Indications of Amorality

by

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The literature of different periods of history is often similar. Historians have long had a theory that human experience is cyclical, that social and political attitudes cause reactions to themselves, which in turn cause other reactions, thus creating a cycle of events. The same seems to be true of literature, which is a reflection of society. It is interesting to note how similar themes appear in the works of authors separated by several centuries. The conventions or even the external forms may be entirely different; but the authors living in both historical periods are concerned with problems based on conditions that differ only to the degree of technological advancement. "Human nature never changes" is an observation that has lost its meaning (the fate of all cliches); but its truth is evident when one notices how often a work of literature seems to be a restatement of something written many years before.

I would like to compare English drama of the Jacobean period with contemporary literature (especially the novel). I feel that the eras which produced the works I discuss in this paper are both characterized by a severe moral upheaval; and since literature mirrors culture, Jacobean plays and contemporary novels are practically unsurpassed for obscenity. I am concentrating primarily

on attitudes toward love and marriage, because the writings on these subjects show the changes in morals most clearly. The greater part of my paper concerns the Jacobean period because there is more information available on the past than current events. My last chapter is a discussion on modern literary trends which I feel are comparable to those in Jacobean times.

The Elizabethan period, which directly preceded the Jacobean, was the Golden Age of England. It was a time of national supremacy in politics, comparatively free movement in society, and of great creativity in the arts. The Renaissance spirit was beginning to make itself felt; but in spite of its influence "the great mass of beliefs and principles of which civilized life was made up continued to be medieval."[1] According to E. M. W. Tillyard, the world picture of the Middle Ages to which Renaissance England still ascribed was "that of an ordered universe arranged in a fixed system of hierarchies but modified by man's sin and the hope of his redemption. . . . Everything had to be included and everything had to be made to fit and connect."[2] The universe was conceived of as a great chain of being in which everything, from God down to the lowest form of inanimate material, had its assigned place. Any tampering with the chain was believed to cause unfortunate upheavals in the normal pattern of life. It seems that this rigidity of form would have been immensely confining, but the "greatness of the Elizabethan age was

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[1]Hardin Craig, "Introduction," The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Chicago, 1961), p. 1.

[2]H. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (New York, n. d.), pp. 5-6 (originally issued in 1944).

that it contained so much of the new without bursting the noble form of the old order."[3] It was not until Jacobean times that changes could no longer be accommodated by the outmoded system.

One of the medieval traditions still evident in the Elizabethan age was that of courtly love. The most widely accepted theory is that courtly love arose in reaction to the brutality of the feudal system. Nobles in the twelfth century saw in marriage a means of enriching themselves, either through annexation of estates or through inheritance; and when a marriage turned out badly, the wife suffered. In order to counteract these abuses, and the war and quarreling to which they led, a system of fealty based on love and entirely outside of legal marriage was established.[4] The courtly love traditions are now probably best remembered for their excesses (such as the poetic conventions used by love-struck young men), but at one time they did serve the purpose of making the harsh realities of arranged feudal marriages a little easier to bear.

By Elizabethan times, moralists were "already beginning to denounce the miseries of enforced marriages."[5] The stage plays of the period show that love matches were

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[3] Ibid., p. 8.

[4] Denis de Rougement, Love in the Western World (New York, 1956), pp. 33-34.

[5] George M. Trevelyan, England Under the Stuarts, 9th ed. (New York, 1920), p. 13.

sometimes tolerated by the parents, and that daughters had the right at least of veto if not of choice.[6] Women were no longer regarded merely as property, nor did they receive an empty homage (as was often the case under the courtly love system) which excluded them from more intellectual pursuits; they became recognized as companions and friends, instead of just lovers.[7]

Edmund Spenser was one of the first to applaud this change in the status of women. In his Faerie Queene, he combines chivalry with an awareness of the newly admitted worthiness of females to produce a worship of womanhood. He does not portray women in the traditional method as impediments to heroic action on the part of men, but rather as forms of inspiration.[8] Because of this, and because his general purpose in the Faerie Queene is to show the qualities of a "Christian soul, perfected in human experience,"[9] Spenser may be taken as the mean of the Elizabethan age. His ideals are medieval ones tempered by the new ideas of the time. It is against the principles that he upholds that later ages reacted.

The third book of the Faerie Queene, because it is concerned with love, is particularly relevant to this study.

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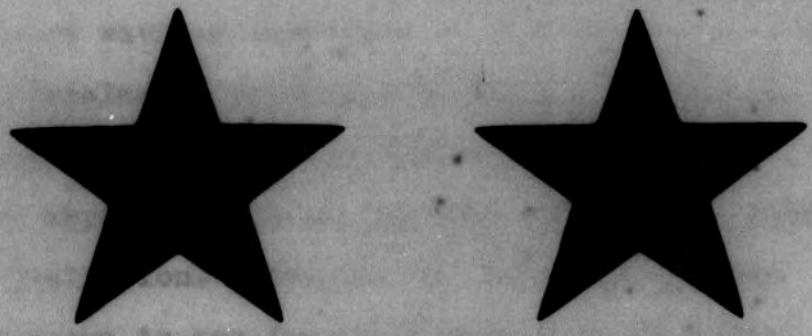
[6] Ibid.

[7] Ernest De Selincourt, "Introduction," Spenser: Poetical Works (London, 1965), p. xlv.

[8] George E. Woodberry, The Torch (New York, 1920), p. 96.

[9] Ibid., p. 98.

CORRECTION



PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN REFILMED TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR

sometimes tolerated by the parents, and that daughters had the right at least of veto if not of choice.[6] Women were no longer regarded merely as property, nor did they receive an empty homage (as was often the case under the courtly love system) which excluded them from more intellectual pursuits; they became recognized as companions and friends, instead of just lovers.[7]

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[9] Ibid., p. 98.

Spenser calls the book "The Legend of Chastitie," but he means far more by "Chastitie" than just continence. He sees chastity as more of a spiritual ideal than a virtue, and it includes all unselfish love between men and women. Spenser emphasizes the thought that pure love (chastity) is unselfish, while dishonourable love (unchastity) seeks only its own pleasure.[10] In choosing his symbol for the virtue of chastity, moreover, Spenser is careful to pick one of

> positive and energetic spirit, capable of strong passions, and moderate in conduct only because rigorously self-disciplined in accordance with reason. . . .In her judgment and resource, she has the equipment for protecting herself from evil design, and she has the ruddy and many-sided interests which, quite as much as immediate self-control, safeguard her from her passions.[11]

By studying Spenser's chaste heroine, Britomart, and the other characters whose personalities and actions provide a foil to her ideal behavior, one can get a fairly clear impression of how Elizabethans felt on questions of love and marriage. This understanding will in turn allow one to see how Jacobean drama rebelled against the moral traditions.

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[10]Kate M. Warren, "Introduction," The Faerie Queene of Edmund Spenser, Book III, pp. vii-xiii, quoted in Frederick M. Padelford, ed. The Faerie Queene, Book III (Baltimore, 1934), p. 312.

[11]Frederick M. Padelford, "The Allegory of Chastity in The Faerie Queene," Studies in Philology, XXI (1924), p. 369.

Spenser, although he claimed kinship with the Spencers of Althorp, could not be considered a member of the old aristocracy. His father was a free journeyman of the Merchant Taylors' Company, and it was only through associations at Cambridge that Spenser was introduced to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in whose household he served. Because he rose from a primarily bourgeois background to a position of some prominence, he was a member of the new aristocracy, and believed with the rest of this class in the ideals of Christian humanism. These ideals had been formulated in treatises of Christian humanists of the early sixteenth century; they stress an integrated hierarchy of social classes (each class having an essential God-given function) which is constantly threatened by chaotic disintegration. It is the duty of the Christian prince who rules the commonwealth to maintain order through use of the laws of reason. Although the humanists do not grant the ruler absolutism, they do view him as God's vicegerent with a moral obligation to make operative the laws of nature. Under such a system, the prince needs wise counselors who are also educated in the laws of reason.[12]

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[12]Paul N. Siegel, Shakespearian Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise (New York, 1957), pp. 45-51.

Since Spenser wrote at the time the new aristocracy was most in favor, and since he professed the ideals of Christian humanism, it is only natural that his treatise on the ideal courtier (the court being the source of wise counselors for the reasonable prince) should stress order and appropriateness above all things.

Britomart, the heroine of Book III of Spenser's Faerie Queene, can be considered the mean of chastity. Whereas other characters may go too far either in the direction of licentiousness or of celibacy, Britomart is ideal.[13] She is a beautiful woman, has wise judgment, is ardent but self-contained, gentle, courteous, unselfish, and zealous in good works. She is established in chastity because established in all other virtues.[14] The first foil for Britomart is the Lady of Delight who reigns at Castle Joyous. The Lady is admittedly carnal, and even tries to enjoy Britomart, whom she takes for a man because of her armor. Britomart can sympathise with the Lady because her passions are just as intense; but

> the difference between the chaste woman and the incontinent lies not in the intensity of their passions but in their attitudes. The one has no power to break the chains of her passion and is therefore at their mercy; the other finds release in a moral and social code

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[13] William F. DeMoss, "Spenser's Twelve Moral Virtues 'According to Aristotle'," Modern Philology, XVI (1918), pp. 23-38, 245-270, quoted in Frederick M. Padelford, ed. The Faerie Queene, Book III, (Baltimore, 1934), p. 320.

[14] Padelford, "Allegory of Chastity," p. 381.

which requires of woman, equally as of man,
the desire for honor.[15]

There are many other examples of unbridled lust in Book III. One of the best is that of the fisherman who awakes to find the beautiful Florimell in his boat. He cannot control his passions, and it is only by the rescue of Proteus that Florimell is saved from dishonour. Proteus, however, proves to be just as much of a problem as the fisherman, although his methods are more subtle. He takes Florimell to his cave under a rock and tries to tempt her to give herself to him. The fisherman cannot resist temptation; Proteus is much worse because he is cunning and hypocritical. And Florimell, although she is as chaste as Britomart, is subjected to evil treatment because she lacks judgment, knowledge of life, and the self-assurance to protect herself. She too soon succumbs to hysterical fear.[16] She is desirable because she is beautiful, but she has no other qualities besides purity and constancy to ally with her beauty. Consequently, she is timorous and passive; her only activity is flight.[17] The fisherman and Proteus cannot control their lust, but at least they are provoked naturally. Spenser presents incarnations of unnatural lust in the giantess Argante and her brother Ollyphant. They are said to have had incestuous

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[15] Ibid., p. 372.

[16] Ibid., p. 371, 377.

[17] Graham Hough, A Preface to the Faerie Queene (New York, 1963), p. 171.

relations even in their mother's womb, and they now slake their lust on people like the Squire of Dames, whose degenerate life makes him susceptible to the powers of sexual evil.

Not all of Spenser's lustful characters are so completely despicable. Hellenore succumbs to the charms of Sir Paridell, but one suspects it is only because her chastity is so unjustly tried. She might have been true if her husband, the greedy Malbecco, had paid less attention to his money and been a little more sympathetic toward his wife.[18] Paridell leaves his paramour, which is not exactly gallant, but at least he does so to participate in the rescue of Florimell.[19] And not all of Spenser's characters are lustful; some stray in the opposite direction from the mean of chastity. Florimell's short comings have already been discussed. Belphoebe is not adverse to love; she just is not aware of her admirer, and is therefore not responsive.[20] Marinell's crimes to chastity are more active; in refusing contact with women altogether, he refuses to admit the claims of love.[21] Both he and Belphoebe are guilty of the vice of deficiency.[22]

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[18] Padelford, "Allegory of Chastity," p. 379.

[19] Kate M. Warren, "Introduction," as quoted in Padelford, p. 313.

[20] Padelford, "Allegory of Chastity," p. 375.

[21] Ibid., p. 373.

[22] H. S. V. Jones, A Spenser Handbook (New York, 1930), p. 217.

Amoret is a special case. Because she was raised in the Garden of Adonis by Psyche, she is well versed in the physical pleasures of love, and cannot place spiritual values in their proper place above bodily contact. She is the character chosen for discipline in chastity.[23] She is subjected to tortures by the Enchanter in the House of Busyrane (a "temple where passion is not only celebrated but made the object of idolatry"[24]), and can be freed only by Britomart. This action may be "taken to signify the power of Chastity freeing Womanhood from thraldom to material passion."[25]

These illustrations from Book III of the Faerie Queene show how Spenser applies the Christian humanist ideals to love and marriage. As long as right reason and order prevail, all is well in the world. The plays of the Elizabethan period show that the majority of the people believed in and supported such ideals; so what happened to produce the plays representative of the Jacobean period? Emphasis is suddenly placed on adultery, incest, and lust; and such emotions are not necessarily condemned or punished. To illustrate the change, let us look at the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, and the type of theater they represented.

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[23] Padelford, "Allegory of Chastity," p. 376.

[24] Hough, Preface to Faerie Queene, p. 174.

[25] R. E. Neil Dodge, "Spenser's Imitations from Ariosto," PMLA, XII (1897), pp. 151-204; XXXV (1920), 91-92, quoted in Frederick M. Padelford, ed. The Faerie Queene, Book III, p. 316.

Beaumont and Fletcher wrote for the select audience of a coterie theater. There were many distinctions between popular and coterie drama, and it might be helpful to look at several differences now. For this purpose, I am indebted to Alfred Harbage's Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions.[26]

The popular theater was national. The audience was composed of all classes, with bourgeoisie predominating but the gentry and nobility well represented. The themes of plays were often historical, and ideals implied in the plays were usually those exhibited in the works of Spenser. By contrast, the coterie theater was private. Its audience was fashionable, educated, intellectual. The themes of the earlier coterie plays (those given in the universities and the Inns of Court) were classical. When the performances moved to the indoor theaters (such as Blackfriars), and as the audience became composed more and more of the new aristocracy, the plays began to deal with social manners. This is to be expected since the playwrights were catering to a group unduly concerned with social forms. Students of Elizabethan drama find much more material on the

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[26]Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions (New York, 1952), pp. 3-120.

popular theater because its plays have proved more enduring over the years (because of the influence of Shakespeare); but the coterie theater was developing simultaneously with the popular.

Before the reign of Elizabeth, not one play title can be assigned with certainty to the private theater; but the number of coterie plays gradually increased. Between the years of 1599 and 1613, fifty-five of the known plays were those performed in the private theater. This growth of coterie drama reflects a shift in attitude among playwrights. They were disillusioned by society, and felt a need to strike out against the conditions of the time. They tried to do this in the popular theater, but they met with little success. There are several possible explanations for their failure. For one thing, the taste of the audience had been established; they preferred the Spanish Tragedy and Titus Adronicus to a new type of play. In addition, when the dramatists tried to present immoral situations on the stage in order to comment on them, they invoked strong disapproval from the Puritans. Consequently, many of the better writers retired from the public stage; popular drama continued along the traditional lines, contenting itself with numerous revivals. Other playwrights, out of the need for money, turned to the coterie theater. They produced many bad plays, because the coterie audience was willing to pay for anything that titillated their jaded senses. A few of the luckier

writers hit upon the well-paying formula of satirizing eroticism, and in doing so found some satisfaction for their feelings of social protest. Because their plays were morally ambiguous, they can be considered as existing on two levels. The coterie audience merely enjoyed the immoral situations; the dramatists were able to make hidden insinuations.

Beaumont and Fletcher belong to the last group of writers. Both men were young, and (at least temporarily) needed the money they could get by writing for the coterie audience. Because they were so talented, they were able to take their audience on the emotional roller-coaster ride they wanted, and at the same time make a comment on society. The very lack of a definite moral code in their plays and the way their characters react to this deficiency, demonstrate a desire for some sort of a pattern. The coterie audience probably missed this point altogether, but I feel I am justified in making it. Consider the fate of the two playwrights. Beaumont, evidently the more serious and philosophical of the two, did not remain in the theater very long. The reaction of his audience was probably not very psychologically reinforcing, and he chose to retire, as did the playwrights mentioned above who tried satire in the popular theater. Fletcher, on the other hand, chose to prostitute his talents completely, and wound up writing slick comedies for those who would pay.

The above discussion shows why one should consider the coterie theater instead of the popular during the Jacobean period. The popular theater stagnated; the coterie theater advanced, and its early career was promising. Its disintegration was a reflection of moral conditions. Beaumont and Fletcher are particularly representative, because they produced a type of drama pleasing to the coterie, and yet one not entirely conforming to their ideals. It was only after the dissolving of their partnership that <u>all</u> pretense of morality disappeared from the coterie stage.

Beaumont and Fletcher watched the theater closely, and through trial and error developed a keen sense of what appealed to Jacobean playgoers. They realized that much emphasis should be placed on technique, and that since source materials had been exhausted, intensification of theatrical effect was the chief remaining means of novelty. Their answer to the demands of the situation was tragicomedy.[27] Tragicomedy, with its tendencies toward melodrama, provided an excellent medium for exciting theatrical tricks; and yet there was room for social comment within the structure.

Consider The Maid's Tragedy. On the surface, the play concerns a wronged virgin, and the shameless whore who is given the virgin's promised husband. On a deeper level, the play is concerned with kingship. James I insisted upon his absolute power, and his courtiers at least pretended to acknowledge this right. Amintor in The Maid's Tragedy seems to express belief in absolute monarchy. When the king forces him to break off his engagement to Aspatia and marry Evadne, Amintor does so with little complaint ("I only brake a promise, / And 'twas the King that forc't me"). He finds out on his

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[27]Lawrence B. Wallis, Fletcher, Beaumont and Company (New York, 1957), p. 174.

wedding night that Evadne is the king's whore, and she refuses to sleep with her lawful husband. Amintor at first wishes revenge, but since it is the king upon whom he must be revenged, he laments to Evadne:

> Oh! thou hast nam'd a word that wipes away
> All thoughts revengeful; in that sacred name,
> The King, there lies a terror: what frail man
> Dares lift his hand against it? Let the Gods
> Speak to him when they please.
> Till when let us suffer and wait.

Such exhortations were enough to please King James and his sycophants, but one must remember that main characters do not always express the beliefs of the playwright. Other characters in the play come closer to being true representatives of Beaumont and Fletcher's views on kingship. Evadne, for example, is not very impressed by the king's supposed divinity; she is interested only in his position of worldly authority, and tells him so to his face.

> I swore indeed that I would never love
> A man of lower place; but if your fortune
> Should throw you from this height, I bade
> you trust
> I would forsake you, and would bend to him
> That won your throne; I love with my ambition,
> Not with mine eyes. . .

Melantius, Evadne's brother, is also dubious of the kingly privileges. When Amintor tells him that the king has made Evadne dishonest, Melantius asserts

> What think my friend I will forget his honour,
> or to save
> The bravery of our house will lose his fame,
> And fear to touch the Throne of Majesty?
> . . .
> I will do what worth shall bid me, and no more.

Amintor is still loyal to the king; he seems to forget (although Beaumont and Fletcher obviously have not) that in this case the king is not worthy of such divine authority. He is a seducer taking advantage of his high position to satisfy his base desires. Under the traditional Elizabethan system of values, the king received privileges because he earned them through just use of power. In The Maid's Tragedy, all that is left is the form of kingship; the moral obligation of the king to his subjects is gone. This breakdown is paralleled in at least one other situation in the play. The king is wiling to keep Evadne as a whore (the morality of this action does not bother him), but at the same time, he wants their affair shrouded. The king seems to feel if Evadne is married, everything is legal. Yet even the king, much at fault as he is, demands that Evadne not sleep with her legal husband. That would make her dishonest indeed.

The above paragraphs show the moral confusion that Jacobean courtiers enjoyed. It could be that they accepted implausibility of this sort in the plays because they did not expect great truths from casual entertainment.[28] It is more likely that they did not actually recognize the discrepancies because they were surrounded by them.

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[28]Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison, 1960), p. 21.

Another point to consider is that the courtiers evidently did not take offense at the extremely suggestive comic interludes, such as the scene between Dula and Evadne as Evadne prepares for her wedding night. There are similar scenes in the plays of supposedly more moral writers (like the scene between Juliet and her nurse in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet), but the difference lies in tone. There is a warmth in even the bawdiest of Shakespeare's scenes; Fletcher, in his desire to please coterie audiences, learned to handle sex themes with a "cold, swift, surface brittleness."[29] We have seen that in Book III of Spenser's Faerie Queene, all matters concerning love and sex have norms to be adhered to. In the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, there are not any norms.

Philaster is a good play for illustrating this point. Although the play speaks almost as much as The Maid's Tragedy on the subject of kingship (in a much more satirical manner--"Things possible and honest! Hear me, thou, / Thou traytor, that darest confine thy King to things / Possible and honest!"), Philaster deals more directly with chastity. Megra, a wanton courtier, can be easily compared to Spenser's Lady of Delight, as can the Spanish prince, Pharamond, be easily compared to the seducer Proteus. In Beaumont and Fletcher's play, however, these sexual offenders are not punished. Indeed, even after slandering several innocent people in the court, they are allowed to go

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[29]Wallis, Fletcher, Beaumont and Company, p. 175.

off together, presumably to lead a life of lustful pleasure. And even the "good" characters in Beaumont and Fletcher have their flaws. The hero Philaster is ostensibly brave and honest; yet in a moment of fear he wounds the sleeping innocent Bellario in hopes of diverting blame from himself. In short, no one is all good, and the bad often do not receive just retribution. This may seem at first glance to be a welcome advance toward realism, because actual people are neither all good or bad; but it is indicative of how belief in a "black and white" rational order was beginning to crumble.

The final Beaumont and Fletcher play I wish to discuss is A King and No King. It is perhaps the most sensational of their plays because it deals with the universal taboo of incest. Much criticism has been devoted to their treatment of the incest theme. Because they prove at the end that the incestuously inclined couple are after all not related, the moral dilemma is dissolved suddenly with no working out of the problem. This might be a fault in a play of more serious intent, but as I have already stated, Beaumont ant Fletcher seem to have been primarily interested in entertaining their audience in any way they could. Their social comment in this play is not concentrated on the incest--probably because not even in the court of James I was incest a dominant problem! Instead, the playwrights turn upon sycophantic courtiers through their character Bessus. Bessus is the typical miles gloriosus,

and his cowardly escapades provide much of the humor of the play. His main function, however, is his flattering agreement with everything King Arbaces says. When Arbaces, fearing his own sexual desires, insists that Panthea is not his sister, Bessus immediately asserts "No marry, she is not, an't please your Majesty, I never thought she was, she's nothing like you." The more noble people in the court try to reason with the apparently mad king; Bessus concedes to his whim. Even when Arbaces asks Bessus to procure Panthea for him, Bessus does not balk. "O you would have a bout with her? I'le do't, I'le do't, I' faith." His further offer, ("and when this is dispatche'd, if you have a mind to your Mother, tell me, and you shall see I'le set it hard."), offends even Arbaces, and he comes to his senses for the time being at least. Bessus, therefore, is intended as a satire on the worst in all courtiers; but since he is exaggerated, it is doubtful that any of the courtiers took him seriously enough to recognize their own propensities.

It is obvious that the structure underlying the Faerie Queene and the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher is radically different. The former is orderly and reasonable; the latter is confused and amoral. What changes took place in society in the few years between Spenser and the Jacobean playwrights to produce such a change?

There are various theories on causes of a sudden disillusionment which produced the pessimism evident in the Jacobean era. One theory, published by Theodore Spencer, deals with new discoveries which changed attitudes toward basic beliefs. Spencer begins his book with a discussion of the three interrelated hierarchies that Elizabethans believed existed in the rational order of the universe--the cosmos, nature, and the body politic. The downfall of one hierarchy could cause the downfall of another. They believed that Adam's fall from grace was an example of this phenomenon. It was an intellectual fall as well as a moral one; but man's reason could not be entirely destroyed because it was a natural gift.[30] Godfrey Goodman in his The Fall of Man (1616) and Robert Burton in his Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) both wrote of the corruptibility of man, and their books were written at the climax of the period of disillusionment; but they were looking backward to the original fall. The real pessimism showed up in other places.

> The conflict was this: belief in each one of the interrelated orders--cosmological, natural, and political--which as we have seen were the frame, the basic pattern of all Elizabethan

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[30]Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York, 1942), p. 23.

> thinking was being punctured by a doubt. Copernicus had questioned the cosmological order, Montaigne had questioned the natural order, Machiavelli had questioned the political order. The consequences were enormous.[31]

Let us consider the influence of Copernicus first. His book, published in 1543, exploded the Ptolemaic system which placed the earth at the center of the universe (and created neat parallels for Elizabethan rationalists); but people were not particularly upset by his ideas when the book first appeared. The word "hypothesis" appeared on the title page, and his discoveries were well-known theories to the sixteenth century English reading public. Mathematicians especially welcomed the new system because it was simpler, but no one took Copernicus seriously until 1610, when Galileo published his Siderius Nuncius. The telescope perfected by Galileo turned theory into fact. This knowledge in itself would have been enough to upset Elizabethan thinking, because one hierarchy was completely destroyed. It must have been distressing to have to face changes in the other two hierarchies as well.

The natural downfall was prepared for by Bernardino Telesio in De Rerum Natura. He stated that the difference in knowledge possible to man and that possible to animals was one of degree only, not of kind. This made man just a smart animal, and not something apart. It was Montaigne, however, who pushed the point of man's bestiality.

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[31] Ibid., p. 29.

Montaigne's father admired Raymond Sebunde's Natural Theology and requested that Montaigne translate the Latin into French. Montaigne found that he did not believe with Sebunde that man may know himself by understanding the book of Nature which God had made him. In his essay "Apology for Raymond Sebond," Montaigne seems to be talking of God's grace in giving man what he has; he is actually just describing the miserable position of man by comparing him in detail to the animals. He speaks of how animals communicate, have religion (based on observation of elephants), and have morals that are not equal but superior to man's (animals are more faithful and magnanimous, and they do not make war on one another). His final blow to the pride of Elizabethans is the assertion that beasts can abstract from sensible phenomena. Montaigne

> had said that there was no real difference between man and the other animals, and he thereby knocked man out of his crucial position in the natural hierarchy. If he was right, the whole traditional structure, so elaborately expounded by Sebunde, fell in ruins.[32]

Montaigne does not stop with comparisons, either. He goes on to say that man knows nothing of God for sure, does not even have proof that man was created in his likeness; neither does man understand his own body and desires, because no standards are universally agreed upon.

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[32] Ibid., p. 38.

> Thus Montaigne, by destroying the psychological order, destroys everything else; a human being who is indistinguishable from animals is not a human being who can comprehend the order of the universe or discover any Laws of Nature in society.[33]

The final hierarchy to be destroyed was that of the body politic. Elizabethans based their government on Cicero's ideas of the virtue of justice and moral right as the basis of action. Machiavelli, in contrast, was entirely practical.

> He regarded human history divorced from revelation and human nature divorced from grace; he looked at man, as Bacon said, not as he should be, but as he is, and he found that man was naturally evil and that the best way to govern him for his own good was by fear and by force.[34]

It is no wonder that The Prince was the object of attacks by people who believed in the old traditions. Machiavelli denied universal truth and God's government of the world. Yet the hysteria of the attacks showed that men were not only horrified but fascinated by what they were afraid to admit--Machiavelli might be right.

Spencer mentions the effects of all these changes on literature. There was a turn from romance to realism, and Edmund Spenser's death of starvation in the last year of the sixteenth century may be taken as a symbol of the passing of the old system. No longer would everything be neat and controlled. Three hierarchies

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[33] Ibid., p. 40.

[34] Ibid., p. 42.

had been demolished by the analytical thinking of just a few men.

Paul N. Siegel approaches the disillusionment from a more political and sociological angle.[35] He explains that Elizabeth ruled by a system of balance among the old pre-Tudor aristocracy, the new Tudor aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie; and when the bourgeoisie grew too powerful, the compromise among factions was destroyed. The destruction brought with it questionings of the Christian humanist world view.

Let us look at this system in more detail. The bourgeoisie was not strong enough to rule directly; it required a strong centralizing force to keep peace and protect trade. Elizabeth provided the protection by putting customs on foreign goods; she also improved the harbors and granted bounties on new ships. Moreover, she often borrowed money from the Merchant Adventurers and other wealthy companies and individual merchants. Her actions led to industrial expansion. The old aristocracy was too weakened by the struggles of the previous century to challenge Elizabeth successfully; they were therefore content to accept a part in her court and serve as a counterbalance to the bourgeoisie. Stripped of their old power, the old nobility became conservative and stood for order in the midst of change. The new aristocracy

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[35] Paul N. Siegel, Shakespearian Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise (New York, 1957).

owed too much to the Tudor monarchy to rebel. Since the members of the new aristocracy were the top of the enterprising gentry, they became greatly involved in the development of commerce and industry, acting as politically dominant senior partners in business alliances with the bourgeoisie.

The structure of the compromise eventually led to its downfall. Growing industry took up much of the floating labor class that had been created by the great enclosures, the dissolution of feudal retainer bands, and the expropriation of monasteries; and because the growth of cities created the need for farming on a large capitalistic basis, the remainder of the unemployed found work on the farms. The causes of social discontent that had threatened the upper classes were removed, and the desire for a strong central government was lessened. The rise of prices, however, in enriching the merchants, industrialists, and capitalistic farmers, weakened the feudalistic gentry and old aristocracy by reducing the value of feudal dues and long-term rents. This in turn weakened the monarchy because it was dependent on revenue from crown lands and judicial fines. The friction between the enriched middle class and the impoverished crown led to the final downfall of the monarchy. The bourgeoisie only had to assert its power.

The incentive for the bourgeoisie to demand its due was provided by the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

The middle class had mobilized for the war with Spain and gained a new feeling of independence. The result was strengthened opposition to monopolies, church control, and foreign policy. The bourgeoisie started making its influence felt through Parliament, and they were no longer satisfied with using members of the new aristocracy as spokesmen. (The new aristocracy, with its dependence on the monarchy and its alliance with the bourgeoisie was consequently crushed as an independent force.) James I was responsible for the break between the monarchy and middle class. He enlarged peerage, choosing favorites, and thereby built up an entourage entirely subservient to him. The result of the downfall of the new aristocracy was the destruction of the Christian humanist principles to which they adhered.

The old aristocracy had been opposed to learning because it was regarded as useless, effeminate, and impractical. The bourgeoisie were too materialistic to favor humanism, because "a class 'on the make' cannot afford to be diverted by the graces of life or by promises of being immortalized in literature."[36] Only the new aristocracy, being primarily university-educated, believed in Christian humanism. We have seen that Spenser was a member of the new aristocracy, and that his Faerie Queene is based on Christian humanist ideals. With the

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[36] Ibid., p. 42.

crushing of the class, potential humanists turned toward satire. We have seen in our discussion on the two theaters (coterie and public) how this affected the drama of the time. So Siegel concludes that

> The conflict between the Christian humanist values and. . .the view of man which either bitterly or cynically rejected any possibilities of good in him. . .furnished the emotional material for later Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy. Gradually, however, the psychological probing gave way to meretricious sensationalism, as the drama became the exclusive property of a jaded, cynical court.[37]

Robert Ornstein does not believe that the reasons for the changes in the drama can be pinned down so easily.[38] He feels that the people <u>wanted</u> something more empirical and utilitarian than the moral and metaphysical formulas offered by the old Elizabethan world picture, and that the total evolution of Elizabethan culture was consequently toward the secular. He uses the example of Bacon. Bacon's contemporaries were willing to accept philosophy as a concept of physical nature, without moral or religious overtones.

> Indeed, the separation of science and religion seemed to guarantee the sanctity of religious belief by eliminating possible conflicts between empirical reason and faith.[39]

It was not, therefore, anti-Christian humanists that caused the changes in the Jacobean era, but an

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[37] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 78.

[38] Robert Ornstein, <u>The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy</u> (Madison, 1966).

[39] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 5.

epistemological crisis. Dramatists were "caught between old and new ways of determining the realities upon which moral values rest."[40]

Ornstein recalls Spencer to mind when he states that

> The sixteenth century moral philosopher inherited the scholastic concept of natural law; but he also discovered in the newly reprinted works of Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus a classical ideal or right reason which was outside of and independent of the previously all embracing theological framework--an ethical ideal which proclaimed the self-sufficiency, or rather the all-sufficiency, of reason in determining moral behavior.[41]

The didacticists were impressed (and probably shaken) that the pagans had worked out such a good moral system without the aid of revelation. So according to Ornstein, it was not the discovery of different ideas that upset the Jacobeans so much as the realization that there might be other systems that could work as well as the one they had used for so many years.

Obviously, each of the three men whose writings on the disillusionment I have cited here have valid points to make. I tend to agree with all of them. and find it strange that they try to confine the causes of the disillusionment to any one particular realm. Indeed, Bastiaenen, in the introduction to his book on the morality of Jacobean and Caroline drama expresses reasons for the disillusionment

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[40] Ibid., p. 6.

[41] Ibid., p. 34.

that touch on all phases mentioned above.[42] I have not quoted him directly, however, because I was able to give a more complete summary by drawing from the works of the other men.

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[42]Johannes Adam Bastiaenen, The Moral Tone of Jacobean and Caroline Drama (New York, 1966).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the change shown from Spenser to Beaumont and Fletcher is the fact that it is a phenomenon not limited to a particular period in history. The same sort of literary revolution is going on today, and it is the result of similar conditions in Jacobean times and ours. It is not yet possible to do the same sort of research on our era that has been done on the Jacobean period; historians can be much more accurate in retrospect than when they themselves are involved in the times. Yet, as a member of an American generation which I believe is similar to the English generation which lived at the end of the Jacobean period, I feel that I can distinguish several points of comparison.

America was first pioneered by English Puritans, and their influence has lingered over the years. The selections in anthologies of American literature usually include sermons such as the "fire and brimstone" ones written by Jonathan Edwards. Rules of right and wrong were strictly delineated, and there was little doubt in the peoples' minds as to when they transgressed. For these reasons, it would be unfair to compare Puritanism to the more liberal Christian humanist philosophy. Puritanism was, however, the standard for moral behavior for early Americans just as Christian humanist ideals were the standard for the Elizabethans.

The puritanical standards which prevailed in early America emphasized the fact that man is at the mercy of God, and only by virtue of divine election is he saved from eternal damnation. The literature of the time, however, shows that such a philosophy was too harsh for all men to believe absolutely. Authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville constantly examined the Puritan standard. They evidently disapproved of its stricture, but because they seemed unable to reject the ethic completely, their works reflect a personal dilemma. William Cullen Bryant and James Fenimore Cooper (early American romantics) clashed with several doctrines of Puritanism because they believed that man was inherently good--if he would follow the dictates of nature, he would be saved.

The transition from Puritanism to the overt acceptance of a mew morality probably began with the writers of the 1920's. Ernest Hemingway is a particularly interesting example. His ideas on women as impediments to men's realizing their full potentials are almost medieval. (This can be seen most clearly in The Sun Also Rises when Brett Ashley says that it makes her feel good not to be a bitch with the young bullfighter Romero. Her words indicate that she realizes the power of women over men and that she has often exercised her advantage.) Hemingway's insistence on right forms, however, as exhibited in the behavior of the various counts in his books, is

very similar to the Elizabethan demand for order. I am calling Hemingway a transitionalist because he was one of the first writers to develop a new moral code. He says in The Sun Also Rises that "morality is what you feel good after," thereby establishing individual moral responsibility.

William Faulkner is also a transitionalist, and his works are closer to my subject than Hemingway's because Faulkner wrote of the American South rather than Europe. Even today, the South is the stronghold of old traditions, and in Faulkner's time the contrast was even more striking. Faulkner recognized the changes in society and their effects on the people living them. For this reason, his works are comparable to later tragedies of Shakespeare. He is still clinging to the old forms, but he realizes that they are not going to last. Consider the Compson family in The Sound and the Fury. Caddy Compson has given in to her sexual desires, and she has to suffer the harsh censure of her peers. Her brother commits suicide partly because he cannot face the fact that Caddy is no longer pure.

Other writers of the 1920's did not concentrate so much as Faulkner and Hemingway on sexual morality. Sinclair Lewis, for example, denounces materialism in Babbitt; and J. D. Salinger, a few years later, complains of the impersonality of the world in Catcher in the Rye. Their works can be compared to the plays of the reformers

and satirists in the early part of the Jacobean disillusionment. People are no longer willing to settle for this sort of social comment. They seem to have placidly accepted the fact that "life is like that," and they demand, just as did the coterie audiences, titillation for their jaded senses.

Two authors in our age who seem to parallel Beaumont and Fletcher closely are Terry Southern and Mason Hoffenburg. Their book Candy is a satire on sex in which the only remaining moral standard is a kind of natural humanity (Candy's reason for sleeping with anyone who asks her to is "He needs me!"). Candy has been a tremendous success; most readers are evidently not offended by the subject matter and find the book extremely funny. It would be interesting, however, to know how many of the people who have read Candy realize that the very absence of all norms in the book shows a desire for them. So Southern and Hoffenburg, as Beaumont and Fletcher before them, have managed to give the public the enjoyment they want, and make an impressive comment on our society at the same time.

Our current literature seems to parallel the plays being performed before the closing of the English theaters in 1642. There is an astonishing amount of pornography on the newstands, and even the novels that are supposed to be good are infused with an inordinate amount of sensational sexual material. Harold Robbin's The Adventurers is a fascinating book as far as plot and action are concerned

but it contains scenes that are obvious titillation for the masses.

Fortunately, there does seem to be a genuine movement toward a new frankness about sex. D. H. Lawrence (who may be a little out of place in this section of my paper since he is English instead of American) treats sex in a more refined manner. His Lady Chatterley's Lover is quite graphic, but one feels that the sex between its characters grows out of a "true responsible relationship"--a term often used in discussions on the new morality. His moral standards are purposely ambiguous, and "right" depends on the situation. One can see in his works the development of a more workable norm, one which accepts the fact that everyone does not fit the same pattern.

So there may be hope for the future of our literature, although right now we seem to be a critical point. In Jacobean times a similar crisis resolved itself when literature collapsed before a strong Puritan reaction to the preceding licentiousness. Hopefully, the same resolution will not follow in our period; but it may. The American public needs to accept sex not as something to be hidden and ashamed of, but as a part of life. Many of our modern writers are directing undue attention to a very natural physical function, thereby overemphasizing its importance. Only when sex is seen in its proper perspective will literature cease to be sensational and treat sex themes in a more mature manner.

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