him as King, and as father, in trying to bring Regan and her husband to speak to him:

The King would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter speak; commands their service.
(II.iv.99-100)

The utter contempt of these two for their duty is shown by their refusal to appear, a refusal which calls Lear's role, his sense of himself, into question: 'we are not ourselves' (105). It is this questioning of the roles from which Lear had drawn his sense of identity which drives him mad. His hysterical obsession with the names of king, father, and daughter keeps the cause of his madness constantly on display, as does the fool's echoing of these in his rhymes. The solitude of madness is increased by the loneliness of its cause: rejection. Rejection is the unifying theme of Lear's ravings, as of his saner laments: 'filial ingratitude' (III.iv. 14), 'unkind daughters', 'discarded fathers' (70,71).

If his daughters question his sense of self, his own questions show him seeking to restore a sense of reality regarding his relationships. The subject of legitimacy which obsesses Edmund mirrors the unnaturalness and uncertainty about relationships which pervades the main plot. Lear's

¹[Lorenzo Ducci], Ars Aulica, [trans. Edward Blount] (London, 1607), p.52.

reaction to Goneril's first open display of harshness is an incredulous question: 'Are you our daughter?' (I.iv.217), followed by a need to disbelieve that such a one is really a legitimate offspring: 'Degenerate bastard!' (253). Similarly, before Regan has shown such open harshness, Lear responds to her formal greeting, 'I am glad to see your Highness' (II.iv.126) with an insistence on the importance of legitimacy:

Regan, I think you are; I know what reason
I have to think so. If thou shouldst not be glad,
I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
Sepulchring an adultrous.

(127-30)

By contrast, Lear's sense of kinship with Cordelia is advanced far more hesitantly:

Do not laugh at me;
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia,

(IV.vii.68-70)

but is unhesitatingly affirmed by Cordelia, not ignored as by her sisters: 'And so I am, I am.' Indeed, Cordelia never wavers from this simple, unqualified, but unadorned positiveness of response. Her statement in the first scene:

I love your Majesty
According to my bond; no more nor less

(I.i.91-92)

is misread by Lear as rejection, until he comes to realise the full implications of simple, unqualified speech.

The respect for bonds, as stated on p.226 above, is the measure by which the characters of this play are judged good or evil. Lear is judged to be blinded at first by self-importance, in that he is quick to remind others of 'The offices of nature, bond of childhood, / Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude' (II.iv.177-78), but is less aware of his own obligations. Kent and the fool, like Cordelia, are judged natural, in the medieval sense of that word, by their loyalty to their bonds. Lear cannot banish Kent in

any sense other than the physical, because the bond is Kent's very identity. His life has no meaning outside his master's, as he tells Lear:

My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thine enemies; nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being motive.

(I.i.154-56)

Edmund is proved to be a villain by his calculating desecration of bonds. Shakespeare returns to the Aristotelian judgement described with reference to Richard III (p.141 above). Edmund's bastardy is like Richard's deformity, an image of unnaturalness carried from birth. Edmund, the true bastard, stands as an emblem of the paradox of natural unnaturalness which surrounds evil in this play. His bastardy is an ironic reversal of the legitimacy of Lear's unnatural daughters, in which Lear cannot bear to believe. The euphemism 'natural' for 'illegitimate' adds to the irony of Edmund's unnaturalness to his father and step-brother. The worst aspect of Edmund's desecration of natural bonds is his willingness to exploit the emotive power of the notion of the bond in order to sever bonds. He incenses his father against the legitimate son, Edgar, by forging a letter, pretending to be unwilling to show it to Gloucester on account of loyalty to Edgar, and finally pressing home the point by telling Gloucester how he tried to dissuade his brother from parricide by reminding him 'with how manifold and strong a bond/ The child was bound to th'father' (II.i.47-48). In the same way he manages to persuade Edgar to look guilty by fleeing, by insisting on his love for him, and by reminding him of the supposed bond between them by his repetition of the word 'brother' as a form of address in their brief conversation.

The bonds that Goneril, Regan, Edmund, and their associates do uphold are cruel parodies of the true bonds, emphasising the real isolation of self-love. Goneril's relationship with Albany, her contempt for him, her mannishness, her adultery, and Regan's partnership in sadism with Cornwall

provide a sinister counterpoint to Cordelia's obedience to France, which is anticipated in her initial denouncement of her sisters' falseness:

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

(I.i.98-103)

The purely sexual associations between Edmund and Goneril and Regan are denials of the bond of marriage, and the emptiness of the loyalty between Goneril and Regan, which is useful to them in turning against their father, is made clear by their willingness to abandon it for Edmund, even to the point where Goneril poisons Regan. Edmund's own perverted family relationships are highlighted by Cornwall's suggestion that he is fit to take on the role of father to Edmund, having secured Edmund's loyalty against his natural father: 'I will lay trust upon thee; and thou shalt find a dearer father in my love' (III.v.23-24).

The process of reversal is one that recurs throughout the play. The fool's songs and epigrams focus the centrality of paradox to this play, and Rosalie Colie has demonstrated how King Lear proves a number of commonplace paradoxical truths through a series of reversals.¹ Reversals of relationship are one of the cruellest ways in which the play answers its own questioning of the real and the natural: What is a real father? a real daughter? a real marriage? real service? real authority? real love? a real king? a real man? Lear's obsession with having begot such unnatural daughters of his own flesh, for example, is reversed by the image of his daughters as feeding on him, destroying the flesh which gave them life. One

¹Paradoxia Epidemica (Princeton, 1966), p.461.

of the sacred relationships of the old chivalric world, that between guest and host,¹ is reversed with uncompromising cruelty. Cornwall's blinding of Gloucester takes place in Gloucester's own castle, and is anticipated when Cornwall first reverses their roles by assuming authority in his host's castle, and ordering him to shut the door on Lear. Gloucester fears worse to come as a result of this reversal: 'I like not this unnatural dealing. When I desired their leave that I might pity him, they took from me the use of mine own house' (III.iii.1-3); he sees a terrifying potential for evil symbolised in such disregard for the established relationships of the social structure.

A reversal which is repeated in order to point the difference between right and wrong relationships is the reversal of a father's authority in the act of kneeling to his children. When Regan advises Lear to ask Goneril's forgiveness for cursing her and leaving her house, his reaction is savage and mocking disbelief:

Ask her forgiveness?
Do you but mark how this becomes the house:
'Dear daughter, I confess that I am old; Kneeling.
Age is unnecessary; on my knees I beg
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food'.
(II.iv.150-54)

Yet the situation is reversed when Lear insists on begging Cordelia's forgiveness at IV.vii.85, and creates the picture of himself kneeling to her for forgiveness as the emblem of his future life (V.iii.10-11).

The difference between natural and unnatural relationships can also be measured by a comparison of terminology. Cordelia, Kent, and the fool do not ration how much they give, but willingly commit themselves totally.

¹The sacredness of this relationship can be seen in Malory, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and everywhere in the medieval romances.

Indeed, the tragedy is set in motion by Cordelia's refusal to measure her love in financial terms for a financial reward, and Lear's suffering can be judged as to some extent deserved, by the fact that it is he who introduces the principle of measurement into love, by asking for such declarations. Goneril and Regan willingly perjure themselves in these terms, and show Lear the meaning of their willingness in their later propensity towards measurement in enumerating his barest needs and the superfluity of his knights.

Terence Hawkes has drawn attention to the old homophone of 'love', meaning '"to appraise, estimate or state the price or value of"',¹ and shows how both senses are present in Cordelia's answer at I.i.91-92 (quoted p.229 above). It is between these two poles of mean-minded measurement and the generous overflowing of love that the play balances. Lear learns that the fulfilment of bare physical need is not enough to satisfy a man; more is needed to confirm his humanity:

Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's.

(II.iv.265-66)

The themes of need and nature link this play with contemporary arguments (and their classical origins) on the rightness of society, since necessity and instinct are the two most frequently offered origins of society. Society is shown in King Lear to be both necessary and natural, fulfilling physical and emotional needs. Lear learns after depriving himself of his original social context that he is not self-sufficient; the aspiration towards self-sufficiency, like the solitude it accompanies, becomes once more the characteristic of the villain and the element of

¹ "Love" in King Lear', in King Lear: A Casebook, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1969), p.179, quoting O.E.D.

chaos. Lear's age, the fool's vulnerability, Poor Tom's nakedness, the harshness of the elements, and the unbalance of Lear's mind are all pointers to man's weakness, his elementary need of other men, of human kindness in the root sense of natural human instinct. In the words of Thomas à Kempis:

Our lorde hath so ordeyned that we shall lerne echone of other to bear patiently the burden of an other, for in this worlde there is no man without defaute, no man without burden, no man suffycient of hym selfe in wisdome or prudence, & therfore must echone of vs helpe to bere the burden of other, echone to comforte other, helpe other, instructe them, & monnisse theym.

But King Lear displays its medieval roots even more clearly in its assertion that society is necessary not only for life in terms of survival, but for life in terms of fullness, happiness, and spiritual fulfillment. The sense of fellowship, as Malory, Chaucer, and the Anglo-Saxon lyricists would agree, is just as important to man's existence as man as the provision of food and shelter.

The disregard for bonds, the solitary movement inwards towards self-love, as opposed to outwards towards fellowship and the sharing of suffering, is shown to be the source of division and disintegration in society, and of self-division in its individual members. Prophecies of the destruction that will follow this unnaturalness are announced at the beginning of the play with the strong verbal overtones of scripture characteristic of the previous century (see pp.105-06 above).² Gloucester sees the events of the first act as emblematic of the times, lamenting that 'we have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollownes, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves' (I.ii.107-09). With cruel

¹The Earliest English Translation of the First Three Books of the 'De Imitatione Christi'..., ed. John K.Ingram, EETS, ES, 63 (London, 1893), I.xvi.165.

²My attention was first drawn to the parallel between the prophetic speeches in Lear and in Matthew 10.21 by Harold Skulsky in his article 'King Lear and the Meaning of Chaos', SQ, 17 (1966), p.13.

irony, it is by echoing these words and claiming them to be an astronomical prediction that Edmund persuades Edgar to flee from his father. Yet it is as if astronomy, or some truth beyond Edmund, mocks him and his scepticism by using him as a vehicle of truth, to predict in detail the events which have not already occurred:

unnaturalness between the child and the parent; death, dearth,
dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces
and maledictions against king and nobles; needless diffidences,
banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches,
and I know not what.

(I.ii.138-42)

These generalised prophecies are one way in which King Lear reaches out to relate its microcosmic world to society in general. This is not a play set, like Hamlet, in narrow closets and lobbies, metaphors for the enclosing individual mind which is the real setting of Hamlet: it takes place partly in echoing state rooms, but for the most part outside walls altogether, on a heath, a cliff, a beach, in harsh, exposed, open spaces. Yet the widest, most solitary place is resolutely contained within a social framework. Maynard Mack quotes T.S.Eliot's phrase, "the life of significant soil"¹ to explain the purpose of Poor Tom's references to villages, farms, and the daily life of a community. The characters of the play represent the whole social spectrum, and the vocabulary of social status, bonds, service, and nature reminds us of their interrelationship and their social roles.

References to the gods set the play in the widest possible context, as does the increasingly immense sense attaching to the word 'nature'. The fool's comments also imply that what Lear is discovering in the particulars of his life are truisms, repeated in all societies and in all ages.

¹King Lear in Our Time, p.101.

Lear's reaction when he cannot believe or cannot accept his daughters' behaviour is to turn to the gods or to Nature with a question, a prayer, or a curse. As his personal relationships and assumptions are called into question, he generalises his disillusion into a disillusion about the whole social order. In cursing Goneril, his curse is significantly specific: not a curse of injury, misfortune, or death, but of sterility, the denial of the comic order of procreation and relation. Since Goneril has refused to acknowledge the bond of her relationship to Lear, he wants to cut her off from all such bonds, sever her from society altogether. Sterility, as already shown in Jaques and the boy of the Sonnets, is the mark of the pariah.

The ideals of this play are erected into absolute values, superseding barriers of individual perceptions. The almost despairing relativity which invaded values in Hamlet is replaced in King Lear by a return to the affirmation of certain social and divine absolutes. In this play, those values which are most obviously circumscribed by an individual ego are also most clearly wrong: right values seem to impose themselves on individuals from outside, from a collective consciousness, rather than to emanate spontaneously from within the individuals. For most, these values are not inherent in their natures; they have to be taught to hold 'vile things precious' (III.ii.71) and to see that what seemed 'nothing' is in fact everything.

The theme of vision which has run through Shakespeare's work since Richard II as an image for the dissolution of absolutes under the sceptical and subjective view of the individual, is complemented in King Lear by the theme of blindness. This dialectic between vision and blindness, as opposed to an exploration simply of different perspectives of vision, clearly replaces the judgement of values as relative with the moral judge-

ment of them as right and wrong in accordance with certain absolutes. The notion of truth as relative to each perceiving individual gives way to the struggle of individuals to achieve a common perception of absolute truth. Wrong vision, distorted by too much of the self, must be exposed by bitter experience as blindness.

The devices of paradox and reversal, the opposition between the ideal of fellowship and the suffering of solitude, and now the opposition between vision and blindness, all show the structure of King Lear to be moral and dialectical, poised between right and wrong, good and evil. This dialectic supersedes the structure of earlier plays, symbolised by the mirror, which had gradually fragmented beyond a simple dualism into a series of reflections within reflections, an impenetrable morass of relativism. The mirror returns to a simple dualism in King Lear. There is only one mirror in this play (aside from the mirrors of parallel and reversal), a stage-property, not an image, and it is used to arbitrate on the most simple and most essential dialectic, that of life and death, when Lear asks in the final moments of the play for a glass, to see if Cordelia's breath will cloud it and prove her to be alive. This final event is the culmination of the play's assertion that there is always an answer, a right and a wrong, not merely the individual perspective. Cordelia is dead, however much Lear may insist on her being alive. The play's movement is not among various modes of perceiving truth, but from what seemed true to what is true.

The language of the play strives in the same way to restore integrity and singleness of meaning to words which have expanded almost to meaninglessness through the wordplay and sophisticated veiling of meaning of the earlier plays. The attempt to restore 'nature' to its medieval universal sense by the moral discrediting of its individual sense¹ is a case in point.

¹See Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature for a full and indispensable

Whereas Hamlet and the comedies used puns and irony to break the bond between one word and one meaning, King Lear uses paradox not to empty words of meaning, but to restore them to truth, and above all, to social truth. Rosalie L. Colie has described paradoxy in Lear as

working not to detach one meaning, one idea, one person from another such, as much as to connect them all in a web of significances in which the paradoxes of poverty, blindness, folly, bastardy, barrenness, and the rest are interrelated and interrelate meanings, ideals, and persons in one firm structure.¹

In striving to reinstate words like the much repeated 'bond', 'truth', 'justice', 'nature', to their medieval semantic simplicity, the play is simultaneously trying to restore the values they represent as universally acknowledged moral laws. This return to the simplicity of absolutes in words and values is mirrored in the increasing importance in the play of the simplest elements of life, the basic physical needs: warmth, shelter, company in suffering. The pervasive theme of nakedness, and its linguistic counterpart 'nothing', also reflect this stripping of truth to bare essentials. 'Robes and furr'd gowns' (IV.vi.165) come to symbolise sophistication, hypocrisy, and corruption, nakedness the essential humanity of man.²

Similarly, as regards language, glibness and ornate speech reek of dissimulation, and plain speaking is the virtue of Cordelia, Kent, and the fool. Despite Lear's own magnificent articulacy in his suffering, words

account of the significances of the word 'nature' for Shakespeare and his audience.

¹Shakespeare's Living Art (Princeton, 1974), p.352.

²These associations of rich clothes were traditional. Cf. e.g. Robert Greene, A Quip for an Upstart Courtier.

are unreliable methods of communication. Some of the truest words are spoken in madness and to no-one in particular.¹ It is through actions and physical touch that men communicate in this play: the fool stays with Lear; Kent returns in disguise to serve him; Cordelia returns with an army to fight for him; Poor Tom leads Gloucester by the arm; all on the heath try to coax each other into the hovel to keep warm; and in Lear's extremity, it is a simple physical gesture of help he requires: 'Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir' (V.iii.309).

In order to reach these essentials of humanity, all that seemed to be self must be discarded. Loss of 'form', which was a divisive experience in Hamlet, leads to reintegration beyond division in King Lear. Kent and Edgar have to abandon rank and identity and take on far humbler roles in order to discover what it means to be a man, rather than a courtier or a Duke's son; they must first disintegrate before they can achieve unity both within and among themselves. Lear too, after casting off the name of king, is constantly searching for a sense of identity, and the answers he receives confirm that he is no longer the self he was, but humble him into realising that he is just an old man. The insistence by his daughters on giving him the title of 'old man', together with Kent's description of himself as 'a man, sir', when Lear asks him 'What art thou?' (I.v.9-10) anticipate the kind of identity Lear will find for himself. No longer respected as King or revered as father, he is forced to examine what it means simply to be a man, and the identity he finds is one which returns to older values through the older and root sense of the word 'identity',

¹Further discussion of language and style here is rendered superfluous by Winifred M.T. Nowottny's brilliant essay, 'Some Aspects of the Style of King Lear', ShS, 13 (1960), 49-57.

which unites men by distinguishing them from the inhuman, instead of dividing them by distinguishing them from one another (see p.101 above).

Like Hamlet, King Lear attempts to define a man, but the definitions are very different. King Lear affirms an essential humanity deeper than the selfhood cultivated in Hamlet. Humanity is to be distinguished from manhood, as Shakespeare also makes clear in other plays: it is 'kindness' in the medieval sense rather than 'virtus' in the classical sense. Lear suffers in losing his manhood, when he weeps at Goneril's cruelty: 'Life and death! I am asham'd/ That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus' (I.iv.296-97). Goneril's definition of manhood, like Lady Macbeth's, is the potential to perform cruel acts unflinchingly, and she taunts Albany for his lack of it (IV.ii.68). As in Hamlet, manhood appears to be identified with strength and cruelty, and humanity with weakness and compassion. Where manhood is active, humanity is passive in both senses, suffering as well as acted upon. Weeping, for others as well as for oneself, is the beginning of the pity that binds men together. Edgar is twice so overcome by pity, on seeing Lear mad and his father blind, that he can scarcely continue his counterfeiting; Cordelia weeps for Lear and condemns the pitilessness of her sisters:

Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire;
(IV.vii.36-38)

and Edmund significantly boasts that 'to be tender-minded/ Does not become a sword' (V.iii.32-33), and is described by Regan as 'too good to pity' Gloucester (III.vii.89).

The relationships between man and man replace the traditional relationships of kinship and service on the heath. The King identifies with the beggar, and defines man with a new minimum:

Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.

(III.iv.102-07)

The most elementary part of man becomes his definition. As such, the paradox is affirmed that the least is also the greatest part, greater than individuality or occupation. For Lear, it is greater than the kingship he lost. He achieves the paradoxical vision that Luther had when he wrote: 'I am a human being; this is certainly a higher title than being a prince, for God did not make a prince; men made him. But that I am a human being is the work of God alone.'¹

Just as the instinct for community defines humanity, so solitude once again defines the inhuman. Goneril and Regan are described as Richard III was, as beasts and cannibals, preying upon themselves and the social order. King Lear makes explicit the self-consumption and destructiveness of solitary actions implicit in the linguistic patterns of the Sonnets: 'Humanity must perforce prey on itself,/ Like monsters of the deep' (IV.ii.49-50).

The prison of self, which holds men apart and violates the social bond, is in this play a different prison from the one experienced by Hamlet, and is closer to that earlier Narcissistic prison of the Sonnets. It is not a prison of self-awareness, but of self-love, egotism, and inadequate self-knowledge. The beginning of the play emphasises the distinctions between men, the separateness of rank, occupation, and privilege; but the course of the play demonstrates the need for men to go beyond these externals enclosing each individual until they reach the common humanity which all

¹Quoted in Roland Mushat Fryé, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine (Princeton and London, 1963), p.199.

men share, in order to restore the bonds between them. Where Hamlet celebrates the uniqueness and separateness of the individual, King Lear celebrates the common bond beyond superficial distinctions.

The language and action of King Lear reach towards 'the mystery of things' (V.iii.16), an absolute which encloses Hamlet's mystery of self and forces it to become merely relative. It is a mystery to be approached not through solitary self-apprehension and inwardness, but through fellowship and the patterns of interrelationship. Whereas Hamlet, Richard II, and the boy of the Sonnets were so self-enclosed that the world felt like a prison to them, Lear achieves such an ability to reach outside himself that for him a prison can become the whole world, if it is shared. In Lear's prison, there is not one alone, but 'two alone', who together can reach a greater, more expansive vision than in solitude:

Come, let's away to prison.
We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies...
And take upon's the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out
In a wall'd prison packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by th'moon.

(V.iii.8-13, 16-19)

CHAPTER X

The Final Condemnation: Timon of Athens

Timon of Athens is Shakespeare's most concentrated examination and condemnation of solitude.¹ It is concerned not so much with the more complex types of internal solitude for which Shakespeare has shown some sympathy in earlier plays, but with simple, physical solitude. Timon's rejection of society is expressed through physical departure, not mental disengagement; he remains spiritually bound to society in hatred, as formerly in love, and never ceases to see himself in relation to it, labeling himself misanthrope, or exile, not simply a self-defined solitary.

Subtler forms of solitude exist, of course, alongside the absolute and physical solitude which Timon chooses. Solitude is present within the city walls as much as outside them; Timon is just as isolated in being deluded, the dupe of flatterers, as he is in the forest, beyond the pale of society. Indeed, Shakespeare most frequently uses walls to indicate a solitude enclosed within them, not to evoke a united community, outside which solitude lies (see pp.179-80 above). Although Timon's placing of himself outside the walls may seem an archetypal image of solitude, the characteristic Shakespearean use of walls in earlier plays serves as a reminder that self-love and the various forms of self-enclosure create an even more invidious and destructive solitude within society.

Solitude is prominent even in the earliest scenes, which depict festive sociability. Apemantus rejects Timon's welcome to the feast at I.ii

¹See Appendix, Plutarch's Solitaries.

thus:

You shall not make me welcome.
I come to have thee thrust me out of doors.
(24-25)

Timon's reply:

Fie, th'art a churl; ye have got a humour there
Does not become a man; 'tis much to blame.
(26-27)

is reminiscent of the first recorded use of 'sociable' (quoted on p.136 above), which shows this same erection of sociability into a moral principle by which men are judged. The implication of the hectoring moral tone, both for Athenian society within the play and for Jacobean society outside it, is the same as the implication of the sudden increase in treatises on the subject of sociability and solitude (see pp.64-65 above): that traditional ideas are under pressure. Although Timon and many of the prose treatises argue that sociability is natural to man, the very existence of opposition to this view shows that it is not longer felt as a natural instinct, but as one of two conscious alternatives, the other, increasingly attractive alternative being solitude.

Apemantus is an uncomfortably obtrusive element of solitude within this society. He is related to the villains and the comic outsiders: a cynic, a satirist, a malcontent, a self-defining egoist, a spectator, refusing to participate, the companion of the fool. Like Richard III, his solitude extends even to a stage direction, which describes him in terms of himself alone: 'dropping after all, Apemantus, discontentedly, like himself' (I.ii). Again like Richard, Jaques, Edmund, and many others, he describes his detachment self-consciously ('I come to observe' (I.ii.33)) and defiantly ('I pray for no man but myself' (61)). He is in the tradition, not of the dissemblers, however, but of the outsider who tells socially unacceptable truths, like Jaques and the fools. But, unlike pre-

vious misanthropists, his misanthropy extends to himself, so that he is forced to hate as well as love himself. He tells Timon of his self-love at IV.iii.307-12, but is described by the Poet as loving few things better 'than to abhor himself' (I.i.63).

He is a solitary by 'nature', in the corrupt sense of the individualists, that is, by the definition of his own particular and self-defining nature. Timon, however, chooses solitude as something alien to his nature, a state following his combination of melancholy and misanthropy on becoming disillusioned with men, a pathological state described by Apemantus as

a nature but infected,
A poor unmanly melancholy sprung
From change of fortune.

(IV.iii.201-03)

Timon is afflicted, in the terminology of contemporary medical treatises, not by 'natural' melancholy, but by melancholy 'adust', which causes men 'to bee aliened from the nature of man, and wholly to discarde themselues from all societie, but rather like heremits and olde anchors to liue in grots, caues, and other hidden celles of the earth'.¹ Withdrawing to a cave is, of course, exactly what Timon does, becoming a solitary in the most primitive sense, a wild man of the woods. But ironically, in his hatred of man, he learns to appreciate the beauty of the natural world, another characteristic attribute of the solitary, described already in the very different context of Petrarch's retirement to Vaucluse. Indeed, Petrarch also refers to himself as a man of the woods, 'silvanus',²

¹T[homas] W[alkington], The Opticke Glasse of Humors (London, 1607), p.68.

²Familiarum, XV.viii.156.

(probably intending it as an urbane witticism), and writes of hating, if not men, at least their sins. Nevertheless, despite the differences in context and implication, Petrarch's combining of the love of nature with the love of solitude is undoubtedly one of the sources of the tradition, inherited by Shakespeare, of portraying the solitary in a forest or wood. Protagonists are banished from the city and find temporary refuge in a forest in As You Like It, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Two Gentlemen of Verona; Imogen flees and finds refuge in a forest cave; Perdita is found by shepherds and brought up in simple, natural surroundings. In all of these plays, however, the temporary return to nature restores the individuals and enables them to re-form a healthy society; for Timon, nature remains an escape from society, and does not heal his disillusion with men.

The solitude of Timon is judged and defined by classical, scriptural, and contemporary standards. The classical setting and the fact that Timon is a character originating in classical times make the enumeration of the familiar classical themes acceptable in the traditional classical format of logical statement as well as in the dramatic form of action. The themes of Timon:—the desirability of self-sufficiency, the horror of solitude, whether friends are necessary, the distinction between true and false friends, the duty of the individual to the state—are all the same themes debated by the Athenian philosophers (see I.i. above) and by their sixteenth-century inheritors. Timon's speech at I.ii.90ff. enumerates these themes in the very style of the prose treatises, even to the point of repeating the indispensable commonplace, 'We are born to do benefits' (96-97).

To the ancients, Timon was the archetypal solitary and misanthrope. The first extant references to him were made by Aristophanes in his comedies, and from then on he was referred to by various writers.¹ Lucian

¹See Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shake-

wrote a full-length play about him and Plutarch mentioned him twice: first in the 'Life of Alcibiades', as 'Timon, surnamed Misanthropus (as who would saye, Loup-garou, or the manhater)', and again in the 'Life of Antony', where Antony describes the solitary life by an antonomasia as 'Timons life'.¹ Judged by classical standards, Timon is quite clearly misguided; Shakespeare's imagery and the primitivism of Timon's savage life in the forest associate him, like Richard III, with the bestiality condemned by Aristotle.

Scriptural standards are more equivocal in their contribution to our understanding of Shakespeare's judgement on Timon. The judgement passed by the strangers at III.ii. is heavily with scriptural overtones. It is a judgement first and foremost not of individuals but of the whole society ('Religion groans at it' (75)) and of its particular vices, the same two vices which torment Timon and tormented Lear, ingratitude and insincerity. Both of these are a betrayal of trust, and Judas, the arch-traitor, is evoked by the language of the shared feast: 'Who can call him his friend/ That dips in the same dish?' (64-65). They call Timon noble, virtuous, and honourable, but this, significantly, is before he has chosen the solitary life.

All the characteristics of this scene: its brevity, its introduction of characters not seen before or after in the play, its lack of action relevant to the plot, its aloofness from the general structure, make it likely that it is intended to stand on a different level from the rest of the play, as an emblem or moral judgement of the whole, like the scene

speare, 3 vols. (London and New York, 1966-75), Vol.VI.

¹ Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, trans. Thomas North, The Tudor Translations, 7-12 (London, 1895), II.107, VI.73.

with Alexander Iden in 2 Henry VI, or the garden scene in Richard II.¹

This scene, along with the judgemental nature of the play generally, in its clear opposition of virtue and vice in the minor characters and its gnomic couplets interspersed throughout, gives Timon the perspective of a morality play, which appropriately mirrors the medieval themes and the nostalgia it shares with King Lear.² Timon, like Lear, portrays the 'disruption of feudal morality'³ and offers money as the cause, isolating men, as it does, in their own self-interest, breaking down relationships by replacing the motivating ideal of the common good by the motivation of individual good. The vision of social chaos evoked in Lear through parallels with the scriptural prophecies of destruction is again present in Timon's invocation to gold:

O thou sweet king-killer, and dear divorce
'Twixt natural son and sire! thou bright defiler
Of Hymen's purest bed!...

(IV.iii.379ff.)

Scriptural parallels also offer evidence, however, that Timon is not wholly free from sin. His generosity veers more towards prodigality than towards charity, and his excess is inherently condemned in that it leads him to commit the same sin as he condemns in others, the breaking of his promise, being unable to repay his debts. A late morality play, Liberality and Prodigality (performed 1601) may help to suggest how Timon should be judged. In this play, Prodigality seeks company indiscriminately, like Timon, whereas Liberality insists on the necessity for discernment:

¹For further examples and discussion, see Hereward T. Price, 'Mirror Scenes in Shakespeare', in Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies, ed. James G. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson, and Edwin E. Willoughby (Washington, 1948), 101-13.

²See A. S. Collins, 'Timon of Athens: A Reconsideration', RES, 22 (1946), 96-108.

³The phrase is the title of an article by E. C. Pettet: 'Timon of Athens: The Disruption of Feudal Morality', RES, 23 (1947), 321-36.

Some men deserue, and yet doe want their due;
Some men againe, on small deserts do sue.
It therefore standeth Princes Officers in hand,
The state of euery man rightly to vnderstand,
That so by ballance of equality,
Ech man may haue his hire accordingly.¹

(III.vi.715-20)

Flavius, a steward, like Liberality, not Timon, shares Liberality's discernment. Prodigality's admission of having 'lost his money 'in the twinkling of an eye,/ Scarce knowing which way' (IV.v.849-50) also anticipates Timon's vagueness about how his money has been spent.

Timon's solitude is inherently condemned by the scriptural authority of Genesis, cited so frequently in contemporary sermons and treatises on solitude, particularly in the context of marriage and fertility (see p.8 above). This text is called to mind by Timon's sexual disgust after his disillusionment, since the opposition of sterility and fertility would be associated in the mind of a contemporary audience with the issue of solitude and society, and in particular with this text. Defenders and ~~and~~ condemners of solitude argued endlessly about the interpretation of the text, whether it should be read as an unqualified pronouncement of the wrongfulness of solitude, or as a judgement related to the specific instance of the necessity for procreation. Donne, who will on occasion go to any lengths to justify solitude, argues from the Latin that solitude is condemned only specifically. The text reads, not 'non bonum homini', which would be a condemnation of solitude generally, but 'non bonum, Hominem' (Donne's punctuation), meaning 'it is not good in the generall, for the whole frame of the world, that man should be alone', concluding therefore that 'man might have done well' enough in that state,

¹The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality, The Malone Society Reprints (1913).

so, as his solitarinesse might have been supplied with a farther creation of more men.¹

The curious irrelevance of Timon's sexual preoccupation to the action of the play² confirms that it exists as a judgement on his solitude, as Jaques' sterile sexuality is evoked to condemn his solitude (see p.205 above). Timon's curses on the fertility of Athens cannot be interpreted as a result of any direct experience of sexual disillusionment on his part, and must therefore be interpreted more generally, as a curse on society itself and its continuance.

As defined by contemporary standards, Timon is an archetype of conflicting states, of solitude and of the feudal social ideal. By classical descent, he was, as we have seen, merely a name to substitute for solitude. Burton uses 'Timon Misanthropus' as an example of solitude symptomatic of melancholy;³ Daniel Tuvil (following his quotation of the Genesis text discussed by Donne above) exclaims:

Hence then with all those Athenian Timons, those Diogenicall Cynickes, that make their private Mansions, the publike Monuments of their living carkasses, and so retire themselves from all occasions of entercourse, that the very doores of their habitation doe seeme to challenge by way of anticipation, the inscription from their Tombes;⁴

and there are innumerable others who use him as an example in this way.⁵

¹Sermons, II.xvii.336-39.

²The whores are only introduced after Timon's solitary cursing has begun. They merely confirm his venom to him. But there is no direct sexual cause for Timon's rage, so that his sexual disgust can only be seen as linked by thematic tradition in the way described above with the issue of solitude and society.

³Anatomy of Melancholy, Part.1, III.i.3.

⁴Vade Mecum (London, 1638), pp.40-41.

⁵e.g. Robert Allott, Wits Theater of the little World (London, 1599); Richard Barckley, A Discourse of the Felicitie of Man (London, 1598);

He is shown as the representative of the closely bonded society of an imagined former age, however, in the first part of the play, and the disintegration of his house clearly parallels the contemporary decay of housekeeping so frequently deplored as an example of falling standards and values since medieval times (see p.80 above). One writer out of many on this topic in the Elizabethan and earlier Tudor period may be selected for comparison with Timon:

it hath been a greate prayse in tymes past, and is truly a thing praise worthy, to be good houskepers, to relieue their neighbours with meate and drynke, to fede many and be themselues fed of fewe...and at theyr owne houses often to be sought.¹

Timon fulfils these requirements to excess at the beginning of the play, until he finds he has overspent his means. Then the word 'kept' is ironically reversed in meaning from keeping open to keeping closed, the staying at home for refuge rather than availability.² As Timon's servant says, in the characteristically proverbial mode of speech:

And this is all a liberal course allows:
Who cannot keep his wealth must keep his house.
(III.iii.40-41)

Timon himself finds it unbearable that the house which he has kept open should now be kept locked; Whereas the Elizabethan preachers would describe the locked house as inhuman to those outside it, Timon sees the inhumanity as turned in on himself:

Brathwait, The English Gentleman; Guilpin, Skialetheia; Samuel Rowlands, The Melancholie Knight (London, 1615), etc. John W. Draper lists several more writers of the period who mention Timon as an exemplum in this way in 'The Theme of Timon of Athens', MLR, 29 (1934), 20-34.

¹The Institution of a Gentleman (London, 1839), sig.f4^v.

²Cf. the repetition of processes of reversal in King Lear, particularly regarding traditional conceptions of social roles, such as the mutual obligations between Lear and his retainers (p.227), or the relationship between a guest and a host (p.232).

The place which I have feasted, does it now,
Like all mankind, show me an iron heart?
(III.iv.82-83)

Timon constitutes an ironical redistribution of self-interest and suffering between householder and outsiders.

Timon is painstakingly defined by the play with reference to all traditions as a solitary. One result of this careful frame of reference is that a tone of thematic set-piece pervades much of the play. Timon's self-consciousness emphasises this set-piece quality: he makes rituals of declaring purpose and motive, of naming himself and his deeds within the traditional frameworks. Withdrawal becomes a ceremonial and symbolic act, as sacrosanct in form as the social ideals which it desecrates.¹

Timon repeatedly re-enacts and re-names his disengagement:

Burn house! Sink Athens! Henceforth hated be
Of Timon man and all humanity!
(III.vi.104-05)

grant, as Timon grows, his hate may grow
To the whole race of mankind, high and low!
(IV.i.39-40)

I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind.
(IV.iii.52).

As well as ritualising his own actions, Timon also perverts familiar rituals. The feast, for example, is a well-established ritual and symbol of social concord both in Shakespeare and elsewhere. One of the earliest extant plays on the theme of the solitary rejecting society, Menander's The Bad-Tempered Man, uses the feast as the symbolic climax of communal goodwill, to which the misanthrope is ceremonially dragged and then forced to dance. Elizabethan conduct-books also use the communal meal as a setting

¹Cf. Richard II's abdication, p.191 above.

for their precepts on behaviour, since it is a focal point for conversation, tact, consideration, and the honouring of degree.¹ Many of Shakespeare's comedies close with a marriage feast, or the anticipation of one, and it is consistently used as an expression of the cohesion of the group (though of course Shakespeare is not the first to pervert this for dramatic or comic purpose). The formality of the first feast in Timon (at I.ii), however, with its ceremonial presentation of gifts, reciprocation of thanks and more gifts, exposes a deadening rigidity of convention similar to that of the later conduct books. The very urge to formulate courtesy in a set of rules made permanent by the written word indicates a hardening of the original informing spirit. Timon himself considers that

ceremony was but devis'd at first
To set a gloss on faint deeds, hollow welcomes,
Recanting goodness, sorry ere 'tis shown;
But where there is true friendship there needs none,
(I.ii.14-17)

and of course the reason that his feast degenerates into mere forms is that everyone except himself is merely setting a gloss on faint deeds, masking the inward absence of feeling.

The second feast at III.vi after Timon has discovered the hypocrisy of his 'friends', is a vicious perversion of all that the feast should represent, an inverted symbol of all that is corrupt in society and all that prevents it from being the ideal which is morally desirable. This concern with the corruptness of society (with individual exceptions) and the examination of the roots of the true society in nature, need, bonds, the bare elements that define humanity, demonstrates the closeness in time of Timon and Lear. As in Lear, the term 'nature' is most frequently

¹Simon Robson actually uses the feast as a structural framework for his book, The Court of Ciuill Courtesie (London, 1591).

used in a degenerate sense, and the medieval word 'kind' denotes the old sense of 'nature' as the humanity which unites individuals. Timon first uses it when he is first made aware of ingratitude:

'Tis lack of kindly warmth they are not kind;
And nature, as it grows again toward earth,
Is fashion'd for the journey dull and heavy,
(II.ii.217-19)

and both 'kind' and 'nature' occur frequently in his judgements of men from then on. Unlike Lear, Timon never achieves a vision of that definition of nature which is the most elemental and also the highest value in man; he defines nature as that which unites them at their lowest level, (and it is noticeable that he uses the plural, implying the separateness of men even as he ostensibly describes what they share):

There's nothing level in our cursed natures
But direct villainy.
(IV.iii.19-20)

The word 'bond' is also used ambivalently in this play, more so than in Lear, where it always refers to the invisible bond of kinship and love. In Timon, it never means kinship, for Timon is unique among the tragic heroes in having no kin, though he tries to invest friendship and loyalty with equal strength. Ironically, 'bond' also means promise, and by extension, a written security, especially for money, the sort of bond which is the destroyer of all bonds of the first type. Only in the first scene of the play is the notion of bonds in the idealistic sense invoked, first when Timon frees Ventidius by paying his debts, and the messenger quibbles on the notions of freedom and bondage, 'your lordship ever binds him' (I. i.107); and again when Timon is dispensing more money to enable a servant of his to marry a rich girl, and he justifies his own gift as fulfilling 'a bond in men' (147). In the very next scene, Apemantus begins to use the word in the sense of 'promise', notably in order to call its validity

into question:

Grant I may never prove so fond
To trust man on his oath or bond.

(I.ii.62-63)

From then on bonds become the pieces of paper that Timon's false friends send him in order to reclaim money, thereby breaking the bonds of true friendship in asking him to place these material bonds first. Legal bonds introduce the principle of measurement already proved to be so destructive to the bonds of nature in King Lear; and, again as in Lear, they debase the value of words by using them in the mean, calculating fixity of such contexts. Feste's comment in Twelfth Night, though spoken half in jest, has the edge of truth characteristic of the fool's wit, which also holds good for tragedy: 'Words are very rascals since bonds disgraced them' (III. i.18). The 'broken bonds' (II.ii.42)¹ returned to Timon mirror for him the breaking of deeper bonds which he only ~~ever~~ imagined existed. Which kind of bonds are valued higher by Athenian society is made clear by Lucullus' reply to Flaminius, who is asking him to help Timon: 'this is no time to lend money, especially upon bare friendship without security' (III.i.41-42).² The irony is, of course, that there can be no security in the sense of communal stability in a society which values money higher than friendship. The members of such a society must necessarily be isolated units, not bound to each other in fellowship, but held apart by the financial bonds which lead them to disregard loyalty and humanity for selfish satisfaction.

¹Alexander prints 'date-broke bonds', but J.C.Maxwell (Cambridge ed.), H.J.Oliver (Arden), and G.R.Hibbard (New Penguin) all follow the Folio in printing 'broken bonds'.

²Cf. the Duke's denunciation of the materialist society of Measure for Measure, quoted on p.108 above.

'Need' is another value distorted by the worship of money. Lucullus, for example, in sending his bonds to Timon to be repaid, says: 'Immediate are my needs' (II.i.25), thus debasing the need which defines humanity. True need emerges as a value only when Timon discovers its existence through trying to deny it. In cutting himself off from men, he denies his emotional need of them, and finds nothing left to live for. He needs other men to reflect his own image, to give him meaning and, as it were, 'prove' his existence:

man—how dearly ever parted,
How much in having, or without or in—
Cannot make boast to have that which he hath,
Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection...
no man is the lord of anything,
Though in and of him there be much consisting,
Till he communicate his parts to others.

(Tro., III.iii.96-
99, 115-17)

Even Timon, wrote Roger Baynes in his Praise of Solitarinesse, needed someone to tell his hatred to.¹ This is shown in Shakespeare's play by the long scene with Apemantus at IV.iii. Both are professed solitaries, yet Apemantus has sought Timon out and cannot seem to leave him, however much Timon insults him, and Timon too is drawn to continue the dialogue of insults even while seeming to dismiss Apemantus. He betrays his need to love also when Alcibiades is kind to him:

I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind.
For thy part, I do wish thou wert a dog,
That I might love thee something,

(IV.iii.52-54)

and when Flavius shows his loyalty:

How fain would I have hated all mankind!
And thou redeem'st thyself.

(IV.iii.499-500)

¹Baynes, p.74.

Yet neither Flavius nor Alcibiades is presented in a full enough social context to offer a viable alternative to Timon's solitude. They do not convince him that his solitude is wrong, but they do point the inadequacy of his definition of man, showing him the kindness which he thought absent in man. Up to this point, Timon has looked at man from the two extremities, as god and as beast, and has himself enacted extremes in his own life, falling from an extremity of sociability and goodwill to an extremity of solitude and misanthropy. As Apemantus tells him: 'The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends' (IV. iii.299-300).

The definition of humanity runs through the play, as in Lear, intertwined with the definition of nature. Apemantus is described by a lord in the first scene of the play as 'opposite to humanity' (I.i.275); but it is Timon's personal apprehension of humanity which is central to the play. The scene in which his definition is most repeatedly explored is the longest in the play, IV.iii. He proclaims himself a beast and wishes Alcibiades were also a beast (see p.256 above) in order that he might love him. Alcibiades asks him: 'Is man so hateful to thee/ That art thyself a man' (50-51), and Timon turns the word back on Alcibiades a little later in mocking his promise of friendship:

Promise me friendship, but perform none.
If thou wilt promise, the gods plague thee, for
Thou art a man. If thou dost not perform,
Confound thee, for thou art a man.¹

(72-75)

His view of man is of the inherent self-division which has been shown to

¹I follow G.R.Hibbard's reading here (though line numbers refer to Alexander's text). Not only does this reading appear to make better sense in the context of the command immediately preceding at line 71, but it accords better also with the general theme of promise and non-performance emphasised throughout the play, both in the empty promises of help from Timon's friends, and in Timon's own promises, which he is unable to fulfil

obsess the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For Timon, man is divided between promise and performance, between, that is, the inner truth and the external show. Even in solitude, therefore, there can be no real security, since the self is two and may betray itself:

Each man apart, all single and alone,¹
Yet an arch-villain keeps him company.¹

(V.i.105-06)

Timon, like Lear, loses his former self, and finds self-division; but unlike Lear he never experiences the rebirth of finding the nature of humanity. He remains dead, never seeing beyond the bestial aspects of man, nor overcoming his urge to dissociate himself from mankind, such as he sees it. For him, as for Apemantus, 'the commonwealth of Athens is become a forest of beasts' (IV.iii.344-45). Apemantus' prophecy in Act I: 'Thou giv'st so long, Timon, I fear me thou wilt give away thyself in paper shortly' (I.ii.243-44), is echoed in Act IV, not by the finding of self after loss, but merely by the confirmation of loss:

Tim. Were I like thee, I'd throw away myself.

Apem. Thou hast cast away thyself, being like thyself;
A madman so long, now a fool.

(IV.iii.218-20)

Timon's progress in the play is not towards a recognition of humanity

when he finds he has lost all his money (see esp. I.ii.194-6). The theme is also introduced again in a discursive way in the Painter's speech at V.i.22-28).

¹It is interesting to compare Shakespeare with Lucian at this point. If Shakespeare knew Lucian's Timon, he deliberately alters the sense here to turn a commonplace into yet another assertion of the inevitability and destructiveness of self-division. Since Shakespeare would have known Lucian, if at all, in translation rather than in the original Greek, I quote first from Erasmus' Latin and then from an English translation of 1634, both of which indicate a verbal parallel with Shakespeare. Lucian's Timon affirms: 'at uita solitaria, qualis est lupis: unusquisque sibi amicus Timon: caeteros omnes hostes, & insidiarum machinatores' (Timon, seu Misanthropus, in Querela pacis (Basle, [1517]), p.306), or according to Francis Hicke: 'I will eate alone as wolves do, and have but one friend in the world to beare me companie, and that shall be Timon: all others shall be enemies and traitors' (Timon, or the Manhater, in Certain Select Dialogues, Watergate Library, 3 (London, [1926]), p.161).

and his own sharing in it, but towards inhumanity. He literally moves away from humanity by leaving men, and by the bestial level of his life in the forest, digging for food with his hands, living in a solitary cave. His inhumanity is partly the result of being treated like an object by men who sacrifice his humanity to their love of money. Timon recognises this in his desperate cry, 'Cut my heart in sums' (III.iv.92). The imagery of sterility reinforces our sense of his increasing alienation from humanity, as does the imagery of death, before death itself. Timon's cave is in exactly the same line as the stream of contemporary imagery of buried torches, covered lamps, and living tombs, used in the prose treatises as analogical arguments against solitude.¹ It represents Timon's withdrawal, in cutting himself off from all context of humanity and meaning, as a death in life. In denying his need of other men to give him meaning as a part in a whole, to sustain his life spiritually as well as physically, he is denying his own humanity and effecting his own death. Thus, when he actually does die, the meaning of the play is not changed; it is no more than a metaphor, a metaphysical truth, made literal.

Although Timon tries, as Lear tried, to reach the nakedness of an unfettered vision, he does not escape from the self-enclosure of his personal circumstances and subjectively limited vision. He leaves the city in nakedness and tries to reach beyond the falsity of words to the nakedness of the things themselves (chastising the poet, for example, 'Let it go naked: men may see't the better' (V.i.65)), but he does not really get beyond words

¹Shakespeare also uses this imagery as a condemnation of solitude elsewhere. See e.g. *MM*, I.i.33-36 (cf. p.10 above):

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not.

or his obsession with false words. False words are the furthest he sees into truth. His phrase, 'men are the things themselves' (IV.iii.317-18), set against Lear's 'the thing itself', points to the narrowness of Timon's vision compared with Lear's. Timon uses it in the limited and personal context of denouncing flatterers, who have preoccupied him throughout, whereas Lear uses the words after he has passed beyond his initial rage against flatterers and hypocrites into a deeper and more essential vision of humanity. Even though, like Lear, Timon seems to reject language: 'Lips, let sour words go by and language end' (V.i.218), it is in fact his words, in the form of his self-composed epitaph, which are the last piece of him in the play; he never achieves the articulacy of gesture or of music which King Lear and the last plays reach.

Timon does not achieve the status of a Hamlet, whose solitude is made to seem temporarily an absolute more acceptable than the compromise of involvement in a degenerate society. Instead, like Richard III, Shakespeare's first real solitary, he is judged by social absolutes which are inherent in the play and stronger than he. Although Timon does not see them, and his contemporary Athenians do not enact them, the great absolutes of nature, need, the social bonds, remain, and cannot be negated by a mere individual act of will (cf. pp.152-53 above). Timon may try to live alone, rejecting all bonds, denying need, denigrating nature; but he cannot escape the truth of these either in his internal or in his external life. Men insist on seeking him out, Alcibiades insists on demonstrating human kindness, Flavius insists on fulfilling his bond of loyalty. Timon remains relative to these truths, not they relative to his cankered apprehension of them. Shakespeare finally condemns solitude as the rejection of nature in this play, re-stating his positive affirmation of the social values. The rejection of nature results not in the death of nature and of the framework of absolute values, but in the death of the solitary who rejects these.

Conclusion

Although the notion of privacy had gained a little ground by Shakespeare's time, the upper classes of his day led nearly all their lives in public...Hamlet, the solitary muser, was an innovation; it is on the whole not till the seventeenth century that praise of solitude becomes a general thing. Only villains, like Lorenzo and Richard III, will say, 'I'll trust myself: myself shall be my friend' 'I am my self alone' or 'Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I'.

Such independence is diabolic.¹

Muriel Bradbrook's above account of Shakespeare's innovative part in the rise of solitude was the initial stimulus which provoked the investigations of this thesis. Miss Bradbrook's two most important points, that Shakespeare exerted great influence over the attitude of his contemporaries towards solitude, and that Shakespeare's own chronological development between Richard III and Hamlet portrays in little the contemporary movement towards solitude, remain basically sound after a detailed examination of the issues. The statement that Hamlet was 'an innovation' and the implication, through the omission of any reference to Shakespeare's later plays, that Hamlet was a culminative, or representative expression of his thought, however, are misleading.

It may be true that Hamlet was the first hero in whom the sense of solitude was so strongly and so centrally focussed, and that he was the first physical solitary portrayed sympathetically and from within, instead of being described externally as simply another ridiculous cult-figure. Yet as such he was the culmination of a movement which had expressed itself more hesitantly and equivocally in literature from about 1570 in England. If the cult of solitude had trivialised the status of the solitary, it had also come into being through a genuine desire or need for solitude, and it could

¹M.C.Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry (London, 1951), p.100.

only be a matter of time before solitude gained acceptability and eventually respectability. Hamlet was an innovation in his finality and fullness, in the uncompromising and sympathetic nature of his solitude, but he was certainly neither unprecedented nor unexpected. In marking the beginning of the tradition of unequivocal praise of solitude, he also marked the end of the struggle towards it.

It should also be clear from a comparison of Hamlet with the other works of Shakespeare considered above that Hamlet is exceptional within Shakespeare's work in its celebration of solitude. Shakespeare never really wavers from his moral condemnation of the solitary in Richard III. The increasing prominence and nobility of the solitary in his later work should not be read as an approval of solitude per se; it should be seen more as a recognition of the inevitability of solitude in a world where social principles seem to be disintegrating and as an ability to identify with the need to escape from such a society into the inner integrity of the self. Only an inadequate society justifies the retreat into solitude, and even then, in Shakespeare's view, such a retreat is regretful and tinged with the longing for what might have been.

Indeed, the fact that those plays in which solitude is most central are tragedies (including, notably, Hamlet) cannot lightly be dismissed. Even in the last plays, where solitude pervades the very nature of language, holding individuals apart with the illusions and non-consummation of a dream-world, the comic ending is only made possible by the momentary escape from this self-enclosed stillness into spontaneous motion, recognition, and reunion. The return of the social sense after long solitude rescues these plays from tragedy. The movement of the statue at the end of The Winter's Tale, or the liberation of Ariel at the end of The Tempest, are emblematic of the action of these plays: movement remains still-born until the sudden re-

lease of the final scenes, in which individuals isolated in their own fantasies throughout the play break through these barriers of individual consciousness and re-form themselves into families and social groups.

Miss Bradbrook is right, however, in indicating the centrality of solitude to Shakespeare's work, and his importance in leading the way towards change in contemporary preferences and morality. Shakespeare's ability to identify with the motivations of the solitary is in advance of that of most contemporary writers, and it is frequently tempting to try to date his work according to the prominence of the solitary and the degree of sympathy with which he is treated. The Sonnets, for example, seem on the whole to be later than Richard III, in that they treat the solitary less simplistically, less mediievally, offering relative portraits of different kinds of solitude, rather than one solitude morally judged. Such speculation is made dangerous, however, by Shakespeare's contravention of the contemporary movement after Hamlet, in his return to a more medieval perspective, which once again offers moral judgements and celebrates the social virtues more overtly. Sympathy, even admiration, for the solitary and approval of the social bonds which the solitary rejects co-exist in all Shakespeare's plays: only the emphasis changes, not the ideal.

Shakespeare can be seen as the champion of both the solitary and the social bond. He liberated the solitary from unthinking condemnation and ridicule by allowing him to retain the trappings of cult-solitude, while at the same time depicting sympathetically the inner motivations which have led him to choose solitude, and which enable him to transcend mere cult-status. The solitary gradually emerges in Shakespeare's work as a complex and tormented being, a man of integrity driven unwillingly towards solitude as the only means of preserving that integrity in a corrupt and fragmenting society. Yet at the same time, Shakespeare never allowed either his sol-

itaries or his audience to lose sight of what had been lost. The solitary is resolutely contained within a social framework, and there is always at least one, a Horatio, a Kent, or a Flavius, who remains true to his bond, as a reminder to the solitary of what could have been. As Shakespeare's sympathy for the solitary grew, so did his regret for the hopelessness of a society which forced solitude on its honest men. Though the focus of his plays moves between the solitary and society, a social life based on justice, loyalty, and an unswerving honouring of bonds remains the ideal, and solitude no more than a harsh necessity imposed by the distance between actual society and the ideal. The solitary may cherish his solitude as the bulwark of his inner truth, but he never ceases to long for the love and fellowship he might have had. Even Hamlet, Shakespeare's greatest and most uncompromising solitary, is also lonely.

APPENDIX

Plutarch's Solitaries

Timon is one of four tragic heroes taken by Shakespeare from North's Plutarch, the other three being Brutus, Antony, and Coriolanus. It is conspicuous that all four of these men are noted by Plutarch for their solitariness or introspectiveness, whether occasional or habitual. Timon is the least fully depicted, and is simply quoted as the archetypal example of the solitary on two occasions (see p.247 above), with the salient details in his life related to this point. Antony takes Timon as his example in withdrawing from the society of men. After his defeat at sea by Octavius, Plutarch writes, he

forsooke the citie and companie of his frendes, and built him a house in the sea, by the Ile of Pharos, upon certaine forced mountes which he caused to be cast into the sea, and dwelt there, as a man that banished him selfe from all mens companie: saying that he would lead Timons life, bicause he had the like wrong offered him, that was affore offered unto Timon: and that for the unthankfulness of those he had done good unto, and whom he tooke to be his frendes, he was angry with all men, and would trust no man.

(VI.72-73)

Cassius describes Brutus as 'being by nature given to melancholick discoursing' (VI.218). Plutarch repeatedly mentions Brutus' love of philosophy, especially of Plato (notable among the early philosophers for his reluctance to participate in the city-state except out of necessity). He is portrayed as withdrawn, preoccupied, unwilling to reveal his secret thoughts even to his wife, and alone among the conspirators in being a true idealist. Finally, solitariness is singled out by Plutarch as Coriolanus' great failure as head of the state. 'Wilfulness', Plutarch considers,

is the thing of the world, which a governour of a common wealth for pleasing should shonne, being that which Plato called solitarines. As in the ende, all men that are wilfully geven to a selfe opinion and obstinate minde, and who will never yeld to others reason, but to their owne: remaine without companie, and

forsaken of all men.

(II.160)

These four men are very dissimilar from one another in nearly every respect but this tendency towards one or another kind of solitude. The implication is that Shakespeare was particularly preoccupied with the question of solitude, physical and metaphysical, and exercised this preoccupation, whether consciously or unconsciously, in choosing models for his tragic heroes. Solitude can then be seen as a crucial element in the formation of Shakespearean tragedy.

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