THREE

Misrule as Comedy; Comedy as Misrule

> ". . . is it fit infirmities of holy men should be acted upon a stage . . . ? . . . no passion wherewith the king was possessed, but is amplified, and openly sported with, and made a May game to all the beholders."
>
> —Henry Crosse, *Virtues Common-wealth*, 1603[1]

Distinctions between life and art, the stage and the world, which are obvious for our epoch were not altogether settled for Elizabethans. Such distinctions are not settled for us either in areas where new circumstances are leading to the development of new artistic forms, notably in the case of television. This chapter will consider the tendency for Elizabethan comedy to *be* a saturnalia, rather than to *represent* saturnalian experience. Renaissance critics discussed this difference in distinguishing between Old Comedy and New and by regularly explaining how Old Comedy was banned for its scurrility in abusing actual individuals. We can make out, as they did not, rudimentary English versions of Old Comedy, produced on holiday where festive abuse turned into *ad hominem* satire, and in the newly established professional theater when players borrowed forms of festive abuse from holiday. In 1601, the "Summer Lord Game" of the village of South Kyme in Lincolnshire developed into such satire under the leadership of one Talboys Dymoke, the younger brother of Sir Edward Dymoke, whose house had a bitter and long standing antagonism to the Dymoke's uncle, the avaricious Earl of Lincoln.

1. Printed by Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 247.

In dramatizing what he called "The Death of the Lord of Kyme" on the "Maypole green" before Sir Edward's house, Talboys Dymoke and his yeomen friends seem to have alluded to the Earl, and taken off his mannerisms, in a fashion which he regarded as lese majesty. Although we have no text of the performance, only descriptions of it in Star Chamber testimony, its similarity to *vetus comoedia* is clear. It was composed for performance with the license of a festival; it used traditional roles and stock scenes instead of a fully developed narrative plot; the zest of it came from abuse directed at an actual spoil-sport *alazon*. But of course, although the occasion and form were broadly Aristophanic, Dymoke's *art* was rudimentary. A direct development of comedy out of festivity, such as may have happened in Greece, was prevented in Elizabethan England by the existence of an already developed dramatic literature—and by the whole moral superstructure of Elizabethan society. When the issue was put to the test, license for festive abuse was never granted by Elizabethan officials. The performers of the South Kyme play learned this to their cost; so did the professional players when they tried to step into the Marprelate controversy. Yet the tendency which we shall be examining in this chapter has significance beyond its abortive fruits, because it witnesses to the saturnalian impulse which did find expression in dramatic fiction. Saturnalia could come into its own in the theater by virtue of the distinction between the stage and the world which Puritans were unwilling to make in London but which fortunately prevailed across the river on the Bankside.

License and Lese Majesty in Lincolnshire

When we write about holiday license as custom, our detached position is apt to result in a misleading impression that no tensions or chances are involved. For those participating, however, license is not simply a phase in a complacent evolution to foreknown conclusions:

it means, at some level, disruption. When majesty in lords is dangerous to meddle with, to act "My Lord of Misrule" or be created one of his retainers says "We are as good as Lords" and at the same time, "Lords are no better than we." The man who acts as a mock lord enjoys building up his dignity, and also exploding it by exaggeration, while his followers both relish his bombast as a fleer at proper authority and also enjoy turning on him and insulting his majesty. Huff-snuff bombast asks for cat-calls. The instability of an interregnum is built into the dynamics of misrule: the game at once appropriates and annihilates the mana of authority. In the process, the fear which normally maintains inhibition is temporarily overcome, and the revellers become wanton, swept along on the freed energy normally occupied in holding themselves in check.

To reach this fear and so defy it with intoxicating impunity, misrule has to take a chance. Give it an inch and it must take an ell—or at least more than the allowed inch. One way to get beyond bounds was to move from flouting in general to flouting particular people, from *symbolic* action toward symbolic *action*, to use a distinction of Mr. Kenneth Burke's. This impulse is amusingly graphic in a satirical description, written by John Taylor the water-poet, of London apprentices rioting on Shrove Tuesday:

> Then Tim Tatters, a most valiant villain, with an ensign made of a piece of a baker's mawkin fixed upon a broom staff, he displays his dreadful colors, and calling the ragged regiment together, makes an illiterate oration, stuffed with most plentiful want of discretion, the conclusion whereof is, that somewhat they will do, but what they know not. Until at last comes marching up another troop of tatterdemalions, proclaiming wars against no matter who, so they may be doing. Then these youths . . . put play houses to the sack, and bawdy houses to the spoil, in the quarrel breaking a thousand quarrels (of glass I mean) . . . tumbling from the tops of lofty

> chimneys, terribly untilling houses, ripping up the bowels of feather beds.[2]

The custom of misrule obviously provided a whirligig that could catch up simmering antagonisms and swing them into the open. In the Dymoke case, it was the animus of a county family and their retainers against a tyrannical nobleman. The Earl of Lincoln's almost insane avarice and inhumanity were repeatedly a problem to the Privy Council and a plague to his neighborhood. The case will be worth following in the full human dimensions which have been skillfully presented through excerpts from the Star Chamber Records and the Duke of Northumberland's papers, in Mr. Norreys Jephson O'Conor's study of the Norreys family and their conflict with the Earl, *Godes Peace and the Queenes*.[3] Since the customs involved are clearly of long standing, the fact that the episode took place in 1601 does not diminish its significance in relation to festive comedy written in the previous decade.

The repugnance which the Earl of Lincoln could inspire can be suggested by the remarks of his son-in-law, Sir Arthur Georges, in a letter written to Sir Robert Cecil in 1600 when Lincoln was attempting to deprive his own daughter and Sir Arthur of an estate:

2. *Jack a Lent His Beginning and Entertainment: With the mad prankes of his Gentleman-Usher Shrove-Tuesday that goes before him, and his Footman hunger attending*. By John Taylor (London, 1630), p. 12, in *The Old Book Collector's Miscellany*, ed. Charles Hindley (London, 1872), Vol. II. There seems to have been a positive tradition of sacking bawdy houses on Shrove Tuesday—a festive way to give them up for Lent! One is reminded of Doll Tearsheet's indignant scorn of Pistol (*2 H.IV* II.iv.155): "You a captain? You slave, for what? For tearing a poor whore's ruff in a bawdy house?" See *Brand's Popular Antiquities*, ed. J. O. Halliwell (London, 1848), I, 89–90.

3. Cambridge, 1934. I am grateful to Harvard University Press for permission to use the very substantial excerpts which follow. I have modernized the spelling and punctuation of Mr. O'Conor's quotations from the records. In the rest of this chapter, references to his text are given by page numbers in parentheses after quotations. My few interpolations, as well as Mr. O'Conor's, are enclosed in parentheses.

> None can testify my careful zeal towards this ungrateful miser (better) than you, whom I have so often solicited with excusing his vices. The love I bore his daughter made me do so, and his cankered disposition requites me accordingly. . . . He has already brought my poor wife to her grave, as I fear, with his late most odious and unnatural despites that he has used towards her, the most obedient child of the world. His wickedness, misery, craft, repugnance to all humanity, and perfidious mind is not among the heathens to be matched. God bless me from him. To have his lands after his death, I would not be tied to observe him in his life.
>
> (pp. 98–99)

The council repeatedly intervened in attempts to persuade the Earl to do justice to his wife, his children, old retainers, and neighbors; at one point he had to be put in the Tower to compel the payment of a judgment against him. Sir Edward Dymoke and his Lady lived near the Earl's castle at Tattershall in Lincoln. That there was very bad blood between them appears from the fact that in 1595 Sir Edward complained to Cecil that he had at one point been "forced by his Lordship's molestations to break up my house and disperse my servants." Sir Edward's younger brother Talboys, who lived in the Dymoke household, was just the sort of free-wheeling wildhead to come into collision with the Earl. We catch a glimpse of him, through the Star Chamber testimony, stopping at the door of an alehouse kept by one William Hollingshead in Tattershall: "and at that time Anne (Hollingshead) brought forth drink to him and his company as they sat on horseback." "At which time with a loud voice," according to Hollingshead, he said "Commend me, sweetheart, to My Lord of Lincoln . . . and tell him that he is an ass and a fool. . . . Is he my uncle and hath no more wit?" Dymoke contended that he had spoken only "about a fortification which the Earl had made about his castle," saying only "What a foolish fortification is this! My Lord sayeth that I am a fool, but I would to God he had a little of my wit in the making

of it, for this is the most foolish thing that ever I saw" (pp. 109–110). By either version, Dymoke was a man who called his soul his own, aptly named Talboys.

In the summer of 1601, Talboys' summer games gave the Earl a chance to attack the Dymoke family by a bill of complaint to the Star Chamber. The bill emphasized the offense of lese majesty done to the Earl:

> Whereas your Royal Majesty in the whole course of your happy and flourishing reign . . . have ever had a gracious regard of the honour and estate of the nobility and peers of this your highness' realm, and men of more inferior condition to them have carried such respective and due observance to the nobles of this kingdom, as they have not once presumed to scandalize or deprave their persons and place by public frowns and reproaches, yet how so it is . . . one Talboys Dymoke, a common contriver and publisher of infamous pamphlets and libels, Roger Bayard of Kyme, in your highness' county of Lincoln, yeoman, Marmaduke Dickinson, John Cradock, the elder, and John Cradock, the younger, of Kyme . . . yeomen, and other their accomplices, intending as much as in them consisted to scandalize and dishonour your . . . subject (i.e. Lincoln) and to bring him into the frown and contempt of the vulgar people of his country, have of late, and since your majesty's last free and general pardon, by the direction, consent, or allowance of Sir Edward Dymoke of Kyme, . . . Knight, contrived, published, used, and acted, these disgraceful, false, and intolerable slanders, reproaches, scandalous words, libels, and irreligious profanations ensuing.
>
> (pp. 108–109)

The principal basis for the charges lay in two episodes of the summer games. The Earl first ran foul of Talboys Dymoke in the course of Sunday misrule of the kind that Stubbes described. Mr. O'Conor

has presented the encounter by quoting from testimony of both sides before the Star Chamber:

> The May day games at South Kyme, where some of the Dymoke family seem then to have been living, were carried on through most of the summer, and, on Sunday, July 25th or 26th, 1601, twelve or thirteen of those who had been taking part in the games went to the neighbouring village of Coningsby "to be merry . . . as Coningsby men had been with them a fortnight before." Among those who rode from South Kyme were: John Cradock, the younger; Richard Morrys, or Morris; Roger Bayard, and Talboys Dymoke; with John, or Henry, Cocke, of Swinstead; John Easton, of Billinghay; and John Patchett, "who were all present at Coningsby . . . and are retainers to Sir Edward Dymoke." Evidently they took with them a few of the theatrical properties used in the games, for "some of the company had reeds tied together like spears, with a painted paper off the tops of them, and one of them had a drum and another a flag." They "did march on horseback two and two together through the streets . . . to one Miles his house, who kept an alehouse" "and there lighting, set up their horses" and "dined."
>
> After dinner the company visited two or three other alehouses; Morris said he did not know how many, adding "he knoweth not certainly whether it were on the Sabbath day . . . but . . . he rather thinketh it was . . . because they were at Evening Prayer." There was indignant denial of their having declared that "they had drunk the town of Coningsby . . . dry"; however, in the afternoon they resumed their parade through the town. Besides the visitors' drum and flag, "Coningsby men had another drum and flag," so that they all must have been able to make a goodly amount of noise, which caused "a great number of people" to come outdoors for the purpose of "looking upon the company."

> While this display was taking place, and "at such time as they were marching homeward," "the Earl of Lincoln . . . had occasion of business to ride through a narrow lane" in Coningsby "through which he was to pass by or near the . . . company," who, according to Thomas Pigott, gentleman, one of his followers, "behaved themselves very rudely, with shoutings, noises . . . that some accompted them to be madmen." To these joyous villagers Pigott was sent "to entreat them to hold still their drums, flags and noise until the . . . Earl might quietly pass by them for scaring of his horse." John Cock, the drummer, said that he "did stay till the Earl was gone, and, after he was passed by, Mr. Talboys Dymoke and one Richard Hunt did call to him to strike up his drum." Edward Miles, the alehouse keeper, saw that "Mr. Pigott was cast down from his horse, but by what means he knoweth not, neither what hurt he had; but he did see him presently afoot again and come to his horse." With this statement the companions of Miles agreed, but Pigott himself declared that when he gave the Earl's message, "Talboys Dymoke, Richard Hunt, and some others . . . answered with great oaths that they had a Lord as good as he, and called the company and drums to them back again, and cried aloud, 'Strike up drums! Strike up drums!'"
>
> (pp. 110–112)

"They had a Lord as good as he" clearly refers to their Lord of Misrule. John Cradock, the younger, was "the Summer Lord of Kyme" (p. 117). He wore a piebald coat that went with the other insignia of misrule, for one of the Earl's retainers testified that he "did hear that there was very ill rule at Coningsby . . . and that young Cradock was there in a piebald coat, and that the (Earl) did there call . . . Cradock 'piebald knave'" (p. 116). Thus it appears that the real Lord was foolish enough to undertake to face down a mummery Lord. At any rate, the Earl's henchman Pigott tried to do so, and the fact that he was

a "heavy, corpulent man" must have been more grist for the merry-makers' mill. Pigott testified that:

> therewithal (Dymoke and Hunt) caused the drummers and flag bearers to run at (him) with their drums and flags, and the whole company after and amongst them in such violent sort, that his horse did fling and plunge, and the more he entreated them to be quiet, the more fierce and angry they were upon him and his horse, insomuch as his horse cast him . . . to the ground to his great bruising, hurt and damage, being a heavy corpulent man. And it had like to cost him his life; and he was forced to keep to his bed a good space after, and to take physic for the same . . . When he was helped up by one of his acquaintance that stood by . . . Hunt and some others cried "Strike him down! Knock him down!"
>
> (p. 112)

The antagonism which the revellers were expressing was active elsewhere at this same time on a practical plane. At nearby Horncastle, Sir Edward or his men made entry into the parsonage to claim "diverse duties" which according to the Earl belonged by right to him.

Then five weeks later, on the last Sunday in August, Talboys Dymoke "did frame and make a stage play to be played in for sport and merriment at the setting up of a Maypole in South Kyme" (p. 114). Neighbors were invited "to take part at some venison" at the house of John Cradock the elder, "yeoman, servant to" Sir Edward Dymoke, and in the afternoon they saw "an interlude" "hard by a Maypole standing upon the green."

> "Talboys Dymoke, being the then principal actor . . . , did first . . . counterfeit the person of (the Earl) and his speeches and gesture, and then and there termed and named . . . the Earl of Lincoln, his good uncle, in scornful manner, and as actor (he) then took upon him . . . representing (the Earl) fetched

> away by . . . Roger Bayard, who acted . . . the Devil. And . . . Roger Bayard in another part of the play did . . . represent . . . the part of the Fool, and the part of the Vice . . . and there acting the . . . part did declare his last will and testament and . . . did bequeath his wooden dagger to . . . the Earl of Lincoln, and his cockscomb and bauble unto all those that would not go to Horncastle with . . . Sir Edward Dymoke against him" . . . And in the interlude there was "a dirge sung by Talboys Dymoke . . . and other the . . . actors . . . wherein they expressed by name most of the known lewd and licentious women in the cities of London and Lincoln and town of Boston, concluding in their songs after every of their names, *ora pro nobis*."
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> (p. 115)

The defense of the Dymoke party was that the play was traditional, a part of the games, with no allusions to the Earl. Dymoke "of himself termed (it) the Death of the Lord of Kyme, because the same day should make an end of the summer lord game in South Kyme for that year" (p. 114). Dickinson testified that about "a fortnight before the day" Talboys Dymoke left at his house "a certain writing in English, some part whereof was in verse or rhymes, which (Dickinson) doth not now perfectly remember, with request that (he) would learn the same without book." But Dymoke insisted that he and the others were simply playing customary roles, explaining the remark about "his good uncle" as a reference to the summer lord of the next village. The author of the play testified that he

> "did represent and take upon him the title and term of Lord Pleasure . . . and did call the Lord of North Kyme (being another summer lord that year) my Uncle Prince," and he did not do this "in scornful manner." . . . Roger Bayard as the Fool "Did bequeath his wooden dagger to the Lord of North Kyme because he had the day before called the Lord of South Kyme piebald knave." Dickinson declared that Bayard spoke "these words in rhyme: . . .

> That Lord shall it have
> Which called the Lord of Kyme piebald knave,
>
> whereunto . . . Talboys answered, that same was his good uncle."

According to their testimony, it was not Dymoke playing the Earl that the Devil carried off, but John Cradock, the younger "(being before the Summer Lord of Kyme) and acting that part in the play," was "feigned to be poisoned and so carried forth" (p. 117).

There is not evidence to determine how commonly this sort of Death of the Summer Lord served as the finale of the season's games. It must have been fairly common, or Dymoke's group could not have relied for their defense on the traditional character of such a play. But the only other case I have run onto is Nashe's far more sophisticated *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. Certainly the particular formulae which Dymoke combined were thoroughly traditional. The Vice or clown was still being carried off the London stage by the Devil in the period when Shakespeare's first plays were appearing; the burlesque testament was also a hardy perennial. The dirge was an equally popular form for satiric burlesque; in the South Kyme performance it was combined with listing actual people by their names in what was sometimes called a "ragman's roll" (with perhaps the implication that the "known lewd women" would be appropriate mourners for the Lord of Kyme, having been close to him during his life).[4] To conclude the career of a mummery lord by a death and dirge, was, moreover, an obvious move for people familiar with accounts of notable deaths in the literature of the *Ars Moriendi*. Winter

4. Baskervill has a packed discussion of the ragman's roll in *Jig*, pp. 22–23: Udall used the term, which is associated with misrule, to translate *fescennina carmina* in the *Apophthegmes* of Erasmus; a fifteenth-century poem called Ragman Roll is "a series of satiric sketches of women which are represented as drawn by lot at the command of King Ragman Holly, obviously a Christmas festival leader presiding over the medieval game of fortune drawing."

reigns of Lords of Misrule might end with formal mourning: for example, the "Christmas Lord, or Prince of the Revels" whose rule after a lapse of thirty years was elaborately revived at St. John's, Oxford, in 1607, reigned through the winter until Shrove Tuesday, when "after a show called *Ira seu Tumulus Fortune*, the Prince was conducted to his private chamber in mourning procession" and there expired.[5] Jack a Lent was another such figure liable to feel Fortune's Wrath. Henry Machyn noted in his diary how on the 17th of March, 1553, in a magnificent London procession which included giants great and small, hobby-horses, "my lo(rd) late being lord of misrule," and the Devil and the Sultan, there came a priest "shreeving Jack of Lent on horseback, and a doctor his physician, and then Jack of Lent's wife brought him his physician and bad save his life, and he should a thousand pounds for his labour. . . ."[6] This was in the brief heyday which the reign of Edward VI granted to old-fashioned pageantry in London; but what the city elaborated on a splendid scale then, were holiday games which continued to be customary in humbler places. Also during Edward's reign, Bishop Gardiner complained that satirists had attacked the discipline of Lent by publishing "Jack of Lent's Testament." Somerset reassured him that "Lent remaineth still . . . although some light and lewd men do bury him in writing."[7] As we shall see in the next section, a satirist also "buried in writing" the Puritan "Jack," Martin Marprelate.

It is unfortunate for us that Dickinson did not repeat more than a scrap of the verses Talboys wrote for him—though no doubt it was wise for Dickinson to forget them. We do get a little of the actual language of a mock funeral sermon which Talboys added to the program. It was "an old idle speech which was made two or three years before," which John Cradock's father, the bailiff, was persuaded to

5. Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, I, 410. See the discussion of the death of Carnival, below, pp. 235 and 243.

6. *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, ed. J. G. Nichols (London, 1948), p. 33.

7. Baskervill, *Jig*, p. 47.

deliver on the spur of the moment, after the play was over. In the heavy language of the Earl's Bill of Complaint,

> John Cradock the elder . . . in frown of religion, and the profession thereof, being attired in a minister's gown and having a corner cap on his head, and a book in his hand opened, did . . . in a pulpit made for that purpose, deliver and utter a profane and irreligious prayer. . . .
>
> (p. 118)

The opening of the fustian prayer, which Cradock read out of a "paper book," went

> De profundis pro defunctis. Let us pray for our dear Lord that died this present day,
>
> > Now blessed be his body and his bones;
> > I hope his legs are hotter than gravestones,
> > And to that hope let's all conclude it then,
> > Both men and women pray, and say, 'Amen' . . .
>
> (p. 119)

Originally the sermon had been delivered "about Christmas," "in the presence of . . . Sir Edward and a number of gentlemen there assembled." This information was furnished by the testimony of a pious neighbor, Robert Hitchcock, who heard it from another neighbor, and who added, "all which manner of counterfeiting was by many godly ministers held to be very blasphemous" (p. 122). It seems likely that the sermon was originally spoken at the end of the rule of a Christmas prince. Another scrap of the sermon's language also suggests an indoor feast: "The mercy of Mustardseed and the blessing of Bullbeef and the peace of Potluck be with you all. Amen" (p. 120). In an age when everybody had to hear long sermons, the minister's hour-glass must often have been the focus of the congregation's

attention; it is easy to see why a crowd would enjoy seeing Sir Edward's bailiff wearing "a counterfeit beard, and, standing in a pulpit fixed to the Maypole on Kyme green, having . . . a pot of ale or beer hanging by him instead of an hourglass, whereof he . . . did drink at the concluding of any point or part of his speech" (p. 120). The speech was organized like a proper sermon, but its divisions were filled with merry morals, tales and local folklore.

> the said person did read a text which he said was taken out of the Heteroclites . . . viz., "Cesar Dando sublevando, ignoscendo gloriam adeptus est, and did English it thus: Bayard's Leap of Ancaster hath the bownder stone in Bollingsbrookes farm. I say the more knaves the honester men." And the . . . parson then divided his text into three parts, viz., the first, a colladacion (collation?) of the ancient plane of Ancaster Heath; the second, an ancient story of Mab as an appendix, and the third, concluding knaves honest men by an ancient story of The Friar and The Boy.
>
> (p. 120)

Though it is not possible to get the comic point of all this, it is clear that a main part of the fun for the audience lay in encountering familiar and unpretentious lore in a form where normally the matter would be religious or moral and require constraint. Mr. O'Conor found accounts of Bayard's Leap which described it as a lonely house on an old Roman road, the haunt of a witch, and also the place where four holes in the ground were left by the hooves of the magic horse, Bayard, in taking a prodigious leap. Other testimony in the Star Chamber records makes it clear that the Heteroclites—a surprisingly sophisticated word for "deviations from the standards"—was by another name the Book of Mab. There is of course no need to assume an influence from *Romeo and Juliet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; three witnesses take "the book of Mab" in stride, apparently using the phrase as a general name for the strange and fantastic among stories

and beliefs. The ancient story of the Friar and the Boy, on the other hand, was a particular narrative and has survived. It is the sort of merry tale that fits the holiday mood of rebuking niggardliness and, broadly, the proposition that knaves are honest men. The Boy triumphs over his begrudging Stepmother and her ally the Friar, thanks to the magic of a kind stranger with whom he shares his food; by the magic, it happens that whenever the Stepmother glares at the Boy, she involuntarily and thunderously breaks wind; moreover, whenever the Boy plays on a magic pipe, everybody, however malicious, has to dance—the Stepmother, the Judge to whom she appeals, and the Friar, who dances himself into a thorn bush.[8]

Mr. O'Conor points out that one further offense charged by the Earl concerned the posting of a bill of defiance by Talboys Dymoke:

> "At the time that the May-game sports were used in South Kyme" he "did make and write a rhyme" which he "did fix and nail upon the Maypole." These lines, in the allegorical fashion typical of the age, referred to the fact that the Earl "had purchased a messuage, and certain lands, in Kyme . . . of one Ambrose Marshe, Sir Edward Dymoke, and Talboys Dymoke," signifying by the ban dog (a dog chained to guard a house, or else because of his ferocity) the Earl, who had for his crest a white greyhound. According to Talboys Dymoke, the bull was "the cognizance of the town of Kyme . . . And . . . the Lord of the . . . May game John Cradock, the younger, did subscribe to the . . . rhyme with these words, 'Lord Cradock.' "
>
> (p. 122)

The elder Cradock's testimony gave "the bull" a more particular meaning as "the only device" of Talboys Dymoke. So the lines which follow, though written presumably by Talboys Dymoke, are addressed,

8. *The Frere and the Boye* ("printed at London in Fleet Street by Wynkyn de Worde, about the year 1512"), ed. Francis Jenkinson (Cambridge, Eng., 1907).

in the running fiction of the game, from the May-game Lord, Cradock, to his henchman or champion or champion-in-arms, Tom Bull Dymoke:

> The Bandog now, Tom Bull, comes to our town,
> And swears by Ambrose Marshe and much ado,
> To signorize, to seat, and sit him down:
> This marsh must marshall him and his whelps too.
> But let them heed Tom Bull, for, if they stir,
> I'll make it but a kennel for a cur.
>
> (p. 123)

Here, as elsewhere, the "summer lord game" permits Dymoke, clearly the moving spirit, to project his feelings towards the Earl into a dramatic fiction in which he and his feelings become only a part of the composition. The Earl's lawyers, concerned to demonstrate damage by individuals to an individual, insisted that the show was directed entirely at Lincoln. Actually, it is clear that the Earl was caught in a wheel of merriment which had been turning before he came along and which kept turning after he had been flung off. The fustian sermon had nothing to do with Lincoln; yet Talboys Dymoke came to Cradock's house after the play was over "and very much begged him to come unto the . . . green and there to deliver an old idle speech"—not to finish off the Earl, but to finish off the occasion, the whirling composition.

When in 1610 the Star Chamber handed down a judgment in Lincoln's favor, the consequences for the Dymoke family and their yeomen friends were drastic. Talboys himself had died by 1603, but the court provided that

> Roger Bayard, John Cradock, and Marmaduke Dickinson, being the chief actors, be committed to the Fleet, led through Westminster Hall with papers, and there to be set on the pillory, and afterwards to be whipped under the pillory; also to

> be set in the pillory at the assizes in Lincolnshire and acknowledge their offenses and ask God and the Earl forgiveness, and then to be whipped under the pillory, and to pay 300 pounds apiece fine, and be bound to good behavior before enlargement. That Sir Edward Dymoke, who was privy and consenting to the offenses . . . be committed to the Fleet during the King's pleasure and pay 1000 pounds fine.
>
> (p. 125)

The Dymoke party had pleaded that all was done "in a merriment at the time of the . . . May games" (p. 124). The humiliations and ruinous fines imposed show how little such a plea availed in the cold, sober, authoritarian atmosphere of the Council sitting as the Star Chamber. It may be, as Mr. O'Conor suggests, that the public tensions about religion which had developed in the interval between 1601 and 1610 worked to the detriment of the Dymokes; the court's judgment stressed the outrage done religion by Cradock's sermon.

But the same sort of discontinuity was present I think throughout the reign of Elizabeth, between what would be tolerated in the festive liberties of settled local groups who did not need to fear mirth, and what would be made of these same liberties if they came to be brought before the highly moral royal council or before a court. The official world, highly conscious of the disruptive potentialities of innovation, assumed that a constant vigilance was needed to cope with things done "in frown of religion" and in contempt of "respective and due observance of the nobles." Incongruities between the official and the informal are always present, of course; but they were made more marked in Elizabethan times by the difference between tradition-directed local communities, which could accommodate holiday licence, and the centers of change and growth, which were anxiously involved in innovating and resisting innovation. Early in Elizabeth's reign an episode is recorded which makes clear how, where innovation is a possibility, saturnalian inversion becomes suspect. In 1564, a group of ardently Protestant Cambridge men, disappointed in their

hope of performing a piece before Elizabeth as part of the festivities of her Cambridge visit, followed her to Hinchinbrook, and secured her permission to present their satire after all:

> The actors came in dressed as some of the imprisoned Catholic Bishops. First came the Bishop of London (i.e. Bonner) carrying a lamb in his hands as if he were eating it as he walked along, and then others with different devices, one being in the figure of a dog with the Host in his mouth.[9]

Elizabeth was outraged by this burlesque of the Mass, and abruptly quitted the chamber, taking the torchbearers with her and leaving the would-be satirists in the dark. They had tried a kind of game which had been tolerated in feasts of fools before the status of the Mass became an issue, in the days when a reduction of the ceremony to the physical could only be read as the expression of a saturnalian mood. But in 1564 their burlesque was a taking advantage of holiday to advocate doctrinal revision at issue in everyday controversy. Elizabeth had sanctioned for the first masque of her reign, on Twelfth Night, 1559, a masquerade of crows, asses, and wolves as cardinals, bishops, and abbots.[10] But 1559 was, within limits, a revolutionary moment, and saturnalia, within limits, could serve it. Thereafter, as Elizabeth's response at Hinchinbrook testifies, the precarious religious settlement made religion an area where the authorities were particularly vigilant to exclude temporary, festive revolutions for fear that they might lead on to permanent revolutionary consequences.

The May Game of Martin Marprelate

It is beyond my scope here to try to do justice, even in summary, to the way the holiday games contributed to the popular comedy of jig,

9. Baskervill, p. 51; see also Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, I, 128.
10. *Elizabethan Stage*, I, 155.

interlude, clown's recitation, and flyting. As Baskervill's work shows almost poignantly, the evidence of this sort of influence is extraordinarily widespread—and tantalizing cryptic. To look briefly at the use of May-game motifs in the Martin Marprelate controversy, however, can serve to provide a sort of spot sample of the relation of the stage to holiday at the formative period of the drama, the end of the decade of the 1580's. As Dover Wilson has remarked, the gifted Puritan satirist who masqueraded as Martin Marprelate used a humorous style which was "that of the stage monologue . . . , with asides to the audience and a variety of 'patter' in the form of puns, ejaculations and references to current events and persons of popular rumor."[11] Francis Bacon, writing in the year of the controversy, deplored "this immodest and deformed manner of writing lately entertained, whereby matters of religion are handled in the style of the stage."[12] Martin's huff-snuff tone was taken up by his opponents. Like much of the other satire of the period, the Martinist and anti-Martinist pamphlets show a curious mingling of buffoonery and invective, of relish for the opponent with scorn, which goes with the satirist's playing the fool to make a fool of his antagonist. The likeness of this tone to a Lord of Misrule's vaunting and abuse is suggested by several passages alluding to the games. Thus Pasquill of England swaggers on to a title page to challenge Martin Junior like one Summer Lord challenging another:

> A countercuff given to Martin Junior, by the venturous, hardy, and renowned Pasquill of England, Cavaliero. Not of old Martin's making, which newly knighted the Saints in Heaven with rise up Sir Peter and Sir Paul; but lately dubbed for his service at home in the defense of his country, and for the clean breaking of his staff upon Martin's face.[13]

11. *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (New York, 1933), III, 436.
12. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 229 and also I, 294.
13. McKerrow, *Nashe*, I, 57.

The knighting of boon companions was a tavern game in which "Rise up, Sir Robert Tosspot" was a formula; here Martin is pictured as a Lord of Misrule who presumes to dub the very saints in heaven cavalieros in his retinue. Elsewhere Pasquill asks his friend Marforius to "set up . . . at London stone" a bill, called "Pasquill's Protestation," enlisting aid against Martin: "Let it be done solemnly with drum and trumpet, and look you advance my colors on the top of the steeple right over against it."[14] This is a procedure like Lord Cradock's defiant rhyme on the Maypole at South Kyme. Opponents are sometimes spoken of—or to—as though they were a Vice or clown, or other stock figure of the stage or the games:

> Now Tarleton's dead, the consort lacks a vice:
> For knave and fool thou may'st bear prick and price.[15]

The actors did in fact take the opportunity to put Martin on the stage, probably as the subject for jigs or other brief afterpieces.

> The anatomy lately taken of him, the blood and the humours that were taken from him, by lancing and worming him at London upon the common stage . . . are evident tokens that, being thorough soused with so many showers, he had no other refuge but to run into a hole and die as he lived, belching.[16]

This dramatization of Martin's illness was referred to also in another pamphlet, which observed that Martin "took it very grievously, to

14. "The Returne of the Renowned Cavaliere Pasquil," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (London, 1883–84), I, 135–136.

15. Quoted by Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 229, from *A Whip for an Ape: Or Martin Displaied*. Chambers reprints many relevant excerpts in "Documents of Criticism," IV, 229–233; it was in reading this collection that I was first struck with the prominence of holiday motifs in the controversy.

16. *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 231, from *A Countercuffe given to Martin Junior: . . . by Pasquill of England*, in McKerrow, *Nashe*, I, 59.

be made a May game upon the stage," specifying "The Theater."[17] A satirical excursion, called "A true report of the death and burial of Martin Marprelate," amounts to a description of a playlet in which Martin is put through stages included in Dymoke's "Death of the Lord of Kyme" and Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. Martin grows sick, with allegorically appropriate ills; he gives repentant advice to his sons, in a burlesque in the manner of men dying in the *Ars Moriendi* literature; he makes his testament, including the bequest of "all his foolery" to the player Lanam; he dies, is allegorically anatomized, buried in a dunghill, and honored with a collection of mock epitaphs and a jingling Latin dirge.[18]

The phrase "to make a May game" of somebody implies that one need only bring an antagonist into the field of force of May games to make him ridiculous. A pamphlet promises its readers a "new work" entitled *The May game of Martinism* and gives a preview which is worth quoting in full as an example of the practice of mocking individuals by identifying them with traditional holiday roles. Various prominent Puritans, along with Martin, are put in the game:

> Penry the Welshman is the forgallant of the Morris, with the treble bells, shot through the wit with a Woodcock's bill. I would not for the fairest hornbeast in all his country, that the Church of England were a cup of Metheglin, and came in his way when he is over-heated! Every bishopric would prove but a draught, when the mazer is at his nose. Martin himself is the Maid Marian, trimly dressed up in a cast gown, and a kercher of Dame Lawson's, his face handsomely muffled with a diaper-napkin to cover his beard, and a great nosegay in his hand, of the principalest flowers I could gather out of all his works.

17. *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 230, from *Martins Months Minde* in Grosart, *Nashe*, I, 175.
18. In *Martins Months Minde* (1589), reprinted in Grosart, *Nashe*, I, 168–205. Bishop Bonner was satirized by a similar burlesque *Commemoration* described by Baskervill (*Jig*, p. 51) as "in the vein of burlesques designed for feasts of misrule."

> Wiggenton dances round about him in a cotton coat, to court him with a leathern pudding and a wooden ladle. Pagit marshalleth the way, with a couple of great clubs, one in his foot, another in his head; and he cries to the people with a loud voice, "Beware of the man whom God hath marked." I cannot yet find any so fit to come lagging behind, with a budget on his neck, to gather the devotion of the lookers on, as the stockkeeper of the Bridewell-house of Canterbury; he must carry the purse, to defray their charges, and then he may be sure to serve himself.[19]

The vivid description of such business as the wooing of a bearded Maid Marian suggests how, quite apart from any ridicule of persons, the performers would farce their roles just for the fun of it. To make such farce into satire of a sort, or more properly, into festive abuse, Nashe or whoever wrote the pamphlet needed only to add proper names and a few scurrilous allusions like the reference to Pagit's club foot.

It is striking that the May game of Martin is promised as a show rather than a pamphlet, "very deftly set out, with pomps, pageants, motions, masks, scutchions, emblems, impresses, strange tricks, and devices, between the Ape and the Owl, the like was never yet seen in Paris Garden." Stage and holiday were thus close enough together to admit the envisaging of a show, fairly similar in character to the Morris dance and marching of a summer lord game, as an entertainment to rival those of the Bear Garden. Stage satire and holiday abuse are spoken of in one breath by Gabriel Harvey when, taking his cue from the notion of a May game of Martinism, he heaps scorn on the unworthiness of the spokesmen by whom the established church has answered Martin's attacks:

19. *The Returne of the renouned Cavaliero Pasquil of England* (1589) in McKerrow, *Nashe*, I, 83. Also printed in *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 231.

> Had I been Martin . . . it should have been one of my May-games, or August triumphs, to have driven Officials, Commissaries, Archdeacons, Deans, Chancellors, Suffragans, Bishops and Archbishops (so Martin would have flourished at the least) to entertain such an odd, light-headed fellow for their defense: a professed jester, a Hickscorner, a scoff-master, a playmonger, an interluder. . . .[20]

Here Martin is set up explicitly as a summer lord; he defies his enemies with a "flourish"; reference to his "August triumphs" suggests Talboys' sort of Sunday marching. Harvey is saying that the bishops have descended to Martin's level, but, significantly, he doesn't put it that way; instead he says that they have entered Martin's May game. They do so by having recourse to a May-game sort of fellow, a professed jester, a scoffmaster, a playmonger. Foolery and comedy are equivalent: "I am threatened with a bauble, and Martin menaced with a comedy," Harvey writes, and goes on to describe ironically a reign of terror by those "that have the stage a commandment, and can furnish-out Vices, and Devils at their pleasure."[21]

The stage satire of Martin is referred to as *Vetus Comoedia* in the same Pasquill pamphlet which describes the May game of Martinism:

> Methought *Vetus Comoedia* began to prick him at London in the right vein, when she brought forth Divinity with a scratched face, holding her heart as if she were sick, because Martin would have forced her, but missing of his purpose, he left the print of his nails upon her cheeks, and poisoned her with a vomit which he ministered unto her, to make her cast up her dignities and promotions. . . .[22]

20. *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 232, from G. Harvey, *An Advertisement for Papp-Hatchett*.
21. *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 233.
22. *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 232.

Vetus Comoedia certainly was an apt term for the theater's way of making a May game of Martin. Such a rough and ready symbolic figure as Divinity is comparable to, say, Aristophanes' Peace; while Martin, when he played opposite to Divinity and tried to force her, must have been a manic sort of clown similar to, say, the Sausage Seller in the *Knights*. Aristophanes' use of traditional formulae or scenarios, such as the *alazons'* interrupting the feast and being thrown out by the *eiron* hero, is similar to the use of the device of carrying Martin off on the Devil's back. To enact physically a phrase normally used figuratively, like "cast up" dignities, is thoroughly Aristophanic, as is also the connecting of several such fancies into an allegorical plot which is grossly physical in execution. A connection of the Old Comedy sort of mockery with country merriments is suggested near the end of the Anti-Martinist dialogue, when Pasquill asks "But who cometh yonder, Marforius, can you tell me?" and Marforius sees *Vetus Comoedia* coming with a garland, apparently dancing:

> *Marforius*. By her gait and her garland I know her well, it is *Vetus Comoedia*. She hath been so long in the country, that she is somewhat altered. This is she that called in a council of physicians about Martin, and found by the sharpness of his humour, when they had opened the vein that feeds his head, that he would spit out his lungs within one year. . . .
>
> *Pasquill*. I have a tale to tell her in her ear, of the sly practice that was used in restraining of her.[23]

The remark that "she hath been so long in the country" seems to imply that the sort of drastic *ad hominem* ridicule practiced on Martin had come to be confined to the frank country world, the world of Talboys Dymoke. After a summer of manhandling Martin, the players had been brought up short by the authorities, as Pasquill was going "to tell her in her ear." Lyly in a pamphlet complained that if

23. *Ibid.*

"these comedies might be allowed to be played that are penned, . . . (Martin) would be deciphered."[24] But instead of welcoming the players' help against the government's Puritan opponent, the Master of the Revels arranged for Burghley to permit the stage's enemy, the Lord Mayor, to prohibit all theatrical exhibitions. And shortly afterwards the Privy Council directed that the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Mayor appoint representatives to work with the Master of the Revels in passing on the books of plays and striking out or correcting "such parts or matters as they shall find unfit and undecent to be handled in plays, both for Divinity and State."[25] Here again the Aristophanic impulse, when directly expressed, ran head on into official prohibition. To find expression, saturnalia had to shift from symbolic *action* towards *symbolic* action, from abuse directed from the stage at the world to abuse directed by one stage figure at another.

24. *Ibid*.

25. *Elizabethan Stage*, I, 295. Chambers handles the dramatic part of the Marprelate controversy as an episode in "The Struggles of Court and City." McKerrow's account is in his *Nashe*, IV, 44. Baskervill relates the pamphleteers' descriptions of stage satires to other similar shows in *Jig*, pp. 50–55.