THE IMAGE OF THE THEATRE
IN SHAKESPEARE

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to suggest something of the extent to which the image of the theatre is reflected in Shakespeare's plays. By image is meant a variety of things -- the physical theatre, its stage, its actors and its audience, and their metaphysical concomitants. The image of the theatre involves Shakespeare's attitudes towards the theatre itself; his comments upon the nature of dramatic illusion, life as an illusion, the inadequacies of stage representation and his methods of overcoming such difficulties. I have also been interested in Shakespeare's significant playing with the spectator's sense of dramatic illusion. Also included under this general heading of image are his ideas about the nature and function of drama as mirror, and the significant ways in which he uses the play-within-the-play as a reflector. Other aspects of the image are the way in which Shakespeare's characters describe themselves, or are described, as role-players, in the sense that they voluntarily adopt or are forced by circumstances to assume, a particular part; and also the theatrical imagery which permeates the language of the plays throughout the canon.

As I have indicated in the introduction, recent criticism touching on this general area has proved to be quite extensive, and often most illuminating. Such writers as S. L. Bethell, Muriel Bradbrook, Una Ellis-Fermor, Bernard Spivack, Robert Heilman, John Lawlor, to mention only a few, have much to say on Shakespeare's characters, their role-playing, and
other aspects of the image, which I found invaluable. Most of the critical commentary, however, though substantial enough and extremely useful in points of detail, was not concerned with the particular approach adopted by the present writer. To the best of my knowledge, none of the authors quoted has been consistently concerned with suggesting the way in which the theatre pervades Shakespeare's work; how it is reflected in his overt concern with the problems of the theatre, in his language and his view of life itself.

There are a number of conclusions to this general, and by no means exhaustive, study. Shakespeare's remarks on dramatic illusion, as given in the prologues to Henry V and Pericles, suggest that he considers the matter of realistic stage presentation as of a somewhat peripheral concern for the dramatist. The true reality of a play lies in the substance which underlies the shadow, or vision, which is presented to us. Shakespeare, particularly in the comedies, often breaks the illusion, reminding us that we are watching a play. Yet for all this juggling with the audience's sense of illusion -- often done subtly and less self-consciously in the tragedies -- the truth which is reflected in the fiction remains unaffected. The inner play in Shakespeare, like the play itself, also serves to mirror truth, as in "Pyramus and Thisbe," "The Mousetrap," and others. The relation of the image of the theatre to character is particularly interesting. I concentrated especially upon certain groups of characters, the lovers, the villains, the fools, the kings, the tragic heroes. Of these groups, some characters are aware of their
role-playing, others are not. The interesting and significant point is that the image of the theatre manifests itself in Shakespeare's conception of character. It also manifests itself in his language and his view of life.

Prospero's famous speech in The Tempest, "our revels now are ended," provides perhaps a fitting climax to this study. As spectators to this last play, our own perspective, which encompasses the fiction of the masque and the "real" spectators Ferdinand and Miranda, themselves a part of the larger fiction The Tempest, is itself displaced and made fictive. We too become as figures in the play of life, the vision of reality.
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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to suggest something of the extent to which the image of the theatre is reflected in Shakespeare's plays. By image is meant a variety of things -- the physical theatre, its stage, its actors and its audience, and their metaphysical concomitants. The image of the theatre involves Shakespeare's attitudes towards the theatre itself; his comments upon the nature of dramatic illusion, life as illusion, the inadequacies of stage representation and his methods of overcoming such difficulties. I have also been interested in Shakespeare's significant playing with the spectator's sense of dramatic illusion. Also included under this general heading of image are his ideas about the nature and function of drama as mirror, and the significant ways in which he uses the play-within-the-play as a reflector. Other aspects of the image are the way in which Shakespeare's characters describe themselves, or are described, as role-players, in the sense that they voluntarily adopt or are forced by circumstance to assume, a particular part; and also the theatrical imagery which permeates the language of the plays throughout the canon.

Recent criticism touching on the general area has proved to be quite extensive, and often most illuminating. S. L. Bethell's Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (London, Staples Press, 1948) discusses the subject of illusion-breaking in ancient and modern art, and provides several interesting comments on the Elizabethan attitude towards the distinctions between reality and fiction. C. L. Barber,
Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959) also makes some very good points about the relations between art and life, with particular reference to Elizabethan drama. On art as the mirror of nature, M. H. Abram's The Mirror and the Lamp (New York, W.W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1958) presents an excellent historical survey which notes that the notion of art as mirror was a dominant critical attitude up to the end of the eighteenth century. Post-romantic theorists came to view art as a transparent medium intended to reveal the poet's heart.

C. L. Barber's remarks on Rosalind, Berowne, Benedict and Puck as role-players were most useful; as were M. C. Bradbrook's illuminating observations on the characters in Shakespeare's comedies (Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry, London, Chatto and Windus, 1951). Especially suggestive were Joseph Summers' notes on the roles played by Viola and Feste in Twelfth Night ("The Masks of Twelfth Night," Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. L.F. Dean, New York, Oxford University Press, 1957, from The University of Kansas City Review, XXII, Autumn, 1955, pp.25-32). R.B. Heilman's This Great Stage (Louisiana State University Press, 1948) provided much that was provocative by way of commentary on the role-playing of both Edgar and Kent. Richard Altick's article "Symphonic Imagery in Richard II" (PMLA, 1947, pp.339-365) provided an approach to Richard II; while Maurice Charney's article on the clothing imagery in Coriolanus ("The Dramatic Use of Imagery in Shakespeare's Coriolanus," ELH, Sept. 1956, pp.183-193) suggested a way of approaching not only Coriolanus, but also
Macbeth. As self-conscious commentators on their own characters, Shakespeare's villains have received a good deal of attention. Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1958), goes into the pre-Elizabethan stage history of the villain type in some detail and with particular reference to Iago, a figure whom Spivack sees as a character possessed at once of conventional and realistic qualities; a development from the morality Vice, yet a person in his own right. Brander Matthews (*Shakespeare as a Playwright*, New York, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1913) tends to see Shakespeare's villains and their soliloquies as rather crude dramatic devices for conveying information to the audience. My own point of view would admit the validity of Matthews' approach; Richard III is truly like a medieval Vice, indeed he says so. But the fact that he says so suggests he possesses a sharp and cynical wit. Alwin Thaler ("Shakespeare on Style, Imagination and Poetry," *PMLA*, Dec. 1938, pp.1010-1036) has some interesting remarks to make about Edmund. Una Ellis-Fermor's study of Shakespeare's kings (*The Frontiers of Drama*, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1946) emphasizes the progression of rulers beginning with Henry VI, from bad to good, culminating with Henry V, whom Una Ellis-Fermor regards as perfect but cold and colorless. Without questioning the validity of Una Ellis-Fermor's approach, the present discussion is concerned with the kings as individuals; and, in particular, the responses they themselves feel as individuals towards the role of kingship which is generally imposed upon them. I was interested in the distinctions between the king, and the man who plays the king.
Most of the critical comment, although substantial enough and extremely useful in points of detail, was not concerned with the particular approach adopted by the present writer. To the best of my knowledge, none of the authors quoted has been consistently concerned with suggesting the way in which the theatre pervades Shakespeare's work; how it is reflected in his overt concern with the problems of the theatre, and in his language and his view of life itself.

My own particular method of approach by no means exhausts the material. Not all the examples of illusion-breaking in Shakespeare have been given, nor all the possible instances of theatrical language mentioned. Nor have I discussed all the role-players in Shakespeare, but rather those who fitted into certain groups, the lovers, the villains and so on. My concern has thus been to indicate a way of using the image of the theatre as an approach to Shakespeare.

All references to Shakespeare's plays are taken from Shakespeare, the Complete Works, ed. G. B. Harrison, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1952.
Chapter I. The Dramatic Illusion

It is to be expected that Shakespeare, as an artist concerned with the problems of creating a dramatic illusion, should have something to say on the subject. His own attitudes and feelings seem to be most clearly expressed in the prologues to Henry V, The Winter's Tale (Act IV), and Pericles (Acts III, IV, V). The difficulties of making the audience believe the stage to be a ship, or a forest, or a castle; or a man to represent an army, or a boy a woman, are considered in these prologues, as they are also in A Midsummer Night's Dream. The efforts of Peter Quince's men to represent such things as moonlight, walls, lovers and lions, upon the stage, are, of course, unwittingly hilarious. Taking especial care that the play lion is not mistaken for the real one, they decide, or rather Bottom does, that Snug must assure the audience that he, Snug, is not a lion indeed but a man. Their answers to the problems of presenting a wall and moonlight are perhaps even funnier. All this is great sport for both ourselves and the courtly audience on-stage. But the problems of dramatic presentation considered by these amateur actors, regardless of the efficacy with which they are solved, are real enough and ones which Shakespeare himself must have faced as a playwright. As Ronald Watkins notes:

... these six men are after all discussing the difficulty that confronted the Chamberlain's men with every play they presented; how namely to create illusion with inadequate means. It is the old problem that Shakespeare ... tossed back to his
audience in Henry the Fifth, how, "with foure or five most vile and ragged foiles" to present Agin-
court."

How do you present moonlight on the stage? The man in the
moon, complete with dog, is certainly one solution. And what
do you do about horses? (Bears would appear to be less of a
problem.) And oh, cries Shakespeare, what are we to do with
the great English battles?

And so our scene must to the battle fly,
Where — oh, for pity! — we shall much disgrace
With four or five most vile and ragged foils;,
Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous,
The name of Agincourt. (Henry V, IV, Pro., 48-52)

Criticism of this kind of unrealistic representation, criti-
cism which characterizes the response of the audience — save
Theseus — to "Pyramus and Thisbe," finds its parallel in con-
temporary Elizabethan writing. Emphasis upon the Aristotlean
unities of time and place — two unities not to be found in
Aristotle, but rather in Italian translations and commentaries
which English critics used — caused Sidney to criticize
unnamed plays in the following terms. (The last phrase is
especially close to the lines above from Henry V.)

But if it be so in Gorboduc, how much more in all the
rest? Where you shall have Asia of the one side, and
Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingsoms,
that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin
with telling where he is, or else the tale will not
be conceived. Now ye shall have three ladies walk
to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage
to be a garden . . . . in the meantime two armies fly
in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and
then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched
field?

1R. Watkins, Moonlight at the Globe, London, Michael
Joseph, 1946, p.77.

2Sir Philip Sidney, The Defense of Poesy, ed. A.S.
Cook, Boston, Ginn, 1890, p.48.
Sidney is a little inconsistent on this point, for elsewhere he says that even a child will not mistake a door marked "Thebes" to be really Thebes. With regard to stage representation Jonson, on the other hand, is quite precise and unambiguous. In the prologue to Every Man in His Humour he jeers at authors who

... with three rusty swords,
And help of some few foot and half-foot words,
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars,
And in the tyring house bring wounds to scars. 3 (9-12)

Shakespeare would not disagree with Jonson's attitude here; four or five swords are inadequate to represent a war. Indeed Shakespeare is the first to mock the insufficiencies of his own stage spectacle, as the tongue-in-cheek tone of the lines quoted above from Henry V suggest. The solution to the problem of dramatic illusion, suggests Shakespeare, lies with the audience. It is their imaginations which must make up what the stage lacks in props, or the actors in talent:

Yet sit and see,
Minding true things by what their mockeries be.
(Henry V, IV, Pro., 52-53)

Shakespeare sees the drama as a representation, a "mockery" of reality, a symbol of action, not a perfect and completely realistic imitation of life. That it is a shadow, a reflection, does not mean that what is thereby presented is trivial, superficial, or unrelated to the realities of human problems and emotions. The substance that underlies the shadow is composed of the truths of humanity. The audience must accept the limits

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of illusion, must see the play as a fiction and take what is presented as a shadow, as reflecting and embodying something worthwhile. This is true, not only of "Pyramus and Thisbe," but of any play, as Theseus points out:

The best in this kind are but shadows, and the Worst are no worse, if imagination amend them. (A Midsummer Night's Dream, V, i, 211-212)

It is interesting to note that much the same kind of gracious comment on the need for imagination is made by Sir Thomas More when the Players visit him:

My good Lord Cardinalles players, I thancke Them for it, Play us a play . . . A theame of some importe, how ere it proove; But, if arte faile, weele inche it out with loove. . . .

(IV, i, 114-117)

In the prologue to Henry V and Pericles Shakespeare makes further appeals to the audience to employ their grace and imagination. Similarly the prologue to the anonymous The Merry Devil of Edmonton implores the spectators to

Imagine now that whilst he is retirde From Cambridge backe unto his native home, Suppose the silent, sable visagde night Casts her black curtaine over all the World;

The appeal is made more humorously in The Knight of the Burning Pestle. There the grocer's wife wishes something particular to be performed:

Wife: George, let Rafe travell over great hills, and let him be [very] weary, and come to the King of Cracovia's house, covered with Velvet, and there let the King's daughter stand in her window all in beaten gold, combing her golden locks . . . ; and


5Ibid., p.265.
5
come down to him, and carry him into her father's	house, and then let Rafe talk with her.
Cit. Well said, Nel, it shall be so: boy let's
ha't done quickly.
Boy. Sir, if you will imagine all this to be
done already, you shall hear them talk together:
but we cannot present a house covered with black
velvet, and a Lady in beaten gold.⁶ (IV, i, 45ff.)

And of course, there are advantages to travelling in the imagi-
nation alone:

And thence to France shall we convey you safe,
And bring you back, charming the narrow seas
To give you gentle pass. For, if we may,
We'll not offend one stomach with our play.

(Henry V, II, Pro., 37-40)

I have mentioned that the sincere but bumbling
efforts of Quince and his actors to create a dramatic illusion
only serve to underscore the theatricality of "Pyramus and
Thisbe." Fearful that their lady auditors will perhaps be
overwhelmed by the power and reality of their passionate art,
the actors stress the reality of the here and now; that is,
of themselves as actors performing their parts. In other words,
they continually remind the audience that they are watching a
play; they break, rather than make, the illusion. In much the
same way that Prospero plays with Miranda's sense of reality,
assuring her that the vision of the ship-wreck is but a harm-
less dream, so Shakespeare enjoys playing with his audience's
sense of dramatic illusion, and reminds them that they are
watching a play. In a quite deliberate fashion, he often
shatters the make-believe atmosphere, especially of the comedies.
At the end of Love's Labour's Lost, for example, Berowne draws
attention to the fact that:

⁶Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Works of, ed. A.
Our wooing doth not end like an old play.
Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy
Might well have made our sport a comedy.

King. Come, sir, it wants a twelvemonth and a day
And then 'twill end.

Ber. That's too long for a play.

(V, ii, 884-888)

Earlier, Berowne describes part of the play's action as being
"... like a Christmas comedy." (V, ii, 462) His reference
to the conventional ending of comedies, when all is brought
to its proper conclusion, and each man has his maid, recalls
Puck's rhyme in A Midsummer Night's Dream: Jack shall have
Jill/Nought shall go ill," (III, ii, 461). Ingenioso, at the
end of Part II of The Returne from Parnassus, also comments
on the unhappy ending of the play, in contravention to "the
lawes of ... comick stage:"

Ing. Nay stay awhile and helpe me to content
So many gentle witts attention,
Who kenne the lawes of every comick stage,
And wonder that our scene ends discontent.

(V, iv, 2200-2203)

In Twelfth Night there is Fabian's comment upon the ridiculous
actions of Malvolio:

If this were played upon a stage now, I could
condemn it as an improbable fiction.

(III, iv, 140)

There is perhaps another way of looking at such references as
these. Even in Illyria there are doubtless theatres and we
can assume that Fabian is a theatre-goer. In this respect,
his reality and the reality of the play world are affirmed; the
illusion remains untouched. Much the same argument can be

7The Three Parnassus Plays (1598-1601), ed. J. B.
applied to Berowne's references to the "old play." There can be little doubt, however, that the immediate effect of such allusions is to break the dramatic illusion.

This kind of game, which seems quite conscious on Shakespeare's part, adds to our enjoyment of the play since it tends to stress the difference between life and art. Occasionally we are reminded, however, that the difference is probably not so great after all. The episode of "Pyramus and Thisbe" is, of course, recognized by the on-stage audience to be a fiction, a play. The courtly onlookers are themselves "real." But are they? Puck's epilogue affirms the fiction both of "Pyramus and Thisbe" and a *Midsummer Night's Dream*:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear,
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,

\[
(V, i, 430-435)
\]

Just as the "reality" of the inner audience fades into the larger shadow, so too we perhaps see ourselves as actors, mere shadows upon the stage of life. Much the same sort of double exposure occurs at the end of *Hamlet*. Hamlet, fatally wounded, addresses the assembled court:

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,

\[
(V, ii, 345-346)
\]

His words, of course, are appropriate, for the courtiers are indeed an audience to this fatal last scene. But Hamlet's remarks apply equally well to the real audience; they too "look pale and tremble at this chance." Thus the "reality" of the stage spectators, onlookers to "The Mousetrap," is
itself seen to be merely part of the larger fiction, *Hamlet*, just as the courtly viewers of "Pyramus and Thisbe" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* become shadows in relation to their play. There is an interesting parallel here with a situation in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. Hieronimo has just revealed to the assembled stage onlookers that the tragedy of "Soliman and Perseda" has been performed in earnest:

> And, princes, now behold Hieronimo,  
> Author and actor in this tragedy,  
> Bearing his latest fortune in his fist;  
> And will as resolute conclude his part  
> As any of the actors gone before.  

(IV, iii, 177-181)

The off-stage audience has known all along that Hieronimo's play-acting is intended for earnest, while the stage viewers have thought it to be truly a play. The sudden shift from the fiction of "Soliman and Perseda" to the real world of *The Spanish Tragedy*, shocks the Spanish king and his entourage. They are like any audience watching the climax of a tragic play. The real audience, watching all the action, retains a perspective from which they see the change from play-within-play to reality occurring within the larger framework of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Once again, the inner audience, representatives of reality, become shadows. This playing with our sense of dramatic illusion is something we should perhaps expect to find only in the comedies. It seems more consistent and in keeping with comedy's greater artificiality of form. Surely, this kind of thing does not occur in tragedy? And yet, as we have seen, it does. In point of fact, two of the most direct

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8Parks and Beatty, *op.cit.*, p.320.
and startling stage allusions occur in *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and I should like to consider these, together with a similar one in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, in some detail.

The first of these occurs near the opening of *Hamlet*. Hamlet has just spoken with the ghost, and has been informed of his father's horrid murder. He now prepares to swear his friends to keep silence with regard to the night's proceedings. It would seem to be a moment of grand and sombre tension. Yet the Prince's reply to the ghost's invocation to them to "swear!" not only reflects high spirits and good humour on his part — a few lines later on he calls the ghost "old mole" — but also calls immediate attention to a feature of the play's production; that the actor portraying the spirit is now underneath the stage platform:

> Ghost. (beneath) Swear.  
> *Hamlet*. Oh, ha, boy! Say'st thou so? Art thou there, truepenny?  
> Come on. You hear this fellow in the cellarage.  
> (I, v, 149-152)

Quite suddenly the solemn unearthly presence of the ghost on the ramparts of Elsinore has been translated to the rather more mundane residence of a space under the Globe Theatre's wooden stage! John Dover Wilson writes at some length on this scene and suggests that Hamlet's jocular attitude toward the Ghost is part of an act put on to deceive Marcellus and Horatio into thinking the spirit is a devil:

He addresses the ghost in the "cellarage" as if it were a devil, a "familiar" with whom he has just been holding converse. He calls it "boy" and "true-penny," that is "trusty fellow" or "faithful servant,"
and he makes Horatio and Marcellus swear with
the devil, as the latter at any rate will believe
it to be, beneath their very feet.9

Certainly an assumption that Hamlet is putting on an act will
help us to account for the inconsistency of his calling his
father's spirit an "old mole." I wonder, though, if Hamlet's
good humour is not a witty response to the ghost's startling
"Swear" from beneath. Hamlet knows the ghost is in purgatory;
could he not be having a joke at its expense? Perhaps this
is too fanciful. At any rate, I think the reference to the
"cellarage" is as much an allusion to the stage as it is to
the platform of Elsinore's castle.

Before going on to Antony and Cleopatra let me first
consider an instance of illusion breaking in Webster's Duchess
of Malfi. The occasion is immediately prior to the Duchess'
murder. She turns to Bosola and the other executioners:

I know death hath ten thousand severall doores
For men, to take their Exits: and 'tis found
They go on such strange geometricall hinges,
You may open them both wayes:10

(IV, ii, 225-228)

What is to be made of "strange geometricall hinges?" Lucas'
note on this part runs as follows:

The meaning is apparently that Death can open
the door out of life from his side, or man can
open it from his: our exit may be by act of God
or of man. This is unsatisfactory: but I see
no alternative.

(p. 187)

9J.D. Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, Cambridge,
University Press, 1956, p.80.

10John Webster, Complete Works of, ed. F.L. Lucas,
M. C. Bradbrook suggests that the words relate back to the lines immediately preceding; that death may come by means—smothered in Cassia, shot to death with pearls—which would seem to promise life rather than destruction. Keeping these interpretations in mind, I believe there may be another possibility. Could not the "strange hinges" be a reference to Elizabethan stage doors which perhaps opened both ways for the sake of convenience? Even if this were not the case, it seems clear that the whole reference is an allusion to the stage similar in kind to Hamlet's "cellarage." The two examples I have been considering are probably not deliberately, in the sense of self-consciously, designed to break the dramatic illusion. Rather they are intuitive expressions of present reality, unself-conscious reminders to the audience that they are watching a play. Cleopatra's famous reference to the stage, on the other hand, reveals an awareness of role-playing.

In Act V Cleopatra foresees the Roman triumph over herself and the dead Antony. The Romans will present their love on the stage:

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us and present
Our Alexandrian revels. Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' the posture of a whore.

(V, ii, 216-221)

Like Hamlet's reference to the "cellarage" these words draw our attention to a particular aspect of Elizabethan and not

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Roman acting practice. Middleton Murry points out the irony involved here:

And that . . . was what was actually happening when those lines were first spoken. The reality, which Cleopatra thrusts away, thus becomes doubly real. It is not some imagined or apprehended degradation which she can avoid: it has already overtaken her.12

This is quite true, but there is something else to be added. For Cleopatra the actress has already played her part as a whore; to her, this role is part of the past, a burlesque of her present role-playing. Now she casts off her baser character and assumes the role, together with the robes, of the tragic Queen:

Give me my robe, put on my crown. I have Immortal longings in me.

Methinks I hear Antony call. I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act, I hear him mock
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
To excuse their afterwrath. Husband, I come.
Now to that name my courage prove my title!
I am fire and air. My other elements
I give to baser life.

(Antony and Cleopatra, V, ii, 283-293)

What she fears is being inadequately represented on the stage. The Romans will present her "i' the posture of a whore," but will forget her "greatness" and her "noble act." The lines thus bear some relation to character; we are reminded of the Elizabethan stage and the "squeaking boy," but as well of Cleopatra, the consummate actress, the mighty and tragic queen, and the poor maid. S. L. Bethell comments on the breaking of the illusion:

... as a direct reference to acting, it brings forcibly to mind the duality of the play-world and the real world. This passage is especially remarkable since it occurs in a tragedy and at a moment of emotional intensity.\textsuperscript{13}

Middleton Murry terms it "... the extreme challenge to reality."\textsuperscript{14}

Certainly it is a measure of Shakespeare's control (deliberate or intuitive) over his art that such stage references as this one can be made without upsetting or impinging upon the tragic spectacle of Cleopatra's death. A similar kind of effect is wrought in Chaucer's \textit{Troilus and Creseyde} where the narrator keeps breaking in and contrasting the illusion of the lovers' reality with his own contemporary presence. He continually stresses the point that he is recording the tale of the lovers, culling it from various historical sources, in particular that of "Lollius." (Similarly Dickens asserts the "truth" of his narrative sources in \textit{The Pickwick Papers}.) For all this, however, the power of the lovers' world, and the spectacle of their tragedy, remain undiminished, for we are able to accept and distinguish the reality of both the narrator's and the lovers' "truths."

This ability to accept the fiction as fiction, yet be moved by the truth which the fiction embodies, is what Bethell calls the principle of multi-consciousness. He suggests that an Elizabethan audience was quite able to enjoy such stage allusions as would emphasize the play, as a play. This


\textsuperscript{14}Murry, \textit{op.cit.}, p.376.
appreciation of the fiction stems from the audience's position as onlookers in the real world. On the other hand, this did not inhibit them from being moved by the problems of the characters in the play. Through stage references, Shakespeare... draws attention to the play as play, overtly, in the dialogue itself, emphasizing verbally... the co-existence of play-world and real world in the minds of his audience.15

Or, as J. Lawlor describes it, the spectator is "... both involved in and removed from the action, ... We are both detached and 'committed',..."16 This duality of response, involvement in and detachment from, the play's action, is particularly marked in such a play as The Winter's Tale. For here we are continually reminded that we are spectators and that the play is but a shadow, a fiction, an old tale. Hermione affirms her fidelity to Leontes and suggests that her loyalty to him is so firmly figured in her life and deeds that not even the assumed example of a play could improve upon them:

You, my lord, best know,  
Who least will seem to do so, my past life  
Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true,  
As I am now unhappy -- which is more  
Than history can pattern, though devised  
And played to take spectators.  

(III, ii, 33-38)

Elsewhere, the play's whole action leading up to the joyful reunion of Perdita and Leontes is described as an "old tale." (V, ii, 31) The phrase is used again to describe the death

15Bethell, op.cit., p.32.

of Antigonus (V, ii, 66) while Hermione's awakening is portrayed by Paulina:

That she is living,
Were it but told you, should be hooted at
Like an old tale.

(V, ii, 115-117)

The Winter's Tale is itself an "old tale," "devised and played to take spectators." Perhaps the word "take," with its suggestion of charm or bewitch, is especially significant in this regard, and is perhaps related to Sidney's views about the idealized reality of the poetic imagination being nearer the ultimate truth than the reality of immediate experience. The spectator is moved by the image in action of truth as it is presented by the "sweet mysteries of poetry." It is a fiction; but it embodies the truths and realities of the human spirit:

Behind the repeated stress laid on the fact that we are following a fable, a "tale" not subject to the normal laws of probability, lies a consistent desire to make this action, this fable, the instrument for a harmonious reading of human experience. The unreality of The Winter's Tale is no mere escape, as some have argued, into a world of fancy. The various stages of the "fable" correspond strictly to steps in the integration of a varied range of emotions from which neither tragic discord nor the sense of harmonious fulfilment is excluded.17

The drama, then, although it is itself a fiction, a dream, a shadow, can, paradoxically, present or reflect reality -- or that which we call reality. The word "reflect," with its suggestion of mirror, is significant, for to Shakespeare, and Hamlet, the purpose of playing is

17D. Traversi, Shakespeare, the Last Phase, Stanford, University Press, 1953, p.105.
... to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature -- to show Virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. 

(\textit{Hamlet}, III, ii, 24-27)

It is to this subject, the purpose of drama as mirror and in particular Shakespeare's use of the inner play as mirror, that I should now like to turn.
Chapter II. The Mirror of Nature

The general concept of art, and the drama in particular — as well as history — being used as a glass or mirror, is typical of Renaissance thought. The poet's duty was to hold up his art as a mirror so that man could both see and correct his faults. The preface to *The Mirror for Magistrates* sets out the purpose of this collection of poems:

> For here as in a looking glass, you shall see (if any vice be in you) howe the like hath been punished in other heretofore, whereby admonished, I trust it will be a good occasion to move you to the soner amendment.18

The epilogue to Skelton's morality play *Magnificence* also includes the image of the glass,

> A myrour incleryd is this interlude, This lyfe inconstant for to beholde and see!19

The same attitude is expressed by Jonson in the prologue to *Every Man in His Humour*. The purpose of comedy is to criticize life; it is to be an image of man's follies and should show

> . . . deeds, and language, such as men do use, And persons, such as Comedy would choose, When she would show an image of the times.20 (21-23)

Instances of this kind are too numerous to mention. It is sufficient to say that the idea of art as mirror was well established in the minds of most Renaissance writers. It is for such a purpose of "shewing forth an image of crime," that

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20 *Parks and Beatty, op.cit.*, p.620.
Hamlet has the players perform "The Mousetrap." He comments on the moral efficacy of drama:

Hum, I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions;
I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle.

(II, ii, 617-625)

In Massinger's The Roman Actor, Paris confers with Parthenius and suggests that a play be performed in which Philargus' miserly conduct will be figured. This, it is hoped, will cure him of that sin:

Paris. Sir, with your pardon,
I'll offer my advice: I once observ'd
In a tragedy of ours in which a murder
Was acted to the life, a guilty hearer
Forc'd by the terror of a wounded conscience
To make discovery of that which torture
Could not wring from him.21

(II, i, 88-94)

Both Sidney and Thomas Heywood record authentic cases of such guilty behaviour. Upon authority then, and wishing success, Hamlet proceeds with the inner play. The king responds to the image of his murderous deed and rushes out. Significantly the Queen, unaware of the real cause of her first husband's death and not guilty of participation in the murder, remains unmoved. Only later, when Hamlet visits her alone, does he make the image clear to her:

Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge,

You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.  

(III, iv, 18-21)

This time the mirror proves effective:

O Hamlet, speak no more.
Thou turnst mine eyes into my very soul

(III, iv, 88-89)

Similarly Cassius plays the mirror to Brutus, showing him indeed that which the noble Brutus did not think he possessed; the capacity for self-deception and murder. Cassius suggests that Brutus' forefathers would not have endured the yoke of tyranny; neither, my friend, should you:

Bru. Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
That you would have me seek into myself
For that which is not in me?

Cass. Therefore, good Brutus, be prepared to hear.
And since you know you cannot see yourself
So well as by reflection, I your glass
Will modestly discover to yourself
That of yourself which you yet know not of.

(Julius Caesar, I, ii, 63-70)

As Hamlet holds up the mirror of "The Mousetrap" to his uncle's face, so Cassius holds up the glass to Brutus, and suggests to him the shadowy images of the latter's future deeds. So, too, the witches' prophecies to Macbeth prove to be a mirror of the future, reflecting forward in time, a show of the things that will be. The action of I Henry IV (II, iv) proves to be likewise an image of the future.

Here, there is a brief play-within-a-play scene between Prince Hal and Falstaff. For their own amusement, the pair decide to put on a little play in which the one is to take Henry IV's part, while the other will pretend to be Hal. After this they are to reverse roles. Falstaff, assuming the king's authority, speaks in praise of himself.
Hal now takes his turn and, under the guise of his father, berates "Hal" for taking up with "that gray iniquity, that father ruffian" (II, iv, 499), Falstaff. But we remember that the Chief Justice had earlier told Falstaff, in earnest:

Have you not a moist eye? A dry hand? A yellow cheek? A white beard? A decreasing leg? An increasing belly? . . . And every part about you blasted with antiquity?

(I Henry IV, I, ii, 203ff.)

The play continues. Falstaff defends his own character and pleads against his fictional banishment:

But for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company.

(II, iv, 521ff.)

Hal's answer "I do, I will" abruptly changes the form of fiction to the hard shape of reality, in much the same way as Hieronimo's address to the stage spectators after "Soliman and Perseda." Hal's assumption of the king's role here and the pretended criticism of Falstaff, are to be paralleled by his own real ascension to the throne and his actual rejection of Falstaff. The fiction here enables Hal to speak his mind freely. The poignancy of the situation is that Falstaff retains throughout the scene his sense of fiction and misses the true import of the Prince's words. This inner play then bears directly on the action of the play as a whole, and functions as a mirror of the future, reflecting what is to come.
Shakespeare employs the inner play as reflector in both tragedies and comedies; not only vice but folly too may be imaged. Just as Claudius' crimes are presented in "The Mousetrap," so "Pyramus and Thisbe" mirrors, and parodies, the problems that the real lovers -- Helena, Hermia, Lysander, and Demetrius -- face in the outside world of ancient Greece. The episode unwittingly mocks the trials and tribulations of romantic lovers, and mirrors the awesome dangers of falling in love with someone living on the other side of the fence. Muriel Bradbrook comments, referring to the inner play, 

Their mimic play apes the flight from Athens, though of course the parallel is not visible either to them or to their highly condescending auditory: it is part of the "mirror" technique of the play-within-the-play . . . where the fun puts both players and audience together inside the jest of professional actors pretending to be mechanicals trying to be amateur actors before an unreal audience.\textsuperscript{22}

The action of "Pyramus and Thisbe," and in particular the "tragic" deaths of the lovers, is probably more than coincidentally related to \textit{Romeo and Juliet}. The fact that the courtly audience watching "Pyramus and Thisbe" fail to see themselves in the glass, as Muriel Bradbrook notes, is quite humorous. Like Gertrude watching "The Mousetrap," the audience in \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, unaware of the interlude's relation to the larger truth which includes them, see the play only as a play. But where Gertrude is unmoved by what is embodied in the fiction because she is innocent, they are simply stupid.

Shakespeare is not above holding up the mirror to his own audience in these inner plays. The spectators' continual interruption of the action of "Pyramus and Thisbe," the "Nine Worthies" pageant in Love's Labour's Lost, to say nothing of Hamlet's invocations to the players to get on with it, was apparently a form of behaviour common to Elizabethan audiences. The gallants in particular -- some of whom sat right on the stage -- were especially culpable, although they were not the only culprits, as we shall see.

A brilliant parody of audience intervention is presented in Beaumont and Fletcher's Knight of the Burning Pestle. In this play, the prologue comes on stage and begins to speak the introduction. At this point, a grocer, and later his wife, accompanied by their boy, Rafe, all apparently real spectators from the off-stage audience, suddenly leave their places below and climb on stage. The grocer demands that the play be changed, for it offends the citizens:

Enter Prologue
From all that's near the Court, from all that's great
Within the compass of the City-walls
We now have brought our Scene. (Enter Citizen)

Cit. Hold your peace good-man boy.
Pro. What do you mean Sir?
Cit. That you have no good meaning: These seven years there hath been Plays at this House, I have observed it, you have stillgirds at Citizens; and now you call your Play The London Merchant. Down with your Title, Boy, down with your Title.23

And so on. The grocer wants the play to be called The Grocer's Honour and the wife insists that the hero -- to be, naturally,

a grocer -- should "kill a lion with a pestle" somewhere in the action. The prologue is quite nonplussed at all this, the grocer and his wife remain adamant, and from that point on they virtually direct the action of the play. Clearly, gallants are not the only ones capable of intimate theatrical criticism. Instances of this inclusion of the audience, mirror-fashion, within the body of the play, are to be found in much Elizabethan drama. Will Summer in Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* remains on-stage as a spectator-commentator, while Sly performs his part as a real, though rather silent, on-stage viewer in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Contemporary Elizabethan critical commentary on this kind of audience participation is indicated in Dekker's *Gull's Hornbook* (Chapter VI: How a gallant should behave himself in the Playhouse), where "instructions" for stage behavior are given:

> By sitting on the stage, you have a signal patent to engross the whole commodity of censure: may lawfully presume to be a Girder: and stand at the helm to steer the passage of scenes . . . you may (without travelling for it) at the very next door, ask whose play it is . . . if you know not the author, you may rail against him: and peradventure so behave yourself; that you may enforce the Author to know you . . . . It shall crown you with rich commendation to laugh aloud in the midst of the most serious and saddest scene of the terriblest tragedy . . . .

The prologue to John Day's *Isle of Gulls*, speaking to certain gentlemen who have come up upon the stage, comments:

> . . . 'tis growne into a custome at playes, if any one rise (especially of any fashionable

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fort) about what serious busines soever, the rest thinking it in dislike of the play, tho he never thinks it, cry mew, by Iefus vilde; and leave the poor hart-leffe children to speake their Epilogue to the empptie feates.25

Thus the actual performances of such plays as The Knight of the Burning Pestle, A Midsummer Night's Dream and Love's Labour's Lost would bring the stage gallants into rather close physical proximity to the spectators watching the inner play. One wonders that there was so much room on the stage for people to watch a play, in which they watch other people watching a play. This sort of situation is really holding the mirror up to Nature.

Chapter III. Lovers, Lunatics and Wise Men

I have mentioned M.C. Bradbrook's comment on the way in which the action in "Pyramus and Thisbe" reflects and mocks the lovers' complicated romantic manoeuvres in the woods near Athens. C. L. Barber also notes the parallel:

The merriments Philostrate was to have directed happen inadvertently, the lovers walking into them blind, so to speak. This is characteristic of the way game is transferred into drama in this play . . . the roles which the young people might play in a wooing game, they carry out in earnest.26

Love, presented as a game, or play, is typical of the action in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Love's Labour's Lost and As You Like It. In these games there are both actors and spectators. The spectators often prove actors themselves, though rather unwilling ones.

Such characters as the lovers in A Midsummer Night's Dream and Silvius and Phebe in As You Like It play at their roles unself-consciously, quite unaware that their actions indeed appear like a game. Puck reports to Oberon on his night's work:

Captain of our fairy band,
Helena is here at hand,
And the youth mistook by me,
Pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord what fools these mortals be!

(A Midsummer Night's Dream, III, ii, 110-115)

In As You Like It Rosalind is invited to watch the pageant of 'Silvius and Phebe.'

If you will see a pageant truly played
Between the pale complexion of true love
And the sad glow of scorn and proud disdain,
Go hence a little and I shall conduct you, . . . .

(RIII, iv, 55-58)

Rosalind, Puck-like, replies:

The sight of lovers feedeth those in love.
Bring us to this sight and you shall say
I'll prove a busy actor in their play.

(RIII, iv, 60-62)

Puck-like she is -- except that she is one of "those in love."
Berowne plays the spectator's role in that scene of Love's Labour's Lost where the King and his friends individually, and, as they think in secret, proclaim their separate loves.
Berowne observes this "scene of foolery" (IV, iii, 163):

All hid, all hid, an old infant play.
Like a demigod here sit I in the sky,
And wretched fools' secrets heedfully o'ereye.

(IV, iii, 78-80)

Yet he too, like Rosalind, is one of those followers of Cupid's band.

To Benedict, Berowne and Beatrice, love is merely a toy, a game. Each one decides that his role in life shall be that of the observer, like Jaques or Puck. But the role of spectator is one that cannot be maintained -- save, of course, by Puck -- so that each in turn accepts the part of the lover in good grace. So Berowne:

By Heaven, I do love, and it hath taught me to rhyme, and to be melancholy; and here is part of my rhyme, and here my melancholy.

(IV, iii, 13-15)

With the same kind of wry self-criticism, Benedict (Much Ado About Nothing, V, ii, 30) and Armado accept the burden of the flesh:
Adieu, valor! Rust, rapier! Be still, drum!
For your manager is in love -- yea, he loveth.
Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for I
am sure I shall turn sonnet.
(Love's Labour's Lost, I, ii, 187-190)

It is interesting to note that in Much Ado About Nothing
Benedict and Beatrice are, as it were, cast in their role
as lovers. Benedict overhears a group of his friends -- who
know he is eavesdropping -- discussing the "fact" that
Beatrice is in love with him. On the basis of this knowledge,
Benedict accepts the lover's role -- mainly, it seems, to
avoid being called proud:

I must not seem proud.
I will be horribly in love with her.

(II, iii, 236-243)

Similarly Beatrice is "conned" by the acting of her friends
into believing that Benedict is in love with her. She accepts
her role; like Benedict, she seems to do it for the wrong
reasons:

Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!
No glory lives behind the back of such.
And, Benedict, love on, I will requite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band.

(III, i, 108-112)

Earlier in the masque of Act II, Scene 1, Beatrice, unaware
both of Benedict's masked identity and of the fact that he
knows who she is, freely criticizes him. Benedict, to say
the least, is not amused. Eventually, of course, their
role playing becomes real, as they each affirm love for the
other.

Rosalind is by far the most complicated player in
the game of love. She is spectator, actor and director all
rolled into one. As spectator, under the guise of Ganymede, she watches the pageant of "Silvius and Phebe," and is aware of the follies and mistakes of love's play. As director-actor she performs her mock-wooing game with Orlando; and under the mask of play, with its many opportunities for ironic comment, she reveals the feelings of her heart. To Orlando, unaware of Rosalind's true identity, the game remains a game; to Rosalind, as to Hal in the play scene of *Henry IV* (II, iv), the play is a means of approaching truth. As actor, she only awaits the right moment to assume her proper role as the mature lover. She never assumes, as do Benedict and Berowne, that she can stand aloof from Cupid's arrows. Unlike them, she is in love from the very beginning of the play. She both mocks the romance, and affirms the sincerity, of love. C.L. Barber admirably sums up her complex role-playing:

> Romantic participation in love and humorous detachment from its follies, the two polar attitudes which are balanced against each other in the play as a whole, meet and are reconciled in Rosalind's personality. Because she remains always aware of love's illusions, while she herself is swept along by its deepest currents, she possesses as an attribute of character the power of combining whole-hearted feeling and undistorted judgment which gives the play its value.27

Viola's role-playing in *Twelfth Night* is much the same as Rosalind's in *As You Like It*. She too, disguised as a man, is in love with someone who does not see her as she really is. Orsino, on the other hand, indulgently plays the melancholy lover while Olivia is at first the devoted mourner,

and later the impetuous and romantic lover. Joseph Summers comments on Viola's part in the play:

Although Viola chooses to impersonate Cesario from necessity, she later plays her part with undisguised enjoyment. She misses none of the opportunities for parody, for confession, and for double entendre which the mask affords, and she never forgets or lets us forget the biological difference between Viola and Cesario . . . . she anticipates and directs our perception of the ludicrous in her role as well as in the role of Orsino and Olivia.28

The truth of love's game is that play is eventually transformed into reality. The masks are removed and the players stand revealed. The formal close of Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, and As You Like It, each with its promise of impending nuptials, affirms the unity of love. The mock wedding of Orlando and Rosalind gives way to the wedding masque, and finally, marriage. So Benedict and Beatrice accept their new roles as husband and wife; so Helena, Hermia, Lysander and Demetrius, awakened from their dream of love -- "something of great constancy" -- are joined in matrimony. But alas! Rosaline and Berowne, thwarted by their creator, must wait another year.

As we have seen, both Viola and Rosalind wear masks as disguise for essentially good purposes. Further instances of this type of role-playing (i.e., actual disguise) may be found throughout Shakespeare. Vincentio and Prospero both perform their parts as omniscient onlookers to the play's

main action. In *King Lear*, both Edgar and Kent are disguised; the one to help his father, the other to aid Lear. Edgar's role-playing functions in close relation to plot and theme, as R. B. Heilman points out:

> His disguise, of course, is virtual nakedness .... This nakedness is at one level simply a technical propriety in the Bedlam beggar; but by its particular inadequacy to a cold and stormy night ... it becomes a symbol of that defenselessness in the world which Edgar has already shown and indeed of the situation of innocent people generally unprotected by pretense ....

In the kind of world governed by Regan, Goneril and Edmund, aided by such rash fools as the impetuous Lear and the credulous Gloucester, disguise becomes imperative. The deceit involved, however, ultimately brings beneficent results. Occasionally the disguise-for-good motif will appear to move toward tragic ends, even though the action occurs in a comedy. This is true of Portia's role as Balthasar in *The Merchant of Venice* and Polixenes' role-playing as the shepherd in the pastoral scenes of *The Winter's Tale*. In the former play's trial scene, Portia, bound by law though appealing in vain for mercy, moves side by side with Shylock toward the heavy sentence. But at the last moment she turns the trick on Shylock and uses justice to defeat his ends. Later, with the episode of the two rings, she and Nerissa have great fun with the disguise motif. The comic atmosphere is thus fully restored. In *The Winter's Tale* Polixenes' sudden revelation of his identity to his son shatters the dream of love which Florizel

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and Perdita shared. But later, disguise once more tends to promote good. Florizel and Perdita, forced to deception by Polixene's rashness, take on their disguises with light hearts, for they know the roles they play will enable them to escape. Autolycus' role as courtier prevents the shepherd and his son from revealing Perdita's identity to Polixenes, a step which Autolycus believes may upset the plot of the lovers to escape. When we consider the personality of Osric in Hamlet, Autolycus' performance hardly seems like an exaggeration.

To complicate further the role-playing-in disguise theme, there are the professional mask-wearers, the fools. Feste and the Fool in King Lear, under a license to criticize which the part permits, see through the masks of others, and reveal the world's unwitting foolery. Detached, in the role of spectator, they observe and anatomize the other actors.

As J. Summers comments of Feste:

> In the business of masking, Feste is the one professional among a crowd of amateurs; he does it for a living. He never makes the amateur's mistake of confusing his personality with his mask -- he wears not motley in his brain . . . . He is able to penetrate all the masks of the others, and he succeeds in retaining his own.

The burden of the fool's part is that he can never remove the mask, as Rosalind or Portia can. A professional player, like Shakespeare's villains, he tends to grow into his mask, so that it eventually becomes part of him. He must always be an observer, for that, as J. Summers notes, is what he is being paid for.

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30Summers, op.cit., p.134.
I think it is interesting to note that the masks worn by Rosalind, Viola, in their roles as men, are physical ones. This is important because it helps to suggest that the roles they play are literally assumed, or put on, as an actor puts on his cloak. The disguise thus involves a change in outer shape only, the character's true personality remaining the same throughout -- essentially good. Edgar comments on his role-playing: "In nothing/am I changed/But in my garments" (King Lear, IV, vi, 9-10). In Hamlet, Macbeth and Coriolanus, which I shall consider later, Shakespeare also employs the imagery of clothes in relation to the acting motif in order to suggest similar discrepancies between man and role. Disguise, then, hides goodness, which finally reasserts itself at the proper time. But disguise may also hide wickedness and evil. This is particularly true of the villains in Shakespeare, and it is to this group that I now turn.
Chapter IV. "I Play the Villain"

Of all Shakespeare's villains perhaps the most famous are Richard III, Iago and Edmund, and it is with these three, and especially the first, that I shall be most concerned. However, there are others whose claim to villainy is less only in degree. Aaron, in Titus Andronicus, is perhaps the classic villain; fiendish and bloody-minded, he plays his part with gleeful joy and enthusiasm, as indeed most of the villains do. Richard III's father, the Duke of York, is no mean hand at the game of seeming (see especially II Henry VI, III, i, 331), and it is clear that Richard has inherited his father's talent. In II Henry VI there is Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, who seems to be Shakespeare's model for Lady Macbeth. At one point, the Duchess sounds out her husband Humphrey with regard to his ambitions for the crown. He is not interested and chastises her for suggesting that he should be so unlawfully ambitious. He leaves and she reveals her inner feelings in soliloquy:

Follow I must; I cannot go before
While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.
Were I a man, a duke and next of blood,
I would remove these tedious stumbling blocks
And smooth my way upon their headless necks;
And, being a woman, I will not be slack
To play my part in Fortune's pageant.

(II Henry VI, I, ii, 61-67)

This fast colloquial style, with the sharpness of "tedious stumbling blocks" and "headless necks" is indeed the authoritative accent of Lady Macbeth and Richard III. The reference she makes to "Fortune's pageant" is detached and sardonic. It is the remark of one who observes the passing scene of
events and resolves to enter in actively and with vigour, to perform and initiate action. She does not, it is true, manage to achieve her aims, for she is soon found out. But for this one moment, at least, she clearly sees what she wants, and knows what to do.

Similarly Richard III resolves to play his part, or rather his parts, in "Fortune's pageant." Like Eleanor he stands aside from events, closely observes them and decides how to act accordingly. He is not content to be a pawn in the hands of history; rather he acts with definite consciousness of what his role-playing will lead him to. Unlike Eleanor he does succeed in his ambitions, making many "headless necks" on the way. Throughout III Henry VI, especially the latter part, and Richard III, he deliberately describes himself as an actor. In III Henry VI (III, ii) he outlines the parts he is to play; by such role-playing he will achieve the "golden time" he looks for:

Why, I can smile and murder whiles I smile,
And cry "Content" to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions

I'll play the orator as well as Nestor;
Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could.

(III Henry VI, III, ii, 182-189)

Even other people seem intuitively aware of Richard's acting. The words spoken by Henry VI just before he is murdered by Richard, "What scene of death hath Roscius now to act;" (V, vi, 10) -- are relevant here. The comparison with Roscius the Roman actor is certainly apt. And, of course, there is Richard's opening soliloquy in Richard III:
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the King
In deadly hate the one against the other.  

(I, i, 30-35)

It is interesting to remark, in connection with this speech, how the sense of theatre, implicit in Richard's character as a conscious villain-actor, seems to work its way into the dialogue itself; for example, in the references to "plots" and "inductions." Later, Queen Margaret becomes witness to a "dire induction" (IV, iv, 5) while Hastings, Rivers and Grey become "... the beholders of this tragic play" (IV, iv, 68). Middleton Murry comments upon this type of language, and links it to Shakespeare's intuitive representation of Richard as an actor:

The predominance of theatrical metaphor in the play no doubt derives in part from the "naive" presentation of Richard III himself. He is conceived as a hypocrite, in the etymological sense -- an actor ...  

References to Richard the actor occur throughout Richard III. He himself notes that he wins Anne by dissembling the part of the woeful lover. Anne, aware of his acting, nevertheless accepts him, and Richard struts off to find himself, interestingly enough, a looking-glass, in which he may see his shadow as he passes. Ironically, he is to fear the shadows of his dreams, more than Richmond's great army. Elsewhere he remarks that he seems a saint when most he plays the

31Murry, op. cit., p.126.
devil (I, iii, 338). Buckingham urges him to "play the maid's part" (III, vii, 51) to win the citizens' approval, and rather fancies himself (with a fine touch of unwitting irony) as a good actor:

Tut, I can counterfeit the deep tragedian,
Speak and look back, and pry on every side,
Tremble and start at wagging of a straw,
Intending deep suspicion. Ghastly looks
Are at my service, like enforced smiles,
And both are ready in their offices
At any time, to grace my stratagems.

(III, v, 5-11)

That Richard is an actor, a dissembler, a player of parts, is obvious from the text of Richard III alone. It is also clear that he knows he is performing, and rather enjoys doing so. This awareness of self as a role-player is by no means a unique piece of character revelation; the mask-wearers Rosalind, Portia, Vincentio, all are aware that they play a role, as an actor would. Shakespeare's villains, however, seem particularly aware of their role-playing. Iago and Edmund, for example, both speak in the idiom of the theatre and see themselves as actors. Iago's soliloquies throughout Othello reveal his interest in himself, as he comments on the distinctions between the faces he puts to the world, and the inner feeling that remains hidden. He muses:

And what's he then that says I play the villain?

... 

Divinity of Hell!

When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now.

(II, iii, 342-359)

Earlier, Iago implies to Roderigo that he will be one of those

Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
And throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them, . . . .

(I, i, 50-53)

Once more the imagery of clothing is used to suggest the
difference between the man and his role. Iago will "put on"
his villainy; he will be "trimmed in forms" of duty. His
reference to the "visages of duty," with that word's close
relation to vizard, or theatrical mask, is especially inter­
esting. Later, Macbeth is to put on the vizard of smiles to
Duncan, to mask his villainy. (This is a further instance,
as I noted in regard to Richard III, of the language being
affected by the author's representation of character as
actor.)

As Iago and Richard III comment on their role-
playing, so, too, does Edmund. Indeed at one point he likens
himself to a character in a morality play while casting his
brother in another role. Edmund has just completed a solilo-
quy:

Edgar -- [Enter Edgar]. And pat he comes like
the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue is
villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom
O'Bedlam.

(King Lear, I, ii, 145-149)

In much the same way, Richard III compares himself to an alle-
gorical figure in a morality:

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

(Richard III, III, i, 82-83)

Alwin Thaler in an article entitled "Shakespeare on style,
imagination and poetry" (PMLA, December 1938, 1019-1036)
comments on Edmund's remark, suggesting that it is out of
character:
Illegitimate Edmund's goddess was nature, not art, and he was not afflicted by the curiosity of nations or of critics concerning details of dramatic technique. He is merely the mouthpiece of Shakespeare -- pleasantly talking shop. By way of avoiding the bother of motivating Edgar's pat appearance, Shakespeare genially likens his management of the scene to the free and easy disregard of motivation in the "lamentable" old "comedy" of Tudor times . . . . (p. 1021)

A. Thaler's note is correct, in respect that only Shakespeare could know that Edgar was later to play the part of Tom O'Bedlam. We are thus reminded here of the play as a play, and of Edmund's role as villain. But is it not also possible to say -- disregarding the anachronism -- that Edmund is aware of his role-playing, and here chooses to comment upon it humorously?

A. Thaler's remarks raise the interesting question of to what extent such self-analytic comments as Iago's or Edmund's or Richard's can be taken at face value. Do such blunt explanations as "I am a villain" merely reflect dramatic convention, suggesting a continuation of the kind of villain-vice character to be found in medieval and early Elizabethan drama, who, in like fashion, readily revealed his hidden feelings to the theatre audience? Brander Matthews sees the soliloquies of Iago and Richard III as rather crude dramatic devices for conveying information necessary to the plot to the audience. Regarding the opening speech of Richard III, he writes:

The exposition is accomplished by an opening soliloquy of Richard's, followed almost immediately by three or four other speeches of his, frankly directed to the spectators, in which he declares himself for the villain he is and
proclaims his evil purposes. There is no psychological veracity in these self-revelatory soliloquies. It is inconceivable that Richard should so completely admit to himself that he is a villain and confess that he is "subtle, false and treacherous." To make him say this to the audience is to put in his mouth, not any opinion that he might possibly hold of himself, but the opinion of every outside commentator on his character.

We must agree with much of what is stated here. Matthews' view that the soliloquy is a necessary dramatic device seems justified. How else is vital information about Richard's character to be given? It can, of course, be done partly through conversation, but the direct address offers the best and most economical method. The form of direct speech doubtless derives from earlier drama where the characters were probably in even closer communication with the audience, in a physical sense, than in Shakespeare's theatre. Allegorical figures in morality plays were likely to turn directly to the audience to point out a moral. This, for example, occurs in John Skelton's Magnificence where Adversyte frankly addresses his remarks to the spectators in commenting on Magnificence's downfall. Such figures quite often remarked upon their own characters and actions and no doubt this kind of self-revelation carried over into Elizabethan drama, manifesting itself particularly in villains. The physical aspects of the medieval and Elizabethan stages were such that actor and audience were in close contact with one another. Indeed, we have already seen that some of the

32Brander Matthews, Shakespeare as a Playwright, New York, Scribner's, 1913, pp. 89-90.
spectators were quite likely to sit upon the stage itself. Under these conditions, the soliloquy would be a natural speech form. M.C. Bradbrook comments:

The simpler kinds of direct address usually recognize the presence of the audience explicitly. The habit was inherited from the moralities and interludes, where the spectators were often taken into the play (e.g. *The Pardoner and the Frere*). To admit all these things is to admit much that is vital to our understanding of Elizabethan villains. But to deduce that the words of Richard's opening soliloquy are not in character, that he does not hold the opinion of himself that he puts forward, or that the speech is merely put into his mouth by Shakespeare, would seem to me deductions which reflect only partly the soliloquy's significance. Surely it is true that the information which Richard gives us here is a product of his own pervasive wit and keen intellectual mind. When Iago or Edmund or Richard III compares himself to an actor, this represents valuable insight into the way his mind works. To say that Iago and Richard are mere conventional villains, and that their soliloquies are only dramatic "techniques" is to say nothing at all about the detached and ironic insight which these figures possess not only into other people's characters, but as well, into their own. In a fine commentary on Richard's opening speech, Derek Traversi suggests the credibility of Richard's remarks:

Although a certain stilted quality survives in the movement of the verse (there is a sense, common in Elizabethan stage villains and heroes,

33Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions*, p.112.
of the speaker playing up to a dramatically acceptable picture of himself), the general effect is remarkably concise and pointed . . . . The speaker is humanized, transformed from the abstract incarnation of a traditional vice exploited for melodramatic effect into something like a person . . . he retains in the cool, pungent run of his comments a definite human plausibility.\[34\]

Richard III, Iago and Edmund are thus keenly aware of themselves as actors; they "put on" the face of friendship, and wear the "visages of duty." Iago plays the part of the honest man, Richard, the role of Bible scholar, while Edmund performs the part of loyal son and faithful brother. All these roles they perform in much the same way, it would appear, that Rosalind assumes the part of a man. Yet there is an important distinction to be made here. The roles that Rosalind plays as seeming man and actual woman are kept quite separate; one is always aware of both player and mask or, as J.'s Summers notes of Viola's acting, of the "biological difference" between the two. Here the disguise is physical, a mask to be put on, and off, at will. The differences between man and mask in Richard III, however, are not so easily formulated. Richard, Iago and Edmund do not merely play the villain, they are villains. As it were, they seem to grow into the mask, so that the vizard of villainy eventually becomes a permanent fixture. Playing the part of the hypocrite poses no problems for them since their very nature is itself hypocritical. Occasionally, it is true, the mask

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slips and another part of the character, represented by conscience, reveals itself. Richard III's soliloquy in Act V, Scene iii, of *Richard III* (194ff.) and Edmund's famous "Some good I mean to do, /Despite of mine own nature" (*King Lear*, Act V, Scene iii, 243-244), are both cases in point. Claudius' self-critical soliloquies and comments are even better examples of this kind of inner division which does suggest a split between man and mask. But on the whole I think it fair to say that Shakespeare's villains are compulsive actors, and one never feels that the mask is ever really removed. Although Iago's villainies are revealed, he himself remains a villain. The distinction between such a character as Richard III and Macbeth lies precisely in this sort of thing; that Macbeth can "play" the murderer but can never be, or fully identify with, the role, as Richard can.

With the role-playing of Macbeth and other of Shakespeare's tragic heroes I will be concerned later. At this point however, I should like to move on to another group of actors, and for this purpose I must revert briefly to my earlier comments on Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester.
Chapter V. The Player-King

What is particularly interesting about Eleanor's soliloquy (II Henry VI, I, ii, 61ff.) to which I referred, is the way in which she implicitly compares herself to an actor:

And being a woman, I will not be slack
To play my part in Fortune's pageant. (I, ii, 66-67)

That is, she is determined to play her part in the drama of history, in "Fortune's pageant." In doing this she is putting herself alongside other characters -- not only Shakespeare's -- who also feel themselves to be playing a role in history's show. But unlike Eleanor, whose part is self-directed, they are "cast" in their roles; the burden of playing is imposed upon them. They must perform because it is their duty to do so. In this class of actors, whose roles are played out before the public but whose decision to perform was not, speaking generally, their own, I would include Henry VI, Queen Elizabeth, Richard II -- an actor in various ways, and Henry V. Shakespeare's main interest in these characters is to be found in his explorations of the distinctions that exist between man and mask, between the player and the kingly role.

The idea or image of the king as actor, and particularly as actor in the grip of fate, appears in contexts other than those of Shakespeare's history plays. By way of preface let me consider a few of these instances.
The sense of historical tragedy which predominates in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, as well as Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* and Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, is that of Fortune whimsically turning her wheel of destiny. The collection of poems known as *The Mirror for Magistrates*, edited by Thomas Baldwin and appearing first in 1559, is a case in point. This work consists of various poems, related by different authors, which tell of famous historical figures and their lives. The poems are presented in the first person. Each of the unfortunates tells his woeful tale of brief and fading glory and of the grief and bitterness brought on by the brevity of Fortune's smiles and their own crimes, which are punished by God's retributive justice. More than occasionally, the Fortune motif is linked to a metaphor drawn from the stage. Lord Richard Nevell, in telling his story, describes his life as being comparable to that of a luckless actor performing in a pageant upon "Fortune's stage:"

> Among the heavy heape of happy knyghtes  
> Whom Fortune stalde upon her stailesse stage  
> Oft hoyst on hye, oft pight in wretched plightes  
> Behold me Baldwin

      ..................................................................  

Lord Richard Nevell.35

Edward IV, in *The Tragedy of Edward Fourth*, asserts that "I have played my pageant: now am I past,"36 which is rather like Eleanor's phrase, "I shall not be slack to play my part

35Campbell, *op.cit.*, p.205.
in Fortune's pageant." The difference is that Eleanor chooses what part she intends to play, whereas the tone of Edward's words suggests that his role is directed by fate. The tune he dances to is not his own.

This kind of involuntary role-playing is suggested again and again in The Mirror for Magistrates. The Tragedy of Locrine, a play included in the Shakespeare Apocrypha, also includes the same sort of image. Brutus, the old king, prepares to pass on the crown to his son Locrine:

Then now, my sonne, thy part is on the stage,
For thou must beare the person of a king.37
(I, i, 187-189)

In the same way, Richard II passes on the cares and burdens of the kingly state to Bolingbroke, as Bolingbroke is later to do to his son, Henry V. But perhaps it would be well to begin my discussion of Shakespeare's kings with the first one he represents on the stage, Henry VI.

As Edward IV in The Mirror for Magistrates must play his part as king in the short and bitter "pageant" of history, so, too, Henry VI is "cast" in his role; he does not choose the part. He sees himself as a victim of fate, and of Fortune:

No sooner was I crept out of my cradle
But I was made a king at nine months old.  
(II Henry VI, IV, ix, 3-4)

This he stresses twice later on (III Henry VI, I, i, lll; III, i, 76), while in Act IV, Scene vi of this play, he is, like Romeo, Fortune's fool:

37Tucker-Brooke, op. cit., p. 41.
Therefore, that I may conquer Fortune's spite
By living low, where Fortune cannot hurt me,

I here resign my government to thee.  

(IV, vi, 19-24)

A weak and ineffectual king, somewhat after the style of Richard II, though less of a poseur and more realistic about the real weaknesses of his own character, Henry continually reflects upon the discrepancies between the appearance of kingship, the glitter and ceremony, and the reality that the actor must play out, the heartbreak and the tragedy attendant upon the man who performs the king's role. In Act III, Scene i of III Henry VI, he speaks with the keepers who detain him, and contrasts the outer crown that kings wear, the one of diamonds and precious stones, with the crown that he cannot wear, although other men may — content.

2. Keep. But if thou be a king, where is thy crown?
K. Hen. My crown is in my heart, not on my head,
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,
Not to be seen. My crown is called content.
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.

(III Henry VI, III, i, 61-65)

It is interesting to compare the future Richard III's own attitude to this kingly crown of content, which he hopes to wear.

And, Father, do but think
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown,
Within whose circuit is Elysium
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.
Why do we linger thus?

(III Henry VI, I, ii, 28-32)

The ironic effect here derives not only from the fact that the two attitudes are completely opposed — Henry wishes to
abjure the king's role, while Richard wants to assume it --
but that the "golden round" Richard eventually wins for him-
self turns merely to dust and ashes, and the dreams of Elysium
become exchanged for the nightmares of hell before Bosworth
Field. The king's role is indeed but feigned bliss and joy.
There is a similar unwitting irony in Eleanor's speech to her
husband in II Henry VI (I, ii, lff.). She too, like Richard
and his father, envisions the crown as a symbol of great joy:

What seest thou there? [she asks her husband.]
King Henry's diadem,
Enchased with all the honours of the world?
If so, gaze on, and grovel on thy face,
Until thy head be circled with the same.
Put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold.

(II Henry VI, I, ii, 7-11)

But Henry's golden crown brings him no joy and no content.
The most famous of Henry VI's soliloquies on the woeful role
that the king must play occurs in III Henry VI, Act II, Scene
v. There Henry compares his own lot with that of the humble
peasant, as Henry V earlier does before Agincourt. Although
the king may wear the finest robes, and eat the best of goods,
and possess all the advantages of wealth and power over his
poor subjects, it is really they who are kings and he the sub-
ject. For they are free from fear, subject only to their own
desires, while the king is subject to the burden of the role,
and the treacheries of such understudies as Richard and Eleanor.
Henry muses sadly upon these things:

Ah, what a life were this! How sweet! How lovely!
Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds looking on their silly sheep
Than doth a rich embroidered canopy
To kings that fear their subjects' treachery?
Oh, yes, it doth, a thousandfold it doth.
And to conclude, the shepherd's homely curds,
His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,
His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,
All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,
Is far beyond a prince's delicates,
His viands sparkling in a golden cup,
His body couched in a curious bed,
When care, mistrust, and treason waits on him.  

**(III Henry VI, II, v, 41-54)**

In the life of Richard III, the villain king, we see that the
public role, the rich and magnificent show of majesty, may
hide an inner evil. In the case of Henry VI, the outer show,
the form of ceremony, which in a good king should reflect an
inner strength that Henry lacks, hides only suffering: and
despair. Like Richard II only more aware of his own failings,
he is a king in name only, a shadow without a substance, a
player who cannot measure up to the role.

Just as Henry VI is a pageant performer, a poor
actor in the role of the king, so, too, in Richard III, Queen
Elizabeth is described as a "poor shadow," an ineffectual
actress in the drama of history. Like Henry VI, she is no
match for Richard III the actor. Queen Margaret describes her:

> I called thee then vain flourish of my fortune.
> I called thee then poor shadow, painted Queen,
> The presentation of but what I was,
> The flattering index of a direful pageant,
> A dream of what thou wert, a breath, a bubble,
> A sign of dignity, a garish flag
> To be the aim of every dangerous shot,
> A queen in jest only to fill the scene.  

**(Richard III, IV, iv, 82-91)**

Like Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan and Grey, Queen Elizabeth
becomes a beholder of "the tragic play" directed by Richard III.
She is an actor who is forced to play her part in Fortune's
pageant. Like Richard Nevell in *The Mirror for Magistrates*,
she is one whom "Fortune stalde upon her stailesse stage."
In my discussion of Richard III as a villain I have mentioned Middleton Murray's comment with regard to the relatively large number of stage allusions in Richard III. He suggested that one of the reasons for this probably lay in Shakespeare's presentation of Richard as an actor-hypocrite. This seems a reasonable explanation in view of the fact that Richard III does indeed dominate his play and, as a sort of director, guides the actions of both his partners in crime and his enemies. Along with such other actors as his father the Duke of York, Suffolk, and Eleanor, Richard III may also be part of the reason why there are in the Henry VI play group a fairly impressive number of stage references.

Gloucester's speech in II Henry VI (Act III, Scene i) is interestingly phrased. (He speaks of Suffolk, York, Beaufort and Buckingham who wish him dead.)

I know their complot is to have my life,
And if my death might make this island happy
And prove the period of their tyranny,
I would expend it with all willingness.
But mine is made the prologue to their play;
For thousands more, that yet suspect no peril,
Will not conclude their plotted tragedy.

(III, i, 147-153)

The speech is important, for it comments on the political discord which has prevailed during the reign of Henry VI up to that point. Further it prophesies ensuing woes, Humphrey's and Henry's own deaths, and Richard III's bloody and successful plots; it looks at the woes behind, historically speaking, to the unlawful deposition of Richard II, and the uneasy reign of Henry IV. Humphrey envisions the sweep of history as some vast play, or pageant; a stage where kings and princes are
the actors, whose opening act is to be his own tragic death, and whose following acts are to consist of the deaths of "thousands more" who, like Hastings in Richard III, as yet do not suspect the roles they are to play. Indeed, Humphrey's death is later described by Warwick as a "suspicious . . . tragedy" (II Henry VI, III, ii, 194). In Richard III, the death of King Edward is described as "woe's scene" (IV, iv, 27), while in Macbeth, Duncan's murder occurs upon the world's "bloody stage" (II, iv, 6). A similar kind of metaphor occurs in Woodstock, where Cheyney describes the foul weather as being prologue to some tragedy:

The lights of heaven are shut in pitchy clouds
And flakes of fire run tilting through the sky
Like dim ostents to some great tragedy.       (IV, ii, 66-68)

Woodstock later continues the image:

God bless good Anne a Beame. I fear her death
Will be the tragic scene the sky foreshows us ....38
(IV, ii, 69-70)

Allusions such as these seem to serve some kind of structural significance. The scenes are, as it were, set off and emphasized as important historical moments. Muriel Bradbrook's comments on a remark of H. T. Price may be pertinent here:

H. T. Price has given the name of "Mirror Scenes" to those symbolic moments in which the theme of the play is directly embodied and fully stated . . . . Such scenes have something of the quality of an Induction, or a play within a play, and may be written in a heightened style to emphasize their special function.39

39 Themes and Conventions, p.125.
The examples I have mentioned above are not mirror scenes in the sense that they reflect the play's theme. Nevertheless, I think they may be thought of as important events -- the death of Humphrey, King Edward and Duncan -- and are so emphasized, not by the use of a heightened style, but rather by likening them to actual stage scenes. In this way our attention is drawn towards them.

Shakespeare presents both Henry VI and Queen Elizabeth as involuntary actors in the pageant of history. A similar sense of unwilling role-playing characterizes the well-known speech of Richard II:

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings --
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed,
All murdered. For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his Court, and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be feared . . .

(Richard II, III, ii, 155-165)

The speech seems to recall, with its "sad stories of the death of kings" the literary form of The Mirror for Magistrates. As Henrie, Duke of Buckingham must play a "wofully . . . slender part," so Richard is allowed a "breath, a little scene" in which to "monarchize." Elsewhere, like Henry VI, he comments on the heavy burden of kingship, comparing the ruler's sorrows with his subjects' quiet life:

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
My figured goblets for a dish of wood,
My scepter for a palmer's walking staff,
My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
And my large kingdom for a little grave.

(Richard II, III, iii, 147-153)

His words recall Henry's earlier contrast of the king's "rich embroidered canopy" with the "sweeter shade" of the hawthorn bush (II Henry VI, II, v). Both men are cognisant of the fact that the king's gorgeous robes do not guarantee health or peace of mind. But where Henry knows that he is the mere shadow of a king, knows that he cannot measure up to the role and so accepts the situation with a full and honest realization of his weaknesses, Richard II possesses no such self-knowledge. Himself an actor, but lacking the strength and substance of character which the role of king truly demands, Richard tragically believes that his acting fulfills what he thinks the role demands. In this, of course, he is deceived, and pathetically so. His fanatic faith in the name of king --

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord.

(Richard II, III, ii, 54-57)

is in sharp contrast to Henry VI's more realistic comments:

No, Harry, Harry, 'tis no land of thine.
Thy place is filled, thy scepter wrung from thee,
Thy balm washed off wherewith thou wast anointed.
No bending knee will call thee Caesar now,

(III Henry VI, III, i, 15-18)

Henry knows that the true power of the king's office lies in the strength of the man who plays the role of king; it is the singer who must carry the burden of the song.
E. M. Tillyard writes of Richard II,

Richard himself is a true king in appearance, in his command of the trappings of royalty, while being deficient in the solid virtues of the ruler.40

E. M. Tillyard suggests that one of the main features of this play is the contrast between two kinds of worlds. On the one hand there is the ceremonial, medieval world of Richard where means, says E. M. Tillyard, are more important than ends. The conflict is between this world and the practical common sense one of Bolingbroke. I am not sure that one can so easily characterize the medieval world as one which stresses means more than ends; and, on the whole, it seems to me that Tillyard tries too hard to read the play as what he calls Shakespeare's vision of the medieval world. Setting this aside however, I think that the implications of his argument, that Richard is largely a ceremonial king, are quite true, and his point that Richard possesses the appearance, while lacking in the virtues, of royalty, is well taken. Although he does indeed "pose" as a king, his behaviour leaves a great deal to be desired, and his crimes are many. Una Ellis-Fermor notes that Richard assumes "... the privileges of kingship while disregarding the responsibilities ..."41 His attitude towards Gaunt, and his assumption of Gaunt's estate, are callous in the extreme. His comments upon hearing of Gaunt's death are icy cold:

41The Frontiers of Drama, London, Methuen, 1946, p.41.
The ripest fruit first falls, and so doth he.
His time is spent, our pilgrimage must be.
So much for that.  

(Richard II, II, i, 153-155)

Ross and Willoughby discuss his other crimes:

Ross. The commons hath he pilled with grievous taxes,
     And quite lost their hearts. The nobles hath he fined
     For ancient quarrels, and quite lost their hearts.
Willo. And daily new exactions are devised,
     As blanks, benevolences, and I wot not what.  

(Richard II, II, i, 246-250)

Part of the blame for Richard's crimes lies with his flatterers, as York points out (II, i, 17-30), but the fault of acting in deed what they suggest in word, is Richard's alone. Despite his crimes, which he must somehow construe as "right," Richard throughout the play continually "casts" himself in the role of the good king. In outward appearance at least, as E. M. Tillyard remarks, he has some semblance of success. But that it is only outward is stressed by York's description of him when Richard appears on the walls of Flint castle:

Yet looks he like a king. Behold, his eye,
As bright as is the eagle's, lightens forth
Controlling majesty. Alack, alack, for woe,
That any harm should stain so fair a show!  

(Richard II, III, iii, 68-71)

In Act I, Scene iii, he "plays" the part of the merciful ruler, as he repeals part of the term of Bolingbroke's banishment. Obviously enjoying his royal prerogative, he casually reduces the sentence to six years. Bolingbroke's comment, "such is the breath of kings," (I, iii, 215) takes us forward, rather ironically, to Richard's later speech about Death's court, and the "antic" who allows the king "a breath, a little scene"
Elsewhere he identifies himself with the glorious image of the sun, and invokes God's aid (III, ii, 36ff.). The central image of Richard the poor player, the actor who mistakenly believes that his acting is in accord with reality, occurs in the scene of Richard's humiliating ride through London. York describes the ride:

As in a theater the eyes of men
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious,
Even so, or with much more contempt, men's eyes
Did scowl on gentle Richard.

(V, ii, 22-28)

The image of Richard as poor actor is certainly more than fortuitous; this is, in fact, what he is. Lacking the inner solid substance of kingship, the high virtuous character which the role demands, stripped now of even that external show or shadow of ceremony which he was able to assume, he is indeed a poor, despised player, a figure in a "woeful pageant" (IV, i, 321).

I have mentioned that Richard, unlike Henry VI, is never fully cognisant of his sins. Perhaps the deposition scene will serve to qualify this opinion a little, for here Richard does seem to come to realize something of the extent of his crimes. Here, Richard II's glass shows him as he truly is, a mockery king of snow:

I'll read enough
When I do see the very book indeed
Where all my sins are writ, and that's myself.
Give me the glass, and therein will I read.
No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath sorrow struck
So many blows upon this face of mine
And made no deeper wounds? O flattering glass,
Like to my followers in prosperity,
Thou dost beguile me! Was this face the face
That every day under his household roof
Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face
That, like the sun, did make beholders wink?
Was this the face that faced so many follies,
And was at last outfaced by Bolingbroke?
A brittle glory shineth in this face --
As brittle as the glory is the face.

(Richard II, IV, i, 273-288)

There is a curious allusion in this speech to a line in Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, where the apparition of Helen appears before Faustus. He speaks to her:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.42

(Scene XIII, 90-92)

Both Faustus and Richard confuse appearance and reality; both believe in the "reality" of the "face" before them. Faustus believes the illusion of Helen's face is sufficient to bestow immortality upon him; while Richard had believed in the strength of outer show, of the king's "face," as a guarantee of power. Both men believe in what is essentially a vision, or a passing show. The particular insistence on the word face that occurs not only in the above speech of Richard, but indeed throughout the play, has been noted by such commentators as Richard Altick in his article on Richard II.43 As Richard puts faith in the "face", so too he believes in the power that resides in the "name" of kingship. But his appeal is futile.

Is not the King's name twenty thousand names?
Arm, arm, my name! A puny subject strikes
At thy great glory.

(Richard II, III, ii, 85-87)

42Parks and Beatty, op.cit., p.415.

Later he wishes to abjure this "name," which has brought him only pain and sorrow:

Oh, that I were as great  
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!  
(Richard II, III, ii, 136-137)

Marlowe's Edward II, a weak and self-indulgent king like Richard, comments truly on the nature of his own role. Lacking ceremony, itself a shadow, he becomes the shadow of a shadow, a player lacking even a name, "a mockery king of snow."

But what are kings when regiment is gone  
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?  
(Edward II, V, i, 26-27)

Like Richard, Lear also believes that the "name" of king is sufficient to guarantee his happiness. Dividing up the power and authority of his kingdom between Goneril and Regan, in effect deposing himself, he retains the "name and all the additions to a king" (King Lear, I, i, 138). Placing his faith in the shadows and ceremonies of kingship -- his retinue of knights, he himself becomes a shadow-king. The Fool's comment to Lear's question rings true:

Lear. Who is it that can tell me who I am?  
Fool. Lear's shadow.  
(King Lear, I, iv, 250-251)

As Richard II is a "mockery king of snow", so Lear, by his own will, becomes a shadow. As the play progresses, Lear comes to realize the vanity of name and title alone. In that climactic scene on the heath he sees the vanity not only of kingly ceremony, but indeed the vanity of all ceremony. Under the disguise of clothes all men are the same:

44Parks and Beatty, op.cit., p.530.
Is man no more than this? . . . . Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Here's three on 's are sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings!

*(King Lear, III, iv, 106-112)*

We are reminded of Henry V's words:

His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but as a man, . . . .

*(Henry V, IV, i, 108)*

In the end there is but one thing that Richard is truly king of -- grief.

You may my glories and my state depose.
But not my griefs. Still am I king of those.

*(Richard II, IV, i, 192-193)*

Although deposed and cast in prison, Richard continues his play acting, but with a difference. Deprived of even that semblance of authority which he thought he possessed, he now plays his roles entirely in his imagination, and creates fantastic shows in his mind. But just how fantastic are they?

I have been studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world.
And for because the world is populous,
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it, yet I'll hammer it out.

Thus play I in one person many people,
And none contented. Sometimes am I King,
Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
And so I am. Then crushing penury
Persuades me I was better when a king,
Then am I kinged again. And by and by
Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke,
And straight am nothing.

*(Richard II, V, v, 1-38)*

In creating these "Fictions" he is, paradoxically -- and unwittingly -- closer to realizing the truth of his own ineffectual role-playing. In his mind's eye he conjures up
what are to him mere pictures, visions of himself as a stage player; yet what is it that he "plays?" Nothing but the roles he performed in real life: the King he was, the beggar he wished to be, the poor player he becomes in the deposition scene, unkinged by Bolingbroke.

But perhaps Richard II is not the only actor in his play? For was not Bolingbroke implicitly compared to the "well-graced actor" in his ride through the streets of London with Richard? A few lines before, York describes what he seems to take as Bolingbroke's conscious role-playing:

> Whilst he, from the one side to the other turning, 
> Bareheaded, lower than his proud steed's neck, 
> Bespoke them thus: "I thank you, country men."

*(Richard II, V, ii, 18-20)*

Earlier, Richard himself describes his acting before the populace, just before Bolingbroke goes into exile:

> How he did seem to dive into their hearts 
> With humble and familiar courtesy, 
> What reverence he did throw away on slaves, 
> Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles 
> And patient underbearing of his fortune, 
> As 'twere to banish their affects with him. 
> Off goes his bonnet to an oyster wench . . . .

*(Richard II, I, iv, 25-31)*

Leonard Dean comments:

> . . . Bolingbroke is also described as busy play acting, paying "courtship to the common people; 
> . . . wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles." 
> Richard accepts such behaviour as a matter of course; 
> it is simply a fact that must be faced and answered with force or guile.\(^\text{45}\)

These two speeches, the one by York, the other by Richard, certainly seem to suggest that Bolingbroke is an actor after

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the style of Richard III and Iago. Even the phrase "craft of smiles" recalls the "enforced smiles" put on by Buckingham (Richard III, III, v, 9). However, in Richard's description there is a kind of sneering and sardonic tone which suggests that Richard is deliberately over-emphasizing Bolingbroke's apparently excessive deference to the commoners. Indeed it is more than likely that Richard's comments have been partly inspired by the subtle hints of his flatterers. There is perhaps some evidence for this, since Richard's speech opens

Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here, and Green
Observed his courtship to the common people -- (Richard II, I, iv, 23-24)

Bolingbroke later confronts Bushy and Green, accusing them of estranging him from Richard:

Myself, a prince by fortune of my birth,
Near to the King in blood, and near in love
Till you did make him misinterpret me,

(Richard II, III, i, 15-17)

What is, I think, demonstrable is that Bolingbroke does not deliberately, and with the carefully considered hypocrisy of Richard III, set out to ascend the throne. He is, of course, an opportunist, and exploits Richard's weaknesses to his own advantage. Considering Richard's ineffectiveness as a ruler, and the many grievances expressed by the people, there is some justification for Bolingbroke's assumption of the role, despite Richard's belief in the divine right of kings; a right, which, as we have seen, counts as naught unless backed up by a human strength of character. In spite of all this, Bolingbroke nowhere says he desires the crown and is, as it were, partly led, against his will, into taking the part. Addressed
by York as King, he cries:

In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne.

(Richard II, IV, i, 113)

He is keenly aware, as was Richard, that the role of king entails much grief and sorrow, and he assumes the kingly robes with no small sense of apprehension for the burden he is putting on himself. To Richard he says:

Part of your cares you give me with your crown.

(Richard II, IV, i, 194)

Later, like his son and Henry VI, Bolingbroke is to realize the full extent of the truth of his words here. Strong and efficient ruler as he is, he too feels the heavy burden of the role, the distinctions between himself and the office, and is aware of the ironic contrast between the outer ceremony and the inner, hidden inquietude. Once more his subjects are more "king" than he:

How many thousands of my poorest subjects
Are at this hour asleep?

Why rather, Sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
And hushed with buzzing night flies to thy slumber,
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
Under the canopies of costly state
And lulled with sound of sweetest melody?

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

(II Henry IV, III, i, 4-31)

We are reminded of Henry VI's contrast of the "rich embroidered canopy" with the sweet "hawthorn bush"; and of Richard II's comparison of his "gorgeous palace" with a "hermitage."

Richard II and Henry VI, as we have seen, do but play their parts; they merely simulate the role of king.
Henry V, on the other hand, performs his allotted roles with a devoted conscientiousness and strength of character which reflect at once the shadow, as well as the substance, of kingship. He is the astute politician, the kingly soldier before Harfleur, the gauche wooer of Katherine, and so on. Una Ellis-Fermor comments on the versatility of his acting abilities:

... we see the diplomacy, the soldiership, the vigilant astute eye upon the moods of people and barons, the excellent acting of a part in court and camp and council room ... .46

In living up to the role of king, Henry finds that he must perform a variety of parts: soldier, statesman, politician and so on. These are the roles that Richard II and Henry VI cannot play, in the sense of giving substance to the part. But Henry V does not play these parts -- as Richard III does, and as Una Ellis-Fermor's reference to Henry's "excellent acting" seems to suggest -- in order to deceive.

Hal's speech in *Henry IV* (I, ii, 218-240), in which he affirms that he will eventually break off with Falstaff and assume the king's role, has been considered by many to be highly hypocritical behaviour. On the face of it, this opinion might seem all too true. But the soliloquy reveals none of the cynical, gloating quality which we associate with Richard III's or Iago's soliloquies in which they discuss their parts and comment on their double-faced behaviour. In Henry's speech there is no personal glee at the role that is to be played. The soliloquy seems rather

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46 The Frontiers of Drama, pp.45-46.
to be a general exposition of what the kingly life entails; man and office, youth and maturity, are to be kept separate. Muriel Bradbrook's remarks are worth quoting here:

His notorious first soliloquy does not proclaim his intention of having his fling and repenting at leisure: it announces a policy of moral disguise, akin to the physical disguise which the ruler so often assumes in Elizabethan drama... for the purpose of attaining knowledge, as in the case of the Duke of Vienna, Henry V before Agincourt, Edward IV at Bradford, and the whole class of characters akin to him.47

To be sure, it cannot be denied that Hal is playing, or assuming the role of the prodigal son, in his relations with Falstaff. But playing does not necessarily involve hypocrisy, and Falstaff -- in the play within the play scene of I Henry IV (II, iv) -- is given an opportunity to see the future Henry. His failure to do so is his own fault, for Henry, as well as others, makes Falstaff's failings perfectly clear to him. J. Lawlor speaks of

... Falstaff's continuing conviction... that whatever the masks they adopt, inwardly men do not change. Revelry behind locked doors is his whole and innocent notion of enthroned kingship.48

Falstaff's failure to penetrate the mask is due, not to Henry's impenetrable hypocrisy, but rather to Falstaff's lack of insight, his unwillingness to accept reality. I see no reason not to accept M. C. Bradbrook's comment that Hal is playing in disguise, as before Agincourt, to obtain knowledge of his subjects. But all this is by way of prelude to the imperial theme, Henry V himself.

47Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry, p.195.

48The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare, p.37.
It has often been pointed out that Henry is probably Shakespeare's picture of the perfect ruler. Una Ellis-Fermor suggests that the series of portraits of kings logically terminates in Henry V, the mirror of all Christian kings. It has been further noted, again by Una Ellis-Fermor, that Henry is somehow too perfect, that in him the distinctions between man and office -- though he comments upon them at length -- really do not exist. There is no Henry behind the role; only a king.

He is solid and flawless. There is no attribute in him that is not part of this figure, no desire, no interest, no habit even that is not harmonized with it. He is never off the platform; even when alone in a moment of weariness and of intense anxiety, he sees with absolute clearness the futility of privilege and the burden of responsibility, he still argues his case in general terms, a king's life weighed against a peasant's, peasant against king. No expression of personal desire escapes him . . . though he makes almost the same comparison as Henry VI, he is detached alike from king and shepherd, commenting upon them . . . his brain automatically delivers a public speech . . . .

It is in vain that we look for the personality of Henry behind the king; there is nothing else there. This seems to be a rather forbidding portrait. It is true to the extent that Henry is an excellent ruler, and both his words and deeds are at all times appropriate to the political occasion. As I have suggested, the role the king must play includes performances as soldier, statesman, lover; in short Henry fits Ophelia's description of Hamlet:

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword --
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,

49Una Ellis-Fermor, op.cit., Chapter III.
50Ibid., p.45.
What Sir Philip Sidney represents in real life, Henry V represents in art. All these roles he performs with admirable success. But to imply, as I think Una Ellis-Fermor does, that Henry is merely a "marvellous, necessary man," and that there is no personal warmth of character in any of his actions, such as would suggest he is both man and king, seems to me not in accord with the facts of the play. There is surely nothing automatic or superficial about the great soliloquy on Ceremony. It is sincere and deeply felt, and there is no hint of cynicism in it, either on Shakespeare's or Henry's part. Here is a genuine comment by Henry the man upon Henry the King's woeful role. For Henry is significantly aware, and not in just a general sense, of the discrepancy between public and private feeling, between the man and the office. It is this distinction which marks not only the ceremony soliloquy but also the great speeches of Richard II, Henry IV and Henry VI. In disguise, Henry V converses with his soldiers. His assumption of the soldier's role here, fits the speech:

... I think the King is but a man, as I am. The violet smells to him as it doth to me, all his senses have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man, and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing.  

(Henry V, IV, i, 105-112)

These sentiments recall Richard II's words:

Throw away respect,  
Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,
For you have but mistook me all this while.
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends.

(Richard II, III, ii, 172-176)

Both Henry's and Richard's words focus the tragedy of the kingly role. Although the king has only the same natural senses as all men, he is called upon to act an extraordinary task. The duties of kingship are imposed on the man, and it is the man who must bear the burden.

It is true that we never see Henry directly suffering from the burden of the role, as we do Richard II and Henry VI; nor does he plead for sympathy, as Richard II does in that speech of his just quoted. We must remember that: Henry's comments on the King as a man are given incognito; he supports the burden alone and with apparent control. Despite this outward control, I do not feel that Henry's speeches on the woes of kingship are therefore glib and meaningless, mere mouthings of a king who feels, and can express, nothing as a person. Besides, the soliloquy on ceremony is not entirely a detached and depersonalized comment. Henry speaks, and suggests that he too has felt something of the misery of which he talks:

I am a king that find thee, and I know
'Tis not the balm, the scepter, and the ball,
The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
The intertissued robe of gold and pearl,
The farced title running 'fore the king

Not all these,

Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,

(Henry V, IV, i, 276-285)
The last lines of the speech, indeed, have an immediate relevance to Henry's position. Sleep, the restorative of nature, the balm of troubled minds, which Macbeth, Lear, and Edward II all lack, is enjoyed by the wretched slave:

The slave, a member of the country's peace,  
Enjoys it, but in gross brain little wots  
What watch the King keeps to maintain the peace,  
Whose hours the peasant best advantages.

_(Henry V, IV, i, 298-301)_

For Henry is himself, at that moment of personal anxiety, keeping watch to maintain the peace, giving his soldiers "cheerful semblance and sweet majesty" so that each man may pluck comfort from his looks. M. C. Bradbrook comments on the soliloquy, linking it in form as well as spirit to Henry VI's words at Towton:

_In Henry V, as in Henry VI, the one scene that lives fully, with the depths of Shakespeare's art, is the tableau of the King set against the representatives of his people and left to meditate on the price of greatness. Henry V at Agincourt looks back to Henry VI at Towton . . . . The likeness between the lament of the pitiful son of Henry V and his father's sterner musings is a proof of the continuity underlying it. 51_

Henry as a man is warm and affectionate with his close friends; in their company he is informally gracious. He calls Erpingham "old heart" and later "good old knight." He speaks kindly and sincerely to Fluellen and jokes with him about his own Welsh blood. Again he inspires his men before Agincourt with words of warmth and companionship:

_We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.  
For he today that sheds his blood with me_

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51_[Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry, p.210.](#)
Shall be my brother. Be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.

*(Henry V, IV, iii, 60-63)*

These are all expressions of comfort which are, of course, expected of Henry as a leader of men; one could perhaps say that such behaviour constitutes his duty as a king. But his own personality is visible, too. It is probably true that there is a certain coldness about Henry's war speeches and that we are not perfectly aware of Henry the man's feelings towards the words he speaks as king and soldier. But even there, for example in Henry's speech before Harfleur, there is some indication of his personal attitude. He suggests that the name of soldier is one which fits best in his imagination; he is not a soldier by nature:

*For as I am a soldier --*
*A name that in my thoughts becomes me best --*

*(Henry V, III, iii, 5-6)*

Una Ellis-Fermor is particularly critical of Henry's prayer to God on the eve of Agincourt. It especially she sees as an expedient or necessary act, a role merely played. It is, she says, an astute bargain, a piece of shrewd diplomacy between one king and another --

*O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts!*
*Possess them not with fear, take from them now*
*The sense of reckoning if the opposèd numbers*
*Pluck their hearts from them. Not today, O Lord,*
*Oh, not today, think not upon the fault*
*My father made in compassing the crown!*
*I Richard's body have interred new,*
*And on it have bestowed more contrite tears*
*Than from it issued forced drops of blood.*
*Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,*
*Who twice a day their withered hands hold up*
*Toward Heaven, to pardon blood,*

*(Henry V, IV, i, 307-317)*
In this speech, as Una Ellis-Fermor sees it, Henry is merely conducting a "... bargain with his God, like a pedlar. His religion and his love for his people alike carry with them a tinge of expediency, a hint of the glib platform speaker." But surely this is not so; the speech is rather a prayer, an earnest supplication to God. In it, Henry affirms humility rather than shrewdness.

All this is by way of justifying Henry as both man and King. He is a good king because he is a good man, not because he is a glib actor.

And thus the image of the king as role-player seems central in Shakespeare's thought. Indeed the implications of the analogy are particularly appropriate in suggesting what is involved in being, or playing, the king's role. "As in a theatre," the king performs before the public gaze; he presents a face to his spectator-subjects which often hides his own suffering. But yet he must play out the role, for the burden is his and his alone. The distinction between the king and the tragic actor is this: that where in an actual play, the actors are truly counterfeiters and the tragedy only a simulated one, the role the king must play is only too real. When the king's tragedy is performed, the catastrophe is indeed irrevocable. The king's life is truly a "woefully slender part," "a little scene!"

\[52\text{Op. cit., p.}47\text{.}\]
Chapter VI. The Tragic Hero

The group of actors I wish to discuss next consists of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Macbeth, Hamlet, Brutus and Othello. These men have much in common. Each one is called upon, indeed required as if it were a duty, to play a particular role. In each case, the act — murder, though it may mistakenly and tragically be termed "sacrifice" by the performer, is carefully staged as a sort of ritual. Macbeth plays the murderer and kills Duncan in his bed; Hamlet assumes the avenger's role and murders Claudius, although the deed can hardly be described as deliberately staged; Brutus plays the sacrificer's role, acting out the murder of Caesar as a public ritual, while Othello performs his role as avenger, carrying out the murder of Desdemona as a form of sacrifice. Within the framework of the "grand" role, there are the lesser ones, the necessary deceptions on the part of Macbeth and the others. Macbeth must play the host to Duncan; Hamlet must seem mad to Claudius; Brutus must play the loyal friend to Caesar and Othello must seem courteous to his wife while plotting her death. Each of the heroes is painfully aware of his play-acting and each must quite consciously learn to perform his part.

Clearly there are variations within this rather general pattern. Brutus and Othello are both deceived, the one by himself and Cassius, the other by Iago, into thinking the roles they play are just ones. Nothing of course could be further from the truth, and Othello's final realization
of what he has truly performed, is indeed tragic. Macbeth, on the other hand, is under no such misconception. He accepts the role of murderer knowing full well what its probable consequences will be for himself. What he does deceive himself in, is in thinking that Duncan's murder will be the "end-all." But he soon learns that, once the mask is on, it is hard to take off. And in both Macbeth and Hamlet, patterns of clothing imagery are used to support the main concept of the hero as actor; this is not so in Julius Caesar and Othello.

Despite these differences, one feature of Shakespeare's presentation of the tragic hero stands out. Macbeth, Hamlet, Brutus and Othello are all uncomfortably aware of their role-playing. Each is cognisant of the fact, in greater or lesser degree, that the role they play is an evil one. A part of them rebels against putting on the villain's mask and performing a villain's deed. It is this inner tension, this inner struggle between the burden imposed by the role and the feeling, or, in the case of Macbeth and Hamlet, knowledge of the actual evil that the deed involves, which Shakespeare seems bent on presenting.

I mentioned earlier that Richard III is an actor who plays his various roles with a view to winning the crown. There is a similarity, in respect of this purposeful play acting, between himself and Macbeth. As Richard plots his course of action behind a mask of smiles, so Macbeth, together with his wife, puts on the mask of friendship to Duncan while the monarch's death is devised. Macbeth quite deliberately hides his feelings under a cover of affability and plays the loyal
kinsman's role. Lady Macbeth, her mind fixing immediately upon Duncan's murder even at the instant of receiving her husband's letter, suggests to him upon his return that they must play their parts carefully. As her first words indicate, however, Macbeth is none too effective as an actor:

Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue. Look like the innocent flower
But be the serpent under 't. He that's coming
Must be provided for.

(Macbeth, I, v, 63-68)

Macbeth prepares himself for the grand role, while playing the lesser:

I am settled and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

(Macbeth, I, vii, 79-82)

In similar fashion, Lady Macbeth takes on the role of murderess (I, iv, 41-55). Later when the deed is done, both of them continue the acting:

Lady M. Come on,
Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks,
Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight.

Macb. So shall I, love, and so, I pray, be you.
Let your remembrance apply to Banquo,
Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue,
Unsafe the while, that we
Must lave our honors in these flattering streams
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are.

(Macbeth, III, ii, 27-34)

The use of "vizard" as theatrical mask, is interesting, and we remember Richard III's "virtuous vizard" (Richard III, II, ii, 28). But "disguising what they are" seems ambiguous. It can mean, disguising the fact of our villainy, or disguising our inner knowledge (at least Macbeth's) that the role of murderer
is vile. Later on Macbeth "plays" the humble host (III, iv, 4). But if he finds it hard to play the deceiver, and he overplays the part of the distraught kinsman, how much harder it is for him to play the murderer. And here, I think, we begin to come closer to the real differences between Richard III and Macbeth.

Richard III and Iago are dedicated whole-heartedly to their course of villainy. Richard is not caught up by any internal struggle as to the moral right or wrong of his actions. It is true that both Richard and Iago comment on the evil of their deeds, but one never feels that they are moved by what they say, and they are only, in effect, being cynical. Macbeth, on the other hand, is torn between good and evil. With a terrifying lucidity, he realizes the significance of the act of murder he is contemplating, in the soliloquy "If 'twere done when 'tis done . . ." (I, vii, lff.). He comments at length upon Duncan's noble qualities: "Duncan/Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been/So clear in his great office. . ." (I, vii, 16). This seems somewhat like Iago's comments on the fidelity of Othello, or Edmund's on the honesty of his brother. In all these cases praise is given someone who is about to be deceived or destroyed. But the tone of Iago's and Edmund's speeches is a sneering, jibing one; neither the nobleness of Othello nor the purity of Desdemona in any way affect Iago, or make him pause to consider his actions. Macbeth's soliloquy, however, reveals a deep and sincere division within the man. He does not sneer at Duncan nor call him fool. Rather he is moved by the kingliness and innocence of Duncan; these are
things which mean something to him, and he cannot proceed
instinctively, as does Richard III, to his murderous deed.

In effect then, there are two Macbeths: the one
evil, the other good. The particular importance of this is
that it rather complicates his play-acting. Not only must he
put on a face to the world, to "seem" the friend, but he must
also put on a face to himself, must mask the better part of
his nature. He has to deliberately assume the villain's role
and convince himself that he is a villain. To Richard III
the role of villain is second nature and scarcely a role at
all. But Macbeth is a poor player; he hesitates and vacil­
lates. But finally the deed is done and Duncan murdered in
his own bed. But once the deed is finished, Macbeth finds
to his horror that the mask of villainy becomes part of him.
More and more, as his crimes increase, he becomes, rather
than merely playing, the villain. (cf. Richard III, IV, ii,
65 and Macbeth, III, iv, 136.)

The uneasiness that Macbeth feels in his role of
unlawful king is suggested in the clothing imagery of the
play. C.E. Spurgeon remarks that Macbeth is "... constantly
represented symbolically as the wearer of robes not belonging
to him."53 Kenneth Muir notes that "the famous iterative image

53C.E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It
Tells Us, Cambridge, University Press, 1958, p.189.
of a man in ill-fitting garments may be regarded as a kind of pictorial antithesis, contrasting the man and his clothes . . . ."54 Cleanth Brooks adds that

. . . Macbeth loathes playing the part of the hypocrite -- and actually does not play it too well . . . . the series of garment metaphors which run through the play is paralleled by a series of masking or cloaking images which . . . show themselves to be . . . variants of the garments which hide none too well his disgraceful self. He is consciously hiding that self throughout the play.55

The kind of image to which these critics refer appears at the outset of the play. Macbeth, greeted with the title of Thane of Cawdor, asks:

The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress me
In borrowed robes? (Macbeth, I, iii, 108-109)

A few lines later, Banquo comments:

New honours come upon him,
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mold
But with the aid of use. (Macbeth, I, iii, 144-146)

One of the most significant of these is the comparison made by Angus, when he comments on Macbeth.

Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief. (Macbeth, V, ii, 20-22)

All these images help to support the idea that Macbeth is unfitted to the roles he assumes; either as murderer-usurper, or as king. The robes he wears are borrowed ones, not truly


his. Even the golden opinions which he has honorably won feel, at first, like "strange garments." Alan Downer writes well on Macbeth, the "unhappy hypocrite":

Macbeth is an unhappy hypocrite who declares before the murder of Duncan, "False face must hide what the false heart doth know." . . . The image is . . . realized, made visual in the action of the play. The first four scenes are various moments during and after a battle. In them Macbeth will naturally be wearing his warrior's costume, his armor, as much a symbol of his nature and achievements as is Duncan's crown . . . . Under pressure from his wife, however, he resolves to seize the kingship, to cover the warrior's garments and the golden opinions that went with them with the clothing that was properly Duncan's.56

Downer concludes:

In Macbeth, the costume change is related to the iterated image to make concrete Macbeth's state of mind. . . .

(p.31)

The poetic image of the borrowed robe may, indeed, be made theatrically effective, suggests Downer:

When Macbeth enters he is wearing his dressing gown, and if the actor is wise it will be such a gown as calls attention to itself, for at this point the change in costume, the disguising of the armor, dramatizes both the change in Macbeth's nature and the iterated image.

(p.29)

Perhaps, to add to A. S. Downer's commentary, the actor could wear robes too large for him, thus giving added point and dramatic emphasis to Angus' comparison of Macbeth to a dwarf. In this regard, C. F. Spurgeon writes:

Few simple things have such a curiously humiliating and degrading effect as the spectacle of a notably small man enveloped in a coat far too big for him . . . it is by means of this homely picture that Shakespeare shows us his imaginative view of the hero, and expresses the fact that the honours for which the murders were committed are, after all, of very little worth to him.57.

I do not quite see the link Caroline Spurgeon makes between the clothing image and the fact that Macbeth's list of murders are of "little worth to him." Certainly though, the picture of Macbeth as a dwarf in a giant's robe is humorous, perhaps even ludicrous, and expresses the fact that Macbeth plays the King's role rather inadequately. He does indeed make himself a small man when he murders Duncan. One might say that he is, like Nathaniel attempting to play Alexander in the pageant of Love's Labour's Lost, "a little o'erparted."

And so Macbeth plays out his parts. In the depths of despair, alone, he is brought word of his wife's death. His famous speech now takes on new significance:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.

(Macbeth, V, ii, 24-28)

John Lawlor's comments aptly sum up all that I could wish to say on Macbeth, the actor:

We thus reach the master-conception that informs the whole. The central isolation of Macbeth,

57Spurgeon, op.cit., pp.324-325.
prompted and rehearsed in his part and launched upon his career by Lady Macbeth, seems to have touched off in Shakespeare's deepest imagination the central isolation of the actor, alone against a potentially dangerous world of observers, with his brief span of time in which to succeed or fail, and the actor's sharp awareness, spectator-fashion, of the limitations of his art. So the sense of a failing performance grows as the expectations roused by the "happy prologues to the swelling act of the imperial theme" begin to be falsified. So, too, Macbeth descends in the scale of public spectacle from a dominant actor playing a King's role to a bear tied to the stake, a process paralleling his putting-off of humanity, the scornful refusal to "play the Roman fool."

Unlike Macbeth, who accepts the part of murderer quite voluntarily -- though he plays it in an involuntary manner, Hamlet is required to play the avenger's role. The burden is imposed upon him from without; he is "prompted" to his revenge by Heaven and Hell, and the ghost, but he laments the role:

The time is out of joint. Oh, cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!

(Hamlet, I, v, 189-190)

But he turns out to be, like Macbeth, a rather poor player.

We might suspect this from the beginning, for Hamlet suggests that playing is something foreign to his nature; he cannot "seem":

Seems, madam! Nay, it is. I know not "seems."
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief --
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play.

(Hamlet, I, ii, 74-84)

58 Lawlor, op.cit., p.142.
But Hamlet is too modest, for he can indeed "play." He feigns
the role of madman and plays the loyal subject to the king.
But the part he cannot accept is that of avenger, and it is
this grand role that Hamlet never really comes to identify
himself with. The central image of Hamlet as ineffectual
actor occurs in his soliloquy of Act II, Scene ii. Here
Hamlet compares himself to the professional actor who,
although possessing only a feigned motive for passion, can yet
act out his role effectively in a way denied to Hamlet who has
indeed the "motive and the cue for passion":

Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!
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Hesitant to the last, reluctant to be the avenger, Hamlet desperately acts out the ritual murder of Claudius, the revenge. The final scene of the play is indeed a public spectacle, played out before ourselves and the court:

> You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,

(\textit{Hamlet}, V, ii, 345-346)

And yet it hardly seems a ritual at all, for Hamlet kills Claudius as much in response to his mother's death, as in revenge for his father's murder. The carefully worked out revenge at the end of Tourneur's \textit{The Revengers! Tragedy} provides a sharp contrast to Hamlet's hasty despatch of the king. In Tourneur, the revengers, visaged in masks, deliberately act out their deed through the ritual of art in the same way that Hieronimo achieves his revenge through "Soliman and Perseda." Hamlet's murder of Claudius seems almost a mockery of ritual, a revenge carried out by casual accident, not design. This confusion of the ritual of revenge reflects Hamlet's inability, professed throughout the play, to fully identify with the avenger's role. At the last, the poor player but fumbles his biggest part.

Hamlet's inability to carry through with the role imposed on him is paralleled by Claudius' own poor performance as a villain. Like Macbeth, he is terribly aware of his villainy:

> The harlot's cheek, beautified with plastering art,
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most painted word.
> Oh, heavy burden!

(\textit{Hamlet}, III, i, 51-54)
Similarly Bosola in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* is a villain who somehow fails to fit the part. Like Macbeth and Claudius, he is aware of the better side of his nature. Recalling Ferdinand's illuminating comparison of Bosola to an actor in a play --

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For thee, (as we observe in Tragedies
That a good Actor many times is curse'd
For playing a villain's part) I hate thee for 't.59
(IV, ii, 307-309)
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Una Ellis-Fermor writes:

> Our interest in the figure of Bosola, for example, is not mainly because, in the service of Ferdinand's mania, he murders the Duchess and brings about unwittingly the death of Antonio, but because of the strange discrepancy between the man he appears, the man he would be and the man that, unknown to himself, he really is. Our interest is intense, first because we are watching the slow permeation of his outer consciousness by this inner self, the slow summation of all his findings in the knowledge of himself: An Actor in the maine of all,

> Much against mine owne good nature. ... 60

In contrast to Macbeth, who accepts his role as murderer aware that the part he plays is evil, Brutus and Othello are both convinced that their roles as sacrificers are justified by, in the one case, the "tyranny" of Caesar and in the other, the "infidelity" of Desdemona.

Tempted by Cassius, who makes a telling appeal to Brutus' pride in the exploits of his forefathers, tragically self-deceived into believing that Caesar is, or will become, a tyrant (II, i, 18-34), Brutus accepts the role of sacrificial agent;

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Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.
(Julius Caesar, II, i, 166)

But he does not accept the part without an inner struggle, a conflict paralleling that which moves Macbeth. Both must assume the role, and the irony in Brutus' case is that the role is unnecessary. His soliloquy:

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
The Genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council, and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.
(Julius Caesar, II, i, 63-69)

recalls Macbeth's:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not.
(Macbeth, I, iii, 139-142)

The state of man, which should be dominated by reason and be in harmony with itself and its earthly ruler, the King, must be subverted. Macbeth, of course, knows that he is substituting evil for good, but Brutus fails to perceive the significance of the inner struggle. If the role of sacrificial agent is both necessary and good, why need the state of man suffer the nature of an insurrection? His words here seem to reflect a subconscious realization that the role is wrong, but tragically this intuitive knowledge does not penetrate to his conscious mind, so he proceeds with the part he has assumed. Confirmed in ignorance, he fails to question the necessity that "good purposes" must put on the mask of smiles, and does not see the contradiction involved:
O Conspiracy,
Shamest thou to show thy dangerous brow by night,
When evils are most free? Oh, then by day
Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough
To mask thy monstrous visage? Seek none, Conspiracy,
Hide it in smiles and affability.

(Julius Caesar, II, i, 77-82)

Later, like Lady Macbeth instructing her husband to play the
loyal host, he directs the murderers to play their parts:

Good gentlemen, look fresh and merrily.
Let not our looks put on our purposes,
But bear it as our Roman actors do,
With untired spirits and formal constancy.

(Julius Caesar, II, i, 224-227)

Although he does not know it, Brutus' mettle is indeed being
"wrought from that it is disposed." (I, ii, 313)

And so the central deed is performed, and the ritual
sacrifice of Caesar played out. Indeed it is so stage-like
that it is jokingly described as if it really were a play act:

Cass. Stoop then, and wash. How many ages hence
   Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
   In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
Bru. How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport,
   That now on Pompey's basis lies along
   No worthier than the dust!

(Julius Caesar, III, i, 111-116)

With a curiously macabre joke about Caesar's having been spared
the miseries of old age, which recalls Brutus' earlier pun on
"like" (II, ii, 128), he frames the action as a spectator,
inviting the sacrificers to continue the role-playing:

Grant that, and then is death a benefit.
So are we Caesar's friends that have abridged
His time of fearing death. Stoop, Romans, stoop,
And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood
Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords.
Then walk we forth, even to the market place,
And waving our red weapons o'er our heads,
Let's all cry "Peace, freedom, and liberty!"

(Julius Caesar, III, i, 103-110)
Brutus, deceived into a belief in Caesar's tyranny, is unaware of the heavy irony in his words. The whole effect of this spectacle may be compared to the murder scene in *Othello*.

Just as Othello, convinced of his wife's infidelity, deliberately stages her death as a revenge rite, so Brutus, convinced of Caesar's tyrannous ambitions, acts out the murder as ritual. In both cases there is a bitter Sophoclean irony which lies in the contrast between what the play or ritual is thought to represent to the actor directing it, and what it really is, in fact.

It is precisely because Brutus acts in what he mistakenly believes to be the general good, that Antony can speak, at the last, on his behalf:

> All the conspirators, save only he,  
> Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.  
> He only, in a general honest thought  
> And common good to all, made one of them.  

(*Julius Caesar*, V, v, 69-72)

Of both Brutus and Othello, Brents Stirling writes:

> The Elizabethan tragedy of Brutus, like that of Othello, is marked by an integrity of conduct which leads the protagonist into evil and reassures him in his error. 61

Just as Brutus acts in the mistaken belief that Caesar was a tyrant, so Othello plays out his role as avenger in the belief that Desdemona is unfaithful.

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61Brents Stirling, "Or else were this a savage spectacle," *Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. L.F. Dean, New York, Oxford University Press, 1957, p.204. (From Unity in Shakespearian Tragedy: the Interplay of Theme and Character, Oxford University Press, 1956, pp.40-54.)
Deceived by the apparent truth of Iago's mask into a disbelief of the actual truth of Desdemona's fidelity, he accepts the part of avenger. In a precise and ritualistic manner he assumes the role:

Arise, black Vengeance, from thy hollow cell!
Yield up, O Love, thy crown and hearted throne
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues!

Now, by yond marble Heaven,
In the due reverence of a sacred vow
I here engage my words.

(Othello, III, iii, 447-462)

We remember Macbeth's:

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.

(Macbeth, I, vii, 79-80)

and Hamlet's:

Oh, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!

(Hamlet, I, v, 93-95)

and Brutus' exchange of vows with the other assassins.

Commenting on this scene from Othello, Irving Ribner writes:

There is an awful solemnity in this scene. Othello in his delusion would convert his sinful vengeance into the guise of a lawful justice, his hatred into duty, and he does so by cloaking his action in the appearance of formal ritual. His delusion parallels that of the earlier Brutus in his desire to carve Caesar as a dish fit for the gods, to make a solemn sacrifice out of a brutal murder. From this point onward Othello will see with the vision of Iago, to whom he is united. Truth will appear as falsehood, love and loyalty as lust and betrayal. Always in his delusion Othello will see himself as the instrument of justice executing his duty in a solemn ritual
although his court-room will be a brothel and his act of justice the destruction of love and truth.  

Confirmed in his tragic ignorance, Othello acts out what he believes to be the truth of Desdemona's adultery. Deliberately faking the part of a customer, he pretends he is visiting a brothel. To him the fiction of his play is based on truth; Desdemona is a whore. To Desdemona, the scene is a "horrible fancy" (IV, ii, 26); to her, Othello's play appears a mockery.

Like Hamlet and Macbeth, Othello finds his main role difficult to pursue; he finds it hard to play or seem. "Oh, hardness to dissemble!" he cries (Othello, III, iv, 34).

Besides this inability to be a natural hypocrite, which he shares with Hamlet and Macbeth, Othello is unable to suppress his love for Desdemona. In effect, he seems to retain a subconscious sense of her innocence, while remaining fully convinced of her guilt. What he cannot understand is how anyone so fair could be so foul. The tense balance between his feelings both towards and away from his wife are suggested in such phrases as --

O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst ne'er been born.

(Othello, IV, ii, 67-70)

In the ritual murder scene, he gives poignant expression to the inner conflict that grips him. He is a man caught between a love which, although consciously abjured, cannot be fully rejected, and the duty of revenge. Duty wins, but the struggle is intense:

Ah, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! (Othello, V, ii, 16-17)

And so the deed is done in the name of Justice.

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.

Yet she must die else she'll betray more men, (Othello, V, ii, 1-6)

After her death Othello again asserts the justness of his act,

Oh, I were damned beneath all depth in Hell
But that I did proceed upon just grounds
To this extremity. (Othello, V, ii, 137-139)

Othello then, like Brutus, proceeds upon the course of impersonal sacrifice. It is this "integrity of conduct" to which B. Stirling refers; an integrity and strength of character marked by Othello's suicide and summed up by Cassio, "For he was great of heart." (V, ii, 361)

In much the same way that Othello carries out his ritual sacrifice of Desdemona, so Leontes, convinced by an inner passion, that Hermione is unfaithful, acts out his vengeance in the trial scene. One of his remarks, indeed, looks forward prophetically to his unhappy role as sacrificial agent:

Thy mother plays, and I
Play too, but so disgraced a part whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave. (The Winter's Tale, I, ii, 186-188)

To Leontes, the trial will embody the truth of Hermione's guilt and be the means of securing justice. His words --

Let us be cleared
Of being tyrannous, since we so openly
Proceed in justice .... (The Winter's Tale, III, ii, 4-6)

recall Othello's "... I did proceed upon just grounds ..."
(V, ii, 138). To Hermione the trial appears a mockery, a "horrible fancy" (Othello, IV, ii, 26). "My life stands in the level of your dreams," she cries to Leontes (The Winter's Tale, III, ii, 82). He speaks more truly than he knows when he replies --

Your actions are my dreams.

(The Winter's Tale, III, ii, 83)

The awakening of Othello and Leontes from their dreams is indeed terrible to behold.

In my discussion of Macbeth, I noted how the clothing image was used to suggest a discrepancy between the hero and the role he assumes as king. The image of the role that seems to sit rather uneasily upon the shoulders of the hero is also found in Coriolanus. Like Hamlet, Coriolanus is called upon to play a particular role which he cannot properly fill. Required to be the humble man before the populace, Coriolanus tries to beg off:

Men. It then remains
That you do speak to the people.
Cor. I do beseech you
Let me o'erleap that custom, for I cannot
Put on the gown, stand naked and entreat them,
(Coriolanus, II, ii, 138-144)

He is prevailed upon however, and dons the robe of humility.
But clearly it irks him and throughout the scene that follows, he refers to it,

Pray you now, if it may stand with the tune
Of your voices that I may be Consul, I have here the customary gown.

(Coriolanus, II, ii, 91-93)

When the two citizens leave, he muses on the part he is at present playing; again the gown of humility figures prominently
in his thoughts:

Why in this wolsvish toge should I stand here,
To beg of Hob and Dick that do appear
Their needless vouches?  

(Coriolanus, II, iii, 122-124)

After the ordeal is complete, Coriolanus asks Sicinius, "May I change these garments?" (II, iii, 154). Brutus and Sicinius also make pertinent comments on the clothes that Coriolanus wears (II, iii, 161; 229). To Coriolanus the wearing of the gown of humility signifies a betrayal of his own nature, his own inner truth. Dedicated to "honour" -- which turns out to be a mixture of pride and a desire to please his mother, a composition of which Coriolanus remains tragically unaware -- rigidly determined to be only a good soldier, he steadfastly refuses to play any part which would compromise his fanatic principles. Acting to him is mere hypocrisy. His response to the customary process of humiliation is to regard the action as a role, a part, which, if played, would falsify his desire "Not to be other than one thing" (IV, vii, 42). He expresses his feelings in theatrical metaphor:

It is a part
That I shall blush in acting, and might well
Be taken from the people.  

(Coriolanus, II, ii, 148-149)

His mother "prompts" him in the role:

Because now it lies you on to speak
To the people -- not by your own instruction,
Nor by the matter which your heart prompts you,
But with such words that are but roted in
Your tongue, though but bastards and syllables
Of no allowance to your bosom's truth.  

(Coriolanus, III, ii, 52-57)

Later she directs him, carefully instructing him in the actions of the role,
I prithee now, my son,
Go to them, with this bonnet in thy hand,
And thus far having stretched it, here be with them,
Thy knee bussing the stones -- for in such business
Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant
More learned than the ears -- waving thy head,

Or say to them
Thou art their soldier,

(Coriolanus, III, ii, 72-81)

Coriolanus reluctantly succumbs --
You have put me now to such a part which never
I shall discharge to the life.

(Coriolanus, III, ii, 105-106)

Cominius half-jokingly replies, completing the theatrical
metaphor: "Come, come, we'll prompt you." And so Coriolanus
assumes the robe of humility; but it does not fit too well,
as Maurice Charney notes:

There is a real discordance between his inner hatred
of the people and his outward signs of humility.
Costume is used ironically to show that Coriolanus
is not the man he seems: he is merely dressed
humbly, but not humble in spirit. There is a
physical uncomfortableness in wearing the gown that
approaches a moral state, and it is up to the actor
to convey this discomfort by the proper gesture. . .
The basis of the imagery here lies in the visual
effect of the costume and the verbal images of "The
napless vesture of humility" (II, i, 250) and "this
wolvish toge" (II, iii, 122) support what we actually
see on the stage.63

Coriolanus, then, cannot play the actions that a man might play;
he cannot "seem" to any man. He must be true to his own nature;
as Menenius remarks:

He would not flatter Neptune for his trident
Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth --
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent.

(Coriolanus, III, i, 256-258)

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63Maurice Charney, "The Dramatic Use of Imagery in
Shakespeare's Coriolanus," ELH, XXIII, Baltimore, John Hopkins
Press, September 1956, p.190.
Ironically, Coriolanus' scrupulous desire to avoid play-acting of any kind, to him the simple equivalent of hypocrisy, is itself an unwitting piece of role-playing. In thinking himself to be the plain modest man, he plays the proud man's part; he is, in fact, proud of not being proud. And when Volumnia suggests that he play the rough and ready soldier's role to win back the crowd's approval -- "say to them Thou art their soldier" -- she little knows how close her words come to an actual representation of Coriolanus' true role-playing. For he has been performing the warrior's part all his life, although without knowing it. Being the blunt, plain-spoken, unflattering soldier is his whole life; it is, as he thinks, his whole nature. And yet it is a role in which he has been schooled by his mother since birth. Again he speaks more truly than he knows when rounding on his mother, he asks

Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me False to my nature? Rather say I play The man I am.  

(Coriolanus, III, ii, 14-16)

He has indeed been "playing" the man he thinks he is.

The only weak link in the warrior's costume he has assumed, and which he feels to reflect the man he is, is his mother. She breaks through the hard exterior armor, which he wears in both a physical and a mental sense, and in the climactic events of Act V, Scene viii, Coriolanus is forced to put off the avenger's role and assume the part of the weak son. Unwittingly he reveals the truth of what happens to him.
Like a dull actor now
I have forgot my part and I am out
Even to a full disgrace.  

(Coriolanus, V, iii, 40-42)

Una Ellis-Fermor's comments are well worth quoting at this point:

The very imagery of Coriolanus, in the latter part of his career, turns instinctively to the stage for its sources, culminating in the sound psychological truth of the commonplace image, 'Like a dull actor now, I have forgot my part,
And I am out, even to a full disgrace.' (V, iii, 45-46)
This is, in fact, though he hardly means it when he speaks, precisely what has happened to him.64

It is in this lack of self-knowledge, this inability to see himself as he really is -- an unwilling actor unaware of his own acting -- that the core of Coriolanus' tragedy lies.

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64 The Jacobean Drama, p.257, note 1.
Chapter VII. Conclusion

In such a general study as this it is rather hard to arrive at a single conclusion which will cover all the material under consideration. Keeping this in mind, it seemed best to summarize each section and suggest conclusions to the individual parts.

My remarks on dramatic illusion and the purpose of drama attempted to indicate the author's own feelings about the nature of dramatic art and what its purpose should be. As to the former, it seems to me that Shakespeare is not especially concerned with sustaining a complete illusion of reality, and, indeed, considers the matter of realistic stage presentation as of a somewhat peripheral concern for the dramatist. Whether one can realistically portray the clash of armies, or represent ships, bears, horses or even moonlight, upon the stage, is of no significant consequence: "the best in this kind are but shadows." The audience's imagination is all that is required to overcome what are essentially problems of physical stage technique. Even the bumbling efforts of amateur actors need not prove disastrous if the audience possesses sufficient grace and good humour to allow for their faults, and lack of stage properties. The true reality of a play lies not so much in whether you can present real moonlight on the stage or no; this constitutes but a minor part of drama. Rather, the worth and value of a play rests in the substance which underlies the shadow, or vision that is
presented to us. What is important, what is real, is the play's inherent idea worked out in action; the clash of character with character, of character with itself and the conflict of character with fate.

So far indeed is Shakespeare from attempting to sustain dramatic illusion, that he often deliberately breaks it, reminding us, the audience, that we are watching a play. This he does particularly in the comedies, especially, as has been noted, Love's Labour's Lost and A Midsummer Night's Dream, and with quite obvious self-consciousness. In the references to the "cellarage" in Hamlet and the "squeaking boy" in Antony and Cleopatra, the illusion is broken with much greater subtlety and certainly much less self-consciousness. Indeed any overt reference to the stage, or acting, however fleeting the allusion may be, must remind the audience of their position as spectators. Shakespeare freely uses dance and masque form, particularly in the comedies, to emphasize the theatrical nature of the play as a whole. The prologues and epilogues also serve to set off the play as an artistic unity. Certainly Shakespeare's art, and the art of the Elizabethans in general, was not one which denied its artificiality in contrast to modern drama and prose. Yet for all this juggling with the audience's sense of illusion, the truth which is reflected in the fiction remains unaffected;

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show,
But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.
(A Midsummer Night's Dream, V, i, 128-129)

65See R. M. Jordan's article entitled "The Limits of Illusion" in Criticism, II, No. 3, Summer 1960, pp.278-305 for a provocative study of medieval, eighteenth century and modern attitudes towards the "reality" of art.
The drama's purpose then is to embody truth, to reflect the actions of man. The idea of the play as mirror is, as noted, a common Elizabethan concept which has its counterpart in medieval and classical thought. What is most interesting about it is the notion that art, although itself a fictional form, can reflect truth. This is a paradox well worth more intensive study than has been given here. Suffice it to say that the play-within-the-play in Shakespeare performs exactly that function, the revelation of truth. This is so not only of such inner plays as "The Mousetrap" in Hamlet, and "Pyramus and Thisbe" in A Midsummer Night's Dream, but also of the "play" action of I Henry IV (II, iv), the play wedding of Rosalind and Orlando in As You Like It, and the mock trial scene in King Lear which grotesquely reveals the ingratitude of Lear's two daughters. Conversely, the brothel scene in Othello, thought by Othello to reflect the truth of Desdemona's infidelity, images the truth of Othello's unwittingly tragic error. In the reactions of the audience to "Pyramus and Thisbe" and the nine worthies pageant in Love's Labour's Lost, the mirror of truth is held up to us in a rather direct way. The inclusion of ourselves, by association, within the framework of the play, makes us wonder just where Art ends and "reality" begins. Life itself becomes like a play.

Moving from Shakespeare's attitudes towards dramatic illusion and his use of the play as a mirror, the writer thought next to indicate something of the extent to which metaphor drawn from the theatre is used in relation to character. In the discussion of what was termed the game or play of love,
I remarked how disguise is used for purposes of deception, though not as a cloak for evil. In this game there are those who, like Viola and Rosalind, play a variety of roles, and are both observers and participants. There are others, like Helena and Lysander, who become a part of the pageant in an unself-conscious way. And there are some, like Benedict and Berowne, who think they can play one role but end up by playing both observer and participant.

In contrast to such mask-wearers as Edgar, Portia, Viola and Rosalind, whose masks are physical and quite literally put on and off, there are the villains Richard III, Iago and Edmund, who use their masks as vizards for evil. Here the mask is really a part of the man and the role-playing a logical manifestation of an inner deceitfulness of nature. Here, too, I noted the idea of convention in relation to the villains; the concept, expressed by Brander Matthews and others, that it is a point of dramatic technique that villains should expound their villainies to the audience. But saying this no more explains the significance or worth of Richard III's soliloquies, than it does to remark that Shakespeare's heroines often assume a male disguise, a point of theatre undoubtedly of aid to the boy actors who had to take the girls' parts. It is important to keep these facts in mind: but surely Shakespeare is as much interested in the situations that arise from such disguisings, as he is in helping his boy actors overcome nature.
The section on the king as player sought to suggest the attitudes and feelings of Shakespeare's kings towards the part they must assume, and dwelt in particular on the distinctions between man and role, the fact that the fine robes of ceremony often serve to cover suffering and an inner despair, which reflects an inability, particularly on the part of Henry VI, to measure up to the role. What seemed to me most interesting about the tragic heroes was the way in which most of them assumed their roles as avengers or sacrificers, as a sort of duty. Unwittingly, of course, they are also taking on a tragic role, for their duties, often pursued in good faith, as in the case of Brutus and Othello, lead to bitter and tragic ends.

One may further remark that the metaphor of the theatre affects not only Shakespeare's conception of character but is also reflected in the clothing imagery of Macbeth and Coriolanus; and, indeed, is to be seen in his language and his view of life itself.

In an article entitled "William Shakespeare: An Epilogue" (in Shakespearean Gleanings, Oxford, 1944, pp.35-51), Sir Edmund Chambers remarks that Caroline Spurgeon, in her book on Shakespeare's imagery, notes only three stage references. On the contrary, Chamber's opinion is that "... the plays are pervaded by theatrical imagery" (p.43), and his suggestion is surely borne out by an investigation of the plays themselves. Many of these can be found through a concordance check under
such titles as \textit{stage}, \textit{theater}, \textit{player}, \textit{audience} and so on. Others insinuate themselves more subtly into the text and are revealed in a theatrical turn of phrase. I quote from Chambers who, after citing some of the more definite stage allusions, continues:

These are all examples, by no means exhaustive, of definite theatrical images. But even where that is not present, stage terms seem in a subtle way to have affected Shakespeare's diction. What his characters have to say and do is their "part." They are "prompted" to speak or intervene . . . .

(p.47)

He notes in particular the use of the verb "play" in the sense of perform:

Shakespeare's characters also play the dog, the cur, the spaniel, the sheep, the spider, the servant, the porter, the cook . . . . There is no end to it.

(p.48)

There is indeed no end to it. For example the word "cue" is often used in a technical stage sense; as in \textit{The Merry Wives of Windsor}, in the exchange of dialogue between Mistress Page and Mistress Ford:

\begin{quote}
M. Ford. Mistress Page, remember you your cue.
M. Page. I warrant thee. If I do not act it, hiss me. \hfill \textit{(The Merry Wives of Windsor, III, iii, 38-40)}
\end{quote}

Later, Falstaff reminds us of the allusion when he speaks of "... the prologue of our comedy." (III, v, 75) Othello declines to fight, when accused by Brabantio of stealing Desdemona:

\begin{quote}
Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it Without a prompter. \hfill \textit{(Othello, I, ii, 83-84)}
\end{quote}
Elsewhere, Romeo refers to the prologue and the prompter (Romeo and Juliet, I, iv, 6-7). I have already noted M. Murray's comment on theatrical metaphor in Richard III, and added my own observations to the significant references to the actor which occur in Coriolanus. It is as if Shakespeare naturally expresses himself through theatrical metaphor; it is congenial to his way of seeing things.

Indeed, at times, he views life itself as a play or passing vision. Often he images the earth as a stage, whose players are ourselves and whose auditors are the Gods. Such allusions occur in As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Pericles, The Winter's Tale. The most famous of these is Prospero's speech in The Tempest:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits, and Are melted into air, into thin air. And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself — Yea, all which it inherit — shall dissolve And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff As dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep.

(IV, i, 147-157)

The thought here is not dissimilar to that expressed at the end of Chaucer's Troilus and Creseyde. As R. Jordan remarks of that poem, "... the perspective of the poet at length displaced that of the narrator, so is the poet's perspective displaced at the very conclusion of the poem ... Thus "real" reality is itself rendered fictive."66 So it is here, in

The Tempest. Our perspective, which encompasses the fiction of the masque and the "real" spectators Ferdinand and Miranda, themselves a part of the larger fiction The Tempest, is itself displaced and "rendered fictive." We too become as figures in the play of life, the vision of reality. The play, itself a shadow, reflects but a shadow, the life of man.
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