THE COURTLY LOVE THEME IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

by

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An abstract of the thesis:

The Courtly Love Theme in Shakespeare's Plays

Shakespeare reveals his interest in the popular theme of courtly love, which came to him as an established tradition, in a number of his plays. This tradition can be traced back to the troubadours of Provence who, during the Crusades, appeared as a class of knights whose chief values were valor, courtesy, and knightly worth. From the troubadours came the idea of love service: every knight must have a lady whose relationship to him was parallel to that between him as a vassal and his lord. This love service came to be looked upon as leading to moral dignity and true chivalry and it was performed by the knight for another's wife. An elaborate set of rules grew up describing the nature of courtly love and the attitudes and responses of both the knight and the lady. From Provence courtly love spread to Italy where it was endowed with spiritual and philosophical aspects by Cardinal Bembo, Dante, and Petrarch, for example. By the time that the tradition reached England it had been modified, added to, and conventionalized in its passage through Italian and Northern French literature.

A number of Shakespeare's predecessors made important contributions to the courtly theme: Chaucer suggested its evil consequences, Castiglione established the rules to guide the perfect courtier and the lady, and emphasized marriage as the only acceptable end of courtly
love, Sidney combined the medieval chivalric and the classical pastoral traditions in an imaginary setting where chivalric ideals always triumphed over evil, and Spenser added a strong moral note, recognizing the physical as well as the spiritual aspects of love in his emphasis on virtue and constancy. By the time that Shakespeare began to deal with courtly love, courtesy meant more than the medieval idea of a willingness to undertake love-service. It meant gentlemanly conduct, refined manners, intellect, and a high moral purpose. When Shakespeare took up the courtly theme, it had been refined considerably.

In an early treatment of the theme, Shakespeare satirizes the folly connected with courtly love and the courtly ideal. This is seen in Love's Labour's Lost where the ladies only toy with the men and where love is not triumphant. In The Two Gentlemen of Verona the satirical vein is continued and the weaknesses inherent in courtly love are exposed in the struggle between love and friendship. As You Like It is another play in this group where courtly love is satirized. Rosalind becomes the spokesman for sincerity and faithfulness in love and condemns artificiality and sham. In a group of plays which treats the courtly theme as comedy (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, Henry IV (Part I), and Henry V) Shakespeare is more fun-loving and gentler in his presentation than he was in the plays where courtly love was treated satirically. No serious issue mars the
comic atmosphere as we see the humorous side of love in each of these plays. In another group, Romeo and Juliet, The Winter's Tale, and Cymbeline, we see the strength derived from romantic love which is presented as a genuine passion leading to permanence. Such love gives strength in adversity and though love ends tragically in Romeo and Juliet and nearly ends tragically in the other two plays, we see that it enables the lovers to meet their fate, even when it is death. Shakespeare reverses the theme in the following plays: All's Well that Ends Well, Much Ado about Nothing, Measure for Measure, and Richard II. In the first three the lady uses a trick to win her man, and in Richard II she pleads for love but is rebuffed. The scheming and trickery of the first three plays in this group brings the theme close to unpleasantness and degrades the courtly lover. Shakespeare here probes the realistic aspects of the theme and shows men and women as they really are. This treatment is followed through in the tragedies Troilus and Cressida, Hamlet, and Othello, where the unpleasant, realistic aspects of courtly love lead naturally to tragedy. In these tragedies the gaiety and idealism of the conventions of courtly love have disappeared completely and the true possibilities have been exposed. After these plays, courtly love no longer could supply a valid pattern for loving and living. In The Tempest the theme is subverted and love is seen as the force of renewal in the world. The lovers are no longer of interest as courtly lovers but appear as mature people whose
marriage becomes the hope of a better world. The conventional suffering for love is gone and in its place is a mature, reasoned attitude to the most basic of man's emotions. With this play Shakespeare has come all the way from artificiality and sham to a lasting, satisfying type of love.
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INTRODUCTION

No person can read far into Elizabethan literature without becoming aware of the importance of the chivalric ideals inherited from the Middle Ages. These ideals had given a spiritual aspect to the deeds and institutions of feudalism in an age of brutality and coarseness by stressing such values as courtesy, generosity, and loyalty. Though the ideals of chivalry were, perhaps, more closely adhered to in the poems and romances of the medieval writers than in actual life, nevertheless, such ideals had an important bearing on the thinking in Western Europe through the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. One can detect a continuity in the Provençal lyrics, the love poetry of Dante and Petrarch, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, the narratives of Chaucer, the prose and poetry of Sidney, the poetry of Spenser, and the plays of Shakespeare. It is often difficult to trace the exact influence of one writer upon another, but still these writers have one thing in common: they all write about chivalry and courtly love.

By the time that Shakespeare took up the theme of chivalry and courtly love it was at least four centuries old. Many changes had occurred in the conventions which came into being to satisfy certain needs in the particular society of the age of the early crusades. It seems more than
probable that Shakespeare was familiar with the whole tradition of courtly love from its earliest manifestations to his own day. The history plays from *The Life and Death of King John* to *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth* deal with a period when chivalry was a part of everyday life. One can see, by noting the images in his plays, that Shakespeare had studied the subject of chivalry thoroughly and that his thinking was influenced by it. Many of his great heroes were fashioned after the chivalric pattern. Furthermore, all those characters whom we feel Shakespeare approved of were guided by a strong sense of honor. Henry V, whom Shakespeare probably loved as well as anyone he ever created, took a firm stand for honor:

> By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,  
> Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;  
> It yearns me not if men my garments wear;  
> Such outward things dwell not in my desires.  
> But if it be a sin to covet honour,  
> I am the most offending soul alive.  
> (IV.iii.24-29)

This passage is only one of many which serve to show the influence that chivalric ideals had upon Shakespeare.

In addition to finding frequent references to the ideals of the chivalric code, one can find a considerable number of plays in which Shakespeare was concerned predominantly with the matter of courtly love. It is the purpose of this dissertation, after discussing the background of the tradition, to investigate a number of plays
in which Shakespeare treats the theme of courtly love. It should be possible to trace the various ways in which the dramatist treats the theme: whether he admires courtly love, satirizes it, treats it romantically, or deals with it in tragedy. One may expect to find that Shakespeare, who dealt specifically with courtly love in approximately half his plays, had more than one point of view to present.

The text edited by Kittredge will be used for all references to the plays of Shakespeare.

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CHAPTER I

LITERARY SOURCES OF THE COURTLY THEME

Provençal
Latin
Italian
Northern French
CHAPTER I

The phenomenon commonly known as courtly love appeared quite suddenly toward the close of the eleventh century in Provence. The exact origin of the phenomenon is still a mystery. However, certain facts are known about this period which help to explain the vogue of a new conception of love that was to find its way into the literatures of many countries with far-reaching effects. It seems unlikely that a new treatment of love just appeared from nowhere at the instigation of one person. On the contrary, William, Count of Poitiers (1071-1127), who is acclaimed by a number of historians of literature as the first known writer to take courtly love for the subject of poetry, seems to have inherited certain conventions of language and certain attitudes towards the lovers which would suggest that the poetry of courtly love was a gradual evolution. At any rate, the crusades which began in the eleventh century brought a major change in the social life of medieval France and created a situation that was ideal for the flowering of a lyrical poetry based on the subject of love. With the advent of the crusades a landless knighthood came into existence whose chief values

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1 Among these is H. J. Chaytor, *The Troubadours*, Cambridge, University Press, 1912, on page 41.

2 Ibid., pp. 41-42.

1a Cf. page 11 ff. for the possible early influence of Ovid.
were those of valor, courtesy, and knightly worth. From this class of fighting knights emanated the troubadours of Provence who germinated the seed of courtly love until it grew into a robust tradition that never quite died with the Middle Ages.

The troubadours, who are often thought of as being a group of lyrical poets that sang of love about and for the courtly class, were actually more than that. They were knights who engaged in battles and tournaments; and, though not all were of noble birth, they were the constant companions of noblemen. The troubadours took part in the earliest crusades which set out from the towns of Provence; and for the crusades they composed songs of war. Their songs were generally sung by the jongleur, a man employed by the troubadour for that purpose. These songs dealt with various topics, including war, politics, personal satire, and love. The songs of the troubadours were a product of the age and displayed a youthful zest for adventure, a hearty and joyous praise of living even amid the perils of an age of treachery and warfare, and betrayed the writer's restless desire to wander afield. Though the work of the

3 Later in the thirteenth century when decadence set in and when they were no longer required for battle, the troubadours often became jongleurs, that is, they sang their own songs as an occupation. The jongleurs, as well, sought to enhance their fortune by calling themselves troubadours in this later period.

troubadour is noted for these characteristics, it is the special treatment of love which was something new to Europe and which gave rise to a whole new set of values in the medieval world. To their particular treatment of love, which came to be known as courtly love, we must now give our attention:

The troubadour accepted the age-old subject of love for his poetry and, by fitting it into the pattern of his society, founded a new conception of love. His important innovation was the idea of love-service, that is, that every knight must have a mistress whose relationship to the knight was parallel to that between him (as a vassal) and his lord. This application of the feudal system to the matters of love gained for woman an exalted position in society and the knights came to consider love-service to a woman as something which led to moral dignity and true chivalry. In short, the love of woman became a desirable thing for every troubadour and an inspiration for his songs and deeds. In his efforts to teach love as being exalted and ennobling, he soon built up a set of conventions regarding love, the lady herself, and the position of the knight.

Love rapidly came to be regarded as a religious cult with its own code of laws to which the lover must submit himself completely; infractions of these laws were theoretically fraught with serious consequences.5

Into their lyrics, for more than two centuries, the troubadours poured their ideas, attitudes, and feelings concerning love, thus firmly establishing the tradition of courtly love.

Certain characteristics of society in the Middle Ages also contributed to the growth of courtly love. The women in this society led a fairly secluded life and often only saw men (or were seen by men) at church or at formal court functions. As a result, much significance might be attached to a glance or a smile. These might be remembered long after the encounter and, quite conceivably, they might assume an air of mystery or imagined passion. This romantic temper was a very real part of the relationship between man and woman and had an important bearing on the development of courtly love.

At the time when the troubadours began to exalt the position of woman by making love to her and by composing lyrics in her praise, her social position was, in reality, inferior to that of man. Indeed, she was merely a chattel: first of her father, then of her husband. Marriage rarely grew out of love but, rather, was an instrument to gain political power or social and economic advantage. Among the knightly class, marriage had nothing to do with love. Often, if love were to be enjoyed to its fullest it could only

be experienced through adultery. This, in brief, was the situation when a new theory of love came into being in Provence. The coming of the chivalric spirit raised woman to a plane where she became the object of devotion.

Courtly love, which reflected the true situation of woman finding satisfaction outside of marriage, became the interest of every nobleman and courtly lady in Southern France.

Courtly love was, in most cases, the love of a knight for a woman married to someone else. Service and devotion were stressed rather than the mere gratification of sexual desires. Though courtly love, perhaps, did not always remain on this idealistic level, it is important for us to recognize that illicit love was not the basic object of the knight, but it only followed as a reward for his valor and devotion. Love was considered to be noble and pure.

The whole idea of courtly love was readily accepted by the nobles. It became customary to look on marriage as being a loveless union and the wife of a nobleman was expected to receive the homage of a troubadour who sang her praises and pledged his devotion, with the understanding between the two that nothing indecorous should be done. The lady was immediately placed on a plane above the troubadour who pledged himself to win distinction by courtly words and chivalric deeds if only he were allowed to do this solely for her. She in turn was to be mindful of his
love and devotion to duty, acknowledging his achievements and rewarding his service with appreciative praise. This love gave the lady a position of usefulness, releasing her to some extent from the frustrations of her married life, and it gave the troubadour a noble purpose, placing a premium on chivalry and courtesy. Thus an emphasis, never before seen in medieval Europe, was put on love and devotion, both to duty and to the lady. An opportunity existed for a whole new set of values and a whole new attitude to love, an opportunity which was quickly seized upon by the troubadours of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

With the inception of courtly love, a number of conventional practices and rules quickly developed. These added to the artificiality which accompanied the new attitude towards love and become an important part of the whole tradition. An obvious need existed for a system of checks to prevent courtly love from degenerating into license and this need undoubtedly led to the various rules and the rigid etiquette which were devised. Courtly love

... was to be mainly an affair of sentiment and honor, not wholly Platonic to be sure, but thoroughly desensualized.7

Four distinct stages were laid down through which the lover should pass:

(1) he adored without confessing it;
(2) he adored while entreating his lady;

7 Smith, op. cit., p. 215.
he adored with hope, knowing his lady was not indifferent;

(4) he became the lady's accepted lover, that is, her vassal and special knight.  

The acceptance of the troubadour by the lady merely meant that she was prepared to receive his homage in songs and to be his inspiration. He in turn would be inspired to perform deeds worthy of her, to strive for the wisdom which would teach self-restraint, to endeavor always to please her, and to sing her praises in song. Of course, since their love must be carried on in secrecy the lady was usually given a pseudonym. Perhaps the idea of secrecy was a practical one because the lady was someone else's wife. However, the troubadours held that love was too noble to be marred by common gossip.

The poetry which grew up around this courtly love tradition abounded in conventional descriptions of the knight and the lady. The lover was always the lady's vassal, obeying her slightest wish and silently suffering her rebukes. This patient obedience was the only virtue he dared claim. In his love lyrics, the troubadour praised his lady as being physically and morally perfect, possessed of

8 Smith, op. cit., pp. 215-216.


8a The sexual aspects of courtly love can not be dismissed. For example, these are evidenced in the relationship of Lancelot and Guinevere.
extreme beauty, and able by her mere presence to cheer the sad and make the lover courteous. His love for her is infinite to the troubadour who would rather suffer death than be denied the privilege to serve her. All his thoughts of good and his pleasure in beauty are owed to her. She alone gives him the ability to sing. Rather than seek another's favor, the troubadour would suffer any pain from his lady. In addition to this worship, the troubadour constantly describes the effect of the lady's love upon him. He can not control his voice when she is near but constantly sighs and weeps. At night he wakes thinking of her and grows alternately hot and cold. His love for her has made a different man of him; he is now strong and merciful, forgiving his enemies and suffering any privation for her sake. Winter is spring to him. If his love is not accepted he will lose his self-control and become unable to eat or sleep. Only the hope of his lady's mercy will keep him alive since he knows his own merit is negligible. One can easily deduce the position of the knight and the lady from this description. The inferiority and humility which the troubadour displayed by such a description of love gave a commanding position to the woman, who could bid her lover to perform deeds requiring extreme courage as a test of his devotion. The adventurous knight, as a reward, could expect her love which sometimes might only be a kiss and encouragement, but at other times

10 This account of the description of the troubadour's love experience is taken mostly from Chaytor, Troubadours, pp. 17-18.
resulted in physical love. Thus it can be seen that though the description of courtly love was often fanciful, exaggerated, and conventional, it was an actuality and an important part of medieval life in Southern France.

As the conception of courtly love grew, it was naturally elaborated upon and carried into other literatures since it was so congenial to the society of the Middle Ages. The tradition actually came to an end as far as Provence was concerned in the thirteenth century when the Roman Catholic Church sent a crusade to wipe out the Albigensian heresy. The crusade broke up the local fiefs in Provence and, destroying the conditions which had enabled the troubadours to flourish, it drove them to other lands or forced them to seek other occupations. The system of love which they had developed was actually incompatible with Christian standards and henceforth Provencal lyricists were to focus their praise upon the Virgin whose grace, beauty, and character were idealized in the same manner as had been the troubadour's lady. However, with the dispersal of the troubadours courtly love did not disappear. Already this conception of love had been spreading, in the twelfth century, into Italy, Northern France, and even England. The Provençal love lyrics were merely the first stage in the development of a system of courtly love which found its full expression in the romances of Northern France and which reached a spiritual level in the late Middle Ages.
in Italy.

The growth of the courtly love tradition was not confined to the Italian, French or Provençal poets. Certain Latin writers also made their contribution. Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* has often been considered a major influence on the troubadours, lying at the base of the whole tradition. In this work, the poet dealt with love as a science or art. One critic comments as follows:

Courtly love had as its chief basis the love poetry of Ovid, and particularly his "Ars Amatoria," in which the whole art of love was classified in a simple, logical, and systematic style, eminently suited to French tastes. The analytical mind of the French race was strongly attracted by a book which, in place of the romantic ecstasies and sweet nothings so common in love poetry, formulated definite rules for the guidance of lovers and analysed the sentiments of sexual love. 11

Many of the critics do not agree that the influence was as clear or direct as Taylor states. However, it is well to recognize that there are some resemblances between the troubadours and Ovid in the matter of certain images, 12 themes, methods of loving, and remedies of love. It is also well to recognize that Ovid's attitude to love is vastly different from that of the troubadours. To him it is a sensual force; to them it is an ennobling one. Lewis points out this difference:


12 Kirby, *Chaucer's Troilus*, p. 5.
... the same conduct which Ovid ironically recommends could be recommended seriously by the courtly tradition. 13

While the influence of Ovid upon the medieval writers cannot be disregarded, it seems likely that the greatest factors in the growth of the courtly love tradition were the temper of the troubadours and the nature of the times in which they lived.

One writer who wrote in Latin prose, during the early thirteenth century, demonstrates the desire to set down a methodical system in the art of love-making, a desire which is close to the core of the courtly love tradition. Andreas Capellanus (André the Chaplain), in De Arte Honeste Amandi, defines love and, explaining what the lover should be and what he should expect, goes on to lay down the rules. Though he is more congenial to the medieval temper than was Ovid, unlike the early troubadours, Andreas is interested in trying to Christianize his love theory.

The lover must be truthful and modest, a good Catholic, clean in his speech, hospitable, and ready to return good for evil. He must be courageous in war (unless he is a clerk) and generous of his gifts. He must at all times be courteous. Though devoted in a special

13 Lewis, Allegory, p. 7.
14 Ibid., p. 32.
sense to one lady, he must be ready
to perform ministeria et obsequia
for all.\textsuperscript{15}

He emphasizes love as the source of all good. It inspires
great deeds, moral uprightness, and virtue, and it may
compensate for lowly birth. Though Andreas recognizes
two kinds of love, the chaste and the impure, only the
chaste is acceptable in courtly society.

The work of Andreas is important because it
codified and set down the practices and conventions of
courtly love which were probably fashionable at the time
he wrote, when the tradition was at its height.

With all the minuteness of a scholastic
treatise and the orderly management
of a philosophical disquisition the
author discusses love in all its aspects.\textsuperscript{17}

This discussion includes the ways in which love may be
acquired, the part correct conversation plays in love-
making, the conventional attitudes which the lover and his
day assume, and the reactions to be expected. Twelve
chief rules are laid down in a dialogue between a lover and
day, and Andreas elaborated later a longer code of thirty-
one rules. The treatise of Andreas is an example of the
medieval love of authority and systematization and indicates

\textsuperscript{15}Lewis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., pp. 64-67.
\textsuperscript{17}Kirby, \textit{Chaucer's Troilus}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{18}Loc. cit.
the manner in which courtly love was developing into a stereotyped system of love-making.

One other Latin work which might be mentioned as dealing with courtly love is Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae (c.1137). In writing of Arthur, Geoffrey of Monmouth makes his court a medieval one, contemporary with Geoffrey's own day, where knights and ladies are concerned with chivalric wars and courtly love. The setting is a courtly one, where love inspires valor and valor inspires love, and where the tournament is used to test a knight. This method of treating Arthurian legend became established in Geoffrey's followers such as Wace (in his Roman de Brut) and later in the French writers of the romances.

In turning to the growth of the courtly love theme in Italy and the influence of the troubadours on the Italians, one finds that there is nothing unusual in the connection between the Provencal lyric and the literature of medieval Italy. The languages of Northern Italy and Southern France were similar. In addition, close relations were maintained between the two regions, many troubadours travelling in Northern Italy and giving rise to a troubadour school there. In Italian courts before the interest


20 Chaytor, Troubadours, pp. 95-96.
in learning began to replace the interest in love, the troubadours were widely imitated and a keen interest was shown in their theory of love. The influence of the troubadours even affected the forms of Italian poetry; the sonnet and terza rima, among other forms, having been traced to Provençal origin. In addition to adopting form and style, the Italians readily accepted the matter of the troubadour lyrics. However, in accepting and imitating them, they wrote of love as a fashionable fancy rather than as an expression of chivalry. In Italy in the Middle Ages, the city became the centre of social life and the feudal system (upon which courtly love was based) was non-existant. One critic says, of the growth of courtly love in Italy:

When the love conventions of Provençal poetry were brought into Italy, they underwent two profound modifications. There the rapid absorption of the feudal lords into the cities resulted in the city, not the castle, becoming the seat of social life, and so in Italy feudalism never took root. Since, then, the social life of Italy was very different from that of France, the love which was the expression of chivalry became "the imitation of Provençal poetry, a fashionable fancy . . . ." And since the French love conventions never became a part of Italian life and thought, they were very easily affected by the Platonic Italian temperament, which has in it an element of philosophical mysticism foreign to the French.

. . . Their love conventions . . . differed from those of the French in that they contained much that is purely fanciful, and much that is allegorical and mystical.22

21 Chaytor, op. cit., p. 108.

The fanciful aspect of the Italian tradition can be seen in the Sicilian imitators of the troubadours. Their poetry is almost totally artificial and their lovers and ladies are type characters. The mystical and allegorical aspects which the Italians added to the courtly love theme can be seen in the works of Guido Guinicelli who was first influenced by the Sicilian school and who later became influenced by the growing intellectual life in Italy. Guinicelli

... was the first to turn chivalric love into the spiritual, to endow Italian poetry with philosophical content.24

It is this particular approach to courtly love that attracted Dante and Petrarch.

Dante can be pointed to as an example of the extreme to which the Italians took courtly love. In his work courtly love becomes idealized, mystical, and metaphysical. Courtly devotion changes to spiritual worship of the lady and philosophical speculation on the effects of love. The dolce stil nuova of Guinicelli which gave a position of heavenly eminence to the woman, is reflected in the Beatrice of the Vita Nuova:

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23 Kirby, Chaucer’s Troilus, p. 71. The Sicilian school cannot be disregarded, for through them certain traditional ideas were passed on to later Italians. On page 73 Kirby says, "As transmitters of Provencal poetic theory and practice, they are distinctly significant."

24 Ibid., p. 75.
Beatrice, while the embodiment of all that is perfect, is also the symbol of something higher. In her, love is transformed into virtue, into the highest good — into a thing all spirit.25

Dante, like Andreas Capellanus, saw the evil at the heart of courtly love and, in making love a purifying force and his beloved a symbol of truth, he sought to purify it by blending it with Christian ideals and service. This approach to the subject of love became popular in Italy, and Petrarch, the greatest love poet of Italy, adopted the mystical interpretation which Dante and his predecessors had advanced.

In the sonnets of Petrarch, courtly love is carried to a further extreme. His Laura is made the object of an ideal love through which Petrarch can learn how to love God. In searching for ideal beauty, the poet describes the charms of his lady and gradually is led, in his search, to the creator of all beauty. Petrarch's approach to Laura, love, and beauty gave rise to set descriptions and a catalogue of conceits. His many imitators focussed on these artificialities and created a cult to perpetuate them. The themes which Petrarch made popular in his Canzoniere became conventional. His lady was of superlative beauty but this beauty was only transitory. However, the poet vowed, though inadequate to the task, to make her beauty immortal in song. The poet describes

the lady's cruelty and the sleeplessness and the suffering which brings him close to death because of his love. The lover vacillates between fleeing from love and being held captive by it. He has dialogues with his eyes and his heart and discusses his loved one with her friends. In his treatment of Laura, Petrarch is visited by her in his sleep and receives an announcement of her death. Finally she dies and he becomes aware of her presence after death and, proclaiming his devotion to God, he prays that she attend him on his death bed.

The manner in which Petrarch treats his love for Laura is kept on an idealistic level.

The most essential characteristic of Petrarchanism is adoration of the loved one, an adoration which makes her the centre of all earthly beauty and relates all creation to her. . . . In genuine Petrarchan love there must be no element of desire, for after one lyric outburst of this nature, Petrarch attempts to stifle the note by removing from all the remaining songs the element of delight in physical beauty for its own sake. 27

This high position which Petrarch gave to women was hardly compatible with the attitude of the Church at this time. However, Cardinal Bembo, in the early sixteenth

26 Pearson, op. cit., p. 37. The Petrarchan conventions in this paragraph are summarized from this book.

27 Ibid., pp. 252-253.
century, brought about a reconciliation between Platonic love and the Church by popularizing the idea that

\[
\text{... man rises to God through the contemplation of the beautiful, and that woman is the nearest approach to divine beauty ... .}^{28}
\]

Soon the Petrarchan attitudes spread into the love poetry of Italy and into the poetry of other countries.

Regardless of the direction in which Dante and Petrarch took courtly love, they are of utmost significance to us because English Literature, in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, was greatly influenced by the various contributions which Italy made to the courtly love tradition.

Of no less importance to the growth of the tradition was the contribution which Northern France made. Provençal lyrics reached their northern neighbor fairly early, since the peoples from both regions met while crusading in the east. In addition, the court of Northern France was of considerable importance in the spreading of courtly love from the south. Eleanor of Aquitaine, the daughter of the first known troubadour, William, Count of Poitiers, is generally accredited with being the first

\[28\] Pearson, op. cit., p. 44.
patroness of the courtly love writers in Northern France. She invited many of the best known troubadours to her court and encouraged the spread of the new love theory in her northern homeland. Eleanor's daughter, Marie de Champagne, became a more famous patroness than her mother, being both patroness and inspirer to the greatest of all French romance-writers, Chrétien de Troyes.

He it was who made Arthurian stories popular, and under Marie's influence transformed them into tales of courtly love, thus starting a vogue which for long remained supreme.

Chrétien gave a new impetus to French romance, and courtly love became an integral part of these romances.

Perhaps the extent to which courtly love was carried in Northern French literature can be best seen in Chrétien de Troyes' Roman de la Charrette, the story of Lancelot and Guenevere. In this romance, the author is midway between the Christian ideal of devotion and the pagan sensual love of Ovid. Guenevere is treated as a virtual religious deity by Lancelot. He is pleased to be humiliated at her request and still he worships her. When coming to her bed-chamber to accept her love, he kneels at her bed and adores her. Before leaving the bed-chamber, Lancelot genuflects toward the bed, treating it as a


30 Ibid., p. 236.
religious shrine. His love for her is true and ennobling and his devotion is absolute. Chrétien shows here the influence which the troubadours had upon his depiction of the Arthurian court, for one of the main characteristics of the Provençal love lyric is the idea of submission and devotion to one's lady. However, Chrétien went beyond the troubadours, creating in his Roman de la Charrette a system of courtly love. When the influence of the Provençals reached him

... he was not only the first, but perhaps the greatest, exponent of it to his fellow countrymen; and, combining this element with the Arthurian legend, he stamped upon men's minds indelibly the conception of Arthur's court as the home par excellence of true and noble love.32

Certain aspects of Chrétien's concept of courtly love are worth noticing. Since the love is illegitimate, the lover occupies a position beneath the lady, who might be haughty, capricious, or even unjust though reciprocating his love. He must sacrifice himself to her service to be worthy of her and she is expected to test his worthiness. The lady stimulates bravery in her lover and his bravery wins her loyalty. The lover is devoted to the task of

31 Lewis, Allegory, p. 29.
32 Ibid., p. 23.
33 Cross and Nitze, Lancelot, pp. 67-68.
winning his lady's love, and to win it he is willing to sacrifice all, even when his passion appears to be unrequited. The art of love has certain rules, like those of chivalry, rules which the lover is bound to obey if he hopes to be successful. Chrétien's handling of love as an art seems to be influenced more by the troubadours than by Ovid, for love is more than a mere art, having as its supreme aim the triumph of an ennobling love. Some Ovidian influence is seen in the poet's use of imagery, in the love soliloquies, and the depiction of the lover as being afflicted with a disease. It would seem that Chrétien took what he considered to be the best from the Latin and the Provençal traditions and, in combining these, devised his own system of courtly love which was a great influence upon the romance writers who followed him. His own particular handling of the tradition shows that it was by no means a static one as it was being adopted and imitated in the languages of Western Europe.

The spreading of the courtly love system throughout Western Europe played an important part in the development of society in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The system found its way into the languages of many lands and each added something to it until a truly significant tradition was established. Courtly love became a topic

34 Cross and Nitze, op. cit., p. 98.
35 Loc. cit.
of discussion and debate in some of the leading courts of Europe and this widespread interest, though directed toward a convention that was increasing in artificiality, played a great part in shaping the intellectual temper of society.

The tradition spread to England in the Middle Ages where a number of writers dealt with it. Eleanor of Aquitaine, who became the queen of Henry II, did much to popularize courtly love. She is reputed to have established a Court of Love where disputes between knights (over a lady) or violations of the code were heard and judgment given, held salons in the art of love-service, tribunals, tournaments, imported troubadours from Provence, and made England for a while the centre of courtesy. As the tradition grew in England, a number of romances were written on the theme of courtly love in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, including a number in the Arthurian cycle. Among the works dealing with courtly love may be mentioned: *Floris and Blanchefleur*, Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, *Gawain and the Green Knight*, James I's (of Scotland) *Kingis Quhair*, and Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Chaucer helped to swell the growing courtly literature and the Scottish Chaucerians, Dunbar and Douglas, added to it. In the sixteenth century, Wyatt and Surrey took courtly love as the subject of their sonnets though they were more directly influenced by the Italian tradition. Thus it may be seen that a considerable English tradition existed before the Elizabethans took up the theme of courtly love.
In England, late in the tradition, the Elizabethans dealt at length with the conventions of courtly love, displaying a readiness to accept them and to elaborate upon the increasing systematization. However, we must note that they did not often mock the system of courtly love. They accepted it enthusiastically, at times as a means of escape it is true, and gave the conventions much consideration in their efforts to analyse and understand the thoughts and emotions of mankind. The fact that they could still apply many of the ideals of courtly love to the society of their day suggests that the troubadours and the tradition which they founded had been an important element in the development of Elizabethan society. And this is the case, even though the tradition, as it came to English literature, had been modified, added to, and conventionalized in its passage through Italian and Northern French literature.
CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE'S PREDECESSORS AND THE THEME OF COURTY LOVE

Chaucer - Knight's Tale
- Troilus and Criseyde

Castiglione - The Courtier

Sidney - Sonnets
- Arcadia

Spenser - Colin Clout's Come Home Again
- The Fairie Queene
CHAPTER II

The first major English writer to deal with the theme of courtly love was Chaucer. He lived in an age when English knighthood was at its height, when the warrior, who was still bound to his lord by feudal ties, was devoted to the ideals of chivalry. Moreover, Chaucer lived at court and wrote for a courtly audience. At court he was able to see the pride, artificiality, and affectation often manifest in the pursuit of the chivalric ideal. Though he accepted the convention of courtly love, Chaucer, with great perspicacity, revealed that he was aware of its less attractive features. In the Knight's Tale and in Troilus and Criseyde, he presents the love of Palamon and Arcite for Emelye and the love of Troilus for Crisye in as courtly love but at the same time shows the unhappiness and bitterness which the relationships cause. Perhaps it is too easy to say that Chaucer actually satirizes courtly love. One must recognize that the perfect courtier is a living ideal to this poet. In the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer emphasizes and admires the courtly ideal:

A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie.
(11. 43-46)
And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port, as meeke as is a mayde.
He nevere yet no vileyne ne sayde
In al his lyf unto no maner wight.
He was a verry, parfit gentil knight.

(11. 68-72)

There is only admiration in this portrait. Actually, in dealing with chivalry and in depicting courtly love, Chaucer has a moral purpose. He insists on the necessity of virtue in noble ladies, he refines the conception of love, making it more acceptable to Christian principles by considering it a natural step to marriage, he holds that love should not be attained too easily, and he shows the evil consequences which can come of courtly love.

Chaucer's blending of the traditions of courtly love with his own particular attitudes to it is evident in the Knight's Tale. There is much that is conventional in the relationship of Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye. The two noble men are cousins and sworn brothers and both fall in love with the beautiful lady, Emelye, whom they espy from their prison in the tower. The two knights both suffer for love of her. In the courtly pose, Palamon says:

1 F.N. Robinson, ed., The Poetical Works of Chaucer, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933, p. 19. All references to the Knight's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde are from this book.
But I was hurt right now throughout myn ye
Into myn herte, that wol my bane be.
The fairnesse of that lady that I see
Yond in the gardyn romen to and fro
Is cause of al my crying and my wo.
(11. 1096-1100)

Arcite is affected in the same way when he catches sight of
the lady:

And with that sighte hir beautee hurte hym so,
That, if that Palamon was wounded sore,
Arcite is hurt as muche as he, or moore.
(11. 1114-1116)

Both men become so jealous that they forsake their solemn
oath of brotherhood. In true courtly fashion they finally
settle their differences in combat, the prize being
Emelye's love. Though the noble Arcite wins the fight, he
falls from his horse and dies. Before dying, he regrets
the jealousy which caused the quarrel with Palamon and
commends Emelye to his cousin's dare, reminding her that
Palamon also served her and is worthy of her love.

In this tale of courtly love, Chaucer carefully
keeps the lovers equal: each is knightly and worthy in
his own way. Throughout the poem the question of which man
loves Emelye the more is present. The reader, at the end,
asks himself which man most deserved the lady. This is
perhaps impossible to answer, but one thing is made clear
by the author: love is capable of instilling jealousy and

2 Robinson, op. cit. p. 32.

3 Loc. cit.
selfishness, and bad faith, causing sworn brothers to attempt
to kill each other. Chaucer concludes the tale on a note of
happiness; true romantic love grows out of what began as courtly love when Palamon and Emelye are wed.

In the longer tale of courtly love, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer also goes beyond the bounds of the courtly tradition. He takes Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, in which the author deals with the relationship of Troilo and Criseida as a sensual one in terms of the conventions of courtly love, and humanizes his characters in a psychological study of the failure of love. Though the tale concerns figures from classical antiquity, Chaucer makes them thoroughly medieval and shows them caught in the snares of courtly love. He does not openly condemn it, but tries to make the system mean something in terms of human experience. It fails, not because it is inherently evil, but because Criseyde has a fatal human weakness, inconstancy.

The two main characters, Troilus and Criseyde, are presented as courtly figures and they conduct their love in the fashion expected of them as such. Troilus is the embodiment of the medieval ideal of lover and warrior. He is strong, brave, gallant, generous, and quick to serve the lady he loves:

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4 Kirby, *Chaucer's Troilus*, p. 92.

4a Before Palamon and Arcite fought, the former had prayed to the God of Love while the latter had prayed to the God of War. Thus the reward that Palamon gets, in winning Emelye, may be ascribed to his devotion to the service of love.
Troilus is the perfect courtly lover, humble, true, patient in his suffering for the love of Criseyde, full of desire to love, and devoted to the service of his lady. In his song (Book I, ll. 400-434) he reveals that love is affecting him in the traditional manner: he suffers, grows hot and cold, faints, thinks he will die, is made humble in his desire to serve and he will be ennobled through the virtue of high service to her.

5 Criseyde is the ideal courtly lady and must respond to Troilus' love. Her beauty and graceful bearing aroused sensual love and for that reason, she was bound by the rules to pity and give some consideration to her lover. She holds the customary position of superiority in the courtly love relationship. However, though Criseyde is sweet and desirable she is also fickle. This led her to put Troilus aside and, contrary to the code of courtly love, to take a second lover when she was forced to return to her father in the Greek camp. She was not to be blamed

5 Criseyde is a widow rather than the usual married woman which means that she is free to carry her love for Troilus through to a natural conclusion by marrying (as Emelye did in the Knight's Tale).

6 This can be seen in Troilus' pleading in ll. 92-98 and ll. 131-147 of Book III.
for yielding to Troilus, for, according to the courtly social code, that was the correct thing to do.

Chaucer did not regard it as a crime in her that she yielded to Troilus.

... But Cressida proved untrue — therein lay her grievous sin. To be unfaithful to one who had done no wrong, who was, as she declared, a "sword of knighthood, source of gentiless," was an unpardonable offence.7

The unhappiness which resulted came because Criseyde did not remain true to the code which bound her to Troilus.

Chaucer seems to have been concerned with the unhappiness which mutable love can bring. Though he does not condemn courtly love, he reveals a side of it that the Provençal tradition neglected. Chaucer can only say:

Swich in this world, whoso it kan byholde:
In ech estat is litel hertes reste.
God leve us for to take it for the beste!
(Book V, ll. 1748-1750)

As in the Knight's Tale, he looks deeper into courtly love than did his predecessors and sees its true relationship to actual life.

As Chaucer shows the interest he takes in the chivalric ideal, from the description he gives us of the Knight and the Squire in the General Prologue, so

Castiglione concentrates his interest in the perfect courtier. Though Castiglione writes his guide-book for all would-be courtiers over a century after Chaucer's tales of courtly love had appeared, still the Renaissance courtier is the direct descendant of the medieval knight.

*Il Cortegiano*, or The Courtier, was written between 1508 and 1516 and it dealt with actual conditions at the court of Urbino. Castiglione endeavored to describe the perfect, noble, gentle person who was an all-round individual, worthy of the name of "courtier" in Renaissance Italy. His book was not intended to be a fanciful description of an artificial, unreal person, but a realistic treatise on what the model courtier should be and how he should act.

Castiglione's *Courtier*, printed in Venice in 1528, was the foremost book of etiquette in this respect. . . . Castiglione set forth in an entertaining manner the qualifications of the ideal lover at court . . . . He would draw largely from experience, and although he was undoubtedly acquainted with the existing works on love, he so combined theory with practice as to present a vivid picture of the society for which he wrote.9

His book was so congenial to the upper society of his day that it became extremely popular and was soon translated into Spanish, French, and English. The Renaissance conception of the courtier, who was to be a perfectly balanced gentle person, a soldier, and a scholar, was fixed by Castiglione and this conception was of tremendous

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8 Pearson, *Love Conventions*, p. 45.
9 Ibid., p. 51.
importance to the literature of Europe. Hamlet and Henry V, to mention only two of Shakespeare's characters, are copies of Castiglione's ideal courtier.

So important is this Italian writer's treatment of the courtier and the code of love to the thought and feeling of all Europe in the sixteenth century, that it is well for one to consider the main points dealt with in his book. The nobility of birth and the physical appearance of the courtier are important, as are his bearing and manner:

The Courtier therefore, beside noblenesse of birth, I will have him to bee fortunate in this behalfe, and by nature to have not onely a wit, and a comely shape of person and countenance, but also a certain grace, and (as they say) a hewe, that shall make him at the first sight loving unto who so beholdeth him.  

He must have the ability to bear arms, acquire prowess in sports and exercises, be a good rider, and be proficient in a tournament. As a soldier, he must also be learned:

That therefore which is the principall matter and necessarie for a Courtier to speake, and write well, I believe is knowledge.

The ideal courtier must be, among other things, a good conversationalist; he must conduct himself with social propriety, be suave, not brusque, humble, not boastful,


11 Ibid., p. 40.

12 Ibid., p. 56.
and be ever careful to enhance his reputation. Indeed, we might say that enhancement of personal reputation is the courtier's whole pursuit. It is necessary for the courtier to choose a good friend:

Then according to their deserts and honestie, love, honour and observe all other men, and alwaies doe his best to fellowshipp with men of estimation that are noble and known to bee good . . .

The courtier must also be able to confide in his prince:

The ende therefore of a perfect Courtier . . . I believe is to purchase him, by the meane of the qualities which these Lordes have given him; in such wise the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withall, that he may breake his minde to him, and alwaies enforce him frankly of the truth of every matter meete for him to understand, without fear or perill to displease him.\(^\text{15}\)

The relationship of the courtier to his prince is important. It is necessary that the courtier be able to advise his prince:

And therefore in mine opinion, as musicke, sportes, pastimes, and other pleasant fashions are (as a man woulde say) the floure of Courtlinesse, even so is the training and helping forwarde of the Prince to goodnesse, and the fearing him from evil, the fruite of it.\(^\text{16}\)

The Courtier, as described by Castiglione, was a model of perfection. This model was taken seriously in the sixteenth century and became the guide for many an aspiring young man

\(^{13}\) Castiglione, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-127.
\(^{14}\) *Ibid.*, p. 120.
\(^{16}\) *Loc. cit.*
who cultivated 'gentlenesse.'

One important consequence of The Courtier was the honorable position it gave to women. Castiglione clearly saw the influence which her courtly excellence could have upon the ideal courtier. One critic, in estimating the value of Castiglione's ennobling of woman, says:

During the Middle Ages she had been lifted by convention to a false height, from which she was too often degraded. Now she was become the inspiration of man, and was also fast becoming a companion and equal.17

Castiglione made her position clear when he laid down the way in which a courtier should treat a lady:

... it is meete the Courtier beare verie great reverence towards women, and a discreete and courteous person ought never to touch their honestie neither in jest, nor in good earnest.18

He points out that the lady is to be guided by the same rules as the courtier. Her birth, beauty, grace of bearing, and her ability to dispatch such womanly duties as entertaining, reading, conversing, and playing music are all very important. In addition, she must be virtuous, chaste, gentle, frank, modest, and gracious.

It is natural that Castiglione's discussion of the

17 Pearson, Love Conventions, p. 45.
18 Castiglione, op. cit., p. 182.
19 Ibid., p. 188.
courtier and the lady should lead up to one of love in
Book IV, for the subject of love was one of the most
important topics of conversation in the Renaissance. His
treatment of love, coming late in the courtly tradition,
combines the medieval tendency to classify it and the
Renaissance tendency to philosophize and speculate upon
it. In defining love in one of the dialogues, Castiglione
has Bembo say:

I say therefore that according as it
is defined of the wise men of olde
time, Love is nothing else but a
certaine coveting to enjoy beautie . . . .

This description of love echoes Plato in "The Banquet."
In this symposium, Plato dignifies the passion in a manner
which appealed to the Renaissance students of love. Love is
described as the emotion which can lift the body and the
soul to a contemplation of the beautiful and the eternal:

Love is the desire of generation in the
beautiful, both with relation to the body
and the soul. 21

One of the members of the symposium points out that love is
not merely the love of the beautiful, but the love of the
generation and production of the beautiful. Since generation
and production, continues this member, are eternal and
immortal forces, then love is also the desire of immortality.

Another of the speakers in "The Banquet," also emphasizes the

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21 Plato, "The Banquet," transl. Percy Shelley, in
Shepherd, R.H., ed., The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley,

22 Ibid., p. 96
close relationship of love and immortality.

Hence do I assert that Love is the most ancient and venerable of deities, and most powerful to endow mortals with the possession of happiness and virtue, both whilst they live and after they die.  

The culminating assertion of this symposium is the doctrine wherein man may rise through love, gradually, to a contemplation of supreme beauty.

When any one, ascending from a correct system of Love, begins to contemplate this supreme beauty, he already touches the consummation of his labour. For such as discipline themselves upon this system, or are conducted by another beginning to ascend through these transitory objects which are beautiful, towards that which is beauty itself, proceeding as on steps from the love of one form to that of two, and from that of two, to that of all forms which are beautiful, and from beautiful forms to beautiful habits and institutions, and from institutions to beautiful doctrines; until, from the mediation of many doctrines, they arrive at that which is nothing else than the doctrine of the supreme beauty itself, in the knowledge and contemplation of which at length they repose.

This doctrine is reformulated by Cardinal Bembo, who popularized the ideas that man rises to God through contemplation of the beautiful and that the most nearly divine form of beauty was to be found in woman. This neo-Platonic doctrine must have appealed to Castiglione since he made the Cardinal his spokesman of love in *The Courtier*.

Just as Plato, in "The Banquet," distinguishes between mere physical gratification and the enjoyment of

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24 Ibid., pp. 101-102.
love on a spiritual plane, so does Castiglione. In The Courtier, it is carefully pointed out that possessing the body is not enjoying beauty but only indulging the senses, from which no true pleasure can come. This view of love reveals a refined attitude towards love generally. Castiglione sees that the most desirable end of courtly love is marriage.

In advising the lady on how to love he says:

I will have her to love one she may marrie, neither will I think it an offence if she shew him some token of love. In which matter I will teach her one generall rule in few wordes, and that is, That she shew him whom she loveth all tokens of love, but such as may bring into the lovers minde a hope to obtaine of her any dishonest matter.

The distinction between true love and sensual love for Castiglione lies in temperance which is the surest guide to the lovers. He admits the attraction of sensual love but he emphasizes that it is beneath true love:

As I judge therefore, those yong men that bridle their appetites, and love with reason, to be godly: so doe I hold excused such as yielde to sensuall, whereunto they be so enclined through the weakenesse and frailtie of man: so they show therein meekenes, courtesie, and prowesse, and the other worthie conditions that these Lords have spoken of,

25 Plato, op. cit., p. 67. "That Pandemic lover who loves rather the body than the soul is worthless."

26 Castiglione, Courtier, pp. 304-305.

27 Ibid., p. 240.
and when these youthfull yeares bee
gone and past, leave it off cleane,
keeping aloofe from this sensual
coveting as fro the lowest step of the
stayres, by the which a man may ascend
to true love. 28

The whole emphasis is upon developing a true lasting
love as the only satisfying end of love service. This is
not contrary to the tradition of courtly love, but is
actually a new element in its evolution.

In much of his discussion on love, Castiglione
deals with it systematically. Rules of wooing are laid
down to guide the courtier: he is to serve his lady and
try to please her, he is to shun ignorance of the passion,
he is to be modest in seeking her love, and he is to be
chivalric, displaying worthiness, valiance, and discretion.
The lady is instructed, also, on how to conduct herself
when being wooed. She is to know how to distinguish
sincere love from pretended love, she must know how a man
paying court to her will act, and she must be forthright
in dealing with her lover, remaining chaste, virtuous, and
modest. This pattern of conduct became an ideal for the
ladies and the courtiers of all Europe.

Perhaps no better example can be found of a
courtier who reflected Castiglione's principles both in
his life and in his writing than Sir Philip Sidney.

Sidney, as scarcely anyone else in all English literature, embodied that perfect balance of graces and accomplishments which made him the delight of all who knew him. Castiglione's ideal had at last entered into the flesh.29

In Sidney were combined birth, courage, Christian charity, grace, virtue, honour, and devotion: all necessary in the Renaissance courtier. Though he died at thirty-two, he was famous as a perfect gentleman, accomplished in arms, in statecraft, and in learning.

In addition to being a living model of the ideal courtier, Sidney displayed a familiarity with the courtier's life, particularly with the conventions of courtly love, in his writing. His sonnet sequence, Astrophel and Stella, shows this familiarity. Like the troubadours of old, Sidney addresses a married lady with whom he is in love. However, in his handling of courtly love, Sidney shows the influence of the Italians. His love is cold and towers over him. He grows hot and cold and cannot sleep. Describing his suffering he says:

Alas, have I not pain enough, my friend, 
Upon whose breast a fiercer gripe doth tire. 
Thus did on him who first stole down the fire, 
While Love on me doth all his quiver spend.30

29 Pearson, Love Conventions, p. 84.

My mouth doth water, and my breast doth swell,
My tongue doth itch, my thoughts in labor
lie... 31

Sidney sees his lady as being the embodiment of love and beauty:

... in Stella's face I read
What love and beauty be, then all my deed
But copying is, what in her Nature writes.32

The last sonnet of his sequence shows a distinct Petrarchan influence. Being unable to find hope in fleshly love, he supplants it with spiritual love. In this last sonnet earthly love is seen as transitory: it "reachest but to dust" and "fading pleasure brings." The Platonic ideal of rising to spiritual love through fleshly love is the only end which the sonneteer can accept:

Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see; Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me.33

In the Arcadia, Sidney deals more comprehensively with ladies, courtiers, and courtly love than he could in Astrophel and Stella. In the longer work, there is an idealistic treatment of honour, courage, valour, endurance, and self-denying devotion -- all the things that make up knightly character.

Sidney, in his imaginary Arcadia... expressed with ingenuous confidence his

31 Hebel and Hudson, op. cit., p. 112.
32 Ibid., p. 107.
33 Ibid., p. 120.
cherished ideals of virtue, heroic energy and chivalrous love.  

Gabriel Harvey's description of the Arcadia with its parenthetical comments on Sidney is worth quoting:

Here are amorous courting (he was young in years), sage counselling (he was ripe in judgement), valorous fighting (his sovereign profession was arms), and delightful pastime by way of pastoral exercises.

The Arcadia is, then, a prose romance, set in a fairyland atmosphere, having a strain of chivalrous adventure, and dealing with love-making and attempted love-making. Within its pages can be found a code of behaviour which could serve as a moral and social guide to the Elizabethan courtly society. Its value to that society cannot be overlooked:

The Arcadia perpetuated and diffused the ideal which Sidney's life had created. It transmitted to the next age his conceptions of spirited and delicate manhood, loyal and intelligent womanhood, justice, government, friendship and piety.

In the Arcadia, Sidney combined the medieval chivalric tradition and the classical pastoral tradition into a romance of people who were either good or bad. However, emphasis is placed upon the good, and the chivalric ideal


36 Ibid., p. 155.
always triumphs in the idyllic land. Most of the characters are nobly born; even the shepherds and shepherdesses utter the sentiments and conventions of the courtly and the refined. The setting is a highly artificial one, where young noble lovers can successfully disguise themselves and embark upon romantic love quests. Nevertheless, with all the fantastic intrigue and adventure, the purpose of love is clearly a happy ending in marriage.

The story is, briefly, as follows: two noble friends, Musidorus of Macedon and Pyrocles of Thessaly are separated in a shipwreck and go to different lands where each is given command of an army. They finally confront each other in hand-to-hand combat (being heads of opposing armies) and recognizing each other, make peace. They then embark upon a love quest to gain the hand of two Arcadian princesses. Musidorus disguises himself as a shepherd, Dorus, and pursues Princess Pamela. Pyrocles disguises himself as a woman, Zelmane, to gain Princess Philoclea. Confusion follows Pyrocles' disguise, for he attracts the love of the parents of the Princesses. Basilius (the king) falls in love with Zelmane (Pyrocles) as does Gynecia (the lustful queen who realizes that Zelmane is a man). In unfolding this tale, Sidney uses the current courtly conventions: the extreme beauty of the lady, the suffering that love causes, the inferior position of the lover who begs the lady for pity, and the ennobling power of virtuous love. All of these aspects of courtly love can be seen in
the pleading of Zelmane (Pyrocles) to Philoclea:

O let not, let not from you be poured upon me destruction; your fair face hath many tokens in it of amazement at my words: think then what this amazement is, from whence they come, since no words can carry with them the life of the inward feeling, I desire that my desire may be weighed in the balances of honour, and let virtue hold them. For if the highest love in no base person may aspire to grace, then may I hope your beauty will not be without pity, if otherwise you be, alas! but let it not be so resolved, yet shall not my death be comfortless, receiving it by your sentence.37

Just as Philoclea can condemn her lover to death, so can Pamela condemn hers. In a letter to Pamela, Dorus (Musidorus) tells that he will die because Pamela wills it (since she will not promise to love him). Yet, like Pyrocles, he gladly accepts the sentence of death since it is Pamela's heavenly will. However, Pamela, in true courtly fashion, has been forced to consider the plight of her lover because of his courtliness and his willingness to do anything for her:

... can I without the detestable stain of ungratefulness abstain from loving him, who (far exceeding the beautifulness of his shape with the beautifulness of his mind, and the greatness of his estate with the greatness of his acts) is content so to abuse himself, as to become Dametas's servant for my sake?39


38 Ibid., pp. 150-151.

39 Ibid., p. 148.
Pamela's description of Musidorus recalls Castiglione's ideal, and, indeed, we feel that Musidorus is Sidney's ideal when he is described as having

... a mind of most excellent composition, a piercing wit quite devoid of ostentation, high erected thoughts seated in a heart of courtesy, an eloquence as sweet in the uttering as it was slow to come to the uttering, and a behaviour so noble as gave a majesty to adversity ... .\textsuperscript{40}

Such is the ideal that Sidney upheld in his life and in his \textit{Arcadia} and passed on to his contemporaries and successors.

Spenser was one of these who saw in Sidney the epitome of all that was noble, virtuous, and gentle. In one of the many elegies where Spenser idealizes Sidney, he says of him:

\begin{verbatim}
Knowledge her light hath lost, valor
hath slaine her knight,
Sidney is dead, dead is my friend,
dead is the worlds delight.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{verbatim}

(11. 7-8)

Though Spenser's handling of the courtly theme differed from Sidney's, still he cherished the same values and ideals. He too measured true nobility by the standards of Castiglione's courtier and held that a knight should combine learning and chivalry. The moral note was strong in Spenser,

\textsuperscript{40} Quoted from Pearson, \textit{Love Conventions}, p. 102.

there being a perpetual emphasis upon patriotic duty, stedfast loyalty, faithful love, and virtuous women full of modesty and grace.

Mediaeval chivalric ideals were fundamental in his system of conduct; but he deliberately united them with metaphysical conceptions of moral principle . . . . 42

Not only did Spenser hold up these values for all to admire, but he made it his purpose to teach them. In doing so he appealed to the poets that followed him and did much to fix the chivalric ideals which came out of the English Renaissance.

Of great importance was his attitude to women and his handling of courtly love. In his poetry, woman has an honorable place, often being equal and superior (in certain ways) to man. Actually he was a devoted spokesman of the existing position of women in society.

At the court of Elizabeth women no longer received an empty homage which excluded them from all the more serious interests of life. Their culture, their education, their artistic accomplishments, enabled them to share in the intellectual life of their time: they were not merely lovers, they had become companions and friends. 44

42 Schofield, Chivalry, pp. 147-148.

43 This fact is borne out in Book III of the Fairie Queene, where Britomart, the symbol of chastity, is capable of gaining Scudamour's quest when he, despite the fact that he loves Amoret truly and wants to rescue her, fails because he is too impatient and gives way to anger.

In Colin Clout's Come Home Again, Spenser has much to say in praise of women. They are equal in nobility, grace, and courtesy to men and their beauty is all-powerful. In one passage where Spenser praises one of Elizabeth's maids, he uses all the medieval conventions in describing his devotion to her:

For that my selfe I do professe to be
Vassall to one, whom all my dayes I serue;
The beame of beautie sparkled from aboue,
The floure of vertue and pure chastitie,
The blossome of sweet ioy and perfect loue,
The pearl of peerlesse grace and modestie:
To her my thoughts I daily dedicate,
To her my heart I nightly martyrize;
To her my loue I lowly do prostrate,
To her my life I wholly sacrifice:
My thought, my heart, my loue, my life is shee,
And I hers euer onely, euer one . . . .

(li. 466-477)

Though this description of the lady and his devotion to her is conventional, we must recognize that Spenser was sincere in his veneration of women.

In his treatment of love, Spenser carries forth the Italian tradition advanced by Petrarch of dignifying the passion. However, Spenser, unlike Petrarch who thought that spiritual love was the only worthwhile goal, combines the love of body with the love of soul. The English poet maintained a heavy emphasis upon the spiritual aspect of love while he did not condemn the physical. To him the natural consummation of true love was to be realized in marriage where a spiritual union of souls might be reached.

45 Cf., for example, The Epithalamium.
Though his conception of love had no place for the early courtly love tradition which could allow adultery under certain conditions, it did not overemphasize the spiritual strain of the Petrarchan theme. Rather, it sought to reconcile the physical and spiritual sides of love and to urge high moral standards. His conception of love placed it as the highest goal of the true knight. Courtly love, as known to the early medieval writers, is openly condemned and a more refined, intellectualized, and moral type of courtly love is favored.

In the *Fairie Queene*, Spenser finds it congenial to deal with the "twelve private moral virtues" by assigning a knight to undertake perilous combats with vice in various forms and to be the champion of each virtue. Still the poem is not entirely a medieval one. In reality, the day of medieval adventures and quests was gone and the knight of Elizabeth's day was not the knight of Henry II's. The *Fairie Queene*, though set in medieval times with medieval figures, reflects the knightly society and the knightly values of Elizabethan England. Spenser introduces all the problems that were of concern to the courtier of his day for, after all, his purpose to "... fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline..." necessitated a story that could be applied to his own society. The Middle Ages offered all that he would

46 Smith and de Selincourt, *op. cit.*, "A Letter of the Authors... to... Sir Walter Raleigh...", p. 407.
teach as being good in his *Fairie Queene*:

_0 goodly usage of those antique times,
In which the sword was servant unto right;
When not for malice and contentious crimes,
But all for praise, and proofe of manly might,
The martial brood accustomed to fight:
Then honour was the meed of victorie,
And yet the vanquished had no despight:
Let later age that noble use enuie,
Vile rancour to avoid, and cruel surquedrie._

(III.i.13)

In his attempt to guide the courtier of his day,
Spenser shows the rewards of following the highest ideals
of the courtly life and, by contrast, he shows the evil and
misery which result from indulgence in lust and vice. In
Book III of the *Fairie Queene*, the lustful side of courtly
love is condemned. Britomart, the symbol of Chastity,
leaves the Castle Ioyeous when she sees what goes on there
between knights and ladies:

_For nothing would she lenger there be stayd,
Where so loose life, and so ungentle trade
Was usd of Knights and Ladies seeming
gent..._  

(III.i.67)

Again in this same book Spenser clearly distinguishes
between sensual and true love:

_Most sacred fire, that burnest mightily
In living brests, ykindled first aboue,
Enomgst th' eternall spheres and lamping sky,
And thence pour into men, which man call Loue,
Not that same, which doth base affections moue
In brutish minds, and filthy lust inflame,
But that sweet fit, that doth true beautie loue,
And chooseth vertue for his dearest Dame,
Whence spring all noble deeds and neuer dying
fame..._  

(III.iii.1)

In Canto X of Book III, Spenser shatters the romantic
atmosphere of the early medieval brand of courtly love. In this canto, Paridell, a false knight, rapes Hellenore, the wife of his host and makes off with her. Nothing but unhappiness and evil comes from this kind of love which Spenser abhors. On the other hand, he praises the chastity and virtue of Amoret, who, though she is held captive and is tortured by Busirane, remains true to Scudamour, to be finally rescued by Britomart. In all his handling of love, Spenser emphasizes chastity, not in the sense of self-denial, but in the sense of virtue and constancy. The reward of such chastity is to be marriage and a happy life, not just pleasure for the moment:

The story he tells is . . . the final struggle between the romance of marriage and the romance of adultery. 47

In Spenser courtly love, which goes back beyond the days of the troubadours, has been transformed from a convenient social convention to a method of gaining true and ideal love. Spenser will have no part of courtly love, in its original medieval sense. The love which he sanctions is courtly love in that it can be realized only by the noble, courtly person who has the highest moral standards.Courtesy, by his time, has come to mean more than the willingness to undertake love service. It implies gentlemanly conduct, refined manners, intellect, and a high moral purpose. Thus,

courtly love, which grew so rapidly in the age of medieval chivalry, changed with the development of society till, by the time of Elizabeth, it showed the refining effects of man's study of himself.

It is this tradition of courtly love, in all its intricacy and diversity, which Shakespeare took up in the great decade of the Elizabethan era, the 1590's and continued to deal with for the remainder of his career as a playwright. Since his greatest interest was man, he could not fail to give his attention to the tradition of courtly love which was a very real, living influence in his society. Such great men as Chaucer, Castiglione, Sidney, and Spenser had all contributed something important to the tradition and Shakespeare could not but be alive to each man's contribution. The society of his own day took a keen interest in the Middle Ages and such topics as chivalry and the effects of love were studied seriously for their relationship to real life. The courtly love tradition attracted Shakespeare, for in his plays he is always concerned with love and its relation to the life of human beings. Though he presents the conventions of courtly love in their many divergences, poses, and fancies, he normally treats the type of love which is a natural passion leading to marriage. With this in mind, we can turn now to a study of Shakespeare's treatment of the theme.
CHAPTER III

THE COURTLY THEME AND SATIRE

Love's Labour's Lost

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

As You Like It
CHAPTER III

Shakespeare's earliest treatment of the courtly theme in his plays gives evidence that he was able to present what the public wanted and still make obvious his own opinion of the convention. When two of his earliest plays appeared, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the courtly theme was enjoying great popularity in the romances of Lyly and Greene, the pastoral tales of Sidney and Spenser, and the sonnet sequences of numerous Elizabethan poets. Though Shakespeare, in his plays, showed a willingness to provide popular entertainment, still he was not prepared to abandon himself to a world of complete unreality as the romancers and sonneteers often had done. Instead, he saw the insincerity and affectation inherent in the courtly conventions. Though he accepted these conventions as part of his heritage, he did not lose sight of the true meaning of friendship, love, virtue, or truth. Rational love was always preferred to courtly love, and sincerity to affectation, even in his earliest plays.

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shakespeare makes fun of the folly connected with courtly love and the pursuit of the courtly ideal. Pedantry, sonnet-writing, and affectation are all ridiculed and the extravagances of courtly love are parodied by the would-be courtier, Don Armado. Even the principal characters of this play make mock of courtly love in their ineffictual suits to their ladies.
The main action of *Love's Labour's Lost* is a satire on courtly love, since the courtly lovers are made the dupes of the more sensible ladies and their love suits virtually end in failure. Ferdinand, the King of Navarre, and his three lords, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumain, foolishly renounce the society of ladies and vow to turn the court into "a little Academe." An embassy from the King of France comprised of the Princess and her ladies, Rosaline, Maria, and Katherine, forces them to break their vow. Despite their intentions, the King and his nobles fall in love with the Princess and her ladies, becoming typical courtly lovers. The ladies do not accept the men, however, but mock them instead. The play ends in disappointment for the men when a messenger brings word that the Princess' father is dead. The ladies break off their frivolity, only promising to consider the suit of each after a year of trial has passed.

The satirical treatment of the courtly theme in this play is not a bitter denunciation, but rather a light-hearted mockery. At all times simplicity and naturalness are favoured by Shakespeare. Berowne, who is the play's most important character, is, generally speaking, the spokesman for these qualities. He sees the impracticality and the unnaturalness of the oath that the four men have taken:

Why should proud summer boast
Before the birds have any cause to sing?
Why should I joy in any abortive birth?
At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's newfangled shows,
But like of each thing that in season grows:
So you -- to study now it is too late --
Climb o'er the house to unlock the little gate.

(I.ii.102-109)

Though Berowne enters into the conspiracy against love, he warns all his companions of the obstacles which confront them. It is no surprise to us that he falls in love rapidly, along with his companions, for he has always had a high regard for love. He ridicules his fellow noblemen on discovering that they have allowed themselves to become the victims of love and denies he has been groaning for love when he says:

. . . I betray'd by you:
I that am honest; I that hold it sin
To break the vow I am engaged in.
I am betray'd by keeping company
With men like you, men of inconstancy.
When shall you see me write a thing in rhyme?
Or groan for love? or spend a minute's time
In pruning me? When shall you hear that I
Will praise a hand, a foot, a face, an eye,
A gait, a state, a brow, a breast, a waist,
A leg, a limb?

(IV.iii.176-186)

However, we feel that this is done more for the purpose of ridiculing his friends than for the purpose of revealing his true opinions. After the king discovers that Berowune is also in love, the latter repeats his early appraisal of the passion:

As true we are as flesh and blood can be.
The sea will ebb and flow, heaven show his face;
Young blood doth not obey an old decree.
We cannot cross the cause why we were born;
Therefore of all hands must we be forsworn.

(IV.iii.215-219)

Berowune here sees that love is a natural passion which cannot be ignored.

In accepting Berowune as the spokesman for a natural
attitude to love, one cannot deny that he belongs in the group of courtly lovers in this play. He too, like Ferdinand, Longaville, and Dumain, is a typical courtier, caught in the customary snares of courtly love. Each is described by the lady he adores with the usual epithets: "sole inheritor of all perfections," "beauteous heir," "well fitted in arts," "glorious in arms," and "all that virtue love for virtue lov'd" (III.i.1-75). Furthermore, each experiences love in the conventional courtly manner. The men write love poetry to the ladies of their affections which parodies the extremes and the absurdities of contemporary love-poetry and ridicules the suffering lover. Berowne, in a rare moment, berates himself for falling in love and tries to describe women in unromantic terms:

What, I? I love? I sue? I seek a wife? A woman, that is like a German clock, Still a-repairing, ever out of frame, And never going aright, being a watch, But being watch'd that it may still go right! Nay, to be perjur'd, which is worst of all; And, among three, to love the worst of all, A whitely wanton, with a velvet brow, With two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes; Ay, and by heaven, one that will do the deed Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard! And I to sigh for her! to watch for her! To pray for her! Go to! it is a plague That Cupid will impose for my neglect Of his almighty dreadful little might. Well, I will love, write, sigh, pray, sue, and groan.

Some men must love my lady, and some Joan. (III.i.191-207)

Despite his efforts to deny the power of woman's beauty, Berowne gives in to love. Soon he is competing with his friends in praising their ladies. In Act IV, Scene iii, each of the four men tries to outdo the other in his lavish praise
of his loved one. Such praise is conventional in its extravagance and reveals that all are caught in the throes of courtly love. The power of woman's beauty and of love have captivated the men, and Berowne speaks for all in his lengthy discussion of woman and love (IV.iii.290-364) which recalls Castiglione's doctrine of the power of woman's beauty.

The theme of courtly love in this play is dealt with, also, on a lower level. Armado, the Spaniard who affects courtly manners and graces, is presented as an example of the absurdities associated with courtly love. Jaquenetta is only a country wench, but Armado pursues her in courtly style. His scenes of love-making are ridiculous as is his letter, cast in a courtly style, which sings her praises. He experiences the usual melancholy and is addicted to writing poetry in praise of his "lady." The extreme end to which courtly love brings him, a burlesque

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1 'By heaven, that thou art fair is most infallible; true that thou art beauteous; truth itself that thou art lovely. More fairer than fair, beautiful than beauteous, truer than truth itself, have commiseration on thy heroical vassal! . . . Shall I command thy love? I may. Shall I enforce thy love? I could. Shall I entreat thy love? I will. What shalt thou exchange for rags? Robes. For tittles? Titles. For thyself? Me. Thus expecting thy reply, I profane my lips on thy foot, my eyes on thy picture, and my heart on thy every part. 'Thine, in the dearest design of industry, Don Adriano de Armado.'

(IV.i.60-89)
figure of a courtier, is seen when Costard reveals that Jaquenetta has been pregnant for two months. Armado finally admits his folly and, like the King and his lords who are put on trial for a year, is dismissed, having "vow'd to Jaquenetta to hold the plough for her sweet love three year" (V.ii.892-894).

No courtier in this play is successful in love. Despite the attention paid to the ladies, none yields to her lover. Unlike the traditional courtly lady who is cruel at first, but is not deaf to her lover's suit, the Princess and her companions remain firm in their answers to their lovers. In disguising themselves to mock the men, the ladies show that they are more than conventional figures. Rosaline, for example, seems to be anything but a courtly lady in stating her opinion of Berowne and in her desire to make a fool of him:

They are worse fools to purchase mocking so. That same Berowne I'll torture ere I go. 0 that I knew he were but in by th' week! How I would make him fawn, and beg, and seek, And wait the season, and observe the times, And spend his prodigal wits in bootless rhymes, And shape his service wholly to my hests, And make him proud to make me proud that jests! So pertaunt-like would I o'ersway his state That he should be my fool, and I his fate. (V.ii.59-68)

This is a devastating mockery of courtly love and its conventions. Before the ladies have finished with their wooers, all four men have been made to feel foolish. The Princess describes the noblemen's abandonment of their oath in apt terms:
That sport best pleases that doth least know how:
Where zeal strives to content, and the contents
Dies in the zeal of that which it presents.
Their form confounded makes most form in mirth
When great things labouring perish in their
birth.
(V.ii.517-521)

Berowne can but reply:

A right description of our sport, my lord.
(V.ii.522)

Shakespeare's satirical treatment of courtly love is sustained to the end of the play. There is no repentance on the part of the ladies who, even after news is brought of the King of France's death, have time to make astute appraisals of their lovers and to set a trial period of one year on each before they depart for the court of France. Each lady, we see, wants more than the lip-service of courtly love. Therefore they do not take their men at face value but put the love of each on trial. Berowne summarizes the ending of the play:

Our wooing doth not end like an old play:
Jack hath not Gill. These ladies' courtesy
Might well have made our sport a comedy.
(V.ii.883-885)

Courtly love has not been triumphant and the play closes leaving us thinking that unless true love, upon which marriage can be based, grows freely in the year of trial, then surely love's labour will be lost.

Shakespeare's treatment of the courtly theme in The Two Gentlemen of Verona is not as gay as in Love's Labour's Lost. Various attitudes to courtly love are
presented by the characters in the play, and very few of these attitudes leave a favorable impression upon the audience. Furthermore, the conflict, a traditional one, between friendship and love pushes the sacrifice of love for friendship to an absurdity and thus degrades the nobler passion of love. Though courtly love ends in fruition and happiness for all, still the satire in the play exposes the absurdities and unrealities inherent in the courtly code and makes the audience aware of its weaknesses.

The plot of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* gives the dramatist ample opportunity to examine courtly love and to satirize it. Valentine, the main character in the play, scorns love and chides his friend, Proteus, for being its slave. While Proteus, who loves Julia, stays in Verona, Valentine is sent to the court at Milan. However, Antonio, the father of Proteus soon cuts short his son's love-making and sends him after Valentine. Upon joining Valentine, Proteus finds that love has captured his friend who reveals his planned elopement with Silvia. Proteus is so overcome with love for Silvia, upon seeing her, that he betrays the sacred bond of brotherhood and tells Silvia's father (the Duke of Milan) of the planned elopement. Valentine is banished from the court and Proteus is free to pursue Silvia. In the meantime, Julia disguises herself as a page and enters the service of her lover, Proteus, where she is free to observe his unfaithfulness. Silvia rejects this false lover and renounces him as a traitor to love and friendship.
With the aid of the faithful knight, Sir Eglamour, she goes in search of Valentine who is now the noble captain of a band of brigands. In the melodramatic denouement, Proteus rescues Silvia from this band of brigands and demands a reward from her for this service. Before he can force her to submit to his demands, Valentine appears. After Proteus repents, Valentine offers to renounce all his claim to Silvia; but a final revelation, that the page is the faithful Julia, facilitates a satisfactory reunion of each couple.

The situation revealed in the plot is well suited to satire. Proteus, who actually gains more of our attention than the protagonist, degenerates from an ideal courtly lover to an inconstant friend and lover, filled with lust and deceit. When we see him in the early part of the play he is the true lover of Julia and the cherished friend of Valentine. Valentine says of him:

> Yet hath Sir Proteus (for that's his name) Made use and fair advantage of his days— His years but young, but his experience old; His head unmellowed, but his judgment ripe; And in a word (for far behind his worth Comes all the praises that I now bestow) He is complete in feature and in mind With all good grace to grace a gentleman. (II.iv.67-74)

Proteus' father also thinks highly of his son and, in sending

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2 The estrangement of the friends, Valentine and Proteus, recalls the theme of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* where, because both love the same lady, Palamon and Arcite become bitter enemies in their pursuit of Emelye.
him to the court of Milan, he hopes that Proteus will become
the counterpart of the ideal courtier. When Panthino describes
to Proteus' father the advantages of training in this court,
as follows:

There shall he practice tilts and tournaments,
Hear sweet discourse, converse with noblemen,
And be in eye of every exercise
Worthy his youth and nobleness of birth.
(I.iii.30-33)

we can expect Proteus to return a courtier worthy of
Castiglione's ideal. Before parting for Milan, Proteus
takes a solemn oath of faithfulness:

Here is my hand for my true constancy;
And when that hour o'erslips me in the day
Wherein I sigh not, Julia, for thy sake,
The next ensuing hour some foul mischance
Torment me for my love's forgetfulness!
(II.ii.8-12)

We soon learn that he is neither the true lover Julia
expects him to be nor the noble courtier his father intends.
Treachery becomes his favorite pastime as he betrays
Valentine and seeks to dupe the dull courtier, Thurio, out
of the love-match being arranged by Silvia's father, the
Duke of Milan. There is a strongly satirical vein in the
instructions on how to woo a lady which Proteus delivers to
Thurio:

You must lay lime to tangle her desires
By wailful sonnets, whose composed rhymes
Should be full fraught with serviceable vows.

• • •

Say that upon the altar of her beauty
You sacrifice your tears, your sighs, your heart,
Write till your ink be dry, and with your tears
Moist it again; and frame some feeling line
That may discover such integrity.

• • •
After your dire-lamenting elegies,
Visit by night your lady's chamber window
With some sweet consort. To their
instruments
Tune a deploring dump. The night's dead
silence
Will well become such sweet-complaining
grievance.
This, or else nothing, will inherit her.
(III.ii.68-87)

Here is an unmistakable depreciation of the fashionable
Petrarchan love conventions. The Duke's answer to Proteus
underlines the satire and insincerity in this description of
courting:

'This discipline shows thou hast been in love.
(III.ii.88)

Indeed, Shakespeare seems to be saying, "If this is the
discipline of love, cannot you see the falsity and
shallowness behind the doctrines of courtly love?" Proteus,
the antithesis of chivalry and courtliness, is made to
question one of the most important ideals of courtly love,
constancy, in his last significant speech:

'Tis true. O heaven, were man
But constant, he were perfect! That one error
Fills him with faults, makes him run through
all th' sins.
(V.iv.110-112)

This man who failed as a courtier and who could not be
constant seems to be saying that constancy is rarer than the
conventions will admit. In reality, love is changeful and
unpredictable in its course, and constancy is impossible,
except as an ideal which can never be attained.

Just as Proteus is a major source of the satire on
courtly love in this play so is Valentine. Valentine is the
perfect friend and lover who maintains a romantic idealism but can renounce love for friendship in the end. When we first meet him, he appears to be a realistic young nobleman who scorns courtly love and its conventions:

To be in love, where scorn is bought with groans;
Coy looks with heart-sore sighs; one fading moment's mirth
With twenty watchful, weary, tedious nights:
If haply won, perhaps a hapless gain;
If lost, why then a grievous labour won;
However -- but a folly bought with wit,
Or else a wit by folly vanquished.  
(I.i.29-35)

This scoffing attitude to love is short-lived and soon Valentine suffers the usual symptoms in falling in love with Silvia (II.iv.128-142). He remains constant in his love for her until friendship intervenes. Even when Proteus is revealed as evil and deceitful, Valentine readily surrenders his loved one in response to a brief superficial apology. In this episode Shakespeare makes it clear that courtly love can be superficial. In doing so, he ultimately degrades Valentine whom he had built up as an ideal courtier, for Valentine, in a final appraisal, appears to be an ineffectual hero who is duped because of his own sentimentality and his artificial devotion to his friend.

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3 Even the murderous brigands could see that Valentine fulfilled the requirements of the ideal courtier:

... And partly, seeing you are beautified With goodly shape, and by your own report A linguist, and a man of such perfection As we do in our quality much want -- .  
(IV.i.55-58)
In addition to Proteus and Valentine, another courtier is a source of satire on courtly love in this play. Thurio, who has been a contender for Silvia's hand, does not deserve the name of courtier. He cannot make love effectively, in the customary manner, and he is incapable of displaying the chivalry expected of him. When threatened by Valentine's sword, he hastily resigns his claim to Silvia and makes a comment which is realistic but unbecoming to one of his class:

I hold him but a fool that will endanger
His body for a girl that loves him not.
(V.iv.133-134)

This knight is not of the stuff of Sidney's or Spenser's heroes.

In addition to noting the mockery which the courtly class makes of courtly love, one cannot miss the reflections cast upon it by the low comic characters in this play. As in Love's Labour's Lost, Shakespeare's treatment of love in these low characters is a significant part of his attitudes towards courtly love. Speed and Launce, on the low level, provide the chief criticism of love and serve as contrasts to the courtly lovers. Speed's comments on the conventional lover are an important source of satire. His description of how he can tell that Valentine is in love is worth quoting in full.

Marry, by these special marks: first, you have learn'd, like Sir Proteus, to wreathe your arms like a malcontent; to relish a love song like a robin redbreast; to walk alone like one that had the pestilence; to sigh like a schoolboy that had lost his ABC; to weep like a young wench that had buried her grandam; to fast like one that
takes diet; to watch like one that fears robbing; to speak puling like a beggar at Hallowmas. You were wont, when you laughed, to crow like a cock; when you walk'd, to walk like one of the lions; when you fasted, it was presently after dinner; when you look'd sadly, it was for want of money. And now you are metamorphis'd with a mistress, that, when I look on you, I can hardly think you my master.

(II.i.18-34)

Here is keen observation and an astute appraisal of the lover.

In addition to functioning as a critic of love, Speed serves another purpose. Though he is only a fool in the play, he can see through deceptions that his master cannot. Speed quickly sees that Silvia has tricked Valentine into writing a love letter to himself(II.i. 11.154ff.). This episode serves to point to the true value of the clown as a commentary on the action of the play.

Launce is also important in his role, as a source of satire on the courtly theme. He describes his own love affair in a coarse, unromantic manner in an interlude with Speed which follows on the banishment of Valentine. It is significant that Shakespeare should present this low comedy interlude at a point in the play when we are most interested in the separation of the lovers. We cannot fail to notice that Launce, as he catalogues the charms of his wench, parodies the Petrarchan lady. One incident regarding Launce

4 Some of her charms include: "She can milk," "She brews good ale," "She can wash and scour," and "She can spin." Launce also lists her vices: "She is not to be kiss'd fasting, in respect of her breath," "She doth talk in her sleep," "She is proud," "She hath no teeth," and "She is too liberal." (III.i.260-374)
may be taken as an important comment on the whole theme of courtly love. In Act IV, Scene iv, he sacrifices his own dog in place of the one which Proteus gave him to present to Silvia. He thinks he is doing the right thing, but actually he is not. This episode is recalled when Valentine sacrifices his love for the friendship of Proteus. Again this is the wrong thing to do. The sacrifice of Launce, which was well-meant but wrong, serves to underline the incompatibilities and unrealities of the courtly conventions. Shakespeare is pointing to the unsatisfactory aspects of courtly love from the low level as well as from the high. Though his criticism of courtly love is not destructive or bitter it is condemning.

In *As You Like It*, a play written much later than the two we have considered, the satirical attitude to courtly love is continued. Shakespeare takes a common Elizabethan plot in which a courtier is pursued by a disguised lady who loves him. In this story are found typical exiled courtiers who lead a happy life in an idyllic, imaginary forest which, somehow, is inhabited by the shepherds of pastoral tradition. The dramatist, in accepting this material, makes full use of the situations and the contrasts of various characters which it provides in order to reveal the artificiality of the courtly theme. An emphasis is placed upon realism and naturalness in love and even such a typical courtly lover as Orlando who sighs, suffers, and writes insipid love lyrics becomes a genuine lover,
finally. The triumph of natural love pushes aside courtly love, after the latter has been much satirized.

Here again, as in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Shakespeare satirizes courtly love through all groups in the play. The love of the clown, Touchstone, for Audrey provides a comment on courtly love and a burlesque of it. Touchstone has only a crude opinion of love: it is the animal desire of man for woman. His love-making is grotesque but through him, with his dislike for insincerity and affectation, we realize just how false are the principles underlying the pastoral fantasies which entertain the courtly society. His scorn for the artificial land where courtiers and ladies are freed from their cares stamps him as the common sense man:

> Ay, now am I in Arden, the more fool
> I! When I was at home, I was in a better place; but travellers must be content.  
> (II.iv.16-18)

Arden lacks the realities that Touchstone so values, but he tries hard to point out the artificialities found there, and in doing so he constantly reminds us that a common everyday world exists. His attitude to courtly love is seen when he ridicules Orlando, the typical courtly lover. His parody of Orlando's sonnets depreciates the convention of sonneteering and mocks the custom of praising the lady:

> If a hart do lack a hind,  
> Let him seek out Rosalinde.  
> If the cat will after kind,  
> So be sure will Rosalinde.  
> Winter garments must be lin'd,  
> So must slender Rosalinde.
They that reap must sheaf and bind,
Then to cart with Rosalinde.
Sweetest nut hath sourest rind,
Such a nut is Rosalinde.
He that sweetest rose will find
Must find love's prick, and Rosalinde.

(III.ii.106-118)

The love-making of Silvius and Phebe helps to reinforce Touchstone's satire of the courtly lovers in a pastoral setting. These two are native to this setting and parody the language of pastoral lovers. Silvius, the sentimental shepherd, employs the usual extravagant conceits of the courtier in his wooing of Phebe, and in doing so he shows how absurd a courtier wooing a shepherdess can be.  Phebe is cruel in her replies, as a courtly

5 He describes what being in love is:

It is to be all made of sighs and tears;
And so am I for Phebe.

... It is to be all made of faith and service;
And so am I for Phebe.

... It is to be all made of fantasy,
All made of passion, and all made of wishes,
All adoration, duty, and observance,
All humbleness, all patience, and impatience,
All purity, all trial, all obedience;
And so am I for Phebe.

(V.ii.91-105)
lady might be, and in being cruel she helps to satirize courtly love. In the denouement, love finally triumphs but it is not because of the courtly wooing of Silvius, but rather because he remained faithful, even when Phebe was infatuated with the disguised Rosalind.

Another important source of the satire on courtly love is to be found in Jaques. His cynical comments on the idyllic situations in the play help to support the satire of Touchstone. As a professed satirist, Jaques' position is very clear and he becomes an important critic of courtly society as he sees it. Much of his scorn is directed at the courtly lover. In his famous description of the seven ages of man, he neatly tags the conventional lover:

And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow.
(II.vii.147-149)

This unfavorable opinion of the lover is upheld in Jaques' encounter with Orlando in Act III, scene ii. Here he takes a frank dislike to lovers such as Orlando and chides the courtier:

I would not be thy executioner.
I fly thee, for I would not injure thee,
Thou tell'st me there is murder in mine eye:
'Tis pretty, sure and very probable
That eyes, that are the frail'st and softest things,
Who shut their coward gates on atomies,
Should be call'd tyrants, butchers, murthers!
Now I do frown on thee with all my heart;
And if mine eyes can wound, now let them kill thee!
Now counterfeit to swound . . .
(III.v.8-17)
The worst fault you have is to be in love.
(l. 299)

Though Jaques is perhaps too bitter in his satire he takes a definite stand against unreality and artificiality. He sees the court as "pompous" and does not want to return to it. Furthermore, his condemnation of love cannot be taken to mean that he distrusts and condemns it altogether. In the end, he says to Orlando when he is pairing together the couples to conclude the play:

You to a love that your true faith doth merit . . . .
(V. iv. 194)

Because he recognizes true love we can attach some significance to his satire and not merely dismiss it as the grumbling of a discontented misfit.

The most effective satire on courtly love in *As You Like It* comes from Rosalind. She is a perfect example of the high-born, cultivated, witty courtly lady, yet she is real. In her constant ridiculing of courtly love she retains her dignity and womanly charm. Here is a voice for a natural realistic love, stripped of artificiality and affectation. This courtly lady has no delusions about her own sex. Her description of the loved one and wife is far removed from the conventional idealized lady:

Maids are May when they are maids,
but the sky changes when they are wives.
I will be more jealous of thee than a
Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen, more
clamourous than a parrot against rain,

7 It must be remembered, though, that Jaques is performing a mechanical function of putting all things straight for the conclusion.
more newfangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey. I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are dispos'd to be merry; I will laugh like a hyen, and that when thou art inclin'd to sleep.

(IV.i.148-157)

Still more satirical is the account of a courtly lady being wooed which Rosalind gives to Orlando when she (disguised as Ganymede) tells how she took the part of a lady to cure a lover:

He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to woo me. At which time would I, being a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing, and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, and inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour . . . .

(III.ii.427-436)

Rosalind's perception here is as sharp as it is in her description of the customary courtly lover. She has been taught to recognize him by her Uncle and in telling Orlando that he does not have the appearance of such a lover, she mocks this type:

A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not. . . . Then your hose should be ungarter'd, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbutton'd, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation.

(III.ii.392-401)

Rosalind's satire of the lady and the courtier is matched with her satire of courtly love. She condemns love as madness (III.ii.420-424), but recognizes that all
are susceptible to it, even herself. Still she cannot abide the nonsense found in the courtly code. She sees love as desirable but sees it in its true relationship to man and life. The courtly lover, like Orlando, who would die for love is denounced:

The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love cause. Troilus had his brains dash'd out with a Grecian club; yet he did what he could to die before, and he is one of the patterns of love. . . . But these are all lies. Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.

(IV.i.94-108)

This is not a cynical appraisal of real love, for Rosalind, in the same scene, is quick to admit to Celia that she is in love:

O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathoms deep I am in love.

(II. 209-211)

Though she is quick to ridicule the artificial love banter of Phebe, Silvius, and Orlando as the "howling of Irish wolves against the moon" (V.ii.119), Rosalind is also quick to recognize the true worth of genuine devotion. Her advice to Phebe may be given for all sincere lovers:

Down on your knees,  
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love .... 

(III.v.57-58)

Rosalind's appraisal of love in which she upholds sincerity and faithfulness and condemns artificiality and sham, labels courtly love as egregious. There is no mistaking the intention of the dramatist who uses nearly every
character in *As You Like It* to convey some attitude towards love and, in his process of contrasting the different kinds of lovers, makes one of the most active, wittiest, and best of his women the spokesman for real and sincere love. Clearly, Shakespeare was on the side of true, natural love.

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *As You Like It*, Shakespeare demonstrates his ability to judge a set of conventions which were of common vogue in his day. He does not treat them destructively or denounce them as unacceptable but rather uses them to point out the common weaknesses of mankind. By showing us how human beings conduct themselves when they accept false ideals, Shakespeare suggests that there is a more genuine set of values. Since he was aware of the worst aspects of courtly love, it is to be expected that satire should recur in many of his plays. However, Shakespeare's interest in the courtly theme extended beyond that of satirizing it as one may see by examining other plays.

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8 For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, much of the first act is given to satirizing the conventional pose of Romeo in his love for the cruel, unheeding Rosaline.
CHAPTER IV

THE COURTLY THEME AND COMEDY

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Twelfth Night

Henry IV (Part I)

Henry V
CHAPTER IV

There is one group of plays in which Shakespeare uses the courtly theme in a vein of comedy. Though, in doing so, he is often not far removed from satire, still there is a gentler and more fun-loving air about the treatment of love in these plays than there was in those we have just considered. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry IV (Part I)*, and *Henry V* courtly love is a source of amusement. Shakespeare, in these plays, avoids the seriousness with which many of his contemporaries treated the theme. As a result, his love of fun finds vent in these plays and no serious issue is allowed to mar the comic atmosphere in which courtly love is presented.

The comic atmosphere is particularly dominant in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There are ample love adventures in the court of Theseus and in the enchanted wood near Athens where the various courtly love sentiments are bandied about. In the imaginary world of this play the irrationality of love is given free rein and the comedy arises out of ludicrous situations. The impulsiveness of love causes Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia, and Helena to flee into the wood where the nature of their passion is exposed for all to laugh at. Their courtly poise is soon abandoned and they become unrestrained, quarrelsome individuals. In this same wood, Titania (the fairies' counterpart of a courtly lady) becomes infatuated with
Bottom, the weaver with the head of an ass. This episode reduces love to the level of farce and provides a contrast to the love of the courtly figures. No harm comes of the strange incongruities in the wood, for, before the lovers can injure one another and before Titania can carry her love-making too far, all is righted with the magic herb. Though we are made to realize that love has its extravagances and absurdities, we also realize that it has its amusing side.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a romantic comedy which appeals to the fancy with its fairies, magic herbs, and its flowing, lyrical poetry. Infidelity in love is handled trivially amidst the impossible reverses of the play, adequately commented upon by Bottom, when he states the theme: "... reason and love keep little company ..." (III.i.136-137). The plot, which is frivolous, unfolds the adventures of two pairs of young lovers (Hermia and Lysander and Helena and Demetrius) who struggle through adversity, hindrances, and cross relationships to a conclusion which is acceptable to all. This happy denouement is brought about by supernatural agents. Oberon, assisted by Puck, tangles and untangles the plot with the juices from magic herbs. This capricious activity of the fairies finally leads to the happy union of Helena and Demetrius while doing no serious harm to the love of Hermia and Lysander. All this magic is hardly the machinery of serious drama, but is rather that of light entertainment designed to delight and amuse the Elizabethan
audience.

The play has two settings: one placed in ancient Athens where the anachronistic figures from English rustic life are seen and where the court of Duke Theseus holds sway in a rational, daylight world. The other, in direct contrast to the first, is placed in an enchanted wood where the fairies rule and where all is permeated by fancy and enchanting moonlight. Such a plot and setting give ample opportunity for the comedy which Shakespeare presents in his handling of courtly love in this play.

Those characters which are presented as courtly figures include Theseus, Hippolyta, Lysander, Hermia, Helena, and Demetrius. Theseus is a noble gentleman of the Renaissance. He possesses the qualities which Shakespeare most admired in the Elizabethan nobleman: leadership, superiority, and an awareness of his duty as a leader accompanied with tolerance, kindness, a sense of authority, and a cool reason. His betrothed, Hippolyta, is only lightly sketched as a haughty courtly lady possessing a

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1 This fanciful setting recalls the idyllic locale of Sidney's *Arcadia*.

2 With the love of Theseus and Hippolyta, Shakespeare injects a serious note into the theme of courtly love. These two demonstrate that love should lead to a rational, substantial, and satisfying union after the frenzied over-emotional period of youthful courtship has passed. The love of these two is not so much the courtly type of love as is that of the young couples. Rather, it is the love of a sensible, responsible couple and serves to underline the extravagances of love which the young couples indulge in.
distinct pleasure in the noble sport of hunting. The two young couples are conventional courtly lovers, Helena and Hermia being more distinctly drawn than Demetrius and Lysander. In the early scenes of the play we see all four at the court in Athens where they are guided by the manners and politeness customary in their society. When all have fled into the wood and the men have been charmed with the magical herbs, the lovers abandon their courtly poise and proceed from abusing each other to open quarreling. Such behavior exposes the courtly conventions and helps us to see the courtier and the lady in a true light.

In their pursuit of love, Helena, Hermia, Lysander, and Demetrius are courtly lovers. They often refer to love and to each other in conventional diction which recalls the chivalric love code in such words as "loyalty," "knight," "gentleness," and "courtesy." Hermia says to Lysander, when they are together in the wood:

   But gentle friend, for love of courtesy
   Lie further off . . . (II.i.56-57)

and Lysander, promising to love and protect her, replies:

   . . . then end life when I end loyalty! (II.i.63)

Later in the same scene when Lysander has been charmed by Oberon's magic juice and wakes to adore Helena, she appeals to his honor by saying:

   I thought you lord of more true gentleness. (II.i.132)

He replies to this in true courtly fashion:

   And all my powers, address your love and might
   To honour Helen, and to be her knight. (II.i.143-144)
In addition to using these stock courtly phrases, Lysander and Demetrius protest their love in a highly stylized manner. The former, in Act I, scene i, carries on a conversation with Hermia which contains all the balance and artificiality of popular euphuism. Later, Lysander, when wooing Helena, speaks with this same euphuistic manner in speeches which are carefully balanced and contain extravagant conceits. In contrast to the style of Lysander's protestations, Demetrius follows with an elaborate, Petrarchan catalogue of Helena's charms. He calls her lips cherries and says her hand is whiter than "Taurus' snow" after having referred to her cruelty as murdering him. The play is full of such conventions and one cannot miss the fun that Shakespeare is having with them.

One important source of the fun is found in the Pyramus and Thisby interlude which burlesques courtly love. Here the rude artisans present a play which parodies the extravagant courtly love phrases. Everything is absurd in their presentation: the language of love making, the

3 Why should you think that I should woo in scorn? Scorn and derision never come in tears. Look, when I vow, I weep; and vows so born, In their nativity all truth appears. How can these things in me seem scorn to you Bearing the badge of faith to prove them true? (III.ii.122-127)

4 So should the murthered look, and so should I Pierc'd through the heart with your stern cruelty. Yet you, the murtherer, look as bright, as clear, As yonder Venus in her glimmering sphere. (III.ii.58-61)
situation where both lovers kill themselves because they draw hasty conclusions that the other is dead, and the artificial poetry spoken by each before dying. In this scene, one of the funniest Shakespeare ever wrote, courtly love is thoroughly mocked.

Another source of amusement in A Midsummer Night's Dream is the wood setting and its effect upon those who enter it. Titania, in addressing Oberon, recalls a theme popularized by Sidney in his Arcadia:

... but I know
When thou hast stol'n away from fairyland,
And in the shape of Corin sat all day,
Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love
To amorous Phillida.

(II.i.64-68)

This serves to remind us of the fanciful notion of noblemen and ladies being lost in some idyllic land where they could sport with shepherds and shepherdesses. However, we notice how this notion is mocked, indirectly, when we observe Bottom transformed into a grotesque figure with an ass' head being wooed by the queen of the fairies and when we observe how this idyllic setting can alter the affections of Demetrius and Lysander with unpleasant results.

When Shakespeare gets the four courtly lovers, Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius into the wood he is free to have his fun with their love-making. On entering the enchanted world of the fairies, these four enter a world where only the illogicalness of a dream rules. Here the unreason of human experience triumphs and the lovers who only
a few hours before were declaring vehemently their love and devotion are soon quarreling. Lysander, who at court loved Hermia, now declares his love for Helena. Demetrius, who once loved Helena but who turned his affection to Hermia, is once more (this time by the means of magic) attracted to Helena. To complicate things further, the two fast friends, Helena and Hermia, soon fall out. One can see immediately that Shakespeare was having fun with these lovers who demonstrate how capricious love really is. The changefulness, irrationality, and brevity of love are clearly seen. The courtly love adventures in the wood are a source of light-hearted, carefree enjoyment, on the surface. Underneath it all, we realize the extreme to which this irrational type of fanciful love can go. Titania, the delicate queen of the fairies, is found making love to a weaver with an ass' head: there is nothing courtly about this. Underlying the whole amusing treatment of love is another theme which only gently points out another side. This is the love of Theseus and Hippolyta which grows out of a steady, seasoned, and balanced attitude to the emotion which clearly idealizes marriage. In this play, Shakespeare chose to treat love in a gay manner and in so doing had considerable fun with the courtly love theme.

The same gay, comic mood is to be found in Twelfth Night. In A Midsummer Night's Dream Shakespeare had exposed the true nature of the young courtly lovers. Here, in Twelfth Night, he reveals that courtly love can mislead lovers.
As in the former play, this revelation is made on various levels, but no complication is serious enough to mar the happy ending. Olivia, Orsino, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Malvolio are all misled in their pursuit of courtly love and the confusion has an important effect on Viola and Sebastian. However, courtly love ends in happiness for Olivia, Orsino, Viola, and Sebastian, and no one is much concerned with the fate of Sir Andrew and Malvolio.

The main plot of this play provides comedy on a high level. There is superb irony in the role of Viola, whose disguise as a page, Cesario, is a source of confusion to her associates and a source of amusement to the audience. Coming to the court of Illyria, in disguise, Viola falls in love with Duke Orsino while engaged as his love-messenger to the Countess Olivia. Olivia, who uses the death of her brother as an excuse to remain secluded from all would-be courtiers and fortune-hunters, spurns the Duke's love-messages, faithfully recited by Viola (as Cesario), but falls desperately in love with the young page. To add to

Viola gives the comic situation of this main plot in referring to Olivia and Orsino:

My master loves her dearly;
And I (poor monster) fond as much on him;
And she (mistaken) seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.
As I am woman (now alas the day!),
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe.

(II.i.34-40)
the confusion, Viola's twin brother, Sebastian, appears and is mistaken for his disguised sister. Olivia immediately urges Sebastian to enter a bond of marriage and Viola finally makes all clear by revealing her true sex. The Duke has a rapid, convenient shift of affection which satisfies the yearning of Viola. The situation in this main plot gave Shakespeare a natural source of comedy which he utilized to show the humorous aspects of courtly love.

These humorous aspects can be seen all through *Twelfth Night* in the futile love of Orsino for Olivia, in the futile love of Olivia for Viola, and in the seemingly futile love of Viola for Orsino. The Duke first appears as the traditional melancholy courtier who is suffering for love. Olivia recognizes his nobility. He is all that is expected of the ideal courtier:

Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble, Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth; In voices well divulg'd, free, learn'd, and valiant, And in dimension and the shape of nature A gracious person. But yet I cannot love him. He might have took his answer long ago. 

(I.v.277-282)

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6 We might be amused by his prudent shift of affection if we remember how he earlier boasted to his page that he was an ideal lover:

Come hither, boy. If ever thou shalt love, In the sweet pangs of it remember me; For such as I am all true lovers are, Unstaid and skittish in all motions else Save in the constant image of the creature That is belov'd.

(II.iv.15-20)
Olivia's refusal of one so noble and courtly shows the progress that woman has made towards independence since the days of the troubadours when she was bound to reciprocate with her love if her lover were deserving. Olivia, however, does not yield and Orsino's persistent suit, carried by Viola, becomes quite amusing. Viola has learned her message well and her recital of Orsino's love, set in Petrarchan language, is funny to the audience who know what is behind the disguise and what Viola's true feelings are. One feels when Viola is delivering, in high courtly tone, the Petrarchan praise of Olivia which Orsino has taught her that it is only half-hearted:

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on. Lady, you are the cruellest she alive If you will lead these graces to the grave, And leave the world no copy.  
(I.v.257-261)

Olivia remains deaf to such praise but the gentleness and the wit of Viola fascinate her:

Methinks I feel this youth's perfections With an invisible and subtle stealth To creep in at mine eyes.  
(I.v.315-317)

Despite the efforts of Viola to discourage the advances of Olivia, this courtly lady falls hopelessly in love. How amused we are when we see her abandon all her courtly poise!
Cesario by the roses of the spring,  
By maidhood, honour, truth, and everything,  
I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride,  
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.  
Do not extort thy reasons from this clause,  
For that I woo, thou therefore hast no cause;  
But rather reason thus with reason fetter:  
Love sought is good, but given unsought is better.  

(III.i.161-168)

Viola's reply is full of irony and, for the enjoyment of the audience, gives the true situation while it only serves to make Olivia more desperate:

By innocence I swear, and by my youth,  
I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth,  
And that no woman has; nor never none  
Shall mistress be of it, save I alone.  

(III.i.169-172)

So desperate is Olivia that she urges the page to return, suggesting that she may yet heed Orsino's message. Of course we know that she will not. Her love for Cesario has captivated her to the point where she becomes reckless:

What shall you ask of me that I'll deny,  
That honour, sav'd, may upon asking give?  

(III.iv.231-232)

Only the arrival on the scene of Viola's twin brother, Sebastian, saves Olivia. After Shakespeare has extracted a maximum of fun from the confusion in this plot, everything is explained and the courtly lovers are bound in marriage.

The confusion evident in the main plot is echoed on a lower level, with the same amusing effect. Both Malvolio, Olivia's steward, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the dupe and drinking companion of Sir Toby Belch, are led astray by their aspirations. Malvolio is a pompous, proud, and narrow-minded individual who thinks he may win Olivia's hand and become Count Malvolio. Though he has ambitions to become a courtier,
he is hardly noble and makes no efforts to woo Olivia in the courtly style. Of course, to the Elizabethans, the idea that this man should hope to rise from steward to master of his lady's estate would be ludicrous. Malvolio is degraded for his stupidity, conceit, and self-regarding pride by being imprisoned by the riotous members of Olivia's house, whom he scorns. However, his degradation is not malicious but becomes the source of much of the comedy in the play. Maria, in disclosing her plan to make a fool of Malvolio, states clearly that it is to be done in fun:

He has been yonder i' the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half hour. Observe him, for the love of mockery; for I know this letter will make a contemplative idiot of him. Close, in the name of jesting! (II.v.17-22)

Malvolio, as we would expect, falls for the trick. He is too proud and foolish to realize that it is unlikely that such a courtly lady as Olivia would write such a letter as he finds. This letter, composed by Maria, is a source of much fun, for we realize that this is her idea of a courtly character:

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em. Thy Fates open their hands; let thy blood and spirit embrace them; and to inure thyself to what thou art like

8 Malvolio is often played tragically but it seems unlikely that Shakespeare intended this. Malvolio provides us with much amusement when we consider what his ambitions to become a courtly lover do to him. That Shakespeare did not want us to attach too much significance to his punishment seems evident for Olivia dismisses him from our minds with her patronizing comment:

He hath been most notoriously abus'd. (V.i.387)
to be, cast thy humble slough and appear fresh. Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants. Let thy tongue tang arguments of state; put thyself in the trick of singularity. Thus she advises thee that sighs for thee. Remember who commended thy yellow stockings and wish'd to see thee ever cross-garter'd.

(II.v.157-167)

Alas! Malvolio follows this foolish advice and in doing so becomes no courtier. In addition, he bewilders the lady he would win and makes her think he is mad. When Olivia turns him over to Sir Toby Belch, Malvolio is made the laughing stock of the servants and the two riotous knights, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Courtly love has made a gull of Malvolio and the ridicule he suffers seems to be his just reward.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in his aspirations, rounds out the comedy on courtly love. This shadow of a knight is no soldier, scholar, or lover. So stupid is he that he lets Sir Toby spend his income of three thousand ducats a year, on the promise that Sir Toby will win his niece, Olivia, for him. Sir Andrew has not followed the normal pursuits of the courtier, as he tells us, himself:

I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting. O, had I but followed the arts!

(I.iii.97-99)

Furthermore, he could never qualify as a courtly lover. He has no idea of how to go about wooing a lady and when he hears Viola delivering the extravagant praises of Orsino to Olivia, Sir Andrew believes he is seeing just how one makes love and so he writes down the phrases for his own use:
That youth's a rare courtier.
'Rain odours' -- well!

'Odours,' 'pregnant,' and 'vouchsafed' -- I'll get 'em all three all ready.

(III.i.97-102)

We are amused at Sir Andrew who becomes jealous of Viola and imagines that Olivia is being prevented from paying attention to him. In Act III, scene ii, Sir Andrew is ready to leave but Sir Toby tries to arouse the valor which Sir Andrew does not possess. An amusing challenge is written out and sent to Viola who, being a woman, shrinks from a duel. Sir Andrew is rewarded finally for his assininity when, mistaking Sebastian for Viola, he strikes the youth and, in return, has his "head broke across." Like Malvolio, this would-be courtly lover gets just what he deserves. In Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Malvolio, Shakespeare rounds out the comedy with which courtly love is treated in *Twelfth Night*.

In two history plays, *Henry IV* (Part I) and *Henry V*, Shakespeare also uses comedy in dealing with the courtly theme which is not, however, the main interest of the play as it was in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*. Courtly love enters incidentally but the comic tone is clear. In a few brief scenes of *Henry IV* (Part I) we see the author playing with the theme when he presents the loves of Hotspur and Mortimer for their wives. Hotspur is a courtly nobleman whom King Henry praises:

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A son who is the theme of honour's tongue,
Amongst a grove the very straightest plant;
Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride . . . .
(I.i.81-83)
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However, Hotspur is hardly the all-round Renaissance courtier, for he is too fond of making war. The King makes this clear by referring to him as

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\ldots \text{Mars in swathling clothes,} \\
\text{This infant warrior} \ldots \ldots
\]

(III.ii.112-113)

This aspect of Hotspur's character is so pronounced that it puts his love for his wife, Lady Katherine, in a subordinate position. The scene where these two are parting reveals the relationship. So filled with war is Hotspur's mind that it makes him melancholy and makes him neglect his wife. She reports how she has been "a banish'd woman from my Harry's bed" (II.iii.42) and how his dreams are of war:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{In thy faint slumbers I by thee have watch'd,} \\
\text{And heard thee murmur tales of iron wars,} \\
\text{Speak terms of manage to thy bounding steed,} \\
\text{Cry 'Courage! to the field!' And thou has} \\
\text{talk'd} \\
\text{Of sallies and retires, of trenches, tents,} \\
\text{Of palisadoes, frontiers, parapets,} \\
\text{Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin,} \\
\text{Of prisoner's ransom, and of soldiers slain,} \\
\text{And all the currents of a heady fight.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(II.iii.50-58)

This courtly lover is unlike the traditional one who suffers restless sleeps because of his love for his lady. So engrossed is Hotspur with war that he scarcely hears his lady protest, even though they are to part within two hours. Katherine must ask:

\[
\text{Do you not love me?} \\
\text{Nay, tell me if you speak in jest or no.} \\
\]

(II.iii.101-102)

If Hotspur were to deny his love there should be no humor in the situation. However, he does not:

\[
\ldots \ldots \text{when I am a-horseback I will swear} \\
\text{I love thee infinitely.} \\
\ldots \ldots
\]
This evening must I leave you, gentle Kate. I know you wise; but yet no farther wise Than Harry Percy's wife; constant you are, But yet a woman; and for secrecy, No lady closer, for I well believe Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know, And so far will I trust thee, gentle Kate.  

(II.iii.109-115)

We can see that Hotspur loves her, but with a brusqueness not found in the usual courtly lover.

One other situation in this play is a source of humor. We are amused by the love scene between Mortimer and his wife, the daughter of Glendower. Mortimer states the situation:

This is the deadly spite that angers me -- My wife can speak no English, I no Welsh.  

(III.i.192-193)

In spite of this handicap, we are told by Glendower that his daughter weeps and is almost distracted for love. Glendower, to our amusement, must act as an interpreter for the lovers, and it is through him that the intensity of Lady Mortimer's passion is conveyed. Though this episode is brief, it serves to point out that Shakespeare could treat courtly love with comedy, without degrading it.

In *Henry V*, there is an amusing interlude when Henry is wooing the Princess Katherine. Though Henry is the ideal prince, being courtly, wise, scholarly, and brave in war, he is very straightforward in his love-making. In speaking his true mind to fair Katherine, he light-heartedly mocks the courtiers who can make love in the accepted, traditional manner. He claims to be a rude soldier, ignorant of the usual language of love:
Will you vouchsafe to teach a soldier terms
Such as will enter at a lady's ear
And plead his love suit to her gentle heart?

(V.ii.99-101)

This plain king, as he calls himself, is indeed no usual courtier:

I know no ways to mince it in love
but directly to say 'I love you.' Then,
if you urge me farther than to say, 'Do you in faith?' I wear out my suit.
Give me your answer; i' faith, do!
And so clap hands and a bargain.
How say you, lady?

(V.ii.129-136)

Henry follows this colloquial-sounding avowal of love with a coarse jest that would have shocked the courtiers, Sidney or Castiglione:

If I could win a lady at leapfrog,
or by vaulting into my saddle with
my armour on my back, under the
correction of bragging be it spoken, I should quickly leap into
a wife.

(V.ii.142-145)

It is clear that Henry has neither the manners nor the sensibility of the traditional courtier. In the same speech he becomes satirical in denouncing the usual courtly lover:

For these fellows of infinite tongue
that can rhyme themselve into ladies' favours, they do always reason themselves out again. What! A speaker is but a prater; a rhyme is but a ballad. A good leg will fall, a straight back will stoop, a black beard will turn white, a curl'd pate will grow bald, a fair face will wither, a full eye will wax hollow; but a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon, or rather, the sun, and not the moon, for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly.

(V.ii.164-175)
Despite this satirical and realistic account of the lover, the love scene between Henry and Katherine retains its humor. We are amused when Henry actually wins this courtly lady, in spite of his unorthodox method of wooing her. This play, along with *Henry IV (Part I)*, *Twelfth Night*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, serves to show that Shakespeare could deal with the conventions of courtly love and still keep an open mind. His treatment of the courtly theme as comedy does not spoil the plays and does not depreciate the theme. Actually, the Shakespeare canon is richer because of such treatment.
CHAPTER V

THE COURTLY THEME AND ROMANTIC LOVE

Romeo and Juliet

The Winter's Tale

Cymbeline
CHAPTER V

Another example of the variety with which Shakespeare treats the courtly theme may be seen in the three plays, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*. In these three, Shakespeare takes the theme and shows it in relation to romantic love. One can see, from these plays, that the dramatist renders romantic love as a deep, genuine passion which is experienced by the young couples involved. Each of these romantic lovers gives himself fully to the lyrical beauty of the emotion and, in so doing, shows that he has real heart and soul. All the characters who experience romantic love in these plays either have or want the permanence of a satisfying, married life. Such love gives strength to all to meet and overcome adversity. In *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, the adversity so often suffered by all young lovers nearly results in tragedy but ends in happiness. In *Romeo and Juliet*, this is not the case. Still the determination which leads both lovers to prefer death to separation and disgrace comes from the same source as in the other two plays. In all three, romantic love grows into an ideal, true

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1 *Romeo and Juliet* ends in tragedy but this is not the natural outcome of their love. Circumstances made their love an ill-fated one and, but for a mere accident which caused Friar John to be quarantined and thus prevented him from delivering Friar Laurence's message to Romeo, their love would have led to a happy life. Later, in studying the courtly theme and tragedy, we shall see that the tragic conclusion of *Othello* follows naturally because of the jealous love of the valiant Moor.
love which means more than life or death to the young lovers concerned. The artificiality, extravagance, and poise of courtly love are abandoned for a more sincere and mature attitude towards love. However, the courtly personalities of the plays we have considered are still met in *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*. Courtly values are still evident and are upheld, generally, by the main lovers of these three plays.

Perhaps in no other play has Shakespeare better drawn the distinction between the extravagances of courtly love and the genuineness which grows from romantic love than he has in *Romeo and Juliet*. Early in the play we see Romeo languishing in a hopeless infatuation for the cool Rosaline. His father describes Romeo's reaction which is so typical of the rebuffed courtly lover:

Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs;
But all so soon as the all-cheering sun
Should in the farthest East begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,
Away from light steals home my heavy son
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out,
And makes himself an artificial night.
Black and portentous must this humour prove
Unless good counsel may the cause remove.
(I.1.138-149)

We are soon convinced that this is an accurate description when we hear Romeo describing the Petrarchan cruelty of his lady:

She'll not be hit
With Cupid's arrow. She hath Dian's wit,
And, in strong proof of chastity well arm'd
From Love's weak childish bow she lives unharmed.
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,  
Nor bide th' encounter of assailing eyes,  
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold.  
O, she is rich in beauty; only poor  
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her  
store.  
(I.i.215-223)

So overcome with this affected love is Romeo that he is made helpless and cannot join in the revelry of his companions.

In refusing to join them he says of Cupid:

I am too sore enpierced with his shaft  
To soar with his light feathers; and so bound  
I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe.  
Under love's heavy burthen do I sink.  
(I.iv.19-22)

This is all a pose, however, since Romeo is not really in love. When he sees Juliet he suddenly forgets his Petrarchan lady and his luxuriating in love:

Did my heart love till now? Forswear it,  
sight!  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.  
(I.v.54-55)

Romeo is soon overcome by a passionate love. His very first words with Juliet are artificial and recall Lancelot's treatment of his lady as a religious shrine in Chrétien de Troyes' Roman de la Charrette:

If I profane with my unworthiest hand  
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.  
(I.v.95-98)

However, Romeo is recognized by Juliet as being more than a worshipper who mouths artificialities. He is worthy of her love. Even her father who hates Romeo's family says of the courtly youth:

2 Cf. Chapter I, page 20, above.
'A bears him like a portly gentleman,
And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
To be a virtuous and well-govern'd youth.
(I.v.68-70)

The remaining four acts which follow the encounter of Romeo and Juliet bear out old Capulet's appraisal. Romeo is no longer the lover of the conventional Petrarchan love poetry.

Despite the intense rivalry between the Capulets and the Montagues, both Romeo and Juliet let no obstacle prevent their love from coming to fruition. Juliet is so in love that she would willingly give up her family name, regardless of the consequences of such a step in her society:

0 Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name!
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.
(II.ii.33-36)

The feud of the two families cannot bar the love of these two, nor can the walls of the Capulet orchard. Romeo overcomes all fear of the Capulets and risks his life in entering the forbidden grounds:

3 One should not miss Shakespeare's comic treatment of courtly love in Act II, scene i. Here Mercutio is making fun of Romeo and his love for Rosaline:

Romeo! humours! madman! passion! lover!
Appear thou in the likeness of a sigh;
Speak but one rhyme, and I am satisfied!
Cry but 'Ay me!' pronounce but 'love' and
'dove! . . .
(11. 7-10)

Of course Romeo (who overhears this mocking of himself) is now sincerely in love with Juliet.
With love's light wings do I o'erperch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do, that dares love attempt
Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.

(II.ii.66-69)

While Romeo is wooing Juliet in this beautiful moonlight scene there is still some of the old, conventional lover in him:

I have night's cloak to hide me from their sight;
And but thou love me, let them find me here.
My life were better ended by their hate
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love.

(II.ii.75-78)

Juliet, in disclosing her love to Romeo, shows that her values are not merely conventional:

O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.
Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won,
I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my haviour light;
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,
My true-love passion. Therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

(II.ii.93-106)

In this romantic scene, true love is valued highly. As so often happens in Shakespeare's plays, here the woman presents the natural, reasoned view of love. Juliet, in answer to Romeo's request that each exchange vows, sees that this is not necessary to those whose love is deep and sincere:

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.

(II.ii.133-135)

This kind of love has only one suitable end, which Castiglione advised the courtly lady to seek. Juliet
recognizes this in her promise to Romeo:

If that thy bent of love be honourable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,

... All my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.

(II.ii.143-148)

This avowal is the natural result of their courtship. Friar Laurence, after hearing Romeo confess that he never really loved Rosaline and after hearing that Romeo is truly in love, agrees to marry them in secret. His advice to Romeo might be the advice to all impetuous lovers, and serves to suggest the difference between the imagined type of courtly love which Romeo felt for Rosaline and the real, permanent, and balanced love he should feel for a wife:

These violent delights have violent ends
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which as they kiss, consume. The sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness
And in the taste confounds the appetite.
Therefore love moderately: long love doth so;
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.

(II.vi.9-15)

4 Romeo says to the Friar:

Then plainly know my heart's dear love is set
On the fair daughter of rich Capulet;
As mine on hers, so hers is set on mine,
And all combin'd, save what thou must combine
By holy marriage.

(II.iii.57-61)

5 We must remember that this new love which Romeo experiences has just been revealed to the Friar who actually knows him as the courtly lover who has long sorrowed because Rosaline spurned his artificial love.
The love which Romeo and Juliet feel for each other has a firm foundation which helps each to meet the events that follow on the brawl between the Capulet and Montague factions. With Romeo's banishment for killing Juliet's cousin, Tybalt, the tragedy which ends in the death of the lovers is precipitated.

The Romeo of the later play is essentially a different man. However, once, upon learning that he is banished and must part with his bride, he returns to his old habit of being extravagant, artificial, and pitiful in demonstrating his sorrow. Even the coarse nurse sees that his despair is unmanly and must admonish him:

Stand up, stand up! Stand, and you be a man. For Juliet's sake, for her sake, rise and stand! Why should you fall into so deep an 0?

(III.iii.88-90)

The Friar's scolding is essentially the same when he prevents Romeo from using the dagger he has drawn:

Hold thy desperate hand:
Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art; Thy tears are womanish, thy wild acts denote The unreasonable fury of a beast.

(III.iii.108-111)

His appeal is to a real courtier, not to a sham one:

Thy noble shape is but a form of wax, Digressing from the valour of a man; Thy dear love sworn but a hollow perjury, Killing that love which thou hast vow'd to cherish; Thy wit, that ornament to shape and love, Misshapen in the conduct of them both.

What, arouse thee, man! Thy Juliet is alive For whose dear sake thou was but lately dead.

(III.iii.126-136)
We soon learn that this reaction of Romeo is short-lived, for the true love he has experienced gives him courage to rise to action. When he receives the faulty news that Juliet is dead, his immediate response is manly:

Is it e'en so? Then I defy you, stars!
(V.i.24)

Romeo could not have made this courageous response earlier.

Juliet is courageous, likewise, in her true love. She keeps her head when her father hastens the plans for her marriage with Paris and keeps her secret marriage from her domineering mother. Though Juliet is young in years she meets the situation with strength and self-possession. She fears she may never wake from the drugs which the Friar gives her, yet she risks death for true love. Though she hates the thought of being put into the family tomb and of waking among the decaying corpses, including the recent one of her cousin, Tybalt, still this girl whose parents have turned against her is resolute. She is just as determined as Romeo who quickly devises a plan:

Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night.
(V.i.34)

He fearlessly buys the drugs which will be his sudden death. There is beauty and pathos in the tragedy which follows. The love between Romeo and Juliet remains romantic to the end. In Romeo's last speech his praising of Juliet's beauty is sincere and ironic:

O my love! my wife!
Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty.
Thou art not conquer'd. Beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.  
(V.iii.91-96)

Romeo dies with a kiss as does Juliet when she revives to see her husband dead. We do not feel that death triumphs over such love which Shakespeare shows to be deep and sincere. But for an accident, this love would have brought happiness to all and united the quarrelsome families. The Friar's comment on the tragedy bears this out:

A greater power than we can contradict  
Hath thwarted our intents.  
(V.iii.153-154)

However, we feel that the romantic love of Romeo and Juliet stood all tests of life and death.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare presents courtly figures who find happiness in marriage through romantic love. This is shown in two plots, that of Leontes, Polixenes, and Hermione and that of Florizel and Perdita. In the first plot we see the love of King Leontes for his Queen, Hermione, disrupted by jealousy. When the play opens, Leontes and Hermione are happily married and Leontes is honored with a visit from his dear friend, King Polixenes, whom he calls his brother. The air of happiness and friendship is soon marred, however, when Leontes becomes jealous upon seeing Hermione playfully persuading Polixenes to stay longer in the Sicilian court. In spite of Hermione's avowal of love, Leontes

---

6 Yet, good-deed, Leontes,  
I love thee not a jar o' th' clock behind  
What lady she her lord.  
(I.ii.42-44)
rapidly becomes insanely jealous:

Too hot, too hot!
To mingle friendship far, is mingling bloods,
I have tremor cordis on me; my heart dances,
But not for joy; not joy.

(I.ii.108-111)

He has no real proof of his lady's infidelity, but unrestrained in his delusion, Leontes does not heed the advice of his court but has his wife imprisoned and plots to poison his dear friend. Happily, Polixenes is told of the plot in time to escape. In commenting on the jealousy of his friend who now terms Polixenes his enemy, Polixenes recognizes the courtly character of Hermione and realizes how dangerous is jealousy:

This jealousy
Is for a precious creature. As she's rare,
Must it be great; and as his person's mighty,
Must it be violent; and as he does conceive He is dishonour'd by a man which ever
Profess'd to him, why, his revenges must In that be made more bitter. Fear o'ershades me.

(I.ii.452-457)

Leontes' jealous hatred and rage is not courtly and causes much unnecessary misery. When Hermione has a little girl, Leontes is further enraged, having convinced himself of his

7 Camillo appraises the king's state of mind accurately, in advising him:

Good, my lord, be cur'd Of this disea'd opinion, and betimes; For 'tis most dangerous. 

(I.ii.296-298)

8 The theme of a lady causing jealousy between two sworn brothers recalls Chaucer's Knight's Tale and Shakespeare's Two Gentleman of Verona. In The Winter's Tale, jealousy is dealt with differently. It is potentially tragic and the tragedy is barely averted.
wife's unfaithfulness. The baby is carried away at his order and Hermione is reported to be dead. To add to the misery, the son of the royal couple dies for grief because he has been separated from his mother, leaving Sicily without an heir. The unhappy, foolish king is brought down in despair.

During the sixteen years which follow these unhappy incidents, Leontes has time to repent. His repentance is genuine and we see how dearly he really loved his queen and how he realizes his mistakes when he stands before what he supposes to be the statue of Hermione:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{0 thus she stood,} \\
\text{Even with such life of majesty (warm life, As now it coldly stands), when first I woo'd her!} \\
\text{I am asham'd. Does not the stone rebuke me For being more stone than it?} \\
\text{(V.iii.34-38)}
\end{align*}
\]

In this winter's tale, much like a fairy story, the statue steps down and it is revealed that Hermione has been alive all these years and has been in hiding to escape Leontes' wrath. True love is again restored to this couple and we have final proof that Leontes has been spiritually re-born when he confesses his folly and is reconciled with his wife and his friend:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Both your pardons,} \\
\text{That e'er I put between your holy looks My ill-suspicion.} \\
\text{(V.iii.147-149)}
\end{align*}
\]

---

9 It was customary in the medieval romances for the lady who had been unfaithful to retire into a nunnery where she could have ample time to repent. The retirement of Hermione from the court recalls this convention, though, of course, she is blameless in this play.
With this request, the happy marriage and the happy friendship which we witnessed in the opening of the play are both restored.

The secondary plot of *The Winter's Tale*, that of Perdita and Florizel, also shows the courtly theme in relation to romantic love. In this plot, which deals with the adventures of Leontes' lost daughter who has been brought up by a shepherd, we are taken into the world of Sidney's *Arcadia*. Perdita, who has been raised as a shepherdess, is wooed by Florizel, the son of King Polixenes of Bohemia. Though their love story is placed in an idyllic setting and has the appearance of a conventional courtly love, still it is interesting to note how Shakespeare depicts this love. It is treated romantically but is more than a diversion in the play. Florizel and Perdita are more than mere types: they are credible individuals. Shakespeare makes it plain that out of their love grows a real, lasting relationship which leads to marriage. Love is more than a sporting pastime.

When we first meet these two they are already happily in love. Prince Florizel, as Perdita tells us, has disguised himself as a shepherd, in traditional manner, in order to woo her:

Your high self
The gracious mark o' th' land, you have obscur'd
With a swain's wearing; and me, poor lowly maid,
Most goddess-like prank'd up.

(IV.iv.7-10)
She, even in her role as a shepherdess, equals the courtly ladies in her beauty and chastity and Florizel vows she is the object of his true love. Speaking of the gods that disguised themselves for love, Florizel says:

Their transformations
Were never for a piece of beauty rarer,
Nor in a way so chaste, since my desires
Run not before mine honour, nor my lusts
Burn hotter than my faith.

(IV.iv.31-34)

Even her supposed father recognizes she is no mere shepherdess:

You are retir'd,
As if you were a feasted one, and not
The hostess of the meeting.

(IV.iv.62-64)

This observation is similar to that of the disguised Polixenes (who is trying to discover why his son has been absent from court):

This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
Ran on the greensward. Nothing she does or seems
But smacks of something greater than herself,
Too noble for this place.

(IV.iv.156-159)

Just as Perdita cannot disguise her courtly birth and bearing, so cannot Florizel. Perdita recognizes that his courtliness

10 It was generally believed that a courtly lady and gentleman could not conceal their birth or bearing even in the garb of a shepherd. Spenser dealt very fully with this convention in the Sixth Book of the Fairie Queene. In this pastoral interlude, Sir Calidore is contrasted to the shepherd Coridon, and the baseness of the latter is made clear. Spenser says of the shepherd:

Fit to keepe sheepe, unfit for loves content:
The gentle heart scornes base disparagement.

(VI.x.37)

The courtly knight wins Pastorell whose courtly bearing betrayed the fact that she was noble born. In the end she learns of her true parentage.
shows through the disguise when she reveals her reaction to his love:

Your praises are too large. But that your youth,
And the true blood which peeps so fairly through't,
Do plainly give you out an unstain'd shepherd,
With wisdom I might fear, My Doricles,
You woo'd me the false way.  

(IV.iv.147-151)

This speech is very important in showing us the nature of love in this plot. Such love is the romantic love of youth which seeks happy fulfillment and a promise to love forever. The beauty of this love is reported by Perdita's supposed father:

He says he loves my daughter.
I think so too; for never gaz'd the moon
Upon the water as he'll stand and read,
As 'twere, my daughter's eyes; and to be plain,
I think there is not half a kiss to choose
Who loves another best.  

(IV.iv.171-176)

Their love is genuine and permanent. This is proved by Florizel's willingness to give up his heritage and his father for his true love, upon being discovered by Polixenes:

Lift up thy looks,
From my succession wipe me, father! I
Am heir to my affection.  

(IV.iv.490-492)

To Perdita he vows his love again:

Dear, look up.
Though Fortune, visible an enemy,
Should chase us, with my father, pow'r no jot
Hath she to change our loves.  

(V.i.215-218)

Such unselfish devotion as is found in this ideal love deserves to be rewarded. True love has grown from the
conventional pattern of a courtier disguised as a shepherd wooing a shepherdess. When Perdita is finally revealed as the lost daughter of Leontes, the young lovers are free to marry. This is a fitting ending to a tale where the wrong kind of jealous love brought misery to all concerned, but where the right kind of unselfish, forgiving love finally brought happiness.

Cymbeline is another play which, like The Winter's Tale, has a fantastic plot. But, like The Winter's Tale, it deals with the subject of romantic love and presents some very positive attitudes towards it. As in The Winter's Tale and Romeo and Juliet, the course of love is not smooth but the passion is strong enough to triumph over adversity in the end. While we must make allowances for the sensational elements in this play we cannot fail to notice that various aspects of the courtly theme are presented with true love finally triumphant.

Some incidental satire should not be missed in this play. The shepherd and his son, the clown, clearly satirize the upstart courtiers. There are some amusing scenes in which the Clown brags of his connections at court, now that his "sister" (Perdita) is found to be a princess.

The improbable, sensational type of play, given impetus by the work of Beaumont and Fletcher, was in vogue when Cymbeline was written (c. 1610). Some of the sensational elements in this play include: the testing of a wife's virtue by giving a letter of recommendation to a companion, an attempted poisoning, an attempted rape, a decapitation (where Cloten's body is found dressed in the clothing of Posthumus and is mistaken by Imogen for her husband), a lost princess disguised as a youth, who, unknowingly, finds her brothers who were kidnapped as babies, and a supposed death where the princess is buried and "comes to life" again.
The various aspects of the courtly theme which Shakespeare presents in *Cymbeline* may be seen in the characters of Cloten, the Queen, and Iachimo, in addition to the two lovers of the play, Posthumus and Imogen. Prince Cloten, the aspiring son of the evil Queen, serves as a contrast to the courtly Posthumus. This evil prince is filled with lust for Imogen, the wife of Posthumus, and provides a satire on the base courtier who pretends to nobility in his search for power. The wicked, scheming Queen is contrasted to the gentle, unselfish Imogen. The Queen is no Petrarchan lady in her love for Cymbeline, which is not actually love but ambition. Iachimo, whose pride and trickery cause the unhappiness between the two lovers, is another courtly type who learns through his mistakes, what true honor and chastity are. He admits this in confessing his deception of Imogen and Posthumus to Cymbeline:

Well may you, sir,
Remember me at court, where I was taught
Of your chaste daughter the wide difference
'Twixt amorous and villainous.
(V.v.192-195)

The evil in this play serves to heighten the good which overcomes it in the end. The strength of true love, championed by Imogen, withstands all shocks, and happiness

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13 Also, the two sons of Cymbeline, Guiderius and Arviragus, are examples of courtly youths whose upbringing in a cave cannot hide their true gentility. Like Spenser's Pastorell and Shakespeare's Perdita and Florizel their true nature shows through their rude surroundings and garb.
is brought out of near-tragedy.

The main interest of Shakespeare's treatment of love in this play centres around Imogen and Posthumus who are secretly married when we first meet them. Though Posthumus is no prince, he is the ideal courtly gentleman worthy of a princess' love. One of Cymbeline's courtiers says that Posthumus:

... liv'd in court
(Which rare it is to do) most prais'd, most lov'd,
A sample to the youngest, to the more mature
A glass that feated them, and to the graver
A child that guided dotards. To his mistress,
For whom he now is banish'd -- her own price
Proclaims how she esteem'd him and his virtue.
By her election may be truly read
What kind of man he is.  
(I.i.46-54)

His love for his wife is deep and his sorrow at parting sincere:

My queen, my mistress!
O lady, weep no more, lest I give cause
To be suspected of more tenderness
Than doth become a man. I will remain
The loyal'est husband that did e'er plight
trough ... .
(I.i.92-96)

This oath which he takes is never broken despite the disillusion that Posthumus experiences when Iachimo returns with apparent proof (which he obtained by being smuggled into Imogen's bed-chamber in a trunk) that Imogen was unfaithful to her banished husband. The romantic love which Posthumus and Imogen experience is never marred through unfaithfulness on either side, regardless of the tests to which it is submitted. Thus the idealism associated with romantic love is not shattered and the reconciliation at the end of the
play forms a natural, happy conclusion.

The unhappiness between the two lovers arises from a wager which Posthumus makes on the chastity of Imogen to the Roman, Iachimo. Though this wager is fantastic, since it provides that Iachimo is free to woo Imogen, it is understandable, for the faith of true love is strong. In wagering his diamond ring, a precious keepsake from Imogen, against Iachimo's ten thousand ducats, Posthumus has utter faith in Imogen:

My mistress exceeds in goodness the hugeness of your unworthy thinking. I dare you to this match.

(I.iv.156-158)

Of course Imogen is unassailable. She is told by Iachimo that Posthumus has been unfaithful when he woos her in an uncourtly fashion:

Revenge it!
I dedicate myself to your sweet pleasure,
More noble than that runagate to your bed,
And will continue fast to your affection,
Still close as sure.

(I.vi.135-139)

Imogen is constant and courtly in her reply, detecting the falsehood:

If thou were honourable,
Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue,
not
For such an end thou seek'st, as base as strange.
Thou wrong'st a gentleman who is as far
From thy report as thou from honour, and
Solicit'st here a lady that disdains Thee and the devil alike.

(I.vi.142-148)

When Cloten tries to seduce her she is just as constant and she makes clear the difference between this false courtier
and her true lord in spurning Cloten:

He never can meet more mischance than come
To be nam'd of thee. His meanest garment
That ever hath but clipp'd his body is dearer
In my respect than all the hairs above thee,
Were they all made such men.

(II.iii.137-141)

The one sustaining element in the play is the faith, hope, and devotion of Imogen. She never denounces her husband, nor gives up her belief that they will be re-united. Since her love for him is infinite, there is never a question of doubting his love. Even the noble Posthumus becomes disillusioned when Iachimo brings apparent evidence that he has been rewarded with Imogen's favors. His response, which depreciates all women, shows the bitter disappointment he feels:

Let there be no honour
Where there is beauty; truth, where semblance;
love,
Where there's another man! The vows of women
Of no more bondage be to where they are made
Than they are to their virtues, which is nothing!
O, above measure false!

(II.iv.108-113)

In a soliloquy which follows, Posthumus becomes bitter in his denunciation. This is a far cry from the conventional courtly praise of women:

For there's no motion
That tends to vice in man but I affirm
It is the woman's part. Be it lying, note it,
The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers;
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers; revenges, hers;
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,
Nice longing, slanders, mutability —
All faults that may be nam'd, nay, that hell knows,
Why, hers in part or all; but rather all!
For even to vice
They are not constant, but are changing still
One vice but of a minute old for one
Not half so old as that. I'll write against them,
Detest them, curse them. (II.v.20-33)

Such is the reaction of a young husband who has just received evidence which seems to be conclusive that his wife was unfaithful. However, Shakespeare did not intend to leave us with this view of young love, for soon all is righted. Imogen is restored to her father and husband, the lost princes are also restored to their father, the wicked Queen dies, and Iachimo confesses and is forgiven. Before Posthumus finds that Imogen still lives, he reveals that he still loves her and that he is to blame for thinking she could not be virtuous:

The temple
Of virtue was she; yea, and she herself!

0 Imogen!
My queen, my life, my wife! O Imogen,
Imogen, Imogen!

(V.v.220-226)

As they are happily re-united we may recall Iachimo's reaction to Imogen's refusal and realize how prophetic his wishes were:

0 happy Leonatus! I may say
The credit that thy lady hath of thee
Deserves thy trust, and thy most perfect goodness
Her assur'd credit. Blessed live you long,
A lady to the worthiest sir that ever
Country call'd his! and you his mistress, only
For the most worthiest fit!

(I.vi.156-162)
The promise of romantic love is fulfilled and the play is brought to a happy conclusion as Cymbeline says:

Pardon's the word to all.

(V.v.422)

In *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* the romantic love of those courtly figures who experience it leads them through adversity to a permanent relationship. After studying Shakespeare's treatment of this love, we feel that only a true, lasting love could stand the trials it is put to in these three plays.
CHAPTER VI

REVERSAL OF THE THEME: THE LADY IN LOVE

(Venus and Adonis)
All's Well that Ends Well
Much Ado about Nothing
Measure for Measure
Richard II
CHAPTER VI

A further example of the variety with which Shakespeare treats courtly love may be found in the four plays *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Richard II*. In each of these, we see a lady in love, even when her lord does not return her love. In each case the lady is the pursuer. This theme has been met in *Twelfth Night* where Olivia was hopelessly in love with Cesario (Viola) and Viola was desperately in love with Orsino. However, in this play, the course of love is complicated by mistakes which result from Viola's disguise. Upon removing the disguise, Viola wins her lord when he discovers the true situation: Olivia has already found a responsive lover in the bewildered Sebastian and Viola loves him dearly. In the group of plays to be considered in this chapter, the pursuing lady is not misled or hampered by mistaken identities. Rather, when the disguise is used (as it is in all but *Richard II*) it is used to trick the man into giving his love, where formerly he had refused. In these four plays, the male courtly lover is degraded, to some extent, because the lady's devotion is far more instrumental in bringing about a realization of her love than is the man's constancy or his willingness to woo her in the courtly fashion. Such love, where the lady is so desperate that she must stoop to trickery, is not in keeping with the highest ideals of courtly love. Nevertheless, it provides an interesting study of Shakespeare's desire to see the
reality lying behind the convention.

This unusual variation of the courtly theme, where the lady is the wooer, was foreshadowed in the early *Venus and Adonis*. In this poem the goddess of love pursues the youthful, noble, but unheeding Adonis. She tries all the snares of the flesh, in seeking to win him, but his reason overcomes her passion and he rejects her suit:

Hunting he lov'd, but love he laugh'd to scorn.  
(1. 4)

Her praises of Adonis are like the Petrarchan praises that the courtier wrote to his lady:

'Thrice fairer than myself,' thus she began,  
'The field's chief flower, sweet above compare,  
Stain to all nymphs, more lovely than a man,  
More white and red than doves or roses are,  
Nature that made thee, with herself at strife,  
Saith that the world hath ending with thy life.  
(ll. 7-12)

In spite of her pleading and weeping, Adonis cannot be won. He is like the cruel Petrarchan lady who was disdainful and pitiless:

'Pity!' she cries, 'some favour, some remorse!'  
Away he springs and hasteth to his horse.  
(ll. 257-258)

So desperate is Venus that she pretends to be dead because of his cruelty in order to trick the youth. However, though she falls down as if dead and scares the boy, she never quite triumphs. Adonis successfully stays her advances, making it plain that there is a distinction between lust and love:

I hate not love, but your device in love,  
That lends embraces unto every stranger.  
You do it for increase. O strange excuse,  
When reason is the bawd to lust's abuse!  
(ll. 789-792)
Before she can devise new tricks to win her loved one, Adonis is killed in a boar hunt. In this poem we see the limits to which the lady will go in order to win the object of her love. The comparison of love and lust is repeated constantly in the struggle between Venus and Adonis. The desperation of Venus and the struggle between love and lust are especially recalled in *All's Well that Ends Well*, and in *Measure for Measure*.

In *All's Well that Ends Well*, Shakespeare gives his fullest treatment of the courtly theme reversed, with the lady pursuing the man. Helena is in love with the reluctant Bertram, a courtier who is above her in social station. She first schemes to make him her husband and is successful when the king allows her to choose whomever she wishes as a reward for curing his serious ailment. However, Helena's quest does not end when she obtains Bertram for her husband, but she must proceed to win his love. She thinks nothing of resorting to trickery a second time, but has herself substituted for Diana, the object of Bertram's illicit love. Finally, her love and devotion are rewarded when it is proved to Bertram that he has kept a love tryst with his own wife, and he accepts her.

Though Helena seems to be driven to desperate ends when she wagers her life in order to convince the king that she can cure him in return for a husband of her choosing and when she forms a plan to trick her husband and be with him, still Shakespeare emphasizes her true worth and her courtly bearing.

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1 Cf. Chapter II, page 34 for the essential qualifications of the courtly lady, as outlined by Castiglione.
The irrationality of love seems to grip her but she remains poised and courageous in her undertakings and displays intelligence, shrewdness, and determination. The King recognizes her true worth:

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Thy life is dear; for all that life can rate
Worth name of life in thee hath estimate --
Youth, beauty, wisdom, courage, all
That happiness and prime can happy call ...
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This appraisal strengthens that of her guardian, the Countess (Bertram's mother), who praised Helena's education, honesty, and goodness (I.i.43-53). This young lady has all the qualities which make up for Bertram's noble rank, and which are likely to qualify her as a new lady in the Elizabethan aristocracy of the nouveau riche.

Bertram, though of noble rank, is necessarily degraded as a hero. This does not mean that he is totally unworthy of his class or of Helena. We are told, early in the play, of his potentialities. His mother tells us that he is an unschooled courtier who promises well:

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Thy blood and virtue
Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness
Share with thy birthright!
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Farewell, my lord.
'Tis an unseason'd courtier; good my lord,
Advise him.
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(I.i.71-81)

Being a young courtier, he longs for honor in battle, as we see when he complains that he is kept at the King's court:

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I am commanded here and kept a coil with --
'Too young,' and 'The next year,' and 'Tis too early.'
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(II.i.27-28)
In the matters of love he is unresponsive and even mean, rejecting Helena because she lacks position:

She had her breeding at my father's charge. A poor physician's daughter my wife? Disdain Rather corrupt me ever!

(II.iii.121-123)

The King's reply to this rejection is truly Elizabethan in its evaluation of rank and honor:

She is young, wise, fair; In these to nature she's immediate heir; And these breed honour. That is honour's scorn Which challenges itself as honour's born And is not like the sire.

... If thou canst like this creature as a maid, I can create the rest. Virtue and she Is her dower; honour and wealth from me.

(II.iii.138-151)

When Bertram still cannot accept Helana, we realize it is his inability to accept love and marriage. Though the King decrees that Bertram must marry her, he vows not to accept this absolute decree:

O my Parolles, they have married me! I'll to the Tuscan wars, and never bed her.

(II.iii.289-290)

Bertram might be expected to rebel at this forced match, yet he never redeems himself as a courtly lover. When we see him later wooing Diana, after he has fled from France and his wife, we are not really impressed with his performance. His intentions are not honorable, and, indeed, only the substitution of his wife (unknown to him) for Diana saves his honor. His uncourtly action is reported by Diana's mother in her reply to Helena's suggestion that Bertram solicit Diana in his unlawful purpose:
He does indeed!
And brokes with all that can in such a suit
Corrupt the tender honour of a maid;
But she is arm'd for him, and keeps her guard
In honestest defence.

(III.v.73-77)

When we see Bertram wooing Diana in the usual courtly manner
we are aware of his dishonorable intentions, and are not
impressed by the semblance of sincerity with which he seeks
to justify the abandonment of his wife:

I prithee do not strive against my vows.
I was compell'd to her, but I love thee
By love's own sweet constraint; and will for
ever
Do thee all rights of service.

(IV.ii.14-17)

As he arranges for a secret love rendezvous with Diana, he is
guided by lust and is unconcerned with the sanctity of his
marriage vows:

Be not so holy-cruel. Love is holy,
And my integrity ne'er knew the crafts
That you do charge men with. Stand no more off,
But give thyself unto my sick desires,
Who then recover.

(IV.ii.32-36)

His abandon to this lustful love is complete and makes easy
Helena's plan to trick him and win his love:

Here, take my ring!
My house, mine honour, yea, my life, be thine,
And I'll be bid by thee.

(IV.ii.51-53)

Such is the man whom Helena loves with all her heart. However,
Shakespeare saves Bertram from utter degradation and worth-
lessness and thus prevents the ending, where the reluctant
husband and the persistent wife are happily united, from
becoming incredible. The rash Bertram is redeemed, to some
extent, when he realizes that he has been misguided by the false courtier, Parolles. Though he does not deserve Helena, we feel, at least he shows promise of improving and becoming a true lover and husband.

Throughout the play, Helena holds our real interest as a courtly lover. It is she who suffers for love and must make all the advances, as the usual courtly lover had done. In an early soliloquy, her despair is evident and her doting upon Bertram's handsome features expresses her love:

There is no living, none,
If Bertram be away. 'Twere all one
That I should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it, he is so above me.
In his bright radiance and collateral light
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.
Th' ambition in my love thus plagues itself.
The hind that would be mated by the lion
Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though a plague,
To see him every hour; to sit and draw
His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,
In our heart's table -- heart too capable
Of every line and trick of his sweet favour.
But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy
Must sanctify his relics.

(I.i.95-109)

2 In depicting Parolles as a foolish, upstart courtier and in exposing his cowardice, Shakespeare is satirizing the ambitious courtier of his own day. The bad influence which Parolles has been is reported by Lafew to the Countess:

No, no, no! your son was misled with a snipt-taffeta fellow there, whose villainous saffron would have made all the unbak'd and doughy youth of a nation in his colour.

(IV.v.1-4)
We may detect the conventional dejection which the lover suffers for unrequited love. Helena reveals the symptoms of the usual lover, as the Countess observes:

Her eye is sick on't. (I.iii.142)

Like the usual courtly lover, Helena wishes to be a vassal in love:

My master, my dear lord he is, and I
His servant live and will his vassal die. (I.iii.164-165)

This young lady does not accept the situation passively, but quickly devises the scheme which wins Bertram. Her determination to win his hand is rewarded, as is her determination to win his love. Though she has to do this by trickery, her persistence gains the desired end. We may wonder why Helena wanted Bertram so badly, especially when he refuses to be truthful about the love intrigue (with one whom he supposes to be Diana):

Let your Highness
Lay a more noble thought upon mine honour
Than for to think that I would sink it here. (V.iii.179-181)

Again his uncourtly manner is evident when his ring is discovered in the possession of Diana and he must confess what is apparently a dishonorable love affair:

Certain it is I lik'd her,
And boarded her i' th' wanton way of youth.
She knew her distance and did angle for me,
Madding my eagerness with her restraint;
As all impediments in fancy's course
Are motives of more fancy; and, in fine,
Her infinite cunning, with her modern grace,
Subdu'd me to her rate. She got the ring,
And I had that which any inferior might
At market price have bought. (V.iii.210-219)
This courtier is an unpleasant fellow, in that his account of the affair is false and his depreciation of Diana's reputation is unjust. However, Helena, who was really his lover in this episode, loves him in spite of his attitude. Such love cannot be explained but it is not necessary that it should be. As all is righted, the King strikes a happy, forgiving note in his final speech:

All yet seems well; and if it end so meet,
The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet.  
(V.iii.333-334)

In Much Ado about Nothing the lady as pursuer may be seen in the Claudio-Hero plot. However, in this play Claudio really wants Hero's love but has not the aggressiveness of the usual courtly lover. He does not try to escape from love as does Bertram, but is rather half-hearted in his attempt to win it. He is glad to let Don Pedro woo Hero for him and when she is won he is easily persuaded of her supposed disloyalty. We might expect more of Claudio, the young courtier, when we hear an early report of how the Prince has rewarded him for his valor:

3 This plot is subordinate in interest to the one of Beatrice and Benedick where love is treated as comedy. The clashes of wit in which these two rail against love provide the audience with amusement. Finally, in agreement with the happy ending of the Claudio-Hero plot, Beatrice and Benedick confess their love for each other, even though they had been tricked into believing the one was in love with the other. These two were mockers of love and neither experienced it as did the Petrarchan lover or his lady. Their marriage is more the union of two equally matched intellects than the reward of two doting courtly lovers.
Much deserv'd on his part, and equally remember'd by Don Pedro. He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion. He hath indeed better better'd expectation than you must expect of me to tell you how.

(I.i.12-17)

When we meet Claudio, the lover, we see one who is unsure of himself. He reveals his hesitance when he says to the Prince:

How sweetly you do minister to love, That know love's grief by his complexion! But lest my liking might too sudden seem, I would have salv'd it with a longer treatise.

(I.i.314-317)

After entrusting his wooing to Don Pedro, Claudio easily becomes distrustful of his friend and quickly despairs of winning Hero:

The Prince wooes for himself. Friendship is constant in all other things Save in the office and affairs of love. Therefore all hearts in love use your own tongues; Let every eye negotiate for itself And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch Against whose charms faith melteth into blood. This is an accident of hourly proof, Which I mistrusted not! Farewell therefore Hero!

(II.i.181-189)

In spite of the ineffectiveness of Claudio as a lover, Hero is won for him. His response, upon being informed by Leonato (the father of Hero) that Hero is his, is prosaic and formal:

Silence is the perfectest herald of joy. I were but little happy if I could say how much. Lady, as you are mine, I am yours. I give away myself for you and dote upon the exchange.

(II.i.317-320)
Claudio lacks the initiative of a courtly lover and we are hardly surprised that it is the machination of Leonato, Hero, Beatrice, and Benedick which finally brings a happy conclusion to the play.

Hero, like Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well*, remains devoted to Claudio, even when she is publicly denounced and disgraced. Her lover accepts the story of the discontented John the Bastard and upon very flimsy evidence is persuaded that Hero is false. His first thought is to expose her, even before he has had proof of her infidelity:

> If I see anything to-night why I should not marry her to-morrow, in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her. (III.i.126-128)

When his intention to shame her is fulfilled Claudio expresses his regret for falling in love and his disillusion:

> O Hero! what a Hero hadst thou been
> If half thy outward graces had been plac'd
> About thy thoughts and counsels of thy heart?
> But fare thee well, most foul, most fair!
> Farewell,
> Thou pure impiety and impious purity!
> For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love,
> And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang,
> To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm,
> And never shall it more be gracious. (IV.i.101-108)

Though Hero swoons from this false accusation, she recovers and willingly enters into the Friar's plan to establish her innocence and win back Claudio:

> Your daughter here the princes left for dead,
> Let her awhile be secretly kept in
> And publish it that she is dead indeed . . . . (IV.i.203-205)
Claudio is soon overcome with remorse and is so penitent that, upon learning of John the Bastard's villainy, he agrees to marry Leonato's niece, if it will make the old man happy. However, the niece turns out to be Leonato's daughter, Hero, who comes to the wedding masked. By helping to deceive Claudio into thinking she was dead and by coming to the wedding masked, as a supposed cousin who was unknown to Claudio, Hero finally wins her lover, whom we feel hardly deserves her for his foolishness and unkindness.

In *Measure for Measure* we return to the unpleasant atmosphere of a lady devoted to an unworthy man who has foul intentions. As in *All's Well that Ends Well*, the pursuing lady wins the man she loves by substituting herself for the lady whose honor the man intends to attack. The evil nature of Angelo is of no consequence to Mariana who, regardless of the fact that he broke his promise to marry her because her dowry was lost, and regardless of the fact that he is driven by lust to pervert the law, is willing to do anything to win him.

When we first meet Angelo, the Duke is surrendering his power to him, hoping that Angelo may be able to enforce the law forbidding unmarried love. The Duke believes that Angelo is worthy of his trust:

*If any in Vienna be of worth, To undergo such ample grace and honour, It is Lord Angelo.*

(I.i.23-25)
However, the Duke is not without his suspicions of this seemingly virtuous man and, in temporarily surrendering his powers, means to disguise himself as a friar and observe his deputy:

... Lord Angelo is precise,  
Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses  
That his blood flows or that his appetite  
Is more to bread than stone; hence shall we see,  
If power change purpose, what our seemers be.  
(I.iii.50-54)

The Duke's suspicions are justified for we see that it is possible to sway Angelo. When Isabella comes to plead against the death penalty imposed on her brother, Claudio, for his love affair with Juliet, Angelo is overcome with her beauty and bearing. His lust for her knows no bounds and he promises to spare Claudio in return for Isabella's honor. Honor is prized very cheaply indeed by this unpleasant courtier. His evil nature is revealed clearly after Isabella has offered to expose him for his uncourtly advances:

Who will believe thee, Isabel?  
My unsoil'd name, th' austereness of my life,  
My vouch against you, and my place i' th' state  
Will so your accusation overweigh  
That you shall stifle in your own report  
And smell of calumny. I have begun,  
And now I give my sensual race the rein.  
Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite;  
Lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes  
That banish what they sue for. Redeem thy brother  
By yielding up thy body to my will,  
Or else he must not only die the death,  
But thy unkindness shall his death draw out  
To ling'ring sufferance. Answer me to-morrow,  
Or, by the affection that now guides me most,  
I'll prove a tyrant to him! As for you,  
Say what you can; my false o'erweighs your true.  
(II.iv.154-170)
This is the undisciplined hypocrite that Mariana is strongly
devoted to. One wonders how any courtly lady could remain
devoted to such a man, especially after the Duke (disguised
as a friar) tells Isabella how Angelo cast aside Mariana:

Left her in her tears and dried not one of
them with his comfort; swallowed his vows
whole, pretending in her discoveries of
dishonour; a few, bestow'd her on her
own lamentation, which she yet wears for his
sake; and he, a marble to her tears, is
washed with them but relents not.

(III.i.234-239)

The kind of devoted love which Mariana experiences can
hardly be explained. As in All's Well that Ends Well, love
causes the pursuing lady to ignore the faults of her loved
one. Thus, again, the lady is degraded because of her
efforts to win a man who most of us would agree was unworthy.

So strong is Mariana's passion for Angelo that she
is willing to accept the Duke's plan to gain him by deception.
The Duke discloses his plan to Isabella, in asking for her
co-operation:

... we shall advise this wronged maid
to stand up your appointment, go in your
place. If the encounter acknowledge itself
hereafter, it may compel him to her recompense;
and here, by this, is your brother saved,
your honour untainted, the poor Mariana
advantaged, and the corrupt deputy scaled.

(III.i.60-66)

The plan works as the Duke intended, and all is righted in the
end. The Duke, in his disguise, prevents the deceptive
Angelo, who meant to hang Claudio and enjoy Isabella regardless
of his bargain, from turning the play into a tragedy. When
Angelo is discovered and shamed he is truly repentant:
Then, good prince,
No longer session hold upon my shame,
But let my trial be mine own confession.
Immediate sentence then, and sequent death,
Is all the grace I beg.

(V.i.375-379)

Happily, the Duke is forgiving and commands Angelo to marry Mariana who asks no other reward for her devotion:

O my dear lord!
I crave no other, nor no better man.

(V.i.430-431)

Though her betrothed is not the ideal courtier, the forgiving Mariana holds hope for him:

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

(V.i.444-446)

Shakespeare does not permit us to feel outraged but, in an atmosphere of forgiving, wishes happiness to all. The Duke voices this as Mariana is triumphant in her quest:

Joy to you, Mariana! Love her, Angelo.
I have confess'd her, and I know her virtue.

(V.i.532-533)

In Richard II we once more meet the lady who is pursuing her loved one. Unlike the ladies in the other plays of this chapter, the Queen is already married when the play begins. However, she has failed to obtain the love of Richard and longs to experience love in the customary fashion. Her longing is not accompanied by any clever tricks to win her lord. Only her pleading reveals her disappointment.

In All's Well that Ends Well, Much Ado about Nothing, and Measure for Measure, the pursuing lady is finally triumphant. In Richard II, this is not the case. The Queen's pleas are
spoken in vain since Richard is concerned only with his own fate. However, though he is weak, reckless, and self-pitying, he is capable of winning the Queen's firm devotion. Whenever we see her she is sad at the thought of parting:

Yet I know no cause
Why I should welcome such a guest as grief
Save bidding farewell to so sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard.  
(II.i.6-9)

She sadly realizes the full effects of Richard's deposition:

Ah, thou the model where old Troy did stand,
Thou map of honour, thou King Richard's tomb,
And not King Richard!  
(V.i.11-13)

The futility of her devoted love for him is made evident when his only response to her grief is to advise her to enter a nunnery and forget him:

Learn, good soul,
To think our former state a happy dream;
From which awak'd, the truth of what we are
Shows us but this.

Hie thee to France
And cloister thee in some religious house.  
(V.i.17-23)

His unkindness and thoughtlessness is hardly worthy of his rank:

Think I am dead, and that even here thou takest,
As from my deathbed, thy last living leave.  
(V.i.38-39)

As they take their final parting, the Queen realizes how hopeless it is to give her heart to her husband:

Give me mine own again. 'Twere no good part
To take on me to keep and kill thy heart.
So, now I have mine own again, be gone,
That I may strive to kill it with a groan.  
(V.i.97-100)

Richard's refusal of her love is sharp and final:
We make woe wanton with this fond delay.
Once more adieu! The rest let sorrow say.
(V.1.101-102)

Such an attitude kills love and as the two part we realize that the man fails as a courtly lover and the lady fails to gain her love.

In presenting the unpleasant aspects of courtly love in *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Measure for Measure* and the failure of courtly love in *Richard II*, Shakespeare was probing into the very heart of the tradition and looking at it realistically. Such plays as these show that he was aware that courtly love was not always a matter of pleasant sporting and a happy pairing-up of noble couples. In these plays, Shakespeare, caught in the age of humanism, looks at man with a critical eye and presents what he sees. Though the result is not always pleasant, we must not conclude that Shakespeare is denouncing man or courtly love. We cannot, however, fail to detect the note of disillusionment which accompanies the portrayal of such courtly men as Bertram, Claudio, and Angelo. Also, we cannot miss the true implication of such courtly ladies as Helena, Hero, and Mariana, who seem to be willing to do anything to win their man. When we look at Bertram we see one who rebels at the established custom of arranged marriages and in the same rebellion deserts the accepted standard of courtly love. Claudio, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, is also less than an ideal courtier. He is a weak lover and is too hasty in his treatment of Hero, giving
credence to the flimsy story of the disreputable John the Bastard. Both Helena, in *All's Well that Ends Well*, and Hero, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, are too ready to pursue the one they love, both resorting to trickery. In *Measure for Measure*, the characters are even more unpleasant. Claudio, the imprisoned lover who nearly loses his life because of his dishonorable relations with Juliet, attaches no value to chastity. He is willing to surrender his sister's honor to save his own life. Claudio's despicableness is outdone by Angelo. He spurns Mariana and is desperate in his lustful designs on Isabella. Finally, Mariana recovers her loved one, Angelo, by substituting herself for Isabella and submitting to his lust. Shakespeare's treatment of courtly love is far from idealistic here. He is showing men and women as they really are. Gone is the conviction of the early Renaissance belief in man's essential goodness. We realize that here are people that really exist. Such people who allow their true natures to guide them and indulge their low desires can end their lives in tragedy. In these plays, which show man's unpleasant side, real tragedy is barely averted. Technically, they are comedies; but potentially, they are tragedies. We have already seen that *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* came close to ending in tragedy due to the jealousy and hatred of certain individuals and were only saved in a twilight hope for man. In the three plays to be dealt with next, Shakespeare actually looks deeper into courtly love and presents it as it sinks into tragedy.
CHAPTER VII
THE COURTLY THEME AND TRAGEDY

Troilus and Cressida

Hamlet

Othello
CHAPTER VII

In *Troilus and Cressida*, *Hamlet* and *Othello*, written about the same time as the plays dealt with in the last chapter, Shakespeare follows through his treatment of the unpleasant and realistic aspects of the courtly theme to its natural, tragic conclusion. Shakespeare, in *Troilus and Cressida* -- as in no other play he wrote -- shows how shallow was the outmoded medieval chivalry, such as Spenser idealized. Though he chooses a story from Greek antiquity to do this, the characters are courtly knights and ladies and the situations are medieval. When we reach the end of the play, we realize that we have witnessed a vigorous realistic criticism of the ideals which guided the knight in love and war. We are aware that Shakespeare detected the true nature of the courtly love relationship and the true implication of a war waged for unjust ends as we see Cressida left to enjoy her new-found passion, Troilus defeated in love with his dreams shattered, and Hector barbarously slain when he is caught unarmed by the supposedly knightly Achilles. The sacred code of love and honor is exposed in this play which gives no hope of lasting happiness to any, but leaves us musing on the shallowness of the doctrines of courtly love and the hypocrisy of the code of chivalric honor. Troilus, himself, says that honor is fundamentally irrational:

*Nay, if we talk of reason,*  
*Let’s shut our gates and sleep. Manhood and honour*  
*Should have hare hearts, would they but fat their thoughts*
With this cram'd reason.
(II.ii.46-49)

Such an opinion of honor hardly convinces us that it could be a value to guide all men.

There is much that is conventional in Shakespeare's presentation of Troilus and Cressida and yet there is a new vision which sees through the idealism of traditional courtly love. When we first see Troilus he is suffering for love and praising his incomparable lady in the customary fashion:

I tell thee I am mad
In Cressid's love. Thou answer'st 'She is fair'!
Pour'st in the open ulcer of my heart
Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait,
   her voice;
Handlest in thy discourse, O, that her hand,
In whose comparison all whites are ink
Writing their own reproach, to whose soft seizure
The cygnet's down is harsh and spirit of sense
Hard as the palm of ploughman! This thou tell'st me,
As true thou tell'st me, when I say I love her,
But saying thus, instead of oil and balm
Thou lay'st in every gash that love hath given me
The knife that made it. (I.i.51-63)

Cressida, likewise, is conventional in her seeming reluctance. She spurns the solicitings which Pandarus makes on behalf of his friend, Troilus, even when Troilus is described as having all the requirements of the ideal courtier:

Have you any eyes? Do you know what a man is? Is not birth, beauty, good shape, discourse, manhood, learning, gentleness, virtue, youth, liberality, and such-like, the spice and salt that season a man?  (I.ii.274-278)
Indeed, Cressida is aware of Troilus, as she shows in her soliloquy which follows:

Words, vows, gifts, tears, and love's full sacrifice
He offers in another's enterprise.
But more in Troilus thousandfold I see
Than in the glass of Pandar's praise may be.
Yet I hold off. Women are angels, wooing:
Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing.
That she belov'd knows naught that knows not this!
Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is.
That she was never yet that ever knew
Love got so sweet as when desire did sue.
Therefore this maxim out of love I teach:
Achievement is command; ungain'd, beseech.
Then, though my heart's content firm doth bear,
Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear.
(I.ii.308-321)

Here we see a cool, calculating woman who knows what she is doing when she assumes the cruelty and aloofness expected of her. Such scheming makes mockery of the device of cruelty which supposedly tested the lover's sincerity and patience. Cressida is not alone in helping us to see through many of the courtly doctrines. When Troilus is discussing, with his brothers, the need for fighting to keep Helen in the Trojan camp, he urges them to take action, not because it is right to keep Helen, but because it is a matter of honor. Here we are reminded of Troilus' earlier assertion that reason had nothing to do with honor. In a speech, which abounds with chivalric phrases, Troilus states his views:

Were it not glory that we more affected
Than the performance of our heaving spleens,
I would not wish a drop of Trojan blood
Spent more in her defence. But, worthy Hector,
She is a theme of honour and renown,
A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds,
Whose present courage may beat down our foes,
And fame in time to come canonize us.
For I presume brave Hector would not lose
So rich advantage of a promis'd glory
As smiles upon the forehead of this action
For the wide world's revenue. 1

(II.ii.195-206)

We cannot fail to detect the selfish motive behind this appeal. Troilus sees that here is an opportunity for his brothers to gain fame and he appeals directly to the self-esteem of Hector who reminded them that Helen was the legal wife of Sparta's king. There is nothing noble in keeping a stolen wife in order to win fame. If such selfishness be behind courtly doctrines, we can expect them to lead to tragedy.

The tragedy of the play, by which Shakespeare exposes the unhappiest possibilities of courtly love, stems from the love of Troilus and Cressida. The former is blind in his wooing, failing to detect the obvious wantonness of Cressida's first words of love. When Pandarus finally succeeds in bringing the two together, we are told the nature of this union:

If my lord get a boy of you,
you'll give him me. Be true to my lord.
If he flinch, chide me for it.

(III.ii.112-114)

1 Cf. Hotspur's speech, Henry IV (Part I), for the same theme of knightly honor:

By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon,
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fadom line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks,
So he that doth redeem her thence might wear
Without corrival all her dignities;
But out upon this half-fac'd fellowship!

(I.iii.201-208)

2 We are reminded here of early medieval courtly love which permitted such unions rather than the later courtly love of the sixteenth century which held marriage to be the only acceptable end.
Troilus was not wrong, according to the code, in accepting this type of love. The mistake he made was in failing to detect Cressida's real nature and in expecting to build a true, lasting love out of this relationship. Cressida's first words of love show her smouldering desire:

Boldness comes to me now and brings me heart.
Prince Troilus, I have lov'd you night and day
For many weary months.

... Hard to seem won; but I was won, my lord,
With the first glance that ever -- pardon me!
If I confess much, you will play the tyrant.
I love you now; but till now not so much
But I might master it. In faith, I lie!
My thoughts were like unbridled children, grown
Too headstrong for their mother. See, we fools!
Why have I blabb'd?

(III.ii.121-132)

Cressida might be expected to confess her love, but here she confesses much more, revealing her inner nature. She desires Troilus, yet suddenly fears she may lose him for her indiscretion. In this scene we witness more romantic love-making between these two than in any other in the play. Still, there is an unhealthy atmosphere about it. The vows of constancy which the two exchange are not convincing. In the midst of them, Troilus expresses his doubt and skepticism:

O that I thought it could be in a woman
(As, if it can, I will presume in you)
To feed for aye her lamp and flame of love;
To keep her constancy in plight and youth,
Outliving beauties outward, with a mind
That doth renew swifter than blood decays!
Or that persuasion could but thus convince me,
That my integrity and truth to you
Might be affronted with the match and weight
Of such a winnowed purity in love!
How were I then uplifted, but, alas,
I am true as truth's simplicity
And simpler than the infancy of truth.

(III.ii.165-177)
If Troilus' intuition is warning him here, in this brief moment, he is incapable of heeding the warning. Cressida swears her constancy and Troilus is lost:

If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth,
When time is old and hath forgot itself,
When water drops have worn the stones of Troy,
And blind oblivion swallow'd cities up,
And mighty states characterless are grated
To dusty nothing -- yet let memory,
From false to false, among false maids in love,
Upbraid my falsehood! When th' have said
'As false
As air, as water, wind, or sandy earth,
As fox to lamb, or wolf to heifer's calf,
Pard to the hind, or stepdame to her son'--
'Yea,' let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood,
'As false as Cressid.' (III.ii.191-203)

We soon realize how significant is this speech in its prophetic irony and how hollow are the vows of Cressida. After they are spoken, Pandarus, the go-between whose idea of love is a purely physical one, refers to the union that he has engineered in a manner which strips love of its beauty or idealism:

Whereupon I will show you a chamber with a bed, which, because it shall not speak of your pretty encounters, press it to death.
Away!
(III.ii.215-218)

This is the culmination of the love of Troilus and Cressida and the brief night spent together is all the reward which the affair yields. In the morning, Cressida is parted from Troilus, being exchanged to the Greeks for a Trojan prisoner, Antenor. It is this parting which wrecks their love, giving Cressida the opportunity to prove her true nature and shatter Troilus' dreams.
The tragic ending of courtly love in this play is emphasized clearly in the scenes where we see Cressida quickly yielding to the advances of the Greek, Diomedes. In these scenes we realize that the tragedy of Troilus is his folly in trusting a wanton. He was blind to the nature of her passion, asserting his belief in her fidelity, before they parted:

I speak not 'Be thou true' as fearing thee,
For I will throw my glove to Death himself
That there's no maculation in thy heart . . . .
(IV.iv.64-66)

His trust in her and his straightforwardness sharpen the tragedy of her unfaithfulness:

Whilst some with cunning gild their copper crown,
With truth and plainness I do wear mine bare.
Fear not my truth. The moral of my wit
Is 'plain and true'; there's all the reach of it.
(IV.iv.107-110)

His plainness and his truthfulness make him worthy of her love and constancy. Moreover, according to the code, Troilus had a right to expect these. Cressida, however, would rather become someone's mistress, if it were to her immediate advantage. Diomedes sees this, and his accurate, instantaneous appraisal of her makes it clear:

Fair Lady Cressid,
So please you, save the thanks this prince expects.
The lustre in your eye, heaven in your cheek,
Pleads your fair usage; and to Diomed
You shall be mistress and command him wholly.
(IV.iv.118-122)

She does become mistress to Diomedes, contrary to the established customs of courtly love, soon putting Troilus
out of her heart. Troilus has an opportunity to spy on them and witness Diomedes' conquest. He hears Cressida say:

    Sweet honey Greek, tempt me no more to folly.
    (V.ii.18)

Diomedes does tempt her and win her in spite of her weak protest. Troilus sees her give the sleeve to Diomedes which he had given to her on parting and hears Cressida weakly fighting with her own conscience:

    You look upon that sleeve? Behold it well.
    He loved me -- O false wench! -- Give't me again.
    (V.ii.69-70)

The unhappy Troilus sees the one he loved and trusted won easily and hears her bid farewell to him:

    Good night. I prithee come.
    Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee,
    But with my heart the other eye doth see.
    Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us I find,
    The error of our eye directs our mind.
    What error leads must err. O, then conclude
    Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude.
    (V.ii.106-112)

The comment of Thersites, which follows this speech, clearly labels Cressida's actions:

    A proof of strength she could not publish more
    Unless she said 'My mind is now turn'd whore.'
    (V.ii.113-114)

Troilus at last realizes he has lost her:

    This she? No this is Diomed's Cressida!
    If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
    If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
    If sanctimony be the god's delight,
    If there be rule in unity itself --
    This is not she.
    (V.ii.137-142)

His bitterness and unhappiness show his changed attitude to love:
Instance, 0 instance! strong as Pluto's gates:
Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven.
Instance, 0 instance! strong as heaven itself:
The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolv'd,
and loos'd.
And with another knot, five-finger-tied,
The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,
The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy relics
Of her o'ereaten faith, are given to Diomed.
(V.ii.153-160)

Troilus never recovers from the disillusion and disappointment which courtly love brings to him. His denunciation of Cressida remains with us to the end of the play:

O Cressid! O false Cressid! false, false, false!
Let all untruths stand by thy stained name
And they'll seem glory.
(V.ii.178-180)

Even his dear friend Pandarus is denounced in the last words which Troilus speaks:

Hence, broker, lackey! Ignomy and shame
Pursue thy life and live aye with thy name!
(V.v.33-34)

Shakespeare, in showing the unhappiness and hatred which could result from courtly love, was aware that such an ending was logical. The comments of Thersites when Troilus is fighting with Diomedes and when Menelaus is fighting with Paris might easily be Shakespeare's own:

Hold thy whore, Grecian! Now for thy
Whore, Trojan! Now the sleeve! now the sleeve!
(V.iv.25-27)

The cuckold and the cuckold-maker are at it.
(V.vii.9)

Gone is the customary idealization of women. We are left to think how nasty courtly love can be. Even Chaucer had more pity for his courtly lady, Criseyde, being reluctant to treat the end of his narrative after presenting her love for
Troilus as something beautiful. Shakespeare merely leaves his faithless lady indulging her latest passion and leaves his courtier fighting furiously because of the hatred and bitterness which have grown out of his experience in courtly love.

In *Hamlet*, the courtly theme also ends tragically. In this play, the hero shows an inability to accept and return the love which he had once experienced. He has come to believe that women are shallow and that love is unpleasant, having the example of his mother before him. Her hasty marriage to the King which seems wicked and incestuous to him, shatters his ideal of womanhood. When Ophelia reminds him of his past attentions to her, he seems regretful and discourages her. Only after she is dead does he openly confess his love and then it is too late. She has been the indirect victim of Hamlet's desire for revenge upon Claudius.

The full tragic effect of the failure of love in this play is borne out by the fact that both Hamlet and Ophelia really want that love. However, Hamlet's inability to express his love, at the crucial moment, and Ophelia's inability to understand his changed attitude and his real feelings make love impossible. Apart from a few brief lines where Ophelia is reporting Hamlet's early avowal of love or where Polonius

3 Ophelia reports Hamlet's honorable wooing to her father:

> My lord, he hath importun'd me with love In honourable fashion.

> And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord, With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

(i.iv.110-114)
is reading the letter Hamlet wrote to Ophelia, which is composed in conventional courtly style, love is never presented in a favorable light. Both Laertes and Polonius give an unfavorable picture of love in their warnings to Ophelia, making plain its dangers rather than its joys.

Laertes says:

> Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain
> If with too credent ear you list his songs,
> Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
> To his unmast'red importunity.
> Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
> And keep you in the rear of your affection,
> Out of the shot and danger of desire.
> The chariest maid is prodigal enough
> If she unmask her beauty to the moon.
> Virtue itself scapes not calumnious strokes.
> The canker galls the infants of the spring
> Too oft before their buttons be disclos'd,
> And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
> Contagious blastments are most imminent.
> Be wary then; best safety lies in fear.
> Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.
> (I.iii.29-44)

Polonius echoes this warning:

> In few, Ophelia,
> Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers,
> Not of that dye which their investments show,
> But mere implorators of unholy suits,
> Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,
> The better to beguile.
> (I.iv.126-131)

Another unfavorable picture of love is given to Hamlet by the Ghost:

> 'To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautiful Ophelia,'--
> In her excellent white bosom, these, &c'
> O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers; I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it.
> Adieu.
> (II.ii.110-122)
Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts --
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce! -- won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there,
From me, whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage, and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine!
But virtue, as it never will be mov'd,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage. (I.v.42-57)

The young lovers, Hamlet and Ophelia, are both exposed to
these adverse views of love. Ophelia, in her innocence, is
hardly affected by them but they prey on Hamlet's mind. The
ghost of his father has condemned his mother who was the
symbol of womanhood to him. It is little wonder that he
fights against his love for Ophelia. The effect which
Hamlet's brooding and melancholy have upon him and the conflict
of attraction and repulsion for Ophelia may be detected in
Ophelia's account of Hamlet accosting her in her closet:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
Then goes he to length of all his arm,
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turn'd
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes,
For out o'doors he went without their help
And to the last bended their light on me.
(II.i.87-100)

The full extent of Hamlet's desire to put aside women and
love can be seen in his cruelty to Ophelia when he orders
her to a nunnery:

Get thee to a nunnery! Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?

... If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery. Go, farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go; and quickly too. Farewell.

(III.i.122-146)

In Ophelia's soliloquy which follows, she describes Hamlet as the ideal courtier and gives voice to her own disappointment and defeat in love:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's, eye,
tongue, sword,
Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
Th' observed of all observers -- quite, quite down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That suck'd the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me
T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

(III.i.158-169)

This full expression of hopelessness is all that love can mean in this play. When Ophelia hears that her dear father has been killed by the one she most loved, she loses her mind and her life. Love is never realized for Ophelia or Hamlet who, at her graveside, in his quarreling with Laertes, finally comes out and expresses his love, too late:

I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers Could not (with all their quantity of love) Make up my sum.

(V.ii.292-294)

As their love is unfulfilled, we realize that Ophelia did not
understand her lover and he did not understand his own true feelings.

The tragic ending of the courtly theme in Othello is also brought about by misunderstanding. In this play, Shakespeare presents a most vital tragedy, since it is love that actually leads a husband to kill his wife. The tragic conclusion is the natural end of such jealous love as we met in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Cymbeline, or The Winter's Tale. Here, in Othello, there is no arrangement which satisfies all, no timely confession of malice on the part of the villain. Rather, the hatred and jealousy of the evil Iago gradually overpowers Othello's noble character till he is convinced that his beloved wife is a wanton. His jealousy is aroused to such a pitch that he kills the faithful Desdemona, thinking he is sacrificing her life to save her from further sinning. Too late he learns that Iago's evidence is false and he realizes his own folly. There is something terrible and tragic in his final realization that Iago has ensnared his soul. Love which ends like this carries its own condemnation.

Though Othello and Desdemona are more complex than the conventional courtly lovers, still they are patterned after the courtier and the lady in many respects. Othello tells us of his birth and position:

5 In this request, Othello suggests that he is damned:

Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he hath thus ensnar'd my soul and body?
(V.ii.301-302)
... I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege; and my demerits
May speak (unbonneted) to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reach'd.
(I.ii.21-24)

He has won his position of trust and honor on his own merits and his true worth is visible to all who know him.

Brabantio, angry because the Moor has won his daughter, tells us that Desdemona deemed him superior to the courtiers of the realm.

Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her!
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunn'd
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,
Would ever have (t' incur a general mock)
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou . . . .
(I.ii.63-70)

The Duke is less grudging in his appraisal, placing full trust in Othello:

Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you
Against the general enemy Ottoman.
(I.iii.48-49)

Desdemona, won by his tales of noble deeds, sees all that she needs in a husband:

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence, and storm of fortunes,
May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdu'd
Even to the very quality of my lord.
I saw Othello's visage in his mind,
And to his honours and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
(I.iii.249-255)

Even Iago, who is astute in his observation of Othello's faults, cannot fail to see his good qualities:

The Moor (howbeit that I endure him not)
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,
And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona
A most dear husband.
(II.i.297-300)
We must not assume that Othello is the all-round courtier, for he, himself, tells us that he has been groomed on the battlefield and is lacking in courtly manners:

Rude am I in my speech,
And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace;
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have us'd
Their dearest action in the tented field;
And little of this great world can I speak
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle...
(I.iii.81-87)

Nevertheless, he is capable of winning the love and devotion of Desdemona, who, her father tells us, is an innocent, courtly lady:

A maiden never bold;
Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
Blush'd at herself; and she -- in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, everything --
To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on!
(I.iii.94-98)

This is the lady whom Othello is capable of winning and we might expect that their love and marriage should be a happy and idyllic one. However, the hatred and scheming of Iago is capable of destroying Othello's trust in his wife, though Desdemona is devoted to the end.

It is the personalities of both Othello and Desdemona that lead them to tragedy. Iago perceived Othello's true nature and exploits it to the full:

The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so;
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
As asses are.  
(I.iii.405-408)

Shakespeare leaves no doubt that this is a correct observation.  
Othello, himself, tells us it is so:

Certain, men should be what they seem.  
(III.iii.128)

This is Othello's criterion and it explains his tragedy, for he is mistaken.  He is convinced of his wife's infidelity, of Cassio's secret love affair with Desdemona, and of Iago's honesty by things which seem to be.  Othello's trusting nature is seen to advantage at first, when Brabantio warns him to watch Desdemona:

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see.  
She had deceiv'd her father, and may thee.  
(I.iii.293-294)

Othello's quick retort shows he cannot allow her constancy to be questioned:

My life upon her faith! -- Honest Iago,  
My Desdemona must I leave to thee.  
(I.iii.295-296)

Unfortunately, Iago has no trouble turning Othello's trusting nature to his own purpose.  Iago's plan to have revenge upon Othello (who made Cassio his lieutenant instead of Iago and whom Iago suspects of having made love to his wife) and at the same time bring Cassio down, is realized with no difficulty:

... I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,  
Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb  
(For I fear Cassio with my nightcap too).  
Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me  
For making him egregiously an ass  
And practising upon his peace and quiet  
Even to madness.  
(II.i.314-320)

Iago is so clever that he can do exactly as he plans, and
Othello is helplessly at the mercy of this malignant jealousy.

Desdemona is likewise at the mercy of Iago's maliciousness. Though she remains constant and devoted, she is helpless to prevent the change in Othello's attitude to her and her own death. In her innocence she does not understand what is happening and cannot defend herself. She seems to lack the spirit to take the initiative as had Rosalind in *As You Like It*, or the ability to fight back as had Imogen in *Cymbeline*. Desdemona is not to be blamed for her innocence, but it is tragic that she does not understand the true implications of her pleading for Cassio's re-instatement and that she does not know why she is accused and condemned. Iago, in his scheming, makes it clear that he understands Desdemona just as well as he does Othello:

For 'tis most easy
Th' inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit. She's fram'd as fruitful
As the free elements. And then for her
To win the Moor -- were'nt to renounce his
baptism --
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin--
His soul is so enfetter'd to her love
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function.

(II.iii.345-354)

Her innocent nature is brought out after she has been called a whore by Othello:

I cannot say 'whore,'
It doth abhor me now I speak the word;
To do the act that might th' addition earn
Not the world's mass of vanity could make me.

(IV.ii.161-164)
In her discussion with Emilia, her maid (and Iago's wife) Desdemona still cannot believe that women could do such things:

Dost thou in conscience think -- tell me, Emilia --
That there be women do abuse their husbands
In such gross kind?

(IV.iii.61-62)

Emilia's conclusive summation shows a more realistic attitude to love. It might be taken as the answer of a lady who was enjoying a new freedom in Elizabethan society to the husband who carried on his own secret love affair:

But I do think it is their husband's faults
If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties
And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
Or scant our former having in despite--
Why, we have galls; and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like they. They see, and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well; else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

(IV.iii.89-106)

Desdemona is not of this independent, rebellious nature, and so submits to her fate.

Othello is not the type of husband nor is Desdemona the type of wife Emilia described, yet the tragedy happens because Othello thinks of his wife in such terms. At first,
Othello is reluctant to believe Iago's reports and tries to control an upsurge of jealousy by explaining that Desdemona is only fulfilling her role as the courtly lady:

'Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well.
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago;
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
And on the proof there is no more but this --
Away at once with love or jealousy!

(III.iii.183-192)

Though Othello seems to be winning his struggle here, he is soon given apparently conclusive proof by Iago that Desdemona is false. Othello, who has been told that it is not natural that Desdemona should marry one of his color or years cannot bear the thought of her seeking love elsewhere because of an ill-founded marriage:

O curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For other's uses.

(III.iii.268-273)

Because he believes that others are sharing her love, he is driven to murder her. In demanding proof of Iago he displays

6 Cf. Chapter II, p. 34.

7 It is worth noticing here that Othello is fighting against the situation condoned by early courtly love, where a young wife was courted by a young lover when the husband was away at war or when the match was not a happy one.
a tortured mind which leads naturally to tragedy:

By the world,
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;
I think that thou art just, and think thou art
not.
I'll have some proof. Her name that was as
fresh
As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd and black
As mine own face. If there be cords, or
knives,
Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,
I'll not endure it. Would I were satisfied.  
(III.iii.383-390)

When Othello is finally worked up to such a frenzy that he
falls into a trance, Iago's gloating makes us aware that it is
possible for evil to come out of noble love:

Work on,
My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are
caught,
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus
All guiltless, meet reproach.  
(IV.i.45-48)

We realize how effectively Iago's medicine has worked when we
see the depth to which Othello's thoughts have sunk:

Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damn'd
tonight; for she shall not live. No,
my heart is turn'd to stone. I strike it,
and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath
not a sweeter creature! She might lie
by an emperor's side and command him tasks.  
(IV.ii.191-196)

Even here, when Othello gives voice to the loathesome words
he has learned from Iago, we may see the conflict. He still
loves Desdemona, as we see when he comes to kill her:

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light.
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,  
Should I repent me; but once put out thy light,  
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,  
I know not where is that Promethean heat  
That can thy light relume. When I have  
pluck'd the rose,  
I cannot give it vital growth again;  
It needs must wither. I'll smell it on the  
tree.  
O balmy breath, thou dost almost persuade  
Justice to break her sword! One more, one  
more!  
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill  
thee;  
And love thee after. One more, and this the  
last!  
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,  
But they are cruel tears. This sorrow's  
heavenly;  
It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.  
(V.ii.1-22)

In this speech, one of the most powerful Shakespeare ever  
wrote, the full tragedy is borne out. Othello, who has  
been driven by his desire for constancy and by his trusting  
nature to kill what he most loves, thinks he is the minister  
of justice, sacrificing his wife to save her and other men.  
When it is too late he learns the truth and, upon the point  
of death, realizes how love has misled him:

... Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you  
speak  
Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well;  
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,  
Perplex'ad in the extreme; of one whose hand  
(Like the base Indian) threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe....  
(V.ii.342-348)

As the play ends we are aware of the tragic implications of  
love. Shakespeare has shown us, fully, the other side of  
such joyous, carefree love as it is found in Twelfth Night.
With the three plays, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*, the courtly theme ends in tragedy. This is the limit to which the theme can go. The idealism and gaiety of the conventions have disappeared and in these tragedies the true possibilities of courtly love have been exposed. After this, the courtly theme could not be accepted seriously as a pattern for loving or for living. Shakespeare, in probing into its every aspect, exposed its true nature and its true value. He needed but to put it aside and to accept other values, for the courtly conventions were long out of date.
CHAPTER VIII

SUBVERSION OF THE THEME

The Tempest
CHAPTER VIII

In *The Tempest*, apparently Shakespeare's last complete play, the courtly theme is subverted. Many of its traditional aspects may be detected, but these are no longer of primary interest. Although the lovers are courtly figures and follow closely the customary pattern of making love, still they are of little interest to us as courtly lovers. The treatment of love is much more profound than it had been in many of the earlier plays, such as *Love's Labour's Lost* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There is less frivolity and more depth in the theme of *The Tempest*, which is the reconciliation of old enemies in the interests of young lovers. Furthermore, love is depicted in its youth and innocence as the force of renewal in the world. The theme of marriage which Spenser and Castiglione had presented in their conceptions of courtly love is carried to its natural conclusion by Shakespeare who emphasizes love and marriage as the means of bringing about a better world.

*The Tempest* deals with a shipwrecked party which is guilty of a crime against Prospero and his daughter, Miranda. This party, which includes the rulers of Naples and Milan,

1 This theme is suggested in Miranda's speech which suits the themes of reconciliation and fruition in marriage:

O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
That has such people in't!

(V.1.181-184)
falls into the power of Prospero, who was deposed as the Duke of Milan by one of their number. Another of the party, Ferdinand, son of the King of Naples, falls in love with Prospero's daughter. In the interests of these two lovers, all is happily resolved when Prospero exercises justice and forgiveness rather than revenge.

The play is dominated by Prospero who, with his book of magic and his superior knowledge, is able to control nature and neatly bring all his adversaries to his island, victims of a storm he has summoned. While they are there he is able to bewitch certain members, keep certain groups apart, and bewilder the courtiers with a banquet, controlled by Ariel, which vanishes before they can eat. Strange shapes and mythological goddesses are conjured up to entertain Ferdinand and Miranda. Such deeds suggest that the course of love could be controlled easily by Prospero, and though he allows love to develop naturally, we are aware that he does so because such development agrees with his intentions.

The courtly characters of Prospero, Ferdinand, and Miranda are of the most interest to us, in The Tempest. Prospero is noble in his bearing, displaying wisdom and the quality of forgiveness. His courtly bearing is more evident in the final act when he gives up his magic and dons his court garb to mete out mercy and restore to freedom all who are his captives. His daughter, Miranda, can scarcely be called a court lady since she has only known exile on the
island with her father. Nevertheless, she has an air of gentility in her youth and innocence. She is simple, but intelligent, sensitive, and benevolently compassionate. Her lover, Ferdinand, is the princely type of whom she says:

I might call him
A thing divine; for nothing natural
I ever saw so noble.

(I.ii.417-419)

In true courtly fashion he willingly undertakes the menial task of piling thousands of logs for Prospero with the complaint:

This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
And makes my labours pleasures. O, she is
Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed . . . .

(III.i.4-8)

We cannot fail to notice that Shakespeare, here, is degrading the knightly quest by turning it into a chore of piling logs, even though it is done willingly for the lady.

Ferdinand and Miranda resemble courtly lovers, though they are not as conventional as the two pairs of lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example. Miranda's love for Ferdinand is innocent but certain. In her response to him she combines modesty with ardour, possessing the bearing of a princess although unfamiliar with the ways of society. All this is seen in her speech to Ferdinand:

I do not know
One of my sex; no woman's face remember,
Save, from my glass, mine own; nor have I seen
More that I may call men than you, good friend,
And my dear father. How features are abroad
I am skilless of; but, by my modesty,
(The jewel in my dower), I would not wish
Any companion in the world but you;
Nor can imagination form a shape
Besides yourself, to like of. But I prattle
Something too wildly, and my father's precepts
I therein do forget.

(III.i.48-59)

Ferdinand is more clearly the courtly lover, though we must recognize that only in his bearing is this evident. We know from the time he first comes into the play that he will have no difficulty in winning Miranda, for he is merely the tool of Prospero's purpose; and, if the latter so wished, he could cast any imaginable spell upon the two lovers. Ferdinand is permitted to woo Miranda, however, without the magic of Prospero and in so doing he displays a gentle, noble nature. Perhaps his most revealing courtly speech is his answer to Miranda's praise (quoted above):

I am, in my condition,
A prince, Miranda; I do think, a king
(I would not so!), and would no more endure
This wooden slavery than to suffer
The fleshfly blow my mouth. Hear my soul speak!
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service; there resides,
To make me slave to it; and for your sake
Am I this patient log-man?

(III.i.59-67)

This passage tells us much of Ferdinand and much of the Elizabethan courtier. It betrays a pride in social position accompanied by a willingness to surrender one's heart to a lady of quality as well as a willingness to serve her regardless of the degradation involved. Ferdinand plainly belongs to the courtly class, with his readiness to endure
the ordeal imposed upon him in order to win his lady's approval. Moreover, he constantly uses the customary language of his class, referring to "service," "honor," "mistress," "bondage," and "lady." Finally, his addresses of love to Miranda are couched in the traditional lyrical phrases which mark them as courtly.

Though the love of Ferdinand and Miranda is closely related to the type of courtly love which we have met in many of Shakespeare's plays, there is an essential difference. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Twelfth Night*, for example, love constituted the main interest. In *The Tempest*, it shares our interest with other matters. The play actually deals with secondary courtly figures whose love story is merely a part of the greater theme of reconciliation between Prospero and his enemies. Moreover, although the lovers are courtly figures and follow closely the customary courtly pattern of making love, still they are of little interest to us as traditional courtly lovers. Their love is no outward show nor an imagined fancy, but is deep and genuine. They are the representatives of all true lovers, for their love is no thing of the hour, but rather a concrete, deep emotion that has its natural consummation in marriage and reproduction. This fact, that love must end naturally in marriage, is stressed, frankly, by Prospero when he warns Ferdinand:

Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition Worthily purchas'd, take my daughter. But
If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be minist'red,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make this contract grow . . . .

(IV.i.13-19)

It is no courtier, drunk with the customary fancies of love
or desperately longing to have his love requited who replies:

As I hope
For quiet days, fair issue, and long life,
With such love as 'tis now, the murkiest den,
The most opportune place, the strongest
suggestion
Our worser genius can, shall never melt
Mine honour into lust, to take away
The edge of that day's celebration . . . .

(IV.i.23-29)

With this speech we realize that courtly love, with its
lyrical protestations of bliss which focus on the period
of wooing, is dead. The conventional sighing and suffering
for love is gone and in its place is a mature, reasoned
attitude to the most basic of all man's emotions. As
Ferdinand looks beyond the mere satisfaction of sexual
love to a whole lifetime of domestic happiness, we leave
the world of make-believe love and enter that of reality.
Shakespeare may have felt, as he concluded this play,
that he had worked through artificiality and sham to a
more lasting, satisfying attitude towards love. At
least the doctrines of courtly love and the precepts
guiding the courtier and his lady had nothing more to
teach mankind.
CONCLUSION

The variety and the frequency with which Shakespeare treated the courtly theme should suggest its importance in understanding his plays. The comprehensiveness of his treatment serves to remind us that love was looked upon as a great educative force by the courtiers of his day who always kept before their eyes the chivalric ideals of the past. From the time when Wyatt returned from Italy with Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, there was a strengthened revival of interest in medieval ideas. This interest was advanced by Castiglione's *Courtier* which became the guide-book for all European courtiers and ladies. By the time of Sidney and Spenser the subject of the courtier in love was something of a poetic passion. We have already seen that love had become a highly conventionalized art when expounded in sonnet sequences, plays, and prose romances by the aspiring writers of the day who sought court favor. The courtier, too, spent many diverting hours in writing of love, freely adopting the conventions of medieval courtly love and of Petrarch. Of course, the lover in Elizabethan literature was more often a fiction than a reality; but, nevertheless, he did mirror the standards of taste and the attitudes held in the matters of love.

In presenting the lovers of his plays, Shakespeare was joining those Elizabethans who wrote on the joys and sorrows of love, the adoration of beautiful women, the
immortality which a poet sought to give through his songs to a beautiful lady, the sleepless nights which love brought, the sanctity of honor and constancy, and the relationship of love to friendship. It is important that we recognize the popularity of these themes and the ease with which any Elizabethan audience would respond to an allusion to them. If the renunciation of a loved one for a friend, such as we met in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, seems absurd to us, we must remember that an Elizabethan audience would be more concerned with the conventional question of whether friendship was stronger than love. Valentine's actions, then, might be understood more readily. Again, in *Twelfth Night*, Viola's dejected longing for Orsino and her secret love for him, expressed when she is disguised, would be understood immediately by the Elizabethan audience which quickly recognized the symptoms of such love and expected the complication which arose out of the traditional disguise. The pattern of love between the prince, Florizel, and the noble-born shepherdess, Perdita, in *The Winter's Tale* would also be a familiar theme which would not trouble an Elizabethan audience. It is necessary for us, if we are to understand fully Shakespeare's plays which deal with the courtly theme, to be aware of the conventions involved and to recognize that though certain allusions or conventions may be obscure now, they were of prime importance to an audience which responded to them almost instinctively. One thing stands out clearest, in tracing Shakespeare's
handling of the courtly theme: he took it, with all its accretion of traditional detail and its artificiality, and turned it over and over in plays which depict it as comedy, satire, romance, reality, and tragedy. In so doing, he always revealed a preference for natural love and upheld such natural love as the only right path to marriage and happiness. This attitude, which did not prevent him from exploiting the many possibilities of the courtly theme, sees love's true significance to man's life. His attitude has remained vital through the centuries which have intervened, while the Elizabethan conceptions of the courtier and of courtly love have long since diminished in importance. Still, a consideration of the courtly theme suggests a useful approach to many of Shakespeare's plays.
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