

## **15. Humanist and Poet**

*“For the liberal arts without a parallel”*

—Shakespeare

*“I have taken all knowledge to be my province”*

—Bacon

One of the great secrets of Shakespeare scholarship—so hidden that commentators rarely give it more than a passing glance—is that Shakespeare was not only a humanist but indeed the very acme of Renaissance humanism. He knew it too: through the mouth of Prospero, he describes himself as "for the liberal arts, without a parallel". Yet there is only one contemporary who could rightly stake this claim, for we see the same epitome of Renaissance Literary Man in Francis Bacon, who declared that he had "taken all knowledge" to be his province. When we consider what Renaissance humanism was, we shall see how its English climax is embodied in the man who was at once artist and scientist, philosopher and poet, and who lived equally in both worlds.

### ***Renaissance Humanism***

The terms 'humanist' and 'humanism' have also been given a wide range of possible meanings and contexts. Alan Bullock in his book *The Humanist Tradition in the West* (1985) states that they are "words that no one has ever succeeded in defining to anyone else's satisfaction, protean words which mean very different things to different people and leave lexicographers and encyclopaedists with a feeling of exasperation and frustration". The two words were first used, centuries apart, in educational contexts and then expanded into wider cultural connotations. (For the origins, see Nicolas Walter: *Humanism: What's in the Word*, 1997.) 'Humanist' originates in the Renaissance, but 'Humanism'—like 'isms' such as socialism, communism and capitalism—derives from the 19th century. It was coined in 1808 by the Bavarian educationalist Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer to refer to what had become a tradition of elitist education in the humanities. In the modern era both terms have acquired a non-theistic definition relating to the good life, the nature of man and man's place in the universe. In this broader philosophical conception, humanism has been applied backwards in time to the thought of many of the writers who were originally regarded as 'humanists' in the narrower, pedagogic, sense. Yet there can be no doubt that the seeds of modern secular humanism were sown by many Renaissance humanists.

The Italian word '*umanista*' or '*humanista*' was coined in the 15th century to denote a practitioner of the *studia humanitatis* or *artes liberales* (humanities or liberal arts). The term derived from ancient Rome and specifically Cicero's cultural ideal of *Humanitas*, 'the art of living well and blessedly through learning and instruction in the fine arts'. Aulus Gellius equated *Humanitas* with the Greek *paideia*, the classical Greek liberal education which was believed to develop the intellectual, moral and aesthetic capacities of a child. The aim was to prevent *homo barbarus* and instead help to create *homo humanum*, a civilised, virtuous human being. Thus in a very real sense, humanism—even if that precise word was not used—was the Renaissance ideal.

Renaissance humanists interpreted *studia humanitatis* as a corpus of five subjects of study—grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy—all based on the Latin and Greek classics. The 'humanists' themselves were generally teachers of these disciplines and, we should note, also sometimes poets and orators themselves. *Studia humanitatis*, or studies of humanity, were delineated from '*studia divinitatis*', or studies of divinity, which concentrated on religious matters. So, already at the beginning, humanists focused on this life and its secular activities, not religion or the well-being of the soul in an after life; in other words, they were human-centred, not church-centred. Although they were usually, though not always, devout Christians, they promoted secular values and in this key respect they were genuine innovators.

### ***Classicism***

A distinguishing feature of Renaissance humanists was their belief that classical antiquity provided the model for all cultural activity. We can see the attempt to regain possession of this classical legacy in the scholar and poet Francesco Petrarch (1304-74), sometimes called 'the father of Humanism'. In one of his poems he wrote: "Genius, virtue, glory now have gone, leaving chance and sloth to rule. Shameful vision this! We must awake or die". Disdaining what he believed to be the ignorance of the era in which he lived, Petrarch is credited with inventing, in the 1330s, the concept of the Dark Ages, and we might date the beginning of the Renaissance from this point. Classical Antiquity, so long considered the 'dark age' for its lack of Christianity, was now seen by Petrarch as the age of 'light' because of its cultural achievements, while his own time, lacking these achievements, was now seen as the age of darkness.

In the writings of ancient Greece and Rome Petrarch discerned a contrast between the contemplative, ascetic, otherworldly passivity of his own era and the more dynamic classical cultivation of worldly beauty,

truth, ambition and personal ability. He spent much of his time travelling through Europe rediscovering and republishing the classic Latin and Greek texts and seeking to restore the classical Latin language to its former purity. "What else is all history", he wrote, "but the praise of Rome?" He even wrote letters to dead authors such as Cicero whom he says he addressed "with a familiarity springing from my sympathy with his genius". Cicero represented for him and many subsequent humanists the ideal of employing both wisdom and eloquence in the public good. It is important for our purposes to stress that Petrarch regarded the orator and the poet as philosophical teachers and with the philosophers of old he declared virtue and truth to be the highest goals of human endeavour. He viewed the preceding millennium as a time of stagnation and saw history unfolding, not along the religious outline of St. Augustine's *Six Ages of the World*, but in cultural or secular terms, through the progressive developments of classical ideals, literature and art.

### ***Secularisation of Education***

A second distinguishing feature of Renaissance humanism was the secularisation of education. This was natural, since humanism was originally neither a philosophy nor a movement but a curriculum concerned with secular values. The central themes in all classical humanistic education was that "no man was considered educated unless he was acquainted with the masterpieces of his tradition" and that "the best way to a liberal education in the West is through the greatest works the West has produced". One of the most significant breaks with tradition came in the field of history. Leonardo Bruni (c.1370-1444) is credited with writing the first modern history book, *History of the Florentine People*. Bruni was the first historian to write about the three period view of history: Antiquity, Middle Age and Modern. The dates he uses to define the periods are not exactly what modern historians use today, but he laid the conceptual groundwork for a tripartite division of history. While it probably was not Bruni's intention to secularise the subject, the three period view of history is unquestionably secular, hence the 'modern' title he has acquired. It was Bruni and his fellow humanists such as Niccolo Niccoli and Poggio Bracciolini who believed they had reached the end of the Dark Age outlined by Petrarch and were entering a modern period, and thus logically called the intervening period a Middle Age. It was Bruni who used the phrase *studia humanitatis*, meaning the study of human endeavours versus those of theology and metaphysics, which is where the term 'humanists' originates.

Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder (1370-c.1445), who was tutor of the

princes of Carrara at their court at Padua and secretary to two popes and one emperor, wrote what could be regarded as the first humanist educational treatise, *De Ingeniis Moribus et Liberalibus Studiis* (On Noble Customs and Liberal Studies, circ.1402-4). In it he states:

"We call those studies liberal which are worthy of a free man; those studies by which we attain and practise virtue and wisdom; that education which calls forth, trains, and develops those highest gifts of body and of mind which ennoble men, and which are rightly judged to rank next in dignity to virtue only... For to a vulgar temper, gain and pleasure are the one aim in existence, to a lofty mature, moral worth, and fame... For I may affirm with fullest conviction that we shall not have attained wisdom in our later years unless in our earliest we have sincerely entered on its search".

The historian John Hale points out that lessons were to shape the pupil's character and prepare him for a life of useful service. Grammar was to enable him to master the exemplary texts that would make his speech and writing easy and varied; history would provide him with examples of behaviour to shun or follow; poetry with a desire to imitate the virtues of the heroes of epic literature; and moral philosophy was to stress the high standards of personal behaviour that were expected of the responsible citizen (*The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance*, 1993, p192).

Two other foundational figures in humanist education were Guarino Veronese (1374-1460) and Vittorino da Feltre (1373-1446), who had been a pupil of Vergerio. Guarino opened the first humanist school, in Venice about 1414, and Vittorino opened an academy for the training of pupils of both sexes in Mantua in 1423. They each independently designed an entire curriculum for their young students consisting of physical and intellectual education. They used the newly rediscovered texts of Quintilian as the model of their educational programme in which students had to master both Latin *and* Greek as well as acquire a thorough grounding in the works of Cicero, Plato, and Aristotle. This would become the model of Renaissance education in the century to follow. Vittorino summed up the civic thrust of humanist education: "Not everyone is called to be a physician, a lawyer, a philosopher, to live in the public eye, nor has everyone outstanding gifts of natural capacity, but all of us are created for the life of social duty, all are responsible for the personal influence that goes forth from us".

Lorenzo Valla (c.1406-1457), who was a pupil of Bruni, greatly enhanced the recovery of classical literature by developing sophisticated models of linguistic analysis to determine age and authenticity, thus making him a pioneer of textual criticism. His most famous project illustrates the extent

to which Renaissance scholarship challenged the Church. He showed that the *Donation of Constantine*, a testament in which Constantine supposedly bequeathed his power and wealth to the Church, was actually a forgery because the Latin text was written four centuries after Constantine's death. His work *The Eloquence of the Latin Language*, provided a programme of study in eloquence and composition based on the imitation of classical models, especially Cicero. Valla was found heretical by the Inquisition on eight counts, including his refusal to believe that the Apostles' Creed was written by the Twelve Apostles but, on the intervention of Alfonso, King of Naples, avoided being burned at the stake.

### ***Individualism and Freedom of Thought***

In contrast to the medieval vision of man as a depraved, helpless creature, the Renaissance viewed man as a being of immense possibilities. An important motto was that "Man is the measure of all things". This was taken from the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras (480-411 BC), who is often regarded as the first humanist. He probably meant that we make the world in our own image and that there is no objective standard or ultimate truth outside human values derived from human experience. Certainly, the Renaissance offered graphic proof to a complacent medieval world that human excellence was bigger than Christendom. Humanists generally had faith in man's power to plan his life in the world, to command his destiny and direct it towards freedom, justice and peace. Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459), who wrote *De Dignitate et Excellentia Hominis* (On the Dignity and Excellence of Man, 1452) in order to refute Pope Innocent III's treatise two centuries earlier 'On the Misery of the Human Condition', expressed the significance of human life with the formula, *Agere et intelligere*, which he understood as meaning "to know how and to be able to govern and rule the world which was made for man".

A similar view pervades the document which has become known as the manifesto of Renaissance humanism, *Oratio de Dignitate Hominis* (Oration on the Dignity of Man), written in 1486 by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). Applying his philosophy of syncretism, an eclectic mix of various other philosophies, Pico had drawn up a list of nine hundred theses using various Greek, Arabic, Hebrew and Roman thinkers who summarised his views. He invited scholars from all over Europe to come to Rome, where he would defend his positions against all challengers. However, the disputation never occurred. Pope Innocent VIII suspended the debate and appointed a commission to investigate the nine hundred theses. Seven of the propositions were subsequently declared unorthodox

and six more held to be dangerous. Pico publicly protested the decision by publishing a defence of his positions. This succeeded only in infuriating the Pope who condemned all nine hundred, reportedly commenting, "That young man wants someone to burn him". Pico fled to France but was arrested there by papal envoys. Through the intervention of friends, he was released by the French King. He spent the rest of his short life in Florence under the protection of the powerful Lorenzo de Medici. The *Oration on the Dignity of Man* was intended as an introductory speech for the proposed debate.

In his oration Pico argues that God has given all creatures apart from humans a unique, fixed nature. They have a certain kind of being that they cannot change. But we as human beings do not have a given being—we alone have the freedom to choose what we will become. Pico imagines God saying to Adam:

"I have placed you at the very centre of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine".

Man can, says Pico, either *degenerate* among inferior beings or be *regenerated* among superior and divine beings. All depends on his free choice. According to Pico, and in contrast to Manetti, dignity does not rest so much in the excellence of the human qualities as much as in human freedom or capacity to achieve such excellence.

Pico has here encapsulated a basic principle of humanism. No faith, no philosophy, no world view ever remains static; the only eternal thing is the human ability and freedom to change and express ourselves in different ways. The greatest dignity of humanity is the boundless power of self-transformation. The 'truth' about humanity, then, can only be found in the sum total of the works, thoughts and faiths of humanity. Above everything else, the greatest human capacity is to be able to express or understand the whole of the human experience; in this light, the principal freedom granted to humanity by God is freedom of inquiry. Thought indeed is free, and Renaissance humanists encouraged the ability of man to find out about the universe by his own efforts, and increasingly also to control it.

### ***Scepticism and Reason***

The Protestant Reformation would not have been possible without the

contribution of Renaissance humanism, which provided an intellectual justification for the challenge to Church authority. Looking back to classical times implied a criticism of the clerical and educational establishment that had dominated intellectual life throughout the Middle Ages. The dogmatism of the Catholic Church and the scholastic philosophy which it perpetrated were challenged by Renaissance humanists who claimed that it was not based sufficiently on practical experience or the needs of society, but relied too heavily on abstract thought. The humanists proposed to educate the whole person and placed emphasis not only on intellectual achievement, but also on physical and moral development. They were also generally drawn to ancient Greek and Roman scepticism. The rediscovery of Socrates in Plato's works for ever disputing static and unsatisfactory dogmas as to what was true or real set the pattern. The Greek word for 'doubt' or 'inquire' is *skepsis* and, after Plato, the Academy continued to be known for its 'scepticism'. The sixteenth century also saw the publication of the texts of Sextus Empiricus, a Greek writer who outlined the Hellenistic philosophy of scepticism known as Pyrrhonism. He argued that when we examine all claims to truth, we find that in many and various ways they are mutually contradictory or impossible and, to reach the state of *ataraxia* or peace of mind, philosophers must first learn to suspend judgement, that is, to believe to an equal degree any claim and its denial. On the other hand, the Academic sceptic, following Cicero's *Academica*, argued that while there were no certain grounds for knowledge, we should behave as if there were enough bases of knowledge for us to function from day to day.

The fundamental attitude of academic scepticism denies the possibility of knowing anything for sure. What we perceive with our senses appears to be something, but we may be perceiving it wrongly. Doubt was thought by the sceptics to bring tranquillity, because the sceptic knows that he cannot know anything, and does not have to try hard to distinguish illusion and reality. In response, Stoics and Epicureans tried to establish in various ways a 'criterion of truth' or of certainty but their solutions failed to satisfy the Renaissance thinkers, and many of them turned their scepticism towards the Christian religion. We have seen that Valla was a pioneer of religious doubt. He was not alone. Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525) argued in *The Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul* (1516) that on all rational grounds man must be mortal because the mind, no less than the body, is adapted to and dependent upon the physical world. But the immortality which reason must deny faith may accept as a revealed truth. Pomponazzi thus stood for the separation of reason and faith, philosophy and theology. He, like Valla and Pico before him, ran into accusations of heresy. Bernardino Telesio

(1509-1588) was a fervent critic of metaphysics and insisted on a purely empiricist approach in natural philosophy—he thus became a forerunner of early modern empiricism. His book *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things) argued that all knowledge is sensation and that intelligence is therefore a collection of isolated data provided by the senses. This aroused the anger of the Church on behalf of its cherished Aristotelianism, and a short time after his death his books were placed on the Index.

Others suffered worse fates. Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), a Dominican from Stilo in Calabria, became a disciple of the Greek sceptics and a follower of Telesio. In 1591 he published *Philosophia Sensibus Demonstrata*, or 'Philosophy Demonstrated by the Senses', in defense of Telesio. Nature should be observed 'directly' rather than relying on the written texts and shibboleths of the past. The book was condemned by the Holy Office and Campanella was imprisoned for heresy. He got into more trouble for another work in which he argued that all nature was alive and that the world possessed a soul "created and infused by God". This time the Inquisition locked him up for 27 years. He eventually fled to France, where he lived his life out peacefully under the protection of Cardinal Richelieu. In 1622 he published his *Apologia pro Galileo* ('Defence of Galileo') in which he defended the Copernican system and the separate paths of Scripture and nature to knowledge of the Creator. He argued that truth about nature is not revealed in Scripture and claimed freedom of thought in philosophical speculation.

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), a lapsed Dominican friar from the same region, was not so lucky. In *De l'Infinito, Universo e Mondi* (On the infinite Universe and Worlds, 1584) he argued that the universe is infinite and is full of a plurality of heliocentric systems, which are composed of matter and soul. Both matter and soul are two aspects of a single substance in which all opposites and all differences are reconciled. The soul of the universe is intelligent; it is—here Bruno takes a pantheistic view—in fact God. Birth is the individualization of the infinite (God) in the finite; death is the return of the finite to the infinite. Religion has a practical but not a theoretical value. Morality is the participation of the individual in the life of the universe. Bruno was charged with atheism because he identified God (the universe or external cause) and Nature (a different form of the universe although a totality of phenomena). To identify God and Nature was not a negation but an explanation, which construction led to Bruno's condemnation. This humanist martyr, who championed the Copernican system and opposed the stultifying authority of the Church, refused to recant his philosophical beliefs throughout his eight years of imprisonment by the Venetian and Roman Inquisitions. In the early hours of the morning

of 17th February 1600 he was taken to the Piazza dei Fiori in Rome and burnt alive at the stake.

His life stands as a testimony to the drive for knowledge and truth that marked the entire Renaissance epoch. In a sense, just as the period began about 1330, so it can be said to have reached its end, at least in its Italian manifestation, with Bruno's death in the year 1600. He challenged all dogmatism, including that of the Copernican cosmology, the main tenets of which, however, he upheld. He believed that our perception of the world is relative to the position in space and time from which we view it and that there are as many possible modes of viewing the world as there are possible positions. Therefore we cannot postulate absolute truth or any limit to the progress of knowledge. Bruno wrote in one of his final works, *De triplici minimo* (1591): "He who desires to philosophise must first of all doubt all things. He must not assume a position in a debate before he has listened to the various opinions, and considered and compared the reasons for and against. He must never judge or take up a position on the evidence of what he has heard, on the opinion of the majority, the age, merits, or prestige of the speaker concerned, but he must proceed according to the persuasion of an organic doctrine which adheres to real things, and to a truth that can be understood by the light of reason...".

By Bruno's time the Renaissance had already spread north beyond Italy affecting, notably, the Netherlands, France and England. Both the Dutchman, Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466-1536), and the Frenchman, Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), continued and refined the sceptical tradition of the Italian humanists. Although born in Rotterdam, Erasmus passed most of his life elsewhere—in Germany, France, England, Italy and especially Switzerland. As with Bruno and so many earlier humanists, Erasmus recommended collating arguments on both sides of a question but suspending judgment, except on religion which he believed was not rational but a matter of the heart. With his conciliatory and moderate attitude and his non-dogmatic and basically ethical type of Christianity, he had a major influence on the development of humanism, not only in Holland but throughout the western world. He was a major inspiration of Martin Luther and the Reformation—he was the man who 'laid the egg that Luther hatched'. After his death, his writings were placed on the Catholic Index, which is hardly surprising; for example, in 1514 he anonymously published a satiric dialogue, *Julius Exclusus*, in which Pope Julius II is turned away from the gates of Heaven by St. Peter. The *Education of a Christian Prince* was published in 1516, 26 years before Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Whereas Machiavelli, who will be discussed further in the next chapter, stated that to maintain control it is better for a

prince to be feared than loved, Erasmus preferred for the prince to be loved, and suggested that he needed a well-rounded education in order to govern justly and benevolently and avoid becoming a source of oppression.

Erasmus's best-known work was *The Praise of Folly* (*Moriae Encomium*), a vitriolic satire on the traditions of the Catholic Church, clerical corruptions and popular superstitions, written in 1509 at the house of Sir Thomas More, published in 1511 and dedicated to his host and fellow humanist (its title is a pun on More's name). Using the familiar device of the 'wise fool' and speaking in the name of Folly, the term used in the Middle Ages as a synonym for human nature, he satirises priests, popes, pardons and indulgences, the worship of saints, transubstantiation, theological disputes, scholasticism, and indeed spares no one and nothing inherent in the Christian religion of his day. Of course, since Folly says these things, who can take her seriously? But the device goes deeper than that, because for Erasmus it is important to distinguish follies to be praised from those to be condemned. For, he argues, truth can be foolish, folly truth. Everything is two-sided and it is only in a tolerant, irrational love that truth can be discovered. Religion, like life itself, is a folly but we should embrace both with all our heart and soul.

*The Praise of Folly* points up a significant difference between the northern humanists and their Italian predecessors. Most Italian humanists—the civic humanists—spoke to and for the upper-class elements in their city-states. They urged political leaders to become more statesmanlike, businessmen to become more generous with their wealth, and all to become more moral. They did not dissent or speak out in opposition; in urging the elite groups to assume their responsibilities, they were actually trying to defend, not condemn, them. Italian humanism focused on the liberality or parsimony of princes, on the moral worth of riches, and on the question of how to define true nobility. The northern humanists like Erasmus, however, spoke out against a broad range of political, social, economic, and religious evils. They faced reality and became ardent reformers of society's ills.

The northern humanists also went further than the Italians in broadening their interest in ancient literature to include early Christian writings—the Scriptures and the works of the Church Fathers. This led them to prepare new and more accurate editions of the Scriptures: Erasmus's Greek edition of the New Testament became famous and was used by Luther. It also led them to compare unfavourably the corruption and complexity of the Church in their own day with the simplicity of early Christianity. Since they held that the essence of religion was morality and rational piety—what Erasmus called the "philosophy of Christ"—rather than ceremony

and dogma, it is hardly surprising that the Church became a major target of their reforming zeal.

Although a reformer and a liberal, Erasmus remained a Catholic. He disliked the religious warfare of the time because of the intolerant atmosphere it induced. Luther's stand, like that of the Church itself, was rigid and inflexible, and Erasmus preferred the road of moderation and conciliation. He was finally brought into conflict with Luther and attacked his position on predestination in his work *A Diatribe or Sermon on the Freedom of the Will* (1524). His arguments include that whoever denies the freedom of the will makes God responsible for sin which would be inconsistent with God's righteousness and goodness and that the demands of God upon man assume his freedom, otherwise God would be a tyrant. He takes the view that man is free to accept or reject the grace of God. He writes: "By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them". Erasmus steers a middle course, advocating a hybrid of grace and free will so that salvation is both by merit and grace. God co-operates with man, and man with God. It is a joint venture, a partnership. Erasmus believed man was bound to sin, but had a right to the forgiving mercy of God, if only he would seek this through the means offered him by the Church itself.

A.C. Grayling explains that what makes Erasmus a humanist, albeit a Christian humanist, "is not simply his love of the classics and his application of them in his life and thought, but more importantly his belief in man's rationality and his ability to take moral responsibility for himself" (*What is Good?*, 2003, Phoenix 2004 edn. p113). The Catholic Church, with its emphasis on man as a weak, irrational, fallen creature, eventually disowned him. Ironically, in some of these respects reformers like Luther and Calvin were closer to the Catholic Church than to humanists like Erasmus. Luther, who had been educated in scholastic theology with little humanist influence, didn't believe in free will and replied to Erasmus's work in 1525 with *On Enslaved Will*. Indeed, both Luther and Calvin were dogmatic and absolutist theologians who could not remotely be described as humanists. So, while on a broad historical scale the Reformation was a step towards secularism, in its early years it proved to be a mirror image of the Catholic hegemony beforehand. It is not Luther who is the real champion of free thought, however brave his "Here I stand, I can do no other" speech at the Diet of Worms, but Erasmus and the other humanists of the Renaissance whom we have been discussing.

We can see this truth also in French humanists, many of whom were greatly influenced by Erasmus. The comic novels *Gargantua* and

*Pantagruel*, written by François Rabelais (c.1494-1553), a Franciscan monk, humanist, and physician, are among the most hilarious classics of world literature. His heroes of the title are rude but funny giants travelling in a world full of greed, stupidity and violence. His books were banned by the Catholic Church and later placed on The Index. Rabelais, originally writing under the name Alcofribas Nasier—an anagram of his own name—satirised his society while putting forth his humanist views on educational reform and inherent human goodness. He made vitriolic attacks on the abuses of the Church and the shortcomings of scholastics and monks, but he had no patience with overzealous Protestants either. What Rabelais could not stomach was hypocrisy and repression and for those guilty of these tendencies he reserved his choicest invective. Even humanists themselves are gently ridiculed for their desperate attempts to quench a seemingly unquenchable thirst for knowledge, sometimes beyond human ability to understand.

There is a certain stoicism in Rabelais which is also found in Michel de Montaigne (1533-92), who at the age of thirty-eight gave up the practice of law and retired to his country estate and well-stocked library, where he studied and wrote. In ninety-four essays he set forth his personal views on many subjects although, as he himself said, "I am myself the matter of my book". He confessed that he had been brought up from infancy with the dead, that he had knowledge of the affairs of Rome long before he had any of his own house and that he knew the Tiber before he knew the Seine. He had a maxim inscribed on his library walls from Sextus Empiricus: "To any reason an equal reason can be opposed". He characterised his own approach as 'humanist', treating strictly human activities or "fantasies" concerning subjects that are "matters of opinion, not matters of faith", and treated in "a lay not clerical manner", in contrast to that of the theologians, who nevertheless have a right to respect. He informed his readers that he did not pretend to have the final answer to the subjects he discussed and so he advocated open-mindedness and toleration, rare qualities in a period when France was racked by religious and civil strife.

Montaigne's scepticism was epitomised in his longest essay, *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*, which formed part of the Second Book of essays published in 1580. Sebond was a 15th century Spanish theology professor at Toulouse whose *Theologia naturalis* (Natural Theology) was directed against the notion that reason and faith were irreconcilable. Sebond believed that God gave two books to man: the book of nature and the Bible. At the Fall, man lost the ability to read the book of nature but he can succeed in reading it again if he is enlightened by God and cleansed of original sin. With faith and God's grace, man can read the book of nature correctly.

Much of Montaigne's *Apology* is taken up with an attempt to show that reason without the illumination of grace cannot give us knowledge. He deals not simply with Sebond's theological argument but with all forms of dogmatism and intellectual pretension. His essay demonstrates how like an animal man is, weak in reason, his senses unreliable, his morality irrational. The world is full of diversity and difference, the whole universe is characterised by flux and change.

So the question of how it is possible to be both a Catholic and a sceptic would be answered by Montaigne that, since we cannot grasp the nature of reality by either the senses or reason, only faith remains (according to Richard Popkin in *The History of Skepticism: From Erasmus to Spinoza*, Montaigne was a Catholic fideist, i.e. someone who uses scepticism in order to clear the ground for the entrance of Catholicism). In Montaigne's case this scepticism nevertheless reinforces the conviction that nothing can be known certainly. He famously wrote: "Man is certainly stark mad; he cannot make a worm, yet he will make gods by the dozen". On a purely human level, in his essays Montaigne tried to lay the bases for a new understanding of what it was to be human. Old philosophies had failed to find general solutions, a new search was in order, starting with the individual's self-study. Self-knowledge, one of the main tenets of ancient wisdom, would lead us to a mature acceptance of life in all its contradictions and to a realisation that every person is equally and fully human, a mixture of virtue and vice, that indeed "the souls of emperors and cobblers are cast in the same mould". And since there can be no one perfect system of anything, diversity and tolerance are essential.

It is this affirmation of humility and human universality that, above all, renders Montaigne a humanist. In his *Apology of Raymond Sebond* he asks: "Why should a gosling not say: "All parts of the universe have me in view: the earth serves for me to walk on, the sun to give me light, the stars to breathe their influences into me""? Like the goslings, humankind has tended to define the universe in its own image. So we egoistically imagine a transcendental purpose, mind and consciousness, all clothed in man-made form. But in a universe beyond human comprehension, Montaigne places us with the goslings rather than the gods. Although we are born to quest after truth, "to possess it belongs to a greater power". The world is "but a school of inquiry", and success lies in the attempt.

The most significant figure in English humanism before Bacon and Shakespeare was Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), the friend of Erasmus. More is best known for his *Utopia*, the first important description of an ideal state since Plato's *Republic*. In this work, inspired by the Sermon on the Mount, More criticised his age by using as his spokesman a fictitious

sailor who contrasts the ideal life he has seen in Utopia (The Land of Nowhere) with the harsh conditions of life in England, a sad kingdom lacking in genuine Christian fellowship. More's denunciations centred on the new acquisitive capitalism, which he blamed for the widespread insecurity and misery of the lower classes. More felt that Governments "are a conspiracy of the rich, who, in pretence of managing the public, only pursue their private ends, ...first, that they may, without danger, preserve all that they have so ill acquired, and then, that they may engage the poor to toil and labour for them at as low rates as possible, and oppress them as much as they please".

In Utopia, by contrast, no one is in want because the economy is planned and co-operative and because property is held in common. Utopia is the only true commonwealth, concludes More's imaginary sailor:

"In all other places, it is visible that while people talk of a commonwealth, every man only seeks his own wealth: but there, where no man has any property, all men zealously pursue the good of the public... In Utopia, where every man has a right to every thing, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full, no private man can want any thing; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, none in necessity; and though no man has anything, yet they are all rich; for what can make a man so rich as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties; neither apprehending want himself, nor vexed with the endless complaints of his wife?"

### ***Humanist Philosopher***

The term 'Renaissance' was coined in 1855 by Jules Michelet, who characterised the period as "the discovery of the world, the discovery of man". But, although the word itself is fairly modern, there were contemporary alternatives which indicate that the concept was real enough at the time. In 1550 the painter and art historian Giorgio Vasari used the term '*La Rinascita*' (rebirth) in his *Vite* (Lives of the Artists) to describe developments from 14th to 16th century Italy in the visual arts that brought art closer to nature. Bacon, who was firmly rooted in the European humanist tradition, used another term, 'instauration'—which means restoration or renewal. In the Proem to *The Great Instauration* (1620), writing of himself in the third person, he states: "He thought all trial should be made, whether that commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things, which is more precious than anything on earth, or at least than anything that is of the earth, might by any means be restored to its perfect and original condition, or if that may not be, yet reduced to a better condition than that in which it now is". In other words, the 'instauration'

was in Bacon's view an attempt to return to the pure state of Adam before the Fall when, being in close contact with God and nature, he had insight into all truth and power over the created world. To this end, the plan would be "to commence a total reconstruction of sciences, arts, and all human knowledge, raised upon the proper foundations".

Although Bacon regarded himself as the instigator or prime mover of this project to bring "human dominion over the universe", he acknowledged the role of his humanist predecessors. His writings discussed, among others, Ficino, Paracelsus, Copernicus, Campanella, Erasmus and Galileo. He praised Machiavelli for his empirical analysis of human beings as they actually are, and not as they ought to be. He frequently quoted Montaigne with approval and followed the Frenchman in writing 'Essays'. He respected Bernardo Telesio, whom he called "the first of the moderns", for his separation of philosophy and theology and his advocacy of induction. He duplicated Pico della Mirandola in dividing his plan into six parts, reminding contemporary readers of God's work of the six days of the creation, a device used by Pico in his *Heptaplus* (1489). He was himself a humanist in the most important respects: he was steeped in the literary classics of ancient Greece and Rome and wrote in Latin as well as English; he was predominantly secular in his interests and wrote less about god and more about people; although a genuine Christian, he had a sceptical, yet open-minded outlook; he was committed to truth, reason and tolerance; he championed the struggle for "the relief of man's estate"; he had faith in the essential goodness of human nature; and, last but by no means least, he regarded himself as a great educator.

Yet he also felt that there was too much respect for the past among Renaissance writers who were blinded to the deficiencies of ancient thought by their contempt for medievalism. He believed it would be a great shame if "the bounds of the intellectual globe should be restricted to what was known to the ancients". *The Refutation of Philosophies* (1606-7) was a polemic directed at a number of ancient philosophers, particularly Aristotle and Plato, and similar attacks occur in *Cogita et Visa* (Thoughts and Conclusions), which dates from the same period. Aristotle is accused of mistakenly trying to construct a world out of his own dialectics: "Aristotle's oracle", the syllogism, cannot cope with the obscurity and subtlety of nature though, significantly for Shakespeare parallels, it can be useful in dealing with subjective topics like ethics and politics. As for Plato, he corrupted the study of nature with theology through his doctrine of ideal forms. In *The Advancement of Learning* he states that Democritus, a pre-Socratic, is superior to both Plato and Aristotle because of his greater reliance on experience.

Although writers such as Campanella and Bruno did criticise the Aristotelian system, in Bacon's view humanists had failed to provide a practical programme for the future. Scepticism was not enough because it was contemplative, not active. In *The Advancement* he criticised some humanists for their "delicate learning", which showed a preference for style over substance and eloquence of language in imitation of ancient authors to weightiness of matter and depth of judgment. Instead, he regarded the educator or philosopher as an active agent who manipulated nature in the production of good works. He was forever using the images of the hunt and exploration to represent the pursuit of knowledge and truth and himself as the herald or trumpeter of a new world. Bacon would have completely agreed with Marx that philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, but the point is to change it—or, at least, to develop a philosophy of progress that would act as a guide to change and the discovery of new knowledge. This did not necessarily mean substituting a 'system' in place of Aristotle's; indeed he expressed denied any desire to do this. Bacon did not want to become a master to be worshipped or obeyed but to create a route to be followed (the word 'method' is misleading because Bacon uses it in the sense of delivering knowledge, not discovering knowledge).

The route that he outlined is very similar to the hypothetico-deductive method outlined by Karl Popper and others, even though he is sometimes portrayed as a pure and naive empiricist who simply advocated the collection of facts. According to Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy* Bacon hoped that mere orderly arrangement of data would make the right hypothesis obvious, but his conception of the inductive method is much more subtle than Russell supposes in recognising the importance played by theories. There is a fusion of reason and critically examined experience in the process which renders Bacon very 'modern' in his view of the process of scientific discovery. In *The Idea of History*, R.G. Collingwood regarded Bacon as one of the great masters of the "logic of questioning" and described his theory of experimental science as based on a logic of question and answer.

Bacon was not a scientist in the professional sense: he formulated no new scientific hypothesis and contributed to none of the discoveries destined to alter the scientific horizon. But, first of all, to quote Perez Zagorin, "his opposition to the old regime of knowledge and the authority of the past was nevertheless crucial in the development of science" (*Francis Bacon*, p127). He helped to create a new vision of the world by developing reasoned arguments to show new possibilities for the progress of knowledge. The very idea of 'experimental science' is a tribute to him. He was, in short, the true founder of the idea of progress. Secondly, he

persuasively argued that science is not merely theoretical but can and should transform the condition of life on earth in accordance with the values of compassion, brotherhood and progress. Truth and human welfare are inextricably bound together. Thirdly, the extension of power over nature is never the work of a single investigator but the fruit of an organised, co-operative and collective effort. In short, Bacon added further dimensions to Renaissance Humanism in his emphasis on the practical, social and moral uses of science and philosophy.

This becomes clearer when we consider what he actually says about human affairs. For it is completely wrong to assume that Bacon was only or mainly concerned about the physical world. In fact, as B.H.G. Wormald argues in *Francis Bacon: History, Politics and Science* (1993), Bacon had two equally important and interrelated programmes: the world of nature and the world of man. He maintained that the inductive method was applicable to all the sciences, including ethics and politics, and he also stated that he applied it in his own works. It is not clear to which works he referred, but the fact of the matter is that he recommended reading the works of historians and poets because they show characters in action and the Shakespeare canon would be a paradigm of Bacon's induction as applied to human nature. Moreover, the plays perfectly combine the parts of human learning which he outlines in the *Advancement*: "The parts of human learning have reference to the three parts of man's understanding, which is the seat of learning: history to his memory, poesy to his imagination, and philosophy to his reason". Who can deny that the Shakespeare plays are an inductive analysis of human behaviour through the dramatic fusion of history, poetry and philosophy? They are, indeed, a study of human nature precisely as Bacon advocated.

Bacon's moral philosophy which, as Zagorin suggests, is "fundamentally secular and autonomous in its character", lies fully in the tradition of Renaissance civic humanism in its endorsement of the active life—the *vita activa*—of engagement in the world as a citizen on behalf of the common good. The travesty that he favoured Machiavelli's moral outlook lingers on, despite the evidence to the contrary. Nothing could be more remote from Machiavelli's views than the essay *Of Goodness, and Goodness of Nature*, which opens:

"I take goodness in this sense, the affecting of the weal of men, which is that the Grecians call philanthropia; and the word humanity (as it is used) is a little too light to express it. Goodness I call the habit, and goodness of nature the inclination. This, of all virtues and dignities of the mind, is the greatest, being the character of the Deity: and without it man is a busy, mischievous, wretched thing, no better than a kind of vermin...".

The beautiful ending of this essay is also worth quoting:

"If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island cut off from other lands, but a continent that joins to them: if he be compassionate towards the afflictions of others, it shows that his heart is like the noble tree that is wounded itself when it gives the balm: if he easily pardons and remits offences, it shows that his mind is planted above injuries, so that he cannot be shot: if he be thankful for small benefits, it shows that he weighs men's minds, and not their trash: but, above all, if he have St. Paul's perfection, that he would wish to be an anathema from Christ for the salvation of his brethren, it shows much of a divine nature, and a kind of conformity with Christ himself".

In his essay *Of Wisdom for a Man's Self*, Bacon writes:

"Wisdom for a man's self is, in many branches thereof, a depraved thing: it is the wisdom of rats, that will be sure to leave a house somewhat before it fall: it is the wisdom of the fox, that thrusts out the badger who digged and made room for him; it is the wisdom of crocodiles, that shed tears when they would devour".

In truth Bacon's writings are littered with attacks on selfishness and expediency, and T. Fowler is clearly right when he suggests: "His place is, surely, not with the small class of moralists, who, like Machiavelli, Hobbes and Mandeville, appeal only, or mainly, to the selfish instincts of mankind, or to the reflections of a cool self-love, but with that far larger class who recognise benevolent principles of action as co-ordinate with and often controlling those which merely regard ourselves" (*Francis Bacon*, 1881, p44).

One fact which perhaps induces a misunderstanding of Bacon's ethical concern is his practice of avoiding preaching and moralising. This habit was deliberately cultivated, and in *The Advancement of Learning* he tells us the reason:

"Another precept is, that the mind is brought to anything better, and with more sweetness and happiness, if that whereunto you pretend be not first in the intention, but *tanquam aliud agendo* (as if they doing something else), because of the natural hatred of the mind against necessity and constraint...".

It is therefore all the more interesting that those who most strongly deny the moral intentions of Shakespeare are nevertheless often the first to insist that he is a great moral teacher. It is worth emphasising that Bacon regarded "the poets and writers of histories" as the best "doctors" of moral knowledge, for Shakespeare would appear to have fulfilled this very task and in the very manner that Bacon outlined.

Another source of misunderstanding concerns the nature of Bacon's realism. He believed that ethical philosophy must first come to terms with people as they actually *do* behave. This does not mean that man is basically evil—on the contrary, "the inclination to goodness is imprinted deeply in the nature of man". But man has a tendency to deny this natural goodness and commit evil acts, and it is therefore important to understand why he does so. Moreover, it is essential that the moral philosopher be aware of such evil, otherwise he will be mocked and ridiculed as naive. This point is stressed in the third of Bacon's *Sacred Meditations* (1597), and I can do no better than quote Farrington's summary of the argument, which Bacon calls "the innocence of the dove and the wisdom of the serpent":

"It considers the case of a man who aspires, not to a solitary and private goodness, but to a fructifying and begetting good involving the lives of others. The business of such a man will be with the world; and though his purpose may be as innocent as the dove, it will be necessary for him to show himself acquainted with the cynicism and villainy of the world or risk being taken for a pious simpleton. He must arm himself with the wisdom of the serpent, but need not on that account fear pollution any more than a sunbeam which shines into a privy" (*The Christianity of Francis Bacon, op.cit.*).

A similar discussion occurs in *The Advancement of Learning* (Book 2, Chapter 21). Bacon is dealing with social good, which he divides into two parts: the individual's duty as a member of a state; and his duty in his profession, vocation or place. In regard to the latter, he stresses the importance of dealing with the "frauds, cautels, impostures and vices of every profession". Moreover, the treatment should not be done satirically or cynically, as is customary, but seriously and wisely. His argument is that exposure in itself can assist in the attack on evil: "For, as the fable goeth of the basilisk, that if he see you first, you die for it; but if you see him first, he dieth; so it is with deceits and evil arts; which, if they be first espied they leese their life; but if they prevent, they endanger". It is at this point that Bacon makes the frequently misunderstood remark: "We are much beholden to Machiavel and others, that write what men do, and not what they ought to do". Yet the meaning is crystal clear: by frankly explaining 'deceits and evil arts', Machiavelli and similar writers enable their opponents to attack these acts at their face value. Indeed Bacon continues:

"For it is not possible to join serpentine wisdom with columbine innocency, except men know exactly all the conditions of the serpent: his baseness and going upon his belly, his volubility and lubricity, his envy and sting, and the rest; that is, all forms and natures of evil: for

without this, virtue lieth open and unfenced. Nay, an honest man can do no good upon those that are wicked to reclaim them, without the help of the knowledge of evil. For men of corrupted minds presuppose that honesty groweth out of simplicity of manners, and believing in preachers, schoolmasters, and men's exterior language; so as, except you make them perceive that you know the utmost reaches of their own corrupt opinions, they despise all morality; non recipit stultus verba prudentiae nisi ea dixeris quae versantur in corde ejus (a fool receiveth not the words of prudence, unless you say what is already in his heart)...".

What we can therefore say is that Bacon's ethic is, first of all, negative in its call for a serious exposure of the nature and causes of evil. In more positive terms, Bacon does not outline a systematic moral philosophy. In the *Advancement* he says that he has been content "to tune the instruments of the Muses, that they may play that have better hands". But, despite this touch of modesty, at least two clear principles may be elicited from Bacon's various writings. First, morality at least partly consists in the rationalisation of the passions: "The end of logic is to teach forms of argument, in order to guard the understanding, not to ensnare it; in like manner, the end of ethics is so to compose the passions, that they may fight on the side of reason, and not invade it". Note too that, according to Bacon, "rhetorical art" (drama?) also has this function: it should "contract a confederacy between the reason and imagination against the affection". This emphasis on the importance of reason in controlling the emotions is found throughout Bacon's works.

The second principle is to establish a balance between the self and others. Bacon's approach is the heart of liberalism: "the sum of behaviour is to retain a man's dignity, without intruding upon the liberty of others". And this idea is repeated in the essay *Of Wisdom for a Man's Self*: "Be so true to thyself as thou be not false to others". In other words, only pursue your own ends to the extent that they do not conflict with the ends of other people. Where they do, Bacon is emphatic that the public or common good should prevail over private or individual good. Bacon never believed that science and technology, *as such*, represented the salvation of man. The liberation of man can be painfully achieved only through the labour, the works, the well-being of the whole of humanity. Humanism believes that human well-being or, in Bacon's words, "the relief of man's estate" through "the effecting of all things possible", requires the responsible search for truth through freedom, reason, empirical research and tolerance. This is exactly what Bacon believed. It was, he said, his hope that "there may spring helps to man, and a line and race of inventions that may in some degree subdue and overcome the necessities and miseries of humanity".

### ***Humanist Poet***

Shakespeare shared all the characteristics of a humanist that we have discussed. As we have seen, he was a man of the highest culture and a large familiarity with the classics, which are of central importance in the plays and in the structure of his imagination. The works are saturated with his favourite classical authors, especially Ovid, Virgil, Seneca, Plautus, Cicero, Terence and Plutarch. Indeed, he has the ancient mythology and history at his finger tips. He also shared the Renaissance desire to seek the truth about human nature. The ancient adage *nosce teipsum*—know thyself—was a key principle of humanist thought and Hamlet's speech about holding the mirror up to nature implies that poetry and drama can help us to acquire that wisdom. By doing so, we can better guard against the barbarism lurking below the surface which the baser side of human nature creates and instead promote the more civilised values. As Robin Headlam Wells writes, Shakespeare's plays show their humanist origins in the themes they dramatise: "Repeatedly, they come back to those matters that concern Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*: 'the properties of government', 'our city's institutions', 'the terms for common justice', 'the nature of our people'" (*Shakespeare's Humanism*, 2005, p27).

At first glance, Shakespeare's brand of humanism seemed closer to Montaigne than Bacon. True, he appeared to be much less religious than Montaigne but, as we have already argued, the great nihilistic speeches of Hamlet, Macbeth and Lear have distinct echoes in the Psalms and the Book of Job, and Shakespeare's Christian ethic was subtly and deeply woven into the works. About human nature, both Montaigne and Shakespeare have been described as 'disillusioned' Humanists who stressed the limitations of reason and understanding, in contrast to the optimism of Bacon, Erasmus and most other Renaissance writers, who believed that cultivating reason would lead to a better understanding of how to act and thus to great benefits for society as a whole. Shakespeare's apparent scepticism about such matters is exemplified in Hamlet's famous speech: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (Act II, Scene II). This appears to be a counterblast to Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

Yet it is hardly the full picture. Hamlet in the early part of the play is a confused and disillusioned idealist. But he matures as he grows older. Ultimately the play challenges Hamlet's early cynicism. Similarly, the author himself shows progression from the tragedies to the late romances,

where the message is quintessentially humanist. Prospero in *The Tempest* is a metaphor for the civilising power of the artist and educator whose 'liberal arts' tame the tempests in the human spirit. He exhibits the ennobling qualities of compassion, generosity, friendship, wisdom, and so on. He does not seek to retaliate against those who wronged him; he seeks only to bring them out of the darkness of hatred and revenge. In this respect, it has been suggested that he is like the Renaissance humanist who builds a bridge for the Dark Ages to cross into the enlightenment of a new age in which humankind renounces its old barbarity and savagery. Bernard D. Grebanier writes: "Shakespeare is perhaps the perfect expression of Renaissance humanism. His profound sympathy for humanity enabled him to pierce to the very core of his characters; his unexcelled gifts as a poet made his men and women unforgettable creatures of flesh and blood. This may be said as much of the best of his earliest plays as of *The Tempest*, where Prospero is himself a kind of incarnation of the best of what the Renaissance had extended to mankind" (*English Literature and Its Backgrounds*, 1950, p242).

It is also important to stress that, like many Renaissance humanists, Shakespeare delighted more in presenting issues than in espousing systems, and held critical awareness, as opposed to doctrinal rectitude, to be the highest possible good. An increasing number of writers are becoming aware of the deliberately dialectical and provisional nature of his works and the fact that they dramatise the unresolvable tensions that are the fundamental conditions of life. Similarly, his unparalleled realism may be seen as the ultimate embodiment, in poetic terms, of the intense concern for specificity endorsed by humanists from the 14th century on.

Shakespearean drama is a treasure trove of the disputes that frustrated and delighted humanism, including (among many others) action versus contemplation, theory versus practice, art versus nature, *res* versus *verbum*, monarchy versus republic, human dignity versus human depravity, and individualism versus communality. In treating of these polarities, he generally proceeds by presenting structures of balanced contraries rather than syllogistic endorsements of one side or another. In so doing, he achieves a higher realism, transcending the mere imitation of experience and creating, in all its conflict and fertility, a mirror of mind itself. Since the achievement of such psychological and cultural self-awareness was the primary goal of humanistic inquiry, and since humanists agreed that poetry was an uncommonly effective medium for this achievement, Shakespeare must be acknowledged as a pre-eminent humanist.

Like Bacon, the mastermind behind Shakespeare eschews moralising. Bacon's sentiment that preaching constrains the mind is echoed by Lucio

in *Measure for Measure*: "And yet, to say the truth, I had as lief have the foppery of freedom as the morality of imprisonment". The absence of an *obvious* ethical viewpoint has led some critics to assume that Shakespeare has none. Dr. Johnson lamented that "he sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose". Yet Johnson forgets the Renaissance habit of instructing by pleasing.

Consider Hamlet's 'mirror up to nature' speech. Here the playwright seems to be telling us what he is trying to do in his plays, and Johnson concludes that Shakespeare is indeed a great poet of human nature in the sense of laying it bare in all its great variety. But H. Levin comments: "The Elizabethan conception of art as the glass of nature was ethical rather than realistic, for it assumed that, by contemplating situations which reflected their own, men and women could mend their ways and act with greater resolution thereafter" (*The Question of Hamlet*, 1959, p157). In other words, Shakespeare is doing precisely what Bacon is advocating: by exposing the weaknesses, cynicism and evil in the world and the destructive consequences which they inevitably produce, the writer is educating his readers to avoid the same mistakes. And he is doing it through 'the foppery of freedom' rather than the 'morality of imprisonment'.

In fact, Shakespeare states this purpose clearly in Jaques' speech in *As You like It*:

*"Invest me in my motley; give me leave  
To speak my mind, and I will through and through  
Cleanser the foul body of th'infected world,  
If they will patiently receive my medicine".*

A motley is a jester's garb, and it is important to consider the role of the Fool in Shakespeare, not just to pander to the popular taste for clowning, or even as a kind of Greek chorus but, even more important; as someone who speaks the truth. We expect a clown to entertain, but by giving him this license we enable him to go beyond his expected role and become the 'fool' who voices wisdom, the 'madman' who speaks for sanity. In a more general sense, while Shakespeare's ostensible purpose was to please, his underlying aim was to instruct, and it is my contention that he used a Fool's garb or 'weed' (the actor William) in order to do so.

As we have seen, Bacon argues that the moralist must acquaint himself with the failings of mankind, a task which involves the study of the characters and passions of people. As K. Fischer writes: "Here Bacon takes the same view of ethics that Shakespeare takes of dramatic poetry. That we may become acquainted with human character Bacon directs us to the source from which Shakespeare has derived his dramas—to the

historians and the poets, especially the Roman" (*Francis Bacon of Verulam*, 1857, p285). Fischer also suggests that in faithfully presenting "that great spectacle of human vicissitudes", Shakespeare is following Bacon's views regarding the internal foundation and external circumstances of human character and that: "There is as great a diversity among characters as there is variety in their factors" (*ibid*, p285).

L.C. Knights draws attention to the realistic element in Shakespeare's political wisdom when he writes: "It is not of course Machiavellian or modern realism ('how realistic is the realist?' is a question that the plays force us to ask), but it is certainly based on a clear perception of the actualities of political situations". Knights goes on to describe this realism as "fundamentally a refusal to allow the abstract and general to obscure the personal and specific". If Knights had not been so blinded by his misguided notion of Bacon's responsibility for a 17th century "dissociation of sensibility", he could have quoted from him at this point:

"For knowledge drawn freshly, and in our view, out of particulars, knoweth the way best to particulars again; and it hath much greater life for practice when the discourse attendeth upon the example, than when the example attendeth upon the discourse. For this is no point of order, as it seemeth at first, but of substance: for when the example is the ground, being set down in a history at large, it is set down with all circumstances, which may sometimes control the discourse thereupon made, and some supply it as a very pattern for action; whereas the examples alleged for the discourse' sake are cited succinctly, and without particularity, and carry a servile aspect towards the discourse which they are brought in to make good" (*Advancement*).

Shakespeare's plays are profoundly moral and deal with the deepest ethical themes and issues. The clearest indication of Shakespeare's moral purpose is that evil never triumphs in the plays. It always suffers ultimate defeat. *Othello* does not end with Iago gloating over the dead bodies of Othello and Desdemona. *Hamlet* does not end with the prince destroying his enemies and ruling Denmark happily ever after. Even characters who are essentially good are punished for their evil acts; so in a sense Hamlet dies for the killing of Polonius and Romeo for slaying Tybalt. The fact that evil loses in the end is certainly not strictly 'realistic' and in this sense Shakespeare's 'feigned' histories—to use Bacon's language—'submit the shows of things to the desires of the mind'.

Despite its pervading presence, evil is always shown as being avoidable. Shakespeare invariably stresses man's moral responsibility for his actions. Hamlet, Othello, Lear and Macbeth all suffer for their sins, not because of some divine decree written in the stars. To be sure, there are often

portents, such as earthquakes, comets and eclipses, as in *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*, but they are usually presented as a sign of God's anger to come if fallen human beings do not repent and avoid evil.

Again, when we seek to discover Shakespeare's basic ethical principles, we find a lack of fixed, predetermined dogma. And, again, there are a few exceptions, the importance of reason being an obvious one. 'Unbitted lusts' and passions, combined with egotism, overcoming reason is a constant theme. The title of *The Tempest* alone symbolises the storms of the emotions. Prospero seeks revenge for his banishment, but the movement of the play is towards the recovery of his humanity. In forgiveness he finds not only a way towards justice but also a road back into human society itself. And by submitting his capacity to reason, Prospero epitomises Renaissance Humanist thought: "Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury do I take part: the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance". In *The Tempest* we see Shakespeare's supreme humanism at work, expressing not only a feeling for human fallibility but also an ability to see man as a potential godlike creature with powers of moral judgment finally equal to the emotional struggles these powers engender.

As in Bacon, so in Shakespeare we find also this preoccupation with 'balance' between self and others. It is noticeable that all Shakespeare's villains are individualists, motivated primarily by egotism. Richard of Gloucester sums it up: "I am myself alone". Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well* avers: "Simply the thing I am shall make me live". And Iago says: "In following him, I follow but myself". The selfish ambitions of such people, or their lust or envy, lead to chaos and disaster. Moreover, by asserting themselves at the expense of others, they become isolated not only from other people but also from themselves. So, after the death of Duncan, Macbeth confesses that: "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself". The evil acts snowball, and the result is described by Albany in *King Lear*:

*"If that the heavens do not their visible spirits  
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,  
It will come  
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,  
Like monsters of the deep" (Act 4, Scene 2).*

Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, and so on, are all faced with the choice of putting themselves or others first. Their tragedies therefore arise ultimately from their selfishness. Yet, it is curious irony that one of Shakespeare's great 'messages' is often assumed to lie in the advice of the selfish opportunist Polonius:

*"This above all—to thine own self be true,*

*And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man" (Hamlet, Act 1 Scene 2).*

Despite the beauty of the words, the sentiment is assuredly not Shakespeare's. Polonius thinks that we should put ourselves and our own interests first. Shakespeare believes precisely what Bacon says in the essay *Of Wisdom for a Man's Self*: "Divide with reason between self-love and society; and be so true to thyself as thou be not false to others". Bacon is saying that we should only be true to our own ends *in so far as* they do not conflict with others; while Polonius is offering purely selfish advice. Of course, if we are true only to our own ends, then logically we can only appear 'false' to others by their standards, not by our own. Both statements are surely written by the same person, aware of the subtleties and ironies inherent in the word alterations.

On the positive side, Shakespeare extols the same virtues as Bacon. Thus when Lady Macbeth suggests to her husband that his nature is "too full o' the milk of human kindness", she wants him to become less human and more of a monster. An essential feature of kindness is the capacity for fellow-feeling, and clearly Shakespeare's good characters have this quality in common. It is also this quality that shines through the entire works and causes commentators to refer to Shakespeare's great compassion. Indeed, love of humanity—or what Bacon calls '*philanthropia*'—is the overriding theme of the plays (the tragedies illustrate the loss of this love).

Repentance and forgiveness are continually stressed and Portia's great speech about the quality of mercy in *The Merchant of Venice* expresses sentiments which surely lie deeply in the heart of the author. Note, in particular, the end where she says of mercy that:

*"It is an attribute to God himself;  
And earthly power doth them show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice" (Act 4, Scene 1).*

These lines echo the end of Bacon's essay *Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature* quoted earlier, when he says that love of one's fellows "shows much of a divine nature, and a kind of conformity with Christ himself".

In reading Shakespeare and Bacon we come face to face with the pinnacle of Renaissance Humanism. There is the same desire to make human beings the focus of attention and to write about universal moral and philosophical problems; the same superficial absence of moral preaching combined with deep moral concerns; the same belief in balance or moderation in the claims of self and others; and the same emphasis on reason mixed with compassion and love of humanity. This identity of moral thinking is another reason for believing that Bacon wrote Shakespeare.