PART FOUR

Achievement and Synthesis
There is good evidence that Shakespeare wrote Measure for Measure and Othello in the same year, 1604, and the two plays do indeed have some similarities in their patterns of self-knowledge. In both, man's lack of self-knowledge is one of the central issues. Angelo creates the illusion that he is a man of rectitude and attempts to live with it; Othello accepts the absolute lie that Desdemona is unfaithful that is pressed upon him by Iago. Both heroes change from men of signal self-control into slaves of passion. Yet these similarities are slight in comparison to the differences. In Othello, the indirect strategy of psychological development we noted in Measure for Measure has given way to a direct one; the Moor is a fascinating but not a puzzling character, and the play is one of the most simple, lucid, and direct of Shakespeare's. This is not merely due to a difference of genre, a shift from comedy or tragicomedy to tragedy, for even if Hamlet, which anticipates Othello by only two or three years, becomes the medium of comparison, the contrast remains. The dramatic hesitations and perplexities Shakespeare built into the plays of his mannerist period have given way in Othello to an energetic artistic affirmation, one that persists in the great tragedies and romances that were to follow.

Not that Shakespeare returned to the simpler patterns of his earlier, "Renaissance" period. The moral field of action of Shakespeare's later tragic and romantic heroes is wider than that of the earlier ones, and they move more dynamically in it. Ethically, Othello is, in the beginning, somewhere near the angelic Desdemona, but he turns from good to evil under the influence of the diabolic persuasion of Iago. In Lear, good and evil characters are even more strongly contrasted. The old king is somewhere in the middle ground between them; in his terrifying outbreak, however, he surrenders
himself to evil, and it takes a tremendous expiatory suffering for him to realize the falsity of those he believed good and the goodness of those he believed evil. Macbeth opts from the beginning for the evil world symbolized by the witches (and I shall argue that he does not do so by way of a basic change in character); but his soul is so strongly and progressively subjected to evil as to undergo also a dynamic movement.

If the heroes of Shakespeare's later tragedies have a dynamic ethical development, we cannot be in doubt about its direction, and we can be sure about their orientation at any point of the action. In the plays of Shakespeare's mannerist period, the question of who and what is good is often posed but generally not definitely answered; now it does not even arise because the moral positions are more certain from the beginning. We debate how to place Hamlet, Troilus, and Angelo morally, but we know that Iago is evil and that Othello, good at the beginning, becomes evil, and we know just when this transformation occurs. And we have no questions about Desdemona's moral fiber, whereas we are puzzled about Ophelia, Gertrude, and Isabella. This ethical placement is a major reason for our feeling that Shakespeare's plays from Othello on—experiments and partial failures like Timon of Athens, Pericles, and Cymbeline excluded—have greater clarity and unity.

This unity is dynamic, comprising contrast and diversity and deriving primarily from the opposition and interplay of gigantic forces of good and evil, or will and passion. Othello here provides the best demonstration. Coleridge expressed the general feeling that this tragedy has a conspicuous dramatic unity when he said that in it everything assumes its due place and proportion and the mature powers of Shakespeare's mind are displayed in admirable equilibrium. This, however, is a different balance from the one achieved in some pre-Hamletian plays, as is evident from a comparison of Othello with Henry V, the model of a symmetrically balanced play in Shakespeare's Renaissance period. The balance of Othello is dynamic; it derives not from a static view of an ideal hero but from the interaction of polar forces of evil and good, passion and patience, hate and love. The play pairs and antithesizes the most cold-blooded of Shakespeare's villains with a strong and warm-hearted hero. It also contrasts this most evil of villains with the one among Shakespeare's heroines most actively intent on doing good. Once the stage is set, the force of evil attacks with purposive speed and awakens
in the seemingly self-assured Othello a dormant passion that tears him apart in a conflict of love and hate. Othello's passion explodes, most manifestly, in an epileptic fit and, most painfully, in the murder of the woman he deeply loves. Simultaneously, the force of evil, working through an Othello transformed into a slave of jealousy, turns Desdemona from a self-assured Venetian lady into a frightened and confused little girl who, without understanding the reason, becomes her husband's victim. All the contrasting dynamic forces are integrated into a unified dramatic structure unequaled in Shakespeare until The Tempest, the last of the romances.

I shall show in greater detail in the next chapter that the foregoing brief analysis of Othello describes accurately the essence of the play. I have given this account here because I believe it exposes a formula of dramatic construction that elucidates the patterns of self-knowledge in the plays I shall subsequently discuss. Each of these achieves or comes close to achieving a dynamic unity on the basis of the formula, modified and varied to suit the particular action. This is not to deny that each play has its unique human, social, or political concerns; but if one interprets it from the central dynamic placement of its hero, a similarity to the Othello formula emerges. The tragic heroes, and at least Leontes and Prospero among those of the romances, are greater than life-size; they are endowed with mighty wills and potentially violent passions that erupt as a consequence of the powerful evil that is at work from the outside or inside and destroys or threatens to destroy them. All these men are in the center of a general conflict of good and evil forces that draws into a vortex the innocent and guilty until the heroes die or, in the romances, until they are released from suffering and passion. Thus, in a sense, the plays ratify the humanists' warnings against evil and passion, but they also demonstrate humanity's dignity and greatness in its extraordinary capacity for suffering. The heightened selves of Shakespeare's later heroes are constructed on the paradox that what destroys or nearly destroys them also makes them great.

It should be said that the Othello formula, as I have called it, is not used in two later tragedies, Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus. Although the heroes of both have mighty wills and passions, these are not triggered by conspicuous forces of evil. Nor is the theme of lack of self-knowledge as prominent in them as in Othello, Lear, and Macbeth; it is transcended by other concerns, the conflict of love and power in Antony and Cleopatra and the rival demands of
pride and patriotism in Coriolanus. In a discussion of the dynamics of will and passion in Shakespeare, these two plays would be prominent, but in the present study, they do not urgently demand treatment.²

Because the principle of the dynamism of will and passion affects all patterns of self-knowledge in Shakespeare's later plays, we may recall how much it reflects prominent political, spiritual, intellectual, and artistic concerns of the dawning baroque age, an age that celebrated and practiced power and was at the same time fascinated with intense feelings and states of mind.² Absolute monarchs and their statesmen craved and achieved authority and adorned it with ceremonies and displays of luxury. In their desire to dominate their subjects politically, the princes and their councilors were rivaled by the eagerness of both Catholics and Protestants to dominate their believers spiritually, and neither the efforts of the monarchs nor those of the religious leaders were restricted to their respective political and religious spheres. Because there was a growing and justified conviction among the intellectuals that these were trying times, philosophers and moralists of various persuasions sought no less arduously than the theologians to arm men for the battle of life, particularly by giving rules on how to strengthen their wills and to direct and, if necessary, to break the wills of others. Bacon combined this theoretical interest with a statesman's practical aim of political domination. He went beyond these ethical and political concerns to outline a system through which man would find it possible to subject and control nature.

An energy similar to that which made Bacon turn outward to nature made itself felt in the turning inward in religious thought and expression, in the mysticism and the mystical poetry that flowered in the seventeenth century. Baroque painting and sculpture translated this interest in the dynamics of feelings into works aflame with emotions. These strike us often as excessive, but they give a unity of movement to the total design. Bernini's Saint Theresa appears the victim of a religious transfiguration hardly distinguishable from an erotic rapture, and she is aquiver with a synchronized emotion equally apparent in the expression of her face and the tremor of her gown. And what was true for religious art also held good for secular painting, sculpture, and architecture. The baroque, as art historians have described it, was both more emotional and more unified than the preceding styles. It overcame the mannerist uncer-
tainties by dynamic certainties. It worked with great masses of stone or color in motion, masses that were controlled and subordinated to the total design. It is true that the English plastic arts had no real equivalent for this exuberant baroque, be it because of the restraining influence of Puritanism or because of the relative lack of patronage at the English court. But English poetry and drama of the early seventeenth century show evidence of a tendency analogous to that of continental art to intensify will and passion and make them central to a baroque unity of composition.

To ascribe the greater force and unity of Shakespeare's later tragedies to the baroque style is not to question that their artistic success was, first of all, due to his mature mastership of all stylistic and dramatic means. But these means and the strong integrative impulse with which he used them owed something, I would say a great deal, to artistic and cultural tendencies of the age. I have noted in an earlier part of this book that the concept of self-knowledge underwent considerable modifications and shifts in emphasis because of certain counter-humanistic tendencies. It is true that these originated before the seventeenth century, but they reached their full strength and had their greatest impact at this time. All shared a particular interest in the working of the will and, for the most part, of the passions, the two structural elements of the Othello formula. Even if Shakespeare was not attracted to any one of these political, religious, and philosophical movements and doctrines, he could not have escaped the aggregate of their influence, which promoted an interest in what one might call personality dynamics. The dialectics of ideas in Shakespeare's later plays, I believe, clearly shows that he was influenced.

One such influence, pervasive but difficult to pinpoint, was that of aristocratic tastes. Under absolutism, the expansive self of the courtier was becoming the inflated self of the royalist cavalier. This development tended to create two separate ethical standards, a religious-moral one for common men and a glorified antihumanistic one for aristocrats. For instance, Tommaso Buoni in The Problems of Beauty and All Human Affections (translated in 1606) extolled the superior constancy of great men in love and even explained as natural their greater talent for hatred and condoned it: princes "are endowed with a knowledge more than human" and therefore have greater insight into wickedness and conceive greater hatred against it; altogether, in noble men, who have "natures more divine, the
affections, making deeper impressions, are of greater force.” Aristocratic tastes gained greater influence on drama as the interest of the court increased—as is evident in the much larger number of dramatic performances at court—and as the middle class began to desert the theaters that the Puritanical preachers condemned in toto as sinful. Aristocratic tastes were surely influential in promoting the popularity of the great-souled hero with superhuman will and passion, although a shoemaker’s son from Canterbury had started the fashion and the learned and abstruse Chapman brought it to a culmination.

Will power was not cultivated only in aristocratic circles; it became not merely an attribute of status but also a requirement for economic aspiration. This is a subject even more impervious to literary analysis, and there is no space here to discuss economics. We may merely recall that, in the seventeenth century, England participated in a European economic crisis due to universal restructuring of society. The crisis indeed had been brewing in the sixteenth century, but only now did it lead to a recognizable conflict of economic classes. The possessive and increasingly wealthy bourgeoisie began to feel its strength and its economic superiority over the financially debilitated nobility in the capitalistic-absolutistic order. The practical and acquisitive self of the bourgeoisie came into conflict with the courtly and inflated self of the aristocrat, who, in fact, was becoming economically dependent on the bourgeoisie. Shakespeare was sensitive to the trend toward acquisitiveness and its effect on morality; as William Elton has noted, King Lear and Timon of Athens condemningly explore “with more specific monetary allusions than usual in Shakespeare, the new acquisitive impulse.” Elton sees a connection between the rejection of ethical absolutes and natural law by a character like Edmund in Lear and the self-assertion of those who felt that they were the class who, because of its drive and freedom from conventional restrictions, had the right to rule.

We must take into consideration still another class, one that had no chance of exerting its will actively but was attracting more attention: the poor. Except for some preachers and a few satirists, the poor had no advocates in the sixteenth century, and even these generally did not diagnose poverty as the result of economic conditions but as due to misfortune or man’s sinfulness (that of the poor as well as the rich). But now there were occasional attempts to see
the world from the perspective of the poor. One of these was a two-part poem, *The Poor Man's Passions and Poverty's Patience*, by Arthur Warren (1605), written, according to the author, in prison (evidently a debtor's prison) as a kind of *nosce teipsum* poem for the poor. It paints a somber, unjust, upside-down, and degenerating world in which the poor can live only by adopting an extraordinary patience. This solution, to which the whole second part of the book is devoted, draws on conventional Christian and Stoic remedies. One of the consolations—"So low I am, lower I cannot fall"—is shown as the fallacy that it is by Edgar in *Lear* (IV.i.26). What makes Warren's poetic pamphlet almost a manifesto of class pride is his acclaim of the superiority of the life of the poor, their primitive, simple, wholesome life, as compared with the luxurious, ostentatious, wasteful, and diseased life of the rich. Even if the elements of this contrast can be found in earlier literature, the author's angle of vision, tone, and emphasis gives them a certain novelty and conviction. There is here an urgency in the call for justice based on charity that can also be felt in *Lear*.

More open to literary analysis than the role of the economic and social conditions in creating an increased interest in the working and the use of the human will is the influence of the major religious and intellectual movements. Of course, there was a connection between these movements and the economic upheavals; if we believe the Marxists, the former caused the latter. But reverse relationships have also been pointed out, such as the function of Calvinism in promoting capitalism. Even if we restrict ourselves to considering the ideological core of these movements, we shall see a fascination with will power, a fascination that transcended individual creeds and philosophies. In religion, it was fostered by the religious crisis. As the warfare of the Christian on earth became largely internecine, both parties, the Protestants as well as the Roman Catholics, sought to stiffen the determination of their followers. There was, of course, nothing new in the interest in the will as such. Medieval and Renaissance theologians saw it as the human faculty that subjected man to sin and yet was a significant instrument in bringing about his salvation. The Christian humanists restated this balanced account of the failure and the achievement of the will, and their position later became Anglican doctrine. As Richard Hooker pointed out in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Bk. I, Chap. vii), man sinned because
he willed to sin; but his will also enabled him to make the right choices between good and evil if it followed the guidance of the understanding in adjusting itself to the divine order.

The two major theological movements that competed with Anglicanism in England, Roman Catholicism and Calvinism, gave still greater emphasis to the role of the will in man's conduct on earth and stressed his need for discipline. For the Roman Catholics, convinced as much as the Anglicans of the freedom of the will, this emphasis grew out of the aims and needs of the Counter-Reformation. Its main instrument, the Jesuit order, had been founded on the idea of gaining and retaining control over souls through a brotherhood trained in soldierly discipline. Naturally, they incurred much hostility. "Their holy exercise," said an English clergyman, was "but a mere Machiavellian device of policy only to make strong themselves in their busy preparations for a spiritual monarchy." 10

It is surely obvious that the English recusants were in need of bolstering their confidence in some more than ordinary way. It is not surprising that exhortations to constancy, firmness, application, resolution, and fortitude are recurrent notes in the popular little book of doctrine that the Jesuit Robert Parsons published for his fellow Catholics in England under the title of The First Book of Christian Exercise (1582). But it is astonishing that this book, later called The Christian Directory, was republished, in only slightly adapted form, by Anglican divines far into the seventeenth century. Parsons's call for an energetic religion evidently found response and echo in the Protestant camp.

The greater outward belligerence in religion was accompanied by a turning inward for renewed strength. The plentiful descriptions of the evil, degenerating world—in particular, of that new Jerusalem, London, with its fashions, vices, and sins—and the threats of an impending doom were intended to keep the faithful on the right path as much as to deter the wicked. In the new literature of exhortation and consolation, the believers were asked to despise the allurements of this world as much as they had been in the old contemptus mundi. For the writers of such tracts, self-knowledge meant primarily a realization of the world's evils, a repentance of sin, and a recognition of the need for patience. As the Spanish Jesuit Diego de Estella said in his De Contemptu Mundi, which was twice translated in Elizabethan times, once for the benefit of Roman Catholics at Douay and once by the Protestant clergyman Thomas Rogers: "Therefore, if
thou seek to know thyself, it will cause thee neither to be proud nor ambitious nor disdainful; it will make thee bear injuries with a quiet mind in as much as thou shalt find thyself to be a miserable sinner, and worthy of all men to be hated and condemned." This is exactly the kind of self-knowledge so painfully acquired by Cardinal Wolsey in Shakespeare's last play, Henry VIII. After his fall, Wolsey renounces his pride and ambition and, in his famous farewell, says, "I know myself now"; and he feels in himself "A peace above all earthly dignities, / A still and quiet conscience" (III.ii. 350 ff.). Not even so conspicuous a consumer of contemptus mundi as Shakespeare's Richard II espouses more strongly than Wolsey the concept of self-knowledge of this old tradition. In Lear and other later dramas, similar moral patterns occur that stress the danger of pride, the need for patience, and the connection between self-knowledge and the voice of conscience. An apocalyptic mood imbues parts of Othello, Lear, Timon of Athens, and Macbeth; and the romances have such strong religious strains as to have tempted many critics to interpretations in terms of Christian allegory. In some ways, the universes of these plays take on the coloring of the morality of the characters in them, as is true for the romantic and treacherous world of the Mediterranean in Othello and the usuring, decaying Athens that "wears as it grows" in Timon (I.i.3); but this connection—and it is often a problematic one—cannot console the characters about the existence of a benevolent purpose in the world. They must rely altogether on their own resources.

This greater inwardness of the later patterns of self-knowledge in Shakespeare's plays, fideistic as it is in a general way, does not allow us to claim Shakespeare's adherence to any particular creed. If the Roman Catholics assessed the human situation pessimistically and derived from this pessimism the need for a stronger faith, so did the Calvinists, whose number and assertiveness were increasing. Self-knowledge meant for Calvin primarily a recognition of man's fallen nature and a submission of the human will to the will of God. For Calvin, the role of the will was most crucial in drawing man to sin, for it did not have the understanding as its guide, as it did for the Christian humanists; the whole mind, understanding and will, of unregenerated man was for him corrupt, and in fact, mind was merely flesh in the biblical sense. Yet this corruption did not relieve man of his responsibility for his actions; his will was "voluntary" even though God was assumed to foresee and preordain its choices.
A paradox like Calvin’s of basing a voluntaristic ethics on a providential metaphysics is, of course, common to deterministic theologies and philosophies, which are always interested in attracting believers to their system of determinism. Calvin’s way out of the paradox of determinism and free will was to say that the will of man that obeyed God fulfilled necessity, but that the will of man opposing Him was responsible for its disobedience.

Of greatest interest in Calvin’s theology for our present subject was his disparagement of the understanding and his elevation of the will to the role of guide for man’s actions. Calvin brought the will in much closer conjunction with the passions than did the Christian humanists, for whom, according to the medieval faculty psychology they continued, it was the active part of the rational soul; man’s successful life on earth depended on making the will serve the understanding in controlling the appetites, which belonged to the sensitive soul and thus were clearly segregated from reason. In Calvin’s psychology, however, the will of unregenerated man was to all intents and purposes identical with the passions. And yet, paradoxically, this will was the human faculty most necessary for salvation.

In making little distinction between the will and the passions and in attributing to them greater significance in human conduct, Calvinism was paralleled by various current philosophical directions. The skeptics, whose affinity to fideism has been noted earlier, thought of reason as little as did Calvin. They decried the Christian humanists’ trust in the ability of reason to keep the appetites under control, a trust founded on the Socratic equation of truth and virtue. By showing that the understanding was too weak to discern the truth and the will was too fickle to stick to what reason posited as a goal, the skeptics described man as a being motivated largely by nonrational factors. They attributed greater force to the will than to the understanding, basing their theory of ethical conduct on the former rather than on the latter. Self-knowledge thus became more closely associated with what man wants than with what he knows. As Charron said, “A man is neither good nor wicked, honest nor dishonest, because he understandeth and knoweth those things that are good, and fair, and honest, and, honest, or wicked and dishonest; but because he loveth them and hath desire and will towards them.”

Although the only partly skeptical Francis Bacon was generally confident in the ability of reason, freed from errors, to find the way to truth, he described the influence of passion and will on the under-
standing in terms very similar to those of the skeptics. In pointing out the "errors of the tribe," that is, mistakes of judgment due to the general human condition, he noted that reason cannot be tightly separated from the will and from the emotions; man often thinks that to be true which he wishes: "The human understanding ressembleth not a dry light, but admits a tincture of the will and passions, which generate their own systems accordingly; for man always believes more readily that which he prefers . . . in short, the feelings imbue and corrupt his understanding in innumerable and sometimes imperceptible ways." 18

Shakespeare's later villains and heroes exemplify the truth of Bacon's principle although, of course, they do so through their actions and the explanations they give for them rather than through philosophic inquiry. When they appeal to reason or believe to found their behavior on it, they often express only the dictates of their will. When Iago proclaims that "we have reason to cool our raging motions," he means that man by his will can control the direction of his desires. Iago appears so cool and rational that it is easy to forget that he is perverted and impelled by a destructive hatred that has corrupted his mind. Sometimes, when self-knowledge becomes a possibility for Shakespeare's later heroes, it remains a rational consideration powerless to combat the forces of will and passion that have infiltrated the understanding and pull it in the direction of what they prefer. Although Macbeth is at the threshold of self-knowledge, he refuses to act on its prompting because his will drives him to seek a knowledge of evil that promises power and domination. And even though Antony at one point realizes the effect of his abandonment to pleasure and publicly admits that "poisoned hours had bound me up / From mine own knowledge" (II.ii.93-94), this rational consideration does not help him to resist the magnetic attraction of Cleopatra. In the very next scene after this admission of having lacked in self-knowledge, he suddenly announces: "I will to Egypt; / . . . I' th' East my pleasure lies" (II.iii.39-41). Quite generally, in Shakespeare's later plays, the passions are even more powerful than in the Christian humanists' warnings against them because they are often indistinguishable from the will and together with it imbue and corrupt the understanding in innumerable and often imperceptible ways.

Of the ancient philosophies that came into vogue in the seventeenth century, Stoicism gave the greatest emphasis to the function
of the human will; it insisted on man’s need to elevate himself by its power over fortune and fate. Stoicism, it is true, had been an ingredient of the Christian-humanist synthesis. But, although some of the humanists admired Seneca’s ideas and culled commonplaces from his essays, their preference for Cicero’s style drew them to the latter’s eclectic ethics, which was only in part indebted to the Stoics. Although Shakespeare surely read some of Cicero’s philosophical works in grammar school, it is extremely unlikely that he was exposed to anything more than a few commonplaces from Seneca’s essays, and there is nothing to show that he read these later. They were not available in translations, except for two minor essays, until Thomas Lodge’s complete translation in 1614, and Shakespeare probably had no taste for reading moral philosophy in Latin after leaving school. But some of the treatises of continental neo-Stoic writers became available in English before the end of the sixteenth century. Sir John Stradling translated Justus Lipsius’s De Constantia in 1595, and Thomas James rendered Guilleaume du Vair’s La Philosophie morale des Stoiques in 1598. The impact of neo-Stoicism was increased by the fact that it was accompanied by a change in English prose style from the imitation of Cicero’s balanced rhetoric to that of Seneca’s racy and aphoristic sentences. English essayists like William Cornwallis and Francis Bacon imitated Seneca’s manner and echoed many of his ideas. So did Marston, Webster, and Chapman.

In assessing the influence of Seneca on Jacobean drama, one should not separate Seneca’s essays from his tragedies, in which the seventeenth century discovered a new interest. Macbeth has closer parallels to Seneca’s tragedies than any of Shakespeare’s plays since Titus Andronicus and Richard III, and some of these parallels are so close as to give the impression that they come from a knowledge of the Latin text. Shakespeare, who is not likely to have encountered Seneca’s tragedies in school, may well have preferred to read them in the original language rather than in the antiquated early-Elizabethan translations.

This interest of the age in both the essays and the tragedies testifies to a realization that they have a common substance. One could say, indeed, that this substance has a striking similarity to the Othello formula of violent contrasts that yet form a dramatic unity, and one could even liken neo-Stoicism to Calvinism in this respect. Like Calvin’s theology, Stoicism is based on a paradoxical combina-
tion of a voluntaristic ethics with a deterministic metaphysics; it reconciles inexorable fate—in the Christian Stoics’ terminology, the providence of God—with man’s responsibility for his choices. As the neo-Stoics liked to say in an old Christian formulation, God knows man’s choices, but it is the will of man that makes them. Seneca and the Stoics pointed up the opposites that constitute man, life, and the universe, that is, body and soul, passion and reason, vice and virtue, good and evil. They countered the variability of the world with the constancy of the mind and the violence and passions of ordinary mankind with the patience and the imperturbability of the saint-like Stoic sage. These contrasts were to encourage man to choose the latter alternatives and to make him aware that the choice was in the power of his will. Even more stridently than the essays, Seneca’s dramas oppose evil and good, passion and patience. In the tragedies, hysterical and pathological outbreaks, like those of Medea, Oedipus, and Hercules, are set off by choruses of moderation, such as the second ode in Medea, the fourth in Oedipus, and the first in Hercules Furens. Hercules, Seneca’s superman, unites in himself the antithesis of passion and patience through his blinding fury in which he kills his family (Hercules Furens) and through his endurance on Mount Oeta (Hercules Oetaeus).

In the dynamic relationship of violent contrasts, this dramatic Stoicism of Seneca had an affinity to a tendency in baroque art to set light and dark areas and contrasting bodily shapes in tension and energetic movement, a tendency we have noted in the dynamic contrasts of the Othello formula. Seneca’s polarization of passion and patience could have served as a prototype for the dynamic tension of Iago and Othello. The evil in Iago, who is absolute in his patience because he is devoid of ordinary human emotions, is the force that sets in passionate motion the soul of the too-trusting Othello. Iago’s patience is, of course, that of a villain, not that of a Senecan philosopher or Christian Stoic; but, in that it is based on the suppression of all emotions, it has a resemblance to the ironlike “apathy” the theologians accused the austere Stoics, new and old, of advocating.

Further, Stoicism may well have had something to do with the growing emphasis on the theme of salvation from passion and evil through patience, a patience purified through love, in Shakespeare’s later tragedies and romances. It is now patience even more than temperance that becomes associated with self-knowledge. The achievement of self-knowledge through patience is the major theme
of the subplot of Lear, the Gloucester story. In Lear and the romances, the heroes who fall prey to passion are accompanied by, or contrasted with, characters who come close to being embodiments of patience and who aid them on the way to regeneration. Such are Cordelia, Kent, and Edgar in Lear, Marina and Thaisa in Pericles, Imogene in Cymbeline, Hermione and Paulina in The Winter's Tale, and Gonzalo in The Tempest. Interestingly, in Shakespeare's last play, Henry VIII, the dying Queen Katherine, a figure of patience herself, is consoled by a maid named Patience—one of the few overt allegorical touches Shakespeare ever allowed himself. It is in most of these cases fruitless to debate the question whether the patience of a character is Christian or Stoic because in practice there was little difference. The Christian theologians tended to make less of the power of reason to overcome passion than did Cicero and the ancient Stoics, and they often denounced the Stoics' insistence that all passions were evil; but Christian patience was in effect very similar to the Stoic brand in being an active virtue that demanded unusual strength and fortitude.

In any case, the Jacobean emphasis on man's need for patience must in large part be attributed to the darkening moral climate, to the growing belief that the world was more evil than good and becoming worse rather than better. When man is a feather to each wind that blows, as it appeared to adherents of various creeds and philosophies, he can be saved only by an extraordinary patience. The neo-Stoics, the neo-Platonists, the austere Calvinists, the militant Catholics, and conservative sympathizers with the poor, like Arthur Warren, all thought so.

But there was also a more active method than the use of patience to steel one's will for the conflict with an evil world, a method that came to be fathered upon Machiavelli. As pessimism became more widespread during the last decade of the sixteenth century, there were occasional remarks that Machiavelli had been right, after all, when he based his politics on the premise that men are by nature inconstant, dissembling, and lacking in gratitude. Such statements appeared at first in attacks on Machiavelli, as for instance, in Richard Barckley's A Discourse of the Felicity of Man (1598):

The time is so changed and men's manners with them so corrupted that the precepts heretofore given by wise men for the commodity of life, grounded upon virtue and honesty, will not serve the turn. Friendship is grown cold; faith is foolishness; honesty is in exile and dissimulation hath gotten the upper hand. That is effectually
done which is commonly spoken: he that cannot dissemble cannot live. Machiavel's rules are better followed in these days than those of Plato, Aristotle or Cicero; whose scholars have so well profited under him that many are able to teach their master. 

The querulous tone and the rhythm of Barckley's diatribe resemble quite notably Gloucester's complaint in Lear (I.i.112) that he has seen "the best of our time": "Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. In cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father." Ironically, Gloucester makes these comments to his Machiavellian son Edmund, who in his immediately following soliloquy adopts his father's analysis that this is the worst of times but who is happy to live in it, totally rejecting his father's contention that the stars determine man's fate and limit the freedom of the will.

As we have noted earlier, the claim of the anti-Machiavellians that The Prince served as a conduct book for his "scholars" appears justified. Although Machiavelli drew the portrait of a prince who by manipulation achieved political supremacy and retained it, the picture could inspire lesser mortals to think of themselves as men of potential prestige, influence, success, and power. Machiavelli seemed to describe so much better the actual world of power struggle and intrigue than the humanistic moralists with their sentimental picture of order, harmony, and degree. This, at any rate, was the conclusion drawn by Gabriel Harvey, who thought Machiavelli really knew the "fashion and cunning of the world" and could teach him to be wise for himself, to acquire the wisdom of the serpent, to be bold, to concentrate all his strength on the immediate purpose, to have a winning manner for achieving success, and to become a veritable combination of serpent, dove, and wolf. The method could not fail to bring results: "A grain of credit with other; and a dram of confidence in yourself is powerable to remove mountains and states and to work miracles, being politically applied with reasonful discretion." Although the method did not actually produce miracles for Harvey, his words prove that Machiavelli taught his disciples (whose aspirations would have utterly surprised him) to associate self-knowledge with a tough-minded, utilitarian, and materialistic concept of man. He taught them to evaluate themselves in relationship to a world where only strength succeeded and to impose their wills subtly on those whose weakness could be exploited.

Bacon's discipleship of Machiavelli rested on the feeling that The Prince described more accurately than the humanistic conduct books
what men actually do rather than what they say. And he had a point. One looks in vain into the *nosce teipsum* tracts, which continued to be written by the preachers and schoolmasters, of whose improving influence Bacon thought little, for a recognition that the humanistic recipes work only when people in general adopt them. The one tract I know of which proceeds beyond these recipes is Thomas Wright’s *The Passions of the Mind* (1601), whose sympathy with skeptic ideas has been noted previously. In his Preface, Wright suggested that knowing oneself had the practical usefulness of equipping the honest against the dishonest. He advertised his book as helpful for good men to protect themselves against “inventions, fetches, sleights, and judgments.” He found his countrymen in particular need of this protection because they lacked the “certain politic craftiness” of the Italians and Spaniards. Naivety about villainy, he said in another passage, can be costly since “simple men . . . must first try and then trust, for their rule lieth in experience and practice more than in reading and speculation because their own harms or their neighbors must school them, for few are capable of practical rules in universal, or at least they cannot apply them to particular, subjects.”

Wright believed in the need for serpentine wisdom beneath columbine innocence. His chapters on “Prudence in Passion” and “Policy in Passion” presuppose that even for an honest man the end justifies the means in dealing with villainy. He advised “to conceal, as much as thou canst, thy inclinations or that passion thou knowest thyself most prone to follow.” The prudent man must know that the way of evil men is to destroy others “by ministering matter to passions, to cast a bait with a hook to draw them into their own ruin.” In this world of envy and deception “it importeth much to know how to second or cross other men’s affections, how we may please them, make them out friends or foes.” Because men are delighted with those whom they see affected by the passions they have themselves, it follows that “if thou wilt please thy master or friend, thou must apparel thyself with his affections and love where he loveth and hate where he hateth.” Wright expanded the discussion of these matters in his second edition of 1604, showing how the passions can be moved by various means, such as producing visual “appurtenances” for stimulation.

I have, on purpose, quoted instructions showing that the techniques useful for honest men and those practiced by villains were...
often identical for Wright in order to point out how different Shakespeare is in this respect. Although Wright’s arguments sometimes evoke parallels from Shakespeare, they do so mainly when it comes to his villains’ attitude and strategy. These indeed draw Wright’s moral that simplicity is foolishness in this evil world—and they accept this world gladly. Thus Iago sneers at the “free and open nature” of Othello (I.iii.393), at his “unbookish jealousy,” which will make him construe falsely Cassio’s conversation with Bianca (IV.i.101), and at “honest fools” like Cassio and Desdemona. Iago is a master in moving the passion of Othello, producing as the final irritant that visual appurtenance, the handkerchief. Edmund congratulates himself on having “A credulous father! and a noble brother,/...on whose foolish honesty/My practices ride easy!” (I.ii.170 ff.). Wright’s remarks on the shortcomings of honesty also recall Iago’s hypocritical protests that “to be direct and honest is not safe” (III.iii.382) and that “I should be wise; for honesty’s a fool,/And loses that it works for” (386-87). In reading Wright’s remark that simple people must be schooled by their harms, one recalls Regan’s saying that her father had ever but slenderly known himself (I.i.293) and her “moral” on his exposure to the storm: “to wilful men/The injuries that they themselves procure/Must be their schoolmasters” (II.iv.301-3). Wright’s instructions on prudence and policy in passion bring to mind how Shakespeare’s villains ensnare their victims, as, for instance, how Iago kneels next to his master and swears to devote “wit, hand, and heart” to Othello’s service and how Edmund draws his sword against his brother “in defence” of his father. Both Edmund and Iago boast their self-knowledge, and, in the sense the word takes in The Passions of the Mind, they have a point.

Wright’s book was more useful as practical psychology than the conventional nosce teipsum tracts because it had something of a new practical orientation. Shakespeare might indeed have found it helpful when he read it, as I think he did, but he also must have thought distasteful the attitude taken in it that human beings can be managed and controlled. Although Othello and Lear may be said to demonstrate the danger of a lack of self-knowledge of the kind described by Wright, they do not point the moral that good characters must study rules and tricks of rhetoric for combating evil. When a good character, such as Edgar in Lear, uses techniques of counter-strategy against evil, he is aware of the ambiguity of the situation, and thus
we become conscious that virtue and deviousness are uneasy bedfellows.

Just as Shakespeare had not succumbed to the stifling moralizing of traditional *nosce teipsum* doctrines, so he did not espouse the simplifications of the practical approach to self-knowledge. His knowledge of "men as they really are" was deeper than that of the "Machiavellian" psychologists of his time, and it was more sympathetic. One can well imagine him to have smiled at some of Wright's generalizations, such as the one according to which resemblance in nature causes love, and contrast, hatred. Although Iago persuades Othello of the truth of this principle, it is negated by Desdemona's abiding affection for Othello. Nor did Shakespeare accept the premise that men as a whole are ungrateful, inconsistent, and dissembling. Although his later tragic world is dark, the gloom is relieved by the brightness of the Desdemonas, Cordelias, Kents, and Edgars. Timon's misanthropic tirades are disproved as an absolute truth about human nature by the loyalty shown to him in misery by a selfless steward. Shakespeare had less to learn from the moralists, even from one as practically oriented as Wright, than they could have learned from him had they desired to do so. He was conscious, as they were not, that it is impossible to classify human nature. He had a sense for the unexpected as well as expected actions of men, for weaknesses that lie below surface strength, as in Coriolanus's sudden reversals, and for subterranean psychic forces that break through miraculously, as in Lear's self-discovery in suffering and madness.

Shakespeare's essential humanity also saved him from the danger of distortion inherent in the heightening of his heroes' selves. Out of context, one might sometimes read a passage in his plays as an adjustment to inflated aristocratic self-conceptions. In *The Winter's Tale*, Polixenes, like Buoni and others, claims that the passions of great men are part of their greatness:

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This jealousy
Is for a precious creature; as she's rare,
Must it be great; and as his person's mighty,
Must it be violent . . .
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(I.ii.451-54)

But in Shakespeare, we must understand the remark in its dramatic context; Polixenes' words are the benevolent excuse of the weak-
ness of a friend. Even if they echo an aristocratic prejudice, it was not Shakespeare's. And when Shakespeare created in Coriolanus an aristocratic Herculean hero in the pattern of Chapman, he made his inner weakness clear, and it is impossible to think of him as an apotheosis of superhuman will and violent passions.

Shakespeare's humanity, gentleness, and sanity did not leave him as he fashioned the dynamic patterns of self-knowledge in his later plays. His questioning of the rigid formulas during the *Hamlet* period had evidently helped him to gain a more penetrating vision of the varied and complex patterns of life; but he did not reject what he found valuable in the humanists' concept of self-knowledge: their call for self-control and for a reasonable assessment of the human situation is audible in his later plays even more clearly than in his earlier ones, although now his heroes have to face this call without the assurance that it will give them a rational orientation to the universe. And Shakespeare assimilated to these patterns the ideas of the changed intellectual climate that were congenial to him, such as the demand for social justice, a demand raised with particular urgency in *Lear* and *Timon*. But since *Julius Caesar* at least, Shakespeare had a strong sense for the limitations of all theory. The heroes from Brutus on are not insured against self-loss by possessing humanistically orthodox theories of self-knowledge. Othello has them; he is very much aware of the hierarchy of psychic functions that subordinates passion to reason, and yet he cannot control his passion. He is even, à la Wright, conscious that the means of persuasion used by Iago might be tricks of custom in a dishonest man, and yet he succumbs to them. Macbeth knows that in order to live with his deed, he will have to deny his former self, and yet he continues on his path to crime. But the choice of the opposite direction, the acquisition of self-knowledge or of at least part of a knowledge of himself in the humanistic sense is for Coriolanus a choice of death. When he gives in to his mother's pleading to show mercy to Rome rather than to continue his revenge—a choice we think is right although, ironically, he feels it offends the gods—he speaks his death sentence. Elsewhere, the humanistic injunction to self-knowledge is shown to be a valid guideline for the reasonable conduct of a moral life, but the injunction is transcended as a criterion for judging a hero's character. One can condemn Antony by Christian-humanist standards, but such judgment is drawn into doubt by his romantic charisma and the power of his love that, at times, makes Rome's imperium seem paltry.
Although Shakespeare took from the creeds, doctrines, and fashions of his day what he found useful, he remained himself. He rejected what he could not reconcile with the immensely sane view of man that had become his, and he continued to draw on ideas that he found true and important, no matter whether they were conventional or fashionable. His deep and abiding humanity prevented him from adopting the simplifications in any of the particular concepts of man that vied for his allegiance. His good sense kept him from accepting and echoing what was exaggerated in the baroque; he was not tempted by it to create caricatures rather than characters. Instead we find that his later heroes’ heightened selves intensify experiences and feelings that are true and genuine. Although Shakespeare’s great characters are often more passionate or more patient, more virtuous or more infamous, more glorious or more unfortunate than we shall ever be and speak in a language more mighty and splendid than ours, we feel that they are essentially like us.