

### CHAPTER III

#### MEN AND WOMEN

##### 1

Whatever was Shakespeare's standard of refined behaviour, he could unfold it on the stage only through the medium of the speech and conduct of his men and women. To reach at his ideal of courtesy, it would be profitable to us, therefore, to examine the men and women that people his plays, for it is through them that he would put it on the stage. Let us assume for the moment that he had such an ideal and that he deliberately conceived his characters to conform to it.

Most characters of Shakespeare's plays are men and women of the nobility, representing high birth and traditions of gentility. The others are those associated with the nobility or who occasionally or

circumstantially find contact with the genteel. A number of scenes, likewise, are laid in royal palaces, or lordly castles: when a scene is laid in a forest, the regal presence is there to grace it; if it is laid in a street, the royal palace or the noble's abode is round the corner. ~~It is~~ It is from the character and behaviour of these noble men and women that we must seek the meaning of courtesy as Shakespeare might have intended it.

Courtesy, in the literal sense, might mean the behaviour of the courtiers, those scions of aristocracy, who move round the king; but the word has been changing the range of its implications from time to time. Its association with chivalry and Christianity, its delectation in the courtly romances in relation to love, as shown in a previous chapter<sup>1</sup>, have influenced its scope and significance and extended or contracted the limits of its connotations. It has even been suggested there that Shakespeare uses the universal conception of 'degree' in setting up the scale of human and social relations. Some of the historical implications of courtesy, again, we may find retained in Shakespeare at places, though it would be

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter II ante.

impossible to draw any rigid line of distinction anywhere. Human culture has always been susceptible to multifarious influences in its growth and can never exist in rigid clear-cut compartments. Shakespeare himself uses the word times out of number in the plays; but any attempt to construe an absolute definition from his use of it in a particular context would be misleading, for some times he bodily transfers the word from the original of his plot as, for example, he does in *Coriolanus*.<sup>1</sup>

One remarkable thing about Shakespeare's use of refined speech and courteous behaviour in the plays is that they do not appear to be mere formalities, blank gestures of politeness or formal turns of speech. On the contrary the impression that we obtain, from the way Shakespeare has used them, is that he must have intended to convey something infinitely more significant and subtle than mere formality. The speech of these noble men and women in the plays, though it is couched in sweet, polite, gentle, considerate, and smooth terms, almost always conveys something more than what mere words may do. It means more than what it says.

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<sup>1</sup> *Coriolanus* : V, iii, 160-61 :

"Thou'st never in thy life/show'd thy dear mother  
any courtesy"

and in North's translation of Putarch's History :  
"besides, thou hast not hitherto shew'd thy poor mother  
any courtesy". Warwick Ed. of the play, p.191.

If we consider only the aspect of human and social relationship in the world of Shakespeare's plays, the best part of such relationship would appear to consist in love. At the same time, it would also appear that women wield a large measure of influence in building up and sustaining that relationship. The comedies inevitably treat of love as their theme; so do some of the tragedies and the romances. And women play everywhere a predominating part with their virtue and grace. Even in the plays where love is not at all the dramatic motive, women appear in the midst of exciting dramatic moments as if to appease the tense and jaded nerves of men and lighten the atmosphere with their gentle speech and graceful actions. They persuade, plead, beg for grace. The three women in Coriolanus and Portia and Calpurnia in Julius Caesar have exactly this function to perform. Isabella, even with her stern self-righteousness, moves like an angel in the uncomfortable atmosphere of Measure for Measure and with the help of the disguised Duke almost cleanses the bawdiness. Women are often given tasks which men have failed to perform. Paulina in The Winter's Tale goes to Leontes for the new born babe, (Perdita), for no man dared

approach Leontes for it. Again Helena in All's Well That Ends Well heals the king physically and her lover spiritually; Portia in The Merchant of Venice saves Antonio. If we take but these women away, the damage to human values and atmosphere of culture and refinement in the plays would be stupendous. One essential mark of refinement that any society may claim for itself, as is well known, is the status it assigns to its women and the way in which its men behave toward them. And so Shakespeare relies not a little on love and women in shaping his norm of social behaviour.

## 3

In a sense this treatment of love and woman is a continuation of the literary practice of the Middle Ages. Medieval literature had done much to raise the status of woman, and the courtly poets, whose imagination was influenced by the idea of love, had given to woman a status almost of divinity. Whether this was transferred<sup>1</sup> in the beginning in its poetical form, from the worship of the Blessed Virgin or set up as an ideal against the real state of medieval marriage or to avenge the Church's ideas about women and matrimony, the ideal of reverence for women developed and lived

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis : The Allegory of Love, p.8.

through the ages to produce a pattern of man's conduct to woman. It fascinated medieval poets and lived on in the period following the Middle Ages. By the time of Elizabeth it had become an integral part of culture and an inevitable attribute of gentility and refinement. The fact, that a woman was presiding over the destinies of the nation, strengthened it all the more. The ideal of courtly love had by this time shed its adulterous character and sought the sanctuary of virtuous matrimony. Even so, woman retained her deified position and called for the same respect and reverence as the courtly ideal had earlier offered her. She was now accorded in literature a status of Beauty and Virtue which was to spur in man all his manly qualities and make him seek her favour as the sum of all values.

This is the ideal of womanhood that Shakespeare depicts in the plays generally and in the comedies particularly, despite what some cynics may now and then have to say to deprecate love and woman. Though in the romantic comedies the lovers 'no sooner met but they looked, no sooner looked but they loved, no sooner loved but they sighed, no sooner sighed but they asked each other the reason, no sooner knew the

reason but they sought the remedy<sup>1</sup>; yet the heroine compares favourably with the Lady of the courtly romances. She is adored as a divinity and the lover is yet a worshipper of a deity. The hose and the doublet have not only to protect the petticoat (and how well and how feelingly Ganymede protects Aliena in *As You Like it* !) but to lay forth all manly vigour and grace for the worship and adoration of the Deity at the altar of Love. Thus to Orlando Rosalind is 'heavenly', (*As You Like It* : I, ii, 264), 'devised by heavenly Synod, one body filled with all graces wide enlarged by Nature at the behest of Heaven', and he would 'live and die her slave;' (III, ii, 143-156); such is the ardent nature of this worship, such the devotion that 'her frown might kill him :' (IV, i, 106).

It is the same with Florizel, for whom Perdita is 'no shepherdess, but Flora peering in April's front.' (*The Winter's Tale* : IV, iii, 2-3); Shakespeare has so sanctified Love that there cannot be any sensuality about it. If occasionally there is, why then, it is to gain a piece of 'rare beauty' and 'chaste', because

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<sup>1</sup> *As You Like It* : V, ii, 34-38.

in the lover the desires 'run not before mine honour,  
nor my lusts burn hother than my faith':

"the Gods themselves  
(Humbling their duties to love) have taken  
The shapes of beasts upon them; Jupiter  
Became a bull and bellowed; the green Neptune  
A ram, and bleated; and the fire-robed God,  
Golden Apollo, a poor humble swain  
As I seem now"

(IV, iii, 25-35).

Even kissing becomes in Shakespeare, 'as full of  
sanctity as the touch of holy bread'. (As You Like It :  
III, iv, 12-13).

and :

"If I profane with my unworhiest hand  
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this,  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand,  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss".

(Romeo and Juliet : I,v,95-98)

To Polixenes Hermoine is 'O my sacred Lady !'  
(I,ii,76). Leontes calls Perdita 'Goddess' as she  
unveils before him (V, i, 130); in his penitent mood,  
looking at the statuesque Hermoine, he remembers that  
she was 'as tender as infancy and grace'; (V,iii,26-27).  
To Belarius, Imogen, even in her boy's weeds, appears  
to be 'a fairy', 'an angel', 'an earthly paragon',  
divineness no elder than a boy'; (Cymbeline : III, vi,  
42-44). Benedick, in Much Ado About Nothing is called



a 'heretic' because he despises beauty.

Juliet is 'O my sweet Juliet, to Romeo,

'Thy beauty hath made me effeminate  
And in my temper soften'd valour's steel!'

(Romeo and Juliet : III,i,117-118)

Portia attracts suitors from all directions, for her high spirit, brilliant wit, 'beauty like the sun'; 'she is fair and fairer than that word of wonderful virtues, nothing undervalued to Caio's daughter, Brutus' Portia.' (The Merchant of Venice : I,i,161-165); she is 'this mortal breathing saint' (II,vi,40); her portrait is 'what demi-god came so near creation', yet 'so far this shadow doth limp behind the substance....' (III, ii, 115-129). Desdemona is 'divine Desdemona', who has

'the grace of heaven,  
Before behind thee, and on every hand  
Enwheel thee round :'

(Othello : II,i,85-87)

Women themselves may not have so high an opinion of themselves. Portia, Brutus' wife, thinks :

Aye me, how weak a thing  
The heart of woman is !

(Julius Caesar : II,vi,39-40)

and 'how hard it is for women to keep counsel!  
(II,iv,9)

But men will not believe them. Othello (II,iv,9) cannot and does not want to think Desdemona to be false in the first stage of Iago's plot to incite him :

" If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself  
I'll not believe it".

(Othello : III,iii,278-279)

And again, " 'Tis not to make me jealous,  
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,  
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well" -

But these are qualities which only embellish the basic virtues of her nature : 'where virtue is, these are more virtuous". (III, iii, 183-186).

" I do but say", he says, "what she is : so delicate with her needle : an admirable musician, o, she will sing the savageness out of a bear; of so high and plentious wit and invention" - (IV, i, 188-191), but these are like the ornamental jewels on a gold plate; the gold plate is virtue itself, nature endowed by Heaven. And this he suspects, she lacks; therefore, 'the pity of it, Iago, the pity of it !' (IV,i,196-97). In fact, she does have the gold; she is so cultivated that she would not befoul her tongue by uttering 'whore' (IV,ii,118). Being a model of chastity, she will not believe that a woman can be unchaste even for the queenship of the whole world, (IV,ii,64); she is so

lovely , fair and smellest so sweet that the sense  
aches at thee.," (IV, ii, 68-69).

Antigonus thinks if Hermione is false, 'Every inch  
of woman, Ay, every dram of woman's flesh is false'  
(The Winter's Tale : II, i, 137-138), and would kill  
his three daughters lest they bring forth 'false'  
generations (II, i, 143-147).

Such tributes to female charms, to Beauty and  
Virtue, - that is the phrase recurrently used in the  
plays - are deserved by all the better women of  
Shakespeare. But the whole galaxy of Shakespeare's  
ideal women, Miranda, Desdemona, Imogen, Portia,  
Cordelia, Hermione are given a touch of the divine.  
They are all courtly women, princess, queen, wife  
or daughter of a nobleman at court; yet there is in  
each of them something more. Imogen, 'the immortal  
god-head of womanhood', sometimes thought to be Shakes-  
peare's own ideal of woman's grace, beauty, intellect,  
is 'fair and royal'.

'And that she hath all courtly parts more exquisite  
Than lady, ladies, woman; from every one  
The best she hath, and she of all compounded,  
Outsells them all'

(Cymbeline: III,v,71-75)

And it is the unromantic, down to earth Cloten who pays this homage ! The divinity attributed to these women is in the medieval tradition of reverential homage. But here this idealisation goes beyond mere lip-service to a tradition or even the glorification of one of that sex who occupied the throne of England at the time. The dramatist is purposefully seeking to establish a social ideal of conduct and <sup>so</sup> moulds his characters that the qualities attributed in each case to these women are made to flow from their inner selves. In other words, these qualities are as much a part and parcel of their being as is their outward physical beauty. The two are inseparable components of a wider whole. Thus Desdemona's white skin -

" - that whiter skin of hers than snow,  
And smooth as monumental alabaster".  
(Othello : V,ii, 4-5)

- is of a piece with her virtue. Therefore, the murderer would not shed her blood or scar her skin; therefore, again, he kisses her before he kills her and then will 'love thee after' (V,ii,19).

Again, these women are 'divine' because with their virtuous qualities, they stand in the 'degree' order at the apex of the human kind and therefore are nearer

the angels and share their qualities. In the plays they are assigned by the dramatist a refining and purifying function. It is not enough that women are virtuous : Shakespeare intentionally makes them radiate a civilising lustre. They correct and chastise the men. Cloten and Iachimo are both purged by Imogen, and this is what happens, as we shall see, to other sinners against women.

As the medieval concept of love loses its adulterous character, marriage in Shakespeare, becomes the goal of love, wedding being 'the great Juno's crown' and

" Then is there mirth in heaven  
When earthly things made even  
Atone together".

(Hymen in As You Like It :  
V, iv, 110-113)

So in Romeo and Juliet : 'the bent of love should be honourable, its purpose marriage (II, i, 185-186).

And chastity becomes the prime quality of womanly grace. Shakespeare insists on it and consciously dramatises it in the plays. In a sense, even this is medieval. If we remember the medieval conception of creation, Man stands between Angels and Beasts. Human

beings therefore have to endeavour to raise themselves to the divine rather than to lapse into beastliness. Women in Shakespeare are given the function of purifying men and help them attain to the angelic state. Therefore, they must needs be pure in themselves, and the purifying influence must proceed from them. They perform this function with their love or in other ways influence the men to the same end. Men who offend against women are punished as sinners and reformed. Leontes has to be penitent, Iachimo is chastised; Benedick, the 'heretic in despite of beauty' is so set right that he takes up a challenge for the sake of love in defence of a lady wronged. If women have the power to wield this purifying influence, then men must revere them. Clearly it is to this end that Shakespeare delineates virtue in women and idealises them: Any lapse from chastity would be degradation into beastliness. That is what disturbs Hamlet deeply and induces him to conclude that 'frailty thy name is woman' for 'a beast that wants discourse of reason, would have mourned longer'. (Hamlet : I, ii, 150-151) In quite other circumstances by which Posthumus loses his faith in women, he would kill Imogen. Othello in

the earlier stages is unwilling to believe that Desdemona is unchaste. Claudio, under his suspicion, thus mourns the degradation of an angel into a beast in Much Ado About Nothing :

" You seem to me as Dion in her orb;  
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;  
But you are more intemperate in your blood  
Than Venus, or those pamper'd animals  
That rage in savage sensuality".  
(IV, i, 57-66)

The image expressing unchastity is always that of beast, animals, savage. Thus, Leonato's grief for his daughter's dishonour is so sharp that he wishes her dead for her foul tainted flesh :

O, she is fallen  
Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea  
Hath drops too few to wash her clean again,  
and salt too little, which may season give  
To her foul tainted flesh!  
(IV, i, 139-143).

It is due to his regard for purity in woman and his concern for her status as a civilising authority that Shakespeare treats of woman's honour so repeatedly in his plays. Incest wakes up the nemesis in Hamlet because woman has degraded herself into a beast; but it is significant that the woman, as sinner, is left to God to be punished. The ghost in Hamlet would have the

the prince avenge himself upon 'that adulterate beast',  
Claudius, but,

"however thou persuest this act,  
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven,  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,  
To prick and sting her"  
(I, v, 84-88).

On the other hand any irreverence done to a pure woman is something of a religious sin and to be accordingly punished. This is what happens in Much Ado About Nothing, The Winter's Tale, All's Well That Ends Well, and Cymbeline. The gods are angry in The Winter's Tale because

"A gross and foolish sire  
Blemisht his gracious dam".  
(III, ii, 196-197).

Bertram's jilting of 'young, wise fair and virtuous', Helena was an 'offence of mighty note' and though the king forgives him, "my revenges were highbent upon him, And watch'd the time to shoot".

(All's Well That Ends Well : V,iii,9-11)

The events in the play provide an education for Bertram. The subject is treated in such a way that in each case the emphasis falls on the ideal of purity in woman and a standard set up for man's conduct to woman.



The idealised portrayal of the wronged woman in those plays is presumably intended to convey an object lesson for the behaviour of men. Iachimo who has never met a virtuous woman before he sees Imogen and whose challenge is a challenge to the whole sex, ends up as a reformed convert with<sup>a</sup> conscience.

The heaviness and guilt within my bosom  
Takes off my manhood: I have belied a lady,  
The princess of this country, and the air on't  
Revengingly enfeebles me :

(Cymeline : V, ii, 1-4)

Leontes', 'saint like sorrow' his speech and conduct after Apollo's verdict are those of a penitent sinner. Likewise De Pedro and Claudio repent for the sin of having wronged Hero. Virtuous women are themselves jealously conscious of their chastity, and are always on their guard to protect it lest by chance some vile man's beastiality might profane it. Some of them, indeed, possess a remarkable almost an uncanny sense of knowing a beast when they meet one. Thus Helena in All's Well That Ends Well asks the rascally Parolles that 'tainted fellow full of wickedness', (III,ii,87) in whom 'the fixt evils sit so fit, that they take place when virtue's steely bones look bleak in the cold wind': (I, i, 102-104) -

" Bless our poor Virginitie from  
Underminers and blowers up !  
Is there no military policy how  
Virtue might blow up men ?"  
(I, i, 120-122)

The widow, in the same play, even though she is one of the common people, has this sensitivity; and zeal for protection of woman's honour : about the amorous count she says, he

" He brookes with all that can in such a suit  
Corrupt the tender honour of a maid;  
But she is armed for him, and keeps her guard  
In honestest defence".  
(III, v, 72-75)

because as her daughter, Diana, later says :

"My chastity's the jewel of our house,  
Bequeathed down from many ancestors;  
Which were the greatest obloquy i' the world  
In me to lose".  
(IV, ii, 46-49)

It would be an impudent nation, says the soldier in the play, where women without honour live (IV, iii, 323-325). In the same play, again, we find the Courtier's functions are defined as those of lover and fighter. It is the courtier's profession to love and be loved as much as it is his business to show his prowess on the battlefield, 'to be shot with fair eyes at the sportive court' as also to be 'the mark of smoky muskets' in the war; (III, ii, 108-110). He cannot

reject the love of a fair maid; if he does, or she cannot marry her love, she must go to a nunnery, as Helena professes to do and becomes St. Jaques's pilgrim in All's Well That Ends Well or as Ophelia is asked to do by Hamlet or as Hernia, who, in A Midsummer Night's Dream is, under the Athenian law, required to abjure for ever the society of men and live in 'shady choister', 'chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon' (I, i, 72). Diana says in ALL's Well That Ends Well, 'It is a hard bondage to become the wife of a detesting lord' (III, v, 65-66). Nor can the lover hate the sex; if that happens cupid himself may intervene or angels or elders may turn match-makers and make matters smooth for wedding bells to ring. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, The Tempest, All's Well That Ends Well, Love's Labour Lost and As You Like It elders take an effective hand in the lovers' affairs.

So exalted a status is given to women by Shakespeare that they become agents of action which is pure and purifying; love is treated as so sacred a bond between man and woman that it must needs find its fulfilment in marriage. Therefore, he usually couples virtue and beauty in the heroines. But these qualities though sufficient in themselves to form an ideal also

become an active influence in the dramas and generate a power that affects other characters and the dramatic action. Paulina, in The Winter's Tale, thus describes Hermione :

" If one by one, you wedded all the world,  
Or from the all that are, took something good  
To make a perfect woman..... She would be  
unparalleled".  
(V, i, 13-16)

but the praise by itself is not enough, it is this image of Hermione that moved Paulina to bring about Hermione's resurrection. Perdita is :

"Women will love her, that she is a woman  
More worth than any man : men, that she is  
The rarest of all women".  
(V, i, 110-112)

obviously she is intended to influence both men and women.

Men address women in the plays with a variety of graceful phrases; 'fair, virtuous, wise, sweet, noble, gentle, divine' are the usual epithets applied to them. But they have an important function to perform as agents of Shakespeare's dramatic intention, that of wielding a refining influence. They generate a force, a compelling one, that at once ennobles and chastises whenever a fall into bestiality occurs or is threatened. Love is often the weapon that they wield to fulfil this function but

the weapon is given its strength, and sharpness and lustre by the inner personality of those who wield it. Whenever necessary women take up the whole action of the drama into their hands and pave the way of love for marriage or redeem a wrong done to their sex or reunite estranged couples. They have the nerve and skill to do all this. The Lady in Shakespeare's plays, in this respect, is different from the Lady of courtly romances of the Middle Ages. Rosalind in As You Like It, Viola in Twelfth Night, Helena in All's Well That Ends Well, and Portia in The Merchant of Venice steer the ship of love, through storm and tempest, to the holy haven of marriage. Where women are not directly concerned with love, they exert a chastising, even castigating influence and shape the course of action in the plays. They evince considerable insight into men's character. Isabella, in Measure for Measure, the Duchess in All's Well That Ends Well, and Paulina in The Winter's Tale resolutely fight every inch to vindicate woman's honour and help determine the dramatic issue on the side of virtue. The Duchess in All's Well That Ends Well, even as a mother, shows positive affection and sympathy for the wronged Helena against her own son and overrides his claim in favour of virtue

in a daughter, who is only adopted.

Besides being virtuous and fair these women are sprightly and witty. They have a will of their own and a vivacity which is refreshing; wisdom, tact, humour, courage and a dozen other accomplishments guide and protect them. But all these, as Othello says, are complimentary to the inner virtue, "where virtue is, these are more virtuous" (III, iii, 183-186). Altogether, they are patterns of their sex which generally can exist more convincingly in the ideal than in reality. It is Shakespeare's art that gives them their dramatic validity and makes them real. These women, Cordelia, Perdita, Imogen, Katherine, "stand out", says Quiller-Couch, "in a simple, almost divine dignity : almost compelling one to doubt if any actress of less than high blood could enact these parts with the unconscious grace they demand"<sup>1</sup>.

What then about their husbands, the men they love and for whom they live ? Noble birth is of course, as the ideal soldier is still part of the Elizabethan model of a courtier. 'Brave', 'noble', 'valiant', 'fair', 'sweet', 'proper' are the customary epithets applied

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<sup>1</sup> Q.'s Introduction to The Winter's Tale, the Cambridge Edition. (XXVI)

to him.' Witty in speech at court and brave in arms on the field is his usual description. "What a pretty thing man is when he goes in his doublet and hose and leaves off his wit" - says Pedro jovially admiring the overwitty Benedick when the latter is converted to love and is ready to bear arms for Hero', (Much Ado About Nothing : V, i, 196-197). The courtiers are all fair in appearance - 'proper', willing to be killed by the dart of a beauteous look, yet brave in arms; noble in birth, witty in conversation, gentle in speech, graceful in conduct; some of them are connoisseurs of art and music; they can compose songs of love, sing, dance, travel, hunt; they are alert, generous, loyal, honest, god-fearing, love abiding, virtuous, courageous, pleasing to see, near, to keep company with; they have pity, piety, a sense of honour and often of humour and always a consideration for others. Such would be a list of attributes of Shakespeare's ideal courtier. They are obviously qualities obtained by a blending of the chivalric and Renaissance ideals. Hamlet is poet, scholar, soldier; Romeo 'bears himself like a courtly gentleman :

And, to say truth, Verona brags him  
 'To be a virtuous and well-governed youth :  
 (Romeo and Juliet : I,v,69-70)

Shakespeare has so idealised Plutarch's portrait of Brutus that he comes very near to the ideal of an Elizabethan gentleman, with his scruples, simplicity, kindness and consideration for others. We can look for such an idealisation also in Othello. In the original, he is gross and simple, cast in a petty mould, his brown being his only distinction. Shakespeare has made him erring, like Brutus, in magnanimity, simple yet grand, towering in force of personality and nobility of nature. There is no arrogance in him, even if he cannot varnish a tale. Bluntness is not to be tolerated in the world of Shakespeare's plays : where it occurs, it does not go without being resented. Men are reprimanded when they happen to show it. Parolles is pulled up for it in All's Well That Ends Well; (II, iii, 263-266). Cassius suffers Casca's rudeness in speech only because 'it is a sauce to his good wit', (Julius Caesar : I, ii, 102). Bassanio permits Gratiano to accompany him to Belmont only on condition that the latter shall

'allay with some cold drops of modesty  
Thy skipping spirit, lest through thy wild  
behaviour  
I be misconstrued in the place I go to  
And lose my hopes'.

( The Merchant of Venice : II,ii,  
185-188)



Paulina is corrected by the first Lord for her fault in the boldness of her speech to Leontes in The Winter's Tale; (III, ii, 216-217), and Orlando for his discourtesy by the Senior Duke in As You Like It, (II, vii, 91-93). Othello, to compensate for his 'unlearning' and lack of qualities of 'a chamberer' is given a magic in his speech and in his manner a compelling force, because of which we cannot seriously charge him with lack of refinement habitual to a courtier. In fine breeding, even without formal nurture, he is equal to any man of refinement he meets. His reproof of the drunken soldiers for losing their "christian manners" in a "barbarous brawl" is characteristic (Othello : II, iii, 169). But in the play, it is Cassio and later Lodovico who represent the polished refinement of court. Cassio is a man of singular charm, 'outwardly engaging', 'with a daily beauty in his life' (Othello : V, i, 19). His welcome to Desdemona is a model of courtesy to a woman of grace and breeding (II, i, 82-87). Ironically enough it is precisely his grace, the daily beauty of his life, that brings on the disastrous consequences upon Desdemona and misery upon himself, but that is Shakespeare's way of relating courtesy to dramatic

action. Lodovico is the perfect gentleman, well-bred, courteous, alert and refined in speech and action, a model 'civil servant'. Desdemona calls him 'a proper man' who 'speaks well' and Emilia knows 'a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot to Palastine for a touch of his nether lip (IV, ii, 35-39).

Bassanio, again, though he never has to use a sword in the play is still described as a soldier. He is a scholar, too. He is of gentle blood but has no estate: he can even be cited as a gambler, a fortunate one, but also somewhat selfish : Portia, whom he wins easily outwines him in the trial scene; whereas his encounter with Shylock before and about the signing of the bond does not flatter him. Yet he evinces a certain nobility in his bearing, an easy refinement of which he appears to be a master. He has simplicity, truth, sense of honour and strength of nature. These qualities give him a quiet dignity which he exhibits in his conduct. Because of them he earns the friendship of so gentle a person as Antonio and the love of so graceful a lady as Portia. He sends, before his arrival in Belmont, 'a messenger with sensible regrets - besides commends and courteous breath, gifts of rich

value', (II, viii, 88-90) : and Portia is eager 'to see quick cupid's post that comes so mannerly' (II, viii, 99-100). For these qualities he becomes 'her lord, her governor, her king'. (III, ii, 165).

Shakespeare never misses an opportunity to reprove the courtiers for their lack of, or lapse from courtly virtues. For a courtier's defects we may remember Portia's commentary on her suitors ( The Merchant of Venice : I, ii, 37-108). Falconbridge, the young baron of England, is 'a proper man's picture' but has no language, Latin, French or Italian; the German Duke's nephew is a drunkard, 'when he is at his best, he is a little worse than a man, and when he is at his worst, he is a little better than a beast'. Morocco, despite his colour thinks : 'I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes, in graces and in qualities of breeding, but more than that in love I do deserve'. (II, vi, 32-34), but Portia calls him 'a gentle riddance' when he fails in his 'dice', because to her : 'if he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me'. But good appearance in men, according to the Shakespearian courtly ideal, was as much necessary as to the woman.

The inner beauty has to be reflected in outer form. The men must come near in that respect the 'angelic' women. Else how are the 'divine', fair, virtuous women to love them ?

The high status that the dramatist accords to these men and women is pertinent to our argument as it is in their speech and conduct that we have to look for the ideal of courtesy. It is when the qualities of these men and women are unfolded through their language and behaviour in the plays that we come to understand the true meaning of courtesy, as Shakespeare intended it. The noble must act nobly : the fair must speak fairly : the beautiful must conduct themselves beautifully. The *summum bonum* of the attributes of the courtly men and women, is grace. And grace in Shakespeare proceeds from virtues. These are purity, pity, piety, truth, honour, courage, honesty. They are essentially ethical virtues, and the medieval knight possessed them, but to them are added now the intellectual qualities of an active mind and wit, and the aesthetic quality of love of music and other fine arts. Accomplishments of the intellect and cultivation of aesthetic taste, however essential to the courtly

concept, would appear to be embellishments of the basic ethical virtues, which make up inner grace. This inner grace is given a graceful habitation to live in. Shakespeare's finer women possess both beauty and virtue. His better men are, most of them, 'proper' men. The other attributes of these men and women, however indispensable for courtly distinction, are embellishments that beautify the beautiful. The totality of grace, then, would be a harmonious blending of the ethical, the intellectual, and the aesthetic qualities. It would be well to carry the idea with us as we go along in our study that Shakespeare deliberately conceived his men and women and endowed them with this high degree of grace, as it is through their speech and conduct that he was to unfold his ideal of social conduct in the dramatic form.

The expression of this grace in speech and conduct is courtesy. It is not a mere formality of conduct or a turn of speech in the plays; its roots lie deep in a standard of ethical values. And it is important to remember that the inward cannot be divorced from the outward. The inner virtue must flow spontaneously into outward language and behaviour. This harmony of

virtue, speech and action is the widest connotation of courtesy, as found in Shakespeare's plays. It is therefore that Shakespeare always insists on the harmony between the inward and the outward in the plays. The face must bear the mind and there is an art to know it; and though the goodly Duncan does not know it,

" There's no art  
To find the mind's construction on the face !  
He was a gentleman on whom I built  
An absolute trust".

(Macbeth : I, iv, 11-14)

Imogen can read through the Queen's dissembling courtesy (Cymbeline : I, i, 83-84) almost at once. Women have the gift of knowing a gentleman when they meet one. Viola has recognised the captain for a gentleman he is even though a short while ago the latter was a complete stranger :

"There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain;  
And though that nature with a beauteous wall  
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee  
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits  
With this thy fair and outward character".

(Twelfth Night : I, ii, 47-51)

The dissemblers are invariably detected and are treated elsewhere in the essay<sup>1</sup>. Hypocrisy, cant,

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter IV. post.

lying, jealousy, dissembling actions are the opposites of courtesy, whatever may be their outer guise. The one condition of true courtesy is that it must flow from inner virtue.

Scurvy, deceptive manners do not make courtesy, however perfect in form they may be. Courtesy in Shakespeare is not just formal court manners, patent gestures of refined behaviour, or mannerisms of speech when courtiers assemble round the king or conventional mode of behaviour in a noble gathering. Though we find all these w everywhere in the plays and they contribute to their atmosphere, yet everywhere they do not make for real courtesy. Shakespeare clearly shows up the chaff from the grain, sharply distinguishes the true from spurious courtesy. And the fact that he deliberately does so goes a long way in helping us grasp his concept of courtesy. The ideal for him has its moorings in ethical virtues; it is for him a revelation of inner beauty, in speech and action, a perfect harmony of the inner and outer grace. He makes his characters conform to the ideal ; and characters so conceived react to the situations in the plays, even shape the action of the plays in so far as it lies in their power to do so. So

Shakespeare, in relating this ideal of social behaviour to the dramatic form, turns it into a weapon to reveal character and mould the action of the plays. He uses the different forms of courteous behaviour to produce ~~that the~~ various artistic effects in the dramatic form, which, for the purpose of this essay, we shall call dramatic effects.

The ideal is mainly restricted to the nobility, because Shakespeare seriously took up the cosmic idea of 'degree', and accepted it as essential to the composition and maintainance of social order. There are therefore 'degrees' in social existence and people have to speak and behave as warranted by their degree. Therefore Lafen in All's Well That Ends Well reproves Parolles :

" You are more saucy with lords and honourable personages than the heraldry of your birth and virtue gives you commission". (II, iii, 263-265).

Yet this class conception does not restrict Shakespeare from extending the ideal to all classes of society, Culture may be a prerogative of the nobly born for opportunities of nurture are largely available to them. Yet if courtesy is the expression



of inner virtues into outward behaviour, then virtues could exist, outside a particular class also. That is why sometimes people of the lower social degrees in Shakespeare show true virtue and grace of behaviour. The many nameless 'gentlemen' in the plays show exemplary polite behaviour. It would have illsorted with the vision of a poet of Nature like Shakespeare to look upon Nature to be so stingy a donor as to give the better gifts only to one class of people. In fact, Shakespeare does not so view Nature, though he would appear to grant the claims of Nurture and heridity.<sup>1</sup> In her bounty Nature bestows plentifully and therefore virtue may exist in any one, in any class. So there is no dirth of virtuous people in the plays. Shakespeare makes a very artful use of this fact by putting characters nobly born and highly bred in close juxta-position with those that are neither, yet who are clearly virtuous; the lords among the shepherds, for instance, in order to show the difference between Nature and Nurture. Courtesy, if it is to come from Nature's sacred nursery of virtue,<sup>2</sup> can exist, in the unrefined form, even among the

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<sup>1</sup> The question is discussed more fully in Chapter VII. post.

<sup>2</sup> Spenser : The Faerie Queene : VI.3.

shepherds as gold ore exists underground. Some of Shakespeare's shepherds with virtues of content and simplicity engendered by their simple, natural habitat could attest to this. That is what the shepherd in The Winter's Tale means when he says : "We stand upon our manners". (IV, iv, 164).

Yet we cannot forget that the idea of courtesy germinated in court life and the ideal was intended, even in Shakespeare's days, to shape the courtier into 'gentle and virtuous discipline'. This is Shakespeare's preoccupation also in the plays.