

ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE AND BAROQUE ART

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THE artistic vitality of Europe around 1600 was remarkable in many centres and in many arts, but two seem to me to have had a decisive pre-eminence: the theatre in London, and the visual arts in Rome. The two are not generally thought of as contemporary because Roman baroque is the distinctive art of the seventeenth century, whereas English drama is vaguely thought of as renaissance and called Elizabethan, although the bulk of it is later. It is true that the greatest of baroque artists was Bernini, whose career very nearly spanned the seventeenth century, prodigious both in his teens and in his seventies; whereas the greatest of English dramatists was of course Shakespeare who died in 1616. There was a slight overlap, but not much. It is more striking that art historians generally see the revival of Roman art as dating from the arrival in Rome in the early 1590s of Caravaggio and Annibale Carracci. Both were dead by 1610, so that the first energies of baroque erupted in Rome between 1590 and 1610—and that almost exactly corresponds with Shakespeare's career in London. The other supreme baroque artist, Rubens, does more to link the two cities: he served as court painter to the Duke of Mantua from 1600 to 1608; he copied some of Caravaggio's paintings and purchased some for his master (they were later sold to Charles I); he also made sketches from Carracci's masterpiece, the ceiling in the Palazzo Farnese. When the grand art collections began to be formed in England by Arundel, Buckingham, and Charles,¹ Rubens was a key figure in their understanding.

For the artists, I have consulted various books and articles, but relied most heavily on: J. Shearman, *Mannerism*, Harmondsworth 1967; M. Kitson, *Caravaggio*, London 1969; J. Summerson, *Inigo Jones*, Harmondsworth 1966; P. Cabanne, *Rubens*, London 1967; H. Hibbard, *Bernini*, Harmondsworth 1965. References to Shakespeare are to the relevant volumes of the Arden Edition, London 1954—

¹ In the second and third decades of the seventeenth century.

He came to London as ambassador and later painted the magnificent ceiling panels of James I for the banqueting house which Inigo Jones had built in Whitehall in 1619. Jones had been in Italy from 1613 to 1615, and had probably been there before about the turn of the century. His series of court masques with Ben Jonson's texts began in 1605, based on Italian designs from the late sixteenth century.

Jones alone might offer direct influence within Shakespeare's lifetime; but I am not concerned to claim direct influence. An artist, even a great artist, can be influential only in a receptive environment. We are apt to believe that the rapid diffusion of new artists' work nowadays is due to rapid communications; in fact, it is still strangely selective and must relate to the readiness of some societies and the unreadiness of others. Rubens was instantly accepted in early seventeenth century England, which argues that London was waiting for him to happen. Why London and Rome should have seen simultaneous eruptions in different arts is naturally a very obscure question. There are some resemblances in their history during the sixteenth century which may (I do not know enough to be sure) provide hints. Reformation London was artistically barren until the last two decades of the century; so, precisely, was counter-reformation Rome. There was, of course, one major difference: Roman baroque was largely, though not exclusively, religious; English drama was almost exclusively secular, though not necessarily pagan. But even this difference does depend on a similarity, for both were governed by ecclesiastical pressure: in England, the religious drama was finally suppressed, and explicit allusion to God or heaven was forbidden in the profane public theatres; in Rome, the Council of Trent had commanded a public art that was purely Christian. It is familiar (and even exaggerated) that the London theatres were attended by a wide audience, from courtier to relatively low-paid worker. Roman baroque is associated with the Papacy at its most ostentatious; but its public monuments in churches were designed for a universal audience.

What I am concerned with, therefore, is not influence but broad analogy; with changes in the aesthetic structure of Shakespeare's plays which reflect changes in their imaginative substance. I did not arrive at this peculiar study from a theoretical devotion to inter-disciplinary study, but from a personal discovery of Bavarian baroque in Munich about a dozen years ago, which led me back to Bernini. In Bernini I saw unexpected

illumination of problems about *Macbeth* which had puzzled me for many years. Bernini eventually took me to Rome, and Rome produced also Carracci and Caravaggio and a far more detailed illumination of some general problems about Shakespeare's career as a whole. I think this can be most clearly expressed in terms of his comedies. The earliest and the latest are equally based on romance themes. Even *The Comedy of Errors* surrounds a Roman farce with a story of long-lost parents and children wandering on journeys and under threat of death in their search for eventual reunion; that is also the plot of *Pericles*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a magic play, animated by the anarchic spirit of Puck, governed by Oberon who was probably doubled with Theseus; *The Tempest* again concentrates on magic under Ariel's anarchic spirit, governed by Prospero who is himself both Duke and magician. Yet, despite these likenesses, the plays are obviously radically different; understanding that difference has continually proved difficult.

We tend to think of baroque art as simply an extension of the renaissance; superficially it appears so, but that is due to a conscious revival of classical forms in early baroque art and architecture. Between the two lies nearly the whole of the sixteenth century, productive of amazingly varied and experimental works, largely anti-classical in effect. The point can be clarified rapidly with some pictures. In *The Coronation of the Virgin* (Plate VI) early Raphael characteristically frames the painting in the shape of a classical arch; the rounded top is reserved for heavenly beings who are not occupying the same space as the human beings below, indeed they are frequently cut off by a horizontal bank of clouds. The human figures have an extraordinary calm but are not otherwise distorted, nor are they notably individualized. The composition is altogether symmetrical. The next picture was painted roughly a hundred years later. In his *Communion of St. Jerome* (Plate VII), Domenichino also uses a classical arch to frame his picture; but this time it is an actual piece of architecture, heavier than Raphael's classicism, and that does establish the cherubim as within the same space as the human figures. They are placed far off centre, and though they roughly balance the off-centre figure of St. Jerome below, the composition is far from symmetry, or even a simple diagonal. It has to move around the group of figures who attract attention by being strongly individualized: the painting relies on the characterization which used to be Shakespeare's chief

fame. St. Jerome himself is painted with precise naturalism, and another structure moves backwards in depth from him into the detailed naturalism of the landscape.

It is manifest that there have been dramatic developments between those two paintings. They were, if anything, more astonishing than the contrast conveys. Raphael's later works are less known here because they were mostly grand designs executed by assistants; he became extraordinarily inventive—so did Michelangelo, but he became more and more frustrated of achievement. Both seem to have moved further and further from classical calm into forms that are either contorted with tension or relaxed into elegance, or both at once: battle scenes that seem to be performed as ballets. The result was mannerism. The difference is immediately obvious. In *The Madonna del collo lungo* by Parmigianino (Plate VIII) the central figure dominates with her own version of calm, and her visible body has its own sensuality; but all this is arrived at through the most extraordinary distortions. The long neck by which the painting is known is only one—her thighs must be even more elongated and so, more disturbingly, is her baby. The literal centre of the picture is the Madonna's navel, but light on skin shifts attention from her remote head to the gathering of seductive angels squeezed together in defiance of symmetry on the left-hand side, finally exposing the long and beautiful leg of the nearest angel who, if probably androgynous, is certainly not asexual. The remarkable sensuality is focused in the emblematic objects, the urn on the left (a perfect echo of the thigh below it) and the dominant pillar on the right. Finally, below the pillar in a quite different scale is the strange El Greco-like male in the bottom right-hand corner.

Elegance dominates the image, and its sensuality is largely shifted to off-centre figures and emblematic objects. Mannerist paintings are continually surprising: they tend to insist on the unexpected, to defy symmetry, and to contrive a predominant elegance out of whatever moral or emotional contortions they display. But that is Florentine; later Roman mannerism was characteristically merely pretty and slight. After Barocci's *Rest on the flight into Egypt* (Plate IX), Caravaggio's work is not merely surprising, it is a revolutionary shock. In *The Conversion of Saul* (Plate X) Parmigianino's elegant elongations are aggressively reversed by the dominating rump of a foreshortened cart-horse. The picture has a double composition: as first seen, it is oddly square, governed by the horse's buttocks and the groom's head at

the top right, Saul's head at the bottom right, and extended by the red cloak to the bottom left-hand corner. That is parallel to the frame and would seem almost bas-relief if the horse were not so decidedly three-dimensional. The other composition is quite different: it depends on the illusion of depth, a spatial composition which focuses on Saul, somewhere about his solar plexus; for that, the horse acts simply as a frame, excluding the space above and creating depth in the darkness between its legs. The curious thing is that you cannot look at both compositions at once: like many optical illusions, you see either one or the other. In this case, you are almost certain to see the horse first and Saul second. In other words, Caravaggio creates the idea of miracle by exploiting an understanding of illusion. Miracle it is: if you cut off the painting from Saul's hands down the dramatic intensity evaporates and you are left with only a boring domestic study of a horse with a fine old 'character' of a groom. So the miracle is essential, but the dominant impact remains the aggressive actuality.

That brings out what seems to me to have been a problem for Caravaggio, to affirm the miracle without losing the actuality. It is more acute in an earlier painting of St. Mary Magdalene (Plate XI). When I first saw this, I thought it dull. It seemed to be a private study of a quiet girl brooding, or perhaps dozing, on a hard chair in a bare room. Her dress is beautifully painted, and so are the carelessly disposed trivia on the floor. Only the title suggests the holy prostitute. But the dress is a shade too splendid for the bare room: she seems to be Cinderella just after the ball. But she *is* the Magdalene, for she has the red-gold hair and the golden robe of traditional iconography. The broken string of pearls declares her profession, and her relation to it, and the broken chains suggest not only the source of the nice clothes, but also the bondage involved. The flask should be oil, but it looks very much like Roman wine from which she has been drinking, modestly, alone.

In short, it becomes a very interesting and moving painting once it is explored. Its quietude is the very opposite of aggressive, as the very plausible image of a woman is neither aggressive whore nor idealized saint. But its full interest is generated between the actual painting and the myth expressed in traditional iconography; the myth itself is scarcely in the painting at all. Only half the idea can really be said to be represented. In fact, tradition has been inverted, and that is done even more strikingly in Caravaggio's *St. John in the Wilderness* (Plate XII),

the painting beside it in the Doria Gallery. The normally ascetic figure of the Baptist has become an erotic youth (wittily borrowed from the Sistine Chapel), and his emblematic lamb is here a full-grown ram returning John's embrace. The startling projection of the figure is made even more disturbing by the leer with which the boy involves us as voyeurs in complicity with his plausible but unorthodox indulgence.

Light is important there, but it is not clear that it is divine. It certainly is in *The Conversion of Saul*, and the idea of grace becomes more explicit in *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (Plate XIII). The initial impact here is made by the brutal and disturbingly sensual central figure of the murderer, displacing the elegant courtly figures to the left, and forming a solid triangle with the other two naked figures below. Matthew's hand is raised in futile resistance. But there, as with *Saul*, the picture reconstructs into another composition, as the raised hand meets the palm offered by the very different nakedness of the angel who twists so attractively over his cloud. The violent world still dominates, but by a play on structures, almost a visual pun, a hint of angelic grace descending is made explicit (as it is in the end of *Hamlet*).

Caravaggio's later works, painted in exile, include a number in prison settings, such as the tragically severe *Beheading of John the Baptist*. The most extraordinary is *The Seven Acts of Mercy* in Naples (Plate XIV). Identifying all the merciful works is difficult, but feeding the hungry is the most striking and bizarre image on the right, where the old man leans through the bars to suck the woman's breast. Into the prison from above sweep a group of angels escorting the Virgin Mary. They are emphatically within the same space, the divine is no longer remote from the human, and the whole complex composition finally contains both naturalistic and mythic dimensions in one.

I offer this selective account of the development from mannerism to Caravaggio in order to draw an analogy that begins with Shakespeare's earliest comedies, which are in several obvious respects mannerist. *Love's Labour's Lost* evolves through four acts its fantasy plot of courtiers and ladies playing elegant sexual games in brilliantly elegant language; but towards the end of the fifth act the messenger of death, Mercadé, destroys the jokes that have, in any case, become uncomfortably cruel, and reorientates the play to a level of perception that could hardly have been anticipated. It is a superb ending, but its

achievement depends on a startling violation of expected symmetry. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is less elegant, but its ending¹ shifts through a whole series of surprises: an extraordinary band of outlaws, a preposterous reunion of friends at the expense of their girl-friends, and finally an even more preposterous *ménage à quatre* of friends and ladies together: 'One feast, one house, one mutual happiness'.² Which is highly improbable. Symmetry of a kind is achieved, but probability is flouted. There is, no doubt, a commentary on the natural, but neither play could conceivably be called naturalistic; nor are they seriously disturbing.

Troilus and Cressida, however, notoriously is, both in its effect of demolishing fantasy worlds in favour of an idea of reality which makes any concept of romance absurd, and in the insistence on a brutal sexuality which concludes with Pandarus bequeathing us his venereal diseases and so involving us in a complicity which articulates that disturbing leer on the face of John the Baptist. Technically, too, it is like Caravaggio in making its point by total reversal of traditional representation, in this case the heroic myth of the Trojan War.

All's Well That Ends Well is much closer to the romance world of *Two Gentlemen*, in plot at least, for in treatment it is vastly different. It is almost a fairy story, of the servant girl who magically cures the King and marries the Duke. Helena is a sort of Cinderella, but it is characteristic of the play that the social differences on which it depends are made minimal. Caste snobbery provokes Bertram to reject her, but she is herself a gentlewoman and only slightly beneath him. Similarly, the King is more competent administrator than elevated royalty: 'I fill a place, I know't'.³ Reticence is characteristic of the play, both in its restrained language, the absence of imagery, and in the self-concealment of its characters. The plot proceeds by traps that successively expose the central figures, Helena, Parolles, Bertram. Its magical core, the curing of the King,⁴ is made strangely ambiguous: it may be achieved by herbs which Helena has inherited from her doctor father, or by divine grace, or by pagan magic, or—as Lafew continually hints—by sexual arousal which cures the King of his fears of old age and impotence—a natural magic. All are suggested, none is decisively supported, and in the tone of the play the naturalistic

¹ Acts iv and v (Act v is very brief).

³ I. ii. 69.

² v. iv. 174.

⁴ II. i and iii.

explanation appears the most acceptable. In the final scene, Bertram's callow bluster is very sharply exposed in a way which makes his final recognition of Helena as his wife virtually unacceptable. Theoretically, she is restored to him with the magic of a resurrection, but the 'miracle' has no supernatural resonance. *All's Well* cultivates brilliantly a naturalism and a reticence that is very much of the same order as Caravaggio's Magdalene; and, as with Caravaggio, it seems to me that Shakespeare, having devised the linguistic and dramatic means to naturalize his myth, is left with a problem how, at the same time, to articulate it as myth.

That becomes more explicit in *Measure for Measure*, the play which most strongly suggests Caravaggio's later work. Justice and Mercy are announced as its themes; three of its five acts are set in prison; it has a demonstrative structure which could have resembled a morality play, but does not because of the strong individuality with which most of its characters are presented. It is not reticent, but works often by conflicting eloquences: Angelo's, Isabella's, the Duke's, and Claudio's; but they extend also to Lucio and the pimp Pompey, as well as to the drunken murderer Barnardine who confounds the naïvety of romance plotting by merely refusing to repent, or die.¹ The last third of the play is directed towards a romantic reconciliation alluding to New Testament ethics, but whether it arrives is still uncertain. The Duke pronounces universal matrimony, but the final grouping is strikingly ambiguous: Isabella has not responded to his proposal; Angelo has preferred death to marrying Mariana; and Lucio has described marrying a punk as 'pressing to death, / Whipping, and hanging'.² Barnardine has no mate, and seems no more reconciled to life than he was to death. It is a superb play, disturbing in its sexuality and in its sense of actuality; but it does also incorporate an idea of grace within the city setting, however uncertain its validity. It has much in common with Caravaggio's *Seven Acts of Mercy*.

With these plays, then, it seems to me that Shakespeare reaches a point directly analogous with Caravaggio's late work. Caravaggio died, and high baroque developed in ways which seem to me intelligible, though scarcely predictable. I have stressed that Rubens studied his work with enthusiasm; so did Bernini. They also studied Carracci, who was generally less startling. Two series of religious paintings seem to me particu-

¹ iv. iii. 52-62.

² v. i. 520-1.

larly interesting. One is of *The Assumption of the Virgin*, where his several variations on human flight are strange. The other is of *The Pietà*; their chronological sequence is uncertain, but the one I find most interesting is again in the Doria-Pamphilj Gallery (Plate XV). The Virgin is highly formalized, presenting rather than mourning her son, and governing the painting with a statuesque calm at once suggesting Raphael; but she is in complete contrast to the dramatically dead body of Christ which seems almost to slide off her lap and out of the picture. It is as though Carracci has made a composite picture out of two contrasting genres. That is certainly what he did, though out of far more than two, in his exuberant pagan masterpiece, the Farnese ceiling, painted around 1600. The elaborate architecture is supported by Roman herms, and decorated with medallions, nude youths, putti, and many more; it is dominated by a central panel of *The Triumph of Bacchus*, and at each end are huge easel paintings of Polyphemus (Plate XVI). But this is not actually an easel painting at all, nor has it a frame: the entire ceiling is paint on a smooth barrel vault with curved ends, above the cornice there is no sculptural detail of any kind at all. It is, in other words, a fantastic exercise in illusion. Everything here is paint: the herms, the Michelangelo youths, the Raphael Galatea, the pissing putto, the medallion of Hero and Leander, are all on a single plane. But the camera does partly spoil it, because it makes the tricks too successful. They are amazing in fact, but can only be so if they are seen to be illusions, and the wit and delight of the work depends on that awareness.

To call Carracci's ceiling miraculous would be metaphoric; but I suggested that Caravaggio's use of optical illusion in *Saul* and *St. Matthew* was more than that: the hyperbole is the point of the picture. So it is with Bernini. The celebrated Cornaro Chapel in St. Maria della Vittoria (Plates XVII, XVIII) consists of the entire chapel, not simply of the central image of St. Teresa in ecstasy. A classical arch frames the complex, as in Domenichino's *St. Jerome*, but here a secondary illusion creates space in the sky beyond the ceiling. The two pictorial images are executed in radically different media—marble sculpture and painted stucco—so that they are at once totally distinct, and yet extensions of each other.

The resources of architectural perspective are deployed to make a chapel out of a shallow bay; sculpture makes the chapel like a theatre. The side boxes contain groups of Cornaro Cardinals supposed to be regarding the miracle, but actually

some are in conversation, some in private thought, none is noticing the central group. It is a witty comment, focusing attention on the illusory nature of the stone vision. The cunning direction of natural light (from a concealed window above) on to the central group generates the illusion of divine light accessible only to imaginative perception. We have, as the Cardinals do not, a miraculous vision; but they are an essential part of the visible mechanics that produce the miracle. There is no ultimate deception: the work of art succeeds in creating miracle only if the technics of illusion are intelligible as well. Baroque is the imaginative art of a rationalist age; it must have owed much to Galileo's work on lenses, and contributed much to Newton's *Optics*.

The Cornaro Chapel depends, of course, on controlling the spectator's viewpoint. The church is so shaped that you are not aware of the chapel until you are right in front of it: the visual brilliance attracts you towards the central group until the altar rail prevents you going too far. From then on the extraordinary tactile quality of Bernini's marble takes over, setting up a tension between the desire to touch and the enforced distance. The counter-reformation ban on nakedness is strictly observed, but the sensuality is overwhelming. It is at first the angel, rather than Teresa, who has a physical body: like Caravaggio's angels, he is at once hermaphroditic and immensely sexual. The vision is literally a realization of St. Teresa's account in her *Life*; Bernini echoes the matter-of-factness of Teresa's prose in the witty detachedness of the Cardinals, and he combines the religious ecstasy with the sexual literalness to extraordinary effect. The angel's delighted and knowing look (a positive version of John the Baptist's complicit leer) directs attention to Teresa and finally on to her face. This is the most perfect representation I know in art of a woman in orgasm. It is also the climax of the Cornaro Chapel: between it and the ceiling above there is no literal death, the assumption into heaven is achieved as an expansion of the experience in that face, the human ecstasy is the miracle that becomes divine.

St. Teresa wrote of actual visionary experience which, as she insisted, was involuntary and not always welcome. In art, the representation is necessarily voluntary. I have described the Chapel in dramatic terms, probably too much so; but it is essentially dramatic, and more than that, it is theatrical. Baroque art is essentially theatrical, just as seventeenth-century theatre became increasingly visual; both tend towards synaes-

thesia, and the characteristic baroque invention was opera. The rationale of Bernini's art is provided by the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. His writing, even more than Teresa's, seems so bare, dry and practical that its sensational reception can be surprising. But sensational it literally is: the exercitant is directed to a systematic and intense application of his sensory imagination which demands both the contemplation of things as they actually are, and their translation through intensification of each sense in turn into their imaginative, and thus divine, equivalent, the amplification that proceeds from St. Teresa's vision to her translation into heaven. St. Teresa's visions were involuntary, and therefore a subject for art; St. Ignatius's exercises were voluntary and therefore suggested a method for art.

It is certain that Shakespeare, when he wrote *Macbeth*, was interested in the Jesuits, but I know of no evidence that he read St. Ignatius; yet an understanding of the significance of St. Ignatius in the transformation of western art seems to me illuminating about aspects of the play that I have found deeply puzzling. Lady Macbeth voluntarily invokes a contemplation of cruelty in her first scene: 'Come, you Spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts'.¹ The concentration on sensory imagination amplifies those spirits into 'murth'ring ministers', and finally into 'Come, thick Night' palled 'in the dunnest smoke of hell'. It is a deliberate, if inverted, spiritual exercise. The process is even more extraordinary in Macbeth's contemplation of his sin towards Duncan:

Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air . . .²

Macbeth's contemplation, unlike Lady Macbeth's, is involuntary; what I find strange is the rapid amplification from Duncan's abstract virtues, to angels, to naked new-born babe, and so finally to heaven's cherubin hors'd on the sightless couriers of the air. Professor Cleanth Brooks explained the

¹ I. v. 40-1.

² I. vii. 16-23.

babe in terms of the numerous other babes in the play; that is true enough, but the strangeness here remains irreducible, because it is the process itself, of visionary amplification, which is important. Like Lady Macbeth, his concentration is primarily on sight, and as she ends with 'sightless substances', so his vision becomes finally sightless (beyond sight; either 'invisible', or 'blind'). But whereas she also invoked touch and smell, Macbeth's second sense is sound: Duncan's virtues 'plead' (the legal sense, or 'beg'), becoming like angels 'trumpet-tongu'd' and hence (by a play on the word) the 'blast' which the babe rides. It is an extraordinary process, and the process itself is of central significance. It echoes Lady Macbeth's speech, and thus partly relates to the peculiar closeness of their relationship. The play is at once peculiarly naturalistic, in its unique delineation of the intimacy of a marriage—their anticipation of each other's mind—and unique too in its demands on visual imagining. That is why it was a central text for two critical traditions so alien as Bradley's discussion of 'character' or the concentration on 'imagery' of the 1930s.

To mediate between those two, the play offers a study of illusion: 'nothing is, but what is not'.¹ The visions of those speeches (and others)² consist in words alone, literally visible to no one. Macbeth's dagger is seen only by him, and even he knows it is not there.³ Banquo's ghost can be seen by the audience as well as by Macbeth, but not by anyone else on the stage: Lady Macbeth looks but on a stool.⁴ The weird sisters, on the other hand, are vouched for by Banquo's less impressionable sight.⁵ Most of these effects can be played in other ways, but that reduces the range of illusory forms which the play explores. It reaches a kind of climax in the apparitions of Act IV, after which, as Macbeth has it, 'no more sights'.⁶ For the rest of the play illusion tricks are subjected to instant rational explanation, as with the moving of Birnam Wood, when vision is returned to the light of common day. The play is an extraordinary *tour de force* exploiting the maximum potential for illusion in an open-air theatre with limited mechanical resources, and no lighting tricks; two-thirds of it are to be imagined as taking place in darkness. This must be at least

¹ I. iii. 142.

² See, especially, III. ii. 46–53, when Macbeth comes closest to Lady Macbeth's words.

³ II. i. 33–49.

⁵ I. iii.

⁴ III. iv.

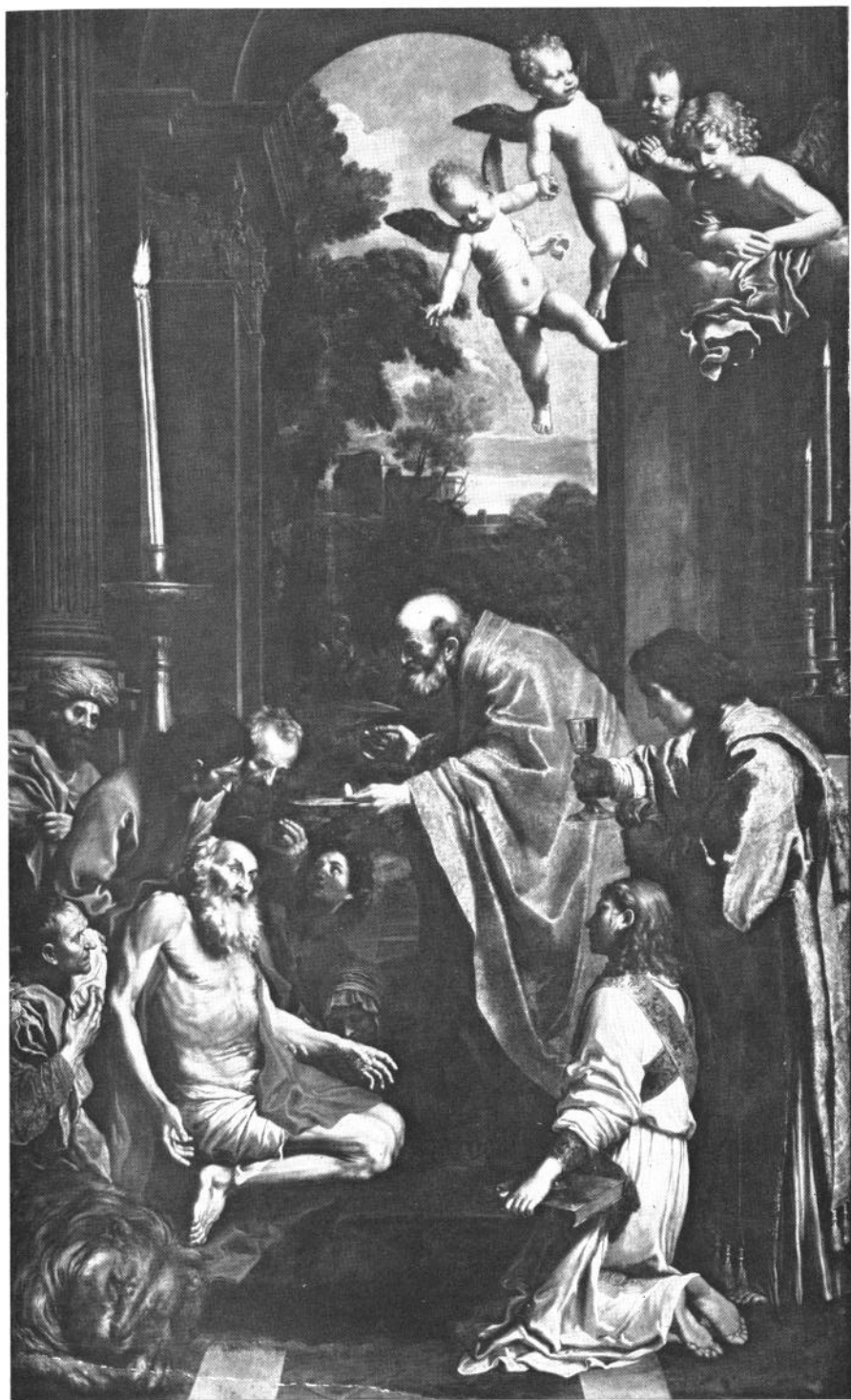
⁶ IV. i. 155.



Apotheosis of James I, Rubens, London, Whitehall Banqueting Suite



Coronation of the Virgin, Raphael, Rome, Pinacoteca



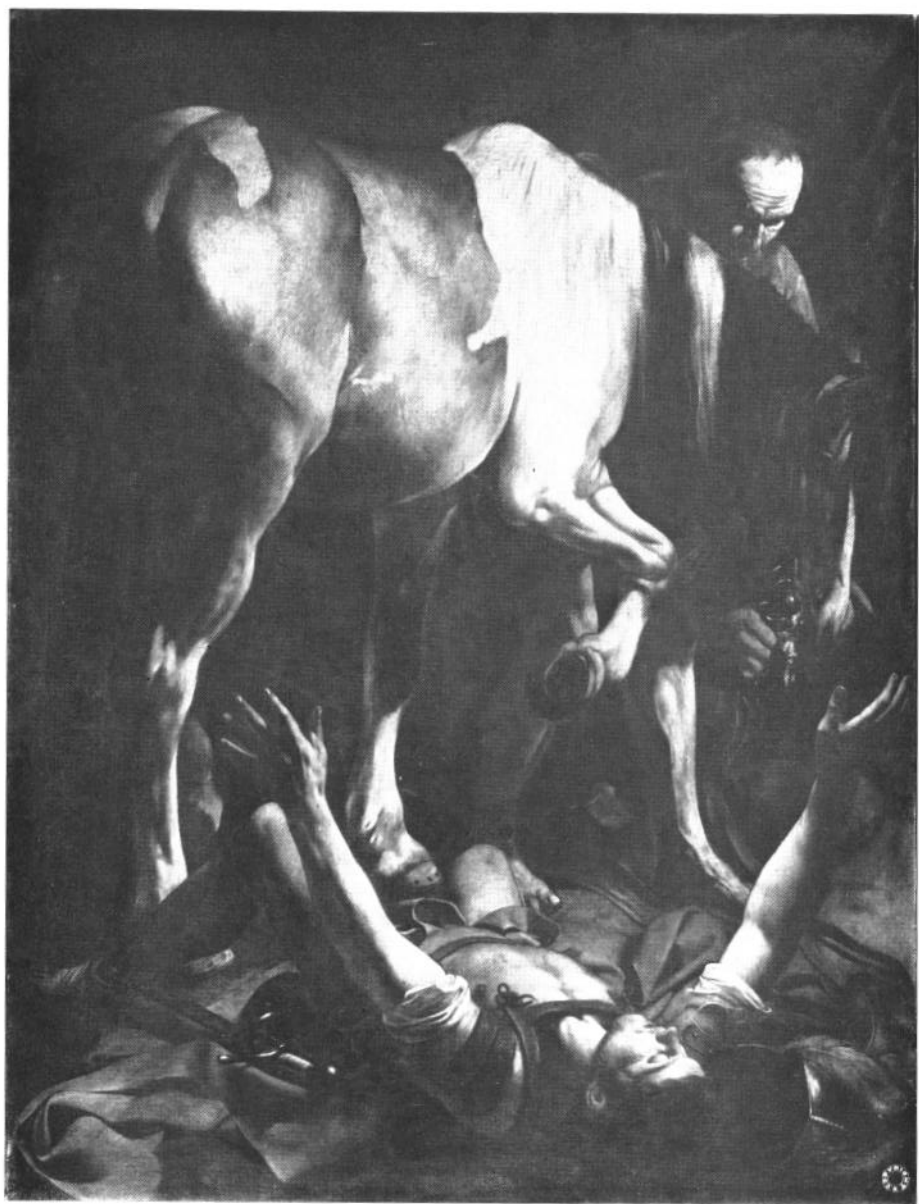
Communion of St. Jerome, Domenichino, Rome, Pinacoteca



Madonna del collo lungo, Parmigianino, Florence, Uffizi



Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Barocci, Rome, Pinacoteca

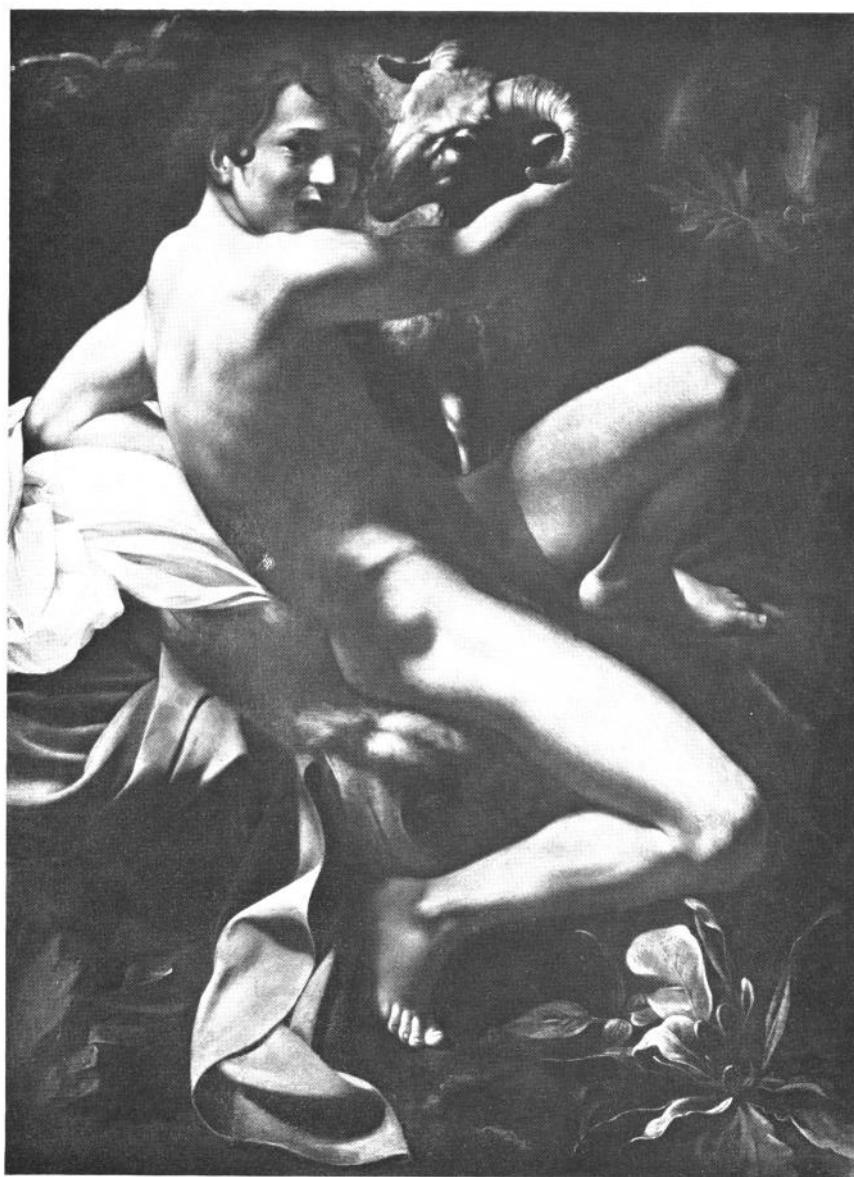


Conversion of Saul, Caravaggio, Rome, St. Maria del Popolo

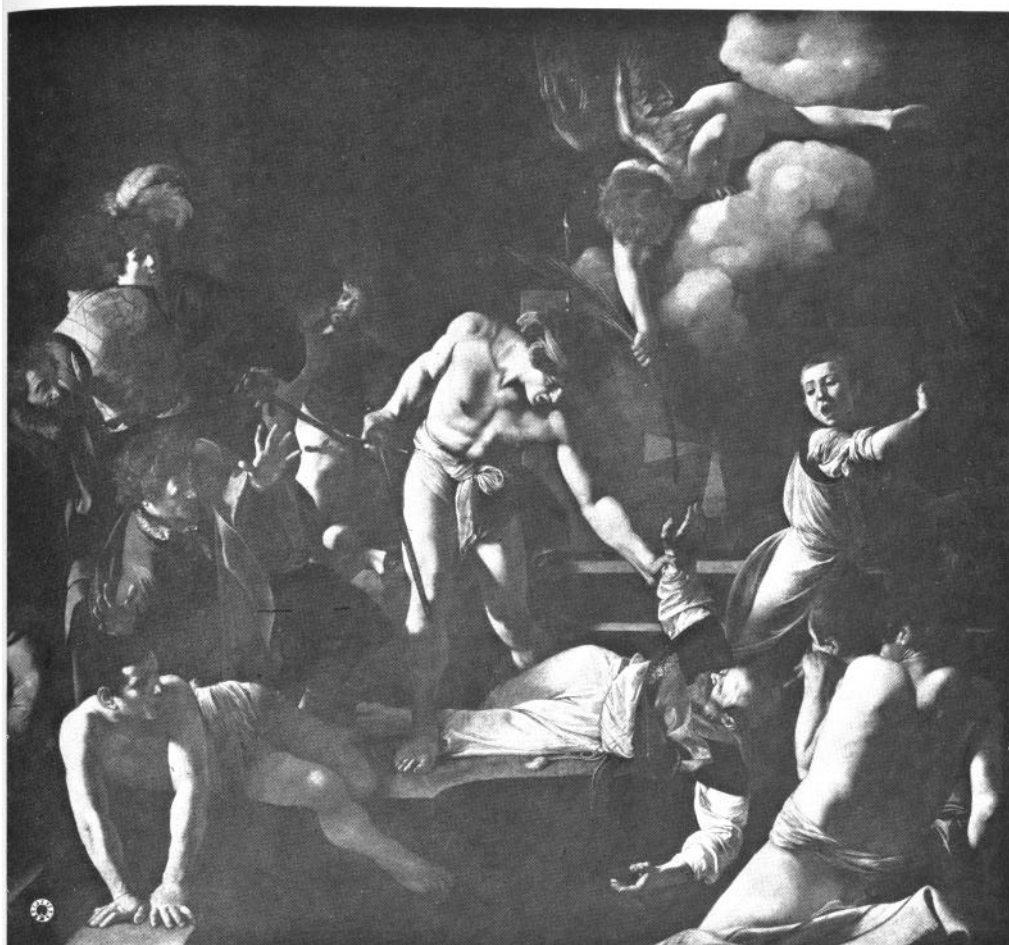


St. Mary Magdalen, Caravaggio, Rome, Doria-Pamphilj

PLATE XII



St. John in the Wilderness, Caravaggio, Rome, Doria-Pamphilj



Martyrdom of St. Matthew, Caravaggio, Rome, S. Luigi dei Francesi



Seven Acts of Mercy, Caravaggio, Naples, Pio Monte della Misericordia



Pietà, Caracci, Rome, Doria-Pamphilj



Polyphemus hurling rocks, Caracci, Rome, Palazzo Farnese



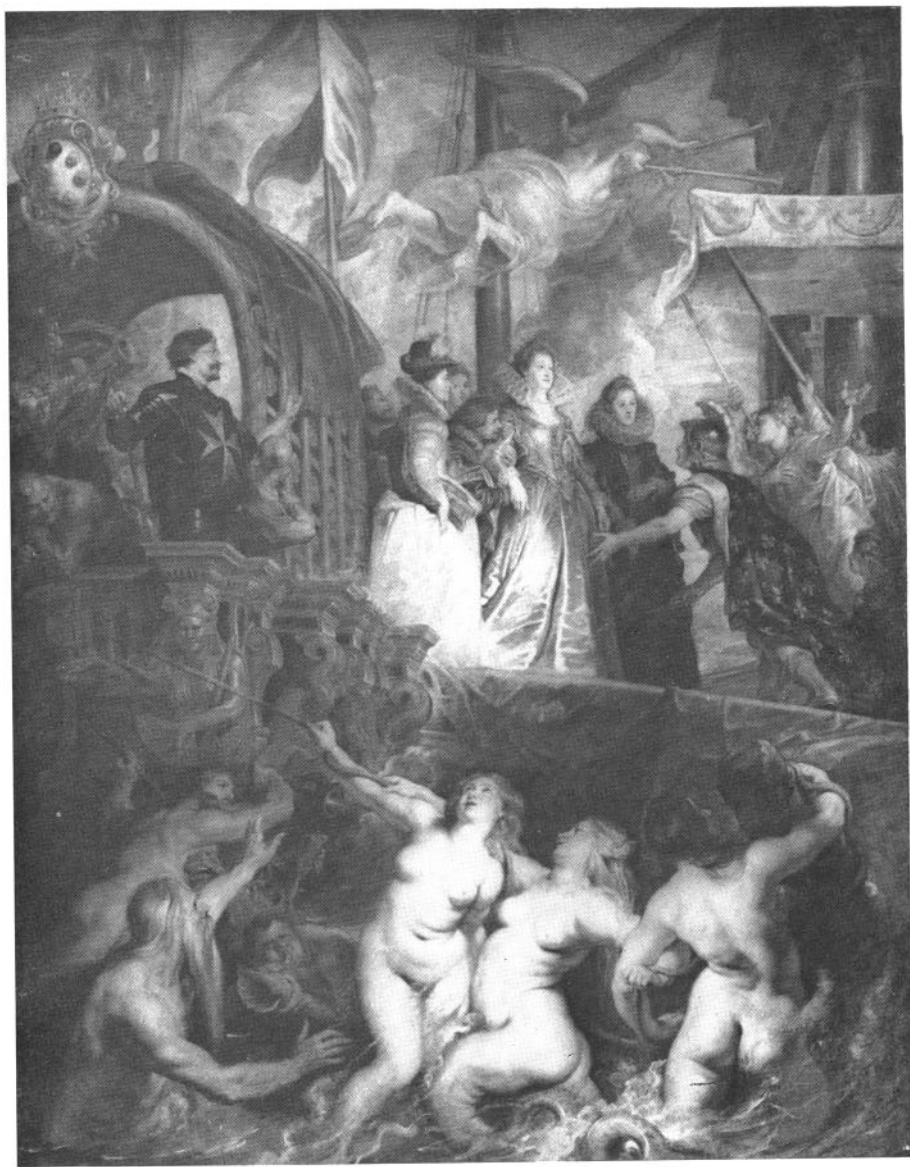
St. Teresa in Ecstasy (Central Group), Bernini, Rome, Cornaro Chapel, St. Maria della Vittoria



Cornaro Cardinals, Bernini, Rome, Cornaro Chapel



St. Teresa's face, Bernini, Rome, Cornaro Chapel



Marie de Medici's Arrival at Marseilles, Rubens, Paris, Louvre

partly why it proves so awkward in the modern theatre where darkness is the natural state.

By being at once the most naturalistic and the most illusionistic of Shakespeare's plays to that time, *Macbeth* clearly solves in its own way the problem of relating naturalistic treatment to mythic structure which I suggested in Caravaggio as well as in *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*. It leads towards a relationship which is apparently quite unlike theirs. Rubens's *Apotheosis of James I* (Plate V) makes its initial impact as fantastic. The painting, like the vault of the Cornaro Chapel, depends on an illusion that the ceiling has a hole in it through which the heavens above can be seen: James is being wafted up through the clouds by magnificently fleshly angels. But like Bernini, Rubens does not actually deceive: the idea of miracle is proposed by a use of perspective which is designed to be understood. And it needs to be, for such an event for James is indeed miraculous, and that is made clear in the superb portrait of the old man with red-rimmed and boozy eyes turned in intelligent apprehension at his levitation, and dismay at the unfamiliar touch of the opulent lady's arm. In the flamboyant mythologizing, the sense of actuality is also insistent; but it is not primary.

It seems that this was the first representation of the Christian apotheosis of a European King. Shakespeare did not go so far, but he did treat pagan apotheosis in *Antony and Cleopatra*, with a flamboyance close to Rubens. Enobarbus' celebrated 'The barge she sat in'¹ is almost literally illustrated by Rubens's painting of *Marie de Medici's arrival at Marseilles* (Plate XX), which also uses Roman models. The queen's solid features are as naturalistic as James I; the herm-like lady on the barge is as witty as Carracci, and Rubens stresses the dependence of the splendour, not only on the mermaids and tritons, but also on the agony of the galley-slaves. But splendour triumphs as, in the end, it does for Antony and Cleopatra. With them, as with James, the counter-image is very fully displayed, of the ageing drunken lecher and the skittish destructive whore; but they fulfil their mythological destinies superbly. The play, like Rubens's major canvases, has an extraordinary range of political and mythological development; but it centres, as do the paintings, on apotheosis, the translation of sensual glory into divinity.

With Rubens, mythology dominates; but it is meaningless without the insistence on actuality which he derived from Caravaggio, however much he seems to have reversed the

¹ II. ii. 191-218.

proportions. That is what I see in Shakespeare's last comedies: they appear fantastic after *Measure for Measure*, yet compared with the early plays their naturalism is striking. *Cymbeline* has, like *All's Well*, a story from Boccaccio; but where *All's Well* minimized the romance, *Cymbeline* maximizes it. In both *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*, the wife tricks her way into her husband's bed, and he (who has never before slept with her) is unsuspecting. In *Cymbeline*, the question of sensual identity is astonishingly crossed with beheading (also in *Measure for Measure*) when Imogen mistakes the decapitated body of Cloten, dressed in her husband's clothes, for Posthumus.¹ She feels the limbs and faints, or falls asleep, on it. The possibilities for the grotesque, or offensive, or absurd are all obvious, and they are all developed, as in the Roman Captain's comment:

How? a page?
Or dead, or sleeping on him? But dead rather:
For nature doth abhor to make his bed
With the defunct, or sleep upon the dead.²

The event is fantastic, but the responses, like the people, are strikingly natural. The tricks of the celebrated last series of revelations are diverse, absurd, and splendid.³ Professor Cyrus Hoy, a few years ago, identified the play's rich variety as mannerist.⁴ I don't propose to quibble with terms, but would suggest that its marvellous interaction of apparently incompatible genres and its delight in theatrical illusions are far closer to Carracci's Farnese ceiling than to earlier models. Its surprises, however extraordinary, are very firmly organized into its classical five Acts, and so far from averting its natural symmetry in its surprises, as *Love's Labour's Lost* did, it wholeheartedly fulfils it, dream of Jupiter and all.

The Winter's Tale is less complicated, but scarcely less astonishing. Its mixture of genres is notorious, and brilliantly focused in the end of Act III when Antigonus's bleak acceptance of death is translated, not merely by a comic stage direction, but by the clown's amazingly funny description of the bear devouring him just off-stage:

the men are not yet cold under water, nor the bear half dined on the gentleman: he's at it now.⁵

The direct manipulation of stage illusion there, from one genre to its opposite, is no less remarkable than the supreme demon-

¹ iv. ii. 295-332.

² iv. ii. 355-8.

³ v. v.

⁴ *Shakespeare Survey*, 26, 1973, 49-68.

⁵ iii. iii. 104-5.

stration of illusion in the last Act. Hermione's statue coming to life works by being in actuality the opposite of what it seems: the actor must hold the pose until it can be held no longer, so that inevitable lapses are transformed into miracle:

See, my lord,
Would you not deem it breath'd?¹

Everything Leontes says has one meaning as he understands it, another as we know it to be. The result is a concentration on the technique of illusion that makes the miracle more natural than impossible.

The technical assurance of these plays, almost effrontery as we are made so conscious of it, moves them rapidly towards Bernini. And it is notable how consciously the plays allude to visual arts. In *The Winter's Tale*, of course, there is the celebrated discussion of Giulio Romano which, however misinformed about Raphael's favourite assistant, displays a significant interest in illusionist art, as well as a contempt for mere deception:

... who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape.²

In *Cymbeline*, Iachimo turns from contemplating Imogen's naked beauty to note on his tablets the inventory of her bedroom's delightfully erotic decorations, which he reports to Posthumus:

Chaste Dian, bathing: never saw I figures
So likely to report themselves; the cutter
Was as another Nature, dumb; outwent her,
Motion and breath left out.³

The Tempest, like *Macbeth*, makes the forms of stage illusion its central motif. But where *Macbeth* is essentially written for a daylight theatre, *The Tempest* more strongly suggests the devices of Jones's court masques. It could use all the resources of the Blackfriars, whatever they actually were. It could use them, but rather astonishingly does not need them. The technical skill extends here to the extraordinary feat of writing a play about illusion as miracle which can function equally with or without elaborate resources; equally well, that is, at the Blackfriars or at the Globe. Hence the constant argument as to how it 'ought' to be performed. It arranges its illusions, also, in

¹ v. iii. 63-4.

² v. ii. 96-9.

³ II. iv. 82-5.

a pattern like *Macbeth*'s: after a sensational opening, relatively simple tricks build up towards the full-scale masque of Juno and Ceres, and after that has been dismissed, the technics of magic are progressively abandoned. The last 'show', of Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess, is at once miraculous to the stage audience (who do not know they are alive) and entirely natural to us (who do); it requires no more machinery than the drawing back of a curtain. It therefore reverses the process of illusion and leads into Miranda's purely 'natural' revelation:

O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't!

and Prospero's inevitable rejoinder:

'Tis new to thee.¹

Prospero does not merely drown his books, he finally steps outside his role altogether and speaks as actor to us as audience. The play is balanced very precariously between boredom and magical delight; and the understanding between nature and miracle is entirely in terms of the imaginative grasp of illusion. Its aesthetic structure has precisely the same foundation as Bernini's.

It is as easy to make patterns out of Shakespeare's plays as to shuffle a pack of cards; my hope is that two parallel patterns may be less arbitrary than one. The sequence of Shakespeare's comedies, from elegant fantasy in the early plays to aggressive naturalism in *Troilus*, *All's Well*, and *Measure for Measure*, and then into the flamboyance of the last comedies, may seem like two reversals of direction; but it has a sequential logic that is intelligible in terms of the evolution of Roman baroque from its origins in mannerism, through Caravaggio and Carracci, into Rubens and Bernini. I prefer this to the traditional explanation by conjectured biography and a fictitious 'tragic period', for there is a similar pattern in the tragedies from the mannered *Titus* and *Romeo*, through *Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*, to *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Shakespearian tradition has been too insular: his woodnotes were not peculiarly native, nor did he achieve a merely belated renaissance. He was in the mainstream of the radical change in European aesthetics of his day, and he ended (not surprisingly) in its vanguard.

¹ v. i. 181-4.

Pictures make some points more instantly than plays which take longer to see; and I am certain that the art I have shown offers more apt illustration of his work than the crude and often medieval woodcuts that have become standard in our textbooks and theatre programmes. The greatest drama in European history was not a cottage industry, it was one of the seminal points of the baroque aesthetic that dominated Europe for two hundred years.

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