THE KNIGHT AS CLOWN,

A Study of the Comic Element in the Chivalric Literature of Malory, Spenser, and Shakespeare.

THE KNIGHT AS CLOWN,

A Study of the Comic Element in the Chivalric Literature of Malory, Spenser, and Shakespeare.

By

Lois Carter

Bachelor of Science

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

1932

Submitted to the Department of English

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

1937

APPROVED:

M. P. Lawrence, Jr.
(In Charge of Thesis)

Berrigan
(Head, Dept. of English)

D. G. McIntosh
(Dean, Graduate School)

I intrude on the reserve of

J. S. C.,

a man of honor,

to dedicate this little work

to him.

THE KNIGHT AS CLOWN,

A Study of the Comic Element in the Chivalric Literature of Malory, Spenser, and Shakespeare.

Contents

The Knight as Clown, a Study of the Comic Element in the Chivalric Literature of Malory, Spenser, and Shakespeare.

I desire in this paper to show that humor in chivalric literature indicates, broadly, by its type the stages of the decadence of chivalry. For my study I have chosen certain works of Malory, Spenser, and Shakespeare. I should like to preface my character studies from the writings of these men with a brief discussion of the term comic, and the use made of it in early chivalric literature.

The comic, broadly speaking, has been defined in various ways. It may be used, according to Thorndike, to include "a wide range of response in smile and laughter".[1] Carlyle tells us that the quality springs not more from the head than from the heart. "It is not contempt, its essence is love, it issues not in laughter, but in smiles which lie far deeper. The comic, then, must affect the intellect as well as the emotions."[2]

Landor in his "Imaginary Conversations between Alfieri and the Jew Salomon" intimates that the comic requires a sound, capacious, and grave mind. Louis Cazamian[3] and Ralph Waldo Emerson[4] say that the comic possesses qualities of sound sense, thoughtfulness and restraint, and that it is

---

1. Ashley H. Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 13.
2. Ibid.
3. Louis Cazamian, The Development of English Humour, p. 18.
4. Thorndike, op. cit., p. 14.

a good test of the civilization of a country. Bergson points out that the comic suggests the depiction of manners and character, and possesses the subsequent intention of correction. The counter-balancing and corrective power of the comic is splendidly set forth in George Meredith's Essay on Comedy, delivered before a London audience in 1877.[5]

> The common aspect of the Comic Spirit... is that of unsolicitous observation....[6]

He says further:

> Men's future upon earth does not attract it; their honesty and shapeliness in the present does; and whenever they wax out of proportion, overbloom, affected; pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or mined with conceit, individually, or in the bulk -- the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter.[7]

It is this counter-balancing attitude of the comic which I wish to employ in this paper. For certain enough the comic holds a criticism of chivalry, whether deliberate or unintentional. The practices of knighthood and the ideals of the

---

5. George Meredith, Essay on Comedy, p. 88.

6. Ibid., p. 89.

7. Ibid., pp. 89-90.

chivalric code are treated by the comic and such treatment shows the degree of reverence in which chivalry is held by the age. A practice that is yet useful and profitable to a people remains untouched, or at least unsmutched, by the comic. On the other hand, an institution that has served its best day -- an institution that exists on its laurels of yesteryear and that dies a slow, torturous death -- furnishes abundant treatment for the critically comic.

Chapter One: Sir Kay (Malory)

There is no such harsh quality of the comic to be found in Malory's Morte D'Arthur. The age in which Malory lived and did his work, combined with the seriousness of the writer himself, precludes any association of the term humor[1] with that of chivalry. His personal reverence toward, and his belief in, the chivalric ideal further account for the obvious absence of humor in the Morte D'Arthur.

The most progressive people even at this time laughed at chivalry, but Malory was not one of these. Even if, in truth, the institution had reached its zenith before the Fifteenth Century, Malory failed to recognize this fact. History tells us that certain foundations of chivalry had been weakened by industrial and social changes. The author of the Morte D'Arthur was of the belief, however, that chivalry had many valuable lessons to teach people, and thus he wrote seriously, with a definite, didactic purpose in mind. We find a clear statement of this purpose in Caxton's Original Preface:

> All is written for your doctrine, and for to beware that we fall not to vice nor sin; but to exercise and follow virtue; by which we may come and attain to good fame and renown in this life, and after this short and transitory life, to come unto everlasting bliss in heaven,..[2]

---

1. Note: I do not use the term humor in any technical sense as it was employed in early literature, but purely as it applies to the comic.

2. Thomas Malory, Le Morte D'Arthur, p. 3.

That Malory's reverence for the institution of chivalry was great is witnessed by his noticeable lack of critical humor. Since the great absence of the comic is wholly obvious to the discerning reader, the most pertinent criticism concerning Malory's work is to note this general absence in the Morte D'Arthur. What little humor is to be found in it encloaks the character of Sir Kay, and is certainly not a criticism of the institution of chivalry.

In Chapter Five of Book One we see Sir Ector; his son, Sir Kay; and Sir Ector's foster son, Sir Arthur, riding to a joust. Kay has forgotten his sword. Such a weapon was, in those days, a knight's most prized and necessary possession. It was essential to a fighter's welfare and no earnest knight would be without one. The fact that Sir Kay would rush away to a joust, of all places, without his sword makes us doubt his sincerity of purpose. Arthur rides back for his brother Kay's sword. Finding no one at home to give him the sword, Arthur goes to the churchyard and pulls a sword from the stone. He gives it to his brother. Whoever is able to pull this sword from the stone is to be king of the land. With this knowledge at hand, Sir Kay goes to his father, Sir Ector, and says:

> Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone, wherefore I must be king of this land.[3]

---

3. Ibid., p. 11.

By such action, it would appear that Sir Kay not only disrobes himself of that essential knightly quality of modesty and makes false assumption to a kingship, but he would mislead his own father. In Malory's picture here of Sir Kay's questionable act, we are able to detect some vague, subtle quality of humor. That Sir Kay must have been looked upon lightly by his associates and forgiven of his shortcomings is witnessed many times throughout the twenty-one books of the Morte D'Arthur.

Sir Arthur, upon becoming the rightful king, makes Sir Kay his seneschal

> and more, by the faith of my body, that never man shall have that office but he, while he and I live.[4]

A protective, sympathetic tone is to be discerned in Arthur's words. That our feeling towards the butt of a joke may be not unmingled with sympathy is set forth by Ashley H. Thorndike in his book, English Comedy. Such an emotion overwhelms Arthur because he has a supple sense of the actualities of things and knows Kay's inabilities and lack of strength.

It is in Books Seven and Nine, however, that we read more about Sir Kay than anywhere else in Malory's work. Upon reflection, we find that a province within the empire of humor is perfectly adumbrated in these two books.

---

4. Ibid., p. 13.

In a division of his Preface, Caxton writes:

> the seventh book treateth of a noble knight called Sir Gareth, and named by Sir Kay, Beaumains;[5]

and we first get an insight into Sir Kay's action in this division. Reading from Book Seven, we learn how an unknown, nameless knight,

> the goodliest young man one that ever I saw,

in the words of King Arthur, asks of the king meat and drink for a twelvemonth. Arthur grants him these; takes him to Sir Kay, his steward, and orders that the young knight should receive

> all manner of meats and drinks of the best, and also that he had all manner of finding as though he were a lord's son. [6]

Upon Arthur's departure, Sir Kay scorns and mocks the young knight, and says

> ...sythen he hath no name, I shall give him a name that shall be Beaumains, that is Fair-hands, and into the kitchen I shall bring him, and there he shall have fat brose everyday, that he shall be as fat by the twelvemonths' end as a pork hog. [7]

---

5. Ibid., p. 4

6. Ibid., p. 182.

7. Ibid.

We are told that this conduct makes Sir Gawaine wroth and causes Sir Launcelot to admonish Kay to leave off his mocking. Such action on Sir Kay's part we observe to fall within the realm of the comic. True it is not the comedy of the head, yet it does possess some of that quality of light humor that brings a smile.

The false side of knighthood is further portrayed by Sir Kay in his subsequent relations with Beaumains. In truth, we see through his associations with others, his true nature revealed. Beaumains, at the end of a twelvemonth, takes polite leave of "King Arthur, and Sir Gawaine, and Sir Launcelot" but there is no mention of a leave taking with Sir Kay. Beaumains completely ignores the seneschal. Quite unaware of his slight, Sir Kay is made to say

> I will ride after my boy in the kitchen,
> to wit whether he will know me for his better.

Against the advice of his friends, Kay does leave and when he comes upon Beaumains, he gets anything but a warm welcome:

> Yea, said Beaumains; I know you for an ungentle knight of the court, and therefore, beware of me.

With these words Beaumains

> ....with a foyne thrust him (Kay) through the side, that Sir Kay fell down as he had been dead; [8]

---

8. Ibid., p. 185.

and further

> ..... all men scorned Sir Kay.

Another scene, an identical one with that where Sir Kay gives Beaumains his name, is that occurrence in Book Nine, Capter One, when

> At the court of King Arthur there came a young man bigly made, and he was richly bisene: and he desired to be made knight of the king, but his over-garment sat over-thwartly, howbeit it was rich cloth of gold. What is your name? said King Arthur. Sir, said he, my name is Breunor le Noire, and within short space ye shall know that I am of good kin. It may well be, said Sir Kay, the Seneschal, but in mockage ye shall be called La Cote Male Taile, that is as much to say, the evil-shapen coat.[9]

One type of comic character is the boaster. A thread of braggadochio in Sir Kay is revealed when a damosel comes into the court and desires a knight to go on a quest, and Sir Kay steps in to answer.

> Sir Knight, said the damosel, what is your name? Wit ye well, said he, my name is Sir Kay, the Seneschal, that wide-where is known.[10]

A note of humor is added when she informs him that it takes a better knight than he to accomplish the task.

It has already been pointed out how Beaumains has ignored Sir Kay, how all scorned him, and how the unknown

---

9. Ibid., p. 300. The italics are mine.

10. Ibid., p. 302. The italics are mine.

damosel refuses his limited help. Witness a similar scene in Chapter Fourteen of Book Nine when Sir Tristram inquires of Sir Kay who he might be:

> Sir, wit ye well, said Sir Kay, that my name is Sir Kay, the Seneschal. Is that your name? said Sir Tristram, not wit ye well that ye are named the shamefullest knight of your tongue that now is living;.....ye are called unfortunate, and passing overthwart of your tongue,..... and Kay followed him but he (Tristram) would not of his fellowship. [11]

Knights in good standing excelled in Jousts. Not Sir Kay. One instance has already been quoted where Sir Kay was bested by his opponent.[12] Another is Kay's encounter with Sir Tristram[13] and yet another is in Chapter Thirty-eight[14] where King Mark meets the seneschal,

> ... and there at that jousts Sir Kay's horse fell down....

Malory deals with the Arthurian cycle as a moralist, and necessarily because of his approach, the comic is sparsely used. In truth, Vinaver points out that such a literary attempt as Malory undertook was a perilous endeavor indeed because it could so easily turn into parody.[15] Of this danger

---

11. Ibid., p. 320.

12. Ibid., p. 185.

13. Ibid., pp. 337-8.

14. Ibid., p. 361.

15. Eugene Vinaver, Malory, p. 34.

Malory was apparently unaware unto the last. Doubtless, however, the juxtaposition of Sir Kay with all the true knights must be a comic conception. His forgetting to take his sword along with him to the joust, his attempting to mislead his father with reference to the sword from the stone, and his inclination to boast all add to the comic character of Sir Kay. Even more than these the Seneschal's mockery of younger knights and his complete inability to hold his own in jousts help us to see him in a humorous light. Yet this is not the censorous comic toward the institution of chivalry that we find in literature of a later period. Sir Kay's slight burlesquing of chivalry is acknowledged to be definitely within the realm of the comic; it wins the sympathy of the reader. Yet we fail to detect the lesson-teaching comic in the Morte D'Arthur that we see something of in Spenser and more of in Shakespeare. The obvious lack of this censorous quality may be attributed to the fact that the institution of chivalry had yet some usefulness for the age and could not be viewed seriously in the light of the comic.

Chapter Two: Interim Between Malory and Spenser

Malory was comparatively untouched by the Renaissance movement that had just started to ripple over his country. He lived in the Middle Ages, and breathed their great spirit into his book of romances. Yet there certainly were signs enough even in Malory's day that a new spirit was rising and that the days of the old order were numbered.

The invention of gunpowder was fatal to chivalry. Its invention made the old type of army inefficient and turned the baronial castle from an impregnable fortress into an interesting antiquity. No longer were wars won by single combats between knights but by units of soldiers, instructed and supervised. Certainly this was a great factor in the deterioration of the chivalric ideal.

The ideal of chivalry was further destroyed by the Wars of the Roses that played havoc with the nobility and swept away all laws of honor and mercy.[1] Successive religious wars followed these in which every idea of chivalry was negated.[2] The ideal of a knight combining bravery, generosity, and devotion in a noble cause was no longer a reality, and picturesque parades had taken the place of arms and prayers. In the words of Pierre de Blois, "knights had their shields beautifully gilt, but they were kept in a virgin and unused condition."[3] The new common soldiers were a match for the

---

1. H. D. Traill, Social England, Vol. III. pp. 71-2.
2. Ward, Prothero, Leathes, The Cambridge Modern History, Vol. II., pp. 550-598.
3. Vinaver, op. cit., p. 58.

knights and gentlemen, and when the knight became a mere trooper and rode to war side by side with paid men-at-arms as well accoutered, horsed, and trained as himself, he began to lose his prestige in war and society.

The day of the common man was dawning on the horizon of world affairs.[4] The great enlargement of the geographical world by discoveries, the vast addition to knowledge wrought by the revival of learning, and the use made of the printing press were accompanied by expansion of commerce and by a quickening of the arts. The great age of geographical discovery belongs to Columbus, Da Gama, the Cabots, and to Magellan, and in part to Hawkins, Drake, and Gilbert. We see evidences of increasing interest in maritime enterprise that subsequently led to the founding of colonies and to the extension of commerce.[5] Erasmus, who was Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge for a few years, was a great exponent of Greek scholarship. Sir Thomas More definitely defended and aided the progress of new learning in England. Coverdale and Tyndale wielded an important influence in English literary history with their versions of the Scriptures.[6] To these names of men of learning must be added that of John Colet, one time pupil of Erasmus, as well as the name of William Lyly, Master of St. Paul's School, and compiler of the first

---

4. Traill, op. cit., p. 31.

5. Ibid., p. 209.

6. Ibid., p. 87.

Latin Grammar for public schools. It is well to recall here the influence of Sir Thomas Elyot and Roger Ascham, teacher of Princess Elizabeth and holder of important secretarial positions under three rulers. That art of printing brought to England in 1477 by William Caxton and kept alive by Lettou, Wynkyn de Worde, Fagues, Rastell, and Parker had one of the best periods of its history during the Sixteenth Century.[7] With the new interest in printing and the marked improvement that went on in this field, the demand for more books greatly increased as the price greatly decreased. The Sixteenth Century saw the rise of the mercantile middle class. The cause of this great group of people was abetted by the Tudor kings. The old nobles, impoversished by wars and the extravagances of the Court of Henry VIII, found themselves in debt and were forced to sell their lands to opulent merchants. Then it was that wealth, not race, began to determine the gentleman. These new important men, the merchants, acquired political power and social recognition. Every new turn of events threw the king out of harmony with the nobility and into the hands of the people. The people did not fail to profit by the opportunity and the House of Commons found it easy to work with the monarch.[8] Towns were rapidly growing in wealth and population and influence. The severe restrictive policy of the guild system[9] and the growing spirit of competition

---

7. R. A. Peddie, Printing-A Short History of the Art, p. 81.
8. Traill, op. cit., p. 33.
9. Ibid., p. 133.

caused people to move to centers of commercial activity.

The profession of soldier-knight can be exercised only in time of war. As an ideal it belongs to a turbulent period of foreign wars or of warring factions and weak central power. Such a period Sixteenth Century England had not seen since the Tudors ascended the throne, and the long peace of Elizabeth's reign particularly turned men's minds from military to civil matters. "No one gained much glory by a military career in these times."[10] In truth, conditions had so changed under Elizabeth that the Court was actually a focus of the highest aspiration. New government policies had brought men of a new kind into the forefront of public life. These new men were men of talent rather than men of birth, shrewd statesmen rather than bold warriors.

A personality with tremendous influence who foreshadowed the power of the new man was Thomas Wolsey, destined for more than a decade to shape England's policy abroad and to be the leading figure in Church and State at home. Educated for the Church, he entered the royal service in 1506 and forged rapidly to the front. Many offices and honors were showered upon him in his lifetime: Archbishop of York, Cardinal and Lord Chancellor, and later Papal Legate, not to mention many other important positions, both ecclesiastical and secular. He founded Cardinal College (afterwards

---

10. William Allan Neilson, Ashley Horace Thorndike, The Facts About Shakespeare, p. 10.

Christ Church) at Oxford.[11] Thomas More, author and statesman extraordinary, followed Wolsey as chancellor. Perhaps no more influential name than that of Sir Edward Coke can be added to this group. Distinguished barrister and judge, and speaker of the House of Commons, he was in time to hold the important post of Attorney General in spite of his severely humble beginning. In the capacity of Attorney General he conducted the famous state trials of Southampton and Essex in 1601, of Sir Walter Raleigh in 1603, and of the Gunpowder plotters in 1605. This list would be incomplete without the name of that distinguished man of state affairs and eminent essayist, Francis Bacon.

Thus with the invention of gunpowder and the use made of it by the new soldier, the geographical discoveries, the increased interest in the art of printing and the reduction in the price of books, the revival of learning, the enlargement of the commercial world, and the new opportunities for the common man we witness the passing of the age of chivalry. The old chivalric ideals of personal bravery, integrity, and brotherly love, pitted against these overwhelming new forces, could no longer stand. In a generation or two more chivalry was the theme for jest, and its glory had departed forever save for its faint coloring of the manners and morals of society.

---

11. Traill, op. cit., p. 90.

Chapter Three: Braggadochio and false Duessa (Spenser)

The work of the next master whom we dare to investigate is that of Edmund Spenser, "the poet's poet." Spenser, although he is chronologically modern, lived much in the world of the medieval. His diction and his orthography demonstrate this conclusion only too clearly. His unlimited use of allegory in his writing offers another proof of his medievalism. The Middle Ages are re-echoed in the motives which he treats in his writing and in the sharp contrast that Spenser draws between good and evil in his Faerie Queene. No expression of the medieval is complete unless it is closely connected with chivalry that is composed of the championship of right, the offering of help to the underprivileged and to the down-trodden, the exclusion of boasting, the possession of a name respected by one's associates, a strong regard for the rights of others, and not the least, a high respect for womanhood.

Incurable platonist that Spenser was, he tended to idealize the institution of chivalry. He shows in the Faerie Queene a sharp contrast between the good and the evil. This sharp contrast is nowhere demonstrated with more clarity than in his characters. Some of them are very, very good people, while others of them are very, very bad. In the first group may be found Artegal, Una, Sir Caledor, and Arthur; while the false knight, Braggadochio, and the feigned and treacherous lady, false Duessa, are pitted against them.

The humor of Spenser lies in these false personalities. Because they pretend to be what they actually are not, they are penetrating examples of the comedy of counterfeit.

The character Braggadochio we find to be not only a boaster and a coward, a liar and a thief, but also a destroyer of the major emblems of the chivalric code. He shows by antithesis what a good knight should be.

One instance of contrast is to be found in Canto Three of Book Five.[1] We read here that Marinell frees Florimell from the cruel hands of Proteas;

> And by him brought againe to Faerie land,
> Where he her spoud'd, and made his joyous bride.
> The time and place were blazed farre and wide,
> And solemne feasts and guists ordain'd therefore.

The glories of the feast were fit work for a herald yet the knights' thoughts soon turned to talk of arms and chivalrous acts. Then it was that many of the knights engaged in a great tournament to prove that the beautiful Florimell excelled all other women in virtue and beauty. Marinell, the knightly protector of Florimell, was victor for two or three days. At last Marinell was outwitted, was in need of succour, and Sir Artegall, the embodiment of Justice, was riding by and lent him aid. To do this Artegall had to borrow the shield belonging to Braggadochio, who, in company with his snowy dame, was journeying along with Artegall.

---

1. Edmund Spenser, Complete Poetical Works, (Student's Cambridge Edition), p. 515, verse II.

Which when he had performed, then backe
again
To Braggadochio did his shield restore,
Who all this while behind him did remaine.[2]

At the sound of the trumpets the host gathered in the open hall to proclaim the shield bearing the broad blazoned sun winner of the tournament. Braggadochio, thus wearing the shield with which Artegall had won the right, came in Artegall's stead and allowed himself to be proclaimed victor. By so doing Braggadochio proves himself false and successfully tramples under foot that part of the chivalric code which protects the rights of others and champions justice. Any proper knight would have displayed modesty and fairness and have hastened to correct the error by offering to earn a name for himself. But not Braggadochio. Because he takes the course in direct opposition to that of a true knight, he proves himself false to the ideal of chivalry.

It has already been stated that one real concern of a genuine knight is to see that a lady is protected, that she is never embarrassed, and that she never sees him fall below the position proper to gentle breeding. To continue with the story of the Faerie Queene, we find that all of

---

2. Ibid., p. 517, verse XIII.

the jousting was done to honor the true Florimell,

> And then to him came fayrest Florimell,
> And goodly gan to greet his brave emprise,
> And thousand thankes yeeld, that he so well
> Approv'd that day that she all others did excell.[3]

Certainly Braggadochio's conduct with its resultant reaction is the spurious portrayal of the knightly ideal when to Florimell's thanks he

> With proud disdaine did scornful answere make,
> That what he did that day, he did it not
> For her, but for his owne deare Ladies sake,
> .....
> And further did uncomely speaches crake.
> Much did his words the gentle Ladie quell,
> And turn'd aside for shame to heare what he
> did tell. [4]

Such conduct on the part of Braggadochio brings crashing about his ears another of the pillars of the knightly code -- a high respect for womanhood.

Further on in the same canto of Book Five a portion of Braggadochio's complete downfall is accomplished by Artegall who can no longer restrain himself against the false knight's boasting pride and graceless guile. To Braggadochio he says:

> Thou losell base,
> Thou hast with borrowed plumes thy selfe
> endewed,
> And others worth with leasings doest deface,
> When they are all restor'd thou shall rest
> in disgrace. [5]

---

3. Ibid., p. 517, verse XV.

4. Ibid., verse XVI.

5. Ibid., p. 518, verse XX.

It only needs to be pointed out that boasting and guilefulness are not included in the chivalric code to discern Braggadochio's comic position.

It is Artegall again who challenges Braggadochio's Ladie as "some faire Franion" and causes her to be revealed as the false Florimell, and Braggadochio

> So daunted was in his despeyring mood,
> That like a lifeless corse immoveable
> he stood. [6]

But it remained for Sir Guyon to complete Braggadochio's exposure. While the crowd was busy with Florimell, up came Guyon to claim his horse and to encounter the thief in battle. While Guyon was protecting a "young bloodie babe" whose parents had been recently slain, his horse and spear were purloined. The horse was in the possession of Braggadochio, who claimed it. Guyon begged the crowd only to open the steed's mouth to see

> Within his mouth a blacke spot that doth appeare,
> Shapt like a horses shoe.[7]

The spirited animal resisted the efforts of all save Guyon to open his mouth for inspection. The horse was Guyon's. When proof of this was established, Braggadochio made a feeble effort to fight with Guyon but the latter felt that

---

6. Ibid., p. 519, verse XXVI.

7. Ibid., verse XXXII.

the false knight had been shamed enough. Yet the false knight's dishonor was not complete until his beard had been shaved off and he had been divested of all the accouterments of his knighthood; then he had been "cleane disgraced" in the sight of all men. Perhaps no more conclusive proof of Braggadochio's false position as a knight could be presented than this last picture. The loss of his good name before his fellows completes his miserable failure to play knight.

Trompart is Braggadochio's servant, and a faithful and wily-witted knave he is, who upholds his master's idle humor with flattery and "blows the bellows of his swelling vanity". He is a materialistic creature fond of gold, who declares, whenever asked, that he followed "a great adventure, whose warlike name is far renowned through many bold emprise". With all these qualities he is fully aware of his master's folly. When we see Braggadochio, who was never assailed by a thought of honor, and his servant, Trompart, we quickly think of Don Quixote and his squire, Sancho Panza. The humor of Braggadochio, however, is unlike that of the brave Don Quixote because Braggadochio is not a burlesque of knightly excesses but merely a peasant make-believe. He does not possess any of the genuine qualities that he professes to represent. This counterfeiting is humorous because it is the opposite of all that chivalry means.

Continuing this idea of the use of the counterfeit as a means of demonstrating the comic, we turn reflectively

to Spenser's other counterfeit character, the false Duessa. In Canto Four of Book One of the Faerie Queene we have seen how the false Duessa has been the cause of the Redcrosse Knight's forsaking the good Una and turning toward herself. Pretending to be worthy of the trust which this young knight has placed in her, Duessa gains his confidence. Thus she, on their travels together, is able to lead him into the "sinfull Hous of Pryde":

> Who, after that he had faire Una lorne,
> Through light misdeeming of her loialtie,
> And false Duessa in her sted had borne,
> Called Fidess', and so supposd to be,
> Long with her traveild, till at last they see
> A goodly building, bravely garnished;
> The house of mightie prince it seemd to be;
> And towards it a broad high way that led,
> All bare through peoples feet, which thether traveiled.
>
> Great troupes of people traveild thetherward
> Both day and night, of each degree and place;
> But few returned, having scaped hard,
> With balefull beggery, or foule disgrace;
> Which ever after in most wretched case,
> Like loathsome lazars, by the hedges lay.
> Thether Duessa badd him bend his pace:
> For she is wearie of the toilsom way,
> And also nigh consumed is the lingring day.
>
> A stately pallace built of squared bricke,
> Which cunningly was without morter laid,
> Whose wals were high, but nothing strong nor thick,
> And golden foile all over them displaid,
> That purest skye with brightnesse they dismaid:
> High lifted up were many loftie towres,
> And goodly galleries far over laid,
> Full of faire windowes and delightful bowres;
> And on the top a diall told the timely howres.

It was a goodly heape for to behould,
And spake the praises of the workmans witt;
But full great pittie, that so faire a mould
Did on so weake foundation ever sitt:
For on a sandie hill, that still did flitt
And fall away, it mounted was full hie,
That every breath of heaven shaked itt;
And all the hinder partes, that few could spie,
Were ruinous and old, but painted cunningly.

Arrived there, they passed in forth right; [8]

There are numerous incidents concerning Duessa which would aptly illustrate the point of the counterfeit providing a comic element. No doubt, however, the occasion in Canto Eight of this same book of the Faerie Queene will most clearly portray this idea for us.

It will be remembered that Braggadochio's dishonor was completed when his beard was shaved and he was divested of his knight's attire.[9] An experience very similar to Braggadochio's occurs to the false Duessa. Reaching back into Canto Eight we learn that the Redcrosse Knight, after drinking from the false dame's fountain, is made captive by the giant Orgoglio.[10] Una learns of his capture and appeals to Prince Arthure to battle for his release. Arthure, as good as his reputation, slays the giant, frees the imprisoned knight, and asks of Una what is to be done

---

8. Ibid., Book I., Canto IV., p. 164, verses II-VI.

9. Ibid., Book V., Canto III., p. 520, verse XXXVII.

10. Ibid., Book I., Canto VII., p. 185, et passim.

with the treacherous Duessa.

'To do her die', quoth Una, 'were despight,
And shame t' avenge so weake an enimy;
But spoile her of her scarlot robe, and let her fly.'

So, as she bad, that witch they disaraid,
And robd of roiall robes, and purple pall,
And ornaments that richly were displaid
Ne spared they to strip her naked all.
Then, when they had despoyld her tire and call,
Such as she was, their eies might her behold,
That her misshaped parts did them appall,
A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill favoured, old,
Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told.

So the false Duessa is a feminine facsimile of Braggadochio. Although limited in her experiences, she, just as consistently as her male counterpart, proceeds to tear down the chivalric code. This sham character is a painted simulacrum of a true lady; she is an imitation of something much better, and in such a character portrayal we discern the author's use of the comic. Like Braggadochio, the false Duessa awakens "thoughtful laughter", through her role of counterfeit impersonation. These two champion the right of none but themselves and offer to help no one, they lend themselves to boasting, and their names can in no manner be respected by others. They represent

---

11. Ibid., Book I., Canto VIII., p. 198, verses XLV and XLVI.

the antitheses of chivalric characters [12] and by such representation fall within the realm of the comic. With Braggadochio and the false Duessa Spenser is satirizing the political personalities of his own day who, by their important positions, should be the exponents of knightly conduct and who are not. In his Mother Hubberd's Tale Spenser hurled caustic censorship at the characters of Lord Burghley and the Duke of Anjou. In the Faerie Queene he does the same thing for Mary, Queen of Scots with his character, the false Duessa. Spenser does not, then, criticize the institution of chivalry, as do Cervantes and Shakespeare, but he points a finger of criticism at individuals of his period who should, and do not, mirror the chivalric ideal.

---

12. William Henry Schofield, Chivalry in English Literature, p. 165.

Chapter Four: Falstaff (Shakespeare)

Although chronologically not very widely separated, Spenser and Shakespeare had vastly different outlooks in their writing. Spenser, it has been remarked, was primarily a medievalist, while Shakespeare was essentially a modern. Just as Spenser cast a backward glance toward the Middle Ages, Shakespeare with a dramatist's contemporaneousness, peered into the maze of the near future. Two of the writings of this famous dramatist we shall use in our study of the humorous portrayal of the decadence of chivalry. These two are Parts I and II of Henry IV and the Merry Wives of Windsor.

Falstaff was Shakespeare's product of the late Sixteenth Century; he was an essentially realistic creation which the dramatist filled in from contemporary English life. Historical and social conditions of a few decades earlier, or later, would not have provided, perhaps, for the creation of such a substantial comic character[1] as the lying, swaggering, roistering glutton, Falstaff.

Henry IV was opposed by his peers, the nobility, but his cause was espoused by the common people. He was as nearly a democrat as the first part of the Fifteenth Century could produce.[2] The common people formed the real

---

1. William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, p. 145.
2. Beverley E. Warner, English History in Shakespeare's Plays, p. 95.

strength of the Lancastrian dynasty established by Henry IV and secured by Henry V. The break with his chief nobles threw Henry back upon the commoners and made way for the breaking down of the feudal system. We see the process of disintegration in its first and most important stages. The real death blow was struck when Henry defeated the combined force of the nobility at Shrewsbury. After this the feudal system carried on an impotent existence until, when the last of the Plantagenet kings died on Bosworth field, and Henry, first of the Tudors, came to the throne, there were but twenty-nine lay nobles to take their places in the first Parliaments.

This passing of the chivalric ideal harmonized exactly with the introduction of Falstaff. The whole comedy movement of the play, of which it appears Falstaff is the center, illustrates not broad farce, but comedy of a more thoughtful quality. In Falstaff, Shakespeare has given us a character who disregards all major obligations of life to live exultantly within his own code of ethics. "Old John", while living by his wits, takes cognizance of the state of honor, truth, and fidelity in his own day. He sees the selfish motives back of acts of valor, the untruth that shabbily mirrors the truth, and the shrewd planning toward self-advancement that prompted fidelity; and "he is far above any attempt at hypocrisy".[3] He understands his world because

---

3. George Brandes, William Shakespeare, p. 111.

he is much a part of it and he openly refuses to bear a false standard.

Falstaff, as well as Pistol, Bardolph, and all their group of petty followers with loud boasting and easily pricked cowardice, is a travesty of the high-born chivalry, at the time of Shakespeare on its last legs, and destined soon to pass away entirely. Chivalry had served the idealism of the Middle Ages. [4] The thing that masqueraded under its name is roughly burlesqued in Falstaff with his shrewd knavery, his animal appetite, his gross trading on the name and title of a gentleman, and above all, his self-admitted knowledge that he is in certain important ways a humbug.

Sir John Falstaff is perennially fascinating because of his jollity and his brilliant wit. At the same time the reader is quite aware that he is "everything that chivalric moralists reprimanded in a knight."[5] It has been observed how Sir Kay and more especially Braggadochio and the false Duessa prove themselves false to the code of chivalry. Familiar as they doubtless are with the basic knightly virtues of honor, respect for name, integrity, courage and proficiency in battle, they, nevertheless, proceed seriously to disregard a great many of these

---

4. Beverley E. Warner, op. cit., p. 124.

5. William Henry Schofield, op. cit., p. 216.

principles. Falstaff, however, is more completely the antithesis of a proper knight because he not only negates the chivalric code but he does it in a spirit of jest. He "coruscates away the seriousness of life, and always remains master of the situation by giving it a clever turn in the idea, or by playing over it with an arabesque of arch waggery."[6] Mastery of circumstance is his pride: it is also his supreme qualification to be a hero of comedy."[7] He refuses to take himself seriously. All his boasting speeches are mere humor and he is careful to make these speeches to people who will understand them. "They contain an unreasonable ridicule of himself, the usual subject of his good-humored merriment. In the presence of the Justices and his own followers he watches his speech because it might be employed at his own expense."[8]

We find the happiest and most carefree Falstaff in the first part of Henry IV. He spontaneously ministers to an amused Prince, is understood by the Prince, and never fails in his wit. His dissolute carelessness of what he says reveals itself in the first dialogue with the Prince:

---

6. Edward Dowden, Shakespeare - His Mind and Art, p. 70.

7. H. B. Charlton, Falstaff, p. 19.

8. Maurice Morgann, Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff, pp. 82 and 83.

Prince: Thou sayest well, and it holds well too; for the fortune of us that are the moon's men doth ebb and flow like the sea, being governed, as the sea is, by the moon. As, for proof now: a purse of gold most resolutely snatched on Monday night and most dissolutely spent on Tuesday morning; got with swearing 'Lay by', and spent with crying 'Bring in'; now in as low an ebb as the foot of the ladder and by and by in as high a flow as the ridge of the gallows.

Falstaff: By the Lord, thou sayest true, lad. And is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?

Prince: As the honey of Hybla, my old lad of the castle. And is not a buff jerkin a most sweet robe of durance?

Falstaff: How now, how now, mad wag! what, in thy quips and thy quiddities? what a plague have I to do with a buff jerkin?

Prince: Why, what a pox have I to do with my hostess of the tavern?

Falstaff: Well, thou hast called her to a reckoning many a time and oft.

Prince: Did I ever call for thee to pay thy part?

Falstaff: No; I'll give thee thy due, thou hast paid all there.

Prince: Yea, and elsewhere, so far as my coin would stretch; and where it would not, I have used my credit.

Falstaff: Yea, and so used it that, were it not here apparent that thou art heir apparent-- But, I prithee, sweet wag, shall there be gallows standing in England when thou art king? and resolution thus fobbed as it is with the rusty curb of old father antic the law? Do not thou, when thou art king, hang a thief.

Prince: No; thou shalt.

Falstaff: Shall I? O rare! By the Lord, I'll be a brave judge.

Prince: Thou judgest false already: I mean thou shalt have the hanging of the thieves, and so become a rare hangman.

Falstaff: Well, Hal, well: and in some sort it jumps with my humor as well as waiting in the court, I can tell you. [9]

In the same scene, immediately following the above conversation, Sir John affects melancholy, from pure satisfaction of heart, and professes that he will reform, because it is the farthest thing in the world from his thoughts. He has no qualms of conscience, and therefore would as soon dwell on them as on anything else when the humor takes him:

Falstaff: But, Hal, I prithee, trouble me no more with vanity. I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought. An old lord of the council rated me the other day in the street about you sir, but I marked him not; and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not; and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too.

Prince: Thou didst well; for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it.

Falstaff: O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal; God forgive thee for it! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked.

---

9. I Henry IV., Act I., Scene II.

I must give over this life, and I will give it over; by the Lord, and I do not, I am a villain: I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.

Prince: Where shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack?

Falstaff: 'Zounds, where thou wilt, lad; I'll make one; an I do not, call me villain and baffle me.

Prince: I see a good amendment of life in thee; from praying to purse-taking.

Falstaff: Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal; 'tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation. [10]

Early in the following act [11] Falstaff easily lets down the reserve on his speech and, while ridiculing the low state that thieving has come to, casts a few words in the direction of his Prince Hal. He has most recently been relieved of his horse by Poins:

Falstaff: Well, I doubt not but to die a fair death for all this, if I 'scape hanging for killing that rogue. I have forsworn his company hourly any time this two and twenty years, and yet I am bewitched with the rogue's company. If the rascal have not given me medicines to make me love him, I'll be hanged; it could not be else; I have drunk medicines. Poins! Hal! a plague upon you both! Bardolph! Peto! I'll starve a deed as drink, to turn true man and to leave these rogues, I am the veriest varlet that ever chewed with a tooth. Eight yards

---

10. I Henry IV., Act I., Scene II.

11. Ibid., Act II., Scene II.

> of uneven ground is threescore and
> ten miles afoot with me; enough;
> a plague upon it when thieves
> cannot be true one to another!
> (They whistle) Whew! A plague
> upon you all! Give me my horse,
> you rogues; give me my horse,
> and be hanged!

Falstaff here should by all account be the butt of the joke. He is being made a jest by his associates but he will not allow himself to fall into such a trap. With his ready wit and effulgent optimism he rises above the position in which he is placed by giving voice to the statuesque line "a plague upon it when thieves cannot be true one to another".

Of the other prominent passages, his account of his pretended resistance of the robbers in Scene Four shows him sparring magnificently with truth. To Poins and the Prince he explains that he has been set upon two hours before, and

> Eight times thrust through the
> doublet, four through the hose;
> my buckler cut through and through;
> my sword hocked like a hand-saw...
> and never dealt better since.....
> a man.

Prince: Pray God you have not murdered some of them.

Falstaff: Nay, that's past praying for: I have peppered two of them; two I am sure I have paid, two rogues in buckram suits. I tell thee what, Hal, if I tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me horse. Thou knowest my old ward: here I lay, and thus I bore my point. Four rogues in buckram let drive at me.....

Prince: What, four? thou saidst but two even now.

Falstaff: Four, Hal: I told thee four.

Poins: Ay, four, in buckram suits.

Falstaff: Seven, by these hilts, or I am a villain else.

Prince: Prithee, let him alone: we shall have more anon.

Falstaff: Dost thou hear me, Hal?

Prince: Ay, and mark thee too, Jack.

Falstaff: Do so, for it is worth the listening to. These nine in buckram that I told thee of.....

Prince: So, two more already.

Falstaff: Their points being broken,

Poins: Down fell their hose.

Falstaff: Began to give me ground; but I followed me close, came in foot and hand; and with a thought seven of the eleven I paid.

Prince: O monstrous! eleven buckram men grown out of two! [12]

Directly following this conversation we find the Prince and Falstaff engaged in a battle of words about Falstaff's recent encounter. The Prince has been one of the two who set upon Sir John, who gets off when the truth is discovered by pretending that he recognized the Prince at the time of the robbery. Such action and conversation from the fat old rogue are nothing but light ridicule of his own inability to look seriously upon fighting.

---

12. Ibid., Act II., Scene IV.

Army life was on a very low plane,[13] partly because the organization and the method of recruiting were changing from the feudal to the modern professionalized system, and partly because Renaissance society, without the organized capital of modern industrialism, could hardly finance this new system which political necessity imposed. Soldiers, in consequence, were very poorly and very irregularly paid;[14] and, as no provision was made for them in peace time or in old age, they often had to live by their wits or turn professional bully or downright highwayman. This created a vicious circle; officers got their positions by favoritism -- very much as Hal procured for Falstaff a "charge of foot" -- and sometimes even by actual sale, and misused their commissions to enrich themselves. Therefore, men of probity avoided military service, and therefore, the profession "despised of every man" sank lower and lower in the general esteem. This decadence of army life made the few chivalrous exceptions all the more conspicuous.

In the same scene [15] where he assumes the role of the old king in order to lecture the Prince and to give himself a good name, we see Sir John turn the laugh into

---

13. Traill, op. cit., p. 452.

14. John W. Draper, Sir John Falstaff, p. 416.

15. I Henry IV., Act II., Scene IV.

new channels by his intellectual alertness and resources of invention. Humor for him is a philosophy; instead of being the butt of laughter, he is the master of laughter. The quality of his comedy is extremely pleasant; it is untinged with malice because it is employed chiefly at his own expense. At the opening of Falstaff's speech, he speaks in the role of King, to the young Prince:

> Falstaff: Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied; for though the camomile, the more it is trodden on the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted the sooner it wears. That thou art my son, I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villanous trick of thine eye and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip, that doth warrant me. If then thou be son to me, here lies the point; why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher and eat blackberries? a question not to be asked. Shall the son of England prove a thief and take purses? a question to be asked. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch: this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest: 16

Then it is that Falstaff turns the conversation in his own favor:

---

16. Ibid., Act II., Scene IV.

Falstaff: For, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink but in tears, not in pleasure but in passion, not in words only, but in woes also; and yet there is a virtuous man whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name.

Prince: What manner of man, an it like your majesty?

Falstaff: A goodly portly man, i' faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or, by'r lady, inclining to threescore; and now I remember me, his name is Falstaff: if that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If then the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then, peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff: him keep with, the rest banish. And tell me now, thou naughty varlet, tell me, where hast thou been this month? [17]

The same flavor of humor runs through the following continued conversations between the Prince and Falstaff, at which time Falstaff plays the part of the Prince:

Prince: Swearest thou, ungracious boy? henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace; there is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man; a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humors, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that gray iniquity, that

---

17. Ibid.

father ruffian, that vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein crafty, but in villany? wherein villanous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing?

Falstaff: I would your grace would take me with you: whom means your grace?

Prince: That villanous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

Falstaff: My lord, the man I know.

Prince: I know thou dost.

Falstaff: But to say I know more harm in him than in myself, were to say more than I know. That he is old, the more the pity, his white hairs do witness it; but that he is, saving your reverence, a whoremaster, that I utterly deny. If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked; if to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned; if to be fat be to be hated, then Pharoah's lean kine are to be loved. No, my good lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins; but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company; banish plump Jack, and banish all the world. [18]

One secret, it would appear, of Falstaff's wit is his absolute self-possession -- instinctive evasion of everything that threatens to interrupt the career of his triumphant good-humor and complacency. "He is always

---

18. Ibid., Act II., Scene IV.

superior to his surroundings, always resourceful, always witty, always at his ease, often put to shame, but thanks to his inventive effrontery, never put out of countenance."[19] His natural repugnance for anything unpleasant provokes the most extravagant remarks. The following conversation between Falstaff and the Prince on Shrewsbury battlefield demonstrates aptly Falstaff's philosophy. The speech is superbly climaxed by the catechism on honor:

Falstaff: Hal, if thou see me down in the battle and bestride me, so; 'tis a point of friendship.

Prince: Nothing but a colossus can do thee that friendship. Say thy prayers, and farewell.

Falstaff: I would 'twere bed-time, Hal, and all well.

Prince: Why, thou owest God a death.
(Exit)

Falstaff: 'Tis not due yet; I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? how then? Can honor set to a leg? no: or an arm? no: or take away the grief of a wound? no. Honor hath no skill in surgery, then? no. What is honor? a word. What is in that word honor? what is that honor? air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? he that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? no. Doth he hear it? no. 'Tis insensible, then. Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? no. Why? detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon: and so ends any catechism.[20]

---

19. Brandes, op. cit., p. 111.

20. I Henry IV., Act V., Scene I.

In this soliloquy on honor we find Falstaff rising to the height of his wit, and to his mocking wit he adds cool judgment of his times. In this passage we have one of the best examples of the chivalric ideal clashing with the realism of the age. We have observed how Sir Kay, and a little later, Braggadochio and the false Duessa in their fashion trampled upon the principles of chivalry. Here we have Falstaff engaged in the same kind of practice yet accomplishing his work in a newer, freer spirit. This may be attributed to the different attitudes of Spenser and Shakespeare toward the code of knight errantry. Falstaff speaks for a master penman who knows the disrespect which the Elizabethan Age has for the code and who openly ridicules it.

The ideals that the old order of chivalry called its own are so little respected in Falstaff's day that he frankly and magnificently jests about them. The Sixteenth Century was the "age of baroque".[21] It is hard to gauge, from the exuberance of the age, the subtle, secret lines of the inner natures of the personalities of the time. We know that coarse manners, a quality not characteristic of the chivalric ideal, were more likely to be seen at the Court than were gentle manners. There was a lack of discrimination and refinement; as Elizabeth's gay and pleasure-seeking temperament was coarse, so was Elizabethan society. "The Queen could control herself

---

21. William Stearns Davis, Life in Elizabethan Days, p. 10.

well enough upon occasion, yet neither she nor her subjects thought fit to check the expression of their emotions, and the consequence was that their manners were at times unbecoming. "Elizabeth spat at a courtier whose coat offended her taste, she boxed the ears of another, she tickled the back of Leicester's neck when he knelt to receive his earldom and she rapped out tremendous oaths."[22] "Coarse manners were often the expression of coarser morals."[23] English government resembled an Eastern despotism. The Queen persecuted not only the Catholics, but also the Nonconformists, Puritans and Independents. "Trial by jury, the most precious of English guarantees, no longer existed."[24] Elizabeth's reign was interestingly colored by acts of treason on the part of her more prominent governmental aides and by their executions. Illustrative of such highlights in the history of the country was the trial and beheading of the Earl of Essex. Moral misconduct of a similar shade was committed by Francis Bacon, entrusted with the position of Lord High Chancellor of England, who degraded his character by unbridled cupidity, was sent to prison and condemned for peculation. When we recall Elizabeth's shabby treatment of Mary of Scotland, which ended in Mary's execution in gloomy Fotheringay Castle, we wonder not that Sir Francis Drake beheaded his chief mate, Doughty, at the straits of Magellan because he had promised Leicester to rid the world of the man and that Leicester's wife was mysteriously killed by a "fall" down the stairs of her own home to satisfy a whim of the

22. Traill, op. cit., Vol. III. p. 383.
23. Ibid., p. 384.
24. Victor Duruy, History of Modern Times, p. 242.

Queen.[25] An age that permits such acts has certainly no respect for the chivalric ideal of justice, honor, self-respect, and brotherly love.

Continuing through the play, we see Falstaff encounter Douglas in the last of Scene Four. Falstaff shows here his disregard of the conventional attitude toward fighting. He refuses to take it seriously.[26] In somewhat the same manner of Sir Kay[27] he falls down, feigning death, at an early point in the duel. On the same field Prince Henry has fought with, and killed, Hotspur. After the battle subsides Falstaff gets up and, peering about, sees Hotspur lying dead nearby. Then ensues as fine a piece of the comic as comes from the actions of this old comedian:

> Falstaff: The better part of valor is discretion: in the which better part I have saved my life. 'Zounds, I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead: how, if he should counterfeit too and rise? by my faith, I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit. Therefore I'll make him sure: yea, and I'll swear I killed him. Why may not he rise as well as I? Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me. Therefore, sirrah (stabbing him), with a new wound in your thigh, come you along with me. (Takes up Hotspur on his back)
>
> Re-enter the Prince of Wales and Lord John of Lancaster

---

25. Abbott, Jacob, Queen Elizabeth, p. 171.

26. Stoll, Elmer Edgar, Shakespeare Studies, p. 406.

27. "...with a foyne thrust him (Kay) through the side, that Sir Kay fell down as he had been dead."

Prince: Come, brother John; full bravely hast thou flesh'd thy maiden sword.

Lancaster: But, soft! whom have we here? Did you not tell me this fat man was dead?

Prince: I did; I saw him dead, Breathless and bleeding on the ground. Art thou alive? Or is it fantasy that plays upon our eyesight? I prithee, speak; we will not trust our eyes Without our ears; thou art not what thou seem'st.

Falstaff: No, that's certain, I am not a double man, but if I be not Jack Falstaff, then am I Jack. There is Percy (throwing the body down): if your father will do me any honor, so; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself. I look to be either earl or duke, I can assure you.

Prince: Why, Percy I killed myself, and saw thee dead.

Falstaff: Didst thou? Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying! I grant you I was down and out of breath; and so was he; but we rose both at an instant and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock. If I may be believed, so: if not, let them that should reward valor bear the sin upon their own heads. I'll take it upon my death, I gave him this wound in the thigh: if the man were alive and would deny it, 'zounds, I would make him eat a piece of my sword.[28]

Such action and words can be nothing short of a finely-wrought travesty of all accepted ideas of heroism.

Sir John never fails to enrich his discourse with allusions to eating and drinking, but he is never actually

---

28. I Henry IV., Act V., Scene IV.

at a table.

Falstaff (to the Prince): No, by my troth
not so much as will serve to be
prologue to an egg and butter.
(Act I., Scene II.)

Falstaff (to the Prince): .....let a cup
of sack be my poison." (Act II., Scene II.)

Falstaff (to hostess): Give me a cup of sack.
(Act II., Scene Iv.,)

Peto (reading a paper taken from Falstaff's
pocket while he is asleep in the inn):
Item, a capon..... 2 s. 2 d.
" , sauce ..... 4 d.
" ; sack, 2 gallons..... 5 s. 8 d.
" , anchovies and sack
after supper..... 2 s. 6 d.
" , bread..... ob.
(Act II., Scene Iv.)

Falstaff (to Mistress Quickly): I forgive thee;
go, make ready breakfast.
(Act IV., Scene I.)

These allusions to the self-indulgent Falstaff should be properly followed by the account in Scene Three of Act Five, where, on the battlefield in the heat of the fighting, the Prince reaches for Falstaff's pistol and finds only a bottle of sack.

Falstaff: O Hal, I prithee, give me leave to
breathe awhile. Turk Gregory never
did such deeds in arms as I have done
this day. I have paid Percy, I have
made him sure.

Prince: He is, indeed; and living to kill thee.
I prithee, lend me thy sword.

Falstaff: Nay, before God, Hal, if Percy be
alive, thou get'st not my sword; but
take my pistol, if thou wilt.

Prince: Give it me: what, is it in the case?

Falstaff: Ay, Hal; 'tis hot, 'tis hot: there's that will sack a city. (The Prince draws it out, and finds it to be a bottle of sack.)

Prince: What, is it a time to jest and dally now? (He throws the bottle at him.)

At any time and all time, wine was the very staple of Falstaff's diet, and by his own admission, the basis of his courage. Such action as Falstaff's on the battle field is a joke to show his contempt for glory accompanied by danger, his systematic adherence to his "eat-drink-and-be-merry" philosophy in the most trying circumstances.

Part Two of Henry IV is probably inferior to Part One as far as it concerns this study. The last years of the reign, troubled by the prolonged illness of the king, as well as the growing responsibilities of the Prince, preclude much of the comic. It would appear that Falstaff's harsh dismissal upon the succession of the Prince to the throne is hardly in the comic spirit.[29]

There are in Part Two many humorous glimpses, however, of the old character we pursued through Part One. His meeting with and his conversation with the Chief Justice are delightfully comic in conception.

---

29. II Henry IV., Act V., Scene V.

Enter the Lord Chief-Justice and Servant.

Page: Sir, here comes the nobleman that committed the prince for striking him about Bardolph.

Falstaff: Wait close; I will not see him.

Ch. Just.: What's he that goes there?

Servant: Falstaff, an't please your lordship.

Ch. Just.: He that was in question for the robbery?

Servant: He my lord: but he hath since done good service at Shrewsbury; and, as I hear, is now going with some charge to the Lord John of Lancaster.

Ch. Just.: What, to York? Call him back again.

Servant: Sir John Falstaff!

Falstaff: Boy, tell him I am deaf.

Page: You must speak louder; my master is deaf.

Ch. Just.: I am sure he is, to the hearing of any thing good. Go, pluck him by the elbow; I must speak with him.

Servant: Sir John!

Falstaff: What! a young knave, and begging! Is there not wars? is there not employment? doth not the king lack subjects? do not the rebels need soldiers? Though it be a shame to be on any side but one, it is worse shame to beg than to be on the worst side, were it worse than the name of rebellion can tell how to make it.

Servant: You mistake me, sir.

Falstaff: Why, sir, did I say you were an honest man? setting my knighthood and my soldiership aside, I had lied in my throat, if I had said so.

Servant: I pray you, sir, then set your knighthood and your soldiership aside; and give me leave to tell you, you lie in your throat, if you say I am any other than an honest man.

Falstaff: I give thee leave to tell me so! I lay aside that which grows to me! If thou gettest any leave of me, hang me; if thou takest leave, thou wert better be hanged. You hunt counter: hence! avaunt!

Servant: Sir, my lord would speak with you.

Ch. Just.: Sir John Falstaff, a word with you.

Falstaff: My good lord! God give your lordship good time of day. I am glad to see your lordship abroad: I heard say your lordship was sick: I hope your lordship goes abroad by advice. Your lordship, though not clean past your youth, hath yet some smack of age in you, some relish of the saltiness of time; and I most humbly beseech your lordship to have a reverent care of your health.

Ch. Just.: Sir John, I sent for you before your expedition to Shrewsbury.

Falstaff: An't please your lordship, I hear his majesty is returned with some discomfort from Wales.

Ch. Just.: I talk not of his majesty: you would not come when I sent for you.

Falstaff: And I hear, moreover, his highness is fallen into this same whoreson apoplexy.

Ch. Just.: Well, God mend him! I pray you, let me speak with you.

Falstaff: This apoplexy is, as I take it, a kind of lethargy, an't please your lordship; a kind of sleeping in the blood, a whoreson tingling.

Ch. Just.: What tell me of it? be it as it is.

Falstaff: Very well, my lord, very well: rather, an't please you, it is the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking, that I am troubled withal.

Ch. Just.: To punish you by the heels would amend the attention of your ears; and I care not if I do become your physician.

Falstaff: I am as poor as Job, my lord, but not so patient; your lordship may minister the potion of imprisonment to me in respect of poverty; but how I should be your patient to follow your prescriptions, the wise may make some dram of a scruple, or indeed a scruple of itself.

Ch. Just.: I sent for you, when there were matters against you for your life, to come speak with me.

Falstaff: As I was then advised by my learned counsel in the laws of this land-service, I did not come.

Ch. Just.: Well, the truth is, Sir John, you live in great infamy.

Falstaff: He that buckles him in my belt cannot live in less.

Ch. Just.: Your means are very slender, and your waste is great.

Falstaff: I would it were otherwise: I would my means were greater, and my waist slenderer.[30]

The best part of Falstaff's wit is his alacrity. His huge body is completely mastered by his mind. His pretended deafness with the Justice; "the impressively patriotic reproach to the servant; the strategic friendly concern for the Justice's well-being; the deliberate mishearing, and then the bold confession of it and a patronising reference to the Justice's wisdom"[31] demonstrate his mental agility. His stupendous effrontery reaches its proper climax when he asks of the Justice: "Will your lordship lend me a thousand pounds?" [32]

---

30. II Henry IV., Act I., Scene II.

31. Charlton, op. cit., p. 26.

32. II Henry IV., Act I., Scene II.

In Act Two Mistress Quickly is having Sir John arrested for debt. Doubtless, no finer humor is to be found in all of Part Two than in this scene where Falstaff not only eludes his debts but persuades the hostess to pawn her plates in order to raise ten pounds to lend to him.[33] There are, too, inimitable scenes in Scene Two of Act Three where Falstaff encounters his men Shallow and Silence and in Falstaff's meeting with the recruits.

Falstaff: Have you provided me here half a dozen sufficient men?

Shallow: Marry, have we, sir....Let them appear as I call; let them do so, let them do so. Let me see; where is Mouldy?

Mouldy: Here, an't please you.

Shallow: What think you, Sir John? a good-limbed fellow; young, strong, and of good friends.

Falstaff: Is thy name Mouldy?

Mouldy: Yea, an't please you.

Falstaff: Tis the more time thou wert used.

.....

Shallow: For the other, Sir John: let me see: Simon Shadow!

Falstaff: Yea, marry, let me have him to sit under: he's like to be a cold soldier... Shadow will serve for summer; prick him, for we have a number of shadows to fill up the muster-book.

Shallow: Thomas Wart!

Falstaff: Where's he?

---

33. II Henry IV., Act II., Scene I.

Wart: Here, sir.

Falstaff: Is thy name Wart?

Wart: Yea, sir.

Falstaff: Thou art a very ragged wart.

The Sir John Falstaff that we have studied from Henry IV has been a character of enthusiastic jollity, ever turning the occasion into personal profit and always master of the situation. He never under any consideration possesses the idea of acting with chivalry. In truth he completely denies the ideal. He deliberately turns his back upon it, and with such droll cleverness and light-handedness that we are made to see the ludicrousness of the portrayal and are completely won over to the side of Falstaff. Sir John Falstaff of The Merry Wives of Windsor has very little in common with Falstaff of Henry IV; this figure in Shakespeare's later play is an old fat man whose wit and eloquence have left him. "I have been transformed, and how my transformation hath been washed and cudgelled, they (his old court associates) would melt me out of my fat drop by drop and liquor fisherman's boots with me: I warrant they would whip me with their fine wits till I were as crestfallen as a dried pear." [34] Falstaff in The Merry Wives of Windsor is the guller gulled. We have the difference between the two characters quite aptly delineated for us when we call to mind the duplicity he

---

34. The Merry Wives of Windsor, Act IV., Scene V.

suffers at the hands of Mistress Ford and Mistress Page.[35] He is as thoroughly mastered by situations as he was formerly a master of them. We discern his undisguised ignominy when we see him forced to hide in the clothes basket and emptied into the Thames,[36] and to masquerading in "the fat woman of Brentford's clothes".[37]

Since the Falstaff of The Merry Wives of Windsor is not the same character as the person bearing that name in the two parts of Henry IV it is well in reaching the conclusions in this study to deal principally with the earlier Falstaff.

In our study of the Morte D'Arthur we watched Sir Kay rebuffed by his associates, women and men alike. We subsequently noted in Spenser's writing how Braggadochio was shamed before his fellow men by having his beard shaved, his sword broken, and his armor taken from him. The false Duessa, his feminine counterpart, was treated with the same lack of respect by those who knew her. Another stage marking the changing of the old order of chivalry is the banishment of Falstaff and his fellows from the court.[38] For Henry V

---

35. Ibid., Act II., Scene I.
36. Ibid., Act III., Scene III.
37. Ibid., Act IV., Scene II.
38. II Henry IV., Act V., Scene V.

to cast him off was to ruthlessly trample Falstaff into extinction, and to kill his heart. Our reaction toward Falstaff's unkind dismissal is very different from our reaction toward the identical treatment given his comic predecessors. We are so saturated with his reasoning wit and so cognizant of the rich elements of human nature in Shakespeare's character that we are completely won over to the side of Falstaff. He proves himself the perfect comic hero by turning our laughter into tears.

While Shakespeare was thus occupied in satirizing the English chivalry of this period, Cervantes was putting forth his immortal travesty of Middle Age knight errantry in the adventures of Don Quixote and his squire, Sancho Panza. However, Don Quixote is more to be compared with Braggadochio in his half-wit extravagances, as exampled by the windmill incident and the battle with the Biscayan, than he is with the cool and reasoning Falstaff. It is well to remind ourselves, however, that Shakespeare's and Cervantes' purposes were identical in openly ridiculing the old chivalric ideal while Spenser tended to idealize knight errantry with his medievalism.

The figure which Shakespeare's imagination has intuitively compounded seems infinitely better provided than any of Falstaff's forerunners to instruct us in the lesson-giving comic. It is true that Falstaff breaks the same

emblems of the chivalric code as did Malory's and Spenser's characters. But Falstaff's rare wit and charm pitted against the old chivalric ideal show us that the antithesis of the ideal becomes lovable.

CONCLUSION.

Middle Age chivalry receives no criticism from the pen of Malory in the limited humor exhibited by the character of Sir Kay in the Morte D'Arthur. Malory's moralizing purpose in the Morte D'Arthur is to teach the good principles of the chivalric code, and although some of his contemporaries see that the code is wearing threadbare, Malory feels that it has yet much to offer the age.

Spenser, who shows by his orthography, his use of allegory, and his use of opposing good and evil that he leans toward the medieval, employs some critical humor against knight errantry. In his Faerie Queene Braggadochio and the false Duessa are the antitheses of chivalric conduct. Criticism of the institution of chivalry is, perhaps, unintentional on the part of Spenser and becomes evident to the student only when he realizes the fact that Spenser has for petty political reasons satirized Mary, Queen of Scots and others who should be proponents of the ideals of chivalry. His satire, then, is not of the order of knighthood but of individuals who should bear the standard of the order and do not.

It is in Shakespeare's character Falstaff that we see open satire directed toward the ideal. At the time of Falstaff the knightly code had been transformed by the

political, economic, and moral conditions until there was but a sham of it remaining. The complicated character of Falstaff is set up by the master dramatist to act as spokesman for his age in giving expression of the total disrespect which the times held for the old, out-worn chivalric ideal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Jacob. Queen Elizabeth. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877.

Bemont, Charles and Monod, G. Medieval Europe from 395 to 1270. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1903.

Bergson, Henri. Laughter, An Essay On The Meaning of the Comic. London: Macmillan Company, 1911.

Boas, Ralph P. and Hahn, B. M. Social Backgrounds of English Literature. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1934.

Brandes, George. William Shakespeare. New York: Macmillan Company, 1924.

Brodby, Godfrey-Fox. Short Studies in Shakespeare. New York: Macmillan Company, 1929.

Bulfinch, Thomas. The Age of Chivalry. New York: T. Y. Crowell Company, 1913.

Carlyle, Thomas. Heroes and Hero Worship. A. L. Burt Company

Cazamian, Louis. The Development of English Humour. Part I. New York: Macmillan Company, 1930.

Charlton, H. B. Falstaff. Manchester: The Manchester University Press, 1935.

Coleridge, Samuel T. Essays-Lectures on Shakespeare. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1909.

Congreve, William. The Complete Works of, London: The Nonesuch Press, 1923.

Davis, William Stearns. Life on a Medieval Barony. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923.

Davis, William Stearns, Life in Elizabethan Days. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930.

Dowden, Edward. Shakespeare - His Mind and Art. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880.

Draper, John W. Sir John Falstaff. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1932.

Duruy, Victor. History of Modern Times. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1894.

Eastman, Max. The Sense of Humor. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Representative Men. Chicago: Union School Furnishing Company, 1910.

Granville-Barker, Harley, and Harrison, G.B. A Companion to Shakespeare Studies. New York: Macmillan Company, 1934.

Hazlitt, William. Characters of Shakespeare's Plays. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1910.

Hicks, Edward. Sir Thomas Malory. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928.

Kelso, Ruth. The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1934.

Malory, Sir Thomas. Le Morte D'Arthur. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1928.

Malory, Sir Thomas. Selections from "Morte Darthur". Introduction and notes by William Edward Mead. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1901.

Malory, Sir Thomas. Le Morte Darthur. Introduction by Sir Thomas Strachey. New York: Macmillan Company, 1901.

Mason, John E. Gentlefolk in the Making - Studies in the History of English Courtesy Literature and Related Topics from 1534 to 1742. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935.

Meredith, George. An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit. London: Constable and Company, 1919.

Milford, Humphrey. Shakespeare Criticism. London: Oxford University Press, 1923.

Morgann, Maurice. Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff. London: C. and H. Baldwin, 1820.

Neilson, William Allan, and Thorndike, Ashley H. The Facts About Shakespeare. New York: Macmillan Company, 1927.

Prestage, Edgar. Chivalry. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928.

Priestley, J. B. Fools and Philosophies. London: The Bodley Head, 1925.

Randolph, A. M. F. The Trial of Sir John Falstaff. New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1893.

Schofield, William Henry. Chivalry in English Literature. Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1925.

Schucking, L. L. Character Problems in Shakespeare. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922.

Spenser, Edmund. The Faerie Queene. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1926.

Spenser, Edmund. The Complete Poetical Works of. (Student's Cambridge Edition) Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1908.

Stokes, Francis Griffin. A Dictionary of the Characters and Proper Names in the Works of Shakespeare. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924.

Stoll, Elmer Edgar. Shakespeare Studies. New York: Macmillan Company, 1927.

Strachey, Lytton, Elizabeth and Essex. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928.

Thorndike, Ashley H. English Comedy. New York: Macmillan Company, 1929.

Traill, H. D. Social England. Volumes II and III. London: Cassell and Company, 1895.

Vinaver, Eugene. Malory. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929.

Ward, A. W., Prothers, G. W., Leathes, Stanley. The Cambridge Modern History. Volumes II and III. New York: Macmillan Company, 1907.

Ward, A. W. and Waller, A. R. The Cambridge History of English Literature. Volumes I and II. New York: Macmillan Company, 1933.

Warner, Beverley E. English History in Shakespear's Plays. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1909.

Wells, H. G. The Outline of History. New York: Macmillan Company, 1921.

Wilson, Dover. The Essential Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932.

Winslow, Ola Elizabeth. Low Comedy As a Structural Element in English Drama. Chicago: University of Chicago Libraries, 1926.

Lois Carter

Typist