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THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE POET IN THE WORLD:  
WYATT, GASCOIGNE, SIDNEY, SHAKESPEARE, AND JONSON

By

Carol L. Duane

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# ABSTRACT

## THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE POET IN THE WORLD: WYATT, GASCOIGNE, SIDNEY, SHAKESPEARE, AND JONSON

By

Carol L. Duane

A significant group of English Renaissance poets -- Wyatt, Gascoigne, Sidney, Shakespeare, and Jonson -- pays special attention to the difficulties of taking significant action in a complex, ethically ambiguous, and problematical world. In different ways, each formulates this problem in terms of the poet's relation to his society -- how he functions in it and how he tries to shape its order. Each asks what it means to be a poet in the world and what poetry can and should do; each presents poet-speakers for whom the writing of the poem constitutes an ethical action, whether that action derives from a social relationship or from a personal relationship set in a social context. Wyatt focuses on issues of engagement and detachment, Gascoigne on assimilating error and failure in the effort to make "wysedome" from "waste." Sidney's *Astrophil* is a negative example, turning away from both social and poetic responsibilities as the sequence progresses. In the dark lady sonnets, Shakespeare focuses on the increasingly problematical relationship between knowledge and action; Jonson, deeply divided, finds the world both hostile and hospitable. The study as a whole also establishes the presence of a pattern which is significant in its own right, which has gone

unrecognized, and which illuminates English literary history as well. Standing apart from the pastoral mode and reflecting the Renaissance transformation of the idea of wisdom from a contemplative to an active moral virtue, these poets ask what happens when active humanism is put into practice. Riveting their attention on the impediments to ethical action as human beings and as poets within their societies, they reassess the complex varieties of worldly experience, examine the inability to act in accordance with reason, explore dilemmas of detachment and engagement, expose the shortcomings of proverbial wisdom, and reject the creation of and withdrawal to private worlds. In their hands, the poem becomes an appropriate vehicle for discovering and communicating the ethical dynamics of personal and social relationships. The poem itself serves as a mode of action, and the poet-speakers reassess and redefine the role and function of the poet in the world.



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## INTRODUCTION

In an early stanza of "Upon Appleton House," Lord Fairfax, Marvell's patron and the house's owner, is gently reprimanded for overextending his retreat to the country and wittily reminded that the time has come for him to resume his military and political responsibilities: cut off from his own regiment and the challenges on which he thrives, he has taken to planting the tulips on his country estate in regimental formation. Enough is enough, the poem suggests: it is time to marshall troops, not flowers; Lord Fairfax belongs in the world of action. His sojourn at Appleton House will have been successful if it enables him to return to the military and political chaos he left and to "make [his] destiny [his] choice."<sup>1</sup> Here, clearly, Marvell is admonishing his patron to "act" in a narrow political sense -- to use his talents and energies for social ends. In other poems, though, Marvell's concern with action derives from a much broader, more inclusive commitment to the world of time and human history. Harold Toliver and Joseph Summers are only two of many critics who have observed, for example, that "The Garden" concludes by endorsing the processes of time and suggests that the contemplative experience of its middle stanzas does not represent a viable way of life.<sup>2</sup>

The poem begins with an unequivocal rejection of the "incessant





labors" required in the vain, confining enterprise of winning recognition for various achievements and an equally unequivocal affirmation of the "garlands of repose," which cannot be found in the "busy company of men." Pursuing the contemplative life, the speaker succeeds in "annihilating all that's made / To a green thought in a green shade"(47-48). But the unflawed perfection of the speaker's hours in the garden -- the fulfillment of body, mind, and soul -- is, like the garden of Eden (of which it reminds him), "beyond a mortal's share." He is in a real garden, not an archetypal one, he suddenly remembers, as he notices the floral sundial -- a product of the gardener's industry and skill -- which is designed to compute the passage of time. "It reminds us," Cleanth Brooks remarks in a recent essay, "that time has never stopped its motion even during an experience which has seemed a blessed respite from it."<sup>3</sup> The hours spent in the garden are not necessarily devalued: they remain "sweet and wholesome," but, like the hours Lord Fairfax spends in his garden, they are preparatory: the speaker will re-enter a world in which industry and skill are not simply dismissed as "vain" and "narrow-verged." "All that's made" has not been "annihilated" after all. Its readers -- the "we" of line 70 who compute our time while making or using beautiful and useful objects like poems, gardens, and sundials -- leave the poem with a new understanding of time, a sense of multiplied possibilities. Contemplation is viewed not as a substitute for action but as a preparation for it -- as something which will bear fruit in action.



In "The Garden" as in "Upon Appleton House," this is a two-stage process which closely follows the familiar pastoral pattern: caught up in the problematics of political or social activity, protagonists withdraw to a world which is figuratively or literally green in order to gain the kind of perspective on themselves, their opportunities, and their responsibilities which will allow them to resume their proper place in human society and attend to what one critic has called "the real business of life."<sup>4</sup> Generally, poems and plays adhering to this pattern end -- as does "The Garden" -- at that liminal moment when such a perspective has been achieved. Behind this pattern stands the familiar Renaissance judgment that the flowers of contemplation produce the fruits of action -- a judgment which derives, in turn, from the commitment to the active life that is such a central feature of Renaissance humanism in England from More to Milton.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the popular notion that Renaissance literature is pervaded by a circular and tedious debate over the relative merits of action and contemplation is actually something of a red herring which distorts the frequently sequential and complementary relationship between the two modes in Renaissance thought.<sup>6</sup> In context, it is more characteristic and more accurate to speak, as Ronsard does, of the process by which contemplation is transformed into action.<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere, however, Marvell considers the possibility that the contemplative and active goals can be realized simultaneously, not sequentially. In the Horatian Ode, for example, he suggests that Cromwell's "active star" comprises both: "So much can one man do /



That does both act and know" (75-76), he says, but his attitude toward Cromwell's success in this endeavor remains elusive and ambivalent, as criticism of the poem has amply demonstrated. Marvell wrote at the end of an era, but his preoccupation with balancing the processes of acting and knowing (the terms are his) runs throughout the period. It was, in fact, a concern which preoccupied Wyatt in his early years at Henry VIII's court. Asked by his friend and patron Catherine of Aragon to translate Petrarch's lengthy (and, by common agreement, murky) De remediis utriusque fortunae, Wyatt begged off after several false starts and finally offered the queen instead the Quyete of Mynde, his prose version of Guillaume Bude's Latin translation of Plutarch's essay, De Tranquillitate et Securitate Animi. In it, analyzing the conditions conducive to tranquillity or "quyete of mynde," he vigorously assents to Plutarch's contention that peace of mind -- the contemplative ideal -- is not necessarily to be achieved in retirement or inactivity, but in the company of others and in the pursuit of an active life. There is, he finds, no correlation between a tranquil or agitated spirit on one hand, and a multitude or scarcity of business on the other: "quyete of mynde" is fully compatible with the active life. Those who are temperamentally unsuited to retirement cannot achieve peace of mind in inactivity, he insists, referring to the inactive Achilles as a "deed lumpe of erthe."<sup>8</sup> Even more suggestive is the fact that the Quyete of Mynde, like its source, is cast in an active frame -- a letter from one busy person to another. The author reveals at the outset that both he and the recipient are





preoccupied with business and pressed for time; he has no more leisure to compose at length than his friend has to read at length, yet "quyete of mynde" is within the reach of both.

Wyatt's Quyete of Mynde is important here not because it is the first prose essay in English, not because it validates the claims of his friends that he was "depe-witted" as well as diplomatic, and not because it links him to Catherine's circle of learned humanists (she was a friend and patron of Vives as well, though there is no evidence that Vives and Wyatt were acquainted), but because it implies that writers as well as readers are likely to be men of the world who seek to apply the fruits of learning to the conduct of life. It dispenses with the two-stage process characteristic of the pastoral mode and endorses instead the primacy of lived experience as a potential source of tranquillity and understanding. This emphasis, so clearly articulated in Wyatt's youthful prose and so clearly derived from the civic humanism of antiquity as well as that of his own era, is underscored and reaffirmed throughout English Renaissance poetry. This study focuses on that emphasis in the verse of five Renaissance poets -- Wyatt, Gascoigne, Sidney, Shakespeare, and Jonson. They seek to equip themselves to respond to an incredibly complex array of challenges, constraints, and opportunities not by withdrawing to gain perspective but through the process of living in the world itself. Their poetry is profoundly and intimately linked not just to central principles of humanistic moral philosophy but also to changing conceptions of the nature of wisdom, which it helps to shape.



Viewed from the broadest possible perspective, these poets have in common what Arthur O. Lovejoy has called "this-worldliness": a belief in "the sufficient worth of the general conditions of existence with which common experience has already acquainted us" and a willingness to identify "the chief value of existence with process and struggle in time, an antipathy to satisfaction and finality, a sense of the 'glory of the imperfect.'" <sup>9</sup> Its opposite, "otherworldliness," is, in Lovejoy's formulation, "the belief that both the genuinely 'real' and the truly good are radically antithetic in their essential characteristics to anything to be found in man's natural life, in the ordinary course of experience, however normal, however intelligent, and however fortunate."<sup>10</sup> The tension between the two, Lovejoy writes, has pervaded Western thought since Plato. Noting a similar polarity, G.K. Hunter has observed that the humanist movement in England as well as on the continent was characterized by a "violent antipathy" to the medieval attitude to contemplation (a "tendency to spin schemes and dreams" but "founder in the mud" when it came to practical matters):<sup>11</sup> "The age was aware of concentrating its cleverness on this world, a world of solid and colourful objects, and of using eloquence to produce a human rather than a theoretical order."<sup>12</sup> Essentially, Hunter's well-known view of Renaissance humanism -- that it "sought to turn religious ideals and energies towards the amelioration of life in this world and to achieve an order in this life corresponding to the religious vision of man's worth"<sup>13</sup> -- is a more historically focused view of Lovejoy's very



broad perspective.

Standing behind both, however, is the emerging Renaissance conception, charted by Eugene F. Rice, Jr., in his indispensable study, The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom, of wisdom as an active moral virtue rather than a purely intellectual virtue, and the belief that its measure is the proper conduct of life.<sup>14</sup> Just as Cicero insisted in De Officiis that wisdom concerns the relations between human beings as well as the relations between human beings and gods, so too, Rice points out, the civic humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries increasingly asked not what one needed to know in order to become wise but what one needed to do in order to live wisely.<sup>15</sup> Thus, wisdom is not a knowledge of metaphysical truths but a comprehension of ethical, experiential truths. The emphasis on turning one's attention to the things of this world is linked, accordingly, to the growing belief that wisdom involves "the right conduct of life," as Douglas Bush very simply puts it, rather than the acquisition of arcane knowledge -- metaphysical on one hand, scientific on the other.<sup>16</sup> In this formulation, the wisdom of the speaker in Marvell's "The Garden" would be measured by what he proceeds to do, how he acts, rather than by what he has learned in the "green shade." Hunter puts it succinctly:

The age sees the historical movement as one out of contemplative idleness (pictured as a monk in Spenser, and elsewhere) and into practical utility. Religion, says Sir John Cheke (who taught King Edward and all Cambridge Greek) has two parts, 'the one of which is placed in the searching after knowledge and in the tracing out of those things which are grateful and





well-pleasing unto God; but the other is employed in action, which puts forward into life and performance what she understands to have the divine approbation. It follows that forceful action of the right kind could be seen as the highest human activity by many Elizabethan theorists, and here they were at one with continental humanism.

Such an emphasis on action -- on conducting one's life properly -- places a heavy responsibility on the actor, and Hunter is right to emphasize that the operative words are "of the right kind." If people are free to choose, if they must validate their choices in action, then they are accountable for their choices and responsible for how they act, how they spend their time. Given this prevailing moral philosophy, then, it is no wonder that Wyatt, like Plutarch before him, was concerned with putting "quyete of mynde" within the reach of intelligent people leading worldly lives.

It has occasionally been argued that the Renaissance elevation of action over contemplation and the accompanying transformation of the idea of wisdom from a metaphysical to a moral idea created what can only be called a double bind for some of those who sought to achieve wisdom on these terms -- that vulnerable scholars, eager to prove their adherence to the prevailing code, turned aside from the sheltered lives for which they were best suited and put themselves at the mercy of a power structure which was only too willing to exploit their irresistible blend of personal naivete and verbal skills.<sup>18</sup> But as Milton made clear in On Education, and as the foregoing discussion has emphasized, the aim of English humanism was to produce citizens, not scholars. Its great poets, for all their learning, were



members of their societies and formed by their communities.<sup>19</sup> Their involvement in the complex and imperfect but vital worlds of court and city was not an endurance test; rather, they focused their energies on the process of sharing, reflecting, evaluating, and criticizing their own experience and that of others in their various circumstances and milieus. Nor are they mouthpieces of stock ideas, producing metrical illustrations of the reigning moral philosophy. Instead, they question and help to qualify and redefine the common (and often proverbial) assumptions of the prevailing humanist orientation as they discover its gaps and limitations. Consider, as a case in point, one difference between Wyatt and Vives. The latter's Introduction to Wisdom is essentially a collection of precepts, lacking a local habitation if not a name; Wyatt's poems about ways of reacting to ruthlessness and faithlessness are, in effect, a critique of such well-intentioned but untested generalities.<sup>20</sup> What Wyatt offers instead is a troubled but intelligently courageous (and very concrete) response to a world where ruthlessness and faithlessness exist but do not necessarily dominate.

But what does it really mean to say that these poets wrote about what it means to live in the world? What actually binds them together? As a group, they implicitly ask, Given what I know, what should I do? What kind of action is it possible for me, a poet, to take -- including the way I write poems? Do my poems cut me off from the world around me -- or do they bind me closer to it? What are my responsibilities to that world, and do they conflict or coincide with



my responsibilities as an artist? Does my involvement in the world provide me with a reliable guide to action, or does it cut me off from the sources of understanding? Despite their very real differences, all the poets considered here are preoccupied with the need to act, to account for their use of time and talents, and to validate their knowledge by translating it into action (Cheke's formula). All seek action which is informed by reason -- action which is intelligent and responsible at the same time that it is timely and effective -- and all seek to act in ways which confirm and enhance their relationships to their communities. But Wyatt, Sidney, and Shakespeare pay special attention to the impediments to such action: for them, a central problem of living in the world involves an inexplicable tendency to act irrationally, even self-destructively. In Jonson's case, the impediments are in society; in Gascoigne's, they are located in the interplay between self and society. In different ways, all question the wisdom of getting deeply involved in their worlds: Wyatt, so concerned with fair play, creates speakers who are temporarily overwhelmed by their desire to revenge themselves on those who have wronged them; Jonson, theoretically so committed to an inclusive, embracing attitude to experience, shrinks from it in a way that has never been satisfactorily explained; Gascoigne, having learned from experience the extent of his own shortcomings, comes to accept the limitations of his society with relative equanimity. Sidney and Shakespeare, in ways that have not been adequately recognized, reject the alternative of setting up private worlds, which are shown to be



deceptive and destructive, not restorative.

Furthermore, these poets not only ask what human beings must do to live well in the world, but what poets must do: in coming to terms with the varieties of their own experience, their speakers account for how they use their time as poets. In some cases they define their poetic aims and identities in terms of taking action as individuals, within personal relationships; in other cases, they center such inquiries in the complexities of social relationships. In some poems, a personal relationship itself is grounded in a social context, and the act of writing the poem has an impact on the social order in turn. In different ways, Wyatt, Gascoigne, Sidney, and Jonson all insist in their verse that poetry has a legitimate social role and that the poet holds an important place in his community (Shakespeare does too, of course, but in the poems considered here he focuses more on the role of poetry in personal than in social relationships); they also suggest, directly and indirectly, that writing poems can be a form of taking action, of having impact on one's community, of asserting one's membership in it. In contrast, say, to Spenser's Colin Clout, who prefers "pypping lowe in shade of lowly grove," where he "play[s] to please my selfe, all be it ill,"<sup>21</sup> Wyatt, as he confides to a friend, is downright irritated at being cut off from the courtly audience that perversely prefers the polite compliment of others to his own plain speaking; an unemployed Gascoigne complains about corruption in high places to a potential patron whom he proceeds to try to educate; Sidney is appalled at Astrophil's abdication of his





responsibilities to both his poetry and his society; Jonson finds it almost more galling to be ignored than to be criticized.

The chapters which follow focus on poets whose work is generated by or grounded in these issues: it is more to the point to pursue the vitality of an issue than laboriously and tediously to discuss its possible relevance to everyone writing at a given period. That period itself ranges from the reign of Henry VIII through the reign of James I (though Jonson continued to write well into the reign of Charles I): to deal with the social and/or public role of the poet in the years during and immediately preceding the civil war is to encounter very different questions, as well as a different sensibility -- one influenced by growing epistemological and scientific debate as well as by political and social change.

A specific overview of each chapter may be helpful. Rather than fashioning his life as a work of art or using his rhetorical skill as an instrument of power in a zero-sum game, Wyatt is defining, through his poetry, a poet's relation to his society as well as insisting upon the social function of poetry. In the sonnets and satires, he creates a social world in which the speaker participates fully, selectively, or reluctantly while wrestling with the problems of engagement and detachment. In these poems as well as in the explicitly self-referential lyrics, Chapter One argues, Wyatt's speakers demonstrate acute awareness of their participation, its rewards, and its costs. Wyatt evaluates a broad range of responses: in poems like "Blame not my lute," he presents a speaker who uses poetry to



criticize a society from within -- and to redefine the role the poet plays in it; in the first satire, in contrast, the speaker "cannot." Nevertheless, because the satire is a verse epistle, a letter to a trusted friend, it establishes a sense of community, another social world, to match against the one it rejects. Accordingly, the speaker's disengagement and isolation are more apparent than real. Moreover, the poem remains firmly rooted in the temporal world; the speaker ends with an invitation to Poyntz to judge how he has used his time. At the same time, however, the poet-speaker in the first satire finds it impossible, while at court, to write poems that tell the truth but inconceivable to write poems that lie; the poet-speaker in "Blame not my lute," in contrast, succeeds in accomodating himself to the conventions of his society while retaining his artistic independence.

Gascoigne's lyrics are similarly anchored in the world of action, but he explores the problematics of that world from a slightly different perspective. Where Wyatt is preoccupied with maintaining his integrity as a human being and as a poet within his society -- and with clarifying the relationship between that integrity and engagement and detachment -- Gascoigne, Chapter Two shows, is preoccupied with individual error and failure. Focusing on the relationship between the shortcomings of the individual and the shortcomings of the social order, he explores the role of poetry in illuminating and redressing these shortcomings. In "The common speech" and the untitled sequence of seven sonnets beginning with "In haste post haste," he reflects on the misuse of time and talents; in "Gascoignes lullabie," he addresses



the issue of self-deception: the speaker is "beguiled" by his own song, which both reconciles him to and protects him from full awareness of the ravages of time. In "Gascoignes wodmanship," his imaginative ability not only helps him to understand better his own circumstances; his rhetorical ability enables him to redefine the poet-"wodman's" relation to the social order and to create a place in the world for the values which poetry represents: the poem makes a unique appeal for patronage at the same time that it seeks to educate the prospective patron.

In different ways, Wyatt and Gascoigne present speakers who are profoundly concerned with the relation between knowledge and action and with the central role of poetry in helping to shape the proper relation. Chapter Three suggests that Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, in contrast, presents a negative example -- a poet-speaker who denies his social role and responsibilities. Rejecting involvement in the world in which he lives, Astrophil denies an essential part of his own nature. In his preoccupation with Stella, a woman who is unattainable but otherwise suitable, he shrinks from knowledge of his own diminished state. Carefully establishing a public context in the sequence, Sidney invites us to observe how Astrophil's failure to fulfill expectations associated with his courtly, civic, or diplomatic roles is linked to his increasingly fatuous conception of himself as poet -- an identity which he actually chooses to obliterate late in the sequence. Thus, the public context sonnets do more than illustrate Astrophil's improper balance of reason, will, and appetite or Sidney's



attempts to "place" romantic love in a broad context of human experience; conflated at crucial points with sonnets about Astrophil's conception of his goals and status as poet, they reveal important similarities in the way in which Astrophil narrows the scope of his ambitions as poet and as courtier.

Like Astrophil, the speaker in Shakespeare's sonnets to the young man recognizes the existence of a social world. Early in the sequence, he laments its inaccessibility and the loss of its rewards, seeking compensation in the private world of the friend's love; later, he dismisses the world as irrelevant (e.g., "You are my all the world, and I must strive / To know my shames and praises from your tongue" [112.5-6]). In the dark lady sonnets, however, the judgments of others are given legitimacy; dwelling on the opposition between what he feels for her and what others say of her, the speaker rages at his inability to stop loving someone who, in contrast to Stella, is attainable but unsuitable. The validation of an external source of judgment late in the sequence is used to call attention to the problematical relationship between action and knowledge. We feel that Astrophil's failure is an individual failure -- that if only he could see clearly, he would be able to align his behavior with his knowledge. Here, however, in what is almost a gloss on the plight of his predecessor, Shakespeare's speaker seems trapped despite his knowledge. At the same time, the speaker's attempts to come to terms with his experience -- with the implications of his own behavior -- do not really leave him "At random from the truth" even though that truth may be "vainly





expressed": Chapter Four explores the way in which the speaker is increasingly perceptive about the complexities of this relationship even if the insight he acquires does not confer the power to change.

Like his predecessors, Jonson is deeply concerned with the poet's relation to his society and with the difficulties of taking action. Unlike them, Chapter Five demonstrates, Jonson exhibits a fundamentally contradictory attitude toward the complexities of human experience: endorsing an inclusive attitude in the Discoveries and in some poems, he advocates retreat in others. On one hand, he praises people who are fully at home in the world and involved in its concerns; on the other, he sees figures of virtue as embattled and beleaguered in a world that is hostile rather than hospitable. These contradictions run throughout his poems and they cut across genres. Nor are they ever resolved, because Jonson does not evaluate one position in terms of the other. In neither group, however, does he present people whose experience has made them wise; instead, while he occasionally praises people for demonstrating wisdom in action, he differs from the other poets considered here in that he does not show them acquiring wisdom from the realm of action. These observations apply to his self-referential lyrics as well: in them, Jonson is deeply sceptical about his own ability to assess and incorporate inclusive experience -- which can also include the experience of error -- into his conception of the scope and purpose of his art.

Were Milton not excluded on chronological grounds, as well as on substantive issues, he would be on generic grounds: epic poetry (and



the epic poet's conception of his function) presents a special case, and the epic narrator, a subject unto itself, is not really comparable to the poet-speaker.<sup>22</sup> For similar reasons, I do not discuss Spenser. First, as the lines from Colin's June eclogue quoted above indicate, Colin endorses pastoral values. Second, Colin is a poet figure who reappears throughout Spenser's work, in The Faerie Queene as well as in "Colin Clout's Come Home Again." And while Spenser himself asks, "Who knows not Colin Clout?" Colin is hard to know -- both because of his own complexity and because of Spenser's complicated attitude toward him. Both Colin's and Spenser's views of the poet's relation to his society change over time and with genre. In the eclogues, Colin's notion of poetry is intensely and defensively private; he has no conception of "playing" to influence others or to give voice to their aspirations. In The Faerie Queene, however, Colin's personal and pastoral achievement is something which is pursued and valued by a representative of a much wider world. As almost everyone who has ever written on Book VI has pointed out, when Sir Calidore interrupts Colin on Mt. Acidale, the knight discovers the true courtesy which should be at court but is not to be found there. What the poet has to offer, then, is, in Spenser's view, both valuable and necessary to the larger community. As Richard Helgerson's recent work on Spenser has demonstrated, these are not just conventional court-country conflicts: rather, Spenser, like other "self-crowned laureates" of the English Renaissance, presents himself in terms of what he thinks a poet should be, and his fluctuating and ambivalent



feelings about Colin's vocation mirror his feelings about his own role.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the length and breadth of Spenser's treatment of this issue make generalizations based on any one of Colin's manifestations seem naive and ill-considered, and require separate, more extensive treatment.

What about other major poets omitted from the present study? Greville presents a fascinating paradox. Epistemologically and ontologically, he is the antithesis of those considered here:

Mixe not in functions God, and earth together;  
The wisdom of the world, and his, are two,  
One latitude can well agree to neither,

he warns.<sup>24</sup> In his view, a prudential active life has no connection with, and is not a means to, a wise life; wisdom -- knowledge of that which is most valuable -- is dependent upon divine revelation, not human effort. Profoundly disillusioned with the political and social order, he held an equally bleak view of the degeneracy of human nature itself, and his lyric sequence, Caelica dismisses all worldly accomplishments in a sweeping rejection of life on earth and a desire for apocalyptic escape from time to eternity. His view is unrelentingly pessimistic: in the powerful imagery of Caelica LXXXVI, "The earth with thunder torn, with fire blasted," life on earth remains a top driven by whipping sorrow; it has no redeeming features, and its desolation is complete.<sup>25</sup> Virtuous activity is irrelevant if not actually counterproductive, he suggests in CVI and CVIII: the former argues that "reasons workes" are anathema to "flesh



and blood" and that a "sincere Magistrate" is more likely to be hated than loved, given the depravity of those he governs. Equally pessimistic, the latter concludes that peace actually brings more evils than war:

The reason is; Peace is a quiet Nurse  
Of Idleness, and Idleness the field  
 Where wit and Power change all seedes to the worse.  
 (7-9)

Nevertheless, Greville pursued power assiduously, chafing when he was cut off from its hub, and he was an ambitious courtier for most of his life.<sup>26</sup> While his poems utterly reject human experience as a source of wisdom and dismiss books and humane learning as "False antidotes" for "vicious ignorance," he actually endowed a chair at Cambridge to further the application of humanistic studies to practical affairs.<sup>27</sup> But Greville does not conceive of himself as a poet in the world. He never writes as a poet-speaker, and the contradictions which help to make him so interesting -- the differences between what he says in his poems and what he does in his life -- are not addressed in the poems themselves.

Raleigh, similarly, pursues power -- pursues it in his relationship with the queen over many years -- even while he writes of "giv[ing] the world the lie" and seeking his "Scallop-shell of quiet."<sup>28</sup> In his case as in Greville's, the relevant issue is the link between his poetry and his life. In Raleigh's case, that link has been brilliantly and thoroughly explored by Stephen Greenblatt.<sup>29</sup> Raleigh seems to have used his poetry in a way that Greville did not:





as Greenblatt's analysis suggests, Raleigh's long poem, "Booke of the Ocean to Scinthia," was probably a tool of courtiership if not of courtship in Raleigh's difficult and volatile relationship with the queen. But the relation between poetry and biography, admirably handled by critics like Greenblatt and Helgerson, is not my subject.

In the case of Donne, another notable exception, I would argue that his commitment to the "here and now" rather than the "there and then" -- to borrow M.M. Mahood's phrase<sup>30</sup> -- is assumed rather than debated: it is a given, a starting point, not a cause for analysis or concern. When Donne does focus on the world around him rather than on a very private world -- the fifth satire, "Thou shalt not laugh in this leafe, Muse," is a good example -- he simply heaps up complaints against it rather than examining his own relation with it. Moreover, in the two anniversaries as in the satires, the fact that the speaker who dissects the world and charts the progress of the soul is a poet is of marginal structural or thematic importance.<sup>31</sup>

Herbert is another story. Although he shunned "the way that takes the town," he is a superb example of that great amphibium who flourishes in divided and distinguished worlds.<sup>32</sup> A religious poet, he nevertheless places a value on human experience which would be unthinkable to Greville and which puts Herbert in the company of the other poets considered here.<sup>33</sup> Like them, he focuses on virtuous action and the proper use of one's faculties. Where Greville insists that "God comes not till man be overthrown," and sees little

value in human achievement, Herbert's poetry is deeply concerned with finding connections between the human and the divine. He carefully assesses the varieties of human experience, especially his own experience as a poet, as he evaluates the worth of wit, language, and learning.

In different ways, the "Jordan" poems, "The Pearl," and "The Forerunners" place limits on the power and relevance of art and intellect and emphasize the need to master the temptation of "beautiful words."<sup>34</sup> But just as many poems about "versing" pull the other way, and insist not simply on the value of the product but on the value of the process -- the experience of writing -- as well.<sup>35</sup> In argument as well as imagery, "The Flower" establishes the poet-speaker's link to the natural world and suggests that to "relish versing" is to "bud again," to "live and write"; here, creative renewal is linked to the ability to respond to the renewal of the earth. In "The Quidditie," on the other hand, making poems is the means by which the speaker transcends the limitations of the world: "But it is that which while I use / I am with thee, / And most take all" (11-12).<sup>36</sup>

If "The Quidditie" suggests that the full use of his gifts enhances rather than impedes the speaker's spiritual well being, poems such as "Dulnesse" and "Deniall" equate diminished creative activity with spiritual deprivation. The former distinguishes "wit" and "mind" and "lines" from "sugred lyas," and implies that the lack of poetic inspiration is as unfortunate as its misuse; the latter argues that



the speaker's inability to write well is directly related to his separation from God. In these poems, the speaker's desire to write well is not the result of muddled thinking or misplaced priorities -- a weakness for the "sugar-cane" of poetic diction -- nor does it stem from an exaggerated sense of his own importance. Other poems -- "Employment (I)" is one example -- focus even more explicitly on the speaker's proper use of his time and talents; in this case, his "employment" is to write the best possible poems and thereby fulfill his responsibility as a "link" in the great chain. These observations about Herbert, based on well established critical views, illustrate the vitality and flexibility of an attitude toward human experience that adapts itself even to religious poetry. They are of illustrative rather than intrinsic importance, however, and therefore do not stand on their own.

In focus and approach as well as in content, this study sets definite limits. First, I deal with only one primary genre, the lyric poem, though I do deal with different lyric forms: sonnets, odes, epigrams, songs, and epistles. This is inevitable, given my priority of picking the most relevant and illuminating examples of the issues at stake, since the poets in question simply did not confine themselves to one lyric form. Second, depending on the author, I deal sometimes with individual poems, sometimes with groups of poems which are treated as part of a sequence or collection (e.g., Sidney's Astrophil and Stella or Shakespeare's sonnets), and sometimes with poems which may appear in a collection but which I treat autonomously

(e.g., poems from Jonson's Epigrammes or The Forrest). The increasingly popular notion that both collections can and should be read sequentially is not relevant to my argument, and therefore I do not pursue it. (When I do make inferences implicitly based on sequentiality, as with Sidney and Shakespeare, I base my arguments on long-established critical precedent.) Third, this is not the study of a style: I make no systematic attempt to establish links between these poets' strategies for dealing with the complexities of their artistic and social worlds and their stylistic practices. Nor is it the history of an idea: my concluding chapter does tentatively suggest some ways in which certain assumptions of intellectual history should be qualified, but that has not been my major aim.

At the same time, my focus in the final chapter on such issues as changing conceptions of wisdom, and my interest in the differences between the poets' and the philosophers' treatment of this topic help to differentiate this study from those focusing on sociopolitical tensions -- an increasingly popular critical approach. In an important book, Daniel Javitch has demonstrated meticulously and persuasively how the qualities needed to be a successful courtier in the middle years of Elizabeth's reign were also the qualities needed to be a successful poet.<sup>37</sup> Following Javitch's lead, others have pursued different analyses of the complex relations between courtiership and eloquence, often finding "sociopolitical encoding" and cryptic complaints to disaffected associates embedded in every sonnet. Where relevant, I have drawn on them. But I am, as it should now be clear,

dealing with broader issues than the constraints imposed or favors conferred by the poets' associations with the prevailing power structure.<sup>38</sup>

Do the arguments advanced by today's revisionist critics (e.g., Greenblatt and Marotti) make the questions informing an inquiry like this seem naive and out of date? Possibly, but not necessarily. To ignore the contributions of the new historicism and to proceed as if the poets' relations to the social order were irrelevant -- as if they endorsed the received wisdom in a vacuum -- would be silly. But the two approaches can and should be complementary. The more we learn from analyses of the literary and patronage systems about the actual circumstances in which Renaissance poets wrote (and the sooner we put to rest any lingering echoes of the ahistorical and inaccurate "nest of singing birds" clichés), the more we understand how the pressing ethical deliberations and dilemmas on which this inquiry focuses were grounded in actual experience. The poets who encountered problematical relationships with the social order were the ones who put their principles into practice as poets. One thing that recent studies in the politics of poetry contribute is a concrete sense of how difficult it was to find (to return to Lovejoy's terms) the "chief value of existence" in "process and struggle in time," in "the ordinary course of human experience."

This study has inherent limitations. Given its very nature, it seeks to shed light on one recurrent concern. If it does not seek to "prove" anything, neither does it attempt to disprove what others have

observed. What is odd is that it has not been done before. We all understand the impact of active humanism on the major poets of the end of the Renaissance, Marvell and Milton. We understand, too, how the prevailing moral philosophy shaped and energized the drama: Hamlet finds it intolerable that "capability and godlike reason" should "fust in us unused."<sup>39</sup> Yet no one has really paid attention to the way the lyric poetry of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is informed by the same ideas. I say informed by rather than influenced by, because this is not a systematic study of the application of those ideas: were it a "sources and influences" project, it would take a very different shape. An inductive inquiry grounded in the poetry itself, it proceeds on the assumption that what the poets have to say is more interesting and relevant than who it is derived from. To assume derivation, in fact, is to divide poetry from serious thought and to imply that the former merely reflects the latter. But to make such a division is to misunderstand a fundamental impulse of the Renaissance: as Petrarch wrote to Francesco Bruni, "You make an orator of me, a historian, philosopher, and poet, and finally even a theologian."<sup>40</sup>

My primary aim, then, has been to establish how the poet-speakers presented by these five poets seek a reliable guide to action and how they link the problematics of acting in a given world to their concerns as poets. These five poets pay special attention to the difficulties of taking significant action in a complex, ethically ambiguous, and problematical world. In different ways, each formulates





this problem in terms of the poet's relation to his society -- how he functions in it and how he tries to shape its order. Each asks what it means to be a poet in the world and what poetry can and should do; each presents poet-speakers for whom the writing of the poem constitutes an ethical action, whether that action derives from a social relationship or from a personal relationship set in a social context. These concerns are grounded in the poems themselves, not imposed from a critical distance; accordingly, each of the five chapters stands on its own in contributing to our understanding of the poets in question. But the study as a whole also establishes the presence of a pattern which is significant in its own right, which has gone unrecognized, and which illuminates English literary history as well. Standing apart from the pastoral mode and reflecting the Renaissance transformation of the idea of wisdom from a contemplative to an active moral virtue, these poets ask what happens when active humanism is put into practice. Riveting their attention on the impediments to ethical action as human beings and as poets within their societies, they reassess the complex varieties of worldly experience, examine the inability to act in accordance with reason, explore dilemmas of detachment and engagement, expose the shortcomings of proverbial wisdom, and reject the creation of and withdrawal to private worlds. In their hands, the poem becomes an appropriate vehicle for discovering and communicating the ethical dynamics of personal and social relationships. The poem itself serves as a mode of action, and the poet-speakers reassess and redefine the role and function of the poet in the world.



"I cannot frame my tune to feign":  
Detachment and Engagement in Wyatt's Flawed World

How to apply ethical standards to a world in which they often seem irrelevant at best is one of Wyatt's central concerns. Contrary to Stephen Greenblatt's recent assertion that Wyatt uses poetry as a weapon, an instrument of power, in a dangerous contest,<sup>1</sup> Wyatt is passionately committed to fair play in a world in which others play only to win. He not only uses poetry -- its figurative, formal, and generic resources -- as a medium for exploring ways of responding to the various power struggles and treacheries which comprise his world and shape his personal and social relationships; he also suggests that the writing of poems is a means of taking significant action in that world. Rather than using his rhetorical skill to wield power over others or exact submission, as Greenblatt argues,<sup>2</sup> Wyatt uses it to discover what happens when an imperfect but thoughtful and conscientious person who is also a poet tries to live fully in, position himself in relation to, and write about a world which is even less perfect and often corrupt.

In some cases, he decides that the appropriate response is detachment or even withdrawal. Protesting the "bitter taste" of life at court, for example, his epigram "In court to serue" concludes that "who so ioyes such kinde of life to holde, / In prison ioyes, fettred with cheines of gold."<sup>3</sup> That distaste is echoed in a handful of poems. The epigram "Stond who so list" paints a similarly bleak picture of the "brackish ioyes" awaiting those who seek fortune "vpon the Slipper toppe / Of courtes estates," in contrast to the



self-knowledge which the speaker prefers to attain "In hidden place" (CCXL). A similar view, one in which the Senecan influence is explicit, informs "Who lyst his welthe and eas Retayne" (CLXXVI), while the sonnet "Ffarewell, Love" endeavors to rank the "perfaict welth" of philosophy above the questionable rewards of love (XIII). Courtly manners and mores are viewed with fastidious contempt in the first satire and with sardonic bitterness in the third.

Such responses, however, are only a small part of the picture. In addition to considering detachment as one possible response to troublesome circumstances and relationships, Wyatt devotes far more energy to exploring the problematics of engagement. Grounding his poems in the world of action, he presents speakers who participate reluctantly, selectively, or fully in their worlds and who often demonstrate acute awareness of their participation, its rewards, its costs, and its implications. At times, of course, he depicts a speaker who is tempted by the prospect of a simpler life, a safe haven; in others, the protagonist is overwhelmed by circumstance, cast adrift or blown to a lee shore. Occasionally, foreshadowing the plight of the protagonists in revenge tragedy, Wyatt's speakers are unable to take significant action or maintain their ethical equilibrium without becoming caught up in the very wrongs they are trying to set right. Others, like the speakers in "Ys yt possyble" (CLXXXIV) and "What vaileth trouth?" (II), ask difficult questions rather than rushing to judgment: in the latter, as Charles Hannen has observed, "the speaker really wants to know the worth of honesty in an environment dominated by treachery."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Wyatt is sometimes able to celebrate



the quiet achievement of speakers who manage to strike a difficult balance, taking their own measure at the same time that they take the measure of the world in which they live.

This range of responses cuts across Wyatt's work in various genres -- songs, sonnets, satires, and psalms. It occurs in poems about personal and social relationships: in both groups, as we will see, Wyatt considers in depth the difficulty of deciding upon -- and following through on -- significant action. After establishing the variety and complexity of Wyatt's exploration of the ethical bases of action in three of the love sonnets, this chapter looks at the satires from a similar perspective and finds them less straightforward, more tentative and troubled, than is generally recognized. But if Wyatt asks, "Given what I know, what should I do?" he also asks, "Given what I know, what sort of poems should I write? What is their function in such a world?" In love lyrics, satires, and penitential psalms, Wyatt's speakers not only use verbal and formal resources to investigate and evaluate the possibility of establishing and sustaining personal and social relationships in a world which is frequently brutal; they also consider and affirm the social and moral function of poetry. The last section of this essay, focusing on Wyatt's self-referentiality, examines his conception of what it means to be a poet in the world.

The sonnets "Ffarewell, Love," "Som fowles there be" (XXIV), and "Eche man me telleth" (X) run the gamut of possible responses to unsatisfactory personal relationships.<sup>5</sup> In the first, the speaker extricates himself from a situation which threatens to consume his





best energies; in the second, a more troubled poem, he is plagued by his inability to do so. In the third, far more subtle in argument and design, the speaker's behavior seems at the outset to be determined by the fickle standards of his society; as the poem progresses, however, he proposes an experimental stability within an unstable community.

The argument of "Ffarewell, Love" is straightforward and explicit. The speaker, recognizing his "blynde errour," resolves to change his course of action, takes steps to do so, and reaffirms the validity of his reasoning:

Ffarewell, Love, and all thy lawes for ever;  
 Thy bayted hookes shall tangill me no more;  
 Senec and Plato call me from thy lore,  
 To perfaict welth my wit for to endeuer.  
 In blynde errour when I did perseuer,  
 Thy sherpe repulce that pricketh ay so sore  
 Hath taught me to sett in tryfels no store  
 And scape fourth syns libertie is lever.  
 Therefore, farewell: goo trouble yonger hertes  
 And in me clayme no more authoritie;  
 With idill yeuth goo vse thy propertie  
 And thereon spend thy many britill dertes;  
 For hetherto though I have lost all my tyme,  
 Me lusteth no lenger rotten boughes to clyme.

Breaking with convention, the speaker identifies love with the "authoritie" of law, and wants to escape from love's constraints to the "libertie" of philosophy. The poem is a rejection, not a renunciation: despite his rather bitter tone, the speaker is untroubled by misgivings about the wisdom of his proposed course of action.<sup>6</sup> If he has erred, he has done so in the past; addressing an abstraction, not a person, he says that he has learned from his mistakes. Relegating "tryfels" to "idill yeuth," he now refuses to continue to engage in self-destructive activities like climbing



"rotten boughs." There is no suggestion that he is turning his back on the proper sphere of human activity, no sense that to continue in the kind of entanglement he is rejecting would constitute the best use of his energies, no intimation of loss. The cost exacted by the relationship or relationships standing behind the poem is far greater than any rewards: the love he rejects is made to seem trivial and distracting at best, deceptive and potentially destructive at worst. Turning his back on it in the contemptus mundi tradition, the speaker thinks in terms of dichotomies: love and philosophy, youth and age, authority and liberty, trifles and perfect wealth, time wasted and time well spent.

If, as the poem ends, there is no indication that he will act contrary to the dictates of reason, that is not the case in "Som fowles there be," in which the speaker's clarity of perception has no impact upon his actions:

Som fowles there be that have so perfaict sight,  
 Agayn the Sonne their Iyes for to defend,  
 And som, bicause the light doeth theim offend,  
 Do never pere but in the darke or nyght.  
 Others reioyse that se the fyer bright  
 And wene to play in it as they do pretend,  
 And fynd the contrary of it that they intend.  
 Alas, of that sort I may be by right,  
 For to withstond her loke I ame not able;  
 And yet can I not hide me in no darke place,  
 Remembraunce so foloweth me of that face,  
 So that with tery yen swolne and vnstable,  
 My destyne to behold her doeth me lede:  
 Yet do I know I runne into the glede.

In the octave, the speaker's powers of observation, classification, and analysis are unimpaired: the eyesight of some



small animals is so perfect, he observes, that they can look straight at the sun without harm; others, sensitive to light, are sensibly nocturnal; but members of a third group, in which he includes himself, are consumed by the very brightness which attracts them. In the sestet, he is partially able to explain why he acts as he does by developing the analogy further: if he is like a moth, the woman whose love is so dangerous to him is like the flame.<sup>7</sup> Unable to "withstonde her loke" or to shield himself from it, he sees unhappily that he is inviting self-destruction but is unable to do anything to prevent it. Unlike the "fowles," however, he possesses a rational faculty and can see what he is doing to himself.

Where "Farewell, Love" assumes that what is debilitating in human experience can be gotten away from easily by the proper use of reason and will, "Som fowles there be" suggests, in contrast, that the source of potential danger is both pervasive and deceptive -- the sun whose warmth gives light also burns -- and that knowledge of its harmful properties cannot always be translated into action. Unlike some of the defenseless and insignificant animals to whom he compares himself, the speaker in the latter poem is unable to seek safety by retreating to the shelter of a "dark place." In contrast to them, the source of his danger lies within as well as without -- in his own mind, his "remembraunce," which accompanies him. Memory, one aspect of his rational faculty, works against him, invading his hiding place and -- in the syntax of the poem -- making his vision "vnstable." Tormented by memory and knowledge, he has nowhere to go. In the closing couplet,



the speaker feels utterly helpless, attributing his inability to stop loving her to "destyne" and knowing that he, like the moth drawn to the flame, faces certain destruction if he continues to "run into the glede." His analysis of the impasse at which he finds himself is a rational and lucid description of irrational behavior.

In these two poems, Wyatt links the relationship of knowledge and action to the issue of detachment and engagement, and presents radically different responses to similar circumstances. In the first poem, the speaker acts decisively to remove himself from the fray and is preoccupied with the need to account for himself and his use of time. In the second, the speaker is so caught up in his experience that he cannot extricate himself, and shifts from accounting for himself to blaming fate. But in the former poem, the destructive experience is easily defined, understood, and dealt with; in the latter, the ability to define and to understand does not confer the power to act in accordance with that understanding.

In contrast to both of these sonnets, however, "Eche man me telleth" suggests a very different possibility. Confronted with an unstable world, its speaker is neither overwhelmed nor forced to retreat; instead, he discovers new ways of taking action in, and reaching an accomodation with, such a world:

Eche man me telleth I chaunge moost my devise.  
 And on my faith me thinck it goode reason  
 To chaunge propose like after the season,  
 Ffor in every cas to kepe still oon gyse  
 Is mytt for theim that would be taken wyse,  
 And I ame not of suche maner condition,  
 But treted after a dyvers fasshion,





And therupon my dyvernes doeth rise.  
 But you that blame thys dyvernes moost,  
 Change you no more, but still after oon rate  
 Trete ye me well, and kepe ye in the same state:  
 And while with me doeth dwell this weried goost,  
 My word nor I shall not be variable,  
 But alwaies oon, your owne both ferme and stable.

The octave deals with his attempt to adjust to the world of change in which he lives. Attributing his own "dyverness" to the way he is treated -- "after a dyvers fasshion" -- he insists that it is only sensible, under the circumstances; proposing to be constant in inconstancy, he seeks to make change predictable. The tone, at once flippant and slightly defensive, is no more cynical than the questions in "What vailleth trouthe?" are rhetorical: everyone tells him that he is changeable, he admits, but he is, after all, subject to the unpredictable behavior of others.

But unlike the sonnet "Dyvers dothe vse" (CCXVII), in which the speaker simply decides to "let it passe and think it is of kinde / That often change doth plesse a womans minde" (13-14), "Each man me telleth" goes beyond the recognition and acceptance of disloyalty. In the sestet, the speaker's flexibility and adaptability take another form. Instead of criticizing me for changing, stop changing yourself, he says in a direct challenge; when you do, so will I. His aim is not just cleverly to rebut a complaint against "dyvernes" but to respond fully and directly to all of its implications. Dependent upon the response of another, he nevertheless declares his willingness to break with the norm -- the way of the world around them -- if she will do the same.



The speaker, then, is not overwhelmed by the fact that the world is governed by change. Neither cynical nor naive, he will not be destroyed by the fickleless of others, nor will he be a victim of his own disillusion. The acceptance of inconstancy in the octave does not render constancy impossible in the sestet. "Eche man me telleth" declares that it is possible to be "boeth ferme and stable" in a world governed by change; the speaker's pledge of fidelity is not dependent upon a change of setting. Moreover, the world of the poem, however flawed, is able to accommodate stability, to make room for a new kind of diversity within its bounds, just as the sonnet's sestet (which can be read either as two tercets or as a quatrain plus a couplet) creates new units within an established formal order.

Approached somewhat differently, however, this carefully constructed poem also contains a subtle analysis of the speaker's character. He is, in fact, not simply complaining about inconstancy in others, but is increasingly aware of its effects upon his own state of mind. To ask, "Against deceipte and dowblenes / What vailleth truth?", as the speaker in that lyric does (8-9), is to raise a moral issue and link it to action; but the more introspective "Eche man me telleth" introduces a psychological dimension which complicates the speaker's response. Echoing the refrain of still another lyric, "For dred to fall I stand not fast,"<sup>8</sup> this speaker is also concerned about the shakiness of his own nature.

From its opening statement, we learn that no matter how rampant "dyverness" may be in the speaker's society at large, his own behavior



is more noticeably erratic than others'. Having decided at the outset that there is no point to constancy in an inconstant world, he overreacts by becoming more changeable than anyone else. What he changes is his "devyse" -- a word whose multiple meanings qualify one another as the poem proceeds. At once a clever plan or invention, a disposition or wish, discourse or communication, or an emblematic figure accompanied by a motto,<sup>9</sup> the word calls attention both to the speaker's tactics and to the feelings which motivate them.

Quite literally, his "devyse" is an ingenious stratagem: he assumes a role, a "gyse," in order to acquire a reputation for wisdom. At the same time, his "devyse" is his conversation with friends, his characteristic way of communicating. On a deeper level, though, his "devyse" is also what he thinks and feels: to be changeable in one's devyse in the sixteenth century is not just to be changeable in one's outward actions, but in one's intentions as well. Finally, to change one's emblem is to change something which is intended to reveal what one stands for. Frequently or casually to change one's devyse, then, is not simply to be a little fickle in taste, but to hedge on bigger commitments. Like the person who "stands[s] not fast" because he "dred[s] to fall," the speaker's distaste for change commits him to change.

The second half of the sestet underscores this emphasis. Revealing that the "wyse" behavior referred to in line 5 is only an outward show, the speaker acknowledges in line 12 that his spirit is "weried," not imbued with wisdom. And the rhyming words of the closing



couplet, "variable" and "stable," remind us of the speaker's warring feelings about flux and permanency: in Wyatt's day, "stable" not only meant "constant in affection" or "dependable," but also "settled in character" or "settled in purpose and resolution"<sup>10</sup> --

connotations which reinforce important undercurrents throughout the poem, and link its end to its beginning. He declares, in effect, that what he says and how he behaves will no longer be at odds with his values; instead of devising a "gyse," an outward seeming which belies his inner revulsion against the predictability of change, he now pledges that he and his word will be "alwaies oon" -- that there will be no gap between what he believes and how he represents himself, as there was in lines 2 and 3. Moreover, he does not need to cut himself off from others -- to seek a contemplative tranquillity removed from his changeable surroundings -- to ensure that his words and beliefs are congruent: as line 13 continues, they are not just "alwaies oon"; they are also "your own." His commitment to the other person (who criticizes his erratic behavior but who is also changeable) is an essential part of the equation.

Furthermore, "Eche man me telleth" dramatizes the process of thinking through a problem and proposing a solution -- just the opposite of "Ffarewell, Love," in which the process of thinking seems to have been completed outside of the poem. There, the speaker is not attempting to clarify his own thoughts. Rather, in what sounds more like public oration than private introspection, he announces and then defends a course of action upon which he has already decided.





Remarkably unified in tone,<sup>11</sup> the sonnet reinforces the speaker's convictions but does not struggle with them or against them, and there is no tension between its parts. "Som fowles there be," in contrast, is all introspection and no action -- an introspective look at the limits of introspection. But "Eche man me telleth," at once introspective and dramatic, fixes the speaker's attempt to come to terms with the gap between the real and the ideal -- and to master his own reaction to it -- in one side of an important conversation between two people during which something important occurs.

On balance, both "Ffarewell, Love" and "Som fowles there be" share a similar perspective and differ fundamentally from "Eche man." The relationships which stand behind the first two poems are both potentially destructive: the difference lies in the speaker's varying ability to act rationally and extricate himself. The speaker in the latter poem would respond like the speaker in the former does were he not immobilized. The view of human life and human love underlying his predicament is echoed in the last lines of another of Wyatt's fine sonnets, "My galley charged" (XXVIII):

The starres be hid that led me to this pain;  
Drowned is reason that should me comfort,  
And I remain dispering of the port.

That view is only slightly less bleak than Fulke Greville's chilling formulation some seventy to eighty years later: "A boat, to which the world it selfe is Sea, / Wherein the minde sayles on her fatall way" (Caelica 96.55-56).



But the spirit of "Eche man me telleth" is closer to Morus' gentle rejoinder to Hythlodæus in Book One of Utopia: "You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the wind."<sup>12</sup>

Like the sonnets just considered, Wyatt's three satires, "Myne owne John Poyntz," "My mothers maydes," and "A spending hand," also focus on the issue of engagement and detachment in a flawed world. More tentative than the sonnets, each satire backs away from closure, raising as many questions as it seems to answer. If the sonnets focus on problematical personal relationships, the satires focus on sustained social relationships in a problematical social system. Since Thomas Warton, the first critic to appreciate their intrinsic value, praised them for their treatment of the "felicities of retirement," critics have stressed their affinities with the Horatian tradition.<sup>13</sup> In important ways, however, that emphasis distorts their content. While "Myne owne John Poyntz" does criticize the court, the speaker is more bitter than tranquil, nor does he come to terms with the involuntary nature of his departure from it.<sup>14</sup> "My mothers maydes" calls attention to the inherent dissatisfactions of all ways of life (including the misery of the rural poor), while "A spending hand" describes country life as swinish and loutish.

On the surface, "Myne owne John Poyntz," the best known of the three, has closer links to the literature of retirement than to the literature of humanism. Exploring the relationship between success and knowledge, advancement and virtue, it centers on the corruption of the court -- a society in which the price of advancement is not worth the



cost -- and sees withdrawal from that corrupt courtly society to the simpler life of the country as a prerequisite to a virtuous and honorable life. In this poem the speaker is as superior to -- and ultimately remote from -- the courtiers he despises as he is from the "common sort" foolish enough to "esteem" them. Taking his own measure, he is reluctant neither to judge himself nor to be judged by others. The tentative resolution that he offers depends upon the rejection of courtly manners and morals: although he "gawnt[s] sumtime that of glorie the fyar / Doth touche [his] hart" (14-15), he is unwilling to pay the price of that glory. The long list of activities that he "cannot" engage in includes hypocrisy, flattery, misuse of poetic gifts, misrepresentation of truth, worship of false gods, and self-glorification of others. He sets up, in contrast, the Horatian picture of the self-sufficient life of the country gentleman, whose freedom from ambition frees him from guile.

The speaker's central concern is in seeking "what dothe inwarde resort" so that he can practice his craft. Although acknowledging that "a clogg doeth hang yet at [his] hele," his essential freedom of action -- as he defines it here -- remains unimpaired; not only is he able to "lepe both hedge and dyke full well," he is also able to "read and ryme," and the freedom to think and write is the yardstick by which he measures what he has left behind. The satire seems to establish a clear hierarchy of values: there is no middle ground, no exploration of the moral ambiguity of the courtier's role, no sense of partial gains measured against partial losses, no awareness of the



possible pitfalls of rural retreat. "In Kent and Christendome," the poet is at once in rural England with book and bow, and in a Christian empire governed by a clear hierarchy of immutable values.

But the speaker is less isolated than he seems. Ostensibly a satire, the poem is actually a verse epistle, a letter to a trusted friend. As such, it seeks to establish a sense of community, and the friend's implied presence does much to determine the poem's conversational tone. In contrast to the duplicity demanded of him at court, the speaker's relationship with his friend permits him to disclose his convictions about what is wrong with courtly life, and the human transaction suggests an act of reaching out rather than pulling back. The opening lines indicate that Poyntz really wants to know the reasons behind the speaker's departure, and subsequent lines imply that his shared values will allow him to understand them. Moreover, the fact that the speaker writes as he does to a fellow courtier who presumably shares at least some of his concerns -- and not, say, to a rural neighbor -- suggests the possibility of a community, however small, which transcends the simple opposition of court and country that the poem seems to set up. His invitation to Poyntz to join him underscores that possibility. At the same time, his disclosures to Poyntz reveal his recognition that he needs to account for himself and justify the use of his time; despite their common ground, Poyntz does not seem to have applauded as a matter of course his friend's removal from "the presse of courtes," but seems instead to expect an explanation.





The account of himself that the speaker gives establishes an implicit but important link between his preoccupations in court and country. The common thread is poetry. Wyatt's speaker is extremely conscious of himself as a poet, and his rejection of the court is linked to his conception of poetry's proper demands. Underlying his defense of his own actions -- and his clear need to align them with his values -- is a concern with the right use of words: saying, speaking, naming, calling. A refusal to use language to distort the truth -- what Ronald Rebholz calls "the context's emphasis of specious rhetoric"<sup>15</sup> -- dominates his self-justification. First, he applies a high standard to his own poetry, refusing to frame his tune "to fayne / To cloke the trothe" (19-20),<sup>16</sup> nor will he misrepresent his own felings -- "with [his] wordes complayne and mone / And suffer nought; nor smart wythout complaynt" (28-29). Furthermore, just as he refuses to equate the mercenary exploits of a self-serving adventurer with the achievements of an Alexander, he also refuses to praise worthless art; he will not adopt the stratagems of the eloquent style to persuade others that the crow's song rivals that of the swan, or confuse the crude music of Pan with that of Apollo. Those poet-courtiers who "Praysse Syr Thopas for a noble tale, / And skorne the story that the knyght tolld" (50-51) earn his contempt.

If there is no sense of responsibility abdicated or opportunity wasted in this poem, there is a very real sense of constraint. The speaker says that he leaves the court because it blocks his pursuit of a given activity; positive actions, like speaking the truth, are ruled



out. Unlike Spenser's Colin, who is content in the June eclogue to play only to please himself, Wyatt's speaker is extremely conscious of whom his songs praise and blame, and how they are received. Although he adopts the role of the country gentleman whose tastes run to hunting and hawking, he seems less at home with his bow and book than he would be with a lute and an audience. Devoting more attention to the difficulties of writing at court than to the rewards of writing in the country, he certainly never suggests that the proper audience for his poetry is a rural one.

Like "Myne owne John Poyntz," "My mothers maydes" focuses as much on the use of time as on the choice of life. At the outset, it seems to be a simple tale about the relative merits of innocence and sophistication, country and city life, but it turns out, upon closer inspection, to be a subtle frame tale about violence and revenge. Most criticism has concentrated upon Wyatt's treatment of the tale itself, and on on his assimilation of and departure from his major sources, Horace, Chaucer, and Henryson. Recently, however, Rebholz and Donald Friedman have pressed the poem further, linking Wyatt's treatment of the familiar tale of the city mouse and country mouse to his preoccupation with inner tranquillity or "quyete of mynde." As Rebholz puts it,<sup>17</sup>

Wyatt's known predecessors emphatically relate attitudes of mind to external conditions of life. One might generalize their morals as a preference for the simple, frugal, quiet and hence mentally and emotionally secure life of country or moderate poverty over the complicated, hedonistic, materialistic, busy and hence anxious life of town



or wealth. On the other hand, Wyatt, using the categories of Christian stoicism, defines earthly happiness as a purely interior state -- quietness of mind -- achieved by the exercise of virtue, and defines concerns about or desires for any external conditions of life as mistaken means to the end of happiness . . . . Of course, Wyatt's choice of the fable does imply that it is probably easier to achieve spiritual peace in the country than in the city or the court . . . . But, since in this poem's more radical analysis each "kind of life" has its "disease" (l. 80), if the mind's attitude is wrong, the mind remains the only place essential to the achievement of health.

What has gone unnoticed, however, is the relationship among the poem's parts. The actual tale of the mice ends with line 69; lines 70-74 are an aside to Poyntz; lines 75-92 an address to a wider audience, to whom the speaker directs the moral derived from the tale, and lines 103-12 an application of the tale to his own circumstances. As with most frame tales, there is a close connection between the speaker's situation and the story which he tells. In lines 75-83, reflecting upon the story he has just narrated, he recognizes, as Rebholz says, that life is full of care almost by definition and reminds his audience, whose minds he calls "wretched," that no way of life offers protection from unhappiness. Ascetic withdrawal is not the answer, however; he reminds his listeners that peace of mind comes not merely with stoical acceptance of one's condition but also (and in the spirit of Plutarch's essay) with the proper use of one's time and talents: it is not enough to be "content with that is the assigned"; it is also necessary to "vse it well that is to the allotted" (95-96).

But the memory of a simple chanson de toile from his rural past



has unsettling implications for his present life in a very different setting:

Hens fourth, my Poynz, this shalbe all and some:  
 These wretched fooles shall have nought els of me  
 But to the great god and to his high dome  
 None othre pain pray I for theim to be  
 But when the rage doeth led them from the right  
 That lowking backward vertue they may se  
 Evyn as she is so goodly fayre and bright;  
 And whilst they claspe their lustes in armes a-crosse,  
 Graunt them, goode lorde, as thou maist of thy myght,  
 To frete inward for losing such a losse.

(103-12)

Not surprisingly, the final section of the poem places the speaker in a problematical situation in which his own "quyete of mynde" depends upon how he acts. He struggles with his own clearly divided feelings toward those "wretched fooles" who have, in some unspecified way, exploited or harmed him. But are the "wretched fooles" of line 104 the same as those "wretched myndes" of line 75? If not, who are they? If so, then why the change in attitude from sympathetic pity to disgust? And why does he seem disgusted with himself as well? Is he, like the naive mouse tricked by a sophisticated world, partially responsible for having gotten entrapped? Is he also at the mercy of a "Catt?" More important, does the speaker himself confuse peace of mind with the desire to avenge himself on his enemies by invoking divine retribution?

The answer depends on one's view of the severity of the punishment he selects for them -- to be deprived of "quyete of mynde!" Does he follow his own advice, seeking tranquillity by giving up





thoughts of retribution, by realizing that his enemies' wretchedness is their own worst punishment? Or does he miss the point of his own tale, upon which he has just moralized, when he wishes the worst thing he can think of -- to see and know the good, and understand the full value of what they have lost -- on those who have exploited him? It is impossible to say which is correct; all that is certain is that the fate of the speaker, like that of the country mouse, remains a mystery. The poem leaves both ensnared -- one in physical danger, the other in moral danger. The mouse is caught up in terror and violence; the speaker, in violent feelings. When he asks, in effect, "how shall I behave toward those who have gulled me?" he is worlds away from his literary as well as his familial heritage -- as far from the composure of Horace and Chaucer as he is from the household of his childhood. This poem moves from the remote to the immediate, from detachment to engagement, from memory of the past to resolve for the future, from a pleasant old tale to an unpleasant self-discovery.

The third satire, "A spending hand," is immersed in the troubles which are kept at a distance in the first satire but which encroach upon the second. The least accessible of the three poems despite its immediacy, it lacks the civilized charm of "Myne owne John Poyntz" and the domestic familiarity of "My mothers maydes." Focusing less on the problem of detachment and engagement than on the problem of corruption in public life, it questions the relevance of received wisdom -- platitudinous proverbs and old tales -- to the complexities of contemporary life. At the outset, the primary speaker mocks the power



of proverbial sayings to "counsell man the right"; in actual fact, he proceeds to stand conventional wisdom on its head by using proverbs to convince Sir Francis Brian that prosperity and honesty are mutually exclusive.

If, he tells Brian, you are committed to exhaust yourself by "runnyng day and nyght / Ffrom Reaulme to Reaulme" (12-13) as a diplomat, a public servant, rather than enjoying a self-indulgent life in the country (which Brian likens to the life of a pig in a barnyard), then you're going to need plenty of money. He then describes in detail a world in which dishonesty, flattery, and treachery are the routine means of advancement -- describes, in fact, scenarios of expediency and corruption that anticipate incidents in Jonson's Volpone. Like Jonson's Corbaccio, Brian is advised to seek wealth by gaining through flattery the inheritance of a sick old man (51-59); like Corvino, he is urged to pimp for his wife or daughter (67-71).

Measured against the world of "A spending hand," Hythlodæus' description in Book One of Utopia of the pitfalls of a life of public service seems mild. Dismissing as irrelevant the issue of personal advancement, More's character argues that honest counselors can have no real impact in a society of parasites and flatterers; worse yet, the rulers they would advise are interested only in war and territorial acquisition, not in governing well. Grounded in the Renaissance conviction that a courtier should use his talents to exert a positive influence on public policy, the conversation in Utopia



examines the very real obstacles to such an effort. When Morus says,  
 "What you cannot turn to good you must make as little bad as you can,"  
 Hythlodæus disagrees:<sup>18</sup>

There is no chance for you to do any good because  
 you are brought among colleagues who would easily  
 corrupt even the best of men before being reformed  
 themselves. By their evil companionship, either  
 you will be seduced yourself, or, keeping your own  
 integrity asnd innocence, you will be made a  
 screen for the wickedness and folly of others.  
 Thus you are far from being able to make anything  
 better by that indirect approach of yours.

But the issues debated in the enclosed garden in Antwerp are not those  
 discussed in "A spending hand." Neither speaker in the poem is  
 troubled by the subtleties which pain Hythlodæus; neither seems  
 bothered by his inability to have any positive impact. The poem is  
 generally read ironically, its central irony located in role reversal:  
 If the primary speaker, who advocates cynicism, is assumed to be  
 Wyatt, known as a man of "depe-witted" probity, in contrast to the  
 notorious Brian, known as Henry VIII's "Vicar of Hell," the poem  
 becomes an elaborate joke at Brian's expense. While nothing in the  
 third satire disproves such a reading, the fact that both speakers in  
 this dialogue are blind to the larger implications of their words  
 makes it hard to view this poem as a simple "praise of poliical  
 responsibilty and personal moral integrity."<sup>19</sup> Brian's  
 "integrity," such as it is, is untried: without money, he will have no  
 power; without power, he will have no influence; without influnce, his  
 "honest name" cannot be used to advance the public good by serving his



prince. Closing doors on the possibility of a decent life at court or in the country, the satire's picture of unimaginative expediency makes Hythlodæus' misgivings seem almost naive.

On balance, it is impossible to say whether the deeper ironies in the satires are there by accident or design -- whether we are intended to see that Brian's complacent assumptions about serving the king while remaining honest are facile and misguided, that the speaker in "My mothers maydes" is blind to his own vengefulness, or that the speaker in the first satire has conveniently forgotten that his departure from court was involuntary and that his real work must be done there. To some extent, the problem is one of audience: certainly Poins, the addressee of the first two satires, would have known the circumstances surrounding their composition, as would the coterie audience among whom they were circulated and by whom they were preserved in manuscript. What does stand out, regardless of audience, is the preoccupation of all three with the uses of writing. Ironically or not, the speaker in "A spending hand" talks about writing to instruct others in the art of living properly; in "My mothers maydes," a story recalled from the speaker's privileged past sheds light on the present; and in "Myne owne John Poyntz," the speaker conveys his disgust with the way in which poetry is misunderstood and undervalued at court. In other poems as well, Wyatt engages in pointed discussions about the proper use of poetry, though the importance he attaches to this subject has received only marginal notice. More than thirty-five years ago, Hallett Smith called





attention to "two interesting lyrics in which Wyatt may be said in some sense to comment on his own songs": "Me list no more to sing" (CCX) and the final stanza of "Lament my losse, my labor, and my payne" (CCXIV) in which the speaker addresses the reader of his book, and which Smith describes as "a kind of retraction" in the Chaucerian mode.<sup>20</sup> But there are many such poems: Wyatt's self-referentiality is extensive and intensive. While its importance is secondary in lyrics like "Me list no more to sing" and peripheral in others like "At moost myschief" (LI) or "Marvaill no more" (LII),<sup>21</sup> it is a major concern in the prologues to the penitential psalms, in "My lute, awake!" (LXVI), and in "Blame not my lute" (CCV).

Like the satires, the prologues to the penitential psalms are also concerned with the uses of writing. But where the speaker in the satires is a victim of the treachery of others, the speaker in the psalms both victimizes those around him and is a victim of his own treachery. As a result, he uses his poetic ability to try to come to terms with his own anguish and remorse. A murderer and adulterer, David has gotten rid of Bathsheba's husband Uriah by sending him off to be killed in battle, and the first penitential psalm opens as he begins to repent. As John Stevens has observed, "Many learned poets worked the psalms because they were 'a divine poem' justifying, against all attack, the use of metre and figurative speech";<sup>22</sup> but Wyatt's treatment goes far beyond the kind of implicit defense of poetry which Stevens describes. While Wyatt goes to the scholar Johannes Campensis as a source for the psalms



themselves, he goes to the poet Pietro Aretino for the narrative prologues which introduce and link them.<sup>23</sup> Greenblatt has argued that this narrative framework appeals to Wyatt because it embeds the poems firmly in the world of royal power which Wyatt understood so well,<sup>24</sup> but whatever Wyatt's intention, one result of his decision to incorporate a terza rima version of Aretino's prose prologues into his handling of the psalms is to focus explicit attention on David's status as a poet. In David's hands, the prologues make clear, poetry becomes a means for discovering and accepting unpleasant truths about his own behavior, for dealing with a crisis, and for praying.

The prologues refer to David's harp not merely as the "Faythfull record of all his sorowes sharp" (CVIII, 192), but also as "his guyde, / Wherewith he offerth his plaintes his sowle to save" (58-59). Thus, his songs are at once a record of the most basic human problems and an attempt to transcend them. Hidden in a cave, David is completely caught up in his plight, and makes his poems out of his own strongest feelings:

His voyce he strains, and from his hert owt brynges  
This song that I not wyther he crys or singes.  
(425-26)

Their intensity and undeniable referentiality, however, do not compromise their artistry:

in his hert he tornith and paysith  
Ech word that erst his lypps myght forth aford.  
He poyntes, he pawisith, he wonders, he prayisith.  
(518-20)



Moreover, in addition to being carefully framed, his songs are powerful enough to surprise even their author, who is taken aback at his ability to sing of "diepe secretes" (509):

The grettnes dyd so astonne hymselff a space,  
As who myght say: who hath exprest this thing?  
(512-13)

Although he will despair once again in Psalm 130, David rejoices temporarily in his own poetic powers in the prologue introducing it:

By cause he knew he hath alone exprest  
Thes grete things that greter spryte compilde,  
As shalme or pype letes owt the sownd inprest  
My musikes art forgid tofore and fyld.  
(634-37)

In this prologue, David's status as a divine poet is confirmed.

In Wyatt's version of the penitential psalms and prologues, David's poems are truly recreative; his artistic power is responsible in part for his new-found ability to pass beyond a rhetoric of guilt and self-disgust, to suspend his disbelief in forgiveness, and hence to seek it genuinely in the poems which conclude the sequence.<sup>25</sup> But the discussion of poetry in the two lute poems, while far more mundane, is just as important. Far from providing "a little music after supper," as C.S. Lewis disparagingly refers to Wyatt's work in the native song tradition,<sup>26</sup> "My lute, awake!" transforms the familiar love complaint into a vehicle capable of absorbing and commenting upon the turbulence of the speaker's feelings, while "Blame not my lute" suggests ways in which poetry can shape a given social



order.

In "My lute, awake!" the speaker laments the inadequacy of his song, which is no more able to reach the woman to whom it is sung than lead is able to "grave in marbill stone"; rejected, he commands his lute to cease its fruitless endeavors and to "be still" or be silent. Despite its conventional beginning, however, this lyric proceeds systematically to reject the values and preconceptions traditionally associated with such love complaints.<sup>27</sup> It emphatically disavows the traditional, long-suffering stance of the unrequited lover who persists in unyielding but unreciprocated devotion.

In addition to its carefully varied and modulated refrain, the poem also contains a song-within-a-song: while the first, second, third, and eighth stanzas are addressed to the lute itself, stanzas four through seven are addressed to a woman (the "her" and "she" of lines 8 and 13). In them, rejecting submissiveness and abject flattery, he tells her bluntly that she is cruel, collecting lovers' hearts like trophies. He warns her that he will be revenged: "withered and old," herself the victim of an unrequited love, she will regret her cruelty to him when it is too late. His characterization of her here eschews all courtly compliment: Unlike the hind in "Who so list to hounthe" (VII), she is predator, not prey. His aim is not to gain her pity by calling attention to his own misery, but to vent his own feelings and tell her off, and when he has done so he has no more to say. In these stanzas, his tone is bitter, resentful, and vindictive. Preoccupied with revenge, he hardly achieves equanimity. Despite his





agitation, however, he is able to break with polite convention by speaking the truth as he sees it; to a certain extent, he retains honesty if not tranquillity, and uses the convention of the musical love complaint to sever himself from its constraints. Unlike the speaker in the first satire, the pressures of his environment do not force him to choose between fawning or fleeing.

But if the ways in which this song-within-a-song breaks with courtly tradition are important, the ways in which the framing stanzas comment upon the speaker's attitude to his song are even more significant. Look at the opening lines:

My lute, awake! perfourme the last  
 Labour that thou and I shall wast  
 And end that I have now begon;  
 For when this song is sung and past,  
 My lute be still, for I have done.

Is the lute commanded to wake to its last song or its last useless song? The two possibilities are contradictory, not complementary, and the difference is crucial. If "perfourme the last / Labour that thou and I shall wast" means "this is the last wasteful song I will play and sing," then it suggests the possibility of other less wasteful songs. (It also suggests that the speaker can distinguish what is wasteful from what is not.) This reading is suggested in part by the stress on "wast" as a rhyming word as early as line 2, but there is no demonstrable support for it in the rest of the poem -- no explicit suggestion that more fruitful songs will follow.

Instead, the manipulation of the refrain and the recurring



finality of "I have done" emphasize the alternative reading. Stanzas 2 and 3 stress the futility of the kind of song the speaker has been singing:

As to be herd where ere is none,  
 As lede to grave in marbill stone,  
 My song may perse her hert as sone;  
 Should we then sigh, or syng, or mone?  
 No, no, my lute, for I have done.

The Rokkes do not so cruelly  
 Repulse the waves continually  
 As she my suyte and affection,  
 So that I ame past remedy,  
 Whereby my lute and I have done.

The final stanza recycles the opening lines; the only changes indicate that the song has been completed, not that the speaker's perspective has changed:

Now cesse, my lute; this is the last  
 Labour that thou and I shall wast,  
 And ended is that we begon;  
 Now is this song boeth sung and past;  
 My lute, be still, for I have done.

The upshot is that the speaker is silenced, brought to a standstill. If he does conceive of a larger, continuing purpose for his song, or of other manner or matter, he does not identify them. If the common theme in the variation on the refrain in the framed song is that he has finished with the woman in question, the common theme in the less varied refrain in the framing song is that he has finished with this kind of singing -- with making poems that fit this conventional model. Moreover, if the framed stanzas seem to reject the



limitation of courtly song to Petrarchan compliment, the framing song demonstrates the extent to which the speaker is dominated -- overwhelmed and utterly silenced -- by the very convention he seems to reject. Defeated as a poet because he is defeated as a lover, the poet-speaker does not claim for poetry a function which transcends his immediate need to avenge himself. Instead of writing a poem in which the speaker realizes that his pursuit of the woman in question is futile, or that his preoccupation with revenge is self-destructive and wasteful, Wyatt has chosen to write a poem in which the speaker's attempt to vent his feelings demonstrates the extent to which he is consumed by them. If the poem seems to cast off courtly convention on one hand, it ironically demonstrates the force of that convention on the other. And if the speaker avoids the dissembling flattery which is protested in "Myne owne John Poyntz," he shares with the speaker in "My mothers maydes" a certain obtuseness about the relation of his words to his own feelings.

"Blame not my lute," however, offers a very different perspective. In this extraordinary lyric, the poet-speaker achieves a rich understanding of the relationship between his various responsibilities -- artistic and ethical, personal and social. Operating within the conventions of the society in which he lives, he uses the plain style of the native tradition to evoke a world in which feigning and inconstancy are as common as art is ornamental and superficial; to expose the infidelity and vanity of the person to whom the poem is addressed; and to reaffirm his own commitment to playing a



role in that society by making the kind of poems which tell the truth without feigning. He does so in a tone which is balanced, thoughtful, and forthright, and in a style which is direct and unadorned.

The poem's dramatic and social context is inseparable from its structure. In a courtly setting -- with others in the background, but close enough, apparently, to overhear -- the speaker is ready to sing a song to (and about) a former lover; since she has been unfaithful, he cannot praise her according to polite custom, but must describe her behavior for what it is. She protests, attempting to break his lute-strings in order to silence him; he objects, telling her pointedly not to blame him or his lute for exposing her, but to blame herself -- to be accountable for her own actions. When she does reach out a second time and breaks the strings (as we learn in the final stanza), he does not retaliate in kind but resolves to continue singing "for [her] sake" -- less to threaten than to illuminate.

The poem needs to be read in its entirety:<sup>28</sup>

Blame not my lute, for he must sownd  
Of thes or that as liketh me;  
For lake of wytt the lutte is bownd  
To gyve suche tunes as plesithe me;  
Tho my songes be sume what strange  
And spekes such wordes as toche they change,  
Blame not my lutte.

My lutte, alas, doth not offend  
Tho that perfors he must agre  
To sownd such teunes as I entend  
To sing to them that hereth me;  
Then tho my songes be some what plain,  
And tocteth some that vse to fayn,  
Blame not my lutte.



My lute and strynges may not deny  
 But as I strike they must obay;  
 Brake not them than soo wrongfully,  
 But wryke thy selffe some wyser way;  
 And tho the songes whiche I endight  
 Do qwytt thy chainge with Rightfull spight,  
     Blame not my lutte.

Spyght asketh spight and changing change,  
 And falsyd faith must nedes be knowne,  
 The faute so grett, the case so straunge,  
 Of Right it must abrod be blown:  
 Then sins that by thyn own desartte  
 My soinges do tell how trew thou artt,  
     Blame not my lutte.

Blame but thy selffe that hast mysdown  
 And well desaruid to haue blame;  
 Change thou thy way so evyll bygown  
 And then my lute shall sownd that same;  
 But if tyll then my fyngeres play  
 By thy desartt their wonted way,  
     Blame not my lutte.

Farewell, vnknowne, for tho thou brake  
 My strynges in spight with grett desdayn  
 Yet haue I fownd owt for thy sake  
 Stringes for to stryng my lute agayne;  
 And yf perchaunce this folysh Rymyme  
 Do make the blush at any time  
     Blame nott my lutte.

Inverting the convention of the witless lover in the opening lines, the speaker assumes full responsibility for songs which document and expose her faults in a society unaccustomed to songs which tell unpleasant truths. The second stanza, reinforcing the first, indicates that his songs are "some what plain" as well as "sume what strange" -- unembellished in style as well as iconoclastic in content -- and the faults he exposes include habitual feigning as well as inconstancy. As the poem continues, the mild excuses he originally makes for the lute (it does not offend, it lacks wit, it sings



casually of "this or that") give way to more forceful claims for his own moral and artistic position. Sensitive to his own retaliatory tone (unlike "My lute, awake!"), he justifies his "Rightfull spight" in terms of his commitment to a larger ethical framework which compels him to speak out and make known to a wider audience the wrongs he sees; he also makes it clear that she, not he, is to blame if the content of his songs is offensive. But he strikes a delicate balance: at the same time that he tells her bluntly to blame herself, he also offers the kind of reciprocity extended in "Eche man me telleth." Urging her to find "som wiser way" to respond to his accusations, he declares his willingness to change his song as soon as she changes her behavior. Reinforcing his distaste for a relationship based upon polite distortion, he appeals to her to change at the same time that he warns her he will continue to expose her publicly if necessary -- just as he is doing here.

The crucial final stanza has been oddly misunderstood. The lute -- the instrument which accompanies his lyrics -- has been temporarily silenced when she succeeds in snapping its strings. What he vows, in contrast to the speaker in "My lute, awake!", is that he will find the means to restring it, to restore its voice, so that he can go on singing songs which tell the truth -- not in retaliation, but "for [her] sake." To say that the speaker implies that he has found "a new mistress"<sup>29</sup> -- the familiar reading of this passage -- is to reduce a coherent argument to a meaningless non sequitur and to ignore the carefully developed relationship between setting, imagery, and



theme that characterizes the poem as a whole.

From beginning to end, the speaker in this masterly lyric defends his unconventional performance of a conventional role. When he reaffirms his intention to remain an active participant (a lute player) in a society governed by values he does not share, he subtly redefines his social role in terms of his artistic responsibilities. In doing so, he differs from the speaker in "My lute, awake!" who articulates no comparable conception of a social and moral role for poetry. He also differs from his counterpart in "Myne owne John Poyntz," who reluctantly sees those roles as mutually exclusive. Wyatt's achievement in this lyric is brought into focus by a revealing passage from one of George Turberville's poems, "Two things in cheefe did move me thus to write," composed some thirty or forty years later. Turberville's speaker frankly describes feigning as the natural activity of the court poet. Although the behavior of his friends is "a death, and grieved me to the gall," he says, he nevertheless admits blandly that "My pen must plead the sillie Suters case, / I had my hire, so he mought purchase grace."<sup>30</sup>

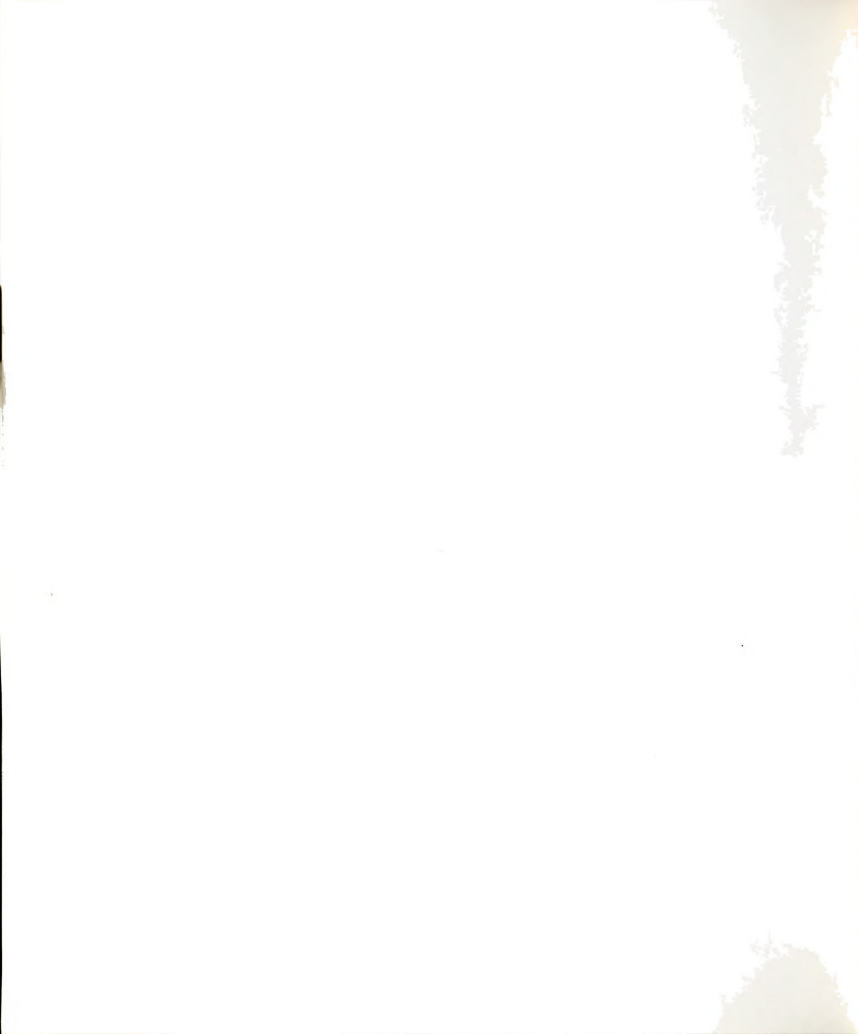
Thus did I deale for others pleasure long,  
(As who could well refuse to do the like?)  
(61-62)

he continues, but what Turberville's speaker dismisses as parenthetical, Wyatt makes central.<sup>31</sup> Poems like "Blame not my lute" are themselves the best rebuttal to C.S. Lewis's disparaging view of Wyatt's lyrics and H.A. Mason's belief that he was "merely



supplying material for social occasions."<sup>32</sup> Wyatt was the first to recognize that such lyrics are indeed grounded in "social occasions" -- that is one of the points the poem makes -- and he goes out of his way to point out that what his speaker has to say will make such a social occasion an uncomfortable one for the addressee. Protesting aesthetic and ethical lapses which Turberville's speaker would find objectionable, he not only affirms his social responsibility as well as his personal and artistic integrity; he suggests that they are inseparable. Nor does the poem imply that other members of his courtly audience find his blunt lyrics offensive; the social order in which he lives and writes is flexible enough to accommodate his kind of singing and to permit the redefinition of a convention which voices its values.

The poet-speaker in "Myne owne John Poyntz" finds it impossible, while at court, to write poems that tell the truth but inconceivable to write poems that lie; the poet-speaker in "Blame not my lute" succeeds in accommodating himself to the conventions and constraints of his society while retaining his personal and artistic independence and integrity, as the speaker in the first satire does not, yet both poems derive from Wyatt's preoccupation with the ethical bases of action and his conviction that poetry constitutes such an action. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that throughout his poetry Wyatt shows such speakers meeting with variable success. Even when they manage to implement their convictions, as is the case in "Blame not my lute" and "Eche man me telleth," they encounter obstacles in themselves and





their societies: in the latter, the speaker must balance introspective reflection with the need to negotiate a complicated relationship; in the former, the speaker must accomodate such negotiation to the convictions which inform his art. Others, however, encounter obstacles which are less readily overcome: the speaker in "My lute, awake!" is silenced as a poet because he is consumed by his own turbulent feelings; the protagonists in the first and third satires fail to implement their values in their public lives not because of personal shortcomings but because of institutional constraints; and the speaker in "Som fowles there be" fails because he is paralyzed, unable to act.



"Where wysedome makes the waye":  
The Erring Poet-Speaker in Gascoigne's Lyrics

Wyatt's characteristic voice commands sustained attention because of its integrity as well as its power and beauty; Gascoigne, in contrast, writes in a voice which calls attention to its almost boundless capacity for error. Wyatt's speakers are successful courtiers skilled in mediating difficult relationships, yet they are weary of the success they take for granted. Gascoigne's speakers, however, hunger after the success which Wyatt's find so ennuyeux, although they never meet with it, and their attention is riveted upon failure in judgment and execution. Accordingly, Gascoigne acts out a subtly different version of the relation between the poet and his society than does Wyatt. Although Gascoigne sets his poems in a concrete social context, lyrics like "The common speech is, spend and God will send" (59) are not primarily concerned with evaluating the drawbacks of the society in which they are set, nor are they built upon the familiar court-country antithesis.<sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, Gascoigne tends in his lyrics to take the shortcomings of the social order as givens, even when he sees clearly that they are shortcomings. At the same time, he never seriously considers removing himself from it. Instead, he is concerned with trying to make sense of his own behavior in the world in which he is immersed. Rather than lamenting its inadequacy, he concentrates on



coming to terms with his own. Much less concerned with the flawed nature of social relationships than is Wyatt, he is far more critical of himself. Therefore, while his erring speaker makes it clear that the courtly hierarchy, the military, and the legal profession all fall short of what they should be, his consideration of mediocrity and corruption in key institutions is secondary. What he focuses on is the whole sorry business of learning from his mistakes and coming to terms with error and loss of opportunity. Caught up in a world in which he seems always on the brink of some new difficulty, he nevertheless fashions a role for poetry in helping him to mediate the claims of that world and to reassure his quintessentially unquiet mind. What is notable in Gascoigne's treatment of error and loss is his generous view of human fallibility, his ambivalence about his own ability to salvage remnants of value from the scrap-heap of failure that he creates, and his surprisingly sophisticated consideration of the role played by poetry. In the untitled sequence of seven sonnets beginning with "In haste post haste, when fyrste my wandring mynde" (60), in "Gascoignes Lullabie" (55), and in "Gascoignes wodmanship" (70), he reflects upon those concerns.<sup>2</sup> Like Wyatt's, Gascoigne's poet-speakers use their poems to understand the social order as well as to have an impact upon it; for them, the poem becomes a vehicle for taking action as well as for assessing it.

"The common speech is, spend and God will send," the least complicated of the poems discussed here, is didactic in a way that the others are not, yet it illuminates many of the concerns expressed more



subtly in other lyrics. On the surface (but only on the surface) it deals with the same subject as Wyatt's "A spending hand":

The common speech is, spend, and God will send,  
But what sends he? a bottell and a bagge,  
A staffe, a wallet, and a wofull ende,  
For such as list in bravery so to bragge.  
Then if thou covet coine enough to spend,  
Learne first to spare thy budget at the brinke.

(1-6)

In contrast to Wyatt's satire, however, Gascoigne's poem takes its proverbs seriously. This is advice to an innocent, warning of the difficulty of amassing enough money to finance aspirations for a career at court and the necessity of managing frugally whatever resources one possesses; it is not a criticism of proverbial wisdom. Nor is it a criticism of a society in which money is the major means of advancement. Although he says,

I not denie but some men have good hap,  
To climbe alofte by scales of courtly grace,  
And winne the world with liberalitie,

(20-22)

his target is not the system which rewards "liberalitie" with power -- with "winn[ing] the world" in a very real way. Almost as if he took "A spending hand" at face value and missed its savage ironies, he focuses on what happens to the individual who spends himself to the point of ruin -- till "Till sute of silke have swet out all their land" and "Davie Debet . . . bids thee welcome to thine owne decay" (28, 30-31).

As the poem progresses, the language becomes more colorful, less proverbial -- "Heape up bothe golde and silver safe in hooches, /





Catche, snatche, and scratch for scrapings and for crummes, / Before thou decke thy hatte (on highe) with brooches" (42-44) -- but the message remains the same, and the speaker returns, at the end, to the kind of proverbial formulation with which he began:

Who spares the first and keepes the laste unspent,  
Shall fynde that Sparing yeldes a goodly rent.

Remarkable in its matter-of-fact attitude toward catching, snatching, and scratching, this poem never suggests that a life of such constant scrambling -- and a power structure dominated by "haggard hawkes" who "mislike an emptie hand" (26) -- is anything but natural. His advice, in part and whole, suggests that while making it at court is expensive, and while payoffs are an ordinary occurrence, success is a matter of prudence -- of having accumulated the resources to bribe the right people. The ominous undercurrents that do exist warn of the spectre of poverty which will threaten if the speaker's advice is not heeded, not of a way of life which will imperil the prospective courtier's "honest name."

Gascoigne's brief sonnet sequence looks directly at some of the issues which "The common speech" glosses over, but it also raises questions which "The common speech" leaves unanswered and reveals the speaker's uncertainty about his own ability to assimilate the implications of his own error. These seven sonnets, linked by concatenation as well as by theme, apply a variant of the proverb "haste makes waste" to the speaker's history.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to "The common speech," in which the speaker admonishes others, it is he, not

those he addresses, who has made serious mistakes and has gravely misunderstood the nature of the world.

The first sonnet evokes the lure of the court for a young man:

In haste poste haste, when fyrste my wandring mynde,  
Behelde the glistering Courte with gazing eye,  
Such deepe delyghtes I seemde therein to fynde,  
As myght beguyle a graver guest than I.  
The statly pompe of Princes and their peeres,  
Did seeme to swimme in flouddes of beaten golde,  
The wanton worlde of yong delightfull yeeres,  
Was not unlyke a heaven for to beholde,  
Wherein did swarme (for every saint) a Dame,  
So faire of hue, so freshe of their attire,  
As might excell dame Cynthia for Fame,  
Or conquer Cupide with his own desire.  
These and suche lyke were baytes that blazed still  
Before myne eye to feede my greedie will.

The speaker, whose mind is already "wandring," is enchanted with the "glistering court," yet there are early hints that its attractions are more apparent than real: the courtiers only seem to "swimme in flouddes of beaten golde"; the "wanton worlde," if "not unlyke a heaven," is not quite like one either. But, because this is not primarily one of the anti-courtly satires so popular in the sixteenth century, the speaker does not really criticize the court's exotic show even though he suggests a discrepancy between the appearance and the reality. Instead, he sets the stage for the exploration of his own errors that will follow in the ensuing poems, noting his susceptibility to "baytes" at the same time that he makes allowances for it; even a more sober and less "greedie" newcomer might be similarly "beguile[d]," he indicates.

In the second poem, tempted by his initial view of a world of



"vain delight" and "dainty delicates," he languishes away from it, until, with "foolish boldness" and "all in haste," he decides impulsively to seek his fortune at court. In the third, arriving at court where he is welcomed as a "gladsome guest," he describes how he felt disgraced by the lack of finery he thought he needed "To prinke me up, and make mee higher plaste" (42). The fourth sonnet describes how he wasted his patrimony to acquire the garb of a courtier -- "Mee thought it beste that boughes of boystrous oke, / Shoulde fyrste be shread to make my feathers gaye" (47-48) -- and how he was ruined financially: "The bough, the bodie, fyne, ferme, lease and lande, / All were too little for the merchauntes hande" (55-56). In the fifth, he explains that he decided to cut his losses and leave the court after balancing his accounts and discovering that the rewards were not worth the cost.

The last two sonnets are more complicated -- not in what he says about his past actions, but in how he considers their implications for his present and future. In the sixth, reflecting on his behavior and generalizing from it, he observes that

My haste made waste, my brave and braynsicke barge,  
Did floate to faste, to catche a thing of nought:  
With leysure, measure, meane, and many mo,  
I moughte have kepte a chaire of quiet state,  
But hastie heades cannot be settled so.

(73-77)

Significantly, even though he sees that he tried "to catche a thing of nought," he is less critical of a system which could make a "blazing badge of bravery" a step to preferment than of his own failure to

govern his behavior "With Leysure, measure, meane, and many mo." "So haste makes waste," he concludes, and continues,

and therefore nowe I say,  
No haste but good, where wysdome makes the way.  
 (83-84)

The final sonnet offers an illustration of this proposition in the parable of the slow-moving creature (in this case a snail) who achieves its objective where a swift-moving but impulsive creature (in this case a soldier) fails. But while this fable supports the claim that "haste makes waste," it does not support the very different claim that there is "no haste but good, where wysdome makes the way." That declaration, which remains unsupported in the poem, is the focal point of the speaker's ambivalence about his own behavior. Occurring three times (it is repeated, by virtue of concatenation, as the first line of the seventh sonnet), it reappears in the closing lines of the sequence as well:

With Nevyle then I fynde this proverbe true,  
 That Haste makes waste, and therefore still I saye,  
No haste but good, where wysdome makes the waye.

But what does it mean to make such an assertion in the context the sequence has set up? Is the speaker implying that he has somehow been able to make wisdom out of waste? This is what the hypotactic syntax of the reworked couplet implies, yet he has spent the bulk of seven sonnets proving just the opposite. Whether the problematical couplet looks to the past or the future -- whether he refers to the "wisdom"

of having decided to leave the court, or whether he suggests that he will hurry to act wisely in the future just as he hurried to act wastefully in the past -- the speaker's elusive logic reveals his own uncertainty about how to incorporate the facts of "waste" and loss of opportunity into his assessment of himself. He remains uneasy about his ability to turn loss into profit.

In another sense, however, the problem created by the presence of words like the reiterated "therefore" in the couplet is one of syntax; the claim that wisdom can come from waste, then, amounts to a verbal trick -- one which reminds us that the sequence itself was written in haste. In line with Gascoigne's characteristically ambivalent attitude about his own work -- frequently self-deprecating, he nevertheless alludes to the potential utility of his poetry -- he suggests here, perhaps, that the speedily composed sonnets can be viewed as slight productions which nevertheless contain the seeds of wisdom.

This undercurrent of ambivalence about his own ability to turn loss into gain assumes increasing importance in his best known (and more explicitly self-referential) lyrics, "Gascoignes Lullabie" and "Gascoignes wodmanship." Ostensibly, their subjects are different: the first deals with the speaker's response to the passage of time, the second with his various professional failures; yet both focus on the acceptance of change and loss, though the losses are of different kinds. In "Gascoignes Lullabie," the speaker's song both reconciles him to and protects him from full awareness of the passage of time; in "Gascoignes wodmanship," he reaches beyond the acceptance of past

error to reassess the meaning of failure and success, and uses the occasion of the poem not merely to appeal for still another chance to succeed but also to persuade his prospective patron of the merit of his kind of "failure."

The "Lullabie" is not concerned with making sense of mistakes, but with accepting the changes which come with time.

Sing lullabie, as women do,  
Wherewith they bring their babes to rest,  
And lullabie can I sing to  
As womanly as can the best.  
With lullabie they still the childe,  
And if I be not much beguilde,  
Full many wanton babes have I  
Which must be stilld with lullabie,

he begins, and subsequent stanzas proceed to lull to sleep the appetites and faculties of youth:

First lullaby my youthfull yeares,  
It is now time to go to bed,  
For crooked age and hoarie heares,  
Have wonne the haven within my head:  
With Lullabye then youth be still,  
With Lullabye content thy will,  
Since courage quayles, and commes behynde,  
Goe sleepe, and so beguyle thy mynde.

Next Lullabye my gazing eyes,  
Whiche woonted were to glaunce apace:  
For every glasse maye nowe suffice,  
To shew the furrowes in my face:  
With Lullabye then wynke a while,  
With Lullabye youre lookes beguyle:  
Lette no fayre face, nor beautie bryghte  
Entice you efte with vayne delyght.

And Lullabye my wanton will,  
Lette reasons rule nowe reigne thy thought,  
Since all too late I fynde by skill,  
Howe deare I have thy fansies bought:





With Lullabye nowe take thyne ease,  
 With Lullabye thy doubttes appease:  
 For trust to this, if thou be still,  
 My bodie shall obeye thy will.

Eke Lullabye my loving boye,  
 My little Robyn take thy rest,  
 Synce Age is colde, and nothing coye,  
 Keepe close thy coyne, for so is best:  
 With Lullabye bee thou content,  
 With Lullabye thy lustes relente,  
 Lette others paye whiche have mo pence,  
 Thou arte to poore for suche expense.

But these middle stanzas, which seem so straightforward in their recognition of the decline of youth, "gazing eyes," and sexual energy, are really double-edged: they suggest, very gently, that the same lullaby which induces sleep does so by diverting attention from unpleasant realities. In the opening stanza, the fact that the speaker is "not much beguilde" signals his ability to think clearly, to see the necessity of accomodating to the changes dictated by age. But when he attempts, in stanzas two and three, to "beguyle" his failing powers, his words remind us that one effect of a lullaby is to induce a soporific state which clouds mental processes, and that to beguile can mean to delude or deceive. In effect, then these stanzas suggest that the best way to deal with regret for the loss of youthful energy (since, as lines 31-32 make clear, his body has no choice but to be obedient), is to indulge one's self in one's imagination -- an implication which becomes explicit in the final stanza:

Thus Lullabie my youth, myne eyes,  
 My will, my ware, and all that was,  
 I can no mo delays devise,  
 But welcome payne, lette pleasure passe:



With Lullabye nowe take your leave,  
 With Lullabye youre dreames deceyve,  
 And when you rise with waking eye,  
 Remembre Gascoignes Lullabye.

These lines indicate the lullaby's dual function: to put to rest the rebellious appetites of youth and to lull the mind into a deceptive dream, allowing it to think that the loss of youth has not occurred. But, in addition to acknowledging "that dreamers often lie," they also acknowledge the existence of a world beyond the dream: the reader of the poem, like the person lulled to sleep by the lullaby, will wake to a world in which hungry lions still roar. Finally, the last four lines raise another question: who is being addressed (or, perhaps, sung to)? On one hand, the speaker is reminding himself to seek the solace of dreams in saying goodbye to "all that was"; on the other hand, he is suggesting that both he and the reader/listener are approaching the end of a poem, an artifact, "Gascoignes Lullaby," which is to be remembered so that it can be employed to deceive more dreams in the future. As it calls attention to its own existence, then, the poem suggests that the best way to cope with loss is to construct a second world in which one pretends that the loss has not occurred, and that the function of art is to deceive and beguile, not to clarify.

But if waste is converted into wisdom by a verbal trick in his sonnet sequence, and if pain is transformed into pleasure by a deceiving dream in "Gascoignes Lullabye," failure and success are redefined by a clear thinker in "Gascoignes wodmanship," commonly



regarded as his finest poem.<sup>4</sup> While not primarily a satire, it contains satiric elements which play upon the collision between the real and the ideal that Hallett Smith has called a prerequisite to the satirical imagination. Both the "possibility of satire, or the necessity for it," Smith observes, come from holding a picture of human beings as the "pride of creation" that is at odds with their actual behavior, their "antics under high heaven."<sup>5</sup> In his analysis of failure, Gascoigne holds up just such a picture.

Exploring the relationship between success and knowledge, advancement and virtue, the poem centers in the relationship between the individual and his society, in the borderline between success and failure, and in the tension that results from the speaker's attempt to combine the modes of contemplative awareness and action in an imperfect world. Ostensibly a poem about failure, it both qualifies and undercuts the appearance of failure by re-evaluating the behavior that makes for success and by emphasizing the function of art -- of poetry, specifically -- in clarifying the difference to those who are in a position to reward success. Indeed, the very term "wodmanship" refers to the practical skill or lore necessary to get along, to make one's way in the world, and this woodman's greatest skill is with words.

Gascoigne begins by explaining to his host and potential patron, Lord Grey of Wilton, why he fails to hit the winter deer on a hunt:<sup>6</sup>



My worthy Lord, I pray you wonder not  
 To see your wodman shoote so ofte awrie,  
 Nor that he stands amased like a sot,  
 And lets the harmlesse deare (unhurt) go by.  
 Or if he strike a doe which is but carren,  
 Laugh not good Lord, but favoure such a fault,  
 Take well in worth, he wold faine hit the barren,  
 But though his harte be good, his happe is naught:  
 And therefore now I crave your Lordships leave,  
 To tell you playne what is the cause of this:  
 First if it please your honour to perceive,  
 What makes your wodman shoote so ofte amisse,  
 Beleeve me L. the case is nothing strange,  
 He shootes awrie almost at every marke.

As wodman, the speaker fails in three ways on the hunt: he shoots and misses; he hits the wrong target; or, absorbed in contemplation, he fails to shoot at all. His central organizing metaphor provides an effective vehicle for explaining his history of missing the mark in a long line of pursuits, since his failures as a wodman are paralleled in other occupations; he fails as a philosopher "Bycause his wanton wittes went all awrie" (20), and as a lawyer because "he most mislikte the thing, / Which most might helpe to guide his arrow streight" (29-30). In his failure to "catch a courtly grace," he takes aim at the wrong target, and depletes his funds by dressing himself up to make an impression instead of prudently bribing his superiors.

So far, the man who "shootes awrie almost at every marke" appears to attribute missing the mark in philosophy, in law, and at court to his own shortcomings, not to the inherent shortcomings of those pursuits or their pursuers. Before the mid-point of the poem, however, he begins to undercut that judgment, and to qualify his negative self-assessment, in his critical glances at the inelegant obscurity





that dominates legal thinking and writing and the bribery that dominates the court. Thus, while he partially blames himself for poor timing, lack of follow-through, and lack of perspicacity, he also subtly begins the process of questioning the integrity of those who do succeed as well as the worth of their success. His own imperfections combine, then, with imperfections in the external world to bring about failure, and foreshadow his difficulty in extracting order or meaning from his own experience. Only in his indictment of the military is he overtly satirical and unequivocally critical: here, for the first time, he explicitly links his failure to his own integrity. His characterization of the typical soldier is as sardonic as anything in Wyatt, and he paints a picture of the soldier's "antics under high heaven" that is expressly opposed to "all the vertues of the minde" (63). Although he frankly admits his own cowardice -- he cannot "leade a charge before himselfe be led" -- he also cannot "pinch the painefull souldiers pay, / And sheare him out his share in ragged sheetes" (77-78), or "pull the spoile from such as pill, / And seeme full angrie at such foule offence" (81-82).

This section is most like Wyatt's indictment of his own society and justification for separating himself from it in his first satire, written some thirty-five to forty years earlier. Lawyers and courtiers are undermined indirectly, the military overtly; but the impact is cumulative, and all are included in the observation that

nowe adayes, the man that shootes not so,  
 Maye shoot amisse, even as your Woodman dothe.  
 (85-86)

This marks a turning point in the poem: the speaker's disdain for the military is expanded and universalized, applied to his society as a whole. He makes a clear moral judgment about those who do succeed in Elizabethan society: if one is to avoid missing the mark, one must be willing to pay the price; and that price includes corruption, hypocrisy, flattery, bribery, and pedantry. Similarly, he realizes that if he "shootes amisse," he does so not only because of his own limitations, but because of limiting circumstances as well. "Success" and "failure," seemingly so different, must be redefined in terms of his enlarged understanding.

Yet that very understanding -- the insight that forces the speaker to challenge the accepted definition of success -- exacerbates, paradoxically, the cause of still another failure: the failure to shoot at all. Reflecting upon his "youthfull years myspente," he says that he is obsessed with the notion that he must have been born unlucky. However, "vayne presumption" leads him to suggest that past and present failures are both more and less than they seem:

For thus I thinke, not all the worlde (I guess,)
 Shootes bet than I, nay some shootes not so well.
 (99-100)

In this paradox upon which the poem turns, the scales have tipped. The speaker begins to reassess his past failures in light of the knowledge he has derived, and the benefits he has accrued, from each. If he has failed as a philosopher -- if his "wanton wittes went

all awrie" -- he has nevertheless learned, from Aristotle, "to guyde my manners all by comelynesse" (102). And, if "law was dark," he has learned from Cicero "to discerne / Betweene sweete speeche and barbarous rudenesse" (103-04). From the courtiers themselves, he says, he has learned to take the measure of the world. In all these achievements, he realizes, he has not missed the mark. Moreover, he decides that those who have managed to "hit the marks that I do misse, / And winne the meane which may the man mainteine" (117-18) can neither

speake, nor write in pleasant wise,  
Nor leade their life by Aristotles rule,  
Nor argue well on questions that arise,  
Nor pleade a case more than my Lord Maiors mule.  
(113-16)

At first, this dual discovery -- that the assets of others are less than they seem, but that his own merits do not necessarily enable him to make his mark in a world in which cruder people succeed readily -- immobilizes him, leading to still another missed opportunity::

And whyles myne eyes beholde this mirroure thus,  
The hearde goeth by, and farewell gentle does.  
(121-22)

He neither remains fixed in immobility nor withdraws from the hunt, however; instead, using all his resourcefulness to win one final chance, he draws on his creative powers to try to convert failure into success:



Let me imagine in this woorthlesse verse:  
 If right before mee, at my standings foote  
 There stood a Doe, and I shoulde strik hir deade,  
 And then shee prove a carrion carkas too,  
 What figure might I fynde within my head,  
 To scuse the rage whiche rulde mee so to doo?  
 Some myghte interprete by playne paraphrase,  
 That lack of skill or fortune led the chaunce,  
 But I must otherwyse expounde the case,  
 I saye Jehova did this Doe advaunce,  
 And made hir bolde to stande before mee so,  
 Till I had thrust myne arrowe to hir harte,  
 That by the sodaine of hir overthrowe,  
 I myght endeavour to amende my parte,  
 And turn myne eyes that they no more beholde,  
 Suche guylefull markes as seeme more than they be:  
 And though they glister outwardly lyke golde,  
 Are inwardly but brasse, as men may see:  
 And when I see the milke hang in hir teate,  
 Me thinkes it sayth, olde babe nowe learne to sucke,  
 Who in thy youthe couldst never learne the feate  
 To hitte the whytes whiche live with all good lucke.  
 (127-48)

In other words, he claims that what he imagines is what may henceforth enable him to shoot right and finally hit the mark -- that the ability to create second worlds is directly related to the ability to survive and adapt in a primary world. Here, he not only suggests that his failures are actually part of a divine plan to convince him that the pursuit of the external trappings of success is unworthy of him; he suggests as well that he possesses the ability to comprehend and reveal to others such hidden truths. In contrast to those who are limited to "plain paraphrase," he is able to find a "figure . . . in [his] head" to discover and convey the significance of his own history. In effect, he is claiming that he can use his verbal ability -- his interpretive, creative, and persuasive powers -- to talk his way into (and out of) just about anything -- a claim which is



reinforced by his slyly renewed appeal for patronage in the poem's closing lines, in which he says he hopes he has told his tale in time:

Thus have I tolde my Lorde, (God graunt in season)  
A tedious tale in rime, but little reason.

Accordingly, his explanation of his history of misfortune constitutes a story -- one which not only assimilates and reworks the experience of both failure and immobility but which constitutes an action -- a new appeal for employment -- as well.

In that action, the roles of "wodman" and poet are conflated. On one level, the speaker's "wodmanship" -- his skill as a hunter -- is a ludicrous joke. But on another level, the woodman is someone who possesses indispensable survival skills for making his way through the forest of life -- skills which the speaker has just demonstrated in clearing away the underbrush of apparent failure and persuading Lord Grey of his true merit. Moreover, he is now ready, he implies, to put those skills at Lord Grey's disposal: he is "your wodman," not just any woodman, as he points out more than once. Thus, instead of presenting himself as an invited guest, he presents himself as a subservient but useful (and expert) retainer: the ambiguous status of the woodman parallels the ambiguous status of the poet who engages to use his verbal powers to represent his patron effectively, and whose verse is simultaneously "worthlesse" and a revelation of the hidden shape of a divine plan.<sup>7</sup>

In the poems considered here, the connection between the speaker's conception of his role and skill as a poet and his ability





to confront and assimilate problematical areas of his own experience is increasingly explicit.<sup>8</sup> In the linked sonnets, the speaker glosses over his uncertainty about his mistakes, short-circuiting his explanation of the process by which waste is converted to wisdom and implying that it is more a matter of rhetoric than anything else; composed in haste, he implies, his sonnets contain nuggets of wisdom which will perhaps be confirmed by future actions. In "Gascoignes lullabie," the speaker views his poem as a way of assuaging the pain caused by loss of youth if not the pain caused by foolish error, and celebrates his ability to beguile himself. In "Gascoignes wadmanship," however, he has less need to be beguiled: confronting the fact of error, he uses poetry to understand the implications of error. The understanding created by imaginative insight provides the basis for future action, which, he implies, will not only be useful to him but to others. Thus, poetry will not only help him to survive in an imperfect world; it will also enable him to educate those in power as well as allow him to create a place in the world for the values which the poet represents.



"Thy lips my history": The Public Context in Astrophil and Stella

Wyatt and Gascoigne both present speakers who are trying to do their best in an imperfect world. At times, Wyatt's speakers are unable to establish harmonious relationships with their society, as we have seen: in some poems, they are overwhelmed by events, and lose their perspective; in others, they need to retreat, to pull back from the full complexity of their experience, in order to preserve their personal or artistic integrity. Gascoigne's speakers err and fail routinely -- that is their distinguishing feature -- but they never neglect to try to discover and come to terms with the nature of their own error. Even if their belated understanding does not allow them to remedy specific circumstances, the speakers in Gascoigne's poems imply the possibility of altered behavior in the future, and Gascoigne maintains his characteristically generous attitude toward human fallibility. In Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, however, we confront a speaker who is increasingly reluctant to consider the implications of his own behavior. Turning his back on his social role as well as on his pursuit of the kind of poetry which would enable him to render his experience in all of its complexity, Astrophil backs away from confronting his own failure as the sequence progresses. Unlike his creator, who argues eloquently in the Defence for the importance of the poet and the usefulness of the knowledge his art imparts,



Astrophil increasingly sees poetry as an effortless exercise to serve his private ends. Where Wyatt's speakers are generally morally superior to the courtly world in which and about which they write (and get into difficulties because of their blunt honesty), the courtly world which Astrophil inhabits actually seems morally superior to him. Like the recreant knight of chivalric literature with whom he has much in common, Astrophil inherits a privileged position. Expected by his friends and associates to play a significant role in the court's diplomatic concerns, he turn his back on them. Perceiving at the outset that his preoccupation with Stella will prove self-destructive, he proceeds to rationalize and justify his inability to act in accordance with the dictates of reason.

Scattered throughout Astrophil and Stella is a group of sonnets establishing a public context -- social, civic, diplomatic, political, military, even historical -- by means of which Astrophil is endowed with a social role and responsibilities, and by means of which his love for Stella is commented upon, "placed," or otherwise evaluated. As a group, these sonnets are apt to be overlooked. Their role in the sequence is not a central one, and they are overshadowed -- justly, perhaps -- by sonnets dealing with the status of the speaker as a maker of poems or as a rational being capable of adhering to a chosen course of action. But the importance of the public sonnets is intrinsic, not merely illustrative, and they should not be overlooked.

They include 14, 18, 21, 23, 27, 30, 41, 53, and 75; when grouped, they form a mini-sequence of their own which recapitulates



the patterns of self-deception and diminution that govern the sequence as a whole.<sup>1</sup> They form pairs among themselves: Sonnets 14 and 21 are addressed to a friend, a fellow courtier, but offer different self-assessments; Sonnets 18 and 23, both introspective reflections, are linked to 14 and 30, respectively, as well as to each other, but 23 is also linked to 27 and deals with a similar situation. In 41 and 53, the tournament sonnets, Stella is credited with inspiring both victory and defeat; yet 41 is also linked to 23, 27, and 30 as Astrophil imagines varied public reactions to his performance. Sonnet 75, which deals with an English king who sacrificed his crown to private pleasure, stands alone; but it echoes and recapitulates the others as Astrophil cites an historical example in order to justify his own history.

These sonnets do much more than simply evoke settings and stances of courtly life or illustrate the speaker's inability to strike the right balance between reason, will, and appetite. Sidney's presentation of his speaker in scenes which call attention to Astrophil's role as courtier, as knight, as friend, as counselor, and as public figure not only expands and develops his characterization of Astrophil; it also establishes norms and values against which his behavior is measured. In validating Astrophil's intermittent self-criticism by placing it in a social context and by attributing similar criticisms to others, Sidney undercuts Astrophil's attempts at self-justification at the same time that he underscores the thrust of other sonnets and groups of sonnets, making it impossible for them to





be read as polite compliment and clarifying -- often dramatically -- the extent to which Astrophil has become "a diminished thing." At the same time, Sidney dramatizes his enduring concern -- shared by predecessors and contemporaries -- with what David Kalstone calls "the relation of love to the demands of the active life"<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested recently that Sidney, frustrated by the society generating the standards which Astrophil flouts, and blocked in his own aspirations, wrote the history of his own sociopolitical difficulties (including his preoccupation with power and submission) under the guise of Astrophil's difficulties with Stella.<sup>3</sup> But this approach, while provocative, not only assumes an identity between poet and speaker; it also ignores Sidney's demonstrable criticism of Astrophil's failure to live up to received standards.<sup>4</sup> Rather than identifying himself directly or indirectly with the plight of his protagonist, Sidney endorses, as we shall see, the norms and values of Astrophil's critics. In doing so, he reaffirms a relation between poet and society similar to that explored and endorsed in Wyatt's and Gascoigne's self-referential lyrics.

Sidney's sequence focuses on Astrophil's ethics as well as on his poetics, and his characterization of Astrophil is ironic rather than sympathetic. Astrophil and Stella is carefully constructed to reveal a speaker who is increasingly diminished and even dehumanized as a result of his infatuation with Stella, and the last lines of Sonnet 107 -- "O let not fooles in me thy workes reprove, / And scorning say, 'See what it is to love' "<sup>5</sup> -- would make a fitting epigraph to



the sequence. By his own admission as well as by demonstration, Astrophil is caught in a conflict in which his love for Stella leads him to reject the full range of his human faculties -- his reason, his ethical sensibility, his perception of the proper relation between body and soul, his social role and responsibilities, and even his status as a "maker" of poetry. The point is not that Astrophil is entrapped by his love for Stella, but that he rejects the applicability of his rational faculty or ethical sensibility to that love: after relegating virtue to "some old Catoe's brest" in Sonnet 4, for example, he urges reason in Sonnet 10 to "Leave sense, and those which sense's objects be: / Deale thou with powers of thoughts, leave love to will." In such sonnets, Alan Sinfield reminds us, Astrophil is "shrugging off the most deeply ingrained commonplaces of Elizabethan religion and philosophy."<sup>6</sup>

At several points in the sequence he is all too well aware of the dangerous discrepancy between his course of action and his code of values. At the end of Sonnet 2, for example, when he declares that he is about to "employ the remnant of my wit, / To make myself beleeve, that all is well, / While with a feeling skill I paint my hell," he both knows that he is going to deceive himself and knows that he will be irreparably diminished by his self-deception. Incapable of facing that knowledge for more than a moment, however, Astrophil embarks upon a process of self-justification which will attempt to conceal his self-deception rather than unmask it. As the sequence progresses he will lose, regain (in Sonnets 5, 18, and 47, for example), and lose



again even that shred of self-awareness. In Sonnet 47 -- one of the most impressive tours de force in the entire sequence -- he reasserts his ability to govern his own behavior and to "Leave following that, which it is gaine to misse." His reawakened integrity leads to a real resolve to act -- "I may, I must, I can, I will, I do" -- but the resolve is betrayed in the poem's stunning double turn:

Let her go. Soft, but here she comes. Go to,  
Unkind, I love you not: O me, that eye  
Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie.

Two sonnets later, even his memory of his temporary resolve has faded as he takes delight in love's "Manage." In Sonnet 69 his conception of virtue is so distorted that it is a condition to which he will hypocritically pretend in order to gain Stella's approbation -- but Paris is worth a mass. At the end of the sequence, reduced to what Robert Montgomery has called a state of psychological paralysis,<sup>7</sup> he declares that "in my joyes for thee [is] my only annoy." He has indeed succeeded in what he set out to accomplish: having thoroughly convinced himself that "all is well," he no longer understands that he is deceived or diminished, and no longer understands the value of what he has lost.

Sidney takes great pains to make it abundantly clear that Astrophil's ability to "see my course to lose my selfe doth bend," however painful, is infinitely preferable to the moral position of Sonnet 108. One reason why we are likely to agree, if we have read carefully, is that another point of view has been established through



the public sonnets.

Having rejected the claims of virtue in Sonnet 4 ("Vertue alas, now let me take some rest") and the claims of reason in Sonnet 10 ("Reason, in faith thou art well serv'd, that still"), Astrophil attempts in Sonnet 14 to persuade a critical friend that he has done neither:<sup>8</sup>

Alas have I not paine enough my friend,  
 Upon whose breast a fiercer Gripe doth tire  
 Then did on him who first stale downe the fire,  
 While Love on me doth all his quiver spend,  
 But with your Rubarb words yow must contend  
 To grieve me worse, in saying that Desire  
 Doth plunge my wel-form'd soule even in the mire  
 Of sinfull thoughts, which do in ruine end?  
 If that be sinne which doth the maners frame,  
 Well staid with truth in word and faith of deed,  
 Readie of wit and fearing nought but shame:  
 If that be sinne which in fixt hearts doth breed  
 A loathing of all loose unchastitie,  
 Then Love is sinne, and let me sinfull be.

At first he attempts to forestall censure by an appeal for pity; next, responding to the friend's "Rubarb words," he insists that his entanglement is consistent with truth, faith, manners, wit, and honor. This sonnet turns on Astrophil's exploitation of a commonplace of amour courtois -- that love confers virtue -- but it also establishes the presence of another viewpoint.<sup>9</sup> As early as the second quatrain, when we learn that the friend has been critical, we discover that Astrophil's associates do not share his belief that reason should "Deale . . . with powers of thoughts, leave love to will" (10.8). At the same time, Astrophil's capacity for duplicity is revealed by the discrepancy between his public protestations of uprightness and his





earlier private accomodation; he had, of course, admitted in Sonnet 4 that his mouth was "too tender" for the "hard bit" of virtue.

But the reassurances of Sonnet 14 desert him when he is called into "Reason's audite," and in Sonnet 18 he is far less complacent. If the former introduces into the sequence another source of judgment, the latter affirms a code of values and a set of ranked obligations which Astrophil will continue to recognize in moments of partial lucidity, and which he will reject only in moments of moral or intellectual blindness:

With what sharp checkes I in my selfe am shent,  
 When into Reason's audite I do go:  
 And by just counts my selfe a bankrout know  
 Of all those goods, which heav'n to me hath lent:  
 Unable quite to pay even Nature's rent,  
 Which unto it by birthright I do ow:  
 And which is worse, no good excuse can show,  
 But that my wealth I have most idly spent.  
 My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toyes,  
 My wit doth strive those passions to defend,  
 Which for reward spoile it with vaine annoyces.  
 I see my course to lose my selfe doth bend:  
 I see and yet no greater sorow take,  
 Then that I lose no more for Stella's sake.

Focusing on the speaker's inability to achieve the proper relationship between knowledge and action, this sonnet also acknowledges the obligations deriving from birthright -- "Nature's rent" -- as it distinguishes them from the speaker's obligations to use properly the "goods" lent by "heav'n" and identifies self-destruction with the failure to pursue an active life -- a productive life. Recognizing in the octave that love for Stella has not enhanced his performance, and providing details of his personal bankruptcy in the first four lines



of the sestet, Astrophil finds his misuse of time and talents inexcusable. But in the couplet, when his thoughts turn to Stella, he makes no attempt to translate knowledge into action: the very real losses faced up to in lines 1-12 are converted into the currency of polite but fatuous compliment which denies the legitimacy of previously acknowledged debts.

His address to his friend in Sonnet 21 is more forthright than in 14:

Your words my friend (right healthfull caustiks) blame  
 My young minde marde, whom Love doth windlas so,  
 That mine own writings like bad servants show  
 My wits, quicke in vaine thoughts, in vertue lame:  
 That Plato I read for nought, but if he tame  
 Such coltish gyres, that to my birth I owe  
 Nobler desires, least else that friendly foe,  
 Great expectation, weare a traine of shame.  
 For since mad March great promise made of me,  
 If now the May of my yeares much decline,  
 What can be hoped my harvest time will be  
 Sure you say well, your wisdom's golden mine  
 Dig deepe with learning's spade, now tell me this,  
 Hath this world ought so faire as Stella is?

Here, as is frequently the case in this sequence, the structure of the sonnet recapitulates its sense: the bulk of the lines is devoted to the presentation of a carefully worked out argument which, however unanswerable, is flung aside in the final lines. The friend's words, a source of annoyance before in 14, are now "right healthfull caustiks"; and in Astrophil's recapitulation of his friend's extensive criticism he seems to acknowledge -- and refrain from contradicting -- its validity. Or does he? This sonnet is less straightforward, perhaps, than it seems. Warned explicitly that he is misusing his



intellectual and literary gifts as well as courting public shame, Astrophil seems to assent to the friend's judgment ("Sure you say well") only to dismiss it, finally, as irrelevant. But all he may really be doing in lines 1-8 is repeating the friend's argument back to him. If these lines are merely a polite paraphrase, then the fear that "Great expectation" might "weare a traine of shame" is the friend's fear, not Astrophil's: in that case, it is the friend, not Astrophil, who defines the misuse of the latter's talents; and Astrophil's own viewpoint remains elusive.

In Sonnet 23, it is Astrophil himself who is preoccupied with his own public image. His aim, however, is not to amend but to amuse himself by imagining what is being said about his distracted and melancholic manner. Those who know his past habits, he reflects, will attribute his withdrawal to a love of learning, to the press of diplomatic concerns, or even to his own desire for advancement; but he knows better: his "dull pensiveness" is caused by "only Stella's eyes and Stella's hart." Expressing passing regret but no real division or struggle, he makes no attempt to justify himself: the scope of his self-awareness has shrunk. Dismissing his associates as foolish busybodies, he assumes fatuously that most of them credit him with good intentions; in Sonnet 27, on the other hand, he suspects that they attribute his withdrawal from active virtue to "That poison foule of bubling pride."

At this point in the sequence we know, from Astrophil himself, that he has compromised and deceived himself and that he has attempted



to pacify and manipulate others; and our assessment is confirmed by the introduction of another point of view -- the indirectly reported criticisms by his friend in Sonnets 14 and 21 and the impressions of his peers in Sonnets 23 and 27. In the former pair he responds, at least, to specific charges against him; in the latter pair, self-absorbed, he no longer bothers to do so. The unflattering picture of Astrophil which emerges in these sonnets is reinforced powerfully in Sonnet 30:

Whether the Turkish new-moone minded be  
 To fill his hornes this yeare on Christian coast;  
 How Poles' right king meanes, without leave of hoast,  
 To warme with ill-made fire cold Moscovy;  
 If French can yet three parts in one agree;  
 What now the Dutch in their full diets boast;  
 How Holland hearts, now so good townes be lost,  
 Trust in the shade of pleasing Orange tree;  
 How Ulster likes of that same golden bit,  
 Wherewith my father once made it half tame;  
 If in the Scottische Court be weltring yet;  
 These questions busie wits to me do frame;  
 I, cumbred with good maners, answer do,  
 But know not how, for still I think of you.

Here, in the only public context sonnet addressed directly to Stella, he listens, utterly disengaged, to the political, military, and diplomatic conversation of the court. According to every Renaissance commonplace, he should be an active participant; but "great expectation" has been reduced to a concern for appearances -- an external adherence to the code of his class. Moreover, he tries to pass off his recreancy as flattery -- a token of Stella's power over him -- and implies, in doing so, that she shares his skewed priorities. The many precise allusions in the octave to significant





international events are brought closer to home in the sestet -- not only in geographic proximity, as he moves from the edges of Europe (Turkey and Russia) to Scotland and Ireland, but also in flickering recognition of the role his family has played in international affairs.<sup>10</sup> Astrophil inadvertently reveals that those he dismisses here as "busie wits" and elsewhere as "curious" or "dustie" wits are engaged in political speculation of real substance and import and assume that he shares their concerns. Whatever his status at court, his counsel is clearly expected.

Sidney never endorses Astrophil's attitude toward his fellow courtiers by suggesting that their preoccupations are trivial -- mere courtly gossip -- nor does he ever suggest that Astrophil rejects a world in which foppish, self-serving behavior is customarily rewarded. Instead, he takes pains to make us see that Astrophil's associates consistently establish and reinforce an ethical norm: individually or collectively, they demonstrate their concern for his welfare and reputation; they warn him about the probable outcomes of his actions; they appeal to his "Nobler desires"; and they invite him to participate in decisions that will affect the welfare of the kingdom. As the public context sonnets move from speculation about mental processes and states of mind to the dramatization of scenes in which concrete action is required, Astrophil's failure to act in accordance with a given code becomes even more marked. That pattern continues in the next pair, Sonnets 41 and 53.

The setting of these sonnets, reflecting the resurgence of



interest in chivalry that took place in Sidney's day, seems borrowed from the world of medieval romance.<sup>11</sup> The image of a beautiful but inaccessible woman watching from a high window as her lover competes in a tournament in the courtyard below is a romance cliché; all that is missing is the description of her token.

Having this day my horse, my hand, my launce  
 Guided so well, that I obtain'd the prize,  
 Both by the judgement of the English eyes,  
 And of some sent from that sweet enemie Fraunce;  
 Horsemen my skill in horsemanship advance;  
 Towne-folkes my strength; a daintier judge applies  
 His praise to sleight, which from good use doth rise;  
 Some luckie wits impute it but to chaunce;  
 Others, because of both sides I do take  
 My blood from them, who did excell in this,  
 Thinke Nature me a man of armes did make.  
 How farre they shoot awrie! the true cause is,  
Stella lookt on, and from her heavenly face  
 Sent forth the beames, which made so faire my race.

In Sonnet 41, having acquitted himself with distinction, he disclaims credit for chivalric success just as emphatically as he disavows the "making" of his own poems elsewhere in the sequence. At the outset, he acknowledges that he has performed creditably in guiding horse, hand, and lance "so well, that [he] obtain'd the prize," and his victory seems a major one in the eyes of the world. There is, however, no more "inward tuch" to his jousting than to his poetry; where onlookers attribute his performance to skill, to strength, to sleight, to heritage, and even to chance, he confides the truth: his prowess was inspired only by a glance from Stella. Here, townsmen and horsemen think more clearly than he does; once again, Sidney endorses the standards of those around Astrophil, not those of



Astrophil himself.

In Sonnet 41, Stella is the source of valor if not of virtue; in Sonnet 53, its companion-piece, the situation is reversed. As "One hand forgott to rule, th'other to fight," Astrophil, decked out in Marse's liverie," humiliates himself in public. In describing the incident, he unwittingly reveals how erratic his own behavior is and how uncertain his own standards are. Stella's blush, of course, suggests that she shares the priorities of townsmen, horsemen, and court wits, and that she would have preferred backing a winner:<sup>12</sup>

In Martiall sports I had my cunning tride,  
And yet to break more staves did me addresse:  
While with the people's shouts I must confesse,  
Youth, lucke, and praise, even fild my veines with pride.  
When Cupid, having me his slave describe  
In Marse's liverie, prouncing in the presse:  
'What now sir foole,' said he, 'I would no lesse,  
Looke here, I say.' I look'd, and Stella spide,  
Who hard by made a window send forth light.  
My heart then quak'd, then dazled were mine eyes,  
One hand forgott to rule, th'other to fight.  
Nor trumpets' sound I heard, nor friendly cries;  
My Foe came on, and beat the aire for me,  
Till that her blush taught me my shame to see.

In none of the public sonnets is Astrophil at war with himself, engaged in a genuine struggle. At best, as in Sonnets 18 and 21, he is a passive, even helpless observer of his own situation. Powerless to take action, he is reduced to description. At worst, he has difficulty distinguishing between victory and defeat. A conflict which had the potential for civil war turns into a sorry story of appeasement and, ultimately, of surrender -- as the diction and imagery of Sonnet 107 make clear, and as he himself inadvertently reveals in Sonnet 75:



Of all the kings that ever here did raigne,  
Edward named fourth, as first in praise I name,  
 Not for his faire outside, nor well lined braine,  
 Although lesse gifts impe feathers oft on Fame,  
 Nor that he could young-wise, wise-valiant frame  
 His Sire's revenge, joyn'd with a kingdome's gaine:  
 And gain'd by Mars, could yet mad Mars so tame,  
 That Ballance weigh'd what sword did late obtaine,  
 Nor that he made the Flourdeluce so fraid,  
 Though strongly hedg'd of bloody Lyon's pawes,  
 That wittie Lewis a tribute to him paid,  
 Nor this, nor that, nor any such small cause,  
 But only for this worthy knight durst prove  
 To lose his Crowne, rather than faile his love.

Reviewing English history, Astrophil singles out for special praise Edward IV -- not because of his personal gifts, not because of his military victories, and certainly not because of his exemplary behavior -- but only because the example of Edward supports the specious opposition between love and public responsibility that Astrophil is trying to set up. As William Ringler points out,

The chroniclers and poets of the sixteenth century, though they admired Edward's popularity with the people, represented him as neither great nor admirable . . . the Mirror for Magistrates said he died of 'surfeting and untemperate life'. . . Sidney knew, and knew that his readers would know, the unsavoury aspects of Edward's life and character; so that he is being patently sophistical.<sup>13</sup>

What Astrophil first found difficult to excuse in himself, he can now excuse in a king. His version of his own history is just as distorted as his version of England's; and his stature in the public sphere is just as compromised as it is in the artistic, the philosophical, or the ethical. The public sonnets, holding up a mirror to a world of





unfulfilled obligations and cancelled values, reveal the changing patterns of his self-appeasement.

Two of the most influential conduct books of the sixteenth century, Castiglione's Il Cortegiano and Sir Thomas Elyot's The Boke Named the Governour, shed light not only on Astrophil's behavior but also on his friends' response to it. Both set forth explicit standards to be emulated by a young aristocrat who wishes to play a significant and virtuous role in his society; and by the standards of both books, Astrophil fails. Where Castiglione's Ottaviano argues that most attributes of a courtier are good only insofar as they are directed toward a virtuous end, Astrophil shrugs off the implications of his actions. Where Elyot believes that counselors should be wise men who employ their wisdom in the active life for the benefit of others, Astrophil listens and responds only because he is "cumbred with good manners." Consider the qualities which Castiglione's Ottaviano emphasizes:

the perfect courtier . . . may indeed be good and worthy of praise, not, however, simply and in himself, but in regard to the end to which he is directed. For indeed if by being of noble birth, graceful, charming, and expert in so many exercises, the Courtier were to bring forth no other fruit than to be what he is, I should not judge it right for a man to devote so much study and labor to acquiring this perfection of Courtiership as anyone must do who wishes to acquire it. . . . But if the activities of the Courtier are directed to the good end to which they ought to be directed, and which I have in mind, I feel certain that they are not only not harmful or vain, but most useful and deserving of infinite praise.

Therefore, I think that the aim of the



perfect Courtier, which we have not spoken of up to now, is so to win for himself, by means of the accomplishments ascribed to him by these gentlemen, the favor and mind of the prince whom he serves that he may be able to tell him, and always will tell him, the truth about everything he needs to know, without fear or risk of displeasing him . . . . And thus, having in himself the goodness which these gentlemen attributed to him, together with readiness of wit, charm, prudence, knowledge of letters and of many other things -- the Courtier will in every instance be able adroitly to show the prince how much honor and profit will come to him and to his from justice, liberality, magnanimity, gentleness, and the other virtues that befit a good prince . . . . And because the real merit of good deeds consists chiefly in two things, one of which is to choose a truly good end to aim at, and the other is to know how to find means timely and fitting to attain that good end -- it is certain that a man aims at the best end when he sees to it that his prince is deceived by no one, listens to no flatterers or slanderers or liars, and distinguishes good from evil, loving the one and hating the other. <sup>14</sup>

According to Castiglione's formulation, Astrophil is one of those who "bring[s] forth no other fruit than to be what he is"; and Ottaviano's words closely parallel Astrophil's friends' rebukes. As we have seen, Sidney places Astrophil in public settings -- most notably in Sonnet 30, but also in Sonnets 23 and 27 -- in which all of the commonplaces indicate that he should be using his "readinesse of wit, charm, prudence, knowledge of letters and of many other things" in order to influence his sovereign to act with "justice, liberality, magnanimity, gentleness, and the other virtues that befit a good prince." Considered from this perspective, Astrophil is culpable not only because he has failed to govern himself or make full use of his



gifts, but also because he has utterly disregarded a Renaissance truism that they should be used to help bring about the proper governing of others. The same three sonnets -- 23, 27, and 30 -- are illuminated by Elyot's discussion of consultation and "counsaille": consultation occurs "where men devise together and reason what is to be done," he explains, and counsel is the advice obtained from each man thus assembled.<sup>15</sup> Elyot's conception of the former as the last part of "morall Sapience, and the beginning of sapience politike"<sup>16</sup> reinforces a reading of these sonnets that finds Astrophil's self-preoccupied withdrawal from action fatuous and irresponsible.

Helpful as the conduct books are in revealing the cultural pattern that stands behind Astrophil's actions, Sidney's preoccupation with the conflict between private emotion and public responsibility -- a concern which also informs the Arcadia -- links him to an earlier body of literature as well. Whatever else Astrophil is -- and his roles are numerous<sup>17</sup> -- he is also, as we have seen in the tournament sonnets, a knight; and he has much in common with other knights of literature. Specifically, he shares with them (and with his closer antecedents, Pyrocles and Musidorus) a marked difficulty in reconciling private inclination with public obligation. This difficulty, far from being novel, forms the basis of two persistent concerns of chivalric romance: the figure of the recreant knight and the theme of the rival claims of love and chivalry.

Not all courtly literature shares the same view of romantic love.



In fact, the chivalric romances -- from Chretien de Troyes to Malory -- offer views that differ subtly from each other but differ markedly from the endorsement of uncritical and self-abasing adoration that is associated with the conventions of amour courtois in lyric poetry of the period. Despite their delight in otherworld journeys, magic springs, dwarves and sorceresses, and elusive geography and chronology, the romances are very much concerned with exploring and explaining how the knight should live in this world -- how he should behave with family and friends as well as with members of the court.<sup>18</sup> As a group, the romancers seek to place love in human experience by setting the lover in a social and/or political context which legitimates and dramatizes other goals, values, and dimensions of life, and which reveals over time the extent to which the lover's behavior is compatible with them. The figure of the recreant knight retains its vitality from Chretien to Sidney: Chretien's Erec, like Sidney's Astrophil, is so wrapped up in the woman he loves that he forgets his obligations and becomes the object of gossip; the greatest difference is that Erec, genuinely ashamed of himself, succeeds in changing his course. One of the most important virtues in the world of the romances is that of mesure; and recreancy is most often the result of an amor desmesure.<sup>19</sup> Like his predecessors, Sidney computes the cost of desmesurance in public currency. Like them, he rejects emphatically the notion that love which flies in the face of other responsibilities is ennobling.

Chretien suggests that a workable balance between the claims of





love and chivalry can be achieved, and he implies that the failure to achieve such a balance is an individual failure, a remediable condition, not a crack in the golden bowl of the chivalric code itself. Investing Arthurian legend with political and social concerns as he considers the privileges and responsibilities of the knight in society, Chretien deals with different kinds of recreancy in Erec et Enide, in Yvain, and in the unfinished Perceval. In all three the protagonists, after meeting initial success, must come to terms with their subsequent failure to carry out certain responsibilities in one sphere or another as they move toward a more mature understanding of their social roles and move from innocence to experience, from ignorance to knowledge. But his treatment of Erec (whose similarities to Astrophil are occasionally startling) is almost paradigmatic for the genre.<sup>20</sup>

From the outset, Chretien takes pains to present Erec as clear thinking, virtuous, courtly, and courageous; no rebel in the cause of love, he shares the values of his world. His marriage to Enide -- no budding midons -- is not merely sanctioned but welcomed by his own father, King Lac, as well as by Arthur and Guenevere, both of whom pay special tribute to the unassuming young woman when she first arrives at court. But while Erec's supreme happiness with Enide meets with public approval, it is also the source of his difficulty:

All loved her for her open heart, and whoever  
could do her any service was glad and esteemed  
himself the more . . . . But Erec loved her with  
such a tender love that he cared no more for arms,  
nor did he go to tournaments, nor have any desire



to joust; but he spent his time in cherishing his wife. . . . His friends grieved over this . . . . He was blamed so much on all sides by the knights and squires that murmurs reached Enide's ears how that her lord had turned craven about arms and deeds of chivalry, and that his manner of life was greatly changed. <sup>21</sup>

Enide, who blames herself for Erec's recreancy, wants no part of a love that turns its back on the courtly world. In contrast to Chretien's Guenevere, who reproaches Lancelot severely for his momentary reluctance to lose face on her behalf, Enide does not measure Erec's love for her by his willingness to sacrifice dignity or reputation. On the contrary, she reveals to him her own misgivings and the misgivings of others:

In this land they all say -- the dark, the fair, and the ruddy -- that it is a great pity that you should renounce your arms; your reputation has suffered from it. Everyone used to say not long ago that in all the world there was known no better or more gallant knight. Now they all go about making game of you -- old and young, little and great -- calling you a recreant. . . . It grieves me when I hear it said, and yet it grieves me more that they put the blame for it on me. Yes, I am blamed for it, I regret to say, and they all assert it is because I have so ensnared and caught you that you are losing all your merit, and do not care for aught but me. You must choose another course. <sup>22</sup>

And so he does. Recognizing the truth of her words, he prepares at once to set out with her to restore his damaged reputation, and a lengthy series of almost penitential adventures ensues.

Fittingly, in the final episode -- the "Joy of the Court" -- Erec not only completes the long process of overcoming his own



but also helps extricate someone else, Mabonagrain, from the same condition. Unlike Enide, whose love for her husband does not cloud her judgment, Mabonagrain's wife has tricked him into abdicating all other responsibilities. Confined in a mysterious garden which has all the attributes of a locus amoenus but which is stifling, Mabonagrain is miserable. Erec releases him from the bondage of the garden and from a suffocating love which robs him of his social identity. If Mabonagrain's forced withdrawal into a private world of love is viewed by his society as a disaster, his release is a matter for three days of celebration -- the "Joy of the Court." His own rehabilitation complete, Erec himself is not only ready to return to Arthur's court; having passed, as D.D.R. Owen observes, "from his earlier self-centered chivalry to a state of social awareness,"<sup>23</sup> he is prepared to assume the kingship of his own land and bring joy to his own court as well.

The similarities in the difficulties confronting Erec and Astrophil highlight the differences in their responses: where Erec's understanding grows, Astrophil's shrinks; where Erec comes to accept his social role, Astrophil rejects his; where Erec is an exemplar, Astrophil is a negative example. But if the comparison is illuminating, is it not also "farfet"? Not really; Chretien's narrative, far from being an isolated example, embodies and articulates the social and ethical concerns of a large and influential body of literature. Those concerns, subsumed in the figure of the recreant knight and the theme of the rival claims of love and chivalry



which provide a framework for so much Arthurian literature, not only dominate romance narrative through Malory; they also play a prominent role in Sidney's Arcadia.<sup>24</sup>

Given the persistence of chivalric attitudes and values in both literature and social forms, it seems sensible to pay attention to the influence of chivalric romance on a writer who is careful to establish a context that Chretien would have understood at once. The public sonnets in Astrophil and Stella raise many of the same questions explored in the narrative romances. In his treatment of Astrophil's amor desmesure and dramatization of his recreancy and its consequences, Sidney draws on the chivalric tradition as much as he does on Petrarchan sonnets or on the "pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral" heroics of Sannazaro and Ariosto.

Understanding the context of the public context sonnets reconfirms what a careful reading of the sequence as a whole reveals: Sidney establishes a point of view grounded in ethical and social norms which dictate the rejection of desmesurance and which find Astrophil's self-absorbed behavior deficient. But the knights who stand behind Astrophil are not poets: and when Castiglione and Elyot write about courtiers and governors who make use of their skill in poetry (or other art forms) to influence the policies of a prince, they are addressing themselves primarily to the issue of courtier as poet, not poet as courtier; the difference is significant.<sup>25</sup>





Astrophil is a poet first of all, as he tells us in the sonnet that introduces the sequence. In the poems which follow, he returns intermittently to the subject of his poetic activity -- sometimes in passing references, sometimes in detail. As a group, these poems about poetry reveal the same narrowing of perspective, the same movement from self-awareness to self-diminution, that defines the pattern of the public sonnets.

In Sonnet 1, "Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show," he laments the fact that "words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay, / Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Studie's blowes, / And others' feete still seem'd but strangers in my way" (9-11), and implies that he will proceed by following his muse's injunction to "'looke in thy heart and write.'" In this sonnet, he analyzes his relation to his literary predecessors; considers the difficulties inherent in reconciling convention and invention; and considers his own affective, stylistic, and rhetorical priorities and practices. His analysis demonstrates that he conceives of poetry as a complex activity, one which will draw upon the full resources of his intelligence, at the same time that it demonstrates his concern with finding his own voice: the poem -- the product of this activity -- must render in verse and without distortion what he really does think and feel.

The next sonnet, trying to explain why he "call[s] it praise to suffer Tyrannie," does just that. His recognition that he is employing "the remnant of my wit, / To make my selfe beleeeve, that all is well,



/ While with a feeling skill I paint my hell"(10-12), emerges from an introspective and lucid analysis of his situation --- an analysis grounded in careful reasoning and accurate reporting. In other sonnets, however -- 3 and 6 are excellent examples -- he dismisses the complexities of verse just as he elsewhere dismisses his public obligations. Reflecting upon the poems of his predecessors and contemporaries, he rejects "strange similes" in Sonnet 3, and decides in Sonnet 6 that he can do without Petrarchan conceits, classical allusions, pastoral conventions, and decorative embellishments. He does not, however, get rid of extraneous or irrelevant elements in order to sharpen the tools of his understanding. On the contrary, his conception of verse has undergone a fundamental change; in these discussions he is no longer concerned with evaluating his own behavior. When he ends Sonnet 3 by saying of Stella's face that "all my deed / But Copying is, what in her Nature writes," he reduces his own role from thinker to copyist. The same constricting formulation concludes Sonnet 6: "all the map of my state I display, / When trembling voice brings forth that I do Stella love." The pattern is repeated in other sonnets dealing with poetry: in 15, "You that do search for everie purling spring," he criticizes those poets who seek inspiration in classical models, rely on "Dictionarie's methode," or rehash "poore Petrarch's long deceased woes." "You take wrong waies, those far-fet helpes be such, / As do bewray a want of inward tuch," (9-10) he warns, offering instead a formula of his own to replace the formula he rejects: "Stella behold, and then begin to endite" (14). A



similar argument informs 28, "You that with allegorie's curious frame"; 35, "What may words say, or what may words not say"; 50, "Stella, the fulnesse of my thoughts of thee"; 55, "Muses, I oft invoked your holy ayde"; and 74, "I never drank of Aganippe well," in which he basks complacently in his own verbal fluency. "How falles it then, that with so smooth an ease / My thoughts I speake, and what I speake doth flow / In verse, and that my verse best wits doth please?" (9-11), he asks, almost redundantly, for the answer by now is distressingly obvious: "My lips are sweet, inspired with Stella's kisse" (14).

How, though, can we be sure that Sidney intends us to take ironically a statement like "Not thou by praise, but praise in thee is raisde"(35.13)? We know, in part, because of the way the public and poetic contexts converge in Sonnet 90:

Stella thinke not that I by verse seeke fame,  
 Who seeke, who hope, who love, who live but thee;  
 Thine eyes my pride, thy lips my history:  
 If thou praise not, all other praise is shame.  
 Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame  
 A nest for my yong praise in Lawrell tree:  
 In truth I sweare, I wish not there should be  
 Graved in mine Epitaph a Poet's name:  
 Ne if I would, could I just title make,  
 That any laud to me thereof should grow,  
 Without my plumes from others' wings I take.  
 For nothing from my wit or will doth flow,  
 Since all my words thy beauty doth endite,  
 And love doth hold my hand and makes me write.

In this poem, the two contexts -- public and poetic -- are clearly conflated. In his preoccupation with his activity as a poet, Astrophil focuses on externals and reduces history to reputation,



achievement to ambition. Once again, he devalues the opinions of others ("If thou praise not, all other praise is shame"). Astrophil is deficient not just as a courtier because he fails to understand and live up to public responsibilities: in his failure to understand and implement the proper relation between public and private, convention and invention, he is also deficient as a poet. Just as his earlier fear that "Great expectation" would "weare a traine of shame" now gives way to a bland obliteration of his own history, his earlier conviction that artistic achievement depended on discovering his own authentic voice and his proper relation to his own literary heritage now gives way to his assumption that nothing authentic can flow from his "wit or will," and to his denial of his very identity as a poet.

There is no suggestion that Astrophil would be diminished as a poet, or that he would produce a trivialized art, were he to fulfill the various expectations referred to repeatedly in the sequence and examined here. Instead, he is deficient in terms of the standards endorsed in the sequence itself as well as in Sidney's Defence, in which, as Daniel Javitch reminds us, "the ethical and persuasive ends previously attributed to the orator" are "appropriated by the poet," who is "able to create a world not only superior to the actual world but capable of shaping and improving the everyday world men inhabit."

<sup>26</sup> What Astrophil's society expects of him (what Sidney tells us of it) stands in sharp contrast to what Wyatt's speakers' society expects of them. There is no intimation in Sidney's sequence that Astrophil's colleagues would like him to conform to polite





hypocrisies, to make his song "less straunge" -- to lie a little, maybe, for the sake of appearances. When Wyatt's speakers withdraw into a private world -- as they do, for example, in "In court to serue" and "Myne owne John Poyntz" -- they do so because they are morally superior to the courtly world around them; their ethical sensitivity is, in fact, the basis of their rejection of that world. In other poems, like "Blame not my lute," the speaker chooses, to put it very simply, not to cut and run but to stay put and fight back: to use poetry as one means of presenting himself to his world, of fashioning a viable public stance, while refusing to rein in his verse to accede to the inappropriate demands of his society.

Resonating in the work of both poets, however, is an affirmation of that fundamental emphasis of English humanism: the assumption that one's nature is confirmed or fulfilled by full participation in one's society; that one's ethical status depends upon such participation; and that one's failure to participate requires explicit justification. Revisionist critics attribute Astrophil's behavior to Sidney's smarting political wounds: Arthur Marotti insists that "The central irony of Astrophil and Stella is that the heterocosm of love to which the poet-lover has fled from the viciously competitive world of the court is no compensation for sociopolitical defeat"; and Stallybrass and Jones, stressing Sidney's inconclusive attempts to win a major appointment, argue that "the suffering of the lover . . . functions as a displacement of the sufferings of the courtier."<sup>27</sup> But even if this is the story of Sidney's life, as F.W. Levy has argued,<sup>28</sup> it



is an explanation which Sidney repudiates in his sequence. Far from presenting the world of the court as "viciously competitive," he takes great pains to characterize its spokesperson -- Astrophil's friend -- as rational and thoughtful, concerned and sympathetic, equally familiar with ethical philosophy and political realities. In fact, Marotti's emphasis on "sociopolitical encoding" is a variant of an argument developed by G.K. Hunter more than twenty years ago. In a provocative discussion of the relationship of humanistic ideas and ideals to the energetic literary activity occurring in the middle of Elizabeth's reign, Hunter suggested that the humanistic credo -- "the myth of state service as the natural end of a training in the humanities" -- constituted not a strength but a "fatal weakness":

"Since Humanism was concerned to point spiritual energies and enthusiasms into this world and so to ameliorate its condition, it deprived the scholar of his natural refuge in contempt of the practical world."<sup>29</sup> But Hunter's implicit equation of poets with scholars is misleading (his catch-all phrase, "up-and-coming literati," hardly bridges the gap). While his argument might illuminate the predicament of a Gabriel Harvey, it does not illuminate the predicament of a poet-speaker like Astrophil. And, far from seeking refuge in scholarly pursuits, Astrophil's creator argues eloquently in the Defence that poetry is superior to philosophy -- to abstract thought -- precisely because of its greater impact on the actual lives of people who live in the "practical world." The central flaw in the "powerful myth" of English humanism, Hunter believes, is



that poets and other writers, deprived of their "natural refuge," have no useful role to play in their societies.<sup>30</sup> But Sidney does not present his Astrophil as a poet-speaker whose society has deprived him of a useful role, or who is seriously engaged in the dilemma Hunter describes. Astrophil speaks as a member of a given society who is also a poet, not as a clerc manque who is deprived of his refuge; and Sidney's only fully-developed poet-speaker is presented as diminished precisely because he abandons a role his creator endorses.



"At random from the truth":  
Knowledge and Action in Shakespeare's Sonnets

A very different world from Sidney's stands behind Shakespeare's sonnets. Far from being a courtier or an aristocrat -- a "child of state" -- Shakespeare's speaker holds a more marginal place in his society. We learn little about his actual role or rank; attempts to identify him as a man of the theatre, based on references to "motley," "public means," and "public manners" in Sonnets 110 and 111, have proved inconclusive.<sup>1</sup> But whatever his status, the speaker does make clear, in the sonnets to the young man, that he views himself as someone "in disgrace with fortune and 'men's eyes" (29.1).<sup>2</sup> In a substantial number of poems, he frequently indicates that he is deprived of the rewards of the world -- a place in it -- which Astrophil so casually turns his back on.

Shakespeare's speaker does not merely dismiss the world of fortune and friends as Astrophil does; instead, repeatedly lamenting the fact that its rewards are not available to him, he makes use of what J.B. Leishman calls the theme of compensation to rationalize its loss.<sup>3</sup> This process cuts two ways: first, the love of the friend compensates the speaker for other losses, which then seem insignificant by comparison (as in Sonnet 29); second, the pain caused by the friend's absence, obtuseness, or treachery makes other gains and rewards seem insignificant, as in Sonnet 90 ("Then hate me when





thou wilt, if ever, now"). Generally, the world standing behind these sonnets -- the world for whose loss the speaker will be compensated -- is, as Hallett Smith says, a social world rather than a natural one.<sup>4</sup> Frequently, however, it is represented by natural imagery: occasionally, as in Sonnets 33, 34, 97, and 98, the social and natural worlds are conflated -- "Ev'n so my sun one early morn did shine"; in them, the "world well lost" is almost wholly imagined in natural terms -- a morning and a day in the first pair, and a whole season in the second.

In these sonnets of compensation (they include 25, 29, 30, 33, 34, 37, 66, 90, 91, 97, 98, and 112),<sup>5</sup> there are only occasional suggestions that the speaker's willingness, even eagerness, to be compensated is misguided; no real sense, except in one poem, that he is making a serious error in casting off "things of great repute." Only twice in these poems, in Sonnets 34 and 112, does the speaker seriously question the validity of his own compensatory thinking for more than a passing moment. In the couplet of Sonnet 34 -- "Ah, but those tears are pearl which thy love sheeds, / And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds" -- the friend's contrition makes up for "ill deeds," not just the accidents of fortune. The terms of the "ransom" to which he willingly agrees cause him some uneasy moments in Sonnet 35, when he considers the possibility that he is "corrupting" himself by "salving" the friend's "amiss" and "authorizing [his] trespass with compare." And in Sonnet 112, he casts off more than material success when he decides to allow the rightness or wrongness of his own actions



to be determined by the friend -- his "all the world" -- and cedes to the friend the freedom to think and judge for him. But his decision in 112 to give up a certain amount of autonomy leads not only to the self-assertion of 121 but also to the self-doubt of 113, in which he introduces the mind/eye antithesis that will trouble him so much in the second part of the sequence.<sup>6</sup> For a moment, perplexed by the discovery that his "most true mind thus maketh m'eyne untrue" (113.14), he stands at the edge of an epistemological abyss, but the moment passes in the self-indulgent reassurances that conclude Sonnet 114.

In the dark lady sonnets, however, the outside world is treated very differently. The mind/eye opposition, glanced at in Sonnets 113 and 114, becomes a recurrent and compelling issue, and the judgments of others -- outsiders -- are given legitimacy as the speaker becomes increasingly preoccupied with the difficulties of making accurate judgments and dwells on the opposition between what he feels for her and what others say of her. In these poems, though, the primary focus is not epistemological but psychological and ethical. The validation of the external source of judgment in the dark lady sonnets is used to call attention to the problematical relation between knowledge and action as the speaker comes to accept the valuations of others and rages at his own inability to stop loving someone who, unlike Astrophil's Stella, is attainable but unsuitable. On balance, we feel that Astrophil's failure is an individual failure -- that if only he could see clearly, he would be able to align his behavior with his



knowledge. Here, however, in what is almost a gloss on the plight of his predecessor, Shakespeare's speaker seems trapped despite his very real grasp of the situation. But a very different sort of poem emerges: there is no suggestion that this unidealized speaker is living wisely or profiting from his experience in any ordinary way, yet he does achieve a certain fidelity or honesty in recording his experience that Astrophil does not. Moreover, in some of these sonnets, the speaker discovers complexity and reciprocity as well as complicity.

In The Tension of the Lyre, his recent study of the sonnets, Hallett Smith stresses the speaker's "great consciousness" of and "more jaded view" of the social world in the sonnets to the dark lady;<sup>7</sup> that a critic as astute as Smith overlooks the sonnets in the first part of the sequence which evoke and then dismiss the world may be a measure of their success in elevating the private sphere. Even a brief overview will help to define the significance of the pattern they establish.

In Sonnet 25, "Let those who are in favor with their stars," the speaker simply claims that he is luckier than the favorite of the great prince, who can be cast aside with a frown, and luckier than the unknown warrior, whose single loss may bring disgrace; barred from such triumphs -- from "public honour and proud titles" -- he sees their drawbacks as he reassures himself that he is secure in the friend's love. Sonnets 29 and 30 are more complex and more interesting; in the former, the speaker wishes for things that he has



never had; in the latter, he reflects on things he once had and lost. In Sonnet 29 the speaker is restless, discontent, envious of the successes of others; his very real misery is grounded in specific detail: "Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, / Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, / Desiring this man's art and that man's scope" (5-7). Nevertheless, the "wealth" of the friend's love is sufficient to cancel out the dearth of his "outcast state": "For thy sweet love rememb'ed such wealth brings, / That then I scorn to change my state with kings" (13-14). The couplet, characteristically trying to counterbalance the preceding quatrains, works to make the complaints and losses of the previous lines seem trivial. Like Sonnet 25, this poem stresses the superficial and ephemeral aspects of fortune's gifts; it is a case of being jealous of the good luck of others, not a case of turning one's back on "reason's audite" or betraying one's birthright, as Astrohil does. Moreover, the speaker's perceptive insight in line 8 -- "With that I most enjoy contented least" -- reveals a more introspective side of his nature which is less susceptible to discontent from passing disappointment.

In the next sonnet, "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought," remembrance of the friend is called upon to compensate for much more -- for acute personal losses, not just for lack of worldly success or comforts. The speaker weeps not only for "love's long since cancelled woe," but also for "precious friends hid in death's dateless night"; moreover, he re-experiences the pain of the old losses, which he "new pay[s] as if not paid before." Not only that, he also





confronts his own irremediable misuse of time -- his "dear time's waste." Once again, however, the love meets the challenge: thinking on the friend, "All losses are restored, and sorrows end." All of the speaker's memories here refer to personal relationships; there is no broader social context, no reference to professional or artistic ambitions, as there is in the previous poem, yet the way those relationships are presented makes it impossible to take their loss lightly, as the loss of public recognition is meant, finally, to be taken lightly in Sonnet 29.

But if the friend's love has power to restore losses and put an end to sorrows, his treachery also has power to destroy the speaker's pleasure in "Suns of the world," as the couplet of Sonnet 33 reveals: "Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth; / Suns of the world may stain when heav'n's sun staineth." The compensatory mood is reestablished, however, in Sonnet 37, which follows a now recognizable pattern: the speaker, "made lame by fortune's dearest spite," is nevertheless "sufficed" by the friend's "abundance," taking all his "comfort" from the latter's "worth and truth." Later in the sequence, Sonnet 90's "Give not a windy night a rainy morrow" conflates images of the natural world with images of misfortune and loss, and states explicitly the insignificance of worldly losses when weighing them against the feared loss of the friend's love:

If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,  
 When other petty griefs have done their spite,  
 But in the onset come; so shall I taste  
 At first the very worst of fortune's might,



And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,  
 Compared with loss of thee will not seem so.

Compensation's negative corollary is demonstrated in Sonnet 98, in which the opening simile -- "How like a winter hath my absence been" -- is not only extended for all fourteen lines, but also provides the basis of the next sonnet, "From you I have been absent in the spring," which reworks the imagery of its predecessor. Both poems -- the former figuratively, the latter literally -- insist that the beauties of the natural world are nothing without the friend: "For summer and his pleasures wait on thee, / And thou away, the very birds are mute" (11-12).

Each of these sonnets, separately and together, works to reinforce the speaker's conviction, reiterated in 91, that "thy love is better than high birth to me." Each, in its way, downgrades the relative importance of professional success, money, prestige, social acceptance, and even friendship, as the speaker upgrades and underscores the importance of a private world of love in light of which the larger social world is well lost. Only once, in Sonnet 66, is the world rejected because it is corrupt or profoundly uncongenial. In all others, its rewards are worth having -- up to a point; their loss causes pain -- up to a point. As the speaker analyzes the relative merits of his circumstances -- of these gains and losses -- he takes their measure himself and does not buttress his conclusions by invoking the opinions of others as support. In some cases, his own mental processes parallel his subjective valuations of his experience:



in Sonnets 29 and 30, for example, it is the process of remembering, the act of thinking, that is the restorer of all losses. To a certain extent, in these poems, the mind creates its own reality.

In general, though, the poems which turn away from the world -- social or natural -- are not poems in which the speaker's judgment is clouded or his words compromised. On the contrary, rather than turning his back on lofty ambitions, worthwhile achievements, or truly pressing responsibilities, he turns away instead from petty preoccupation with wealth, status, and popularity to what he views as the richer, less transitory rewards of the friend's love. As readers, we are invited to share his perspective; there is no indication, in the sonnets looked at so far, that the speaker's judgment is distorted, that his assessment of events is inaccurate, or that his weighing of priorities is skewed. But other sonnets or groups of sonnets address themselves to that possibility.

Of course, in 35, the "civil war" sonnet, the speaker sees that he is making himself an "accessory" to the friend's wrongdoing by "authorizing" his trespass; his acknowledged complicity casts doubt on the wisdom of the ransom agreed to in Sonnet 34. But Sonnet 34 itself places a heavier burden on the power of compensation than do its fellows; the friend himself is the agent of the speaker's misery, the agent of treachery, as the opening lines make clear:

Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,  
And make me travel forth without my cloak,  
To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way.

(1-3)



While the speaker has been betrayed, and while his "wound" and "disgrace" are caused by the friend, his concern is with the inadequacy of the friend's apology, a salve which "heals the wound and cures not the disgrace": "Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss." But the couplet emphasizes two subtle points: first, it is not just the friend's love which has the power to "ransom all ill deeds," but his contrition: the speaker responds generously to his friend's tears, and the couplet focuses upon the power of forgiveness, not on the power of compensation. Second, there is a very real difference between ransoming "ill deeds" -- paying a high price, knowing all too well the cost they exact -- and glossing over them, disguising their nature. Strictly speaking, Sonnet 34 is not a sonnet of compensation, then, but a sonnet of guilt and contrition; as such, it is properly linked with Sonnets 119-21 as well as with 133. But it is linked to the compensatory sonnets (to 90 as well as to 33) by its imagery.<sup>8</sup> Reading 33 and 34 sequentially, we end, like the speaker, by downgrading the relative importance of glorious mornings, other suns, and even gilded streams. We feel their beauty: we feel their abrupt and painful loss; but we also feel the sudden power of forgiveness to make the loss less acute.

But a new element dominates Sonnets 93-96 and qualifies our reading of the compensatory sonnets 97-98, to which they are linked by figurative language as well as by order. In the first group, the speaker's misgivings intensify, and his criticism of his friend -- made explicit in Sonnet 35 and echoed in innuendos and undercurrents





throughout the intervening poems -- becomes even more overt. Sonnet 93 opens with the speaker's decision to "live, supposing thou art true, / Like a deceived husband"; and Sonnets 95 and 96 attest to the friend's power not to compensate for loss but to make the bad seem good. In the former, he protests against the friend's ability to make him "bless an ill report," warning him in the couplet that such power will not necessarily continue. But by Sonnet 96 he withdraws that threat and defers:

Thou mak'st faults graces that to thee resort.  
 As on the finger of a throned queen  
 The basest jewel will be well esteemed,  
 So are those errors that in thee are seen,  
 To truths translated, and for true things deemed'.  
(4-8)

But the friend's power to "make . . . shame" "sweet and lovely" is overlooked in the winter of Sonnet 97's discontent. To a certain extent, however, the exposure of the friend's faults in 93, 95, and 96 -- not to mention the insinuations of the inscrutable 94, "They that have pow'r to hurt, and will do none" -- limits their endorsement of the speaker's willingness to be compensated in the sonnets that follow. 94's "summer's flow'r" (which may be a lily that festers) casts doubt upon the certainties of Sonnet 97. It qualifies, if we accept Q's order here, that powerful poem's "abundant issue" of "summer and his pleasures"; it also undercuts the pastoral otium of 97's blander Spenserian successor, which is decorated with roses and lilies -- the flowers subject to cankers and festering rot.

Throughout the sequence, the burden placed upon the compensatory



power of the friend's love has grown heavier, overcoming first material deprivation, then canceling out acute losses, then ransoming the friend's occasional acts of betrayal, then outweighing suspected flaws in the character of the friend himself. In each case, however, the speaker is presented as a man who knows what he is doing, what kind of bargain he is striking: when one talks about paying a ransom, one is generally aware of the cost. In Sonnet 35, for example, he is exquisitely sensitive to such issues. At other points in the sequence -- in Sonnets 97 and 98, for example -- we suspect, if we follow Q's order, that the speaker tends at times to put aside his awareness of the friend's faults and of his own complicity in "fairing the foul." In general, however, the speaker is not blind to the friend's faults. Rather, as a growing body of criticism has made clear, he uses the sonnets to expose those faults to the reader while seeming to flatter and court the less perceptive friend himself.<sup>9</sup> If the speaker is deceived, it is not about the friend but about his own ability to continue to write such double-edged poems without being unduly "confined" by this sort of constancy or compromised in the effort. Thus, Jane Roessner writes that Sonnets 100-114 "are set up at once to deceive and reveal: to appear to be genuine praises (and often, seemingly designed to fool the young man into hearing them as such), while in fact covertly revealing the corruption of the friend, and ultimately, of the sonnets themselves which had first seemed to be stays against corruption."<sup>10</sup> But certain elements in Sonnets 110-112 suggest that the speaker is deceived about the implications of



his own actions and motivations. They introduce another perspective, one which invites us to believe that the speaker errs in 112 when he turns a deaf ear on critics as well as on flatterers and opts instead for a private world to which alone he is alive.

In 110, it is his turn to feel contrite and to seek forgiveness. He has not only made a public spectacle of himself, a "motley," in some unspecified way; he has also, he admits, "Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear" and "looked on truth / Askance and strangely." In Sonnet 111, however, instead of accepting responsibility for his own acts, his own situation, as he does in 110, he attempts to blame "Fortune," "The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds," for the fact that his "nature is subdued / To what it works in, like the dyer's hand" (6-7). But as Rosalind could have told him, and as she reminds Celia when the latter confuses "fortune's office" with nature's, "Fortune reigns in gifts of the world, not in the lineaments of Nature" (AYL. 1.2.40-42). The distinction reveals the distortion in the speaker's thinking (and the author's likely view of it) as he prepares to cede further responsibility for his own behavior and assessment of it in Sonnet 112.

The uneasiness generated by Sonnet 112 is due to ambiguities and ironies which are intrinsic, and not merely functions of context. In it, the speaker abandons his independent judgment, his moral autonomy, his critical faculty. He seeks to obliterate the memory of "vulgar scandal" by turning away from "all the world besides" the friend:



For what care I who calls me well or ill,  
 So you o'er-green my bad, my good allow.  
 You are all my world, and I must strive  
 To know my shames and praises from your tongue.  
 (3-6)

He is no longer just asking for pity; he is explicitly giving up the freedom (and responsibility) to judge for himself the rightness or wrongness of his own actions: whether they are "shames" or "praises" will be up to the friend. Hallett Smith finds "easy assurance" in the phrase "you are all the world," but surely that assurance belongs to the speaker, not to the creator. The denial of responsibility for one's fundamental judgments, treated seriously here, is treated playfully by Shakespeare in a very different context -- one which mocks, in counterpoint, the untenable position of the speaker in the sonnets. In Act IV, Scene 5 of The Taming of the Shrew, Petruchio challenges Kate by insisting that day is night and that the sun shining in the sky is really the moon, and threatens to keep her home if she disagrees. Exhausted, she decides to play with him:

Petruchio: I say it is the moon.

Kate: I know it is the moon.

Petruchio: Nay then you lie; it is the blessed sun.

Kate: Then God blest, it [is] the blessed sun,  
 But sun it is not, when you say it is not;  
 And the moon changes even as your mind.  
 What you will have it nam'd, even that it is,  
 And so it shall be so for Katherine  
 (4.5.16-22)

But while Kate is distraught, she is not at wit's end; in her tactical





concession, she mocks Petruchio and his power play as well as herself. Whatever we think of the trade-off she makes, the humor of the interchange depends on her certainty (and ours) that the moon does not change with his mind, that what she says would be ludicrous were it taken seriously. What she pretends to do, the speaker in the sonnet actually does. The problem is not just that he solipsistically turns inward, but that he denies what Thomas Greene calls, in another context, "the centered self," and seals himself off from critics as well as flatterers.<sup>11</sup> Nor is it a question of difficulty in distinguishing between appearance and reality, as it is, say, in 93, 113, or certain key poems in the dark lady group in which the speaker is genuinely perplexed, hard put to separate what is real from what is illusory. Instead, he wills away the power to make such distinctions as he wills away the rest of the world.<sup>12</sup>

By the end of this sonnet, Shakespeare's speaker has done what Sidney's Astrophil has done: to say "None else to me, nor I to none alive" is not very different from saying "Thine eyes my pride, thy lips mine history." Both invest the person they love with sovereignty over their rational faculties; both make that person the arbiter of right and wrong; both yield their capacity for autonomous judgment. But Shakespeare's speaker, whose turn of mind is perhaps more speculative than Astrophil's, seems uneasy about his constricted vision and uncentered self. He suspects, in Sonnet 113, that he is not perceiving the world accurately and that his vision is distorted.<sup>13</sup> All the eye sees -- "The most sweet favor or



deformed'st creature -- is shaped to the friend's "feature":

Incapable of more, replete with you,  
My most true mind thus maketh m'eyne untrue.  
(13-14)

One kind of truth clashes with another; the truth of fidelity distorts his vision of other worlds, other realities. As Roessner says, "Loving the friend . . . would require being dead to all the world, being cut off from all sights and sounds, living a confinement."<sup>14</sup>

The same potential epistemological chaos dominates the first half of Sonnet 114 as the speaker continues to examine the possibility that his love for the friend has distorted the workings of his mind, teaching it "To make of monsters, and things indigest / Such cherubims as your sweet resemble, / Creating every bad a perfect best" (5-7). But while he frames his dilemma in terms of the mind/eye conflict -- an opposition which will be important in the dark lady poems -- he does not follow through. Instead, producing what Stephen Booth calls an "intellectual confection,"<sup>15</sup> he plays games with his argument, manipulating its premises sophistically. As Booth says, the ending is "frivolous" in its "intellectual ingenuity."<sup>16</sup> Complacent in his cleverness, the speaker backs away from the issues raised in Sonnet 113.

While he does not reconsider the connection between epistemology and ethics in the sonnets to the friend, he does, in Sonnet 121, reverse the position adopted in 112, revise his view of subjectivity, and redefine what Giorgio Melchiori calls the "ethics of social



behavior."<sup>17</sup> Whatever one thinks of the aesthetic qualities of Sonnets 119 and 120 -- Stephen Spender refers to the latter as "doggerel"<sup>18</sup> -- their "plot" links them to the aesthetically more satisfying 110 and 111. In both pairs, the speaker is preoccupied with guilt, with a strong sense of personal inadequacy or wrongdoing. Both are exaggerated, emotionally and verbally; the fulsome praise of the first gives way to the effusive apologies of the second. More important, though, is the difference in the way these feelings are resolved: seeking pity and reassurance in the former pair, the speaker is led, in 112, to place himself in the friend's orbit, to deny an independent self as he denies the value of the outside world. Overcome with recriminations and contrition in the latter pair, he ends in 121 by denying the importance of just about everything but himself.

While less opaque than 94, Sonnet 121 ("Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed") is a difficult poem whose complexities -- tonal as well as syntactical -- are beyond the scope of this essay. It is, however, fair to say that its speaker reasserts an ethical center in himself, an independence, which he denied in 112, and that he reappraises his relations with his society and its judgments. What is difficult to decide is whether Sonnet 121's self-assertion represents an advance in self-knowledge, a growth in insight from 112, or whether the speaker simply oscillates between two unsatisfactory extremes -- "You are my all the world" and "No, I am that I am." Hilton Landry argues at length for the first view, describing as "moderate and relative" the speaker's famous "declaration of independence."<sup>19</sup>



But G. Wilson Knight thinks the speaker believes himself to be beyond good and evil, and Stephen Booth insists that the "unmistakable" Biblical echo in the phrase "I am that I am" makes the speaker sound "smug, presumptuous and stupid."<sup>20</sup> Melchiori's precise, extended analysis is probably the most skillfully balanced: in his view, the speaker opposes his individual personality to "the corrupt social world that judges by perverted standards," but his individualism does not provide a viable alternative; instead, it generates the "uneasiness" of the third quatrain and the "Machiavellian" hypothesis of the couplet.<sup>21</sup> Structurally, the poem moves parabolically "from an ambiguous statement through a shrill affirmation to an open doubt . . . in the octave it exposes and clears away the confusion between social and ethical values; in the sestet it restates the contradictions and tensions met in the attempt to reconcile the social and ethical spheres."<sup>22</sup>

Melchiori's careful (and ultimately inconclusive) analysis of this sonnet's contrapuntal ambiguities should deflect facile readings. What counts here, however, is not settling on a preferred interpretation but being sensitive to the speaker's continuing preoccupations -- to his sense of the continuing and confusing interplay between the self, the social world, and the ethical sphere. Melchiori's suspicion that Sonnet 121's "world of subjective reality is by no means untainted"<sup>23</sup> applies equally well to the dark lady poems, which are informed by an extended and underlying conflict between what others think and what the speaker thinks and feels -- a





reformulation of the mind/eye antithesis of Sonnet 113. Here, the presence of the external world makes itself felt not in references to the gifts of fortune, as in the compensatory sonnets to the friend, but in matters of judgment -- as it does in 121 and as it fails to do in 112.

In the dark lady poems, the speaker backs away from assertions like "You are my all the world" as well as from its opposite, "No, I am that I am." Instead, he struggles against and moves away from the private judgments and subjective valuations of the poems to the young man. In the latter group, the world makes itself felt as a system of values, opinions, convictions, judgments held by others which are antithetical to his own, but which he comes to endorse; the focus then falls not merely on the content of a given judgment but on the factors which inhibit its implementation.

Philip Edwards finds a "continuous play in these sonnets between fairness-beauty-virtue and darkness-ugliness-vice" and suggests there is a "sophistical confusion between the two poles."<sup>24</sup> But that confusion is largely confined to the early sonnets in the dark lady group, in which the speaker first attempts to convince himself that the rest of the world thinks as he does, and then, finding that it does not, seeks self-justification. In the opening sonnet, 127, his main concern is whether or not the woman conforms to conventional standards of beauty; he not only develops an ingenious argument about her coloring, but reassures himself that his view is shared by others: "every tongue says beauty should look so" (14). Even the couplet of



129 -- "All this the world well knows, yet none knows well / To shun the heav'n that leads men to this hell" -- reveals a similar preoccupation with the predilections of others; it insists on the applicability of lines 1-10 ("All this") not to the speaker in particular but to all men in general. Reflecting upon the difference between his own assessment of the woman and the assessments made by others, he dismisses the applicability of conventional standards in 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), but he reveals his reluctance to dismiss or diverge from "all the world" in 131:

To say they err I dare not be so bold,  
Although I swear it to myself alone.

(7-8)

His own taste leads him to redefine beauty ("Thy black is fairest in my judgment's place") and to distinguish between physical beauty and moral worth at the same time that he decides to be obtuse about the implications of the distinction:

In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds,  
And thence this slander as I think proceeds.

The couplet's "slander" works two ways: first, she is slandered by those who call her appearance foul when only her deeds are foul; second, the speaker's muddled thinking is itself slanderous. In 132, the redefinition of beauty begun in 127 is completed as the speaker commits himself to a new alignment of antitheses, vowing to "swear beauty herself is black, / And all they foul that thy complexion lack" (13-14).



But after two pairs of poems dealing with different subjects (133 and 134 with the triangle, 135 and 136 with "will"), the speaker returns in 137 to the issues skirted or treated sophisticatedly or playfully in sonnets like 127 and 131. He does so, however, with a radically altered outlook. Not only does he repudiate his own previous self-justification; he also inaugurates a process of questioning, of backing away from the answers, of continuing to unmask, that dominates the rest of the sequence and resonates with the echoes of Sidney's *Astrophil*.

This intriguing aspect of the relationship between Sidney's sequence and Shakespeare's dark lady sonnets seems to have gone unnoticed. In both, the speaker is caught in a problem-ridden relationship which causes him great unhappiness: Stella, otherwise suitable, is unattainable; the dark lady, otherwise unsuitable, is all too attainable. Both speakers perceive the nature of their dilemmas, but fail to extricate themselves; their understanding does not enable them to achieve the proper relationship between reason, will, and appetite. Both groups of poems, grounded in the commonplaces of Renaissance faculty psychology, focus upon the problematical relationship between knowledge and action. Both speakers face strikingly similar impasses as they encounter contradictions between their expressed values and their own actions.<sup>25</sup>

The crucial differences lie not in their situations but in their responses. *Astrophil*, perceiving a collision of truths, backs away from the knowledge in the course of the sequence; his ability to



comprehend the significance of his words and actions is diminished as he seeks not to understand but to justify his own behavior. In contrast, Shakespeare's speaker, though frequently tempted by projection, rationalization, and self-deception, confronts his situation much more directly and gives, in sonnets like 137, 147 and 152, an increasingly accurate account of his own predicament. At the same time, however, his knowledge does not bring with it the power to change. Having failed to align his behavior with his judgment -- "For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright, / Who art as black as hell, as dark as night" (147.13-14) -- he is not necessarily "at random from the truth," even though that truth may be, in every sense of the word, "vainly" expressed.<sup>26</sup>

As we have seen, Sidney takes great pains to make it abundantly clear that Astrophil's ability in Sonnet 18 to "see [his] course to loose [him] selfe doth bend" is, however painful, infinitely preferable to the moral position of Sonnet 108. At the end of the sequence, Astrophil has indeed succeeded in what he set out in Sonnet 2 to accomplish: "To make myselfe beleieve, that all is well, / While with a feeling skill I paint my hell." Declaring in 108 that "in my joyes for thee [is] my own annoy," he has thoroughly convinced himself that "all is well", and no longer understands that he is self-deceived and diminished. Throughout the sequence, Sidney invites the reader to perceive Astrophil's failure as an individual failure -- one which is precipitated by a series of deliberate choices, and one which could be qualified or modified, if not entirely averted, by the proper use of





his faculties. Shakespeare's speaker possesses a capacity for rationalization and self-deception that equals, if not exceeds, Astrophil's: for every sonnet in which he unmasks his behavior, there are others in which he engages in a "willing" diminution, even debasement, of self; in which he denies the implications of his behavior as well as the responsibility for it; and in which he attempts to conceal from himself his own complicity in "fairing the foul." At the same time, however, the thrust of these poems is a relentless thrust to know -- to pull back from the deception of the self, of ideas, even of words -- and to apply the full range of his faculties to the comprehension and articulation of his predicament. If he fails to extricate himself, it is not because he has failed to think clearly. At crucial moments the sonnets reveal a speaker whose understanding of his situation increases at the same time that his relationship with the dark lady exacts a greater cost, and whose ability to examine the implications of his own behavior is augmented at the same time that he perceives his situation to be hopeless.

Look, for example, at Sonnet 137. Where Astrophil ends with the discovery of an impasse, a contradiction, Shakespeare's speaker begins with it:

Thou blind fool love, what dost thou to my eyes,  
That they behold and see not what they see?  
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,  
Yet what the best is take the worst to be.

The questions which follow are unanswerable, but instead of using the couplet to dismiss them, he uses it to reinforce them; instead of



undercutting his own earlier insights, as Astrophil does, he ends by stating them more plainly than before and shifting responsibility from a personified force ("Thou blind fool love") to himself:

In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,  
And to this false plague are they now transferred.

Instead of insisting on his own powerlessness, he exercises his capacity for accurate observation in documenting the distortions of his own judgment. It is his eyes and heart, after all, which have erred, and the couplet underscores his ability to be truthful about his own ability to lie. Moreover, the anger that he directs at himself in this poem emerges from the almost buoyant celebration of his mistress's promiscuity and his own exuberant sexuality in the "will" poems preceding it -- "The sea. all water, yet receives rain still." Even more remarkably, perhaps, Sonnet 137's anger is transmuted into the more tolerant appraisal of Sonnet 138, which genially advocates mutual acceptance of mutual deceit.<sup>27</sup>

The pattern governing Sonnet 137 is even more pronounced in Sonnets 147 and 152. The shift from 146 ("Poor soul") to 147 marks a major turning point. One critic, Philip Edwards, finds in 146 "hints of tragedy in that a man should know what this poem knows and yet be unable to avail himself of what the poem offers",<sup>28</sup> but the analysis of the relation between body and soul that occurs in this poem does have a direct impact upon what follows. What happens next is the speaker looks -- with greater intensity than before -- at what is rather than what perhaps should be. In contrast to the poems which



follow it, Sonnet 147 is all direct statement: its powers of observation, description, and analysis are acute; its language is unadorned; even its metaphors are, as Stephen Booth puts it, "efficient."<sup>29</sup> In this poem the speaker begins to experience fully and openly the despair which he fears in Sonnet 140 and to which he alludes in 144. Contrary to his expectations, however, it emerges not from madness or confusion but from clarity of vision and accuracy of observation. On one level, his despair is caused by the discrepancy between knowledge and action: reason, which should cure him of self-destructive love -- a "disease" -- has not been acted upon, and has therefore abandoned him; as a result, he is "past cure." On another level, however, he is just as concerned with his "thoughts" and "discourses -- how truthfully they are "expressed" -- as he is with other forms of action. The couplet, which will be reworked in Sonnet 152, attempts to achieve accuracy.

After the discoveries of Sonnet 147, the downward spiral of Sonnets 148-51 seems inevitable. In 148, certain of nothing but uncertainty, the speaker begins to suspect that the condition of loving is in itself blinding; that it may, almost by definition, lead to a compromised judgment and loss of integrity; and that what is happening to him, and why, are beyond the limits of his understanding. Recognition of that potential loss of integrity is made actual and rendered dramatically in Sonnet 149: the questions that were unanswerable before have become rhetorical now, as he offers his debased submission to her as proof of his love. The mood changes



subtly in Sonnet 150, although the questions continue. Disgusted by his own loss of autonomy and integrity, he asks:

Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,  
That in the very refuse of thy deeds  
There is strength and warrantise of skill,  
That, in my mind, thy worse all best exceeds?  
(5-8)

His bitterness intensifies as his blindness lifts and his ability to distinguish what is real from what is illusory returns; the retreat into confusion is no longer viable, and he once again recognizes that the crux of the problem is not his inability to see clearly but his inability to align his feelings with what he sees. Knowing that he can "hear and see just cause of hate," all he can do is to deny his "better part" in a twisted appeal for reciprocity based on a self-destructive hatred of himself and her. Sonnet 151, despite its preoccupation with conscience, acts out the couplet of its predecessor.

Sonnet 152, however, admits and encompasses the facts that give rise to irresolution, abdication of responsibility, self-debasement, and appeasement in its immediate predecessors; and it recycles the despair of Sonnet 147 from which the speaker subsequently recoiled. The self-destructive bitterness of his appeal for reciprocity in Sonnet 151 is neutralized here as he reaches toward mutuality and acknowledges the breadth and depth of his own complicity -- "But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee, / When I break twenty?" -- at the same time that he continues to love. Just as the speaker reworks





the couplet of Sonnet 147 in the interests of greater accuracy, he reworks his formulation of the problem. He says, in effect, "I have nothing to accuse you of because I have 'sworn deep oaths' that you are true, kind, and loving -- all of which are 'foul lies.'" He knows, however, precisely what he has done to land in this state of perjury. The new couplet -- "For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye, / To swear against the truth so foul a lie" -- marks a shift from a psychological formulation to an ethical one. Unlike Astrophil, who shifts all sovereignty and power to Stella in Sonnet 107, Shakespeare's speaker here wrests sovereignty and responsibility from the dark lady. Where he previously blamed her, he now blames himself. No longer taking refuge in the mistaken belief that he is mad, he affirms his autonomy as well as culpability. He does so, moreover, without falling prey to the subjectivity and solipsism that accompany such efforts in the first part of the sequence.

To be sure, the understanding that the speaker achieves is incomplete; no one is suggesting that he wins through to a self-knowledge which is transforming. There is, throughout, a great deal of projection -- a recurrent temptation to lash out at the woman and condemn her for what he cannot accept in himself. Aside from misgivings about her appearance, what he complains about the most is her sexual activity, her promiscuity (he describes her in 137 as "the bay where all men ride" and "the wide world's common place"). But the truth is that he refuses to see her in any other terms. On the one occasion when she is involved in a sexually neutral activity --



playing a musical instrument -- he redefines it in terms of his own preoccupations; he envies the keys which "kiss" her hand instead of his own "poor lips, which should that harvest reap," but which stand blushing at the wood's "boldness." Moreover, he blatantly applies a double standard to her liaison with his friend, prompting at least one critic to observe that the morality of an act in these sonnets seems to depend upon the gender of the person performing it.<sup>30</sup> In the speaker's rationalized formulation, the friend's affair with the dark lady is the product of an odd blend of passivity and selflessness: "He learned but surety-like to write for me, / Under that bond that him as fast doth bind"; he is one who "came debtor for my sake" (133.7-8,11). The woman, in contrast, is "covetous," a "usurer." As Linda Bamber says of the mature tragedies, "there is a firm connection between self-hatred, reversal of fortune, and misogyny. The hero's view of women reaches bottom at the moment when he is out of control of himself and his world; women are whores to men when it is no longer possible for men to reconcile themselves to what they are."<sup>31</sup>

At times, the untenability of his proposition overwhelms and disgusts him. In sonnets like 150, 151 and -- it must be said -- 146, he seeks easy explanations by postulating a dichotomy between body and soul: in the former two, he annihilates his soul -- his "nobler part" -- to appease his body; in the latter, he speaks of annihilating his body to appease his soul. In his view, his body and soul do not coexist harmoniously but are antagonists; it is a question of which will destroy the other.



Frequently, he is anguished by his inability to perceive correctly, to see as others do, to assign the proper value to what he sees. When he does begin to see clearly -- to see, for example, that he is "longing still / For that which longer nurseth the disease" (147.1-2), he is appalled and repelled by the sight and attributes it to the workings of a diseased mind, a distorted imagination.<sup>32</sup> Occasionally, he seems almost obsessed with the disjunction between mind and eye, heart and eye: "How can it? O how can love's eye be true," he asks in 148.

There is, of course, no real resolution; but despite the impasse, despite the tendency to retreat into self-deception and/or self-annihilation, there is an unmistakable counter-pull to discard sophisticated confusions and self-justifications, to discard the temporarily reassuring notion that unpleasant truths are the product of derangement, to accept -- if not fully to understand -- the implications of blindness and loss of judgment. Paradoxically, the metaphorical blindness he experiences propels him into a new kind of sight. As Leishman observes in passing, illusion is loved, even cultivated, in the sonnets to the young man; in those to the dark lady, it is hated.<sup>33</sup>

A recent article about these sonnets refers to the speaker as a "man descending a staircase,"<sup>34</sup> yet even a backward glance at Asrophil suggests, by contrast, the inaccuracy of this characterization. Where Astrophil ends by backing away from the implications of his actions and denying the full use of his faculties,



Shakespeare's speaker does just the reverse. The clarity with which he thinks and sees at crucial moments does not enable him to stop loving or resolve the impasse at which he finds himself, but it does invest him with considerable understanding and with the ability to give an accurate accounting. Where Astrophil is enervated by his perception of the gap between knowledge and action and is reduced to feeling only "annoy," Shakespeare's speaker, in what is almost a gloss on the words and thoughts of his predecessor, comes to discover complexity as well as complicity. There are, it seems, aspects of the dark lady sonnets which are not all that dark.

What of the final impasse -- the speaker's inability to move beyond recognition to action? The contradiction which Shakespeare explores here is one which preoccupied his predecessors as well. Wyatt, beginning with the simple cataloguing of Petrarchan contraries in poems like "I fynde no peace and all my warr is done," found an explosive potential in such antitheses, manipulating them to reveal the motions of a mind divided against itself, unable to act according to the dictates of reason, unable to translate rational inference into action. In "Som fowles there be," for example, the speaker watches himself helplessly as he self-destructs, unable, apparently, to stop himself. Ironically, the animals to whom he compares himself behave more rationally (certainly more prudently) than he does, yet in the chain of being which formed the basis of Renaissance psychology, human beings surpass animals precisely because of their rational faculty. Wyatt's poem does not hint at distorted thinking or muddled





priorities; the speaker's analysis is lucid and his mind clear; but rational people simply do not destroy themselves -- and he does. In an age when sapientia was increasingly identified with prudentia, when a wise person was increasingly one who could incorporate knowledge into lived experience, the impasse which Wyatt describes was unacceptable and inexplicable. Wyatt pursues the subject as far as possible within the sonnet itself, taking advantage of its form to render its paradoxes psychologically; he explores but does not explain, and the investigation ends with the poem.

His heirs, however, make that impasse the focal point of their sonnet sequences. Sidney's Astrophil, as we have seen, refuses to recognize the impasse as such and retreats from the complexity that such a recognition would entail. At the end of the sequence, he is not divided against himself -- as he is earlier and as Wyatt's speaker is in "I fynd no peace" and "Som fowles there be" -- because he has taken the easy way out and closed his mind to complexity. There is no gap between knowledge and action at the end of Astrophil and Stella simply because the protagonist's knowledge has shrunk to fit the scope of his action, as his creator makes clear. Sidney's treatment differs from Wyatt's in one important respect: he links Astrophil's state to the misuse of his faculties -- to his "infected will," to his refusal to apply his reason to his predicament. As a result, the impasse at which Astrophil finds himself is not inexplicable, not something that results from a fundamental paradox in human nature. It is, instead, something comprehensible, something which a less complacent person



might have managed to avoid. Presented in the sequence as the result of willed stupidity, it would, presumably, yield to intelligence. Shakespeare's speaker, more like Wyatt's than Sidney's, finds himself at an impasse which does not yield to reason or to psychological explanation, which hints at something intractable, something potentially tragic, in his nature or in the nature of human relationships. Like Montaigne, Shakespeare suspected that knowledge does not necessarily have the power to make people happy or good.<sup>35</sup>

In his recent study, The Playwright as Magician, Alvin Kernan says that the poems to the dark lady "create a growing sense of complexity, relativity, the intermixture of good and evil, the simultaneous existence of logical opposites, which are central to the dramatic conception of life. The young man and the Dark Lady are not only characters but symbols as well of two views of life, and two kinds of art."<sup>36</sup> Hallett Smith, however, believes that the world intruding in the dark lady sonnets is "one of disorder," full of the breaking of vows and oaths, which are "the compacts of a stable world."<sup>37</sup> But what if that stability is illusory, as it is in the first part of the sequence? Kernan's description seems closer to the truth: while his characterization of the dark lady as the "Muse of theater" may be somewhat fanciful, his characterization of the experience of these poems -- the experience of complexity, relativity, ambiguity -- is not.<sup>38</sup> What Kernan describes is precisely what the speaker must come to terms with.



"This man hath trauail'd well":  
Jonson's Ambivalence toward Inclusive Experience

In his second epigram to William Roe, one of his best known and most perfectly balanced poems, Jonson examines the ability of the "centered" or "gathered" self to assimilate broad experience;<sup>1</sup> but he also raises questions about the nature of that experience which remain unanswered:

Roe (and my joy to name) th'art now, to goe  
Countries, and climes, manners, and men to know,  
T<o>'extract, and choose the best of all these knowne,  
And those to turne to bloud, and make thine owne:  
May windes as soft as breath of kissing friends,  
Attend thee hence; and there, may all thy ends  
As the beginnings, here, proue purely sweet,  
And perfect in a circle always meet.  
So, when we, blest with thy returne, shall see  
Thy selfe, with thy first thoughts, brought home by thee,  
We each to other may this voice enspire;  
This is that good AENEAS, past through fire,  
Through seas, stormes, tempests: and imbarqu'd for hell,  
Came backe vntouch'd. This man hath trauail'd well.  
(CXXVIII)<sup>2</sup>

Quite plainly, Roe is urged to "turn to bloud" the best of his new experiences -- to incorporate them so thoroughly that they are indistinguishable from his former self, to assimilate the best of what he sees but to remain untouched, unchanged; and he is sent on his way with the generous wish that the entire journey will prove as "sweet" as its beginning, not with the warning that the course he is embarking on is dangerous or that the knowledge he will acquire is threatening. The belief that he will have endured a risky and frightening exposure



belongs to those who stay behind. In this sense, then, the epigram is less paradoxical than it first appears. Even though the speaker includes himself among those who will ultimately believe Roe to have come back "untouched" -- the "we" of lines 9 and 11 -- lines 3 and 4 indicate that the opposite will be true. Roe is reminded that his goal is to absorb new experiences without altering his own nature -- without abandoning his "first thoughts" in the "contentious surf of new experience," as Wesley Trimpi puts it<sup>3</sup> -- so that he will appear unchanged. Thus, the poem turns on the familiar Jonsonian tension between circumference and center (both must be present to complete a circle, and an uncompleted journey would result in an incomplete circumference).<sup>4</sup> The challenge Roe faces, then, is to maintain a balance between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies, between the business of inscribing the circle on one hand and retaining the proper center on the other; and Jonson compliments him when he assumes his friend's success.

But even Jonson's celebrated preoccupation with the need to equilibrate centrifugal and centripetal forces does not explain how the interesting but unexceptionable things of this world -- "countries, and climes, manners, and men" -- can become the "fire" and "hell" of lines 12 and 13, or how the benevolent "windes as soft as breath of kissing friends" can turn into "seas, stormes, tempests." Nor does it account for the travail/travel wordplay in the last line.<sup>5</sup> Trimpi believes the poem suggests that "knowledge is a risk," and that knowledge which is "particularly rare and powerful is dangerous; men have gone to hell for it and will again,"<sup>6</sup> but that is not what the poem says: Roe is





setting out to see the world, not to brave the underworld. What accounts for this contradictory shift in perspective, and for the sense of danger emphasized in the last three lines? Is Roe a young man of discriminating taste about to begin a prototypal grand tour, or is he a budding epic hero? Will Roe's character be determined by his ability to absorb or resist new knowledge, new experiences? Is he, in fact, about to acquire a broad knowledge of the world, or a carefully selected extraction or distillation of its most attractive offerings? Is it really possible to absorb new elements into one's blood and yet remain "vntouch'd"? Why, above all, does the speaker, who spends eight lines stressing the potentially benevolent aspects of Roe's journey, adopt the view of those who consider it perilous? If he wished to suggest that Roe's stay-at-home friends were likely to exaggerate the dangers of the unknown, he could easily have done so by changing the "we" to "they" or "your other friends," and disassociated himself from their concern, but he includes himself among the ambivalent. Whether Jonson believes that Roe is about to go to hell and back or on the adventure of a lifetime, whether Roe will come back untouched, and why Jonson numbers himself, in the end, among those who see what they hope will be a pleasant, fruitful journey as a "travail" -- whether, in short, the world is hospitable or hostile -- are questions that this poem asks but does not answer. What they reveal is an underlying contradiction that pervades Jonson's verse.

On one hand, he emerges as a man of letters at home in the world, concerned with developing a style suited for writing about the behavior of real people; entering the world of his poetry is, as one critic puts



it, like "squeezing one's way to the rear of a crowded bus on a cold wet winter's dusk."<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, what Jonson feels about riding crowded busses on cold wet days is distaste. On one hand, he writes poems in which "life crowds in at every line"; on the other, he creates a world "in which virtue and vice assume ideal forms."<sup>8</sup> On one hand, he consciously broadens the subject matter of poetry, writing about everyday events and rejecting topics remote from actual experience; on the other, he writes as an observer of others -- as a judge deciding whom to acquit and whom to indict -- rather than as a participant. He commends some friends for their worldliness, others for their innocence. The aesthetic, ethical, and epistemological foundations of his thought encourage the cultivation of a sense of discovery, a commitment to experience; yet he begins the Cary-Morison ode with the bizarre story of the Infant of Saguntum who, half-born, takes a long look at the ugly, ransacked world he is about to enter, and decides to turn around -- the "Wise child" who "didst hastily returne, / And mad'st thy Mothers wombe thine urne"(7-8).

Moreover, while the epigram to Roe invites us to view Roe's prospective journey from competing and contradictory points of view, such a dual perspective is the exception, not the rule, in Jonson's verse; on balance, he is unwilling to entertain the notion that ducks can look like rabbits.<sup>9</sup> Except for the epigram to Roe, he seems unaware that he advocates mutually exclusive positions. Nor can these contradictions be explained in terms of the centered self, as we have seen: as the reactions of Roe's friends indicate, whether the world



proves hospitable or hostile depends not just on one's ability to balance center and circumference, but on other factors which frequently remain unidentified and elusive. In some poems, the world about which he writes is hospitable if not actually benevolent; in it, the poet, like other intelligent people, finds a comfortable home, and poetry itself plays a significant role in human society. Other poems suggest unequivocally that life is a state of siege rather than a series of discoveries: the world is inherently dangerous, hostile to virtue; in it, the poet, like other virtuous figures, is embattled and beleaguered, if not actually despised.

Occasionally, Jonson endorses an attitude to human experience and human society that is inclusive and even exuberant. In such poems, he praises people for being good historians, writers about public affairs, and public officials, and links their ability to fill these roles to their support of or achievement in literary or other artistic fields. He commends friends like Weston for having studied "the arts of life"; Savile for producing a translation of Tacitus that is informed by his knowledge of the world; and Selden (whose wit can be bounded by "Nothing but the round / Large clasp of Nature") for his active and productive historical curiosity -- for qualities, in short, to which Jonson commits himself in the Discoveries, where he describes wisdom as "the observation, knowledge, and use of things"; "sense," he maintains, "is wrought out of experience, the knowledge of humane life, and actions."<sup>10</sup> His admiration for Bacon's empiricism is well known, but he also celebrates in verse the mental agility of scholars like Selden



and Camden and Savile -- people who possess the qualities praised in the Discoveries -- and endorses their energetic investigation and

understanding of contemporary experience as well as of past history.

"What skill, what faith thou hast in things! / What sight in searching the most antique springs!" he says in an epigram to William Camden, uniting admiration for his former teacher's antiquarian knowledge itself with admiration for his confidence and diligence in pursuing it.

His most enthusiastic praise is directed to Selden, the jurist and antiquarian, whom Jonson commends -- in a metaphor echoing the epigram to Roe -- for having traveled broadly in his mind without having left England:

Stand forth my Object, then you that have beene  
Ever at home: yet have all Countries seene:  
And like a Compasse keeping one foot still  
Upon your Center, doe your Circle fill  
Of generall knowledge;

(Und. XIV, 29-33)

But he also praises Selden's knowledge of human behavior in a way that links perceptive observation of the present to knowledge of the past: Selden has

watch'd men, manners too,  
Heard what times past have said, seene what ours doe:  
(33-34)

In just a few lines, Selden emerges as a man of letters who is as much at home in the world as he is among his books. His scholarly activities are not separated from the rest of his life; rather, the knowledge he derives from the former seems part of his experience of the world, part





of his urbanity: in Jonson's colloquial idiom, "hearing" about the past -- a casual, informal kind of activity -- is not all that different from "seeing" what occurs in the present. Moreover, Selden's scholarship itself is generous and inclusive as well as tenacious, as the following lines make clear:

Which Grace shall I make love too first? your skill  
Or faith in things? or is't your wealth and will  
T<o> 'instruct and teach? or your unweary'd paine  
Of Gathering? Bountie' in pouring out againe?  
(35-38)

These values, in turn, are linked to what Jonson perceives as a rigorous historical methodology: not only do Selden's confident empiricism and painstaking investigations ferret out mistaken assumptions about the past; his curiosity and energy also lead him to fresh perceptions and "Innovations":

What fables have you vext! what truth redeem'd!  
Antiquities search'd! Opinions dis-esteem'd!  
Impostures branded! And Authorities urg'd!  
What blots and errours, have you watch'd and purg'd  
Records, and Authors of! how rectified,  
Times, manners, customes! Innovations spide!  
Sought out the Fountaines, Sources, Creekes, paths, wayes,  
And noted the beginnings and decayes!  
(39-46)

Jonson's poem was prefixed to Selden's Titles of Honour, published in 1614; and he concludes, after celebrating Selden's style, by praising him for dedicating that volume not to an influential patron, but to a friend and fellow scholar, Edward Hayward, who has "wrought / In the same Mines of knowledge" and can therefore appreciate the true value of



Selden's achievement.

Throughout this epistle, Jonson praises Selden in a manner which is neither short nor obscure:

I yeeld, I yeeld, the matter of your praise  
Flows in upon me, and I cannot raise  
A banke against it. Nothing but the round  
Large clasp of Nature, such a wit can bound,  
(61-64)

he insists. In his recent study, Imitation and Praise in the Poems of Ben Jonson, Richard Peterson calls attention to the way in which Jonson "traces out ideals applicable simultaneously to life and to art."<sup>11</sup> Peterson's concern is with Jonson's "distinctive brand of imitatio, that process of judicious gathering in, assimilation, and transformation or turning whereby a good writer, and by extension a good man, shapes an original and coherent work of art or a virtuous life";<sup>12</sup> and the lines to Selden celebrate an analogous achievement -- one which is is historiographic rather than literary, but which represents to Jonson many of the same values conferred by art.

The claims Jonson makes for Sir Henry Savile, whose translation of Tacitus he admired, are more modest. He commends Savile's masterly "merit" in filling gaps in the manuscript, but also praises him for turning to the writing of history rather than claiming the place "at the helme" to which his knowledge entitles him:

Although to write be lesser then to doo  
It is the next deed, and a great one too.  
We need a man that knowes the seuerall graces  
Of historie, and how to apt their places,  
Where breuitie, where splendor, and where height,



Where sweetnesse is requir'd, and where weight;  
 We need a man, can speke of the intents,  
 The councells, actions, orders, and events  
 Of state, and censure them: we need his pen  
 Can write the things, the causes, and the men.  
 (Epi. XCV, 25-34)

In Savile's case as in Selden's, a person must have knowledge of the world as well as of style and scholarship to "write the things, the causes, and the men."<sup>13</sup> But while Jonson commends Savile for having written well about the past, he also urges him to write about the present -- to turn his talents to current English history. Savile is fitted for this task, Jonson suggests, because his scholarly and literary skills are supplemented by two other crucial qualities: integrity and independence. Having decided "wisely" not to put himself forward politically but to remain free from "faction," Savile is said to be "so cleere of present crimes" that he "need'st not shrink at voyce of after-times." Here, Jonson suggests that Savile's scholarly impartiality would be compromised by partisan activity, not that that scholarly and political activities are inherently incompatible. Rather, he insists that the contemporary historian must master the raw materials of history: one cannot "censure" the "events / Of State" without detailed knowledge of the "intents" and "councells, actions, orders" that comprise them.

Almost as explicitly as the epistle to Selden, Jonson's epigram to Weston conflates artistic achievement with achievement in more mundane spheres. As a compliment to England's Lord Treasurer, Jonson outlines the artifacts he wishes he could offer as gifts:



If to my mind, great Lord, I had a state,  
 I would present you now with curious plate  
 Of Noremberg, or Turkie; hang your roomes  
 Not with the Arras, but the Persian Loomes.  
 I would, if price, or prayer could them get,  
 Send in, what or Romano, Tintoret,  
Titian, or Raphael, Michael Angelo,  
 Have left in fame to equall, or out-goe  
 The old Greek-hands in picture, or in stone.  
(Und. LXXVII, 1-9)

But Weston, who was well known as a connoisseur, collector, and shaper of Caroline taste, not only can "Discerne betweene a Statue, and a Man," Jonson continues; he can also "Doe the things that Statues doe deserve, / And act the businesse, which they paint, or carve" (14-16). Jonson claims, in short, that the exemplary behavior represented in the visual arts can be found in public life.

What you have studied are the arts of life;  
 To compose men, and manners; stint the strife  
 Of murmuring subjects; make the Nations know  
 What worlds of blessings to good kings they owe,  
(17-20)

he decides, implicitly equating the fine arts with the very practical art of governing well (or at least of minimizing the recalcitrance of Charles I's "murmuring Subjects"). Jonson does not praise Weston's learning as he does Savile's and Selden's, but he does suggest unequivocally that Weston's application of the "arts of life" is of inherent value.

Indeed, the equation of learning and doing in all three of these poems is remarkable: it indicates a view of the world -- and a faith in the possibility of civilized, educated people taking virtuous, humane

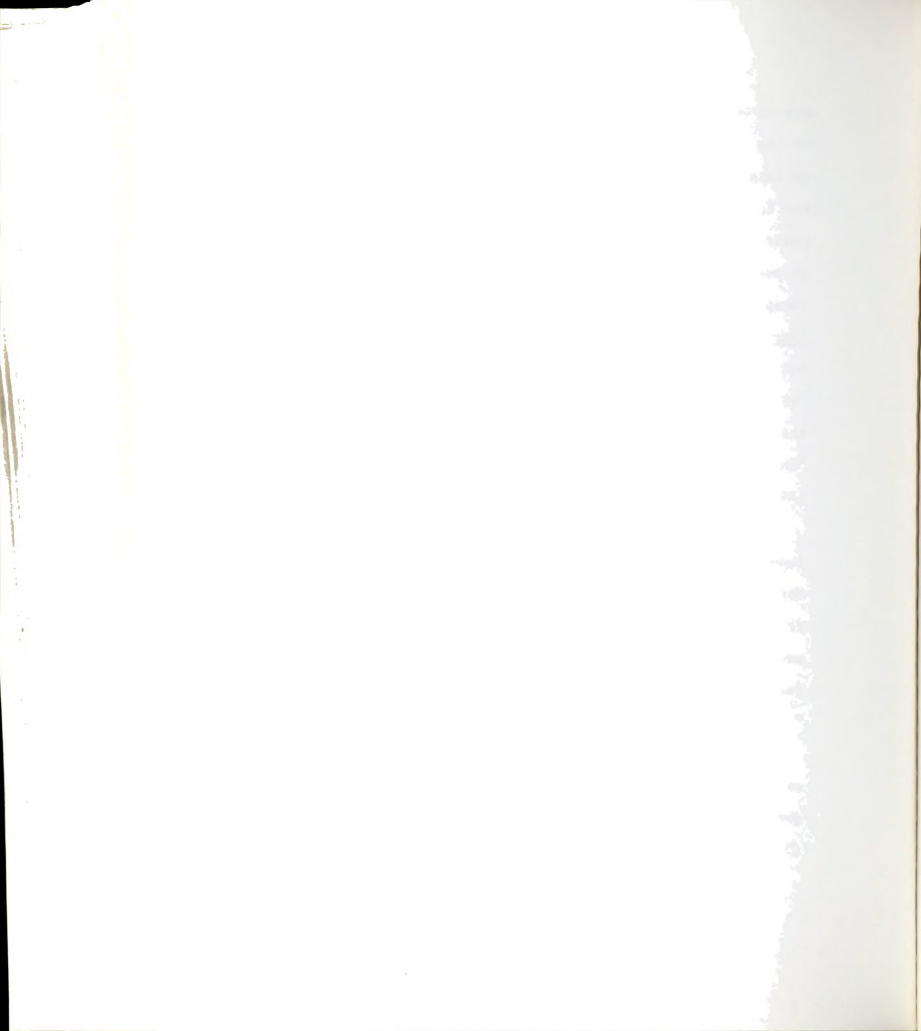




action -- that is not troubled by the misgivings entering the last lines of the epigram to William Roe. Other poems focus less on the application of intellectual or imaginative gifts to the "arts of life" and more on the intrinsic importance of action and the proper use of time. "When nature bids us leave to live, 'tis late / Then to begin," Jonson warns in another epigram to William Roe (LXX.1-2): "Each best day of our life escapes us, first" (6). Similarly, the birthday ode to William Sidney (For. 14) indicates that private virtue -- being round within one's self and straight -- is insufficient. The young man is cautioned against "standing still" as well as "running wrong," and is urged not to rest on the repute of his family name but to seek achievements in his own right: "And he that stayes / To live untill to morrow' hath lost two dayes" (49-50).

Like the birthday ode, the Cary-Morison ode (Und. 70) stresses the importance of using time well -- a feat Jonson attributes to Henry Morison, who died at twenty but lived a full and exemplary life as friend, son, statesman, and soldier; "got the harvest in" early (128); and demonstrated that life could be "perfect" in "short measures" (74). Insisting that a person's life should be evaluated by the "act," not the "space," Jonson contrasts Morison's short but effective span of twenty years with the long but miserable lives of two aging figures -- the eighty-year-old Stirrer and the poet/dramatist-speaker: "life doth her great actions spell, / By what was done and wrought / In season" (59-61).

Still another group of poems focuses specifically on the suitability



of poetry itself for conducting the business of life. By demonstration and assertion as well as by conviction, Jonson insists on his role as a lyric poet who is also, as Alexander Leggatt puts it, "a man among men, part of a community."<sup>14</sup> How the poet functions in his society, how he helps to bring about its proper ordering, and whether eloquence will be used for the right ends are questions which occupy Jonson throughout his career. In fact, he is so preoccupied with his poetic identity that almost a fourth of the Epigrammes and a third of The Forrester, let alone a large number of poems in Underwood, have a self-conscious poet-speaker. But what is most important is neither their number nor the claims they make for the power of poetry or the role of the poet. What is important is their ordinariness. In them, Jonson writes about poetry as matter-of-factly as he writes about everything else -- in the style, as his friend Francis Beaumont puts it, "which men / send Cheese to towne with."<sup>15</sup> He writes as if poetry were part of what can only be called everyday life because of his conviction that poetry should be and can be part of everyday life.<sup>16</sup>

Look, for example, at the handful of short poems which open the Epigrammes: "To The Reader," "To My Booke," and "To My Booke-Seller" establish a context which is at once self-referential, social, and generic: in Epigram IX, Jonson announces his intention to write as poet, not as herald; and the very brief X -- "Thou call'st me Poet, as a terme of shame: / But I haue my reuenge made, in thy name" -- gives us a foretaste of what that decision implies. And so it goes: his dead son becomes his "best piece of poetrie"; Lucy, the Countess of Bedford, the



"rare friend" asked for by "rare poems"; Lord Aubigny, the generous patron.

Poems whose subject matter is confined to the topic of poetry are rare, but include three in The Forrest -- "Why I Write Not of Love," the untitled X ("And must I sing? what subject shall I choose?"), and "To Elizabeth Countesse of Rutland" -- as well as Underwood's "A Fit of Rime Against Rime" and "An Execration upon Vulcan." All but the epistle to Elizabeth, which defends poetry's eternizing power and laments the low regard in which it is currently held, underscore Jonson's commitment to write poems which deal authentically with human experience, which avoid stylistic and rhetorical artifice, and which reject stale, trite, remote, or unsavory mythological subjects. He does not write love poetry, he explains, because Cupid, who cannot be "fettered" by poets, "Into my ri'mes could ne're be got / By any arte" (For. I,9-10); and he accuses rhyme itself of distorting the experience it seeks to describe -- "Cosening Judgement with a measure, / But false weight. / Wresting words, from their true calling" (Und. XXIX,5-8) -- though he does so in rhyme. In the diatribe against Vulcan, he argues that the blaze which destroyed his own house, books, and manuscripts was misdirected, and that Vulcan's target really should have been the kind of writing Jonson himself disparaged -- not just the popular pamphlet literature and "The whole summe / Of errant Knight-hood, with the<ir> Dames, and Dwarfes, / The<ir> charmed Boates, and the<ir> enchanted Wharfes," but also "the strong lines, that soe the time doe catch" (Und. XLIII,66-68,78) are included in the trash to be burned:



These, had'st thou pleas'd either to dine, or sup,  
 Had made a meale for Vulcan to lick up. (83-84)

More common are poems in which Jonson intersperses treatment of a specific topic -- a friend, a complaint, an event -- with comments on poetry or on his own concerns as a poet. "My Answer. The Poet to the Painter," Jonson's response to William Burlase, is typical of this approach: it uses the poem itself to emphasize the way in which a poem can be a means of celebrating and even cementing a friendship; good friends, like good writers, do not need the "flatt'ring Colours" of rhetoric. It ends:

But, you are he can paint; I can but write:  
 A Poet hath no more but black and white,  
 Ne knowes he flatt'ring Colours, or false light.

Yet when of friendship I would draw the face,  
 A letter'd mind, and a large heart would place  
 To all posteritie; I will write Burlase. (Und. LII, 19-24)

In Epigramme CI, "Inviting a Friend to Supper," Jonson not only uses the poem as an invitation to supper; in his hands, it becomes a social occasion in itself, as he offers to share with a friend choice morsels of Latin writers:<sup>17</sup>

How so ere, my man  
 Shall reade a piece of Virgil, Tacitus  
Livie, or of some better booke to us,  
 Of which wee'll speake our minds, amidst our meate;  
 And Ile professe no verses to repeate. (20-23)

The poem subtly insists that literature is a customary part of a special





meal, a necessary part of civilized life -- and that the friend will understand and share that belief. At least one critic has stressed the fragile nature of the projected event -- "the host has to work against a tight budget [and] his own tendency to egotism"<sup>18</sup> -- but surely the speaker's tone is confident, not tentative. He is inviting a friend to a very real dinner that very night, not wistfully anticipating a future possibility that is merely "wished-for." He knows exactly what he will and will not be able to provide; he acknowledges his own tendency to exaggerate; he sees that he mustn't mar the occasion by getting carried away with the wish to recite his own lyrics. Jonson invites his friend to share a civilized occasion in which poetry plays a recognized role at the same time that he offers a realistic appraisal of himself and his own resources.

Like the epigram, "An Epistle answering to one that asked to be sealed of the tribe of Ben" (Und. XLVII) affirms friendships based on shared values, and implies the existence of a world in which generous human relationships are possible and genuine bonds exist. In this poem, however, the recipient is also an intimate to whom Jonson confides his thoughts about himself:

Well, with mine owne fraile Pitcher, what to doe  
 I have decreed; keepe it from waves, and presse;  
 Lest it be justled, crack'd, made nought, or lesse:  
 Live to that point I will; for which I am man,  
 And dwell as in my Center, as I can,  
 Still looking too, and ever loving heaven;  
 With reverence using all the gifts then<ce> given.  
(56-62)

In contrast to the generosity which informs Epigram CI, the



"Epistle answering . . . ," and the tribute to Burlase, Jonson's epistle to Drayton brutally but brilliantly insists on the impossibility of true friendship -- even between poets -- when there are no shared standards, no common ground, at the same time that it confidently establishes complicity with understanding readers as it warns against the way in which bad poetry will be misunderstood -- and accordingly misused -- by the ignorant.

It hath been question'd, MICHAEL, if I bee  
A Friend at all, or if at all, to thee:

he begins, but we do not need to read as far as the following passage to discern Jonson's private opinion of Drayton's style and subject matter, or to figure out that Drayton would be safer in the company of admitted enemies:

So shall our English Youth vrge on, and cry,  
An Agincourt, an Agincourt, or dye.  
This booke! it is a Catechisme to fight,  
And will be bought of euery Lord, and Knight,  
That can but reade; who cannot, may in prose  
Get broken peeces, and fight well by those.  
(U.V.XXX,69-75)<sup>19</sup>

In these poems, the poet-speaker, like the friends he admires, is deeply involved in the world in which he lives -- engaged in the range of social and professional activities that make up his everyday life and provide the subject matter of his poetry. In contrast to such poems, in which virtuous achievement and effective art are linked to a broad knowledge of life -- to urbanity, one is almost tempted to say -- other poems recommend retreat and retrenchment, discover dangers rather than



pleasures at every turn, and advocate a defensive response to a hostile and ugly world. In two extreme cases -- the epistles to Sir Robert Wroth and Katherine, Lady Aubigny -- Jonson goes so far as to commend his addressees for disengaging themselves from a world which can only corrupt them. Others examine the low esteem in which poetry is held, describing a society in which the poet, like his creations, has no real place. While several of these poems are from The Forrest -- the three epistles, the epode, and the gentlewoman's farewell -- the point of view they represent is not confined to that collection.

The opening line of the epistle to Wroth -- "How blest art thou, canst loue the countrey, WROTH" -- suggests that not everyone is able to share that young man's enthusiasm for rural life, but the potentially interesting tension implicit in this point of view is never developed. Nor is the speaker sure whether his addressee's way of life results from "choice, or fate, or both" -- whether it results from intelligent preference or from an accident of temperament. Wroth is congratulated for pursuing a life free from the materialism and social climbing of city life, which in turn is presented as hopelessly corrupt: soldiers are guilty, lawyers dishonest; others, obsessed with seeking "place and honour," are "glad to keepe / The secrets, that shall breake their sleepe"(87-88). But unlike the owner of Penshurst, who manages a productive estate, Wroth's life is composed of pleasant pastimes, not purposeful activities: hunting, for example, is pursued more for "exercise" than for "fare," and there is no attention paid to the place of the great house in the rural economy. Following J.C.A. Rathnell, who



shows the extent to which Jonson's tribute to Penshurst takes into account the realities of the owner's financial difficulties, Leggatt concludes that Penshurst is not "a good place in a dream, but a good place in the real world."<sup>20</sup> That cannot be said of Wroth's estate -- not, at least, from evidence in the poem. "To Penshurst," which compares the Sidney family's manor not to the town but to the new vogue for prodigy houses, stresses the way in which it functions effectively as a center of rural economy and works for the reciprocal benefit of the estate's dependents and owners;<sup>21</sup> "To Sir Robert Wroth," in contrast, concentrates on carefully regulated festivity and describes, without irony, a world in which "Freedome doth with degree dispense" precisely once a year, when the estate's rustics, whose "rudenesse then is thought no sinne," are graciously admitted to the great hall for a Christmas party and treated to drink in which "their cares are drowned." This is the setting, then, that fosters innocence: a life of harmless but purposeless pleasure against a backdrop of care-ridden peasants whose rough manners are tolerated only on specified formal occasions, when they are encouraged to drink too much.<sup>22</sup>

Significantly, Jonson praises Wroth's innocence, not his active virtue; the former does not derive from positive actions or qualities of personal character, but depends, instead, on continued isolation from possible sources of contamination. When Jonson says, "Striue, WROTH, to liue long innocent," he implies that Wroth's innocence is a temporary phenomenon, artificially maintained, and that the effort to preserve it is bound ultimately to fail. What the poem unmistakably suggests is that





Wroth's innocence (its opposite seems to be guilt, not experience) will not survive exposure to a more complex world. What is unclear, however, is the extent to which the fault is Wroth's -- whether someone slightly less susceptible to germs could risk exposure to the ills of urban life.<sup>23</sup>

But no such ambiguity exists in the epistle to Lady Aubigny. If Wroth's retirement, at least in the context of the poem, is pleasant if narrow in scope, Lady Aubigny's decision to "decline her life" is more like the defense of a fortress -- and it is a decision which Jonson describes as "wise." He promises to hold up a mirror that is "subtile, cleere, refin'd" enough to reveal not merely her physical beauty, but "the beauties of [her] mind"; but the picture which emerges is a bleak one:

Wherewith, then, Madame, can you better pay  
 This blessing of your starres, then by that way  
 Of vertue, which you tread? what if alone?  
 Without companions? 'Tis safe to haue none.  
 In single paths, dangers with ease are watch'd:  
 Contagion in the prease is soonest catch'd.  
(53-58)

Even friendship is discouraged here; companions are not only a source of possible "contagion"; they are also likely to distract her from the need to watch out for threats. In contrast to Roe, whose exposure to "manners and men" is at least assumed to be potentially beneficial, Lady Aubigny's passage through the world offers no compensatory rewards.

This makes, that wisely you decline your life,  
 Farre from the maze of custome, error, strife,"  
(59-60)



he continues, suggesting in his use of the word "decline" an act of turning away from, rejecting, as well as a process of carrying out -- declining an invitation as opposed to declining a noun.<sup>24</sup> To live "farre from the maze of custome, error, strife," then, is not to live at all, in one sense.

What follows suggests that Lady Aubigny's only alternative to this rather chilling isolation, with only her conscience for company, is to enter the "turning world" which is "giddie with change." Lines 71-88 describe what she has rejected -- the superficial, mindless, and sometimes vicious ways of other women, whose weakness for following fashion is, in fact, equated with exploiting and corrupting others:

You, Madame, yong haue learn'd to shunne these shelues,  
Whereon the most of mankinde wracke themselues,  
And, keeping a iust course, haue earely put  
Into your harbor, and all passage shut  
'Gainst stormes, or pyrats, that might charge your peace."  
(89-93)

In other words, the best defense against shipwreck is not to chance the voyage in the first place. Having exhausted the possibilities of the nautical metaphor at this point, Jonson sensibly shifts to land -- fruitful with trees, roots, and branches, we learn -- as he suggests that the honor of producing Aubigny's heir will more than compensate Katherine for the trip cut short.<sup>25</sup>

Lady Aubigny, we need to remember, was a young woman when she married Esme in 1607, ending Jonson's five years' sojourn in his patron's house. On what basis does one decide, at such an age, to enter



the harbor early? Although the speaker claims the power to reveal her to herself, the analysis of entropic decadence on which he bases his argument is the product of his thinking, not hers -- and he bases it on his own experience and observation of the world. Wroth, similarly, is not presented as having chosen an innocent bucolic existence after having been frustrated or repelled by the corruption of the city or by the limitations of professions other than that of gentleman farmer: that assessment belongs to the speaker; and Wroth, even more clearly than Lady Aubigny, is being instructed and advised. But while the epistle to Wroth hints that Wroth's personal limitations, at least in part, make his retreat advisable and appropriate, there is no indication that Lady Aubigny's centered virtue is vulnerable in any way. Nor is it a question of balance and proportion, as it is in the epigram to Roe. This epistle presents a world which on one hand is so utterly devoid of interest that a person of intelligence and virtue could not find it tempting, and which, on the other, is so fraught with unexpected dangers that not even a formidable exemplar of virtue could afford to enter it carelessly.

But another poem in The Forrest -- "To the World. A farewell for a Gentle-woman, vertuous and noble" -- offers a perspective which is subtly different. Its speaker, a woman entering the "morne of age," is in an excellent position to draw her own conclusions and needs no one to speak for her. Her life seems to have been neither one of intellectual or cultural concerns (unlike the countesses of Rutland and Bedford) nor one of aristocratic tranquillity (unlike the lady of Penshurst or Lady Aubigny); instead, she has been "planted" "in a soile"



Where breathe the basest of thy fooles;  
 Where enuious arts professed be,  
 And pride, and ignorance the schooles,  
 Where nothing is examin'd, weigh'd,  
 But, as 'tis rumor'd, so beleeu'd:  
 Where euery freedome is betray'd  
 And euery goodnesse tax'd, or grieu'd.

(46-52)

What needs to be stressed, though, is that she seems to have spent the better part of a lifetime in that soil without being destroyed by it -- as Jonson seems to fear Wroth and Lady Aubigny will be. Her experience has been miserable -- "I know thou canst nor shew, nor beare / More hatred, then thou hast to mee," she insists -- but it does not seem to have impaired her judgment. Nor has she been immobilized; rather, she makes it clear that she has used her reason to extricate herself from an unpleasant situation, and that she is not likely to behave irrationally in the future:

What bird, or beast, is knowne so dull  
 That fled his cage, or broke his chaine,  
 And tasting ayre, and freedome, wull  
 Render his head in there againe?  
 If these, who have but sense, can shun  
 The engines, that have them annoy'd;  
 Little, for me, had reason done,  
 If I could not thy ginnes avoyd.

(29-36)

This poem cuts two ways. On one hand, her own ability to survive undercuts her assessment of the world's destructive powers. On the other hand, what the gentlewoman says about the world corroborates what Jonson tells Wroth and Lady Aubigny:<sup>26</sup> that a worldly life has no redeeming features, and that they are missing nothing worth having.





"False world, good-night," she begins; "My part is ended on thy stage"; and her assessment is unwaveringly negative. She leaves no room for doubt that the world which is deceptively attractive to the naive is filled with corruption and betrayal; she has been there, and she knows, as she tells us repeatedly:<sup>27</sup>

I know thy formes are studied arts,  
 Thy subtle wayes, be narrow straits;  
 Thy curtesie but sodaine starts,  
 And what thou call'st thy gifts are baits.  
 I know too, though thou strut, and paint,  
 Yet art thou both shrunke up, and old,  
 That only fooles make thee a saint,  
 And all thy good is to be sold.  
 I know thou whole art but a shop  
 Of toyes, and trifles, traps, and snares,  
 To take the weake, or make them stop:  
 Yet art thou falser than thy wares.

(9-20)

The poem seems at first to echo the familiar pattern of the contemptus mundi tradition -- a pattern which is announced at the outset by phrases like "False world, good-night" and "My part is ended on thy stage," and reinforced by the end-stopped lines of the native didactic tradition. The ending, however, undercuts that pattern, because the gentlewoman does not, after all, seek the otherworldly alternatives implied by the convention in whose idiom she speaks; instead, she resolves not to wander (hardly an option in contemptus mundi literature), but to endure, in some unspecified way: to "make my strengths, such as they are, / Here in my bosome, and at home." Significantly, given the nature of the epistles to Wroth and Lady Aubigny, she not only finds it unnecessary to seek a safe harbor; she



decides in the end not to retreat after all, but stoically to endure what she insists are the conditions of life itself:<sup>28</sup>

No, I doe know, that I was borne  
 To age, misfortune, sicknesse, grieve:  
 But I will beare these, with that scorne,  
 As shall not need thy false reliefe.  
 (61-64)

While the resolution that Jonson attributes to the gentlewoman is somewhat more complex than that which he offers to Wroth and Lady Aubigny, it does not afford her a comfortable place in human society; her acquisition of knowledge comes, after all, when her "part is ended" on the world's "stage."

The general advice offered in the "Epode" (For. XI) is as bleakly pessimistic as any offered to Lady Aubigny or by the gentlewoman. Its focus is the business of encountering "vice" and eradicating it -- a difficult process which requires constant vigilance:

(since no brest is so sure,  
 Or safe, but shee'll procure  
 Some way of entrance) we must plant a guard  
 Of thoughts to watch, and ward  
 At th'eye and eare (the ports unto the minde).  
 (5-9)

Even this strict surveillance is ineffective, however, since the enemy is within as well as without: reason itself is susceptible to distortion and co-option by guerilla-like raids by rebellious "affections" -- the most insidious of which is "blinde Desire." In this threatening world of sentinels, spies, and treasonous forces, however, the speaker suddenly and inexplicably asserts the existence of "true Love" -- "Pure, perfect,



may divine . . . a golden chaine let downe from heaven" (46-47). But before he can explain a) who is blessed with such perfection and why, and b) who would reject it and why, he is interrupted by an eavesdropper who -- having perhaps taken seriously the import of the first 42 lines -- says bluntly that "there's no such thing" (67). The rest of the poem is given over to the speaker's attempted rebuttal, which centers on conventional sexual fidelity: offered the love of an ideal woman -- a "divine" creature -- even a lout would be "fearefull" to "offend" her, let alone "a noble, and right generous mind / (To vertuous moods inclin'd) / That knowes the waight of guilt" (111-13). So much, then, for the "golden chaine": the speaker's conclusion inadvertently confirms the pessimism of his own opening as well as the objections of the "vicious foole."

One could argue, perhaps, that beleaguered figures of virtue like Wroth, Lady Aubigny, and the unnamed gentlewoman are not really comparable to urban intellectuals like Camden or Selden or to successful public figures like Weston, and that the differences in their circumstances and natures account, at least in part, for differences in their relationship to their societies. But the poems in which Jonson examines his own role as a poet and reflects on his own relation to his society reveal the same contradictions.

The opening lines of the epistle to Lady Aubigny indicate that he, too, perceives himself to be in a state of siege. "'Tis growne almost a danger to speake true / Of any good minde, now," he begins, describing the hostility and viciousness of the world around them as well as its



power to make both "prais'd, and praisers suffer." Significantly, Jonson himself does just the opposite of what he advises Lady Aubigny to do. Rather than "declining" his own vocation, he congratulates himself -- if somewhat pompously -- on risking criticism by praising her:

I, that haue suffer'd this; and, though forsooke  
 Of Fortune, haue not alter'd yet my looke,  
 Or so my selfe abandon'd, as because  
 Men are not iust, or keepe no holy lawes  
 Of nature, and societie, I should faint;  
 Or fear to draw true lines . . .  
 I, Madame, am become your praiser.

(15-21)

While he never considers it necessary to retrench for the sake of his own integrity, he does see himself as the embattled scourge of a "vicious" society which is willing to "indite [his] wit"; but he calls attention both to his endurance and his determination not to "faint" or "abandon" himself but to retaliate by "drawing true lines."

In the epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland, Jonson's target is the baseness of a whole society so dominated by "almightie gold" ("that, for which all virtue now is sold, / And almost every vice . . . / That which to boote with hell, is thought worth heaven" [1-3]) that it has no use for poetry: verse is "scorned" by "noble ignorants." But the Countess of Rutland (Sidney's daughter) is the exception:

With you, I know, my offring will find grace.  
 For what a sinne 'gainst your great father's spirit,  
 Were it to thinke, that you should not inherit  
 His love unto the Muses, when his skill  
 Almost you have, or may have, when you will?

(30-34)





But when Jonson adds that "It is the Muse, alone, can raise to heaven"(41), he is not urging her to use her own considerable gifts, but to recognize his own talents and to endorse (and perhaps underwrite) his efforts on her behalf. He plans to immortalize her and the Countess of Bedford in a poem so filled with "high, and noble matter, such as flies / From braines entranc'd"(89-90) that it will bring honor to author and subjects alike:

Then all, that have but done my Muse least grace,  
 Shall thronging come, and boast the happy place  
 They hold in my strange poems . . . .  
(79-82)

Of course, he betrays the pain of his own "outcast state" and the depth of his wish for acceptance at the same time that he reveals his deep alienation from the values of the society whose approval he desires. When he is vindicated, moreover, it will not be because the society which currently rejects poetry comes to its senses: those most likely to applaud him, he makes clear, are hangers-on who try to profit from the success of others.

In the epistles to the Countess of Rutland and Lady Aubigny, both of which were written in the first decade of the seventeenth century, the poet-speaker has a troubled and unhappy relationship with his society; he seeks reassurance by dwelling on his own poetic gifts and courage in exercising them. Implicit in that mode of reassurance is the assumption that the lyric poet should speak out and be listened to -- that he would have a recognized social role in a properly organized society.<sup>29</sup> In Jonson's two odes to himself written after the New Inn

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July 1900

August 1900

September 1900

October 1900

November 1900

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fiasco in 1629, the poet-speaker's relation to his society is even more vexatious and problematical than in the epistles written some twenty years earlier. There is, however, one major difference: in these odes, Jonson abandons his earlier commitment to a socially responsible art and an artistically responsible society -- a fact which has been overlooked in the critical emphasis on the bitterness pervading these poems.

Contrasting lyric purpose with dramatic and opting for the former, he vows in the first ode to "sing high and aloofe, / Safe from the wolves black jaw, and the dull Asses hoofe" (Und. XXIII, 35-36); in the second, he reiterates his intent to confound his critics, "leave the loathed stage/ And the more loathsome age" and follow lyric models.<sup>30</sup> Both odes, despite their differences in tone and intent, suggest a view of poetry which is private, defensive, and isolated from the society which criticizes it.<sup>31</sup> In both, lyric poetry is chosen because it frees him from his social ties and allows him to pursue his art in isolation -- a far cry from the objectives pursued in the epistles, let alone the generous and urbane conviction that poetry should and can be a part of everyday life, and that it should and can play an important role in shaping human society.

These antithetical perspectives pervading Jonson's verse cannot be explained away in terms of chronology, genre, collection, or audience, nor are they peripheral to Jonson's artistic concerns. To question whether the world is hospitable or not is simply another way of questioning whether the cultural and intellectual values represented by poetry are nourished or starved by the poet's society. For a poet whose



vision is not private and introspective but social -- "he could not think of poetry without thinking of the society to which it belongs," Leggatt observes<sup>32</sup> -- such a question is central, not marginal.

Both positions are unmistakably present; both are asserted unequivocally. Accordingly, it would be pointless as well as difficult to argue that one is more characteristic or representative than the other. Nor can it be argued convincingly that the relation between the two positions is developmental: the "Epode" appeared early in Jonson's career, in 1601; the epistle to Lady Aubigny, about ten years later; and the odes to himself followed the New Inn failure in 1629, yet all are informed by a similar perspective.<sup>33</sup> Challenging those who insist on Jonson's consistency, Ian Donaldson wonders whether writers who lack the capacity to change their minds might not have certain limitations -- moral as well as emotional or imaginative. Not only do Jonson's plays satirize those who are incapable of change, he points out, but "to read through the whole oeuvre is to be even more acutely aware of the dynamic, shifting, and various nature of his moral thought."<sup>34</sup> But Donaldson's remarks, while certainly applicable to the plays, imply a fruitful inconsistency which is just not present in the poems under consideration. Except for the epigram to Roe, Jonson simply asserts the two positions separately and does not address himself to the vexing question of their interrelationship. He does not evaluate one position in terms of the other.

Moreover, these contradictions point back to the aesthetic, ontological, and epistemological foundations of Jonson's thought. As



Trimpi has argued at some length, Jonson's adoption of the classical plain style reflects his commitment to a resilient and inclusive classicism which is "subtly sensitive to things experienced."<sup>35</sup> For Jonson, Trimpi says, classicism is "a habit of discovery, a constant revaluation of epistemological methods in the investigation of experience."<sup>36</sup> This position, developed in the Discoveries, implies a view of the world -- of human experience and the capacity to absorb it, rework it, and put it to use -- that is essentially confident and inclusive. To argue, as Jonson does in the Discoveries, that wisdom is "wrought out of experience" is to say, very simply, that experience is a source of wisdom, not an impediment to it -- that people are capable of learning from their mistakes. Does Jonson endorse this position in one group of poems but reject it in another?

In one sense, the poems to people like Savile and Weston and Burlase do seem based upon such an inclusive and confident outlook, as we have seen. In another sense, however, it can be argued that Jonson backs away from this outlook in both groups. The virtue of those who do find a comfortable place in the world is often static, not something which grows out of a process of trial and error. When Jonson praises people who pursue achievements and active lives, he praises them not for working out difficult accommodations or for balancing competing goods, but for managing not to err or fall from grace. How does John Selden manage to achieve such an admirable blend of personal and scholarly qualities? How does a man like Richard Weston manage to "Doe the things that Statues do deserve" while implementing Charles I's economic





policies? Was there a pressing need for Savile "at the helme" -- a need on which he had to turn his back in order to protect his independence or integrity?

Regardless of what he says in the Discoveries, Jonson's poems do not say that their experience has made these men wise; instead, like the epistle to Lady Aubigny, these poems suggest that wisdom is antecedent to experience; that the capacity for virtue is a fragile possession -- a static entity which must be protected from damage rather than an attribute which can be used (or even misused) without serious harm. In both groups of poems, he commends his addressees for possessing and retaining certain qualities, not for coping successfully with the problematics of developing or applying them. Even his metaphors underscore this notion: in "An Epistle answering . . . ," as we have seen, he worries about protecting his "owne fraile Pitcher," "Lest it be justled, crack'd" (56,57).<sup>37</sup> Only in the opaque and ambiguous "Epode" does he suggest for a moment that the "waight of guilt" is compatible with nobility of spirit or generosity of mind.

Perhaps because he considers virtue as a fixed quantity, something which people must strive not to lose or misuse, Jonson has little interest in moral ambiguity. To put it as simply as possible, Jonson does not readily assent to the proposition that good people do bad things -- or even that they make mistakes. Is it really true, as he claims, that only "bad men" could "hate" a person like Weston (Und. 75.6)? His moral vision does not often make room for mixed motives or unavoidable compromises. He is not interested in how people respond to



situations requiring complex moral choices. His poems of admiration celebrate and assert the fact of the ideal, not the process of attaining it. Burlase is the epitome of friendship; Selden and Savile, of disinterested scholarship; Weston, of leadership. They are as free from the blots of experience as is Lady Aubigny. The point is not what happens to them, not how they accomodate, not how they change -- but that they do not change. For all their individuality, they remain ideal types in less than ideal surroundings. If Jonson's poems show us what kind of behavior to emulate and what to avoid, they do not show us people in transition from one kind to the other -- people in the process of moving from good to bad or from bad to good -- just as they do not examine the practical, concrete ethical dilemmas which result when one good clashes with another, or when public and private moralities clash.

Consider, in addition to the poems themselves, this passage from the Discoveries (it occurs at the end of his famous remarks about Shakespeare's failure to "blot lines"):

His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it  
had been so too. Many times hee fell into those  
things, could not escape laughter: As when hee said  
in the person of Caesar, one speaking to him;  
Caesar, thou dost me wrong. Hee replyed: Caesar did  
never wrong, but with just cause; and such like;  
which were ridiculous.

(660-66)

But Jonson's words reveal the extent to which he has missed the point. As Julius Caesar clearly indicates, Shakespeare was well aware that the coexistence of such contraries was not impossible; the mixture



of right and wrong, of honorable and dishonorable motives -- and the difficulty of sorting them out -- is a major concern of the play. The line which Jonson ridicules seems subsequently to have been revised;<sup>38</sup> but Julius Caesar remains a drama in which more than one person encounters the problem of doing wrong with just cause. We do not need Antony's final words to convince us that Brutus plotted and carried out Caesar's assassination because of his commitment to principles -- that he acted "in a general honest thought / And common good to all" (5.5.71-72). Nor, on the other hand, are we comfortable with the motives informing Antony's skillful manipulation of the mob's raw emotions in his funeral oration at the forum -- or is he, as he insists, simply a "plain, blunt man"(3.2.218) -- one whose love for his friend blinds him to the reaction his words will provoke?<sup>39</sup> Far from making a ridiculous mistake, Shakespeare captured in a single phrase the contradiction which shapes the play; and he would have assented, we suspect, to the corollary (and equally contradictory) perception of Thomas a Becket in T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral -- another verse-drama about a politically motivated assassination:

The last temptation is the greatest treason,  
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.<sup>40</sup>

But Jonson, in contrast, insists in "An Epistle answering . . ." that "Men that are safe, and sure, in all they doe, / Care not what trials they are put unto" (1-2), and a third of the way through the poem he reasserts his confidence in his own uncompromising standards:



Let these men have their wayes, and take their times  
 To vent their libels, and to issue rimes.  
 I have no portion in them, nor their deale  
 Of newes they get, to strew out the long meale,  
 I studie other friendships, and more one,  
 Then these can ever be; or else wish none.  
 (25-30)

Like Lady Aubigny, who is told that isolation is preferable to contamination, he prefers no friends to imperfect friends.

Only in a few poems -- "To Heaven" and "On my first sonne" are obvious examples -- is Jonson emotionally engaged in his own uncertainty, preoccupied -- to borrow Trimpì's phrase once more -- with the "contentious surf" of his own experience; only rarely does he overlook faults. The most provocative example occurs in the epistle to Selden, where he confides that he has "too oft preferr'd / Men past their termes, and praised some names too much"(20-21):

Since, being deceiv'd, I turne a sharper eye  
 Upon my selfe, and aske to whom? and why?  
 And what I write? And vex it many dayes  
 Before men get a verse: much lesse a Praise;  
 So that my Reader is assur'd, I now  
 Meane what I speake: and still will keep that Vow.  
 (23-28)

If he has been taken in by others and has misapplied his talents as a result, he has also proved resilient enough to recover from his mistakes. For once, even Jonson admits and tolerates error, but at the same time he insists it will never happen again!

These lines are intriguing not just because of our natural curiosity about who has deceived him, what he has said that he no longer means, or which poems he implicitly retracts, but because they suggest





two different views of poetry and experience. If he uses the poem at hand -- the self-disclosing epistle -- to find out what he thinks by reassessing his own experience and coming to terms with his own errors, he also signals his renewed intent to pursue what one critic has called "a rhetoric of praise and blame"<sup>41</sup> -- to dispense poems like judgments or rewards -- and to be even more rigorous in the future.

But the nature of his error is itself ambiguous. On one hand, lines 24-26 suggest that he has not chosen his subjects carefully enough -- that lack of rigorous scrutiny has led him to praise some people more than they deserve; on the other hand, the lines which precede them suggest a different possibility:

Though I confesse (as every Muse hath err'd,  
And mine not least) I have too oft preferr'd  
Men, past their termes, and prais'd some names too much,  
But 'twas with purpose to have made them such.  
(19-22)

If he has praised some names "past their termes" -- more than their actions merited -- he has done so knowingly, intentionally: he has tried to use his verbal powers to figure forth ideal behavior, to attempt to persuade others to be what he claims they are, so that they will imitate in their lives the action of the poem. In this sense, his error is that he has been too optimistic about the power of poetry to shape reality and influence behavior.

Both meanings are present; both carry over into lines 23-25, when he questions the purpose of writing ("and why") as well as its subject and content ("To whom" and "what"). But in both cases, he locates the



source of error more in his own judgment than in the behavior of others. Having been deceived in the past, whether about the merit of others or about the transforming power of the poem, he now "turne[s] a sharper eye" upon himself. Nevertheless, the very real self-doubt that emerges in these lines is relegated to the past. As he reassures his reader, he has profited from the unpleasant experience of deception (self-deception) and has regained his characteristic confidence in his own judgment. Whether he refers to his decision to evaluate others more rigorously or to accept a certain limitation inherent in poetry when he says "I now / Meane what I speake: and still will keepe that Vow," he declares his conviction that he will not err again.

Like the epigram to William Roe, which reveals a fundamental ambivalence about the wisdom of exposing one's self to the experience of change, the epistle to Selden reveals a similar ambivalence about the wisdom of exposing one's self to possible error. In the epigram, Jonson not only considers the young man's ability to "turne to bloud" his new experiences, but also reveals his own uncertainty (as one of Roe's friends) about how to assess and respond to Roe's opportunity. In the epistle, Jonson's subject is his own ability similarly to assess and incorporate the experience of error into his conception of the scope and purpose of his art. Both suggest a precarious and indeterminate resolution which may be more apparent than real; and the ambivalence expressed so subtly in both is polarized throughout Jonson's verse. Like the women and men about whom he writes, his poet-speakers are at times beleaguered, in a state of siege, at times able gracefully but



powerfully to assume their appropriate role in a properly ordered society. Never addressing explicitly this fundamental conflict or contradiction, but articulating it only in the most subtle use of pronouns -- the erring "I" of the epistle, the doubting "we" of the epigram -- Jonson uses these poems to his friends to disclose his underlying uncertainty about what he can and should do as a poet in his world.



## Conclusion

As the preceding chapter indicates, Jonson is deeply engrossed in the relation of the poet to his society -- how he functions in it, how he tries to bring about its proper ordering, and whether his art will be effective. Those concerns, of course, are shared by his predecessors. Wyatt and Gascoigne both examine the shortcomings of the social order about which they write (Wyatt, about the court; Gascoigne, about the effects of social and economic change in several spheres). Neither turns his back for very long on the difficult society in which he lives, and both -- for all their differences -- stress the way in which the poet remains a member of the society which he criticizes and the way in which his criticism is intended to help shape that society. Sidney, in contrast, does not suggest that Astrophil's difficulties are exacerbated by the shortcomings of the world around him. Like Sidney, Shakespeare in the sonnets focuses less on society per se than on crucial imbalances within the individual; his concerns are ethical and psychological. In his treatment of the poet's relation to his society, then, Jonson is closer to Wyatt and Gascoigne than to the Sidney of Astrophil and Stella or the Shakespeare of the sonnets. In important ways, Jonson does exactly what Wyatt set out to do and talked about doing: using verse not to feign, or to praise the unpraiseworthy, or distort what he observed,





but to assert the poet's obligation to speak plainly and truly. Like Jonson, Wyatt uses poetry to express his frustration over the impediments to writing such poetry.<sup>1</sup>

Each poet works out his own perspective, but all share overlapping concerns which form patterns, as we will see, that are significant in their own right. Those patterns, and the ideas which shape them, do not belong to the poets alone; instead, they are part of a much larger intellectual context, the detailed richness and relevance of which has not been attended to, except in passing, by literary critics. Clarified by scholarship familiar to intellectual historians (the following discussion is deeply indebted to one of them, Eugene F. Rice, Jr.),<sup>2</sup> that context not only sheds light on the concerns which have dominated this study -- the preoccupations of individual poets -- but on the relationships among the poets and on the patterns that emerge from their shared perspectives.

If it is possible to quote Jacob Burckhardt without implicitly endorsing his thesis, the Renaissance "discovery of the world and of man" fostered a proliferation of inquiries about what kind of knowledge was of greatest potential value and how such knowledge should best be used.<sup>3</sup> Those inquiries focused on reassessing and redefining the nature of wisdom -- sapientia -- a term whose meaning changed radically over the course of the Renaissance. Described as an art of living well by Cicero and Seneca -- an ars vivendi -- it had been defined by Augustine as the knowledge and love of God. Even after the Aristotelian revival of the middle ages, Augustine's elevation of



the divine and suppression of the human components of wisdom proved more influential than Aquinas' attempts to strike a balance between them.<sup>4</sup> As patristic and medieval ways of thinking gives way to increasing differentiation in the post-medieval world, however, and as the idea of wisdom becomes increasingly secularized, we find several competing conceptions of sapientia which flourish from Trecento Florence to the late sixteenth century in the North. Not surprisingly, they generate multiple strands of inquiry which coexist and overlap. While the pattern they form is complex, and while unraveling its separate strands is a task for the intellectual historian, some discernable configurations do emerge. Broadly speaking, the Renaissance reassessment of sapientia focused on the following issues: whether wisdom is grounded in knowledge of the human or of the divine; whether it is acquired by reason or by revelation; whether it is an active or a contemplative virtue; and whether it is compatible with prudence. Conceived as an active virtue, it is defined in ethical terms; as a contemplative virtue, in intellectual terms.

To writers like Celtis and Bovillus, wisdom is an encyclopedic knowledge of all things, human and divine, which gives Promethean powers to those who possess it and which can be acquired by reason alone.<sup>5</sup> To the Florentine neoplatonists like Ficino and Pico, on the contrary, wisdom is the product of divine illumination -- an illumination of the world of ideas standing behind the deceptive, illusory world of human experience. Beyond the reach of human reason, it has nothing to do with life in the world.<sup>6</sup> To Sir Thomas Elyot,



totally unmystical but just as much a neoplatonist as his Florentine counterparts, wisdom is also the knowledge of the invisible but intelligible world of ideas -- but knowledge which can be attained by human reason alone. Where the Florentine neoplatonists view wisdom as a mystical intuition of the divine, Elyot believes that the rational faculty is powerful enough to achieve knowledge of God.<sup>7</sup> But Elyot, who addresses himself to the question of wisdom in Of The knowledg which maketh a wise man. A Disputacion Platonike, as well as in The Boke named the Governour, also writes -- contradictorily, it would seem -- that it is human experience which produces the knowledge that "maketh a man wise."<sup>8</sup>

Whether writing of human experience or of the world of ideas, Elyot conceives of wisdom in terms of knowledge which is achieved rather than in terms of action which is taken. But another group of writers, like the poets considered in the preceding chapters, concentrate their attention on how best to live in the world, reappropriating the Ciceronian conception of wisdom as an ars vivendi and transforming wisdom from an intellectual virtue to an ethical virtue -- from knowledge to action. In such a formulation, people are judged wise or unwise according to what they do -- how they act -- rather than according to what they know.<sup>9</sup> As a result, wisdom is associated with the realm of moral philosophy, distinguished from metaphysics and theology on one hand and from scientific inquiry on the other.<sup>10</sup>



This conception of wisdom is fundamentally opposed to the contemplative ideal. For every thinker like Francesco Filelfo, who insists that the highest human activity is to contemplate the divine and that the contemplative life is as superior to the active life as the divine is to the human, there is a thinker like Coluccio Salutati, one of the first in the Renaissance to define wisdom in terms of ethical behavior and to argue that wisdom is rooted in action, in the conduct of human life.<sup>11</sup> Underlying the debate over such a question -- a debate which continued for some two hundred years and engaged major figures like Erasmus as well as a lesser-known supporting cast -- is a concern about the usefulness of human knowledge. This concern is most frequently formulated in discussions of the relation between wisdom and prudence -- between sapientia and prudencia. On one hand, the Venetian Giovanni Pontano argues that those who are wise are by definition inept in the world of action, and Pierre Charron uses the expression "faicte en clerc" to characterize a thing badly done.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the Florentine Leonardo Bruni sees the philosopher not as someone who is isolated in contemplation (and therefore inept in action), but as someone whose intellectual achievements are actually enhanced by family and civic activities.<sup>13</sup> That assessment, in turn, suggests that certain kinds of intellectual pursuits are more desirable than others: Bruni believes, as Rice puts it, that it is better to know how "to live well than to know the causes of frost, snow, and the colors of the rainbow."<sup>14</sup>





In essence, the Italian humanists of the late Trecento and early Quattrocento establish paradigmatic formulations of arguments which lie dormant throughout most of the fifteenth century but re-emerge as central issues as the Renaissance moves north. Guillaume Bude, for example, concludes that prudence and wisdom are incompatible; those who seek the latter, even though it is nobler than the former, become useless to themselves and others.<sup>15</sup> Bude deplores the unwise behavior of academically learned people whose lives are ethically bankrupt: troubled by the kind of "wisdom" which does not result in virtuous action, he reminds his readers that Aristotle judged Anaxagoras and Thales wise but imprudent because their knowledge of divine things, however admirable, was useless.<sup>16</sup> Believing that the pursuit of wisdom interferes with a full life in the world, Bude continues to equate it with esoteric knowledge. Others, like Louis Le Caron, Vives, and Erasmus attempt to minimize the conflict between sapientia and prudentia by redefining sapientia in terms of its desired end -- by making wisdom compatible with, even identical with, ethical behavior.

Le Caron, for example, sees a closer relationship between wisdom and prudence than Bude believes possible. He argues in his Dialogues that wisdom must be sought in the world, in the company of others, and that it is actually incompatible with solitude and the contemplative life.<sup>17</sup> Like Ronsard, who similarly endorses an active virtue which yields success in political or social affairs over a purely contemplative intellectual virtue, Le Caron praises the "active and



successful burgher" at the expense of the "improvident and frivolous philosopher."<sup>18</sup> Vives' Introduction to Wisdom, a collection of precepts, similarly focuses on how one must act in order to be considered wise, not on what one must know; and Erasmus observes, in The Praise of Folly, that frivolous arguments hide true wisdom.<sup>19</sup> Neither Vives nor Erasmus, the major exponents of Christian humanism in the north, attempts to sever wisdom from divine revelation -- both define it as the possession of knowledge which will ensure salvation -- but both indicate that such knowledge must be demonstrated in action by living a good life and following an exemplary pattern.<sup>20</sup>

In itself, the notion that wisdom was not confined to esoteric knowledge but could be attained and exemplified by people leading active lives in the world is not necessarily anti-intellectual: it is precisely because Bude values erudition that he deplores its misuse. At the same time, any formulation which privileges the ideas of successful burghers over those of philosophers, as does Le Caron's, leaves the door open to potential devaluations of human learning. That door is implicitly flung open by Pierre Charron late in the sixteenth century. Charron prefers the culture of Sparta to that of Athens -- not in spite of Spartan contempt for erudition and art, but because of it.<sup>21</sup> Charron, in fact, goes so far as to argue that the fruits of speculative thought are not only irrelevant but are actually impediments to the proper conduct of human life; he observes at one point that the wise are rarely learned and the learned are rarely wise.<sup>22</sup> Erasmus, in contrast, refuses to believe that ethical and



intellectual virtues are mutually hostile, let alone mutually exclusive; his Enchiridion explicitly identifies wisdom as the combination of virtue and erudition.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, there is a close relationship between the issues which preoccupy English Renaissance poets focusing on the active life and the issues which preoccupy a significant group of moral philosophers from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. All the poets considered here focus on human things rather than divine things; all suggest, implicitly if not explicitly, that wisdom is acquired as well as demonstrated in experience; all examine, in different ways, the relation between wisdom and prudence. Wyatt's exploration of the relation between sapientia and prudencia resembles that of Bude, whose work he knew, and he locates value in the use of time, the quality of action, not in contemplation or abstract knowledge. Gascoigne and Shakespeare, despite their vast differences, dwell on the almost infinite capacity of human beings to learn from error -- a perspective which grows naturally out of the notion that wisdom can best be acquired in the normal course of human experience. Jonson, though he does not share Charron's epistemological scepticism and resultant elevation of the will over the intellect, is deeply divided, as Charron is, on the issue of the active life: the latter insists that virtue is proved in action at the same time that he advocates fleeing base and vulgar opinions of the herd and withdrawing to a safe haven in times of conflict.<sup>24</sup> If Jonson seems to endorse an inclusive attitude to experience in the Discoveries and in some poems, he



reassesses that endorsement in the gentlewoman's farewell and retracts it altogether in the epistle to Lady Aubigny. In fact, as I have argued, Jonson does not present people whose experience makes them wise, to borrow Elyot's phrase. At best, experience does not erode wisdom; at worst, experience is something to be shunned. In both cases, wisdom antedates experience; Jonson shows people demonstrating wisdom in action, but not acquiring it through action. For all of his apparent similarity to the other poets considered here, then, Jonson's conception of wisdom as a quality which is antecedent to experience separates him from them.

Sidney, despite the fact that he pokes fun at the "sullain gravitie" of the moral philosophers, recapitulates many of their arguments.<sup>25</sup> He not only echoes the emphasis of writers like Salutati, Bruni, and Le Caron on full human development within a social context; he also argues explicitly, in the Defence, that knowledge which leads to virtuous action is more valuable than knowledge which merely yields intellectual understanding:<sup>26</sup>

This purifying of wit, this enriching of memorie, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit, which commoly we cal learning, under what name so ever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the finall end is, to lead and draw us to as high a perfection, as our degenerate soules made worse by their clay-lodgings, can be capable of. This according to the inclination of man, bred many formed impressions. For some that thought this felicity principally to be gotten by knowledge, and no knowledge to be so high or heavenly, as acquaintance with the stars; gave theselves to Astronomie: others perswading theselves to be Demygods, if they knew the causes of things,





became naturall and supernaturall Philosophers. Some an admirable delight drew to Musicke; and some the certaintie of demonstration to the Mathematicks: but all one and other having this scope to know, & by knowledge to lift up the minde from the dungeon of the bodie, to the enjoying his owne divine essence. But when by the ballance of experience it was found, that the Astronomer looking to the stars might fall in a ditch, that the inquiring Philosopher might be blind in him self, & the Mathematician, might draw forth a straight line wih a crooked hart. Then lo did prooffe, the overruler of opinions make manifest, that all these are but serving sciences; which as they have a private end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistresse knowledge by y<sup>e</sup> Greeks architectonics, which stands as I thinke, in the knowledge of a mans selfe, in the Ethike and Politique consideration, wih the end of well doing, and not of well knowing only. Even as the Sadlers next ende is to make a good Saddle, but his further ende, to serve a nobler facultie, which is horsemanship, so the horsemans to souldiery: and the souldier not only to have the skill, but to performe the practise of a souldier. So that the ending end of all earthly learning, being verteous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that, have a most just title to be Princes over al the rest: wherein if we can shew, the Poet is worthy to have it before any other competitors.

The point, however, is not to define causal links between a philosophical framework and what the poets say but to establish more concretely the intellectual context in which they write. To pin down correspondences precisely would require a separate study: Astrophil and Stella; for example, eclectically blends more than one strand of sapiential inquiry in its mixture of platonism and active humanism.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the poets frequently view the moral philosophers as inferior competitors: accordingly, using the conclusions of the latter as a guide to the beliefs of the former can



be deceptive. Neither Gascoigne nor Jonson, for example, draws invidious distinctions between scientia and sapientia. Gascoigne's "Wodmanship" never implies that knowledge makes people vicious, only that it can be misused and that its possession does not guarantee the kind of virtue necessary for true success. In fact, it is the speaker's understating of the true value of Aristotle and Cicero that helps him to assess his own value in relation to the shortcomings of others. Jonson, similarly, frequently suggests that knowledge of history and a broad experience of human life enhance one's ability to make appropriate decisions, whether in public or private life: Weston and Savile make choices which benefit their societies, and those choices are informed by active involvement in the fine arts and historical inquiry.

Moreover, while understanding the intellectual context in which the poets write is helpful, the history of the Renaissance idea of wisdom is far more complicated than the writings of the moral philosophers suggest. A thorough exploration which met methodological standards commonly applied to work in the history of ideas would have to consider how the idea of wisdom was diffused in the popular culture of the time -- in the pamphlet literature and the drama, for example.<sup>28</sup> Needless to say, this study makes no such attempt, but even a cursory glance at a single treatment of one issue -- the relation between wisdom and prudence -- indicates the extent to which the questions are far more complex than intellectual historians have indicated. Does Prospero give up "wisdom" -- arcane knowledge -- when



he decides to drown his book? Is such a sacrifice necessary if he is to return to Milan and govern effectively? Or does he, over the course of the play's "two hours' traffic," acquire a different kind of ethical knowledge -- one which is rooted in action -- in place of the knowledge of the mage? But isn't it precisely his access to magic that enables him to arrange Miranda's meeting with Ferdinand and his own encounter with Antonio? Doesn't such knowledge, therefore, benefit both his family and community -- something which esoteric knowledge was not supposed to do? Does the play, in fact, ask us to consider competing conceptions of wisdom? Forced to respond quickly to fast-moving events and new threats to his plans, does Prospero perhaps learn to behave prudently and wisely? If so, does the play suggest that sapientia and prudentia can be reconciled?

The answers, of course, lie in the play itself, not in its sources. Just as Shakespeare evaluates and transforms the ideas of people like Bude and le Caron in The Tempest and just (as Robert Ornstein has shown) as he evaluates and criticizes the inherited Tudor myth in the histories,<sup>29</sup> the poets considered in this study challenge and transform contemporary and inherited ideas about wisdom. If the philosophers defend a conception of wisdom which is rooted in action, the poets ask what happens when such ideas are put into practice. If they do not necessarily search for generalizations, they do evaluate ways of taking action as they rivet their attention on the impediments to action. Reviewing their search for a reliable guide to action, we not only encounter a critique of proverbial wisdom and of



the ability to act in accordance with reason; we can also see how they define their behavior as poets in terms of their conception of the impediments to action.

Wyatt, massively preoccupied with the relationship between inherited ethical precepts and the complex, changing world in which he finds himself, exposes the gap between them. "A spending hand" reveals the inadequacy of proverbial morality, demonstrating how it can be used to justify vicious behavior. Bryan is instructed in prudence, not wisdom, as he is told what he must do to provide for himself and reminded that a "hand that always poureth out" needs "a bringer in as fast"; the dishonest man can, in fact, do very well for himself if he interprets certain proverbs literally and carries out their injunctions precisely. Much in the tone of Robert Frost's "Provide! Provide!" proverbial wisdom is used to justify, however sardonically, a whole range of consciously opportunistic actions.<sup>30</sup> The treatment of proverbial wisdom in "My mothers maydes" is more complicated: clichés about country and city life are superseded by the realization that every way of life has drawbacks and that externals do not determine whether one lives wisely or well. The issue in this poem is not the "choice of life," but the problems inherent in any choice. Country life is no protection against foolishness or the desire for advancement, and fails to teach wisdom, while city life at least teaches prudence -- the management of practical affairs. Prudence leads to viciousness in "A spending hand," but not in "My mothers maydes": the greatest criticism as well as the greatest sympathy is





directed at the country mouse who is unequipped to deal with the temptations of a complex and confusing world.

Gascoigne, unlike Wyatt, does not really question the value of proverbial wisdom. He begins one well-known poem by arguing that "the common speech" -- "spend and God will send" -- cannot be believed, but proceeds by replacing one truism with another, and ends it by endorsing a whole series of proverbial utterances. The poem is less an analysis of the deficiencies of "the common speech" itself than a selection among its varieties. Similarly, the argument of his prototypal sonnet sequence defends the proverbial saying "haste makes waste." Though the modification he offers in the conclusion -- "No haste but good, where wysedome makes the waye" -- contradicts the import of the proverb, he neither acknowledges nor resolves the contradiction between the two assertions.

In Astrophil and Stella, Sidney treats received wisdom differently, focusing on familiar ethical and psychological formulations rather than on proverbial sayings. First, he affirms the long-standing and widely accepted view that fulfilling one's social responsibilities is essential to one's full human development -- a notion which, as we have seen, is not confined to Renaissance thinkers but is found among medieval writers as well. Very clearly, Astrophil is not an exemplar who is immobilized by his encounter with a corrupt or vicious courtly society -- with "power's babie-creatures," to borrow Greville's decription.<sup>31</sup> Instead, Sidney locates the fault in the self-indulgent and muddled Astrophil, not in his society.



Similarly, Sidney affirms many of the standard working assumptions of Renaissance faculty psychology in his refusal to sanction Astrophil's privileging of will over reason, endorsing throughout the sequence the belief that reason should deal with the concrete circumstances of life, not just with "thought," and that love should not be left to "will." Lest the point be missed, Astrophil himself makes explicit the true nature of his own clever rationalizations in such admissions as "My best wits still their owne disgrace invent" (19.5).

At the same time, however, Sidney does not allow his sequence to offer pat answers. He does not, for example, tie up loose ends by putting the palinodic sonnets "Thou blind man's marke, thou foole's selfe chosen snare," and "Leave me o Love, which reachest but to dust" at the end of the sequence -- or even within the sequence. To the dismay of some critics, he does not offer the perspective which those sonnets contain as a "solution" to Astrophil's problem.<sup>32</sup> As a result, Astrophil ends much as we find him early in the sequence: caught between two extremes, knowing that "It is most true, that eyes are form'd to serve / The inward light: and that the heavenly part / Ought to be king," yet protesting that "Desire still cries, 'give me some food'" (5.1-3, 71.14).

Shakespeare accomplishes the same end by following the opposite strategy: putting sonnet 146, "Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth" (which parallels "Leave me o Love") at such a point in the sequence as to demonstrate the inefficaciousness of its observations. In the very next poem, "My love is as a fever, longing still," the



"rebel powers" of the speaker's "sinful earth" are victorious, even rampant; traditional formulations fail to make a difference in the speaker's ability to change the way he acts. In neither sequence does the insight associated with a spiritual realm solve or even mitigate the very real problems which both protagonists face.

If traditional spiritual observations offer no relief, neither do simplistic explanations of morally complex predicaments based on oppositions between public vice and private virtue or sophisticated corruption and innocent simplicity. Wyatt focuses on demolishing the predictable court-country dichotomy. In the first satire, the speaker seems to deal with the complexities of life at court by resorting to a simple antithesis, contrasting the innocence of life at his country estate with the corruption of life at Henry's court. But unlike Spenser's Colin, who contentedly plays to please himself, Wyatt's speaker defensively seeks his friend's approval as he proceeds to justify a course of action which he indicates will be hard for his friend to understand. Moreover, the remaining satires comment on the inadequacy of this response: one insists that "eche kind of lyffe" is potentially diseased; the other exposes the swinish realities of rural existence. Gascoigne's speaker, even less tempted by retreat, focuses on finding a way to maximize his own resources in the face of confusion and waste.

Sidney and Shakespeare similarly reject the temptation to resolve complex moral choices by constructing and then withdrawing to private worlds: Astrophil's retreat to a private world of love is shown to be



self-destructive as well as self-deceptive; Shakespeare's speaker's retreat ends at one extreme in solipsism and at the other extreme in an epistemological nightmare. In Jonson's poems, as we have seen, the issue is bounced back and forth but never resolved, but Jonson approaches the question from the opposite direction: where the others warn against retreating from complexity, Jonson focuses on the dangers of jumping in -- of contaminating one's self in a polluted stream.

More serious and more challenging than the criticism of proverbial wisdom or popular formulations is the examination of the inability to act in accordance with reason. On one hand, Wyatt is a poet who is able to look directly at himself and his world, assess what he sees, weigh the real against the ideal, note the discrepancies, and proceed to act in a way that affirms the ideal within the limitations of the real. In this sense, then, his poetry assimilates experience in a rich and complex way: if he does not write of "countries and climes, manners and men," he does chart the voyage of one particularly fine human mind as it tries to come to terms with dishonesty and shabby behavior. Contrary to Stephen Greenblatt's assertion, Wyatt's response to such an environment is not to meet treachery with treachery, viciousness with viciousness. What is so striking about Wyatt's achievement, as Thomas Greene says, is that he takes the world's measure so accurately but does not falter by responding in kind: "Few poetic speakers are more lucid than Wyatt's at his best, lucid about themselves, their moral predicaments, their confusions, their failures when judged either by the standards of the





world or of eroded idealisms."<sup>33</sup> But Wyatt does chart another kind of perilous journey. In "Som fowles there be," the only thing the speaker learns from experience is that he is unable to learn from experience. As he describes the conditions that cause him to seek self-destruction, all he can say is that he knows what he is doing and is nevertheless powerless to stop himself. But this poem treats a specific situation, a single weakness: "My galley charged," in contrast, is far more bleak. Here, the absence of reason is universal, endemic: in the tempest imagery of the poem, reason -- the quality which makes people fully human -- is "drowned" by the element of life itself.

Gascoigne's treatment of the kind of wisdom that is gained from experience contains no comparably terrifying perceptions; instead, he holds out the hope that those who fail, even repeatedly, can still profit from their errors by gaining in self-knowledge and knowledge of the world; the mistakes which open "The common speech" lead to a perspective which is explicitly identified with "wisdom" in the final poem, "No haste but good, where wysedome makes the waye," and the sequentiality and concatenation of the series reinforces the progressive, experiential nature of this development.

Sidney's Astrophil, the antithesis of Gascoigne's speaker, fails utterly to learn from experience -- not because his situation is inherently unyielding, and not because he is thrown off balance by looking too closely into an abyss of irrationality, but precisely because he backs away from knowledge of himself which makes him



uncomfortable or which challenges his self-indulgence. In Gascoigne's world, waste can generate wisdom, success can grow out of failure. Success itself is finally redefined, measured -- in "Wodmanship" above all -- by the speaker's increased understanding of his own predicament and by his discovery that the apparent success of others is illusory when measured by the proper yardsticks. Such an increased understanding, in contrast, is precisely what Sidney's Astrophil fails to achieve. Sidney does not suggest that Astrophil is incapable of learning from his mistakes -- incapable of absorbing the bitter lessons of his experience and revising his course -- but only that he lacks the resolve to see such efforts through. In his case, they end in false starts and wasted opportunities. There is all the difference in the world between the predicament facing Astrophil, who backs away from acknowledging his situation for what it is, and that facing the speaker in "Som fowles there be," who sees his situation clearly but is helpless to change it. Where Wyatt's speaker's inability to act in accordance with reason is inexplicable, Astrophil's is not.

At the same time, however, Sidney's treatment of the gap between action and knowledge is fully developed where Wyatt's is sporadic and occasional. Recycling the Petrarchan conventions of antithesis and paradox in poems like "I find no peace," Wyatt probes their implications and invests them with a new level of significance as he explores the dark side of human irrationality, but his encounters with the terror of unreason are momentary. Sidney's sequential treatment of Astrophil's irrational behavior is far more fully orchestrated; it



constitutes, as I have argued, a major theme in the sequence. At several points in Astrophil and Stella, Astrophil is unable to act in accordance with reason. Rather than lamenting the fact that the rational faculty should "fust in us unused," as Hamlet will, his solution is to banish reason to a realm which has nothing to do with action -- nothing to do with the realities of his life -- when he tells it to "deale . . . with powers of thoughts, leave love to will" (5.8). Indeed, his commitment to unreason is both "willed" and "willful" in every sense of those words. But if Sidney does not focus consistently on the gap between what Astrophil knows and what he does, it is because Astrophil knows less and less as the sequence proceeds -- and because the gap narrows accordingly. Sidney's speaker, unlike Wyatt's and Gascoigne's, does not perceive the significance of his own behavior.

Only in Shakespeare's sonnets do these separate strands -- the acquisition of wisdom from experience, the clarification of one's own situation, and the inability to change it -- come together in a fully articulated pattern. Like Astrophil, Shakespeare's speaker errs and deceives himself; unlike him, he pulls back from error, sees through his own self-deception, and does his best to "tell the story of [his] days" accurately. Thrust into a net of relationships in which almost every action he takes is morally ambiguous if not questionable, he survives his own mistakes -- including his his weakness for "authorizing . . . trespass with compare" and "bless[ing] an ill report." Shakespeare's sonnets -- especially those in the dark lady



group -- endorse the conviction of his predecessors that wisdom is indeed derived from experience, that what is most worth knowing can only be known if one leaves one's self open to the complexities of human life. In the end, the lessons of such experience can be bitter, possibly tragic. Like Wyatt's speaker who fears that reason is "drowned," Shakespeare's speaker sees himself at one point as a mortally ill madman on whom reason-as-physician has given up. Drawing on Wyatt, Gascoigne, and Sidney, Shakespeare shows his speaker coming to terms, over the course of the sequence, with painfully acquired knowledge of himself and others, as well as with the recognition that such knowledge does not necessarily generate tangible change. In the first part of the sequence he discovers that the private, compensatory world he tries to create yields only a solipsistic confusion, and that poetry, far from conferring immortality, can instead be used to conceal and distort the truth. In the second part (in which poetry is never explicitly mentioned)<sup>34</sup> he discovers that telling the truth is the best he can do. Shakespeare thus brings together with special intensity two themes which recur individually in the work of his predecessors: the belief that wisdom is derived from experience and applicable to it, and the perception that there is also a residual, intractable element in human experience which does not yield to change.

Jonson, so concerned with the surfaces of the questions occupying his predecessors and contemporaries, differs from them in more important ways than he resembles them. Wyatt's most outstanding





achievement, we recall, is his creation of a voice which is profoundly engaged with experience, which insists on asking for (and offering) reciprocity and fair play in a world of shifting loyalties and uncertainties. Most impressive of all is the bold way in which it establishes the powerful reality of such a world at the same time that it insists and assumes that fair play is possible within it. Nor does it tie expectations of fairness to unrealistic assumptions about the infallibility or even superiority of a chosen few. Jonson, however, has little patience with those who have erred, little toleration of human fallibility. He rarely presents the uncentered or uncertain self sympathetically. In his world, knaves remain knaves, fools fools. He would never have written a poem like Wyatt's "My galley charged with forgetfulness," in which an intelligent and articulate speaker announces that his reason is "drowned." Suggesting that a person bereft of reason could or should be taken seriously or sympathetically would surely be just as absurd, in his opinion, as believing that one could do wrong with just cause. Moreover, Jonson has none of Gascoigne's generous view of human fallibility; he does not present speakers who learn as much from failure as from success, who accept their own tendency to repeat mistakes, whose wisdom may be nothing more than an attempt to beguile themselves. Unlike his contemporary Fulke Greville, he does not write for those "that are weatherbeaten in the Sea of this World, such as having lost the sight of their Gardens, and Groves."<sup>35</sup>

Because he has little if any patience with the uncentered self,



Jonson really does not explore the impediments to ethical action in the same way that Wyatt, Gascoigne, Sidney, and Shakespeare do. As a result, his conception of the relation between knowledge and action is superficial compared to theirs. In his view, determining what is right -- and proceeding to do it -- is not difficult. Even in his self-disclosing epistle to Selden, when Jonson realizes that he has deceived himself about his own ability to judge others and assess his own powers, he quickly regains his characteristic confidence in his own judgment. In effect, what Jonson allows himself to learn from mistakes is that they should not be allowed to occur.<sup>36</sup>

One final form of action to be evaluated is the act of writing the poem. In addition to mastering the introspective lyric, Wyatt uses the poem to discover and communicate the dynamics of personal and social relationships: by making the point that the poem is the appropriate vehicle for doing so, he also articulates and defends the role of the poet in human society. In "Lullabie" and "Wodmanship," Gascoigne similarly uses the poem as a way of coming to terms with himself and sorting out his misgivings about his own use of time, but in "Wodmanship" he also uses the poem to mold social relationships, to influence hierarchical structures, and to demonstrate the powerful combination of imagination and rhetorical skill. If Wyatt's characteristic speaker is a person who tries to do the right thing and wonders why others do not value fair play as much as he does, Gascoigne's is an unlucky bungler who calls attention to his own mistakes.<sup>37</sup> Despite their differences, both speakers, however,



emerge as morally superior to the prevailing social order at the same time that they reaffirm their continuing participation in it. Both, learning from trial and error, reach certain conclusions about themselves and their calling; both claim the role of poet as educator and exemplar; both accept and assert their membership in the group to which they address themselves.

Antithetically, Sidney's *Astrophil* is both isolated from and inferior to the associates whom he patronizes; a negative example, he begins by committing himself to making poems which will employ figurative, formal, and logical elements to deal adequately with complex situations, but soon reduces this endeavor to an exercise -- "copying." Ceasing to berate himself because his "knowledge brings forth toys," he comes to disavow his own identity as an artist, inviting Stella -- and posterity -- to obliterate his "poet's name." Withdrawing to a private world and turning his back on his own social obligations, he also turns his back on the educative role of the poet which his creator endorses so eloquently in the Defence. In his sequence, Sidney blames *Astrophil*, not the courtly society to which he belongs, making its spokespersons representatives of reason and endorsing their views.

The emphasis in Shakespeare's sonnets falls on the function of poetry in personal rather than social relationships. Shakespeare's speaker begins to come to terms with his own capacity for misusing his verbal powers in a different way as he comes to confront poetry's power --not necessarily to confer immortality in the future but to



conceal and even distort the truth about the present. In addition to criticizing the rival poet for excessive praise of the young man (e.g., "I never saw that you did painting need"), he discovers his own propensity for "fairing the foul" and increasingly accepts the consequences of his own actions. Even when not referring to his own poems, the speaker worries about using his analytical and verbal skill to define his situation accurately and to represent its emotional, ethical, and behavioral complexities without distortion.

Jonson remains ambivalent. The epistle to Selden suggests that at one point he believed to some extent in the transforming power of poetry -- in its ability to elicit the best possible behavior from others in response to praise. At the other extreme, the late odes to himself circumscribe the role of lyric poetry, confining it to an isolated introspection that protects the poet from the buffetings of his society rather than connecting him with it. On balance, however, Jonson's verse, even when troubled, underscores his conviction that poetry is a natural medium for communicating in everyday situations and that it invests simple human transactions with an aesthetic dimension and an allusive resonance.

In different ways, all five poets are preoccupied with making use of poetry as they address some of the most problematical aspects of their worlds. Whether they focus on personal relationships (as does Shakespeare) or social relationships (as does Gascoigne), they create poet-speakers who explicitly employ their poetic skills and implicitly employ their rhetorical skills to the dual process of comprehending





and affecting such relationships. As poets, those speakers not only deal with the difficult process of assimilating their own experience in all of its complexity but also use the poem itself as a mode of action as they question and redefine the role of the poet in the world.



## Notes

### Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> The Poems and Letter of Andrew Marvell, ed. H.M. Margoliouth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I, p. 85. Other quotations from Marvell are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.
- <sup>2</sup> Harold Toliver, Marvell's Ironic Vision (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 150-51, and Joseph H. Summers, The Heirs of Donne and Jonson (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 153-55.
- <sup>3</sup> Cleanth Brooks, "Andrew Marvell: Puritan Austerity with Classical Grace," in Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance, eds. Maynard Mack and George deForest Lord (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 227.
- <sup>4</sup> A.D. Nuttall, "Two Unassimilable Men," in Shakespearean Comedy, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 14 (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), pp. 228-29.
- <sup>5</sup> The best analysis remains Douglas Bush's The Renaissance and English Humanism (1939; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1965).
- <sup>6</sup> Among the critics reinforcing this notion is Joseph Mazzeo (Renaissance and Revolution: The Remaking of European Thought [New York: Pantheon Books, 1965], p. 53). For a radically different view, see Louis Adrian Montrose, "Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form," ELH, 50 (1983), 415-59.
- <sup>7</sup> Pointed out by Eugene F. Rice, The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 154. In Des Vertus Intellectuelles et Morales. Discours prononce a l'Academie du Palais par Ronsard en Presence de Henri III. Oeuvres Completes ed. Gustave Cohen [Paris: Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, 1950], II, 1030-34), Ronsard responds to the king's inquiry whether the moral or intellectual virtues are more important ("si les vertus morales sont plus louables, plus necessaires et plus excellentes que les intellectuelles" [1030]). The former win; the latter are judged less useful in the conduct of public affairs ("pource qu'il y a plusieurs sciences intellectuelles qui ne sont utiles au maniment des affaires publiques, comme est la phisque, l'astrologie, la judiciare et beaucoup d'autres telles curiositez, si nous comparons telles vertus



intellectuelles aux moralles, les vertus moralles les passeront de beaucoup" [1032]). This, he continues, was recognized not just by Socrates, who turned contemplation into action by bringing philosophy into the lives of urban men ("aux hommes et la logea dedans les citez, tournant la contemplation en l'action" [1033]), but also by Pericles, Themistocles, and Aristides; in contrast, contemplatives like Anaxagoras, Thales, and Democritus never contributed to their republic by living the lives of good citizens ("ils n'ont jamais rien profite a leur republique pour en acquerir le nom de bons citoyens" [1033]).

<sup>8</sup> Sir Thomas Wyatt, The Quyetete of Mynde, in Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt, eds. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969 [hereafter cited as Muir-Thomson]), Appendix B, p. 443. Stephen Greenblatt's reminder that "there is no translation that is not at the same time an interpretation" surely applies to Wyatt's essay as well as to his poetry (Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980], p. 115).

<sup>9</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936; rpt. 1966), p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Lovejoy, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> G.K. Hunter, John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 13, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Hunter, p. 13

<sup>13</sup> Hunter, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Rice deals with a broad spectrum of European writers, tracing changes in the history of the idea of wisdom through antiquity, the patristic and medieval periods, and the Renaissance. Focusing primarily on the writings of moral philosophers, he does not deal with imaginative literature in general or with English poets in particular. Nevertheless, his solid and useful intellectual history provides a helpful framework for the specific issues I consider, and places them in perspective in a rich cultural heritage. I discovered his book after developing the basic plan for this study and locating its governing ideas in the poetry itself, but found his work indispensable, especially in the process of placing my findings in a broader context.

<sup>15</sup> Rice, p. 150; Cicero, De Officiis, I, vi, 19 and II, ii, 5-6, trans. Walter Miller (Loeb Classical Library XXI, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 20-21 and 170-73. "All these professions [astronomy, mathematics, dialectics, and civil law]



are occupied with the search after truth; but to be drawn by study away from active life is contrary to moral duty. For the whole glory of virtue is in activity" (p. 21).

<sup>16</sup> Bush, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Hunter, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Thus, Hunter's belief that the involvement of Elizabethan humanists in the nation's political life proved "crippling" (p. 14) has been revived with variations in recent years by the exponents of the new historicism. See, for example, Jonathan Goldberg, "The Politics of Renaissance Literature: A Review Essay," ELH, 49 (1982), 514-42.

<sup>19</sup> Bush, pp. 113-14. See also Milton, "Of Education," Complete Prose Works of John Milton, II, ed. Ernest Sirluck (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 357-415: "I call therefore a compleate and generous Education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously all the offices both private and publicke of peace and war" (pp. 377-79).

<sup>20</sup> For Wyatt, see the following chapter; for Vives, see Marian Leona Tobriner, ed. and introd., Vives' Introduction to Wisdom: A Renaissance Textbook (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> The Shepheardes Calendar ("Iune," 71-72), in Spenser. Poetical Works ed. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1912; rpt. 1975), p. 442.

<sup>22</sup> For two excellent treatments of Milton's -- and the epic narrator's -- presence in Paradise Lost, see George DeForest Lord, "Milton's Dialogue with Omniscience in Paradise Lost," and Janet Adelman, "Creation and the Place of the Poet in Paradise Lost," in Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams, eds., The Author in His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 31-50 and 71-84, resp.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Helgerson, "The Laureate and the Literary System" and "The New Poet Presents Himself," in his Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 21-54 and 55-100. See also Harry Berger, Jr., "Orpheus, Pan, and the Poetics of Misogyny: Spenser's Critique of Pastoral Love and Art," ELH, 50 (1983), 27-60; David L. Miller, "Spenser's Vocation, Spenser's Career," ELH, 50 (1983), 197-231; and Montrose, "'The perfecte paterne of a Poete': The Poetics of Courtship in The Shepheardes Calendar," TSL, 21 (1979), 34-67.

<sup>24</sup> Fulke Greville, A Treatise of Religion, 98.1-3, quoted in





Richard Waswo, The Fatal Mirror: Themes and Techniques in the Poetry of Fulke Greville (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> All quotation from Caelica are from Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Poems and Dramas of Fulke Greville, First Lord Brooke (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945). See also Charles Larson, Fulke Greville (Boston: Twayne, 1980), pp. 14, 18; F.J. Levy, "Fulke Greville: The Courtier as Philosophic Poet," Modern Language Quarterly, 33 (1972), 443; and Ronald A. Rebholz, The Life of Fulke Greville, First Lord Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 237-38.

<sup>26</sup> In Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, 1554-1628: A Critical Biography (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1971), Joan Rees points to his "deep and powerful religious conviction of the inherent and ineradicable sinfulness of the world and the tense situation of men, who are called to be in the world but not of it" (p. 1).

<sup>27</sup> Rebholz, p. 293. "How did Greville relate his engagement with literature to his view of the corruption of all worldly matters?" Rees asks (p. 182); after looking at Caelica LXVI, she turns to the Treatie of Humane Learning for an answer -- precisely because Caelica with one exception, ignores this question. Basically, Rees concludes that in Caelica LXVI and the Treatie Greville, like Calvin and Milton, believed that "Where the inward man is corrupt, books and learning can only serve corruption. Where the heart and mind are pure, on the other hand, the truths of revelation are the only learning worthy of contemplation" (p. 187). See her useful discussion (pp. 187-98) of how this position is worked out in detail in the Treatie

<sup>28</sup> The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh, ed. Agnes M.C. Latham (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), pp. 45, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, Sir Walter Raleigh: The Renaissance Man and his Roles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

<sup>30</sup> M.M. Mahood, Poetry and Humanism (1950; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1967), p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Marotti disagrees; see his "John Donne and Patronage," in Patronage in the Renaissance, eds. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 207-34. Marotti argues that Donne deeply resented his lack of employment at court, and that poems like "The Canonization," far from rejecting the pursuit of power, as is commonly assumed, project Donne's fascination with it: the poem's imagery reveals, he says, that Donne's mind is never very far from thoughts of states and princes.

<sup>32</sup> "Affliction [I]" (38). All quotation from Herbert are from



F.E. Hutchinson, ed., The Works of George Herbert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941, rpt. 1972).

<sup>33</sup> As Helen Vendler says, "his primary subject is the workings of his own mind and heart rather than the expression of certain religious beliefs," and his poems insist upon the "absolute primacy of lived experience" The Poetry of George Herbert [Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1975], pp. 4,6). Waswo (pp. 139-42) and Larson (pp. 127-28) also compare Greville to Herbert.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley Fish, who makes a similar point, believes that in the "anti-aesthetic" of "Jordan (II)" Herbert views the plain style as a temptation, not as a solution (Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature [Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1972], n. 21, p. 199). See also pp. 177-79, 219-22, as well as Barbara Leah Harman, Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert's Poetry (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> It can be and has been argued that Herbert does more than make the kind of figurative and/or literal assertions I have been describing in this particular poem -- that, in fact, he uses the poem as a place where open-ended "making" can occur. See, for example, Vendler's chapter on the "reinvented poem" (pp. 25-56) in which she stresses the "provisional quality" of much of Herbert's verse (p. 25): "Herbert 'reinvents' the poem afresh as he goes along. He is constantly criticizing what he has already written and he often finds the original conception inadequate" (p. 29). In this sense, the experience of writing or "making" the poem is a process of discovering what it is he really thinks -- of putting time to good use. See Harman, p. 199, n15, and Richard Strier, "Humanizing Herbert," Journal of Modern Philology, 74 [1976], 78-88), for a critique of Vendler's emphasis on the poem as process.

<sup>36</sup> As Vendler says, "The very indirectness and inarticulateness of the final definition, coupled with the large claim of the last three words, limits the secular world suddenly to its own now impoverished inventory, which until this moment had seemed the spirited sum of all things and all doings. The closing definition is careful not to make verse a means of passage to God. Not 'By using verse, I can reach thee' but 'While I use verse, I am with thee,' says Herbert. The final revenge on all those nouns and verbs is fairly earned" (p. 183).

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Javitch, Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

<sup>38</sup> For a helpful exposition of the principles informing this critical approach, see Goldberg, pp. 514-42.



<sup>39</sup> 4.4.38-39, The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 1172. All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., trans. Hans Nachod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 34.

## Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, p. 7. As Thomas Greene points out in his review (Comparative Literature [1982], 186), Greenblatt's book, however brilliant, is wrong about Wyatt. It is, nevertheless, the most important work on Wyatt to appear in years.

<sup>2</sup> Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, p. 120 ("Wyatt remains within a context governed by the essential values of domination and submission . . . Wyatt cannot fashion himself in opposition to power and the conventions power deploys").

<sup>3</sup> Muir-Thomson, CCLIX, p. 252. All quotations from Wyatt are from this edition and will be identified parenthetically. We still do not possess a scholarly edition of Wyatt that is generally accepted as authoritative; for a discussion of widely recognized shortcomings in Muir-Thomson, see H.A. Mason, Editing Wyatt (Cambridge: Cambridge Quarterly Publications, 1972), and Joost Daalder's review of Muir-Thomson, "Editing Wyatt," Essays in Criticism, XXIII (1973), 399-413; for a helpful guide to the textual problems still plaguing Wyatt critics, see Richard Harrier, The Canon of Sir Thomas Wyatt's Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975). Ronald A. Rebholz's edition Sir Thomas Wyatt: The Complete Poems [New York: Penguin Books, 1978]) contains some of the best commentary, critical and historical, and helpfully groups poems by genre rather than by manuscript, but employs modernized spelling and punctuation. Daalder's Sir Thomas Wyatt: Collected Poems (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), another recent edition with modernized spelling, groups poems by manuscript but separates ascribed and unascribed lyrics within manuscripts. The difficulty of producing a definitive edition is closely tied to the difficulty (the impossibility, perhaps) of establishing the Wyatt canon with any certainty. In fact, one of the problems with Greenblatt's book, Greene's review points out, is that Greenblatt bases one crux of his argument on a poem whose authorship is widely regarded as uncertain ("To wette yout yee withoutyn teare" [CLXX]), despite the fact that it is included in the major editions. To minimize such problems, I have confined my discussion to poems which textual experts confidently attribute to Wyatt on the basis of external as well as internal evidence.



<sup>4</sup> Thomas A. Hannen, "The Humanism of Sir Thomas Wyatt," in The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry from Wyatt to Milton, ed. Thomas O. Sloan and Raymond B. Waddington (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 43. Hannen's essay, like mine, is broadly concerned with Wyatt's relation to the humanist tradition. His emphasis on rhetoric, however, leads him in a direction different than the one I pursue, and he emphasizes two lyrics ("What vailleth trouth?" and "Ys yt possyble?") to which I refer only in passing. Hannen's study, like Greenblatt's, is useful because it focuses squarely on what Wyatt thought -- a subject which has been dealt with only peripherally, and which has generally been subordinated to a concern with Wyatt's metrical sophistication, his relation to his sources, or his texts. Recent emphasis on Wyatt as a poet who uses lyric forms for serious inquiry begins in earnest with Douglas Peterson's important chapter in his The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne: A Study of the Plain and Eloquent Styles (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 87-119; Peterson argues correctly that Wyatt is "the first poet in sixteenth-century England to have used the plain style within the native song tradition to deal seriously with ideas" (p. 118). Other significant studies of Wyatt include Donald M. Friedman, "The 'Thing' in Wyatt's Mind," Essays in Criticism, 16 (1966), 375-81, and "The Mind in the Poem: Wyatt's 'They flee from me,'" SEL, 7 (1967), 1-13; H.A. Mason, Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959); and Patricia Thomson, Sir Thomas Wyatt and His Background (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> I discuss these three sonnets in order of their increasing complexity, not according to any assumptions about chronological order. It is tricky enough to establish the Wyatt canon, let alone its chronology.

<sup>6</sup> See Peterson, pp. 266-68, for the place of "Ffarewell, Love" in the history of the penitential lyric. He views it as a significant break with the medieval didactic tradition because it justifies renunciation "not on the grounds that renunciation is necessary for salvation, but on the grounds that desire is self-inflicted privation" (p. 267). As Friedman puts it, this "palinodic sonnet . . . is remarkable in that love is rejected not because it is sinful or irrational but because it is tiring . . . the emphasis falls . . . on the poet's wearied realization that he has squandered the powers of his mind" ("The 'Thing' in Wyatt's Mind," 376).

<sup>7</sup> Because this sonnet turns on line 8 instead of line 9, and because of the incongruity between its formal units and logical/syntactical units, it may be inappropriate to speak of a sestet at all. Any temptation to speculate that the break after line 7 enacts the motions of a mind divided against itself should be tempered, however, by the fact that Wyatt's unusual structure follows that of his Petrarchan original, "Son animali al mondo di si altera"





(Francesco Petrarca, Rime, 19, Introduzione e Note di Guido Bezzola (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1976), p. 107.). In both Petrarch and Wyatt, line 8 "forms a bridge passage, concluding the octave and introducing the sestet" (Muir-Thomson, p. 284). But formal and syntactical units are congruent in Petrarch where they are incongruent in Wyatt. For an excellent discussion of Wyatt's use of Petrarch, see Greene, The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 246-57.

<sup>8</sup> "It may be good, like it who list" (XXI). See Hannen's helpful discussion of this poem (pp. 52-55).

<sup>9</sup> As the OED points out, two very different words -- one from Old French and one from Middle English -- have run together and are virtually impossible to distinguish from Caxton on. Spellings include devis, devys, devise, and device.

<sup>10</sup> OED 6a, b.

<sup>11</sup> Like "Eche man me telleth," one of Wyatt's few wholly original sonnets, it is in fact so unified in tone that J.W. Lever has argued that it contains no real sestet and is actually a prototypal English sonnet (The Elizabethan Love Sonnet [London: Methuen, 1956], p. 27). But whether or not lines 9-12 comprise a quatrain, the second part of the poem underscores the first; the couplet reveals an angry intensity -- a loss of composure -- that is perhaps absent from the previous lines, but it does not undercut them.

<sup>12</sup> The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, eds. Edward Surtz, S.J., and J.H. Hexter (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), IV, p. 99.34-35 ("& in tempestate naus destituenda est, quoniam uentos inhibere non possis" [98.27-28]).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Warton, The History of English Poetry, in Wyatt: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patricia Thomson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 43-44.

<sup>14</sup> As Greenblatt point out, "For the briefest moment we glimpse an unpleasant answer to the question with which the poem has begun . . . the poet's country freedom is in fact a kind of house arrest" (Renaissance Self-Fashioning p. 132).

<sup>15</sup> Rebholz, Sir Thomas Wyatt (p. 442). Greenblatt emphasizes its "essential link between language and power" (Renaissance Self-Fashioning, p. 130).

<sup>16</sup> Only the Muir-Thomson edition prints line 19 as "my tonge" rather than "my tune." "Tune" is printed by Rebholz, Daalder, and Muir (Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,



1949, rpt. 1963]). The fact that lines 1-52 are missing from the Egerton ms. -- the copy-text for the remainder of the poem -- complicates the editorial problem. Both Tottel and the Devonshire ms. print "tune"; the Parker ms. (Rebholz's copy-text for lines 1-52) prints "tonge"; and the line is missing from the Arundel and Hill mss.

<sup>17</sup> Rebholz, Sir Thomas Wyatt, p. 446; Friedman, "The 'Thing' in Wyatt's Mind," 375-81.

<sup>18</sup> The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, pp. 101.1-2 ("quod in bonum nequis uertere, efficias saltem, ut sit quam minime malum" [p. 100.1-2]) and p. 103.9-15 ("Porro nihil occurrit, in quo prodesse quicquam possis, in eos delatus collegas, qui uel optimum uirum facilius corruperint, quam ipsi corrigantur, quorum peruersa consuetudine uel deprauaberis, uel ipse integer atque innocens, alienae malitiae, stultitiaeque praetexeris, tantum abest ut aliquid possit in melius obliquo illo ductu conuertere" [p. 102.8-13]).

<sup>19</sup> Rebholz, Sir Thomas Wyatt, p. 450. See Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning (pp. 133-35), for the best treatment of the poetic (as opposed to the biographical) implications of Wyatt's decision to make Brian the spokesperson of honesty, and for its effect on the reader. For a diplomatic historian's view of the satire (and contribution to the continuing debate over its dating), see David Starkey, "The Court: Castiglione's Ideal and Tudor Reality; being a discussion of Sir Thomas Wyatt's Satire addressed to Sir Francis Bryan," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 45 (1982), 232-29.

<sup>20</sup> Hallett Smith, "The Art of Sir Thomas Wyatt," Huntington Library Quarterly, 9 (1946), pp. 350, 351. But there is no conclusive evidence that "Lament my losse" is by Wyatt: Harrier classifies it among the "doubtful poems" (p. 54). See also Muir-Thomson, p. 423.

<sup>21</sup> Others include "All hevy myndes" (LXXXIV); "Might I as well within my song belaye" (CLIII); "My pen, take payn a lytyll space" (CLXXIX); "As power and wytt wyll me Assyst" (CLXXXVIII); "Sins you will nedes that I shall sing" (CCIX); "Now of all chaunge" (CCXXVI); and "Such is the course" (CCL). It seems clear, too, that when Wyatt refers to his "songs," he means words, not music; when a lyric which begins "Me list no more to sing" also says "Marke well, I say, this text" (CCX, 1, 29), the connection seems self-evident. The relation of words and music in the early Tudor period is problematical, as the divergent conclusions of John Stevens and Winifred Maynard indicate, but both seem to agree on this point. Stevens, arguing that most "songs" by Wyatt and his contemporaries were not written to be accompanied by music, and that Wyatt probably knew very little about music in any case, points out that musical and literary references occasionally occur, as they do above, in the same poem (Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court [Lincoln: University



of Nebraska Press, 1961], p. 123). Maynard, who believes that Wyatt, following Serafino, may well have introduced the practice of writing art songs for the lute to England, nevertheless sees his references to "song" as "purely conventional alternatives to literary texts"; in "My lute, awake!" she says, the lute's voice is joining with his own ("The Lyrics of Wyatt: Poems or Songs?" RES, 16 (1965), 253, 251.

<sup>22</sup> Stevens, p. 85. For important critical treatments of Wyatt's penitential psalms, see Greenblatt, pp. 115-27; Mason, Humanism and Poetry, pp. 206-21; R.G. Twombly, "Thomas Wyatt's Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms of David," TSL, 12 (1970), 345-80; and Hallett Smith, "English Metrical Psalms in the Sixteenth Century and their Literary Significance," Huntington Library Quarterly, 9 (1946), 249-71.

<sup>23</sup> See Muir-Thomson, pp. 356-58, and Mason, Humanism and Poetry, pp. 203-21, for a full discussion of Wyatt's use of his sources in the penitential psalms.

<sup>24</sup> Greenblatt, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> There are strong and interesting parallels between the difficulty David experiences in accepting forgiveness as a real possibility (it is what motivates the despair from which he emerges in Psalm 130) and the similar difficulty encountered by Marlowe's Faustus.

<sup>26</sup> C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 230.

<sup>27</sup> For a full discussion of Wyatt's departure from the tradition of the courtly love lyric, see Peterson, pp. 87-119.

<sup>28</sup> While this poem appears only in the Devonshire ms., in a section comprised of non-Wyatt poems, and while the only external evidence for Wyatt's authorship is a "W" at the end of the third stanza, Harrier includes it in the Wyatt canon "in view of the style of the poem and the authority of the 'W' " (p. 52).

<sup>29</sup> Muir-Thomson, p. 420.

<sup>30</sup> George Turberville, "Two things in cheefe did move me thus to write" (lines 42 and 47-48), Tragical Tales and Other Poems (Edinburgh: 1837, rpt. from the edition of M.D. LXXXVII), quoted in C.T. Prouty, George Gascoigne: Elizabethan Courtier, Soldier, and Poet (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 118.

<sup>31</sup> Peterson, who sees the same relationship, has made a similar point: "What is especially interesting about Turberville's version is the way in which it confirms Wyatt's earlier charge that



hypocrisy and affectation are nurtured in court society, in the writing of verse as well as in social relationships. These are precisely the vices which the proponents of the plain style from Wyatt to George Herbert proudly proclaim their own habits of plain speaking avoid" (p. 125).

<sup>32</sup> Mason, Humanism and Poetry, p. 171.

## Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> C.T. Prouty, ed., George Gascoigne's A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Studies, 17 [1942], p. 154). All quotations from Gascoigne's poems are from Prouty's edition of A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres and will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup> My shift from referring to "Gascoigne's speaker" to "Gascoigne" within one paragraph is neither careless nor arbitrary. The question of who is speaking in his lyrics is complicated by the fact that not only do several of them refer to biographical incidents; the speaker makes clear that those incidents are part of his biography. Yet "Gascoigne's lullabie," the title and last line of which would seem to place it in the same category, seems to defy such classification for purely biographical reasons: if Prouty's dating is correct (and it has never been challenged), then this poem, in which the speaker laments the onset of age, was probably written when Gascoigne was about 25 at the most. In view of the ambiguity which Gascoigne himself creates, it seems best to refer to the speaker when discussing individual poems, and to refer to Gascoigne the poet when discussing themes which reappear in several poems. See Prouty, A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres, pp. 34-37, for the argument that the poems in this collection are both sequentially and chronologically ordered. Prouty offers evidence that "Gascoignes wodmanship" refers to events which occurred in the winter of 1572-73, the sonnet sequence to 1563. He places the "Lullaby" at about the same time as the sonnet sequence.

<sup>3</sup> The poem is prefaced by "Alexander Nevile delivered him this theame, Sat cito, si sat bene, whereupon he compiled these seven Sonets in sequence, therein bewraying his owne Nimis cito: and therwith his Vix bene, as foloweth (Prouty, A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres, p. 155).

<sup>4</sup> In his influential essay, "The 16th Century Lyric in England: A Critical and Historical Reinterpretation" Poetry, 52 (1939), 138-72, 320-32; 54 (1939), 35-51, Yvor Winters calls "Gascoignes wodmanship" one of the greatest lyrics of the sixteenth century, surpassed in his view only by Shakespeare's sonnets. Peterson's The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne contains an important analysis of Gascoigne's use of rhetorical devices in organizing the poem as well as a lucid discussion of Gascoigne's





contribution to anti-courtly writing in the plain style (pp. 152-63). See also Ronald C. Johnson, George Gascoigne (New York: Twayne, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry: A Study in Conventions, Meaning and Expression (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 206.

<sup>6</sup> "Gascoignes wodmanship written to the L. Grey of wilton uppon this occasion, the sayde L. Grey delighting (amongst many other good qualities) in chusing of his winter deare, and killing the same with his bowe, did furnishe master Gascoigne with a crossbowe cum Pertinencijs, and vouchsafed to use his company in the said exercise, calling him one of his wodmen. Now master Gascoigne shooting very often, could never hitte any deare, yea and often times he let the heard passe by as though he had not seene them. Whereat when this noble Lord took some pastime, and had often put him in remembrance of his good skill in choosing, and redinesse in killing of a winter deare, he thought good thus to excuse it in verse" (Prouty, A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres, p. 181).

<sup>7</sup> Javitch makes a similar point in "The Impure Motives of Elizabethan Poetry," Genre, 15 (1982), 225-38. See that essay and his Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England for important discussions of the "subtle kind of self-advertising" that the Elizabethan court poets engaged in ("The Impure Motives," p. 226) and the place of Puttenham's The Arte of English Poesie as a document in the history of such self-advertising.

### Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> This reading of the sequence -- that it deals with patterns of self-deception and diminution -- draws upon, and is reinforced by, a substantial body of criticism reassessing Astrophil and Stella. See especially Alan Sinfield, "Astrophil's Self-Deception," Essays in Criticism, 28 (1978), 1-18, and "Sidney and Astrophil," SEL, 20 (1980), 25-41. See also Richard C. McCoy, Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1979); David Kalstone, Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965); and Robert Montgomery, Symmetry and Sense: The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1961). For recent revisionist treatments of Sidney's sequence, see Marotti, "'Love is not love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," ELH, 49 (1982), 396-427; Montrose, "Celebration and Insinuation: Sir Philip Sidney and the Motives of Elizabethan Courtship," Renaissance Drama, N.S. 8 (1977), 3-35. Other relevant studies include James J. Scanlon, "Sidney's Astrophil and Stella: 'See what it is to love' Sensually!" SEL, 16 (1976), 65-74; Andrew W. Weiner, "Structure and 'Fore Conceit' in Astrophil and Stella," TSL, 16 (1974-75), 1-15; J.G. Nichols, The



Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney: An Interpretation in the Context of His Life and Times (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1974); and Richard A. Lanham, "Astrophil and Stella: Pure and Impure Persuasion," ELR, 2 (1972), 100-15. For a traditional view, see Lever, pp. 51-91; John Danby, Poets on Fortune's Hill: Studies in Sidney, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher (1952; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1966); and A.C. Hamilton, "Sidney's Astrophel and Stella as a Sonnet Sequence," ELH, 36 (1969), 59-87.

<sup>2</sup> Kalstone, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Marotti, for example, argues that Sidney writes as a failed politician to a coterie audience which would have understood "the metaphorizing of love as ambition": "Lady Rich was for him, as was Anne Boleyn for Wyatt, a fit symbol of his unattained and unattainable social and political goals" ("Love is not love," p. 400). Similarly, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass suggest that "the contradictory tyrannies of court life . . . find their counterparts in the contradictory tyrannies of love" and believe that the sequence effects "a complex displacement of the ideological pressures of the court" ("Courtship and Courtiership: The Politics of Astrophil and Stella" [presented and distributed at a special session on revisionist literary history of the English Renaissance at the 1982 MLA convention], p. 2). But Javitch argues persuasively that Sidney's sequence is free of those sociopolitical or "extrapoetic" agendas present in much Elizabethan verse: "I would contend that one of the principal though unstated aims of his sonnet sequence was to rebuke prior Elizabethan writers of amatory verse, not solely for the inferior quality of their verse but for the extra-amatory and extra-literary motives that had prompted it" ("The Impure Motives of Elizabethan Poetry," 233). Kalstone takes the traditional view that the sequence sets the public world at a comic distance, making it seem irrelevant to the private world of love (p. 143). For a different perspective, see John Stevens, Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court. Stevens points out "one of the central paradoxes in the 'game of love' -- that the desired fruit of personal experience of love is joyous social activity. The 'game' is private but it is played in public" (p. 187).

<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it also overlooks this important point made by Richard McCoy: even when Sidney does deal with struggles which have political implications, their origins tend to be "romantic and psychological": "Sidney's characters find the tyranny of their own emotions as menacing as the intervention of authority, and they have difficulty negotiating a responsible and autonomous course. The conflicts that result are prompted by a sudden eruption of impulse rather than by serious differences of policy" (pp. 26-27). Moreover, while Sidney was indeed preoccupied with the "fictive exploration of the problems of sovereignty, obedience, and autonomy," those concerns are "muted" in Astrophil and Stella (p. 21). I agree with much of what



McCoy says about Sidney's sequence -- with one important exception. He implies that Sidney is unaware that Astrophil is riddled with conflict and ambivalence -- that Astrophil's conflicts are, in fact, projections of Sidney's. I am arguing, in contrast, that Sidney knew exactly what he was doing. Far from projecting his own difficulties onto Astrophil, he demonstrates Astrophil's psychological and emotional excesses as carefully as he reveals his speaker's rhetorical flourishes.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations from Astrophil and Stella are from The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> Sinfield, "Sidney and Astrophil," p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Montgomery, p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> Rees (pp. 102-03) and Marotti, "'Love is not love'" (p. 405), suggest that the friend in these sonnets was probably Greville.

<sup>9</sup> Sinfield points out that, much later in the sequence, Stella's words in the fourth song and the third person narrator in the eighth song also introduce another perspective and "intensify the reader's sense that there is another point of view to be stated" ("Astrophil's Self-Deception," pp. 14-15).

<sup>10</sup> I do not mean to suggest a biographical reading which equates the history of Astrophil's family with the very similar history of the Sidney family. These lines illustrate the complexity of the biographical question; Sidney's father was, after all, governor of Ireland. See Sinfield's "Sidney and Astrophil" for a balanced, cliché-free discussion of the subtleties involved.

<sup>11</sup> Arthurian literature was popular in Sidney's day; in the Defence, he mentions the story of King Arthur in the same breath as the Orlando Furioso. Sidney himself was an enthusiastic participant in tournaments, including the Accession Day tilts which have been seen as a serious attempt to stimulate interest in chivalry. As McCoy points out, "the mystique of chivalric glory was a persistent anachronism" in Elizabethan culture (p. 9); see Frances Yates, "Elizabethan Chivalry: The Romance of the Accession Day Tilts," JWCI, 20 (1957), 4-25 (rpt. in Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975], pp. 88-111). For a perceptive discussion of Sidney's relation to the ludic tradition outlined by Johan Huizinga (Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949]), see Dorothy Connell, "Play and the Courtly Maker," in her Sir Philip Sidney: The Maker's Mind (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). Observing that "Huizinga's concept of play allows psychological complexity" and that such activity is "not simply a consciously-indulged pretence or a form of nostalgia" (p.



54), Connell links Sidney's active participation in neo-chivalric tournaments and tilts to the conception of life as self-conscious game. See also Arthur B. Ferguson, The Indian Summer of English Chivalry (Durham: Duke University Press, 1960).

<sup>12</sup> She may feel the same way in Sonnet 64, "No more, my deare, no more these counsels trie," in which Astrophil is no longer even ashamed of failure. Astrophil brags here about his willingness to risk the "worst disgrace" of fortune for Stella's sake ("Let all the earth with scorne recount my case"), but I have not grouped 64 with the public context sonnets because it is unclear whether Stella is attempting in her counsels to dissuade him from disgracing himself or simply from pursuing her -- whether or not she separates herself from his perspective on social responsibility.

<sup>13</sup> Ringler, p. 481. See also McCoy, p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> Baldesar Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), pp. 288-90.

<sup>15</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot, The Boke Named the Governour, ed. Henry Herbert Stephen Croft, III (London: 1883, rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), p. 430.

<sup>16</sup> Elyot, p. 447.

<sup>17</sup> As Richard B. Young reminds us in "English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella," in Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton (New Haven: Yale Studies in English, Yale University Press, 1958), pp. 1-88.

<sup>18</sup> The romancers' utter lack of interest in matters of circumstantial realism does not prevent them from being as bourgeois in spirit as they are didactic in intent. But for an opposing view see Erich Auerbach, "The Knight Sets Forth," in his Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (1946; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 123-42. For a view closer to my own, see John Stevens, Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973). See also Charles Muscatine, "Realism and Romance," in his Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 41-57.

<sup>19</sup> John A. Yunck, Introd. and trans., Eneas: A Twelfth-Century French Romance (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, Astrophil is a courtier, Erec a knight; but in Chretien's source, the Mabinogi tale of Gereint Son of Erbin, the





recreant Gereint is a member of the court, like Astrophil, and is criticized for abandoning courtly pursuits. Gereint's recreancy is overcome at court, not away from it, and Chretien's decision to ground Erec's recreancy in the world of tournaments and active chivalry represents a definite departure from his source. See D.D.R. Owen, *Introd. and Notes, Arthurian Romances* (New York and London: Dent and Dutton, 1976), pp. xii, 363, and Thomas Jones and Gwyn Jones, *The Mabinogion*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Everyman's Library, 1974). In a broader sense, *Erec et Enide* is characteristic of the genre, not idiosyncratic. Chretien's *Yvain* also seeks a balance between the rival claims of love and chivalry, and the hero of his unfinished *Perceval* must also learn to redefine the stakes of the chivalric game in which he is a key player. Similarly, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* presents romantic love as compatible with and productive of both social and spiritual stability; both Chretien and Wolfram advocate what Jean Frappier has called "an equilibrium between romantic love and social duty" ("Chretien de Troyes," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959], p. 170). An exception to the rule is Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*. Gottfried's exaltation of his lovers and his consciously orchestrated dismissal of the consequences of their love are anomalous in romance narrative. In contrast to the *Tristan*, the literature dealing with the Lancelot-Guenevere-Arthur triangle is consistently, acutely, and sometimes tragically aware that the public consequences are massive. For a fine discussion, see P.E. Tucker, "Chivalry in the Morte," in *Essays on Malory*, ed. J.A.W. Bennett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 64-103. See also Larry Benson, *Malory's Morte Darthur* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1976); D.S. Brewer, *Introd., Malory: The Morte Darthur* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 1-37; R.T. Davies, "The Worshipful Way in Malory," in *Patterns of Love and Courtesy*, ed. John Lawler (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), pp. 157-77; C.S. Lewis, "The English Prose Morte," in *Essays on Malory*, pp. 7-28; and Eugene Vinaver, ed., *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed. (1967; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), vol. 3, pp. 1615-26.

<sup>21</sup> Chretien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, *Arthurian Romances*, p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Chretien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, *Arthurian Romances*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>23</sup> D.D.R. Owen, *Arthurian Romances*, p. 365.

<sup>24</sup> There is growing recognition that the ancestry of Sidney's narrative has many branches and includes more than the popular *Amadis de Gaule*, Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, and the Greek prose romances: in recent years, critics as diverse as Walter Davis, Richard Lanham, and Jean Robertson have all discussed, from different perspectives, the influence of medieval romance on both versions (Walter R. Davis, "A Map



of Arcadia: Sidney's Romance in Its Tradition," and Richard A. Lanham, "The Old Arcadia," in Sidney's Arcadia [New Haven: Yale Studies in English, Yale University Press, 1965], pp. 1-179 and 181-405, resp.; and Jean Robertson, Introd., The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia [The Old Arcadia] by Sir Philip Sidney [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973], pp. xv-xli). While Robertson rejects the idea that they contributed "any real ethos behind the sentiment and the emotion" (p. xxiv), Lanham's iconoclastic study of the Old Arcadia disagrees. He points out, quite rightly, that the Greek romances take place in a political vacuum and offer "no organizing principles, no standard of behavior implicit in the organization of society and against which we are to judge the behavior of the protagonists" (p. 386). And although he finds Sidney's ethical framework more complex than that of his predecessors, Lanham links the Old Arcadia's central concerns -- the continual interplay between public and private spheres, the struggle between reason and emotion -- to the preoccupations of chivalric romance. This essay makes no attempt to discuss thematic similarities between the Arcadia -- old, new, or composite -- and chivalric romance on one hand and Astrophil and Stella on the other; there is very real disagreement among critics about the implications of the differences in characterization, in plot, in narrative technique, and even in genre between the cancelled and revised Arcadias, and to treat them casually would lead to real distortion. But there is common agreement about the obvious: Pyrocles and Musidorus temporarily turn their backs on a world of heroic obligation in order to pursue private romantic interests; their story, along with Basilius', provides Sidney with a framework for exploring the rival claims of love and chivalry in terms of the dichotomies so dear to the Elizabethans: engagement and detachment, reason and passion, social order and social anarchy. For a helpful discussion of the relation of the Amadis de Gaule to Sidney's poetry, see John J. O'Connor, Amadis de Gaule and its Influence on Elizabethan Literature (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970). For Sidney's use of Malory, see Marcus S. Goldman, Sir Philip Sidney and the Arcadia (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1934).

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent discussion of this issue, see Javitch, Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England, pp. 151-62.

<sup>26</sup> As Javitch points out in Poetry and Courtliness, Sidney suggests "that the ethical and persuasive ends previously attributed to the orator have now been appropriated by the poet" (p. 104); both he and Spenser "believe that the poet is able to create a world not only superior to the actual world but capable of shaping and improving the everyday world men inhabit" (p. 152).

<sup>27</sup> Marotti, "'Love is not love,'" p. 405, and Stallybrass and Jones, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> F.J. Levy, "Philip Sidney Reconsidered," ELR, 2 (1972), 5-18).



<sup>29</sup> Hunter, pp. 15, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Hunter, p. 15. For a useful critique of Hunter's formulation, see Javitch, Poetry and Courtliness, pp.13-15. See also Hanna H. Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," JHI, 24 (1963), 497-514 (rpt. in Renaissance Essays, eds. Paul Oskar Kristeller and Philip P. Wiener [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969]).

#### Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Alvin B. Kernan, The Playwright as Magician: Shakespeare's Image of the Poet in the English Public Theatre (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 44-48, and James Winny, The Master-Mistress: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), pp. 80-85. Kernan considers Sonnet 111 "one of the crucial documents in the history of the artist's turn away from patronage to the public marketplace as a source of support" (p. 45); Winny, following Boswell, emphatically rejects the notion that these poems suggest any connections with the stage.

<sup>2</sup> Sonnet 29, line 1. All quotations from Shakespeare's sonnets are from Stephen Booth's edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> J. B. Leishman, Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets (London: Hutchinson, 1961), pp. 202-13. Leishman concludes that there is "no real precedent in previous love-poetry" for this theme, although there are resemblances in Petrarch and Ronsard to its corollary, " 'the catalogue of uncompensating delights' " (p. 209). Leishman's discussion focuses on sources and analogues, not on the issues considered here.

<sup>4</sup> Hallett Smith, The Tension of the Lyre: Poetry in Shakespeare's Sonnets (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1981), p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> Leishman's selection is somewhat different; he identifies 25, 29, 30, 31, 37, 66, 90, 91, and 92 as compensatory sonnets.

<sup>6</sup> Everyone writing on the sonnets makes working assumptions, however tentative and implicit, about their order. This essay assumes Q's order, but is not a study of the sonnets' arrangement. For a useful summary of criticism on the subject, see Smith, The Tension of the Lyre, pp. 115-125. "There are various reasons for the adopting the order of the 1609 Quarto," he says, "The first and most obvious is laziness. The second is skepticism about any of the arrangements that have so far been offered" (pp. 121, 122). A recent essay by Carol Thomas Neely ("The Structure of English Renaissance Sonnet Sequences,"



ELH, 45 [1978], 359-89) offers a third reason: she documents the presence of a structural pattern which "validates the standing order" of this and other sequences and helps to account for their "perplexing conclusions" (p. 359). As Booth points out, "the 1609 sequence seems to need interpretation or reorganization not because it is disordered but because it is so obviously ordered" An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 12).

<sup>7</sup> Smith, The Tension of the Lyre, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the metaphorical links between these sonnets, see Booth, Essay, pp. 3-12.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to Booth's line-by-line commentary on individual sonnets, see, for example, Anne Ferry, All In War with Time (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); Carol Thomas Neely, "Detachment and Engagement in Shakespeare's Sonnets: 94, 116, and 129," PMLA, 92 (1977), 83-95; and Jane Roessner, "Double Exposure: Shakespeare's Sonnets 100-114," ELH, 46 (1979), 357-78.

<sup>10</sup> Roessner, p. 359.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas M. Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," SEL, 10 (1970), 325-48.

<sup>12</sup> See Booth, Shakespeare's Sonnets, pp. 364-72, for a detailed discussion of the textual crux in line 14 and the arguments for and against various emendations: "the Q text, 'That all the world besides me thinks y'are dead,' does not make ready sense without emendation," he concludes, suggesting that Sonnet 112 is an "unfinished poem or one that Shakespeare abandoned in frustration" (p. 369).

<sup>13</sup> For the intellectual history of the mind/eye relationship, see Forrest Robinson, The Shape of Things Known: Sidney's Apology in Its Philosophical Tradition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972). For a discussion of the mind/eye relationship in Renaissance faculty psychology, see Ruth Leila Anderson, Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays (Iowa City: University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, 1927), pp 92-113. See also J. B. Bamborough, The Little World of Man (London: Longmans, Green, 1952).

<sup>14</sup> Roessner, p. 358.

<sup>15</sup> Booth, Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 378.

<sup>16</sup> Booth, Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 377.

<sup>17</sup> Giorgio Melchiori, "'Tis Better to be Vile': Sonnet 121 and the Ethics of Social Behavior," in his Shakespeare's Dramatic





Meditations: An Experiment in Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 71-103.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Spender, "The Alike and the Other," in The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets, ed. Edward Hubler (New York: Basic Books, 1962), p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> Hilton Landry, Interpretations in Shakespeare's Sonnets (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), p. 93. Landry also points out the connection between this poem and Sonnet 112 (p. 87).

<sup>20</sup> G. Wilson Knight, The Mutual Flame (London: Methuen, 1955), p. 49; Booth, Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 410.

<sup>21</sup> Melchiori, pp. 90, 92.

<sup>22</sup> Melchiori, p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> Melchiori, p. 74.

<sup>24</sup> Philip Edwards, "The Sonnets to the Dark Woman," in his Shakespeare and the Confines of Art (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> In The Elizabethan Love Sonnet, J.W. Lever sees links between Astrophil and Stella and the dark lady sonnets; the "story" of the latter is "broadly reminiscent" of the former outline (p. 174). However, his reading of Sidney's sequence is traditional: "But Sidney was interpreting the romance experience through contemporary life and ideas; Shakespeare consciously aimed at negating all its values. Therefore the resemblance of the Mistress series to Astrophil and Stella was rather like that of a parody to its original" (pp. 174).

<sup>26</sup> Most criticism of the dark lady poems tends to focus on individual sonnets (e.g., 129, 130, 138, 144, 146); the relatively few studies which hazard assessments of the "progress" of these poems tend either to rearrange Q's order or to emphasize the speakers' increasing demoralization. Two interesting essays avoid the first temptation and equivocate on the second. Edwards suggests that sonnets 127-54 "were put forward by Shakespeare as a coherent sequence" (p. 18) in which the speaker attempts to deal with "the peculiarly unhappy fact of his predicament" by trying out "different objectifications of the intolerable position he finds himself in -- and none of them 'works'" (p. 27). But he also argues that "Shakespeare sets poetry the task of describing a certain kind of hopelessness and he shows poetry pulling like a tidal current away from hopelessness toward resolution of one kind or another" (pp. 30-31). Michael J.B. Allen's title, "Shakespeare's Man Descending a Staircase," (Shakespeare Survey, 31 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], pp. 127-38), implies progressive decline, but ultimately



backs away from assessing the direction of the dark lady poems as a whole. His essay seeks to "vindicate" some of the "weaker" sonnets by examining their contexts in the 1609 order, and to validate that order by showing how the "explosive juxtapositions" force the reader "to begin to concentrate on the transitory, intensely volatile, unpredictable mixtures themselves . . . . The Dark Lady sequence places us in the position of a maker: as we proceed, we make larger meanings from the succession of smaller ones" (p. 128). Other relevant treatments of the dark lady sonnets include: Patrick Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954, rpt. Glamorgan: Lewis Reprints, 1970), pp. 1-38; Edward Hubler, The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 38-63; Smith, The Tension of the Lyre, pp. 43-68; and Winny, pp. 90-120.

<sup>27</sup> For a fine discussion of this poem, see Edward A. Snow, "Loves of Comfort and Despair: A Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnet 138," ELH, 47 (1980), 462-83. "In Sonnet 138 the laughter of the gods has been internalized," Snow says (p. 465), agreeing with Hubler's description of its "amused contentment" (The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 45). See Snow, p. 481, n5, for a summary of the critical opposition.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Booth, Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 517.

<sup>30</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner, in an unpublished paper presented at a 1982 MLA Special Session, "Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare: Revision and New Directions."

<sup>31</sup> Linda Bamber, Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> As Edwards points out, he is "afraid of his own facility for consoling himself" (p. 26).

<sup>33</sup> Leishman, p. 199.

<sup>34</sup> The title of Allen's article.

<sup>35</sup> "Apology for Raymond Sebond," in The Complete Essays of Montaigne, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948), pp. 358-59).

<sup>36</sup> Kernan claims that as the "plot" moves from the young man to the dark lady, it moves "from a lyric to a dramatic conception of life, from simplicity and certainty to complexity and ambiguity, and the Poet moves in the same direction, from the great house to the



public theater" (p. 43). He makes a similar argument in "Shakespeare's Essays on Dramatic Poesy: The Nature and Function of Theater within the Sonnets and the Plays," in The Author in His Work, pp. 179-82. Cruttwell also attributes the change in the sonnets' "texture" to a "multiple, critical, dramatic" sensibility which finds its "true home" in the London theatre, not in the courtly world which was hospitable to the simpler poetry of more lyrical sonneteers (p. 26).

37 Smith, The Tension of the Lyre, p. 54.

38 Neely's important discoveries about structural patterns in two-part English and Italian sonnet sequences demonstrate that the shorter second parts of Italian sequences are preoccupied with sublimation, renunciation, and even transcendence, but that the second parts of English sequences, in contrast, are marked by increased eroticism and mutuality, which lead to irresolvable conflicts ("Structure," pp. 359-89). This, she says, helps to account for characteristic strategies of closure in the English sequences: "to stop abruptly in medias res, acknowledging the futility of the enterprise," "to achieve detachment from irresolvable conflicts by moving the verse into a new mode, genre, or voice," or "to provide a narrative resolution, however precarious" (p. 375). Her essay helps to make sense of the presence of the two anacreontic poems at the end of the sequence -- excellent examples of the shift to another poetic mode which she describes. The accuracy of the speaker's analysis in 152 reveals fundamental contradictions; if the sequence ended there, it would indeed end abruptly, along the lines of the first strategy of closure she identifies. Sidney's does: his decision to pursue the first strategy and not allow a transforming or transcendent ending has made some critics unhappy enough to meddle with the contents of Astrophil and Stella, preferring that it end with one if not both of the palinodic poems concluding Certain Sonnets [see Conclusion, n 32]. Ironically, as the sequence is actually constructed, it would be more than enough if Astrophil paid proper attention to the things of this world, let alone "aspire to higher things." Numerous Shakespearean critics have proposed similar rearrangements that "clarify" the speaker's progress toward greater self-knowledge or toward probable resolution of his predicament; Sonnets 129 and 146 generally play key roles in such schemes (In The Shakespeare Sonnet Order: Poems and Groups [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968], Brents Stirling says that 129 and 146 form Poem "E" which comes after the linked group 147-52 and in effect concludes the sequence [p. 22]; Winny's desire to rearrange is tentatively expressed -- "If there is a case for arranging these poems in a different order, it would have the object of clarifying the development of the lover's self-awareness" [p. 92] -- but it nevertheless forms the basis of his analysis.) Not surprisingly, Shakespeare's sequence is more daring than Sidney's; by introducing sonnets like 146 which show the speaker grasping for transcendence but by refusing to end on such a note, he "places" such moments in the larger context of the speaker's experience. His decision in the dark



lady poems to concentrate the speaker's experience in the here and now, however disorderly and contradictory, is not only a move toward a dramatic conception of life, as Kernan puts it in The Playwright as Magician; it is also, as Neely demonstrates, a decision shared, in its essentials, by other sonneteers.

## Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> See Thomas Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," 325-48, and "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature," in The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), pp.241-64.

<sup>2</sup> Quotations from Jonson's poems are from Ben Jonson, eds. C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, VIII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925-32), and will be identified parenthetically.

<sup>3</sup> Wesley Trimpi, Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Peterson, Imitation and Praise in the Poems of Ben Jonson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 27-29, 33-43, and Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," pp.326-33.

<sup>5</sup> In the Renaissance, the spelling of "travel" (to go on a journey) and "travail" (to exert one's self, weary one's self, put one's self to trouble) were the same -- hence the precision of Jonson's pun. See OED I,1b,2,5.

<sup>6</sup> Trimpi, p. 174.

<sup>7</sup> W.H. Herendeen, "Like a Circle Bounded in Itself: Jonson, Camden, and the Strategies of Praise," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 11:2 (1981), p.143.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Partridge, "Jonson's Epigrammes: The Named and the Nameless," SLI, 6 (1973), p.164; and Alexander Leggatt, Ben Jonson: His Vision and His Art (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), p.277, resp.

<sup>9</sup> See E.H. Gombrich's discussion of the rabbit/duck puzzle in Art and Illusion: A Study of the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), pp. 5-6, quoted in Norman Rabkin, Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 34-35.





<sup>10</sup> Discoveries, ll.1867-68, 1887-88, and 1757-58, resp., in Herford and Simpson, VIII. In the Discoveries he also says, "I could never thinke the study of Wisdome confin'd only to the Philosopher: or of Piety to the Divine: or of State to the Politicke. But that he which can faine a Common-wealth (which is the Poet) can governe it with Counsels, strengthen it with Lawes, correct it with Iudgments, informe it with Religion, and Morals; is all these" (1032-38). See also Trimpi, p.148: "Nearly the entire Discoveries deals with the intellectual disciplines of the humanistic mind rather than with particular works we more easily regard as literary today. The passages on style relate writing to the acquisition and the use of knowledge; they are general and present a theory of style which speaks with an 'antiquity of voice' about the necessity and difficulty of extending the range of human experience in the present world."

<sup>11</sup> Richard Peterson, p. xiii.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Peterson, p.xiv. See also Thomas M. Greene, "Accommodations of Mobility in the Poetry of Ben Jonson," in his The Light in Troy. Greene views the "imitative act" as "a kind of diachronic metaphorizing, an intertextual translation" (p.278).

<sup>13</sup> "To make something, moreover, is to act," and in the world of necessary action, the poet has his rightful place, a recognized social role, L.C. Knights says of these lines to Savile ("Ben Jonson: Public Attitudes and Social Poetry," in A Celebration of Ben Jonson, ed. William Blissett, Julian Patrick, and R.W. Van Fossen [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973], p. 178).

<sup>14</sup> Leggatt, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> "To Mr B.J." (13-14), Herford and Simpson, XI, p. 378.

<sup>16</sup> He also thought it could be overdone: "It is a ryming Age, and Verses swarme / At every stall," he complains (Und. 44.27-28). Responding to critics bothered by the fact that so much of Jonson's verse is occasional, Jonathan Kamholtz says that Jonson redefines and "rechannels many of the crucial elements of occasional poetry": "He transforms people into poetic problems; public occasions become, literally, poetic occasions" ("Ben Jonson's Epigrammes and Poetic Occasions," SEL, 23 [1983], 78).

<sup>17</sup> "Morsels of Roman history appear side by side with coneyes and larks," Peterson says (p.31). Greene, who complains that the phrase "civilized urbanity" only "grossly" describes the tone of Jonson's poem (The Light in Troy, p. 280), sees another dimension of the relationship between hospitality and imitation: the subtext itself is " 'entertained,' received into a wealthy human complex that invests it with a kernel of signifying potential it might otherwise have appeared to lack. Has anyone ever given more to Martial, enhanced his



achievement more, than Jonson in his imitations?" (p.285; see also pp.283-84). For a fine discussion of friendship in Jonson's poetry, see Hugh Maclean, "Ben Jonson's Poems: Notes on the Ordered Society," in Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age, Presented to A.S.P. Woodhouse, ed. Millar MacLure and F.W. Watt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 43-68.

<sup>18</sup> Leggatt, p. 117.

<sup>19</sup> The wonder is that Drayton printed it as a compliment. William B. Hunter, Jr. points out that Drayton himself took it at face value, prefixing it to his 1627 volume, The Battaile of Agincourt . . . . The Miseries of Queene Margarite . . . . Nymphidia . . . . The Quest of Cynthia. The Shepheards Sirena. The Moone Calfe. Elegies upon Sundry Occasions (The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson [New York: Norton, 1963], pp.379, 380). Herford and Simpson also take it at face value: allowing that relations between Drayton and Jonson were "chequered," they nevertheless conclude that "Drayton's abounding and unequal poetry received in his time no heartier, more heartfelt, or, on the whole, more judicious praise" (II,376). One more aspect of Jonson's lines to Drayton needs to be addressed. Almost as explicitly as the Cary-Morison ode, "An Epistle answering . . . .," and other poems in which he identifies himself, this poem makes it clear that the speaker is Ben Jonson, not a fictive voice; rather than dwelling upon conventional distinctions between poet and speaker, it might be more useful, in Jonson's case, to think in terms of Wayne Booth's conception of the implied author, which he distinguishes both from narrator and historical author. Greene (The Light in Troy) argues similarly that Jonson turns poems into performances, creating in the process the character of " 'Ben Jonson' who lives up to the role he has led us to expect him to play" (pp.286, 87).

<sup>20</sup> Leggatt, p. 122. In "Jonson, Lord Lisle, and Penshurst" (ELR, 1 [1971], 250-60), Rathnell provides the kind of historical detail which makes his and Leggatt's inferences persuasive: "The Mediterranean fruits to which Jonson refers in his poem -- quinces, peaches, grapes, and apricots -- suggest a literary rather than a Kentish landscape, but in fact they are precisely the products of his orchard in which Lord Lisle took most pride," he points out, citing numerous letters in which the owner of Penshurst worried about early frosts, ordered new species, and distributed produce to friends at court.

<sup>21</sup> See G.R. Hibbard, "The Country House Poem of the Seventeenth Century," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 19 (1956), 159-74; and William A. McClung, The Country House in English Renaissance Poetry (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1977). McClung takes issue with Hibbard's view that Jonson is reacting against neoclassical architectural influences in "To Penshurst" (the Italianate style did



not appear in country houses until well into the Caroline period, he observes); despite differences in method and premises, however, both studies conclude that Jonson criticizes the taste and motives of those who built impressive country estates solely to seek favor by entertaining their superiors.

<sup>22</sup> For an opposing view, see Geoffrey Walton, From Metaphysical to Augustan: Studies in Tone and Sensibility in the Seventeenth Century (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1955). In Jonson's poem to Wroth, he says, "The Golden Age is thus naturalized in the hall of an English mansion in a real agricultural setting, and we end with an almost Homeric scene of feasting, in which bounty and humanity have temporarily overthrown the whole social hierarchy" (pp.33-34).

<sup>23</sup> Inexplicably, after establishing in detail the corruption of the army and other arenas of public life, Jonson exhorts Wroth to go forth and serve his country. Judith Kegan Gardiner, who stresses the poem's "disunifying" qualities, points out the same contradiction (Craftsmanship in Context: The Development of Ben Jonson's Poetry [The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1975], pp. 66, 71). Leggatt's view of the epistle to Wroth is more positive than mine, though he acknowledges the "chill" behind Jonson's advice (p. 132); Gardiner shares my reservations. For evidence that Jonson may have disliked Wroth -- he reportedly told Drummond that Wroth's wife, Lady Mary (Robert Sidney's daughter), was "unworthily married on a Jealous husband" -- see Herford and Simpson, I,142, and McClung, p.130.

<sup>24</sup> See Richard Peterson (pp.26-27) for Jonson's transitive and intransitive uses of "decline." See also OED 1,11,12,13,20.

<sup>25</sup> He does anticipate a future for her -- a virtuous one -- as Aubigny's wife and the producer of his heir, but he confines her to pleasing Aubigny and submerging her own identity in his after having "declined" her own life.

<sup>26</sup> What he has already told Wroth and what he will tell Lady Aubigny, if the poems in The Forrest are read sequentially. Kamholtz has attempted to do so; see his "Ben Jonson's Green World: Structure and Imaginative Unity in The Forrest (SP, 78 (1981), 170-93. His reading, while less than fully convincing, is interesting in its attempt to conflate the Latin interest in collections of silvae -- shared by Jonson -- with the Renaissance fascination with green worlds. See Also Alastair Fowler, "The Silva Tradition in Jonson's The Forrest," in Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance, pp. 163-80.

<sup>27</sup> Pointed out by Philip McGuire.

<sup>28</sup> As Gardiner says, "Part of the strength and surprise of the poem's ending is that after what seems to be a conventional religious poem rejecting the world, the woman elects to stay in the



world as we understand it and does not make any overt plea to, or even mention of, God or heaven. Furthermore, the mode of her withdrawal from the world is unclear. She does not appear to be entering a convent; she is not even covertly wishing for death like the speaker of 'To Heaven'. Her final resolution is a declaration of moral independence, of stoic self-sufficiency as well as of Christian trust" (p.72). Gardiner also points out that the final poem in The Forrest, "To Heaven," is not simply opposed to "To the World," but has much in common with it (p.72).

<sup>29</sup> See Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, "Asper-Criticus-Quintus-Horatius- Flaccus-Jonson," in her Vision and Judgment in Ben Jonson's Drama (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 5-52, for Jonson's treatment of the artist figure in the plays. See Leggatt (pp. 89-98), for a perceptive and illuminating analysis of Jonson's treatment of the social role of the poet in Poetaster (See also "The Poet as Character," pp. 199-232).

<sup>30</sup> Quotations from The New Inn ode are from The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, ed. G.A. Wilkes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), vol. IV, p. 471.

<sup>31</sup> See Trimpi for a more positive reading of the first ode: "The poet, then, in order to be free of the ignorant and at the same time to write, must turn from the stage to the smaller audience of learned men. His poems may then make the greatest possible use of his knowledge, and his poetic talent may enable others to share in that knowledge. The ode is a philosophical statement about the powers of the human mind and the powers of literature if it properly makes use of the mind" (p. 204). But the ode itself says nothing about sharing knowledge with a smaller but more receptive audience; it anticipates the compensatory rewards of singing "high and aloofe." Gardiner says of the second ode that "the combination of the words 'loathed' and 'loathsome' . . . demonstrates one of the tactical flaws of the poem: it is clear what Jonson personally loathes, but the poet does not altogether convince his reader that the objects of his loathing are objectively 'loathsome' to anyone else" (p.130).

<sup>32</sup> Leggatt, p.89. "If a healthy culture is necessary to a healthy society, it follows that the role of poet is of supreme importance. Jonson has something like Sidney's view of the poet as teacher, but with a distinctly social emphasis" (p. 91), he adds.

<sup>33</sup> Gardiner argues explicitly (if somewhat mechanically) for a developmental reading. While her view is carefully developed on the whole, she tends to equate chronology of publication with chronology of composition -- a problem when dealing with Under-wood especially. She treats it as his "later lyric work" (p.86), but the epistle to Selden, for example, was first published in 1614, but omitted -- along with other prefatory poems -- from Jonson's 1616 folio.





<sup>34</sup> Ian Donaldson, "Jonson and the Moralists," in Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp.148, 154).

<sup>35</sup> Trimpi, p. 206.

<sup>36</sup> Trimpi, p. 144.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Peterson takes a very different view of the epistle: it is, he says, "a celebration not simply of survival by withdrawal but of self-knowledge which extends beyond mere inventory of one's contents to a confident sense of copious inner resources to be shared with the proper companions" (p. 112). See his chapter, "The Full Circle: Poet as Vessel" (pp.112-57) for a rich discussion of "An Epistle answering . . ."

<sup>38</sup> The Riverside text reads "Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause / Will he be satisfied" (3.1.47). In his Riverside introduction to the play, Frank Kermode unaccountably attributes Jonson's remarks about the "nonsense line" not to the Discoveries but to the conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden: "But Jonson was not on oath in the Drummond conversations, and this may be no more than inaccurate gossip based on a joking parody of the line as we have it" (p.1100). This is an odd lapse from a critic of Kermode's stature (and from the Riverside editors); the only specific mention of Shakespeare's flaws as a dramatist in the conversations with Drummond is the famous complaint about the seacoast of Bohemia (11.208-210 [Herford and Simpson, I, p. 138]).

<sup>39</sup> As Rabkin says, in Julius Caesar Shakespeare "present[s] one of the defining moments in world history in such a way that his audience cannot determine whether the protagonist is the best or worst of men, whether the central action springs from disinterested idealism or vainglorious egotism, whether that action is virtuous and necessary or wicked and gratuitous" (p. 61). In his own drama, Jonson tends to avoid mixing motives as scrupulously as he avoids mixing genres: in Catiline, his own play about a political conspiracy, there is no difficulty in distinguishing the "good" characters from the "bad." Cicero, the conspirators' target, epitomizes stalwart virtue and traditional morality, even though he is a bit of an underdog in the consular campaign. The conspirators, in contrast, are personally and politically unwholesome and unappealing. Upstarts and malcontents who act for selfish motives, they are seeking power, not fighting to preserve a principle. They are, moreover, not very intelligent: their own ineptness gives them away. And the potentially interesting character of Fulvia is never really developed, even though her role of go-between is frequently a focal point of moral complexity in Renaissance drama. At first she seems to act with small-minded



self-interest; but her real reasons for breaking with the conspirators (and divulging their plans to the opposing side) are never made explicit; and then she is abruptly dropped.

<sup>40</sup> T.S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral, The Complete Poems and Plays (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), p.196.

<sup>41</sup> Gardiner, p. 168.

### Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> Jonson, of course, works under none of the constraints that Wyatt indicates he felt as a court poet. As Isabel Rivers observes, Jonson felt free to move in and out of court society, and to criticize it as well as profit from his association with it: "He held a place in James's court that Spenser would have envied while asserting an independence of which Pope would not have been ashamed" (The Poetry of Conservatism: A Study of Poets and Public Affairs from Jonson to Pope [Cambridge: Rivers Press, 1973], p. 21). In fact, Jonson's world was limited only by the diversity of London, and he moved freely in it. The severe constraints of his late years, after the accession of Charles, were imposed by financial insecurity, poor health, and theatrical unpopularity, but they followed a lengthy period of reasonably fruitful bids for patronage, and reasonable personal success in town and at court. In essence, then, what is a major issue for Wyatt is something which Jonson can take for granted, and which he puts into practice over a period of some thirty years.

<sup>2</sup> My summary of the changing conception of wisdom is heavily derived from (though not entirely limited to) Rice's The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom. Even when my observations are based upon the texts in question as well as upon Rice's analysis, they are obviously highly derivative. Naturally, I cite Rice whenever appropriate, but his monograph is so central to my summary that it is hard to do justice through conventional documentation to his framing of the questions.

<sup>3</sup> This famous phrase, the title of a major chapter in English translations of Jacob Burckhardt's 1860 landmark study, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, is associated with Burckhardt's long-discredited conviction that Renaissance individualism represented an abrupt break with medieval patterns of thought: "It was a simple matter for him, since Renaissance day banished medieval night, and the few gleams of individualism that he discerned in the Middle Ages, such as the Goliardic songs, were obviously the first rays of dawn," says Douglas Bush in a useful summary of early twentieth century conceptions of the term "Renaissance" ( The Renaissance and English Humanism, p. 27). For a more current view, see Hanna Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence."

- <sup>4</sup> Rice, pp. 4-5, 8, 19-20.
- <sup>5</sup> Rice, pp. 93-123.
- <sup>6</sup> Rice, pp. 58-68; Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), pp. 48-69.
- <sup>7</sup> Rice, pp. 85-89; Sir Thomas Elyot, "What is the true signification of understandynge," The Boke Named The Governour (III, xxiv), vol. II, pp. 369-82.
- <sup>8</sup> Similarly, Leonardo da Vinci calls wisdom the daughter of experience ("la figliola della sperienza") in his Pensieri (40), quoted in Rice, p. 100. Elyot, "of Experience whiche haue preceded our tyme, with a defense of Histories," Governour (III, xxv), vol. II, pp. 383-401. Elyot's Bankette of Sapience (London: Thomas Bertelet, 1534) is less relevant here than his other writings; as its title suggests, it is simply an eclectic assortment of sententiae from other writers, as Rice points out (p. 85).
- <sup>9</sup> Rice, p. 150.
- <sup>10</sup> Rice, pp. 4, 78-79.
- <sup>11</sup> Rice, pp. 37-43.
- <sup>12</sup> Rice, pp. 56, 182.
- <sup>13</sup> Rice, p. 46. See also Hans Baron, "The Historical Background of the Florentine Renaissance," History, N.S. XXII (1937-38), 315-27.
- <sup>14</sup> Rice, p. 47.
- <sup>15</sup> In his De philologia libri II (Paris: Badius Ascensius, 1532), V,r, translated and summarized by Rice, p. 150.
- <sup>16</sup> Rice, p. 151.
- <sup>17</sup> Louis Le Caron, (Les Dialogues de Loys Le Caron [Paris: I. Longis, 1556]), quoted in Rice, p. 152.
- <sup>18</sup> Rice, p. 153.
- <sup>19</sup> See Tobriner, pp. 71-74; Rice, pp. 161-62; and Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, ed. and trans. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941, p. 83).

<sup>20</sup> Rice, p. 160.

<sup>21</sup> In contrast to Charron, Bude considers wisdom nobler than prudence and laments its ineffectiveness (Rice, p. 182).

<sup>22</sup> Rice, p. 182. Two editions of Charron's De la Sagesse livres trois (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1601), translated by Samson Lennard were published in London in the early years of the seventeenth century -- one in 1608 (STC 1442) and one in 1613 (STC 5051). "Science is feruile, bafe, and mechanicall in respect of wifedom," Charron says in the 1608 edition: "wifedome and learning feldome concurre and meete together" (III, xiv, pp. 504, 506).

<sup>23</sup> Rice, p. 160.

<sup>24</sup> Rice, p. 201-02; Charron, III, iv. One shortcoming in Rice's study is his habit of simply summarizing the content of someone's work without taking note of its contradictions.

<sup>25</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, The Defence of Poesie, in The Prose Works of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912, rpt. 1962), vol. III, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Sidney, Defence, pp. 11-12.

<sup>27</sup> Reiterating neoplatonic commonplaces, Astrophil calls earthly beauty "but a shade" of heavenly beauty and refers to humankind as "pilgrims" on earth who "should in soule up to our country move" (5.10, 12-13). But when he laments that his "knowledge brings forth toyes" (18.9), he endorses a different attitude toward human experience.

<sup>28</sup> For the classic -- and still relevant -- statement, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Study of the History of Ideas," in The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea (pp. 3-23): "Any unit-idea which the historian thus isolates he next seeks to trace through more than one -- ultimately, indeed, through all -- of the provinces of history in which it figures in any important degree . . . . the working of a given conception, of an explicit or tacit presupposition, of a type of mental habit, or of a specific thesis or argument, needs, if its nature and its historic role are to be fully understood, to be traced connectedly through all the phases of men's reflective life in which those workings manifest themselves, or through as many of them as the historian's resources permit" (p. 15). For an historian's perspective on the critical problems generated by treating works of imaginative literature as documents of intellectual history, see pp. 16-17. See also Lovejoy's "The Historiography of Ideas," in his Essays in the History of Ideas (1948; rpt. New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), pp. 1-13.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Ornstein, A Kingdom for a Stage: The Achievement of Shakespeare's History Plays (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972).

<sup>30</sup> Frost's poem concludes, "Better to go down dignified / With boughten friendship at your side / Than none at all. Provide! Provide!" (The Complete Poems of Robert Frost [New York: Henry Holt, 1949], p. 404). Is Frost glancing wryly at those who hedge their bets by making such provisions, or is he drily warning of what will happen to those who fail to do so? The tone is just as controlled, just as double-edged, as Wyatt's in the epistle to Brian.

<sup>31</sup> In Caelica CI ("Mans Youth it is a field of large desires"), he speaks contemptuously of "powers babie-creatures" who "dare set rates / Of scorn upon Worth, Honour upon Sinne" (33-34).

<sup>32</sup> As does David Kalstone in Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations: "The only possible dramatic resolution for Astrophel and Stella comes in two sonnets long printed as part of the sequence, but now divorced from it by critical consent since there is no sixteenth-century precedent for their inclusion. For a poet so pessimistic about desire and about the possible refining power of love, there is real relief in the finality and assurance of the two poems printed for the first time among Certaine Sonets appended to the folio of 1598" (p. 178). In contrast, Dorothy Connell argues that Sidney's palinodic sonnets were written early, not late, and that they represent an attitude toward earthly beauty and human experience which Sidney emphatically rejected in the bulk of his writing (Sir Philip Sidney: The Maker's Mind [pp. 12-14; see also p. 49, n 1]). See Ringler, pp. 423-24, for the history of various attempts to place Certaine Sonets 31 and 32 at the end of Astrophil and Stella and for a summary of the critical response to such attempts.

<sup>33</sup> In his review of Greenblatt's Renaissance Self-Fashioning, p. 186.

<sup>34</sup> As far as I can determine, no other critic has pointed out that the speaker in the dark lady poems is not a poet-speaker: the references to verbal discourse or assertion (e.g., "I have sworn thee fair" are general, not specific to literary discourse, in contrast to the literary self-consciousness of the poems to the young man. The implications of this difference remain unexplored.

<sup>35</sup> "Life of Sir Philip Sidney," in Selected Writings of Fulke Greville, ed. Joan Rees (London: Athlone Press, 1973), p. 152.

<sup>36</sup> Backing away from emotionally painful situations as well as morally problematical ones, Jonson's final comment in Epigramme XLV on the death of his son is a hope (expressed by the dead child) that he will avoid such grief in the future by not caring for anyone so

deeply.

<sup>37</sup> The mistakes which are explicitly mentioned in the poems -- failing at various careers, wasting his inheritance, etc. -- seem to have been mistakes which Gascoigne made in his own life as well. That he had a reputation for being a bungler, even a luckless buffoon, is suggested by C.T. Prouty in George Gascoigne: Elizabethan Courtier, Soldier, and Poet. Amassing details of "the unhappy events which seemed continually to dog Gascoigne's every move," Prouty documents Gascoigne's disastrous involvement in legal quarrels, lawsuits, and imprisonment for bad debts (pp. 23-49).

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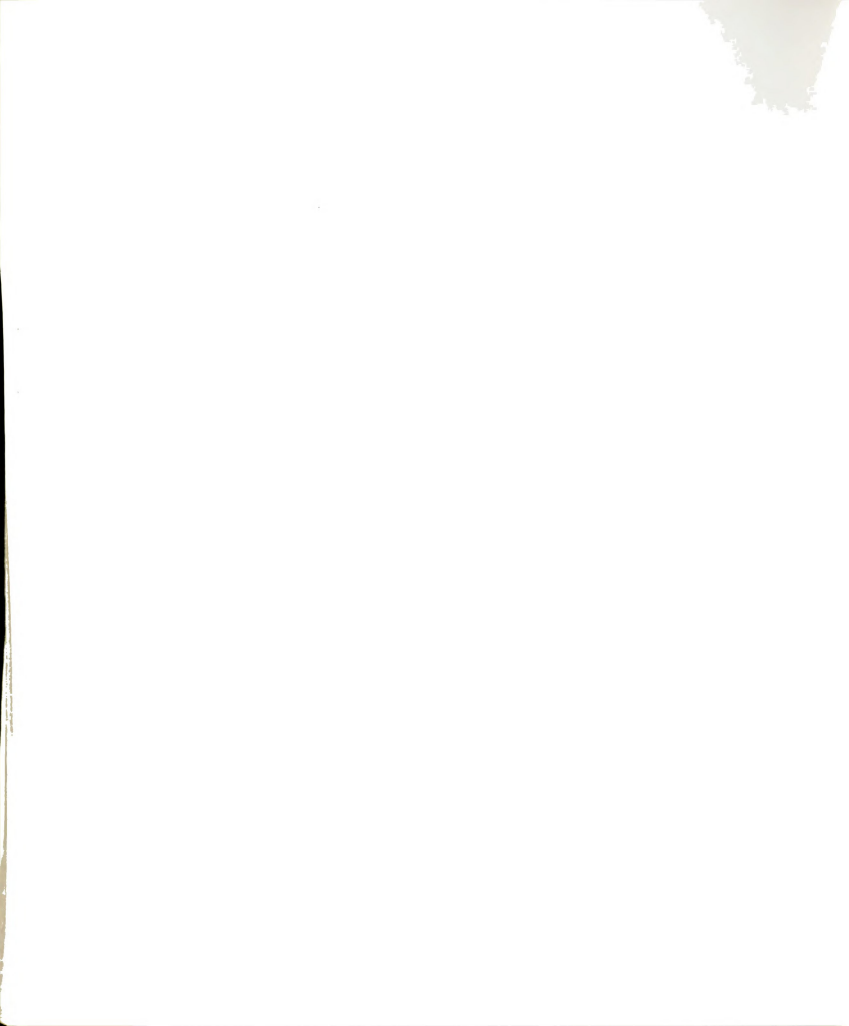
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