Parody, the Child-Actors and Marston's *Antonio* Plays.

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'Who winks and shuts his apprehension up
From common sense of what men were, and are,
Who would not know what men must be – let such
Hurry amain from our black-visag'd shows; '

Antonio's Revenge, (Prologue, 17–20)(1)

'The truth is that the spectators are in their senses and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage and that the players are only players.'

Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare.*

'The actor on a stage plays at being another before a gathering of people who play at taking him for that other person.'

Jorge Luis Borges, *Everything and Nothing.*

Until the 1960 s, writers on Marston found themselves in general agreement as to both his dramatic intentions, and his dramaturgical failings; T. S. Eliot's essay may be taken as representative:

'If we read first ... *Antonio's Revenge* and *Antonio and Mellida*... our first impression is likely to be one of bewilderment, that anyone could write plays so bad, and that plays so bad could be preserved and reprinted ... One at first suspects Marston to have been a poet, with no inclination to the stage, but driven thereto by need, and trying to write to the popular taste.'(2)

Eliot's crucial assumption here is that, in his earlier work at least, Marston

was attempting to write straight plays in the popular Elizabethan tradition: 'he spent nearly the whole of his dramatic career writing a kind of drama against which we feel that he rebelled'(3). Eliot is clearly not entirely happy with his own account of the plays, but this assumption that Marston was a failed Senecan is one often shared by later critics(4). It was in opposition to just this assumption that R. A. Foakes published his article 'John Marston's Fantastical Plays'(5); whereas earlier critics had condemned the *Antonio* plays for their strained rhetoric and unreal action, Foakes declared that these qualities were their very dramatic point, seeing them as 'a satire directed not so much against folly and vice...as against conventional literary and theatrical modes and attitudes'(6). The plays were, in other words, conscious parodies of the popular Senecan drama, and of *The Spanish Tragedy* in particular.

Central to Foakes' argument, however, is the thesis that the acting of the child-actors, who first performed the plays, was inherently unrealistic, and that indeed Marston wrote such parodies of the popular stage to exploit this weakness. At approximately the same time as Foakes - and apparently quite independently - Anthony Caputi developed a very similar view of the boys' acting style, and also concluded that parody and burlesque constituted a dominant element in the earlier plays of Marston, although his actual location of this element seems to differ somewhat from that of Foakes(7). These arguments have been influential - as one may judge from G. K. Hunter's not terribly successful attempts to combine this new sense of parody with the more orthodox view of the plays as straightforwardly Senecan(8). While I find myself in sympathy with some of the points made by both of these writers, they both seem to have been so impressed by what they take to be the inherent unreality of a performance of Senecan drama by the child-actors, that they have failed to consider the very real

critical problems raised by their view of the plays. Two main issues are raised by their views: first, the 'realism' or otherwise of Elizabethan acting, child or adult, and its relevance to our interpretation of the drama, and, second, the related question of how to recognise parody, both in the drama generally, and in these plays in particular.

The argument as to the 'formalism' or 'realism' of Elizabethan acting has been going on for some time now, and, although much of interest has been said on both sides, few clear conclusions seem to have been reached. Critics such as M. C. Bradbrock, S. L. Bethell, and B. L. Joseph, have argued, with differing degrees of conviction, for a 'formal' style of acting. In support of this view they have pointed to Elizabethan descriptions of acting - and in particular to the repeated analogy drawn between actor and orator - to Elizabethan stage-conditions, to the use of boys to act women, and to the nature of the drama itself(9). Writers such as M. Rosenberg and J. R. Brown have challenged these views, and argued instead for a more or less naturalistic style of acting, pointing again to contemporary accounts, which frequently stress the 'realism' of the acting and the power of the dramatic illusion thus generated, as well as to the nature of the drama(10). An examination of the arguments used on both sides, however, leaves one unsurprised that clear conclusions have not been reached, for all the participants share, to some degree, certain misleading assumptions. Rather than discuss their arguments in detail, I wish to examine these assumptions and to propose a rather different view of the matter, a view which will also help us to assess more clearly the questions of parody and realism in the drama.

It is clear from Elizabethan accounts of acting that writers in the period felt quite able to hold both of the modern views - 'formalist' and 'realist' - at once. If we look at R. M.'s character of 'A Player', published in his 1629 pamphlet *Micrologia*, this becomes obvious:

> 'A Player is a volume of various conceits or epitome of time, who by his representation and appearance makes things long past seem present. He is much like the counters in arithmetic, and may stand one while for a king, another while a beggar, many times as a mute or cipher. Sometimes he represents that which in his life he scarce practises - to be an honest man. To the point, he oft personates a rover, and therein comes nearest to himself. If his action prefigure passion he raves, rages and protests...[11].'

Here we find acting described in terms of 'representation', 'appearance', 'stand for', 'personate' and 'prefigures' - where, one wonders, would R. M. have stood in the modern debate, the terms of which are well conveyed by Rosenberg's description of the 'formalist' attitude: 'which now comes to this: that the Elizabethan dramatist's words were all that really counted, and that his actors were trained to be graceful mannered mouthpieces who recited the dramatic poetry without letting their personalities or their personal ideas of the part they played colour the performance in any way; they acted formally, not naturally; they did not portray character, they symbolised it'[12]. Rosenberg's is a hostile account, but clearly R. M. could be cited as evidence on either side of this debate, just as other contemporary accounts have been[13]. Yet the reason why this evidence seems contradictory to us is that we have unthinkingly worked to understand Elizabethan acting from the viewpoint of a predominantly naturalist dramatic convention; in unthinkingly accepting an equivalence of realism and naturalism, we have inevitably concluded that if Elizabethan acting was formalist, then it cannot have been realistic, and if it was realistic, then it cannot have been formalist. It has thus seemed meaningful to oppose evidence for formalism with evidence for realism, and vice versa. To unravel the misconceptions behind such an attitude, it is necessary to explore in rather more depth the nature of a dramatic convention.

Drama is probably better understood as a sort of game played by

dramatist, actors and audience, dominated by a willingness to pretend, than as a subterfuge practised upon a passive and captive audience. The rules of this game are the dramatic conventions, which we may briefly define as agreements between all concerned as to what is and is not relevant to our understanding of the action on stage, that is, to knowing what to pretend is occurring. This definition may be illustrated by the convention of the stage-whisper; when we witness a stage-whisper in the theatre, we are aware that it is relevant to our interpretation of the action that the speech is unvoiced - this is our signal that it is a whisper - and that it is not relevant that the 'whisper' can in fact be heard by all on stage. Of course, when we talk of a stage-whisper in everyday life then it is precisely this latter quality that we are referring to - we expose the convention by placing it in the conventions of real life. This example is an interesting one because it illustrates also the sort of absolute constraint that naturalism faces; if the whisper was any more realistic, then it would not be heard by the audience at all, and the whole point of the exercise would be defeated. Thus we may further define naturalism as the dramatic convention that everything that we witness on stage is relevant to our understanding of the action, as long as it lies within the constraints imposed by the nature of drama itself.

Now this manifestly is not the convention of Elizabethan theatre, as can be clarified by a consideration of the ubiquitous Elizabethan convention of disguise. If an actor was to appear in a transparent disguise in a play by Chekhov and in a play by Shakespeare, we would take it as signifying something different in each case; in Chekhov the transparency of the disguise would be relevant to our interpretation of the action - we would probably conclude that its wearer was to be supposed insane. In Shakespeare, on the other hand, his transparency would not be relevant - we would pretend that the disguise was adequate in order to understand the story. The

great advantage of seeing conventions in this way, as rules for the interpretation of the action, is that it enables us to discuss modes of realism in the theatre without becoming involved in reference to such tenuous psychological variables as 'dramatic illusion' and 'theatrical experience'; notions which annoyed Brecht so much[14]. Coleridge's oft-quoted 'willing suspension of disbelief' is right precisely because it emphasises 'willing'; anybody in the audience might stand up and say that Edgar's disguise could not fool anyone, but the proper response to this would not be to tell him that he is ruining the 'dramatic illusion', but rather to tell him that he is failing to understand the convention, that he is not observing the rules of this particular game.

In these terms we can say that the convention of realism is merely the convention that the dramatist is presenting us with a history, that is that the actors are pretending to be people, just as, as Borges points out, we are pretending to take them as such. Allegorical drama, for instance, clearly has a different convention, although, as the development of the *Interlude* shows, drama seems to carry an implicit drive towards history, simply because it involves personification. At the other end of the spectrum, naturalism also represents a sort of terminus of dramatic convention, for, as Brecht saw so clearly, it is theatre attempting to deny itself as theatre. The extremes of pure abstraction and pure mimesis are in practice impossible to realise.

Now, just as the dominant convention of Elizabethan drama seems to be realist and yet not naturalist, so it seems likely that Elizabethan acting was, in accordance with this convention, formal and yet realist - capable of moving spectators to tears, as they were moved to tears by an actor's portrayal of Desdemona in 1610[15]. The fact that contemporary evidence about acting seems to us contradictory does not mean that it is so, because it is

only from a naturalist convention that formal recitation will seem 'puppet-like'. To conclude that formal acting seemed so to Elizabethan audiences is to make both an error of historical perspective and an error of dramatic convention. Blank-verse is certainly unrealistic by the standards of 19 th-century naturalism, and it certainly demands a delivery which is sensitive to rhythm and metre in a way in which spontaneous speech never is. Yet the convention of the drama is simply that blank-verse is to be taken as representing spontaneous speech, and while we watch or read the plays we accept the convention. Thus J. R. Brown overstates his case when he argues that: 'our modern actors stand a better chance of interpreting Shakespeare than those who were his contemporaries, for the modern tradition is based on a thorough - going naturalism unknown to the Elizabethans'[16]. While we may agree that the Elizabethan dramatists aimed at a species of realism, it is surely false to think that acting appropriate to a tradition which denies key Elizabethan conventions, such as blank-verse, is the best way of conveying that realism. The way to move an audience is to have the courage of the conventions that a dramatist commits you to; it is not necessary, as is often claimed, for conventions to be unconscious, merely for them to be accepted.

But to argue that modern audiences can recover the conventions of past drama is not to say that all historical information is irrelevant to our understanding of the plays; historical knowledge may be necessary if we are to recognise and recover past conventions. Moreover, it is surely relevant to our understanding of the convention of disguise, for example, that costume had an emphatically semiotic function in Elizabethan society, as is indicated by Elizabeth's Sumptuary laws. More generally, the Elizabethan acceptance of formalism as realism was obviously supported by the ubiquitous formality of Elizabethan social life, as well as the concomitant stress

in intellectual life upon the formal, general and archetypal nature of reality, as opposed to the spontaneous, specific and unique qualities emphasised in bourgeois society[17].

If we then cease to oppose formalism and realism in our discussion of Elizabethan theatre, our sense of the inherent unreality of a boys' performance must be greatly reduced. In a naturalist theatre - a theatre denying its identity as theatre - child-acting is clearly inappropriate to the drama, but in a theatre which attempts no such total mimesis upon the stage, this becomes a far less important issue. In other words, we must not confuse, as I think Foakes and Caputi do, the question of whether the boys were taken as 'straight' in their performance of adult roles, with the question of how inherently naturalistic such a performance could have been. Again there are various supporting conditions in Elizabethan society for the convention of children representing men; to think here of modern analogies, such as schoolboy performances of Shakespeare, will not help us very much, for, as Andrew Gurr remarks, the training of the child-actors in rhetoric and oratory was probably rather superior to that of the adult players. Given the rhetorical nature of much Jacobean drama, they may have been more adequate to their parts in some ways than the adults[18]. Also relevant here is the gap between pre- and post-Romantic attitudes towards childhood; when Caputi argues that 'the child-actors constituted a major satiric premise: that adults are often children' he is evoking a sense of the otherness of childhood which is inappropriate to the period under discussion, just as when Harbage finds a smutty contrast of adult sexuality and childhood innocence, he is invoking an idea of childhood that was not developed until later[19]. As J. H. Plumb has noted, 'certainly there was no separate notion of childhood. Children shared the same games with adults, the same toys, the same fairy stories. They lived their lives together, never apart.'[20] Indeed

there were no public ceremonies or rituals from which children were excluded - Lady Jane Grey, for instance, was chief mourner at her mother's funeral when she was only eleven years old[21]. Moreover the ages of the boys varied in 1600 (the date of *Antonio and Mellida*'s first production) between ten and fifteen, and it seems to me very likely that the smaller and younger boys took the parts of pages, the boys of middle size and age the parts of women, and the largest and oldest boys the parts of men. This would mean that the biggest parts would have been played by the older and more experienced boys, and also that realism would have been helped by the creation of a sort of model of the adult world in terms of both size and voice - most of the songs in the *Antonio* plays are performed by the pages.

However, even if it could not be demonstrated that the boys were capable of a straight performance of the plays under discussion, the problem of the relevance of this to our interpretation of the plays would remain. If we assume, for instance, that the *Jeronimo* which the child-actors stole and performed was, in fact, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and that the performance was, as Caputi suggests[22], a burlesque, then this fact clearly would not affect our assessment of the play: it would be a fact about the boys rather than about the play. This point may be made even more sharply with reference to a play such as *The Malcontent* which was acted by both boys and adults - was it a burlesque with one and a straight play with the other? And if so, which is the preferable reading? Clearly reference to the original production will not decide this question for us. One of the advantages of the view of convention that I have been developing is precisely that it enables us to distinguish between a merely contingent treatment of a text, such as a burlesque of *The Spanish Tragedy*, and the acting style demanded by the text itself, because it enables us to distinguish between artificiality as a dramatic convention and artificiality as a dramatic idea.

As J. R. Brown argues, it is important to recognise that the initial phase of the Elizabethan drama rapidly came to be seen as artificial[23]; yet this development should not be characterised, as it is by him, as simply a relinquishment of formalism. Rather, this is simply the way in which realism develops - by exposing old conventions and positing new ones[24]. Blank-verse, for instance, gained rapidly in fluency and flexibility through the period, approaching far greater naturalism than was at first possible, but nevertheless retaining the essential convention. Thus in *Hamlet* the play within the play is given an artifical diction which is in marked contrast to that of the rest of the play: the conventionality of the play within the play enforces the reality of the play-world itself[25]. The verse of the other characters remains, of course, artificial, yet it is an artificial convention, whereas that of the play within the play represents artificiality as a dramatic idea. Such an effect is, of course, highly ambivalent, and indeed some critics argue that the effect of the play within the play is to expose the convention of the whole play. Examples of such self-reference are extremely common in Elizabethan drama, and as they figure largely in Foakes' argument, it is worth taking a slightly closer look at them.

We must draw a distinction here between self-reference and actually breaking the convention. If we look at a famous example of self-reference in *Antony and Cleopatra* the distinction will become clear:

> 'Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I'the posture of a whore' (V. ii. 217-220)

This speech does not break the play's convention; if we thought that the actor was suddenly revealing that he was not Cleopatra at all, but rather a

boy acting Cleopatra, we would be misinterpreting the speech. Rather, its point is precisely the contrast between such a 'squeaking' boy and Cleopatra's own greatness. At a subtler level what is being suggested, in part, is the histrionic quality of Cleopatra's own behaviour, and our second-level response to the speech - but 'she' is in fact a boy-actor - would strengthen this sense. This effect, however, depends upon a simile being suggested between pretence and actuality, between the play-world and the world of the theatre, not an equivalence. *Julius Caesar* yields an even more interesting example of this; immediately after the assassination Cassius says:

Cassius: 'How many ages hence
Shall this lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn, and accents yet unknown!
Brutus: How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport...' (III. i. 111-114)

Here again Shakespeare is pointing to elements of the situation which are theatrical, yet he is equally strenuously emphasising the vast gulf between the reality of the ugly slaughter, which Brutus' liberalism betrays into ritual, and its purely unreal representation: the lines have a ghastly secondary application to Brutus' own attitude to the murder. Again, however, this operates in the theatre through simile rather than equivalence.

Clearly this sense of the distinction between artificiality as a dramatic convention, and artificiality as a dramatic idea, has especial application to the question of dramatic parody. For parody also works by incongruity, by exposing one convention and positing another. In parody the convention that is posited is simply that of the reality of the theatre itself; in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, for instance, the conventions of the popular romantic drama are exposed, whilst the reality of the citizen, his wife, and Ralph is asserted; they represent the 'reality' of the play-world. Thus an

actor would act Ralph acting the Knight; in parody actors act actors acting parts, rather than simply acting parts. Therefore to suppose that parody may be related in a simple way to the inherent incompetence or unreality of boy-acting is to betray a misunderstanding of parody as a literary fact, as opposed to a merely contingent treatment of a text. Nevertheless if the convention posited is that of the reality of the actors themselves, adequacy does not really enter into it, as they will merely be acting themselves. But this question of the convention posited by the drama can only be answered by an examination of the text itself; a consideration of the acting that the text demands, rather than merely the acting it has happened to receive.

Of course, this rejection of old conventions and positing of new may be purely implicit in parody - one can think of, for instance, the contrast between rhetoric and matter in Pope's *Rape of the Lock* - but such purely implicit parody may be difficult to recognise, precisely because too expert an imitation of a set of conventions may well render serious and parodic composition indistinguishable. Equally, a poet may come to take seriously the very conventions that he begins by mocking. Seeing parody in this way as a simultaneous exposing and asserting of convention also allows us to account for the fact that we can read a parody of, say, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and yet return afterwards to the play and not find it ruined for us; clearly this is because we can recover its conventions. This fact is exactly the same as the fact that we can turn from the realism of a naturalist theatre to the realism of a formalist theatre, without one ruining the other. Let us now turn to the *Antonio* plays and apply this somewhat lengthy reasoning to our reading of them; our concern here must be to establish their conventions.

As I remarked earlier, the convention of parody pure and simple is that the reality of the action is the reality of the theatre itself: it is by

comparison with this reality that the rest of the action is exposed as ridiculous. Thus Foakes argues that: 'it is immediately apparent from the *Induction* to *Antonio and Mellida* that Marston was very consciously writing for children'[26]. It is doubly surprising, therefore, to discover that the *Induction*, the convention of which, after all, is always that the actors act themselves, contains no clear references to the boyishness of the boys, and that Foakes has to consistently distort or misread it to make his point. The purpose of the *Induction*, in fact, is not so much to render the characters of the play unreal, as to direct the audience's moral judgement of them; one can see this immediately with Piero:

Alb: 'Whom do you personate?
Piero: Piero, Duke of Venice!
Alb: O, ho; then thus frame your exterior shape
To haughty form of elate majesty
As if you held the palsy-shaking head
Of feeling chance under your fortune's belt' (Induction, 6-10)

(We may note in passing that the term 'personate' has been held to signify a more naturalist style of acting developing amongst the Elizabethans[27], and that J. R. Brown cites the whole of this Induction as evidence for the naturalism of Elizabethan acting![28].) Here, however, Marston uses the overblown style of Piero's part to make a moral point:

Piero: 'Who cannot be proud, stroke up the hair and strut?
Alb: Truth. Such rank custom is grown popular;
And now the vulgar fashion strides as wide
And stalks as proud upon the weakest stilts
Of the slight'st fortunes...' (Induction, 14-18)

This may constitute, as Foakes claims, a reference to adult acting, although this seems to me unlikely as 'such rank custom' had not recently 'grown

popular', but rather was fast becoming outmoded. The explicit point of the speech is merely that the Senecan strut is an appropriate image for the hypocrisy of the usurper; Piero is a tyrant and the tyrant's claim to power is always hollow.

We find something similar at work in Antonio's discussion of the difficulty of his Amazonian disguise:

Ant: 'I a voice to play a lady! I shall ne'er do it.
Alb: O, an Amazon should have such a voice, virago-like. Not play two parts in one? away, away: 'tis common fashion. Nay, if you cannot bear two subtle fronts under one hood, idiot, go by, go by, off this world's stage.'
(Induction, 72–76)

The odd thing here is that the joke relies, as it does in the play itself, on the difficulty for a man like Antonio of acting a woman: his boyishness is to be forgotten. Again the dramatic problem is turned into a comment upon the world's hypocrisy; one cannot survive in the world unless one can act well, just as Antonio cannot survive in Piero's court unless he is well disguised. Antonio's reply to Alberto again emphasises the difficulty of acting two parts, but this arises precisely from the fact that one can learn to act one part persuasively.

When we come to Matzagente, we come to the parody of outmoded fustian that Foakes makes such play with:

Matzag: 'By the bright honour of a Milanoise
And the resplendent fulgor of this steel
I will defend the feminine to death,
And ding his spirit to the verge of hell
That dares divulge a lady's prejudice.
Fel: Rampum, scrampum, mount tufty Tamburlaine! What rattling

thunderclap breaks from his lips? (Induction, 81–87)

Foakes removes Feliche's comment from its context, and suggests that it is to be applied to all the Senecan rhetoric of the plays; but to do this is to completely disregard the fact that Matzagente's fustian is contrasted with the diction of the other characters, precisely because Matzagente is presented as a ridiculous and affected fop:

Alb: 'O' 'tis native to his part. For acting a modern Bragadoch under the person of Matzagente, the Duke of Milan's son, it may seem to suit with a good fashion of coherence.' (Induction, 88–90)

Matzagente, like many another Elizabethan courtier of the drama, is presented as artificial in the extreme; but the effect is gained through the sharp contrast, in terms of both rhythm and vocabulary, between his speeches and the others. Thus here, as generally in the *Induction*, there is no direct reference to the boyishness of the actors, and the artificiality of the parts is discussed as a means of directing our judgement of the characters represented: Piero as a hypocrite, Antonio as a man unable to be a man in the rotten court, and Matzagente as a ridiculous and affected fop.

When we turn to the plays themselves we see the attitude of the *Induction* amply affirmed; the action of the plays is presented as actual, and yet at the same time shown as dominated by behaviour which is exposed as histrionic. There are, in fact, only two points in the plays where the convention is broken by reference to the world of the theatre itself (A & M IV. i., and A. R., II. i.) and both of these are only minor in effect. Elsewhere, the court is presented as the reality of the play, although within this convention much of the actual behaviour is exposed as unreal, Piero, for instance, opens *Antonio's Revenge* in a quite explicitly histrionic manner:

Piero: 'Hell, Night
Give loud applause to my hypocrisy.' (A.R., I. i. 30-31)

Yet this histrionic quality is being used to make a point about Machiavellan tyranny: its monstrous egotism:

Strotzo: 'Yes.
Piero: No. Yes. Nothing but no and yes, dull lump?
Canst thou not honey me with fluent speech
And even adore my topless villainy. (A.R., I. i. 82-85)

To read this as simply a parody of the stage-villain is to miss the point, which is the histrionic quality of real villainy: the parody is being used to expose evil itself to ridicule. Thus when Piero is faced with events that he cannot control, the collapse of his fluent rhetoric has added point: '... or do-do-do, so-so-so-something. I know not who-who-who-what I do-do-do-nor who-who-who-where I am'(A. & M., III, ii, 175-177). Clearly this stuttering chaos demands from the boy actors a realistic 'personation', just as the other speeches demand a realistic performance of Piero acting the villain.

Yet, if the court world is presented as real, we find that when we look at exactly what behaviour is asserted as natural, as lying behind the complicated pose and counter-pose, the net effect is highly complex. For although passion of a Senecan kind is consistently exposed as histrionic, the same is true of the passionless mask of stoicism. Unfortunately I do not have the space here to demonstrate this in detail, but if we examine one of the typical attacks on passion in the play, the point can be illustrated; in *Antonio's Revenge* Pandulpho says:

'Wouldst have me cry, run raving up and down
For my son's loss? Wouldst have me turn rank mad,
Or wring my face with mimic action,
Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike.
Away 'tis apish action, player-like.
If he is guiltless why should tears be spent? (A.R., I. ii. 312-317)

Pandulpho's view here is relatively clear: stoicism gives one the proper response to bereavement, which is to laugh at it; passion is merely an empty drama which achieves nothing - it is, in fact, unreal. Equally clearly, what Pandulpho ridicules here, Antonio, for example, has been doing for most of the rest of the play, and Pandulpho's sense that passion achieves nothing seems to be confirmed elsewhere:

Maria: 'How now sweet son; good youth what dost thou?
Ant: Weep, weep.
Maria: Dost naught but weep, weep?' (A.R., II. ii. 139-141)

Moreover, the sense of the unreality of such passion is confirmed by Antonio himself:

Ant: 'Madam
I will not swell like a tragedian
In forced passion of affected strains' (A. R., II. ii. 104-106)

although he himself immediately reverts to such behaviour.

If we look at the context of Pandulpho's speech cited above the effect becomes more complex:

Pand: 'Ha, ha, ha.
Alb: Why laugh you, uncle? That's my coz, your son,

Whose breast hangs cased in his cluttered gore.
Pand: True, man, true; why, wherefore should I weep?' (A.R., I. ii. 294-297)

Here the attitude of apatheia is pushed to the point where we feel that it is simply crazy, and because of this unsettling sense we are well prepared for his volte-face later in the play:

Pand: 'Man will break out despite philosophy.
Why all this while I ha'played a part,
Like to some boy that acts a tragedy,
Speaks burly words and raves out passion;
But when he thinks upon his infant weakness
He droops his eye' (A. R., IV. ii. 69-74)

This speech merely makes explicit the attack upon stoicism which is articulated in both plays, in the characters of Feliche and Andrugio in *Antonio and Mellida* and of Pandulpho in *Antonio's Revenge*, yet it is phrased in a curious way. To explain his emotional outburst, he describes his previous apatheia in terms of the image of a boy-actor raving out passion. The effect of the self-reference is similar to those discussed earlier: analogy rather than equivalence between play-world and the world of the theatre is asserted. But it seems strange to see the stoic as histrionic in exactly the same way as the tragedian, for the unreality of the one is the unreality of a lack of passion, and the unreality of the other is the unreality of an excess of passion. We should notice, however, that both stoic and tragic figures in the plays find it impossible to maintain the poses that they adopt because of passion; Antonio's rhetoric, as much as Piero's, collapses under the pressure of emotion:

Ant: 'What was't I said?
O, this is naught but speckling melancholy

I have been-
That Morpheus tender skinp-Cousin German?' (A.&M., IV. i. 23-26)

Yet, at the same time, all the characters can see intermittently that from the point of view of stoicism such passion is unreal; what Marston aims at, and achieves, in these plays is the effect of the simultaneous absurdity and inevitability of human passion. Passionate rhetoric is condemned from the viewpoint of Senecan apatheia, yet stoicism itself is helpless against the facts of the human psyche and of human experience. When Antonio enters reading Seneca's *De Providentia* he comments:

'Pish, thy mother was not lately widowed,
Thy dear affied love lately defam'd
With blemish of foul lust when thou wrotst thus.
Thou wrapp'd in furs, baking thy limbs fore fires
Forbidst the frozen zone to shudder' (A.R., II. ii. 50-55)

This is clearly realism in the sense that Marston claims it in his prologue to the play; yet it does not entirely rob the stoic perspective of its force, and a double-perspective on the action - unreal and inevitable - is entirely in keeping with a Christianised stoicism, which saw Seneca's weakness as the unreal demands that he made on fallen man, and yet accepted much of his teaching on providence.

Thus Caputi and Foakes, impressed as they are by the inherent lack of naturalism in a boy's performance of these plays, distort their meaning as much as do the arguments of, say, T. S. Eliot. Far from being simply parodies of the popular Senecan tradition, devised to exploit an inherent incompetence on the part of the boys, they rather use parody of elements of the tradition to convey a Protestant sense of the simultaneous absurdity and inevitability of human passion. Marston's Antonio plays may be 'fantastical', as Foakes claims, but they are, as Marston himself said, 'seriously

fantastical' (Dedication, *Antonio and Mellida*).

〈References〉

(1) All references to the plays are to: John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida*, ed. G. K. Hunter, Regents Renaissance Drama Series, (London, 1965), and John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, ed. G. K. Hunter, Regents Renaissance Drama Series, (London, 1965).

(2) T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 3 rd edition, (London, 1953), p. 223.

(3) Ibid., p. 233.

(4) See for example: Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama*, (London, 1947), Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*, (Wisconsin, 1960).

(5) R. A. Foakes, 'John Marston's Fantastical Plays: Antonio and Mellida and Antonio's Revenge', *Philological Quarterly*, XLI, I, (Jan, 1962).

(6) Ibid., p. 238.

(7) Anthony Caputi, *John Marston, Satirist*, (Cornell, 1961), esp. Chap. IV.

(8) See his introduction to *Antonio and Mellida*. See also Reavley Gair's introduction to *Antonio's Revenge* in John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, ed. Reavley Gair, The Revels Plays, (Manchester, 1978).

(9) See M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*, (Cambridge, 1935), S. L. Bethell, 'Shakespeare's Actors', *R. E. S.* n. s. 1 (July, 1950) : 193-205. B.L. Joseph, *Elizabethan Acting*, (Oxford1964).

(10) J. R. Brown, 'On the Acting of Shakespeare's Plays,'(1953), Marvin Rosenberg, 'Elizabethan Actors: Men or Marionettes?'(1954), reprinted in *The Seventeenth Century Stage*, ed. G. E. Bentley, (Chicago, 1968).

(11) *A Book of Characters*, ed. W. H. D. Rouse, (London, 1930), p. 171.

(12) M. R. Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 95.

(13) J. R. Brown, op. cit., takes up a lot of B. L. Joseph's evidence and cites it back at him.

(14) See the essays by Brecht included in *The Theory of the Modern Stage*, ed. Eric Bentley, (Harmondsworth, 1968).

(15) See the letter cited by Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 98.

(16) J. R. Brown, op. cit., p. 42.

(17) See Lise-Lone Marker, 'Nature and Decorum in the theory of Elizabethan Acting', in *The Elizabethan Theatre* III, ed. D. Galloway, (1970).

(18) A. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, (Cambridge, 1970).

(19) Caputi, op. cit., p. 113; A. Harbage. *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, passim, (London, 1952).

(20) Cited by M.J. Tucker, 'The Child as Beginning and End: 15 th and 16 th century English Childhood', the *History of Childhood* ed. de Mause, (New York, 1974). See also P. Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, (Harmondsworth, 1979), Gair; op. cit., pp. 30 ff.

(21) Tucker, op. cit., p. 232.

(22) Caputi, op. cit., p. 111.

(23) J. R. Brown, op. cit.

(24) My argument here has been strongly influenced by E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, (London, 1960).

(25) On this see Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, (London, 1962).

(26) R. A. Foakes, op. cit., p. 229.

(27) A. Gurr, op. cit.

(28) J. R. Brown, op. cit., p. 49.