CHAPTER SEVENTY

IF WE HAD limitless space, we should like nothing better than to review all the plays, citing evidences of various revisions. We should like to examine the manner in which the dramatist's underlying intent to tell his story in its fluid setting, as time moved forward, shifting its values, crystallizing its issues, darkening its theme, penetrates and colors almost every line, while unifying and keeping vibrant the whole fabric of the work. We have indicated this as much as possible as the story has progressed and must be satisfied to let it go at that, except in a few cases too important to be left unnoted.

The extraordinary unity-in-diversity of the work as a whole is signalized by certain clear-cut *motifs* which pervade the literature of the plays, as Wagner's themes interweave through his music-drama of *The Ring,* where one interprets the artist's meaning and purpose by recognition of, say, the *Rhine,* the *Sword,* the *Valhalla,* or the *Redemption through Love* phrases. The most striking of Shakespeare's themes are calumny, or slander of a chaste wife, jealousy and pride of "good name," banishment, storm or shipwreck, ambition, virtue (vertue) at the mercy of guile or evil, ingratitude, revenge.

Connecting links—textual as well as of situation and character—run through the dramas. In *Measure for Measure,* for example, there are distinct connections with *Pericles,* with *All's Well, Much Ado, The Merchant, Hamlet,* etc. We find that Mariana of "the moated grange," whose "reputation was disvalu'd in levity," is married Anne (Cecil) living, as she did for a time, in the moated Manor House of the de Veres near Lavenham, is Hero of *Much Ado,* partially Imogen of

Cymbeline, partially Hermione of *The Winter's Tale,* Desdemona, Ophelia; all this providing one aspect of Oxford's first marriage and the experience which prompted his many heartfelt utterances about calumny.—"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."—Anne is Helena in *All's Well,* Jessica in *The Merchant,* Anne Page in *The Merry Wives,* Thaisa in *Pericles,* who is forced—by a literal "wrack"—to live apart from her husband for a period of years, as Hermione also did; she seems to be the too-good-to-be-true Bianca, and a little of Kate as well, in *The Shrew.* Then, to provide a certain element in other themes, she is combined with Anne Vavasor and the Queen in Cressida, in Helena-Hermia of *The Dream,* and apparently with one aspect of the Queen as Julia in *The Two Gentlemen.* (She is also the Gaoler's Daughter, another, cruder Ophelia, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen.*) She is shown to have been small, "sweet," and "brown in hue."

Is it any wonder that Oxford so candidly said, in Sonnet 76:

> Why write I still all one, ever the same,
> And keep invention in a noted weed,
> That every word doth almost tell my name,
> Showing their birth and where they did proceed?

The "noted weed" in which he kept his "invention" was his own life-story, and he was writing of his son at the same time, for they were one.

The Earl himself is, of course, ubiquitous in the dramas. We are shown every aspect of his rich and varied nature, the bad and the good alike. The man emerges in his full stature when we make a general survey of his work; and, as we have said before, his personality, his character, cannot be divorced from it, nor can the events of his passionately experienced life. Given his temperament, his quality, and his setting in a turbulent and picturesque age, his story was bound to be vivid and dramatic. There has never been another to compare with it. He was obsessed by the compulsion to tell this story, and so fearful was he—and well he may have been, as time has shown! —that it might not be apprehended in the record he was leaving behind him that, in his role of Hamlet, he besought the staunch Horatio to clear his "wounded name" by making an extreme effort to tell it, at no matter what pains. Edward de Vere was like a torch lighted more for us than for himself.

> Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
> Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
> As if we had them not. *Spirits are not finely touch'd*
> *But to fine issues,* nor Nature never lends
> The smallest scruple of her excellence,

> But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
> Herself the glory of a creditor,
> Both thanks and use. (*M. for M.*: I.1.32-40.)

His "virtue" has indeed gone forth from him to us. We ought at least to recognize its source—where it "did proceed."

During the period of the composition of the Sonnets, Lord Oxford seems to have interpolated many clues in the plays to reveal the truth about his early love-affair with the Queen and the identity of their son, the authentic heir to the kingdom, as well as scion of the noble house of Vere, of whom he said, in No. 67, "his *rose* is *true.*"

The most outspoken of all the plays in respect of this truth is *The Two Gentlemen of Verona.* In an early court-version, as *A history of the Duke of Millayn and the Marques of Mantua,*[1] it must have been light comedy, suggestive in regard to the Earl's affair with Elizabeth but more discreet about their son. Later, as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*—in which Valentine says of Proteus (II.4.63), "I know him as myself"—it must have been privately performed, for evidence is clear that it was familiar to persons in the literary world, but there is no record of any public performance while the author lived, or of its being printed before 1623, in the First Folio. It is primed with clues unmistakable, which, when related to similar hints and leads in other plays, illuminate them, emphasizing their purport and validity.

The original version belongs to the early 1570's, because there are definite topical allusions, as we have shown, connecting it with that time, including much talk of "the sheep," Hatton. This was, perhaps, before Silvia-Elizabeth was "deformed," preceding the birth of Southampton.

Of the Two Gentlemen (of one Ver), Valentine is the courtier and idealist side of the Earl, who sets forth to travel; Proteus is the darker, the creative, side. The *Dictionary of Mythology* describes Proteus as "a marine deity, who could foretell events and convert himself at will into all sorts of shapes." In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* he is called *Proteus ambiguus;* and it is significant that the word "metamorphosed" is used twice in this play and never again in any other. Proteus says of Valentine and himself:

> He after honour hunts, I after love:
> . . . . . .
> Thou, Julia, thou hast *metamorphos'd* me,—
> Made me neglect my studies, *lose my time,*
> War with good counsel, set the world at nought;
> Made wit with musing weak, heart sick with thought. (I.1.63 *et seq.*)

[1] First recorded performance 1579; probably privately presented long before that.

This is what Elizabeth did to Oxford (and it is another version of Cleopatra's demoralization of Antony): she monopolized him, even keeping him from his wife, she drove him frantic with her faithlessness; *but she stimulated his genius.* Silvia is obviously Elizabeth, the Queen: that is one of her moon-significant names; and Julia is a composite, it would seem, of Elizabeth and Anne Cecil. "Poor wounded name!" the latter says of Proteus. (I.2.111.)

And she, Julia, discusses her suitors with Lucetta (I.2) precisely as Portia-Elizabeth discusses hers with Nerissa. (There are phrases here and there identical with some to be found in Oxford's letters.) The passage about the "glove" at the beginning of *Act* II refers to the perfumed gloves the Earl had brought the Queen when he returned from the Continent, the talk of the court for a long time. The most extravagant praise is lavished upon Silvia, such as that which was habitual towards Elizabeth. Valentine says,

> Yet let her be a *principality,*
> *Sovereign* to all the creatures on the earth. (II.4.153-4.)

A "principality" was one of the nine orders of angels. This is the sort of adulation to which the Queen was accustomed, which, indeed, she demanded. Proteus says she is "an earthly paragon." Valentine replies: "Call her divine." All this, though it was merely a convention to which the young courtiers lent their eloquence, has a ring of sincerity here and indicates that the youthful Oxford was genuinely enthralled with the Queen for a time—during the early 1570's, when he was torn between the claims of his wife and those of his royal mistress.

Proteus questions himself:

> Is it *mine eye,* or *Valentinus' praise,*
> *Her true perfection,* or *my false transgression,*
> That makes me *reasonless to reason* thus?
> She's fair; and so is Julia that I love. (II.4.197-200.)

We may be sure he questioned his own behavior, his own state of mind, in private torment, wondering whether he were simply idealizing the Queen and whether he were swayed by lust or ambition or love. Later Proteus says:

> To leave my Julia, shall I be forsworn;
> To love fair Silvia, shall I be forsworn;
> . . . . . .
> At first I did adore a twinkling star,
> But now I worship *a celestial sun.*
> . . . . . .
> And Silvia—witness heaven that made her fair!—
> Shows Julia but *a swarthy Ethiope.*
> I will forget that Julia is alive. . . . (II.6.1 *et seq.*)

The third scene of *Act* I seems to belong partly to a late revision, but some of it was evidently in the original version. The word "importune," occurring in *lines* 13 and 17, and again in III.1.145, with "importunacy" in IV.2.114, together with Silvia's remark to Proteus (V.4.40),

> Therefore be gone, solicit me no more,

connect this situation, as we have previously noted, with the early poem signed by Oxford and "attributed to Queen Elizabeth," which has the repeated refrain,

> Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere,
> *Importune me no more.*

But there is a reference to what must have been Oxford's 1575–76 Italian tour in Panthino's speech (I.3.30-2),

> There shall he practise tilts and tournaments,
> Hear sweet discourse, converse with noblemen,
> And be in eye of every exercise;

for later Valentine tells the Outlaws that he had sojourned in Verona —that is, away from home—

> *Some sixteen months;* and longer might have stay'd
> If *crooked fortune* had not thwarted me. (IV.1.21-2.)

"Sixteen months" was exactly the length of time the young Earl, the "traveller," had remained on the Continent when "crooked fortune" —scandal and lack of money—had brought him home in haste.

Valentine adds that he was "banish'd" thence; which indicates that the dramatist is now telescoping that trip with the earlier one he took when he and the Second Earl of Southampton ran away to Europe in 1574, presumably dismissed—"banished"—by an irate Elizabeth. In the same passage Valentine says he had killed a man. The only man we know of that Oxford had killed was Burghley's undercook, who was doubtless spying on him. Lucentio, who is partly Oxford, in *The Shrew,* confesses that *he* had killed a man. (I.1.232.) So perhaps such a thing had happened, though this too may allude to the undercook.[2]

Launce—or Lance, Spear—is Proteus's "clownish servant." His amusing monologue about his dog (II.3) brings up again the esoteric identity of the "dog" with the playwright role—or, as he felt, the mongrel

[2] In *Richard III* there occurs a highly suggestive passage which may shed light upon this point: Gloucester's speech (III.5.74-7):

> Infer the bastardy of *Edward's* children:
> Tell him how *Edward put to death a citizen*
> Only for saying *he would make his son*
> *Heir to the crown.*

side—of Lord Oxford, just as it is found in Jonson's *Every Man Out,* where Sir Puntarvolo has to leave his dog outside with a Groom before he can go into the court to see Saviolina-Elizabeth. Launce distinctly says (22-3):

I am the dog,—O! the dog is me, and I am myself.

In his second monologue (IV.4) Launce shows a deep though rather shamefaced affection towards the dog, and a staunch protectiveness, which is certainly comparable with Oxford's attitude towards his authorship of the plays he was unable to acknowledge (again exactly the same as Puntarvolo's about his dog). Like the misbehaved dog, the playwright offends people; and Launce, or the Earl, may be said to "take the rap" for the creature's misdeeds. (Compare Beatrice's remark about Benedick: *Much Ado,* II.1.139-42.)

Curiously—yet perhaps not so, in fact—Proteus also has a dog, concerning which his attitude, too, is identical with Puntravolo's in *Every Man Out.* (Jonson would of course have taken his cue from Oxford, no doubt from this very play.)

> *Proteus.* Go, get thee hence, and find *my dog* again,
> Or ne'er return again into my sight.
> Away, I say! Stay'st thou to vex me here?
> *A slave that still an end turns me to shame.* (IV.4.59-62.)

This last, directed against Launce, emphasizes Oxford's attitude towards his *nom de plume,* Shake-*speare,* which Nashe called his "dudgeon-dagger." He shows his feeling for the plays themselves in his treatment of Miranda and the others who stand for them. It is impossible not to believe that Ben Jonson had somewhere seen a private performance of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* before writing *Every Man Out,* in 1598. This is the sole explanation of some of the features of that play and of *The Poetaster* as well.

When the Duke, Silvia's father—who stands, we take it, for the Privy Council, or the conventional supporter of royalty—discovers Valentine's poems to his daughter, he says scornfully:

> Why, Phaeton . . .
> Wilt thou aspire to guide the heavenly car
> And with thy daring folly burn the world? (III.1.153-5.)

This is a clear allusion to Oxford's, and later his son's, identity with Phoebus-Phaeton, and a reference to Oxford's "daring folly" in believing he could be accepted as Elizabeth's husband and "guide the heavenly car" (or that his son might guide it afterwards).

There follows a torrent of "banish, banish'd, banishment," which must refer to the crisis of 1574, for Valentine's speech to Silvia, beginning, "And why not death rather than living torment? . . . Silvia

is myself," is composed in the same spirit as Sonnet 109, which we had connected with this crisis before we had come to realize the significance of the similarity here. Initially it had to do with Alençon but would have been elaborated for the personal application.

> What light is light, if Silvia be not seen?
> What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by?
> . . . . . .
> Except I be by Silvia in the night,
> There is no music in the nightingale:
> Unless I look on Silvia in the day,
> There is no day for me to look upon.
> *She is my essence;* and I leave to be,
> If I be not by her fair influence
> Foster'd, illumin'd, cherish'd, kept alive.
> I fly not death, to fly his deadly doom:
> Tarry I here, I but attend on death;
> But, fly I hence, I fly away from life. (III.1.170 *et seq.*)

The sonnet goes thus:

> As easy might I from myself depart
> As from *my soul, which in thy breast doth lie.*
> That is my home of love. . . .

We can only conclude that the Queen, after some terrific scene following upon the Fair Youth's birth, banished Oxford from her sight; he ran away to the Continent; she sent Bedingfield to bring him back; and she received him with joy on his return—after which he was her high favorite for six more years. How could he tell all this more plainly than he does?

The passage immediately ensuing is electric in its flash of revelation: "hair" being the customary pun on "heir," and "nothing" standing for the initial, O. The hunting-call, "Soho," may be intended to suggest Southampton.

> *Proteus.* Run, boy, run, run, and seek him out.
> *Launce.* Soho! soho!
> *Proteus.* What seest thou?
> *Launce. Him we go to find:* there's not a *hair* on's head but 'tis a *Valentine.*
> *Proteus.* Valentine?
> *Valentine.* No.
> *Proteus.* Who then? his spirit?
> *Valentine.* Neither.
> *Proteus.* What then?
> *Valentine. Nothing.*
> *Launce.* Can *nothing* speak? Master, shall I strike?
> *Proteus.* Who wouldst thou strike?
> *Launce. Nothing.*
> *Proteus.* Villain, forbear.
> *Launce.* Why, sir, I'll strike *nothing.*

The implication is obvious and consistent. Having an heir has reduced Oxford to nothingness. He may not acknowledge his son, he may not acknowledge his plays. He is discredited, anonymous.

This scene is illuminated by II.5, in which Speed calls Launce a "madcap," the epithet familiarly applied to the young Oxford. Here Julia is Elizabeth.

> *Speed.* But shall she marry him?
> *Launce.* No.
> *Speed.* How then? Shall he marry her?
> *Launce.* No, neither.
> *Speed.* What, are they broken?
> *Launce.* No, *they are both as whole as a fish.*

There is a great deal of play here about Speed's not "understanding" Launce. Then:

> *Speed.* But tell me true, will 't be a match?
> *Launce.* Ask *my dog:* if he say ay, it will; if he say no, it will; if he shake his tail and say nothing, it will.
> *Speed.* The conclusion is, then, it will.
> *Launce.* Thou shalt never get *such a secret* from me but by a *parable.*

Launce's dog—or Speare's plays—will tell the truth by signs. This then is the "parable," the story told in this play, by which we are to "understand" the "secret" of Elizabeth-Silvia-Julia and Oxford-Valentine-Proteus, through Launce and his dog. The Earl was, indeed, a madcap, never lacking in audacity.

Speed's next question is significant. They have been talking about Launce's master—who, be it noted, is Proteus, the dark, creative side of Oxford; but Speed continues,

> But Launce, how sayst thou, that *my* master is become a notable lo*ver?*
> *Launce.* I *never* knew him otherwise;

hinting that Valentine and Proteus are really one and the same.

Returning to III.1.212, we find Valentine speaking of "sacred Silvia" and of his "banishment." Then Proteus calls her "tears pearl"; which is a reminder of Sonnet 34, addressed to Elizabeth:

> Ah! but those *tears are pearl* which thy love sheds,
> And they are rich and *ransom all ill deeds.*

Launce and Speed appear again (III.1.278 *et seq.*), the latter chiding the former for his "old vice" of playing on words, as Lorenzo chides another Launcelot in *The Merchant of Venice* (III.5.41 *et seq.*): not the last critic, it may be said, of Shake-speare's inveterate punning. The "news" of Launce's milkmaid-sweetheart is as "black as ink." His description of her, similar to a device used in other early plays, seems to be simply a mocking travesty of the flamboyant flattery

of the Queen—in other words, the reverse side of the picture of perfection, which Oxford, in his role of clownish servant, or Court Jester, could not resist indulging in. The "black as ink" suggests the well-known "stain," the "ill deeds," as well as emphasizing Launce's having it all written down in ink.

This scene contains another play on "hairs." Speed says that Launce's milkmaid has "more hair than wit," presently adding that she has "more faults than hairs." (Elizabeth did, indeed, have more illicit *amours* than offspring!) Whereupon Launce exclaims that "that's monstrous" and ought to be deleted (from the record):

> *O, that that were out!* (III.1.364.)

Proof that Shakespeare intended the pun on "hair" and "heir" can be found in *The Comedy of Errors* (III.2.121 *et seq.*). Dromio of Syracuse is describing the kitchen-wench who thinks he is her husband:

> *Dromio of S.* . . . she is spherical, like a globe; I could find out countries in her.
> *Antipholus of S.* In what part of her body stands . . . Scotland? . . .
> *Dromio.* I found it by the barrenness; hard in the palm of her hand.
> *Antipholus of S.* Where France?
> *Dromio of S.* In her forehead; armed and reverted, making war against her *heir.*

There is also the long punning passage in II.2. (77 *et seq.*), as well as others in other plays. It would be interesting to know whether the Elizabethans pronounced "hair," "hare," and "heir" alike, either with or without the aspirate aitch.

Launce winds up the scene about his milkmaid with even plainer language:

> Now will he be swing'd for reading *my letter.* An unmannerly slave that will *thrust himself into secrets.*

The Earl of Oxford had no intention of being anonymous, if he could get his letter—which was O, "nothing"—or his "news"—which was written down "as black as ink"—across to his audience, even in code, so that they—we, all of us—might thrust themselves into his "secrets."

The Outlaws would seem to be Lord Oxford's literary associates, as Salanio and Salarino were in *The Merchant of Venice.* One of them declares that his captain, Valentine, "bears an honourable mind": the very same expression writers were accustomed to use about their patron, the Earl of Oxford.

This play can almost be said to be written in code. If the Sonnets were "the key with which Shakespeare unlocked his heart," *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is the clue with which he resolves his personal

enigma, and his essential duality, for posterity, as well as his youthful affair with the Queen.

When Julia becomes Sebastian (this part no doubt played by the Fair Youth in private performances), she is to Silvia as Viola, another Sebastian's twin, in *Twelfth Night,* was to Olivia-Elizabeth. But now, momentarily, Julia is Anne:

> *Silvia.* Belike she thinks that Proteus *hath forsook her.*
> *Julia.* I think she doth, and that's her cause of sorrow. (IV.4.146-7.)

This is just what Oxford was saying in the poems about Anne in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres,* published early in 1573.

Julia is still Anne when she rebukes Proteus (V.4.101-3):

> Behold her that gave aim to all thy oaths,
> And entertain'd them deeply in her heart:
> How oft hast thou with perjury cleft the root!

The protean side of Oxford had been unfaithful to his wife, and although Valentine, his better side, had revered Silvia-Elizabeth, Proteus had been moved to lust:

> I'll woo you like a soldier, at arms' end,
> And love you 'gainst the nature of love,—force ye. (V.4.57-8.)

Anne Vavasor evidently came into the picture in about 1576, for the combined names, Julia and Lucetta—Juli-et (ta)—suggest Juliet, who was the ardent young Earl's love caught on the rebound from Elizabeth-Rosaline. "Silvia above, at her window" (IV.2) will soon be Juliet on her balcony. Her words, "by this pale queen of night I swear," will become Juliet's, "O! swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon."

The talk of the exchange of the ring (IV.4.132-6) suggests here, as it does in other instances, some sort of betrothal ceremony tantamount to marriage, which must have taken place between Oxford and Elizabeth. We find a significant parallel situation in the case of another Edward and another Elizabeth, in *Richard III,* also an early drama.

Edward IV had married Elizabeth, widow of Sir John Grey, by whom he had two sons, the elder to be the rightful King upon his father's death. But Buckingham advises Gloucester that he can have them declared illegitimate, because Edward had been previously betrothed and was, therefore, not legally married to Elizabeth.

> *Buckingham.* You say that Edward is your brother's son:
> So say we too, but *not by Edward's wife;*
> *For first he was contract to Lady Lucy,*
> Your mother lives a witness to *his vow,*
> And afterward by substitute *betroth'd*

> To Bona, sister to the King of France.
> These both put by, a poor petitioner,
> . . . . . .
> Even in the afternoon of her best days,
> Made prize and purchase of his wanton eye,
> Seduc'd the pitch and height of his degree
> To base declension and loath'd bigamy:
> By her, in his unlawful bed, he got
> This Edward, whom our manners call the prince. (III.7.176-90.)

This might serve to explain why the Fair Youth was not considered illegitimate. If Elizabeth and Oxford had exchanged rings, say, in 1570 or '71, in some sort of ceremony—necessarily a secret one, certainly private—then they regarded this as a binding marriage, or Oxford did, and his subsequent marriage to Anne Cecil merely a practical alliance. As we have said, such a circumstance would explain Oxford's bolting on the eve of his wedding and the consequent abrupt postponement. The Archbishop may, in 1574, simply have sanctified this early bond. The question continues to crop up, but we shall probably never have a complete answer.

The original version of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* evidently concluded as we have it today, with Valentine saying to Proteus:

> Come, Proteus, 'tis your penance but to hear
> *The story of your loves discovered:*
> That done, our day of marriage shall be yours:
> *One* feast, *one* house, *one* mutual happiness.

The inescapable inference is, And one Ver—Ver-ona; which is to say, *one truth,* for he had certainly, in this play, spoken the truth in "discovering" his "loves."

Sir Sidney Lee says, "Trifling and irritating conceits abound in *Two Gentlemen.*" So much the worse for Sir Sidney Lee, but not, as he implies, for Shakespeare!

In the final revision of the play, the older Oxford apparently becomes, as usual, Antonio; and there are references to several of the Sonnets—the first to No. 99, which begins,

> The *forward violet* thus did I chide,

and speaks of "A vengeful canker."

> *Valentine.* And *writers say,* as the most *forward bud*
> Is eaten by the *canker* ere it blow,
> Even so by love the *young and tender wit*
> *Is turn'd to folly:* blasting in the bud,
> Losing his *ver*dure even in the prime,
> And all the fair effects of future hopes.
> But wherefore waste I time to *counsel thee*
> *That art a votary to fond desire* (I.1.43-52.)

Though this is spoken by Valentine, not Antonio, it is the older Oxford, the "writer," saying how his "young and tender wit" was "turn'd to folly, blasting in the bud" his fresh green life and depriving him of "all the fair effects of future hopes." He is speaking to the Fair Youth now, but he knows he is wasting his time in such "counsel," for the son too is "a votary to fond desire."

The picture appears as an integrated whole. Every element falls into place.

Valentine's confession (II.4.135),

> Love hath chas'd sleep from my entralled eyes,

immediately recalls Oxford's first sonnet to Queen Elizabeth:

> Who first did break thy sleeps of quiet rest?

In conclusion, we must speak of the lovely song, "Who is Silvia?" (IV.2.) How perfectly fitting that it was composed by a devoted young courtier to his Queen! You can no more separate Lord Oxford from a close relation to Elizabeth than you can separate Shakespeare from the age to which she gave her name. It is all part of the wondrous story.