par Papire Masson, l'autre par Anne d'Urfé, un contrat de mariage et des testaments, des lettres et des comptes de dépenses d'étudiants foréziens à Paris, des inventaires de bibliothèques. La deuxième partie, consacrée plus particulièrement à l'activité littéraire, comprend quelques extraits de l'oeuvre d'Antoine du Verdier, Anne d'Urfé, Antoine de Laval, Etienne Valancier.

Il serait souhaitable que Claude Longeon ait des émules. La Normandie, la Savoie, la Champagne, la Bourgogne, Lyon, Nérac, attendent toujours l'historien qui étudiera leur vie intellectuelle, considérée dans son sens le plus large, c'est-à-dire, non seulement les oeuvres littéraires mais aussi les conditions de la vie intellectuelle, ses relations avec l'état social, son rayonnement, les moyens de culture. Si l'étude économique et sociale de la province française progresse d'une manière satisfaisante, le moins que l'on puisse dire c'est que son histoire intellectuelle accuse un sérieux retard. Il est regrettable que le vieux préjugé voulant qu'il n'y ait de bonne littérature qu'à Paris demeure aussi vivant. Ce n'est qu'en multipliant les monographies provinciales que l'on pourra prétendre brosser un tableau satisfaisant de la vie intellectuelle en France au XVI^e siècle.

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John Weld. *Meaning in Comedy: Studies in Elizabethan Romantic Comedy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975. Pp. x, 255.

The title of Professor Weld's book is a little ominous. The search for "meaning" in comedy can, we know, lead to a solemn kind of criticism, insensitive to the tone and manner of the plays it deals with. It is to Weld's credit that for much of his study these fears are unjustified; and if in the end his search for meaning leads him into an old critical trap, there is much lively and sensitive commentary on the way.

His intention, he announces in his Introduction, is to recover what certain plays by Lyly, Greene and Shakespeare would have meant to their original audience. He recognizes, sensibly, that the Elizabethan audience was not monolithic, and that the plays themselves can change in different performances. He stresses the importance of seeing, or being able to visualize, the play on stage. In other words, he strikes all the right cautionary notes. And in his first three chapters, discussing the morality play and the survival of its conventions in later drama, he shows an admirable flexibility of response. His central theme here is the way the allegorical characters of a morality play can acquire an independent life, participating in actions and demonstrating feelings in such a way as to make any simple identification between the character and the abstraction whose name he bears impossible. (Mercy in *Mankind*, for instance, is often reduced to scolding.) As he points out, "the inconsistent or fitful metaphor is nearly inevitable in dramatic allegory. . . . once the metaphor is continued through an extended action, its vehicle begins to gather irrelevant or even contradictory connotations and implications" (pp. 39-40). The effect becomes quite complex in a later, morality-influenced play like Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London*, in which Judge Nemo does justice on Lucre, Love and Conscience: we take the satiric point that "nobody" does justice in this

world — and yet, theatrically, we see justice being done. Weld argues from this that audiences must have been capable of a sophistication of response even before the University Wits began writing for them.

But his main business is to discuss not the morality play but the romantic comedies of the 1590's. The transition, as he himself admits, is a difficult one. But his main purpose in coming to the romantic comedies *via* the moralities seems to be to argue for the same sophisticated complexity of response — in this case, to see beneath the romantic stories of cross-wooing insights into the general nature of man that go back to the morality tradition. This may sound like a devious way of introducing the sort of narrowly Christian reading that was parodied in *The Pooh Perplex* ("O *Felix Culpa!* The Sacramental Meaning of *Winnie-the-Pooh*"), but on the whole Weld has enough tact to keep the presence of the morality perspective light and suggestive. His best discussion is of Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. He may be a little too solemn (or too ingenious) when he claims, of the scene in which Edward views Lacy and Margaret through the Friar's glass, "To verbalize the stage metaphor, we may say that Edward views the lovers in the enchanted glass of his own passion and mistakes their murder for his good" (p. 139) (the latter point is a forced reading of Edward's remark that his choler "Made me thinke the shadowes substances"). But he is on safer ground — for one thing, the point is simpler — when he suggests that the switch of roles between Edward and Lacy "duplicates the inversion in Edward's own psyche" (p. 138). And he is excellent on our mixed reaction to Margaret's renunciation of the world to enter a convent, followed by her recantation to marry Lacy. We recognize in her withdrawal from the wicked world a genuinely serious idea, which the play has just supported with the surprising scene of the double murder; and yet we feel relieved when she yields to human nature and seeks a limited earthly happiness instead. The recognition of her frailty is both comic and reassuring, and is supported by the play's generally festive tone, of which Weld writes with considerable appreciation.

Writing of Lyly, he strikes a nice balance between the charm and fun of the plays and their serious intent. In the ending of *Endymion*, for example, "everyone gets what he wants, and what he gets therefore defines him" (p. 130). This points to something distinctive in Lyly's vision, "the notion of man as comic in his very nature as opposed to the notion of man as comic in his correctable or reformable vice and folly" (p. 135). And he writes well of the urbanely balanced vision of *Campaspe*, in which Diogenes (for example) is both reasonable in his ideas and laughable in his manner, and "The result is a comedy of human nature, damned to be funny alike in its irrationality and in its striving to be rational" (p. 120). But he becomes too solemn, I think, when he relates the trick ending of *Gallathea*, in which we are promised one of the girls will become a boy, to the mystery of Christ. (That, I take it, is the intent of the following passage: "because of the limitation of fallen human nature and because passionate man subjects himself to Fortune, he can achieve happiness only through the divine suspension of natural law. That suspension, an actual historical event, has made human happiness possible" [p. 124]). It may be, as he argues, that in a play like Gascoigne's *Supposes* there is an analogy between the workings of the plot and the workings of Providence, producing a happiness beyond what the characters can imagine; but when Weld tries this approach to the ending of *Gallathea* (in which the sex-change is treated

with such cheerful casualness that we are not even told which girl will be changed) the tone seems fatally wrong.

The trouble really starts when he comes to Shakespeare. He tries — with a persistence that is surprising after his earlier flexibility — to see in the machinery of the comic plots a Christian vision of fallen human nature. Thus, Aegeon in *The Comedy of Errors* and — even less convincingly — Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are victims not of a particular comic law but of the Law, which condemns man “simply for his nature” (p. 193). Adriana, addressing a long speech to the wrong husband, “is only human. Human beings err by nature; their wills are naturally unbridled, mistaken, led by passion” (p. 163). It is fair enough to see in the confusion of the plot images of man’s natural proneness to error; but to see this as the result of *passion* seems to be straining beyond the material of the play. Similarly, it is fair enough to relate the tricking of Christopher Sly to the popular idea of life as a dream or play, but not to conclude from this that the “meaning” of the Induction is “the vanity of worldly delights” (p. 172). But my fundamental disagreement with Weld can be summed up by looking at his treatment of the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Here, as Puck and Oberon both lead and mislead the lovers, “In this respect they are like the appearance of Fortune, whose caprices, dominating passionate men, mask the reality of Providential design, and within this analogy the four lovers are like generic mankind” (p. 199). Even as generic lovers, they do not quite fit; as the play suggests, there are aspects of love beyond their experience. As generic mankind, they are even less well cast; their problem is too specific, its solution too special. And Weld’s view of them leads him to construct a scheme of redemption that does not fit the play: “Mankind remains too passionate and absurd, its goals ridiculous and its eyesight blind. It is brought into harmony by a superior power” (p. 203). This misses one of the play’s central ironies: the power that makes the characters absurd and the power that brings them harmony are one and the same. And that power is not Christian redemption but romantic love.

In the final chapter, on *The Merchant of Venice*, Weld abandons his earlier caution and flexibility, and the critical trap I mentioned earlier closes. We have here a classic instance of a critical pattern that is consistent within itself at the cost of being inconsistent with the play. Having declared that Shylock, as a Jew, exemplifies natural man, living under the Law, he continues, “This is, I think, a sufficient ‘spine’ for an interpretation of the play, and other matters will fit into place easily enough around it. The play becomes a play about man’s escape, or rescue from, his own nature and situation, and the last act can be joyful because it celebrates the escape of all the characters, including Shylock, from the justice which he invokes” (p. 213). We may have our doubts about Shylock’s escape, but Weld is persistent; he sees the Jew as having a final happiness parallel to that of the lovers: “Of course they will live happily ever after. And so with Shylock. Of course he is converted. He too lives happily ever after” (p. 214). Weld seems to have forgotten one of his own best principles — to remember the effect of the play in the theatre. Shylock’s curt “I am content,” his silent exit, and his absence from the fifth act make the parallel between him and the lovers simply untenable.

But it is only fair — and, given Weld’s concerns, appropriate — to end this review on a note of forgiveness. Even in the section on Shakespeare, which I find

the weakest part of the book, there are sensitive readings. I would instance two: the account of Petruchio as a man who can engage in the comedy of life and yet remain detached from it; and the analysis of the way the happiness of the ending of *The Merchant of Venice* is placed within "an amused awareness of human limitations" (p. 235). In discussing Shakespeare, Weld may be overconfident about some dubious readings, and he may give us more theological background than the passages he is trying to illuminate can really bear; but his approach does produce moments of insight, and if he often provokes disagreement he never fails to provoke thought.

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Jonathan L. Marwil. *The Trials of Counsel, Francis Bacon in 1621*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976. Pp. 236. \$14.95

Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry VII* was much admired in his own time, and it has been highly influential. It established the image of Henry VII as a wise but unlovable monarch, prudent, cautious, secretive and rather cold, that has persisted to the present. In recent years, however, the *History* has come increasingly under attack. Modern studies have shown that Bacon's practice as a historiographer is a contradiction of his scientific principles; he engaged in little research, took few pains to establish his facts, acquired most of his information from easily available secondary sources of dubious accuracy, used the old classical convention of the invented speech in a manner incompatible with any real prospect for the advancement of learning, and proceeded throughout in a highly deductive fashion.

The modern process of attack on the *History* is continued by Jonathan Marwil in *The Trials of Counsel*. Marwil builds his study on the fact that the *History* was written in 1621 a few months after Bacon's impeachment and fall from his great position as Lord Chancellor. Disputing the common view that Bacon was seriously torn between the active and contemplative lives, he holds that his overriding ambition was always for political power, and that he did not retire to the studies and writings of his later years without making every effort to regain his great place in public life. In Marwil's view the *History* was written as a part of this effort. Its purpose was to persuade King James of his abilities as a counsellor of kings, so that he might be reinstated in office. Thus the *History* is very far from being an objective work; it is rather a self-interested piece of propaganda and personal image building.

In developing this thesis Marwil attempts to place the *History* not only in relation to the crisis of Bacon's impeachment but also in the wider context of the author's earlier life. He begins with a chapter on the impeachment, next moves back to give two chapters on the earlier life, to show "the progress of his mind and career up until his downfall," and then concludes with a chapter on the *History* itself.

This is, as Marwil states, an "unorthodox structure." Unfortunately problems of both proportion and unity arise from it that he does not satisfactorily solve.