A study of the independent plays of Philip Massinger

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A STUDY OF THE INDEPENDENT PLAYS OF PHILIP MASSINGER

by

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N O T E

In footnotes the following abbreviations have been used throughout:

Bentley = G. E. Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, IV, Oxford, 1956.

Chelli = M. Chelli, Le Drame de Massinger, Lyon, 1914.

Cruikshank = A. H. Cruikshank, Philip Massinger, Oxford, 1920.

Dunn = T. A. Dunn, Philip Massinger, 1957.

Gifford = The Plays of Philip Massinger, edited by W. Gifford, 2nd edition, 1813.

Quotations from Massinger's writings are made from the following editions:

(1) Believe As You List, in Philip Massinger (Mermaid Series), II, edited by A. Symons, 1889;

(2) Gifford for all the plays apart from Believe As You List.

CHAPTER I

Career and Stage History

Philip Massinger[1] was baptised at St. Thomas's, Salisbury, on November 24, 1583; nothing more is known of his early years until his matriculation at St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, on May 14, 1602. His father, Arthur Massinger, held a position of responsibility in the household of the Herberts, whose principal seat was Wilton House, near Salisbury, and much has been conjectured about Massinger's possible connections with the family.[2] He seems to have left Oxford without a degree: again, the reason for this has been much disputed.[3] It is usually accepted that he left the University for London where he began his stage career, possibly as an actor;[4] but there is no evidence of his activities until 1613, when, along with Field and Daborne, he wrote from prison to Henslowe, requesting advance payment for a play.[5]

The early years of Massinger's career as a dramatist,[6] up to 1625, are confused because of his association with John Fletcher. No play was published in the seventeenth century as a collaboration by Massinger and

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1. For a detailed discussion of all the known facts of Massinger's biography, cf. Dunn, pp. 1-54.

2. cf. R. H. Ball, 'Massinger and the House of Pembroke', MLN, XLVI (1931), 399.

3. cf. Dunn, pp. 11-13.

4. cf. Bentley, p. 752.

5. cf. Bentley, p. 752.

6. For an account of Massinger's career as a dramatist, cf. Bentley, pp. 752-5.

Fletcher, but Sir Aston Cokayne commented on the partnership twice in the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio of 1647 and again in a verse letter published in 1658.[1] Critics have since traced the hand of Massinger in several of Fletcher's plays written for the King's Men between 1616 and 1625, but it is often difficult to judge whether these are genuine collaborations or revisions by Massinger of older plays by Fletcher. During this period Massinger also collaborated with Field in The Fatal Dowry, also for the King's Men, and with Dekker in The Virgin Martyr, for a Red Bull company; while his independent plays probably written between 1621 and 1625, The Maid of Honour, A New Way, The Bondman, The Parliament of Love and The Renegado, were written for Beeston companies at the Phoenix. Bentley suggests that,

> 'a better dating of the plays might show a complete break with the King's company and an attachment to Beeston's troupes for two or three years'.[2]

Although so little is definitely known about Massinger's work in these years, deductions about the authorship of the collaborated plays have frequently been made. Chelli's book on the collaboration of Massinger and Fletcher[3] is perhaps the major contribution to this field, but work has also been done by E. H. C. Oliphant,[4] R. Boyle,[5] H. D. Sykes,[6]

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1. All quoted by Bentley, p. 753.
2. Bentley, pp. 754-5.
3. Étude sur la collaboration de Massinger avec Fletcher et son groupe, Paris, 1926.
4. The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, 1927; 'The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher', Englische Studien, XV (1891), XVI (1892).
5. 'Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger', Englische Studien, V (1882), VII (1884), VIII (1885), X (1887).
6. Particularly in Sidelights on Elizabethan Drama, 1924, pp. 140 ff.

and recently by Cyrus Hoy[3]

B. Maxwell[1], ~~and~~ F. Jones,[2] and the whole question has frequently been discussed, briefly or at length, by Massinger's critics.

After the death of Fletcher in 1625, Massinger succeeded him as the regular dramatist for the King's men, and for this company all but one of his remaining independent plays were written. In addition to his extant work, Massinger wrote several plays that have been completely lost; if these are taken into account he seems to have probably produced two plays a year from 1626 to 1639. However,

> 'Though Massinger was Fletcher's successor as regular dramatist for the King's company, it is clear that he never attained anything like Fletcher's popularity. The difference is most apparent in the list of the plays of the King's men's repertory which they were protecting in 1641 . . . Though nearly all the plays Massinger had written for the King's men were more recent than any of Fletcher's, the company thought it worth while to protect three times as many Fletcher as Massinger plays . . . This evidence of comparative failure in the theatre is confirmed by the number of dedications and commendatory verses in the Massinger quartos which excuse or at least refer to unappreciated performances'.[4]

The impression to be gained from the prologues and contemporary references is certainly that of a disappointed man, continually in financial difficulties. Two of the plays, however, were re-printed: The Duke of Milan, first printed in 1623, and The Bondman, 1624, were both re-printed in 1639. Even during the dramatist's life-time certain records draw attention to what were to prove two of his most popular plays in

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1. Studies in Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger, Chapel Hill, 1939.
2. 'An Experiment with Massinger's verse', PMLA, L (1932), 727 ff.
4. Bentley, p. 755. The Lord Chamberlain's list in 1639 includes The Bondman, The Renegado, The Great Duke, The Maid of Honour, A New Way. His list in 1641 includes The City-Madam, The Guardian, The Bashful Lover.
3. 'The Share of Fletcher and his Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon', Studies in Bibliography, VIII (1956), pp. 129-146; IX (1957), pp. 143-162.

later years: in 1635 A New Way, printed two years previously, was acted in the Craven District by 'a certeyne company of roguish players',[1] and in 1636 appeared William Cartwright's The Royal Slave, a play apparently influenced by The Bondman.[2]

Massinger died in March 1639/40, and his burial is recorded in the registers of St. Saviour's, Southwark; according to Cokayne's epitaph, he was buried in Fletcher's grave. The period of comparative failure that attended his plays during his life-time was followed by the closing of the theatres during the Civil War and the interregnum. When, however, the theatres opened again with the Restoration, there began a series of revivals and adaptations that testify to a new popularity:

> 'Eleven of the seventeen printed plays were adapted wholly or in part . . . before the death of Thomas Betterton, and several of the plays were acted in a form about which we have no specific record . . . Almost as high a proportion of Massinger's plays were on the stage, then, as of Shakespeare's (twenty-nine out of thirty-seven) or of Beaumont and Fletcher's (thirty-nine out of fifty-three).'[3]

The most frequently mentioned play in this period is The Bondman,[4] which was a great favourite with Samuel Pepys:

> 'There is nothing more taking in the world with me than that play.'[5]

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1. Quoted by Bentley, p. 801.

2. cf. W. G. Rice, 'Sources of William Cartwright's 'The Royall Slave'', MLN, XLV (1930), 515.

3. J. G. McManaway, 'Philip Massinger and the Restoration Drama', ELH, I (1934), 281.

4. '. . . few changes would have been necessary in the character of Marullo, a perfectly chaste, perfectly self-controlled, almost a Platonic lover' (ibid., p. 287).

5. The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. H. B. Wheatley, 1904, IV, 201 (July 28th, 1664).

Pepys, who bought a copy of the play in 1661, and was reading it in 1666, records performances in 1660/1 (when he had already 'seen it often'[1]), 1661, 1662 and 1664. Edward Browne saw it in 1662 or 1663,[2] and it was in the repertory of Rhodes' company at the Cockpit shortly before the Restoration.[3] Betterton's performance as Pisander impressed Pepys.[4] A New Way was seen in London by two Dutch visitors in 1661/2, and in Norwich soon afterwards by Edward Browne.[5] The Renegado was included in the list of performances by the King's Company, 1660-2, and was seen in Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1662 or 1663.[6] A manuscript revision of The Renegado in a late seventeenth century hand is still extant.[7] The catalogue of plays of His Majesty's Servants, 1668/9, includes The Duke of Milan, The Roman Actor, The Emperor of the East, The Guardian, The Bashful Lover, and The Unnatural Combat. It is possible that The Guardian was presented at court in 1674,[8] and the performance of 'The Spanish Lady, or The very Woman' in Oxford in 1661 may have been a production of Massinger's play.[9]

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1. ibid., I, 362.
2. cf. Bentley, p. 767.
3. cf. Bentley, p. 766.
4. Pepys, op. cit., I, 354. cf. also J. Downes, Roscius Anglicanus, 1708, p. 18.
5. cf. Bentley, p. 81.
6. ibid., p. 812.
7. cf. W. J. Lawrence, 'The Renegado', TLS, 1929, p. 846. cf. also McManaway, op. cit., p. 288.
8. McManaway, op. cit., pp. 291-2.
9. cf. Bentley, pp. 825, 827.

Massinger's standing in the late seventeenth century is not merely to be assessed by records of productions: his influence is to be felt in many new plays of the period. Cokayne's The Obstinate Lady (1657) shows some dependence on A Very Woman,[1] and in 1659 Chamberlaine borrowed from The Renegado in his Pharonnides.[2] Love Lost in the Dark (1680) is a rehandling of material from the Three New Plays printed in 1655 (The Guardian, A Very Woman, The Bashful Lover). There are echoes of A New Way in Shadwell's True Widow, Lacy's Sir Hercules Buffoon, and Ravenscroft's The Canterbury Guests. The City-Madam is used in Thompson's Mother Shipton, Sir Hercules Buffoon, and possibly in Dilke's City Lady and The City Match by Mayne. Lee's Theodosius owes something to The Emperor of the East, Mrs. Behn's The City Heiress to The Guardian. The proviso scene in Congreve's The Way of the World (1700) has many antecedents in seventeenth century drama, but the parallels to be found in The City-Madam suggest that there may have been some direct influence.[4]

Kirk has described a manuscript adaptation of The City-Madam, called The Cure of Pride, which he dates in the early eighteenth century , and suggests James Love as the possible author. The plot has been made more plausible by the substitution of a trip down the Thames on a stormy night

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1. cf. G. Langbaine, An Account of the English Dramatick Poets, 1691, p. 69.

2. cf. G. W. Rice, 'The Sources of Massinger's The Renegado', P.Q., XI (1932), 74-5.

3. cf. R. Kirk (ed.), The City-Madam, 1934, pp. 36-41.

4. cf. McManaway, op.cit., for a full discussion of Massinger in the Restoration period.

for Sir John's retirement to a monastery, but Massinger's verse has been ruined.[1] In 1719 there was published, 'as acted at Drury Lane', The Bondman or, Love and Liberty, an anonymous alteration usually ascribed to Betterton. This version shows many deletions, particularly in long speeches and in the use of coarse language, but there has been no drastic alteration. Betterton's name is also associated with The Roman Actor.[2] An altered version of the play was published in 1722,[3] and in the same year there was a performance at Lincoln's Inn Fields:

> 'Not acted 30 years, the History and Fall of Domitian, or the Roman Actor, revived with alterations.'[4]

In the middle of the eighteenth century a new phase in the stage-history of Massinger's plays opened with the growing popularity of A New Way to Pay Old Debts, but this play must be reserved for individual treatment.[5] The rest of Massinger's plays were neglected during the middle years of the century. In 1763, however, The Picture was performed at Canterbury and Sittingbourne,[6] and an alteration of The City-Madam by Love is said to have appeared at Richmond in 1771.[7] Cumberland's

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1. cf. Kirk, op.cit., pp. 18-27.
2. cf. Bentley, p. 817.
3. W. L. Sandidge (ed.), The Roman Actor, 1929, pp. 2-3.
4. J. Genest, Some Account of the English Stage, 1832, III, 82.
5. cf. p. 14 below.
6. cf. S. Rosenfeld, Strolling Players and Drama in the provinces 1660-1765, 1939, pp. 262-3.
7. Love 'played the part of Luke with great success' and 'afterwards prevailed on Mr. Garrick to bring the Play forward at Drury Lane'. (Gifford, IV, 2).

alteration of The Duke of Milan, consisting of 'Massinger's play, and Fenton's Mariane, incorporated', was performed in 1779.[1] In the same year appeared an alteration of The Bondman, also attributed to Cumberland. The alterations 'consisted chiefly in reforming the comic scenes',[2] It was, however, 'very coldly received, being acted only about six nights';[3] it was 'highly spoken of by the critics, but it did not succeed to the degree that was reasonably expected'.[4] In 1783 H. Bate's The Magic Picture was acted and printed. The 'advertisement' comments on an excellent performance and a 'very flattering reception', and explains the alterations:

> 'After giving a different turn to the drama, by making the changes of the Picture, the effects of Eugenius's jealousy, instead of the magic art of Baptista, and expunging the gross indelicacies which overran the play, it was found that most of the characters required a little fresh modelling to complete the design of the present undertaking.'

The City-Madam was also performed in 1783, for Baddeley's benefit, with Palmer as Luke.[5] In 1785 appeared an alteration of The Maid of Honour by Kemble, who, surprisingly, himself played Adorni.[6] Kemble also played in The Roman Actor:

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1. cf. T. W. Baldwin (ed.), The Duke of Milan, 1918, p.9.
2. Genest, op.cit., VI, 140.
3. D. E. Baker, Biographia Dramatica, 1782, II, 64.
4. cf. B. T. Spencer (ed.), The Bondman, 1932, p. 10.
5. cf. Genest, op.cit., VI, 289.
6. ibid., p335.

> 'Kemble, during a winter theatrical fête at York, Hull, and Edinburgh, in 1781, declaimed Paris's defence of the stage.'[1]

Paris was one of his chief roles in his Irish tour in 1781-2.[2] In 1795 the 'Defence of the Stage' was included in a programme for Chalmers' benefit in Philadelphia.[3] The Female Patriot, an alteration of The Bondman by Mrs. Rowson, was performed in New York[4] and Philadelphia in 1795: no copy is extant, but the omission of Cleon, Asotus and Corisca from the dramatis personae suggests a curtailment of the low comedy.[5] In 1798 there was an unusual revival in Disinterested Love, an adaptation of The Bashful Lover:

> 'Disinterested Love was not acted a 2d time - it was altered from Massinger - the alteration is attributed to Hull, who has foolishly changed the name of Farneze, and of 2 other characters - Oulton says that Pope was ill, and that Johnston read the part.'[6]

The early nineteenth century, which saw the publication of Gifford's edition of the collected works in 1805 and 1813, and Lamb's revival of Massinger and his contemporaries in his Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, initiated a new period of interest. Apart from the theatrical success of A New Way, the century is more outstanding for the printed

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1. W. L. Sandidge (ed.), The Roman Actor, 1929, p. 4. cf. also Genest: 'Kemble was particularly impressive in Paris, and acted the part afterwards at Dublin with great applause - considerable omissions were necessary in order to fit the Roman Actor for representation, but cutting it down to 2 acts was (as Puff says) not using the pruning knife, but the axe.' (op.cit., VII, 243).

2. Sandidge, op.cit., p. 4. 3. ibid., p. 5.

4. R. H. Ball, The Amazing Career of Sir Giles Overreach, Princeton, 1939, p. 172.

5. B. T. Spencer (ed.), The Bondman, 1932, p. 11.

6. Genest, op.cit., VII, 370.

editions of the plays than for stage performances. The City-Madam, however, enjoyed considerable popularity in the form of Riches, the adaptation by James Bland Burges which was first acted and printed in 1810. The success of the play arose largely from the attraction which the part of Luke has for 'great individual actors, whose talents gave it an importance which it would hardly have attained otherwise'.[1] James Grant Raymond was the first to act the part in 1810. The play was most favourably reviewed by The Times, which said that it received 'the general applause of a crowded audience'. The Examiner comments:

> 'It succeeded for a season, and was a great relief from the feeble jesting of the modern drama.'

William Charles Macready, who first acted Luke late in 1810 in Birmingham at the age of seventeen, was the next great actor to win success in Riches, at Newcastle in 1811-12, at Bath in 1815, and in London in 1814, 1837 and 1841. A review in The Spectator in 1841 vividly describes his portrayal of the miser and schemer, and in addition provides some insight into current interpretation of the play:

> 'The sudden and violent transitions of character in Luke, startling as they are in the play, appear unnatural from the want of that semblance of hypocrisy in MACREADY'S profession of goodness and generosity which should make clear to the audience the artful insincerity of his conduct. MACREADY pleads for the debtors with the fervour of real benevolence, and a boldness and vehemence alike inconsistent with his dissimulation and deferential humility towards his brother.'[2]

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1. Kirk, op.cit., p. 45. For a full account of the play, and details of performances and reviews, cf. Kirk, pp. 45-50.

2. Macready's performance would perhaps have pleased T. S. Eliot: 'His [Luke's] humility in the first act of the play is more than half real. The error in his portraiture is . . . the premature disclosure of villainy

Macready himself commented on the scope the play afforded the actor: its success

> 'in the country was very considerable, although in London it took no permanent hold of public interest'.

In Dublin, he says, it was his most popular character: it

> 'added to my reputation and materially improved my finances'.

But the greatest representation of Luke was that of Edmund Kean: his benefit performance in 1815 cleared for him £1,500, 'the largest sum ever realized by a theatrical benefit', his biographer tells us. He acted the part in London in 1814, 1817, 1822, and 1830, and at Bath in 1816. The Theatrical Inquisitor gives a long and detailed description of his performance; it seems that he succeeded where Macready had failed:

> 'There was a consciousness of expression in his countenance, a shuffling left-handedness of movement, and an affectation of speech, sufficient to acquaint the audience with all the workings of his mind, without awakening the distrust of those whom it was his purpose to deceive.'

Hawkins[1] also gives an impressive account, but perhaps Hazlitt, more than any other, conveys minutely the particular quality of Kean's treatment of the part: in the last scene, at the appearance of his brother,

> 'The shame and agony displayed in the manner in which he holds by the back of the chair, to which he has staggered, with his hands before his face, shrinking up into himself, and the abject posture in which he crawls, like a spider, to cling to his brother's feet, had a truth, an originality, and an impressiveness of effect, equal to anything we have witnessed in this extraordinary actor.'[2]

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in his temptation of the two apprentices . . . But for this, he would be a perfect chameleon of circumstance' ('Philip Massinger', 1920, Selected Essays, p. 219).

1. F. W. Hawkins, Life of Edmund Kean, 1869, I, 259.

2. W. Hazlitt, 'Dramatic Criticism', 1814, Works, ed. P. P. Howe, XVIII, 195.

Kean played Luke during his visit to America in 1821-2, and Booth acted the part in 1831. Other American productions are recorded in 1810, 1819, 1820, and 1830. The play was performed at Sunderland in 1819. An anonymous adaptation of the original play, with Samuel Phelps as Luke, was produced in 1844 and repeated in 1852, 1856 and 1862. Phelps' performance, though apparently not great, seems to have been 'sincere and worthy acting'.[1]

The Duke of Milan was revived with anonymous alterations in 1816. In the last act Eugenia, disguised as the dead Marcelia, holds a poisoned flower which kills Sforza. Hazlitt[2] poured scorn on the weakness of this alteration, and, like Hawkins,[3] was less impressed by Kean's Sforza than by his Overreach. Some insight into Kean's management of the play is revealed by a copy in the British Museum, marked with MS stage-directions and alterations, and inscribed,

'Correctly marked according to the directions of Mr. Kean'.

The conclusion was performed in style. When Sforza, discovering Francisco's identity, wildly calls out for tortures, no less than eight guards were to enter, and finally the 'Curtain falls to slow Music'. The play was presented in London and Bath. Hawkins says this was Kean's last endeavour to redeem the works of Massinger from obscurity:

> 'Other plays suggested themselves to him for revival, but he desisted from the undertaking, feeling sure that in A New Way

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1. Kirk, op.cit., p. 51.
2. W. Hazlitt, 'A view of the English Stage', 1816, Works, V, 289-90.
3. Hawkins, op.cit., p. 361.

> to Pay Old Debts he had opened to view the fruitful mine which Massinger's plays afford.'[1]

This seems to have not been strictly true, as in 1822 Kean appeared in The Roman Actor, or the Drama's Vindication. Paris' defence of the stage was a popular extract: it was read by Hackett in New York in 1827, and in 1886 it was remarked that it had 'been advertised as an attraction' on many occasions.[2]

In 1831 Fanny Kemble revived The Maid of Honour:

> 'She said that the part of Camiola was the only one that she had ever selected for herself.'[3]

However, it was not a popular stage success. There was a surprising adaptation, in 1834, by Elton, of The Unnatural Combat. Chelli says that it seems to have been well received.[4] Translations of The Duke of Milan were performed in Vienna in 1846 and in Berlin in 1879.

Since the early years of the nineteenth century Massinger's plays have been almost totally neglected in the theatre. Apart from A New Way there seem to have been only two revivals in the present century, and neither of these took place in public theatres. In 1922 three performances of The Great Duke were given, in aid of the Inns of Court Mission, in the Middle Temple Hall, by

> 'a company of old Oxford amateurs, including Mr. Ledward, Mr.

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1. Hawkins, op.cit., p. 362.
2. cf. W. L. Sandidge, The Roman Actor (ed.), 1929, p.5.
3. E. A. Bryne, The Maid of Honour (ed.)., 1927, p. xxxvi.
4. Chelli, p. 65.

> Colbourne and Mr. Ramage, reinforced by Miss Cathleen Nesbitt and Miss Elizabeth Pollock'.[1]

The production was warmly praised by The Times: the actors were said to have captured the delicacy and artificial grace essential to the play, and this spirit

> 'is better displayed in these surroundings than it could be in in any other'.[2]

The following year a performance of The Duke of Milan was given for the tercentenary celebrations at Merton College, Oxford. It was directed by Nigel Playfair, who also designed for the production an 'Elizabethan Stage . . . specially built by the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith'. The performance seems to have included a good deal of music, and a prologue was written for it by Professor G. S. Gordon.[3]

The most outstanding feature, however, of the stage-history of Massinger's plays is the extraordinary success of A New Way to Pay Old Debts which, after its revival by Garrick in 1748, was produced intermittently throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and occasionally in the twentieth century, in America as well as in England. So far no-one has compiled a full account of the stage-history of the other plays, but in the case of A New Way a monumental task has been performed by R. H. Ball in The Amazing Career of Sir Giles Overreach, Princeton, 1939.[4]

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1. The Spectator, Feb. 18, 1922, p. 205.
2. The Times, Feb 24, 1922, p. 7.
3. Details of the performance are given in the programme, to be seen in the British Museum.
4. The following is largely based on this book.

Ball has noted every recorded performance of the play, with quotations from contemporary reviews. The secret of the play's theatrical success seems to lie in the opportunities which the character of Sir Giles offers to the star actor of the romantic type: the stage presentation of the part has therefore been that of a passionate tragic villain, inclining, it would seem, towards the melodramatic. The fashion was set by Henderson, who first appeared in the part in 1779:

> 'Henderson it was who released the flood-gates; hereafter no important actor could avoid breasting the current of emotion which rushed through the character of Sir Giles. He was the first to turn the extortioner into a role which a recognised star must essay.'[1]

Kemble first acted the part in 1781 and Cooke in 1801. But the greatest Sir Giles of all time was Edmund Kean: he gave numerous performances in England between 1816 and 1833, and in America in 1821-2 and in 1826, and was followed by a steady stream of minor actors who kept the play alive throughout the century. The play seems to have been introduced to America by Chalmers in 1795, and there too it was constantly revived, its stars including Junius Brutus Booth, Davenport and Edwin Booth. Ball has commented, however, on a change of attitude towards the play in the later years of the nineteenth century: it was eventually abandoned by the public theatre, 'pushed . . . into antiquarian revivalism' by 'a tendency in the direction of realism', and to be found only 'in institutions of learning, in dramatic societies, or still newer repertory theatres, where it seems no longer an active part of the dramatic life of the present, but an old

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1. Ball, op.cit., p. 43.

play revived because it is old'.[1] The twentieth century performances testify to this change: in England the play has been performed by the Marlowe Society, Cambridge, in 1912, the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1914, the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich, in 1921, Merton College, Oxford, in 1930, Birkbeck College, London, in 1932; and in America there have been several college productions, beginning with one at Princeton in 1908. However, there was also a professional revival by Walter Hampden in America in 1922. In England there was a broadcast performance in 1948, produced by John Richmond, with Hugh Griffith as Sir Giles. In 1950 there was a provincial tour by Donald Wolfit. According to one reviewer Wolfit seems to have repeated something of the intensity of Kean's performance:

> 'There were moments . . . when we were tempted to see Sir Giles, in Wolfit's person, as playing a private tragedy against the light-hearted background of a different play'[2]

The stage-history of A New Way has interesting features for a literary appraisal of the play. The contemporary reviews of the nineteenth century performances, extensively quoted in Ball's book, reveal, in the minute detail of the reporting, the current interpretation of the play. Ball has remarked on the scenes that seem to have been most effective in the theatre, for example, the frequently criticised opening scene of Act IV, where Sir Giles declares himself to Lord Lovell, and has suggested how this can modify literary judgment.[3] The conception of Sir Giles as an

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1. Ball, op.cit., pp. 158-9.
2. The Sheffield Telegraph, Oct. 10th, 1950.
3. Ball, op.cit., pp. ~~158-9.~~ 384-7.

impassioned, almost hysterical figure of overwhelming evil is the dominant theme of the reviews, particularly in such a detailed account of the acting of Kean as that of Hawkins,[1] who paints with great fervour, and no doubt exaggeration, the dynamic effect it had upon the audience. This concentration upon the figure of Sir Giles is also apparent from Kemble's stage version, which was widely used in the nineteenth century.[2] One of the main alterations is a condensation of the last scene and some rearrangement in order to keep Sir Giles on the stage and avoid his exit and reappearance in the middle of the scene. Ball has commented on the change of tone implied by this alteration, with its unrelieved concentration on the villainy of Sir Giles:

> 'On the Caroline stage the play was probably more comic than in revival, and Massinger may have felt it necessary to temper the inherent seriousness of the action by means of Sir Giles's first exit and the ensuing level dialogue before his final reappearance and outburst of insanity. With the change in spirit which emphasized the serious and emotional side of the play, however, Kemble aspired as much as possible to harrow the feelings of his audiences that they might leave the theatre with awe as well as relief.'[3]

The nineteenth century stage presentation of Sir Giles, and particularly that of Kean, has had a lasting effect on critical opinion.

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1. Hawkins, op.cit., pp. 344-55. Some idea of Kean's performance may also be gained from Clint's picture (1820) of the last scene of the play (to be seen in the Garrick Club) in which Sir Giles is seen with drawn sword threatening his enemies. Hawkins calls the picture 'an equivocal success' (op.cit., p. 346 n.), but the Merton College production reproduced the grouping of the picture, apparently with great effect (Ball, op.cit., p. 162).

2. First printed in 1810, but reprinted in several collections, e.g. The Acting Drama, 1834, The British Drama, 1864.

3. Ball, op.cit., p. 405.

Hazlitt's vehement character sketch[1] is obviously coloured by his experience in the theatre. In later generations, however, among critics who had never known Kean, the genuine eloquence and insight of Hazlitt have been lost, and the melodramatic tendency of the play has often been overstressed. In the twentieth century this has been counteracted by the penetrating criticism of Eliot[2] and Knights,[3] but it is disappointing to see an extreme instance in the introduction of the play's most recent editor: the play is designated 'a thoroughly romantic Regency-Victorian melodrama',[4] and the final judgment is:

'the play, though not great drama, is high-class melodrama'.[5]

This view of the play in terms of melodramatic black and white makes nonsense of its comic seriousness in the Jonsonian manner, denies its roots in actual social and economic problems. It in fact seems to stem principally from the stage-history of the play, from the conception of Sir Giles initiated by Henderson and fully developed by Kean. The amazing career of Sir Giles Overreach has earned for Massinger's play the distinction of having 'the longest vogue of any Jacobean or Caroline play except Shakespeare's';[6] but in its effect upon critical opinion it has frequently

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1. W. Hazlitt, 'Lectures on the age of Elizabeth, IV', 1820, Works, ed. Howe, VI, 267.
2. T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', 1920, Selected Essays, 1932, pp.205ff.
3. L. C. Knights, Drama and Society in the age of Jonson, 1936, pp.270ff.
4. M. St. Clare Bryne (ed.), A New Way to Pay Old Debts, 1949, p. 13.
5. ibid., p. 16
6. Bentley, op.cit., p. 803.

led to a limited, even distorted, interpretation that has mistaken and underrated the real importance of the play.[1]

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1. The stage-history of The Virgin-Martyr, by Massinger and Dekker, and The Fatal Dowry, by Massinger and Field, is of some relevance to a consideration of Massinger's reputation as an independent writer, as in both cases he has usually been regarded as the chief collaborator. The Virgin-Martyr was performed several times on the continent during the eighteenth century, and had some vogue in England as Injured Virtue, an adaptation by B. Griffin first performed in 1714. The Fatal Dowry, a much admired play, was used by N. Rowe in The Fair Penitent (1702); subsequent critics frequently accused Rowe of theft and compared him unfavourably with Massinger. For this and other adaptations, cf. J. F. Kermode, 'A Note on the History of Massinger's The Fatal Dowry in the 18th century', N & Q, 3 May 1947, p. 186.

CHAPTER II Tragedies

Massinger's tragedies are perhaps his least characteristic work, though they have been rated highly by many of his admirers.[1] The transitional nature of Massinger's writing which creates a certain uneasiness in his work as a whole is particularly apparent in the tragedies. Not yet freed from the mode of the earlier Jacobean dramatists, he retains many of their features of blood and revenge and violence. But these elements have invariably a sense of contrivance: the sombre world of the the earlier dramatists is being re-created in an era where the same impulses no longer exist. A certain loss of vitality goes along with an assertiveness which tends to make everything seem exaggerated. Massinger's tragic characters are painted in extreme colours. Sforza, in The Duke of Milan (1621-2), is dominated by such forces of love and jealousy that he arranges for his wife to be killed should he he die first, and after her death persists in wooing her corpse. Malefort, in The Unnatural Combat (1621-5?), having poisoned his wife before the play opens, kills his son and develops an incestuous passion for his daughter. Domitian, in The Roman Actor (1626), orders murders and seductions as part of his daily routine. Antiochus, the long-suffering hero of Believe As You List (1631), is a very different kind of character, but his persecutions are presented with an exaggeration that corresponds to the excesses of the other tragic

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1. e.g. H. Hallam, Introduction to the literature of Europe, 1839, III, 615.

characters. Massinger seems frequently to be straining for tragic effects. At the same time there is a genuine power in his presentation of the over-passionate man and his hint of timely repentance as a possible means of averting tragedy; and The Roman Actor and Believe As You List are imbued with a conception of stoicism that gives a certain depth to both plays.

Sforza, the Duke of Milan, is perhaps Massinger's most characteristic tragic hero, swinging from one emotional extreme to the other, ultimately repentant, and a gifted orator. Leaving his court at a time of military crisis to mediate with the Emperor Charles, he entrusts all his affairs to his brother-in-law Francisco, making him promise to kill his wife, Marcelia, should he himself die on the battle-field. Francisco attempts in vain to seduce Marcelia, but succeeds in cooling her affection for her husband by revealing the plot against her life. At his return Sforza is persuaded by Francisco that Marcelia has been unfaithful to him, and kills her. Her innocence revealed too late, he is only prevented from suicide by the pretence that she is unconscious but alive. Sforza finally dies by kissing the corpse which Francisco, in the guise of a doctor, has painted with poison. The plot, based in the first place on the story of Herod and Mariamne,[1] is obviously influenced by Othello,[2] and Sforza has several characteristics reminiscent of Shakespeare's hero: he is a man of action and great physical passion, with an eloquence best exhibited on

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1. cf. T. W. Baldwin (ed.), The Duke of Milan, 1918, pp. 12-22.

2. 'Massinger . . . saw the possibility of reworking the Herod-Mariamne story in the Othello type, the tragedy of intrigue, and proceeded to re-shape the characters and plot accordingly.' (ibid., p. 22).

formal , public occasions. There is another parallel in Ford's Love's Sacrifice (1632?) where the Duke is deceived by the love of his friend and wife and falls into a jealous passion like that of Sforza.[1] But Massinger's handling of his hero is characteristic, with the implicit moral judgment that is never entirely absent. Sforza is a heroic figure, but his particular kind of power and splendour is rooted in the corrupt and sordid. At times his love for Marcelia lifts him to exaltation and defiance of all earthly danger:

> 'Fall what can fall, I dare the worst of fate:
> Though the foundation of the earth should shrink,
> The glorious eye of Heaven lose his splendour,
> Supported thus, I'll stand upon the ruins,
> And seek for new life here.' (I,iii)

But the news of military defeat can subdue this in an instant:

> 'Silence that harsh music: a tolling bell,
> As a sad harbinger to tell me, that
> This pamper'd lump of flesh must feast the worms,
> Is fitter for me.' (I,iii)

His passion and eloquence do not constitute a sustaining force, but emotional instability: 'impulsiveness takes the place of vigour'.[2] However nobly he may rise as a heroic figure, the idea of the 'pamper'd lump of flesh' is never far away.[3] The actual repulsiveness[4] of Sforza's

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1. cf. J. E. Baker, 'The Plays of Philip Massinger', Academy, June 1890, p. 430.

2. Sir L. Stephen, Hours in a Library, 1877, II, 149.

3. 'The complete absorption of every manly feeling in weak devotion to a mere animal beauty he [Massinger] delights in exhibiting.' (R. Boyle, 'Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger', ES, IX (1886), 238).

4. The play, especially for Sforza's speeches to Marcelia, was condemned for repulsiveness by J. W. Mills, Academy, Dec. 1891, p. 566.

magnificence, the superficiality of his splendour, emerge also in the background and in the speeches of the minor characters, Gracoho officially ordering widespread drunkenness, the gentleman providing all that may please the senses for the banquet. Sforza's own impassioned speeches contain in their emotional exaggeration an implicit censure and a suggestion of coarseness as well as a certain eloquent vitality:

> 'A mistress, mother! she is more to me,
> And every day deserves more to be sued to.
> Such as are cloy'd with those they have embraced,
> May think their wooing done: no night to me
> But is a bridal one, where Hymen lights
> His torches fresh and new.' (I,iii)

This excessiveness sometimes verges on the grotesque, perhaps deliberately so, as in Sforza's narration of the horrors which would be more endurable than the slightest suffering on Marcelia's part:

> 'The city ta'en, the kennels running blood,
> The ransack'd temples falling on their saints;
> My mother, in my sight, toss'd on their pikes,
> And sister ravished.' (I,iii)

Sforza's chief claim to nobility is his distinction as a soldier and his fearlessness and strategy in public life, particularly as this is presented in the encounter with the Emperor Charles (III,i).[1] Sforza surrenders himself with such frankness and magnanimity that Charles at once restores his dukedom to him. The episode seems something of a digression: Massinger is indulging in the opportunity for a piece of rhetoric as Sforza overcomes his enemies by his eloquence. The scene does, however, emphasise the comparison with Othello: calm and forceful in

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1. Cruikshank thought this the finest scene in the play, 'bathed in the romantic atmosphere so congenial to our author' (p. 136).

public affairs, Sforza returns home elated with success, only to be overwhelmed by domestic turmoil. As a result of Francisco's treachery, Marcelia treats Sforza coolly: bewildered and passionate, he suffers every humiliation in an endeavour to restore her love. The tension of the play swiftly increases as the various members of the court try to convince Sforza of Marcelia's disloyalty, but he refuses to believe until Francisco himself declares that the duchess is in love with him. The climax comes swiftly; the speeches are short as Sforza accuses his wife and suddenly kills her. Marcelia with her last breath manages to establish her innocence, and the closing eloquence of the act is the unexpected silence this imposes on Sforza, a silence that is particularly effective in contrast to the impassioned speeches that have flowed from his lips with such facility earlier in the play. Marcelia dies with words of reconciliation:

> 'As I do
> May heaven forgive you! [Dies.
> Tib. Her sweet soul has left
> Her beauteous prison.
> Steph. Look to the duke; he stands
> As if he wanted motion.
> Tib. Grief hath stopp'd
> The organ of his speech.
> Steph. Take up this body,
> And call for his physicians.
> Sfor. O my heart-strings! [Exeunt.' (IV,iii)

Dunn has said of this part of the play:

> 'The whole scene is a theatrical masterpiece, moving, and yet remarkably restrained. Sforza's final cry of anguish could provide one of the most effective tragic endings in English drama and no modern dramatist would ever dream of going beyond it. But Massinger could not leave well alone, ruled as he was by the

> five-act convention and, what was even more operative, his moral purpose . . . So a rather anti-climactic fifth act is inartfully tacked on.'[1]

It is true that Massinger sometimes seems to start afresh after the fourth act,[2] and also that it is basically a moral purpose that shapes the ending of the play. But Sforza's derangement is more moving and more essential to the artistic unity of the play than Dunn admits. Sforza's very silence at this points creates a sense of expectancy, a restraint that must eventually be loosened, and a new note is introduced into the play by the practical realism of Stephano as he takes command first of the dead and then of the living:

> 'Take up this body,
> And call for his physicians.'

Massinger's interest in the sick in mind and the relation between sin and sickness, a theme he was to explore later in the tragi-comedies, emerges for the first time here, in one of the earliest of his plays. The play is protracted not merely to enforce the moral with which it concludes,

> 'And learn, from this example, There's no trust
> In a foundation that is built on lust', (V,ii)

but to explain the nature of 'lust' in psychological terms. Sforza's excessive passion in the earlier scenes is itself an abnormality, a symptom of mental illness which invades him completely when he has allowed himself to be over-ruled by passion in killing Marcelia.[3] As formerly he lavished every praise on his wife and wished to exclude everything else

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1. , p. 68.
2. cf. a similar premature climax at the death of Paris (The Roman Actor, [IV,ii).
3. 'Jealousy is a crime . . . against reason: it is punished by a loss of reason' (Dunn, p. 155).

from his life, so he cannot now live without the pretence that she is still alive and lavishes every care on her dead body:

> 'Carefully, I beseech you,
> The gentlest touch torments her; and then think
> What I shall suffer.' (V,iii)

This part of the play strongly resembles the anonymous Second Maiden's Tragedy,[1] but a comparison with the older play only serves to show the greater subtlety of Massinger. The Tyrant woos the corpse of his lover, knowing she is dead; but in The Duke of Milan the element of the sensational is reduced by the fact of Sforza's delusion, and the macabre device is used to present a psychological state. Massinger is interested in his hero not primarily as a conventional tragic hero but as a man suffering from human ailments. Before he enters in Act V Pescara recounts in some detail the origin and course of Sforza's delusion, a feature that characterises Massinger's interest in his characters as medical cases. Sforza finally dies, not with an impassioned speech, not assuming any heroic pose, but with the quiet recognition of the true assessment of his past life:

> 'I come: Death! I obey thee.
> Yet I will not die raging; for, alas!
> My whole life was a frenzy.' (V,iii)

Like Webster's Ferdinand,

> 'He seems to come to himself,
> Now he's so near the bottom.' (The Duchess of Malfi, V,v)

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1. 'Massinger imitated Act V, Scene 2 of this play in some rather minute points of conduct and even in many of the ideas there expressed, so much so indeed that his use of it may be considered an adaptation' (T. W. Baldwin, op.cit., p. 26). Some scholars have in fact attributed authorship to Massinger (ibid., pp. 28-9).

W. Minto[1] has commented on a certain uneasiness at the end of the tragedy, a feeling that the fate of Sforza and Marcelia ought and could have been different: the tumult that has been raised is not tranquillised. This is true to some extent, but it is not merely the effect of Massinger's didacticism, as Minto suggests. Not himself sharing a tragic vision of existence, Massinger seems in Sforza to be presenting the tragic hero in terms of a more stable and psychologically understandable world, where the tragic event is avoidable rather than inevitable, and the hero deserves compassion rather than admiration.

Malefort, the central figure of The Unnatural Combat, is an over-passionate figure similar in some respects to Sforza, and again it is upon the development of his character, 'a masterly delineation and ably sustained',[2] and upon final retribution that the power of the play depends. Malefort is charged by Beaufort, the governor of Marseilles, with participation in the piracy of his son. To prove his innocence Malefort fights a duel with his son, who has an unrevealed cause for hating him. Malefort's daughter Theocrine is to be betrothed to Beaufort's son, but her father, after an increasing unwillingness to give her up, finally breaks the match and acknowledges to himself that he is in love with her. In an attempt to cure his passion he allows his friend Montreville to take her away: Montreville subsequently rapes Theocrine in revenge for Malefort's past treatment of him. Theocrine dies, and Malefort is struck dead by

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1. Characteristics of English poets, 1834, p. 477.

2. H. Neele, 'Lectures on English Poetry', IV, Literary Remains, 1829, p. 130.

lightning, having first confessed to his murder of his wife, which had prompted his son's enmity towards him. The macabre element is over-indulged and exaggerated, but although Massinger's taste in this play has been criticised as decadent[1] and perverse,[2] the sombre power of the play has often been recognised and it has even been regarded as his best work.[3] Malefort is a forceful figure from the start, dominating the stage with his 'indignant burst of savage ostentation'[4]:

> 'Live I once more
> To see those hands and arms free! these, that often,
> In the most dreadful horror of a fight,
> Have been as sea-marks to teach such as were
> Seconds in my attempts, to steer between
> The rocks of too much daring, and pale fear,
> To reach the port of victory! . . .' (I,i)

But he becomes most interesting after the death of his son, when he begins to fall in love with his daughter. Adverse criticism of the play has condemned it for its extreme unnaturalness, Massinger's 'inability to humanise so inhuman a theme'.[5] Several critics have felt that the play would have been more acceptable had Massinger indicated that Malefort was unbalanced.[6] But this is to judge the play by inappropriate standards:

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1. Review of R. S. Telfer's edition of the play, TLS, 1932, p. 638.

2. S. A. Dunham, Lives of the most eminent literary and scientific men, 1837, II, 271.

3. 'The air of gloom which overhangs the . . tragedy is as great in its way as anything which our author has attained; and though the play is what we may call Elizabethan rather than for all time, yet it is in some sense the best specimen of his serious work ' (Cruikshank, p. 31).

4. Gifford, I, 138.

5. A. W. Ward, English Dramatic Literature, 1875, III, 16.

6. S. T. Coleridge, 'Table Talk', 1833, Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. T. M. Raysor, p. 417; E. A. Peers, Elizabethan Drama and its Mad Folk, Cambridge, 1914, p. 162; Cruikshank, p. 139.

as in the presentation of Sforza, only to a greater extent here, Massinger seeks to analyse psychologically the inherited type of the tragic hero, and it is implied in the very violence of his actions that, like Sforza's, his 'whole life was a ffenzy'. The development of Malefort's love for his daughter is traced with subtlety, and the main action revolves round the gradual change in his attitude.[1] The first hint is given just after the duel in Malefort's excessive praise of his daughter, his perception of her as the replica of her mother:

> 'for she had
> Such smooth and high-arch'd brows, such sparkling eyes,
> Whose every glance stored Cupid's emptied quiver,
> Such ruby lips, - and such a lovely bloom,
> Disdaining all adulterate aids of art,
> Kept a perpetual spring upon her face,
> As Death himself lamented, being forced
> To blast it with his paleness . . .' (II,iii)

His possessiveness increases as the play moves forward, until finally he is forced to recognise the truth in his own mind, and there is a genuine touch of pathos in his puzzled recognition of what had hitherto been largely unconscious:

> 'I thought it no offence to kiss her often,
> Or twine mine arms about her softer neck,
> And by false shadows of a father's kindness
> I long deceived myself: but now the effect
> Is too apparent.'[2] (IV,i)

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1. '. . . in spite of the melodramatic donnée of this play and the general boisterousness of the action, it is chiefly an analysis of character, a psychological drama, episodic in respect to incident, but close-knit in respect to character and purpose' (R. S. Telfer (ed.), The Unnatural Combat, 1932, p. 52).

2. Gifford (I,191) notes that this passage is closely based on Ovid.

After a considerable struggle with himself he allows Montreville to take Theocrine away, but finds that absence makes no difference:

> 'She's absent, but I have her figure here;
> And every grace and rarity about her,
> Are by the pencil of my memory,
> In living colours painted on my heart.' (V,ii)

He finally yields to his passion, pleads with Montreville to restore Theocrine to him, and eventually finds her, dishonoured and dying. Like Sforza, at his moment of greatest suffering he achieves a certain calmness and a quiet though regretful acceptance:

> 'Take not thy flight so soon, immaculate spirit!
> 'Tis fled already. - How the innocent,
> As in a gentle slumber, pass away!
> But to cut off the knotty thread of life
> In guilty men, must force stern Atropos
> To use her sharp knife often.' (V,ii)

Up to this point Malefort has been steadily growing into a figure with realistic human dimensions: the melodramatic pose of the early scenes has been penetrated and the workings of the man's mind laid bare. His evil claims our sympathy, because of the moral struggle which accompanies it. But the abrupt violence of the end of the play is at variance with the preceding development. Montreville explains his motives for revenge, Malefort's ill treatment of him in the past, and in his final speech Malefort confesses to having killed his second wife, thus provoking his son's hostility. But, although the revelation of these crimes explains and completes the plot, emotionally they are irrelevant. Montreville is a figure of such little consequence in the bulk of the play that it is a shock to find him assuming such prominence at the end, and in the absorbing presentation of Malefort's love for Theocrine the combat at the

beginning of the play and the issues raised by it seem to have lost their significance. Chelli, commenting on the basic disunity of the play, points out the dual nature of the character of Malefort, rejoicing in his earlier villainy, but suffering moral conflict over his love for Theocrine:

> 'monstre partout ailleurs, Malefort est ici honnête homme, puisqu'il se fait violence. Nous avons donc une tragédie véritablement humaine et étudiée, sur un fond d'atrocité purement mélodramatique . . .' [1]

Massinger has tried to graft his own theme on to the framework of the earlier Jacobean tragedy, but his attempt to write in the earlier mode is too deliberate, uncongenial to his own bent,[2] lacking in compulsion. Early in the play Malefort expresses his villainy in the most extreme terms as he surveys his son's corpse:

> 'Were a new life hid in each mangled limb,
> I would search, and find it: and howe'er to some
> I may seem cruel thus to tyrannize
> Upon this senseless flesh, I glory in it.' (II,i)

This recalls the characteristic attitude of Webster's villains:

> 'I limn'd this night-piece and it was my best.'
> (The White Devil, V,vi)

But Massinger's hyperbole, rhetorically effective though it is, is merely sensational. There is a similar sense of the contrivedly melodramatic in the close of the play: Malefort is assailed by thunder and lightning and ghosts, phenomena that recall The Atheist's Tragedy (1607-11), but which are little more than stage machinery here. The storm is obviously the climax of the theme of unnaturalness that is made explicit from time to

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1. p. 154.

2. cf. H. Hallam, Introduction to the Literature of Europe, 1839, III, 614.

time throughout the play, an inversion of the natural order that suggests Macbeth (1605-6?). But natural disorder is not sufficiently embodied in the background and the whole texture of Massinger's play, as it is in Shakespeare's, and depends too much on overt assertion. Malefort hails the elements in a manner recalling Lear on the heath:

> 'Do, do rage on! rend open, Aeolus,
> Thy brazen prison, and let loose at once
> Thy stormy issue! Blustering Boreas,
> Aided with all the gales the pilot numbers
> Upon his compass, cannot raise a tempest
> Through the vast region of the air, like that
> I feel within me . . .' (V,ii)

But there is a certain frigidity about his language that makes the whole speech rather hollow and anti-climactic.[1] Massinger seems to be aiming at something comparable to the grandeur of Faustus' final soliloquy. Like Faustus, Malefort strives after salvation through repentance,

> 'Can any penance expiate my guilt,
> Or can repentance save me?' (V,ii)

but the disappearance of the ghosts implies that forgiveness is denied him. Malefort then veers from the Faustian figure to that of the characteristic tragic figure blaming fate defiantly:

> 'What's left to do then? I'll accuse my fate,
> Thatdid not fashion me for nobler uses . . .'

But the ideas of forgiveness and fate are new to the play: Massinger seems suddenly to ransack all the tragic sources open to him in order to present

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1. '. . . after a weak beginning, Malefort proceeds to a speech of such businesslike discourse as was never, outside laboratories for the investigation of paranormal psychology and E.S.P., addressed to dis-embodied spirits' (Dunn, p. 249).

a grand finale, with the result that undigested elements are superficially yoked together.[1] The horror and violence of the play have shocked many readers in the past:[2] the main reason why the play has proved repellent is that there is something gratuitous about the horrors; they are not made acceptable by any predominating tragic vision, but seem to have been accumulated by deliberate effort.

This adoption of certain features of Jacobean tragedy in a world-order that cannot sustain them is noticeable also in The Duke of Milan, chiefly in the character of Francisco. Massinger again tries to weight his villain too heavily with the conventions of Jacobean tragedy. In his attempted seduction of Marcelia, Francisco finds his closest counterpart in Iachimo: in fact there are in his scenes with Marcelia verbal echoes of Cymbeline. As this kind of figure, cunningly deceptive, composed and plausible, Francisco is successful, and his colloquies with Marcelia are written with some subtlety. But Massinger was not content to create merely a villain of the tragi-comic type, possibly capable of defeat and repentance, and it is when he attempts to force too much tragic villainy upon Francisco that the play is weakest. The sensational exaggeration of his protestations to Marcelia at times strikes a false note:

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1. Some critics have found little or no fault with the conclusion. H. Neele says it 'seems to harmonise with the tremendous tone of the whole picture' (Literary Remains, 1829, p. 130). R. S. Telfer remarks, 'The working out of his theme, ; . . only slightly marred by the accumulation of horrors at the catastrophe, is an achievement of the very highest order' (The Unnatural Combat, 1932, p. 53).

2. 'No Englishman, afterthis play, ought ever to speak of the horrors of the German stage . . . Yet it is a noble drama, and, if decency could allow it to be acted, would afford ample scope for the talents of the greatest performer(Sir Jas. Mackintosh, 1807, quoted in Life of Sir Jas. Mackintosh, ed. R.J. Mackintosh, 1835, I, 363).

'For with this arm I'll swim through seas of blood,
Or make a bridge, arch'd with the bones of men,
But I will grasp my aims in you . . .' (II,i)

Still more jolting are the occasional asides:

'all my plots
Turn back upon myself; but I am in,
And must go on: and, since I have put off
From the shore of innocence, guilt be now my pilot!' (II,i)

As in Sforza's preamble to his command for Marcelia's death,

'For 'tis a deed of night, of night, Francisco!' (I,ii)

evil and villainy seem too deliberately evoked; the sentiment seems too much for the occasion and seems to have the effect of thrilling and curdling the blood rather than conveying a tragic conception of evil. The 'strange "Italianate" world of treachery and poison with which Webster, Ford, and Tourneur make us familiar', which Cruikshank[1] finds in the play, is too much of a conscious dramatic device to be convincing. This is particularly apparent in the last act, which, moving though it is in its presentation of Sforza's illness, nevertheless 'tails off into a tragedy of blood.'[2] Francisco is seen with his sister Eugenia, who, as it has been briefly mentioned earlier in the play, is Sforza's cast-off mistress. It appears that the motive for Francisco's persecution of Sforza and Marcelia is revenge for his sister, and the two now dedicate themselves anew to vengeance (V,i). As in the case of Montreville and Malefort at the close of The Unnatural Combat, the unexpectedness of this revelation

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1. p. 135.
2. W. Archer, The Old Drama and the New, 1923, p. 109.

makes it seem artificial;[1] and the complete absence of Eugenia from the play so far, together with the stilted quality of her speeches, prevents her from making any real impact on our attitude to Sforza. Because the revenge theme is something imposed on the play from without and is alien to its central thought, Francisco's closing speeches are little more than an empty posture. Massinger attempts to make him into a Jacobean villain par excellence:

> 'Give me all attributes
> Of all you can imagine, yet I glory
> To be the thing I was born. I Am Francisco . . .'
> (V,ii)

But this boasting, and likewise Francisco's defiant, exultant last words,

> 'Now I have kept my word, torments I scorn:
> I leave the world with glory. They are men,
> And leave behind them name and memory,
> That, wrong'd, do right themselves before they die',
> (V,ii)

are quite out of keeping with the critical, realistic approach to the heroic figure in Sforza. H. Budd defended Francisco from Hazlitt's[2] charge of unnaturalness and insufficient motivation, by comparing him to Iago.[3] But Francisco is a pale figure beside Shakespeare's villain: because Iago

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1. Chelli, however, comments on the unity of subject: 'Ici comme dans Unnatural Combat, il y a donc quelque chose qui reste mystérieux, dont nous attendons le mot; mais cela est ici intégralement mêlé à l'intrigue centrale' (p. 157).

2. 'A View of the English Stage', 1816, Works, ed. P. P. Howe, V. 289.

3. '. . . if we approve Iago as a villain without a motive . . . we cannot refuse our approval to Francisco as a villain with an inadequate one?' ('A Short Examination of Hazlitt's Criticism of Massinger', St. Mary's Hall Lectures, 1898, p. 193)

takes the audience into his confidence, as it were, and evolves his plots in public, his lack of motive is not noticeable, but Francisco we see only from the outside, and he is little more than a wooden imitation of Iago.

A fresh approach to Francisco was, however, suggested by H. W. Garrod. He wondered whether Massinger was tired of the "italianate" plot and was deliberately mocking it in the scene where Francisco paints Marcelia's corpse with poison in order to deceive and kill the duke: it is

> 'conceivable that when, in the 5th act of The Duke, he came to the corpse scene, he rubbed his friendly hands in prospect of a calculated burlesque'.[1]

This is an extreme view, and yet there are moments in the play when Francisco seems to be presented almost comically, chiefly through the comic character Graccho. Graccho falls into Francisco's power early in the play, and there follows an intermittent battle of wits, Graccho trying to outwit Francisco but being invariably foiled. This serves to throw into relief Francisco's capacity as a plotter, a master of intrigue, rather than an embodiment of evil, the skeleton of a villain without the vitalising spirit. Graccho's own comments tend to place Francisco and his actions in something of a comic light; for instance, his rueful recognition of Francisco's superior skill:

> 'This 'tis for a puisne
> In Policy's Protean school, to try conclusions
> With one that hath commenced, and gone out doctor', (IV,i)

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1. 'Massinger', The Profession of Poetry, 1929, p. 238. This scene has a close parallel in The Revenger's Tragedy as well as The Second Maiden's Tragedy.

and his comic relish at the discovery of Francisco's apparent love for Marcelia:

> 'A brave discovery beyond my hope,
> A plot even offered to my hand to work on!' (III,ii)

This possible element of burlesque is significant in relation to the satiric tone that is frequently present in the tragedies. Indeed there is a note of sardonic commentary running through all the tragedies which more than anything else points to Massinger's characteristic bent as a dramatist. His tragedies are concerned with the position of man in society, rather than man's relationship with the universe, the relation of the abnormal heroic figure to the norm of ordinary life; and his view of society is that of the satirist. The world of The Unnatural Combat, introduced in the opening scene by Montreville, who with a bitter jocularity exposes the ineffectualness of honest dealings in Theocrine's attempt to save her father, is one of petty villainy, beset by crime rather than evil. The sub-plot, presenting the fortunes of the forsaken soldier, Belgarde, is almost entirely satirical. His long tirade on the unjust neglect of soldiers in peace-time (III,iii), interrupting as it does the main action of the play, is a satirical shaft aimed directly at the audience and not merely at the characters of the play. Dunn disapproves of Belgarde's re-appearance at the climax of the play (IV,i): it

> 'involves an abrupt interruption of an intense tragic ascent. This is a grave example of that fault of "the mingled drama".'[1]

But it suggests the importance attached by Massinger to the Belgarde

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1. p. 62

theme, refusing to silence it even before the main tragic business. This fundamentally satirical attitude also seems to account for the pettiness of some of the tragic characters. When the women characters in The Duke of Milan quarrel (II,i), the insults they cast at each other about their respective heights and Mariana's undignified threat of physical violence,

> 'O that I could reach you!
> The little one you scorn so, with her nails
> Would tear your painted face, and scratch these eyes out',

are more reminiscent of the bickering of the women in A Midsummer Night's Dream than of anything in tragedy. There is a similar quarrel between the women in The Roman Actor (I,iv). In instances of this kind the characters fall far below tragic stature: they are satirical comments on the standards of a society that is not plunged into dynamic evil but corrupted by petty passions.

This view of society is strongest in The Roman Actor. The underlying tone of the play is one of disgust, the social background one of corruption and decay. Rome under Domitian is an over-ripe civilisation: sated with conquest, Rome has now no fresh glory to be striven for. The normal scale of values is inverted:

> 'So dangerous the age is, and such bad acts
> Are practised every where, we hardly sleep,
> Nay, cannot dream with safety. All our actions
> Are call'd in question; to be nobly born
> Is now a crime; and to deserve too well
> Held capital treason. . .' (I,ii)

This nightmarish quality, with the sense of bitter loathing, closely resembles the picture of society in Chapman's The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois (1613), where the opening scene similarly comments on a society

corrupted by peace and luxury and regretfully looks back to former days of struggle and glory. Domitian Caesar himself is the outward husk of glory, degenerate and perverted in his assertions of power. Returning to Rome from the wars, he orders Lamia to give up his wife, Domitia, to him; the most monstrous crimes can be made lawful if they are his wish:

> 'The world confesses one Rome, and one Caesar,
> And as his rule is infinite, his pleasures
> Are unconfined; this syllable, his will,
> Stands for a thousand reasons.' (I,ii)

Petty desires are exalted to the stature of major ambitions, and this hollowness deprives his rhetoric and imagery of any real emotional force:

> '. . . to yield account
> Of what's our pleasure, to a private man!
> Rome perish first, and Atlas's shoulders shrink,
> Heaven's fabric fall, (the sun, the moon, the stars
> Losing their light and comfortable heat,)
> Ere I confess that any fault of mine
> May be disputed!' (II,i)

In such a world, deprived even of the vitality of evil, the tragic and truly heroic are impossible; in fact, the prevailing tone of disgust and disillusion again suggests the satirist rather than the tragic writer. A similar comment has been made on Jonson's Catiline (1611):

> 'Solemnity he can assuredly command, if not tragedy; we feel the presence of a satirist or a great moralist rather than of a tragic poet.'[1]

What does emerge as a positive force in the play is an attitude of Stoic resignation:

> 'And since we cannot
> With safety use the active, let's make use of
> The passive fortitude' (I,i)

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1. U. Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, 1936, pp. 111-112.

The most prominent demonstration of Stoicism occurs in the middle of the play (III,ii) when Caesar supervises the torturing of the two philosophers, Sura and Rusticus. In the physical world all must submit to the will of Caesar, but here for the first time his authority trembles, and he is unnerved by the silent endurance of his victims:

> 'I was never
> O'ercome till now. For my sake, roar a little,
> And show you are corporeal, and not turn'd
> Aerial spirits.'

Rusticus defies Caesar in lines that recall the martyrdom of Dorothea in The Virgin-Martyr (1620?), IV,iii:

> 'That securely,
> As 'twere a gentle slumber, we endure
> Thy handman's studied tortures, is a debt
> We owe to grave philosophy, that instructs us
> The flesh is but the clothing of the soul,
> Which growing out of fashion, though it be
> Cast off, or rent, or torn, like ours, 'tis then,
> Being itself divine, in her best lustre.'

This passage also resembles Clermont's speech as he prepares for his own death in The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois:

> 'The garment or the cover of the mind,
> The humane soul is; of the soul, the spirit
> The proper robe is; of the spirit, the blood;
> And of the blood, the body is the shroud.
> With that must I begin then to unclothe,
> And come at the other.' (V,i)

But such a precise statement of faith is rare in Massinger;[1] more characteristic of his philosophising is the calm detachment of the actor

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1. B. T. Spencer, who has fully analysed the elements of Stoicism in Massinger's plays ('Philip Massinger', Seventeenth Century Studies, ed. R. Shafer, Cincinnati, 1933, pp. 3 ff.), remarks that Massinger discusses the Stoic system but does not personally accept it (p. 34).

Paris, negative endurance rather than positive faith:

> 'We, that have personated in the scene
> The ancient heroes, and the falls of princes,
> With loud applause; being to act ourselves,
> Must do it with undaunted confidence,
> Whate'er our sentence be, think 'tis in sport:
> And, though condemn'd, let's hear it without sorrow,
> As if we were to live again to-morrow.' (I,i)

A similar Stoic ideal emerges from Believe As You List (1631). In these two later tragedies Massinger seems to turn away from the analysis of the heroic active figure in Sforza and Malefort to a consideration of the man made helpless by social and political organisations, for whom the only mean of self-assertion is 'the passive fortitude', a change comparable to that in the tragic heroes of Chapman,[1] a dramatist with whom Massinger has some affinity. Antiochus, formerly king of Asia and believed dead, has for twenty-two years wandered around the world unknown, grieving for his country, now under Roman rule, and the slaughter resulting from its last defeat. His companion, a Stoic philosopher, urges him to conquer his passion by wisdom and accept the duty marked out for him. Antiochus proceeds to seek help from his former allies, the rulers of Carthage, Bithynia and Sicily, that he may regain his country. As he moves from court to court he is pursued by the Roman Flaminius, who succeeds in preventing each ruler in turn from helping Antiochus. Antiochus is a statuesque figure, posing as a moral exemplum of the working of fortune. His Stoicism is, however, coloured by Christianity. When, persecuted and imprisoned, he is eventually offered weapons to kill himself, he rejects suicide:

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1. cf. U. Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, 1936, pp. 63 & 65-66.

'My body's death will not suffice, they aimed at
My soul's perdition.' (IV,ii)

He does in fact become a kind of Christ-figure towards the end of the play in the account of his being led through the city on an ass and of the charges brought against him:

'When the city-clerk with a loud voice read the cause
For which he was condemned, in taking on him
The name of a king, with a settled countenance
The miserable man replied, "I am so."
But when he touched his being a cheating Jew,
His patience moved, with a face full of anger
He boldly said, "'Tis false." I never saw
Such magnanimity.' (IV,iv)

The episodic nature of the plot has been criticised,[1] and there is certainly a sense of a lack of sufficient dramatic material, though the sustained dignity and eloquence of Antiochus' speeches give the play considerable force:

'L'histoire où il figure n'a rien de dramatique: mais lui, il l'est éminemment.'[2]

The main reason for this seems to be the particular purpose and significance of the play at the time of composition. The play's licence was at first refused

'because it did contain dangerous matter, as the deposing of Sebastian king of Portugal, by Philip the second, and there being a peace sworn between the kings of England and Spain.'[3]

The play was then apparently revised as the story of Antiochus, but Don Sebastian still seems to have been strongly in Massinger's mind, as the

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1. e.g. by Cruikshank, p. 140.

2. Chelli, p. 164. cf. also G. B. Smith, 'Philip Massinger', New Quarterly Magazine, V (1875), 61; A. Symons (ed.), Philip Massinger, I (1887), xxiii.

3. Quoted by Bentley, p. 762.

close parallels with contemporary accounts[1] suggest ø and the prologue to the play indicates:

> 'If you find what's Roman here,
> Grecian or Asiatic, draw too near
> A late and sad example, 'tis confessed
> He's but an English scholar at his best.' [2]

Despite the equivocal title of his play, Massinger seems to have wholeheartedly supported the Pretender, who is reported to have been a saintly figure, living in voluntary poverty, steeled to endure the worst of misfortunes. The theme of the play closely resembles Ford's Perkin Warbeck (1634), but a comparison only emphasises the difference in attitude. Ford never asserts the true identity of his hero but leaves the question open to the very end; Massinger, however, goes even to ludicrous lengths to prove that Antiochus is the king:

> '1st Mer. His very hand, leg, and foot, on the left side
> Shorter than on the right.
> 2nd Mer. The moles upon
> His face and hands.
> 3rd Mer. The scars caused by his hurts
> On his right brow and head.
> Bere. The hollowness
> Of his under-jaw, occasioned by the loss
> Of a tooth pulled out by his chirurgion.' (I,ii)

Massinger's play has in fact the impact of dramatised propaganda rather than of tragedy; and both the thinness of the plot and the episodic structure stem from this fact.

But the play is not merely concerned with the fortunes of Don Sebastian[3]: it embodies a more general political criticism, an 'exempli-

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1. Anthony Munday, The Strangest Adventure . . . containing a discourse concerning the success of the King of Portugal Dom Sebastian, 1601.

2. S. R. Gardiner finds a closer parallel with Frederick, Elector

3. C. J. Sisson, however, does not think Massinger responsible for the prologue or epilogue (Believe As You List, The Malone Society Reprints, 1927, p. xx).

fication of the conflict of public and private virtue'.[1] The rulers from whom Antiochus seeks help all believe, as individuals, in his sincerity; but, for the safety of the people whom they govern, each is obliged to yield to the wishes of Rome and desert Antiochus. The central question of the play is the conflict between political necessity and personal conscience. To some extent the characters themselves are abstractions. The struggle between Antiochus and Flaminius is an impersonal one, each suppressing his own personality to act a political role. Antiochus has no personal desire to assert his claim, but is directed by the Stoic:

> 'You must now forget
> The contemplations of a private man,
> And put in action that which may comply
> With the majesty of a monarch.' (I,i)

In so doing Antiochus feels he is merely acting a role laid upon him by fate:

> 'Where lies the scene now?
> Though the hangings of the stage were congealed gore,
> The chorus flinty executioners,
> And the spectators, if it could be, more
> Inhuman than Flaminius, the cue given,
> The principal actor's ready.' (V,ii)

Flaminius explicitly speaks of himself as acting a part,

> 'A Protean actor, varying every shape
> With the occasion.' (III,i)

As an intriguer and plotter he bears some resemblance to Francisco in The Duke of Milan, but his 'cruelty is political virtue';[2]

Palatine and titular king of Bohemia ('The Political Element in Massinger', Transactions of the New Shakespere Society, 1875-6, p. 321); but the general principles involved are more important than the particular application.

1. B. T. Spencer, op.cit., p. 42.
2. ibid., p. 42.

> 'What we do for the service of the republic,
> And propagation of Rome's glorious empire,
> Needs no defence, and we shall wrong our judgments
> To feel compunction for it.' (IV,iv)

Massinger's main concern is in fact with political institutions, and in this the hand of the satirist and observer of contemporary affairs is particularly in evidence. Antiochus' bitter comment on the principles and method of Roman rule seems to be Massinger's own:

> 'Let it suffice, my lord, you must not see
> The sun, if in the policy of state,
> It is forbidden.' (V,ii)

The play has been credited with 'rather the interest of literary curiosity than of imaginative sympathy';[1] the uneasiness often felt about it seems to arise from the basic tract-like nature of the play.

But this foundation of drama upon discussion also characterises The Roman Actor, the most impressive of Massinger's tragedies. Massinger himself regarded it with particular seriousness: in his dedication he remarks on 'The gravity and height of the subject' and declares,

> 'I ever held it the most perfect birth of my Minerva.'

This resembles Jonson's dedication to his Roman tragedy Sejanus (1603), where he regards the chief qualities of a tragic writer to be,

> '. . . truth of argument, dignity of persons, gravity and height of elocution, fulness and frequency of sentence.'

Massinger's play has two main themes,[2] the story of the emperor ,Domitian, who, after unlawfully taking Domitia for his wife and committing many

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1. A. C. Swinburne, 'Philip Massinger', 1889, Works, ed. Sir E. Gosse and T. J. Wise, XII, 277.

2. '. . .two conflicting themes which could not be easily reconciled' (Dunn, p. 65).

crimes, is finally terrified by prophecies about his death and is assassinated; and the fortunes of the actor Paris, a favourite of Domitian, but killed by him when he is seduced by Domitia. Paris, though mentioned in the historical sources,[1] is largely a creation of Massinger's own: the play is

> 'based on classical material treated from a romantic point of view.'[2]

The central theme of the play is a discussion of drama, its purpose and values. At the opening of the play the actors are summoned before the senate, charged with libel, but Paris wins their acquittal with a magnificent oration in defence of the stage. Drama, he maintains, has a moral force, showing the victory of virtue and defeat of evil: the philosophers,

> 'with cold precepts (perhaps seldom read)
> Deliver, what an honourable thing
> The active virtue is: but does that fire
> The blood, or swell the veins with emulation,
> To be both good and great, equal to that
> Which is presented on our theatres?
> Let a good actor, in a lofty scene,
> Shew great Alcides honour'd in the sweat
> Of his twelve labours; or a bold Camillus
> Forbidding Rome to be redeem'd with gold . . .
> if done to the life . . .
> All that have any spark of Roman in them,
> The slothful arts laid by, contend to be
> Like those they see presented.' (I,iii)

He denies the charge of libel: the stage presents only general representatives of humanity, and

> 'if there be,
> Among the auditors, one whose conscience tells him
> He is of the same mould, - WE CANNOT HELP IT.'

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1. Suetonius, 'Life of Domitian'.
2. W. L. Sandidge (ed.), The Roman Actor, Princeton, 1929, p. 17.

This view of drama echoes and elaborates Chapman's comments in The Revenge of Bussy D'Amboise. In his dedication Chapman gives a definition of tragedy that would appeal to Massinger:

> '. . .material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary, being the soul, limbs, and limits of an authentical tragedy.'

Massinger seems to have found the germ of Paris's speech in the brief discussion of drama between Guise and Clermont: Clermont sees a moral force in the actor in his ability to present all types of men and demonstrate their vices and virtues:

> 'Is a man proud of greatness, or of riches?
> Give me an expert actor, I'll show all
> That can within his greatest glory fall.
> Is a man fray'd with poverty and lowness?
> Give me an actor, I'll show every eye
> What he laments so, and so much doth fly,
> The best and worst of both.' (I,i)

Paris's defence has been related to the growing feeling against the stage in James's reign, and to the various attempts to combat this, particularly Heywood's Apology for Actors (1612), which advances arguments similar to those of Paris.[1] Paris's theory of drama has been declared Massinger's own: the play was written as

> 'a defence, with all the arguments [Massinger] could adduce, not for a specific time, but for all times.'[2]

However, The Roman Actor is not so simple an exposition of a defined attitude as Believe As You List. Paris's argument is in fact disproved by the action of the play. The first of the three playlets in which Paris

1. Ibid., pp. 17-23.
2. Ibid., p. 23. cf. also Spencer, op.cit., pp. 3-6.

is involved, 'The Cure of Avarice', presents a miser who is eventually persuaded to abandon his miserly ways, and is intended as therapeutic treatment for the avaricious Philargus. Here Massinger echoes the play scene in Hamlet (II,ii):

> 'I once observed,
> In a tragedy of ours, in which a murder
> Was acted to the life, a guilty hearer,
> Forced by the terror of a wounded conscience,
> To make discovery of that which torture
> Could not wring from him.' (II,i)

The playlet here is intended to reflect Philargus as clearly as 'The Mousetrap' did Claudius:

> 'He shall be so anatomized in the scene,
> And see himself so personated . . .
> that I much hope the object
> Will work compunction in him.'

This is an expressdenial of Paris's previous assertion that

> if there be,
> Among the auditors, one whose conscience tells him
> He is of the same mould, - WE CANNOT HELP IT.' (I,iii)

Moreover, the play is ineffective: Philargus refuses to part with his gold and is thereupon put to death by Caesar.

The second playlet (III,ii) likewise betrays the exalted conception of drama. Domitia has arranged for Paris to act the part of Iphis, a noble, languid lover who suffers from the disdain of Anaxarete, played by Domitilla. Domitia is moved to great pity for Iphis: but her emotions are actually roused by the real people, Paris, whom she loves, and Domitilla, whom she despises. Domitia uses the play to titillate her own emotions, and the effect of the play is in fact to make worse an unhealthy situation. Domitia subsequently woos Paris; he is forced to yield to her and they

are discovered together by Caesar. Caesar then commands a performance of 'The False Servant', a play whose plot roughly corresponds to the actual situation. Caesar himself plays the part of the lord, Paris that of the servant beloved by the lord's wife, and Caesar kills Paris in earnest. Here drama has been invaded by actuality, used as a ceremonial to lend dignity to the brutal facts of murder:

> 'to confirm I loved thee, 'twas my study,
> To make thy end more glorious, to distinguish
> My Paris from all others.' (IV,ii)

The Roman Actor cannot be regarded simply as a glorification of drama. It is rather a discussion, offering no definite solution, suggesting but not theorising. Critics have rarely given the play unqualified approval: some have felt that 'it aims at too much' and fails.[1] The structural weakness that has been criticised[2] is symptomatic of a confusion in thought. The sense of deep disillusion in the presentation of the degraded Roman society is accompanied by a belief in the validity of dramatic art that is nevertheless beset by doubts and perplexity as to its function in a corrupt society. At the same time the play has a solidity and assurance that to some extent hide the inner uncertainty. This poise is achieved by Massinger's rhetoric, his eloquence and sense of gesture and ceremonial which emerge forcefully here in the senate scene and the device of the play within the play. W. D. Briggs has said that in both

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1. S. A. Dunham, Lives of the most eminent literary and scientific men, 1837, II, 289. cf. also Ireland, Gifford, II, 424.
2. Dunn, p. 65; Chelli, p. 160.

Sejanus and The Roman Actor the 'gravity and height' interferes with the working out of the plot:

> 'Massinger is misled through the attraction of the rhetorical opportunities of his subject to commit dramatic errors very like those committed through a similar attraction by Jonson in Sejanus.' [1]

But the rhetoric is in fact more important for Massinger's purpose than the plot. Rhetorical excellence, embodying as it does 'the passive fortitude', is his principal refuge in the uncertainty of his speculations on the individual and society, particularly in Believe As You List and The Roman Actor. His work has been criticised for its lack of vitality:

> '. . . we do not feel that any one feels very keenly who can take his sorrows for a text, and preach in his agony upon the vanity of human wishes or the excellence of resignation.' [2]

His tragedy has been defined as

> 'the highest degree of verbal excellence compatible with the most rudimentary development of the senses.' [3]

These criticisms both arise from the fact that Massinger's attitude is basically that of the satirist and commentator. In The Duke of Milan and The Unnatural Combat he ventures into the tragic world with uncertain success; but Believe As You List and The Roman Actor are primarily plays of disgust and discussion, concerned with man's social and political duties rather than with his personal relationships. The relaxation of the

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1. 'The Influence of Jonson's Tragedy in the 17th century', Anglia, XXXV (1912), 320.

2. Sir L. Stephen, 'Philip Massinger', Hours in a Library, 1877, II, 162.

3. T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', 1920, Selected Essays, 1932, p. 214.

tragic mood reaches its height in The Roman Actor, where, in the absence of any more urgent problems, the drama turns in upon itself and discusses its own nature. But the play is not simply a rhetorical indulgence or 'a series of striking situations'[1]: the conflict of thought that lies beneath the surface - assurance typifies the questioning attitude that is the basis of Massinger's tragedy.

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1. Dunn, p. 65.

Two of Massinger's plays, A New Way to Pay Old Debts (1621 or 1622?) and The City Madam (1632?) show a marked influence of Ben Jonson in characterisation and subject-matter, the plays showing a preoccupation with contemporary social and economic problems.[1] Although these plays form such a small proportion of Massinger's total output, they have been invariably regarded as the peak of his achievement, and critics have usually felt satirical and moralising comedy to be his particular excellence.[2] The relation of early seventeenth century comedy to the contemporary social and economic background has been presented in great detail by L. C. Knights,[3] and his account of the changing structure of society in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is necessary for an understanding of the satirical impact of Massinger's comedies.

Knights has traced the breakdown of the whole fabric of medieval society that attended the change in the ownership of land:

> 'Hitherto the possession of land had been associated with certain duties, recognised explicitly or implicitly, and the Elizabethan aristocracy had traditions of public service and responsibility . . . It was because that tradition was not easily assimilated by the newer commercial classes that their acquisition of land meant so much more than a mere change of ownership.'[4]

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1. cf. M. Kerr, The Influence of Ben Jonson on English Comedy, New York, 1912, p.42.

2. '[Massinger] found his place to be in a censorship of society, and was right in concerning himself with what he could do so well' (A. Symons, Philip Massinger, I (1887), xxxi).

3. Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, 1936. 4. ibid., p.111.

The reigns of Elizabeth and James I formed a period of transition,

> 'the transition from a subsistence economy to the early stages of an economy of plenty, with a corresponding change in men's habits, attitudes and general outlook: and the new economy was based on the purchasing power of money'.[1]

The medieval conception of 'status', with its insistence on degree and decorum, was finally superseded by the modern 'class' system, which was determined, in the long run, by the possession of money. Traditional social morality was still a living force when the new class of wealthy business men emerged: they were

> 'individualists, at a time when current opinion set the emphasis on community, order and organisation',[2]

The needs of the new capitalist economy eventually changed the general social structure and attitudes:

> 'By the reign of James I the social ideas inherited from the Middle Ages were already proving incompatible with the demands of capitalists; and theory followed practice.'[3]

Knights analyses the reaction to this state of affairs, the 'anti-acquisitive attitude', in Jonson primarily, but also in the comedies of Massinger.[4] Both plays are concerned to expose the materialism of the new monied class, The City Madam showing its impact on city life, A New Way on country life.[5]

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1. ibid., p. 121.
2. Ibid., p. 157.
3. ibid., p. 157.
4. A New Way has been called 'a romance of finance' (report of the Clifton Shakespeare Society, Academy, June 1892, p. 596).
5. Knights, op.cit., p. 163.

The women in The City Madam, Lady Frugal and her daughters, who, since Sir John Frugal was knighted, have conducted themselves in a manner far exceeding their citizen class origin,

> 'their dreams are
> Of being made Countesses; and they take state
> As they were such already', (I,i)

find a counterpart in Lady Bornwell in Shirley's The Lady of Pleasure (1635). Both plays hint at the traditional pattern of living as something which has almost passed away. The steward in Shirley's play comments overtly upon it:

> 'The case is altered since we lived i' the country;
> We do not now invite the poor o' the parish
> To dinner, keep a table for the tenants;
> Our kitchen does not smell of beef; the cellar
> Defies the price of malt and hops; the footmen
> And coach-drivers may be drunk like gentlemen,
> With wine; not will three fiddlers upon holidays,
> With aid of bag-pipes, that called in the country
> To dance, and plough the hall up with their hob-nails,
> Now make my lady merry. We do feed
> Like princes, and feast nothing else but princes.' (II,i)

Massinger nowhere makes such an explicit statement: his evocation of the older, more humane life is rather implicit in his picture of the city. Plenty, a country gentleman who assumes the position of a city gallant, is a figure of ridicule, in the first part of the play at least, but his rural background is introduced as something stable and honourable:

> 'I eat my venison
> With my neighbours in the country, and present not
> My pheasants, partridges, and grouse to the usurer.' (I,ii)

Mary Frugal, destined to marry Plenty, like Lady Bornwell (The Lady of Pleasure, I,i) disdains the menial tasks of country life:

'And can you in your wisdom,
Or rustical simplicity, imagine
You have met some innocent country girl, that never
Looked further than her father's farm, nor knew more
Than the price of corn in the market, or at what rate
Beef went a stone? that would survey your dairy,
And bring in mutton out of cheese and butter?
That could give directions at what time of the moon
To cut her cocks for capons against Christmas,
Or when to raise up goslings?' (II,ii)

Contemporary records show 'country huswifry . . . to be an essential part'[1] of a lady's accomplishments; and although the depreciation of country life, common in Restoration drama, begins to emerge in this play, especially in the ungainly figure of Plenty, Massinger's audience would on the whole regard Mary's speech as an implicit criticism of herself rather than of rural life.

There is not, however, simply a contrast of city and country in The City Madam, but also a comparison of the old city life and the new. The former structure of city society laid great emphasis on decorum and degree,

'It being for the city's honour that
There should be a distinction between
The wife of a patrician and plebeian'. (IV,iv)

The neglect of this convention is the result of a growing greed and self-indulgence, a new materialistic outlook. Luke upbraids Lady Frugal for her increasing extravagance since she first became a merchant's wife (IV,iv), showing her to be a particular example of the general trend which Jonson bitterly denounces in The Staple of News (1626):

'There was a certain trade, while th'age was thrifty,
And men good husbands, looked unto their stocks,

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1. Memoirs of the Verney Family, quoted by Knights, op.cit., p. 112. For further records, cf. p. 286, n. 1.

> Had their minds bounded, now the public Riot
> Prostitutes all, scatters away in coaches,
> In foot-men's coats, waiting-women's gowns,
> They must have velvet hanches (with a pox)
> Now taken up, and yet not pay the use;
> Rate of the use? I am mad with this time's manners.'
> (III,iv)

A similar state of social transition is presented in Eastward Ho (1605) by Chapman, Jonson and Marston, a play which, as Cruikshank[1] indicates, has several points of resemblance with The City-Madam. Gertrude , fired with ambition to be a great lady as are the women in Massinger's play, marries a knight, for which she is censured by her sister, who in contrast chooses her father's apprentice for husband:

> 'Where Titles presume to thrust before fit means to second them, Wealth and respect often grow sullen and will not follow. For sure in this, I would for your sake I spake not truth. Where ambition of place goes before fitness of birth contempt and disgrace follow.' (I,ii)

In both plays there is a general background of commerce and shipping, though this is much more prominent in Eastward Ho, and in both there is significant reference to the colonisation of Virginia and voyages of exploration. Luke Frugal, a masterpiece of humility in the first part of the play when he is dependent on his brother, Sir John, becomes extortionate in the extreme when Sir John, supposedly retired to a monastery, leaves his wealth and household to Luke. Sir John and the rejected suitors of his daughters come to Luke disguised as Indians, and promise him great wealth if he can provide two virgins and a matron to be sacrificed to heathen rites in Virginia. Luke persuades Lady Frugal and her daughters

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1. Cruikshank, p. 113.

to accompany the Indians, pretending that they will be made queens in Virginia. The action is finally resolved when Sir John and the two young men reveal their true identities. The episodes involving the Indians have received scorn and censure from critics: they have been called 'cumbersome incidents'[1] and 'balderdash'[2]. However, fantastic as this part of the plot is, it has some significance when related to the contemporary background.[3] The authors of Eastward Ho ridicule the vogue for voyages of exploration in the voyage to Virginia attempted by Sir Petronell and his companions: Petronell and Seagull are eventually washed ashore, think they are in France, and attempt to talk in French, only to discover they are still on English soil(IV,i). Massinger, in a more heavy-handed fashion, is attempting a similar burlesque. Moreover, the idea of Virginia and colonisation is directly linked to the main social theme of greed and acquisition. The contemporary conception of Virginia is apparent from Seagull's description:

> 'I tell thee, Gold is more plentiful there than copper is with us; and for as much red Copper as I can bring, I'll have thrice the weight in Gold. Why man all their dripping Pans, and their chamber pots are pure Gold; all the Prisoners they take, are fettered in Gold . . .' (III,ii)

This has obvious associations with Volpone and The Alchemist, and with the theme of gold in The City Madam, in particular in Luke's soliloquy

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1. J. J. Jusserand, A Literary History of the English People, 1906-9, III, 426.

2. Dunn, p. 71

3. For some account of this as it affects the City-Madam, cf. R. R. Cawley, The Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama, 1938, pp. 295, 302, 308-9, 357-9, 374-5.

on his wealth (III,iii). This kind of background gives a certain weight to the Indian plot, and Luke's kinship with Sir Epicure Mammon and Volpone relates him to the economic conditions which Jonson and Massinger were both concerned to satirise. Chelli, however, in his analysis of the play as a combination of 'réalisme et romanesque',[1] sees only Lady Frugal as a realistic representative of society, Luke as an abstract personification of avarice.[2] But in the light of contemporary social and economic conditions and their treatment by dramatists Luke seems to be more than this: he

> 'represents the attitude that was becoming common of acquisitiveness basing itself on legality.'[3]

Similar themes are developed in A New Way to Pay Old Debts. Sir Giles Overreach is a member of the new aristocracy, a wealthy man of low birth fighting his way upwards in the social scale, and wishing to marry his daughter Margaret to Lord Lovell in order to unite wealth and aristocracy. Margaret, shrinking from the marriage,

> 'tissues matched with scarlet suit but ill;' (III,ii)

echoes the imagery of Mildred in Eastward Ho,

> 'I had rather make up the garment of my affections in some of the same piece, than like a fool wear gowns of two colours, or mix Sackcloth with Satin.' (II,i)

There is a further social significance in the apparent foundation of the character of Overreach on Sir Giles Mompasson, and that of Justice Greedy

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1. Chelli, p. 175.
2. ibid., p. 174.
3. Knights, op.cit., p. 289.

on Mompesson's associate, Sir Francis Michel, who both terrorised the country in the years immediately preceding the composition of Massinger's play. R. H. Ball has written of the career of Sir Giles Mompesson in some detail,[1] M.P. since 1614, he suggested in 1616 the creation of a commission to grant licenses to ale-houses, was knighted, and was appointed commissioner when the patent was granted. Other monopolies followed, and he became notorious for his extortions, until in 1620/1 the House of Commons held an investigation into his practices. Monopolies were a frequent subject of abuse: as early as 1616 Jonson in The Devil is an Ass defined a 'projector' as

> 'one that projects
> Ways to enrich men, or to make 'em great,
> By suits, by marriages, by undertakings.' (I,vii)

Merecraft in Jonson's play is in some respects a slighter, less terrifying version of Sir Giles Overreach, but with a similar unscrupulousness:

> 'We'll take in Citizens, Commoners, and Aldermen,
> To bear the charge, and blow 'em off again,
> Likeso many dead flies, when 'tis carried.' (II,i)

Massinger himself introduces a Projector in The Emperor of the East (1630/1), who is criticised as one who would advise the king:

> 'no man should dare
> To bring a salad from his country garden,
> Without paying gabel; kill a hen
> Without excise: and that if he desire
> To have his children or his servants wear
> Their heads upon their shoulders, you affirm
> In policy 'tis fit the owner should
> Pay for them by the poll; . . .' (I,ii)

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1. 'Sir Giles Mompesson and Sir Giles Overreach', (Parrott Presentation Volume, Princeton, 1935, pp. 277-87.

In The Bondman (1623) a character speaks of 'your new counterfeit gold thread' (II,iii), a reference to the gold-thread patent granted to Mompesson in 1618, which produced one of his notorious ventures. References in The Guardian (1633) to

> 'The cormorant that lives in expectation
> Of a long wished-for death, and, smiling, grinds
> The faces of the poor,'. . . (II,iv)

and

> 'The grand encloser of the commons, for
> His private profit or delight,'. . .

serve to emphasise the relationship of Overreach to contemporary events. The commendatory verses by Henry Moody in the 1633 quarto suggest a topical significance:

> 'thou couldst not
> So proper to the time have found a plot.'

A New Way, like The City-Madam, is firmly rooted in contemporary economic affairs. Luke's avarice is that of the city, for gold; Overreach, like Merecraft and Fitzdottrel in The Devil is an Ass, is greedy for land and position. Massinger

> 'observes the significant economic activities of the time, and sees their significance'.[1]

His comedies, however, are not simply social commentary; his satire may to some extent be described as Eliot describes Jonson's:

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1. Knights, op.cit., p. 277. For Overreach's relationship to the usurer, cf. C. T. Wright, 'The Usurer's Sin in Elizabethan Literature', Studies in Philology, XXXV (1938), 178; A. B. Stonex, 'The Usurer in Elizabethan Drama', PMLA, XXXI (1916), 195, 206.

> 'But satire like Jonson's is great in the end not by hitting off its object, but by creating it; the satire is merely the means which leads to the aesthetic result, the impulse which projects a new world into a new orbit.'[1]

Knights indicates how The Alchemist and Volpone are constructed to isolate and magnify the central theme of lust and greed:

> '. . . all the interests aroused in the reader point in one direction, so that effects of exaggeration are possible here as they would not be in a "realistic" play involving more complicated emotions'.[2]

Massinger seems to be trying to create a similar kind of world in his comedies, implying a conception of drama that makes irrelevant Koeppel's criticism that 'the sober light of day is unfavourable to Massinger's characters'.[3] Sir Giles Overreach has something of Volpone's quality in his dynamic vigour and vitality, and the action of A New Way revolves round him. He plans to marry his daughter Margaret to Lord Lovell, who pretends to acquiesce, but secretly enables her to marry his page Allworth, and Overreach is finally outwitted. Wellborn, nephew to Overreach, has been disowned by his uncle, but when Lady Allworth allows it to be thought that she and Wellborn are to be married, Overreach aids his nephew, plotting to eventually win Lady Allworth's lands for himself. However, he is

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1. 'Ben Jonson', 1919, Selected Essays, 1932, p. 158.

2. Knights, op.cit., p. 207. cf. W. Hazlitt, 'Lectures on the age of Elizabeth', IV (1820), Works, ed. P .P. Howe, VI, 267: '[Massinger] endeavoured to embody an abstract principle; labours hard to bring out the same individual trait in its most exaggerated state; and the force of his impassioned characters arises, for the most part, from the obstinacy with which they exclude every other feeling.'

3. 'Philip Massinger', Cambridge History of English Literature, VI (1910), 160.

thwarted here too, by the trickery of his servant Marrall, and by Lady Allworth's marriage to Lord Lovell instead of to Wellborn. Hazlitt's long and exuberant description indicates the forcefulness with which he dominates the play:

> 'His steadiness of purpose scarcely stands in need of support from the common sanctions of morality, which he intrepidly breaks through, and he almost conquers our prejudices by the consistent and determined manner in which he braves them.'[1]

The manner in which Overreach is presented has, however, caused some uneasiness. Sir Leslie Stephen complains that Massinger has not projected himself into his villain, that when Overreach speaks he describes a wicked man from the outside.[2] Eliot has analysed this further:

> 'There is no reason why a comedy or a tragedy villain should not declare himself, . . . but the sort of villain who may run on in this way is a simple villain . . . Barabas and Volpone can declare their character, because they have no inside; appearance and reality are coincident; they are forces in particular directions. Massinger's two villains are not simple.'[3]

The complexity that Eliot detects in Massinger's villains does help to explain the dissatisfaction critics have often felt with Sir Giles, but further explanation is given by Enright in a comparison of the verse of Jonson and Massinger.[4] Enright analyses the double nature of Volpone's speeches, the magnificence which forms a standard against which the other characters are criticised, and the over-assertion, the exaggeration, by

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1. Hazlitt, op.cit., p. 267n.
2. Sir L. Stephen, Hours in a Library, 1877, II, 154.
3. T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', 1920, Selected Essays, (1932), p. 218.
4. D. J. Enright, 'Poetic Satire and satire in verse', Scrutiny, XVIII (1952), 211.

which Volpone himself is subtly criticised. In Massinger, he says, there is not this double quality: the word has less power than it used to have. There is certainly a good deal of overt self-criticism and self-declaration in Overreach's utterances, as if Massinger felt he could not rely on the poetry of his speeches to act unaided. He is most successful when self-declaration is fused with a statement of his practical aims called for by the dramatic context, as in the passage quoted with approval by Eliot:[1] Marrall asks why Overreach does not secure the post of justice for himself, and he replies,

> 'Thou art a fool;
> In being out of office I am out of danger;
> Where, if I were a justice, besides the trouble,
> I might or out of wilfulness or error
> Run myself finely into a premunire,
> And so become a prey to the informer.
> Ah, I'll have none of't; 'tis enough I keep
> Greedy at my devotion: so he serve
> My purposes, let him hang or damn, I care not; . . .'
> (II,i)

The practical demonstration of callous worldly wisdom in speeches of this kind is convincing and sufficient; it is when Overreach continues to comment explicitly upon this than one has a sense of artificiality:

> 'I would be worldly wise; for the other wisdom
> That does prescribe us a well governed life,
> And to do right to others as ourselves,
> I value not an atom.' (II,i)

There is no need for explicit moral comment here: it has an air of intrusion. As Enright says of Massinger's style in general,

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1. 'And how well tuned, well modulated, here, the diction! The man is audible and visible' (op.cit., p. 219).

'Massinger saunters smoothly along, explaining what does not need explanation, never daring to leave anything unsaid.'[1]

In the same scene Overreach's project to have 'ladies of errant knights decayed' to attend his daughter in itself points the antithesis of court and city, the old order and the new, and his subsequent overt statement,

> 'there having ever been
> More than a feud, a strange antipathy,
> Between us and true gentry',

again has an air of redundancy.[2]

Stephen, however, does not quote this kind of speech to illustrate his objection, but instead Overreach's climactic speech to Lovell; Lovell asks if he is not frightened by the curses of his victims, and Overreach replies:

> 'Yes, as rocks are,
> When foamy billows split themselves against
> Their flinty ribs; or as the moon is moved,
> When wolves, with hunger pined, howl at her brightness.
> I am of a solid temper, and, like these,
> Steer on, a constant course: . . .' (IV,i)

But this is surely not so much self-description as self-assertion almost in the manner of a tragic character.[3] If we feel any difficulty here, it is rather the result of the complexity of Massinger's villains suggested

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1. op.cit., p. 218.

2. B. Matthews suggests that Massinger 'prefers to drive his moral home however inartistically, rather than risk the danger of its not being perceived at all' (Representative English Comedies, ed. Gayley, 1914, III, 303).

3. A. H. Cruikshank acutely remarks: 'Hazlitt had often seen Sir Giles on the stage; I wonder if the writer of Hours in a Library had followed his example' (A New Way to Pay Old Debts, Oxford, 1926, xxi). The theatrical impact of this speech is evident from J. Doran's account of Kean's performance (Their Majesties' Servants, 1864, III, 390).

by Eliot and of the sense that Massinger is moving beyond the limitations of comedy, striving for a kind of tragic stature for Overreach in aligning him with the cosmic and inanimate. The villainy which we have seen him practise earlier in the play is sufficiently grim to carry the weight of the poetry here. As Eliot[1] has pointed out, a false note is struck later in the speech in Sir Giles's simple self-description:

> 'Nay, when my ears are pierced with widows' cries,
> And undone orphans wash with tears my threshold,
> I only think what 'tis to have my daughter
> Right honourable; and 'tis a powerful charm
> Makes me insensible of remorse, or pity,
> Or the least sting of conscience.'

Enright, it is true, feels that Eliot is being over-subtle, and claims that these lines are operative as a '"formal" statement of policy to Lord Lovell' and 'a deliberate change of tone on the part of Sir Giles.'[2] But there is an inevitable sense of anti-climax and inadequacy about the passage, following as it does the heightened opening to the speech: the stereotyped emblems of the widows and orphans strike a jarring note after the genuine poetic force of the rock and moon images. The impersonal quality of the opening lines raises the stature of Overreach to a new level of evil and power: the conventional terms of the closing lines make them self-declaration of the inferior kind and reduce Overreach's villainy to a pose.

The tragic element in Overreach's character is brought to its climax in his final outburst of madness, and again he speaks in terms which

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1. op.cit., p. 219.
2. op. cit., p. 222.

move beyond the limitations of satiric comedy and attempt to create for him a tragic stature:

> 'Why, is not the whole world
> Included in myself? to what use then
> Are friends and servants? . . .' (V,i)

There is an echo of the last scene of Doctor Faustus as he sees the devils coming to capture him:

> 'Ha! I am feeble:
> Some undone widow sits upon mine arm,
> And takes away the use of't; and my sword,
> Glued to my scabbard with wronged orphans' tears,
> Will not be drawn. Ha! what are these? sure, hangmen,
> That come to bind my hands, and then to drag me
> Before the judgment-seat: now they are new shapes,
> And do appear like Furies, with steel whips
> To scourge my ulcerous soul.'

As Enright remarks,

> 'That is perhaps the one point at which Massinger's widows and orphans really come alive.'[1]

We are reminded here of other instances of madness in Massinger's plays, notably Sforza in The Duke of Milan, himself a tragic hero. The conflict in Overreach between the comic villain, superbly dominating the satirical world of the play, and the tragic villain, struggling to break out from the social setting and identify himself with forces beyond it, has been summarised by Eliot:

> 'Giles Overreach is a great force directed upon small objects; a great force, a small mind; the terror of a dozen parishes instead of the conqueror of a world. The force is misapplied, attenuated, thwarted, by the man's vulgarity. . .'[2]

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1. op.cit., p.222.
2. op.cit., p.218.

Enright challenges this: he does not find

> 'any such suggestion of the parochial about his activities; within the terms of the play, in fact, he does threaten to conquer a world.'[1]

But the 'terms of the play' cannot be precisely defined: the 'more complicated emotions'[2] which Kinghts says must be excluded in Jonsonian comedy are here in evidence. Overreach himself expresses his inability either to dominate in his own world or to break away from it:

> 'Since, like a Libyan lion in the toil,
> My fury cannot reach the coward hunters,
> And only spends itself, I'll quit the place.
> Alone I can do nothing; but I have servants,
> And friends to second me; and if I make not
> This house a heap of ashes (by my wrongs,
> What I have spoke I will make good!) or leave
> One throat uncut, - if it be possible,
> Hell add to my afflictions!' (V,i)

But friends and servants are of no avail; his fury can only spend itself, and he goes mad because there is no outlet for his passion in the comic framework of the play.[3] There is a similar suggestion of verging on the borders of tragedy in the final act of Volpone, but Jonson handles the downfall of his villain-hero with the utmost restraint: Massinger on the other hand goes out of his way to create something approaching tragic stature for Overreach at the end of the play. Enright's comment that

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1. op.cit., p. 221.

2. cf. p. 61 above.

3. '. . . in order to rid humanity of the fiend, the conclusion of the comedy . . . touches the borders of tragedy' (E. Koeppel, Camb.Hist.Eng. Lit., VI, 160). But Overreach's madness was regarded as primarily a theatrical effect by A. C. Swinburne ('Philip Massinger', 1889, Works, ed. E. Gosse and T. J. Wise, XII, 252); A. W. Ward (English Dramatic Literature, 1875, III, 24); A. Mézières (Contemporains et successeurs de Shakespeare, Paris, 1881, p. 326); E. A. Peers, Elizabethan Drama and its Mad Folk, 1914, p. 102).

> 'The poetry through which Sir Giles has been created lacks the double nature of Volpone's great revelatory speeches, and the devices of intrigue and character opposition on which Massinger relies to counteract and dismiss the villain have let him down,'[1]

seems misapplied. Massinger is not simply trying to destroy Overreach, as Enright suggests,[2] but appears also to be deliberately attempting to create in him a kind of tragic figure.

This double view of Overreach is strengthened by a certain ambivalence in the presentation of the other characters. The 'good' characters, Lady Allworth, Lovell, Wellborn, Allworth and Margaret, with whom we sympathise in their opposition to Overreach, are not wholly attractive. Wellborn's callous trickery, his treatment of Tapwell and Froth, are hardly in keeping with the conception of the repentant man newly set in virtuous ways, and his final request for a commission from Lord Lovell in order to redeem his reputation through military prowess (V,i) seems a too obviously convenient means of securing a comfortable position and income.[3] Lady Allworth and Lord Lovell, the true aristocrats in antithesis to the upstart Overreach, present gentility in a not wholly pleasant light. Overreach's vulgarity is to some extent paralleled by an excessive snobbishness and sense of aristocracy on their part, as in Lovell's rejection

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1. op.cit., p. 222.

2. 'Massinger created him by means of poetry, and then attempted to destroy him with the feebler means of overt moralizing, plot machinery and character manipulation' (ibid., p. 223).

3. cf. however Cruikshank: 'Wellborn's character is fine piece of work; we pity his disgrace, we rejoice in his success, we believe in his desire to do better in the future' (p. 125).

of any possibility of a marriage with Margaret:

> 'Were Overreach'states thrice centupled, his daughter
> Millions of degrees much fairer than she is,
> Howe'er I might urge precedents to excuse me,
> I would not so adulterate my blood,
> By marrying Margaret, and so leave my issue
> Made up of several pieces, one part scarlet,
> And the other London blue. In my own tomb
> I will inter my name first.' (IV,ii)

His condescending patronage of Allworth implies membership of a cliquish society rather than true gentility:

> 'I can make
> A fitting difference between my footboy
> And a gentleman by want compelled to serve me.' (III,i)

His assertion, in reply to Lady Allworth's qualms, of the decorum of marrying a widow is almost grotesque:

> 'I grant, were I a Spaniard, to marry
> A widow might disparage me; but being
> A true-born Englishman, I cannot find
> How it can taint my honour: . . .' (V,i)

Allworth and Margaret, both shadowy characters, are not unpleasing, but their rather stilted discussion (IV,iii) as to whether Margaret has been superior in virtue because she has not fallen in love with Lord Lovell, or whether Lord Lovell is to be thanked for not falling in love with Margaret, is almost ludicrous in its excessive politeness. Enright comments on the unfavourable presentation of these characters: he remarks that Wellborn 'remains profoundly ambiguous',[1] but regards this as a failure on Massinger's part to create an effective force to oppose Sir Giles. However, it seems possible that this playing-down of the 'good' characters is deliberate. The idea of aristocracy presented in the play is that of

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1. op.cit., p. 223.

a decayed order in which affectation and snobbery tend to replace true honour. Massinger is concerned to show up the weakness of the old order as well as of the new.[1]

Viewed in this light, the moral statements of the play do not seem so straightforwardly didactic as they have usually been regarded.[2] Lovell speaks piously of the heavenly simplicity of the young people:

> 'judgment, being a gift derived from Heaven,
> Though sometimes lodged in the hearts of worldly men,
> That ne'er consider from whom they receive it,
> Forsakes such as abuse the giver of it.
> Which is the reason that the politic
> And cunning statesman, that believes he fathoms
> The counsels of all kingdoms on the earth,
> Is by simplicity oft over-reached.' (V,i)

However, it is by no means the simplicity of the lovers that brings about the solution of the plot, but the machinations of Lovell and Marrall. The main moral of the play is also summarised by Lovell,

> 'Here is a precedent to teach wicked men,
> That when they leave religion, and turn atheists,
> Their own abilities leave them.' (V,i)

From his lips the moral falls with a sense of inadequacy, perhaps a deliberate irony on Massinger's part. The play is certainly not a simple moral tract, as Dunn seems to see it:

> 'A New Way to Pay Old Debts, though not nominally a tragedy, is really an example of Aristotle's third category of unsatisfactory tragic plots - "an extremely bad man . . . falling from happiness into misery".'[3]

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1. It is more usual to find 'a peculiarly narrow social view' in the play (A. H. Thorndike, English Elizabethan Comedy, 1929, p. 233).

2. e.g. by Mrs. Inchbald (A New Way to Pay Old Debts, p. 5, The British Theatre, 1808, VI).

3. Dunn, p. 124.

Nor can the characters be simply fitted to morality types. Dunn's statement that

> 'The characters here seem even more than usually drawn in blacks and whites'[1]

seems a superficial judgment: the apparently white characters are almost all decidedly tinged with grey. A New Way is a disturbing play; constructed in the manner of a Jonsonian comedy and yet striving to break away from the limitations of comedy; raising important social and moral themes but not offering a final solution, ending with a sense of uncertainty and perplexity.[2]

The City Madam is in many respects a simpler play, and Luke a less perplexing character than Sir Giles. The comic and satiric world of the play is more compact, the treatment of social and economic problems more prominent and obvious.[3] Jonson's influence is most potent in Luke's reaction to his newly acquired wealth:

> 'In by-corners of
> This sacred room, ~~with~~ silver in bags, heap'd up
> Like billets saw'd and ready for the fire,
> Unworthy to hold fellowship with bright gold
> That flow'd about the room, conceal'd itself.
> There needs no artificial light; the splendour
> Makes a perpetual day there, night and darkness
> By that still-burning lamp for ever banish'd. . .'[4](III,iii)

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1. Dunn, p. 133.

2. Cruikshank's association of the play with Goldsmith is surprising: 'In its atmosphere of ease and propriety there are no harsh lights or discordant tints' (p. 124).

3. 'In The City Madam the traditional social morality is even more potently present. The intrigue is of much less importance than that of A New Way; the whole effect lies in the presentation of two major social themes' (Knights, op.cit., p. 280).

4. '. . . one of the most splendid efforts of eloquence in English' (Cruikshank, p. 73).

The similarity to Volpone's address to his gold is obvious: Knights also comments on echoes of Epicoene and Sejanus, but remarks,.

> 'Massinger is not a mere unconscious plagiarist. The passage has a life of its own, and it forms a genuinely original variation on the Jonsonian mode.'[1]

Luke's character as a rogue exposing the weaknesses of others recalls Volpone, and establishes a certain measure of sympathy in the audience which we do not feel for Overreach.[2] However, in Volpone the dual nature of rogue and moral agent is conceived as a single force: Volpone's castigation of the other characters is inseparable from his delight in his own villainy, and his superiority is that of a greater vitality, a more exuberant roguery. In Luke, on the other hand, the two functions tend to fall apart: his exposure of the vices of others is more strictly didactic. His upbraiding of Sir John (I,iii) and of the women (IV,iv) is delivered in homiletic speeches and direct statement. Luke is a hypocrite, and these speeches serve to emphasise his hypocrisy by the gulf which separates them from his true nature. But they are not merely illustrations of his hypocrisy: they embody moral standards which are active in the play in effecting the reformation of the characters to whom the speeches are addressed. This differentiates Luke from a hypocrite like Molière's Tartuffe: Tartuffe's profession of virtue is completely sham and has no

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1. op.cit., pp. 271-2.

2. Critics have usually inclined to the extreme view that no sympathetic contact is possible: e.g., 'Sympathy with his villains was beyond Massinger's power; he makes them odious, but their odiousness, if it satisfies strictly moral requirements, interferes with their reality' (Review of Cruickshank's Philip Massinger, Durham University Journal, XXII (1920), 208).

significance as a moral force in the play; Luke on the other hand, despite his hypocrisy, his obvious disregard, in his own conduct, of the standards he professes, is in effect the chief moral agent of the play. The vigour of his speeches chastising the women is more than hypocrisy:

> 'Do not frown;
> If you do, I laugh, and glory that I have
> The power, in you, to scourge a general vice,
> And raise up a new satirist.' (III,iv)

Massinger does in fact 'raise up a new satirist' in Luke, a rôle that does not entirely cohere with his character as a materialist and hypocrite. Massinger seems to be manipulating Luke to fit in with the moral scheme of the play: it is surely this lack of depth and underlying force that makes him a lesser figure than Overreach, not merely, as Dunn says, that Overreach is hateful, Luke merely despicable.[1] Eliot says that

> 'Luke Frugal just misses being almost the greatest of all hypocrites. His humility in the first act of the play is more than half real.'

Massinger's error, he says, lies in the premature disclosure of his villainy (II,i):

> 'But for this, he would be a perfect chameleon of circumstance.'[2]

His humility certainly is more than half real; in the middle of the play he expresses his penitence in a soliloquy:

> 'I deserve much more
> Than their scorn can load me with, and'tis but justice,
> That I should live the family's drudge, designed
> To all the sordid offices their pride
> Imposes on me; since, if now I sat
> A judge in mine own cause, I should conclude

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1. Dunn, p. 126. 2. op.cit., p. 219.

I am not worth their pity . . .
O Heaven! it is not fit
I should look upward, much less hope for mercy.' (III,ii)

There is no one to hear Luke; his piety has an apparent sincerity:[1] this is surely the error in his characterisation rather than the early disclosure of villainy, necessary to establish his hypocrisy, to which Eliot objects. There is about Luke's character in general a sense of a lack of complete grasp on Massinger's part, a forcefulness within the individual scene rather than in the play as a whole.[2]

A similar kind of inconsistency can be seen in the characterisation of Sir John Frugal. At the beginning of the play he is presented in an unfavourable light,

'for Sir John Frugal,
By some styled Sir John Prodigal', (I,i)

and his conduct towards his debtors is, until Luke's intervention, decidedly harsh; in fact, there seems to be an echo of Shylock in his opening words:[3]

'What would you have me do? reach me a chair,
When I lent my moneys I appeared an angel;
But now I would call in mine own, a devil'. (I,iii)

By the end of the play he has become an embodiment of virtue and justice

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1. It is possible, however, that Luke intends his speech to be overheard by Anne and Mary; cf. Cruikshank (ed.), A New Way, Oxford, 1926, p. xxxi.

2. Cruikshank, however, speaks of Luke as 'the most skilfully drawn example of development of character' (p. 73).

3. Cruikshank on the other hand describes him as 'the bluff successful British merchant, tender-hearted, yet ashamed of being unbusinesslike, and a good judge of men' (p. 133).

and his early unpleasantness seems completely forgotten. Lady Frugal acknowledges that Luke has been the means of her own reformation,

> 'Yet, sir, show some mercy;
> Because his cruelty to me and mine
> Did good upon us,' (V,iii)

but there is no similar recognition on SirJohn's part. His function in the play, it seems, is to act as a foil to Luke, to bring out the maximum effectiveness of the individual scene, to play a part in the general dramatic pattern rather than as a n individual character. The whole play has an air of deliberate manipulation, and its general design has some likeness to that of the moralities.[1] The 'staginess'[2] that critics have often criticised in the play's conclusion is not really out of keeping with the deliberately abstract kind of structure of the play as a whole. Dunn has listed the numerous features in the play which indicate that the Frugal household are Roman Catholics:[3] perhaps the suggestion of Roman Catholicism in the general background is intended to underline the morality and ritual elements in the play as a whole.

Despite the suggested lack of coherence in the presentation of individual characters, the development of the plot and the playing off of the characters against each other give the play a satisfying compactness. Unlike A New Way, there is no attempt to break through the

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1. Dunn's assignment of all the characters to distinct morality types (p. 133) seems, however, an over-statement.

2. Dunn, p. 72. He interestingly compares the Masque of Orpheus and Eurydice (The City Madam, V,iii) to 'The Cure of Avarice' in The Roman Actor, II,i. The coming to life of the statues recalls The Winter's Tale, V,iii.

3. Dunn, p. 186.

limitations of comedy, and Luke fades quietly from the picture at the end. There is certainly an element of horror in Luke's plot to dispose of the Frugal women[1] (V,i): Massinger is characteristically extreme in demonstrating the threat of evil, but it remains no more than a threat. This structural skill is also a feature of A New Way, and has been analysed in detail by Dunn[2]: it serves to off-set the inner uncertainty and conflict of the play.

Massinger's comedies hold an interesting position in relation to the drama of his time: stemming from the comedy of Jonson and yet moving towards the comedy of high society manners of Shirley and his contemporaries, Massinger's plays strike an individual note.

> 'The ability to perform that slight distortion of all the elements in the world of a play or story, so that this world is complete in itself, which was given to Marlowe and Jonson . . . was denied to Massinger. On the other hand, his temperament was more closely related to theirs than to that of Shirley and the Restoration wits.'[3]

His difference from his contemporaries is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by a comparison of A New Way with the play which seems to have been its source, Middleton's A Trick to Catch the Old One (1604-6?).[4] In Middleton's play the hero Witgood suffers at the hands of his miserly uncle, Lucre, but succeeds in winning his favour by pretending that he is

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1. 'Act V of The City Madam is deformed by monstrous and unnatural horror' (Swinburne, Works, XII, 252).

2. Dunn, p. 58.

3. Eliot, op.cit., p. 220.

4. E.Koeppel, Quellen-Studien zu den Dramen George Chapman's, Philip Massinger's und John Ford's, 1897, p. 137. Courthope also seems to have noticed this independently (History of English Poetry, 1903, IV, 348).

to marry a lady of wealth and rank, who is in fact a disguised courtesan. The parallel in the main plot of the two plays is obvious, but on this similar framework two very different plays have been constructed.[1] The primary effect of Middleton's play is that of witty intrigue, quite remote from the sombre tone and moral earnestness of Massinger's.[2] Even the alteration of the hero's name seems significant: both are morality ticket names, Witgood suggesting the sprightly wit and intrigue that characterise both play and hero, Wellborn suggesting the more serious social theme. Witgood is gay as Wellborn never is: the rakish gaiety of his opening conversation with the host (I,i) is far from the moral stress of Wellborn's presentation as the reformed rake. The device of the pretended marriage is given much greater prominence by Middleton and is the focus of considerable intrigue and comedy: Massinger's characters, who are altogether more grave and dignified, are never involved in such intrigue, and the plot is very much a means to an end, rather than providing comedy in itself as in Middleton's play. Many features taken over from the earlier play are treated with more austerity by Massinger. Both Witgood and Wellborn are approached by their creditors when they become wealthy:

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1. Koeppel, pointing out the source, says that Massinger shows little imagination in framing his plot (Quellen-Studien, p. 137). cf. Knights, however: 'In his comedies Middleton's inspiration derives from nothing more profound than the desire to make a play. Massinger does at least feel indignation at a contemporary enormity' (op.cit., p. 274).

2. '[What Middleton] treats in a spirit of pure and reckless gaiety, Massinger converts into grim didactic' (H. J. Grierson, The First Half of the Seventeenth Century, 1906, p. 129).

but whereas we merely see Wellborn distributing payment (IV,ii), Witgood's creditors appear several times (II,ii; III,i; IV,v), and act out a little sub-plot of their own. A similar paring down of the plot is evident in the scene of Overreach's change of attitude towards his nephew. Lucre makes overtures of friendship to Witgood in a scene of some length (II,i), and his efforts to pretend that he has never born any ill-will towards his nephew are the source of much comedy. This part of the plot is disposed of much more quickly in Massinger's play: Overreach briefly and overtly declares his change of tactics to Wellborn in a business-like manner (III,iii); Overreach is never a comical figure of Lucre's type, and moreover Massinger seems eager to speed up the plot and concentrate on the main line of action. This element of concentration and of a much more grim kind of comedy in Massinger is further emphasised by the fact that Middleton has really two villains, the uncle Lucre and his enemy Hoard, while in A New Way all the villainy is concentrated into the one dominating figure of Overreach. Besides parallels of plot and character, Massinger also echoes Middleton verbally. Occasionally the resemblance is quite close: Hoard's description of Lucre has something of Massinger's seriousness in tone and language:

> 'His uncle, a severe extortioner;
> A tyrant at a forfeiture; greedy of others'
> Miseries; one that would undo his brother,
> Nay, swallow up his father, if he can,
> Within the fathoms of his conscience.' (III,i)

But this kind of writing is rare in Middleton's comedy, as is the use of verse; although Massinger may owe something to him here, and adaptation

of the lively prose characteristic of A Trick into Massinger's own more leisurely verse is much more typical of his verbal borrowings. For example, Witgood speaks of his uncle in a brief epigrammatic prose statement:

> 'if his nephew be poor indeed, why, he lets God alone with him; but if he be once rich, then he'll be the first man that helps him'. (I,i)

In Massinger's play the description comes, significantly, from Overreach himself, and becomes a speech of self-declaration lengthily expanded into verse:

> 'We worldly men, when we see friends and kinsmen
> Past hope sunk in their fortunes, lend no hand
> To lift them up, but rather set our feet
> Upon their heads, to press them to the bottom;
> As I must yield, with you I practised it:
> But now I see you in a way to rise,
> I can and will assist you: . . .' (III,iii)

The complete difference in mood is brought out by the conclusions of the plays. At the end of A Trick to Catch the Old One all are reconciled and a general good humour prevails, while the play's character as an exuberant series of intrigues is stressed by Hoard's concluding moral,

> 'Who seem most crafty prove oft-times most fools'. (V,ii)

The final scene of A New Way is a sharp contrast with its disturbing hint of tragedy and grim moral,

> 'Here is a precedent to teach wicked men,
> That when they leave religion, and turn atheists,
> Their own abilities leave them.' (V,i)

The sombre, austere tone of Massinger's thought and expression, the concentration upon a moral purpose, that are revealed in his handling of

his source material in A New Way, emerge also in his relationship with his period as a whole. The City-Madam has for its background the life of the city and port, but it has little of the breadth and vitality of Middleton's picture of city life in, for example, The Roaring Girl (c.1610), or the actuality of the port setting in Eastward Ho or Davenant's News from Plymouth (1635). Massinger is concerned not so much with a reproduction or direct commentary upon city life, as with a presentation of the moral issues involved, in the manner of Jonson. His handling of the affectations of the higher level of society links him with Shirley: but the preoccupation with social frivolities and love-making in a play like The Lady of Pleasure distinguishes it from the moral severity of Massinger:

> '. . . his interest is not in the follies of love-making or the absurdities of social pretence, but in the unmasking of villainy.' [1]

Some features in Massinger's comedies seem to foreshadow later developments. The wooing scene in The City-Madam (II,ii), in which Anne and Mary declare the conditions on which they will agree to marry their suitors, seems to be the first of a line of 'proviso' scenes in English drama.[2] Anne's speeches have something of the aristocratic affectation that we find in Shirley and the Restoration dramatists:

> 'Yes, sir, mine own doctor;
> French and Italian cooks, musicians, songsters,
> And a chaplain that must preach to please my fancy:
> A friend at court to place me at a masque;
> The private box ta'en up at a new play
> For me and my retinue; a fresh habit,

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1. T. S. Eliot, op.cit., p. 217.

2. For the subsequent history of the scene, cf. K. M. Lynch, 'D'Urfé's L'Astrée and the "Proviso" scenes in Dryden's comedy', PQ, IV (1925), 302; The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 1926, p. 84.

> Of a fashion never seen before, to draw
> The gallants' eyes, that sit on the stage, upon me;. . .'

Mistress Carol in Shirley's Hyde Park (1632) propounds similar conditions, though the tone here is much lighter, more arch, the moral implications much slighter:

> 'You shall not ask me before company
> How old I am, a question most untoothsome.
> I know not what to say more; I'll not be
> Bound from Spring-garden, and the 'Sparagus.
> I will not have my tongue tied up, when I've
> A mind to jeer my suitors, among which
> Your worship shall not doubt to be remembered,
> For I must have my humour, I am sick else.' (II,iv)

Massinger's device, moulded by the tone of Shirley, is finally translated into the polished prose of the bargaining scene in Congreve's The Way of the World (1700).[1]

Massinger's closest links, however, are with the early comedies of Jonson. Jonson's later plays, comedies like the The Staple of News (1626) and The New Inn (1628-9), suggest Massinger in their satire of contemporary vices, but they have less concentrated drive than the earlier Volpone, with which Massinger's comedies are chiefly associated. Massinger's presentation of vice is extreme, his moralising often heavy-handed;[2] but

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1. In view of later developments it is surprising to find Anne and Mary designated simply as Extravagance and Vanity of the earlier moralities (Dunn, p. 133).

2. This has been over-emphasised by B. Matthews: 'To a certain extent he suggests Hogarth, a moralist also with an obvious enjoyment in his own portrayal of degrading vice and its appalling consequences . . . He is heavy-handed and coarse-fibred ethically as well as aesthetically' ('Philip Massinger', Representative English Comedies, ed. Gayley, III, 318).

his two sombre satiric comedies are perhaps the most alive and satisfying of his plays. Jusserand has disparagingly relegated him to the escapist world of romantic comedy,[1] but there is more justice in the view that in these plays Massinger

> 'combined his own genuine earnestness with a photographic reproduction of manners like that of Middleton . . . For a sober presentation of London life without flippancy or caricature, they have few rivals in Elizabethan dramatic literature.'[2]

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1. op.cit., p. 428.

2. R. S. Forsythe, The Relations of Shirley's plays to the Elizabethan Drama, 1914, p. 6.

CHAPTER IV

Romantic Comedies

Massinger's romantic comedies, written in the form established by Fletcher and popular with the later Jacobean and Caroline audiences, are diverse in character. Only one is closely modelled on Fletcher: The Guardian (1633) is in fact the most Fletcherian of all Massinger's plays.[1] It has a recklessness and multiplicity of intrigue that distinguish it from the rest of his work and associate it with Fletcher's comedies, although Massinger's clumsier and more sober hand is still very much in evidence. The Great Duke of Florence (1627?), however, which equally invites the label of romantic comedy, is written in a mode that is peculiarly Massinger's own.[2] It is the most courtly and deliberately artificial of his plays: its pre-eminently aristocratic and restrained tones are remote from the greater vigour and more varied accents of Fletcher's comic world. The Parliament of Love (1624) is an uneven play: its courtly world is as romantically artificial as that of The Great Duke, while the intrigue of the sub-plot is akin to the comedy of manners of Fletcher or Shirley. The three plays embody Massinger's nearest approach to gaiety, though even here the tragic threat and the moralist's strictures are not entirely absent.

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1. This has often been noted, e.g. by A. H. Thorndike, English Comedy, New York, 1929, p. 229.

2. '. . . cette gracieuse fiction ne rappelle pas le brio de Fletcher' (Chelli, p. 95). J. Ferriar calls it a 'specimen of elegant comedy, of which there is no archetype in his great predecessor' [i.e. Shakespeare] ('Essay on the Dramatic Writings of Massinger', 1786, Gifford, I, cxi).

Critics have censured Massinger for adopting in The Guardian a style foreign to his own more serious bent of mind and failing in the attempt.[1] Massinger's plays are usually constructed round a single theme, but the blending of several strands in this play recalls the method of Fletcher, as does the shift of emphasis. There is a certain disunity in some of Fletcher's plays, for example, The Humorous Lieutenant (1619?) and The Custom of the Country (c. 1619-20), where the plot seems to change direction midway and the final outcome is in some respects detached from the initial situation: the dramatist seems to be trying to include as much as possible in the play, depending for effect more upon diversity of situation than on the development of one particular theme. This also seems to happen in The Guardian. At the opening Durazzo, who provides the title of the play, is one of the most prominent characters, as he defends the education of his ward, Caldero, and urges him on in his wooing of Calista. When Calista mistakes Caldero in the dark for her lover Adorio, it is Durazza who takes advantage of the mistake and organises Caldero's flight with the unsuspecting Calista. But Durazzo soon fades to the background. Interwoven with the adventures of the young lovers is the story of Iolanthe, Calista's supposedly widowed mother, who solicits the love of a stranger, who is in fact her brother in disguise, and is betrayed by the sudden return of her husband, Severino. The last act brings all the characters together in the forest court of Severino, who

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1. Chelli is particularly severe (p. 262). But the play's 'vitality and strength' appealed to Cruikshank (p. 134).

is now the most prominent figure, though the final climax is the appearance of the king, Alphonso, who so far has been only a counter in the background but now emerges to shape the closing of the play. The discussion of city life and romantic intrigue centred upon Durazzo when the play opens has eventually been abandoned for a rhetorical court scene at the close involving different characters and issues. The intrigue is nevertheless skillfully handled and the interweaving of scenes gives some sense of continuity, while the family relationship of Calista to Iolante and Severino gives a certain unity at the close.[1]

One of the most interesting features of the play is its approach to the comedy of manners as it is found in Fletcher and developed in the Restoration drama. J. G. McManaway has commented on this, and on it bases his claim for Massinger as 'the best link between the early drama and the later'[2]: here Massinger 'comes nearest to urbanity and suavity'.[3] The play opens with Durazzo spiritedly defending the unbringing of his nephew:[4]

> 'Riots! what riots?
> He wears rich clothes, I do so; keeps horses, games,
> and wenches;
> 'Tis not amiss, so it be done with decorum:
> In an heir 'tis ten times more excusable
> Than to be over-thrifty.' (I,i)

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1. Chelli allows the play only the external unity imposed by the setting (p. 172).

2. 'Philip Massinger and the Restoration Drama', ELH, I (1934), 280.

3. ibid., p. 278.

4. 'This sounds very much like the opinion of Sir Edward Belfond in Shadwell's Squire of Alsatia . . . Both dramatists may have had in mind the Adelphi of Plautus' (ibid., p. 279).

Durazzo's genial indulgence approaches the amorality of the Restoration world, but the fact that he has to defend his ideas, the explicitness of his assertions, betray an inner uncertainty. The opening conversation does in fact seem to be detached from the rest of the play, part of an experiment that is not properly assimilated into the dramatic structure. It prepares us for a reckless, dissolute Caldoro, but we actually find him virtuous almost to the point of preciousness. Adorio is much closer to the picture of Durazzo's nephew: he seems to be closely modelled on Fletcher's rake Mirabell.[1] In particular his rejection of marriage is close to that of Mirabell (The Wild-Goose Chase, I,ii):

> 'Can I part with
> My uncurb'd liberty, and on my neck
> Wear such a heavy yoke? hazard my fortunes,
> With all the expected joys my life can yield me,
> For one commodity, before I prove it?. . .' (I,i)

But again this strain is cut short: the next time we see Adorio (II,iii) he has suddenly repented and abandoned his former way of living.[2]

There is something too deliberate and formal about the rakishness of Durazzo and Adorio: the passage in the play which comes nearest to the Restoration spirit is the conversation between Calista and her maid, Mirtilla, after Iolante has forbidden her daughter even 'to look upon a man' (I,ii). The two girls are horrified; but Calista's perturbation is not so much grief for a lost lover as dismay at being deprived of

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1. cf. McManaway, op.cit., p. 278.

2. J. R. Lowell surprisingly says of Massinger: 'I do not recall any of those sudden conversions . . . which trip up all our expectations so startlingly in many an old play' (The Old English Dramatists, 1892, p. 126).

society and its entertainments:

> 'Calis. Not stir abroad!
> The use and pleasure of our eyes denied us!
> Mirt. Insufferable.
> Calis. Nor write, not yet receive
> An amorous letter!
> Mirt. Not to be endured.
> Calis. Nor look upon a man out of a window!
> Mirt. Flat tyranny, insupportable tyranny,
> To a lady of your blood.' (I,ii)

The hint here of the languid protestations of Congreve's Millamant[1] finds a closer resemblance in Mirtilla's summary of the conditions which alone can render a young lady's life tolerable: 9/

> '. . . if she would allow you
> A dancer in the morning to well breathe you,
> A songster in the afternoon, a servant
> To air you in the evening; give you leave
> To see the theatre twice a week, to mark
> How the old actors decay, the young sprout up,
> (A fitting observation), you might bear it;
> But not to see, or talk, or touch a man,
> Abominable!'[2]

The sub-plot of The Parliament of Love has also something of the spirit of the comedy of fashionable society. Novall and Perigot make love to the wives of Dinant and Chamont: the husbands discover this and lead the courtiers on until they are finally entrapped and punished. The pursuit becomes a battle of wits in which the plotters are out-plotted just on the brink of success, the kind of situation that occurs in The Little French Lawyer (1619-23), by Massinger and Fletcher, when Dinant is

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1. Calista 'is not unlike her Restoration nieces' (McManaway, op.cit., p. 279).

2. cf. a similar anticipation of Congreve in the proviso scene in The City-Madam (II,ii).

enticed by Iamira, with her husband's consent, only to be finally thwarted (III,i). In Massinger's play, Novall pretends to be ill in order to gain access to the house of Dinant, the court physician. Dinant perceives the plot and seems unwittingly to promote it in prescribing exactly the treatment desired by Novall: he commands his wife,

> 'you shall,
> In person, wait on him; nay, hang not off,
> I say you shall: this night, with your own hands,
> I'll have you air his bed, and when he eats
> Of what you have prepared, you shall sit by him,. . .
> more, I durst trust you,
> Were this our wedding day, you yet a virgin,
> To be his bedfellow;. . .' (IV,ii)

A similar device is used in Shirley's The Witty Fair One (1628), where Fowler pretends to be ill in his attempt to seduce Penelope (III,iv). The battle of wits in both plays foreshadows the combats of Restoration comedy, but Shirley's is much nearer the later plays in its lightness of touch. Massinger's intrigue is heavy-handed: Dinant's instructions to his wife are too explicit and extreme, and lack the poise and delicacy of Fowler's insinuations, patent though they be:

> 'Fow. . . I have a great mind, an 'twere but for two or three minutes, to have a maid warm my bed -
> Pen. That may be done.
> Fow. With her body - else 'twill do me no good, the doctor says - to put life in some of my limbs, a little virgin warmth would do it.'

Massinger's intrigue is not worked out in intellectual terms: his lovers are not thwarted by reason as in The Little French Lawyer and The Witty Fair One, but the plot ends in horseplay, Perigot being tossed in a blanket, Novall rendered helpless by a drug.

A similar lack of suavity is apparent in The Guardian, which also has certain points of contact with The Witty Fair One. The contrasting figures of Caldero and Adorio at the opening of the play are paralleled by the similar characters of Aimwell and Fowler in Shirley's play. Adorio's speech on marriage has been cited as an exposition of the Restoration attitude,[1] but the rhetorical, abstract kind of style in which it is delivered is Massinger's own. The full flavour of Massinger's peculiar mannerisms, the general, conventional nature of his imagery, the formal quality of his verse which makes almost every speaker a public orator, is brought out by the contrast between Adorio's speech (I,i) and Fowler's on the same theme:

> 'Dost think I am so mad to marry? sacrifice my liberty to a woman; sell my patrimony to buy them feathers and new fashions, and maintain a gentleman-usher to ride in my saddle when I am knighted and pointed at, with Pythagoras for a tame sufferance; have my wardrobe laid forth and my holiday breeches, when my lady pleases I shall take air in a coach with her, together with her dog that is costive;. . . 'twere a sin to discretion, and my own freedom'. (The Witty Fair One, I,iii)

The catalogue of concrete details here, the note of flippancy, the attack on individual feminine affectations, are very much in the style of Congreve. Adorio's speech, however, is conceived in terms of abstract principles rather than concrete demonstrations. Adorio is a kind of skeleton sketch of a rake. Moreover, he is only presented in this light in the opening scene, where the contrasting natures of the two men seem to be taking stands on either side of a theoretical discussion. However, it is not a simple contrast of vice and virtue. The exaggeration of

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1. cf. quotation, p. 86.

Caldero's protestations of virtue seems deliberately ironical in the light of Durazzo's deflating comments:

> 'My nephew is an ass;
> What a devil hath he to do with virgin honour,
> Altars, or lawful flames . . .' (I,i)

This device of deflating the ostensibly grandiloquent recurs throughout the play and is one of the chief sources of humour. Caldero's speeches of adoration as he stands, Romeo-like, in the dark beneath Calista's window are again exposed by the bluff common sense of Durazzo (III,v), who is always present with Caldero and acts as a kind of standard against which all the passionate utterances of the young man are measured. The high-flown discourse between Caldero and Calista when Calista discovers she has been carried away by the wrong man (IV,i) is subjected to the same treatment. Although Massinger seems to set out to present immorality positively in Durazzo and Adorio, in the fashion of the rakes of contemporary and later comedies of manners, the emphasis shifts to a presentation of virtue and gallantry, made comic by its exaggeration. This method, the comic treatment of virtue rather than vice, is more characteristic of Massinger, and is developed with greatest consistency in his most successful comedy, The Great Duke of Florence.

The play as a whole is closer to Fletcher than to Restoration comedy in its dependence upon chance and its abundance of physical action. It is a series of exciting incidents rather than a sustained witty intrigue. The scene in the dark (III,v) in which Calista mistakes Caldero for Adorio, and Adorio mistakes Mirtilla for Calista, recalls Fletcher's The Maid in the Mill (1623), IV,iii; and Iolante's coarse sensuality is,

in the manner of Fletcher, more consciously immoral than the amoral type upon which the initial portrayal of Adorio is modelled. But perhaps Iolante's closest affinity is with Sir Penitent Brothel in Middleton's A Mad World My Masters (1608). A feature which distinguishes both Middleton and Massinger from the later comic writers is their firm recognition of moral standards. Sir Penitent and Iolante are both hypocrites: both are aware of their immorality, and explicitly comment upon it in the midst of their respective intrigues. Sir Penitent Brothel, just as his seduction of Harebrain's wife is in full progress, utters a homiletic verse speech quite out of tone with the gay irresponsibility of most of the play (I,i), and Iolante, likewise, at the height of her preparations to receive Laval, acknowledges to herself her own evil:

> 'I, that did deny
> My daughter's youth allow'd and lawful pleasures,
> And would not suffer in her those desires
> She suck'd in with my milk, now in my waning
> Am scorch'd and burnt up with libidinous fire
> That must consume my fame; yet still I throw
> More fuel on it.' (III,vi)

Both characters are finally brought to shame and full repentance. The movement towards the Restoration mode that is apparent in parts of the play is checked by this insistence on moral standards, which Massinger seems unable to discard: he could not 'feel at home in an amoral society.'[1] However, Iolante's reformation is by no means so unequivocal as that of Sir Penitent: there is even a suggestion of jocularity about it. We do

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1. McManaway, op.cit., p. 277. cf. Chelli, p. 95: 'La comédie de Massinger a un fond sérieux. A New Way, The City Madam, et meme The Guardian ont une morale.'

not feel that Iolante has been transformed into a positively virtuous woman, but that she has merely succeeded in restraining a potential immorality which itself is as strong as ever. Her commendation of life in the forest,

> 'here are no allurements
> to tempt my frailty', (V,i)

suggests a virtue as sensationally precarious as that she claims earlier in the play,

> 'I keep no mankind servant in my house,
> In fear my chastity may be suspected.' (I,ii)

Massinger seems to be treating even his usually serious moral pronouncements in a somewhat comic vein, for Adorio's repentance has likewise a suggestion of irony. After Durazzo's mockery of Caldero's 'lawful flames' it is difficult to take seriously Adorio's high-flown resolve to meet 'chaste desires with lawful heat' in 'Hymeneal sheets' (II,iii). The dramatist's attitude to his characters and themes is not altogether clear. In Adorio, Caldero and Iolante virtue seems to be expressed, to some extent, to a gentle ridicule, and this interpretation is in keeping with the general tone of the comedy. But invariably there seems to be a serious moral intention in the presentation of Severino. Caldero's sententious and not altogether relevant philosophising (IV,i), mocked as it is by Durazzo, seems intended to provoke a smile. When, however, Severino philosophises in a similar vein,

> 'Danger, Claudio!
> 'Tis here, and everywhere, our forced companion:
> The rising and the setting sun beholds us
> Environ'd with it; our whole life a journey
> Ending in certain ruin', (II,iv)

and discourses on suicide, there is no suggestion of irony. Massinger seems to be trying to create a potentially tragic figure in Severino, but the result in unconvincing: his reflections are strained and flat and seem irrelevant in a play of this nature.[1] Severino is the chief moral agent of the play: not only does he restore his wife to virtue, but he also acts as a judge of society in general. In his banishment from Naples he has formed his own forest kingdom, like Shakespeare's duke in the Forest of Arden, where he penalises passers-by in the manner of Robin Hood. The scene in which the articles of the forest code are proclaimed (II,iv) enables Massinger to display his 'keen eye for social evils'.[2] The concern shown for contemporary problems, the very language used,

> 'The cormorant that lives in expectation
> Of a long wish'd for dearth',

recall the themes of A New Way and The City-Madam; but here the social theme forms only a brief incidental episode.

The sense of uncertainty in the moral import of the play makes it difficult an overall interpretation, and its ambivalence is nowhere more apparent than in the climactic scene of Severino's discovery of his wife (III,vi). It opens with great theatrical effect: Iolante, hidden by a curtain, speaks of her sin; Severino thinks she is praying and draws back the curtain, only to find her richly dressed and preparing a banquet for her lover.[3] Iolante's half-repentant soliloquy is ironically followed

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1. Dr. Ireland, however, praises Severino's 'moral melancholy' (Gifford, IV, 236).

2. Cruikshank, p. 12.

3. Dunn comments on the theatrical effectiveness of this scene (p. 79). It is a powerful elaboration of the first story in Westward for Smelts,

by Severino's speech, as he hears her voice but not her words,

> 'Tis her voice, poor turtle:
> She's now at her devotions, praying for
> Her banish'd mate . . .'

and the scene that is revealed when he draws the curtain has the incongruity of comedy. The quarrel that follows hovers uncomfortably between the tragic and the ludicrous. Severino's exclamations in the grand manner,

> 'What do I behold!
> Some sudden flash of lightning strike me blind,
> Or cleave the centre of the earth, that I
> May living find a sepulchre to swallow
> Me and my shame together!'

are too suddenly provoked, too extreme and elaborate, to be convincing as serious drama, and his subsequent speech of revenge, knife in hand, is even more patently contrived and unsubstantiated by any genuine feeling. The scene has been regarded as a single excursion into tragedy in an otherwise light-hearted play:[1] but at best it is no more than melodrama. Severino's threats and armed attack, can, however, be regarded as comedy, of a macabre kind. He finally wounds the maid Calypso, who, unknown to him, takes the place of her mistress. Calypso's reaction to the wounding of her nose and arms is in a coarsely comic vein:

> 'A <u>kiss</u>, and <u>love-tricks</u>! he hath villainous teeth,
> May sublimed mercury draw them! if all dealers
> In my profession were paid thus, there would be
> A dearth of cuckolds. Oh my nose! I had one. . .'

Massinger's probable source (cf. Gifford, IV, 123), where the husband merely discovers that his wife has been out of the house.

1. F. H. Ristine, <u>English Tragi-Comedy</u>, 1910, p. 132.

Iolante returns, and Severino, hearing her pray that her wounds may be healed as a proof of her innocence, is obliged to believe in the apparent miracle. Iolante's feigned sanctity cannot but be intentionally comic, and the whole episode is little more than a melodramatic farce. The cutting off of Calypso's nose is crude and repulsive: it is used merely for sensational effect and is soon forgotten as the play proceeds. Iolante's sudden repentance in the middle of the scene after a few minutes spent off-stage with Laval, is somewhat invalidated by her subsequent cunning and audacity in devising the miracle. The scene is lively and exciting, the action well planned: but it leaves the reader with some perplexing questions. How genuine is Iolante's repentance? Is Severino heroic or mock-heroic? How much are we intended to shudder, how much to laugh? In a modern production the comic element would need to be stressed, but the general impression is so blurred that Massinger's own intention is not clear.

This confusion is symptomatic of the disintegrated quality of the play as a whole. Critics have pointed out that the moral intentions of the play do not work, that although Massinger intended virtue to triumph his presentation of vice is far more attractive.[1] Certainly Iolante remains in our minds as an immoral rather than a moral figure, the final sylvan court scene at which all are reconciled (V,iv) leaves a much less distinct impression than the intrigues and accidents of the lovers, and the prevailing temper of the play is established by the personality of the

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1. e.g. McManaway, op.cit., p. 277.

benevolent but hardly moral Durazzo. However, to say as Enright[1] does,

> 'the poetry of the play . . . has operated in a contrary direction to plot, character alignment and moral intention,'

is to oversimplify, as Massinger was perhaps in part deliberately exposing the ostensible moral to ridicule, as he does with greater delicacy in The Great Duke. Perhaps the main cause for dissatisfaction is that Massinger was trying to do too much within the bounds of a single play, reaching out towards a Restoration type of comedy, but unable to sustain it, trying to achieve a full-blooded Fletcherian romance,[2] but handicapped by a lack of Fletcher's lightness of touch and a temperamental necessity to moralise on vice and injustice, both private and public. It is nevertheless a lively and in many respects attractive work, and Chelli's dismissal of the play as insipid[3] seems quite unjustifiable.

The Great Duke of Florence is remote from The Guardian in many respects: its atmosphere and characters seem to belong to a different world altogether. The gap between them is to some extent bridged by The Parliament of Love. This play, printed for the first time in Gifford's edition from a manuscript already considerably damaged,[4] is difficult to

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1. D. J. Enright, 'Poetic satire and satire in verse', Scrutiny, XVIII (1952), 223.

2. F. S. Boas is surprised 'that in so late a play Massinger should show kinship to Fletcher in his most questionable aspects' (Stuart Drama, 1945, p. 325). Chelli, however, refers to the two recent failures mentioned in the prologue to the play: 'Peut-etre, découragé par son insuccès, se fia-t-il, pour reconquérir les applaudissements, aux moyens éprouvés et classiques' (p. 171).

3. p. 171.

4. For an account of his acquisition of the MS, cf. Gifford, I, c ff.

assess completely because of its fragmentary condition: the first two or three scenes are entirely missing and there are several smaller gaps. Thorndike[1] says that it 'retains the trappings of romance in a comedy of manners'. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that a comedy of manners is inserted into the form of a romance. The play is concerned with heroic themes in the vein of a medieval romance. King Charles of France establishes a parliament to which all lovers may bring their complaints,[2] and the action of the play consists in the negotiations of various sets of lovers which are eventually judged by the parliament. The minor plot, with its roots in the contemporary city life comedy, has already been described.[3] Linking this intrigue to the exclusively courtly plot is the lustful pursuit of Bellisant, 'a noble lady', by Clarindore, who is the most intelligent of the group of lesser figures to which Novall and Perigot also belong. Bellisant is as hardened a woman of the world as any Restoration lady in her defence of her life of 'continual feasting, princely entertainments':

> 'What proof
> Should I give of my continence, if I lived
> Not seen, nor seeing any? Spartan Helen,
> Corinthian Lais, or Rome's Messaline,
> So mew'd up, might have died as they were born,
> By lust untempted: no, it is the glory
> Of chastity to be tempted, tempted home too,
> The honour else is nothing! . . .' (I,iv)

However, her rhetorical style, classical allusions and lofty manner are

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1. A. H. Thorndike, English Comedy, New York, 1929, p. 230.

2. For some account of the medieval Parliaments of Love, cf. Gifford, II, 237-8.

3. cf. pp. 87 - 8 above.

very much in the vein of the main heroic plot. Leonora refuses to accept Cleremond as her lover until he has slain his best friend: this involves Cleremond in a duel with Montrose, who has just won the love of Bellisant. Cleremond's emotional conflict, torn between love for Leonora and love for and loyalty to his friend, gives the play a tragic threat. The play is a more highly charged development of the plot of Marston's The Dutch Courtesan (1605).[1] In Marston's play Franceschina has a motive of jealousy in ordering Malheureux to kill Freevill: Chelli remarks on this and severely criticises the unnaturalness of Leonora's unmotivated demand.[2] But Massinger is not trying to create realistic individuals with credible motivation for their actions: that Leonora's demand should be totally unreasonable is part of the romance pattern, an arbitrary command to set the play in motion which we accept within the framework of the play as in a fairy-tale. The play certainly involves serious issues in the ideal of friendship, and the conflict it causes between love and honour. But even at the most intense moments there seems to be a certain detachment in the dramatist's attitude, as if he were consciously manipulating his themes and characters into a rhetorical pattern, discussing rather than re-creating the situations of the plot. The ornate quality of the verse is the chief means of conveying this: for instance, Cleremond, at the height of his affliction, poses as a tragic figure, but his method of describing his

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1. F. L. Lucas (Complete Works of John Webster, 1927, III, 5-9) and E. E. Stoll (John Webster, 1905, 162-171) have both commented on the relationship of Massinger's play with The Dutch Courtesan and also with Webster's A Cure for a Cuckold.

2. p. 130.

position, the analogies he draws, are almost leisurely:

> 'But I rise up a new example of
> Calamity, transcending all before me;
> And I should gild my misery with false comforts,
> If I compared it with an Indian slave's,
> That, with incessant labour to search out
> Some unknown mine, dives almost to the centre;
> And, if then found, not thank'd of his proud master.
> But this, if put into an equal scale
> With my unparalled'd fortune, will weigh nothing; . . .'
> (III,ii)

Moreover, the very structure of the plot, stemming from the parliament set up in the first act,[1] does in a measure condition our response to the events of the play. As Charles enters (I,v) on his return home from the wars and reproaches the courtiers for their languidness, there is a strong sense of retirement from the world of action: the vital military affairs are now dispatched, and in the absence of anything of more serious concern the king diverts the activity of his court to more trivial matters:

> 'Tamed Italy,
> With fear, confesses me a warlike king,
> And France shall boast I am a prince of love.
> Shall we, that keep perpetual parliaments
> For petty suits, or the least injury
> Offer'd the goods or bodies of our subjects,
> Not study a cure for the sickness of the mind;
> Whose venomous contagion hath infected
> Our bravest servants, and the choicest beauties
> Our court is proud of? These are wounds require
> A kingly surgeon, and the honour worthy
> By us to be accepted.'

The king's solemn tones are not without irony. The whole purpose of the establishment of the parliament is to restore the court to merriment, and

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1. The inadequacy of the Parliament as a unifying factor has been criticised by Chelli (p. 129) and Dunn (p. 73).

the sessions at the beginning and the close of the play frame the action like a tableau.[1] There is a holiday atmosphere about the initiation of the Parliament of Love: it is a kind of royal game, dignified though it is.[2] This is reiterated at the close of the play, where Charles's speech to the courtiers merges into an epilogue to the audience, and first the parliament and then the whole play recedes into an atmosphere of revels ended:

> 'So break we up LOVES'S PARLIAMENT, which, we hope,
> Being for mirth intended, shall not meet with
> An ill construction; and if then, fair ladies,
> You please to approve it, we hope you'll invite
> Your friends to see it often, with delight.' (V,i)

Critics have always seemed uneasy about The Parliament of Love, but they have usually agreed on the quality of its verse.[3] The plot gives Massinger ample opportunity for the set speech and for debate. The play concludes characteristically with a court scene. Charles's opening speech[4] on the nature of 'pure love' recalls the achievements of ancient times and presents the heroic and romantic code around which the play is constructed:

> '. . . pure Love, that has his birth in heaven,
> And scorns to be received a guest, but in

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1. 'It is a picture rather than a drama' (S. A. Dunham, Lives of the most eminent, 1837, II, 290).

2. G. B. Smith says the play is 'written in an easy, sprightly manner and the proceedings of the court, for mirth intended, are, on occasion, mirth-provoking' ('Philip Massinger', New Quarterly Magazine, V(1875), 55).

3. 'This fragment is in Massinger's best style' (J. O. Halliwell, Dictionary of Old English Plays, 1860, p. 189). The only virtue admitted by The Edinburgh Review is its 'fluent and elegant versification' (XII, (1808), 119).

4. Highly praised by Cruikshank, p. 42.

> A noble heart prepared to entertain him,
> Is, by the gross misprision of weak men,
> Abused and injured. That celestial fire,
> Which hieroglyphically is described
> In this his bow, his quiver, and his torch,
> First warm'd their bloods, and after gave a name
> To the old heroic spirits: such as Orpheus . . .' (V,i)

The eloquence of the play is largely directed towards the creation of a remote romantic world. Cruikshank's summary of the play is on the whole a fair comment:

> 'The Parliament of Love contains much fine poetry and one great forensic scene, such as our author loves. It is, however, in too fragmentary a state for us to judge it fairly. The atmosphere is unreal, the interest flags, the boisterous comedy is unattractive.'[1]

The unreality of the atmosphere is, however, not a fault in itself: the fault lies in that it does not become a completely artificial world that can impose its own terms on audience or reader. This Massinger was to achieve in one of his most consistently moulded plays, The Great Duke of Florence.

The Great Duke has usually won high commendation.[2] It is the epitome of Massinger's courtliness, and in its exclusion of any jarring or serious elements it holds a unique place in his work.[3] Massinger's source has been shown to be A Knack to Know a Knave,[4] which itself is a dramatisation

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1. p. 139.

2. '. . . the most purely delightful play . . . ever written by Massinger' (A. Symons (ed.), Philip Massinger, I (1887), xxix).

3. '. . . absence d'émotions très fortes, de périls véritablement grands, de méchanceté et de misère extremes, cela suffit pour que la pièce ne soit classée en aucun genre que le comique' (Chelli, p. 263).

4. For a comparison of the two plays cf. E. Koeppel, Quellen-Studien zu den Dramen George Chapman's, Philip Massinger's und John Ford's, Strassburg, 1897, pp. 117ff., and U. M. Stockholm (ed.), The Great Duke of Florence, Baltimore, 1933, pp. v ff.

of the chronicle story of Edgar and Alfreda: but, as Stochholm comments, nothing can better throw into relief the characteristic atmosphere of Massinger's play than a comparison with the grim, unsophisticated source play.[1] The first act, which Stochholm justly describes as 'a model of efficient exposition and economy of plot',[2] creates the world of the play:

> '. . . no serious passions disturb the serenity of the characters, who move in an artificial and beautiful world with stateliness and grace and decorum. These men and women are emotional but not passionate; they are gifted orators, speaking with eloquence and fervour rather than with deep conviction.'[3]

The play opens on a note of ornate compliment, characteristic of a society where each strives to outdo the other in courtesy. Charamonte's long and elaborate eulogy of the young prince Giovanni, whose education he has been supervising, is tinged with a delicate humour as Contarino adopts the same extreme phraseology in which to ask the simplest of questions:

> 'And what place
> Does he now bless with his presence?' (I,i)

Giovanni, summoned to court, bids farewell to his tutor and Lidia, the daughter of Charamonte. He laments that his high birth prevents him from marriage with Lidia and pictures the rural life they might have shared:

> 'we might walk
> In solitary groves, or in choice gardens;
> From the variety of curious flowers
> Contemplate nature's workmanship, and wonders:
> And then, for change, near to the murmur of
> Some bubbling fountain, I might hear you sing . . .'

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1. op.cit., p. xl.
2. ibid., p. lxxxv.
3. ibid., p. lxxxiii.

Much of the play takes place in the country, but it is a rusticity permeated by the court, very different from the rural scenes of The Guardian. The wanderings of the lovers in the forest and the presentation of Severino's court faintly echo A Midsummer Night's Dream and As You Like It, but the country setting has no actuality and is only slightly sketched. Durazzo's long and eloquent account of country sports (I,i) is, however, surprisingly vivid, but is not really assimilated into the world of the play.[1] In The Great Duke the picture of rural life is patently artificial, but deliberately so. Massinger, with an underlying vein of subdued humour, seems to be consciously creating a rural community in the manner of Marie-Antoinette. Giovanni's idyllic vision of 'a poor sordid cottage' is of one surrounded by gardens and untouched by poverty. Charamonte's household is only a more frugal extension of the court, and the highly educated Lidia is no everyday country maiden.

The second scene moves to the court, the other setting of the play, and here again the elaborate artificial structure impresses itself upon us. The remote elegance of this kind of life is apparent in Cozimo's welcome to Sanazarro, who comes to report the seizure, under his directions, of some treasure-ships. Sanazarro's speech is brief and factual: there is no extended narration of the sea-fight, something that one feels would be almost sordid in the context of the play. The importance of the naval success is the honour it bestows upon Sanazarro in the hierarchy of the court: his actual military career lies quite outside the play. Fiorinda

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1. cf. Dunn, p. 256.

later tells how she has listened, Desdemona-like, to tales of his adventures:

> 'I profess,
> When it hath been, and fervently, deliver'd,
> How boldly, in the horror of a fight,
> Cover'd with fire and smoke, and, as if nature
> Had lent him wings, like lightning, he hath fallen
> Upon the Turkish gallies, I have heard it
> With a kind of pleasure, which hath whisper'd to me,
> This worthy must be cherish'd'. (II,i)

As she continues to acknowledge, it is Sanazarro the courtier rather than Sanazarro the soldier who has won her heart:

> 'His armour off, not young Antinous
> Appear'd more courtly; all the graces that
> Render a man's society dear to ladies,
> Like pages waiting on him . . .'

The soldier must abandon his armour for the rich robes of the court, the field of heroic action for the strategies of aristocratic life.[1]

A similar sense of detachment from anything urgent is conveyed by Giovanni's account of his education to Fiorinda. As it is expounded in the first act this has been regarded as Massinger's ideal of the upbringing of a prince;[2] but there is a suggestion of mild amusement on Massinger's part in Giovanni's periphrastic summary of his studies:

> 'I had a grave instructor, and my hours
> Design'd to serious studies yielded me
> Pleasure with profit, in the knowledge of
> What before I was ignorant in; the signior,
> Carolo de Charomonte, being skilful
> To guide me through the labyrinth of wild passions,

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1. '. . . cette grace qui consiste à mouvoir dans une intrigue plaisante, au-dessus du réalisme, en dehors des difficultés et des infortunes vulgaires' (Chelli, p. 266).

2. Stockholm, op.cit., p. lxxxiii.

> That labour'd to imprison my free soul
> A slave to vicious sloth.' (II,i)

Giovanni's education, it seems, has not been inspired by any high aspirations, but merely to avoid slothfulness, a fault that the leisurely pace of life in the Florentine court seems only to avoid in the following out of its own little intrigues.

As in The Parliament of Love, the romantic world of the play is largely built up through the quality of the verse; here the effect depends mainly on leisurely ornamentation. Dunn has criticised Massinger's use of imagery for its 'precise pedantry' and lifelessness,[1] and quotes in illustration two of Cozimo's speeches as he welcomes Sanazarro back to the court:

> 'Still my nightingale,
> That with sweet accents dost assure me, that
> My spring of happiness comes fast upon me! , . .'
>
> '. . . we have not
> Received into our bosom and our grace
> A glorious lazy drone, grown fat with feeding
> On others' toil, but an industrious bee,
> That crops the sweet flowers of our enemies,
> And every happy evening returns
> Loaden with wax and honey to our hive.' (I,i)

Dunn has severely criticised Massinger's use of imagery here:

> 'Both these metaphors are patently "stuck on" as ornamentation. Sanazarro is first of all a nightingale and then "an industrious

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1. 'His metaphors tend either to give the impression of verbal appliqué work and of something not absorbed into the speech or to swell out and take charge of what is being said, the completion and elaborate carrying-out of the metaphor becoming an end initself rather than a means to an end' (Dunn, p. 251).

> bee"; and in any case a bee, industrious or otherwise, in his bosom would create upon the Duke an effect very different from that Massinger is wishing to express. The metaphors are both inappropriate and, if not dead or moribund, at least dormant, and, given no life by Massinger, spring from no life in Cozimo's speech.'[1]

But the whole tone of the play prevents us from making any such literal application of the metaphors as Dunn suggests: the effect of superimposed embroidery is deliberate. The bee is not an image from actuality but has literary roots: it recalls the comparison of the world of the bees and that of man that is used by Virgil in The Georgics and by Shakespeare in Henry V. Massinger is most successful in this play when he makes fun of his own formal eloquence. The first meeting of Giovanni and Fiorinda is invested with a grave humour: their politeness is just a little too extreme and finally they are obliged to abandon it.

> 'Giov. Madam, that, without warrant, I presume
> To trench upon your privacies, may argue
> Rudeness of manners; but the free access
> Your princely courtesy vouchsafes to all
> That come to pay their services, gives me hope
> To find a gracious pardon.
> Fior. If you please, not
> To make that an offence in your construction,
> Which I receive as a large favour from you,
> There needs not this apology.
> Giov. You continue,
> As you were ever, the greatest mistress of
> Fair entertainment.
> Fior. You are, sir, the master;
> And in the country have learnt to outdo
> All that in the court is practised. But why should we
> Talk at such distance? . . .' (II,i)

This passage characterises the quality of the language of the play as a

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1. p. 252.

whole, affected, languid, but always with a slight hint of irony that preserves its delicacy and saves it from flatness.

The sophistication in which every aspect of the play is steeped seems to have been ignored by many critics in the assessment of the character of Lidia. She has usually been regarded as the ideal of rural innocence,[1] but in her own way she is as courtly and elegant as Fiorinda: her very protestations of humility and innocence are framed with a certain coyness. When Sanazarro, smitten by her beauty, turns away in confusion, she is quite indignant at his neglect of her; and when he asks if she will give him 'hope Of future happiness', she replies in the tones of a hardened intriguer:

> 'That, as I shall find you:
> The fort that's yielded at the first assault
> Is hardly worth the taking,' (II,iii)

It is perhaps significant that in the scene immediately preceding this a certain coarseness is revealed in Charamonte that is surprising in one so refined and restrained as we have so far seen him. At Sanazarro's arrival he excitedly tells a servant:

> 'Bid my daughter
> Trim herself up to the height; I know this courtier
> Must have a smack at her.'. . . (II,ii)

A similar sense of intrusion is felt when Petronella, the drunken kitchen maid, is substituted for Lidia, so that Cozimo will not fall in love with her.[2] This primarily farcical scene has generally been regarded as

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1. e.g. by F. W. Harness in The Plays of Philip Massinger adapted for family reading, 1830, p. 108.

2. This device is borrowed from A Knack to Know a Knave.

'a blot upon the comedy':[1]

> 'Cet épisode détonne, sur l'ensemble de l'oeuvre, polie, courtoisie, plaine de goût: puisqu'elle est, d'un bour à l'autre, une conversation entre personnes d'élite, esprits et coeurs raffinés.'[2]

But perhaps in all these instances Massinger is hinting, with a smile, at the artificiality of the play's refinement, at the existence of a more gross actuality outside the rarified existence of the court. The Petronella episode has also been condemned for its improbability:

> 'as a trick it is so gross and palpable, that the duke could not have been deceived by it for a moment. . .'[3]

but this is surely to misinterpret the plot of the play. Giovanni and Sanazarro are the most amateur of conspirators: they are like children trying to deceive grown-ups and there is not a touch of real villainy in the play.[4] The understatement of Giovanni's rueful comment,

> 'This is gross: nor can the imposture
> But be discover'd', (IV,ii)

the foolishness with which the intriguers realise that they have forgotten to take the simplest of precautions,

> 'Giov. O, my Lord,
> How grossly have we overshot ourselves!
> Sanaz. In what, sir?
> Giov. In forgetting to acquaint
> My guardian with our purpose.' (V,ii)

are instances of a deliberate clumsiness. The inefficiency of the

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1. W. Archer, The Old Drama and the New, 1923, p. 108.
2. Chelli, p. 168.
3. Gifford, II, 503.
4. cf. Chelli, p. 168.

plotters is part of the play's humour.

The prevailing tone of the play is indeed one of good-humoured indulgence in which the wrongdoers find forgiveness: Fiorinda consents to marry Sanazarro (V,iii) without a hint of reproach, in marked contrast to Camiola (The Maid of Honour, c.1621?), who finds herself in a similar position. The duke, we feel, rules a court invested with make-believe. The play closes characteristically with a trial scene at which Lidia pleads for the pardon of Giovanni. For a moment there is a serious threat as it seems that the duke is going to marry Lidia himself, but he remembers his vow at the death of his first wife never to marry again, and Charamonte ingeniously explains,

> 'The prince, in care to have you keep your vows
> Made unto heaven, vouchsafed to love my daughter.' (V,iii)

The duke good-naturedly yields to this interpretation and all is amicably settled:

> 'Though we know
> All this is practice, and that both are false:
> Such reverence we will pay to dead Clarinda,
> And to our serious oaths, that we are pleased
> With our own hand to blind our eyes, and not
> Know what we understand.'

This again has been blamed for improbability,[1] but its preposterousness is in keeping with the humour of the play, which appropriately ends upon a joke.

The remote artificial world of The Great Duke, presented with a gravity that seems to gently mock itself, is the peak of Massinger's achievement in romantic comedy. The Guardian and The Parliament of Love

1. e.g. by Gifford, II, 525.

are uneven plays, and The Guardian in particular is written in the manner of other plays of the period, but The Great Duke has a flavour that is peculiarly Massinger's own:

> 'We must not look for profundity or sublimity, but at least we shall not be troubled by false and inflated efforts to achieve the profound and the sublime. Readers who savour a delicate artificial grace are best equipped to enjoy this play.'[1]

Its artificial serenity is consistently maintained to the extent of making irrelevant charges of improbability. Great delicacy would be needed in the play's performance:

> 'It should be acted by Lysis and Charicles, Glaucon and Adeimantus.'[2]

A report of a production in 1922 has caught accurately the individual quality of the play and suggests that it was conveyed in this performance:

> 'Massinger's virtue is that he is consistently artificial; he never peeps out apologetically from behind the mask he has assumed . . . The loves of Giovanni and Lidia, of Sanazarro and Fiorinda, the little complexities and misunderstandings so easily swept away - are all no more than the outlines of a formal and exquisite embroidery, a thing of silks and bright colours and pleasant embellishments . . .'[3]

Massinger's work in this field is varied in kind and quality. The fact that so few of his plays can be designated simply romantic comedy witnesses to his leaning towards serious themes, his incapacity to realise either the reckless gaiety of Fletcher or the 'golden world' of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. For a moment he achieves a fragile but sustained serenity in The Great Duke, but for a moment only: in his tragi-comedies he sets out to present the invasion of the courtly world by the more grim actualities outside it.

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1. Stockholm, op.cit., p. lxxxviii. 2. Cruikshank, p. 47, n. 2.
3. The Times, Feb. 24, 1922, p. 7. cf. pp. 13 - 14 above.

CHAPTER V Tragi-comedies

The tragi-comedies of Massinger, like the more light-hearted romantic plays, are closely associated with those of Fletcher. It is in this group of plays that Fletcher's influence is most apparent, an influence that has been variously assessed by critics. Some have seen Massinger as following too closely in Fletcher's footsteps, to his detriment;[1] but usually Massinger has been differentiated by his moralistic attitude,[2] and a new spirit has been detected in the established form:

'Son théatre est un théatre d'idées'.[3]

There is certainly a marked difference in the tone of Massinger's tragi-comedies. Fletcher's definition of tragi-comedy in his preface to The Faithful Shepherdess is a much more accurate indication of his own plays than of Massinger's:

> 'A tragi-comedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to m make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned; so that a god is as lawful in this as in a tragedy, and mean people as in a comedy.'

The patchwork quality suggested by Fletcher's definition, the swift

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1. e.g. R. Boyle, 'Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger', Englische Studien, X (1887), [illegible], 411.

2. e.g. by M. Kerr, The influence of Ben Jonson on English comedy, New York, 1912, p. 43.

3. P. Legouis and L. Cazamian, Histoire de la littérature anglaise, 1933, p. 494

movement from one extreme to another and final resolution in an ingenious twist of the plot, is not so marked in Massinger's plays which have usually an underlying and unifying theme of some seriousness. The happy solution is not easily achieved: those who sin must repent, and only through their repentance, a long and difficult process, can general concord be achieved. Such is the characteristic pattern of Massinger's tragi-comedies. Moreover, he uses the flexible form of the romantic play to include the discussion of serious topics, political, social, religious. The general effect of these plays is of a certain disintegration, a survey of various elements which do not completely cohere. The comic world, presented in its fullness in The Great Duke of Florence, partly submits to the pressure of actuality, the intrusion of moral problems and threats of disaster. Ristine distinguishes the bulk of Massinger's work in this kind from the 'fullness of incident, profusion of tragic possibilities, and thrills and surprises'[1] that characterise Fletcher's plays, and comments on a greater consistency of tone. Massinger does, however, repeat some of the themes of the tragedies in these plays. His tragi-comedies are an attempt to compromise between the tragedies and the social comedies on the one hand and the fashionable romantic plays on the other; and yet they have a pattern of their own.

The closest resemblance between these plays and the tragedies is in their presentation and judgment of emotional extremes, particularly uxoriousness and its close ally, jealousy. King Ladislas in The Picture (1629) closely resembles the tragic hero Sforza (The Duke of Milan). The

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1. F. H. Ristine, English Tragi-Comedy, 1910, p. 130.

courtiers Ubaldo and Ricardo, describing the king's passion for his wife Honoria (I,ii), use some of the same terms as are used in the presentation of Sforza: for example,

> 'As she were still a virgin, and his life
> But one continued wooing';[1]

and like Sforza, Ladislas is so absorbed in his love as to become indifferent to the military affairs of his kingdom. Here, potentially, is the tragic theme of The Duke of Milan; but Ladislas' passion is never allowed to assume the dimensions of Sforza's. The king and queen enter, make elaborate speeches of mutual adoration, and are openly criticised by the old courtier Eubulus, who tells the story of Semiramis and Ninus as a warning to the king. Honoria proceeds to defend both herself and the king, and the scene develops into a kind of debate, a battle of wits between Honoria and Eubulus, in which the whole question of the doting husband is as it were held up for theoretical discussion. Ladislas is little more than a puppet version of Sforza, and remains very much in the background. He later shows signs of jealousy and makes a slight gesture of tragic passion,

> 'I am much troubled,
> And do begin to stagger; (III,iv)

but it remains nothing more than a gesture. Despite its inclusion in the concluding moral of the play,

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1. 'Isab. You still court her,
As if she were your mistress, not your wife.
Sfor. . . . . no night to me
But is a bridal one, . . .' (The Duke of Milan, I,iii)

'Neither to dote too much, nor doubt a wife',

the theme is only of subsidiary importance.

The main plot of The Picture concerns the jealousy and temptation of Mathias, who, at the opening of the play, leaves his wife to win glory in the wars. This he does, and is received at the court of Ladislas. The queen Honoria, jealous of Mathias' love for and confidence in his wife, sends courtiers to seduce Sophia and herself makes love to Mathias. He only submits when the magic picture of his wife, which he carries with him, temporarily changes colour, which implies that she is being unfaithful; however, the picture becomes clear again, Mathias rejects the queen's advances, and she reveals that she only wished to test him.

Massinger's theme here is chastity, temptation, and the distortion that results from jealousy, and, just as Ladislas, Honoria and Eubulus are placed in their debating positions in the early court scene, so the main characters are allotted their parts in the action of the play as a whole. There is really little that is genuinely romantic about the play: it is a discussion of chastity rather than of love. Dunn[1] and Lamb[2] have admired the presentation of marriage here. However, the stiffness and formality of the language can hardly be said to be distinguished by any 'peculiar liveliness of fancy' or 'intimate knowledge of the human heart'.[3]

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1. Dunn, p. 161.

2. C. Lamb, Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, 1808, II, ed. W. Macdonald, 1921, 169.

3. Dr. Ireland, in Gifford, III, 236.

Marriage is presented almost as a kind of business arrangement:

> 'You have been an obedient wife, a right one;
> And to my power, though short of your desert,
> I have been ever an indulgent husband.
> We have long enjoy'd thesweets of love, and though
> Not to satiety, or loathing, yet
> We must not live such dotards on our pleasures,
> As still to hug them, to the certain loss
> Of profit and preferment. Competent means
> Maintains a quiet bed; want breeds dissention,
> Even in good women .' (I,i)

This objective, homiletic manner of discussing one's own marriage is not altogether attractive, but the play is consistent in making its characters impersonal in this way. Mathias' chief cause for disturbance at leaving his wife is not grief at their parting but the fear that, left unguarded, she will succumb to temptation. It is the 'sweet coldness' of Sophia's chastity (III,v) rather than the heat of his own love that binds him to her, and both husband and wife regard their love as terminated as soon as either is convinced of the other's infidelity. The marriage relationship is very much a matter of chastity rather than love, and even chastity is a negative kind of quality: Schelling has commented on Massinger's

> 'conception of good and evil as less innate than a matter of extraneous circumstances . . . [he saw] all human virtue as potentially soluble in the acid of temptation'.[1]

Sophia's sudden overt renunciation of chastity when told of her husband's disloyalty has shocked and worried critics.[2] The fact remains that Massinger does tend to make his characters behave in this way[3]: he seems

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1. F. E. Schelling, Elizabethan Playwrights, 1925, p. 258.

2. cf. Chelli, p. 269; W. J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry, 1916, IV, 360.

3. 'Everything is extreme and yet weak; the characters are made of india-rubber, and the dramatist presses them down or pulls them out as he sees fit' (E. Gosse, The Jacobean Poets, 1894, p. 211).

often not so much concerned to explore the state of mind and motives of a person committing a given action, as to place a character in a given situation and to develop it not in terms of the individual personality but in relation to an overall moral pattern. It is a convention of the drama of the time for a character to fall suddenly in or out of love: Massinger expends the minimum amount of care to hide the suddenness. Donusa is afflicted with a violent passion for Vitelli the first time she sees him and at their second meeting becomes his mistress (The Renegado). Theodosius, after his first glimpse of Athenais, leaves the stage with the words,

'From foul lust heaven guard me!'
(The Emperor of the East, I,ii)

Aurelia, as she sees for the first time Bertoldo walking on the stage, remarks:

'A prisoner! nay, a princely suitor, rather!'
(The Maid of Honour, IV,iv)

Almira's love for the disguised Antonio is much more delicately handled, as we see her musing and questioning Leonora; but it has been thought that A Very Woman bears traces of Fletcher's hand.[1] In The Unnatural Combat Massinger presents in some detail the gradual development of Malefort's love for his daughter, but usually he is not interested in tracing 'la transition, la nuance';[2] and in The Picture more than anywhere else his characters have the nature of hypothetical figures placed in the

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1. cf. p. 149.
2. Chelli, p. 269.

necessary situations. Sophia's renunciation of chastity is unpleasant and jarring, but to some extent it is made acceptable because it accords with the manner of the play as a whole.

At this stage in the play there seems to be a threat of tragedy in the rising passions and effects of jealousy. But all is brought to a happy conclusion, not by any arbitrary means, but through the reassertion of moral standards. Sophia is the first to repent of her temporary lapse: she enters, book in hand, discoursing on damnation in a speech that has a genuine moral seriousness:

> 'Nor custom, nor example, nor vast numbers
> Of such as do offend, make less the sin.
> For each particular crime a strict account
> Will be exacted; and that comfort which
> The damn'd pretend, fellows in misery,
> Takes nothing from their torments: every one
> Must suffer, in himself, the measure of
> His wickedness.' (IV,ii)

When he sees her picture clear again, Mathias too is restored to virtuous thoughts and eloquently denounces Honoria so that she too repents. The scene in which he refuses to yield to her and urges her to chastity (IV,iv) is strongly reminiscent of the scene in The Renegado (III,v) when Vitelli discards Donusa. Both are rhetorical, debate-like scenes in which the man overpowers the woman by his eloquence. Both men have succumbed to temptation, only to rise again strengthened in virtue, and both scenes form the turning-point in the moral pattern of the play. In The Picture the process of repentance is continued when Mathias and the king and queen visit Sophia in the country. Sophia has already brought the two courtiers, sent to tempt her by the queen, to subjection, and they are shown meekly

spinning; but both Mathias and Honoria have to beg forgiveness from her before a happy conclusion can be reached. It is of interest to note that in the story told by Painter,[1] Massinger's apparent source, the courtiers come as the result of a wager made with Mathias, in the manner of Posthumus and Iachimo, while Massinger has made the queen's jealousy responsible.[2] Honoria's motive is as unnatural as Sophia's fall from virtue:

> 'How I burst
> With envy, that there lives, besides myself,
> One fair and loyal woman! 'twas the end
> Of my ambition to be recorded
> The only wonder of the age, and shall I
> Give way to a competitor?' (II,ii)

But again it is in keeping with the dramatic method as a whole. The play as a whole is distinguished from Fletcher's tragi-comedies and from the others of Massinger by its dependence on mental events rather than external action, its sense of having been constructed round a theory: this quality is indicated by Whipple,

> '. . . the temptations are often contrived out of the natural course of things, and exist rather as possibilities to the intellect than realities to the imagination.'[3]

It is a sophisticated, and somewhat perverted, form of morality play: its chief significance in relation to the rest of Massinger's tragi-comedies is its emphasis on moral standards, and the suggestion that through repentance and rightminded action tragedy can be averted.[4]

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1. W. Painter, The Palace of Pleasure, II, Novel 28.

2. E. Koeppel suggests Massinger altered the source to avoid similarity with Cymbeline (Quellen-Studien, p. 124).

3. E. P. Whipple, Essays and Reviews, 1850, II, 66.

4. Critics have usually praised the play, e.g. G. B. Smith, 'Philip Massinger', NQM (1875) V, 59; though the magic picture has been condemned

The Emperor of the East (1630/1), like The Picture, is concerned with the potentially tragic themes of uxoriousness and jealousy. The writer's grasp here is, however, far less sure. One of its most obvious difficulties is its presentation of two quite different plots,[1] the first part of the play being concerned with Pulcheria's upbringing of her brother Theodosius and her arrangement of his marriage, the interest being centred on the discussion of kingship, while the second half presents the love and jealousy of the married emperor. Dunn has understandably said that the play,

> 'which is full of talk and disputation but has little real action, leaves a very unsatisfactory impression. It seems in an undefinable way to lack unity of purpose'.[2]

The avoidance of tragedy here is much more Fletcherian in method. Theodosius dotes on his wife, as does Ladislas, and his passion leads him to be too liberal in his grants of petitions. His sister Pulcheria teaches him the folly of this by winning his unwitting permission to seize the empress as her maid. This is in some respects a practical demonstration corresponding to Eubulus'homiletic narration of Semiramis and Ninus (The Picture, I,ii): the didactic function of the episode again carries the sense of something hypothetical. Theodosius' dotage eventually leads to the tragic development of jealousy. He is presented with an apple of

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for improbability (e.g. by S. A. Dunham, Lives of the Most Eminent, 1837, II, 289). The best summary is perhaps Cruikshank's: 'The Picture is full of power, and enriched with some good strokes of satire, . . . there is, however, a crudeness and hardness of texture about the play' (p. 135).

1. 'Défaut rare chez Massinger, cette pièce pèche par la construction' (Chelli, p. 143).

2. Dunn, p. 73.

extraordinary beauty by a countryman (IV,ii) which he sends as a gift to his wife. She at once sends it to Paulinus, a courtier ill with gout (IV,iii), who sends it to the emperor (IV,iv). Theodosius accuses Eudocia of unfaithfulness and orders the death of Paulinus. The play suddenly veers towards tragedy: Theodosius' speeches are heavy with the imagery and declamatory tone characteristic of Massinger's tragic heroes:

> 'What an earthquake I feel in me!
> And on the sudden my whole fabric totters.
> My blood within me turns, and through my veins,
> Parting with natural redness, I discern it
> Changed to a fatal yellow.' (IV,v)

The scene in which Theodosius questions Eudocia about the apple (IV,v) and she pretends to have eaten it is closely modelled on Othello's similar questioning of Desdemona about the handkerchief. Theodosius, believing Paulinus executed, is beset by a sense of guilt against which he struggles, and finally assures himself of his wife's innocence by disguising himself as a priest and hearing her confession. In the emotional conflict of the last part of the play we come close to tragedy; but, with Theodosius' timely discovery of his wife's innocence and the sudden revelation that Paulinus is still alive, the plot is brought to a happy conclusion. Mc Ilwraith has in fact suggested that the play was in its original state a tragedy[1]: we know that it was originally a failure,[2] and McIlwraith suggests that Massinger reshaped the play for the later court performance.

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1. A. K. McIlwraith, 'Did Massinger revise The Emperor of the East?', RES, V (1929), 36.

2. cf. commendatory verses by John Clavell and William Singleton (Gifford I, clxii-iii) and 'Prologue at Court' (Gifford, III, 245).

McIlwraith has pointed out several instances of carelessness and inconsistency which suggest revision:[1] but the most important point is the reappearance of Paulinus alive at the end of the play. In the story as it is told by Zonaras and Cedrenus, Paulinus is in fact executed,[2] and the empress goes into exile and dies soon after, and McIlwraith suggests that this was the original conclusion of Massinger's play.[3] Recent research has, however, discovered a new, and more likely, source for the play in Nicholas Caussin's The Holy Court (1626);[4] this version of the story mentions the possibility that Paulinus suffered only sequestration, which may have given Massinger the hint for his happy ending.[5] In any case the uneven and disintegrated quality of the play makes speculation difficult. The earlier scenes do not prepare us for the near-tragedy of the last two acts; and it is difficult to assess Massinger's intention.

Theodosius is delivered from Sforza's fate by trickery and chance, but Massinger's most characteristic method of deflecting the consequences of sin is, as in The Picture, the large-scale repentance of the sinners. The sense of guilt which precedes full repentance and atonement is often attended by physical illness: Massinger sees a close connection between disease of the body and of the mind and convalescence is invariably a

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1. op.cit., pp. 36-39.
2. E. Koeppel, op.cit., p. 126.
3. op.cit., p. 39.
4. J. E. Gray, 'The Source of The Emperor of the East', RES, II (1950), 126, and P. G. Phialas, 'The sources of Massinger's Emperor of the East', PMLA, LXV (1950), 473.
5. Gray, op.cit., p. 132.

spiritual as well as a physical matter. There is a suggestion of this even in the presentation of Theodosius, although it is not fully developed here. As doubt and guilt assail him after his command for Paulinus' execution he is described as being in a 'melancholy fit', and the violent nature of the fit is described:

> 'Like a Numidian lion, by the cunning
> Of the desperate huntsman taken in a toil,
> And forced into a spacious cage, he walks
> About his chamber; we might hear him gnash
> His teeth in rage, which open'd, hollow groans
> And murmurs issued from his lips, like winds
> Imprison'd in the caverns of the earth
> Striving for liberty; and sometimes throwing
> His body on his bed, then on the ground,
> And with such violence, that we more than fear'd,
> And still do, if the tempest of his passions
> By your wisdom, be not laid, he will commit
> Some outrage on himself'. (The Emperor of the East,V,ii)

This recalls, even in the words used, Sir Giles Overreach's self-description:

> 'Since, like a Libyan lion in the toil,
> My fury cannot reach the coward hunters,
> And only spends itself . . .'(A New Way to Pay Old Debts,V,i)

and Kean's rendering of Sir Giles[1] seems to have been close to the account of Theodosius' behaviour. Massinger seems to have had a genuine interest in mental derangement resulting from excess of passion. His potentially tragic figures, in the tragi-comedies and in A New Way, are robbed of tragic stature by this analysis of passion as something not ennobling or terrifying but abnormal and to be cured.

Massinger's most detailed treatment of this theme is in A Very Woman (1634), where he presents two cases of combined illness and repentance in

1. F. W. Hawkins, Life of Edmund Kean, 1869, p. 345 ff.

the figures of Cardenes and Almira. Almira has rejected the suit of Don John Antonio, who is taunted and provoked to a duel by her favoured suitor Cardenes. Cardenes is seriously wounded and Antonio escapes, to reappear later as a slave in disguise. Almira falls in love with him and at the end of the play his true identity is revealed. Meanwhile Cardenes, in the course of his illness, has repented of his behaviour towards Antonio, and renounces all claim to Almira. We see little of Cardenes before the duel early in the play: he is revealed to us primarily as a sick man undergoing a lengthy course of treatment. His life, once out of danger, Paulo the doctor reveals a deeper cause for anxiety:

> '. . . melancholy,
> And at the height, too, near akin to madness, . . . (II,iii)

Cardenes' recovery is shown in various stages; at first he torments himself with regret for his wrongs done to Antonio and angrily blames the woman who was the ultimate cause. This is accompanied by a feeling that 'virtue's chain' is broken, that life is essentially disordered (III,iii). Later, as his mind becomes clearer, he begins to glimpse a more ordered vision though it is still beyond his achievement:

> 'A strange position, which doth much perplex me:
> That every soul's alike a musical instrument,
> The faculties in all men equal strings,
> Well or ill handled; and those sweet or harsh.' (IV,ii)

Paulo's task is to restore order and harmony: he is a kind of divine artist and his skill is constantly stressed by the reverent wonder of the other characters. He occupies a central position in the play: not only does he restore Cardenes, but he volunteers to cure Borachia's drunkenness (IV,iv), and is instrumental in bringing Antonio and Almira together

(V,iv). The prominence of illness and medecine is strongly suggestive of Ford, particularly The Lover's Melancholy.[1] The two dramatists have a similar interest in the sick in mind and both present elaborate processes for restoration to health. Ford's characters, however, are not ill primarily through their own fault as are Massinger's: Palador and Meleander are cured by being granted their previously unfulfilled desires, while Cardenes has to learn to take a new view of what has already happened. Paulo, disguised as a friar, recounts his own life to Cardenes, a narration which corresponds to the experience of Cardenes himself. Cardenes is thus saved from despair by the example of the friar, who says repentance enabled him to live in peace. A soldier and a courtier are then presented to him, and by accepting the ideals of the one and rejecting the way of life of the other, Cardenes fully recovers a balanced mind. It now only remains for him to make reparation to Antonio, which he does at the end of the play, at the same time asserting a humane standard of honour to replace the ideal of revenge:

> 'I have received from your hands wounds, and deep ones,
> My honour in the general report
> Tainted and soil'd, for which I will demand
> This satisfaction - that you would forgive
> My contumelious words and blow, my rash
> And unadvised wildness first threw on you.
> Thus I would teach the world a better way,
> For the recovery of a wounded honour,
> Than with a savage fury, not true courage,
> Still to run headlong on.' (V,vi)

There is an obvious parallel in The Custom of the Country, by Fletcher and Massinger, in the character of Duarte, who provokes Rutilio to a duel, is injured, and later seeks to thank his enemy for having brought him,

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1. cf. Cruikshank, p. 81.

through illness, to a sounder mind. Duarte tells the doctor:

> 'You have bestow'd on me a second life,
> . . . my first being
> Insolent pride made monstrous; but this later
> In learning me to know my self, hath taught me
> Not to wrong others.' (IV,i)

The moral emphasis, with its religious undertones, is yet more marked in Cardenes:

> 'My first life . . .
> Was by my headstrong passions, which o'er-ruled
> My understanding, forfeited to death:
> But this new being, this my second life,
> Begun in serious contemplation of
> What best becomes a perfect man, shall never
> Sink under such weak frailties.' (V,iv)

The prominence and detail of the portrayal of Cardenes are revealed by a comparison with the superficial and perfunctory treatment of Duarte. Duarte in fact seems to be a rough sketch of the figure elaborated in Cardenes.[1]

Massinger's preoccupation with mental illness is apparent in the inclusion of a second case within the play, the temporary distraction of Almira. In the first act she is presented as passionate, wayward, impulsive, even to the point of assaulting her suitor with a sword (I,i).[2] When her lover Cardenes is supposed dead she suffers temporary delusions and is described sleep-walking in the manner of Lady Macbeth (II,iii).

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1. The exact date of The Custom of the Country is not known, but G. E. Bentley suggests 1619 or 1620 (The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, III)(1956), 325-7). A Very Woman was licensed in 1634, but is a revision of an older, unidentified and undated play (Bentley, IV, 825-8).

2. Fletcher's hand is perhaps to be traced in this incident: it recalls the stabbing of Arethusa by Philaster (Philaster, IV, iii). Antonio's wound is never referred to again in the play and is not mentioned in Almira's repentance, but seems to have a purely spectacular function, showing a kind of moral insensitivity unusual in Massinger.

Like Cardenes, she is finally brought to a full repentance by a re-enactment of her own misdeeds: Antonio, disguised as a slave, with whom she finds herself falling in love, tells her his story, which, like the friar's relation to Cardenes, acts both as a mirror and an example:

> 'In this man's story, how I look, how monstrous!
> How poor and naked now I show! what don John,
> In all the virtue of his life, but aim'd at,
> This thing hath conquer'd with a tale, and carried.
> Forgive me, thou that guid'st me! never conscience
> Touch'd me till now, nor true love: let me keep it.'
> (IV,iii)

Almira's passion for a slave who is in fact a prince and her former suitor in disguise is not merely a romantic device: it has a moral fitness as necessary for Almira's full repentance and recovery. It has some analogy with the restoration of Eroclea to Palador in The Lover's Melancholy.

Massinger's conception of mental illness is, however, differentiated from Ford's in its close association with moral issues. The suggestion of religious terminology in Cardenes' repentance is a feature more highly developed in some of the plays where a priest takes the place of the doctor. Grimaldi, in The Renegado (1624), has committed a crime against religion and is restored through the action of the priest, Francisco. We are told how he had once seized the host from the bishop's hands and 'dash'd it upon the pavement' (IV,i). Later, reduced to poverty, he begins to acknowledge his sin and is at first seized by a religious despair (III,ii). Massinger seems to suggest that this despair is a kind of disease, and medical terminology is constantly used: Francisco is a 'heavenly physician', concerned with material as

well as spiritual welfare:

> 'I'll provide
> A lodging for him, and apply such cures
> To his wounded conscience, as heaven hath lent me.'
> (III,ii)

Again recovery and forgiveness can only be achieved by the re-enactment of the past: Grimaldi only gains peace of mind after Francisco has appeared to him in the bishop's cope he wore at the time of his crime and formally forgiven him.

It is not, however, Francisco the priest who restores Grimaldi, but Francisco acting the part he played long before: Francisco's treatment is efficacious as that of a doctor in the manner of Paulo. So that even in this play, where Francisco is a genuine priest, the ecclesiastical element is primarily a means towards an end. This is even more marked in The Bashful Lover (1636 or 1637), where the priest-figure is quite openly a pretence. Alonzo, who has formerly dishonoured Maria, is unwittingly carried wounded to the home of her father Octavio. Alonzo has been restored to physical health, but, invaded by a sense of guilt, suffers mentally. Octavio makes elaborate preparations to 'cure the ulcers of his mind': disguised as a friar, he hears Alonzo's confession and repentance, and finally Maria is restored to him (IV,ii). The ceremonial nature of the scene is characteristic of Massinger. All of his repentance scenes have a sense of being 'staged': they are offered to us in a manner similar to the debate scenes of The Picture.

The priest disguise is also used at the end of The Emperor of the East, but here it is further removed from the idea of cure and repentance

and is much more of a theatrical device. Theodosius, in order to find out whether his wife is in fact innocent, masquerades as a priest and hears her confession. For theatrical excitement the scene is one of the most memorable in Massinger's plays. It opens on a sombre note, with Eudocia in sackcloth, singing the one fine song ever written by Massinger:

> 'Why art thou slow, thou rest of trouble, Death,
> To stop a wretch's breath,
> That calls on thee, and offers her sad heart
> A prey unto thy dart?
> I am nor young nor fair; be, therefore, bold:
> Sorrow hath made me old,
> Deform'd, and wrinkled; all that I can crave,
> Is, quiet in my grave.
> Such as live happy, hold long life a jewel;
> But to me thou art ever cruel,
> If thou end not my tedious misery;
> And I soon cease to be.
> Strike, and strike home, then; pity unto me,
> In one short hour's delay, is tyranny.' (V,iii)[1]

The verse has something of the muted haunting cadences of Ford's songs and macabre delicacy of Shakespeare's 'Come away, come away, death' (Twelfth Night, II,iv). It has lyrical qualities of suggestion and reverberation unique in Massinger's work. Eudocia's soliloquy attempts to prolong the element of mutability and the macabre, with its image of the dying swan, but the bulk of her speech, proclaiming an austere preparation for death in terms of Christian penitence, has an air of frigid piety. But even here the religious element conveys a primarily theatrical thrill in the spectacle of the formerly luxuriously clad empress now dwelling upon dust and ashes: there is something morbid about Eudocia's severity.

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1. The song has been set to music by C. H. H. Parry, English Lyrics, 1920, Eleventh Set, no. 7.

Theodosius enters as a friar and urges her not to omit any sin in her confession. Eudocia proceeds to tell the story of the apple, and the tension mounts as Theodosius, in the earnestness of his urging and warning, almost breaks through his disguise, and Eudocia passionately affirms her innocence. The scene, which begins as a dirge and continues as a confession, moves into one of the quasi-court scenes of which Massinger is so fond, as, leaving behind to some extent their rôles of priest and penitent, Theodosius and Eudocia become eloquent combattants. At the climax of the scene Theodosius reveals himself, and the play is then quickly brought to an end with the reconciliation of husband and wife and the appearance of Paulinus - a rather lame conclusion. The confession scene is something of a tour de force. The theme of penitence, fundamental in other of Massinger's plays, has not the same significance here, and the religious element is exploited for theatrical effect.

Massinger's presentation of religious features as a whole has provoked much discussion among critics. There have been frequent comments on his genuine religious feeling;[1] his introduction of certain ecclesiastical features has even convinced some that he was a Roman Catholic.[2] There can be no doubt of Massinger's Christianity, and his treatment of specifically Christian topics distinguishes him from other dramatists

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1. cf. for example, H. J. Makkink, Philip Massinger and John Fletcher - A Comparison, Rotterdam, 1927, p. 121; Sir Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library, 1877, II, 153; Dunn, p. 184.

2. Notably Gifford, I, xliv. E. Colby includes Massinger in English Catholic Poets, 1936, pp. 161 ff.

of the period.[1] But at the same time one often has a suspicion that the chief attraction of religious features for Massinger was their potentiality for dramatic effect. Massinger had a deep-rooted feeling for ceremonial, for the formal speech and gesture, and of all brands of Christianity Roman Catholicism offers the greatest scope for this tendency: granted a certain initial sympathy with a religion that expresses itself in elaborate ritual, perhaps Massinger's taste for the Catholic church may be adequately explained by dramatic, and not necessarily personal, reasons. The theatrical use of the idea of confession at the end of The Emperor of the East is in fact a mockery of the whole principle.

Most comments on Massinger's religion have been based on The Renegado (1624), which has been called 'a dramatised treatise on Christian evidences'.[2] The play shows the fortunes of Vitelli, who, aided by the Jesuit Francisco, is attempting to rescue his sister Paulina, who has been kidnapped and taken from Venice by the Renegade, Grimaldi. The search takes them to Tunis, where Donusa, the sultan's niece, falls in love with Vitelli and becomes his mistress. Vitelli subsequently repents of this and repudiates Donusa: but, overheard by other members of the court, they are imprisoned. Donusa is converted to Christianity by Vitelli. Meanwhile Paulina, who has been sold to the Viceroy Asambeg

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1. 'Alone of all the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists he displays an almost constant religious bias' (Dunn, p. 176). F. S. Boas says his preoccupation with religious problems is almost unique among Stuart playwrights (Stuart Drama, 1945, p. 306).

2. R. F. Patterson, Six Centuries of English Literature, 1933, II, 315. Cf. also Chelli, p. 329.

by Grimaldi, is constantly wooed by her keeper, but manages to preserve her chastity. Finally, through the plot of Paulina and Francisco and the aid of the repentant Grimaldi, Vitelli and Donusa are rescued from captivity and sail from Tunis.

The play abounds in romantic surprises, disguises and intrigue: Chelli in fact denies it any other quality.[1] But most commentators have been impressed by Massinger's boldness in his presentation on the stage of a Jesuit 'within twenty years after the Gunpowder plot' and 'almost on the eve of Phineas Fletcher's denunciation of Jesuits in his Appolyonists'.[2] B. T. Spencer, however, has remarked that Francisco is more of a stoic teacher than a member of his order.[3] The virtues he promulgates are certainly those of a kind of stoical aristocracy which are a feature of Massinger's work as a whole, although expressed in specifically Christian terms:

> 'Will you, that were train'd up
> In a religious school, where divine maxims,
> Scorning comparison with moral precepts,
> Were daily taught you, bear your constancy's trial,
> Not like Vitelli, but a village nurse,
> With curses in your mouth, tears in your eyes? -
> How poorly it shows in you.' (I,i)

The primary demonstration of religion in the play is in fact a kind of Christianised stoicism, together with the preservation of chastity, Massinger's characteristic interpretation of virtue.

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1. Chelli, p. 132.
2. F. S. Boas, op.cit., p. 308. Cf. also H. J. Makkink, op.cit., p.127.
3. 'Philip Massinger', Seventeenth Century Studies, ed. R. Shafer, Cincinnati, 1933, p. 48.

There is, nevertheless, a strong sense of Christian ritual in the play, which is most apparent in the relationship between Vitelli and Donusa and the tension of their two religions. As often in Massinger, we have the feeling of a debate in the juxtaposition of Moslem and Christian. Chew has commented upon the vividness of 'local colour' in the play, the creation of an exotic Islamic community.[1] An additional reason for the presentation of Christianity in a Roman Catholic form here would seem to be its suitability as an equally colourful alternative to the Moslem creed.[2] The debate reaches its climax when Donusa attempts to persuade Vitelli to change his faith in order to save their lives but is instead converted herself to Christianity, a situation that finds a parallel in The Virgin-Martyr (III,i) where Dorothea converts Calista and Christella, whose task it was to destroy her faith. Vitelli's tirade against Donusa, stiffly declamatory as it is, has obviously Massinger's approval:

> '. . . I would now
> Pluck out that wicked tongue, that hath blasphemed
> The great Omnipotency, at whose nod
> The fabric of the world shakes. Dare you bring
> Your juggling prophet in comparison with
> That most inscrutable and infinite Essence,
> That made this All, and comprehends his work! -
> The place is too profane to mention him
> Whose only name is sacred.' (IV,iii)

However, the discussion is not completely one-sided; Donusa criticises

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1. S. C. Chew, The Crescent and the Rose, 1937, p. 536.

2. Chelli sees the Roman Catholic element as no more than this (p. 331). Cf. A. Mézières, however: 'Massinger répond ainsi aux attaques de Webster contre l'église romaine' (Contemporains et successeurs de Shakespeare, Paris, 1881, p. 291).

Christianity on a point that is not answered by Vitelli: the 'narrow bands' of the Christian Church are

> 'Rent in as many factions and opinions
> As you have petty kingdoms.'

This comment on the disunity of the Church is substantiated in the opening scene of the play, where Gazet satirises it in his Vicar of Bray affirmation:

> 'I would not be confined
> In my belief: when all your sects and sectaries
> Are grown of one opinion, if I like it,
> I will profess myself, - in the mean time,
> Live I in England, Spain, France, Rome, Geneva,
> I'm of that country's faith.'[1]

This implicit criticism of the Church is not developed, but its mere presence in the play is notable.

The most striking moment is that of Donusa's baptism. Vitelli has previously consulted Francisco on the validity of baptism performed by a layman and has been assured that in cases of necessity it is permissible. This discussion (V,i) is not merely an irrelevant theological nicety[2]: the questioning of the validity of the ceremony, the prominence it is given, add a certain urgency to the actual baptism scene (V,ii) and stress its central importance in the play. Vitelli and Donusa are brought before the court, to hear their sentence, and the ceremony that follows has a treble significance: they are celebrating their marriage, they are preparing for death, and Donusa is to be received into the

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1. Makkink, however, sees in this speech simply a declaration 'that religious liberty was his [Massinger's] ideal' (op.cit., p. 128).
2. cf. Chelli, p. 332.

Christian faith. Vitelli asks permission to perform a Christian death-rite, and baptises Donusa. Her sudden claim to faith and insight is somewhat facile, but theatrically it is a highly charged scene, and the baptism, with its actual and symbolic values and spectacular effectiveness, is the culminating moment of the play.

Unfortunately the effect of the scene is undermined by the rest of the play. As always Massinger seems to hover between a serious line of thought and a tendency to romanticise, and the comparison is nowhere more apparent than in this play. Instead of logically developing his theme and sending the lovers to their martyrdom, Massinger provides an elaborate plot of escape. Paulina takes charge of Donusa, under the guise of making her her slave, and food is sent to Vitelli, containing a rope enabling him to escape from a window in his room, and ships are ready to carry the Christians away to safety. The intrigue has a cheapening effect, a sense of anti-climax.[1]

Whatever his function earlier in the play, Francisco is reduced to that of a cunning stage-manager and detective at the end: religion, despite its former severe stress on the endurance of all ills even to martyrdom, becomes simply a means of escaping from difficulties:

> 'O best of men! he that gives up himself
> To a true religious friend, leans not upon
> A false deceiving reed, but boldly builds
> Upon a rock; . . .' (V,vii)

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1. W. J. Courthope comments on its staginess (History of English Poetry, 1903, IV, 359). Cruikshank, however, comments on the 'good plot, which works up to an exciting end' (p. 134).

A similar inconsistency in the treatment of religious themes occurs in The Maid of Honour (c. 1621?), a play which has invariably been highly commended by those who have written on Massinger. Schelling groups the play with The Renegado in a judgment which it is difficult to accept wholeheartedly in either case:

> '. . . fine plays, sustained by a noble sense of ethics, neither strained nor perverted.'[1]

The hero in this play, Bertoldo, is a knight of Malta, and for this reason Camiola, whom he loves, refuses to marry him. Bertoldo, with a band of adventurers, joins the forces of the Duke of Urbin to fight against the Duchess of Sienna. He is taken prisoner but the king refuses to ransom him: Camiola, however, privately sends the money on condition that he will be her husband. Bertoldo is set free: the duchess Aurelia at first sight falls in love with him, and they visit the Sicilian court as prospective bride and bridegroom. Camiola, however, prevents their marriage by publicly reminding Bertoldo of her prior claim to his love; she then enters a nunnery herself, and bids him resume his dedicated life as a knight of Malta.

The seriousness of Bertoldo's pledge is stressed early in the play. Bertoldo says that a dispensation will absolve him, but Camiola insists,

> 'O take heed, sir!
> When what is vow'd to heaven is dispens'd with,
> To serve our ends on earth, a curse must follow,
> And not a blessing.' (I,ii)

There is a genuine note of pathos in this scene as Camiola struggles

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1. Elizabethan Playwrights, 1925, p. 257.

with her passions, and yet even here the religious issue is not quite clear: Camiola's chief objection seems to be the difference in rank between the lovers, and Bertoldo's vow only a secondary issue.

Camiola is left to deal with her suitors in the court, and Bertoldo goes to war. Gonzaga, who captures him, is grief-stricken when he discovers Bertoldo's identity, for in fighting against Aurelia he has broken the vow of a knight. The shame he expresses is, however, that of the proud and powerful man forced into humiliation, and the breaking of his vows seems to cause him no concern. One of his most impressive speeches is in fact an accusation of his friends and quite remote from self-blame:

> 'O summer-friendship,
> When flattering leaves, that shadow'd us in our
> Prosperity, with the least gust drop off
> In the autumn of adversity! How like
> A prison is to a grave! when dead, we are
> With solemn pomp brought thither, and our heirs,
> Masking their joy in false, dissembled tears,
> Weep o'er the hearse; but earth no sooner covers
> The earth brought thither, but they turn away,
> With inward smiles, the dead no more remember'd . . .'
> (III,i)

The sombre elegiac note here, the struggle with which Bertoldo attempts to accept the teaching of Seneca (IV,iii), give a certain depth to the character, but he seems to have a curious indifference to his duty as a knight of Malta. Camiola likewise seems to have forgotten all her previous scruples in the course of the play: hearing that the king refuses to pay Bertoldo's ransom, she sends the money, on condition that he will marry her.[1]

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1. cf. Dunn, p. 182-3. Bayne (op.cit., p. xii) points out that in Massinger's source (W. Painter, Palace of Pleasure, II, novel 32)

The question of the vows is not mentioned again until the last scene of the play (V,ii), and even here at the climax it receives a somewhat perfunctory treatment. Camiola briefly bids Bertoldo to reassume his order and redeem his 'mortgaged honour', Gonzaga restores his cross to him, and he simply says,

'I'll live and die so.'

The main interest here is of course centred on Camiola, and as a lover who turns to the cloister she has had fervent praise showered upon her over the centuries.[1] She first of all denounces Bertoldo before the king and pleads her own case in a forensic scene characteristic of Massinger.[2] Bertoldo is reduced to shame and submission and Aurelia magnanimously waives her claim to him. However, Camiola now refuses to marry Bertoldo, and calls for a priest, who, to the astonishment of all, seizes her 'as a principal ornament to the church'. The scene assumes a note of ritual as the priest, in a speech in octosyllabic couplets that seems to foreshadow Milton's Il Penseroso,[3] proclaims Camiola's new life, and she herself rejoices in her symbolic marriage:

Camiola insists on marriage so that her reputation is not compromised by paying the ransom, and asserts that in Massinger's play she has the same motive. But there is no indication of this in Camiola's speeches (III,iii).

1. cf. for example, G. Bradford, Elizabethan Women, 1936, p. 170.

2. 'We are witnessing a drama cast in legal terms, for the entertainment of an audience accustomed to hear law and to talk of law' (J. M. Robertson, The Baconian Heresy, 1913, p. 156).

3. First pointed out by Ireland (Gifford, III, 109). It was remarked, however, in The British Critic, 1806, p. 361, that after this comparison Paulo's speech has 'diminished charms'.

'This is the marriage! this the port to which
My vows must steer me! Fill my spreading sails
With the pure wind of your devotions for me,
That I may touch the secure haven, where
Eternal happiness keeps her residence,
Temptations to frailty never entering!' (V,ii)

Critical opinion remains divided in its attitude to this conclusion. It has usually been recognised that Massinger was attempting to do something different from the usual methods of contemporary romantic drama.[1] Some have seen a 'lofty moral'[2] or a 'noble lesson'[3] in Camiola's renunciation of the world and claimed that 'a mechanical device is turned into a noble and beautiful dramatic climax'.[4] On the other hand, it has been labelled 'a quite blatant "turn" of the drama of surprise',[5] and the much admired Camiola, it has been said,

'begins the play as a consumptive lily and ends it as a bitch-in-the-manger'.[6]

There is cause for uneasiness about the religious theme of this play, and for opposite reasons from that felt in The Renegado. In the latter what seems to be a genuine attempt to present a religious experience is dissipated in conventional romance; in The Maid of Honour a religious motif is suddenly thrust upon a romantic structure which cannot hold it. Ristine has commented upon

'Massinger's consistency of purpose in handling a serious

1. cf. Cruikshank, p. 132.
2. Anon., 'Philip Massinger', TLS, 1940, p. 134.
3. Ireland, op.cit., p. 109.
4. G. Bradford, Elizabethan Women, 1936, p. 169.
5. Dunn, p. 183.
6. C. Leech, 'Philip Massinger', TLS, 1948, p. 147.

> motive that involves a moral question, and his refusal to sacrifice the principles of his art to the exigencies of a happy ending.'[1]

But it is just consistency of purpose that is lacking. The shallowness of the treatment of the Knight of Malta theme is demonstrated by a comparison with Fletcher's The Knight of Malta, a play in which many have detected Massinger's hand:

> '. . . one of these plays must have inspired the other. In their frank concern with a religious problem, they stand alone in the Elizabethan and Stuart secular drama. . . . In both, the final note is one of a romantic sadness that is not often found in English literature before the romantic era of the nineteenth century.'[2]

But The Knight of Malta, inferior in workmanship as it is in many respects, treats the theme with much greater seriousness and consistency. The ritual of the final scene (V,ii), in which Mountferrat is formally expelled from the order and Miranda accepted, is the logical outcome and climax of what has preceded and has a much more genuine ring than Camiola's ceremony, which is very much a theatrical gesture.

More striking in The Maid of Honour is the treatment of political problems. The first scene, in which Roberto's aid is sought by the Duke of Urbin in his siege of Sienna, is perhaps the most alive part of the play. The significance of this in terms of contemporary politics has been frequently discussed.[3] Roberto is usually regarded as representing

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1. F. H. Ristine, English Tragi-Comedy, 1910, p. 134.
2. Bryne, op.cit., p. xviii.
3. It was first pointed out by T. Davies, Some account of the life and writings of Philip Massinger, 1789, p. 36.

James I, who refused to send military aid to his son-in-law Frederick, exiled in Bohemia in 1620 by the Hapsburgs. Strong feeling was aroused in England against James for his inactivity. Massinger's play can hardly be called propaganda, but includes a spirited debate on war, vitalised with a particular urgency for Massinger's contemporaries. Massinger is certainly on the side of the patriot and warrior Bertoldo who eloquently extols 'England, the Empress of the European Isles' (I,i) and her military exploits. However, Roberto also has valid reasons which are presented cogently by Massinger:

> 'Let other monarchs
> Contend to be made glorious by proud war,
> And, with the blood of their poor subjects, purchase
> Increase of empire, and augment their cares
> In keeping that which was by wrongs extorted,
> Gilding unjust invasions with the trim
> Of glorious conquests; we, that would be known
> The father of our people, in our study
> And vigilance for their safety, must not change
> Their ploughshares into swords . . .'

There is a real tension of ideas in this discussion which makes an arresting opening to the play, although it is not developed in the subsequent action.

The same theme is employed in the striking first act of The Bondman (1623). Timoleon, the newly appointed general of the Sicilian army, calls upon the citizens to offer their persons and wealth in the defence of their country and upbraids them for their sloth and needless luxury. Cleora, daughter of the praetor, subscribes her own jewels and urges her companions to action. The formal court scene has a certain massive quality and the discussion a seriousness that recall the senate scene

in The Roman Actor. Spencer has remarked that the account of Sicily here is in fact a thinly veiled picture of contemporary England, a criticism

> 'of England's failure to provide funds for national enterprises and of the ebb of patriotic feeling and decay of military discipline.'[1]

It would be unwise to relate Massinger's dramatic world too closely to seventeenth-century England, as S. R. Gardiner sometimes seems to do;[2] but there can be no doubt of Massinger's sense of political responsibility. A genuine enthusiasm for war and a lofty conception of the military profession are frequently found in his plays; it is an attitude he seems at pains to impress upon his audience. In The Bondman Cleora advocates the soldier's task as one only to be performed by the noblest:

> 'Let these of meaner quality contend
> Who can endure most labour; plough the earth,
> And think they are rewarded when their sweat
> Brings home a fruitful harvest to their lords; . . .
> Honour won in war,
> And to be styled preservers of their country,
> Are titles fit for free and generous spirits,
> And not for bondmen: . . .' (I,iii)

The kind of extra-dramatic urgency felt by Massinger about these topics is apparent in the set speeches or episodes sometimes inserted in the plays. Just before Mathias' arrival in court in The Picture Eubulus delivers an animated speech on the lot of the soldier:

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1. B. T. Spencer (ed.), The Bondman, 1932, p. 28.

2. e.g. his interpretation of the end of The Maid of Honour ('The Political Element in Massinger', Transactions of the New Shakspere Society, 1875-6, p. 330).

'They, in a state,
Are but as surgeons to wounded men,
E'en desperate in their hopes,' (II,ii)

fervently hailed in time of war, but shamefully neglected by 'scarabs bred in the dung of peace'. This speech closely resembles Bolgarde's apologia for the soldier in The Unnatural Combat (III,iii), and both have the effect of insertions. Mathias' soldiery is something apart from the main theme of The Picture, but the very fact that the grim actuality of war is acknowledged distinguishes it from the rarefied world of The Great Duke, where war is no more than an emblem of glory. In the tragi-comedies Massinger seems to some extent to be providing a kind of yardstick from actuality against which the romantic world is to be measured. Eubulus is in fact a commentator throughout the play: his sarcasm and criticism place the courtly world in perspective.

One of Massinger's favourite themes is a consideration of kingship and concern for justice. The topic is most fully treated in The Emperor of the East. The young emperor Theodosius is in the charge of his sister Pulcheria, who rules the court and kingdom with a justice that all admire. Her justice is displayed in the second scene of the play, a court scene in which she dispenses mercy and punishment in an exemplary fashion. Certain of the courtiers, however, are discontented and urge Theodosius to assume the task of government himself. Theodosius is at first indignant and deplores the fact that a ruler is expected to be luxurious and tyrannical or else his glory is not acknowledged:

'Cannot I be an emperor, unless
Your wives and daughters bow to my proud lusts?

> And, 'cause I ravish not their fairest buildings
> And fruitful vineyards, or what is dearest,
> From such as are my vassals, must you conclude
> I do not know the awful power and strength
> Of my prerogative?' (II,i)

However, he does subsequently displace his sister, and after his marriage to Eudocia falls into the error of

> 'exorbitant prodigality,
> Howe'er his sycophants and flatterers call it
> Royal magnificence.' (III,ii)

Pulcheria cures him of this by winning his consent to an unspecified petition, which proves to be that Eudocia should be her servant. The capture of Eudocia and the subsequent explanation and moralising are rather tiresome, and none of the characters emerge from it in a very attractive light: the whole play is at fault in this respect, and yet there is an element of seriousness in this preoccupation with questions of government. Massinger seems to come to no definite conclusion: along with the conception of an all-powerful justice in the early picture of Pulcheria there is a strong protest against absolutism:

> 'Wherefore pay you
> This adoration to a sinful creature?
> I am flesh and blood, as you are, sensible
> Of heat and cold, as much a slave unto
> The tyranny of my passions, as the meanest
> Of my poor subjects.' (V,ii)

Dunn has commented on the political implications of the play and the fact that although it seems to imply criticism of Charles there was a court performance: the ideal monarch presented abstractly in the play probably seemed to echo Charles's own conception of his position.[1] Massinger

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1. Dunn, p. 175.

is certainly persistent in his comments on kingship, which suggest a genuine awareness of one of the most prominent subjects of discussion in the seventeenth century. His lost play The King and the Subject is known to us only by a passage which was 'too insolent and to bee changed', a bold criticism of Charles's methods of raising money: the Spanish king says,

> 'Monys? Wee'le rayse supplies what ways we please,
> And force you to subscribe to blanks, in which
> We'le mulct you as wee shall thinke fitt. The Caesars
> In Rome were wise, acknowledginge no lawes
> But what their swords did ratifye, the wives
> And daughters of the senators bowinge to
> Their wills, as deities.'[1]

It is characteristic of Massinger that, when Camiola in The Maid of Honour revolts against the king's command that she should marry Fulgentio, she does not plead from a standpoint of personal emotion but argues the crime of the king in making such a command:

> 'as a man,
> (Since, when you are unjust, the deity,
> Which you may challenge as a king, parts from you,)
> 'Twas never read in holy writ, or moral,
> That subjects on their loyalty were obliged
> To love their sovereign's vices.' (IV,v).

The personal situation is seen in terms of the general and political: and political commentary is shaped into an effective dramatic device.

The Bondman, more than any other of Massinger's plays, comments upon the structure of society as a whole, the rulers and the ruled. In the absence of the men of the city at war Marullo leads a revolt of the slaves against their owners: they take charge of the city and the women,

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1. cf. Bentley, p. 795.

2. For a full account, cf. B. T. Spencer (ed.), The Bondman, 1932, pp.12ff.

and those men left behind are obliged to obey them. At the return of the lords, however, they are threatened with whips and at once yield. Marullo, urging his fellow slaves to revolt, propounds the equality of all men:

> 'Equal Nature fashion'd us
> All in one mould. The bear serves not the bear,
> Nor the wolf the wolf; 'twas odds of strength in tyrants,
> That pluck'd the first link from the golden chain
> With which that Thing of Things bound in the world',
> (II,iii)

and suggests how the particular qualities of individual slaves might have been trained for nobler purposes:

> 'Cimbrio, thou art a strong man; if, in place
> Of carrying burthens, thou hadst been train'd up
> In martial discipline, thou might'st have proved
> A general, fit to lead and fight for Sicily,
> As fortunate as Timoleon.'

However, this idealized view of human nature is one that the play in fact sets out to disprove. Marullo, the high-minded slave, is in fact a nobleman in disguise. The dénouement of the play, the yielding of the slaves to the whip, which is taken from classical sources,[1] has been criticised for improbability and a sense of anti-climax.[2] There is some justice in this, and yet a consistent line of thought can be deduced from the play. The ideal community which Marullo expounds to the returning lords is not one where all are equal in rank, but a hierarchy

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1. For a full account, cf. B. T. Spencer (ed.), The Bondman, 1932, pp. 12 ff.

2. cf. E. W. Harness, The plays of Philip Massinger adapted for family reading, 1830, p. 206.

ruled by a benevolent aristocracy:

> 'Happy those times
> When lords were styled fathers of families,
> And not imperious masters! . . .
> when their labours
> Were cherish'd and rewarded, and a period
> Set to their sufferings; when they did not press
> Their duties or their wills, beyond the power
> And strength of their performance!' (IV,ii)

Spencer has analysed in detail the relation of the thought in the play to various brands of stoicism, in particular to the idea of slavery as a mental condition:

> 'Central in the Stoic view is the differentiation of the slave in fortune from the slave in spirit.'[1]

Those citizens quelled by the slaves are slavish in spirit, enslaved to greed and material things, but the inherent inferiority of the slaves themselves is apparent in their immediate yielding to the whips. Spencer's analysis does, however, seem a little strained at times: however logical the philosophy may be proved to be, the dramatic effect is not wholly convincing. Dunn, commenting on this, offers a simpler explanation:

> 'The egalitarian explanation . . . and the sympathetic account of the rising of the slaves would seem to demand that the slaves should be victorious. Yet, because Massinger is an anti-revolutionary and holds by political stability, the slaves have to be defeated. He extricates himself from his difficulty by a somewhat dubious juggling with our sympathies.'[2]

Moreover, The Bondman is primarily a romantic play, although it is more

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1. B. T. Spencer, 'Philip Massinger', Seventeenth Century Studies, ed. R. Shafer, Cincinnati, 1933, p. 86.

2. Dunn, p. 165.

reflective than the usual romance.[1] Massinger's divergences from his sources emphasise its romantic quality:

> '[He makes] Pisander's love rather than a struggle for social domination the actuating force in the play. For a tragi-comic conclusion he has written a final scene filled with forgiveness and mutual understanding between the bondmen and their masters instead of utilising the severe punishments recorded in Justin.'[2]

Pisander, a suitor previously rejected by Cleora, disguises himself as a slave and leads the rebellion in order to have her at his mercy, but, the victory once won, he does not take advantage of his position. In this Platonic chivalry he is close to Hortensio, the hero of The Bashful Lover. Hortensio, likewise a noble in disguise as a man of low birth, is content to adore the princess Matilda unknown and from a distance:

> 'I find it a degree of happiness
> But to be near her, and I think I pay
> A strict religious vow, when I behold her;
> And that's all my ambition.' (I,i)

During the war he fights for her honour in the manner of a medieval knight. But just as Marullo is finally revealed to be a nobleman, so Hortensio's identity is finally made known with the news that his father has died, making him ruler of Milan. Both Marullo and Hortensio are thus enabled to marry the women they love, which makes a satisfactory romantic conclusion but somewhat destroys the validity of the Platonic ideal set forth previously.[3] Political philosophy and spiritual

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1. cf. Chelli, p. 140.
2. B. T. Spencer (ed.), The Bondman, 1932, p. 13.
3. cf. Chelli, p. 306.

ideals are alike resolved in romantic surprise and intrigue.

This element of chivalric elevation in the treatment of romantic themes is characteristic of Massinger and distinguishes his purely romantic plays from those of Fletcher. The Bashful Lover in particular, with its presentation of the three rival lovers and their different approaches to love, has this quality. This play and A Very Woman are the most purely romantic of Massinger's plays.[1] Both abound in intrigue and sudden shifts of plot, but the presentation in Hortensio and Antonio of the disguised lover nobly sacrificing his claims gives an individual touch. A Very Woman is in fact distinguished from the rest of Massinger's work by its inclusion of some genuinely lyrical passages, which give a romantic depth not found elsewhere. Antonio, disguised as a slave, tells Almira in scarcely veiled terms of his neglect by her, in accents that palely echo Viola's speeches to Orsino in Twelfth Night. Leonora, seeking to console her mistress, achieves a certain elegiac grace:

> 'Time's hand will turn again, and what he ruins
> Gently restore, and wipe off all your sorrows.
> Believe you are to blame, much to blame, lady;
> You tempt his loving care whose eye has number'd
> All our afflictions, and the time to cure them:
> You rather with this torrent choke his mercies,
> Than gently slide into his providence.
> Sorrows are well allow'd, and sweeten nature,
> Where they express no more than drops on lilies;
> But when they fall in storms, they bruise our hopes; . . .'
> (III,iv)

Swinburne, who designated A Very Woman Massinger's best play,[2] attempted

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1. cf. Cruickshank, p. 199.

2. A. C. Swinburne, 'Philip Massinger', 1889, Works, ed. E. Gosse and T. J. Wise, XII, 208.

to bring out this quality in his prologue to the play.[1] However, the original prologue tells us that the play was a revision, and some have felt that Fletcher was responsible for this:

> 'there are a grace and delicacy about A Very Woman which seem to suggest the hand of Fletcher.'[2]

Eliot, who wholeheartedly applauds Swinburne's judgment of the play, suggests that the humour is more lively than Massinger was capable of unaided.[3]

Massinger's most characteristic manner in his tragi-comedies is not in fact the purely romantic attitude: the feature that makes his plays interesting is the thoughtful, questioning spirit they reveal that tries to include as much as possible within the romantic framework. Eliot has criticised the romantic drama for its lack of emotional unity:

> 'The romantic comedy is a skilful concoction of inconsistent emotion, a revue of emotion . . . The debility of romantic drama . . . consists in an internal incoherence of feelings, a concatenation of emotions which signifies nothing.'[4]

This is a harsh pronouncement on the kind of intention and achievement of Massinger's tragi-comedies. The plays are certainly compromises: a conclusion like that of The Renegado or The Bondman is unsatisfying and inconsistent. But this dissatisfaction arises because Massinger tries to make his tragi-comedy more than 'a revue of emotion': he also

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1. 'Prologue to A Very Woman', Works, ed.cit., VI, 322.
2. Cruickshank, p. 129.
3. T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', 1920, Selected Essays, 1932, p. 214.
4. ibid., p. 214.

makes it a revue of intellectual speculations. He is trying to create a romantic structure that can also be an adaptable vehicle for more serious comments. In his presentation of sin and the sick in mind he comes near to establishing a tragi-comic pattern of his own, a moral pattern in which the tragic consequences of sin are averted by repentance and regeneration, which finds a closer analogue in the last plays of Shakespeare than in anything by Fletcher. Massinger frequently lacks the deftness and grace of Fletcher; his attempts to moralise and philosophise are often awkward and ill-placed. But there is a genuine seriousness about his tragi-comedies, that of a man groping and stumbling towards a new and individual dramatic expression which he never fully realised. It is this note of serious questioning and moral responsibility that differentiates his plays from contemporary romantic drama and gives them interest, despite their errors and awkwardnesses.

CHAPTER VI

Reputation

As an investigation into the stage-history of Massinger's plays suggests, they were not always greeted with great enthusiasm at the time of first production, and likewise the few critical comments that can be found in the seventeenth century suggest a mixed reception. Even the commendatory verses tend at times to praise in defiance of the popular reception of the play;[1] and a poem by Henry Parker seeks to encourage the downcast dramatist in the face of a recent failure.[2] On several occasions, however, he is listed with other dramatists of the period and given equal stature with them,[3] and he is the subject of a highly flattering epigram:

> 'Apollo's Messenger, who doth impart
> To us the edicts of his learned art,
> Who cannot but respect thee, for we know,
> Princes are honour'd in their legats so.'[4]

The comparison with Beaumont and Fletcher, which was later to become the centre of critical discussion, emerges in two different assessments in the commendatory verses. Thomas Jay, introducing The Picture, rates Massinger much lower:

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1. e.g. D. Lakyn on The Renegado (Gifford, I, clii), and W. Singleton on The Emperor of the East (Gifford, I, clxiii).

2. cf. Dunn, p. 33.

3. J. Taylor, 'Praise of Hempseed', 1620; Sir A. Cokayne, 'Praeludium to Brome's Plays', 1653; and anonymous references in Wit and Fancy in a Maze, 1656, and The Great Assizes holden in Parnassus . . ., 1645.

4. Anonymous, Wits Recreations, 1640.

'I know you'd take it for an injury,
(And 'tis a well-becoming modesty,)
To be parallel'd with Beaumont, or to hear
Your name by some too partial friend writ near
Unequall'd Jonson; being men whose fire,
At distance, and with reverence, you admire.'

However, the same man takes a very different stand when praising A New Way:

'You may remember how you chid me, when
I rank'd you equal with those glorious men,
Beaumont and Fletcher: if you love not praise,
You must forbear the publishing of plays.'

There are only a few references that comment on any particular quality in Massinger's work. W. Hemminge, in his Elegy on Randolph's finger (1632-3), described Massinger's fluency in lines which were often reprinted or quoted:

' 'Messenger that knowes
the strength to wright or plott In verse or prose,
Whose easye pegasus Can Ambell ore
some threscore myles of fancye In an hower.'

An anonymous elegy on Davenant, who died in 1668, attributes an unexpected virtue to Massinger:

'Shirley and Massinger comes in for shares,
For that his language was refin'd as theirs.'

Samuel Sheppard, in The Times Displayed (1646), introduces Massinger's name as 'his that the sweet Renegaddo pend'; the only other play to be singled out for especial praise during this period seems to be The Bondman; some instances of Samuel Pepys' commendation of this play have already been noted.[1]

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1. cf. pp. 4-5.

The first writers to discuss Massinger at any length were G. Langbaine[1] and A. à Wood,[2] who both, in 1691, spoke of him as a popular dramatist in his life-time. When Langbaine mentions his collaboration with Fletcher, it is, however, with a suggestion of condescension on Fletcher's part:

> 'Nay, further to show his Excellency, the ingenious Fletcher took him in as a Partner in several Plays' . . .

Massinger then seems to have been neglected until the middle of the eighteenth century, when Colley Cibber (1740)[3], W. R. Chetwood (1749)[4], and Lessing (1758)[5] all wrote of his reputation in his own age; and finally he was brought to prominence by the first complete edition of his plays, edited by T. Coxeter (1761). The introduction[6] was written by George Colman, who ranks Massinger not far below Shakespeare, regrets his present neglect, and urges Garrick to revive his plays. In 1764 D. E. Baker[7] wrote of a revived interest in Massinger, urging Garrick to uphold this, and in 1779 appeared a second collected edition by J. Monck Mason. This edition, hurried and faulty as it is, was the subject of much scorn and ridicule by Gifford,[8] but the editor's opening admission that he read Massinger for the first time only two years before and then began work on

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1. An Account of the English Dramatick Poets, p. 352.
2. Athenae Oxonienses, 2nd ed., 1721, I, 630.
3. An Apology for the life of Colley Cibber, 1756 ed., II, 202.
4. A General History of the Stage, p. 16.
5. cf. Chelli, p. 73.
6. 'Critical Reflections on the Old English Dramatic Writers'.
7. cf. Chelli, p. 65.
8. In the notes to his edition, 1805.

him for his own amusement, at least testifies to a new and genuine enthusiasm. Colman's remarks were reprinted and the edition also includes an essay by T. Davies,[1] who warmly praises Massinger for many qualities, particularly as a moralist, discusses the political implications of his plays, and, like Colman, speaks of his undeserved neglect. This re-discovery of Massinger in the late eighteenth century was followed by an increasing stream of critical comment. Mason[2] had rated him next to Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher; but in 1782 D. E. Baker declared him second only to Shakespeare and equal to Beaumont and Fletcher and Jonson.[3] J. Ferriar[4] in 1786 analysed Massinger's qualities in some detail and extolled him yet more highly. E. Garden[5] in 1792 was more cautious, dismissing the bulk of Massinger's tragedy as 'flat and diffuse', though finding the comedies more successful. C. Dibdin, however, in 1800, while criticising certain plays, declared that

> 'posterity has placed him very little behind Jonson, far before Beaumont and Fletcher',[6]

and in a broadside of 1803, in which lines from The Bondman are quoted as a patriotic exhortation at the time of the expected Napoleonic invasion, Massinger is hailed as 'our great Dramatic Poet'.[7]

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1. 'Some Account of the Life and Writings of Philip Massinger', reprinted as a monograph 1789.
2. The Dramatic Works of Philip Massinger, I,v.
3. Biographica Dramatica, pp. 306-7.
4. 'Essay on the Dramatic Writings of Massinger', reprinted in Gifford, I, cxi-cxlv.
5. 'On the Dramatic Works of Philip Massinger', Miscellanies, p. 165.
6. Complete History of the English Stage, III, 231-46. The passage [quoted is on p.234.
7. Broadside to be seen in the British Museum.

Massinger's position as one of the principal seventeenth century dramatists was finally established by the edition of his works in 1805 by Gifford, the second edition of which, published in 1813, as yet remains the standard text. In a period of renewed interest in seventeenth century drama Massinger won much enthusiastic approval. Gifford included in his edition Ferrier's essay and also a series of comments by Dr. Ireland, who, though shocked by any suggestion of immorality or coarseness in the plays, warmly praises them. The edition, however, had a mixed reception. Sir James Mackintosh[1] and The Edinburgh Review[2] both regard Gifford's enthusiasm as exaggerated, though they allow the plays considerable merit, but The British Critic[3] is in closer agreement with Gifford's editing and Ireland's commentary. A. W. von Schlegel[4] made a brief reference to the edition, but says no more about Massinger than that his work is indistinguishable from that of Beaumont and Fletcher. Charles Lamb included passages from some of the plays in his Specimens of English Dramatic Poets (1808),[5] and commented on them with qualified approval. Massinger's moral, thoughtful turn of mind was stressed by Mrs. Inchbald[6] and The Mirror of Taste.[7]

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1. Life of Sir James Mackintosh, ed. R.J. Mackintosh, 1835, I, 354.
2. XII (1808), 99-119.
3. 1806, pp. 347-81.
4. Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature (1808), ed. 1846, p. 474.
5. II, 157-73.
6. The British Theatre, 1808, VI.
7. cf. Chelli, p. 71.

The next comment of any substance was that of Hazlitt, who, as well as writing on current productions of the plays[1] and criticising Gifford's editing,[2] gave some analysis of Massinger as a whole, and in particular of Sir Giles Overreach in his Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth, IV.[3] His remarks on the extremes of passion upon which Massinger's characters are constructed were frequently taken up by later critics and have since become a commonplace of Massinger criticism. Sir Walter Scott in 1819 attributed to Massinger some of the excellencies of Jonson and Shakespeare.[4] The element of piety and morality which many nineteenth century critics found and extolled in Massinger is apparent in the remarks of N. Drake[5] in 1817 and Miss E. W. Macauley's[6] prose narrative of The Duke of Milan, retold for its moral content. B. W. Proctor, however, in 1824 declared Massinger 'a little overrated perhaps, at present, owing to the exertions of his editor',[7] and in 1829 H. Neele remarked that, owing to Gifford's edition and Kean's performances, the public was better acquainted with Massinger than with most of his contemporaries.[8]

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1. In 'A View of the English Stage', Works, ed. P. P. Howe, V, 272-4, 277, 289, 302; and 'Dramatic Criticism', Works, XVIII, 195.
2. 'The Spirit of the Age', Works, XI, 125-6.
3. Works, VI, 265-9.
4. 'Essay on the Drama', The Prose Works, ed. 1834, VI, 342.
5. Shakespeare and his Times, II, 561-2.
6. Tales of the Drama, founded on the tragedies of Shakespeare, Massinger, Shirley, and others, 1822.
7. Effigies Poeticae, I, 71.
8. 'Lectures on English Poetry', IV, Literary Remains, p. 129.

F. W. Harness in 1830 echoed Ferriar's commendations,[1] and in 1832 J. Genest cautiously praised most of them.[2]

After Hazlitt's character-sketch of Sir Giles, the next landmark was to be the comments of Coleridge, which are a medley of praise and censure. At least two of Coleridge's remarks have had a lasting effect on criticism, his description of Massinger's verse as the nearest approach to the language of real life compatible with a fixed metre,[3] and the remark that 'his plays have the interest of novels'.[4] Although Coleridge made his remarks as commendations, his influence seems to have damaged Massinger's reputation as a poetic dramatist, leading ultimately to statements that

> 'Massinger . . . is not a poet . . . His ideas are prose-concepts,'[5]

and that he sought for effects

> 'which the novelist can undertake but which the limitations of the stage render almost impossible.'[6]

W. Minto[7] in 1834 and S. A. Dunham[8] in 1837 wrote warmly of Massinger, pointing out the higher moral tone of his plays as compared with those

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1. The Plays of Philip Massinger adapted for family reading.
2. Some account of the English stage, VII, 686-98.
3. Lectures VII' (1818), Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. T. M. Raysor, pp. 40-97. The passage referred to is on p. 93.
4. Table-Talk, 1833, ed.cit., p. 417.
5. Dunn, p. 266.
6. Cruikshank, p. 76.
7. Characteristics of English poets, pp. 474-7.
8. Lives of the most eminent literary and scientific men, II, 252-95.

of Beaumont and Fletcher, as did Hallam[1] in 1839, who, in one of the more substantial pieces of Massinger criticism, ranked him second only to Shakespeare as a tragic writer, and 'in the higher comedy' hardly inferior to Jonson. In the same year appeared Hartley Coleridge's edition of the plays[2]: the introduction, though primarily concerned with speculations on the dramatist's life and character, parallels Hallam in pointing to Massinger's depiction of virtue and its trials as his chief excellence. C. Magnin in 1843, comparing Massinger unfavourably with the genius of Shakespeare, labelled him 'un homme habile',[3] and similarly G. L. Craik in 1845 said that he achieved 'all that can be reached by mere talent'.[4] A certain popular interest in Massinger is suggested by the inclusion of the story of A Very Woman in Sharpe's London Magazine in 1847,[5] together with a full page illustration on the front page of the issue. E. P. Whipple[6] in 1850 and A. Mills[7] in 1851 commented on Massinger's reflective attitude and dignity.

During the first half of the nineteenth century Massinger's reputation was also enhanced by the appearance of a number of editions of his plays. Some of them, in particular A New Way, were included in many of the stage collections of the period, for example, Inchbald's British

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1. Introduction to the Literature of Europe, III, 608-15.
2. The Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford, in The Old Dramatists series.
3. Causeries et méditations, II, 236-8. The passage quoted is on p.236.
4. Literature and learning in England, III, 205.
5. 'Stories from the Dramatists,' III, 326 ff.
6. Essays and Reviews, 1856 ed., II, 66-70.
7. The Literature and the Literary Men of Great Britain and Ireland, I, 352-6.

Theatre (1808), The Mirror of Taste (1810), Modern British Drama (1811), The London Stage (1824), and Dibden's The London Theatre (1816). Extracts appeared in Porter's The Beauties of Massinger (1817) and Campbell's Specimens of British Poets (1819), and an expurgated edition of the plays 'for family reading' was published under the name of Murray in 1830, and of Harness in 1831. In 1836 several of the plays were translated into German by Baudissin. Meanwhile original scholarship was in progress: The Parliament of Love was printed for the first time in 1805 (in Gifford's edition), and in 1849 T. C. Croker edited the recently discovered manuscript of Believe As You List for the Percy Society.

A new line in the approach to Massinger was introduced by the German critic M. Rapp in 1856, who regarded him as marking the fourth period in English dramatic history, being preceded by Marlowe, Shakespeare and Fletcher,[1] an assessment that was frequently to reappear.[2] In the same year Massinger was branded with Fletcher and others in Charles Kingsley's[3] condemnation of the immorality of the period. In France E. Lafond[4] wrote in 1864 of Massinger's strong religious feeling and translated some of the plays. Three plays were included in Keltie's Works of the British Dramatists (1870), and in 1868 appeared The Plays of Philip Massinger edited by F. Cunningham. One possible result of the

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1. cf. Chelli, p. 74.
2. e.g. A. Symons (ed.), Philip Massinger, I (1887), xiv.
3. Plays and Puritans, 1873, pp. 10-13, 18, 46-7.
4. Contemporains de Shakespeare, Paris, vii-xii.

new edition seems to be a fresh interest in the more minute details of the dramatist's biography and plays which springs up in the literary journals of the late nineteenth century, where Massinger is the subject of much inconsequential speculation.[1] In 1875 A. W. Ward[2] suggested that in the general recognition Massinger had received he had possibly been over-estimated, but in the same year G. B. Smith[3] echoed the high approval of Hallam. S. R. Gardiner[4] in 1876 commented in detail on Massinger's reflection of contemporary politics, an approach that has become widespread in modern criticism.[5] This was followed in 1877 by one of the most vigorous and frequently quoted essays on Massinger, by Sir Leslie Stephen,[6] whose comments on the 'convertibility' and 'lowered vitality' of his characters and his failure to project himself into his villains have become a focus for discussion of Massinger's characterisation.[7] Massinger's life and career were investigated in some detail in 1879 by J. Phelan.[8] His growing reputation in France is indicated by

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1. e.g. the commentary on Massinger's name by J. S. A. C. (N & Q, XCII [1895], 484-5) and the subsequent discussion by correspondents.

2. English Dramatic Literature, II, 1-36.

3. 'Philip Massinger', NQM, V, 36-64.

4. 'The Political Element in Massinger', New Shakspere Society Transactions, 1875-6, pp. 314-30.

5. e.g. B. T. Spencer, The Bondman, 1932, pp. 15-43; J. M. Stochholm, The Great Duke of Florence, Baltimore, 1933, pp. lxviii-lxxx.

6. 'Massinger', Hours in a Library, II, 131-63.

7. cf., for instance, T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, 1932, p. 218.

8. (1) 'Life of Philip Massinger', (2) 'The Plays of Philip Massinger', Anglia, II, 1-61.

the high praise of A. Mézières[1] in 1881 and Trévenet[2] in 1886-7. In 1874 F. G. Fleay[3] had applied metrical tests to Massinger's verse in order to establish evidence for authorship, and this approach was developed by R. Boyle[4] in the following decade. Stopford Brooke[5] in 1882 expressed a combined repulsion and admiration at the coarse language and the presentation of purity in Massinger's plays, a dual aspect frequently commented upon and developed more fully by J. R. Lowell[6] in 1887. In the same year George Saintsbury[7] inaugurated a fresh and influential approach by pointing out the consistent standard of Massinger's work and accusing critics of allowing too little for general competence as against momentary excellence.

A new wave of discussion was promoted by the appearance in 1887 and 1889 of two volumes of Massinger's plays selected by Arthur Symons (in the Mermaid Series). Symons[8] saw Massinger in relation to the decline of the drama, his work being characterised by a lack of imagination; and Swinburne,[9] in an outstanding essay in 1889, defined

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1. Contemporains et successeurs de Shakespeare, Paris, pp. 279-328.
2. cf. Chelli, p. 75.
3. 'On metrical tests as applied to dramatic poetry', Transactions of the New Shakspere Society, I, pp. 1-84.
4. cf. p. 2.
5. English Literature, p. 106.
6. The Old English Dramatists, ed. 1892, pp. 113-28.
7. History of Elizabethan Literature, pp. 394-401. The passage referred to is on p. 401.
8. 'Philip Massinger', Philip Massinger, I (1887), vii-xxxii.
9. 'Philip Massinger', Works, ed. Sir E. Gosse and T. J. Wise, XII, 252-88. The passage quoted is on p. 288. cf. also the sonnet, 'Philip Massinger', Works, ed.cit., V, 175; and 'Prologue to A Very Woman', Works, ed.cit., VI, 322.

Massinger's claims to honour as 'moral and intellectual' rather than 'imaginative and creative'. The 1890's saw a spate of general critical activity in which Massinger was mentioned by many writers in varying degrees of detail: he was discussed by L. Boucher,[1] D. G. Mitchell,[2] J. E. Baker,[3] W. E. Golden,[4] I. B. Choate,[5] H. Budd,[6] Edmund Gosse,[7] and George Saintsbury.[8] No strikingly new attitude emerges from this group of critics: the general appraisal of Massinger seems to be that of a dramatist not of the first rank but at the highest point of a dramatic decline, lacking in brilliance and imagination but consistent and workmanlike, deficient in wit and humour but distinguished by a genuine earnestness and strong didactic element. The charge of immorality, which frequently struggles in the minds of critics with praise of moral stability, emerged fully in the Dictionary of National Biography (1893).[9] A certain popular interest in Massinger is suggested by the reports of some meetings of the Clifton Shakespere Society devoted to discussing his work.[10] K. Deighton edited A New Way in 1893, E. H. Oliphant[11] followed Boyle in analysing Massinger's characteristics as

1. Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise, Paris, 1890, pp. 177-9.
2. English lands, letters, and kings, 1890, pp. 93-5.
3. 'The Plays of Philip Massinger', Academy, June 1890, pp. 430-1.
4. A Brief History of the English Drama, 1890, pp. 140-2.
5. Wells of English, 1892, pp. 204-10.
6. St. Mary's Hall Lectures, Philadelphia, 1898, pp. 166-95.
7. The Jacobean Poets, 1894, pp. 203-16; Modern English Literature, 1897, [p. 138.
8. A Short History of English Literature, 1898, pp. 432-3.
9. XXXVII, 10-16. By R. B[oyl]E.
10. Academy, June 1891, pp. 591-2; Dec. 1891, pp. 566-7; June 1892, p. 596.
11. cf. p. 2.

a collaborator, and in 1897 E. Koeppel[1] published his work on Massinger's sources.

The early years of the twentieth century continued the stream of comment in a similar vein, in the work of R. Garnett and E. Gosse,[2] H. J. C. Grierson[3] and Saintsbury.[4] In 1903 W. J. Courthope stressed more firmly than any preceding critic the spirit of the early morality plays to be found in Massinger's work,[5] an extreme view that was to reappear in later criticism. E. C. Morris[6] wrote of the over-elaboration and self-consciousness of Massinger's plots and style; J. J. Jusserand[7] condemned him for escaping from reality into romantic extravagance. G. Stronach, however, in his edition of A New Way (1904) declared its author a worthy rival of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Saintsbury[8] examined Massinger's verse and wrote of its 'literary' quality. F. H. Ristine[9] saw the development of a new kind of tragi-comedy in

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1. Quellen-Studien zu den Dramen George Chapman's, Philip Massinger's und John Ford's, Strassburg, p. 82 ff. This was followed by a number of German monographs in the early twentieth century on the sources of individual plays.
2. History of English Literature, 1903, II, 351-2.
3. The First Half of the Seventeenth Century, 1906, pp. 127-9.
4. History of English Prosody, 1908, pp. 304-5.
5. History of English Poetry, IV, 348-68.
6. 'On the date and composition of The Old Law', PMLA, XVII (1902), 1-70.
7. A Literary History of the English People, III (1909), 424-8.
8. History of English Prosody, 1908, pp. 304-5.
9. English Tragi-Comedy, 1910, pp. 130-5.

Massinger's romantic plays. W. D. Briggs[1] stepped aside from the general drift of criticism in assessing the influence of Jonson on Massinger's tragedy, and in the same year M. Kerr[2] wrote of his relations to Jonson as a comic dramatist, a relationship frequently mentioned in earlier criticism but not to be fully explored for several years.[3] His relation to Middleton as a writer of realistic comedy was indicated by R. S. Forsythe.[4] During this period there were a number of new editions. A New Way was included in Neilson's Chief Elizabethan Dramatists (1911); four of the plays appeared in L. A. Sherman's Masterpieces of the English Drama (New York, 1913); and J. S. Farmer edited Believe As You List (1907). In 1904 R. Prölss translated The Great Duke into German. A New Way was edited by C. B. Wheeler[5] in 1915. In 1914 B. Matthews wrote a lively essay on Massinger, severely condemning his coarseness.[6] F. E. Schelling[7] and A. H. Thorndike,[8] however, adopted what had by this time become the traditional attitude, relating his romantic plays closely to those of Fletcher, but strongly distinguishing him from the latter by his seriousness and moral sense.

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1. 'The Influence of Jonson's Tragedy in the 17th century', Anglia, XXV (1912), 277-337.

2. The Influence of Ben Jonson on English Comedy, New York, 1912, pp. 24, 42-3.

3. By L. C. Knights in Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, 1936.

4. The Relations of Shirley's plays to the Elizabethan Drama, 1914, pp. 5-6.

5. Six Plays by Contemporaries of Shakespeare (World's Classics).

6. Representative English Comedies, ed. Gayley, III, 303-20.

7. English Drama, 1914, pp. 196-201; Elizabethan Playwrights, 1925, pp. 256-9.

8. Tragedy, New York, 1908, pp. 219-26; English Comedy, New York, 1929, pp. 224-34.

In 1920 appeared the first full-length study of the dramatist, Philip Massinger by A. H. Cruickshank. Cruickshank put forward no very new attitude, but considered the dramatist at greater length than any previous writer. He praised Massinger's plotting, his 'sturdy morality', and fluent style: Massinger is 'sober, well balanced, dignified, and lucid', and 'is the most Greek of his generation'. Cruickshank's enthusiasm for Massinger was not, however, wholly shared by his reviewers, and like Gifford he was sometimes accused of having a little overrated his subject.[1] His investigation of Massinger's borrowings from Shakespeare was taken up and developed by T. S. Eliot in the same year in an essay[2] which remains the most interesting piece of general criticism on the dramatist. He acutely diagnosed the 'cerebral anaemia' of Massinger's style, and showed Massinger's transitional position, isolated 'from both the Elizabethan and the later Caroline mind'. His dismissal of Massinger's tragedies perhaps needs modification, but his comments on A New Way and The City-Madam, presenting Massinger as a great writer of sombre comedy in line with Marlowe and Jonson, at last allowed these plays their real value. In 1923 there followed M. Chelli's Le Drame de Massinger, a book already completed at its author's death in 1914.[3] This is an exhaustive study of the plays from various aspects, on a much

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1. e.g. Durham University Journal, XXII (1920), 207.
2. 'Philip Massinger', reprinted in Selected Essays, 1932, pp. 205-20.
3. This was followed by the supplementary study, Études sur la collaboration de Massinger avec Fletcher et son groupe, Paris, 1926.

larger scale than Cruikshank's book, but Chelli's analytic method tends to hinder an appreciation of the plays as individual works of art. Chelli's chief tribute to Massinger is his 'cohérence', a structural order and unity 'à la fois technique et philosophique'; and Massinger, 'la figure la plus honorable de la décadence dramatique', is distinguished from his contemporaries by his intellectual calm and the moral and religious convictions implicit in his work.[1] In 1927 appeared yet another full length work, H. J. Makkink's Philip Massinger and John Fletcher - A Comparison (Rotterdam). Makkink minutely catalogues illustrations of dramatic and personal characteristics from the plays of both dramatists, in an attempt to provide a basis for distinguishing their work in the collaborations. Much of the information cited is trifling, sometimes to the point of absurdity, but at least the book testifies to an admiration of Massinger. In 1921 Edmund Gosse[2] could still speak of Massinger's neglect in comparison with the fate of his fellows, but W. Archer[3] in 1923 wished that Warburton's cook

> 'had fed her fire with the works of almost any of his contemporaries rather than with his.'

The decade ended, however, a little less auspiciously with H. W. Garrod's[4]

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1. '. . . Massinger possesses as a dramatist those qualities of sobriety, order, and rhetorical declamation which we should expect a Frenchman to admire' (TLS, 1924, p. 334).

2. 'Philip Massinger', Books on the Table, pp. 149-54. The passage referred to is on p. 149.

3. The Old Drama and the New, pp. 102-9. The passage quoted is on p. 109.

4. 'Massinger', The Profession of Poetry, pp. 225-9. The passage quoted is on p. 234.

forthright essay in 1929: his overall judgment was that

'Massinger is the greatest of dramatic hacks.'

However, Massinger's reputation maintained its height during the 1930's in the comments of J. W. Mackail[1] and R. F. Patterson,[2] and the much discussed question of his 'decadence' received favourable treatment from E. Legouis and L. Cazamian[3] and Oliver Elton.[4] In 1933 the political and philosophical aspects of the plays and their roots in classical thought were explored with great thoroughness by B. T. Spencer.[5] A fresh approach was made by J. McManaway,[6] who, in relating the stage-history and influence of Massinger's plays during the Restoration, indicated certain features that relate them to the prevailing attitudes of that period. Another view of the comedies was presented by L. C. Knights,[7] who, by relating A New Way and The City Madam to contemporary social and economic conditions and showing them to partake of Jonson's comic vision, developed the line of thought initiated by Eliot[8] and revealed a new significance in the plays. The effect on his plays of voyages and books of travel was demonstrated by S. C. Chew[9] and

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1. The Approach to Shakespeare, 1930, pp. 136-7.
2. Six Centuries of English Literature, 1933, II, 315-6.
3. Histoire de la littérature anglaise, Paris, 1933, pp. 491-8.
4. The English Muse, 1933, p. 194.
5. 'Philip Massinger', Seventeenth Century Studies, ed. R. Shafer, Cincinnati, pp. 3-122.
6. 'Philip Massinger and the Restoration Drama', ELH (1934), 276-304.
7. Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, 1936, pp. 270-300.
8. cf. p. 165.
9. The Crescent and the Rose, 1937, pp. 532-6.

R. R. Cawley.[1] E. Colby[2] made the usual comments on Massinger's moral attitude, G. Bradford[3] more guardedly wrote of his frigid piety; but M. C. Bradbrook,[4] unusual among critics of Massinger, associated him with Fletcher in a lack of serious morality, a blurring of good and evil. In 1939 appeared R. H. Ball's The Amazing Career of Sir Giles Overreach, which, by its immensely detailed and copiously illustrated account of the various stage presentations of A New Way, has given considerable insight into the interpretation of the play over the centuries. At a climactic moment in 1940 an anonymous article was published in the Times Literary Supplement[5] to commemorate the tercentenary of Massinger's death: the writer, however, seems to have been unaffected by the body of sound and serious criticism that had emerged during the past twenty years, and judged Massinger's chief qualities to be those of a provider of film scenarios. The superficiality of this attitude was, however, exposed by C. Leech,[6] and Massinger re-instated as 'the inheritor of Jonson's and Chapman's masculine outlook'.

The flood of criticism in the 1920's and 1930's was accompanied by several new editions of individual plays. In England A New Way was Believe As You List by C.J. Sisson for the Malone Society Reprints in 1927, edited by A. H. Cruikshank in 1926, and The Parliament of Love by

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1. The Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama, 1938, pp. 295, 302, 308, 357-9, 374-5.
2. English Catholic Poets, 1936, pp. 161-7.
3. Elizabethan Women, Cambridge, Mass., 1936, pp. 160-70.
4. Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, 1935, pp. 72-4.
5. 'Philip Massinger', TLS, 1940, pp. 134, 140.
6. TLS, 1940, p. 147.

K. M. Lea in 1928. In America there appeared a number of critical editions, thoroughly investigating the sources and stage-history of the plays as well as making some critical judgment. Some of these were prepared at Princeton University, where there seems to have been a sustained interest in Massinger studies: The Roman Actor was edited by W. L. Sandidge in 1929, The Bondman by B. T. Spencer and The Unnatural Combat by R. S. Telfer in 1932, The City Madam by R. Kirk in 1934. The series of American editions also includes The Duke of Milan by T. W. Baldwin in 1918, The Maid of Honour by E. A. W. Bryne in 1927, and The Great Duke of Florence by J. M. Stochholm in 1933. In 1933 Chelli's translation La Fille d'Honneur was published. During this period there also began to emerge a considerable body of scholarship apart from purely literary criticism which has continued to the present day. There have been many bibliographical notes and studies, especially by A. K. McIlwraith[1] and W. W. Greg, and many essays on the sources of individual plays.[2]

Since the tercentenary tribute in 1940 criticism on Massinger has been surprisingly sparse. In 1945 F. S. Boas[3] wrote favourably of him,

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1. McIlwraith has made other noticeable contributions to Massinger scholarship: cf. especially, 'Did Massinger revise The Emperor of the East?' RES, IV (1929), 36-42; 'On the date of A New Way to Pay Old Debts', MLR, XXVIII (1933), 431-8.

2. cf. especially, C. Stratton, 'The Cenci Story in Literature and Fact', Studies in English Drama, ed. A. Gaw, 1917, II, 138-43; A. Steiner, 'Massinger's The Picture, Bandello and Hungary', MLN, XLVI (1931), 401-3; W. G. Rice, 'The sources of Massinger's The Renegado', PQ, XI (1932), 65-75; R. H. Ball, 'Sir Giles Mompesson and Sir Giles Overreach', Parrott Presentation Volume, 1935, pp. 277-87; J. E. Gray, 'The Source of the Emperor of the East', RES, I (1950), 126-35; P. G. Phialas, 'The sources Massinger's Emperour of the East', PMLA, LXV (1950), 473-82.

3. Stuart Drama, pp. 304-30.

stressing the wide range and variety of his work. He was labelled 'a problem playwright' in 1948 by Stephen Williams,[1] who writes of him with uneasiness. A New Way was edited in 1949 by M. St. Clare Byrne, who summarised the play as 'high-class melodrama',[2] and Massinger was treated no more seriously in 1952 by Peter Quennell,[3] who commented,

> 'His sense of drama clung to the surface of life, rarely involving itself in profound emotional issues.'

However, in the same year D. J. Enright[4] developed and refuted points in Eliot's essay in a penetrating discussion of Massinger as a satirist, comparing him with Jonson:

'Jonson wrote poetic satire, Massinger wrote satire in verse.'

The most recent contribution is also one of the most considerable in size, T. A. Dunn's Philip Massinger, published in 1957. This is a long and very thorough study of the plays from various angles, including a detailed biography of Massinger, but, like Chelli's, it suffers from too schematised an approach. Dunn, while stressing Massinger's essential skill as a master of the stage, has equally stressed his predominating moral and didactic outlook and shown how that interferes with plotting

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1. Radio Times, Oct. 15, 1948, p. 6.
2. p. 12.
3. 'Philip Massinger', The Singular Preference, pp. 37-43. The passage quoted is on p. 39.
4. 'Poetic Satire and Satire in verse: a consideration of Jonson and Massinger', Scrutiny, XVIII (1952), 211-23. The passage quoted is on p. 223.

and characterisation. Dunn does not seem to share the enthusiasm which Cruikshank and Chelli felt for Massinger, and his final assessment is that

> 'Massinger . . . is not a poet. . . . His ideas are prose-concepts.'[1]

A new edition of Massinger, begun by A. K. McIlwraith and to be completed by Philip W. Edwards, is to published by the Clarendon Press.

Dunn's comment on Massinger's lack of poetry raises one of the most important issues in any discussion of Massinger, as it directly challenges his claim to be a poetic dramatist. The prosiness of his verse is a frequent topic among modern critics in particular; J. Middleton Murry provides perhaps the most extreme example:

> 'His blank verse is nearer to the norm of plain, lucid prose than any actual prose written in his time. . . . Obviously Massinger would have been happier, had he been freed from the obligation of cutting his prose up into lines.'[2]

But this is to ignore the individual flavour of Massinger's style, the subtle welding of a loose but formal utterance to the blank verse line, which, though it is close to the rhythms of conversation, is nevertheless ultimately differentiated from prose. The extract quoted by Murry as an example of 'excellent prose' includes the following passage:

> 'I once observed,
> In a tragedy of ours, in which a murder
> Was acted to the life, a guilty hearer,

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1. ~~Ibid.~~, p. 266. Dunn's appraisal of Massinger has not on the whole been favourably received: cf. reviews by J. I. M. S., The New Statesman, Jan. 24, 1958, and R. A. Foakes, English, XII (Spring 1958), no. 67, pp. 20-1.

2. The Problem of Style, 1922, p. 56.

> Forced by the terror of a wounded conscience,
> To make discovery of that which torture
> Could not wring from him. Nor can it appear
> Like an impossibility, but that
> Your father, looking on a covetous man
> Presented on the stage, as in a mirror,
> May see his own deformity, and loath it.'
> (The Roman Actor, II,1)

These lines lack the terseness and imaginative vitality of the passage in Hamlet (III,iv) which they obviously echo; but, when articulated with the degree of formality imposed by Massinger's stage, they are unmistakably verse. The cumulative sentence structure may be paralleled in oratorical prose, but the unit upon which the passage is built, the basic rhythm and balance, are those of the blank verse line. Murry says of Massinger's verse in general:

> 'It must have been delivered quite conversationally, for to impose a blank verse rhythm upon it would be monstrous . . .'[1]

But there is no question of imposing a rhythm on the line of a dramatist renowned for the flowing texture of his verse: Coleridge observed with greater justice:

> 'Read him aright, and measure by time, not syllables, and no lines can be more legitimate, none in which the substitution of equi-pollent feet, and the modification by emphasis, are managed with such exquisite judgment.'[2]

Dunn has commented on 'the unsuitability of Massinger's style for the stage',[3] a surprising judgment on a dramatist of this period:

> 'If a periodic and involved style is generally unsuitable

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1. ibid., p. 56.
2. 'Lecture VII', 1818, ed.cit., p. 77.
3. p. 222.

> for dramatic dialogue, it is made still more so when coupled with a blank verse that has too much freedom and too little discipline.'[1]

But the faults that Dunn finds are the very features that are brought to life by the spoken voice:

> 'If Massinger is read in the full, deep, dignified, controlled style of the orator, each part falls into its place and the period is natural; if not, he is a "howling wilderness" of dependent clauses and parenthetical statement.'[2]

The rhetorical nature of Massinger's utterance is in fact the basis of his drama: it is a quality which shapes his thought and dramatic construction as well as his verse. Comparison with Shakespeare can only prejudice appreciation, and this is perhaps the root of Dunn's discontent:[3] Massinger's aims and method are distinctly different from those of Shakespeare. The whole nature of his thinking is that of a debater and orator, and the shape of his drama is dominated by the desire for the fine speech. This rhetorical tendency makes questionable the frequent assertions that Massinger would have been more at home in the novel than in the drama. It is true that there is a certain 'literary' quality about his work:

> 'Not only does the character inform us of his or her own symptoms, but we are likely to have our attention called to them by the comments of other characters, informing us of what we are supposed to be observing for ourselves.'[4]

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1. p. 236. 2. T. W. Baldwin (ed.), The Duke of Milan, 1918, p44.
3. cf. his detailed comparison of Massinger and Shakespeare, pp.238-46.
4. Baldwin, op.cit., p. 38. For a different illustration of this tendency, cf. the MS of Believe As You List at the British Museum (B.M. Egerton 2828), where Massinger's stage-directions have been revised as containing more information than is relevant to stage production. The full MS version was printed by the Malone Society, 1927.

But Massinger wrote his speeches to be declaimed, and it is the force of the spoken word that gives his plays life: although his verse drops at its worst into a stilted flatness, his best scenes and passages are animated by a formal rhetorical poetry, whether it be manifested in the grave, if relaxed, dignity of The Roman Actor, the slightly blunted vigour of A New Way or The City Madam, or the faintly cumbersome grace of The Great Duke.

Massinger's rhetoric embodies a thoughtful, questioning mind, alive to the social and political problems of his time, seeking to assert the traditional religious and moral standards which had become blurred in contemporary drama. As has frequently been observed, his earnestness differentiates him from his contemporaries, in fact to some extent he occupies an isolated position:

> 'His ways of thinking and feeling isolate him from both the Elizabethan and the later Caroline mind. He might almost have been a great realist; he is killed by conventions which were suitable for the preceding literary generation, but not for his.'[1]

As a tragic writer he has some affinity with Chapman, and both in tragedy and comedy he follows in Jonson's footsteps; and his own personality gave him an individual view of sin, suffering, and injustice, and the necessity for repentance and endurance. But, a collaborator and follower of Fletcher, he was frequently obliged to compromise, to yield to the prevailing romantic mode, and this results in a certain sense of uneasiness and disintegration in his work. Eliot's final assessment is severe:

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1. T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', 1920, Selected Essays, 1932, p. 220.

> 'Had Massinger been a greater man, a man of more intellectual courage, the current of English literature immediately after him might have taken a different course.'[1]

But this very severity implies a just assessment of Massinger as a major figure in the early seventeenth century drama, a writer of some individuality, infusing a new spirit into current trends, but lacking the assurance to maintain an independent stand.

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1. ibid., p. 220.

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In the following lists the dates are from The Jacobean and Caroline Stage by G. E. Bentley, vols. III, IV.

(a) Independent Plays

Alexius, or The Chaste Lover [Gallant] (1639) (Lost)

Antonio and Vallia ? (Lost)

The Bashful Lover (1636 or 1637)

Believe As You List (1631)

The Bondman (1623)

The City Honest Man ? (Lost)

The City Madam (1632?)

Cleander (1634): possibly identical with The Lovers' Progress (see (b) below)

The Duke of Milan (1621-2)

The Emperor of the East (1630/1)

The Fair Anchoress of Pausilippo [or The Prisoner?] (1639/40) (Lost)

Fast and Welcome ? (Lost)

The Forced Lady (>1641) (Lost)

The Great Duke of Florence (1627?)

The Guardian (1633)

The Honour of Women (1628) (Lost)

The Italian Night-Piece [Masque] ? (Lost)

The Judge (1627) (Lost)

The King and the Subject (1638) (Lost)

The Maid of Honour (c.1621?)

Minerva's Sacrifice (1629) (Lost)

A New Way to Pay Old Debts (1621 or 1622?)

The Orator [or The Noble Choice?] (1634/5) (Lost)

The Painter ? (Lost)

The Parliament of Love (1624)

Philenzo and Hypollita ? (Lost)

The Picture (1629)

The Prisoner[s] ? (Lost)

The Renegado, or The Gentleman of Venice (1624)

The Roman Actor (1626)

The Secretary (Lost?)

The Tyrant ? (Lost)

The Unfortunate Piety (1631) (Lost)

The Unnatural Combat (1621-5?)

A Very Woman, or The Prince of Tarent (? - revised 1634)

The Woman's Plot (>1621) (Lost)

(b) Collaborations

(Ascriptions given below are those indicated as probable by Bentley.)

The Custom of the Country (c.1619-20), with John Fletcher

The Fatal Dowry (1616-19), with Nathan Field

The Jeweller of Amsterdam (1616-17), with John Fletcher and Nathan Field (Lost)

The Little French Lawyer (1619-23), with John Fletcher

The Lovers' Progress, by John Fletcher (1623), revised by Massinger (1624)

The Old Law ? with Thomas Middleton and Samuel Rowley

The Virgin-Martyr (1620?), with Thomas Dekker

Sir John van Olden Barnavelt (1619), with John Fletcher

Massinger's hand has also been traced in the following plays in the Beaumont and Fletcher folios:[1]

Beggars Bush (>1622)

The Double Marriage (c. 1621)

The Elder Brother (1625?)

The False One (c. 1620)

The Knight of Malta (1616-18)

Love's Cure (?)

The Prophetess (1622)

The Queen of Corinth (1616-17)

Rollo, Duke of Normandy (1617?)

The Sea Voyage (1622)

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The Spanish Curate (1622)

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1. cf. Bentley, III, 312-18, 329-32, 332-6, 340-2, 351-4, 363-6, 394-7, 401-7, 411-4, 415-7, 417-21, 398-400.

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