

12. Nature's Mirror

"For the mind of man is far from the nature of a clear and equal glass, wherein the beams of things should reflect according to their true incidence; nay, it is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture, if it be not delivered and reduced"

—Francis Bacon

"The purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure"

—Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

In terms of the argument from ideas, opponents of the Baconian theory want to have their cake and eat it. On the one hand, they assure us that Bacon's intellectual interests and beliefs are far removed from Shakespeare's. On the other hand, whenever numerous identities of thought and expression are indicated, they hasten to emphasise their 'commonplace' nature. It would therefore appear that a Baconian cannot hope to win the argument. Yet the Bacon-Shakespeare identity is not merely a matter of a word here or a phrase there. It goes much deeper into the very heart and soul of the writings. We are speaking of an identical vision seen through the same mirror, albeit sometimes with different patterns and designs around the edges.

We may quickly dispose of the argument from Elizabethan commonplaces. Basically, it claims that many of the turns of expression found in Bacon and Shakespeare can also be found in other contemporary writers and therefore proves nothing about an identity. Let's take a few examples. Shakespeare writes: "Who steals my purse steals trash" (*Othello*). Bacon writes: "All worldly things are but trash" (speech in 1612). But Greene writes: "Riches are trash" (*Alcida*) and Ford writes: "Money is trash" (*Lady's Trial*). Shakespeare writes: "By love the young and tender wit is turned to folly" (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*). Bacon calls love 'the child of folly' (*Essay Of Love*). However, Greene writes: "Love is folly" (*Philomela*). Shakespeare writes: "To be wise and love exceeds man's might; that dwells with Gods alone" (*Troilus and Cressida*). Bacon writes: "It is not granted men to love and be wise" (*Advancement of Learning*). Marston writes: "The Gods themselves cannot be wise and love" (*Dutch Courtezan*).

Certainly, it was an age when literary theft was rife. Yet these are only surface similarities. The implication that Bacon and Shakespeare were

purveyors of the obvious is absurd. Shakespeare had clearly the most brilliant mind of any poet who ever lived. His awareness of the human condition and his ability to express that awareness have no parallel, except in Bacon. This identity of unique intellect is arguably itself sufficient to establish that Bacon *was* Shakespeare. In any case, many of the similarities are not easily explained as shared 'commonplaces'. I do not propose to examine them in detail here. In his *Bacon and Shake-speare Parallelisms* (1902), Edwin Reed lists no fewer than 885 parallels. I refer the reader also to Cockburn's *The Bacon Shakespeare Question* (1998), where 100 are discussed at length, and to Melsome's *The Bacon-Shakespeare Anatomy* (1945) which also has a comprehensive selection. Cockburn, for example, cites the various references in Bacon's prose works to Julius Caesar and compares them to lines in the Shakespeare play, which was not published till 1623. Melsome, *inter alia*, shows that Bacon and Shakespeare quote or partially quote similar parts of the Bible, especially in *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs*.

Another approach is to show the identity of peculiar ideas and errors. Ignatius Donnelly in *The Great Cryptogram* (1888) demonstrates that Bacon and Shakespeare held the following opinions:

1. That a shrewd mind will turn even disadvantages to use.
2. That sounds are heard better by night than by day.
3. That authority cannot be derived from books.
4. That character is shown in the face and in bodily action.
5. That there is a universal power of goodness.
6. That there was a widespread fear of making a will until the last moment.
7. That sickness or weakness leaves the mind open to the influence of external spirits.
8. "Assume a virtue if you have it not".

As examples of identical errors, Donnelly gives the following:

1. That one fire can expel another, even as one nail drives out another.
2. That spontaneous generation is possible.
3. That there is a precious stone in the head of a toad.
4. That the liver may be the seat of sensuality.

It is also worth mentioning some changes in *Hamlet*. In the 1604 quarto there appears this line:

*"Sense sure you have
Else you could not have motion".*

This ancient doctrine that everything which has motion must have sense is also upheld by Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605),

but in the later latinised version *De Augmentis* (1623) he renounced it. So in the same year did the author of Shakespeare. The *Hamlet* quartos of 1604, 1605 and 1611 all preserve this notion, but in the 1623 *Folio* version of *Hamlet* it is dropped. Again, in the 1604 *Hamlet* the author supports the popular belief in the moon's influence on the tides, and all the subsequent quartos continue to echo it. Bacon also held this view in the 1590s, but in 1616, in his *De Fluxo et Refluxu Maris*, he withdrew his support of it, and of course the author of Shakespeare dropped it from the *Folio* version of the play.

Again, in the 1603 quarto the first line of Hamlet's letter to Ophelia reads: "Doubt that in earth is fire...". In the 1604 quarto, however, it becomes: "Doubt that the stars are fire...". So the doctrine of a central fire in the earth was taken out of the play some time between the appearance of the first edition in 1603 and that of the second in 1604. Now, Bacon wrote a tract entitled *Cogitationes de Natura Rerum*, assigned to the latter part of 1603 or the early part of 1604. Spedding thinks it was written before September 1604. In this tract, Bacon boldly took the ground that the earth is a cold body, cold to the core, the only cold body, as he afterwards affirmed, in the entire universe, all others, sun, planets, and stars, being of fire. It appears, then, that Bacon adopted this new view of the earth's interior at precisely the same time that the author of *Hamlet* did; that is to say, according to the record, in the brief interval between the appearance of the first and second editions of the drama, and, furthermore, against the otherwise unanimous opinion of the physicists throughout the world.

What really concerns me in the current work, however, is intellectual interests and beliefs. The argument from diversity of intellectual interests is stated by J.M. Robertson in *The Baconian Heresy*: "Unless they deny it, the Baconians must be presumed to see that Bacon throughout the mass of his avowed writings has an end in view; that he is profoundly concerned to influence opinion. Yet they impute to him the deliberate assumption of the time-devouring task of writing dozens of stage plays, in not one of which are his intellectual purposes so much as hinted at" (1913, p527). This view is so wrongly conceived that it seems to have been written by someone with almost total ignorance of both Bacon and Shakespeare. What Robertson does is to misrepresent Bacon and then inform us that Shakespeare doesn't fit into his caricature. At the same time, he leaves unanswered the question of the dramatist's motive for writing plays. He seems to imply that they since they were unlikely to have influenced opinion, therefore they are not about anything very much. Presumably, he wrote for the motive suggested by Pope; that is, financial gain rather than glory.

Almost every line of Shakespeare belies this notion that he wrote clever and skilful entertainments merely to line his own pockets. On the contrary, he is the most philosophical, political and moral of poets. So, in answer to the question: are the Shakespeare plays about anything? I say, yes, they most certainly are. As Ben Jonson suggested, they are about the defeat of ignorance through knowledge and wisdom. In pursuit of this goal, there are many interwoven themes throughout the works. Here I want to consider some of the constant themes and oppositions, and again the dominant ideas point us inexorably towards a Baconian conclusion.

Dogmatism and Scepticism

Francis Bacon describes himself as being committed to uncertainty and "as being gifted by nature with desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to reconsider". In the *Advancement of Learning* (1605) he distinguishes between two kinds of writer, the 'magistral' and the 'probative'. The former operates from certainty and delivers knowledge "in such form as may best be believed, and not as may best be examined". The probative writer, however, is provisional rather than dogmatic, an explorer rather than a preacher, who realises the necessity of doubt and initial suspension of judgment on the road to the discovery of truth: "If a man will begin in certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties".

A major obstacle to this sceptical approach is the dogmatism of system-builders, which results in the slavery of disciples to their masters instead of to the truth. "Doctrine should be such as should make men in love with the lesson, and not with the teacher; being directed to the auditor's benefit, and not to the author's commendation". Thus he makes it abundantly clear that the last thing he would want to do is to create a system: "I have no desire to found a sect, after the fashion of heresiarchs", he writes. In the preface to *The Great Instauration*, where he announces his commitment to uncertainty, he deliberately plays down his own contribution to the advancement of human knowledge:

"The same humility which I use in inventing I employ likewise in teaching. For I do not endeavour whether by triumphs of confutation, or pleadings of antiquity, or assumption of authority, or even by the veil of obscurity, to invest these inventions of mine with any majesty; which might easily be done by one who sought to give lustre to his own name rather than light to other men's minds. I have not sought (I say) nor do I seek either to force or ensnare men's judgments, but I lead them to things themselves and the concordance of things, that they may see for

themselves what they have, what they can dispute, what they can add and contribute to the common stock..."

To which 'inventions' is he referring? The word was employed then in the context of poetry and drama, and he does refer to the 'veil of obscurity' which might cover these 'inventions'. In them, he says that he wishes to avoid giving 'lustre' to his own name but instead to give light to other men's minds. If Bacon used the mask of Shakespeare, then this extract does explain at least one of his intentions for doing so.

But let us focus more on this commitment to uncertainty. In his chapter on Bacon in *The 17th Century Background* (1946) Basil Willey argues that his campaign against dogmatism raises Bacon above all mere pleaders for science or freedom of thought and places him alongside those poets and prophets who have believed that "wise passiveness" is the attitude "most favourable to fine living and creating". Significantly, Willey finds the same attitude in Shakespeare. He recalls the concept of "negative capability"—"when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"—which Keats believed Shakespeare "possessed so enormously". Willey is right: Francis Bacon possessed and indeed advocated that very negative capability which Keats discovered in the poet.

Why is it so difficult to know exactly what Shakespeare believed? Was he a progressive or a reactionary? A Protestant or a Catholic? A romantic or a rationalist? An optimist or a pessimist? Why is it indeed possible for almost any sect of philosophers, politicians, Christians or critics to claim Shakespeare as its particular prophet? Is it not precisely because this 'myriad-minded' man was a 'probative' rather than a 'magistral' writer? Is it not precisely because his plays are explorations rather than sermons? Is it not because his works are so deeply infused with irony—the 'master ironist', as Kierkegaard called him—offering the reader a range of possible meanings? Even when one distinct belief is posited, there is nearly always an equally strong presentation of its antithesis. In an important sense, by constantly pitting ideas against their opposites, the Shakespearean drama is an exploration of antagonistic or apparently antagonistic forces: good and evil, love and romance, reason and imagination, art and nature, appearance and reality, doubt and certainty, deduction and induction, revenge and forgiveness, extremism and moderation, theology and faith, and so on. Arguing on either side of the debate is part of a lawyer's skill and a rhetorician's training, and Shakespeare was a master of the art of persuasive rhetoric.

The habitual error is to assume that the dramatist did not care deeply

about truth, ideas, ethics or politics; that he was not a conceptual thinker; that he had no moral purpose. Hazlitt wrote that "Shakespear was the least moral of all writers; for morality (commonly so called) is made up of antipathies, and his talent consisted in sympathy with human nature, in all its shapes, degrees, elevations, and depressions". Yet Hazlitt, though he realised that this poet was very much a philosopher, failed to see that the morality in Shakespeare is more subtle than a sermon. It is not a preaching dogmatism but instead a gentle yet relentless nudge in the direction of truth, goodness and justice. It is an insinuating ethic in which we learn by contemplating the thoughts and actions of the characters and exploring the implications of the drama.

Two characters will serve to illustrate these points: Hamlet and Falstaff. Hamlet's scepticism and self-doubt have often been remarked. Harold Bloom notes that the play itself is obsessed with the word 'question', which is used seventeen times. Hamlet asks himself which of two extreme views of humanity is true: is man "the paragon of animals" or a "quintessence of dust"? Of himself, he inquires: "What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth?" Is life worth living?—the biggest question of all—is posited in the ultimate speech of doubt and indecision in all literature. Hamlet himself seems to embrace so many contraries as to be not one but a dozen separate individuals. According to Bloom, Shakespeare created Hamlet as a dialectic of antithetical qualities, a dance of contraries, and he suggests: "Hamlet's quintessence is never to be wholly committed to any stance or attitude, any mission, or indeed anything at all" (*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Fourth Estate, 1999, pp386, p406). Is this not a distinct echo of Bacon's description of himself as being committed to uncertainty and "as being gifted by nature with desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to reconsider"? And remember, as Bloom adds, Hamlet is Shakespeare's own consciousness, his own self-analysis.

As for Falstaff, earlier we discussed the suggestion by Bate, Holden and Greenblatt that he is modelled on Robert Greene, and we offered William of Stratford as a more likely candidate. But there is also no doubt that the author had Socrates in mind when he drew the character as a parody, and this raises the interesting possibility that in a real and deliberate sense, the Shakespeare plays are Renaissance equivalents of Plato's *Dialogues*. In his book *Of Philosophers and Kings* (2001) Leon H. Craig discusses Shakespeare's debt to Plato. He has noticed that Falstaff and Socrates have a number of parallels. He begins with the strikingly similar descriptions of their deaths (e.g. with their going cold and numb from the feet upwards; *Phaedo* 117e-118a, *Henry V* 2.3.20-5). More important,

both were accused of practising sophistry: Falstaff of "wrenching the true cause of the false way" (2nd *Henry IV* 2.1.108-9), Socrates of "making the weaker argument appear the stronger" (*Apology* 18b-c, 19 b-c, 23d). Note also the identical charge against Falstaff ("that villainous abominable misleader of youth" (1st *Henry IV* 2.4.446-7), as was mortally applied to Socrates (*Apology* 24b). Both characters do their military service on foot rather than mounted on horseback. Both are notoriously capable of consuming much drink. Falstaff says he is witty and the cause of wit in other men (2 *Henry IV* 1.2.6); the friends of Socrates think that he is wise and the cause of wisdom in themselves. Neither Falstaff nor Socrates is beautiful, yet both exercise an attraction upon other men, particularly youths. The late Allan Bloom, who wrote both on Plato and on Shakespeare, concludes that "the Hal-Falstaff relationship is not entirely unlike the one between Socrates and Alcibiades".

Crucially, Falstaff adopts the Socratic method of inquiry and the Socratic question, "what is a thing?" with his question, "what is honour?". Harold Bloom calls Falstaff the Socrates of Eastcheap, the comic Socrates, an outrageous version of the philosopher, and sees him as representing a dialectic of freedom versus power and order. He says that there is a link between Shakespeare's Falstaff and Montaigne's Socrates, a connection that may be a direct influence since Shakespeare probably had access to Florio's translation of Montaigne while it was still in manuscript. I have no doubt that this is true, though how William of Stratford managed it is a mystery whereas Bacon was a friend of Florio's. The most authentic parallel, says Bloom, between Falstaff and Montaigne's Socrates is their shared contrast of outer deformity and inner genius, as depicted especially in Montaigne's final two essays, *Of Physiognomy* and *Of Experience*: "The ugliness of Socrates is the vessel that contains wisdom and knowledge, even as the grotesque Falstaff exceeds every Shakespearean character except Hamlet as an intellect" (*op.cit.*, p292). But it is also the worthlessness and ordinariness of William of Stratford that is the vessel containing Shakespeare's wisdom and knowledge.

The questions posed by Hamlet and Falstaff are part of the means by which the author exhibits the Socratic dialectic of *elenchos* or cross-examination in drama. Socrates has been lauded as the father of scepticism, and the Shakespeare mastermind follows his and Montaigne's example in creating Platonic polylogues of doubt and question and exploration. Germaine Greer gets it right when she says: "intellectual life in the Shakespearian mode is a never-ending learning process; each of the plays enacts the mental adventure of scepticism" (*Shakespeare*, 1986, 2002 p120). It is when and only when we grasp the fact that Shakespeare's

approach is indeed the conscious and deliberate adoption of the Baconian philosophy of sceptical suspension of judgment—indeed the application of the inductive method to drama—that we begin to make sense of the 'myriad-minded' man with the 'boundless, cloudless human view'.

Art and Nature

In his chapter on 'Pan, or Nature' in *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609) Bacon writes: either nature "came of Mercury, that is, the Word of God, which the Holy Scriptures without all controversy affirm"; or it came from "the confused seeds of things"; or "it points to the state of the world, not considered in immediate creation, but after the fall of Adam, exposed and made subject to death and corruption; for in that state it was, and remains, to this day, the offspring of God and sin". These three opinions correspond to three modes of reality—a higher, a middle and a lower order. So when Bacon speaks of effecting "a commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things", he means, above all, that man should strive to re-establish (or 'instaurate') that higher nature in which God intended him to live, and in which he did live before the Fall.

As Northrop Frye suggests in *A Natural Perspective* (1965), these three modes of reality are also found in Shakespeare. The lowest order of nature is "the abyss of disorder which Shakespeare often summons up by the word 'nothing' and symbolises, most frequently, by the tempest. It is also the world of the devouring time which sweeps everything into annihilation. The subjective equivalents for storm and tempest are madness, illusion or death itself" (p137). Although Shakespeare suggests that all three modes are 'natural', he regards the ideal as nature as God planned. And it was Bacon who suggested: "No one can treat of metaphysics, or of the eternal and immutable in nature, without rushing at once into natural theology".

This contrast between the highest and the lowest mode of nature is reflected also in the duality of the human soul. Man, according to Bacon, has two souls: one peculiar to himself, the rational soul which he derives from "the breath of God"; and the other, shared by him in common with the "brutes", the irrational soul, deriving from the "wombs of the elements". Thus "all natural bodies have really two forces, or consist of a superior or an inferior species". Frye believes that Shakespeare's basic message is that man should for ever strive to attain the higher nature. To it, "or to the equivalent of it, man strives to return through the instruments of law, religion, morality, and (much more important in Shakespeare's imagery) education and the arts" (*ibid*, p136). This view has been expressed by a number of critics including Elizabeth Sewall in *The Orphic Voice* and

John Danby in *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*. Sewell explicitly states that "Shakespeare in his dramas accomplishes the Baconian work" (*op.cit*, p155), while Danby regards *King Lear* as 'the real *Novum Organum* of Elizabethan thought' (1948, p15).

Frye writes particularly about the late romances, where he finds that all the arts are employed as regenerative symbols, but especially music because it expresses the "harmony of the soul". Bacon of course says the same thing in prose on numerous occasions, notably in that famous account of the Orphic legend in the *Advancement* where he actually refers to learning in the context of "Orpheus' theatre". In his chapter on Orpheus in *The Wisdom of the Ancients* Bacon says that he stands for 'philosophy', and intriguingly he even had a statue of Orpheus erected in his garden which he called 'Philosophy Personified'. In Baconian terms, therefore, the Shakespeare plays are deliberately intended as Orphic drama, enticing man away from his lower and towards his higher nature through explorations, precepts, laws and religion "sweetly touched with eloquence and persuasion".

King Lear is a key play on the theme of the higher and lower natures. G. Wilson Knight is surely correct to see it as "a play of naturalism, of spiritual qualities represented as a natural growth" (*The Wheel of Fire*, p229). Goodness becomes the 'natural' goal of man and the aim of evolution. Wilson Knight considers that Edmund, Lear and Cordelia correspond to three periods in man's evolution—the primitive, the civilised, and the ideal. When Edmund declares, "Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law, my services are bound", the nature to which he is appealing is Bacon's lowest form, the animal law. The same is true of Goneril and Regan. Lear calls the former a "detested kite" on whom Regan would show her nails to her "wolvish visage". He refers to Goneril's "sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture here". Albany also compares the sisters to animals, calling them "tigers, not daughters" and names Goneril a "gilded serpent". All three—Edmund, Goneril and Regan—embody Albany's view that "humanity must perforce prey on itself, like monsters of the deep". This lower form, sometimes called in political language the new individualism or even a nascent capitalism, sees no moral order in the world apart from the self and the assertion of one's own interests. The 'good' life consists in an aggressive assertion of one's own individuality.

The higher nature is epitomised in Cordelia. It is the nature which Edmund denies to exist and which Lear fails to recognise when it is before him. She is the norm itself or, as Danby puts it, "she belongs to the utopian dream of the artist and of the good man" (*op.cit*, p138). But she is not only Nature in this higher sense; she is also Art, the art pledged to present and

express the wholeness society violates. This wholeness or community of goodness—call it culture, civilisation, or what you will—is partly based on the traditional Christian conception which stresses faith, hope, love and charity. It is also partly feudal in its emphasis on the need for communal 'bonds', but it also predates both Christianity and feudalism. It goes back at least to the wisdom of the ancient Greeks.

Shakespeare's position is similar to Plato's *Gorgias* where Socrates says that wealth and power are corrupting influences because people who possess them will be guided by their further pleasures rather than by knowledge of what is right and good. To rule a state or to rule oneself, one must know what is best for the state or for human life, and one must learn to take pleasure in practising these virtues. For Plato in the *Gorgias*, a true art is regulative and corrective; its goal is to maintain order and harmony; and it seeks 'good' rather than 'pleasure'. Of course, this is the very antithesis of the orthodox view of Shakespeare's motivation in writing plays, but it is a view which is supported by a clear understanding of the texts of those works.

Implicit in this analysis is the notion that art is not something distinct from nature but rather one of man's chief ways of aspiring to this higher nature. The affinity between art and nature is made clear by Bacon in a passage from *Descriptio Globi Intellectualis*:

"It is the fashion to talk as if art were something different from nature, so that things artificial should be separated from things natural, as differing totally in kind; whence it comes that most writers of natural history think it enough to make a history of animals or plants or minerals, without mentioning the experiments of mechanical arts (which are far the most important in philosophy)... Therefore as nature is ever one and the same, and her power extends through all things, nor does she ever forsake herself, these three things should by all means be set down as alike subordinate only to nature; namely, the course of nature; the wanderings of nature; and art, or nature with man to help. And therefore in natural history all these things should be included in one continuous series of narratives".

Thus art is an agent of nature and necessary to the development of created nature. It is largely through art that we fulfil our higher nature. Art is nature with man to help. Again, what Bacon says in prose, Shakespeare says in verse:

*"Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean; so ever that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,*

*And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend nature—change it rather; but
The art itself is nature".*

The Winter's Tale, Act IV, Scene IV

Throughout Shakespeare the higher and lower natures are continually contrasted. The latter are portrayed through qualities such as deception, lust, cruelty, ambition, selfishness and wanton emotion. The role of art becomes crucial. It is the skilful use of the higher qualities of wisdom, insight, knowledge, love, friendship, justice, humility, selflessness, and so on, as a means of rendering them more permanent features of human 'nature'. Art—including, crucially, dramatic art—fulfils a fundamental role in nature's renewal, or, to use Bacon's word, instauration.

Appearance And Reality

Bacon thought much about the reasons for man's failure to attain this higher nature. It was not simply a matter of 'evil' but a more complicated process of deception and self-deception. Moreover, he was particularly gifted to explore human weaknesses and failings. As H.C. Dick notes, the essays "owe no small part of their impact to the writer's unsparing insight into the gullibilities, self-deceptions and pretences of men". And he adds: "One always has the sense of a shrewd and insatiable intelligence exploring the ways of man with extraordinary penetration" (*Selected Writings of Francis Bacon*, 1955).

A fundamental reason for our failure to attain this higher nature is, according to Bacon, our preference for appearance over reality, our need for "vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like" (*Of Truth*). In the *Novum Organum* he refers to human attachment to the fictions created by language, tradition, customs and imagination as Idols. He identifies four in all: the idols of the tribe, or perceptual illusions; idols of the cave, or personal biases; idols of the marketplace, or linguistic confusions; and idols of the theatre, or dogmatic philosophical systems. The most relevant here are the Idols of the Cave: "Every one... has a cave or den of his own, which refracts and discolours the light of nature", so that people tend to seek truth "in their own little worlds, and not in the great and common world".

Yet, is this not precisely what Shakespeare is constantly doing in the plays? Is he, too, not fully qualified by his comprehensive wisdom regarding human beings to dissect this deficiency? Is this discrepancy between appearance and reality not a recurring Shakespearean theme? Indeed, for many, it is *the* Shakespearean obsession. Lear equates words

and appearances with truth and reality, and that is his tragedy. When he is finally stripped of his illusions—his 'vain opinions' etc.—and discovers the truth, Lear becomes, as Bacon suggests in the same essay quoted above, one of those "poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves". In *Hamlet* the theme is announced in Act 1 Scene 2 when Hamlet says to his mother: "Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems'".

In his book about the history plays, *The Lost Garden* (1978) John Wilders comments that "the inescapable tendency of men to create their own world-views, to see themselves and others not in absolute, objective terms but subjectively according to their own characters and situations was dramatised fully by Shakespeare for the first time in *Richard II*" (p85). He also notes that in *Henry IV, Part One*, Shakespeare presents characters who tend to see the world in their own terms and dictate these terms to other people. Wilders sees the conflicts between different conceptions of the world as also a prominent feature of *Troilus and Cressida*, where the obstacles to truth are discussed in abstract, as well as concrete, terms. But there is a further development. Just as we create our own subjective worlds consistent with the minds that perceive them, "so we form images of ourselves consistent with the impressions we receive from others" (*op.cit*, p98). Wilders quotes Ulysses in Act 3, Scene 3:

*"A strange fellow here
Writes me that man—how dearly ever parted,
How much in having, or without or in—
Cannot make boast to have that which he hath,
Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection;
As when his virtues shining upon others
Heat them, and they retort that heat again
To the first giver".*

Wilders comments that a man may possess certain qualities but can be conscious of them only to the extent that they elicit responses from others. He might have added that Bacon describes this very phenomenon in his essay *Of Great Place*:

"Certainly great persons had need to borrow other men's opinions to think themselves happy; for if they judge by their own feeling, they cannot find it; but if they think with themselves what other men think of them, and that other men would fain be as they are, then they are happy as it were by report, when, perhaps, they find the contrary within; for they are the first that find their own griefs, though they be the last that find their own faults".

The theme of appearance and reality also looms large in the comedies and tragedies. It has been remarked that Shakespeare presents life as a quest for self-discovery but, whereas in the comedies men do discover the truth about themselves, in the tragedies they do not or do too late. When the characters lose themselves for any length of time it is generally because they adopt a false consciousness which prefers deception and/or self-deception to the truth. The masks and disguises, frequently literal but continually metaphorical, ensure that man is blind to self-knowledge. J. Lawlor comments:

"The world of appearance is largely the world of illusion, and the illusion is the projection of ourselves, our dominant interests. Thus there is blindness to what is outside our own conceptions; and so our guesses about each other can be disastrously wrong. This we see above all in the relation of parent and child: the one thing in the created universe that eludes understanding is our own motives confronting us in our own flesh and blood. Conversely, the projection of our own motives on to another can only lead to disillusion; though the nature of that disillusion may be something we cannot grasp, our condition being perhaps, like Falstaff's, incurable" (*The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare*, 1960, p42).

The playing of roles pervades the plays. Again, *Hamlet* is the paradigm. The language itself is, as Maynard Mack indicates, significant. The words 'seems', 'assume', 'show', 'act' and 'play' recur throughout. Elsinore is a deceptive world, full of nooks, arrases and upper galleries where someone may be lurking secretly, spying or eavesdropping on behalf of someone else. On the surface, the world appears to be honest and sane, but in reality it is filled with lies, cruelty, madness and injustice. We are presented with a constant contrast between the roles people play to the outside world and the inner world of their own thoughts and feelings. All the main characters put on acts, not least Hamlet himself despite his protests to the contrary. His surface roles include: grieving son, lover, prince, philosopher and madman. Underneath, there is also Hamlet the manipulator, the cynic, the critic, the friend, the jester, the revenger. The real Hamlet remains deliberately elusive and we cannot "pluck out the heart of his mystery" (*The World of Hamlet*, Yale Review, XLI, 1952, pp502-23).

Sometimes in Shakespeare the deception is for a good motive. In *Lear* Kent disguises himself as Caius the servant and Edgar feigns insanity as Tom o' Bedlam. Yet both remain their true selves beneath the disguise. Their intent is good and true, as is the case with many of the disguises. Mistaken identity, whether through intentional disguise or accident, is a plot device in virtually all the comedies. Some of them even appear to be simply meditations on the theme, such as *The Comedy of Errors*, *Two*

Gentlemen of Verona and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *Twelfth Night* there is Viola masquerading as Cesario, Antonio mistaking Viola for Sebastian, her twin brother, Maria forging Olivia's handwriting, and so on. As for the so-called 'dark' comedies, in *Measure for Measure* the Duke uses disguise and mistaken identity to reveal the truth about Angelo's character. *The Merchant of Venice* features a key scene in which Portia is disguised as a male judge, and in the play generally the central characters are guilty of mistaking their own identities, not merely the identity of others, because they pretend to believe one thing while acting another.*

The spectacle of failure dominates the plays. In the histories the predominant idea is that man's hopes and ambitions are continually thwarted, largely because he pursues the means of his own defeat. In the tragedies, too, the idea prevails that the downfall of the heroes is caused primarily by their own weaknesses and deceptions. Even in the comedies there is more than a hint of serious social criticism of human foibles. All the works bespeak of a shrewd and incisive mind, always alive to human pretences and deceptions, precisely what we said at the beginning of this section in relation to Francis Bacon.

Yet, along with this incomparable insight, we find in Bacon and Shakespeare a rejection of cynicism and the suggestion of ways forward. In no other writer(s) does such a consistently rational dissatisfaction with man's past and present combine so strongly with hopes for the future. In a real sense, the whole *opus* is a monumental effort to lead humanity towards a more desirable reality by confronting us with the stark nature of our errors and failings so far. If we know what we are and if we realise that it is not, in Bacon's own words, conducive to "magnanimity, morality and to delectation", then we may know better what we should become.

Deduction and Induction

It was a strong medieval notion that appearance is related to reason and reality to intuition. Aquinas, for example, suggests that reason is confined to the world of appearance, and therefore of unreality, because it works through and is limited by the senses. This view has its roots in Greek thought. Plato distinguishes two kinds of intellect: the higher intellect which works intuitively and which is concerned with pure ideas, and the

* We might well ask, by way of parenthesis, why the author is so obsessed with the notion of disguise and of wearing masks. Does he, too, wear a mask concealing his true identity? Does he don a motley like Jaques or Touchstone or Feste or Lear's Fool in order better to speak his mind and avoid the resistance towards the didactic preacher?

lower intellect which works rationally and which is concerned with mathematical concepts. For Neo-Platonists, only when we exercise the higher, intuitive faculty can we understand what is truly real. One inference is that the earthly life is only a world of appearances and should therefore be rejected in favour of a life of spiritual contemplation.

This was not Bacon's position. He realised that the Neo-Platonic equation of reason and appearance arose from the traditional use of reason that sprang from Aristotelian philosophy. According to Bacon, Aristotle "corrupted natural philosophy by logic". It was hardly surprising that many thinkers believed man could know little about reality since this emphasis on *deductive* reasoning implied that only a small number of observations were needed from which all that was knowable could be deduced. Deduction merely makes explicit what is already contained in its premises. Thus an emphasis on deduction makes for a closed system in which philosophers regard themselves merely as the organisers and preservers of a fixed, and limited, stock of knowledge. For Bacon, on the other hand, knowledge was both practical and cumulative. Hence his emphasis on inductive reasoning and the need for man to study nature itself, not merely words.

T. Fowler sums up Bacon's position as follows:

"The office of reason, he was, in effect, saying, ought not to be limited to an examination of the conclusions and their dependence on the premisses; what it ought to insist on doing, is to examine the premisses themselves. What is required is a new logic, a logic of induction, which shall do for the premisses what the old logic, the logic of deduction, does for the conclusions. It is not enough that the conclusion follows from the premisses; what we require to know is whether the premisses themselves be true, and, unless we can succeed in satisfying this want, we may simply be multiplying error instead of advancing truth. Had this been the only lesson which Bacon read to his generation, he would, assuredly, have deserved to be reckoned amongst the greatest of its benefactors" (*Francis Bacon*, 1881, p199).

Turning to Shakespeare, we find that villains like Claudius, Lady Macbeth, Iago and Edmund all tend to be rationalists, but the significant fact is that they are *deductive* reasoners. There are few flaws in their arguments; it is their premisses which Shakespeare asks us to question. He is showing that deductive reasoning may be used for either good or evil purposes and that the latter will triumph if the good people shun it and so leave themselves open to manipulation by those who are merely serving their own selfish ends. In this sense, Shakespeare's villains represent the personification of Machiavellianism, which the dramatist clearly regarded

as the application of deduction in the interest of personal power. Critics of the Baconian theory point to Bacon's remark in the *Advancement* where he writes: "We are much beholden to Machiavel and others that write what men do and not what they ought to do". They fail to note that Bacon also refers to Machiavelli's "evil arts". Moreover, what Bacon is actually saying, and the context makes it clear, is that an understanding of how men *do* in fact behave and why is a necessary preliminary to any philosophy about how they *ought* to behave.

A number of critics have sensed the inductive approach in the Shakespeare works without calling it by that name. It is the basis of Keats' remark about 'negative capability' and of Arnold's complaint that Shakespeare is as obscure as life itself. It causes L.C. Knights to remark that "the way a great artist stimulates ideas is by the presentation of particulars" ('The Thought of Shakespeare', in *Hamlet and other Shakespearean Essays*, 1979, p174).

Proceeding from particulars to the general is, of course, the essence of induction. Unfortunately, the mistaken implication that many draw from this vague awareness is the notion that Shakespeare's 'thought' is not what we would normally call by that name—that it is not the thought of a philosopher or moralist but rather 'dramatic' thought. What this peculiar brand of thinking comprises they never clarify, which is hardly surprising since it doesn't exist. The futile attempt to deny that the Shakespeare mastermind was a great intellect is refuted, for example, by this very practice whereby each generation and each new student reinterprets his ideas—a continuing process which was clearly part of the deliberate purpose of a genius keenly aware of the cumulative nature of knowledge and of the need for an inductive approach to its discovery.

Shakespeare's approach, however, is neither purely inductive nor purely deductive. Rather, it is like the bee as described by Francis Bacon:

"Those who have handled sciences have been either men of experiment or men of dogmas. The men of experiment are like the ant; they only collect and use; the reasoners resemble spiders, who make cobwebs out of their own substance. But the bee takes a middle course; it gathers its materials from the flowers of the garden and of the field, but transforms and digests it by a power of its own. Not unlike this is the true mode in which philosophy works. For it neither relies solely or chiefly on the powers of the mind, nor does it take the matter which it gathers from natural history and mechanical experiments, and lay it up in the memory whole as it finds it; but it lays it up in the understanding, after it has been duly transformed and digested" (*Novum Organum*).