ARCANA IN SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO 'THE COMEDY OF ERRORS' AND 'A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM'

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to demonstrate that Shakespeare encoded his comedies with spiritual arcana including: theurgy; Celtic mysticism; alchemy; Renaissance Platonism; and the Bible. An analysis of The Comedy of Errors and A Midsummer Night's Dream shows that the plays are polysemous, providing simultaneous readings of a number of spiritual allegories.

The arcana are examined in the light of material to which Shakespeare could have had access. They are separately documented in chapters designed to provide a resource of information on their contemporary nature mediated for modern understanding.

The research is based on an exploration of plays in production, represented in programme notes in the appendices. The work was undertaken to clarify the director's notes to cast and audiences of the international professional Theatre Set-Up company and the results of this study informed their productions from 1983 to 1996. It was found that explanations of the scripts' iconography which the research revealed, clarified and lightened their performance.

Early chapters review a range of opinions from literary criticism on the issues discussed in the thesis, revealing considerable sympathy with its tenets.
(108,870 words)

With many thanks to

Tom and Angela
Susan and Brian
Celia and Brian

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is based on the proposition that Shakespeare encoded his plays with arcana the understanding of which removes implausibilities in characterisation and plot, explains mysteries in the language used and reveals deeper levels of meaning and significance. 'Arcana', as used in this thesis is defined by Dr Ernest Klein as a 'secret, mystery'. He claims that the word derives from '_Orcus_, name of the god of the infernal regions in Roman mythology'. [1]

The proposition of the thesis is examined in the light of a range of critical opinion on Shakespeare's comedies in Chapters One to Three. Chapters Four to Seven discuss potential secret meanings in Shakespeare's plays, examining them in detail from sources available to Shakespeare himself and relating them to the broad spectrum of his work, including his tragedies. Chapters Eight and Nine record the exploration and application of these secret meanings to two particular comedies, _The Comedy of Errors_ and _A Midsummer Night's Dream_. In these chapters internal evidence is presented in support of the notion that the arcana discussed in detail in Chapters Four to Seven are embodied in the plays. They are detected by comparing the text with its source material and by identifying significant language, characterisation and stage action. This interpretation, undertaken for practical purposes, is related where appropriate to perceptions from a spectrum of literary criticism. The

process of presenting the plays in performance in the light of the research is also recorded and the effects of the research, (within the limits of monitoring them imposed by the performance conditions) on actors and audiences of the professional international touring theatre company, Theatre Set-Up (described in detail below), is included in each relevant chapter. The programme notes for each Theatre Set-Up production present the research which has informed it to the audience and are included in Appendices A (The Comedy of Errors and A Midsummer Night's Dream) and B (all other productions presented by Theatre Set-Up between 1982 and 1995). My analysis of The Comedy of Errors does not exactly correspond to the production presented by Theatre Set-Up (as reference to the plays' programme notes in Appendix A will indicate), as I have written with the benefit of hindsight, later research illuminating the earlier production work. However the exposition of A Midsummer Night's Dream, including productions mounted in 1983 at the beginning and in 1995 at the end of the research period, builds on the 1995 director's notes given to the cast, and presented in the programme notes to the production's audiences, thereby giving an accurate record of material upon which the production was based.

The impulse to undertake this study was created by the academic needs of Theatre Set-Up, which I direct and manage and whose summer seasons from 1983 to 1995 provided

the practical component of this work. The company was founded in 1976, initially as a part-amateur, part-professional company with the aim of using the beautiful settings provided by the gardens and Banqueting Suite of Forty Hall, Enfield, as backgrounds for plays by Shakespeare. In 1979 the company was invited to tour for The National Trust and it became fully professional, reducing its cast numbers for touring convenience from twenty-five to twelve, plus musician/ director/ administrator, (my function), and company/stage manager. In successive years, because of economic pressure as the season was expanded to include venues owned by city councils, English Heritage, and private people, these numbers were reduced and my function enlarged to include acting roles until in 1987 the tour was performed by nine people including the company/stage manager and myself (see cast lists in the plays' programmes in Appendices A and B); this subsequently being our preferred size of company.

The actors were initially cast through selection resulting from advertisements in professional stage publications, but as the company's reputation increased, advertisement became unnecessary and casting was possible from actors applying to the company or supplied by interested acting agents. As the company qualifies annually as a management with British Actors Equity contracts entitlement, it is possible each year to employ two newcomers to the acting profession who thereby gain

their Equity Cards. Thus an apprenticeship system has established itself, wherein in return for training in their professional debut given throughout the season by senior cast members, the young actors in the cast bear the brunt of the physical chores of the company in its tour.

This provides an excellent balance and age range in the cast which must function as a cooperative team for touring the productions, and as a versatile ensemble capable of performing all the characters in the play between them.

There is an equal wage structure, the amount conditioned by the Equity/ITC contract agreements made between British Actors Equity on behalf of their members and Independent Theatre Council representing the managements of small scale theatre companies.

The aim is to present the plays almost in their entirety, lines only being cut from the scripts to trim them to reasonable performance length. For example, in Love's Labour's Lost cuts were made in V.i of the lines 27-31, 50-81, and 92-103 (from 'I do' to 'pass'); in V.ii. of lines 488-498, 704, 708-711, and 759-760. All these cuts were made to keep the pace of the action of the play flowing.

The company imitates the touring/private performance style of Shakespeare's own company, The King's Men, with respect of its presentation of his plays with such a small cast. E.K. Chambers in The Elizabethan Stage

acknowledges that precise information is not available on the exact numbers of actors in companies touring the provinces, but considers:

> that the average may be put at about 10 for the latter part of the sixteenth century...Probably 10 men, duplicating parts, could play many of the London plays without alteration. [2]

Our own experience demonstrates that this number may be lowered to seven, eight or nine with some plays, especially the early comedies (see cast lists in the plays' programmes in Appendix A and B).

Any difficulties encountered in accomplishing the quick changes of costume needed for doubling or trebling roles are solved by inserting songs into the script at that point. M.C. Bradbrook in The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy refers to the skill of the Elizabethan actors in their quick changes of costume:

> all sections of the audience enjoyed the feats of the quick-change artist...A series of plays involving a quick-change artist were put on about 1599 by the Admiral's Men. [3]

Our audiences also enjoy the actors' rapid transformations.

The company plays mostly out-of-doors using beautiful settings provided by castles, abbeys, stately homes and gardens as back-ground to the plays. In most venues the audience bring their own rugs and chairs which they place in a semicircle around the stage area (usually on the grass), marked out by the lighting cables linking our outdoor sunfloods which, propped up on bricks on the

ground, illuminate the play as darkness falls. The company uses no staging or platforms, but some venues (such as Mont Orgeuil, Jersey, in 1986 and 1987), construct a stage and auditorium. Other venues have tiered seating. Theatre Set-Up always strives to accomplish a close physical relationship in its arrangement of the playing space with the audience. This corresponds to the staging of Shakespeare's day in both private and public theatre venues described by Anne Righter in Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play:

> The construction of the playhouse, like that of the inn-yard before it, allowed the spectators to impinge upon the world of the drama from all sides, and to share a common daylight, a common weather, with the stage.[4]

We share her judgement of the advantage of this theatre convention mirrored in the nature of the plays themselves, which:

> allowed the dramatist to stress the intimacy of audience and actors while preserving inviolate the dramatic distance necessary to the life of the illusion (p.62).

However we acknowledge with our audiences at rained-on performances the disadvantage of the 'common weather'. The Theatre Set-Up out-of-doors venues are presented from June to September, and performances continue regardless of weather, costumes and stage properties being made to withstand rain and wind. From September to October performances are sited indoors: in cathedrals, (performed at the heart of the cathedral on the crossing of the nave

with the transepts); in great halls or other indoor locations in historic sites; or in theatres with auditoriums not exceeding a capacity of 700.

Theatre Set-Up is not grant-aided, covering its costs from box office receipts, sponsorship, fees paid by the managements of venues, and private donations. The company has gradually established a regular cycle of venues played each year at the same time, with a small annual variation as some venues drop out and are replaced by others. International touring began in 1993 with performances in Norway, The Netherlands and Germany and had settled into a regular pattern of established venues in Europe by 1995. (see front of programme notes for A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1995, Appendix A.3.).

The compact touring style of the company, with minimum use of stage properties, minimal cast and an ability to set up a production and pack it up afterwards in less than an hour has given it a capability of playing in places inaccessible to more cumbersome companies. In particular, island venues have become a feature of the season, (see in venue lists on the programme's front covers, Appendices A and B).

Attractive, durable costumes are important to the production. Before 1994 they were designed and made by the company's non-paid directors, including myself. After that time additional costumes, including hats and masks have been made by the professional costumiers, Andrew

Fisher and Kim Jones. Travelling on the mainland is done with the company's minibus and a private car. Travel by ferries and aeroplanes to the islands forces the company into an economy of packing. Over the years the actors have developed precise touring operation formulae which ensure maximum efficiency.

This has been matched by the development of a specific Theatre Set-Up acting technique, with conventions designed to project voice out-of-doors and to clarify subtleties of meaning (especially of archaic and obscure lines and of any abstract concepts or words) by use of gesture and broad movement, to audiences which include children. For example, in Love's Labours Lost I. 1. 1-23, the abstract concept of 'fame' (line 1.) would need to be given emphasis and concrete form by being located by a gesture made by the actor at some precise location skywards behind the audience (in rehearsals at Forty Hall we usually give location to abstract concepts by gesturing at one of the chimneys of the building behind the audience. In any of the successive venues if no such corresponding object exists, the actor just points to an imagined location at the corresponding point in the sky.) The actor would then gesture from that point to himself and his companions on 'our brazen tombs' (line 2.), and then gesture a location for the abstract concept of 'Time' (line 4.) at another fixed point in the opposite direction from that indicating 'fame', linking them

together in a gesture with both hands on 'That honour' (line 6.) and then, gesturing to his companions and himself on 'us heirs of all eternity' (line 7.) apply both concepts of 'fame' and 'Time' to themselves. The actor would emphasise the key words spoken on the gestures with vocal stress so that comprehension of this key passage at the start of the play would be made easy and the fact made clear to the audience that the King's motive for the action he is about to describe and attempt to carry out is to attract eternal fame.

In order for this sort of procedure to be automatically applied to the text with understanding, and without gesture and vocal emphasis appearing overdone, a technique of subtlety in its use has become a necessary attribute for Theatre Set-Up actors. It is thus important for the company to retain each year at least three people who have played for Theatre Set-Up before so that traditional acting techniques and conventions can be imparted by example to the newcomers in the cast. As the paid employment offered by the season (limited by the extent of the summer) lasts for only twenty one weeks, it is impossible (and not always desirable) to retain the same company of actors each year, but several of them have sufficiently established careers to guarantee their employment in the off-season and return in the summer to Theatre Set-Up.

The company is a registered charity, with a

supporting 'Friends of Theatre Set-Up' (see the plays' programme notes in Appendices A and B), and a regular following of audiences totalling about twenty two thousand a season.

Academic research was necessary to clarify my work as a director: in order to be able to explain the texts and the subtexts to the actors; to provide a coherent philosophic and artistic core for the productions; and to present before the public performances which were logical, clear and hopefully 'magical', with the arcane dimension of the plays presented affectively in the style of the production and cognitively in the plays' programme notes. (I use the terms 'affective' and 'cognitive' in the sense applied in the practice of Education where 'affective' applies to learning which infuses itself through the senses and emotions and 'cognitive' to learning consciously effected through logic.)

Specifically, my impetus to explore the arcane dimensions of the plays grew from a dissatisfaction with inadequate explanations of the implausibilities in Shakespeare's plays, and a realisation that in terms of the depth of truth needed for valid characterisation on the part of the actors and a plausible explanation of the plot for the audience, current theories seemed not to go far enough.

As literal interpretation of the plays failed to be coherent and logical, an allegorical reading seemed to be

indicated, particularly with the paradoxical early romantic comedies. In this thesis the sense in which the term 'allegory' is used is as defined in A Dictionary of Literary Terms by J.A. Cuddon:

> an allegory is a story in verse or prose with a double meaning: a primary or surface meaning; and a secondary or under-the-surface meaning. It is a story, therefore, that can be read, understood and interpreted at two levels (and in some cases at three or four levels). It is thus closely related to the fable and the parable (qq.v). The form may be literary or pictorial (or both, as in emblem books q.v.).[5]

The resulting symbiosis between the academic investigation and the work of the theatre company exemplified Northrop Frye's precept:

> The dialectic axis of criticism, then, has as one pole the total acceptance of the data of literature, and as the other the total acceptance of the potential values of those data.
>
> This is the real level of culture and of liberal education, the fertilising of life by learning, in which the systematic progress of scholarship flows into a systematic progress of tasks and understanding.[6]

Although the judgements made in this study are measured against those of literary criticism, the stance taken is that the plays are scripts written for practical performance by actors before an audience. Bertrand Evans highlights this often overlooked fact that Shakespeare's plays are scripts written in response to the needs of a particular theatre company:

> The very close involvement with actors in the imbroglio of both public and private theatres must have daily brought him face to face with a practical manifestation of the problems facing the playwright who is not just a visitant but a close working colleague of temperamental actors. Drama created

> while the eventual executants are breathing over the dramatist's shoulder has a complicated grain that differs from the polished results of the writer's solitary immunity from interference. [7]

Peter Reynolds claims that:

> Over the last decade there has been a tremendous growth in critical literature acknowledging that plays need to be studied in the context of performance. Many new insights and enhanced understanding have been developed as a consequence. [8]

This honours the original intentions of the playwright whose works are designed for practical performance. As John Marston says in his preface to The Malcontent:

> only one thing afflicts me, to think that scenes, invented merely to be spoken, should be enforcively published to be read. [9]

T.M. Parrott endorses this attitude that Shakespeare regarded his plays as scripts, not as texts. 'Shakespeare, it seems, always regarded his plays as things to be acted rather that read'. [10]

Andrew Gurr comments that the plays 'were working playscripts before they became written texts'. [11]

Alfred Harbage concurs with the observation that he did not hasten his plays into print.

> That he showed little interest in seeing his plays in print suggests absorption in his medium rather than indifference to it. Plays were not books, and books were not plays. [12]

In aiming to present annual productions of Shakespeare's plays in a way which can be understood by a wide range of people, Theatre Set-Up creates for itself the two pragmatic problems the solving of which has formed the basis of this thesis.

First, as its yearly tour includes many regular venues, a fresh play must be presented each year, and the company's repertoire extended to include not only the popular favourite plays (such as A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night and As You Like It), but those with less direct appeal (such as The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Measure For Measure and Love's Labours Lost). Yet all the plays presented must attract sufficient audiences to cover the plays' costs from box office receipts. This need to satisfy the annual expectation of the audiences in the regular venues has motivated Theatre Set-Up to give equal value to every play and not indulge in a discriminating attitude, categorising some plays as minor or inferior.

In response to this problem, the plays herein discussed in detail in Chapters Eight and Nine or referred to in additional chapters in the Theatre Set-Up productions' programme notes, were performed by the company in the order made possible by the research. The clarification of problems in one play threw light on the difficulties of another. Thus the research on Celtdom and alchemy undertaken for the 1983 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream made possible a plausible explanation of enigmatic aspects of The Merry Wives of Windsor for 1985, The Winter's Tale in 1988, and Cymbeline in 1989, while work on Renaissance Platonism in Love's Labours Lost and The Comedy of Errors (performed in 1984 and 1986 respectively) made performance of the controversial The

Two Gentlemen of Verona possible in 1987, All's Well that Ends Well in 1990, and Measure For Measure in 1991. The research on theurgy in The Two Gentlemen of Verona enlightened perception of all subsequent productions.

Our venues fortunately attract as audience many people who would never consider entering a usual theatre. This fact was monitored and recorded in my unpublished M.Ed. thesis A Process Account of Making Shakespeare Accessible Within the Community 'You Can Never Bring in a Wall', wherein I discovered from the analysis of questionnaires distributed at random to our audiences in 1979 and 1980 that a proportion of people in our audiences do not normally go to plays written by Shakespeare or attend theatres, and that they come to our performances because of the attraction of the beautiful venues. [13] This same attractiveness endeared them to the plays, and the natural backdrops of our settings endowed the performances with a degree of credibility they found suspended in a normal theatre with its artificial mise-en-scène. It is this, their cautious approach to the conventions of theatre presentation, which puts us on guard with respect to our whole style of presentation of Shakespeare's plays. In recent years our circumstances, including an increase in the number of venues we play, an increase in the length of the season, a diminishing in the length of time played in each venue and a reduced number of actors available to carry out all the tasks of the

season, have prevented further issuing and monitoring of questionnaires; but audience response to our performances has confirmed to us the likelihood that a proportion of our audiences will contain people as unwilling to 'eke out our imperfections' with their thoughts as Northrop Frye reports of Samuel Pepys:

> When Pepys saw A Midsummer Night's Dream and pronounced it the most insipid and ridiculous play that ever was wrote, he was not failing in critical judgement; he was saying what any honest man would have to say about it if he were unable to accept its convention. [14]

It is a risk that we cannot take that they will practise the tolerance expected of readers and students of the plays as text who accept such literary conventions as that which Northrop Frye claims, applies to Romance:

> ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: all improbabilities violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. [15]

This poses a two-fold challenge to Theatre Set-Up. The play must be presented by the director to the audience in a form which makes sense of its departure from real-life logic and the performances of the actors must be completely believable.

This latter is only possible to professional actors (who are trained to be sincere in their intentions in acting their roles and to question anything they cannot understand or believe in) if the logic of their characterisation and of plot is clear to them. As Constantin Stanislavski claims, they must 'play truly' and

this means 'to be right, logical, coherent, to think, strive, feel and act in unison with your role'. [16] It will not do to expect the actors to compensate for the lack of logic with efforts of their imaginations. Stanislavski, in role as a director/teacher advises a student actor who complains of the failure of his imagination, 'your plot was not logical...It was only reasonable that your imagination should balk at being asked to work from a doubtful premise to a stupid conclusion'. [17] This axiom of Stanislavski represents not only the basis of contemporary acting training, but sound commonsense to an actor, especially one who must be sincere at all times and can never afford the luxury of indulging in pure theatricality or acting for effect.

As director it is my task to explain the play to the actors in such a way that it seems entirely logical and they are thus enabled to 'act truly'.

An example of a typical textual difficulty which a director must enlighten for an actress is in A Midsummer Night's Dream, II. 1. 203, when Helena begs of Demetrius:

> And even for that do I love you the more.
> I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
> The more you beat me, I will fawn on you.
> Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
> Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
> Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
> What worser place can I beg in your love -
> And yet a place of high respect with me -
> Than to be used as you use your dog? [18]

To a modern actress this is illogical and an anathema, even explained in the social context of Shakespeare's day

to such an extent that sincere interpretation of the part may be difficult to motivate. Only a non-literal interpretation will make it possible for an actress to perform this with conviction so that Helena does not seem to be a fool (see below p.25).

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona V. 4. 77-83, Valentine, deeply touched at his friend's repentance for having threatened to rape Silvia, his betrothed, speaks the lines which seem to make his character so unsympathetic that the play is rarely performed:

> Then I am paid
> And once again I do receive thee honest.
> Who by repentance is not satisfied
> Is nor of heaven nor earth, for these are pleased;
> By penitence th'Eternal's wrath's appeased.
> And, that my love may appear plain and free,
> All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.

It is not sufficient for an actor (or a modern audience) to pass off this seemingly callous gift of Silvia to a man who has just offered her violence, as a convention of romantic comedy. I consider that the failure of the play at this point when interpreted in terms of psychological realism calls for a non-literal interpretation as remedy, (see the programme notes to the Theatre Set-Up 1987 production, Appendix B.4.).

Derek Traversi shares this view that Shakespeare's comedies are contrived and asserts that the protagonists are not 'recognisable human beings'. [19] C.L. Barber considers the characterisation often to be bland:

> so much of the action...is random when looked at as intrigue, so many of the persons are neutral when

> regarded as character, so much of the wit is inapplicable when asserted as satire, that critics have fallen back on mere exclamations about poetry and mood.[20]

Leo Salingar believes in a rationale behind Shakespeare's artificial conventions, which, he feels, do not exactly place, 'real people in real situations. Shakespeare's comic and romantic improbabilities do imply a belief, a general attitude towards the world'. The solution Salingar poses is that characters are helpless before the strictures of society and whims of Fortune.[21]

G. Wilson Knight in The Wheel of Fire recommends that if we look at any play by Shakespeare as a whole the 'faults' begin to disappear. He specifies a spiritual reading of the plays, 'in Shakespeare a purely spiritual atmosphere interpenetrates the action, there is a fusing rather than a contrast.'[22]

Northrop Frye considers that the implausibilities of character are caused by the dictates of the mythically motivated plot which we must simply accept as a theatrical convention; 'Shakespeare tells a story that stylises his characters and may force them to do quite unreasonable things. This is more obvious in his comedies than in his tragedies.' He suggests an acceptance swayed by the rhetoric of the dialogue:

> In every comedy there is some explicitly antirealistic feature introduced: this feature forms a convention that we have to accept, and if the rhetoric fails to persuade us the convention is still there to fall back on.[23]

Unfortunately this will not satisfy actors. A professional cast expect the director to 'do his homework' and nowadays this does not consist of a set of instructions dictating exactly how the play is to be performed, but an understanding of the script and how this may enlighten their characterisation and interaction with other characters in the play.

I felt that the inadequacy of my realisation of this task was indicated in 1979, 1980 and 1981 (when we performed Twelfth Night, As You like It, and Much Ado About Nothing) by the amount of time the cast seemed to need to discuss inconsistencies in the text and subtext. In 1982 my understanding of The Tempest's allegorical Celtic meaning (see Appendix A.1.) clarified characterisation and difficulties of plot for the actors but they suffered identity confusion in the textual references to Milan, (see programme notes to The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Appendix B.4.).

That, combined with press and audience challenging of my The Tempest programme notes, convinced me of the need to explore the possible allegorical interpretations of the scripts which might explain textual ambiguities and implausibilities.

This approach also seemed valid applied to the problem of rationalising the play for audiences, in especial consideration of the fact that Shakespeare himself, according to Alfred Harbage, must have

encountered similar problems from 'the 'vulgar and adult'rate brain' in the public theatres just before Jonson withdrew from them'. That Shakespeare achieved general accessibility for his plays is evidenced by his financial success from their box office receipts (always the measure of audience appeal). Harbage claims for him:

> He wrote for a theatre... that was far from classless; yet he faced in the direction of what was in his day (and is in ours) the future, and in his conception of the community there is a breadth of sympathy unequaled among the writers for the urban clique. [24]

He considers that it was the response to this fusion of society in Shakespeare's audiences which encouraged the universal qualities of his work. Because of this social diversity in the audiences he advises caution in generalising about Elizabethan audiences and their effect on the literature of the time and 'the Elizabethan attitude toward this thing or that without considering the chance that there may have been more 'Elizabethan attitudes than one' (p.291).

Parrott also considers that Shakespeare's audience 'represented a cross section of London life'. 25

Bradbrook makes similar reference to the 'old homogeneity' of Shakespeare's audiences which resulted in the happy fusion of learned and folk traditions within the same play and theatre space (p.6).

Andrew Gurr notes that the same entertainments were presented in the days of the Elizabethan public theatres

to monarch, nobility, citizenry and artisans alike. He comments that the choice of plays or the baiting of bulls or bears, advertised to the public on handbills posted around the city of London, were identical to that presented to the Queen for court entertainments. He further observes that the social mobility of the time was reflected in the subject matter of certain plays such as Dekker's Shoemaker's Holiday which celebrates the success of a protagonist in crossing social barriers and Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor, whose inter-marrying and inter-acting protagonists are a mix of the court and the local townsfolk (pp.11,15).

Anne Jennalie Cook attributes the social accessibility of the Elizabethan Public theatres to their commercial nature:

> As frankly commercial enterprises, the theatres opened their doors to anyone with the price of admission...behind the satiric hyperbole of The Gull's Hornbook lay an indisputable fact: the privileged shared the playhouses with plebians...Without question, commoners came to the plays. Their presence was well documented in sermons, government records, plays, and other literature of the period.[26]

Northrop Frye extends this commercial aspect of Elizabethan theatre to Shakespeare's motivation in writing the plays:

> It is consistent with Shakespeare's perfect objectivity that he should show no signs of wanting to improve his audience's tastes, or to address the more instructed members of it with a particular intimacy. His chief motive in writing, apparently, was to make money, which is the best motive for writing yet discovered, as it creates the right blend

of detachment and concern (p.38).

As a theatre manager I concur with his opinion that commercial survival must be a dominating factor in determining the content of the shows presented, but I disagree with his assessment of the way in which this operates. It is my experience, reinforced by the opinions of the managements of Theatre Set-Up's venues who ask us to return to play for them each year only if they cover their costs because their patrons appreciate the style of what we are presenting, that audiences appreciate an attempt on my part to present them with material which is slightly beyond their experience, in a manner which makes it possible for them to understand it. It is precisely my need to do this which has created the impetus to undertake this academic study.

If one accepts the premise that the portrayal of such characters as Stephano and Trinculo in The Tempest might indicate some similarities between the unscholarly in Shakespeare's day and our own, it can also be assumed with regard to textual implausibilities that in order to be able to accept and appreciate the plays, those of Shakespeare's day must have been equipped with understanding, (other than of contemporary language and references) lacking now.

Paradoxically, in Theatre Set-Up's experience of audiences, probably the greatest dissatisfaction with implausibilities and seeming artificiality of action and

characterisation comes from the scholarly who can accept the idea that these may be attributed to stage and literary conventions but still feel a sense of frustration with their hollow effect. They do not experience the artistic fulfillment that the more straight forward and literal tragedies bring.

Northrop Frye considers this attitude unreasonable, citing an extract from George Peele's Old Wives Tale as authority for his opinion that not only should appreciation of theatre be entirely affective and not subject to the demands of logic, but that it is probably how it was in Shakespeare's day, the social and cognitive conditions being quite irrelevant to the play. An audience, he considers, either likes the play or not. In support of this argument, dominant in his interpretation of Shakespeare, he makes a plausible comparison between the response of an audience to the musical form of a symphony and their response to the imagery of poetic drama (pp.12-13,85).

John Russell Brown hoped for audiences of Shakespeare's comedies that they could lose themselves in productions which they took at face-value :

> Shakespeare wrote his comedies with prodigal invention, creating 'worlds in which members of an audience may 'lose' themselves and view each episode for what the actors' performances and their own imaginations can make of it. [27]

However, as a serious theatre company, Theatre Set-Up must ensure that our interpretation satisfies all members

of our audience. Our estimation of our success in this way will be that rapport described by M.C. Bradbrook, 'that response of the audience which kindles and transforms the actors' (p.11). We cannot risk overlooking any interpretation of the plays which will give greater satisfaction to our audiences and this involves tackling the non-literal aspects of them.

Nowadays, the literal meanings of the play, the aspects of plot and characterisation which present valid interpretation of a recognisable real world, present no problem. These a director considers in marshalling the evidence justifying his selected interpretation to the actors and audience. In order to redress the balance between modern actors and audiences and those for whom Shakespeare originally wrote his plays, the missing secrets which I consider to be obviously encoded in the scripts must be revealed so that contemporary understanding and appreciation can do them justice.

In order to clarify the implausibilities of plot and characterisation in Shakespeare's plays, specifically in five of his early comedies, which impede their ready acceptance by cast and audience, I seek to support the view expressed by John Vyvyan in Shakespeare and The Rose of Love that Shakespeare intended to disseminate a particular philosophy throughout his plays:

> To use the stage for the dissemination of a highly individual, indeed a unique philosophy - was then, and never ceased to be, one of his intentions. [28]

In Chapters Eight and Nine I seek to demonstrate this intention revealed by the clear internal evidence which I consider points to a carefully constructed plan, using codes and symbols recognisable to members of Shakespeare's own audiences and to those in our times who still follow the ancient spiritual traditions. These I discuss in Chapters Four to Seven which deals with the nature of the arcana and their cultural symbols.

A similar view is held by John Russell Brown who speaks of the importance of central 'implicit judgements' to the form and purpose of Shakespeare's comedies. He considers that the identification of these themes would not only reveal the basic form of the plays and their chronology (see above p.13), but would give an explanation of the implausibilities and incongruities:

> Our analysis must also help to explain the incongruous elements; it must show why the conclusions are so often lacking in fully developed characterisation and why life-like characters, like Bottom and Shylock, are given subordinate positions in plays which are mainly in another, less life-like idiom. It must also help us to understand the sequence in which Shakespeare wrote the early comedies. If the recognition of certain ideas or themes can clarify these matters, then it may be assumed that they were at least a part of Shakespeare's concern while writing these plays. The recognition will then help us to see more clearly the world of the early and mature comedies, and to share more fully in the life-enhancement which this vision brings.[29]

He seeks to carry out this policy by discussing varieties of comic structures and then relating them to the early comedies through associated themes or ideas which he feels

reveal the implicit judgements which inform the core of the plays. The clues he claims to use in his search for these implied meanings are similar to those I employ in Chapters Eight and Nine in examining the internal evidence for arcane significance (see above p.1). These are: the manner in which the plays were ordered (see above p.13), and Shakespeare's choice of situations, actions and language. He also thinks it crucial to take into account meanings of other works by Shakespeare, especially those contemporary with the plays under consideration (p.25). I do this specifically in Chapter Nine when comparing A Midsummer Night's Dream with Romeo and Juliet (see below p.76), and generally through the thesis.

I do not maintain that Shakespeare slavishly adhered to the dogma of the underlying secret spiritual meanings in the plays but often challenged and tested them through the course of the stage action. In taking this attitude I agree with John Vyvyan who considers that Shakespeare discriminates in his acceptance of received material and selects from it a kernel of ultimate truth:

> Shakespeare never submitted to any influence with docility. There is no book, no dogma, no tradition - nothing that he took on trust. If it were possible to follow the advice of St Paul and 'test all things' he did so; and he held fast to what, in his own judgement, he found to be good (p.59).

I do not support Wilson Knight's view that Shakespeare's intentions were not specific and that the resulting effect in the plays is unrelated to the original

purpose:

> The intentions...are but clouded forms, which, if he attempt to crystallize them in consciousness, may prefigure a quite different reality from that which eventually emerges in his work (p.6).

It was my aim as a director to present the plays in performance in such a way that the underlying meanings and central philosophies gave thrust and clarity to the 'crytallised' dramas. This effort is recorded in Chapters Eight and Nine and the importance to the performance documented.

In presenting my hypothesis that Shakespeare's plays, with particular reference to two early comedies, reveal a specific intention to encode arcana, I make a number of suppositions. Chapters One to Three name and examine these in relation to literary criticism, cite external evidence in support of the propositions of the thesis and present the two early comedies in the context of the literary issues of the chapter.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERARY CRITICISM

These first three chapters discuss a range of critical opinion on: the nature of comedy, the validity of allegorical interpretation of Shakespeare's plays and the possibility of their polysemous and anagogical content. (The OED definitions of 'polysemous'and 'anagogical' are respectively, 'having many meanings' and 'of words and their sense: mystical, spiritual, having a secondary sense, allegorical.')

They present the propositions of this thesis within the context of the mainstream of literary criticism, demonstrating opposing and supporting views. I place the two plays which comprise the main subject of this study in a general perspective within the content of these chapters, reserving detailed literary comment upon them for treatment in Chapters Eight and Nine.

I visualise these first three chapters allegorically as a stepladder consisting of a range of conflicting opinions, yet leading the reader from literal interpretations of the comedies to views which admit of their potential secret meanings.

Chapter One begins with a review of conflicting opinions on:

The definition of comedy

The structure and nature of Shakespearean comedy

The function of Shakespearean comedy

Then in this and the following chapters at each succeeding step I examine the basic suppositions

upon which this thesis is based in terms of literary criticism. The suppositions discussed in Chapter One are:

Comedy may have a serious intention and be treated as seriously as tragedy.

Shakespearean comedy is idealistic and mythical.

Chapters Two and Three continue with the more controversial suppositions, ie:

Shakespeare's plays are allegorical.

Shakespeare's plays are polysemous.

There are arcana in Shakespeare's plays significant to their interpretation.

I test the application of these suppositions to the two early comedies which comprise the main subject of this thesis in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Reference is made throughout to the sources of influences on drama in general and Shakespearean comedy in particular in classic, Renaissance and English literature and theatre traditions.

DEFINITION OF COMEDY

The OED gives three non-figurative definitions of comedy: plays or stories of varied natures with happy endings; drama presented in a 'humorous or familiar style' which portrays amusing characters and incidents; and burlesques:

> 1. A stage-play of a light and amusing character, with a happy conclusion to its plot. Such are the

comedies of the ancient Greek and Latin writers, and of the modern stage. But in the Middle Ages the term was applied to other than dramatic compositions, the 'happy ending' being the essential part of the notion. In the English use of the term the following stages may be distinguished:

a. Its medieval use for a narrative poem with an agreeable ending. [Probably taken from Italian; cf. the Divine Comedy, the great tri-partite poem of Dante, called by its author La Commedia, because 'in the conclusion, it is prosperous, pleasant, and desirable', and in its style 'lax and unpretending', being written in the vulgar tongue, in which women and children speak']...
1430 - Chron.Troy II. xi, A comedy hath in his gynnynge, A pryme face a maner complaynynge, And afterwarde endeth in gladnesse

b. Applied to mystery-plays or interludes with a prosperous ending...
1588 SHAKS. L.L.L V. ii 462 Heere was a consent, Knowing aforehand of our merriment, To dash it like a Christmas Comedie.

c. Applied to the ancient comedies, as they became known after the Renaissance...
1588 M.KYFFIN Andria, the first Comoedie of Terence in English

d. The modern use, arising out of b. and c. ...
1553 UDALL Royster D. Prol.22 Our Comedie or Enterlude which we intend to play Is named Royster Doyster in deede. 1623 (title) Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories & Tragedies.

2. That branch of the drama which adopts a humorous or familiar style, and depicts laughable characters and incidents (Sometimes personified). Old, Middle, and New Comedy: the three stages of Attic comedy; the first two were largely farcical or burlesque in character, and indulged freely in political and social caricature; the last corresponded to modern high comedy...
1581 SIDNEY Apol. Poetrie (Arb.) $$ The Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life. 1589 PUTTENHAM Eng. Poesie I. xiv (Arb.) 47 This bitter poeme called the old Comedy being disused and taken away, the new Comedy came in place, more ciuill and pleasant a great deale. 1598 B. JONSON Ev. Man in Hum. Prol., Persons, such as comedy would choose, When she would shew an image of the times, And sport with human follies, not with crimes.

> 3. A humorous or burlesque composition. Obs. 1607 TOPSELL Serpents (1652) 718 Homer in his Comedy of the fight betwixt Frogs and Mice.

I consider that the first of these three offered definitions, namely a play whose ending is happy, is most appropriately applied to the two comedies treated in this thesis. The nature of the events leading to the culmination of the happy ending is varied in both plays, but contains sufficient dramatic material which would have led the protagonists into tragedy had it not been for the happy ending, and the characters are all developed with such psychological realism as to remove the plays from inclusion in categories two and three, namely farce or burlesque where serious characterisation is sublimated to the comic distortions of the plot. The Comedy of Errors begins with the tragedy of Egeon facing execution for illegal trespass in a country where he is seeking to find the members of his family divided many years previously by a shipwreck. The sense of this tragedy is almost lost as the comic events of the play resolve themselves into the happy ending of the re-united family and official pardon of Egeon. A Midsummer Night's Dream begins with the resolved conflict of one couple, Duke Theseus and his now-betrothed, Hippolyta, with the separation between another, Helena and Demetrius, and the very unhappy plight of Hermia whose father, supported by the law of the land, insists that she may not marry the man she loves, Lysander, but must either marry the man of his choice,

CHAPTER ONE: LITERARY CRITICISM

Demetrius, beome a nun, or be executed. The action of the play transforms the situations of the unhappy couples into that of happy marriage on the day of the Duke's wedding so that the happy ending of the play takes on the nature of an epithalamium. [1]

THE STRUCTURE AND NATURE OF SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY

Many opinions on the structure, nature and function of comedy with particular reference to Shakespeare will obviously be cited in this chapter in the sections dealing with the presuppositions of my hypothesis. This section examines opinions on these topics which exclude the main propositions of this thesis but relate to associated characteristics of drama which are of general importance and particular significance to practical performances of Shakespeare's plays. It prepares the ground for the later assumption that comedy could be used as a vehicle for the transmission of spiritual arcana.

Much less has been written on Elizabethan comedy than on tragedy. Muriel Bradbrook considers that this comparative critical neglect, in spite of the fact that there were more comedies written than tragedies, may be due to the structural sophistication of comedy and its conventions:

> Comedy has received comparatively little attention from critics, perhaps because its ingredients are more varied and its lines of development less obvious

> than those of the well-marked forms of tragedy and history. Yet comedies outnumber tragedies on the Elizabethan stage by nearly three to one (p.3).

This various nature of Shakespeare's comedies and the ambivalence of their structure is reflected in the range of opinions of the following selection of literary critics.

T. M. Parrott thinks that Shakespeare shares with his contemporary playwrights the use of classical influences to impose form and order on the dramas, especially the comedies. He also recognises a fusion of the classic element with the native realistic tradition but adds a third component of an impulse to create infinite beauty in verse:

> There are three dominant characteristics of Elizabethan drama, especially of Elizabethan comedy: a native, often naive, realism; a striving toward the classical idea of form and order; and a recurrent urge to express in verse something of that beauty which lies beyond the reach of all the pens that ever poets held. All three find expression in Shakespearean comedy; at times one, at times another predominates; in his best work they blend in a harmony that lifts them high above the rank and file of Elizabethan plays and makes them a possession for all time (p.Preface ix).

Nevill Coghill gives priority to classic sources in considering the importance of the structure of the comedies. He claims that Shakespeare was following a tradition that evolved during the middle ages derived from the fourth century grammarians, Evanthius, Diomedes and Donatus. The four parts: a Prologue, a Protasis, an Epitasis and a Catastrophe that Evanthius consistently

applied to his works Coghill identifies in Shakespeare's method. In this system he explains that the Prologue provides the preface of the story, the Protasis:

> the first act and the beginning of the drama, the Epitasis is the growth and progress of the confusions and contains the knot of the whole misunderstanding and the Discovery (agnorisis) is the turning round of things to happy issues, made clear to all by a full knowledge of the actions. [2]

Coghill makes it clear, however, that Shakespeare did not follow the classic models slavishly. He exemplifies this with reference to The Comedy of Errors whose source was the Menaechmi of Plautus, and he demonstrates that the different nature of the Shakespearean play, in particular the treatment of the catastrophe, indicates medieval influence:

> Anyone caring for poetical forms who compares The Comedy of Errors (1592-3) with the Menaechmi will find significant differences in the shapes of the two plays. It is not simply a matter of the doubling of the pairs of twins by the exuberant Elizabethan. It is a matter of a change of venue, of quality, and of catastrophe. He medievalized the story; he invented a beginning and an end for it, starting in trouble and ending in joy (p.9.)

He correlates this with the medieval concept of the correct form of comedy (see above p. 30), to justify his belief in Shakespeare's modification of the classic structures:

> These modifications in Plautine structure can hardly have come about by accident or whim. And if by whim, how is it that the new shape should correspond so exactly with the medieval view of what is proper to comic form? (p.9)

Bertrand Evans has a high regard for the importance

in any assessment of his comedies of another kind of technique used by Shakespeare. He examines the significance of the tensions caused by dramatic irony and considers that Shakespeare's use of awareness and control in respect of differing levels of perception between audience and characters is of such importance that he approaches the comedies through them. He claims that the comedies and romances depend for their effect upon this dramatic irony which he quantifies in great detail:

> Shakespeare's devotion to a dramatic method... gives the audience an advantage in awareness, and thus opens exploitable gaps between audience and participants and between participant and participant... the seventeen comedies and romances include 297 scenes, in 170 of which an arrangement of discrepant awareness is the indispensable condition of dramatic effect, that is to say, we hold significant advantage over participants during those scenes. Further,the comedies include 277 named persons (and unnamed ones whose rules have some importance) of whom 151 stand occasionally, frequently, or steadily in a condition of exploitable ignorance; that is to say, we hold significant advantage at some time over these persons... more than half the persons in the comedies and romances are shown as speaking and acting 'not knowing what they do' in about two-thirds of the scenes in which they appear (p.vii).

Dover Wilson regards the structure of the comedies as reflecting or being dictated by their themes. He isolates five main thematic ingredients that make up what he calls the 'happy comedies'. These are: 1. 'A continental or Mediterranean backgound in all except The Merry Wives of Windsor'. 2. 'Clownage and Foolery...the fools thus skilfully keep sense at bay and the clowns mishandle the language through ignorance'. 3.'Quibbling by the

gentry...their [the fools] betters endlessly toss the language to and fro'. 4. 'Merchants and mercantile life (after Plautus)'. 5. 'Love and friendship among persons of high rank (after Montemayor)... 'Who ever loved that loved not at first sight' and its corollary'. [3] I consider that these themes apply to the two early comedies examined in this thesis and indeed provide a basic thematic frame for their plots. I discuss this in fuller detail in the relevant chapters.

In his system of categorising these early comedies John Russell Brown judges the classical influence to be mixed with the conventions of narrative comedy in what he calls 'Shakespeare's continual experiments with comic structure'. He seeks 'to define the kind of vision or judgement on life which the comedies present' by examining their structure. He divides the early comedies into intrigue and narrative styles, claiming the former as a purer form, based on classical or neo-classical models. The intrigue is based on 'some obstacle to happiness or separation of lovers or of parents and children'. Examples of this he cites to be The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew and The Merry Wives of Windsor. The narrative comedy he considers to be 'more pervasive, of mixed origin, more mixed form' and is typical of Love's Labour's Lost, The Two Gentlemen of Verona and A Midsummer Night's Dream. [4]

He points out that this fusion of classical and

narrative styles demonstrates Shakespeare's flexible attitude to form and that he was 'always experimenting, modifying what he borrowed in accordance with his own purposes'.

Leo Salingar attributes further significance to this function of narrative and romance traditions with classical sources in the form of Shakespeare's comedies. He claims that Shakespeare was modifying the classic style of new comedy with influences relevant to the society in which he lived in order to produce a new kind of comedy whose contemporary function was as pertinent as that of the Old Comedy of Aristophanes to ancient Athens:

> As an English playwright of the Renaissance, he was using the forms of New Comedy to re-shape medieval romance. But in this he was doing more than naturalising New Comedy. He was creating comedies that seem aware of their place in the life of a nation, as perhaps no other comedies had been since the time of Aristophanes (p.325).

K. Tetzeli Von Rosador judges the classical influence upon the structure of Shakespeare's early comedies to be responsible for their tragic elements. He attributes the gravity of the stories within whose frame the comic elements take place to the Terentian models of the introduction of turbae (the Latin plural of 'tumult, disturbance') at the beginning of the play and their subsequent development as the play unfolds:

> Both the thematic dimension and the forward movement of plot can be illuminated through the Renaissance theorists' use of the concept of turbae, which denotes the perturbation, error, peril, anguish, in brief the complication and potential tragedy of comedy. Such turbae, most Terentian exegists hold,

> should be introduced as early as the protasis, the beginning of the play, to be developed during the epitasis.[5]

Another critic who considers classical influence on Shakespeare's comedies to be of great importance is Ruth Nevo who claims classic models for the structure of Shakespeare's 'comic transformations' in Roman New Comedy.[6] I refer to her more fully in the chapter on A Midsummer Night's Dream (see Chapter 9).

In recent years considerable attention has been given to notions of thematic structure as well as to those of plot and tension modelled upon ancient models. Attempts have been made to classify Shakespeare's plays according to their relationship to either the 'structuralist' theory (in which a tight substructure of meaning dominates the play in some way) or the 'deconstruction' process, (in which any substructures are subverted from within). Christopher Norris, in Deconstruction and Practice, defines the structuralist theory as propounded by Jonathan Culler in Structuralist Poetics as a defined framework of reference existing within a text to aid interpretation free of personal bias:

> The proper task of theory, in his view, is to provide a legitimate framework or system for insights which a 'competent' reader should be able to arrive at and check against his sense of relevance and fitness.[7]

He explains that the process of deconstruction opposes any belief in the existence of such frameworks:

> Deconstruction is avowedly 'post-structuralist' in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any

sense given or objectively 'there' in the text (p.3). Norris describes the efforts of Jacques Derrida, the originator of deconstruction, to rid criticism of what he considers to be artificial limitations:

> Some of Jacques Derrida's most powerful essays are devoted to the task of dismantling a concept of 'structure' that serves to immobilize the play of meaning in a text and reduce it to a manageable compass (p.2).

Gary Waller, in his introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies, comments that the most interesting articles in the Norris edition criticise 'the formalistic residue of deconstruction' and recommend that analysis of Shakespeare's plays should more correctly take into account contemporary historical influences. 8

James K. Kavanagh, observes that Shakespeare constructs tight systems in his dramas which provide the governing principles motivating the stage action and then deconstructs them. [9] He cites A Midsummer Night's Dream as a prime example of this (pp. 152-156). The rigid construct determining the initial events of the play is the harsh patriarchal law of Athens which condemns Hermia to death, or to entry into a nunnery unless she marries the man of her father's choice. The Duke Theseus, enforcing this edict, has already subjugated by force his bride Hippolyta and they present an example of harmonious acceptance of this patriarchal dominance. Hermia, refusing to accept it, initiates the deconstructive mode of the play by taking the action of the play into the

woods where Titania also has defied this principle of rightful male dominance and caused corresponding disorder in nature itself. Puck subverts the strictures laid upon Hermia by use of a magic potion which changes her unwanted lover's affections, but enforces the principle of male dominance on Titania by use of the same drug which causes her to fall in love with Bottom, an artisan upon whom Puck has fixed an ass-head, thus demonstrating the madness of not obeying her rightful lord. This Shakespearean characteristic of interacting constructive and deconstructive principles is further re-enforced in the manipulation of the scenes involving the artisans who are preparing a play with which to honour the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. The chosen play is Pyramus and Thisbe, a piece whose themes echo the very ones of A Midsummer Night's Dream itself, (including, I suggest, that of alchemy, see below Chapter Nine), and the performance is so ludicrous that it parodies or deconstructs the stage-action within which it is enclosed.

This same characteristic of self-parody can be observed in other Shakespearean plays such as in The Two Gentlemen of Verona when Launce and Speed parody or deconstruct the artificial and restricting Petrarchan convention of love which dominates their masters' courtship in their more worldly descriptions of Launce's own love (III.i.261-372) and in Henry V (III.ii.1) when Bardolph mimics Henry's rousing speech which has inflated

the audience's sense of the play's patriotic grandeur (III.i.1-34). Robert Weimann in Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre calls this self-parody 'enchantment and disenchantment', a characteristic which Malcolm Evans claims to be a feature of deconstruction.[10]

Also contributing to Alternative Shakespeares, Evans posits that in Love's Labour's Lost 'a mirror is held up to deconstruction' by Holofernes who despises the principle of imitation in contrast to 'the jerks of invention' as exemplified by the works of Ovid (IV.ii.118-22)(p. 67). Evans demonstrates that even his claim that imitation is only fit for animals is deconstructed by the behaviour of Launce's dog, Crab in The Two Gentlemen of Verona who proves unable to sustain imitation of human behaviour in his making water 'against a gentlewoman's farthingale' (IV.ii.53) and by Launce himself exchanging roles with the dog in taking the blame for his behaviour (pp. 67-8). Even Proteus can become like a dog, a spaniel, for love of Silvia (IV.ii.14). This subversion in one play of the principle against imitation propounded in another is called by Evans 'a gift to deconstruction' (p. 68). Evans further claims that this deconstructive principle underlines all the comedies (pp. 73-4). He further maintains that they:

> confront interpretation with surfaces that are concerned not so much with yielding textual depths as with reflecting other surfaces or deconstructing the surface-depth opposition (p. 82).

In the light of this assumption he re-assesses the work of particular literary critics. Of Charlton, Tillyard and Dover-Wilson, whom he calls the 'Shakespearean heavy-weights' he observes that they re-dressed the balance that had been lacking in serious interpretation of the comedies. However, it is the views of Northrop Frye, who emphasises the importance of constructs in the comedies, and C.L. Barber, who identifies constructs in them associated with a subversion associated with the release of holiday festivity, that he finds particularly interesting (pp. 76-84). His conclusion is that the comedies, displaying as they do an examination of their own intrinsic structures, display the characteristics of deconstruction:

> Perhaps the comedies themselves, viewed as self-conscious discourses on a textual 'materialism', lack a certain theoretical rigour (p. 84).

Any attempts to classify them according to particular theories he dubs as 'cooking the books' and pours scorn on critics such as Frye who do so in what he terms a 'reductive' process (pp. 84-85). This scorn, however, he also applies to the over-rigid application of the term 'deconstruction' to the comedies and suggests that an acceptance of them as pieces composed primarily for oral performance and not for theoretical analysis by literary critics might indicate the use of less fixed terms:

> The scene is occupied, perhaps, not by 'deconstruction' but deconstructions, with one

> version currently threatening to upstage the others (p.94).

My own opinion which I seek to justify in subsequent pages, is that Shakespeare applied a healthy cynicism to systems which he never accepted at face value, but that he made use of all philosophies and other structures as familiar frameworks around which he built additional secret structures of allegory.

THE FUNCTION OF COMEDY

Shakespeare's contemporary, Philip Sidney, claims one of the functions of comedy to be instructively satiric. He advocates that the play-wright of comedy should strongly hold our errors up to scorn so that we should be cured of repeating them:

> The Comic, whom naughty play-makers and stage-keepers have justly made odious. To the argument of abuse I will answer after. Only thus much now is to be said, that the Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one. [11]

This should evidently be a serious business and he criticises the association of comedy with the coarseness of laughter. Comedy should only delight and teach:

> But I speak to this purpose, that all the end of the comical part be not upon such scornful matters as stirreth laughter only, but, mixed with it that delightful teaching which is the end of Poesy (pp.136-137).

CHAPTER ONE: LITERARY CRITICISM

In our own time John Palmer does not consider that Shakespeare's comedies satisfy Sidney's criteria for satire, his approach to humanity being essentially sympathetic:

> Sympathy then, and not satire, is the inspiration of Shakespeare's comedy. 12

Nevill Coghill agrees with this judgement of Shakespeare's sympathetic treatment of the subjects of his comedies, supporting his opinion by contrasting Shakespeare's approach with the 'harsh ethic' of his contemporary playwright, Ben Jonson, an acknowledged satirist. He claims that even the most unsympathetic of Shakespeare's characters have redeeming features:

> Hardly one... is lacking in, or incapable of, a generous impulse. The very butts can think nobly of the soul and have everything handsome about them (p.1).

Northrop Frye attributes Ben Jonson's different style of satirical comedy to his use of models in the so-called New Comedy of classic theatre, based in the world of everyday reality:

> The action of New Comedy tends to become probable rather than fantastic, and it moves towards realism and away from myth and romance...The conventions of New Comedy are the conventions of Jonson and Moliere.[13]

I add my own comment that the dramatic distortion necessary to achieve effective satire destroys the plausible characterisation which a practising theatre person like Shakespeare would know is essential to motivate actors in truthful portrayal of the dramatis

personae (see above p.15). It is my experience as a theatre director that actors also find it difficult to portray any character with whom they cannot identify and for whom they can have no sympathy at all. I therefore agree with those critics who support the view that Shakespeare's comedies do not fulfil the function of satire as stipulated by Sidney and exemplified by Ben Jonson. It is really a choice of theatrical styles that any theatre practitioner must make, comparable to that made today between presenting legitimate theatre and variety.

However it is possible that the theatre of Shakespeare's time was hybrid in its form, lacking the kinds of distinctions that we observe nowadays. In his survey of Elizabethan theatre, Michael Hattaway observes that inherited theatrical customs, such as the performance of often inappropriate interludes and jigs during and at the conclusions of plays, must have created an adulterated form of theatre. [14] He quotes John Lyly's complaint that the mixed nature of theatrical presentations is imposed upon dramatists by the nature of their world:

> In his prologue for Midas (1589), admittedly a Paul's play, Lyly seems therefore to speak for all dramatists 'If we present a mingle-mangle, our fault is to be excused, because the whole world is become a hodge-podge' (p.69).

Whether the function of the comedy is to satirise or amuse, the laughter it provokes often does not attract respect. Henry Bergson believes laughter to be devoid of

emotion. He remarks upon 'the absence of feeling which usually accompanies laughter', considering it to be an intellectual reflex:

> In a society composed of pure intelligences there would probably be no more tears, though perhaps there would still be laughter; whereas highly emotional souls, in tune and unison with life, in whom every event would be sentimentally prolonged and re-echoed, would neither know nor understand laughter. [15]

The effect of laughter, however, he thinks must provoke emotion and be cruel if it is to fulfil what he judges to be its prime function of satire:

> Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness (p.187).

Edward Hubler acknowledges the continuing tradition of the low status accorded to drama which stimulates laughter:

> Since laughter cannot be separated from the impulsive and is by nature irreverent, comedy is not only isolated, it is downgraded. Even the jester knows that his place is at the end of the procession, and the upright in heart naturally feel, and take their feeling for granted, that there is something potentially base about laughter. [16]

However he disagrees with this concept of the baseness of dramatic humour and with 'Bergson's idea of the Comic' and maintains that the joy which the laughter of comedy signals represents the true reality of life and indicates an identity separate from any intention to satirise, moralise or instruct:

> The happiness of things in bloom is a very real matter, and it is central to much of comedy. It has

> nothing to do with morality, or society, or intellectualisation of any sort, and it has no impulse whatever to correction (p.59).

He blames our Hebraic-Christian tradition for the prevailing belief in an identification of reality with pain and grief rather than with joy, and claims that Shakespeare demonstrates an opposing view in his drama whose even tragic moments radiate a joy of fulfilled identity (p.59).

Dover Wilson also identifies our disparaging attitude to dramatic humour and traces our received opinion of the function of comedy to a critical legacy from ancient Greece, in particular the views of Plato and Aristotle, who considered comedy to be mere entertainment (see above p.30). He speculates on the possibility that Aristotle may have attributed to comedy the catharsis he claims for tragedy. If this document had survived, the real function of the benefits of comedy may have been more generally appreciated. The implications of this view are considerable. The catharsis Aristotle accorded to tragedy presupposes that an audience should so completely identify with the agon and protagonists of a drama that they should experience a simulation of the play themselves and through this empathy be purged of grief or baseness. It is attractive to think that this purifying process of drama might have been applied to comedy also but it runs counter to the opposing belief that in comedy the audience must be detached from a too intimate identification with the stage

action and its characters in order for laughter to take place (pp.17-18).

John Palmer held this latter belief, considering that a detached audience attitude is a necessary component of comedy, relating this to audience characterisation:

> characters in a comedy, if we are to laugh at them, must be presented with detachment... Shakespeare's detachment is admittedly absolute in the sense that he never appears in his own person. His characters, once created, exist in their own right (p.vii-ix).

Gareth Lloyd Evans supports a similar view. For him the benefit to the audience occurs with the distancing that he considers comedy automatically creates between audience and play. This makes enlightened satiric observation possible in a way not available to tragedy:

> Comedy invokes less identification from an audience than does tragedy. In fact comedy depends for its effects upon a certain distancing. It requires a barely realized mental posture of superiority so that there can be a full deployment of that element that causes us to laugh. If tragedy induces the feeling- 'there but for the grace of God and art go I' - then comedy involves the response - 'catch me doing or saying that'. [17]

This detachment that comedy can create John Russell Brown considers to be inherent in the commendable 'wide focus' essential for correct comic perspective. He justifies his application of this to Shakespearean comedy by contrasting the titles of the comedies with the tragedies, the former indicating a wider spectrum of subject matter than the latter which name individual people:

> The dominant focus of Shakespeare's comedies is wide. Their very titles proclaim it, for these plays are

> not named after their main characters like the tragedies... The audience of a Shakespearean comedy is not led towards an intimate knowledge of a single character, but towards a wide view of the whole stage (p.9).

This principle certainly applies to the plays under review in this thesis: The Comedy of Errors and A Midsummer Night's Dream. Not one protagonist in them is named in the titles, and my experience of their presentation upon the stage is that the audience is never over involved with any character to such an extent that laughter becomes unseemly or impossible. They are also excellent plays for encouraging ensemble playing as they boast no leading characters but distribute the interest of the drama throughout the dramatis personae.

It is this breadth that John Russell Brown thinks apt to serve the satiric function he considers appropriate to comedy, which he claims should provoke laughter stimulated by satiric observation of human life presented in wide focus on the stage. A narrower focus would create the identification with the protagonists that would inhibit a detached, amused, critical view:

> A wide focus permits an audience to make the comparisons or contrasts which are often held to be the source of comic pleasure. The opposite, intense focus would involve an audience too directly and minutely to allow laughter (p. 10).

Leo Salingar claims that Pastime and revelry, the immediate theatrical antecedents of Elizabethan comedy, bridge the gap between everyday life and the stage, their function being to provide a 'borderland between everyday

life and the stage' (p.9). This indicates what I consider to be another function of comedy: that it has always served to relate to the prosaic realities of life and in a dramatically less heightened way than tragedy. Shakespeare seems very aware of this in The Two Gentlemen of Verona when the clowns parody their masters, giving the lyrical view of events a more life-like reality. I find that this characteristic of comedy makes it accessible to many people who consider the high style of tragic and lyric drama outside their everyday experience. Besides, they like to laugh, and the fact that they can do so puts them in a better mood to listen to the serious parts of the play. If one of the important functions of comedy be to make people laugh at the absurdities of their own behaviour, this prosaic characteristic of the subject matter is most critical.

Nevill Coghill glosses for us works by Diomedes and Donatus with reference to this relevance of comedy to ordinary people and its corresponding function of self-criticism. He reports that Diomedes contrasts the subject matter and style of tragedy with its kings, generals and public figures involved in grief, exile and slaughter, with the more homely content of comedy wherein humble and private people enjoy love affairs, including the abduction of maidens! He quotes the opinion of Donatus as believing that this more domestic sphere of comedy is designed to instruct daily behaviour (p.2).

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I now summarise this section which reviews contrasting opinions on the functions of comedy. On one hand it is thought necessary to instruct humanity by causing it to laugh at its own foolishness. This can be done fiercely as enjoined by Sidney and practised in the satires of Ben Jonson, or with gentle sympathetic amusement, as in the comedies of Shakespeare. In order for the laughter to take place, some consider that the audience must remain detached from too much emotional involvement with the protagonists, but it might be possible that comedy can provide a catharsis similar to that claimed for tragedy. On the other hand, other views of comedy consider this component of instruction superfluous, as comedy can exist as mere entertainment, or as an expression of the joy of human existence. As the subject matter of comedy is usually closely related to real life, it is accessible to most people.

AT EACH SUCCEEDING STEP I EXAMINE THE BASIC SUPPOSITIONS UPON WHICH THIS THESIS IS BASED IN TERMS OF LITERARY CRITICISM

<u>Comedy may have a serious intention and can be regarded as seriously as tragedy</u>.

This is the first supposition that must be affirmed in the building up of the case that Shakespeare's plays are encoded with spiritual arcana.

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George Meredith observes the low status experienced by comedy in relation to tragedy and exemplifies this with reference to the drama of ancient Greece:

> Comedy, we have to admit, was never one of the most honoured of the Muses. She was in her origin, short of slaughter, the loudest expression of the little civlization of men. The light of Athene over the head of Achilles illuminates the birth of Greek tragedy. But comedy rolled in shouting under the divine protection of the Son of the Wine-jar, as Dionysus is made to proclaim himself by Aristophanes.[18]

However he pays Shakespearean comedy the compliment of saying that it portrays humanity with a poetic grandeur:

> Shakespeare is a well-spring of characters which are saturated with the comic spirit; with more of what we will call blood-life than is to be found anywhere out of Shakespeare; and they are of this world, but they are of a world enlarged to our embrace by imagination, and by great poetic imagination (p.11).

This poetic vision of humanity is one which could be viewed seriously.

It is Wilson Knight's opinion that humour itself should be taken seriously. In 'The Wheel of Fire',he warns against dismissing humour as being trivial, and claims for it an intangibility that makes it difficult to pin down and analyse:

> It is an error of aesthetic judgement to regard humour as essentially trivial... Humour is an evanescent thing even more difficult of analysis and intellectual location than tragedy (p.160).

John Russell Brown, in 'Shakespeare and his Comedies', identifies similarly intangible characteristics in the early comedies which he proposes may have militated against their being taken seriously enough to warrant much

literary criticism. However he defends them, claiming that the pleasure they give is so self-evident as to render criticism superfluous:

> Indeed the early comedies can appear so light-hearted and capricious, so inconsequential, so beautiful and bawdy, so obviously pleasing courtier and groundling by turns, that the probing questions of the critic seem ludicrously inapposite (p.12).

He maintains that they do not share substance that might warrant critical attention in contrast with the later comedies which he says are 'comical satires' in which Shakespeare has 'grappled with serious intellectual issues' or the last romances in which he finds 'symbolic treatments of regeneration' (pp.11-12), and see below in the Theatre Set-Up programme notes to The Winter's Tale and Cymbeline Appendix B.5, B.6. I hope in this thesis to refute his claim that the early comedies do not share the serious themes of the later ones, and to demonstrate that like the romances, they also symbolise regeneration.

John Vyvyan shares with John Russell Brown this concept of the regenerative quality of the romances and later comedies, differentiating their resolutions from the endings of the earlier comedies, although conceding that there is a relationship between them:

> The union of love which closes the plays of regeneration is something other that the happy ending of a comedy, although they are related. [19]

However he supports the view that the comedies can merit as serious a regard as the tragedies. His interpretation of Shakespearean comedy is that it represents an upward

spiral of events caused by the protagonist making the right choice when faced with temptation, while tragedy portrays the downward spiral caused by his incorrect choice. He exemplifies this by reference to Measure for Measure and Hamlet which display poles of response to the temptation of exacting revenge:

> In Measure for Measure he is showing us the resolution of Hamlet. He is telling us that tragedy, even on the threshold of its consummation is not inevitable (p. 76).

He subsequently links the core of Shakespearean comedy with Christ's resistance to the temptations of Satan, and tragedy to the yieldings of Judas:

> The temptations in the gospels - both the resistances of Christ (comedy) and the yieldings of Judas - were at the heart of his tragic pattern (p. 148).

Thus for Vyvyan comedy and tragedy share a common basis in the gospels. He reverses the roles of tragedy and comedy in relationship to the theatre of ancient Greece, associating the purifying effect 'leading to bliss to come or apotheosis' experienced by the protagonists of Greek tragedy with the effect found in Shakespeare's late comedies (p.146).

In similar vein to Vyvyan, John Russell Brown considers that the poles of Shakespeare's tragedy and comedy are concerned with a relationship to the hero's response to 'hearken after the flesh' which leads to the disorder of tragedy or the 'establishment of love's order, comedy' (p.134).

Dover Wilson also considers that there is emotional coherence between the tragedies and the comedies. He values the comedies so much that he postulates that they encapsulate the germ of Shakespeare's art:

> What is true of his comedies is true also of his tragedies... It seems that in looking for the secret of Shakespeare's comic genius we have stumbled upon the secret of his dramatic art as a whole (p.33).

He thinks that the comedies provided the matrix for the tragedies and that this explains the coherence and intermixing between both styles of drama:

> His tragedies grew out of the comedies. The stuff of his 'mind and Art' was first woven on the comic loom and it retained something of this comic texture right up to the end... nearly all the comedies have something of a tragic strain about them (p.16).

These points of view support my opinion that the early comedies contain the seeds of his early plays in both exoteric and esoteric themes. [20]

Milton Crane does not think that sophisticated theories are required to explain this intermixing of Shakespearean comedy and tragedy, as this reflects real life. He points out that dramatic style is also enhanced by the relief provided by comic scenes in tragedy, and vice versa. He comments that Bernard Shaw followed this custom:

> Shakespeare and Shaw, as comic dramatists, are exceedingly casual about freely mingling comic and serious matter, no doubt on the excellent principle that the best comedies must deal with serious themes and consequently may well introduce scenes that border on the tragic. (We are familiar enough with comic relief; but let us remember that serious, and even tragic, relief also exists). [21]

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Edward Hubler claims that Shakespeare established this genre of juxtaposing the comic and serious upon a typical tradition within English theatre:

> The alternation of the comic and the serious is as old as the English theatre, but it remained for Shakespeare to make each part of the other. A shaft of laughter brightens his darkest passages, and his gayest moments pass quickly into shadow (p.59).

He agrees with Crane that this is a logical reflection of Shakespeare's accurate perception of real life:

> His was the broadest vision of life, and for the expression of it neither comedy nor tragedy was enough. In him the comic and the solemn stand side by side fortifying each other...He did not exclude subject matter because it was, as other writers might suppose, inappropriate to the kind of thing he was doing (p. 59).

If this was a developing tradition of English theatre, not all of Shakespeare's contemporaries approved of it. Philip Sidney expresses his distress at the current lack of theatrical decorum shown by the infusion of comic elements into tragic plays, especially without the benefit of the unities of space, time and action as observed by classic writers:

> Their plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders... their mongrel tragi-comedy... I know Apuleius did somewhat so, but that is a thing recounted with space of time, not represented in one moment; and I know the ancients have one or two examples of tragicomedies, as Plautus hath AMPHITRIO. But, if we mark them well, we shall find, that they never, or very daintily match hornpipes and funerals (pp.135-6).

In support of his own opinion, Leo Salingar refers to Samuel Johnson's view that Shakespeare's concept and

portrayal of the world was unique and distinct from that of other playwrights, and that the tragic/comic mix mirrors the real world as he saw it. Salingar himself advises a cautious approach to the comedies to allow for their serious content, 'they have too much in them of other moods, besides the mood of holiday' (pp.17-18).

This agrees with Wilson Knight in the acknowledgement that Shakespeare fused the medieval tradition with the opposing culture of Renaissance humanism:

> Shakespeare labours to harmonize opposing cultures: Renaissance humanism and medieval doctrine. [22]

Salingar grants Shakespeare a more spontaneous effect due to historical coincidence and talent:

> One element of dramatic interest seems to flow into and qualify the others in the total effect. This variety within the bounds of a single play results in part from his position in the history of the stage, at a meeting-place of medieval, classical and renaissance traditions, and in part from his exceptional powers of assimilation (p.19).

Sherman Hawkins likens the hierarchy of Shakespeare's multiform creation to cosmic order:

> As the natural creation is ordered by the supreme Maker in hierarchical classes and categories, so the poetic microcosm, the golden world of art, has its analogous 'chain of being', ranging from the lofty forms of epic and tragedy down to the lowly farce and humble epigram... Decorum, the canon of appropriateness, is the literary equivalent of natural law, which assigns to every creature the mode of working proper to its form and end. [23]

However this categorisation of literature according to the Elizabethan 'kinds' which were synonymous with nature he admits not to be fixed and he cites the list of hybrid

plays in the repertoire of the Players described to Hamlet by Polonius (Act II.ii.392-398) as typical of some of Shakespeare's own works (p.63).

Wilson Knight claims that Shakespeare's 'mongrel tragi-comedie' derives doubly from the Middle Ages: in the nature of the Miracle plays where comic elements supplied much-needed light relief in the religious dramas and in the particular medieval connotation of the words 'comedy' and 'tragedy':

> 'Comedie' was a heritage of the miracle plays, in which comic elements were freely mingled with the most solemn matters of religious history, in order to satisfy the popular craving for a little fun amidst so much seriousness... On the other hand, the type itself was in part a relic of the meaning given to the words 'comedy' and 'tragedy' in the Middle Ages. These terms were not applied to the religious drama just spoken of. Indeed not until the Renaissance was it realised that they had once possessed a theatrical significance.[24]

E. M. W. Tillyard regards this medieval inheritance as a licence Shakespeare felt able to use in his swift changes of mood within a play. He regards this as being more applicable to tragedy but relevant to the fusion of the real with the unlikely of comedy:

> I refer... to the medieval inheritance of the mixed play, of the freedom to set the serious and the ridiculous side by side. The most direct examples of this inheritance are seen in tragedy, where highly serious matters exist alongside the comic. In comedy it is a case not so much of mixing the serious and the trivial as of mixing the fantastic and the realistic.[25]

By contrast, T. M. Parrott equates tragedy with

comedy in this respect. Further he classifies this convention as typically Elizabethan, rooted in the native and Renaissance traditions which completely departed from the classic drama of homogeneous comedy or tragedy.

> [Shakespeare] did not write sharply distinguished types of drama. On the contrary... There is hardly a Shakespearean tragedy in which the sound of laughter is not heard, hardly a comedy in which there is not at least the shadow of impending disaster (p.vii).

Shakespearean comedy is mythical or idealistic

In this section I review opinions that see a mythical and/or idealistic content in Shakespearean comedy.

The definition of myth that I use as a basis for my work in this thesis generally is my own, from my dissertation on Drama as a Mesocosm (short title). This is culled from four sources on the practical application of myth in society: The Masks of God by Joseph Campbell, Mythologies of Roland Barthes, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries of Mircea Eliade, and The Golden Bough of J.G. Frazer, and is crucial to my understanding of the nature and application of the arcana within Shakespeare's plays. It is:

> A myth is a process, a narrative or group of images, presented as a spoken story or as a ritualised event which serves man in his attempt to come to terms with life, death and the universe. It resolves a tension, caused by a problem, which may be rooted in the psyche or in the needs of a social group.[26]

In this chapter I also refer to other definitions of myth which may have influenced critics in the conclusions they

reach on Shakespearean comedy as applied myth.

In his review of modern concepts of mythology Pierre Maranda reports the Claude Levi-Strauss analysis of a similar function of myth which he seeks to test mathematically:

> We see, then, what a structural analysis of the myth content can achieve in itself: it furnishes rules of transformation which enable us to shift from one variant to another by means of operations similar to those of algebra.[27]

Maranda discusses the correspondence between different mythologies and certain aspects of their cultures such as taboos. He states that analysis of mythology from a variety of cultures must be mediated by understanding of the underlying conditioning rules, 'It is essentially the investigation of the culture-conditioning mechanisms that mould ethnic cognitive systems,' (p.8).

Northrop Frye gives us his own understanding of myth as:

> Myth, an abstract or purely literary world of fictional and thematic design, unaffected by canons of plausible adaptation to familiar experience.[28]

In other words he conceives myth occurring within an invented or fantasy sphere unrelated to the real world. He refers us to his concept of the basic mythical function of comedy, the preparation of an individual for his integration into society:

> The theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it. The mythical comedy corresponding to the death of the Dionysiac god is Apollonian, the story of how a hero is accepted by a

society of gods (p. 43).

He relates this to classic and Christian traditions of probation and salvation:

> In classical literature the theme of acceptance forms part of the stories of Hercules, Mercury, and other deities who had a probation to go through, and in Christian literature it is the theme of salvation, or, in a more concentrated form, of assumption: the comedy that stands just at the end of Dante's Commedia (p.43).

This corresponds with my own view to a certain extent. I deviate from Northrop Frye's assessment of the goal of the probation in considering it not to make the subject fit for society but for contact with the spiritual world. Gareth Knight has glossed Dante's Commedia to have this meaning. [29]

Frye also postulates that all comedy, whether consciously intended or not, stems from a central myth of seeking for the rightful order of nature:

> The mythical view of literature as leading to the conception of an order of nature as a whole being imitated by a corresponding order of words (p.118).

For him myth is a source of literary conventions through whose use poets can recapture a sense of the original myth:

> Conventions are descended from myths... Hence the literary convention enables the poet to recapture something of the pure and primitive identity of myth.[30]

Tillyard also considers that the conventions of literature which he calls 'the literary kinds' have their source in 'recurrent propensities or patterns of the

human mind' (p.33).

Israel Gollancz applies this universal mythic quality to Shakespeare's work. He observes that whether it is intentional or not, his treatment of subject matter touched on its mythical core:

> Shakespeare, in dealing with each of his stories, with the tale or the novel or whatever else might have come to his hand, had the instinctive power of divining - unconsciously perchance, but divining - the germ of the particular myth behind it. [31]

My own view is that it is Shakespeare's intention, and that the precedents from which he drew for the nature of the arcana, were themselves mythical universals.

Wilson Knight, like Gollancz, perceives a probably accidental mythic drive, which he links to the essence of poetry itself:

> What Shakespeare is concerned with in his most powerful engagements is, whether he knew it or not, and he probably did not, to present a new dimension of human existence; using, as it were, a poetic x-ray... so that his people... have a poetic aura... All poetic drama (though spirits are not directly involved) shows us people with an imaginative aura or halo. [32]

H.B. Charlton's opposite view of comedy itself precludes any possibility of mythical or universal content. For him comedy is based on, and must remain and function, within everyday life:

> Comedy is concerned with life as a thing to be lived. It has no direct cognisance of thoughts which wander through eternity. It is exclusively concerned with the problems of mortality. Conjectures of immortality are values beyond its competence to assess. [33]

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Some critics believe that Shakespearean comedy stems from specific mythical sources. Janet Spens draws comparisons with ancient folk rituals, attributing to their influence Shakespeare's tragic/comic mix:

> The primitive drama began with a tragedy and ended with the comic motif of marriage.[34]

C.L. Barber, in '<u>Shakespeare's Festive Comedy</u>', accords to the comedies of Shakespeare the function of psychological release patterned in ancient Saturnalias. (The OED defines a Saturnalia as: 'The festival of Saturn, held in the middle of December, observed as a time of general unrestrained merrymaking, extending even to the slaves.'):

> The whole body of this happy comic art is distinguished by the use it makes of forms for experience which can be termed Saturnalian (p.3).

In this sense he regards them as Aristophanic, although technically modelled on the New Comedy of Terence and Plautus:

> Once Shakespeare finds his own distinctive style, he is more Aristophanic than any other great English comic dramatist, despite the fact that the accepted educated models and theories when he started to write were Terentian and Plautine (p.3).

He believes that Shakespeare used the sophisticated forms of theatre to create, through an infinite variety of 'Saturnalian patterns', a constant formula which moves 'through release to clarification' (p.4). I make the point at this stage, that this corresponds closely to the formulae of spiritual initiation contained in the arcana

of alchemy, theurgy and the Celtic UnderWorld Initiation (see Chapters 4 and 5). Barber uses the term 'festive' to describe this and he considers that the 'festive comedies' have been strongly prefigured by the 'social form of Elizabethan holidays' (p.4). He identifies Saturnalian characteristics in Elizabethan holiday and comedy in such features as the clowns with their anarchic behaviour and 'ironic misrule' (p.3).

I would agree with his association of the English holiday with the essential nature of the comedies and point out that these same holidays probably had their origin in Celtic pagan festivals, whose aim and processes correspond with the Celtic arcane level in some of the plays.

Barber justifies his convictions in these matters by reference to the use of holiday and festive motifs in Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream and Twelfth Night and to the great variety of pastime, much of it theatrical and ritualistic which took place on Elizabethan feast days. He emphasises the seriousness of the seasonal feasts as 'landmarks of the year' which he maintains share a common purpose with the comedy:

> The holiday occasion and the comedy are parallel manifestations of the same pattern of culture, of a way that men can cope with their life (p.6).

This 'coping with life' is the kind of content I consider to be mythic. The way in which he applies it is in the sense he attributes to Freud, who describes an energy

whose 'maintaining inhibition is freed for celebration' (p.7). The importance of 'benevolent ridicule' is emphasised, mocking kill-joys and 'high-flown idealism' (pp.7-9).

Northrop Frye agrees with this connection between Shakespearean comedy and seasonal mythic celebration. He points out the importance of nature in the plays, creating what he terms a 'green world', with symbols associated with seasonal rituals:

> The green world charges the comedies with a symbolism in which the comic resolution contains a suggestion of the old ritual pattern of the victory of summer over winter.[35]

He exemplifies this with reference to Falstaff's humiliation in The Merry Wives of Windsor as comparable to the death of winter (p.322). He proposes that the 'green world' seems to be the reality in the comedies and the everyday world the Saturnalia:

> In the comedies the green world suggests an original golden age which the normal world has usurped and which makes us wonder if it is not the normal world that is the real Saturnalia (p.324).

I comment that nature is central to the arcana of alchemy, theurgy and the Celtic UnderWorld Initiation (see below Chapters Four and Five).

Tillyard doubts the validity of these opinions expressed by Janet Spens, Northrop Frye and C.L. Barber. He claims that the festivals had an ancient practical purpose of achieving certain results from the rituals, and

that this purpose had ceased to operate by Shakespeare's time:

> Miss Spens, Northrop Frye and C.L. Barber... assert that medieval folk-festivals, based on ritual, were a major influence on Shakespeare's comedies. To have any paramount significance, to be worth serious distinction from the general instinct for periodical jollification, these festivals must remain what they once were: pieces of ritual intended to lead to practical results. I am most doubtful of their so remaining in the age of Chaucer and feel certain they did not by the time of Shakespeare. They served well enough as means to periodical amusement; they were still part of life; but as applied to literature they are too generalized in significance to help our understanding of it. In fact I am impelled to ask the three critics... are your connections really necessary? (p.29.)

I claim that there is a continuing magical tradition from the matrix of these folk-festivals to the present day, that the plays of Shakespeare were part of that tradition, and that Spens, Frye and Barber have intercepted important features of his work which may even have aimed for the ultimate effect on audiences that the old rituals hoped to achieve.

John Middleton Murry disagrees with all interpretations that pose mythic concepts adumbrated in Shakespeare's comedies. He asserts that Shakespeare simply 'humanised a given story'. [36]

In focusing on the idealistic in literature, Northrop Frye applies a different kind of humanising to the mode of romance which characterises Shakespearean comedy. The OED definition of 'Romance' is '1. Love. 2...strange Gothic quality of wildness. 3. A particular kind of narrative

study'. Frye considers that this aspect of literature represents an analogy of innocence, the characters its human symbols. In support of this view he points out the importance of chastity and virtue in all the characters and of virginity in the heroines of romance. [37] This interpretation can be seen to have particular significance applied in The Two Gentlemen of Verona in the threatened rape of Sylvia by Proteus and her defence by her true lover, Valentine. If romance does, as Northrop Frye suggests, have an allegorical significance representing innocence, its symbol in this play could probably be Sylvia and the defence of her innocence could uphold the idealistic values of the romantic idiom of the play. Frye also considers that romance displaces myth, aiming 'to conventionalise content in an idealised direction' and that in its nature it lies midway between myth and realism (p.136). He values highly this idealistic mode of expression in Shakespeare's plays, regarding the dominantly romantic nature of the last plays Shakespeare wrote as 'a logical evolution'. [38] This high respect can be attributed to his opinion that the romantic mode has 'a tendency to idealise the human representation of the divine and spiritual world' and that its 'organising ideas seem to be love and form' (p.153). These concepts closely approximate those of the hypotheses of this study.

John Russell Brown also acknowledges the idealistic

romantic elements in Shakespeare's comedies:

> A Shakespearean comedy is not, of course, 'laughs all the way'. A romantic, fantastic or ideal strain runs through each of them. Often this is quantitively the greater part, and always it provides the dominant mood of the concluding scene (p.10).

The displacement he identifies is not mythic, as Northrop Frye thinks, but that distortion of the real world which Freud considered provided psychological release in both dreams and jokes:

> Indeed Shakespeare's comparison of his play to a dream may be more apt than he could have known. It may be true of both the romantic and the comic elements, for Freud has argued that the mental processes which he called 'wit-work' are very similar to those he called 'dream-work.' Both involve displacement of normal experience, illogical sequences, exaggerations, condensations, substitutions and indirections. Freud concluded that jokes and dreams alike provide a release of reactions which are normally censored by the alerted ego. Perhaps Shakespeare sensed that the relaxation of a wide focus was required both for comedy and romance (p.X11).

He further attributes to Shakespearean drama a depth created by the imaginative use in each play of a microcosmic theme. He thought that Shakespeare avoided superficiality in his work by:

> submitting the material for each play to a governing theme or idea, and by selecting, shaping and emphasising every detail of his writing in accordance with that idea. So one comedy may present generous and possessive loves another deep and shallow loves, another the privacy and precariousness of all human idealisms... Each comedy is a world - with idealism, wit, humour, tensions and resolutions - in which the audience can see... the image of scorn and the form and pressure of the very age and body of the time (p.15).

Wilson Knight considers that the idealised aspect of

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Shakespeare's work gives us a spiritual interpretation of mankind. He thinks that the romantic element is supplied by the detachment Shakespeare provides in his exotic locations:

> Shakespeare's poetry offers us in varying degrees an idealised, and therefore spiritualised reading of man. His action is generally distanced, and to that extent romanticised, by being located in the ancient world or Italy (pp.12-13).

This exotic nature of the mode of romance which embodies the idealistic in Shakespearean comedy is considered by some critics to be more typical of the genre than ideals respecting love with which romance is usually associated.

T. M. Parrott acknowledges the importance of both strains in the English romance tradition, attributing its development not only to the release of romantic material into England from Europe but to a developing consciousness of humanism and love of earthly life:

> It is not until late in Elizabeth's reign that this influence makes itself markedly felt upon English drama, more especially English comedy. The underlying cause was the almost complete transformation of English life in that period from a medieval to a Renaissance civilisation that turned from the former contemplation of death and its consequence in Hell or Heaven, to a frank enjoyment of the newly enriched life upon earth (p. 43).

He claims that the English expression of romantic subjects was admirably light yet intense:

> There was an increasing tendency to express this new material the rich, the strange, and the beautiful, in appropriate language... new motives, especially Petrarchan love-longing, appear in English verse; and the English lyric strikes at once a lighter and

an intenser note (p.43).

He also comments on the typical romantic setting of plays in Italy, saying this to be a convention (p.52).

Tillyard takes a less complimentary attitude to the exotic strain of the romantic tradition of Shakespeare's time:

> Simple people have that in their minds that welcomes the marvellous even if the items that compose it fail to add up or to attain any further significance. Much of the Romance matter available in Shakespeare's age played up to that instinct (p.40).

However he observes that in Shakespeare's hands the exotic romantic element is blended with comedy to produce a remarkably harmonious whole:

> In sum, romance has to do with parts of the mind prevalent in children or very simple people or with certain simple and fundamental things common to us all. Unlike St Paul, Shakespeare did not put away childish things when he grew to manhood; rather he allowed childish things to live in harmony with things adult and sophisticated. And it is in the Comedies above all that he combines and harmonizes both kinds. This feat no other dramatist has achieved with anywhere near the same success (pp. 43, 44).

In fact he considers this aspect of Shakespeare's work to be a distinguishing factor:

> What makes Shakespearean comedy different from other great comedy is the admixture of the status of mind proper to romance (p. 39).

It has been my experience as a theatre director that the exotic or romantic strains on all of Shakespeare's comedies have a specific meaning and purpose within the arcane significance of the plays, and that the revealing of this significance makes sense of some

seemingly bizarre aspects of Shakespeare's work. Certainly I found that the interpretations of The Winter's Tale and Cymbeline which I undertook for Theatre Set-Up in 1988 and 1989 were facilitated by the work I had done on the earlier comedies (see Appendix B.5 and B.6.). In this respect I agree with Wilson Knight that the romance found in Shakespeare's comedies represents a symbolic treatment of regeneration.

The controversial issues of the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays as allegories and even as embodiments of arcane systems I deal with in the following chapter.

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Shakespeare's plays are allegorical

I refer in this section to the definition of allegory above (see above, p.9), in A Dictionary of Literary Terms by J.A. Cuddon.

Shakespeare would have had considerable access to the pictorial form of allegory in the emblem books mentioned in this definition. Henry Green, writing in Shakespeare and The Emblem Writers notes that his precursors, Francis Douce, Langlois of Rouen, Charles Knight, Noel Humphreys and Dr Alfred Woltmann had all observed as he had 'similarities of thought and expression' between the early Emblem writers and Shakespeare. [1] He quotes the description by Bacon of an Emblem in his Advancement of Learning, bk V. chap 5 which corresponds to a modern concept of 'affective learning', acquired through the senses, favoured above 'cognitive learning', through the intellect (see above p.10):

> Embleme deduceth conceptions intellectual to images sensible, and that which is sensible more forcibly strikes the memory, and is more easily imprinted than that which is intellectual (p.1).

Green discusses and lists correspondences between passages from Shakespeare's plays and 'devices and subjects' of the emblems treated in his book. He lists six of these in The Comedy of Errors: II.i.97 - 'Eagle renewing its feathers', II.ii.167 - 'Elm and vine', III.ii.27 - 'Sirens and Ulysses', III.ii.131 - 'America', I.v.2-53 - 'Time turning back', V.i.210 - 'Circe transforming men'; and fourteen

in A Midsummer Night's Dream: ' I.i.168 - 'Arrow with a golden head', I.i.180 and II.i.194 - 'Astronomer and magnet', I.i.232 - 'Bear, cub and Cupid', II.i.148 - 'Appreciation of melody', II.i.155 - 'Cupid and Death', II.i.173 - 'Drake's ship', II.i.181 - 'Ape and miser's gold', II.i.227 - 'Daphne changed to a laurel', II.i.231 - 'Golding's Ovid used', II.ii.145 - 'Countryman and serpent', III.ii.200 - 'cots in heraldry', III.ii.237 - 'Ape and miser's gold', and III.ii.260 - 'Snake on the finger' (p.532). Predominant among the sources of emblems in this selection is Geoffrey Whitney's Choice of Emblems, and Green quotes his definition of an emblem, as explaining the attraction of the custom, which I would claim to be the enduring appeal of allegory:

> somethinge obscure to be perceived at the first, whereby, when with further consideration it is understood, it maie the greater delighte the behoulder (p.6.)

Green also edited a photo-lith fac-simile reprint of the Lyons Edition by Bonhomme of 1551, Andrea Alciati Emblematum Flumen abundans; or Alciat's Emblems, in their Full Stream. [2] This contains a useful classification of the emblems under these titles: insignia; God, or religion; virtues - faith, prudence, justice, fortitude, concord, hope; vices - perfidy, folly, pride, luxury, sloth, avarice, gluttony; miscellaneous - nature, astrology, love, fortune, honour, The Prince, The Republic, life, death, friendship, hostility, revenge,

peace, science, ignorance, marriage, trees (p.7). From this list we can gain an insight into the range of subjects treated in this explicit pictorial manner and understand the extent to which they could have influenced contemporary graphic art and literature.

Writing in 1964, G.Pellegrini similarly emphasises the importance of symbols and emblems upon Elizabethan and Jacobean art,

> The potent force exerted by symbols, translated into diverse emblematical forms, upon sixteenth and seventeenth-century life, thought, painting and literature can hardly be overstressed. Unless we fully realize the current faith in these symbols and learn to recognize the many ways in which they were made to play their effective role, we shall fail to appreciate what may be termed the inner spirit of that age.[3]

(The OED defines 'symbol' as 'an object, animate or inanimate which represents or 'stands for' something else').

In Shakespeare and the Emblem, Tibor Fabiny edits a range of works written before 1984 on the relationship between Shakespeare and the tradition of emblems.[4] The governing idea of this book is that there was a close association between Renaissance poets and painters which is clearly revealed in their common use of symbolic emblems and that Shakespeare continued in this inherited tradition. Considerable attention is given to Cesare Ripa's Iconologia of 1593 with the claim that its influence was such that it determined the way in which 'abstract concepts, aesthetic features and qualities' of

the time were portrayed in writing and visual material. This is attributed to the work's suitability for the ideological propaganda of the time (p.85). In this respect, Fabiny claims that its material provided precise and naturalistic images which 'intensified the emotional response to religion and mysticism' (p.85).

Applying this same belief more precisely, Lyndall Abraham, writing '<u>The Lovers and the Tomb': Alchemical Emblems in Shakespeare, Donne, and Marvell</u> in <u>Emblematica</u>, finds exact correspondences between the dramatic emblems with specific alchemical significance, on the subject of 'the lovers and the tomb' and dramatic action in Shakespeare's <u>Romeo and Juliet</u>, and poetic images in the works of John Donne and Andrew Marvell. [5] Referring to the emblems on this subject in <u>Rosarium philosophorum</u> (1550), and its much later re-working in Johann Mylius's <u>Philosophia reformata</u> with engravings by Balthasar Schwan in 1622, she indicates that the key alchemical idea symbolised by 'the lovers and the tomb' is the cyclic process of 'solve et coagula', or the violent breaking up, separation and dissolving of the base matter of alchemy in a symbolic 'death' and its re-combination in an 'alchemical marriage'. This cyclic process symbolised the key concept of alchemy which was especially applied to mankind's spiritual condition, that no 'regeneration' or 'conception' was possible until the 'death' had taken place, (for a detailed exegesis of alchemy please see

below Chapter Five). Abraham enumerates the instances of this death/love theme and imagery in Romeo and Juliet: Juliet, after her first sight of Romeo, bids her Nurse, 'Go ask his name. If he be married, / My grave is like to be my wedding-bed' (III.ii.136-7); Lady Capulet's, 'I would the fool were married to her grave' (III.v.140) on Juliet's refusal to marry Paris; Juliet's plea in response to this proposed marriage, 'Delay this marriage for a month, a week, / Or if you do not, make the bridal bed / In that dim monument where Tybalt lies' (III.v.199-201); and the love-in-death embraces of both Romeo and Juliet in V.iii. on her tomb (pp. 305-6). Abraham points out that the speed with which the deaths of Romeo and Juliet follow their wedding is 'characteristically alchemical' (p.307), and departs from the two weeks' separation between these events in the received source of the play, Arthur Brooke's poem, The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet. [6] She indicates another deviation from the source, suggesting Shakespeare's contriving of the plot to give an alchemical reading, in the 'alchemical' means by which Romeo's death is brought about in his purchase of the death-poison from an apothecary, whose shop signs its owner's alchemical knowledge, by the suspension in its interior of a stuffed alligator and the skins of fish (p.308). Furthermore, she notices that the poison itself plays an alchemical role as the paradoxical agent often called a poison, which both kills and

resurrects the bodies of the lovers (p.310). In this case, the 'resurrection' is the re-uniting of the feuding factions of Verona (p.308). She also comments that this reconciliation itself, effected by the death of the lovers and negotiated over their tomb, is intrinsically alchemical, representing the regeneration of spirit and matter after its 'death' (p.311). I consider this convincing exposition of allegorical meaning in Romeo and Juliet, probably inspired by specific contemporary emblems, to be important evidence in support of the case for the claim that Shakespeare encoded arcana in his work.

A.D. Nuttall, in Two Concepts of Allegory, attributes the proliferation of symbolic material in the sixteenth century to the small degree of literacy in the population:

> There was in those days a greater profusion of basic iconic symbols everywhere than there is today, for a very simple reason. The growth of literacy has led to the gradual usurpation by writing of the function of symbolic images.[7]

He observes that symbols were not merely decorative but functioned throughout everyday life:

> Thus the iconography of the sixteenth century is not exhausted by heraldry and literary emblems , but extends to the ordinary world of buying and selling, with its pied poles, mortars and pestles and inn signs (p. 77).

In addition to the influence of emblematic material, there is a long tradition of allegory in Western literature before Shakespeare, which could reasonably be considered to have established a precedent from which he would also have drawn. In his Allegory of Love, C.S.

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Lewis traces the popularity and heritage of medieval allegory back to the classical and philosophical literature of ancient Greece and twelfth century philosophical poets:

> The whole story of the Aeneid is interpreted as an allegory of the life of man...The twilight of classical antiquity and the Dark Ages, then, had prepared in diverse ways for the great age of allegory. Antiquity had first created the demand and partly supplied it. The Dark Ages, while not adding very remarkably to the supply had kept alive, and even rendered chronic, the demand: (the poets of courtly love were... the great philosophical poets of the twelfth century.) [8]

In The Medieval Stage, E.K. Chambers refers to the popularity of allegory in the fourteenth century when, 'the influence of the Roman de la Rose and other widely popular works was bringing every department of literature under the sway of allegory'. [9] In this poem by Geoffrey Chaucer, with additions by unknown authors, abstractions such as 'Ydelnesse', 'Mirthe', 'Gladnesse', 'Curtesye', 'Vilanye', 'Companye', 'Fair-Semblaunt', 'Pryde' and 'Beautee' are personified within the moralising story. [10] Chambers claims that this allegorical 'spirit of the age' obviously also influenced drama so that:

> the 'moral plays' or 'moralities'... in which the characters are no longer scriptural or legendary persons, but wholly, or almost wholly abstractions, and which, although still religious in intention, aim rather at ethical cultivation than the establishing of faith (p.151).

He lists antecedents of this genre in previous centuries including: Antichristus, a twelfth-century Latin play; two unprinted French plays on the 'theme of the Heavenly

Virtues, which is suggested by the words of the eighty-fifth Psalm'; and 'that singular danse macabre or 'Dance of Death', which exercised so powerful a fascination on the art of the Middle Ages' (pp.151-153).

An example of this genre is the anonymous morality play Everyman, which is a prescriptive allegory of Christian Salvation. God sends Death to summon Everyman who seeks companionship on this pilgrimage to his grave. He is rejected by Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods, Beauty, Strength, Discretion and Five wits, but assisted by Good Deeds, Knowledge and Confession. [11]

T. M. Parrott attributes the existence of allegory in Elizabethan drama to the Morality plays which he defines as 'dramatized allegory with didactic intent' (p.13). He describes an increase in their comic and exotic content over the years of their development, caused by a need to gain 'popular approval' until the presentation of the play Mankind c. 1475 presents an example of a piece performed more for entertainment than edification by a small group of professional actors (pp.12-15). The continuance of this allegorical dramatic tradition into the time of Shakespeare is noted with the performance in 1584 of The Three Ladies of London which Parrott claims, 'represents the final merging of the Moral into social comedy' (p.22).

Alan Hobson thinks that the characters in

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Shakespeare's plays, as in the morality plays, are moral symbols:

> Shakespeare writes comedies and tragedies; that is, he is concerned with happy endings and unhappy endings; hence he explores proportion and disproportion, not only as elements in artistic form, but as features of human life. Not only his tragic heroes, but Falstaff and Toby and Bolingbroke and Achilles and Angelo and Malvolio and Shylock and Benedick and Beatrice are images of disproportion'd life.[12]

John Vyvyan believes that Shakespeare uses allegory in a poetic tradition continuing from the Middle Ages, but in danger of not being recognised in our own times:

> In strict derivation, allegory means other-speak. Double-talk, one might be tempted to call it; and Shakespeare, like the poets of the Middle Ages, delights in double-talk. In our own century we are unattuned to poetic allegory, and may think of allegorical figures as puppetry. There is a penalty for this: we sometimes fail to see allegory, unless it is so crude as to be a blemish or unless a label, 'This work is allegorical' has already been tied on.[13]

Vyvyan's own work, which I have found so useful in practical interpretation of Shakespeare's plays for production (see below Chapter Nine and Appendices A.3, and B.4, B.7, B.8, B.9, and B.10), builds upon a firm conviction that the plays have allegorical meanings which make sense out of inconsistencies of characterisation and plot (see above p.10):

> there are many [situations] in Shakespeare - where psychological analysis lets us down; but allegorical analysis not only explains what is taking place but shows it to be inevitable (p.43).

John Russell Brown identifies these same inconsistencies of characterisation in the early comedies

which indicate to him an ulterior purpose in the plays:

> The notion that Shakespeare put the creation of life-like character first does not make sense of the sequence in which he wrote the early comedies. As these plays become more mature, more controlled in atmosphere and more certain in style and dramatic technique, they do not show an equally general advance in characterisation... often character is distorted to create a happy ending... there must have been some overriding artistic purpose which, on occasion, led him to neglect the representation of individual character (pp.16-18).

However he does not, like Vyvyan, attribute this to deep allegory but to style and exuberant content:

> Perhaps Shakespeare neglected characterization on occasion in order to pack tight the action of his comedies with a great variety of fancy, realism, courtliness, bawdry, sentiment and poetry (p.18).

I consider both writers to be correct and that the plays are not only allegorical but also exuberant in a style and content which may owe much to Ovid, the Latin poet born in 43 B.C., whose influence passed through to the Elizabethan period. We have absolute proof of a direct reading of Ovid by an Elizabethan writer in George Chapman's Ovid's Banquet of Sense (1595). [14] F.P. Wilson states of Shakespeare's own classical reading:

> That he read Ovid as well as Golding's Ovid, some Seneca and Virgil as well as English Seneca and Virgil, is I think, proved. [15]

He refers to the evidence given in T.W. Baldwin's William Shakspere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke of the classical content of the kind of grammar-school which Shakespeare attended in Stratford-Upon-Avon which would contain a study of such works. [16] Jonathan Bate, in Shakespeare and

Ovid, re-affirms this fact, commenting that in the upper schools of these grammar schools, the study of Ovid was compulsory as part of the syllabus in rhetorical training.[17] Implying the influence of Ovid on the style of Shakespeare's writing, he observes that the epithets bestowed on Shakespeare and his works by his contemporaries, are very similar to those given to Ovid. Speaking of Shakespeare's amazing facility with words, he writes:

> His contemporaries recognized and appreciated this, praising his distinctive qualities with such epithets as 'sweet', 'honie-tong'd, 'hony-flowing Vaine', 'fine filed phrase', happy and copious', 'mellifluous.' These were the terms in which the Elizabethans also praised Ovid (pp.20-1).

The great poem by Ovid, Metamorphoses, can be said to be an allegory of transformation, the fifteen books into which it is divided each providing different stories, moving chronologically from the legendary transformation of chaos into the order of the universe, to the politically flattering supposed deification of Julius Caesar of Ovid's own times. [18] I refer in detail to my alchemical reading of the story of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' in Book IV, that I consider is made evident by Ovid's selection of narrative and verbal symbolism, in the chapter on A Midsummer Night's Dream (see below Chapter Nine). Jonathan Bate finds many correspondences between the works of Ovid and Shakespeare, including A Midsummer Night's Dream, many features of which he claims to be a

re-working of Ovid, 'a displaced dramatization of Ovid' (p.131). He describes the manner of this as a typical example of 'Renaissance conceptions of translatio and imitatio' in which a work from a foreign culture and written in a foreign language, was not only translated into another country's native language, but adapted to have contemporary relevance and application (p.131).

In Ovidian Transformations, F. Laroque examines the influence of Ovid's work on the transformations in A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and As You Like It. 19 He makes the important observation that a direct reading of the poem by Shakespeare in its original Latin is suggested by the use of the name 'Titania' which appears in that form as an alternative name for Diana in Book III, 173. The William Golding translation which can also be considered Shakespeare's reference for some of the Ovidian references in The Dream, translates the name as 'the Titan's daughter', so could not have been the source (p.24). If Shakespeare had read the original Latin form of the story, I think it likely that he would also have understood the alchemical allegory which I consider he uses in a similar manner, and with such consistency throughout The Dream, that the 'Pyramus and Thisbe' story is placed at the conclusion of the play as the summation of this theme. [20]

There is extant an alchemical interpretation of part of this Ovid work in Shakespeare's time. Discussing

'undermeanings in Ovid's Metamorphoses,' in Mysteriously Meant, Don Cameron Allen describes a commentary supplied by Johann Ludwig Gottfried to his edition of the Metamorphoses in 1619 in which, although 'moral readings outweigh all the others', Gottfried 'provides occasional astrological and alchemistic allegories'. [21]

Allen also mentions the important influence of Biblical allegories on Renaissance literature. He glosses the opinion of Erasmus relating to the issue of allegorical interpretation (evidently a controversial issue at the time) of the Bible:

> Allegory, to his mind, is useful for stirring up the languid, consoling the dejected, confirming the wavering, and delighting the fastidious. Its use does not imply that the Bible is uncertain but is to the contrary a sign of its riches. The Holy Spirit wishes the several meanings to be discovered, and those who find them should be thought inspired (p.241)

I refer in Chapters Eight and Nine to the Biblical references which Shakespeare uses, in a reverse process, to encode mystic meanings relating to Jesus of Nazareth.

J. W. Lever, in Shakespeare and the Ideas of His Time reports that a school of critics in the forties and fifties read the plays in terms of their Biblical New Testament significance 'as repositories of Christian doctrine'. [22] He describes how words, characters and scenarios were viewed over-simplistically in his opinion as symbols of the Christian allegory, including:

> The salvation of Lear, the damnation of Othello, and sometimes of Romeo and Juliet, the identification as Christ-figures of heroines as diverse as Portia,

> Isabella, Desdemona and Cordelia, or, as Satan-figures, villains as various as Shylock, Lucio, Iago, Goneril and Regan. The epithets 'angel', 'devil', 'hell', 'heaven', were literally construed, and mention of swords, hanging, tears, blood, wine, allegorised as allusions to Gethsemane, Calvary or the Last Supper. Where the dramatic context was too flagrantly at odds with such constructions, 'disjunctive analogies' were found: Shakespeare with more than scholastic subtlety denoted by unlikeness, lucus a non lucendo.[23]

Lever exempts G. Wilson Knight from the above category of critics on the grounds that his 'highly individual estimates of Shakespeare as a Christian artist generally eschewed doctrinal categories' (p.88). In Shakespeare and Religion Wilson Knight affirms the importance of our trying to understand the symbolism in Shakespeare's plays as well as appreciating their literal meanings. He demonstrates that breadth of vision which Lever admires:

> Though there is so much else in Shakespeare, we shall only receive his total work as a harmony if we allow his symbolism to be our guide. The study of 'characters' alone leaves us with a wealth of human understanding, rich but chaotic; the study of thought and imagery in isolation will plunge us into a misleading medievalism. Both, the humanistic and the doctrinal, are legitimate constituents, but neither, nor both together, give us the essence. Academically there is always the temptation to concentrate on these more easily definable elements, separately or together, but the dramatic essence will not be found in so comprehensively simple a scheme as (i) the philosophic and imagistic over-lay of (ii) a human story.[24]

He perceives symbolism linking character and plot in Shakespeare's plays:

> It lies rather in the knotting together of these two elements through symbolism; and this knotting together can only come from intuition of a third reality, or dimension, whereby, or wherefrom, the

> disparity is dissolved; and so we have various indications of a supernature, not definable in orthodox terms and yet out-spacing realism, as the resolving agent (p.312).

I have a particular sympathy with Wilson Knight's views, because his theories were tested out upon and his convictions were reinforced by directing and acting in the plays he discusses. An example of this is in his experience of performing Timon in Timon of Athens, resulting in his statement made in The Wheel of Fire:

> Timon is first a symbol, second a human being; the play is primarily an argument or parable, only secondarily forced, as it best may, to assume some correspondence with the forms and events of human affairs (p.250).

The benefits of experiencing the plays in performance are also valued by John Russell Brown who believes that the later comedies such as Pericles, Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale show clear evidence of symbolic treatment:

> Most critics believe that they clearly evince symbolic mythopaeic or thematic intentions (p.26).

and that they are linked in their interpretation with the earlier comedies:

> But when we have deduced themes from the more immediately baffling early comedies and turn again to these later ones we become dissatisfied with customary opinions about them. All the earlier themes kindle these plays into life, as well as the obvious ones of regeneration, patience, nature and culture; and recognizing the contribution of the old interests we are led to a re-assessment of the new comic mode and of the reflection of our world that the last comedies present in performance (p.26).

Don Cameron Allen acknowledges that another important influence on Elizabethan writers in its declared use of

this kind of symbolic treatment of themes, was Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso translated into English by Sir John Harington in 1591 (p. 286). This work makes its allegorical practice clear by giving an account of the different levels of meaning (moral, history, allegory, allusion,) of each book after its conclusion. [25]

Possibly imitating Ariosto's explanation of intent, the poet Edmund Spenser declared in a prefatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, that his epic poem THE FAERIE QUEENE Disposed into Twelve Books, Fashioning XII MORALL VERTUES was 'a continued Allegory, or darke conceit', and in order that it should not be misconstrued, he made clear 'the general intention and meaning' of the allegory which was 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline'. He explains that in order to be 'furthest from the daunger of envy, and suspition of present time' he has written this moral poem in 'the historye of King Arthur'. He cites historical precedent for this distancing allegorical convention, naming poets from Homer to Tasso:

> First Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath exampled a good governour and a vertuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis: then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of Aeneas: after him Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando. and lately Tasso dissevered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a private man, coloured in his Rinaldo; the other named Politice in his Godfredo. By ensample of which excellent Poets, I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private

morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised. [26]
He reveals a further allegorical reference to Queen Elizabeth I as monarch in The Faerie Queene herself (the visionary object of Arthur's quest) and in her aspect as 'a most vertuous and beautifull Lady', Belphoebe (p.3).

Edwin Casady, in The Neo-Platonic Ladder in Spenser's **Amoretti** finds allegorical encoding of the Platonic idea of the ascent of the soul through unselfish love in Spenser's Amoretti. [27] This might suggest a correspondence with the allegorical Platonic interpretations of Shakespeare's plays by John Vyvyan which I have found so useful for director's notes on the plays.

In Spenser's Allegory, the Anatomy of Imagination, Isabel Maccaffrey claims 'A cosmic poem like The Faerie Queen... depicts this intelligible world as it looks to the eye of the mind'. [28] She links the imaginative force of Spenser's allegory to Shakespeare through the philosophic speculation of Duke Theseus in A Midsummer Night's Dream:

> To give body to this invisible realm is the task of poetic imagination, in particular of allegory. Shakespeare's Theseus, at the end of a dream play, speaks of how 'imagination bodies forth/ The forms of things unknown' (MND V.i.14-15) (p.4).

In speaking of the debt owed by Shakespeare to Spenser's influence, Tillyard says, 'Thus there has till recently been a reluctance to allow Spenser's poems their due' (pp. 12-13).

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John Vyvyan notes that Shakespeare himself acknowledges his admiration for Spenser:

> In The Passionate Pilgrim, he himself tells us of his admiration for Spenser:
>
> > Spenser to me, whose deep conceit is such
> > As, passing all conceit, needs no defence.
>
> ...this reference gives Spenser unique importance as a link. [29]

This correspondence between Shakespeare and Spenser makes it likely, given the allegorical nature of Spenser's work, that Shakespeare could also have applied allegory to his plays.

The compliment paid to Queen Elizabeth the First by Edmund Spenser in his allegorical references to her (see above p.87) could be interpreted as politically strategic diplomacy. Marion Taylor, writing in support of Elizabethan 'topical allegory', complains of critical cynicism:

> It seems to be fashionable to disparage those scholars who have pointed out political allegory in the plays of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists. [30]

G.K.Hunter speculates that Spenser could, during the years when they were living in nearby premises in London between 1576 and 1580 and sharing an acquaintance with Gabriel Harvey, have known John Lyly, an important precursor and a contemporary playwright of Shakespeare, whose plays also flatter Queen Elizabeth in undisguised political allegory. [31] There are critics who acknowledge Shakespeare's debt to Lyly if only in terms of stylistic

structures in the plays such as paradox, symmetry and antithesis. Hunter draws close parallels between the plays of Lyly and Shakespeare's early comedies, demonstrating the superior technical subtlety of Shakespeare's treatment of themes (pp. 298-349.). He refers to a direct connection between the writers in Shakespeare's 'famous parody of Euphuism in Henry IV' (p. 298). R Warwick Bond also remarks upon this particular correspondence, (which he identifies as occurring in Henry IV, II.iv.438-61, corresponding to Euphues p.196 in his own edition), and furthermore, lists passages from Shakespeare's plays whose language and sense suggest a parallel to extracts from Lyly's prose work, Euphues. He makes particular reference to Love's Labour's Lost in this respect. [32]

Janet Spens claims 'It is from Lyly that we must start to understand Shakespeare's comedy at its heart' (p. 9). She describes the style, as she perceives it, of the allegory in Lyly's plays:

> Lyly's plays are essentially masques; that is to say, they are representations of actual incidents of the time at which they were performed, translated by the language of symbolism into a more radiant plane of existence (p.9).

I consider that this 'radiant plane of existence' has a more profound source. It has always been my suspicion that Shakespeare and certain other Elizabethan playwrights made available to the wide public the same arcana and mysteries as those that were encoded in Lyly's plays and

presented before the select coterie that comprised Lyly's audiences. For example, I find in the fantastical play Endimion, (whose story is a type of myth providing a story which explains the presence of 'the man in the moon'), many elements in common with the plays of Shakespeare discussed in this thesis and their corresponding allegorical readings. [33] Endimion scorns the human love of Tellus for that of Cynthia, the moon. Feeling herself betrayed, Tellus persuades the witch Dipsas to cast a sleeping spell on him during which he will age and thus be deprived of the enjoyment of his youth. This sleep lasts for forty years and is both ended, and he rejuvenated, by a kiss from Cynthia, who is responding to an oracle revealed in a fountain by the unselfish love of Endimion's friend Eumenides. In the surprise ending of the play, Cynthia takes Endimion to the moon with her as her favoured lover, after disentangling enchantments and misalliances of those involved in the plot, and encouraging the pairing of three other couples. I find in this play a similarity to the lunar motifs in A Midsummer Night's Dream, with the moon both personified, (as Titania in The Dream, as Cynthia in Endimion) and as a planetary sphere, and in the assumed allegorical references to Queen Elizabeth as Cynthia and the unrelenting encouragement typical in entertainments of the time that she should end her virginity. Marion Taylor reports Elizabeth's tried patience in 1565 as she was

presented with yet another dramatic offering applauding the married state. Turning to Guzman da Silva (who later wrote about the incident to his master, Philip of Spain), she observed, 'This is all against me' (p.14) In Endimion, Cynthia ultimately takes Endimion as a lover. Justifying his love for the moon whose waxing and waning usually deems her inconstant, Endimion cries:

> Cynthia, being in her fullness decayeth, as not delighting in her greatest beauty, or withering when she should be most honoured.(I.ii. p.72)

In similar vein in The Dream, Duke Theseus, referring to the religious chastity with which Hermia is threatened if she does not marry the man of her father's choice, advises:

> Thrice blessed they that master so their blood
> To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;
> But earthlier happy is the rose distilled,
> Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
> Grows, lives and dies in single blessedness.(I.1.74-78)

Noel Purdon, in The Words of Mercury: Shakespeare and English Mythography of the Renaissance, claims that Lyly tactfully changes the myth which identified England's queen with Diana, the Moon-goddess, 'Endimion loves her - Cynthia herself cannot be shown as a victim of love. She is beautiful and inscrutable.'[34] In the preface to his edition of the play, (see above p.91) Ashley Thorndike claims:

> The story of Cynthia's love for a mortal is made to symbolise the queen's affection for Leicester, and the allegory is multiplied after the fashion of 'The Fairy Queen', so that Cynthia, for example, may be

the moon, or Chastity, or Queen Elizabeth (p.ix).

Doubtless echoing the myth of Acteon's transformation into a stag when he strays upon the pool where the virgin goddess is bathing, transformation into part bestiality as a punishment for trespass into the realm of Diana/Cynthia is featured in Endimion as it is in A Midsummer Night's Dream and in The Merry Wives of Windsor. In Endimion, Corsites trespasses on the 'Lunary bank' where the enchanted Endimion lies protected by Cynthia's henchmen, and tries to remove Endimion, when fairies, in a style similar to that employed by the tormentors of Sir John Falstaff, (disguised as the stag-headed Herne the Hunter in The Merry Wives of Windsor (V. v.93-102), and punished for his attempted transgression upon the virtue of the wives of Windsor), pinch him in a song of torment, which sends him into an enchanted sleep that transforms him into part-leopard. This is akin to Bottom's transformation into part-ass when he strays near Titania's bower. In The Comedy of Errors, set in Ephesus, known for its temple to Diana and for its witchcraft, there are many references to animals into which the Duke Solinus protests the protagonists must have been turned, such is their seeming lunacy (V.i.271).

I find similar correspondences in the motifs which I interpret as allegories of mystic systems in the plays of both authors. The forty-year sleep of Endimion both punishes him for his abuse of Tellus and transforms him

into a being fit to be the consort of Cynthia. The 'forty' has mystic significance, (see below p.233) and compare with Puck's 'I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes', (Dream, II.i.175-176), and with the forty ducats owed to the courtesan in Errors) and incorporates elements which suggest to me a process of soul-initiation (see below Chapters Four and Five). The first of these seem to indicate alchemical initiation suggested by terms applied to Endimion as he sleeps. Eumenides, debating at the oracle-fountain whether to ask for something for himself or for the freedom from enchantment of Endimion says, 'Shall he die in a leaden sleep, because thou sleepest in a golden dream?' Corsites, trying to lift Endimion, observes, 'What stone still? turned [sic] I think, to earth'. **Earth** and **lead** are analogues for the base matter which alchemical processes will transform to symbolic **gold** or the Philosopher's Stone, (see below Chapter Five). This implies that in Endimion are contained the beginning and end of alchemic processes, and suggests to me that this signals the transformation that he is undergoing. It is possible that there are several layers of undermeanings. The fountain-oracle itself mirrors the oracular wells in the Celtic tradition (see below Chapter Four). Renaissance Platonism is implied: in the interchange with the character Pythagoras, wherein Cynthia persuades him to condition his philosophy by the moderating sway of nature (IV.iii.); in the transforming

effect of love, (on Corsites, Endimion, Cynthia, Semele, Dipsas, Tellus, and in its parody form, Sir Tophas); in the power of true and unselfish love exampled in giving Eumenides the ability to read the prophecy in the well and to discover the cure for Endimion (III.iv.); and in the significance of the four couples with which the play ends (see below Chapter Six). A diplomatic political level exists in the flattery of the monarch Queen Elizabeth implied in the constant praise of the virgin moon, Cynthia.

T. M. Parrott acknowledges that there is a mystery in the allegory of Lyly's work:

> There has been, perhaps too much scholarly industry expended in the attempt to pluck out the heart of Lyly's mystery; his allegory, like that of The Faerie queene is veiled and shifting (p. 62)

I think that the veils hide the encoded arcana in a tradition that Lyly was copying from Ovid and re-working into a dramatic tradition that would culminate with Shakespeare. Parrott observes the connection with Ovid, 'it is from Ovid that Lyly lifts the magical transformations that occur in several of his plays' (p.62).

Wilson Knight, referring to symbols in Lyly, comments on the depth of their intrinsic significance:

> a true symbol does not properly stand instead of something else. Meanings can be found in it: it is not conditioned by any meaning.[35]

He attributes the role of Cupid effecting changes in some

of the plays to a psychological function:

> Behind the miraculous changes arranged by Cupid in more than one play are possible psychological significance as I have aleady noticed (p. 170). I posit that these 'changes' are the mutations typifying mystery initiations such as alchemy, and that Cupid represents a spiritual guide or agent such as Mercury in alchemy, (see below Chapter Five), in addition to carrying out the Platonic function of the transforming power of love (see below Chapter Six).

Other writers of Shakespeare's time besides Lyly were writing plays with ulterior meanings. T. M. Parrott describes the allegory in the play, A Looking Glass, by the Elizabethan playwright Robert Greene and his collaborator Lodge:

> it is an attempt to dramatize the story of Jonah and to apply the lesson to contemporary London, which the play intimates, is a no less sinful city than Nineveh (p.78).

We know the direct connection between Greene and Shakespeare from Greene's bitter condemnation of Shakespeare in Groats-worth of Wit, as:

> an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his **Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde,** supposes he is well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute **Iohannes fac totum,** is in his owne conceit the onely Shakes-scene in a countrey.[36]

D. Allen Carroll has suggested an allusion in the 'Iohannes fac totum' of Greene's document to the revolutionary Jack Cade, also known as John Mend-All,

and refers to the opinion of Andrew S. Cairncross in his Arden 2 Henry VI, that Greene's attack refers to a speech that occurs in the scene of Shakespeare's play which introduces this John Cade and which describes Gloucester:

> Seems he a dove? His feathers are but borrow'd
> For he's disposed as the hateful raven:
> Is he a lamb? His skin is surely lent him,
> For he's inclined as is the ravenous wolves
> (III.1.75-78) [37]

If this is the case, then I suggest some internal evidence for the possibility that Greene could also have been referring to Shakespeare's coding of arcane mysteries in plays, and complaining that this was a custom copied from Greene and his fellow playwrights. The words 'dove', 'raven', and 'wolf' are key symbols in alchemy, (see below Chapter Five).

Shakespeare copied Greene's story Pandosto, the Triumph of Time in The Winter's Tale, a play which I consider has an 'exoteric' alchemical reading, 'exoteric' in this context referring to the actual chemical practice of Alchemy (see Appendix B.5.). I consider any proven connection between Greene and Shakespeare significant to my argument, in that it provides possible external evidence that Shakespeare's use of allegory, particularly that related to mystery traditions, was following a contemporary convention employed by certain playwrights such as Greene. Further internal evidence which I posit indicating Greene's practice of this custom, is his selection of the story of Jonah and the whale for his

political and ethical allegory of London corruption in A Looking Glass, (see above p.96), as this also has an alchemical reading, the whale being one of the alchemical symbols of 'prima materia', the base matter which is to be transmuted into the 'redeemed' gold (see below Chapter Five). His character Queen Dorothea in James IV prefigures the women disguised as men in Shakespeare's plays, (Julia, Viola, Rosalind, Portia, and Imogen), which I claim represent the androgynous Hermaphrodite, as a creature above the limitations of male-female duality, a symbolic goal of alchemy, and also the alchemical 'soul', counterpart of their partners' alchemical 'body', (see below Chapter Five and Appendix B.4, B.6, and B.9.).

In his traducing of Shakespeare, Greene names three colleagues, 'his Quondam acquaintance' whom he warns against imitators, 'those Puppets (I meane) that spake from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours.' One of these acquaintances must have been his friend, the playwright George Peele, whose play, The Old Wives Tale, incorporates elements of certainly Celtic and possibly alchemic mysticism which T. M. Parrott calls 'bits of English folklore' (p. 75.). An example of this is the scene containing a 'Well of Life', within which are enchanted heads, the first of which offers gifts of corn, and the second gold, which as it rises calls:

> Gently dip, but not too deep,
> For fear thou make the golden beard to weep.
> Fair maid, white and red,
> Comb me smooth and stroke my head,

> ...And every hair a sheaf shall be,
> And every sheaf a golden tree. [38]

Ann Ross, in Pagan Celtic Britain, explains Peele's debt to Celtic tradition in this scene:

> All the elements present in the Celtic tradition are here-the heads in the well of life, their powers of speech and their fertility associations...and prosperity, both mercenary and agrarian as shown by the bestowal of gold and corn...The combing and the smoothing of the head may be compared with the treatment of a severed head in the early Irish story Cath Almaine [39]

Shirley Ann Reid notes Shakespeare's debt to this play in its Celtic emphasis and to others such as Clyomon and Clamydes where the importance of nature and the relationship between characters and Celtic nature spirits is evident. [40] I find this connection important in providing a precedent for the Celtic levels of undermeanings of A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and Cymbeline, (see Appendices A.2, A.3, B.3, and B.6.).

There is also a possible alchemical reading of the above passage of Peele's verse in the use of the colours red, white and gold which symbolise the last three of four stages in alchemy, and the double emphasis on the gold which is its goal (see below Chapter Five).

The fantastic element with its allegorical style in the work of Peele, Greene and Shakespeare may owe its nature, as the comedy of John Lyly was attributed by Janet Spens, to masques, the court entertainments (see above, p.90). As described by E.K. Chambers, these were

extended metaphors of political and ethical allegory, elaborately costumed and performed essentially by amateurs, particularly members of the court themselves. [41] Chambers describes an account given of court entertainments centred upon a 'Prince of Misrule', one Henry Helmes from Norfolk, presented before Elizabeth over the Christmas/New Year period 1594:

> At Shrovetide, the Prince took his mask to the court at Whitehall. The maskers were the Prince of Purpoole and his Seven Knights; the torchbearers eight pigmies; the presenters Proteus, Thamesis, Amphritite, and one of the Prince's Esquires; the musicians two Tritons, two Nymphs, and a Tartarian Page.
>
> The performance was upon a stage. After a hymn, the presenters made speeches setting out how the Prince and Knights were in an Adamantine Rock, to be released by Proteus, on the discovery of a Power (the Queen) of more attractive virtue. The maskers issued from the Rock, and danced 'a new devised measure &c.'; then took ladies, and danced 'their galliards, courants, &c.'; then danced 'another new measure'. The Pigmies brought in eight escutcheons, with the maskers' impresses, which the Esquire presented to the Queen. The maskers then entered the rock, while another hymn was sung (pp.56-57).

The exotic protagonists of this masque, the flattery of the Queen, the extraordinary scenario and the spectacle of the presentation all imply a contemporary context of flamboyant dramatic conventions within which the 'romantic' elements (see above p.66) and any mystic allegory would be very much at home.

Anne Righter, in Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, comments upon another kind of allegory in the metaphor of the play itself:

> consistently, men who watched a dramatic performance of any kind, or pondered a classical comedy or

> manuscript, seem to have been tempted to equate the real world with the imaginary kingdom of the stage, to describe Man as an actor and assign either to Fate or God Himself the double position of dramatist and audience (p.65).

She implies that this metaphor of the real world in the play was assummed to be valid to Shakespeare and his company in their Playhouse motto, which had an ancient derivation:

> The words which tradition associates with the sign of The Globe Playhouse, 'Totus mundus agit histrionem' were formulated by Petronius (p.65).

I comment as a theatre practitioner that this blurring of the edges of reality into fantasy and vice versa in the metaphor of drama is one that is aimed for in the suspension of belief that is necessary to give a convincing performance of a play (see above p.10). As a member of an audience I assume that the play or film that I am watching has its own reality and if a metaphor is present I derive added levels of enjoyment from the extra dimension of meaning, in the same sense as that described by Geoffrey Whitney (see above p.73). I do not think that any allegory will necessarily be continuous or comprehensive throughout a work, indeed a member of our audience of A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1983 found the alchemical allegory to be inconsistent, commenting that the play 'went in and out of Alchemy.' It is my experience as a director of Shakespeare's plays, that some of Shakespeare's early plays are less systematic in their allegorical content than the later ones, a point reflected

in the programme notes I write for the plays. From 1988 to 1993 when I was presenting the later and middle plays of Shakespeare I was able to set out the levels of allegory corresponding with the story in a chart which audiences told me that they appreciated for their clarity. However, when we performed an early play, The Taming of the Shrew, in 1994, I could find no systematic allegorical correspondence to the different sections of the story and received complaints from several members of the audience about the resulting missing chart that year.

We find in Theatre Set-Up, that the exposition of the research and resulting 'inner line' of direction of the plays in programme notes, available for anyone who wishes to follow our rationale for the production, is necessary to condition the mind-frame of the audience which obviously affects its reception of the allegory. Some members of the audience, who already follow or study the Western Mystery traditions, the Cabbala, or Platonism from which I find the allegories derive (see below Chapters Four to Seven), have the advantage of previous knowledge which facilitates their understanding of the inner meaning of our productions. Other regular members of our audiences build up understanding of the way in which we perceive the plays we produce in terms of their secret meanings over the years of studying what we are doing in the programme notes. We have continual requests for the programmes to be sent ahead to the venues so that people

can read them before the play begins. On the other hand, many people are not interested in the secret meanings, and only wish to enjoy the play for the interest of its story line.

I also accept that people's own experiences and beliefs will affect their perceptions of allegory in plays that they are watching or reading. An example of this is Jan Kott's exposition in Shakespeare Our Contemporary of his political reading of A Midsummer Night's Dream based on his contacts with Europeans who had suffered political repression. [42]

I do not think that the application of allegory in plays is significantly different from poetry or prose where it is coded in symbols, situation and characterisation. If we refer to Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, a work written in poetry and providing written analysis in prose of its different levels of meaning including the allegory, we can examine the ways in which the allegory is applied. For example, Ariosto explains the allegory of the Fourth Book for us: the character Atlant, 'by many of his gestures and actions here specified' represents love personified as Cupid; the warring aspect of love is indicated by Atlant 'taking up' in addition to 'women and weaklings', 'brave captaines and souldiers', (p. 56); the wings of the beast, the 'Griphith horse' represent Cupid's wings, (p. 57); the imprisoning effect of love is indicated by Atlant's

actions in imprisoning, 'all he takes' (p.57); the routes to the castle of Atlant are 'craggie, headlong and unpleasant', indicating the similar nature of the passion of love, (p.57); the castle itself is in the middle of a 'rockie mountain cloven in sunder', which signifies that the folly of love strikes most in middle age, (p.57); the pleasures to be had in the castle simulate those that feed the state of love; and 'the fortification of the castle, the fuming pots of stone, the situation and height, and everything that is said of the man, the horse, the house, the shield', all have allegorical significance which Ariosto considered so obvious as not to require explanation (p.57). The parts of the poetic story which Ariosto names as elements of the allegory all fall into the category of symbols: the wings of the Griphith horse, the castle, its location, routes and pleasures, the divided mountain, and all aspects as named of the man, his mount, his amour and his house; characterisation, (the nature of Atlant and the people he encounters); and situation, (as the 'taking up' of people and imprisoning them, and the indulgence of pleasure in the castle), as the allegory does in the plays I analyse in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Anne Righter demonstrates Shakespeare's own awareness of the metaphor of the play itself by reference to the induction scene of The Taming of the Shrew:

> The induction of The Taming of the Shrew centres upon the play metaphor. It demonstrates...the cunning

> with which elements can insinuate themselves into life, and be mistaken for reality (p.105).

Northrop Frye, in contrast to the above critics, finds only literal meanings in the plays:

> There is no passage in Shakespeare's plays,... which cannot be explained entirely in terms of its dramatic function...there is nothing which owes its existence to Shakespeare's desire to 'say' something.[43]

With similar scepticism Richard Levin uses external evidence in his paper, The Relation of External Evidence to the Allegorical and Thematic Interpretation of Shakespeare, to substantiate his claim that allegorical readings of Shakespeare's plays are unjustified. [44] From my experience as a theatre director I consider that his conclusions are not valid. He begins his argument by citing three contrasting examples of allegorical readings of The Winter's Tale which deal with different sections of the play and which from internal evidence could be thought plausible. However, he considers their very variety to be self-contradictory:

> If we limit ourselves to internal arguments based upon the relationship of the allegory to the text, we would have to conclude that all three interpretations are equally plausible, so that they, in effect, cancel each other out and become equally implausible. For no one, I hope, would maintain that Shakespeare could have meant his play to convey three entirely different allegories (p.3).

I hope to demonstrate in this thesis that this is exactly what Shakespeare did mean and that there is an internal logic in their polysemous nature (see below Chapter Three). Levin observes that the three writers, (whom he

does not identify by name), attempt to establish Shakespeare's deliberate allegorical intention by reference to examples of preceding allegorical literature, but that none of Shakespeare's contemporaries who wrote accounts of his plays, (or for that matter of those of other playwrights), make reference to any allegorical content. I claim that their doing so would have been nonsensical on two counts.

Firstly it would have been superfluous as the practice of symbolic coding was a convention. Edgar Wind in Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance demonstrates how symbolic meanings were encoded in artifacts and works of art in the Renaissance. [45] He is able to offer us a reasonable spiritual programme for Botticelli's painting, Primavera. By reference to the Renaissance Platonic philosophy of Marsilio Ficino with whom he is able to establish a historic link with Botticelli (p.113), he interprets the picture as an allegory of Platonic love (pp.114-127). This interpretation makes sense of some of the picture's hitherto unexplained features. For example he posits that Mercury turns away from the general scene to touch clouds with his staff rather than golden apples in the trees because, in the sense of Ficino:

> The highest wisdom is to know that the divine light resides in clouds...
> If it is the hidden light of intellectual beauty (intellectualis pulchritudinis lumen) to which Mercury raises his eyes and lifts his magic wand, then his posture also agrees with his role as 'leader of the Graces'; for in turning away from the world to contemplate the Beyond, he continues the action begun

in their dance (p. 124).

This process of finding a rationale in a Renaissance work of graphic art by interpreting its allegorical significance in terms of its Renaissance philosophy is the same as that applied to Shakespeare's plays by those who read them in terms of their allegorical content. There is no complaint made of the lack of contemporary references to the allegorical content of the works of art discussed by Wind, nor is it assumed that because these are lacking, allegorical readings of them are not valid.

Secondly, I would contend that the point of some of the allegorical levels of meanings in the plays is that they represent forbidden political or religious material, (see below Chapter Five), and discussion of them by contemporaries would lay both observer and playwright open to scrutiny and perhaps arrest. The performance of King Richard II at the Globe theatre during February 1601 given by Shakespeare's company The Lord Chamberlain's Men and commissioned by Sir Gelly Merrick in anticipation of a successful rebellion of Robert Earl of Essex against Queen Elizabeth 1st, was interpreted allegorically as treacherous in intent by the Privy Council, who interrogated the actor Augustine Phillips, (who had presumably acted as the company's negotiator), and executed Merrick. Queen Elizabeth herself is reported to have said, 'I am Richard II. know ye not that...this tragedy was played 40tie times in open streets and

houses.' [46]

Levin refers to a description by Simon Forman of The Winter's Tale which consists only of an account of the plot and claims:

> It demonstrates that at least one contemporary did not discern any allegory - religious, political, or esthetic - in the play. Forman could scarcely be called a typical Jacobean... but his very eccentricities, especially his great interest in astrology and the occult, should have made him more disposed than most people to find some "higher" meaning behind the literal dramatic surface. Yet it obviously never occurred to him that the play was not meant to be taken literally (p.5).

I claim that had Forman discerned secret meanings in the play it would hardly have been likely, given his interests and sympathies, that he would have 'blown Shakespeare's cover' and endangered himself.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERARY CRITICISM

Shakespeare's Plays are Polysemous

T.S. Eliot, in his introduction to The Wheel of Fire agrees with Wilson Knight's perception of the double meanings of Shakespeare's plays, a characteristic he claims for all great literature:

> The greatest poetry, like the greatest prose, has a doubleness; the poet is talking to you on two planes at once. Shakespeare has this doubleness of speech (p. xv).

In The Allegory of the Faerie Queene, M.Pauline Parker notes that this admirable 'doubleness' was carried through to the work of Spenser from the Middle Ages:

> Spenser's legacy from the Middle Ages, included the ability to perceive visible things both as they were in themselves, and as they represented other things in the mind, thus existing on two planes of reality at once...To the Middle Ages... all created things were both themselves and the pictures of something else. [1]

John Vyvyan applies this duality to Shakespearean drama:

> In strict derivation, allegory means other-speak. Double-talk, one might be tempted to call it; and Shakespeare, like the poets of the Middle Ages, delights in double-talk. [2]

I go further in making a claim that there are a number of different arcane meanings in Shakespeare's plays, (each of these discussed at length in Chapters Four to Seven, and applied to the productions of plays discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine).

In Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye attributes the source of incorporating multiple meanings in a text to the

Middle Ages:

> when a precise scheme of literal, allegorical, moral and anagogic meanings was taken over from theology and applied to literature (p.72).

Citing Dante as an exponent of this custom, he remarks on the necessity of its acceptance as a literary convention:

> all meanings can be arranged, as the medieval four-level scheme implies in a hierarchical sequence, in which the first steps are comparatively elementary and apprehension gets more subtle and rarified as one goes on...the principle of manifold or 'polysemous' meaning, as Dante calls it, is not a theory any more, still less an exploded superstition, but an established fact (p.72).

So adamant is he in this belief, that he considers the equal acceptance of all possible levels of meaning the only valid scholastic approach, and its rejection mere pedantry:

> The student must either admit the principle of polysemous meaning, or choose one of these groups and then try to prove that all the others are less legitimate. The former is the way of scholarship and leads to advancement of learning; the latter is the way to pedantry (p.72).

Nevill Coghill also refers to Dante's exposition of the principle of polysemous interpretation of text. He gives us a translation of Dante's own full description of the principle, which he illustrates with examples. Dante writes that in addition to the primary literal interpretation of his text, there are secondary allegorical meanings:

> The meaning of this work is not single (simplex), indeed it can be called, polysemos, that is of several meanings; for there is first the meaning to be had from the letter; another is to be had from what is signified by the letter. And the first is called the literal (meaning); the second, however,

> is called the allegorical, or the moral, or the anagogical (p.6).

He illustrates this principle by a biblical reference to the Exodus of the Children of Israel in the time of Moses, indicating that in addition to the informative historical narrative are significant Christian mystic and moral allegorical (or anagogical) levels of meaning:

> This method of analysis, that it may seem the clearer, may be considered in these verses: 'In exitu Israel de Aegypto, domus Iacob de populo barbaro, facta est Iudaea sanctificatio eius, Israel potestas eius.' Now if we only look at the letter, the meaning to us is the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, at the time of Moses; if to the allegory, the meaning to us is our redemption made through Christ; if to the moral meaning, there is signified the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin into a state of grace; if to the anagogical, the departure of the holy soul from this servitude of corruption into the liberation **(libertatem)** of eternal glory (p.6).

Dante establishes that the mystic and moral levels of meaning that he finds in addition to the literal narrative should be classified as 'allegory', and that thus the subject must be considered to be 'double', with alternative meanings.

> And although these mystical senses are called by various names, they can all be generally called allegorical, since they differ from the literal or historical. In view of these things it is clear that the subject should be double **(duplex)** round which should flow alternate meanings (p.6).

I would argue that this declaration from Dante provides a precedent for the custom to be applied by writers in later times including Shakespeare, but Coghill is more cautious. 'Whether such a technique can in any way be usefully

applied to Shakespearean Comedy has still to be argued,' he says, (p.6.) although he does later apply this interpretation to The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest (pp.16-25). His motive and justification for doing this stems, as mine, from his practical experience of presenting the plays of Shakespeare :

> It has been my fortune, at one time or another, to produce all these plays, and in doing so I have been made aware of the presence of other planes of meaning than those immediately manifested in the 'story'. Spiritual parallels suggest themselves (p.18).

He prescribes that detected meanings should be measured against the main meanings of the play to avoid the criticism of sceptics, and that any such validated meaning must affect total production of the play:

> When this happens to a producer the newly-discerned 'meaning' must be rigorously tested against the manifest meaning as a whole, for fear someone may say with Horatio ''tis but our fantasy'. But when the new meaning is confirmed by such a test it will be found to make practical demands on the technique of production, if no part of it is to escape unexpressed (p. 18).

I actually read this passage from Coghill's work after I had done the kind of research he describes is needed to clarify interpretation of Shakespeare's plays, (recorded here in Chapters Eight and Nine), and was extremely gratified to find the similarity of our opinions and heartened to continue applying the results of my research to Theatre Set-Up productions (see Appendices A and B).

Ariosto's Orlando Furioso (see above p87), provides evidence that the polysemous tradition described by Dante

was continued into later times. I posit the possibility that such was the acceptance of the tradition, that mention of its use in literature or drama such as expected by Levin, (see above p.108), would have been redundant. I also consider it reasonable to infer that the types of levels of meanings mentioned by Dante should have been continued and augmented by writers including playwrights such as Lyly, Greene, Peele and Shakespeare.

There are Arcana in Shakespeare's plays significant to their interpretation

Coghill qualifies his interpretation of Shakespeare's use of allegory to exclude the genre of medieval character allegorisation:

> If I use the word 'allegory' in connection with Shakespeare I do not mean that the characters are abstractions representing this or that vice or virtue (as they do in some allegories say The Roman de la Rose or The Castle of Perseverance itself) (p.21).

On the contrary, it is his belief that the allegory, although it may represent certain principles, signifies universals applicable to the human experience and important to what Stanislavsky would call the 'inner line' of the play (see Introduction):

> I mean that they contain and adumbrate certain principles, not in a crude or neat form, but mixed with other human qualities; but that these principles taken as operating in human life, do in fact give shape and direction to the course, and therefore to the meaning, of the play (p.21).

What Coghill also observes from Dante's polysemous

analysis cited above is 'the hint that love is a theme in Comedy' (p.6). He defines this as the kind of love which informs the Platonic undermeanings so valued by John Vyvyan in his interpretations of Shakespeare's plays and which I find central to the understanding of many of them, (see above p.80 and below Chapter Six)

> In The Divine Comedy it is the theme of themes, though it is no longer merely human love but love absolute, the power and the glory of God, seen by created souls as the Beatific Vision for which indeed they were created (p.6).

He indicates how crucial this mystic arcane level is to our wider understanding of the nature of comedy as used by Dante and possibly Shakespeare, and considers this function of love in Dante's work of important significance to the implied meaning of 'comedy' in the title Divine Comedy, linking this to Shakespearean comedy in a way that produces a similarity to my own concept of Shakespeare's understanding of the medium (see above p.31). He describes how Dante found a correspondence between the pattern of comedy (as the happy resolution of an initial problem), the course of the redeemed soul after death, and virtuous life on earth:

> Dante...saw the formula for comedy as the pattern or picture of ultimate reality, and applied it to the state of the soul after death. That application may be extended to include life on earth; there was trouble in Eden, the knot was untied on Calvary, there is bliss in Heaven. The course of human life well-lived is a Comedy as defined. These realities, then unquestioned, could be figured in an earthly tale that followed the same pattern (p.12).

He considers that the comedy here referred to in this

exposition is synonymous with a harmony achieved after trouble which represents the norm of the human condition desired by Heaven:

> Any human harmony achieved out of distress can awaken overtones of joy on higher planes. At least they imply an assertion that the harmonious is the normal, the attainable, that heaviness may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning (pp.12-13).

Love is an essential component of this Christian ideal of harmony:

> Life is a union in love, not a battle of self-interest waged by the rules of an expedient ethic. Its greatest and characteristic triumph is positive joy, not a negative correction of vice and folly (p. 13).

John Vyvyan contrasts this humane aspect of Christianity as adumbrated by Dante with the more severe pagan beliefs of the time and aligns the contrasting styles of the fellow playwrights, Ben Jonson and Shakespeare, with these polarities:

> The best pagan faith offers Justice; Christianity, Mercy and Forgiveness.
>
> In a spirit of conformity with these opposites stand the Comedies of Jonson and Shakespeare respectively. Almost all in Shakespeare are built upon a love-story, often indeed on a group of love-stories; lovers are united, faults are pardoned, enmities reconciled (p.12).

He claims for Shakespeare in this prevalence of love themes not sentimentality, but adherence to a vision of the ideal life as one corresponding to the harmony created by the resolutions of comedy.

> All this might be thought intolerably sentimental if it were merely a question of sentiment, not a whole and serious view of the real nature of life. Shakespeare's comic vision is not a sickly indulgence or 'an escape from reality', but the firm assertion

of basic harmony (p.12).

Vyvyan shares similar thoughts to those of Coghill on the arcane significance of Shakespeare's characters, and the importance of perceiving the added dimension of meaning that this implies. He insists that to pass over these meanings is to lose the essence of the plays in taking the outer literal interpretations to be the only ones possible:

> If we miss the allegory in Shakespeare we miss his mind; we still have, it is true, the magnificent raiments; but not the life they spring from. Even to glimpse this, we must continually insist on the dual nature of certain characters, that they are both real and allegorical at the same time, and that their full significance includes both these aspects (p.72).

He attributes any scepticism of this principle to historic counter-traditions of recent centuries. He reasons that whereas Shakespeare lived in a period of time when the Medieval mystic traditions were still actively practised, we live in a period in which our more rational modes of thinking have been conditioned by previous centuries:

> It is difficult for us to appreciate this principle of construction because our outlook is so different from Shakespeare's. Our background is the rationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while his was the mysticism of the Middle Ages; we look at him across the age of reason and are apt to forget that he knew nothing of it; since the **eclairissement**, Europe has been sharpening its intellect, but in an earlier age it was much more interested in the exploration of its soul. The men of the renaissance stand between. And every blossoming of civilisation is partly a promise of the future, but mainly a summation of the past (p. 96).

However not all modern people are as sceptical as Vyvyan declares. Recently many writers have found

specific allegories in Shakespeare's plays, particularly those relating to alchemy. (I refer the reader wishing for further clarification of alchemical terms, symbols or processes than are contained in this chapter to Chapter Five.)

D.S. Savage, in An Alchemical Metaphor in Hamlet, identifies Shakespeare's alchemic approach to the needed moral cleansing of Denmark. [3] He posits that the true meaning of 'eale' in I.iv.36 is not 'evil' but 'eisel', which was used in the process of distillation in alchemy, giving us the subsequent possibility that the 'dram of eale' means a flaw in a man's character which prevents its being 'gold' (p. 158). Savage considers, however, that alchemy is not consistently applied in the play, that it is 'a pronounced alchemical train of thought manifesting itself intermittently thoughout the play' (p.160). I would disagree with this, as when I prepared the play for Theatre Set-Up in 1993, I found that it followed a systematic scheme of alchemy (see Appendix B.10).

Robert F. Fleissner, in 'Hamlet's Flesh Alchemically Considered', considers that in Hamlet's first soliloquy (I.ii.129,130) Shakespeare is deliberately referring to the alchemic processes of distillation and solution when wishing his 'solid' flesh to, 'melt,/ Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!'. [4] He points out that the 'dew' into which Hamlet wishes his flesh to be transmuted, could be said to correspond to the distilled water, or matter, that

the successful alchemist would attain after the process of distillation, and as that process did not involve cleansing, the use of the controversial word 'solid' is more appropriate than the 'sullied' sometimes suggested (p. 508).

In Why was Duncan's Blood Golden?, W. A. Murray, writing in 1966, offers an alchemic reading of Macbeth. He links the imagery in the play relating to Hell, Chaos and blood to alchemical tracts of Paracelsus. [5] For example, he associates Banquo's description of the vanishing of the three weird sisters:

> The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
> And these are of them (I.iii.79,80).

with the Paracelsan 'systematic theory of the nature of elemental spirits' which states that:

> the most tenuous of all spirits are earth spirits, which have to live in the earth-chaos and move through it (p. 38).

Murray posits that the spilt blood of the saintly King Duncan is associated through its colour and significance with the goal of alchemy, the red powder (called variously 'The Philosopher's Stone', 'gold' or 'The Phoenix', see Chapter Five):

> An alchemical tincture, an enormously strong colouring agent made of perfected matter, which has the power of transmuting substances (p. 41).

He considers that when Macbeth is justifying his murder of Duncan's grooms to Macduff, he invokes a vision of Duncan's body, and from his perspective as an occupant of

the dark Hell-on-Earth that his murder has placed him in, there is created in his mind a living picture of Duncan's skin as luminous silver, and the blood, (new-flowing as in legendary custom in the presence of the murderer), seems to be gold:

> As he watches the blood of the murdered saintly king glows and flows in the presence of the murderer. It is golden, for it is already in the hand of God. It is part of the perfection of heaven (p. 42).

Like Vyvyan, Murray laments contemporary interpretations of Shakespeare which ignore arcane symbolism by straying from the actual text and language of the plays:

> We appear to be entering a period in which Shakespeare is due for another eighteenth-century mauling. Acting versions are becoming less tied to the established text, criticism is becoming detached from a study of the language, and particularly from the complex study of linguistic associations (p. 43).

He moves from particular reference to the alchemical imagery in Macbeth, to commenting on the general importance of acknowledging the potent cultural force of the alchemical imagery in Shakespeare's plays. Murray regards alchemy as a matrix of human wisdom which we should not ignore:

> Consequently it [Macbeth] preserves in a tremendously powerful and well-unified set of images one of the greatest forces in Western European culture, a force which, however alien it may be to many of us today, we can afford neither to forget, nor to neglect, for it contains and can still convey, much of the wisdom of human experience (p.43).

In Theatre And Alchemy, Bettina L. Knapp credits alchemy with the same kind of universal cultural importance, especially when applied in literature, as does

Murray. [6] In a foreword to the book, Mircea Eliade describes how uniquely Knapp identifies alchemy with the essential motivation and processes of dramatic literature itself:

> As far as I know, no literary critic nor historian of culture until now has envisaged a systematic analysis of the alchemical process underlying the entire dramatic literature (p.xi).

Knapp refers to the writing on this subject by Antonin Artaud, 'There is a mysterious identity of essence between the principle of theatre and that of alchemy'. [7] She also makes reference to the work by C.G.Jung on the correspondence between psychology and alchemy:

> The entire alchemical procedure...could just as well represent the individuation process of a single individual. [8]

I deal in greater depth in Chapter Five with Jung's writing on alchemy which assisted me in my understanding of the significance of alchemical symbolism. In the same chapter I also draw on the clear explanations of the alchemical processes which Knapp gives in her book. She builds on the theories of Artaud and Jung in her analysis of specific works in terms of alchemical analysis and claims that, 'Any play may be interpreted alchemically'. She demonstrates for example, the correlation between alchemy and the inner processes of August Strindberg's A Dream Play:

> Theatre and alchemy are rituals of transformation and projections of inner states onto matter. Just as the alchemical process is composed of numerous and seemingly disconnected sequences and operations, A Dream Play is likewise divided into disparate images

> which give form and substance to intangible and invisible thoughts and feelings (p.19).

This kind of alchemical interpretation of theatre differs from my own understanding of Shakespeare's alchemical coding of his plays which I consider to be systematic and deliberate in its use of specific terms and processes, (see below Chapters Five, Eight and Nine).

Knapp claims that the characters in this play do not have 'flesh and blood' reality but are symbols like those of alchemy:

> Nor are his characters flesh and blood. They are symbols, archetypal images, fantasy figues, instincts, functions, essences - all reminiscent of alchemical representations and personifications to be found in the manuscripts of medieval and Renaissance scientists (p. 19).

In this I suggest another divergence from Shakespeare's use of alchemy in his plays. I consider that the characters in his plays, in addition to their figuring in alchemical processes, are fully fleshed people in their own right and that Shakespeare has created them in the light of psychological reality.

Shakespeare's sonnets are given an alchemic interpretation by Stephen Booth in his edition of Shakespeare's Sonnets. [9] For example, he claims Sonnet 119 to be 'largely constructed of metaphors and analogies from alchemy and medicine' (p. 398). In justification of this opinion he points out the naming of the alembic vessel in which the alchemical processes took place, and the process of distillation in the second line, 'Distilled

from limbecks foul as hell within'. He interprets the lines, 'And ruined love, when it is built anew,/ Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater', in terms of the central alchemical processes of breaking down matter in order for it to be reformed in an improved state:

> Lines 11 and 12 are particularly suggestive of alchemy, in which the essential operation was to break down matter and then reconstitute it in altered and superior form (p. 400).

I suggest this to be the core process of all of Shakespeare's plays.

In The Chemical Theatre, Charles Nicholl detects alchemy in John Donne's poetry, and in plays of Ben Jonson. [10] In addition he gives an alchemic reading of King Lear which has informed my perception of alchemy in Shakespeare, with the difference, however, that Nicholl only perceives alchemy in tragedy. Writing of the alchemic process, he claims, 'It is the basic pattern of tragic drama' (p.141). I claim for Shakespearean comedy the same redemptive function Nicholl detects in tragedy:

> Tragedy is, then, a drama of redemption. Its unremitting depiction of loss and doom is placed in a wider context of renewal (p.142).

Like Knapp, Nicholl also supports his views by reference to Jung's writing on the correspondences between alchemy and psycho-analysis:

> Both alchemy and tragedy define a journey: a road to wholeness that goes by way of dismemberment and dissolution. We are close here to the Jungian interpretation of alchemy. Jung drew deep and detailed analogies between the alchemical process

> leading to the Stone, and the psycho-therapeutic 'individuation process' leading to an integrated whole personality (p. 143).

Of the tragic protagonist King Lear, Nicoll writes, 'He is one who endures the torment of inner dismemberment; an ailing king who must learn the secrets of generation', (p.143). Nicoll points out the importance of the image of the wheel in King Lear, the 'wheele of fire' that Lear himself refers to when, after his torments at the hands of his elder daughters, he sees his youngest daughter, the virtuous Cordelia at lV.vii.4 (p.145). He indicates the connection with both the cyclic nature of the fates experienced by the protagonists of the play, and the alchemic wheel, described by George Ripley, Canon of Bridlington, and mentioned by him as 'The Wheele of our Philosophie thou hast turned about' on the title page of his The Compound of Alchymy, a book widely available in Shakespeare's time and one which I therefore use as a basis for my exposition of alchemy in Chapter Five. [11] Thus Nicholl links Lear's 'purgatorial Wheel of Fire', during which the king is cast down into a nadir of rejection and madness, and from which he rises to a state of redeemed grace, with 'Alchemy... a circular process of transformation.' (p.147).

Nicholl describes the extent to which Lear can be distinguished as a suitable subject for symbolic regeneration in the first scene of the play: he abdicates his kingship in all but title by giving away his lands and

power on the grounds of the limitations imposed upon him by his extreme age; he has three daughters but no sons and foolishly nominates as his sons two sons-in-law who are not fit to be kings; he demonstrates folly and lack of perception in demanding flattery in return for reward and in punishing sincerity:

> Lear's kingship is theatrical, two dimensional, a brittle surface concealing unexamined tensions and violences. (p.156)

When his daughter Cordelia refuses to be complicit in the false flattery bestowed on him by his other daughters, he curses her with a mad venom which foreshadows his later insanity and reveals a sinister element in his nature, unseemly in a king. Nicholl says of this, 'Beneath the kingly surface, something monstrous is glimpsed' (p. 156). This, Nicholl explains, gives us a typical alchemic symbol of a king:

> The figure of an ailing barren king is one we encounter often in alchemical writings and emblems...The alchemical King in his symbolic status as common gold or Raw Stuff is a curious mixture of nobility and corruption (p. 157).

He comments that the symbol is a fluid one, capable of representing various functions, including the beginning and the ultimate fulfilment of the alchemical process. A flawed king is one that must undergo the **opus** (or Great Work as it was called) of alchemy:

> We must not forget that the King is also frequently a symbol for the Stone itself, the triumphant Red King reborn...Hidden within the ailing, degenerate corporal king are the seeds of the transcendant, tingeing Red King: in order to discover them and bring them to fruition, the King must undergo the

> dissolutions and darkness of the **opus**. A flawed superficial kingship must be resigned for the true one to be won (pp.157-158)

Thus Nicholl states the alchemical process to be engaged. He then describes how, with the expulsion of Cordelia, Lear initiates the horrendous series of events that will create the disintegration into the nadir of the **nigredo**, the black stage of alchemy. When Lear's honest servant, Kent, attempts to reconcile him to Cordelia, Lear expels him too in speech which styles himself as a dragon, 'Come not betweene the dragon and his wrath' (I.i.122). Nicholl points out the important alchemic symbolism of the dragon which frequently represents the raw material upon which the process of alchemy took place and identifies it with the monster emerging from within Lear:

> The Dragon suggests the green, raw and primordial heart of matter. It is - as in Lear - the monster that lurks 'beneath' the King: the chaos of unredeemed nature (p.163).

He tells us that the dragon can also represent the fiery dissolving corrosive which effects the alchemic processes of dissolution and putrefaction:

> The mythological slaying of the Dragon thus becomes the alchemists conquest of unregenerate material nature (p.163).

Thus the dragon has a dual nature, the eater and the eaten, often being pictured as eating its own tail, an image which Nicholl suggests is applicable to Lear:

> Just as the alchemical Dragon is the true object of its own poison... so too Lear is the true recipient of his own curses: it is he who is banished and dismembered, 'made nothing' by the storm and his

madness (p.165).

When Lear is cast out by his daughters, Goneril and Regan, and rages in madness at the storm to which he is exposed, Nicholl explains that within the image of the 'wheel of fire', Lear has reached the bottom of the circle and will then move upwards to his redemption (p.165). The daughters Goneril and Regan draw from Lear epithets such as 'wolf' and 'serpent' which associate them with corrosive agents. They contrast with Cordelia who, Nicholl asserts, will provide the balm that will heal Lear. This opposing nature of Lear's daughters fulfils the dual nature of the symbolic agent of alchemy called 'Mercury':

> The daughter in Lear - caustic and balm, torment and nurse, disease and physician - has precisely the double nature of alchemical Mercury...As the secret fire or Dragon, Mercury is the corrosive agent of dissolution (p.168).

He expounds on the alchemical healing function of Mercury. It is like a spirit which evaporates from the stuff being processed, and returns like a dew to be rejoined with the purified matter to which it gives life:

> Mercury's other nature is as quintessence or **anima**, released as fugitive vapour and returning as 'dew of heaven' or 'divine breath' to reanimate the blackened Stuff (p.168).

This, he claims is the exact function of Cordelia in the play:

> And so Cordelia in Lear, returning to 'repaire those violent harmes that my two sisters Have in thy reverence made' (p.168).

Lear is subjected to tortures which, Nicholl asserts, all

have explicit alchemical significance: the daughter Goneril as the 'wolf antimony'; the vitriol performing the function of mortification; the Fool, his jester, personifying Mercury in all its aspects; the storm as 'ultimate solvent' and as the fire in the alchemical furnace, the athanor; the darkness of the night as the stage of putrefaction; and the hovel as the alchemist's alembic in which the process is occurring. Into this horror of Lear's purgation comes Edgar, the man who will ultimately succeed Lear as King, disguised as a madman. Nicholl identifies him as the King's son, an alchemic symbol of regenerated matter, signifying that an up-turn of the 'wheel of fire' is about to take place (pp.172-201). This occurs when Lear is re-united with Cordelia and he demonstrates his changed nature with a new-found humility. She, as the restoring aspect of Mercury, has breathed life into him:

> It is her return which completes the transformation of father by daughter, Raw Stuff by Mercury. She had been cast forth - the flight of the **anima mercurii** expelled as vapour from the corrupt chaotic Stuff (p.205).

Nicholl then refers to the other aspect of Lear's-daughters-as-Mercury, her sisters, Goneril and Regan, who had broken down the 'Raw Stuff' of the King, which she now brings back to life:

> She had hovered in present-absent promise while the other Mercury, the caustic serpent and secret fire, had performed its ruinations. Now she descends to reanimate -to return the **anima** to - the eclipsed King and thus completes the double nature of Mercury,

> destroyer and restorer (p.205).

When Lear and Cordelia therefore experience a reversal of fortune, are defeated in battle and imprisoned, Nicholl claims that Lear's redemption has made them unassailable, 'Lear and Cordelia stand before their captors indissoluble and untouchable' (p.211). They have achieved the alchemic stage of exaltation and symbolise the 'alchemical wedding', an analogue of the Philosopher's Stone, the goal of the alchemic process:

> Lear and Cordelia side by side at the centre of the stage, suffused with a magical power that confounds their misfortune, is Shakespeare's masterly dramatisation of that favourite alchemical emblem of the Stone - the Red King and the White Queen inseparably linked in the Chemical Wedding (p.212).

Nicholl proposes a solution to the enigma of Cordelia's death, strangled by Edmund's captain. He suggests a non-tragic alchemic perception of her death and the subsequent death of Lear as she and her father have alchemically transcended worldly limitations. He cites, in support of this theory, the last words of Lear in which he seems to see actual breath on her lips, 'Looke on her, looke, her lips,/Looke there, looke there' (V.iii.312-313) and suggests that it is as if he can see her ascending spirit, 'This is only as much to say that spirit is invisible' (p.217). He considers that Cordelia's death exemplifies the principle of the alchemist Paracelsus, that Nature:

> is not visible though it operates visibly; for it is simply a volatile spirit, fulfilling its office in bodies (p.217).

and that Lear perceives the 'office' of both Cordelia and himself to have been fulfilled in their transcendence above their worldly function:

> The moment is felt as 'tragedy' by all except Lear himself (p. 217).

At the end of the play, Nicholl asserts, the alchemic achievement of the Philosopher's Stone has been sucessfully completed, the old King has finished his task and Edgar the new King reigns in his place:

> The rule of the new King begins: the old King's task is completed by his death. The gene of royalty has been safely delivered. 'Let us now rejoice together', says the alchemist, 'for the reign of death is finished and the son doth rule' (p.218).

I think that Nicholl demonstrates in this seminal interpretation of King Lear, done in such a way that an underlying purpose and structure illuminate the plot, aspects of which can be puzzling and even distressing, how Shakespeare made systematic use of mystic allegories in his plays.

However I do not agree with Nicholl in his belief that the alchemic meanings which he detects in this play are Shakespeare's first attempts at encoding his plays systematically with alchemical allegory (p.152). He dates composition of the play at 1605 and notes the advent of other significant writings in that year which he thinks might have influenced Shakespeare: Bacon's Advancement of Learning, Tymme's Practise of Chymicall Physicke, besides the major works of Valentine, Sendivogius and Quercetanus,

the anthology Theatrum Chemicum, Andreae's early version of Chemical Wedding, Ben Jonson's Eastward Hoe and Volpone and John Donne's Songs and Sonnets:

> If Shakespeare were to embrace alchemy into his poetry, as these writers did, then 1605, might be the year, King Lear the play (p.152).

I consider that not only were there precedents in alchemic symbolism in the works of Shakespeare's literary forebears, (see above pp.90-91) but that Shakespeare himself was making use of alchemic symbolism from the time of his composition of the early plays, a thesis also supported by Luminitsa Niculescu and George Trevelyan, (see below pp.136 and 141). Nicholl himself refers to the alchemic symbolism in The Merry Wives of Windsor. He describes how the gross Falstaff is purged by Mistresses Ford and Page in ways which are described even by Falstaff as corresponding to processes of alchemy. Falstaff recounts the indignity of his ordeal, when, to escape from Mistress Ford's jealous husband, he is hidden in a laundry basket which is then thrown into the river Thames (III.v.90-94, 114-125) . This produces an analogue of the process of distillation (p.79). I made use of this material when directing the play for Theatre Set-Up in 1985, (see Appendix B.3.).

I agree with Nicholl's additional statement that although the alchemy may be only part of the meaning of a Shakespearean play, an understanding of allegories such as the alchemy gives us an insight into meanings lost in

recent centuries:

> I hope, therefore, that this 'alchemical reading' will also be an alchemical reconstruction: that it will restore to King Lear certain meanings which have been lost in intervening centuries. Those meanings in no way displace other interpretations of the play; there are no final solutions to King Lear (p.153).

He makes the point which we in Theatre Set-Up find so germane to the scope of our work: that we should try to supply to our audiences through an understanding of any meanings of the plays not in common currency today, a sense of what the significance would have been of the plays in Shakespeare's day:

> If John Dee or Robert Fludd, James Forester or Francis Anthonie had watched King Lear...if, for that matter, Francis Bacon or Ben Jonson or John Donne had seen the play; these are, I believe, some of the meanings they would have drawn from it (p.153).

Nicholl also finds alchemical readings in Shakespeare's last four plays, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest. He does not give a detailed analysis of them, claiming that the alchemy 'is present as part of an overall magical or mystical tone' (p. 227). His interpretation of aspects of Cymbeline gave me the clues which made it possible for me to interpret and present Cymbeline for Theatre Set-Up in 1989. He links the cave in lV.ii. with symbolic nature itself, and the depth of matter into which the alchemic initiate must journey to effect initiation (pp. 227-28). He interprets the strange part of this scene where the drugged heroine Imogen wakes to find herself beside a headless corpse

which she embraces in the mistaken belief that it is her husband, as the stage of alchemy called 'coniunctio', or 'Chymical Wedding' (p.233). When preparing the play for performance by Theatre Set-Up, and examining it in the light of this revelation by Nicholl, it was my experience that this scene was indeed a 'coniunctio', but part of a total system of alchemy throughout the play (see Appendix B.6.).

Nicholl provides a contemporary correspondence to Shakespeare's use of alchemy in his plays, with his analysis of Ben Jonson's similar procedure. In The Alchemist, a work which ridicules occult charlatans including alchemists, Nicholl notes Jonson's shrewd use of the inherent comic possibilities of the mystifying alchemic terms and the frequent abuses of its practice:

> Alchemical language is central to the play's comic purpose, rather than merely providing colour and verisimilitude. Jonson's infallible instinct told him that alchemy required nothing in the way of comic magnification. Its foibles and excesses were all there in the original: alchemy was its own caricature (p.98).

He describes the irony of the alchemical allegory in the play. The characters Face and Subtle swindle many people into paying for bogus alchemic services. Instead of receiving the benefits they had hoped for, they are punished for their folly by becoming the 'Raw Stuff' that Face and Subtle transmute into the gold of profit (p.112). This same kind of trickery provides Nicholl with an alchemical reading of Volpone. Volpone lures all manner

of avaricious fools to bring him presents in the hope that he will favour them and make them heirs to his fortune. These gift-bearing fools thus create the 'Stuff' from which he will gain the gold of profit:

> It is they, the battening clients, who are unwittingly the Raw Stuff. By a fine irony, they are the very materials of the fortune they hope to inherit (p.113).

However Nicholl comments that Volpone's adulation of worldly gold classifies him as a debased alchemist without the correct mystic intentions (p.117). Of the style of alchemy in these two plays, Nicholl comments that Jonson always declared his intention to satirise contemporary social follies in his plays, and that here he has managed to equate alchemy with capitalism (pp.115-118). He points out how Jonson further employs this technique in The Divell is an Asse, in a play that pivots on a punning use of the word 'projector' in the one sense of being a person who dreams up economic projects, and in the other alchemical one of the stage of **projection**, in which the red powder consituting the Philosopher's Stone is 'projected' on to lead to transform it into gold. Nicholl subtitles the play, Eastward Hoe, 'a chemical morality', and demonstrates how the moral message of the play, balanced between two precepts praising thrift and industry and condemning unseemly ambition, is reinforced by Jonson's use of an alchemical metaphor (p.107). This is indicated by the names given to the three protagonists,

CHAPTER THREE: LITERARY CRITICISM

Quicksilver, Golding and Touchstone, whose alchemical significance, Nicholl observes, are reflected in their characters:

> The impish, mercurial Quicksilver; the virtuous incorruptible Golding; the presiding, judicial Touchstone, against whom the purity and worth of his apprentices are measured (p.107).

He claims that the plot functions according to the alchemical characteristics of these protagonists. For example, in the first scene of the play, Quicksilver unsuccessfully tries to urge Golding to revolt against their master, Touchstone, thus enacting the alchemical processes of 'fixing' Mercury, which has inappropriately tried to corrupt the gold (p.108). The course of the character Quicksilver follows that of Mercury in alchemy: he is sacked from his apprenticeship and rejoices in his freedom, (alchemically he flies out or evaporates in the process called **solve**); his crimes bring him punishment and he is imprisoned (alchemically this is defined by his master, Touchstone, who says, 'there is my Quicksilver **fixd**', in the process called **coagula or fixation** (IV.ii.328), (pp. 108-110). The plot treatment of the character Golding is also consistent with the alchemical significance of his name: his constant good behaviour brings him 'social elevation' as in the stage of **exaltation.**

Nicholl's work on Jonson makes his hypothesis on Shakespeare more valid, providing as it does, external

evidence of the customary use of alchemy by one who was Shakespeare's colleague and contemporary playwright.

Referring to the work of Nicholl, Lyndall Abraham, (see above p.122), in Alchemical Reference in **Antony and Cleopatra**, also finds traces of alchemical allegory in a Shakespearean tragedy. [12] Citing Lepidus, 'Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun: so is your crocodile' (II.vii.26-27), Abraham indicates the alchemic implications of the use of the terms 'serpent', 'mud', 'sun,' and 'crocodile' and indicates that the phrase 'operation of your sun' is a 'distinctly alchemical term' whose origin is in the alchemical document, the Emerald Tablet (p.100 and see below, Chapter Five). She describes how this work, of which the earliest known version was discovered by E.J. Holmyard in an eighth century Arabic text, was 'ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus or the Egyptian Thoth', and was used as a basic text for alchemists from its translation into Latin in the thirteenth century, until the seventeenth century, and that it appeared in English in Shakespeare's day in London in 1597 as part of Roger Bacon's Mirror of Alchimy (p.100).

Abraham explains that the term 'sun' was one of the many synonyms for the goal of alchemy, the redeemed matter also known as 'gold', or 'The Philosopher's Stone' (see Chapter Five). Thus the process of alchemy known also as an 'Opus' could be termed the 'operation of the sun'

(p.101). She describes the magical associations of the Nile 'mud', which had the legendary diverse meanings of the 'Prima Materia', the base matter needing the regenerative process of alchemy, and the 'Stone' itself (p.101). 'The crocodile' also, she says, could refer to the goal of alchemy (p.101). Further alchemical allusions are cited in the description by Enobarbus of Cleopatra in her barge on the Nile (II.ii.191-4), in Antony's description of Cleopatra as a 'serpent of old Nile', and in Cleopatra offering Antony golden armour (p.104). However Abraham does not find that these alchemical references have any bearing on the meaning of the play, but perceives them as merely decorative elements which provide an exotic atmosphere appropriate to the Egyptian queen whose country was the alleged matrix of alchemy:

> If Shakespeare wished to add specific local colour to the Alexandrian material in Antony and Cleopatra, then the inclusion of alchemical imagery would be entirely appropriate...The alchemical images in the play are identified with Cleopatra, Alexandria, and Egypt, reinforcing the sense of the exotic and the mysterious (p.104).

Luminitsa Niculescu in Shakespeare and Alchemy: let us not admit impediments discovers a more essential alchemical function in Shakespeare's history plays. [13] She discusses the significance of the links between 'king', 'sun', and 'gold' in alchemy, and the identification of these with both the goal of alchemy and the monarchs in the history plays (pp. 171-175). In this context she suggests that alchemical symbolism implies

that the monarch must be purged of his impurities if he is to rightfully assume the throne and achieve a wholesome kingdom for his subjects. The need for being purifed before becoming this 'symbol of the sun and an equivalent of alchemical gold' is deemed by her to be fully appreciated by Prince Hal, who, in Henry IV Part One, I.ii.201-208, promises radical self-reform on assuming kingship, using a metaphor which suggests the alchemic transmutation of metals, 'like a bright metal on a sullen ground' (pp. 175-176). Therefore the ambitions of the Duke of Gloucester to be king in Richard III must be doomed to failure by his corrupt behaviour:

> He may look to the 'golden time' of kingship, but he is not capable of distilling the impure elements of his nature and remains 'a base foul stone' (Richard III, V.iii.250)

Niculescu finds this theme repeated in Henry VIII where Shakespeare provides a flattering contrast between the 'gold' of Queen Elizabeth and other unrefined protagonists:

> In the conflict between Cardinal Wolsey, the Dukes of Norfolk, Suffolk, and the Earl of Surrey, we are reminded of alchemists who cannot achieve gold unless they have first distilled the coarse impurities of their nature; the 'officious lords', who have not refined their imperfections (after all, they 'are moulded' out of 'coarse metal' - III.ii.239)...By contrast, Queen Elizabeth ...is, in fact, the only 'gem' (78), the only 'mighty piece' (V.v.27) of gold which 'doth refine' 'rudeness it selfe' (p. 183).

I find this thesis of Niculescu particularly interesting as it implies a consistency in the alchemical content of Shakespeare's plays from his early history plays to his

last play, Henry VIII.

From 1983, (the year before Niculescu wrote the above article) I found myself in a 'chicken and egg' paradoxical situation with regard to material written about arcana in Shakespeare's comedies. In that year I had directed A Midsummer Night's Dream for Theatre Set-Up and the programme notes containing the research on the arcana which had informed our production of the play were circulated around the UK and sent abroad. Several scholars specialising in the study of the Occult wrote to me and sometimes included writing from the A Midsummer Night's Dream programme notes (see Appendix A.1.). One of these was Cherry Gilchrist, whose work, Alchemy:The Great Work, contained acknowledged references to these programme notes. [14] She judges the alchemical interpretation and its application in the production to be successful:

> A Midsummer Night's Dream, for instance, can be interpreted successfully as an alchemical drama, as the Theatre Set-Up company have proved in their research and 1983 production (p.131).

She goes on to detail the aspects of my interpretation:

> Their conclusion is that Shakespeare used a heady mixture of Celtic lore and alchemy to give the Dream its enchanting quality. Programme notes point to the theme of the four lovers, who to reach true harmony and a proper relationship must first be disrupted and set in conflict with one another, just as the first material must be broken down if it is to be transformed (p.131).

The programme notes are then quoted or paraphrased (which I will not record here as their substance is detailed in Chapter Nine), and the ideas compared with the work of

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Charles Nicholl on King Lear:

> The concluding 'golden' harmony is not as obvious in King Lear as in A Midsummer Night's Dream, but alchemical purgation of the gross and exalting of the fine has indeed been seen to take place (pp.133-4).

In 1984, our Theatre Set-Up work on Love's Labours Lost was seen by George Trevelyan, one of the lecturers to The Francis Bacon Research Trust whose representatives subsequently enrolled the Trust as annual financial contributors to the Friends of Theatre Set-Up scheme (see Introduction) and who presumably have seen our productions each year. The Trust conduct annual seminars by lecturers including Peter Dawkins on arcana in Shakespeare's plays. In the Trust's 1994 prospectus, Vita Concordia he writes:

> Shakespeare was a master of Cabala, Alchemy and the whole Western Mystery Tradition. Cabala, alchemy, and the processes of life and initiation underlie each and every Shakespeare play. The poetic imagery and language of Shakespeare is rich in allegory and symbology, drawing deeply upon the myths, fables and mystery teachings of many countries and traditions. Like a sacred book, hardly a sentence is spoken without it conveying more than one level of meaning (p.6).

In 1990 Peter Dawkins collaborated with the actor Mark Rylance in productions of The Tempest performed in the light of the play's secret meanings and in sites throughout Britain which had some historic significance in the Western Mystery Tradition. Since that time Mark Rylance, later in 1994 to win the Lawrence Olivier Best Actor Award, who coincidentally trained at R.A.D.A. at the same time as the Theatre Set-Up actor Tony Portacio, (see Appendix A.1, A.3, and Appendix B.2 - B.11), and from

January 1996 is the artistic director of the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, has been associated with the work of the Trust through performances of his company Phoebus Cart. In the 1994-5 Vita Concordia prospectus this association is reported in a workshop-seminar weekend called 'The Living Art of Shakespeare', led by Peter Dawkins and Mark Rylance and based on the peformance of Measure for Measure given by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-Upon Avon:

> We will delve deep into the cabalistic and initiatory aspects of the play, going beyond the purely psychological interpretations and into the spiritual laws and themes which lie behind the psyche. Through acting, under Mark's guidance, we shall be able to experience what it is like to be some of the characters (p.14).

Further aspects of the course on Shakespeare advertised in this prospectus are titled 'The Mysteries of Shakespeare' and 'The Alchemy of Shakespeare', the former dealing specifically with the later comedies sometimes, as here, called 'Romances':

> The great Shakespearean Romances portray allegorically how the initiate becomes the adept and finally the illumined magus or master soul, the master of life (p.13).

'The Alchemy of Shakespeare', deals with alchemy in a way different from my own:

> The four seminars provide a study of the four principal aspects of human life, in terms of the four major alchemical stages that are portrayed in the Shakespeare plays, using the plays to shed light on the Hermetic life process and our own human natures (p.13).

Since the Theatre Set-Up production of The Winter's Tale

in 1988 I have viewed the alchemical content in the plays in terms of the twelve-stage alchemy as set out by George Ripley in his Compound of Alchymy, (see below Chapter Five). If I were to subdivide these into four it would be into the stages of 'nigredo', 'albedo', 'rubedo' and 'gold' that I defined in the 1983 A Midsummer Night's Dream production, (see below Chapter Nine). Peter Dawkins, however, perceives the alchemic stages in terms of the elements, 'water', 'air', 'fire' and 'earth' which he entitles 'Waters of Emotion', 'Airy Thoughts', 'Fires of Action' and 'Earth and Quintessence'.

In order to keep this interesting difference between the scope of our related work I have never attended any of the Trust lectures, workshops or courses on Shakespeare, but my understanding of the seminal function of the initiation process of theurgy linked with alchemy in Shakespeare's plays (see below Chapter Five) was begun by a written-up lecture given to the Wrekin Trust in 1981 by George Trevelyan (and handed to me in late 1986) on The Merchant of Venice: An Interpretation in the Light of the Holistic World-View. [15]. Trevelyan introduces his lecture by relating the contemporary mystic notion of 'Holism' to Renaissance thinking. He describes this in terms of the writing by Robert Fludd which presents a view of creation stemming from a 'primal divine unity known as 'Ain Soph', the One Wisdom'. This unity 'pours itself out into an ocean of being, 'polarises into male and female principles

whose 'deep longing for re-union' causes the marriages from which stem 'the birth of forms' and the multiplicity of nature which, having the same origin 'all works to the harmony of Divine Law' (p.1). This harmony may be disrupted by human beings, motivated by self-will which is 'driven by desire' but any rifts can be healed by 'the redemptive impulse of true Love' (p.1.). Trevelyan describes this process as a paradigm for the Fall of man as perceived by Christians, the 'descent and redemption of the soul'. He comments that the alchemists of the Renaissance, perceiving man as a 'droplet of the ocean of divinity', hold the same view of the imperishable nature of the human soul linked through a shared source with the whole of creation with modern Holistic thinkers. This view regards life-on-earth as a form of trial:

> The drastic limitation of birth and embodiment gives the setting for soul-training.(p.1.)

Another Renaissance principle which Trevelyan links to this philosophy (also the basis of the ancient Greek initiatory rites) is the 'Law of the Correspondencies' wherein the cosmos is mirrored in man, the microcosmos. Speaking of the Renaissance thinkers he says:

> Man is the microcosm reflecting the macrocosm. They still knew the meaning (which we have lost) of the Greek maxim carved above the Mystery Temples: 'Man know thyself and thou shalt know the Universe' (pp.1-2).

Trevelyan explains that the candidates for initiation in ancient Greece suffered trials and ordeals in order to

effect a 'shift in consciousness' which would give them an experience of the immortality of their own souls. The sense of this process of initiatory mysteries, forbidden to those not privileged to undergo the initiations, was conveyed through the use of the symbolism of myth in stories, art and the theatre so that the great dramas of ancient Greece were paradigms of mysticism:

> The 'man in the street' could not have grasped these deep and dangerous mysteries and to reveal them was rewarded by death. They were given out in the symbolism of myth, legend and fairy story...The whole world-picture is profoundly dramatic. Thus it called for expression in art and drama, directly appealing to the intuitive and imaginative faculties. The Theatre and Mystery Temple are thus closely allied (p.2).

He claims that the same process of representing mystic initiation, forbidden in the context of the restrictive Puritan Christianity of England and as exemplified by the Elizabethan alchemists and related beliefs such as Rosicrucianism, was carried out in Shakespeare's cycle of plays:

> In like manner in Renaissance England the Shakespeare Cycle presented this alchemical and Rosicrucian world-picture, but obviously in a hidden form. Puritan authority could not tolerate mystery or morality plays (p.2).

Trevelyan suggests that thus there lies hidden in the Shakespearean canon a system of mysticism which calls for academic analysis in the light of an understanding of the holistic philosophy:

> the esoteric (hidden) truth is there to be found and unveiled by those who can read the symbolism. This calls not merely for academic analysis, but a different form of interpretation through the applying

of the holistic world-view (p.2).

He maintains that the comedies are the main carriers of the holistic alchemic philosophy. He exemplifies this by reference to two comedies in which he detects prime samples of arcane significance, The Comedy of Errors, which he describes as a 'text-book statement of Robert Fludd's world-picture', its story revealing a 'primal harmony divided and subdivided, thrown into confusion by human self-will, but restored to order and harmony by the impulse of true love', and As You Like It, which he identifies as a 'morality play about the mystic way, with every name and event suggesting inner truth' (p.2). He upholds that the plays may be interpreted on different levels (see above pp.109-113), including that of psychological reality:

> Outwardly the plays present splendid stories containing much psychological wisdom. They can be read on many levels and it is for each to unravel the deeper meaning as best he may (p.2).

He also perceives The Merchant of Venice as an analogue of an initiation drama, the hero Bassanio representing the 'base matter' of alchemy, the matter which is to be 'redeemed', by being tried and tested, itself a paradigm for the candidate for initiation. He thus considers Portia, the lady he seeks to marry, to be the goal of alchemy or the 'Higher self', the 'immortal soul' with which the initiate seeks to identify in his journey. He notices the importance of 'gold' (the paradigm for the

goal of alchemy) and other metals in the play, and links this to the alchemic process he considers to underlie the action:

> It is an alchemical study of metals, knowing that behind the metal gold is the divine power of the Sun, behind silver the sweet influences of the Moon, behind lead the anchoring strength of Saturn in the personality (p.3).

In support of this view he cites the friend of Bassanio, Antonio, who taunts the money-lender Shylock (I.iii.128):

> Antonio:...for when did friendship take
> A breed for barren metal of his friend?

and in (I.iii.90-91)

> Antonio:...is your gold and silver ewes and rams?
> Shylock: I can not tell, I make it breed as fast (p.3).

Trevelyan considers Shylock to be 'a sub-personality within all of us', (p.8), and his crime that which tarnishes all Venice, 'to treat gold as mere substance' (p.3).

He views the different locations of the play which demonstrate contrasting attitudes to gold as 'different levels of consciousness', pointing out how they radically affect the behaviour of Bassanio and his friends: when they are in Venice, the merchant's city of the false sense of gold, where gold is the 'hard food for Midas', they behave roughly:

> In the rich city they are all besmirched by the same coarseness and greed, lively and spirited though they may be (p.3).

However they are transformed when they go to Belmont, the sphere of Portia, the true 'gold' of Bassanio's Higher Self:

> For Portia in Belmont, the temple of the Spiritual Sun, gold is the pure essence of Life and Light. The initiate soul, united fully with its own Divinity, will in time transform the Midas touch, until all that it touches with the beam of its thought and love will be transmuted into light, the living Gold (p.3).

The trial-by-selection of the three caskets, of gold, silver and lead by which Portia's father has decided she must be won in marriage, and which is undertaken by three suitors, The Prince of Morocco, The Prince of Arragon and Bassanio (I.vii., II.ix., III.ii.,) is interpreted in terms of an alchemic soul-trial with each suitor a different aspect of 'soul evolution' (p.4). Morocco, who chooses the gold casket is 'the sentient soul', Arragon, who selects the silver, 'the intellectual soul' and Bassanio, who correctly selects the leaden casket which gives him the right to marry Portia is 'the consciousness soul, in which thinking can apprehend the spiritual words with enhanced intelligence' (p.4). When I directed the play for Theatre Set-Up in 1992 I presented an additional interpretation of these scenes. I considered that each of the suitors was a different aspect of the same personality, (they were all performed by the same actor), who as an initiate beginning his trials, was not worthy of the gold or silver caskets. The lead casket was the appropriate one for Bassanio as the metal lead is an

analogue for the 'base matter' of alchemy, and represents an initiate embarking on his journey of initiation which Bassanio will soon do (see Appendix B.9.).

Trevelyan posits that as Bassanio's motives in seeking Portia for his wife are not entirely free from desire of financial gain, he is not yet worthy of being united with his 'Higher Self' at the point in the play when he succesfully wins Portia as his wife by selection of the correct casket, and that he must undergo the 'death-experience' in order to attain this worthiness (p.7). This will be achieved through the threatened killing of Antonio by Shylock, averted by the intervention of Portia, his 'Higher Self' with whom he is ultimately united (pp.8-9). The seeming implausibility of the overfortuitous 'happy ending' with its several marriages, (Portia and Bassanio, Gratiano, Bassanio's friend and Nerissa, Portia's maid), and the sudden news that Antonio has recovered his previously-lost fortunes, is attributed in this interpretation to an analogy of the integration of the personality (p.9). This coincides with my own interpretation of the similar endings of the plays which I produced for Theatre Set-Up before my reading of this paper in late 1986. (see Appendix A.1 and Appendix B.1, B.2, and B.3.).

The material in this paper led me to investigate further the initiation rituals of the Western Mystery

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Tradition the discussion of which begins the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEURGY and CELTIC MYSTICISM

This and the following chapters are concerned with the nature of the arcana (for definition see above p.1) which I consider to be embodied in Shakespeare's plays and which I claim to be derived from the British Mystery tradition known as 'The Western Way' or 'The Western Tradition' described below (pp.153 and 173). Firstly I discuss aspects relating to the arcana and to their modern counterparts, set out what they have in common through their content in 'The Western Way' and then explicate them within the categories into which they are differentiated, that is: theurgy (white magic), Celtic traditions, alchemy, Christianity, Renaissance Platonism and associated Renaissance beliefs. (There is ambiguity in the naming of the kind of Platonic philosophy practised in the Renaissance. For example, Nesca A. Robb uses the term 'Neoplatonism', John Vyvyan writes of 'Neo-Platonic' theories and Paul Oskar Kristeller designates the movement 'Renaissance Platonism' (see Chapter Six). As the term 'Neoplatonic' is also used to cover the specific period of Platonism practised from 200 A.D. to 1300 A.D., I apply Kristeller's terminology, 'Renaissance Platonism', to the period covered by this thesis). I acknowledge the Cabbala to be a part of the general arcana but do not deal with this body of Hebraic Mysticism in this thesis as I do not find Cabbalistic references in the early plays. I refer to the Cabbala in the programme notes in Appendix B.9, of the Theatre Set-Up performances of <u>The Merchant of Venice</u>,

a play whose interpretation I believe to be dependent upon an understanding of the Cabbala.

I add to the external evidence by which I seek to validate my opinion that Shakespeare used these arcana, by indicating sources concerning them which would have been accessible to him. I also refer to later material which describes the continuing traditions of some of these arcana into the present day. The explanations in these modern works of some of these secret traditions make it possible to comprehend the arcana and identify their presence in Shakespeare's plays through contemporary experience. In this chapter I refer in detail only to Shakespearean plays not dealt with in Chapters Eight and Nine in presenting internal evidence in support of the hypotheses of this thesis.

General aspects of the arcana

Those believing in the existence of a spiritual world would claim that there is a basic spiritual truth variously interpreted by different cultures, thus giving rise to the world's different mysteries, religions and magical systems. I refer the reader to an example of a detailed syncretic analysis of such systems in my diploma dissertation (unpublished) Drama as Mesocosm, (see above p.59). In this sense the arcana in Shakespeare's plays could be said to share the same spiritual beliefs and processes with the modern religions and spiritual systems

with which we can easily identify. This idea is cogently expressed in the Hindu belief in a variety of yoga as paths leading to the same divine centre. In the introduction to the translation of the Bhagavad-Gita by Swami Prahavananda and Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley glosses this key teaching in the Hindu epic in a way which makes the basic principle accessible to contemporary experience:

> Krishna, who is here the mouthpiece of Hinduism in all its manifestations, finds it perfectly natural that different men should have different methods and even apparently different objects of worship. All roads lead to Rome - provided, of course, that it is Rome and not some other city which the traveller really wishes to reach. [1]

A footnote to the main text of this work defines yoga:

> (1) Union with God.
> (2) A prescribed path of spiritual life. The various yogas are, therefore, different paths to union with God (p.39).

However this tolerant attitude did not prevail in Renaissance times and the spiritual paths represented by the arcana in Shakespeare's plays and in the literature of his period were unorthodox and therefore forbidden. It is for this reason that they were hidden in coded form. Sir Philip Sidney in An Apology for Poetry affirms this secret method of hiding secret meanings in poetry in order to protect them:

> Believe, with me, that there are many mysteries contained in Poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused (p.142).

The 'profane wits' to whom Sidney referred would not have

been able to understand the coding, the 'written darkly' passages. Presumably only those sympathetic to the unorthodox spiritual meanings in literature were able to 'crack the codes'.

In Source and Meaning in Spenser's Allegory, John Erskine Hankins interprets in Spenser's The Faerie Queene a similar reference to the idea of hiding significant meanings from 'profane wits'. [2] He describes the veil that Una (symbolising the truth) must wear before Redcross (symbolising holiness) until she is married to him and glosses this as a symbol of prohibiting Redcross from seeing the truth that her face represents until he is worthy to do so:

> The object of her quest is to reveal herself to those who are qualified to see. The veil is there for Redcross because of his inadequacy, not because Truth (Una) wishes to remain unrevealed...it is useless, perhaps dangerous, to reveal her beauty until he is prepared to see it. Holiness must achieve a state nearer perfection before it can comprehend the full measure of truth, but only imperfectly (p.12)
> John Vyvyan, in Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty

indicates the prevalence of deliberately masked philosophies in Renaissance works:

> The Renaissance was an age of mysterious philosophies; and it delighted to express them in a veiled way, so that they should be both published and not published, in Pico della Mirandola's phrase, 'editos esse et noneditos' (p.14).

This custom of hiding spiritual content in literature by veiling it in obscure symbols is also adopted by Celtic bardic writers. In The Flaming Door, a book which discusses Celtic magical traditions fordidden by British

orthodox religions, Eleanor C. Merry attributes the obscurity of the works of these writers to a need for safety from abuse and persecution:

> All the bardic writings that have come down to us are clothed in the greatest obscurity of language and of imagery, probably for the reason that in this obscurity lay the only hope of preserving their wisdom from being desecrated by the unenlightened. [3]

In his claim for the spiritual significance of many ancient British ballads, riddles and stories, R.J. Stewart in The Prophetic Vision of Merlin gives a similar explanation for the obscurities in British traditional literature:

> The disregarded nonsense, the incomprehensible rubbish from the fringe of cultural and religious evolution, is the open secret, the final hiding place of the Mysteries. [4]

Caitlin and John Matthews, in The Western Way (also known as The Western Tradition, see above p.149), define 'mysteries' as used in this specific sense, as kinds of portals to spiritual experience and as a means of communicating that spiritual experience:

> Mysteries are gateways, thresholds between this world and the Other, the meeting place of gods and people....mysteries are a language in which spiritual concepts can be communicated and stored. [5]

John Middleton Murry forges a link between the numinous in Shakespeare and the works of the British folk tradition:

> What of the numinous clings to the Shakespearean fable comes from antiquity or history folk-lore (pp.135).

The OED definition of 'numinous', as used in this context

is:

> of or pertaining to a numen; divine, spiritual, revealing or suggesting the presence of a god; inspiring awe and reverence. (The definition of 'a numen' is: deity, divinity; divine or presiding power or spirit).

He makes the further point that the proclamation of 1559 prevented writers from using contemporary political or religious material:

> He was forced to take his material where he could find it, and he was forbidden to seek it in the religious mythology of Christianity, or in politics - in 'matter of religion or of the governance of the estate of the common weale' as the proclamation of 1559 put it (pp.135-136).

Thus, he claims, Shakespeare's work survived by seeming to be secular, yet containing spiritual material from a typical British tradition which satisfied a need of the people of the time outside the current play form of the interlude and the accepted orthodox religions whose practice had begun to decline:

> The drama of Shakespeare is a secular drama: that is why it arose at all. It was the expression of the English spirit at a moment when the religious tradition, the reality of a communal worship had begun to decay. It was the new satisfaction of the appetite that could no longer be satisfied by the drama of the Mass and its comic anti-drama of the Interlude (p.136).

The fragmentation in orthodox religion to which John Middleton Murry refers is regarded by Caitlin and John Matthews as one of the causes of the spread of unorthodox occult movements in Northern Europe such as Rosicrucianism during Shakespeare's time:

> Through the syncretic function of Rosicrucianism at a time when Christianity was further fragmented at the

> period of the Reformantion into Catholic and Protestant an old esoteric Impulse was able to permeate Europe.[6]

The Rosicrucianism to which they refer is defined by the OED as:

> a secret society allegedly founded in Germany by Christian Rosenkreuz (in 1484)- The name arose from the Latinization of Rosenkreuz, Lit 'rosy cross'.

Like Murry, they identify the spiritual need experienced by a people deprived in the new Protestant movement of the ritual to which they had been accustomed, and attribute the growth of alchemic practice to the urge to satisfy this:

> The speculative Rosicrucianism of Northern Europe countered the much symbolically-curtailed Christianity which Protestanism presented: robbed of the sacrificial liturgy, the esoterically unfulfilled turned to the transmutations of alchemy (p.218).

Gareth Knight, in A History of White Magic, considers that it was the defiance of the Renaissance mind which brought into focus the magical impulse which provided a common faith to those on opposite sides of the Protestant-Catholic divide:

> The Renaissance meant a disturbing of traditional values, and magic was a part of this urge for speculative inquiry that threatened to overthrow the pious Christian world view. Renaissance man wanted to manipulate the creation to his own advantage, not simply to be an observer of it.
>
> Similarly magic was at the centre of the trauma of the Reformation. It had common ground with both Catholic and Protestant sides and by that very fact tended to be condemned by both (p.101-102).

Theatre Set-Up had an unpleasant experience of being condemned for their association with unorthodoxy after

performances of Love's Labours Lost in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey in 1984 when a member of the public wrote a letter entitled 'Occultism by any Name' to the vicar in the Chaplaincy on St Mary's in the Isles of Scilly where we were scheduled to play later in the season, objecting to our performing on any ground hallowed to the Anglican Church as he considered that the play's programme notes (see Appendix B.2,) demonstrated our evil occult associations. The experience taught us to be extra cautious in the programme notes and I made sure that in the following year, in the programme notes to The Merry Wives of Windsor (see Appendix B.3,) reference was made to the fact that 'The Philosopher's Stone', the goal of alchemy, was considered in Shakespeare's day to be synonymous with Christ. We had had first-hand experience similar to that of the Elizabethans, of the ways in which it was necessary to present unorthodox spiritual matters in a way acceptable to orthodox dogma in order to avoid prohibition from any intolerant public. It also made me understand the extent to which the Renaissance syncretic impulse to view pagan philosophies and mysteries in terms of Christianity might not only have been an act of belief but of self-protection against persecution.

There is a conventional misunderstanding of magical practice as an evil thing associated with such activities as 'Black Masses' in which, with evil intent, the rites of the Christian Mass are distorted. Knight elucidates the

controversial ethics of 'White Magic' (Theurgy), one of the arcana discussed in this thesis and still practised and misunderstood today, throughout his book A History of White Magic, in which he relates the development of Magical practice to other respectable myths and religions.

In Shakespeare's time we have an example of suspicion of overt magical practice and subsequent persecution in the history of the life of John Dee, whom Diane di Prima in the preface to J.W Hamilton-Jone's work on Dee, The Hieroglyphic Monad, entitles 'Elizabethan England's great magus, and one of the international scientists and scholars of his period'. [7] He never made any attempts to hide his occult activities and as a result was increasingly treated with official suspicion, especially when the witchcraft-fearing monarch James I came to the throne. This must have instructed others of the strategic wisdom in being secretive when dealing with mysticism.

Merry attributes the secrecy of the Western Magical tradition to the political appropriation of Christianity itself. The terms 'exoteric' and 'esoteric' in the context of the following passage mean 'open in the sense of following conventional dogma' and 'concealed in the sense of being part of a mystery tradition' (see below in Celtic traditions pp177-196):

> As early as the fourth century, exoteric Christianity began to deny its kinship with the Mysteries, under the infuence of those who sought to continue with the imperial power of Rome in another form, and esoteric Christianity was driven to follow hidden paths

(p.10).

Caitlin and John Matthews claim that the Bible itself has been edited to exclude esoteric material opposed to the orthodox interpretations of Christianity. Writing in an essay included by R.J. Stewart in The UnderWorld Initiation she writes that the 'so-called apocryphal Narratives... once canonical to the Christian New Testament' have been removed from the current biblical texts, leaving gaps in meaning which, she claims, can be filled in from 'oral Christian tradition and from both apocryphal Gospels and Gnostic texts.' [8] As an example of this, she cites the bias of focus on religious material in the medieval mystery plays, observing that the New Testament incidents of the life of Christ are given only slightly more emphasis than stories of Creation and the Harrowing of Hell which stem from Apocryphal material (p. 282). Thus, she maintains, medieval lay-people, through their exposure to this additional material, could understand the spiritual content of the Bible better than is possible today (p.282).

What the arcana have in common with each other through their content in 'The Western Way' and with present-day systems

In his The Elizabethan World Picture, E.M.W. Tillyard claims that the Elizabethans followed the patterns of medieval thought. This includes the medieval tendency to

link the ideologies, philosophies and literature of the past which had contributed to their cultural inheritance to their own moral and religious system:

> The world picture which the Middle Ages inherited was that of an ordered universe arranged in a fixed system of hierarchies but modified by man's sin and the hope of his redemption...Everything had to be included and everything had to be made to fit and to connect. For instance, it would not do to enjoy The Aeneid as the epic of Augustan Rome: the poem had to be fitted into the current theological scheme and was interpreted as an allegory of the human soul from birth to death. [9]

This moralising characteristic unified ideologies and gave rise to the syncretic works of such writers as Marsilio Ficino and Paracelsus which gave a Christian dimension to Platonism and alchemy, creating new hybrid philosophies which resembled each other through their common Christian component (see below Chapter Six).

In addition to the Christian material, I also consider that all the Shakespearean arcana mentioned above share with each other, as well as with contemporary systems, common ground and the same basic process (which could be derived from a common ancient matrix), that is: a striving of the individual to change for the better by submitting to ordeals and trials, thus becoming fit for contact with the Divine.

In this sense they are all initiatory rites of passage in which the neophyte/initiate/magician undergoes a process wherein his ego is confronted by trials designed to fragment it in a simulated death to the material world,

so that he can be fit to make contact with the centre of divinity. This fragmentation and divine contact changes and enlightens the candidate for initiation, who returns to the outside world improved and able to mediate the light of divinity to others in the course of his life. All the arcana are analogues for union with God, and all the systems of the Western Tradition (of which the arcana are part) are paradigms of a means of effecting access to a benevolent spiritual world, a process which requires a breaking up, refining and re-coordinating of the human psyche to merit communication with the divine. In seeking the spiritual world, the initiate strips off the impurities and falsehoods which impair vision of the divinity within his own soul, through energising symbols and rituals.

C.G.Jung, who examines the connections between psychology, mythology and alchemy in Psychology and Alchemy, claims that the symbols of initiatory rites have a psychological significance which defies any possible categorisation of them as archaic and infantile:

> The symbolism of the rites of renewal, if taken seriously, points far beyond the merely archaic and infantile to man's innate disposition.[10]

He considers that the rites themselves have been designed to integrate separate elements of man's psyche:

> The rites are attempts to abolish the separation between the conscious mind and the unconscious, the real source of life, and to bring about a reunion of the individual with the native soil of his inherited, instinctive make-up (p.137).

As an example of this he describes the 'ritual death in initiation' as a 'veritable bath of renewal in the life-source where one is once again a fish, unconscious as in sleep, intoxication, and death' (p.131).

However J.G. Frazer in The Golden Bough, in reviewing 'the ritual of death and resurrection' in a range of primitive cultures, concludes that the universal custom of pretending to kill boys who are candidates for initiation and then to bring them to life again is spiritual symbolism connected with the boy's totem. This totem, he establishes, is a 'receptacle in which a man keeps his soul or one of his souls', and he concludes that the symbolic death and resurrection of the initiation rites represent 'extracting the youth's soul in order to transfer it to his totem' (pp.904-905). I consider it feasible that both explanations given by Jung and Frazer of the prime causes of the rites of initiation which, in more sophisticated form, find their way into the plays of Shakespeare, are viable.

Mircea Eliade, writing on the links between contemporary and ancient mythologies, 'the encounter between contemporary faiths and archaic reality', in Myths, Dreams & Mysteries, believes that rites of initiation in contemporary tribal systems and in the more sophisticated rites of ancient cultures introduce the neophyte to reality by gradually revealing the sacred to him, importantly through a simulated 'death experience'

(see Trevelyan, above p.147):

> The mystery of initiation discloses to the neophyte, little by little, the true dimensions of existence; by introducing him to the sacred, the mystery obliges him to assume the responsibilities of a man. Let us remember this fact, for it is important - that access to the spiritual is expressed, in archaic societies, by a symbolism of Death. [11]

Jung emphasises the importance of ancient Egypt as a source of the classical Greek and subsequently the Western styles of initiation (pp.54-57). The interpretation of these ancient rites in Britain, combined with Celtic and Christian traditions, became known as 'the Western Way' or 'The Western Tradition'. When it refers specifically to magical practice it is known as 'The Western Esoteric Tradition'. The tradition was first formalised in the great Mystery traditions: the Hibernian Mysteries which gave rise to Druidism and the Celtic Mystery tradition known as the Celtic Underworld Initiation; the Mysteries of Eleusis, (whose contribution to the Renaissance was considerable, as it is likely that most of the great philosophers and writers of ancient Greece and Rome whose works formed the foundation of Renaissance Platonism were initiates of these rites); and the Mysteries of the Christian religion.

An important aspect of the paradigms of initiation in the Western Way was that the successful achievement of the process would not only transform the individual, but might improve world order. This latter phenomenon reflected the Renaissance belief that the individual (the microcosmos)

was connected to and interacted with the cosmos.

Tillyard explains the Elizabethan view of creation as consisting of interconnecting planes of existence 'arranged one below another in order of dignity but connected by an immense net of correspondences'. [12] He names these planes in descending order of degree as:

> the divine and angelic, the universe or macrocosm, the commonwealth or body politic, man or the microcosm, and the lower creation (p.91).

The correspondence that concerns us for the moment is the idea that a man contained within himself the whole universe. Parts of the body were thought to have a correspondence with parts of the universe, an idea that gave rise ultimately to the idea of 'Adam Cadmon', a cosmic man whose body represented in its parts the body of the universe (see figure 1, p.164) a concept which I believe Shakespeare satirised in The Comedy of Errors in Dromio's description of Nell in III.ii.120-147, (see below Chapter Eight).

A man's passions were said to have correspondence within nature, so that the aroused passions of a king, the primate (nature's first degree) of mankind, would effect sympathetic response from nature. A typical example of this is the storm that accompanies the madness of Lear in King Lear III.iv. When the order of nature is disturbed in the murder of a king, unnatural events accompany the act. In Macbeth the murder of King Duncan elicits from

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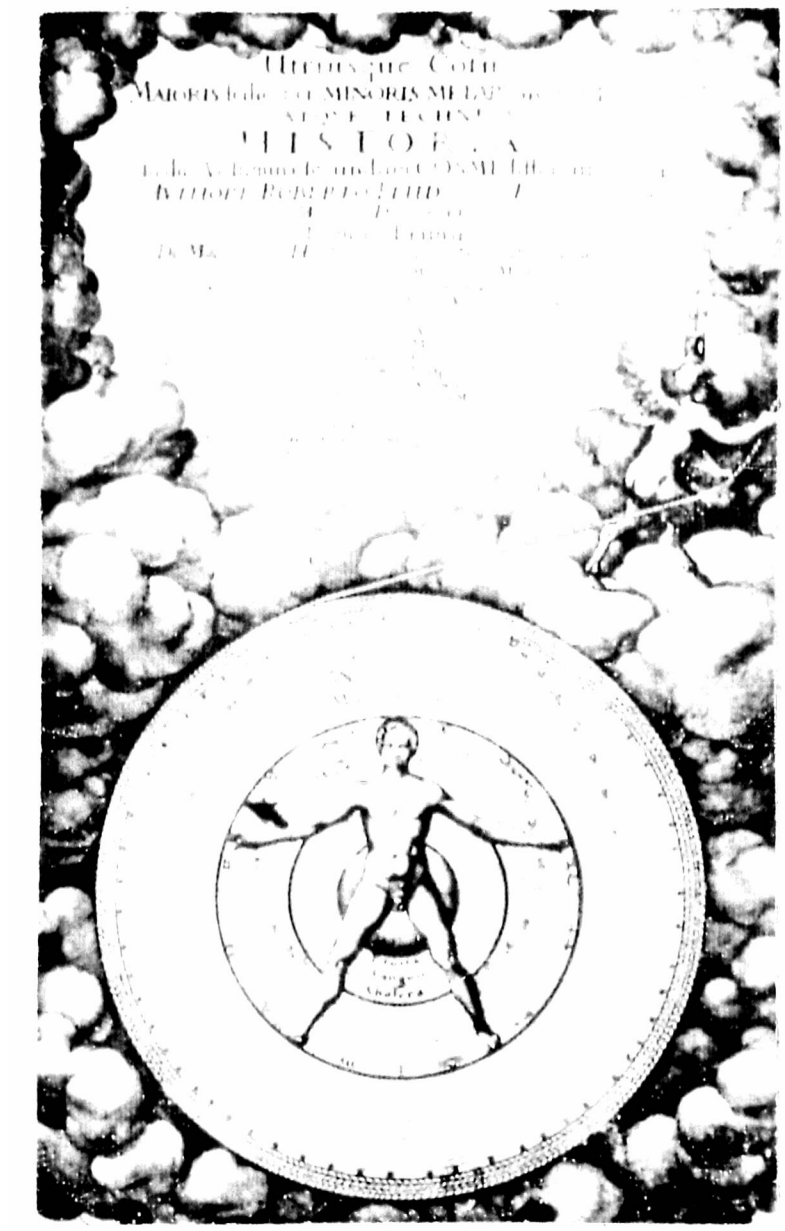


Figure 1: Man as microcosm, 'The Macrocosm and the Microcosm' Robert Fludd, Utriusque Cosmi Historia (London, 1617) title page.

nature sympathetic reversals of natural order such as night replacing day, (II.iv.6-9), a mouse-eating owl killing a falcon, the primate of birds, (II.iv.12-13), and Duncan's horses turning wild and eating each other. Sympathetic nature can sometimes warn of imminent danger as on the eve of Caesar's assassination, (Julius Caesar, II.ii.16-24), when amid a fearful storm, a lioness, the primate of animals, whelps in the streets, the dead emerge from graves and sepulchral wars are fought in the air, yielding real blood which rains on the Capitol.

Thus the Elizabethans practising alchemy or theurgy in any of its forms would do so in the hope of effecting beneficent influences on nature and reciprocally on mankind. Tillyard comments that a belief in this correspondence must have produced a moral obligation to create an ordered world:

> Morally the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm, if taken seriously, must be impressive. If the heavens are fulfilling their vast and complicated wheelings, man must feel it shameful to allow the workings of his own little world to degenerate (p.101).

In this instance Tillyard may be considered exempt from the criticism of the authenticity of his work levelled by J.W. Lever and others who support the demands of the 'New Historicists', who require more historical data than Tillyard was able to supply before reaching conclusions on any ideological scheme. In Shakespeare and the Ideas of his Time, Lever discredits as reductive the over-

simplification of ideas in Tillyard's The Elizabethan World Picture, (p.85), but later re-inforces himself the concept of the macrocosm (the greater world of nature), interacting with the microcosm, (mankind), in King Lear:

> Shakespeare uses the old story of Lear to present his terrible picture of the microcosm, the picture which shows how, under the good appearance, the evil in man's nature can bring chaos in a kingdom and a soul, and be reflected in the chaos of the external world (p.130).

Elizabethan alchemists such as John Dee were further confirmed in the belief of this maxim by its statement in the form of, 'As above, so below' in the 'Emerald Tablet', (see above p.210), claimed to be a divine revelation and part of the teachings of the legendary Hermes Trismegistus, founder of the so-called Hermetic philosophy closely allied with alchemy (see Chapter Five). In an attempt to summarise the unity which he considered to underlie creation, Dee designed a diagram, 'The Hieroglyphic Monad', (see Figure 2, p.167). Diane di Prima, describes the monad in terms of the key initiatory process described above (see preface):

> The monad represents the alchemic process and goal of the Magus, who in partaking of the Divine, achieves that gnostic regenerative experience of becoming God, and thus furthering the redemption and transmutation of worlds (inside cover).

She relates the intention of Dee's work to the theory of correspondences and comments on the significance of this to all magical practice:

> Dee calls the Hieroglyphic Monad a 'magical parable' and even to begin to comprehend his aims and method we must come to an understanding of the Doctrine of



Figure 2: John Dee's Hieroglyphic Monad, The symbol of the monad as it appears in his book, Monas Hieroglyphica, translated and with a commentary by J.W. Hamilton-Jones (New York, 1977), facing p.9.

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> Correspondences which lies at the heart of all magical practice and is the key to the Hermetic quest. 'As above, so below' reads the much-quoted Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus (Preface).

In Backgrounds of Shakespeare's Thought, John Erskine Hankins discusses an early occurrence of the micro/macrocosm theory indicating the link between mankind and the world in the writings of Macrobius in the fourth century:

> 'The physicists said that the world is a great man, and man a little world' (p.17).

He comments on Shakespeare's application of this philosophy:

> Shakespeare's interest in man, the microcosm or 'little world', is paralleled by an interest in the macrocosm or 'great world' of which man is the model (p.17).

Hankins attributes Shakespeare's expansive quality of characterisation to this belief:

> The idea of such a resemblance or 'cosmic sympathy' is prevalent in Shakespeare's plays and contributes to their 'larger than life' portrayals (p.17).

Thus within the plays any characters performing the stage action which can be said to represent the different rituals of the arcana are selflessly effecting larger concerns than the confines of their own lives. I discuss the specific application of this principle in Chapters Eight and Nine.

This Renaissance belief is relevant to productions of Shakespeare's plays endorsing interpretations which apply to society today. This 'cosmic sympathy' can be

experienced in the modern 'Holistic' movement which claims that man is an integral part of an animated universe of which the earth itself is a living part which mankind must thus respect and not exploit. The principles of the movement motivate such political parties as the European Green Parties whose policies favour environmental conservation. The term 'Holistic' implies an integration of all aspects of creation and existence, spiritual as well as material. The 'prophet' of the Holistic movement, through his published writings and extensive world-wide lecture tours, is George Trevelyan, (see above p.141). His main publications on this subject are, Summons to a High Crusade, A Vision of the Aquarian Age and Magic Casements. [13] Other modern writers on this subject include Caitlin and John Matthews, who lament the West's lost sense of harmony with the universe and advocate holistic living:

> [our ancestors] once lived in harmony with the universe as they saw and understood it; it would seem that now we know so much more we have lost the way of that harmonious relationship. Our responsibility is surely, therefore, to re-learn techniques for holistic living - ways which extend to the spirit as well as the body. [14]

Theurgy (White Magic)

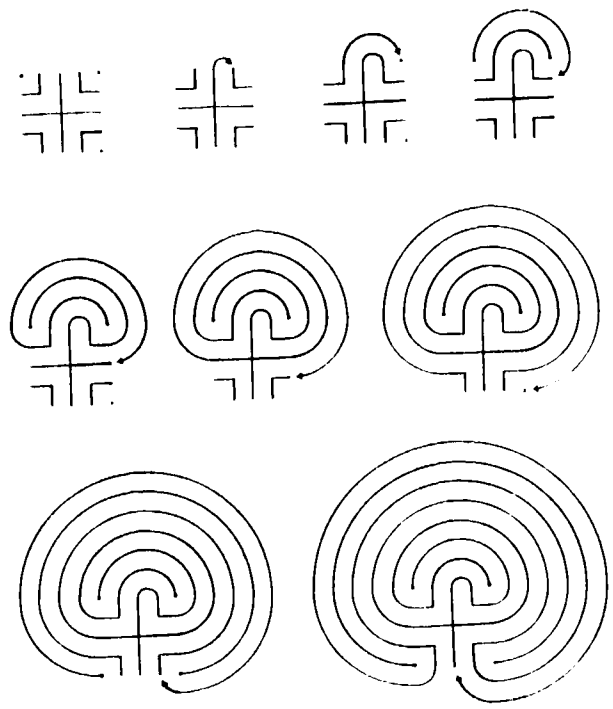
The arcane process at the centre of most mystic systems is theurgy which Gareth Knight defines:

> Theurgy, or white magic, is the raising of consciousness to the appreciation of the powers and forces behind the external material world in a pious intention of developing spiritual awareness and

> subsequently helping to bring to birth the divine plan of a restored Earth (p. 26).

Although it can be undertaken by anyone at any stage, preferably with the assistance of an experienced guide, its core process never changes from the rites of initiation described above (pp.159-162) only acquiring variations from its practice by different cultures.

The journey that the initiate must make is usually symbolised by a labyrinth which leads the neophyte through ordeals and experiences designed to teach him and age his psyche, into the 'divine centre' and then back to the outside world (see figure 3, p.171). These symbolic labyrinths are to be found in many ancient cultures from paleolithic cultures to more recent times. Caves were often used as ready-made labyrinths and the caves of the Dordogne in southern France which contain prehistoric cave-paintings may be such initiatory labyrinths, the paintings designed to be part of the teaching process of the young neophytes. A study of labyrinths designed for raising spiritual awareness has been made by Sig Lonegren in Labyrinths: Ancient and Modern Uses.[15] Throughout this book the universal occurrence of the labyrinth from North America to Europe, Egypt and Greece, and its ancient ancestry, dating back to pre-historic times, is emphasised. He tells us of the Labyrinth's function: to take the participator on a single path to its centre and then re-take that same path out again, hopefully gaining



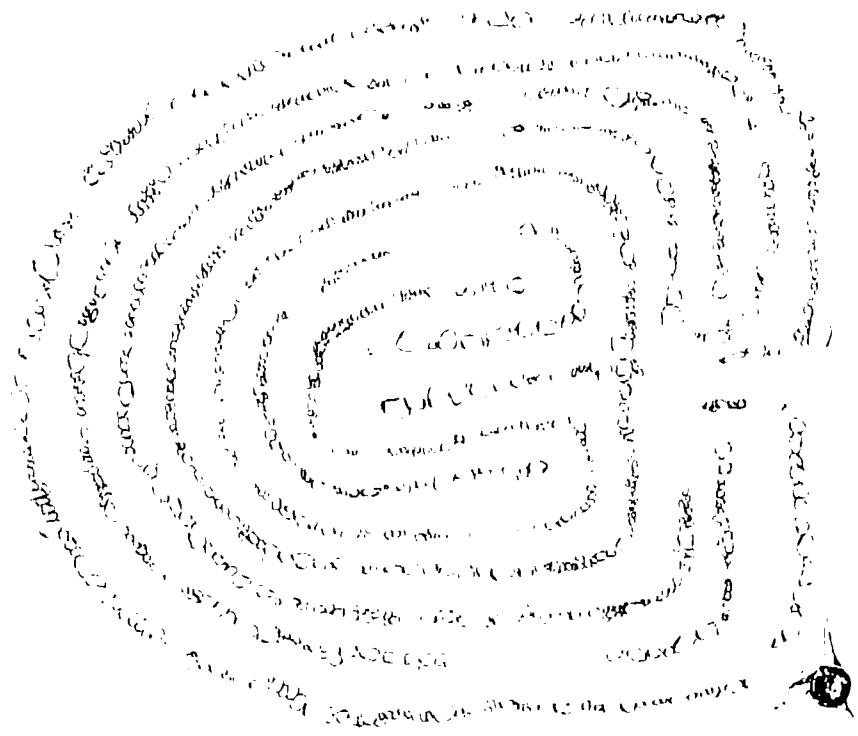


Figure 3: Labyrinths. Sig Lonegren analyses in diagrammatic form how a Classical Seven Circuit labyrinth is made and gives an example of this in the plan of the Lindbacke Labyrinth in Sweden. Labyrinths: Ancient Myths and Modern Uses (Glastonbury, 1991), pp.33, 38.

spiritual enlightenment along the way:

> It is magical in that through the conscious use of the labyrinth, answers to questions can come, spiritual awareness can be enhanced (p.25).

A great variety in the form, size and shape of labyrinths and paradigms for labyrinths are part of magic practice. They can be imagined or real, constructed or, as the caves of the Dordogne mentioned above, natural phenomena. Lonegren points out that mazes, often hedge mazes, which offer a choice of routes to take, are games for intellectual exercise, not labyrinths to be used in magical practice (p.25).

However, stories which are familiar to us may provide paradigms of magical labyrinths. A possible example of this may be the legend of the labyrinth constructed in Crete by Daedalus to contain the half man/ half bull monster, the minotaur, into which Theseus and his companions were thrust as a sacrifice to the monster, and from which he led them to freedom by the unravelling of thread given to him by the king's daughter Ariadne. Describing a medieval example of the motif, Gareth Knight gives a metaphysical reading of the soul-quest through the stepped labyrinths of Hell in Dante's Divine Comedy (pp.79-83).

Forests and woods can also function as labyrinths for mystic rites and I believe that those Shakespearean plays which feature journeys into woods from which the characters emerge transformed, (A Midsummer Night's Dream,

As You Like It, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and Cymbeline,) are making use of natural labyrinths for the magical process of theurgy which the characters are undertaking.

Caitlin and John Matthews describe The Western Way in terms of a labyrinth, with the inward spiral the British native traditions originating in pre-history and surviving today as Neo-Paganism, and the outward spiral Hermeticism and alchemy, originating in Classical antiquity and manifest today in contemporary magical schools. They claim that the symbiosis of these systems gives a commendable balance:

> Together they balance each other out: the one probing deeper into the first mysteries of human awareness; the other seeking to utilize this inner understanding in a clearer expositive way. Here the traveller learns to use what was taught on the inner journey - carrying it back into the light of day. [16]

I suggest that this is similar to the balance of Shakespeare's use of the arcana except that they are not applied consecutively but simultaneously on all levels (see diagrams on analyses of plays in Appendices A.3, and from B.5 to B.10.).

The journey in initiation that the neophyte must make to the centre of the labyrinth, whether this is undertaken metaphorically or in reality, is presented as confrontation with ordeals. Integral to the mystery traditions is their secrecy which an initiate would reveal on pain of death so that the details of this journey are

obscure to the outside world. However some did betray their Mystery, giving us a hint of their nature. It is interesting to note the extent to which Apuleius, an initiate into the Mysteries of Isis early in the second century A.D., feels limited to describe initiation in The Golden Ass. [17] He enjoins the reader to grant belief in what he is able to impart:

> I will record as much as I may lawfully record for the unititated, but only on condition that you believe it (p.286).

He then describes a journey to the margins of death, a return to the world of life and a view of other world beings, including one whom he describes as the sun appearing at midnight:

> I approached the very gates of death and set one foot on Proserpine's threshold, yet was permitted to return, rapt through all the elements. At midnight I saw the sun shining as if it were noon; I entered the presence of the gods of the under-world and the gods of the upper-world, stood near and worshipped them (p.286).

This 'sun shining' which Apuleius experienced in his initiation is a paradigm for the Divine, sometimes known by the term 'Sun-Logos', which combines the senses of 'illumination' and 'the word', and which writers on theurgy claim to be synonymous with the Christ whom Christians consider to be the Son of God and to whom followers of the Western Way give the additional attribute of being the Divine Power at the centre of magical quests and initiations even before his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth. Eleanor Merry claims that Christ in this form

was the Divine Centre at the heart of the mysteries of Hibernia, a term given to lands occupied by early European Celts:

> The initiate of Hibernia was spiritually led out at last by his initiators to behold the vision of Christ (p.68).

The most famous rites of initiation, associated with the legendary Demeter and her daughter Persephone, abducted and taken to the centre of the earth by Hades, and emerging the following spring to rejoin her mother, were those of Eleusis in Greece, a traditional seat of the worship of Demeter who was supposed to have wandered for nine days in search of her daughter before learning the truth of her daughter's whereabouts from the sun.

In these rites of Eleusis, the descent and re-ascent of Persephone were symbolically re-enacted in rituals whose purpose was to strengthen the initiates' faith in continuing life and rewards and punishments after death. We only know the external facts of these rites, the inner mysteries being, by definition, secret, but it is known that the ceremomies and rituals lasted for nine days, beginning with purifying bathing and sacrifices, and culminating in rites performed in darkness which were supposed to painfully excite the celebrants with suspense and expectation. The chief priests of these rituals, called Hierophantes, while telling relevant stories, would show the neophytes shrines of the goddess, revealed in brilliant blazes of light, while holy songs were sung and

accompanied by musical instruments. [18]

At the climax of the initiation a drama was performed representing a story of the three goddesses from the worlds above and below. Shakespeare refers specifically to this section of the rites in The Tempest, when Prospero summons spirits to create a mask at the climax of the successful initiation of Ferdinand who has been subjected to improving trials by Prospero in role as hierophant. Iris, Ceres (Demeter), and Juno are conjured in this drama whose scenario instructs chastity before marriage and bestows prosperity, honoured issue and health after it, (IV.i.60-138). This scene is sometimes regarded as superfluous to the play but must be included if Ferdinand's rites of initiation are to be correctly consummated. The rites of Eleusis were concluded with libations of water poured in an east-west direction from two top-shaped vessels. [19]

Today's practitioners of the white magic which, in its modern form, follows the same process as the Mysteries of Isis, Hibernia and Eleusis mentioned above, and with which we thus have contact through experience, comment on the difficulties of the initiates' journey that must be undertaken in search of the 'divine centre', and on the value of the quest. Caitlin and John Matthews say of this:

> The path to inner enlightenment and the journey outwards to actualize the realization is a long, painful one, fraught with many failures. But the

journey is worthwhile. [20]

A number of Shakespeare's plays involve the protagonists in journeys during which they experience ordeals and which result in their ultimate enlightenment in some form or other. The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Hamlet, All's Well that Ends Well, King Lear, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, are examples of this, and I suggest that these journeys are analogues of the magical quest.

Celtic Traditions

As a full exposition of Celtic traditions would occupy a whole volume, only those traditions relevant to aspects of Shakespeare's plays will be dealt with here. I define the Celts as the group of people identified by their cultural distinctiveness in the centuries B.C. as occupying some areas of the Levant but mostly of western and northern Europe, whose traditions, inherited from an earlier people who were the builders of such places as Stonehenge, have carried on into the lives today of the native peoples of Ireland, Britain, the Isle of Man, parts of Spain, and France.

One of the problems with giving an accountable record of Celtic matters is that often they are not to be found in writing as there is an important oral tradition.

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T.G.E. Powell describes the significance of this tradition, shared with Indian Brahminical schools, which featured memorising long texts in ritual incantations. He claims that the priest-judge-scholars of Britain, the druids, did not use writing in their learning traditions as it lacked religious acceptance, being 'not hallowed by ancient usage'. [21] Folklore also inherited this custom and maintained its traditions through the telling of stories and poems. Shakespeare's contemporary, Michael Drayton, writes in POLY-OLBION that the reason that the druids delivered their judgements in oral verse rather than in writing was their imitation of other classical oral traditions:

> In a multitude of verses they delivered what they taught, not suffering it to be committed to writing, so imitating both **Cabalists, Pythagoreans** and ancient Christians. [22]

John Sharkey describes the power of the Celtic oral tradition and the resultant taboo against writing:

> The ancient oral tradition that perpetrated the laws, legends and tribal teachings, through the trained memories of a group of poets and priests, made the act of writing unnecessary...the taboo on writing continued as long as the old religion lasted. [23]

However, there are written Celtic works which embody the mainstream mythologies and of which The Mabinogion is particularly relevant to this study, as Shakespeare could have had access to it in its form as The White Book of Rhydderch. [24] Also readily accessible to Shakespeare would have been the semi-legendary The History of the

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Kings of Britain written by Geoffrey of Monmouth early in the twelfth century A.D. [25] In Shakespeare's day this was included in a Welsh translation with the text of The Mabinogion (in its contemporary form) to which it is also directly related in its subject matter through its chapter on 'The Prophecies of Merlin' which R.J. Stewart has interpreted as an allegory of Celtic mysticism, thus providing a blue-print for our understanding of this tradition, called 'The Celtic UnderWorld Initiation'. [26] I found this to be a key system in the interpretation of Cymbeline for Theatre Set-Up's production in 1989 and discuss it in fuller detail below (pp.192-196) .

Smaller works once imparted orally and since written down, such as songs, riddles and poems, are also keys to our understanding of Celtic traditions. Stewart cites a number of traditional British ballads and songs: 'Leaves of Light', 'Young Tam Lin', 'Thomas the Rhymer', 'Lord Bateman', 'The Demon Lover', 'The Wife of Usher's Well', 'The Cruel Mother', 'The False Knight on the Road', 'Down in Yon Forest', as allegories of Celtic mystic traditions.[27]

There are those ready to point out the availability to Shakespeare of much Celtic material generated by the Tudor monarchs' desire to legitimate their position on the British throne, and also to indicate the internal evidence within Shakespeare's plays of his knowledge of Celtic lore.

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Writing in 1919 in Shakespeare and the Welsh, Frederick J. Harries lists Shakespearean biographical Welsh connections: Thomas Jenkins, the Welsh schoolmaster at his grammar school (p.19); the Welsh names of 'Bardolph and Fluellen' included in local Stratford documentation on their failure to attend church with his father John Shakespeare (p.21); the declaration by John Shakespeare in his application for a grant of arms in 1596 that his paternal ancestors fought in Bosworth Field on the side of Richmond and received from Henry VIII 'in reward for valiant and faithful services, tenements and lands in Warwickshire' (p.66); the influence of Michael Drayton, the Warwickshire poet, who demonstrated in his works that he had considerable knowledge of Wales and who was certainly an acquaintance of Shakespeare in London (p.66); the presence of many Welsh men or men of Welsh extraction in the government, in the court and functioning in society, (William Cecil, Lord Burghley, William Herbert, the First Earl of Pembroke, Lord Herbert of Cherbury and his brother the poet George Herbert, Sir John Salisbury, John Williams, goldsmith to James I, Sir Hugh Myddleton, engineer, and his brother, Sir Thomas Myddleton, Lord Mayor of London in 1613, Sir Roger Williams, military adventurer, Inigo Jones, architect, and actors in Shakespeare's own company, Nathaniel Field, brother of Theophilus Field, (Bishop of Llandaff in 1619 and of St David's in 1627) and Robert Armin (pp.45, 46,

50, 54, 55, 56, 57, 61, 61, 66). [28] Harries comments on Queen Elizabeth's eagerness to acknowledge her Welsh lineage and her insistence in 1563 that the Bible be translated into vernacular Welsh (pp.66, 218). He further observes Shakespeare's accurate portrayal of Welsh characters such as Glendower and Lady Mortimer in Henry IV Part I (who speaks only Welsh and sings and plays in the bardic tradition), Sir Hugh Evans (in The Merry Wives of Windsor), and Fluellen (in Henry V) in his plays (pp.65, 66, 137). He claims that Shakespeare demonstrates obvious knowledge of obscure Welsh lore in such lines as those spoken in Henry V, (V.i.28) by Pistol to Fluellen, 'Not for Cadwallader and his goats', referring to a legend of the last king of Wales and a goat which turned into a goat-woman, and 'the esteem in which goats were held in Wales for their supposed possession of occult intellectual powers' (pp.105-106).

Another claim is made in 1919 for Celtic associations with Shakespeare by Sir D. Plunket Barton in Links between Ireland and Shakespeare. [29] He makes the claim that Shakespeare's background in Warwickshire was the main source of his Celtic references:

> It is probable that Shakespeare received his Celtic impressions less from the study of old books than from the influence of environment and heredity (p.227).

He justifies this view-point by observing that the Stratford-Upon-Avon of Shakespeare's childhood and youth

is located at the centre of the ancient Kingdom of Mercia, where even the place names are witness to the 'commingling of Angle with Celt' (pp.227-228). Barton also identifies the celtic origin of many of the songs in Shakespeare's plays: Ophelia's song, 'Bonny Sweet Robin' in Hamlet, (IV.v.186), 'The Light o' Love', advocated as a suitable tune for a love song by Margaret in Much Ado About Nothing, (III.iv.43), and by Julia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona (I.ii.83), and 'Come o'er the bourne, Bessy, to me', sung by Edgar and the Fool in King Lear, (III.v.25-27). He speculates that the Irish lutenist and composer John Dowland, believed to be a friend of Shakespeare, might have provided him with Irish music.

Further witness to a contemporary awareness of Celtic culture is provided by Michael Drayton, who in POLY-OLBION, speaks at length of the Celtic bards and their music and in terms which attest a sophisticated classical, not a folk tradition. Writing of the kind of singing and harp-playing that occurs at a a Welsh music festival called a 'Stethva', he comments:

> So varying still their Moods, observing yet in all
> Their Quantities, their Rests, their Ceasures metricall:
> For to that sacred skill they most themselves apply (p.74).

He praises them as the oral custodians and transmitters of British legends:

> Posteritie shall praise for your so wondrous skill,
> That in your noble Songs, the long Descents have kept

> Of your great Heroes, else in **Lethe** that had slept (p. 118).

Drayton also writes with considerable knowledge of the British druids, describing: how scholars were sent from Gaul to learn from them (p.117); how they gained knowledge of nature through their religious practices (p.119); that they were great Philosophers, judges and Lawyers and had knowledge of the Cabbala and Pythagoras (pp.122, 193, 214); a ritual sacrifice to 'th'eternall heaven' of a white bull beneath an oak tree stripped of its mistletoe, accompanied by a declaration of the immortality of the soul was made (pp.179-180); and that they were monotheistic, their invocations being made to 'one **All-healing** or **All-saving** power' (p.193). This opinion of their monotheism is shared by Dudley Wright:

> Although seemingly polytheistic in character, Druidism recognised and inculcated the belief in the unity of the Supreme Being, to whom alone the prayers of the people, through the priests, were addressed.[30]

Geoffrey G. Hiller, in discussing Drayton's idealisation of Druids as poets, throws doubt on the accuracy of his perception of them, by commenting on his unqualified admiration of them (omitting for example their horrendous human sacrifices).[31] Wright acknowledges the witness of Roman writers on these sacrifices censured by Hiller, but claims that they were the capital punishments meted out to 'malefactors, felons or captives of war' (p.50). Ward Rutherford cités Roman sources, claiming witness of the Druidic practice of human sacrifice, particularly in the

form of being burnt in a large wicker-work giant and possibly by being drowned in cauldrons. [32] Proinsias MacCana links this with the deaths in Irish legendry of the two Irish kings by drowning in a vat 'of mead, beer or wine'. [33] This, and the custom of killing by several means, has resonances in the murder of the Duke of Clarence in Shakespeare's Richard III (I.iv.273) who is stabbed and then drowned in a butt of malmsey.

Rutherford makes the important point that much druidic lore may have become imbued in the Welsh legendry of The Mabinogion and in other Welsh Celtic customs through having been proscribed during the Roman occupation and thus hidden in stories (p.78). I consider that it could have thus entered the national consciousness and subsequently become available to Shakespeare. We presented the characters of The Tempest in the 1982 Theatre Set-Up production of the play in terms of a correspondence to orders of druids, in what was considered by the actors to be a valid interpretation of the combined roles they were to perform in the play, (see the play's programme notes, Appendix B.1.).

Shirley Ann Reid writes of another source of ancient Celtic lore to Elizabethans, the Tudor political impulse which inspired the proliferation of so much of the Celtic material to which Shakespeare and his contemporaries such as Drayton would have had access:

> It is commonly known that Henry Tudor claimed to be descended from Cadwallader, the last of Celtic

> kings...This attempt to affiliate themselves with a popular Celtic myth was continued and encouraged by the entire Tudor line, as it was both flattering and politic to do so...The Elizabethan interest in their Celtic forebears was manifested in their numerous genealogies, chronicles, and epic poems, as well as the history plays and comedies that appeared throughout the sixteenth century (p.5).

She observes that among the historical content of this material was much that recorded Celtic religion and mythology:

> Included in these works, however, was also documentation of ancient ritual, of belief in the Other World, of Celtic folk motif including fairies and heroes (p.5).

One of the most important of these heroes was the legendary King Arthur, whom Michael Drayton refers to as a 'King crouned in Fairie' who shall one day return from the Other World, 'out of Fairie' to reign again in Britain (p.67). Gareth Knight has given an interpretation of the Arthurian legends in terms of this 'Fairie', and their significance to the Western magical tradition in The Secret Tradition in Arthurian Legend.[34] Drayton, discussing Arthur in the context of Glastonbury Abbey, where the bodies of the king and his wife, Guinevere, were claimed to have been discovered at the instigation of Henry II, also refers to another legend important to the Celtic tradition (p.66). He claims the site as the burial place of Joseph of Arimathia, thus proving an early date for Christianity in Britain, 'which gives proof of Christianity in the Ile', and refers to the legend of the Glastonbury thorn, 'a Hawthorne thereby on Christmas day

alwayes blossometh' (p.67). Unorthodox views of the biography and mystic function of Christ are very important in the Celtic tradition, and this source in Michel Drayton provides a contemporary correspondence to any similar references Shakespeare might have used (see Chapter Nine).

Before I deal with the spiritual aspects of the Celtic tradition which ultimately centres on Christ, it is pertinent to mention several cultural characteristics which are often reflected in Shakespeare's plays.

The Celtic year was divided into two main halves, commencing with the dark half, the Calends of winter, beginning at the festival of Samain on the first of November and continuing until the festival of Beltane on the first of May which heralded the light half, the Calends of summer. Further subdivisions were made at Imbolc in February and Lugnasad in August. Darkness was associated with the supernatural and thus the festival of Samain (now celebrated as Halloween) marked a flow of the supernatural to earth, particularly the ghosts of the dead. Thus the dark of night was considered to effect the heightened approach of the supernatural, especially at midnight. Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees give an account of the additional predisposition to contact with the supernatural of those even born at night. [35]

The four directions, North, East, South and West had magical significance relating to specific correspondences. North was the direction where magic and the Otherworld was

located. [36] Its correspondences were the element earth, the colour green, and death. East was associated with the element air, the colour white and birth. South represented maturity, the element fire, and the colour red. West was where the dead were thought to reside (orientations of graves thus being east-west, a tradition reflected in the east-west orientation of the naves of cathedrals and abbeys), its corresponding element being water and its colour blue. Boundaries, between: seasons, night and day, dates in the calendar, people's properties (particularly marked by stiles where fairies could sit), political territories (particularly those edged by rivers or lakes), are said by Rees to have additional supernatural resonances, for good (associated with order) or evil (associated with chaos) and to be the particular abodes of the Otherworld (pp.89-92). Connected with this is the belief that natural locations of water (wells, springs, rivers, fords and lakes) are entrances to the Otherworld. Dew is supposed to have magical properties and dew gathered at night has double magical properties. Shakespeare observes this custom in Cymbeline when Belarius observes that the flowers left on the grave of Cloten and Imogen should be left to acquire the additional power of midnight dew (IV.ii.283-287).

Perhaps Shakespeare took the name 'Belarius' in Cymbeline from that of the Celtic god of light, Bel or Belenos. The god associated with him and with the sun was

Lugh, (or Lud). Also important in the pantheon of Celtic gods is a horned god, Cernunnos, with the head and body of a man but with a stag's antlers. He is the god of the hunt, his antlers the quarry he will kill, embodying the principle 'the hunter and hunted are one'. [37] A resonance of this appears in The Merry Wives of Windsor, when Falstaff, hunting for money in his wooing of the Mistresses Ford and Page, becomes the quarry himself, when, dressed in stag's antlers as Herne the Hunter (a mythic personage derived from Cernunnos) he is tormented by the people of Windsor whom he has regarded as his prey (V.5.)

The zoomorphic motif appears in other aspects of Celtic mythology. The 'Triple Goddess', associated with the earth, and manifest as a maiden, a matron or a crone can be represented as a mare called 'Epona'. [38] She is a potent energy, with triple control over birth, life and death. She makes her appearance in Shakespeare in The Merry Wives of Windsor where she features as Anne Page, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, (the triple goddess, or Morrigan, would often appear to Celtic heroes at fords, as she does in the epic Tain Bo Cuailnge, to the hero Cuchulainn, shape-changing herself from a young girl into an eel, a she-wolf, a heifer and then an old woman). [40] In Cymbeline she is represented by Imogen, the ghost of Posthumus' mother, and the Queen. In The Tempest, her presence is real in Miranda, but shadowed in Miranda's

dead mother and the dead Sycorax, mother of Caliban. Celtic kings were ritualistically married to this goddess who could be represented by a surrogate maiden.

In addition to the stag and the horse, the pig (or wild boar), dog (or wolf), serpent (or dragon), bear, bull and birds (particularly the owl, wren and raven), are creatures whose motifs in mythology and artifacts denote their religious significance. A predisposition to shape-changing, including into any one of these animals, characterises Celtic legendary heroes and supernatural beings like the Morrigan. Shakespeare reflects this tradition in the transformations of Puck and Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream (III.i) and in Falstaff's assuming the costume of a stag's head in The Merry Wives of Windsor.

An important legendary folk-hero/god who features in the Irish legendary concerned with an ancient race, the Tuatha De Danann is 'the Dagda', a Herculean giant-like man with a club. He has a magic cauldron from which 'no company would go away unsatisfied'. [41] His Welsh correspondent is the colossus Bran, (associated with a particular bird, the raven) who also has a magic cauldron with the property of conferring immortality upon partakers of its contents who are virtuous, but which dispatches death to those who are evil. The figures of Epona and Bran appear as The Uffington White Horse in Oxfordshire and as The Cerne Abbas Giant in Wiltshire in the form of

giant carvings into the chalk terrain (see Sharkey, plates 9, 26). There is a resonance of the mythology connected with Bran and his cauldron in The Tempest, (III.iii.20-82), when Prospero causes a mystical banquet to appear before his co-patriots including his enemies Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio, who have landed on his island of enforced exile. As Alonso approaches the banquet to partake of it, Prospero's attendant spirit, Ariel, appears in the shape of a harpy (a winged monster of classical antiquity, who pursued sinners to exact revenge), and as the banquet vanishes, he accuses them of unworthiness and lists their sins against Prospero.

A concept of the duality and polarity of nature (summer and winter, night and day, dark and light, male and female, hot and cold, dry and wet, life and death), permeates the Celtic perception of humanity, reflected in artifacts of two-faced heads, (see Sharkey plate 18). The principle of three was also perceived as a universal of nature, with resulting tricephalos sculptures, (see Ross Figure 45. p.77) and threefold motifs in religion, (as in the triple earth-goddess), in literature and art. I have based my interpretation of Shakespeare's pattern of characterisation on these principles of the multiplicity of personality in our casting style, wherein one actor sometimes plays characters who represent different aspects of the same person, (see cast lists in programme notes in Appendices A. and B.)

CHAPTER FOUR: THEURGY and CELTIC MYSTICISM

Human heads themselves were thought to have magical properties and in the more barbaric times of the Celtic people their warriors would take the heads from vanquished enemies and keep them for the power that they were supposed to contain, embalming them in cedar oil. [42] This tradition is followed in the Mabinogion when the god Bran, poisoned in the foot by a spear during a conflict and therefore nearing death, commands his followers to cut off his head and to keep it, still living, with them until the time is right for it to be buried in 'White Hill', (which is now the sight of the Tower of London), thus ensuring the future well-being of Britain. [43] The continuance of this legend survives in the maintenance of ravens, (Bran's associate creatures) in the Tower of London. Shakespeare observes the tradition in Cymbeline when Guiderius vanquishes Cloten who has boasted that he will cut off the heads of Belarius, Arviragus and Guiderius, 'And set them on Lud's town' (IV.ii.124). However Guiderius dispenses him a similar fate, throwing his severed head into a stream and thence to the sea (IV.ii.151-154).

The Celtic lore of all periods was intrinsically bound to a respect for nature. Nature spirits were acknowledged and were thought capable of interacting with humans. This was especially reflected in The Old Religion, a term which has come to represent British native spiritual traditions and which still has its

followers today. (After our Theatre Set-Up performances of A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1983 we received correspondence from a ship's captain who claimed to be a follower of this tradition.) Caitlin and John Matthews describe The Old Religion as a way of life rather than a formal religion:

> In its earliest form it was not a religion, as we understand it, at all; more a way of living with intention than a formal expression of worship...No aspect of life is too humble to be excluded from its own special saying and blessing: from the smooring or subduing of the fire for the night and the blessing of seed-corn for sowing, to the invocation against the evil eye and the charm for travellers.[44]

In this total dependence of all aspects of life upon spiritual benevolence, supernatural beings such as saints, angels and fairies are invoked in blessings, rhymes and songs. [45] A recent aspect of this tradition is the invocation to 'Bless this House' in the form of pictures and samplers to be found upon walls inside British houses. The Shakespearean correspondence is in A Midsummer Night's Dream which I discuss more fully in Chapter Nine.

I give the following account of the deeper Celtic spiritual tradition known as The Celtic UnderWorld Initiation, or the Otherworld journey, as described by R.J. Stewart in The UnderWorld Initiation, referring to it in its form accessible to Shakespeare as 'The Prophesies of Merlin' (see above p.179).

The initiate who attempts this magical spiritual journey will encounter these features: a Goddess of the

UnderWorld; a Guardian at the entrance to the labyrinth who will admit only those strong enough to endure its trials; Guides to lead; a surge of Inner Fire which will propel the initiate to act correctly; an act of love and self-sacrifice by the initiate; a change in the initiate's bloodstream (which can even cure ill-health); confinement in a 'prison' or cave; contact with ancestors; a 'magic dream'; and a vision of the Universal Tree. [45]

Stewart summarises the Otherworld experience in terms of an initiatory process during which the neophyte travels magically to the spirit world, and during a sequence of experiences including communing there with his ancestors, gains the ability to perceive the World Tree, whose fruit gives wisdom and inspiration to prophetic vision:

> An individual is transported magically to an Otherworld, which is the origin of all life and death and power. In this Otherworld certain events occur in specific sequence, culminating in a vision of a magical Tree, the fruit of which brings both wisdom and prophecy.
>
> During this Journey, the initiate communes with the Ancestors, a tradition derived from the most primitive Celtic roots, the cult of the dead. Finally, the prophetic vision vouchsafes a sequence of insights, some of which are predictive, while others are unutterable in normal language (p.18).

Stewart interprets the story of Merlin and Vortigern as told by Geoffrey of Monmouth in 'The Prophecies of Merlin', as an allegory of this process. The story has its roots in the history of the British King Vortigern, who imported Saxons to assist him in putting down local

troubles, only to find that the Saxons themselves began to take over the land. In this version, Vortigern consults magicians, who advise him to build a fortified tower from which to defend himself, but his attempts to build this tower prove fruitless, as it collapses after each day's work on it. The magicians advise that the tower will only stand if mixed with the blood of a young man who has had no father. The young Merlin, supposed to be the son of a human mother and an unknown and often invisible Otherworldly father is found, and with his mother, who is needed to confirm the facts about his birth, is taken to the king. However, Merlin resists his intended sacrifice and instead asks the magicians to say what is beneath the foundations of the tower that prevents its building. They cannot answer and Merlin tells them of a lake there. When this is revealed Merlin asks them what is in the lake. In response to their inability to reply, Merlin tells them of two stones with two dragons asleep within them which will be revealed if the lake should be drained. The king has this done and as he and Merlin are seated on the edge of the drained hollow, a red and a white dragon emerge from the stones and begin to fight. The king asks Merlin to interpret what this battle of the dragons portends. Merlin responds with a series of profound predictions relating to Britain (pp. 43-47).

Stewart interprets this story as an analogue of the process of a psyche undergoing initiation. Merlin

presents an 'image of spiritual potency', Vortigern of 'uncontrolled lust', the magicians of 'confusion and false information', the tower of 'the false construct', the lake beneath it of 'the collective unconscious...or UnderWorld sea or pool of the ancestors', the two dragons 'fundamental polarized energies' and their conflict and the prophecies 'powers arising' (pp.52, 53). Thus the triumph of Merlin over the magicians, and over his intended fate as a sacrificial victim, his successful divining of the presence of the lake and the dragons and the action he instigates which releases the power of the dragons which becomes his 'inner fire', all transform him and the spirit of the psyche he represents to a privileged visionary (pp.47-64).

Theatre Set-Up made use of this work of Stewart in their interpretation of Cymbeline in 1989 (please see Appendix B.6.).

Stewart also identifies the prophecies themselves, which are the result of this process, as 'the fruit of a system of magic, with a potent pattern of symbolic modes'. He claims that the prophecies can have the effect of a 'magic spell' and points out a correspondence between the seven primary elements of the lore they represent and their vertical arrangement 'of ascending and descending

order' and current systems of magical instruction. He claims these elements to be:

1	SPIRITUAL	(Religious)
2	ASTROLOGICAL	(Astronomical)
3	MYTHOLOGICAL	(Trans-personal)
4	POETICAL	(Riddling)
5	MAGICAL	(Practical)
6	PREDICTIVE	(Suggestive)
7	HISTORICAL	(Pseudo-historical) (p.27)

If his interpretation is correct, it provides availability to Shakespeare through this work of a manual of magic instruction which gives credibility to his occasional inclusion in his plays of a level of meaning which can be interpreted as an allegory of theurgy.

The ascent and transformation of the psyche is a task also undertaken by alchemy, with whose processes Stewart observes that Merlin's trials relating to the dragons show a marked similarity, (p.54), a process I now deal with in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: ALCHEMY

The word alchemy is derived from the Arabic term 'al kimia'. 'Al' refers to the definite article 'the', but the meanings of 'kimia' are variable. One meaning may be taken from the Egyptian word for 'black', implying the title of either 'The Black Art' or, as Egypt itself was known as 'The Land of the Black Soil', 'The Egyptian Art'.[1] John Read ascribes the origin of the name to the Hebrew name for Egypt, 'khem', the 'Land of Ham'. [2] Gilchrist finds another possible source in the Greek word 'chyma', meaning the casting of metals and deriving from an older word 'cheein', meaning 'to pour out' with its variants 'chymos', meaning 'plant juice' and 'chylos' which adds the sense of 'taste' (p.10). This etymological connection implies, that in the early days of alchemy, there may have been a link between the extraction of juices from plants and metal-working (Gilchrist, p.10).

The exact origins of alchemy are not known, but it was established in its practice from 200-300 B.C., both in the Far East, particularly in China which specialised in attempts to produce an elixir of longevity, and in the West, centred in Greece and Alexandria, where alchemists specialised in working with metals and minerals (Gilchrist, p.10). While the eastern tradition continued uninterrupted until recent times in China, the western schools of alchemy moved to the Arabic world from the fifth to the sixth centuries A.D. until the twelfth century, when Europeans again took an interest in its

practice (Gilchrist, p.10). In the following centuries the art was practised with enthusiasm throughout Europe, and through its experiments with chemicals and the distillation of liquid essences, it fostered scientific techniques later employed in chemistry, physics and medicine. Charles Nicholl reports that although Alchemy was legally considered a felony from 1404 to 1689, many prominent members of Elizabethan and Jacobean society, from Sir Philip Sidney to Sir Walter Raleigh and even Queen Elizabeth I herself, followed its practice in its acceptable philosophic form (pp.13-22). In the seventeenth century alchemy continued to enjoy a popularity which waned in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when exact scientific practice outmoded it. Since then alchemy has declined in its practice, often followed by isolated individuals who pursue it as part of the wider field of occult practice. Over the years, members of the audiences of the annual Theatre Set-Up performances have identified themselves to the cast as alchemists, cabbalists, theurgists, and practisers of the Celtic Old Religion, usually combining an interest in several if not all of these, (see above p.192). The images and language and sense of the processes of alchemy have survived down to present times in occult movements, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and in psychological analysis, mainly in the work of C.J.Jung (see below p.205). It is through the continuity provided

by these modern uses of alchemy that we are able to acquire an understanding of it today.

Alchemists believe in the unity of matter (see below p.211). Therefore they have faith that their efforts to achieve the transmutation of base metals into gold, a miracle that can be effected by discovery of 'The Philosopher's Stone' through a process known as 'The Great Work', can be applied figuratively, philosophically, and literally to all aspects of the cosmos, including human health, psychology, spiritual growth, and all nature. (As alchemy was designated and often practised exclusively as a philosophy, its components are often prefixed with the term 'philosopher's' or 'sophic' to distinguish them from their material correspondences, hence 'Philosopher's Stone', and the 'sophic sulphur' and 'sophic mercury' discussed later in the chapter in pp.220-221). Achievement of a lesser degree of transmutation, from lead to silver, was known as the 'little work'.

The image of the Stone has its source in the Greek legend wherein Saturn, informed by augury that one of his sons would supplant him as king, devoured each of his children at birth. However his wife, Rhea, deceived him by replacing his new-born son Zeus with a stone, which he subsequently spat out. It is this stone which alchemists selected as a metaphor for the goal of their operation. [3] In medieval and Renaissance times the Stone and alchemic mysticism became publicly associated with the craft of

stonemasonry in the ancient movement of 'Masonry' which became known as 'Freemasonry'. Discussing stone-symbolism in Freemasonry, Isabel Cooper-Oakley points out other sources of this image in the reputed Stone of the Holy Grail which is said to have originated in the crown of Lucifer. She also cites the idea in mystic traditions of referring to man himself as a stone. [4] F.V.Mataraly demonstrates the Masonic development of this idea in his report that a cubic stone is the Masonic symbol of perfect manhood. [5] The concept of 'stone' as 'gem' associated with occult movements is related by C.C.Zain to some Masonic doctrine which reflects the alchemical principle of transformation through effort:

> Yet remember...that before the polished jewel there must be the stone in the rough...seek ye to learn the laws of workmanship governing its transformation from unsightly pebble into a shining gem. [6]

The 'Philosopher's Stone', in the chemical process of the 'Great Work' is a powder which will convert into gold any base metal upon which it is sprinkled. It is the goal of all the different systems of alchemy to achieve this Stone. [7] Thus if alchemy is practised as a spiritual process, the Philosopher's Stone is a transcendental state of spiritual awareness. If the transmutations are applied within the spiritual context to the development of man's psychological self-awareness, the Philosopher's Stone becomes enlightened consciousness, the goal of the 'consciousness raising' practised by so many mystic

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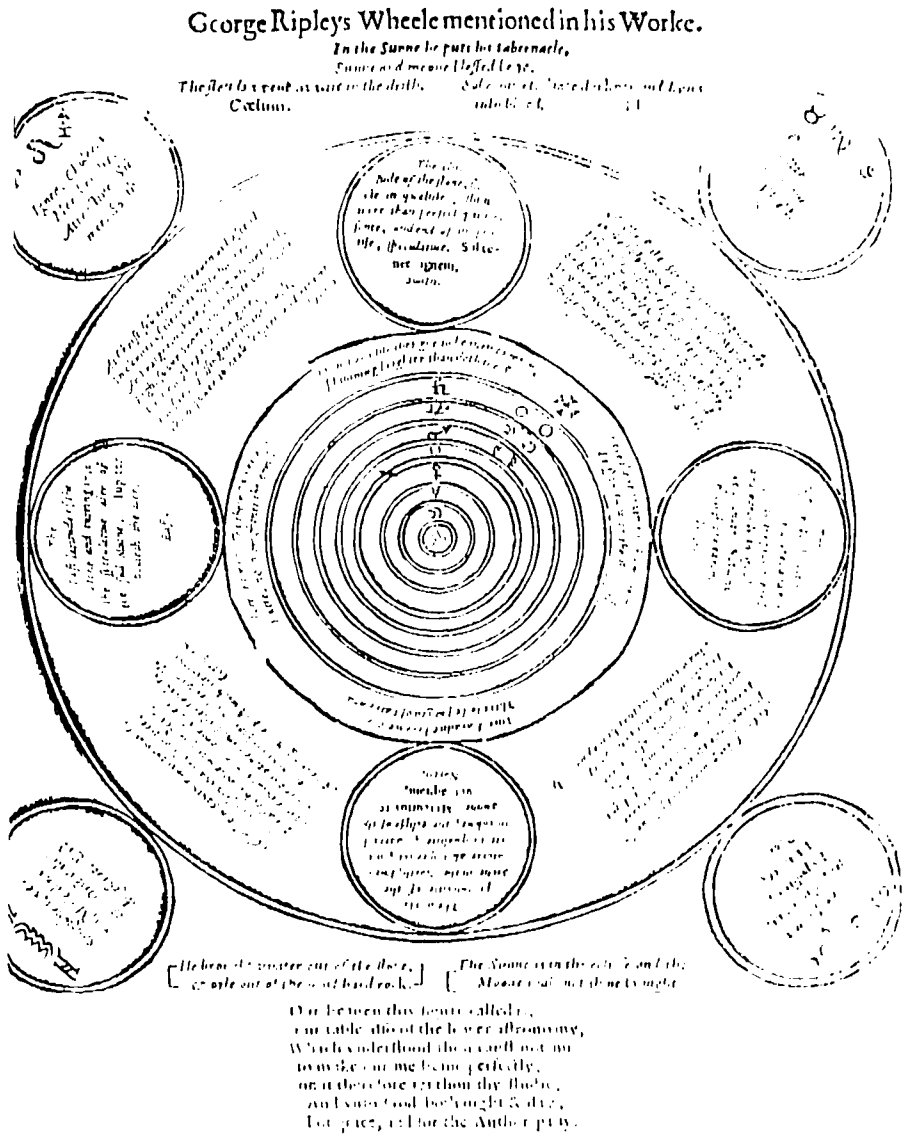


Figure 4: George Ripley's Diagrammatic Wheel of correspondences between the elements, the four directions, the planets, the signs of the zodiac, alchemy and Christianity. Compound of Alchymy (London, 1591) sig.M2v.

systems (see above p.143). [8]

The Aristotelian concept that all things were striving for perfection was inherent in the tenets of alchemy. According to this system, all matter was transforming itself so that it could become higher on the 'ladder' of the cosmos. Metals were graded on a similar metaphorical ladder in the alchemical system, and associated at each rung with planets. The ascending order of metals and corresponding planets was: lead and Saturn, iron and Mars, copper and Venus, mercury and Mercury, tin and Jupiter, silver and the moon, and gold and the sun. [9] These correspondences are observed by George Ripley in the diagram which he includes in his Compound of Alchymy, (see below p.212 and figure 4, p.201) I include in Figure 5 (p.203) a graphic representation of alchemical symbols, in Melencolia, the engraving by Albrecht Durer, (1471-1528), which includes the Stone and the seven-rung ladder. Also pictured are other features of alchemy: a rainbow (see below p.217); a crucible; the alchemist's fire presented typically as sharp implements; instruments which represent the careful balance, timing and measurement needed in alchemy; references in the child, (whom he devoured) and hour-glass (which he sometimes carries to represent his function as personified death) to Saturn, the prevailing planet governing alchemy; a dog representing 'sophic sulphur' and a lake of water

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Figure 5: Melencolia From the copper-plate engraving by Albrecht Durer (1514). Facsimile-Reproduction der Reichsdruckerei, Berlin. Reproduced from The Alchemist: in Life, Literature and Art, by John Read (London, 1947), Plate 14.

representing 'sophic mercury',the basic components of the compound of alchemy (see below p.221); and the central angelic figure presenting the mood of melancholy attendant upon students such as philosophic alchemists. [10]

The system of alchemy concerned with the processes of chemistry involved in the transmutation of base metal into gold and giving rise in many of its procedures and discoveries to modern chemistry, is known as 'exoteric alchemy.' The interpretation of the alchemical transmutation processes in terms of the human mind and spirit is 'esoteric alchemy' and the one I consider to be reflected in Shakespeare's plays. When practised in the latter mode, the transformation corresponds to the other arcana in the way in which the practitioner is purified by undergoing many trials until fit to experience the Divine, and then to convey the benefits of this experience to others. However, the two different means should not be separated, as the true alchemists (called 'adepts'), would practise the chemical alchemy in order to attain the mental or spiritual transformation which accompanied it. Nicholl describes this phenomenon as a 'mirror':

> The alchemist's probing, purifying, transforming operations became a kind of mirror for psychic discoveries and changes (p.5.).

He cites Gerhard Dorn, an alchemist of the sixteenth century, who claims that only the person who attains knowledge of himself can effect the transformation of matter (p.5).

Investigation of this psychic aspect of alchemy was undertaken by C. G. Jung (1875-1961) who found direct connections between the images of alchemy and the dreams of his patients, claiming that both stemmed from a psychic area of shared human inheritance which he termed the 'collective unconscious'. Jung ultimately established a correspondence between the alchemic process, psychological 'individuation' and the techniques of psycho-analysis. The 'self' thus becomes the compound, the base-matter upon which alchemy was practised, often called 'prima materia', and sometimes referred to in alchemical imagery as a 'king'. This frame of royal imagery presented alchemists with a very dramatic scenario: of the 'king' eating his own son (as the base-matter seems to consume its by-product); of the 'wolf' (the chemical antimony) devouring the king and of the king being resurrected or 'redeemed' (as the compound was transmuted, having been 'killed' in a process similar to that of 'breaking down' the psyche in psycho-analysis); and the old king drowning as the new king is born. These metaphors provided material for extraordinary graphic representations of alchemy (see Theatre Set-Up programme notes to The Winter's Tale, Appendix B.5, and Figures 6,7,8, pp.206-209). Examples of the use of such imagery in Shakespeare's plays are the King Leontes in The Winter's Tale, King Cymbeline in Cymbeline, Lear in King Lear (see above pp.122-129) and in



Figure 6: The King eats the Son. From the Book of Lambspring, Museaum Hermeticum Reformatum et Amplificatum...Continens Tractatus Chimicos XXI praestantissimos, 2 vols, Frankfurt, 1678; expanded from the original edition, Frankfurt, 1625. Translated by A.E. Waite, The Hermetic Museum Restored and Enlarged, 2 vols, (London, 1893). Paperback edition by Samuel Weiser 1 vol. (Maine, 1994), p.301



Figure 7: The Wolf eats the King: 'The Death and Resurrection of the King', Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens: hoc est, Emblemata nova de secretis naturae Chymica (Oppenheim, 1618), p.105.



Figure 8: The Old King Drowning and the Birth of the New King, Splendor Solis, ascribed to Salomon Trismosin, Harley MS 3469 in British Library, 1582, Plate 7.

all the 'history plays' (see above pp.136). In our Theatre Set-Up production of The Winter's Tale in 1988 I took the point of view that King Leontes was the subject of the alchemy of the play, his adviser, Paulina, being the alchemist practising upon him (see the play's programme notes in Appendix B.5.). In 1989 we discovered in our production of Cymbeline that the subject of the alchemy was Britain and that this was not undertaken directly by its representative, the King Cymbeline, but by his son-in-law Posthumous Leonatus and his daughter Imogen. However the achievement of the Philosopher's Stone by these dramatic and alchemic protagonists brings benevolent effects to Britain and its king (see the play's programme notes in Appendix B.6.).

Nicholl also reports that Jung considered the psychic subtext of alchemy, with its 'exotic symbolism', to be an Elizabethan replacement for the 'psychic and religious archetypes' that the medieval church had supplied as bridges to the unconscious, but which disappeared in subsequent centuries, so that alchemy related to orthodox religion like an 'undercurrent to Christianity that ruled on the surface' (p.5).

It was the 'puffers', (named after the bellows which were used to control the fire in the furnace), the charlatans with the 'get rich quick' attitude, who neglected the spiritual side to alchemy, only practising alchemy in order to attempt to make gold from lead. This

style of alchemy was satirised by Ben Jonson in his play The Alchemist. [11] George Ripley, Canon of Bridlington, in his Compound of Alchymy, (which he dedicated to the contemporary King Edward IV. For further details see below p.212) gives a graphic description of these men whom he presents as poverty-stricken in threadbare clothes, exhausted from their vain labours (sig.F3).

There were a variety of texts which informed Renaissance alchemists, among which the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, (a supposed Greek equivalent of the Egyptian god Thoth), highly figured. The authorship of this ancient document was, in fact, multiple, and probably assembled over a period of years. It took the form of an 'Emerald Tablet' of obscure, legendary origin. The text of this work comprises thirteen precepts which lie at the heart of alchemic practice. They are written in the usual mystifying figurative language of the alchemist, designed to be understood only by adepts and to confuse cynics and 'puffers'. In this doctrine Hermes Trismegistus:

commands commitment, secrecy and truth from adepts; treats of the unity of all matter, declaring that 'what is below is like that which is above and what is above is like that which is below'; states that all things, produced by the word of 'one Being' are in a state of flux; names the 'sun' and 'moon' as the parents of the Philosopher's Stone which is also nurtured by the wind and the earth; describes the Stone as the 'father of all perfection';

states that the power of the Stone becomes vigorous when it is 'changed to earth'; instructs that the alchemist must judiciously and prudently separate earth from fire and 'the subtle from the gross'; advises that the Stone must be made to ascend from earth to heaven, then descend to earth, to unite with 'things superior and things inferior', giving world-wide glory; tells that this glory has fortitude in its conquest of all matter; informs that the world was formed in this way; teaches that wonders proceed from this; explains that the qualification, 'Trismegistus' is added to his name 'Hermes' as he has three parts of the philosophy of the whole world'; and concludes that this completes the 'operation of the sun'.[12]

Coudert glosses the essence of this oracular material in terms of its practical alchemical significance. She explains that every alchemist must be truthful and discreet and that the concept of unity of matter is basic to the idea of alchemy, whose functions reflect those throughout all creation and whose source is a single divine mind:

> Every created thing emanates from a single, divine soul-substance which assumes innumerable material forms, each of which is in a constant state of flux. Transmutation is, therefore, an inevitable fact of life, and the reactions which occur in alchemical vessels are microscopic reflections of the world at large (p.29).

She defines the reference to the 'sun' and 'moon', the parents of the Philosopher's Stone, as the basic

constituents of alchemy, 'sophic sulphur' and 'sophic mercury' (see below p.221), as well as indicating, by the additional inclusion of the 'wind' and 'earth', its inherent composition of the four elements, fire, (equated with the sun), water, (represented by the moon), air, (the wind), and earth. The Stone can achieve perfection if 'changed into earth', thus avoiding evaporation by being 'fixed' by the alchemist's fire. The 'gross' elements in the alchemist's compound are the base minerals which are separated from the 'subtle', the gold, while the prescribed ascent and descent of the Stone represents 'reflux distillation', which occurred in the main processes of Greek alchemy when a piece of metal was suspended in a vessel called a 'kerotakis' and exposed to different vapours (p.29).

Such was the influence of this document that alchemic philosophy was often termed 'Hermeticism'. However, other Hermetic texts display a greater kinship to forms of Platonism (see below Chapter Six).

There is a vast amount of material written on alchemy, enough to fill many volumes, but much is not necessarily relevant to the subject of this study. Therefore in this section I shall give an account of alchemy as described by George Ripley, in his Compound of Alchymy, as its availability through its publication by Ralph Rabbards in 1591 makes it a probable document of reference for Shakespeare. Written in 1471, this poem

composed in rhyming stanzas consisting of seven lines, existed only in manuscript until its publication by Rabbards. I shall gloss Ripley's 'compound' from modern sources which strive to de-mystify the alchemic terminology and from my own understanding of the material from the practical application of it in the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. I give a detailed account of Ripley's work, not omitting any of the processes or terms which in later chapters I suggest were used by Shakespeare.

Ripley presents alchemy as a castle with twelve consecutive gates representing the stages in the process: 'calcination', 'dissolution', 'seperation', 'coniunction', 'putrifaction', 'congelation', 'cibation', 'sublimation', 'fermentation', 'exaltation', 'multiplication' and 'projection'. [12] In this metaphor one must pass through each gate in sequence before gaining admission to the next gate, as in a succession of grades in a test.

Gilchrist comments that Ripley's image of the castle reinforces alchemy's sense of the circular nature of the process, also often presented as an Ourobouros, a snake eating its own tail (p.59). [13] This image of the circle derives from the innate nature of the process, which recycles material within itself. For example, vapours (metaphorically known as 'soul', or 'spirit'), distilled from the subject of the alchemy (the metaphorical 'body'), rise up in the vessel in which the alchemy is practised,

the alembic vessel (the metaphorical 'psyche') where they remain while the 'body' is further tried and tested. They later descend and are recombined with the 'body' to form a new regenerated substance. The circular process of alchemy, achieving the perfection symbolised by the form of the square (see Read p.20), after passing through the disintegration of the process represented by a triangle, was often referred to as 'squaring the circle' (see illustration in Theatre Set-Up's programme notes of Hamlet, Appendix B.10.). The metaphor of a wheel was also used to express the circle of the alchemic process (see below p.224 and figure 4, p.201).

Ripley prefaces his account of entrance through the 'gates' of his metaphorical castle with a description of an alchemic 'vision' he has experienced and with a general discussion of alchemy. His 'vision' was of a toad which drank the juice of grapes too fast so that he began to be ill and from his every orifice and pore venomous substances issued. In his death throes he turned white, then into a 'golden humour', discharging drops which stained the ground red. As this imagined toad died he turned black, rotting in his own venom for eighty four days until Ripley, in his vision, took action and tried to expel the poison. To do this, he exposed it to a 'gentle fire' after which it changed into many colours, then white, then into a permanent red. Ripley visualised himself as ultimately making a medicine from the resulting

substance which was capable of killing any 'venom' and saving any 'such as venome chaunce to take'. He ends this 'vision' with praise to God, 'the graunter of such secret wayes'. In this amazing 'vision,' Ripley provides his readers with a paradigm of the whole process of alchemy and initiates them into the way in which it gives account of itself through symbols and allegory (for a pictorial representation of this scenario with the toad as the metaphorical subject of alchemy in an alembic vessel, please see illustrated material in the Theatre Set-Up programme notes for A Midsummer Night's Dream, Appendix B.3.).

The toad represents the subject of alchemy, the base-matter which must be purified and refined. Coudert writes that serpents, dragons and toads shared this symbolism and provided graphic images of alchemy (p.145). These creatures are venomous, but they carry within them the Stone, the goal of alchemy, which the alchemist must find by symbolically 'killing' them (p.145). (For illustration of base-matter as a serpent-dragon being killed by the alchemist as Hercules, with his sword which represents the alchemists' fire, please see the programme notes to the Theatre Set-Up Hamlet, Appendix B.10.) Of toads, Coudert describes the emblem and epigram in Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens of 1617, in which a toad is placed on a woman's breast, it sucks her to death, and from the resulting toad filled with the milk of the woman,

a medicine can be made which can 'drive poison from the human heart' and 'mitigate destruction' (p. 145). Maier, she cites, explains that the toad is really the woman's son, a fact that emphasises the cyclic nature of alchemy, that 'all is one and one is all', a maxim endorsing the renaissance macro-microcosmic theory (see above p.163), that is demonstrated in the allegory of Ripley's toad, from which medicine is extracted that will neutralise the venom that it first produced by its excess drinking of grapes of the colour that it ultimately becomes in its redeemed state (p.145). Gilchrist adds the further comment that the image of a toad was also selected by alchemists to represent the illusory ugliness on the outside of matter which contained beauty within (p.43). In Occult Sciences in the Renaissance, Wayne Shumaker identifies the toad symbolism as part of the general 'animistic' naming of alchemical chemical stages (see below p.217). [14] Ripley himself later refers to the toad in the first 'gate', 'calcination', by describing the result of this process as 'Our Toad of the earth which eateth his fill', (sig.D).

The initial corruption of the body of the toad corresponds to the early breaking down of the base-matter until it becomes of the quality needed to enter the purifying stages of the process. The 'gentle fire' which Ripley visualises himself applying to the toad is the alchemist's fire in the furnace called an athanor, into

which the hermetically sealed alembic vessel was placed. The black colour of the toad symbolises the stage called 'nigredo', (often also symbolised by a raven), attained after the matter has been broken down into the basic substance and its 'spirit' (often symbolised by a dove). The many colours the toad becomes signify the hues the substance attains during the different stages. These colours were sometimes referred to as a 'rainbow' (the origin of the legend of the gold to be found at the end of the rainbow), or a 'peacock's tail'. The white colour into which the toad was turned is the 'albedo' stage (also often associated with the symbol of a dove), in which the basic substance is further refined while the 'spirit' 'ascends' to an 'astral sphere'. The permanent red signals the attainment of the red powder, known as the 'philosopher's stone', the goal of alchemy also known as the 'phoenix', which was reputed to have miraculous qualities, such as bestowing immortality, curing illnesses, and, when projected on to lead, to turn it into gold (see illustration of the four stages of the alchemical process in the programme notes to the 1995 Theatre Set-Up A Midsummer Night's Dream, Appendix B.3.).

In the preface to his description of each 'gate' of alchemy, Ripley exhorts all would-be practitioners to live virtuous lives in order to merit the attainment of the Philosopher's Stone which he deems to be a secret of God (sig.B3). He links the Creation as related in the book of

CHAPTER FIVE: ALCHEMY

Genesis in the Bible with alchemy, comparing the diversity of the created world from the single mass of matter to the secrets of the Philosopher's Stone which must spring from a single image. This image he qualifies as 'the lesseworld, one and three', comprising magnesia, sulphur and the mineral mercury, sometimes called quicksilver. He claims that the Stone, which he names 'Mercury' and not to be confused with the metal quicksilver which shares the same name, is possessed by all human beings, is in every place, throughout all time, and that great care must be taken in searching for it in the correct place (sig.B3v.). It cannot be seen by the light of the celestial spheres, the sun and moon, appearing 'by effect to sight' as a perception of the mind. It is 'a soule, a substance bright' (sig.C). Ripley maintains that to understand the 'Mercuries three', constitutes the keys to the understanding of the science of alchemy. These 'keys' are in turn associated with the materials which will become the ingredients of the chemical alchemy (sig.C). The 'compound' (or base-matter) which constitutes the subject of the alchemy, is given the alternative terms of 'lead', and 'earth', and the 'quality of clearness' in the process is said to come from the spheres, the sun and moon. The 'Lyon greene' is named as a menstrue which is an agent that can achieve the changes that will be reflected in the correct colour sequence in the process culminating with 'the tincture', the red powder which is the Stone

(sig.C). [15] He speaks of other necessary menstrues such as 'an humiditie vegitable' and the 'natural fire' which will render the compound, which he now calls 'Hermes tree' into ashes, although it is in its nature 'incombustible and unctuous'. This fire is given high praise as Ripley recapitulates the main factors to be remembered so far, placing them in a metaphorical context which recalls the 'Emerald Tablet' (see above p.210) in its image of the element air as wind and the earth as nurturer:

> It is our naturall fire most sure,
> Our Mercurie, our Sulphur, our tincture pure,
> Our soule, our stone borne up with winde
> In the earth ingendred, beare this in minde (sig.C).

Ripley now gives the Stone another quality, 'the vapour of mettalls potentiall', for the attainment of which he prescribes obtaining 'water cleare', by 'separating the elements,' 'earth', 'water', 'air' and 'fire' of which all matter was thought to exist, and their re-combination throughout the alchemic process is crucial to the success of the operation (sig.C). He gives further advice on drawing out a golden oil from the compound from which he claims 'Aurum potabile', or the metal, real gold, can be made (sig.C2). To the Stone that can effect this, he further gives terms which describe its quality as a medicine, 'our great Elixir', and its power to 'flay Mercury', that is, to extract the potential from the compound, like the Greek mythical serpent whose breath or look could kill, 'Our Bazeliske or our Cockatrice'

(sig.C2). He summarises the whole process as guiding the 'base both red and white', (the 'red' being the base sulphur and the 'white the base mercury' often called 'sophic sulphur' and or the 'white queen') to perfect 'all bodies to Sunne and Moone' by attaining the intrinsic 'Mercury' in the compound and establishing it in a permanent 'reign' (sig.C2).

Alchemy is inconsistent in the use of its images and metaphors, often as both subject and object of a process, in a way that Nicholl claims endorses a 'total' reading through their alternative symbolism, which indicates the self-generating principle of alchemy. For example, the terms 'sun' and 'moon' can be confusing. Sometimes they refer to the actual spheres themselves and give a sense of the totality of the operation, which aims to give perfection to all things that have existence by day and by night. Polarity (again implying the sense of the totality of the operation) in the contrasting natures of these spheres can also be implied, and by giving gender to them, the sun, male, and the moon, female, this is reinforced. The quality of 'dryness' is often symbolised by the use of 'sun' just as 'moon' can imply 'moist'.

The alchemists use this gender-contrast to provide another metaphor. The basic substances of the compound, 'sophic sulphur' also known as the 'red' or even the 'red king' or presented as a lion, can also be called the 'sun', and its counterpart, 'sophic mercury', the 'white',

or 'white queen' or presented as a unicorn, can also be the 'moon'. Any qualities given to the spheres of 'sun' and 'moon', such as 'dry' and 'moist', will apply to sophic sulphur and sophic mercury. They are sometimes presented as husband and wife, sometimes as brother and sister, and occasionally as mother and son. The 'lion' can refer to 'sophic sulphur', sometimes called the 'red lion', to the transforming agent known as the 'green lion' or to the Stone inherent in the whole process (see illustrations in the Theatre Set-Up programme notes for the 1995 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, Appendix B.3.).

When Shakespeare gives a name which contains a 'lion' reference to a male character (usually through its Latin form as 'leo') and one which contains a 'Mercury' reference (usually through its Greek form as 'Hermes') to a corresponding female character in his plays, such as Leontes and Hermione in The Winter's Tale, Posthumus Leonatus and Imogen in Cymbeline, and Leonato and his often-edited-out wife, Inogen, in Much Ado About Nothing, I suggest that he is presenting those characters as a metaphor for sophic sulphur and sophic mercury within a general allegory of alchemy in the play (see the Theatre Set-Up programmes for The Winter's Tale and Cymbeline, Appendix B.5. and B.6.).

Sometimes 'dragon' refers to the base-matter of the compound and sometimes, as cited by Ripley, it refers to

the fire of the furnace:

> This is our Dragon as I thee tell,
> Fiercly burning as the fire of hell (sig.E)

In Romeo and Juliet, Juliet's anger against Romeo's killing of Tybalt uses this image amid many of the other alchemical animistic imagery:

> O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!
> Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
> Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical!
> Dove-feathered raven! Wolvish-ravening lamb!
> (III.ii.73-84)

In this context I believe that Shakespeare refers to 'serpent' and 'dragon' as unregenerated base-matter. The 'cave' is the 'alchemic cave-amphitheatre', a metaphor selected by alchemists for the alembic vessel in which the process of alchemy took place (see illustration in Theatre Set-Up's programme notes for Cymbeline, Appendix B.6.). Literal deception is implied in the comparison of Romeo to a raven with dove's feathers and a lamb which devours like a wolf. However, there is additional alchemic meaning when the feathers of the 'dove', the alchemic symbol for albedo, a pleasant stage of alchemy, when the 'spirit' enters the 'body', thus signalling success of the operation, are applied to 'raven', the symbol for nigredo, the violent, difficult stage when the compound is dismembered. Similar alchemical dislocation is described by the lamb, symbol of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, a paradigm for the Philosopher's Stone, taking on the behaviour of the wolf, symbol for antimony in the process

of nigredo (see above p.217 and illustrations for the Theatre Set-Up programmes of The Winter's Tale, Appendix B.5.).

The term 'fire' itself has several meanings, as the fire of the furnace, an agent of transmutation and as the element 'fire', which is itself transformed.

As mentioned by Ripley in his 'Mercuries three' (see above p.218), there is also confusion in the repeated use of the term 'Mercury' or 'mercury' to describe three different functions: the mineral mercury which is one of the constituents of the base compound, the Mercury which is the essence of the Philosopher's Stone which must be extracted from the compound by 'flaying Mercury,' and Mercury which can be the agent of alchemical transformation itself. 'Mercury' can also be used to symbolise the element 'air'. I suggest that it is in this sense that Shakespeare gives the name 'Hermia' to the female protagonist in A Midsummer Night's Dream. My understanding of the Mercury that must be extracted from the base-matter of the psyche and which is the essence of the Stone, is that it represents the essence of the human soul or a Divinity residing in all people, and with which the alchemist, by transforming his psyche in the processes of his art, may become united and thus transmuted, and be capable of improving world order. Often the Stone was represented as Jesus Christ, a fact that supports this hypothesis, in its dual representation of a Divinity who

is claimed both to live in people's hearts, and to have been purged, killed and resurrected in the manner of the alchemic Mercury (see below Chapter seven and the Theatre Set-Up programme notes for The Winter's Tale and Hamlet, Appendix B.5. and B.10.).

Ripley draws a comparison between the Christian 'figure of the Trinity' and the way in which the work of Calcination, the first 'gate' of his detailed description of alchemy, should be done. This stage is described as a 'purging of our Stone', proceeding 'by joining kind with kind' so that 'each thing is first calcined in his owne kind', working upon the 'white and red', (the 'sophic mercury' and 'sophic sulphur') for a year in order to produce a 'Calx' which is perfect (sig.C3). The proportions recommended in this treatment of Mercury relating to the sun (with its drying effects) and moon (giving moisture) are first, 'One of the Sunne, two of the Moone' and then 'foure to the Sun/ Two to the Moone as it should bee'. He claims that equal proportions of 'water' and 'earth' will create a new generation of substances which must be killed and which share the 'red' and 'white' characteristics (sig.D).

In a process which he presents in the form of a metaphor of turning a wheel, he describes how the elements are 'rotated' in order to 'perfect' them by turning their 'foure natures into the fifth'. On the 'forward rotation' of the 'wheel', earth must be turned into water, water

turned into air and air into fire. The 'backward rotation' turns fire into water, and air into earth. Three times they must be 'circulate' before their unity is attained and 'foure are made one'. The accomplishment of this attains a blacknesse in the compound known as its 'mortification', which, Ripley explains, attracts a number of names: 'head of the Crowe', 'the Crowes bill', 'the ashes of Hermes tree', 'our Toade of the earth which eateth his fill' and 'the Spirit with venome intoxicate' (sig.D). Coudert adds to this list of images that alchemists used to express this black stage of nigredo with 'ravens', 'skulls', 'coffins and various macabre and violent scenes of dying or killing' (pp.44, 45).

Nicholl glosses Ripley's description in the first 'gate' of the 'circulation of elements' during which the wheel is presented as an image of progress from West to North to East to South in terms of the cycle of regeneration it represents:

> The circular journey begins in the West: the setting sun suggests gold in its unredeemed state, resplendent but decadent. The North is thus the nadir of this solar wheel - night, winter, the blackness of putrefaction...The ascent into the East represents the first stage of resurrection - sunrise, summer, delight, **albedo**, - culminating in the 'midday' triumph of the Stone (p.150).

Gilchrist glosses the less dramatic action to be found through the next 'gate', Dissolution, as:

> The matter is dissolved in a water that does not wet the hand. Everything should be carried out in one vessel only. Solution brings to light what is hidden (p.59).

Ripley describes the vessel in which this process takes place as an 'egg'. Gilchrist explains that the egg-shaped alembic vessel was designed to symbolise the 'oneness' of the alchemist and his operation with nature in the hope that he will attain a natural wholeness and his work a perfection (p.60). The 'white' and 'red' sophic mercury and sophic sulphur of the evolving compound are termed 'sister and brother', which are further characterised as 'agent and patient' (Ripley, sig.D2, D3).

The gate of Seperation leads to the active separation of the parts of the compound, 'the subtle from the grosse, the thick fro the thinn'. The 'subtle' is often called the 'spirit', or 'soul', which is dramatically represented as ascending in the alembic vessel as if into the astral sphere, while the 'grosse', becomes the 'body' which must remain below to be further purged and tested.

Metaphorically presented, the soul of a man who becomes the body of the compound is a woman, and the soul of a woman who is the compound is a man. Sometimes a 'body' has a 'soul' and a 'spirit'. I believe that Shakespeare practises this metaphor most clearly in The Winter's Tale when Hermione as the spirit 'ascends' into a simulated death (III.ii.150), Leontes as 'body' undergoes purging (the penance that is referred to in V.1.1-12 and his castigation by Paulina in that scene and in III.ii.173-240), while his 'soul', Perdita, whom he has cast out (II.iii.169-182), lives in exile (IV.iv.). A

prophecy from Delphi proclaims the necessity for his soul to return in order for Leontes to have life through an heir (III.ii.130-133). Only when Perdita returns to Leontes does the 'spirit', Hermione, return to him so that the 'self' is reunited, or in psycholgical terms, the personality is integrated. (V.iii).

During Seperation the elements again undergo transformation: earth is turned to water under the colours of black and blue, water into air under white and then air into fire. He compares these transformations leading to the bringing forth of the golden 'oyle incombustable' from the Stone, to the Biblical reference of Moses bringing forth water from a rock by striking it (sig.D4).

In the next stage, Conjunction, an 'alchemical marriage' takes place between the materials of opposite nature which had been separated in the previous process (see Lyndy Abraham on The Lovers and the Tomb in this process of 'Solve et Coagule' reflected in Romeo and Juliet above p.75). This 'of different qualities a copulation', as Ripley calls it, brought forth amazing imagery in graphic art and in literature (sig.E2). I suggest that the strange coupling between Titania and Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream (following III.ii.), is an example of this. Shakespeare's policy of maintaining his unmarried heroines' virginity (as demanded by Prospero of his daughter, Miranda and her lover,

Ferdinand, in The Tempest, IV.i.14-23) made this process only possible between married couples. However, Oberon takes the unusual step of making his wife fall in love with some hideous creature as revenge for her disobedience to him (II.ii.27-34), which provides an opportunity for the Conjunction to take place (for detail see Chapter Nine).

Ripley describes three kinds of Conjunction (sig.E3). These are: 'Philosophers Diptative', between the 'male' sulphur and the 'female' mercury; 'Triptative', wherein body, soul and spirit are joined (see above in the reuniting of Hermione, Perdita and Leontes in The Winter's Tale, p.226); and 'Tetraptative' in which the elements are combined (see below on A Midsummer Night's Dream, Chapter 9). The aim of Conjunction is the begetting of new substances, and Ripley recommends that the 'woman' be left alone after this process so that the 'childe' may be produced (sig.E3).

This implied peace is shattered by the process through the next gate, Putrifaction, which Gilchrist glosses as the killing of the matter to effect regeneration :

> The bodies must be killed by heat so that regeneration can occur (sig.59).

Ripley makes compare between this and the necessary death of the grain of wheat in the ground to bring forth its increase (sig.E4). He identifies it in alchemical terms

as the flaying of bodies, 'after Philosophers sayings, to be of bodies the fleying' (sig.Ev.). This violent stage of moist-heating the process to effect transformation into a black powder, 'the crowes bill', should, he claims, last for ninety nights (sig.F). He presents another strange image: the elements should be made to play like children until they become dirtied, when the 'woman' must be taken to be washed, which will make her swoon in a faint and ultimately die with all her children and go to purgatory for the cleansing of their original sin, their 'filth originall' (sig.F). In this purgatory their 'paines' must be increased by continuous fire until the whiteness, 'the light of Paradice', appears which marks the passing into the next phase of the alchemy. He also adopts the image of the marriage within the grave:

> Therefore at the beginning our stone thou take,
> And burie each one in other within their grave,
> Then equally betwixt them a marriage make (sig.F).

Conception of regenerated matter is to take place within the grave in an image of life-within-death:

> Their feede conceived, kindly to nourish and save
> From the ground of their grave not rising that while,
> Which secreat point doth many a one beguile.
>
> This time of conception with easie heate abide,
> The blacknes shewing shall tell thee when they dye
> (sig.F).

He describes the rainbow of colours that will follow this 'death' (see above p.202) in the same way as the rainbow appeared to Noah in the Biblical story of Noah's flood, which he likens to the action of the 'sun' in this part of

the process, whose waters even exceed the Biblical deluge in their forceful passing and bearing away of purged material (sig.F2). This association of a flood with the violence of Putrifaction gave rise to the convention of presenting this stage in the metaphor of tempests. Shakespeare made use of this convention in his plays: the storm in The Tempest which Prospero creates to confound and then transmute his enemies (I.i); the storm in King Lear which orchestrates Lear's true understanding of himself (III.i); the storm in The Winter's Tale, which sinks the ship which brings Perdita to Bohemia (III.iii); in The Comedy of Errors, the storm which Egeon reports has divided his family (I.i); in Macbeth, the storms during which the witches make their appearances (I.i., I.iii, III.v., IV.i); in Julius Caesar, the storm on the night which precedes the assassination of Caesar (I.iii., II.ii); in Othello, the storm which wrecks the Turkish invaders and separates Othello from Cassio (II.i.); and in The Merchant of Venice, the storms which presumably wreck Antonio's ships (III.i). In accordance with the principles of unity of matter (see above p.210), the storms in King Lear, Macbeth and Julius Caesar, can also signify nature's participation in man's fate, their tumult reflecting a disturbance in the natural order when a rightful king or head of state, mankind's primate, is unnaturally supplanted.

The white stage is achieved in Congelation, the sixth

'gate' wherein Ripley claims there occurs a fixing of spirits, 'confixation of spirits which flying are' (sig.G3). The elements 'will knit together soone' and 'then will the spirit with the bodie congealed be'. Gilchrist describes the moderation of this stage:

> a temperate heat is used to bring in the desired whiteness and to fix the spirits into the white stone (p.60).

Ripley advocates that the compound be as wax that can melt with ease and that it should 'congeale like pearles' (sig.G3). Shakespeare makes some use of 'pearl' imagery signifying this stage: in Hamlet, Claudius, intending to kill Hamlet, poisons a pearl which he puts into a potion which his wife Gertrude accidentally drinks and dies, a fate he will soon share with her (V.ii.); and Proteus, in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, describes the tears of Sylvia over Valentine's banishment as 'a sea of melting pearl' (III.i.224.).

Nicholl makes the observation that the remaining 'gates', giving entrance to the processes which take the work from the white to the red stages of the attainment of the Stone are dealt with in a more summary fashion than in previous sections:

> The remaining gates describe the processes for further exalting the White into the Red Stone. They are briefer and less tractable to analysis: Ripley covers the second stage of the journey in only 61 stanzas, as opposed to the 151 of the first six gates (p.40).

Perhaps this briefer treatment indicates that these later

stages took less time to accomplish than the earlier ones.

The first of these, the gate of Cibation leads to a moderate feeding of the compound with 'milke and meate' (Ripley, sig.H3). I suggest that the sheep-shearing feast in The Winter's Tale, (IV.iv), the drink that poisons Gertrude and Claudius in Hamlet, and the supper that Kate never manages to eat as she is not yet sufficiently 'tamed' in The Taming of the Shrew (IV. i), are examples of this (see the plays' programme notes, Appendix B.5, B.10, and B.11.). Petruchio's prevention of Katharine's eating food that could increase her unsociable shrewishness, as part of a plan of action which he claims is done for her benefit, 'I intend/ That all is done in reverent care of her' (IV.ii.192-93), is a reflection of Ripley's caution to alchemists not to overfeed the compound in this stage of Cibation:

> But give it never so much, that thou it glut;
> Beware of dropsey, and also of Noahs flood (sig.H3).

Rather than cause or exacerbate a malady in the 'young' substance from overfeeding it, he recommends that it be subjected to a diet:

> But rather let it thirst for drinke among,
> Than thou shouldst give it overmuch at once.
> Which must in youth be dieted for the nonce (sig.H3).

Petruchio advocates similar benefits of diet to Kate. Speaking of meat that he has rejected with the complaint that it is burnt and therefore not suited to those of choleric temperament such as themselves, he says:

> And better 'twere that both of us did fast-

> Since of ourselves, ourselves are choleric-
> Than feed it with such overroasted flesh.
> Be patient. Tomorrow't shall be mended,
> And for this night we'll fast for company.
> (IV.i.162-166).

In the next, the eighth gate of Sublimation, the 'body' and 'spirit' are further reconciled as Ripley enjoins the alchemist to 'make thy bodies first spiritual/ And then thy spirits...corporall' in a process that should last for forty days (sig.H3v). Violence is required to bring the 'spirit' down from the top of the vessel so that the 'soul' may 'come out/ From his owne veynes'. The substance, consisting of the combined 'red' and 'white' must again be purged and washed until the water becomes black. This stage is often portrayed in graphic art as a king and queen sharing a bath, (see Coudert p.131).

The ninth gate leads to Firmentation. There are three firments, two pure, 'two be of bodies in nature cleene', and the third the 'lion' who must be given drink 'till his belly burst' (sig.I2). The 'lion' is here synomymous with 'gold' of the compound which must be fermented with gold, 'thy gold with gold thou must ferment' and element with element to bring 'the spirit of life' and endurance to the compound (sig.I2). Ripley looks forward in this stage to the culmination of the operation, the production of the Stone, which he here calls 'quintessence', and a healing medicine (sig.I3).

He compares Exaltation of the tenth gate to Sublimation and cites Christ as saying, 'if I exalted be,/

Then shall I draw all things unto me ' (sig.I3). This Christian analogy is further teased out in a description of the compound having been 'crucified and examinate' before, as man and wife, being 'contumulate' and then revived by 'the spirit of life' (sig.I4). After this they must be exalted up to heaven, 'there to be in bodie and soul glorificate' and thus, among the angels, they shall draw, 'al other bodies to their owne dignitie'. The metaphorical wheel must again be turned to transmute the elements: air must be turned into water, so that two contraries shall meet until they 'right well agree', and thus the water be turned to air; and from the air shall fire be obtained by putrifying and subliming, and from fire the earth. Another turn of the metaphorical wheel converts air into earth and water into fire and then earth into air and fire from the earth. He instructs that the circulation should be begun in the west and then into the south supplying a diagram to act as a guide. Charles Nicholl cites this aspect of Ripley's work in relation to the motif of the wheel in King Lear (see above p.123). [16]

In the penultimate gate, Multiplication, the compound, now the Stone or Elixir, is augmented by the gradual addition of water 'in colour, in odour, in vertue and also in quantitee' (sig.K).

The castle is now conquered on entry to the twelfth gate, Projection, which leads to 'the use of the Stone for transformation'. [17] The Elixir, the transformed compound,

if cast on to 'bodies made cleane' will transmute them as they take on its golden colour. With this action the Great Work is achieved.

The attainment of success in alchemy in achieving this Great Work was considered to be a paradigm, in the spiritual aspect of the philosophy, for union with the divine spirit of God which had been extracted from the compound/psyche of the alchemist. This philosophy implies a belief that Godhead resides in matter, a principle which was also followed in Renaissance Platonism, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: RENAISSANCE PLATONISM

This chapter reviews material available to Shakespeare derived from the work of Plato and related subsequent philosophers. I consider these philosophies to be the basis of much allegory in Shakespeare's plays and endemic to an understanding of their content. I examine in particular detail Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's 'Symposium', relating the material to Shakespeare's plays in this and subsequent chapters. The early part of the chapter deals with the background to this document, relating the history of Platonism, Neoplatonism and the Renaissance Platonism to which Ficino was a major contributor. [1]

The Greek philosopher Plato upon whose work Platonism is based, lived from between 428 and 427 B.C. to between 348 and 347 B.C., founding in about 387 B.C. and presiding over it throughout his life, an institution in Athens named the Academy which was dedicated to philosophical and scientific research. [2]

In addition to lecturing at the Academy and promoting its work, Plato wrote a great body of philosophical work composed in the form of dialogues arranged in nine tetralogies (groups of four): (1) Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo; (2) Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophistes, Politicus; (3) Parmenides, Philebus, Symposium, Phaedrus; (4) Alcibiades I, Alcibiades II, Hipparchus, Erastae; (5) Theages, Charmides, Laches, Lysis; (6) Euthydemus, Protagoras, Gorgias, Meno; (7) Hippias I (major), Hippias

II (minor), Ion, Menexenus; (8) Clitophon, Republic, Timaeus, Critias; and (9) Minos, Laws, Epinomis, Epistles. [3] These dialogues take the dramatic form of debates and discussions on philosophical issues between historical protagonists such as Socrates and Parmenides. In Renaissance Thought, Paul Oskar Kristeller expresses the problem we have in identifying the real authorship of the ideas expressed in the dialogues as they can be attributed to either Plato or to the protagonist discussing them:

> Since Plato rarely speaks in his own name, it seems difficult to identify his own definite opinions, or to separate them from those of Socrates, Parmenides, and his other characters. [4]

As they share with Shakespeare's comedies the subjects of 'love' and 'the soul', I suggest that the dialogues which are most relevant to this study are the Symposium and the Phaedrus and the versions and variants of them which were available to Shakespeare. Both these dialogues propose philosophies concerning the human soul and love which inform themes in Shakespearean drama. Vyvyan develops this proposition in Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty, claiming the speeches of Socrates in these works to be the source of Renaissance 'theorizing on love and beauty' (p.15). He demonstrates by the examination of specific plays, the indebtedness of Shakespeare to the ideas of these dialogues, re-fashioned by post-Platonic thinking.

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In this chapter I examine the Symposium in more detail than the Phaedrus of which I include only the significant key images relating to those of the Symposium from which our experience in our Theatre Set-Up productions have taught us to draw (see Appendices A.3, B.4, B.5, and B.7 - 10).

The exact route by which the philosophical ideas of Plato's dialogues travelled to reveal themselves in Shakespeare's plays is debatable. There is the possibility that Shakespeare took them directly from Latin translations. As mentioned above (p.81), in his treatise on the subject of Shakespeare's access to Greek and Latin classics, William Shakspere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke, T.W. Baldwin commends the high standard of classical education in the type of grammar school attended by Shakespeare in Stratford-Upon-Avon and proposes that such an educational background could have given Shakespeare considerable ability in the reading of Greek and Latin texts. (Baldwin presents evidence supporting this governing idea throughout both volumes of this publication). F.P. Wilson considers that his proved reading in Latin includes, 'Ovid as well as Golding's Ovid, some Seneca and Virgil as well as English Seneca and Virgil' (p.14). He points out that as Thomas Dekker, a playwright contemporary with Shakespeare and sharing a similar education, translated from Latin texts that were known not to be accessible in English, presumably

Shakespeare could have done the same (p.15). However, in spite of this circumstantial proof of Shakespeare's ability to read texts in Latin, Wilson considers that most of Shakespeare's reading was in English (p. 17).

Jonathan Bate demonstrates, in Shakespeare and Ovid, Shakespeare's certain knowledge of Ovid's Metamorphoses (pp.20-23 and see above p.82). He also considers that part of this familiarity with the text could have come from a reading of the Arthur Golding translation of the work into English. [5] However, he discusses the effect of an assumed study of the Latin version on Shakespeare's plays in a related facility in the use of rhetorical devices, stemming from the disciplines of his grammar school curriculum in exercises in rhetoric, executed in Latin and based on such texts as Metamorphoses (pp. 20, 21). He cites the player's speech in Hamlet as an example of this:

> The player's speech in Hamlet, with its accumulation of figures designed to elicit sympathy for the passion of Hecuba, is a standard rhetorical set-piece (p. 20).

Thus it can be established that Shakespeare could have had a facility in reading Latin texts, so that any translations of the Platonic dialogues into that language would have been accessible to him. In this chapter I propose to examine sources available to Shakespeare of versions in Latin of Platonic philosophy as mediated by Marsilio Ficino and in this and subsequent chapters hope

to demonstrate Shakespeare's application of this material in his plays. [6]

The Latin translations of Plato's dialogues by Marsilio Ficino were first published in 1484, and his commentaries on them are known to have been available in England since their publication. The letters between Ficino and the Englishman, John Colet, (1466-1519 A.D., and at one time Dean of St Paul's, London), and Colet's marginal commentaries on Ficino's work are extant, readily accessible to us now in John Colet and Marsilio Ficino by Sears Jayne. [7] Colet's interest in Ficino was based on theological concerns. In his interpretation of the works of Plato, Ficino had sought to reconcile specific Platonic concepts with ideas and beliefs of his own time. In particular he endeavoured to achieve a symbiosis between Platonic theory and Christianity, to 'up-date' the Platonic views on Divinity, the human soul, love, and man's place in the cosmos in the light of the later teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, in the work, Theologia Platonica, published in 1482, and in letters, Epistolae, published in 1495, in which he defends the work against charges of 'heresy and paganism' (see Jayne p. 43).

The interest which Colet showed in the correspondence between Platonic and Christian doctrine which Ficino sought to demonstrate was reflected throughout Renaissance Europe by scholars who now believed that they could safely

examine the Platonic texts, not as pagan works, but as evidence of a kind of Truth established by God in the work of Plato before the Christian era (see Jayne p.44). For example, the Christian and Platonic accounts of the creation were found to be strikingly similar, (see below p.292) as were also the division of Godhead into a Trinity, in Christianity taking the form of The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit, while the Platonists selected a variety of terms, Ficino himself nominating Saturn, Jupiter and Venus (see Jayne p.44). There was only a short distance between the acceptance of the truths of these aspects of Platonic theology to an accommodation of other Platonic ideas into Christian thinking. In particular the relative accounts of the descent of the soul from its spiritual home with God into mortal flesh and its re-ascent to God interested them (see Jayne p.48). In the biblical version of this the whole of humanity fell with Adam and could only be redeemed by the love and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, but Plato provided a corresponding set of metaphors to describe the history of the soul which provided a very satisfying supplement to the biblical version and fascinated the Renaissance mind (see Jayne pp.45-47).

An important source of this material was made available by Ficino in his Commentary upon Plato's, Symposium, accessible to readers of Shakespeare's time through its publication in Latin in Basel in 1561 and in

Lugdunum (modern Lyons) in 1590, and to us through an English translation by Sears Jayne, in Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's 'Symposium'. [8] The commentary takes the usual Renaissance form of 'quoting brief pasages, then explaining them' (Jayne p.16).

In his commentary and indeed in his whole interpretation of Platonic philosophy, Ficino demonstrates influences from previous philosophies deriving from Platonism which require discussion at this point to give a true perspective to his ideas. The first of these is Neo-Platonism, followed in Greece, Rome, The Levant and Alexandria from the third century A.D., and initially focused in the Enneads, the great work of the philosopher, Plotinus (A.D. 205-270). Plotinus perceived in reality a Trinity of The One, Nous (the intellect) and the World Soul, each of these situated beneath the other and between them embracing the whole of creation. The aim of the good person was, by intellectual and moral discipline and inspired by love and the contemplation of beauty, to ascend beyond the sphere of material creation in the World Soul, to Nous, and thence to union with the Divine, the One. [9] The biographer and editor of Plotinus was his pupil Porphyry, (A.D. 233- c.304) who maintained this spiritual aspect of the philosophy and evolved a system of daemonology, to account for evil in the world (see Armstrong, p. 218). Iamblichus, (c.250-c.330) the pupil of Porphyry, founded a Syrian school of Neo-Platonism and

changed the nature of that body of philosophy for centuries, developing concepts and practices in which theurgy (in its sense of the achievement of white magic see above pp.169-177) was embraced through the codification of the divinities, rites, and myths of the classical world and from which Christianity was excluded and condemned (see Armstrong, p.218 and XII p.30). This trend achieved political impact in A.D. 361 in the conversion of the Roman emperor Julian to Neo-Platonism and his rejection of Christianity (see Armstrong p. 218).

In the fifth century the Neo-Platonism of this style which had been followed in the Academy which Plato had established in Athens, was extensively recorded by its distinguished scholar, Proclus (A.D. 410-485) (see Armstrong p. 218 and XVIII pp. 545-546). The works of Proclus relevant to this study are: (1) commentaries on Plato, the Republic, Parmenides, Timaeus, Alcibiades I, being extant; (2) Platonic Theory, particularly in its 1618 edition of Aemilius Portus; (3) Elements of Physics, based on Aristotle's physical works, and Elements of Theology, an exposition of Neo-Platonic metaphysics in 211 propositions.

The movement to reconcile the spiritual aspects of Neo-Platonism with Christianity, which, after the death of Julian in 363, became the official religion of the Roman Empire, began in the Alexandrian school of philosophers in the fifth century and culminated in their conversion to

Christianity in the seventh century A.D. (see Armstrong p.219). West of Alexandria, in Rome and western Europe, the effect of Iamblichus had not been felt as in the East and Neo-Platonism continued to be followed in the style of Plotinus and Porphyry. Pagans in the fifth century working within this tradition and whose work subsequently influenced medieval thinking were Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius (c.A.D. 400) and Martianus Capella (see Armstrong p.219). The main work of Macrobius is Saturnalia, a 'symposium' in the tradition begun by Plato's work of that name. However, of particular relevance here is his commentary, in two books, on Cicero's Somnium Scipionis ('The Dream of Scipio') from the De Republica, which referred to Plato's Timaeus, for which he may have used Porphyry's commentary and in which he may have used a Neo-Platonic commentary on Virgil. [10] In the fourth century there had already been Christian Neo-Platonic philosophers such as Gaius Marius Victorinus whose Latin translation of the works of Plotinus and his conversion to Christianity in old age were to have an impact on St. Augustine, later converted to Christianity himself. [11] Through the authority of the extensive writings of St. Augustine, (A.D. 354-430), Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, Platonic ideas in their Neo-Platonic form in Plotinus, which Augustine incorporated into his ecclesiastical disputations, were propelled through the middle ages into the Renaissance (see Lacey pp.681-685).

In particular, the doctrine subsequently intrinsic to Christian dogma, of 'original sin', that he developed, and in which he attributes the tendency of mankind to commit sins to its historical fall from grace in the Biblical Garden of Eden, owes to Plotinus the idea that mankind itself, being part of the One which is good, can not, of itself, be sinful (see above p.242 and see Lacey pp.684-685).

Achieving a less radical effect on Christian dogma but a permanent one of idealistic association between Christianity and Neo-Platonism is the Christian Neoplatonist and mystic of about A.D. 500, assuming the name (and often thus given the prefix 'Pseudo') of Dionysius the Areopagite (who, in earlier centuries, had been converted to Christianity by St Paul in Athens). Making ecclesiastical use of the Pauline associations with his adopted name, pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite linked Christianity and Neo-Platonism in the early sixth century in his use of terminology and ideas from the work of Proclus in his own writings on Christian mysticism, thus disseminating Neo-Platonism to his Christian readers in later ages. [12] However not all Christian Neo-Platonists at this time linked their philosophies with their religion. For example, the contribution to later understanding of Neo-Platonism made by the Christian Roman Boethius (c.480-524), also writing in the early sixth century, was in the production of logical commentaries on

Aristotle and Porphyry, which were of seminal importance in the diffusion of Neo-Platonic thinking into Western Europe, but which made no attempt to reconcile the philosophy with Christianity. [13]

Between the Neo-Platonism of these early centuries of the first millenium, transforming the ancient Greek texts from which they were derived and the writings of Marsilio Ficino, working from the original texts themselves, lies a period in which thought, metaphysics, art, and science received further Neo-Platonic influence through the medieval Latin translations of Proclus and of the Arabic philosophers, themselves influenced by Neo-Platonic ideas (see Armstrong, p.219). Nesca Robb classifies these ideas into two categories: the naturalistic, as followed by Arab philosophers like Avicenna, perceiving creation to be an emanation of the Divine and thus a suitable subject for the pursuit of truth in such disciplines as mathematics and the natural sciences; and the mystic, as practised by pseudo-Dionysius and St. Augustine, believing that true knowledge comes to individual souls through self-knowledge and revelation. [14]

These ideas became manifest in the literature of the early Renaissance. For example, Robb identifies elements of Neo-Platonism in the work of the poet Dante, whose concept of love is of something heavenly to be attained in an ascent resembling the ascent of the soul to the Divine

as described by Plotinus, (see above p.242):

> a means of moral perfection, an ascent through stages of contemplation towards a celestial vision (p.18).

Other Platonic and Neo-Platonic characteristics which Robb notes to have been observed in the work of Dante are: the affinity to those in Plato's Timaeus, of his theories of creation, in which a divine Trinity, Power, Wisdom and Love made the world so that all creatures could share with God 'the joys of conscious existence'; a similarity to the 'theories of emanation' of the Alexandrian school in his view that the order of angels, the heavens and primal matter, stamped by God with the 'forms of all things' were created like three arrows from a three-stringed bow; earthly existences are caused by the 'virtue of the heavens', which are themselves moved by the angels; God 'breathes' only into man an immortal soul with an accompanying gift of free will by which, through grace, he can 'purify his affections'; the main activity of the universe, and the inspiration of all art and philosophy is love, which motivated God to the act of creation, which pulls all creatures back to Him and is the means by which the soul can ascend, through graded states of being until it achieves the satisfaction of the 'Beatific Vision'. [15] This centrality of love to the functioning of the cosmos and the soul's progress became known, when applied to the human condition, as Platonic love.

However Robb claims that it was Petrarch, writing

during the middle years of the fourteenth century, when the human dimension of existence was beginning to be more valued than the medieval emphasis on the divine, who first linked Plato with the key ideals of the Italian Renaissance (p.21). Petrarch is known to have possessed sixteen works of Plato in the original Greek (which he could only have understood through a translator), a Latin translation of the Timaeus in a copy which he annotated and which is still extant, and he would have had access to Latin translations of the Meno and the Phaedo (see Robb pp.21-22). For his understanding of the key principles of Plato, however, he was dependent on their interpretation by St Augustine who supported the Platonic idea of divinity intrinsic in all creation, and especially in mankind (see above p.246). Petrarch found in the Platonic concept of mankind's soul as a divine essence seeking to ascend to be re-united with its divine source, a re-assuring difference from the medieval Christian idea of mankind separated from a divinity outside of itself, (see below) and unable to rise from its debased state without a gift from that divinity (see Robb pp.22-23). The Platonic philosophy granted that the individual personality could achieve a moral status impossible in the medieval system (see Robb p.23). The increased self-esteem that humanity could accrue from an ability to ascend towards divinity by its own efforts was an important component in the establishment of the 'humanistic' movement in the

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Renaissance, which valued focus on human potential and its existence in this world for its own sake, not merely as a preparation for life after death. However, Petrarch took a more humble view than his Italian humanist successors of mankind's ability to be, within limits, the architect of his own destiny, acknowledging a frailty in the will of man to carry out what he knows to be right (see Robb p.27-28). He judged mankind's true greatness to lie in the creativity of his spirit, highly esteeming poetry as the fruit of its productivity, and raising art and the mind of man to that centrality of importance it later enjoyed in the Renaissance (see Robb pp. 27-28). In Shakespeare's work this attitude finds its most famous expression in the words of Hamlet:

> What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. Hamlet II.ii.311-315.

This developing humanism was stimulated in the years between Petrarch and Ficino (1374-1483) and the interest which Petrarch had generated in Plato and the classics was facilitated for his followers by an increased understanding of the original Greek language in which they were written, and a greater availability of original manuscripts (see Robb pp.31).

So when Ficino came to the translation of the works of Plato and to his commentaries upon them, there was a strong cultural tradition of Platonism already in

existence. This was sufficient to motivate the rich and powerful Medici family in Florence to commission Ficino to translate texts which they supplied. It was Ficino's lifetime of dedication to the translation of the works of Plato, Plotinus and the so-called Hermes Trismegistus (see above p.210), which inspired Renaissance humanists with the ideas of Plato and the Neo-Platonists and provided subsequent generations of scholars with an adequate supply of available classical texts to form the basis of their own studies.

His commentary on the Symposium, Commentarium in Convivium Platonis, only survives in the second version written as part of his translations of the works of Plato and published in his lifetime at Florence in 1484 and at Venice in 1491. [16] Of the later editions available, (see above p.240), Jayne selects that of Basel, 1561 as the most useful and reliable to work from for his English translation which I now discuss.

I include two kinds of material: that which I hope to demonstrate was used by Shakespeare in his plays, and other work which throws light on that material, such as the creation theories in the earlier part of the document. The form that the commentary on the Symposium takes imitates the style of Plato's work itself, that is, of a dramatic dialogue between guests at a feast after the main courses have been cleared away and before and during the dessert (see Jayne p. 123). Plato's Symposium on Love is

first read before the feasters, who have a Florentine setting and identity contemporary with Ficino, and then each guest is given a speech from the work to explain (see Jayne pp. 122-23). Thus Ficino, like Plato, speaks through the words of the protagonists, drawing on post-Platonic ideas (such as concepts formulated by Neo-Platonists) to illuminate the text of Plato for his contemporary readers. [17]

The first speech on 'By what Rule Love is Praised. In what its Dignity and Greatness Consists', given in the Platonic original by Phaedrus, is explained by the Ficino protagonist Giovanni Cavalcanti. (As 'Love' is deemed to be a god it is written by Ficino with an initial capital letter unless it describes a quality of feeling or a verb and not a characterised emotion. This system is applied by Ficino to other nouns such as 'Beauty' and 'Idea'). He cites the system by which a Platonic philosopher examines and judges any matter: what precedes it, by what it is accompanied and what comes after it. If these three are judged good the categories are termed 'noble', 'great' and 'beneficial' which Phaedrus concludes are merited by his examination of love in his application of this system (see Jayne pp.124-25). Cavalcanti then discusses the process by which Phaedrus has reached this conclusion, beginning with 'The Origin of Love out of Chaos'.

He explains the Platonic system as reasoned by Phaedrus. Love, 'the oldest and wisest of the gods, and

perfect in himself' is said to be located in the heart of Chaos (the world in its state without form) which existed before the world (in its formed and ordered state) and before the other gods (see Jayne p.125-26). As the Platonists consider that there are three worlds, the Angelic Mind, the Soul of the World and the Body of the World there are three corresponding states of Chaos, (see Plotinus, above p.242). In Backgrounds of Shakespeare's Thought Hankins perceives this Platonic concept to be reflected in Shakespeare's Othello. [18] Othello identifies his love for Desdemona in terms of the order that love has created from chaos:

> Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul,
> But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
> Chaos is come again. (III.iii.90-92)

The first substance to be created by God, the Angelic Mind, also called Essence, was initially formless but gained form from the burning of its passion when it turned towards God in the desire for its maker. In this Mind God created the Ideas, the spiritual protoforms of all material things in existence, and sometimes characterised as gods. The turning of the Mind toward God is designated the birth of love, the fire of the passion the increment of love and the gift of the forms the 'completion of love' (see Jayne p.128). The composite of all the forms is called a 'mundus' in Latin, a 'cosmos' or 'Orderliness' in Greek, and the attractiveness of that orderliness is Beauty. At birth, Love drew the Mind to Beauty thus

making Mind beautiful, and demonstrating the principle that 'Love attracts to beauty and makes the unbeautiful, beautiful' (Jayne p.128). Love is also characterised as the first of the gods, being the impulse that turned the Mind towards God.

Cavalcanti relates that a similar impulse of love is said to have turned the World-Soul from its state of chaos towards the Mind and God the source of its birth, thus bringing about a transference of the forms and a state of order. The Body of the world experienced a like process, turning through an impulse of love towards God and the World-Soul, thus causing the material world embodying the Ideas to come into being. This process demonstrates the creative characteristics of Love:

> Love accompanies the chaos, precedes the world, wakens the drowsy, lights the obscure, revives the dead, gives form to the formless, and finishes the incomplete (Jayne p.129).

The origin and nobility of Love being established, Ficino discusses through his protagonist Cavalcanti the benefits of Love. He expounds the principle that evil deeds are ugly and good deeds beautiful, and avoidance of the evil leads to pursuit of the good, observing that codes and laws follow this rule. It is Love in the philosophical understanding of it as 'desire for beauty' which motivates men to obey laws. This desired beauty is a threefold harmony even when applied to human beauty: of the soul, perceived by the mind; of the body, seen by the eyes;

and of sound, heard by the ears. Enjoyment through the senses of taste, smell and touch is defined as lust, and lasciviousness deplored as ugly in itself and therefore not appropriate to the pursuit of beauty. Love and the wish only for physical union are judged to be opposite impulses (see Jayne p.130). It is not possible, however, to love intemperately in the pursuit of real beauty (see Jayne p.130-31). When two people love each other in this way the benefits are great. As they continually watch over and try to please each other, they avoid the practice of ugly deeds, and zealously undertake virtuous tasks to 'seem worthy of an exchange of love' (Jayne p.131). Thus Love brings the benefit of making men strong and virtuous (see Jayne p.131). By pursuing in this loving way the harmonious beauty of the body, the beauty of the soul of the loved one is also perceived. If the body is beautiful but the soul is not, there should be a reluctance to love the beautiful body. However if a beautiful soul is perceived in a body which is not beautiful, Love should pursue that soul. A junction of beauty in body and soul in the beloved will bring an added spiritual joy in a kinship to that of Platonists:

> When either beauty happens to coincide with the other, let us be especially adoring, and thus we shall testify to our having belonged to the Platonic family, for it knows nothing but holy, joyful, heavenly, and divine things (Jayne p.132).

Hankins observes that the comment made by the disguised duke in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure upon Isabella's

beauty, reflects Ficino's Platonic principle that true physical beauty stems from God-given beauty of soul:

> The hand that hath made you fair hath made you good; the goodness that is cheap in beauty makes beauty brief in goodness; but grace, being the soul of your complexion, shall keep the body of it ever fair. (III.i.184-188) [19]

The second speech beginning with, 'God is Goodness, Beauty, and Justice, the Beginning, Middle, and End', given in the Platonic original by Pausanias, is mediated by the Ficino protagonist, the theologian Agli. He begins by stating the belief of the Pythagorean philosophers that everything is measured by a trinity: God governs things in threes; all things are categorized in threes; God first creates everything, then he attracts it, then finishes it; everything when born stems from that source in God, flows back to it and is finished when it returns. God is thus the beginning in his creation of things, the middle in the attracting to himself of things and the end in the finishing of the things that return to him. He is called Good when creating, Beautiful when attracting and Just when each thing is finished according to its deserts. Divine Beauty thus flows from Goodness and proceeds to Justice (see Jayne p. 133).

Agli then discusses 'How Divine Beauty Inspires Love', explaining how it creates love, that is desire for itself, in everything, as part of the circular process of the endless attraction of creation, originating in God, back to God (see Jayne p. 136). This single circle has

three names for its corresponding functions: Beauty as it begins in and attracts to God; Love as, in going into the world, it 'captivates the world'; and as it returns to its source in God, Pleasure. Thus 'Love begins in Beauty and ends in Pleasure' and is described as a 'circle of good' (Jayne p.134).

The metaphor of the circle is continued in the next section discussed by Agli, 'Beauty is the Radiance of the Divine Goodness, and God is the Centre of Four Circles'. This philosophical image, designed to reinforce the idea that all things centre upon God and strive to return to him, placed Goodness in the centre of a circle and Beauty on the circumference in the form of four circles, Mind, Soul, Nature, and Matter. Each of these circles centre upon their own identity which must be established before they can turn to God in their attraction to him (see Jayne p.136). Soul and Nature are invisible and Matter consisting of material forms is but a shadow of them. The constancy of Mind, as the Angelic Mind (see above p.252) makes it immovable. The World-Soul as Soul (see above p.242) moves, as it learns by 'circulating among ideas' (Jayne p.136). Nature as a kind of generative power of Soul moves within itself and generates its own movement within Matter. Matter is moved by and moves within Soul. Beauty in this context is deemed to be the light of God infused in these circles and forming in them the images of everything, in Mind called Ideas, in Soul, Concepts, in

Nature, Seeds, and in Matter, Shapes (see Jayne p.137). Shakespeare reflects knowledge of the Platonic concept of Nature's Seeds (here designated by their germinating form, 'germens') in Macbeth. Macbeth, King of Scotland is soliciting augury from witches, reckless of the consequences on mankind and nature:

> Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
> Though palaces and pyramids do slope
> Their heads to their foundation; though the treasure
> Of nature's germens tumble all together,
> Even till destruction sicken, answer me (IV.i.56-60)

The Platonic metaphors of creation are further developed by Agli in his next topic, 'How Plato Explains Divinity'. God is established as the Platonic source of all beauty which illuminates creation which then returns to him in the order in which he created it: the Shapes through the Seeds, the Seeds through Concepts and the Concepts through the Ideas (see Jayne p.138). This process of spiritual descent into the material world and then re-ascent back to God in a continual spiral is seminal in the Platonic system (see Jayne p.139). In this particular metaphor of the circles, Ficino makes Agli add another image. Just as divinity is threefold, consisting of God, Mind and Soul, so the corresponding images, Ideas, Concepts and Seeds are three kinds of divine forms. The Ideas revolve around God, drawing Mind to God, the Concepts around Mind, drawing Soul to Mind, the Seeds around Soul, drawing Nature to Soul. Outside this ring of divinity, the Shapes generated by Nature circle around

Matter, drawing Matter to Nature and into its divine origin. The divine in humanity creates a desire for divinity, thus kindling the 'passion of the soul' (Jayne p. 139). Humanity can not judge of God's attributes by comparing them with earthly qualities as all earthly things are but shadows of the divine models which are the true form of all things (see Jayne p. 139-140).

The way in which divinity can be perceived by humanity is now recounted in 'The Divine Beauty Shines through Everything and is Loved in Everything'. In this section divine Beauty, whose force and light causes the transference of Ideas through Concepts and Seeds to Matter, is compared to the sun, illuminating the four 'bodies,' fire, air, water and earth. Whoever can perceive this illumination can receive impressions of the 'glow of God' through nature and love God himself (see Jayne p. 140).

This love of God in turn affects 'The Passion of Lovers', and the nature of human love which is the subject of subsequent sections. The passion experienced by lovers which cannot be entirely satisfied by touch and sight of the beloved, is defined as love of the divine in nature and thus of God. It is a disturbing emotion, as lovers do not know exactly what it is they seek as they can never experience the full nature of God, being 'charmed' by 'the aroma' of divinity in nature but unable to 'distinguish its flavour' (Jayne p.140). This is judged to be the

cause of the tremor which a lover experiences in the presence of the loved one, as the 'glow of divinity' which reveals itself in beautiful bodies compels awe and reverence (see Jayne pp.140-41). Those who love in this way value the presence of the loved one above all else, despising, for example, 'riches and honours', as the divine is to be valued above the worldly (Jayne p.141). This can also rationalise how some lovers wish to transform themselves into the beloved, thus striving to acquire the divinity which comprises the essence of their love. The feelings of alternating hot and cold, rejoicing and lamenting that lovers experience are explained by this phenomenon, the cold and the lamenting occurring as elements of the self depart to admit of the warming, rejoicing divine. This change effects a sharpening of the lover's mind as perception increases with the acquired divine light (see Jayne p.141).

Attention is now turned from the effects of love to the duality of love through 'The Double Nature of Venus.' (Jayne p.141). Venus is claimed to be two-fold. The first Venus is in the form of an intelligence in the Angelic Mind, and she endeavours, by an innate love, to understand the beauty of God, which is translated to the second Venus, a 'power of generation' located in the World-Soul (Jayne p.142). She, in turn, strives to translate that beauty into matter in the form of 'divine sparks' which a human soul perceives and loves as a

beautiful person. This duality is claimed to be reflected in the dual nature of the powers of the human soul relating to love. As an intelligence like the first Venus, the lover appreciates the beauty of the beloved; as an agent of generation like the second Venus the lover wishes to reproduce this beauty. Both these loves are honourable, arising from 'a concern with the divine image' (Jayne p.143). Dishonourable love unmotivated by an appreciation of the divine is typified by a lack of balance between the two kinds of love and results in over-desire for physical love, indulgence in copulation with those not also loved in soul, and preference for physical beauty to that of the soul (see Jayne p.143). A proper respect for love would ensure praise for the beauty of the body through which would be perceived love of the beauty of the soul, the mind and God. Physical love should be enjoyed within the bounds prescribed by wise human laws (Jayne p.143).

Ficino causes Agli to exhort the company to embrace this love which is 'a thing certainly divine' (Jayne p.143). He undertakes a discussion on the bitter-sweet nature of love. A lover dies to himself and lives in the beloved. If his love is reciprocated he has a continuing life, but if the love is unrequited he 'lives nowhere; he is completely dead' (Jayne p.144). Thus two people who love each other live in the contemplation of each other,

mutually exchanging identities. They are said to symbolically die to themselves in order to live in the other. The wonder of this supposed process is presented as an eulogy in this document:

> O, happy death, which is followed by two lives. O, wondrous exchange in which each gives himself up for the other, and has the other, yet does not cease to have himself. O, inestimable gain, when two so become one, that each of the two, instead of one alone, becomes two, and as though doubled, he who had one life before, with a death intervening, has now two. For a man who dies once and is twice resurrected has exchanged one life for two and his single self for two selves (Jayne p. 145).

This argument proposes that a lover's soul is like a mirror in which the beloved can see the image of his own soul reflected (see Jayne p.146). Such love is supposed to be generated by a similarity of natures, a theory giving rise to threefold speculations: that astrological coincidences in birth, or the sharing of the same daemon directing one's life, or likeness of mind, body and upbringing are the causes of this similarity. If there is a coincidence of all three of these causes, the mutual love is the most intense (see Jayne p. 146).

The dialogue is summarised as 'What Lovers Seek' and concludes that they seek beauty, not only in the physical enjoyment of the body, judged to be like the pre-occupation of a wanton and deranged servile man, but also comprehended by the mind (see Jayne p.147).

The third speech, given in the Platonic original by Eryximachus, is mediated succinctly by Ficino through his

protagonist, the physician Ficino. [20] This speech addresses particular aspects of the nature of Love: its omnipresence in all things; its function as creator and preserver of all things; and its role as the instructor and master of the arts (see Jayne p.148).

In support of the argument that Love is present in all things, Ficino cites the Neo-Platonist, Dionysius the Areopagite, (see above p.245) who maintains that love is a force which unites all things, creating mutual affection between equals, and bringing creatures of higher and lower orders in all realms from the divine to the mortal into caring relationships (see Jayne p.148).

Love's function as creator and preserver is defended by the argument that God, desiring to propagate his own divine perfection beyond himself, created all things, which in turn propagate that divinity: heavens are moved by the holy spirits; the stars are moved by the heavens; the light of the stars is given to the elements; these, fire, air, water and earth generate each other's functions by mutual attraction; plants generate themselves; beasts reproduce themselves; and finally mankind, 'carried away by the charms of the same passion,' beget offspring. (Jayne p.149). The instinct to propagate is accompanied by an instinct to preserve, imprinted throughout the same chain of creation (see Jayne p.149). The whole of creation is preserved by its continual movement, in a state of mutual attraction, thus forging a harmony which

maintains it (see Jayne pp.149-50). This harmony motivated by Love, a 'unity of parts', is seen in the balance of humours in the body and in the coherence of the elements (see Jayne p.150).

Ficino upholds the argument that Love teaches the arts by reasoning that all invention in the arts is motivated by a desire to discover truths and that those who teach love their pupils (see Jayne p.150). Love rules the arts, as the artist in order to succeed must esteem both the work he is doing and the people for whom he makes his art (see Jayne p.150). Specific arts, such as medicine, music, astronomy and augury are examined and found to contain the essential characteristics of Love in their practice: the attraction of similar elements, love of the divine and a harmonious balance (see Jayne p.152).

The fourth speech, on 'The Myth of Plato on the Ancient Nature of Man is Explained', given in Plato by Aristophanes, is mediated by the Ficino protagonist, a poet, Cristoforo Landino (see Jayne p.154). He glosses the Platonic myth of mankind's origins according to which in the beginning there were three sexes, male, born of the sun, female, born of the earth, and a third, bi-sexual, which was a composition of both, born of the moon. This third sex was a rounded creature, with four legs, four hands, and two identical faces on either side of the head. (see Jayne p.154). Their proud moon-born spirits caused them to attempt an attack on the gods and to climb to

heaven, in punishment for which insolence Jupiter cut each one of them in half, threatening to split them again if they repeated the offence. Subsequently each of the two halves of the divided nature of man desired and sought its other half, which it embraced when encountered. To prevent 'privation and inactivity', God provided each half with a means of intercourse (Jayne p.154). Thus love is innate in all men, striving to make the divided whole, and to heal mankind (see Jayne p.154-55).

Ficino through Landino glosses this myth, claiming that often ancient theologians used allegory to conceal their sacred secrets from the profane (see above p.151). He interprets that when human souls were originally created by God they 'were whole', having two perceptions or 'lights', one, a 'natural light', by which they could behold 'inferior and co-equal things', and one, a 'supernatural light' which gave them perception of 'superior things' (Jayne p.155). When 'they aspired to equal God' they 'reverted to the natural light alone' and immediately 'fell into bodies' (Jayne p.155). This fall from the grace of God has marked similarities with the biblical version of mankind's fall through Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (see below p.303), a point which Jayne notes made the early Christian fathers classify Platonism as Christian (see Jayne p.154). God then threatened that further sins of pride would merit loss of their 'innate and natural light' (Jayne p.155). Each of the three sexes

had different attributes: the males from the sun 'received the glow' of bravery, the females from the moon received temperance and the bi-sexuals justice (see Jayne p.156).

Ficino further states that these bi-sexuals' souls, divided and plunged into bodies, are drawn by love to each other, and when they become adolescent, they are inspired by their 'natural light' to seek, by the study of truth, the 'divine supernatural light,' the other half of themselves, which they lost in the fall (Jayne p.156). If they win this back they will attain wholeness and 'be blessed with the vision of God' (Jayne p.156).

He further elaborates his interpretation, establishing that souls themselves are the essential constituents of mankind and that they are immortal. He re-affirms that, as soon as a soul is born of God, it is attracted to return to God, and in turning towards him is illuminated by his rays, thus creating a 'natural light' through which the soul perceives itself and the material world. When this light is drawn closer to God, it receives another, clearer divine light, 'by which it recognizes even the heavenly' (Jayne p.158). On these two lights the soul is thus able to fly, as on wings, through the heavens. However often the soul forgets its divine light, and thus descends into the material body. The divided soul can thus be said to be a person illuminated only by one of the soul's lights and obsessed by bodily

things. When that person matures and 'the instruments of sense have been purged through learning', the soul's 'natural light' inclines it, in a process called 'true love', to search for its divine light (Jayne p.159). In this way God leads men to a bliss which constitutes 'enjoyment of Himself' (Jayne p.159). There are four virtues which lead to that bliss, Prudence, Courage, Justice and Temperance. This rapturous knowledge of God is presented as a banquet, where those who love God feast on eternal bliss. These blessed people demonstrate a lack of any kind of envy, content in their own portions, 'in all the different degrees of bliss' (Jayne p.162). This speech is concluded with the statement that Love: leads us back to God, making the divided whole; makes us content with our lot in life's banquet; and when we are replete, rekindles a new delight to enrapture the soul (see Jayne p.163).

The fifth speech, given in the Platonic original by Agathon, is mediated by Ficino through his protagonist Carlo Marsuppini. In this speech attention is given to the nature and identification of Love and Beauty. Emphasis is given to the value of inner goodness reflecting in an external beauty. The lover of beauty is thus led to goodness of the soul (see Jayne pp.164-165). Further, it is upheld that the beauty that is not particular but is perceived by anyone is not corporeal but of the spirit:

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> It is an incorporeal quality which pleases. What pleases is attractive to anyone, and what is attractive, is, in short, beautiful. And so it is brought about that love has reference to something incorporeal, and beauty itself is rather a spiritual image of a thing than its corporeal form (Jayne p.168).

This spiritual image, a universal beauty, Marsuppini claims, is the face of God himself, 'the Splendor of the Divine Countenance' and universal love is the emotion of the Angelic Mind seeking to view that face (Jayne p.169). Particular love of a particular beauty is the identification, through a combination of the sun's light and the lover's own natural light, achieved by perception through their eyes, of Divine beauty (see Jayne p.170). Thus lovers have perception of God through their mutual love, their souls being, as it were, mirrors of the Divine Countenance (see Jayne p.171, 174).

Marsuppini describes other aspects of beauty and love as set forth by Agathon: beauty of the human body is to be judged by conformity with a set of correct proportions, such as the length of the body should consist of eight times the length of the head (see Jayne p.173); the virtues of love, personified as a god of love, give it predominance over other gods (see Jayne p.176-178); it bestows gifts, rendering those who experience 'simple' (that is unrequited) love, many admirable attributes:

> judicious in foresight, sharp in discrimination, eloquent in discussion, great-souled in tasks, witty for jokes, quick for jests, and strong for serious things (Jayne p.178).

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In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Hamlet himself, his love for Ophelia repelled, displays these characteristics. In contrast to this pattern, those who enjoy mutual love of each other are said to be offered peace and happiness:

> peace by driving off dissension, and happiness by avoiding misery, for where there is mutual regard, there are no plots; everything is in common; there controversy, deceit, homicide, and strife cease (Jayne p.178).

Indeed in Hamlet, it could be argued that had Ophelia not repelled Hamlet's love, but joined with him in mutual affection, the course of the play might have been different. In Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet it is the mutual love of Romeo and Juliet which brings peace to Verona although the division made between the lovers of Romeo's banishment causes their own unhappiness and deaths.

Marsuppini further comments on Agathon's theory that the arts were given to mankind through love, and in this respect through the gods who govern each sign of the zodiac (see Jayne p.181). He dwells on the importance of the art of music, born from the orderly rotation of the heavens: eight tones from the eight orbits of the planets creating a ninth sound from their harmony, giving rise to the nine muses and an innate sense in all mankind of this heavenly music, imitated in songs and with musical instruments and giving witness to God's beneficence (see Jayne p.181).

Another perspective of love is rendered by the Ficino

protagonist Tommaso Benci in the sixth speech, given in the Platonic original by Socrates, who claims to have learnt his philosophy of love from Diotima, 'a prophetess who was inspired with a divine spirit' (Jayne p.182).

This philosophy poses that love of a person occurs when he/she projects a ray of his/her splendour through the eyes of the lover to his/her soul. The lover is thus drawn, like a fish on a hook, towards the soul of the beloved. This attraction, called Love, is deemed by Diotima to be an intermediate thing between opposites, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, God and man, and as such, is like a daemon, a species of creature which inhabits the intermediate ground between heaven and earth (see Jayne pp.183-84). Diotima reasons that this mediating function of daemons between heaven and earth resembles the function of love moving between souls, as the earth itself can be said to be a living entity, moved by its own soul, composed of many living parts, each living thing an integral part of the world body and soul, just as there must be 'one soul of the universe' (Jayne p.184).

Further clarification of this notion of the importance to mankind of daemons is given. Daemons which are good in character are protectors of mortals and are termed Angels, each associated with a particular planet (see Jayne p.186). They are delegated by the gods to bestow gifts from heaven to mankind. This is imagined to

occur at a person's birth, God's gifts being infused into the human soul as it is born of him, falling first through the milky way, and then through the prevailing constellation and into a human body, wrapped in spirit to protect the pure soul from the less pure body (see Jayne p.186). The reigning planet at the time of the birth influences the kinds of gifts bestowed on the new-born:

> Hence it happens that the souls of the planets establish and strengthen in our souls, and their bodies in our bodies, (the powers of) those seven gifts which were given us in the beginning by God.
>
> (Jayne p.186-87).

This particular philosophy suggests that there are two daemons of love, one which inspires love of the divine in the beloved and the other which urges procreation. Both are good daemons, but the second is often judged bad because of our abuse of its gifts (see Jayne p. 192). Plato developed this idea further in the dominant metaphor in his Phaedrus which presents souls consisting of three elements, reason, spirit and appetite. [22] Reason is presented in the metaphor as a charioteer with wings which can lift the soul to Ultimate Truth, in a chariot harnessed to a white horse which represents the spirit and a black horse which represents the appetite. [23] The steady course of the chariot is conditioned by the charioteer's ability to control the restlessness of the black horse and to balance its urges with the power of the white horse which will allow the charioteer visions of

reality beyond the vault of the sky (see Shen Lin p.24). Those whose control of their black horses is so poor that they lose their wings, fall from the chariot down into matter and into a mortal body (Shen Lin p.24-25). Shen Lin observes that Shakespeare has framed this concept of the soul's descent into flesh in The Merchant of Venice. Lorenzo regards the night sky with Jessica and comments on the music made by the moving stars, creating a harmony of the spheres, similar to that of immortal souls, who, while they are enclosed in flesh, cannot hear the celestial music:

> Look how the floor of heaven
> Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
> Such harmony is in immortal souls;
> But whilst this muddy Vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
> (V.i.58-65)

Ficino himself makes the comparison between the presentations in Phaedrus and Symposium of Plato's concepts of man's soul and the two differing kinds of love in the concluding pages of his commentary (see Jayne p.232). He explains that the 'Mind directed to the divine' is represented as the charioteer in man's soul. The white horse is 'Reason and Opinion', which occurs in nature. The black horse is 'confused Fancy and Sense Appetite'. The circular nature of the soul stemming from God and returning to God is represented by the wheel. The wings of the charioteer are to carry the soul to the

sublimity of God. One wing is an image of an inquiring mind, always seeking truth, the other desire of the goodness which influences our will. These aspects of the soul become disordered by the confusions of the riotous body (see Jayne p.232).

Shakespeare presents us with examples of unruly 'black horse' behaviour in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Proteus has lapsed in his true love of Julia, (inspired by the 'good' daemon of love), aspiring, (by the agency of the 'bad' daemon), to attain the prestigeous Silvia, loved by his friend Valentine, (inspired by the 'good' daemon of love). He threatens to rape Silvia when his advances to her are rebuffed (V.iv.55-59). Silvia is fortunately saved from this abuse by her true lover Valentine, who himself has displayed unruly qualities in attempting to abduct her (inspired by the 'bad' daemon of love) when his suit has been turned down by her father (III.i.) Both these unfit lovers, dominated by the black horses in their souls, are subjected to redemptive penance, Valentine to banishment (III.i. - V.iv) and Proteus to defeat and scorn at the hands of Valentine (V.iv.60-72). The way recommmended in The Phaedrus for the charioteer of the soul to regain his wings is by recollection of the divine reality, prompted by contemplation upon an object of true love (see Shen p.26). This is experienced by Proteus in his recognition of Julia and re-experiencing of their true love (V.iv.109-18). This is an example of stage action

which provides a metaphor for an ascent of the soul through love towards God, in the same way described in The Symposium (see above p.252).

Ficino through his protagonist Benci provides another account of this ascent as recounted to Socrates by Diotima in the section of the sixth speech, 'How the Soul is Raised from Bodily Beauty to the Beauty of God' (Jayne p.212). Diotima speaks of the necessity of this ascent by reference to the myth of Narcissus who is fascinated by his own reflection in water and pursues this shadow of reality to the exclusion of an appreciation of reality itself (see Jayne p.212). This myth Diotima glosses as a metaphor of false love and obsessive lust of the body, ignoring true love which comprises recognition of the divine countenance, (see above p.267), in its own soul (see Jayne p.212). A soul thus ignored becomes disturbed, infected by the body's diseases and suffers a kind of death (see Jayne p.212). In order that the soul of Socrates should avoid this fate, Diotima led him to this ascent of the soul, 'from Body to Soul, from that to the Angelic Mind, and from that back to God' (Jayne p.212).

Diotima reasons that beauty of the body is inconsistent, subject to differing opinions and changing with age, therefore 'the prime and true beauty is not in bodies' (Jayne p.213). However, many bodies are called beautiful so they must share some common nature. Diotima claims that this is the Idea of beauty lodged in the soul

of every man and that this must be loved, rather than the isolated body of the beloved himself (see Jayne p.213). She maintains that the beauty of the soul itself is an 'invisible light' and this in turn is what should be loved rather than the beauty of a body which is perceived by visible light (Jayne p.213). Things of the body must not be allowed to impair the beauty of the soul, which consists of truth, given to men by God (see Jayne p.214). This quality upholds the moral virtues of justice, courage and temperance and the higher more esoteric intellectual virtues of wisdom, knowledge and prudence, the exercise of which leads to true happiness (see Jayne p.214). The practice and esteem of the moral virtues should lead to appreciation of the intellectual virtues though which a single light shines, making them beautiful. The eternal quality of these virtues raises them above the soul of man to the 'single truth' which is the beauty of the Angelic Mind, which must be worshipped 'above the beauty of the soul' (see above p.252)(Jayne p.214). The source of the light shining through this Angelic Mind is a unity beyond it which is the origin of all things, the 'One Itself'. This light is 'infinite beauty', eternal and pure which demands a commensurate love. This, Diotima tells Socrates, is the true destination of human love:

> So the light and beauty of God, which is pure, freed from all other things, is called, without the slightest question, infinite beauty. But infinite beauty demands a vast love also. Wherefore, I ask you, Socrates, to esteem other things with a definite limit and restriction; but you must worship God

> truly with infinite love, and let there be no limit to divine love (Jayne p.215).

Ficino adds a summarising coda to this speech. He re-affirms the origin of man in the material world as a shadow of the Idea in Mind, stemming from God, (see above p.252):

> Each of us separated from god on earth is not a true man since he is separated from the Form and Idea of himself (Jayne p.215).

This painful separation from the divine source can be removed by love of God in man, thus re-uniting man with his Idea and ultimately with God:

> To this Idea divine love and piety will lead us, although we are here divided and mutilated. Joined then, by love, to our own Idea, we shall become whole men, so that we shall seem first to have worshipped God in things, in order later to worship things in God; and shall seem to worship things in God in order to recover ourselves above all, and seem, in loving God, to have loved ourselves (Jayne p.215).

This described circle of love, leading from the divine through the trials of incarnation back to the divine may be compared with the wheel of alchemy, (see above p.201). I make the observation that it is a much less painful circuit to run than the alchemical path, its challenge based on the pleasant emotion of recognising divine love, and lacking the elements of self-scourging which the trials of alchemy demand.

The final speech given in the Platonic original by Alcibiades, is mediated by Ficino through his protagonist, Christoforo Marsuppini who contributes a further metaphor as an aid to understanding of the Platonic philosophy of the duality of love. He describes a mirror, struck by the sun's rays, returning the sun's glow and setting on fire

an adjacent piece of wool (see Jayne p. 216). He compares the mirror to the part of the soul called 'dark fancy and the memory' and imagines it being struck through the eyes, as the mirror is by the sun, by a picture of Beauty which ignites desire and causes the soul to love (Jayne p.216). This is called voluptuous love which is base, revolving around the love of one particular body (see Jayne p.217). Then there is reflected in the mind a picture, not of the particular person whose image has caused the emotion of love, but of the whole of humanity (see Jayne p. 21). This is a higher contemplative love which raises man to the realms of the divine, centred on the love of the 'universal beauty of mankind' (Jayne p. 217). The philosopher Socrates is cited as an example of the perfect lover of this kind, meriting that his name should designate this love, 'Socratic love' (Jayne pp.217-220).

Marsuppini commends Socratic love, by contrasting it with some of its opposites, Bestial Love and Earthly Love. He describes Bestial Love as 'a Kind of Insanity', qualifying this insanity not as the 'divine madness' which he cites Plato as attributing to 'divine inspiration', but a 'sickness of humanity' which casts the inflicted from a man down the hierarchy of creation to a brute (Jayne pp.220-221). This descent from humanity is occasioned when hopeless love causes the heart to become diseased from an excess of black bile in the body, created by choler and melancholy (see Jayne pp.221, 230). The victim

continually laments, imagining fearful dreams (see Jayne p.221). Marsuppini describes their uncontrolled actions:

> They rush into madness and raging passion, and, as though blind, do not know where they are being hurled (Jayne p.230)

Hankins discusses this species of melancholy as 'adust', (a term which he glosses as having been burnt by passion's heat) melancholy (p.127 and see pp.130-143). I judged this affliction to be the cause of Ophelia's madness in the 1993 Theatre Set-Up production of Shakespeare's Hamlet (see Theatre Set-Up's programme notes to the production in Appendix B.10.).

Earthly Love is described by Marsuppini as a 'Certain Bewitchment' (Jayne p.221). He relates how the heart of the beloved sends out a spirit or vapor of blood which becomes a love-infected ray shot through the eyes and into the eyes of the lover (see Jayne p.222). This infection takes root in the lover's heart and thus flows into his bloodstream (see Jayne p.222). Such a process is recorded in The Merchant of Venice in the song performed as a background to Bassanio's choice of the casket which will bestow upon him Portia's hand in marriage (III.ii.63-72). The subject of the song is 'fancy', a lighter affection than the true Socratic love Portia's father seeks to secure, through the trial of the casket-selection, in the husband for his daughter. The song questions the origin of fancy:

> Tell me where is fancy bred
> Or in the heart, or in the head?

How begot, how nourished? (III.ii.63-65)

The reply is given that its source is the eyes, and a criticism is made of this kind of superficial love with a wish for its extinction:

> It is engend'red in the eyes,
> With gazing fed, and fancy dies
> In the cradle where it lies.
> Let us all ring fancy's knell. (III.ii.68-71)

The casket which brings the reward of Portia as wife is not the gold or silver casket, but that made of lead, reinforcing the Platonic idea that true love consists not in love of external beauty but in recognising the divine light within an ugly exterior. The note inside the casket praises its selector for demonstrating this quality of discernment:

> You that choose not by the view
> Chance as fair, and choose as true. (III.ii.131-132)

A further characteristic of earthly love and exemplified in the song (III.ii 68,69), is described by Marsuppini. The exchange of blood-spirit through the eyes is supposed to infuse both bodies of the lovers to the extent that they wish to merge each other in coition. This can lead to an excess of wishing to consume the other by eating. An example is given of Artemisia who loved her husband the King Mausolus of Caria so much that she had his dead body ground to dust and drank it, dissolved in water. An example of this is to be found in Shakespeare's Cymbeline. Imogen finds the headless body of Cloten dressed in the clothes of her husband, Posthumus (IV.ii.291-332). She

concludes her lament over the supposed body of her husband with the resolution to steep her cheek in his blood, the following stage instructions commanding that she should fall on his body. Charles Nicholl interprets this action of 'gruesome sexuality' as a paradigm for the stage in alchemy of 'coniunctio', the chemical wedding (see above pp.131-132) and posits that the picture of Imogen embracing a headless body would present to an audience the picture of her eating it:

> the woman's bloody face and hands inescapably suggest that she has, mantis-like, devoured the head of her mate (Nicholl p.233).

He reasons that this suggests in the context of the alchemical imagery of the play, the alchemical metaphor of a coitus where the male is swallowed completely into the body of the female in a process from which he will emerge re-born from her body alchemically transmuted (Nicholl p,233). I suggest that this is a probable meaning, and used this interpretation in the 1989 Theatre Set-Up production of the play (see the Theatre Set-Up programme notes of Cymbeline, Appendix B.6.). However I now consider that there is also implied that this action of eating the beloved refers to the excesses of an illusory earthly love, a false kind of love, as the body is not, in fact, Imogen's husband Posthumus, but her hated step-brother, Cloten.

To rid oneself of such an intoxication of harmful, earthly, non-Socratic divine love, Marsuppini recommends

the passage of time and plenty of exercise until the infected blood be gone from the lover's body (see Jayne p.229).

He comments upon the nature of the contrasting divine madness which raises man beyond the body to God who draws the soul which is slipping down into the lower world back up to the higher (see Jayne p.230). There are four stages between God and the body: Mind, Reason, Opinion and Nature (see Jayne p.230). These descending orders represent increasing states of instability and multiplicity (see Jayne p.230). The soul is capable of perceiving these orders through abilities inherited from its divine origin (see Jayne p.231). This perception unites it at all times with that divine origin and gives it ability to contemplate the universals of all things in Mind (the Ideas, see above p.252). In its material incarnation it can apply this perception to uniting and forming matter (see Jayne p.213).

Marsuppini defines four kinds of 'divine madness': 'poetic madness', from the muses; 'of the mysteries', from the Greek god of ecstasy in art and wine, Dionysus; 'of prophecy' from the Greek sun-god, Apollo; and 'of love' from Venus. In the ascent to God the soul must pass through each of these states, acquiring a greater sense of unity with each one (see Jayne p.231).

I suggest that Shakespeare gives us an example of these changing states of 'divine madness' in Hamlet, the

ultimately-desired unity being that Hamlet should acquire an ability to undertake his duties as the true king of his country (his uncle having usurped the throne by killing his brother) by ridding the country of the corrupt usurper and to face up to the death that must be risked by undertaking such an action. At the beginning of the play Hamlet presents a picture of the archetypal poet, solitary, melancholy, finding solace in his poetic soliloquising in which he expresses his perturbation of spirit (I.ii.129-159). When his father's ghost exhorts him to take revenge upon King Claudius for the murder of his brother, Hamlet's father, Hamlet's response is not appropriate action but poetic speech and a resolution to adopt a feigned madness (I.v.91-109, 170-180). The task given him by his father's ghost has, however, focussed his mind into directing his attention upon the task of achieving revenge although this is dissipated in the intermediary task of first needing to test his uncle's guilt, (II.ii.595-612). He is still unable to face death, although contemplating committing suicide (III.i.56-88). He can be said to be passing through the stage of the mysteries, achieving rites of passage at the end of which he will be able to face death. He acquires the power of prophecy from Apollo in the next stage of his ascent, accurately foreseeing the intent of Claudius to kill him (IV.iii.48-50, V.ii.4-24, V.ii.214-221). His ability to face death which he thus expresses:

> If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all (V.ii.222-224).

is only possible after he has passed through the next madness, insane grief at the death of his love, Ophelia, (V.ii 254-291). Then, propelled by Venus, he moves on to his royal destiny, dying in the act of freeing his people from Claudius and passing to unity with God, as is his last wish, 'the rest is silence', (V.ii.360). This final heavenly ascent is solicited by his friend Horatio, 'And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest' (V.ii.362).

Ficino's commentary ends with an enumeration of the benefits of Socratic love, bringing the fruits of altruism to those beloved and loving, and aiding the soul in its ascent to God. It enjoins the participants in the symposium to worship divine Love and partake of its benefits:

> Divine Love, the giver of all the divine goods, we cannot help loving. Therefore, my friends, let us so worship this Love that is so kindly toward us, as to venerate his wisdom and wonder at his power so that, under Love's leadership, we may possess, so to speak, the whole God, and, loving the whole with the glow of love, we may enjoy the whole God with perpetual love (Jayne p.235).

I make the comment that this philosophy is enjoyably beautiful, and if it did inform Shakespeare's plays must have provided a proportion of the charm that constitutes their success. Certainly the actors of Theatre Set-Up have often found the knowledge of this philosophy applied to the specific plays of the company's seasons invaluable

in the preparation of their parts. The first year I offered this information to actors and audiences as artistic director of Theatre Set-Up was in 1986 for the production of Comedy of Errors, the subject of Chapter Eight wherein I discuss in detail what I consider to be the correspondences between aspects of the play and this document of Ficino.

The detail of these correspondences leads me to believe that Shakespeare had direct access to this document. However the governing ideas of the Ficino work are also present in a publication nearer to Shakespeare's time, The Book of The Courtier by Baldesar Castiglione, first published in 1528, translated into English by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561 and available today through the translation by George Bull. [24] This book is a prima of advice for Renaissance courtiers and it reflects the social, moral and philosophical mores of the time. In the introduction to his translation of the work, George Bull points out the use made by English Renaissance writers of the book: in 1531 its content is reflected in Sir Thomas Elyot's Governor; it is recommended in 1570 by the educationist, Roger Ascham, in his The School-master; Ben Jonson uses it for a scene in Every Man out of his Humour; and Shakespeare's witticisms 'renew the jokes and puns recommended by Castiglione' (p.14).

The section of The Courtier most relevant to this discussion is the speech concerning the Platonic

philosophy on love and beauty by the character in the book called Pietro Bembo. His discourse is a defence of the notion that an old man can be a more ideal lover than a youth, obviously drawing on the Platonic claim (see above p.276) that Socrates was the ideal lover (see pp.323-324). He explicates the Platonic idea that love such as prevails among the young, excited and gratified by the senses, is base compared to the nobler love perpetrated by the mind in a way more likely to be observed by an older man (see pp.324-328). He defines real beauty as good, stemming from a divine source (see pp.330-332), and claims that a true lover wishes 'that his soul be transported by divine love to the contemplation of celestial beauty' (p.337). This contemplation leads Bembo's listeners along the philosophic path laid down by Diotima, Plato's prophetess (see above p.273), which guides the lover from contemplation of a particular beauty to a vision of heaven:

> So let us direct all the thoughts and powers of our soul towards this most sacred light which shows us the path that leads to heaven (p.341).

This journey then refers to the Platonic theory of each human's fall from divinity into the material body and its possible ascent back to divinity through love:

> and following after it and divesting ourselves of the human passions in which we were clothed when we fell, let us ascend by the ladder whose lowest rung bears the image of sensual beauty to the sublime mansion where dwells the celestial, adorable and true beauty which lies hidden in the secret recesses of the Almighty where profane eyes may not see it (p.341).

CHAPTER SIX: RENAISSANCE PLATONISM

It is likely that Shakespeare knew both versions of Plato's philosophy of love and the soul as provided by Ficino and summarised by Castiglione. Writing on the influence of Plato on the work of Shakespeare's contemporary, the poet Edmund Spenser, Lilian Winstanley traces direct connections between the Ficino commentary on the Symposium and Spenser's The Fowre Hymnes.[25] For example, she demonstrates that Ficino's comment on the unity of divine beauty throughout nature finds expression in Spenser's Hymne in Honour of Beautie wherein God is revealed throughout creation as in a mirror:

> Those unto all he daily doth display,
> And shewe himselfe in th'image of his grace,
> As in a looking-glasse, through which he may
> Be seen of all his creatures vile and base. II.113-116. (p.lxxi)

She also finds the Ficino theory that lovers may be companion souls who have shared some historic cosmic circumstance, such as being born under the ascendancy of the same star, in this poem:

> For Love is a celestiall harmonie
> Of likely harts composed of starres concent
> Which joyne together in sweete sympathei,
> To worke ech others joy and true content,
> Which they have harbourd since their first descent
> Out of their heavenly bowres, where they did see
> And know ech other here belov'd to bee. II.197-203. (p.lxviii)

Relating the Platonic belief in the concept of the centrality of love to the soul's progress in Shakespeare, John Vyvyan, throughout his book Shakespeare and the Rose of Love, examines his proposition that Shakespeare's

heroines adumbrate this principle in a passive mode, so that the hero discovers celestial beauty through her. However he considers that Shakespeare colours the Platonic model with ideas drawn from the medieval traditions of courtly love and the redemptive love exemplified by Christ in the Gospels, a proposition which I examine in the next chapter which deals with the influence of the Bible on Shakespeare's work.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE 'BIBLE'

Peter Milward, in Shakespeare's Religious Background, identifies biblical influence throughout Shakespeare's plays:

> There is hardly a book of the Old or the New Testament which is not represented at least by some chance word or phrase in one or other of his plays.[1]

Furthermore, he considers that the thematic material of the plays is governed by ideas and precepts from the Bible:

> He does not merely borrow an occasional phrase or allusion for the enrichment of his dramatic language, but he derives the central ideas and images that run through all his plays. (p.87)

It is probable that this acknowledged presence of the ideas and language of the Bible in the work of Shakespeare is due to the mores of his contemporary culture. Through the missionary work of the followers of Christ and establishment of their Church, Christianity came to be the established religion of Western Europe, upon whose culture the influence of the moral teachings and linguistic style of the Bible has been profound. Roland Mushat Frye has identified the Christian influence on Shakespeare's work in Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine. [2] In Biblical references in Shakespeare's Comedies, Naseeb Shaheen is able to demonstrate this influence on the plays that are the subject of this study. [3] I deal with the specific references that he has identified in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Shakespeare and his contemporaries experienced direct

contact with the Bible in English from the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I in 1558. Henry VIII, in breaking away from the Catholic Church who forbade the reading of the Bible in any but its Latin version, had made the translation and circulation of the Bible in English during subsequent years possible. David Daniell claims that all English versions of the Bible are indebted to William Tyndale, whose translations of the New Testament from the original Greek and of sections of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew were circulated in England, despite opposition from Tunstall, Bishop of London, in the 1520s during his lifetime, and after his death as a heretic by instigation of the Catholic authorities in 1536. [4] At the time of Tyndale's death Miles Coverdale, in Cologne, was incorporating the work of Tyndale with his own into the first complete translation of the Bible in English which appeared with further editing by John Rogers as the Matthew's Bible under the protection of Henry VIII in England in 1534. [5] This edition, Daniell claims, is the foundation of subsequent English Bibles which never acknowledge any of the Tyndale authorship due to a general conviction that he was a Lutheran and thus a heretic beyond the pale of English religious orthodoxy (p.xxviii).

During the five years' reign of the Catholic Queen Mary from 1553, English translations of the Bible were prohibited, but during this period a group of English

protestant exiles living in Geneva produced a new English translation of the Bible, completed in 1560. [6] Editions of the Bible from the Geneva edition in 1560 onwards arranged all the material in chapters and numbered verses, each presented as a separate paragraph for easy reference (see Shaheen p.19). The custom of numbering the chapters and verses both with arabic numerals separated by full stops, is followed herein.

In 1576, Laurence Tomson revised the New Testament of the Geneva Bible with commentaries on the text which were so popular that the Tomson New Testament often replaced the Geneva version of the New Testament in a quarto edition containing the Geneva Old Testament, the Apocrypha and the Tomson New Testament, known as the Geneva-Tomson Bible. The Apochrypha was a further section of Old Testament books which also record parts of the religious history of the Hebrew people, but were judged not to merit inclusion in those parts of the Bible suitable for religious devotion, 'bookes which were not received by a common consent to be read and expounded publickly in the Church'. [7]

An edition of the Bible produced at the instigation of Archbishop Parker after the accession of Elizabeth to the throne, produced in folio form and called the Bishops Bible, became the main edition to be used in churches from 1572. Shaheen has established that although Shakespeare drew on many different editions of the Bible, he mainly

used the Geneva-Tomson Bible (identified by information which Shakespeare would have taken from Tomson's commentaries) and the Bishop's Bible (pp.19-27) . Biblical quotations in this and future chapters will be taken from the Geneva-Tomson Bible, the publications used being dictated by the legibility of available versions of this edition. Quotations, except from Genesis which are from a 1599 edition, are from the 1609 publication.

Shaheen also considers that Shakespeare's numerous references to the Old Testament book of Psalms derive from the Psalter, the hymnal/prayer book used at the time for Morning and Evening Prayer services, and often included in publications of the Geneva Bible (pp.18-27).

There are different ways in which Shakespeare uses the Bible. He may take a biblical character and event and apply them in a particular context in order to infer an association of meaning as in Hamlet II.ii.410 when Hamlet taunts Polonius for his manipulation of his daughter, Ophelia, by referring to him as Jeptha, the Hebrew judge who sacrificed his own daughter (see Judges 11.30-39). He may simply distort a biblical quotation as in The Comedy of Errors, II.ii.64-65, when Syr. Antipholus admonishes his servant for the inappropriate timing of his jesting:

> Learn to jest in good time; there's a time for all things.

This paraphrases Ecclesiastes 1.1,4:

> 1. To all things there is an appointed time, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...
> 4. A time to weepe, and a time to laugh: a time to

mourne, and a time to daunce.

Often Shakespeare derives ideas from biblical doctrine and thoughts which he incorporates in the larger ideas of his plays. The principle of Christian forgiveness whose principle underlies the Shakespearean comedies (exemplified in greater length at the end of this chapter) is an example of this. Sometimes this principle incorporates direct biblical quotation as in The Comedy of Errors, II.ii.174, when Adriana cites the image from Psalms 128.3 of an ideal wife being as a vine.

In the following pages I will examine particular aspects of the Bible which are essential for an understanding of Shakespeare's moral stance in his plays and which relate to the other arcana discussed in this thesis. I draw on references from Shakespeare's tragedies as well as his comedies to illustrate the influence of the Bible on his work, particularly in examining material from the Old Testament. This operates against the views of Hubler, (see above p.47), who attributes to the Hebraic-Christian Western tradition an English tendency to associate the reality of life with grief and thus with tragedy. He remarks that Shakespeare is not party to this pessimistic approach and gives even his tragedies a sense of joy. On the other hand, Vyvyan, (see above p.53), finds in their response to temptation, a New Testament source for both the tragedies, which he thinks pattern the yielding of Judas to the temptation to betray Christ, and

the comedies which he considers reflect Christ's resistance to the temptation of Satan's blandishments in the wilderness. Milward, examining the influence of the Bible on Shakespeare's ethics, claims a similar source in New Testament doctrine for the differentiation between the comedies and tragedies which he considers take their nature from the protagonists' experience of Christian love (p.226). Similarly Coghill, (see above p.114), identifies in Dante and Shakespeare the centrality of divine love in comedy, linking it with humanity's salvation from the sin committed in the garden of Eden (see below), by Christ's sacrifice on the cross (see p.12).

The Old Testament, consisting of thirty nine books, celebrates a literature rich in imagery, records the history of the Hebrew people until the Christian era, and expounds the moral principles of its monotheistic religion including the presentation of a creation story.

As the scenario of this creation story is pertinent to some of the arcane meanings in Shakespeare's plays (see above p.241), and as I believe that the ideas it expounds have conditioned the Western thinking reflected in Shakespeare's plays, I will discuss it here. This version of the creation of the world set forth in Genesis 1.1-31, the first book of the Old Testament, presents the Hebrew God initially creating a dark and formless heaven and earth. On the first day of the specific creation of the world, God reputedly created light, separating light from

the darkness, making day and night. On the second day the story tells us that He created a 'firmament', a visible heaven, which separated the waters above heaven from the waters on earth. This daily creation is continued for a further four days: on the third day He divided the waters from the lands to make the seas and earth and He established vegetation; on the fourth day He made the sun, 'the greater light to rule the day' the moon, 'the lesse light to rule the night', (as named by Caliban in The Tempest, I.ii.336-338), and the stars; the fifth day saw the creation of birds, fish and all livings things in the sea and air; on the sixth day were created all animals that live on the land, and mankind, made in the likeness of God himself, and given supremacy over all other living things. The seventh day following these six days of creation God is supposed to have blessed as a day of the rest he took himself.

The story is inconsistent in that after the account of the creation, including mankind, in six days, a further account of the creation of living things and mankind is given in Genesis 2. In this scenario, God created rain on the earth, and from the dust of the ground he created Adam, the first man. God created a garden 'eastward in Eden', (Genesis 2.8), in which every tree that was pleasant to look at, and whose fruit was good to be eaten, was produced. In the midst of these trees were also a 'tree of life' and a 'tree of knowledge of good and evill'

(Genesis 2.9). A river, passing from Eden to water the garden, divided into 'foure heads' (Genesis 2.10), which became: Pison, in the land of Havilah where there is gold, and precious jewels - bdellium and onyx stone; Gihon, of Ethiopia; Hiddekel, of east Assyria; and the Euphrates (of Sumaria) (Genesis 2.10-14). Adam was placed in this garden with the instruction that he might eat fruit from all the trees excepting that of the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil', which, if he were to consume, would cause his death (Genesis 2.16-17). God then created every 'beast of the field' and 'foule of the air' and gave them to Adam to name (Genesis 2.19-20). In order to create a companion for Adam, he put him to sleep and took out one of his ribs, from which he made a woman (Genesis 2.21-22). Adam thus claimed this woman, his wife, to be 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh', motivating the decree that a man should leave his father and mother and 'cleave' to his wife, as husband and wife are 'one flesh' (Genesis 2.23-24). Both Adam and his wife were unashamedly naked in their garden of Eden (Genesis 2.25).

The cultural and social effects of this story upon peoples following the Hebrew or Christian religions, or living in countries whose social and political mores have been influenced by those religions, have been considerable.

The order which, in this creation myth, God imposed on the earth through the creation of light and by

separating the waters from the land became associated with godliness. Also by association, light came to symbolise God and darkness evil. Job writes that God withholds the light from the wicked (Job 38.15). David the psalmist identified God with light: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation' (Psalm 27.1); 'For with thee is the well of life, and in thy light shall we see light' (Psalm 36.9); 'light is sowen for the righteous' (Psalm 97.11); and 'The Lord is mighty and hath given us light' (Psalm 118.27). Jesus Christ of Nazareth, claiming to be the Son of God, called himself the 'light of the world' (John 8.12), an image which the disciples fostered, 'This was that true light, which lighteth every man that commeth into the world' (John 1.9) and which Jesus applied to the disciples themselves, 'Ye are the light of the world' (Matthew 5.14). The prophet Jeremiah calls the godless Israel a 'land of darkenes', an image used by the prophet Isaiah to report a change in this situation: 'The people that walked in darkenes have seene a great light' (Isaiah 9.2). Christ's apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians gives thanks to God for delivering Christians from 'the power of darkness' (Colossians 1.13). In his letter to the Ephesians he makes clear his identification of darkness with evil:

> For wee wrestle not against flesh and blood: but against principalities, against powers, and Against the worldly governours, the princes of the darkenesse of this world, against spirituall wickednesse, which are in the high places (Ephesians 6.12).

Tomson in this edition of the New Testament felt it necessary to personify the concept of darkness as evil for his readers and has inserted the words 'princes of' before 'darkenesse' in this passage. His marginal comment against this verse makes it clear that the enemy St Paul warns the Ephesians against is an evil spiritual power:

> hee declareth that our chiefest and mightiest enemies are invisible, that we may not thinke that our chiefest conflict is with men.

Shaheen observes that Shakespeare is likely to have drawn on this version of the Bible in the passage from All's Well that End's Well, 'The black prince , sir, alias the prince of darkness, alias the devil' (IV.v.42-43).

Darkness is associated by the apostle John with an evil which includes hate. Writing that in the Christian world, 'the darknes is past, and that true light now shineth' (I John 2.8), he cautions, 'He that saith that he is in that light, and hateth his brother, is in darknesse until this time (I John 2.9). Speaking of Christians, the apostle Peter also makes this association with light contrasting with the darkness of unenlightened evil:

> But yee are a chosen generation, a royall priesthood, an holy nation, a people set at libertie, that ye should shew forth the praises of him that hath called you out of darkenes into his marveilous light (I Peter 2.9).

R. M. Frye observes, citing the apostle Paul as authority, that when the forces of evil wish to deceive humans, they can appear as an angel of light (p.140).

The murkiness of the pre-ordered creation when water

and land were confused together became associated with evil for the Elizabethans. In storms the elements of nature are violently mixed together (see above p.230). The witches, servants of the 'prince of darkenesse' in Macbeth, appear heralded by storms, announcing at the end of the first scene of the play the correspondence between the disorder and consequent deception of their moral intent and the attendant weather:

> Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
> Hover through the fog and filthy air (I.i.10-11).

The chaotic filthy aspect of the nature of Hell is identified by Lady Macbeth, experiencing the horrors of hellish torment from the depths of despair revealed in her sleep-walking, 'Hell is murky' (V.i.38). The witches hint to Macbeth that the first three apparitions which they cause to appear to him are from Hell by prefixing their entrances with the thunder which is their hallmark, a fact which is lost on him (IV.i.69, IV.i.76, IV.i.86).

The fact that the creating God of Genesis 1. and 2. is a personality outside of the material world is at variance with certain other myths, religions, and mystic traditions including the arcana dealt with in this thesis: theurgy, Celtic mysticism, alchemy, later Christianity and Platonism. Such an interpretation of divinity as a personality separate from a world which he has created has considerable implications. The created world of creatures and plants has a diminished status without the divine

content which might protect it from the kind of exploitation encouraged by the edict in Genesis 1. 26-28, which gives humanity the right of dominion over all living matter. The character Jaques in Shakespeare's As You Like It demonstrates a sensitivity to the issue of man's exploitation of animals. Finding a deer wounded by his own fellows-courtiers, (who have been outlawed by the usurping Duke Federick to the forest of Arden), he laments its suffering and unjustified fate at the hands of those who are usurping its rights to live untouched in its own habitat (II.i.60-63). The exiled duke himself expresses this sentiment as he prepares to hunt deer:

> Come, shall we go and kill us venison?
> And yet it irks me the poor dappled fools,
> Being native burghers of this desert city,
> Should, in their own confines, with forked heads
> Have their round haunches gored (II.i.21-25.)

Shakespeare demonstrates in this perception a sensitivity beyond the mores of his culture which links him with cultures of other times and countries. For example, this kind of squeamishness characterises Hindu cultures who go further in respecting the sanctity of all living creatures which they will not kill for food. This extreme is not observed by hunters and gatherers, people in the Paleolithic stage of culture, who worship and respect nature. However they are non-exploitative in their taking of life for food, which they do within the strict terms of a covenant they consider to have made with a godly prototype of each animal which is its material

shadow on earth. For example they must not kill more than they need for food and will perform a kind of burial service over every animal which is the successful victim of their hunting. In modern times, in western society, the Genesis version of a hierarchy of creation, giving mankind the right to exploit the rest of nature is becoming outmoded, and there is an increase in pagan beliefs which maintain divinity to be immanent in living creatures. Modern Spiritualists, and many whose consciences rebel against taking of life, are vegetarians, and a greater awareness of the dire consequences on the environment of our 'robber economy', in which we uphold our Genesis-inspired dominance over nature characterises our society. Shakespeare demonstrates, in the sensitivity of Jaques and the exiled Duke in As You Like It, an inclination towards this modern attitude, and a divergence from the orthodoxy of his own time.

Humanity itself is diminished when divided from intrinsic divinity as its nature becomes subject to identification with baseness and concepts of original sin, a notion with which St Augustine had problems (see above p.244). The consequences of this attitude, reflected in the tenets of the orthodox religion of his day, are portrayed by Shakespeare in Hamlet in the suffering of Hamlet's father's ghost, murdered by his brother as he lay sleeping in his orchard, and thus removed in his sudden unexpected death, from the religious rituals which might

send him forth into the next world cleansed from his participation in a material existence, his 'days of nature'. If his son is a reliable witness, this king was a good man, and yet the punishment he reports to be suffering in the afterlife is terrifying:

> Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
> And for the day confined to fast in fires,
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid
> To tell the secrets of my prison house,
> I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul (I.iv.10-16)

The view of creation set forth in Genesis 2. has stamped further imprints on the western culture which shaped Shakespeare's plays. The concept of the paradise presented by the garden of Eden itself is a strong cultural motif. Shakespeare reproduces a symbol of it in Measure for Measure in the moated grange where Mariana laments her jilting at the hands of Angelo (IV.i.). Further reference is made to a paradigm of the garden of Eden in the walled garden where Angelo has arranged his assignation with Isabella but where the Duke has conspired to substitute Mariana so that her love for Angelo will be consummated with him there (IV.i.28.). The Forest of Arden in As You Like It is regarded by the exiled Duke and his followers as a paradise in contrast to the court from which they have been exiled. Their primitive, simple lifestyle there has gained repute in the world outside their haven, and is compared to that of a past paradisaical age, known as 'the golden world' (I.i.116).

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE 'BIBLE'

Shakespeare makes further reference to the general ambience of Arden as a paradise in his giving the name of Adam to a benevolent old retainer of Orlando (Act I.i). While seeking out the means to succour Adam in the Forest of Arden, Orlando discovers and joins the band of exiles in their paradise (II.vii.88).

The two specialist trees in the middle of the garden of Eden, the tree of life and the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil, are interesting symbols. The tree of life whose fruits bestow immortality, is an image shared by other cultures. In myths relating to the Teutonic god Odin, he is reputed to have acquired knowledge of the runes, alphabet glyphs with mystic significance, after hanging for nine days and nights on Ydrassil, the ash tree of immortality. The Celtic Western Mystery Tradition (see above Chapter Four) centres on the visualising of a tree of immortality the descent through whose roots gives access to mystic experience (see Theatre Set-Up programme notes for Cymbeline, Appendix B.6.). The Hebrew culture further developed the image into their Tree of Life, a pattern of abstract symbols whose composite total represents for them the soul of man and the universe (see the Theatre Set-Up programme notes for The Merchant of Venice Appendix B.9.). The significance of both images from these cultures is combined in the Christian religion in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ of Nazareth on the cross, a 'tree' upon which, like Odin, Christ underwent

ordeals in order to secure immortality for the souls of all mankind. I consider that the tree of knowledge of good and evil has more moral and less mystic significance in mythology. I sceptically interpret its presence in Genesis as a symbol of the pernicious habit that priests of religion often have of demanding a kind of unquestioning obedience to their edicts.

The version of the creation of woman from Adam's rib in Genesis 2. had far-reaching consequences in the presumed inferior status of women in society, a notion supported by Shakespeare in The Comedy of Errors. Luciana, (her name implying divine light), reprimands her sister Adriana for her rebellious attitude towards her husband in a speech which exemplifies the principles laid down in Genesis 1. and 2. of a hierarchy in nature that places man above beasts and all males above females:

> There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
> But hath his bound, in earth, in sea, in sky.
> The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls
> Are their males' subjects, and at their controls;
> Man, more divine, the master of all these,
> Lord of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas,
> Indued with intellectual sense and souls,
> Of more preeminence than fish and fowls,
> Are masters to their females, and their lords;
> (II.1.16-24).

In Genesis 3. the state of paradise enjoyed by Adam and his wife in the garden of Eden was destroyed. The Devil, characterised as a serpent, asked Eve if she were allowed to eat of every tree in the garden (Genesis 3.1). She replied that only the fruit of the tree of knowledge

of good and evil was forbidden, the eating of it bringing death (Genesis 3.2-3). The serpent replied that the fruit did not bring death, but revelation, and status as gods in the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3.4-5). Adam's wife then took and ate the fruit, giving some to Adam who also ate it (Genesis 3.6).

Immediately the 'eyes of them both were opened' and they perceived their nakedness, sewing fig leaves together to make clothes for their lower bodies (Genesis 3.7). [8]

When Adam and his wife heard the voice of God in the garden while they were walking in the 'coole of the day' they hid from Him (Genesis 3.8). God called to Adam to ask where he was and Adam replied that he was hiding, afraid because of his nakedness (Genesis 3.9-10). God asked how he knew that he was naked and if he had eaten the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3.11). Adam replied that the woman God had given to be with him had given him the fruit which he then ate (Genesis 3.12).

God reproached the woman and she said that the serpent had 'beguiled' her to eat the fruit (Genesis 3. 13). God then spoke to the serpent, telling him that from thenceforth he would be cursed above all other creatures, that he should move on his belly along the ground, and that he should only eat dust for the rest of his life (Genesis 3. 14). Further, enmity would exist between the serpent and the woman and always between his species and the woman's species, to their mutual injury (Genesis

3.15).

God decreed that thenceforth the woman's sorrow would increase: she would experience sorrow in childbearing; and her desire would be subjugated to that of her husband who would have rule over her (Genesis 3.16). Shakespeare displays a sensitivity to the effects of this biblical curse upon women, which decrees that childbearing must be painful and that any sexual relationship with men must be submissive and by implication pleasureless, in The Comedy of Errors. Egeon takes the male orthodox view in commenting that his wife Emilia was pleased to suffer the difficulties involved in pregnancy with twins (I.i.45-46) but Luciana, although she seems to uphold the Genesis doctrine regarding man's supremacy over woman (II.i.20-25), is reluctant to undergo the experience of being the submissive object of a man's passion in bed (II.i.27).

The curse laid upon men in Genesis is work-related, rationalising the basic difficulties mankind experiences in producing his own food from the land. As punishment upon Adam for following his wife's example in eating the forbidden fruit, God is said to have cursed the ground so that thenceforth thorns and thistles would spring from it and it should be difficult to cultivate for his staple food which would now consist of the bread on which he must live until he die, and then return to the dust from which he was made (Genesis 3.17-19).

Shakespeare implies in The Winter's Tale that these

inherited curses upon mankind of punishment for the original sin of Adam and Eve can be unmerited, when Polixenes describes the childhood innocence he shared with Leontes as one so pure, that had they died at that time, they would have claimed from heaven exemption from their share of any due punishments for original sin (I.ii.67-74).

Adam called his wife Hevah, (now abbreviated to Eve), as she was 'the mother of all living' (Genesis 3.20). God made coats of skin for Adam and Eve so that they were clothed (Genesis 3), a reference used by Shakespeare in The Comedy of Errors (see below p.386).

The next verse presents the reason why, in this scenario, God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. Fearing that humans, now possessed of the knowledge of good and evil, should also eat the fruit of the tree of life, gain immortality and become as the gods, God expelled Adam, sending him out into the world to till the ground from which he came:

> And the Lord God said, Beholde, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evill. And now, least he put foorth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever;
> Therefore the Lord God sent him foorth from the garden of Eden, to till the earth, whence he was taken (Genesis 3.22-23).

Outside the garden of Eden he put cherubims and a flaming sword in order to guard the tree of life:

> Thus he cast out man, and at the East side of the garden of Eden he set the cherubims, and the blade of

> a sword shaken, to keepe the way of the tree of life (Genesis 3.24).

In this scenario the serpent displays a likeness to the Greek mythical Prometheus, who gave humans knowledge and in return was punished by the gods who were jealous that humanity had become too like them. This theme of the rebel who defies the gods, often assisting mankind, is a mythical motif identified by Joseph Campbell as common to many cultures. [9] It is also a truism that the gods of a conquered culture acquire the status of devils in the religion of the conquerors. The Genesis version of the garden of Eden story is therefore interesting in that the Hebraic-Christian religion supplanted the beliefs of the indigenous cultures which provided the matrix of some of the arcana, that is, theurgy, Celtic mysticism, alchemy and Platonism, which I believe that Shakespeare used in his plays. As it is therefore possible that in dealing with these opposing mythic systems he might have been presented with a challenging contest of ideologies, I examine some of the alternative interpretations of the Genesis story.

In Masks of God: Occidental Mythology, Campbell presents the mythic ancestry of the Hebrew scenario of Genesis 3. [10] The serpent was an ancient god existing in the Levant for seven thousand years before Genesis was written. The ability of the serpent to slough its skin and thus renew itself made it a symbol of rebirth. Its

moving through damp undergrowth, emergence from the earth like a spring, and movement in water like waves, gave it the additional symbolism of water (pp.9-10). The serpent was linked in all this symbolism with the moon, of whom it is sometimes presented as a consort (p.9). It is often associated in ancient mythologies and graphic representations with a 'World Tree' which it guards from the profane but allows the worthy to partake of as a boon (pp.10-14). The divinities associated with the garden of this World Tree are not exclusively male, as in the patristic Hebrew Genesis, but contain female personages (p.13). An Eve figure in her aspect as mother of all humanity as described in the Bible by Adam, is represented in a seal from ancient Sumeria, receiving fruit of the tree from a female goddess (p.13). There is no sense of guilt in the pre-Genesis versions of the garden of Eden scenario:

> The boon of the knowledge of life is there, in the sanctuary of the world, to be culled. And it is yielded willingly to any mortal, male or female, who reaches for it with the proper will and readiness to receive (p.14).

It is also interesting to note that although The Hebrew religion claims to be monotheistic, Genesis 3. 22 refers to a collection of Gods of whom the Lord God claims to be part by his exclamation, 'Behold, the man is become as one of us'.

I find that this sort of examination of the scenario of Genesis, the foundation of the beliefs of the orthodox

religion prevalent at the time of Shakespeare, important to the study of his plays on two counts. Firstly, the mystic traditions which form the basis of the arcana examined in relation to Shakespeare's plays in this study derive from ancient mythologies which would have had their source in the Levant and Egypt. Sumeria was the oldest of all the world's civilisations, reaching its peak in 2,500-2,000 B.C. Its cultural motifs and social ideas (such as the hieratic city-state) are found in subsequent cultures. [11] For example, the emblem of the serpent finds its way into the Greek mythic symbol for Hermes, as the caduceus, which represents intertwining serpents around a stem which suggests the original Sumarian scenario of the serpent-symbol of rebirth around the World Tree. As Hermes became a symbol of several aspects of alchemy, so the serpent also accrued significance, representing the compound of alchemy, or the self in esoteric alchemy (see above Chapter Five).

The Celtic mystic tradition also incorporates a serpent coiled around a tree. R.J. Stewart describes how the ancient Celtic ballad of The Lailly Worm also presents the symbol of a serpent as a person who is to undergo transformation in the Celtic mystic tradition. The Lailly Worm, (a serpent), is in fact, an enchanted young knight who has been shape-changed by a witch and whose experiences as a serpent and liberation back into human form initiate him into the Celtic mysteries. Stewart

identifies this worm-serpent which is coiled about a tree as the ancient mythological symbol of the serpent intertwined with the tree, which, in the Celtic tradition, is an initiatory tree, usually a hawthorn. [12]

I find sufficient evidence of Shakespeare's use of this Celtic tradition (see the Theatre Set-Up programme notes to Cymbeline, Appendix B.6,) to warrant the assumption that Shakespeare would have been aware of the alternative interpretations of the Genesis scenario, a factor which leads this argument to the second reason I consider examination of alternative meanings of this scenario important. The orthodox Christianity of Shakespeare's day held literal interpretations of the controversial first three chapters of Genesis to be valid. However these chapters are self-contradictory, presenting as they do within themselves different versions of the creation (see above p.293) and presenting at once a monotheistic and pluralistic divinity (see above p.305). If, as the evidence suggests, (see above p.289), Shakespeare used the portable quarto Geneva-Tomson Bible in the preparation of some of his plays, it implies that he would have read the Bible for himself and the inconsistencies of Genesis would have become obvious to him. As he could have therefore observed that the literal approach of Christian orthodoxy was flawed, I therefore posit that he would have been ready to accommodate in his mind and work the unorthodox mystic systems discussed in

this thesis. Milward establishes that Shakespeare's family and possibly Shakespeare himself are likely to have followed the catholic faith, proscribed during Elizabeth's reign (pp.15-23). He also identifies elements in Shakespeare's work which derive from the Anglican liturgy (pp.104-125). It therefore seems reasonable to classify Shakespeare as one of those whom Murry considers caught in a 'decay' of 'communal worship' and whose religion Caitlin and John Matthews perceived to be fragmented, thus making him open to the Elizabethan rise in unorthodox esoteric systems such as those discussed in this thesis, (see above p.155).

Further inconsistencies perpetuate themselves in Genesis 4. In Genesis 3 Eve was given her name as token of the fact that she was the mother of all men. Yet numerous other people, not the children of Eve, are referred to in Genesis 4 (see verses 14-26). In this chapter Eve bore three sons, Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel, and Seth.

Caitlin and John Matthews write of a Judaic, Islamic Gnostic and theurgic mystic tradition that attributes the 'generations of humanity' to Cain, but 'the mystical remnant', (those who inherit the remnant of the 'divine spark' that Adam brought from the garden of Eden), to the descendents of Seth. [13] They further refer to the potency of the metaphor of the lost paradise of the garden of Eden within the mystic tradition of the Western Way (see above

Chapter Four). In this tradition, the garden is a metaphor for the Otherworld, the spiritual world of all mystic systems where realities exist in terms of their potential:

> The enclosed garden and island paradise are therefore primal states, interior realities where every vital component of life is in potentiality. It still has its first wildness, yet it has its own grace and rules of governance. There is no human trickery or deception here. [14]

This interpretation of man's exclusion from the garden of Eden suggests a metaphor for the loss of mankind's awareness of this paradisaical spiritual world:

> The Fall of Man is concerned far more with banishment from or cessation of communion with the Otherworld than it is with the consequences of sinfulness (p.108).

The Christian view of man's regaining the lost paradise presents the Son of God, the Sun-Logos (see above p.174) incarnating as Jesus of Nazareth in order to preach, to minister and then stand as sacrifice to redeem humanity from its fallen state. The Matthews cite another analogue for this scenario which marries the Christian scenario to that of theurgy. They refer to the Song of the Pearl from the Acts of St Thomas, in the Apocrypha to the New Testament. [15] They interpret this document as a paradigm for 'the descent of the soul into flesh and its eventual return' (a soul-journey similar to that described in Renaissance Platonism - see above Chapter Six). They gloss the 'pearl' of this song as a symbol of gnosis, the 'divine spark' for which a prince (Jesus Christ) travels

from his home in the East (Heaven) to Egypt (the flesh) to bring back the pearl which is there, surrounded by the serpent (pp.68-70.) The apostle Matthew gives an account in the New Testament of Christ comparing 'the kingdom of heaven' to a valuable pearl for which all else should be given up (Matthew 13.45-46).

Shakespeare makes use of this imagery linking divinity with a pearl in a scenario which also suggests the fall of man in Eden. In Othello he presents a man who falls headlong from grace. Othello, enjoying almost a surfeit of happiness in his life, 'it is too much of joy' (II.i.195), is tempted into jealousy, suspicion and murder of his innocent wife, Desdemona, by Iago, a villain who untypically in a Shakespearean play, demonstrates no redeeming moral features and thus could have been intended as a paradigm for the devil. After his evil treachery has been recognised, Iago is accused of having diabolical characteristics, the nature of a serpent and feet which are cloven hooves :

> Lodovico:
> Where is that viper? Bring the villain forth.
> Othello:
> I look towards his feet -but that's a fable.
> If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee.
> (V.ii.284-286)

Iago himself identifies his wits and their purpose with the devils in hell, 'my wits, and all the tribe of hell' (II.i.360).

In the scene when Othello murders Desdemona, he

speaks of her as a light which he is going to extinguish as he symbolically puts out the light he has brought into the bed-chamber, 'Put out the light, and then put out the light' (V.ii 7). His use of this term is reminiscent of the light which is the Platonic and Christian symbol of the divine spark in the soul (see above pp.265 and 295). After he has discovered her innocence and before he kills himself from remorse for her murder, he speaks of his wronged wife in this sense, identifying himself with those who betrayed Christ, and her with Christ. He represents Christ and Desdemona as a pearl in its gnostic meaning of divinity, and New Testament metaphor for paradise, lamenting that he:

> Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe. (V.ii 346). [Following the Signet edition use of 'Judean']

Just as Adam's fall from the grace of God in Genesis 3. seemed to lead to the murder of innocent Abel by his jealous brother Cain in Genesis 4, so in Shakespearean drama, a hero's fall from grace through temptation by an evil force leads to the murder of innocents. Othello, tempted by evil personified but disguised in Iago, murders Desdemona. In Macbeth the powers of evil do not disguise themselves, appearing in their own form as witches to engineer Macbeth's spectacular fall from grace during which he murders his king to attain the throne and then as king himself, murders his own innocent subjects. No Christ-like redemption is offered in Othello but in

Macbeth, heaven assists Macbeth's innocent subjects, as Malcolm claims, 'the pow'rs above/ Put on their instruments.' (IV.iii.238-239).

This cycle of mankind's fall and redemption is mirrored in Celtic mysticism. R.J. Stewart identifies a shortfall between the metaphysical energy patterns of the tree of life (which is visualised in magic practice) and the basic energy patterns of the human body, due, he claims, to the 'Fall from Grace'. [16] He claims that a compensating energy was created by the resurrection of Jesus Christ which has altered the field of awareness in esoteric practice:

> Since the alteration to the flux or field of awareness which is attributed to Jesus Christ, the descent and resurrection of a new degree of being, a further stage is available to us (p.58).

Stewart describes the historical separation, motivated by the self-interest of religious and esoteric practitioners of the religion of Christianity, from the understanding of Christ's power in esoteric practice, and the keys which experience of this can give to initiates:

> So much power was released by this Individual that it carried the weight of a world religion...Esoterically the true Keys were soon suppressed and concealed by modifications within the developing Roman Church. These changes were for blatantly political ends, but also for magical self-aggrandizement by those who still had the power-contact but refused to share it as was originally intended (p.58).

I would like to suggest that a sense of these 'keys' was also held by practisers of esoteric disciplines in Shakespeare's time, that this found expression in his

plays and was reinforced by the contemporary pursuit of such practices as alchemy, theurgy and Celtic mysticism. It was a syncretic age in which attempts were made to accommodate mystic systems with Christianity, exemplified by Marsilio Ficino's success in reconciling Christian concepts with the key ideas of Platonism (see above Chapter Six) and alchemy's use of the idea of Christ as a symbol for the Philosopher's Stone. The indigenous mystic systems of theurgy and the Celtic Western Way (see above Chapter Four), incorporated at their heart the idea of Christ as the sun-logos, the quintessence of divinity, with whom initiates strive to attain union. We tend to emphasise orthodox Christian interpretations of the Bible and may have ignored text in it which supports the idea of Christ in this function. I propose to examine the Tomson edition of the New Testament in the light of this possibility, also looking at other aspects of the text which bear relation to ideas in Shakespeare's plays. [17]

Christ's disciple John, a primary witness of Christ's teaching, begins his account of Christ's life in the New Testament with a description of Christ in terms that we can recognise as the sun-logos, naming him as the word and the light:

> 1. In the beginning was that Word, and that Word was with God, and that Word was God.
> 2. The same was in the beginning with God.
> 3. All things were made by it, and without it was nothing that was made.

> 4. In it was life, and that life was the light of men. (John 1.1-4) [18]

The marginal Tomson commentary remarks that the 'Word' shares God's immortality and nature:

> The Sonne of God is of one, and the selfe same eternitie or everlastingnesse, and of one and the selfe same essence or nature with the Father.

Tomson also notes that Christ existed before creation, 'hee was before the beginning of all things', and that he partook of that creation. He makes it clear that 'Word' does not refer to religious law.

This role of Christ as the sun-logos accompanying God is commensurate with that of many mystic systems. Eleanor Merry names some of these, ranging from India to Greece:

> This Being held the central place in all the old Mysteries. He was spoken of in ancient India as 'Vishvakarman', who was the 'Light of the World'; in Persia as 'Ormuzd'; in the Zend-Avesta it is said of Him: 'He will descend to Earth; He will overcome age, death, decay; He will create free decision; then, when the time is ripe for the resurrection of the dead, He will have the victory of life. He will be the victorious Saviour, surrounded by Apostles. In Egypt He was known as Osiris; in Greece as Apollo; by Moses, as the I AM (p.70).

Merry states that the aim of the mystery systems was to reinforce the notion that all beings were descended from God, (see Platonism above, Chapter Six), to give them a clear spiritual perception of that descent, and to know that the son of God would himself descend into a man (p.71). She locates the realisation of this happening in Christ's incarnation in specific references in the New

Testament books known as the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John:

> The God descended is especially to be found in Matthew, and in John. (The Word of the Beginning made Flesh.) And the heights from which He descended are alluded to in Luke's genealogy: 'from Adam, which is the Son of God'; and also in Mark, where we are immediately made aware of the Divinity in Jesus in the way in which the Gospel opens and specially in the recognition in Him by the demons: 'We know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God (Mark 1. 24, p.71).

She glosses the words of St. John as a description of Christ's mystic role, (see also above p.174), emphasising that the apostles had come to terms with understanding how His incarnation had changed everything, linking those who believed Him directly with Godhead (p.276). In the words of the apostle John:

> As many as received him, to them he gave prerogative to be the sonnes of God, even to them that beleeve in his Name (John 1.12).

Christ is reported in Matthew 12.40 as linking himself with an aspect of the mysteries traditions wherein the neophyte sometimes underwent a three-day initiatory sleep during which he made contact with underworld beings and from which he emerged renewed. Christ refers to the prophet Jonas being kept in the belly of a whale for three days and three nights, an imprisonment he would mirror in the centre of the earth:

> For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whales belly: so shall the sonne of man be three dayes and three nights in the heart of the earth.

A shift in perception of Divinity from the God

outside mankind as presented in Genesis, to a Divinity who is the actual source of mankind who, through the intercession of His Son, can partake again of His divinity, is reflected in this New Testament teaching. The likeness to Platonic philosophy which historically predates the New Testament by hundreds of years is remarkable, and either indicates a cultural influence or a common source outside both philosophies. The ministry of Christ echoed the essence of Platonic philosophy in its emphasis upon the importance of love. This links, in Platonic fashion, the love of man with communion and love of God as recorded in I John 4.7-8:

> 7. Beloved, let us love one another: for love commeth of God, and every one that loveth is borne of God, and knoweth God.
> 8. Hee that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.

The Tomson marginal comment explains that the brotherly love St. John recommends is so divine that whoever does not practise it does not know God:

> Because it is a very divine thing: and therefore very meete for the sonnes of God: so that whoever is voyde of it, can not bee sayd to know God aright.

This theology explicated by St John posits a loving God who has created the world through love and divinity, and who has, through his love, also incarnated part of his divinity (his Son, the sun-logos), to forge closer links with him, severed by the original sin committed by Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. The incarnation and ordeal undergone by Christ on the cross will also bestow upon

mankind the eternal life God had denied in that garden by preventing access to the immortality symbolised by the tree of life:

> 9. Herein was that love of God made manifest amongst us, because God sent that his onely begotten Sonne into this world, that wee might live through him.
> 10. Herein is that love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Sonne to be a reconciliation for our sinnes (I John 4.9-10).

Access to this gift and to loving contact with divinity is granted, in the Platonic fashion, by love of people on earth:

> 11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.
> 12. No man hath seene God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfect in us (I John 4. 11-12).

That Greek culture was known to the writers of the New Testament might be indicated by the fact that it was written in Greek. There is an incident relating Greeks to Christ in John 12. 20-24, wherein Christ instructs some Greeks who request to see him that his crucifixion and resurrection is imminent. His response to the Greeks takes the form not only of this prediction of his death but of a statement qualifying its necessity:

> 20. Now there were certaine Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast.
> 21. And they came to Philip, which was of Bethsaida in Galile, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see that Jesus.
> 22. Philip came and told Andrew: and againe Andrew and Philip told Jesus.
> 23. And Jesus answered them, saying, the houre is come, that the Sonne of man must bee glorified.
> 24. Verily, verily I say unto you, Except the wheat corne fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth foorth much fruit.

The Tomson marginal comments explains that at that time the term 'Greek' was used to apply not only to inhabitants of Greece but also to non-Jews. The statements that Christ makes to the Greeks are interesting. Christ's statement in verse 24. that only death (in this case His death), can bring forth life is the basis of alchemy, which in that period of history, was practised by the Greek culture throughout the extent of the Roman Empire, which embraced Israel and Judea, the location of the events recorded in the New Testament. Shakespeare expresses in words this life-from-death precept in Much Ado About Nothing when the friar advocates that Hero should feign death until the circumstances which have made Claudio repudiate her at the altar are known, 'Come lady, die to live' (IV.i.252). The alchemical death from which new life would spring, (see Abraham on Romeo and Juliet, above p.75 and Theatre Set-Up programme notes, Appendices A and B), is marked in the plays by the stage of Nigredo when the soul is separated from the body until both are fit to be reunited in a resurrected substance (see above Chapter Five). The dramatic allegory in Shakespeare most closely resembling Christ's metaphor for the seed dying to create new life, is in The Winter's Tale, where the death of Mamillius, the son of King Leontes, awakens him to an awareness of himself and his guilt, from the new life of which his soul will gain redemption (III.ii.140-144).

John reports Christ further saying to the Greeks that

it is the soul that is immortal, not the body:

> 25. Hee that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keepe it unto life eternall (John 12).

This resembles the emphasis in Platonism on the importance of the soul rather than the body.

The Christian concept of the descent into flesh of Christ who thus becomes the 'Sonne of man' as well as the 'Sonne of God' and who then re-ascends to re-join the divinity of which he was part, is also similar to the Platonic idea of mankind's descent into flesh from divinity, and then re-ascent back to God. The difference between them is that in the New Testament teaching, Christ stands between God and man, taking upon himself and on behalf of mankind the trials and ordeals which are symbolised in alchemy, with a result affecting theurgy and all mystic systems. Christianity thus links Platonism, alchemy and mystic sustems such as theurgy and the Celtic Western Way. Certainly in terms of this thesis I consider that the thematic links which Shakespeare might also have perceived, between Christianity and the other arcana, render any historical coincidence between them irrelevant, and would defend him against any charge of blasphemy in his use of non-Christian arcana in his plays.

The thrust of the theology of the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, is ethical and generous, and Shakespeare's use of it must have been a largely contributory factor to the beneficent nature of his plays

whose conclusions are always morally righteous.

The Christian theme of self-sacrifice for the common good appears as the dominant motif of two of his plays: Hamlet, where Hamlet is aware of the sacrifices, including that possibly of his life, that he must make upon his father's instruction on behalf of his country; and Romeo and Juliet, where the protagonists are sacrificed through their mutual love, for the ultimate peace of Verona. In recognition of this, Theatre Set-Up have performed both of these plays in cathedrals and churches in the UK and The Netherlands.

The theme of Christian forgiveness underlies much of the drama in the comedies where a happy outcome is often dependent on general amnesties and forgiveness between protagonists. Forgiveness provides pivotal themes for two of Shakespeare's comedies, Measure For Measure and The Merchant of Venice. In Measure For Measure Isabella, speaking with the moral self-confidence of an initiate nun, advocates a policy of merciful forgiveness to Angelo (II.ii) which she is later called upon to apply herself in her judgement of him (V.i.445-456). A similar application of the 'do as you would be done by' policy of forgiveness is applied by Portia to Shylock in The Merchant of Venice. His failure to respond to her plea that he should be merciful to Antonio (IV.i.183-204), is turned upon him in his own punishment for breaking the law (IV.i.345-361). However tragedy is averted when the Duke and Antonio

practise Christian forgiveness in the penalties they exact from him, which allow him his life (IV.i.367-371, 379-389). In Christian doctrine human forgiveness reflects the divine as St Paul writes in his Epistle to the Ephesians:

> Be ye courteous one to another, and tender hearted, freely forgiving one another, even as God for Christes sake, freely forgave you (Ephesians 4.32)

The Comedy of Errors is set in Ephesus and contains references to this Epistle of St. Paul. The play concludes in an atmosphere of surprising amnesty, with Solinus suddenly finding the means to remit Egeon's death sentence (V.i.390), which at the opening of the play he claimed could not be waived (I.i.97). This same phenomenon occurs in A Midsummer Night's Dream when the Duke Theseus in IV.i.178 sweeps away the law of Athens which insists that Hermia must marry according to her father's will, although at I.i.120 he disclaimed an ability to disregard it. Perhaps it is biblical authority which overides the inconsistency of these incidents.

A pattern of forgiveness is repeated in the final acts of all the other Shakespearean comedies. In As You Like It, Orlando forgives his brother Oliver; in The Merry Wives of Windsor, everyone is reconciled and forgiven; in The Taming of the Shrew Katherine forgives Petruchio, (although not in the RSC interpretation of the play in the 1996 season); in The Two Gentlemen of Verona Valentine forgives Proteus; in Much Ado About Nothing,

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Hero forgives Claudio; in All's Well that Ends Well Helena forgives Bertram; in The Winter's Tale Hermione forgives Leontes; in The Tempest Prospero forgives his enemies; in Cymbeline, Cymbeline and Belarius forgive each other; and in Pericles Thaisa forgives Pericles. However in Twelfth Night Malvolio sounds the theme of the tragedies, 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you', a soured note which Orsino hopes to change with, 'Pursue him and entreat him to a peace.' The exception within the tragedies to the rule of revenge is the forgiveness granted by Cordelia and Edgar to their fathers, Lear and Gloucester, creating isolated moral acts in a play full of the horrific vengeance which characterises the tragedies and histories. Perhaps it is a message which Shakespeare encodes in his plays, that lack of biblical charity and forgiveness leads to tragedy.

I study the application of this principle and the other arcana to The Comedy of Errors and A Midsummer Night's Dream in the following Chapters Eight and Nine.