

all Bacon's work is brought to nothing. Unforgettable elements in the play are the tender feeling for gentle Prince Arthur's suffering and the bold wit of Philip Faulconbridge, bastard son of Coeur de Lion. The crudity of the methods employed to humiliate the woman who is 'renowned in Padua for her scolding tongue' is somewhat offset by Petruchio's masterful irony— first in pretending to find her a gentle creature, later in irresistibly denying her food and clothes on the grounds that they are not good enough for her, and making a noble virtue out of it: Well, come, my Kate; we will unto your father's, Even in these honest mean habiliments: Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor, For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich. There is neater workmanship in James IV. The Scottish king is married to Dorothea, daughter of Henry VII, but his wayward passion for Ida, daughter of the Countess of Arran, is fanned by the villainous Ateukin (another disciple of Machiavel). ('I have sat in the stocks for puddings he hath eaten: otherwise he had been executed.') Petruchio is the energetic and resourceful gentleman who brings the termagant Katherina to heel in *The Taming of the Shrew*, an anti-feminist tract to delight the male heart. He is not only the repellently vengeful moneylender who can relish the prospect of having a pound of his debtor's flesh in lieu of payment; he is also the victim of anti-Semite contempt who can cry out in protest that the Jew has eyes and hands, senses and passions, like other men, is 'fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons...warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is'. The parallelism between the plot to deceive a light-hearted couple (Beatrice and Benedick) into love and happiness, and the plot to deceive an earnest couple out of happiness, is balanced by the parallelism between the ready assumption of each other's enmity that so long divides Beatrice from Benedick, and the ready credence given to Hero's infidelity that so long divides Hero from Claudio. The other plot, whereby an arch-villain deceives Claudio into believing his beloved Hero unfaithful even on the eve of her wedding (he displays a night tryst in which she is impersonated by her maid), leads Elizabethan drama 51 to a painful rejection before the altar of a finely presented woman, and a tragic note is sounded. To read Shakespeare's histories in chronological sequence enables the reader to get a bird's eye view of political history (as seen through Elizabethan eyes) from the time of the composition of *The Canterbury Tales* to the reign of Henry VIII. Searching for lost and separated twin sons, with their respective lost and separated twin servants, while the pairs are in the same city of Ephesus, has farcical possibilities that are fully exploited in the comic entanglements, though the whole is contained within the grave framework of a threat hanging over the seeker. Proteus, Elizabethan drama 49 who is faithless to his mistress Julia, faithless in wooing his dear friend Valentine's beloved, Silvia, and faithless in betraying Valentine to Silvia's father, is, happily, faithless to his own villainy at the end in timely repentance and re-conversion to love of constant Julia. But the play performs convincingly: the stereotyped 'wicked Jew' of literature is perhaps no more offensive to Semites than the stereotyped 'wicked stepmother' of fairy stories is damaging to second wives; and Shakespeare of course made Shylock more complex than that. Hither come those who have good reason to flee the world's injustices: Orlando, brutally done out of his due inheritance by his elder brother; Rosalind (the Duke's daughter), invidiously cast out by the usurper, her uncle; and Celia, her cousin, determined to share her fate. Shakespeare took his material from Lodge's *Rosalynde*, but the two characters who spice the play with melancholy disillusionment and caustic humour, Jaques and Touchstone, are Shakespeare's

inventions. In *Twelfth Night* the theme of identities confused in separated twins (Sebastian and Viola) recalls *The Comedy of Errors* just as the theme of a girl in male disguise (Viola as Cesario) harks back to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. We see Shakespeare's comic characterization at full maturity in the persons of Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Malvolio; and this is the play where Feste, the clown, sings 'O mistress mine' and 'Come away, death'. Nashe, in the same year, plainly seems to allude to the popularity of *Henry VI Part 1* when he speaks (in *Pierce Pennilesse*) of 'ten thousand spectators at least (at several times)' beholding the scenes of Talbot's death. Masculine fidelity is touchingly evident in the devotion of Proteus's 'clownish servant' Launce to his pet dog Crab, a sour, dumb partner in much drollery. We know from Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* that the Jew was a fit target for the groundlings' hostility; and the implication of the Portuguese Jew, Roderigo Lopez, in a plot to poison Queen Elizabeth, gave a fillip to anti-Jewish themes for a time. We are in the reign of Henry III and Friar Bacon's closing prophecy foresees the golden age of England's peace and prosperity under the queen whose 'brightness shall deface proud Phoebus' flower', Elizabeth. Henry VIII, in which Shakespeare collaborated with Fletcher, is memorable for the dignity in distress of Queen Katharine and for Wolsey's bearing at his fall. The accompanying love story of Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, for Margaret of Fressingfield, a keeper's daughter and a delightful romantic heroine, is managed with freshness and charm. The very different fantastic element in *The Merchant of Venice* requires us to accept a world where a suitor may win or lose a wealthy bride by opening the right casket, or one of two wrong ones--the three made of lead, silver and gold respectively. The situation thus contrived is the extreme instance of Shakespearian multiple irony in exploiting female impersonation by boy actors. Pictures of corruption are interspersed with moral exhortations from Oseas, who acts as chorus and pricks the conscience of Londoners. Moreover the form (the drama) had got through its teething stages and was ripe for high fulfilments, and the medium (the English language) was at a point of rich potential in terms of its historical development. (Julia does her stint as a disguised pageboy in Proteus's service.) The balanced exploration of love and friendship is expeditiously contrived, and not on one social level alone. The three comedies, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, give astonishing proof of Shakespeare's now established virtuosity. Beatrice and Benedick are at once united in the conviction that Hero has been wronged, and that alliance helps to make the transformation of their relationship plausible. Dogberry and Verges, a blundering constable and his colleague, are a delightful answer to the technical question of how to bring the deception of the hero to light. Dogberry's heavy-footed, heavy-worded helpfulness and obtuseness leave us wondering why we do not call a malapropism a dogberryism. The complications and denouements are managed by wilful and playful human contrivances with some help from 'an old religious man' who, in the nick of time, converts the wicked uncle 'from his enterprise (i.e. vengeance) and from the world'. But Shakespeare composed the 'later' cycle (*Henry VI* and *Richard III*) before the 'earlier' and much superior cycle (*Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*). Moreover there is some dispute about the authorship of *Henry VI* and the extent to which other hands than Shakespeare's were involved in its composition. The play's lesson is pressed home in a series of extravagant spectacles requiring elaborate stage machinery.