THE RIVERSIDE
SHAKESPEARE

The Riverside SHAKESPEARE

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Bereleigh House, Hampshire. Collection of F. Tyrwhitt-Drake

Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Elizabeth Tudor dominated her age in symbol and in fact, a dominance celebrated in the portrait above (by an unknown artist) commemorating the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Through the left window are seen English ships arrayed against the Spanish fleet; through the right, a storm taking savage toll of the Armada. The magnificence of the Queen's highly stylized gem-encrusted costume befits the proud occasion here signalized.

The portrait of James I, her successor, is related to a different aspect of English foreign policy. It is a detail from a larger painting, by the Indian artist Bichitr, in which James, together with the Ottoman sultan, is represented as paying homage to the Mogul emperor Jahāngīr at his court in Delhi. The likeness of James was almost certainly copied from a miniature carried to India by Sir Thomas Roe on his embassy of 1615–18 to negotiate commercial privileges for the East India Company. The figure at the bottom is a court official holding a picture of an elephant and two horses—presumably the gifts which James is imagined as offering.

General Introduction

Harry Levin

I. THE SHAKESPEAREAN HERITAGE

Now and again the observation is offered about a great writer that he has created a world of his own. Such artificial worlds are necessarily smaller than the one we live in; otherwise they would not help us much to understand it; like a map, they locate situations by reducing them to a comprehensible scale. Lifelike and large as these representations of truth may seem to us, they are limited nonetheless by the means and motives of their creation. Yet the writers whom we regard as the very greatest have a way of surpassing limitations by convincing us that their range of perception is just as wide, and their sense of reality just as authentic, as anything that we are ever likely to encounter during the course of our own experience. So the ancients placed Homer in a unique position because his epic outlook seemed to be coextensive with the breadth and depth of the world they knew. Similarly, for the Middle Ages, all the circumstances of human existence were summed up in the luminous vision of Dante. Since then man's horizons have so enlarged and his problems have so complicated themselves that, although he still can find much beauty and significance in the poetry of Homer and Dante, they have long since ceased to serve as his active guides. Indeed, if it were not for Shakespeare, we might well doubt whether any single creative genius could have encompassed so much of the variety, the profundity, and the abundance of life as it has been lived in the modern era of civilization.

Shakespeare's works have therefore been accorded a place in our culture above and beyond their topmost place in our literature. They have been virtually canonized as humanistic scriptures, the tested residue of pragmatic wisdom, a general collection of quotable texts and usable examples. Reprinted, reedited, commented upon, and translated into most languages, they have preempted more space on the library shelves than the books of—or about—any other author. Meanwhile they have become a staple of the school and college curricula, as well as the happiest of hunting-grounds for scholars and critics. As plays they continue to meet the one decisive criterion by maintaining their importance in the dramatic repertory, all the way from Harlem to Uzbekistan, and to provide the roles that leading actors compete in when they seek to demonstrate their talents. Ever since David Garrick staged his Stratford Jubilee of 1769, Shakespeare's native town has been a shrine for literary pilgrims; more recently its festival has come to set a standard for Shakespearean productions; and now the cult has spread to transatlantic Stratfords in Ontario and Connecticut, not to mention regular performance at innumerable theatres elsewhere. If all this seems to smack too uncritically of ritual observance and traditional piety, we should be reminded that Shakespearean drama has continually renewed itself through adaptation to changing times. It has adapted not only to contemporary dress but to current issues; thus the conflicts of the Roman plays have been sharpened by the political pressures of the twentieth century.

Shakespeare showed prophetic insight into his own future when, looking back to Rome in *Julius Caesar*, he allowed his Cassius to look ahead down the centuries to come:

> How many ages hence
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
> In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
> (III.i.113–15)

The leading spirit among his fellow dramatists, Ben Jonson, also foresaw that triumphant survival when he prefaced Shakespeare's First Folio with the poetic tribute: "He was not of an age, but for all time!" But Jonson, who was well aware that such universality must have its basis in a firm grasp of immediacy, had begun his poem by hailing Shakespeare as the major voice of his time: "Soul of the Age!" Few of his contemporaries had been quite so magnanimous or far-seeing. The earliest critical recognition of his career had been a truculent outburst from Robert Greene, hack-writing upon his very deathbed in 1592, and denouncing Shakespeare as a young upstart for his presumption in vying with those already established playwrights whom we call the University Wits. That outburst was countered soon enough by a handsome retraction from Greene's editor, Henry Chettle, and the subsequent testimonials from Shakespeare's colleagues suggest their personal affection and professional esteem.[1] In those days, however, merely to be recognized as a playwright was to be rather an artisan than an artist; it did not carry with it any particular standing as a man of letters. His more serious literary pretensions were declared when he brought out his two narrative poems in the classical erotic vein, and when he privately circulated his sonnets, which would be published belatedly under other auspices.

As for the plays, they were the property of the producing company, which had commissioned and bought them outright at ten pounds or so apiece. So long as they were popular on the stage, it would not have been in the company's interest for them to be printed. Sooner or later slightly more than half of them found their way into print, many of these pirated and garbled, through the separate editions known as quartos. Subject to such hazards of publication and to the rigors of censorship, Shakespeare's hand was obscured by anonymity while he was young and unknown, and credited apocryphally with plays by other hands when he was older and famous. On the whole, it is surprising and fortunate that the corpus of his writing has mainly come down to us through so authoritative an edition as the First Folio. Seven years before that landmark appeared, Jonson had braved the scorn of critics for gathering up the plays he had written to date and bringing them out in folio as *Works*—a format and a title which then seemed much too pretentious for mere stage-pieces. Shakespeare's collected volume, edited by two of his fellow actors and theatrical partners, John Heminge and Henry Condell, bore a title simply indicating the disposition of its contents: *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*. From its appearance in 1623, seven years after his death, Shakespeare stood among England's principal authors; but through the seventeenth century he shared equal applause with the scholarly Jonson and the courtly John Fletcher; he did not emerge into the light of preeminence until Dryden signalized him as that writer who possessed "the most comprehensive soul."

The neo-classicists of the eighteenth century, emphasizing that opposition between nature and art which Shakespeare had done so much to reconcile, thought of him as a wholly natural genius who was consequently lacking in conscious artistry. The turning point in the history of his reputation came with the preface to Samuel Johnson's edition of 1765. It was Dr. Johnson who, rescuing Shakespeare from the indignity of being harshly judged by neo-classical rules, insisted on granting him the status of a classic. If his plays followed certain laws of their own, henceforth the path lay open to the discovery of those laws. But the Romantics were as eager to associate him with nature itself as their predecessors had been to distinguish his endeavors from their notions of art. Even Ben Jonson's eulogy had been, as he dryly put it, "on this side idolatry." During the later eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's interpreters practiced what Bernard Shaw liked to call "Bardolatry." They all but deified the Bard of Avon because he was the creator of so many characters who could be treated as if they were human beings—could be identified with, psychologized over, arraigned for moral judgment. Shakespeare's full-bodied realism, as opposed to the more formal characterization of continental drama, meanwhile triumphed over the barriers of verse translation. His name became a rallying cry in the campaigns for Romanticism, and his influence contributed to the self-realization of the various national literatures of Europe.

Our century, which has latterly celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of his birth, has brought him the twelfth generation of his continuing audience. Yet, despite the ever-widening time-span, we may approach him somewhat more closely today than we could have done at intervals in the past. Historical knowledge of his period has helped to bridge the gap, while a comparative view of the drama is helping us to see his work in more extended and clarifying perspective. So much interpretation has surrounded it that we sometimes barely glimpse the forest because of the many screeds which the commentators, like his Orlando, have hung upon the trees. But commentary is useful in alerting us to assumptions or implications we might have missed, and editorial scholarship has learned to correct distortions by removing encrustations. It is the purpose of this introduction, and of the comments that herewith introduce and accompany Shakespeare's texts, to set them into their most meaningful contexts. Universal as his attraction has been, it is best understood through particulars. Though—to our advantage—his creations are relatively timeless, they would not mean so much to us if they had not been timely in their day. Nor would they have made their lasting impact, if their author had not been past master of his exacting and exciting medium, linguistic, poetic, dramatic. Since that mastery was the ripe attainment of an individual mind, we owe some attention to the man in his time before turning to the materials and techniques of his art.

[1] The passages from Greene and Chettle, together with various other biographical and critical documents referred to in this essay, are reprinted in Appendix B below.

II. THE BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

Contrary to a fairly widespread impression, there is no special mystery about his life. Indeed it is unusually well documented, for a commoner's of his period. Unfortunately for our personal curiosity, most of this documentation takes the colorless form of entries in parish registers or municipal archives, legal instruments involving property, all too fragmentary theatrical records, and a few business letters to or about him. The biographical outline provided by more than a hundred such documents is filled in by well over fifty literary allusions to Shakespeare and his works in the published writings of contemporaries. But these details, even when they have been eked out by traditions and conjectures, scarcely combine to portray a vivid personality. Modern readers, accustomed by the Romantics to poets who lived their poems and dramatized their lives, have felt somewhat put off by the undramatic nature of the dramatist's private career. The figure of Shakespeare as a practical man of affairs, although well attested by the evidence, seemed rather too modest to occupy the lofty pedestal reared by the Bardolaters. Hence the strange proliferation of irresponsible theories proposing rival candidates for the authorship of Shakespeare's work, most of them titled and all of them colorful but none of them circumstanced to have done the job—as William Shakespeare indubitably was. His existence should not seem uneventful if we consider that its main events were the thirty-eight plays created, in rapid succession and brilliant diversity, within a span of less than twenty-five years.

The first recorded fact under the family name at Stratford-on-Avon is neither inspiring nor revealing: it is the imposition of a fine upon the poet's father for countenancing a dunghill too near the house and shop on Henley Street that would be pointed out as Shakespeare's birthplace. What would be truly significant was the son's lifelong connection with the prosperous and picturesque market town in the rich heart of rural England. He was a country boy, and he kept returning to the Warwickshire countryside, like the fabled giant who renewed his energies by touching his native soil. North of the winding Avon lay the Forest of Arden, which must have cast some shade on the woodland scenes of *As You Like It*, even though the play introduces tropical flora and fauna, and is linked by verbal associations with the Franco-Belgian Ardennes. The association that means most here, however, is the fact that Shakespeare's mother had been Mary Arden, and that her yeoman family was related to those Ardens who held large estates nearby. Her husband, John Shakespeare, son of a local tenant farmer, was by trade a glover or leatherworker. He became one of Stratford's leading citizens, was elected a burgess or member of the town council, acted as magistrate and in various civic capacities, and served a brief term as bailiff or mayor during William's infancy. Though John's fortunes declined before his death in 1601, about the time when *Hamlet* was being completed, he lived to be granted the arms and style of a gentleman, probably through the endeavors and the successes of his son.

Thus, like many good English families, the Shakespeares made the transition from the status of tradesman to that of esquire during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The name of their eldest son William appears first on record under the date of his baptism, April 26, 1564, at the Church of the Holy Trinity, where he was to be buried just fifty-two years afterward. Since the day of his death in 1616 was (if the inscription on his monument in the church can be trusted) April 23, which is also the holiday of England's patron Saint George, it is coincidentally celebrated as Shakespeare's birthday. Because the sons of burgesses were specifically entitled to free tuition at the local grammar school, it seems most probable that he studied there, absorbing a curriculum strongly based on rhetoric, Christian ethics, and classical literature. He did not go on to attend a university; and, understandably, he would not be regarded as a man of learning by such consciously erudite humanists as Jonson and Milton. But our age is so much less devoted than theirs to the cultivation of the classics that what looked to Jonson like "small Latin and less Greek" might well strike us as a respectable grounding in the humanities. His plays show amply that he was conversant with Latin and French, plus a smattering of other foreign languages, history both ancient (notably Plutarch) and modern (the British chronicles), philosophic speculation (Montaigne), continental fiction such as Boccaccio's, earlier English poets like Chaucer and Gower—not to mention fellow Elizabethans, from the high-minded Sidney to the abusive Greene.

A writer's reading tends to reveal itself most directly through his earliest efforts, and Shakespeare's smell somewhat of the Greco-Roman lamp in their use of quotation and mythological ornament. The prototypes for academic drama, as Polonius would duly observe, were Seneca for tragedy and Plautus for comedy. It is no accident that the apprentice Shakespeare, while feeling his way toward popular dramatic forms of his own, was to experiment with the Senecan *Titus Andronicus* and the Plautine *Comedy of Errors*; and it is noteworthy that Francis Meres, when he attempted a survey of English writers in his *Palladis Tamia* of 1598, cited Shakespeare as the versatile counterpart of both Roman playwrights—also mentioning Ovid as his forerunner in the field of amorous poetry. One of the better-grounded Shakespearean rumors, coming down to us from an actor in his troupe, tells us that he taught Latin for a while as a country schoolmaster. But he has expressed his opinion of pedantry in Holofernes and *Love's Labor's Lost*. The book-learning that Shakespeare displays here and there is far less impressive, in the long run, than his fund of general information. His frame of reference is so far-ranging, and he is so concretely versed in the tricks of so many trades, that lawyers have written to prove he was trained in the law, sailors about his expert seamanship, naturalists upon his botanizing, and so on through the professions. If

this be paradox, it is resolved by Fielding's remark that Shakespeare was "learned in human nature." So far as education has genuine meaning, he must be viewed as a genuinely educated man.

Some confusion seems to attend the facts regarding his marriage, but these are too meagre to encourage surmises. We know that a license was obtained on November 27, 1582, that the former Anne Hathaway was eight years his senior, and that their elder daughter Susanna was born six months later and christened on May 26, 1583. But, since the betrothal might have taken place at some previous point, we may allow the couple the benefit of ceremonies timed more casually in their day than in ours. Nor should we infer any reservations about his wife from the one bequest to her in his will: that "second-best bed" may have been hallowed by conjugal sentiments, and she was provided for otherwise through her dower rights. Given the circumstances of his calling, which inevitably centred on London and occasionally branched out into provincial tours, it could be said that he was at some pains to keep up his domestic ties with Stratford. Twin children, Hamnet and Judith, were born there in 1585; Hamnet, his only son, was to die eleven years later. Biography loses sight of Shakespeare during the interval between the birth of the twins and Greene's attack in 1592, but the latter makes it quite explicit that Shakespeare had meanwhile become a player and was already emerging as a playwright. Retrospectively it would seem clear that those crucial seven years had been fully occupied, not to say well spent, in preparing to meet the demands of the theatrical profession and to endow it with a steady sequence of its finest vehicles.

Though he is listed as having appeared in his own plays and Jonson's, we have no account of his acting. The two roles that tradition has assigned to him are secondary, though not uncongenial: the Ghost in *Hamlet* and the old servitor Adam in *As You Like It*. In any case, the fundamental certainty about Shakespeare is that he was a man of the theatre to his fingertips. No titled amateur could have conceivably handled, with such practiced and inventive skill, all the available resources of his professional medium. His craftsmanship as a dramatist was solidly backed, like Molière's, by long experience as an actor-manager—by the manager's sense of the public, as well as the actor's talent for projecting himself into other selves. During the seasons of 1592–3 the plague was making its terrible visitations; and while the London theatres were closed, Shakespeare seems to have been composing his non-dramatic Ovidian poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. When the theatres reopened, he was one of the sharers or partners in a newly organized company under the sponsorship of the Lord Chamberlain, head of the royal household. This company was to dominate the Elizabethan and the Jacobean stage (in the later period under the sponsorship of King James himself), performing publicly at the famous Globe playhouse and for smaller audiences at the Blackfriars. Along with its best-known actors, Richard Burbage and William Kemp, he received payment for presenting two plays before the Queen at court during the Christmas festivities of 1594.

The Chamberlain's Men had not infrequent occasion to offer such command performances; and after 1603, when the troupe became His Majesty's Servants, its sharers were officially treated as members of the royal household. Shakespeare made other connections with courtly circles, principally through the patronage of the dashing young Earl of Southampton, to whom he had dedicated both of his printed poems. Southampton is one of those actual personages who have been identified with the noble youth addressed in Shakespeare's sonnets. On that theme there has been—in Falstaffian disproportion—an intolerable deal of conjecture to one halfpennyworth of fact. If the sonnets constitute the key with which Shakespeare "unlocked his heart," in Wordsworth's unguarded phrase, then they have opened no secret doors; if they had done so, as Browning retorted, "the less Shakespeare he." To reread them as if they were confessions is to beg a moot question, since there is just as little external support for attempts at other identifications: the Dark Lady, the rival poet. Doubtless Shakespeare could not have dealt so movingly with love and friendship and with literary and sexual rivalry if he had not experienced them in some intimate guise. But his sonnets would differ unbelievably from his plays, and would come suspiciously close to the effusions of more subjective writers, if he had not again been exercising his gift for dramatic projection. The sonneteer's involvement, within his formal genre, is that of the dramatist with his *dramatis personae*. After all, it is he himself who assumes the identities of his characters:

> my nature is subdu'd
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
> (Sonnet 111.6–7)

The advance in Shakespeare's worldly fortunes is evident from a number of business transactions. In 1597 he acquired New Place, one of the most substantial residences in Stratford. Gradually he had given up acting for writing; and by his late forties, several years before his relatively early death, he was living in retirement there. His meticulous testament, which remembers his colleagues, seems designed to perpetuate his estate through his elder daughter's progeny. But his line did not survive his grandchildren; for his many living descendants we must look to the drama. His monument, the bust in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church, is thought to be a true—if stylized—portrait. The same benignant features greet the reader from the frontispiece to the Folio. The recurrent word in the testimonials of Shakespeare's friends and acquaintances is "gentle." It characterizes an engaging but self-effacing person who, while remaining impersonal, could penetrate the minds of multitudinous personalities. Coleridge described him as "myriad-minded." Keats suggested how those many aspects must have been integrated when he spoke of "Negative Capability," that quality

of sympathetic imagination, that unexampled gift of insight which enabled Shakespeare to empathize with all sorts and conditions of men. It was Keats again who threw light on the symbolic relation between an artist's *modus vivendi* and his artistic achievement, when he succinctly noted: "Shakespeare lived a life of Allegory. His works are the comments on it."

All lives are more or less allegorical, insofar as they relive the cycle of Everyman. Shakespeare's uniqueness lies in his commentary, his memorable power of individualizing those common experiences. The course of his worldly career has sometimes been subdivided into four periods, which were neatly but problematically formulated by Edward Dowden. To label the first period "In the Workshop" and the second "In the World" is cogent enough, since it merely implies an objective development from apprenticeship to maturity through the mastery of a craft. But to call the third phase "Out of the Depths" and the fourth "On the Heights" is to misread the plays by presuming that Shakespeare intended them as successive chapters in a kind of spiritual autobiography. We are less well acquainted with what went into his work than with what came out of it. That there are emotions of despair in *Hamlet* and attitudes of serenity in *The Tempest* we cannot doubt; yet he could not simply have chosen to write tragedies while he was feeling depressed and comedies when a mellower mood came upon him; there were more determining factors, as we shall see. Clearly the man who wrote *Romeo and Juliet* knew what it felt like to be in love. It may be that the author of *King Lear* had known sufferings that brought him near to madness. But, by following that line of rationalization, we reduce it to the absurd presumption that the author of *Macbeth* had committed murder. Whereas the play is an imaginative exercise, a psychological discipline which we undergo with the playwright, who—by conveying what it might feel like to be a murderer—ends by enlarging our consciousness.

III. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

We can follow the development of Shakespeare's work in greater clarity if we view it as a response to, and an expression of, the proud and eventful period in which he lived and for which he constructed the principal monument. To recollect that the year of his birth marked the deaths of both Michelangelo and Calvin is to set him at the zenith of the two great formative movements in the arts and religion that they personify, the Renaissance and the Reformation. The year of his own death also bore witness to Harvey's first lectures on physiology, heralding a momentous succession of new achievements for scientific method. Putting Shakespeare beside his immediate contemporaries, we may note that he was born in the same year as Galileo and died in the same year as Cervantes. Cervantes is said to have written an epitaph for the Middle Ages by demonstrating, through the very first of modern novels, that the invention of gunpowder had exploded the institution of chivalry. Yet Shakespeare seems to have anticipated that point in *1 Henry IV*, where the antagonistic conceptions of honor advanced by Hotspur and Falstaff run parallel to the ideological argument between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. And Shakespeare seems to have anticipated Galileo's demonstration that the earth revolves around the sun, which supported the astronomical challenge to the anthropocentric conception of the universe, when Hamlet wrote in his little metaphysical poem addressed to Ophelia:

> Doubt thou the stars are fire,
> Doubt that the sun doth move. . . . (II.ii.116–17)

But heretical doubts were still counterweighed by an orthodox belief that the human race played the central role in a cosmic spectacle, whose interpretation might be sought in the antiquated pseudo-science of astrology, as Sonnet 15 affirms in a characteristically theatrical metaphor:

> That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
> Whereon the stars in secret influence comment.

The drama is the most social of literary forms, since it stands in so direct a relationship to its audience. Hence it presupposes certain fostering conditions, and its golden ages have been sporadic in finding their conjunctions of time and place: ancient Athens, classical France, baroque Spain, Zen Buddhist Japan, and Shakespeare's lifetime in England. We like to look back on his age as "the spacious times of great Elizabeth." The nostalgic phrase of Queen Victoria's poet laureate, Tennyson, conjures up the national cult of the Virgin Queen, with its emanations of courtly compliment and magnificent pageantry. Elizabethan men of letters vied with courtiers in paying their elaborate respects to the royal coquette, most elaborately in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Shakespeare was not remiss in declaring his homage, gallantly alluding to "a fair vestal throned by the west" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (II.i.158) and retroactively prophesying blessings for the reign of the newly christened Princess Elizabeth in *Henry VIII* (V.v). But the spaciousness of the times found surer justification in its discoveries, conquests, and hitherto unparalleled geographical expansion. "This England," of which the Bastard Faulconbridge boasts in *King John* (V.vii.112–18) and for which John of Gaunt voices his fears in *Richard II* (II.i.40 ff.), was breathlessly transforming itself from an island off the coast of Europe into a dominant sea power and an emergent colonial empire. Shakespeare was well abreast what was happening; *The Tempest* reenacts a shipwreck encountered by the Virginia Company's fleet; conversely, *Hamlet* and *Richard II* were performed on the East India Company's flagship off the coast of Sierra Leone in 1607.

The imperial trend, which had its prose epic in the voyages chronicled by Hakluyt and Purchas, brought commercial affluence in its wake. But rapidly accumulating wealth, inequitably distributed at best,

was by no means a guarantee of widespread economic security; the discontented populace of Shakespeare's Roman plays and the hungry followers of Jack Cade in *2 Henry VI* lend a prefiguring voice to protests against the enclosure of common lands and other social grievances of the sixteenth century. England's main international effort, during the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, had been to disentangle the ties that had bound her to France since the Norman Conquest. The rhythm of Shakespeare's history plays, which is agitated by the battles of the Hundred Years' War, accelerates to its patriotic climax with the triumph of Henry V at Agincourt. The long-drawn-out civil conflict, the struggle among the barons over the kingship, had led on through the Wars of the Roses to the attrition of feudal power and the establishment of a more centralized monarchy under the house of Tudor—a consummation which Shakespeare hails at the end of *Richard III*. For him—as for the chroniclers he rather freely followed, the compendious Holinshed and especially the apologist Edward Hall—the Tudors had conjointly inherited the strongest claims of their warring predecessors, the houses of York and Lancaster. Their enthronement seemed to have been providentially ordained to foster the restoration of peace, with the attendant cultural benefits that distinguish a glorious epoch.

Loyal subjects were bound to see the whole historical sequence as the consummation of a legendary design. Shakespeare even envisages a laying-on-of-hands between the last of the Lancastrian kings, the ill-fated Henry VI, and the founder of the Tudor line, the young Earl of Richmond, later to be crowned as Henry VII. Yet the claim of the Lancasters was itself open to question, since their crown had been wrenched away from Richard II by Henry IV, practicing an admixture of force and "policy" (a word which always connotes the intrigues of Machiavellian statecraft). The situation, as Shakespeare has treated it, illustrates the division of loyalties that intensified the complications of king-making and -unmaking. Ideally, God's ruler can do no wrong; he rules by divine right, as the legitimate Richard ineffectually reminds his refractory peers. The blame for his mistakes is largely placed upon his parasitical favorites, those "caterpillars of the commonwealth" (II.iii.166). At all events, there is nothing that could morally justify his dethronement; and the scene of Richard's deposition was considered such political tinder that it was omitted from the earlier quartos of the play. Consequently Henry's rule is regarded by his enemies as a usurpation, though he is much abler than his deposed cousin, and the curse of the Plantagenets hangs heavy over the destinies of the Lancastrians. In their turn the latter yield to the brief and violent Yorkist dynasty, culminating in the nightmarish regime of the arch-usurper Richard III, from which the Tudors bring about England's happy deliverance.

Their strategy was that of the popular monarch, firmly controlling baronial factions, while commanding enthusiastic loyalty from the common people. Shakespeare's commoners are as likely to be misled by demagogues as his kings are by self-serving councillors; but when king and people strive together in mutual confidence, then they fulfill the basic Tudor principle of "commonweal." Unhappily, the ensuing era of stability and prosperity was menaced and riven by religious dissension. The English Reformation, made official at the personal behest of the sovereign, Henry VIII, broke politically with the Roman Catholic Church but did not embrace the theological doctrines of the extreme Puritans. During the short reigns of Henry's son and elder daughter, Edward VI and "Bloody Mary," Catholics and Protestants were successively persecuted, the Queen having married the King of Spain and attempted to revive Catholicism in England. The accession of Henry's younger daughter Elizabeth in 1558 reaffirmed and established the Anglican compromise, while the Tudor dynasty was guided to its culmination through her fortunate gifts, which included longevity. Thus the intellectual climate surrounding Shakespeare was one in which inherited dogmas had been forcibly questioned and strategically modified. Like all Elizabethans, he was—at least nominally—an Anglican whose forebears had been brought up in the Catholic confession. Unlike the majority of contemporary believers, he was tolerant enough to enter into the spirit of both faiths with that "wonderful philosophic impartiality" which Coleridge has discerned in his politics.

The tone of his comedies is sometimes affected by the bustle of current mercantile enterprise; even their foreign settings seem to reflect an increasingly cosmopolitan outlook. Through the resounding series of explorations, exploitations, and naval campaigns against Spain, with the western hemisphere as the grand prize, England was achieving its leadership among nations. The climactic decade of Elizabeth's reign occurred between the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 (*Love's Labor's Lost* jibes at its fallen vainglory in the mock-heroic person of Don Armado) and the return of the Essex expedition from Ireland in 1599 (welcomed in triumphal expectation by the Chorus in the fifth act of *Henry V*). Shakespeare, who was even then moving through the dramatic workshop into a wider world, expressed the upsurging nationalism of those fervent years through his cycle of history plays; all but the belated *Henry VIII* were produced during that decade. But the Irish expedition proved a failure; the brilliant Earl of Essex, long the Queen's favorite, was precipitated from her favor; and, after an abortive conspiracy against her, he was beheaded in 1601. Confronted with an aging Queen, the unsettled problem of her succession, and the mounting unrest at the turn of the century, many anxious and thoughtful Englishmen had pinned their hopes upon him. Possibly Shakespeare had done so; we know that his company's revival of *Richard II*, as a possible incitement to treason, topically figured in Essex's trial. His downfall heralded the approaching transition, as did the concurrent appearance of *Hamlet*.

A modulation, deeper perhaps and sadder and wiser

than the conventionally mellow Elizabethan note, could be heard in the literature of the later fifteen-nineties, as writers turned away from sonnets to satires, cultivated their melancholia, and began to sound the depths of tragedy. It may be symptomatic, if not prophetic, that the typical protagonist of Jacobean drama is rather a disinherited prince than a self-crowned king. James I, who finally succeeded Elizabeth upon her demise in 1603, never approached her in popularity; yet, since he was already King James VI of Scotland, his accession united the crowns of both kingdoms; and, being a conscientious patron of letters, he accorded royal sponsorship to the Shakespearean troupe, as well as to the standard English Bible that perpetuates his name. Shakespeare, for his part, paid homage to the new king with *Macbeth*, not only by choosing a Scottish theme, but more specifically by recalling the legend that traced the Stuart line back to Banquo. Shakespeare's Witches predict a brighter future for the Stuarts than they were to have, and James himself stored up trouble for his successors by promoting a courtly aristocracy and alienating a more and more Puritanical middle class. But the most salient characteristic of Jacobean culture was its devotion to the pursuit of knowledge, which involved the most searching introspection and the most fanciful speculation, along with the ambitious program for science that Bacon outlined in his *Advancement of Learning*. "And New Philosophy," as Donne lamented, "calls all in doubt."

Shakespeare, of course, was a playwright and not a philosopher. Yet drama is dialectic in concrete form; the attitudes and actions of its characters would have little value or meaning if they were not based on certain philosophical premises. Shakespeare's plays are very richly charged with implicit ideas, some of which are made memorably explicit by sententious remarks or purple passages, whose purpose is to keep us well aware of the larger issues and moral implications. One of his fullest statements in this vein, the monologue of Ulysses on "degree" in *Troilus and Cressida* (I.iii.85 ff.), frames his weary Greek heroes against a backdrop as wide as the universe. But this particular universe is the traditional cosmos of Ptolemaic astronomy, where the planets revolve around the earth in concentric orbits, influencing human destiny in ways that the astrologers claimed to interpret. This macrocosm centres upon that microcosm which is man, in whose person the elements are mixed, the humors disposed, and the faculties governed to accord with a similar pattern. Hence King Lear, within his "little world of man" (III.i.10), reproduces the storm that rages upon the heath. His psychological breakdown has its external counterpart in the disintegration of his kingdom. The body politic resembles the human body; the order of physical nature is a visible mirror of the divine order. The age-old conception of a "great chain of being," extending from God through the angels toward mankind and downward to beasts, plants, and inanimate matter, links together all created things. Prospero, through his natural magic, is served by the ethereal Ariel from on high and by the bestial Caliban at the subhuman level.

Given this all-embracing continuity, every creature must adhere to its hierarchic position in order to discharge its preordained function—must, in Ulysses' words, "observe degree, priority, and place." The stars set the universal example, and it is their harmonious functioning that generates the music of the spheres. All is well with societies, families, and individuals when they do their duties and know their places. But when they stray out of orbit, Ulysses warns of disastrous consequences, shifting his comparison from the planetary to the musical plane:

> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
> In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
> Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
> And make a sop of all this solid globe. . . .

It seems unlikely that so word-conscious a writer could have penned that last line without a side-glance at the theatre where his plays were being performed; for the Globe was truly a microcosm or little world of man, an artistic replica of the whole human condition. As for its solidity, we are told in *The Tempest* (IV.i.148–58) that Prospero's pageant and "the great globe itself" have been compounded of the same insubstantial fabric, the stuff of dreams. Ulysses, having sketched his ideal world-order, visualizes its impending dissolution, and opens up a harrowing prospect of chaos and anarchy. Similarly, a number of Shakespeare's histories and his tragedies take place in a "time misord'red" (*2 Henry IV*, IV.ii.33) which the hero is called upon to set right, while his comedies revel in timeless disorder until the norms of society are restored by the happy ending. Now, as between a set of professed ideals and the observed realities of experience, there is usually some sort of gap or lag, which tends to widen during critical periods such as the Renaissance, thereby amplifying the dimensions of the tragic or the comic point of view. And if the accepted world view was founded upon an obsolete cosmology, as the scientists were impressively showing, then scholastic traditions could be undermined by experimental approaches and monarchic authority itself would soon be challenged by more democratic ideologies.

The humanism of the Renaissance, with its consciousness of historic renewal, its revivals of the classics and the fine arts, its confidence in the mind, and its embellishment of its material surroundings, was a flowering of plenitude, to be sure; but it was likewise a crisis of uncertainty. It balanced the immediacies of this world against otherworldly values; its enjoyment of the senses quickened the lively spirits of comedy; but its fullness of life was deeply grounded in the inevitability of death, which is the precondition of tragedy. The medieval vision, with its tangible hopes for an afterlife in the next world, found its fulfillment in a *Divine Comedy*. In the Middle Ages tragedies were falls of princes, like Richard II's "sad stories of the death of kings" (III.ii.156). Men's

decline from prosperity to adversity taught a moral lesson by manifesting the power of providence and the transience of mere earthly glory. The fickle bitch-goddess Fortune determined the fates of captains and kings, alike with beggars and clowns, through the revolutions of her allegorical wheel. To suffer her slings and arrows had been the sanctioned course; to take arms against them was a novel and tempting alternative. To become the captain of one's fate, to make one's own fortune, to rise in the world by exerting one's will—it is through this dynamic choice that the self-reliant protagonists of Marlowe's plays attain their heroic stature. The individualism of Dr. Faustus, exploring all the available possibilities, recognizes no limits. Shakespeare reveals a more comprehensive awareness of the opposing forces that take the measure of the individual, and of the resulting interplay between character and destiny.

The exclamation of Hamlet, "What a piece of work is a man!" (II.ii.303), carries an ironic reverberation. His melancholy gaze looks up and down: skyward toward "this brave o'erhanging firmament" and earthward toward the grave. Those two portraits which he shows to the Queen illustrate man's potentialities for good and for evil. The scale ascends or descends with the spiritual and carnal aspects of his dual nature; he can aspire to be a godlike Hyperion or else can grovel like a brutal satyr. Hamlet's existential dilemma echoes the self-interrogations of Montaigne, not merely through the language of John Florio's translation but in its ambiguous balance between scepticism and faith. Though the supernatural is invoked and evoked throughout Shakespeare's work, it remains—as it doubtless should—an ultimate mystery. We are mystified with Hamlet over questions which were highly problematic in Shakespeare's day; we share the suspense over whether the Ghost is real or false, and whether it has been sent from heaven, purgatory, or hell. With Lady Macbeth we suspect that the apparition of Banquo may be a subjective phenomenon, while the "dagger of the mind" (II.i.38) might conceivably be the playwright's expressionistic device for conveying Macbeth's remorse of conscience. As for the Witches, though they foretell the outcome, they do not control it, since their prophecies are equivocations and Macbeth is free to choose at every stage. Omens and dreams portending catastrophes, though they are often greeted with disbelief, charge the air with fatality when they come true.

Most of the plays, unfolding within a Biblical frame of reference, broadly conform to the tenets of Christianity: witness the enforced conversion of Shylock the Jew. Yet *King Lear* deliberately reverts to a pre-Christian Britain, where the gods are pluralized and supplicated by pagan names, and where the enigma of their relation to men is argued back and forth: is it supernal grace or naturalistic indifference, poetic justice or cosmic irony? Moreover, the characters in the Roman plays are measured by the ethics of Stoicism. Suicide is denounced in the tragedies subject to Christian doctrine; Hamlet resists it because God's ethical canon is set against self-slaughter; and Ophelia's funeral rites are abridged because "her death was doubtful" (V.i.227). Whereas, in the environment of Rome and under the danger of humiliation, self-inflicted death can be an act of greatness, ennobling the final moments of both Cleopatra and Brutus. An anachronistic clock is mentioned in *Julius Caesar* (II.i.192), and it has been charged that Shakespeare's Romans are Elizabethans thinly disguised. Yet, in our single drawing of a contemporaneous Shakespearean production, the cast of *Titus Andronicus* is depicted in something like Roman dress. What is more important, Shakespeare has used his imagination to catch the moral atmosphere breathed by his ancient heroes. His recreation of a vital past is animated by the sense of living in a time of greatness, which is so energetically affirmed by King Henry V in his speech on Saint Crispin's Day. As the Earl of Warwick tells Henry IV, "There is a history in all men's lives" (*2 Henry IV*, III.i.80).

IV. THE LINGUISTIC MEDIUM

Among the various circumstances that made his moment so opportune for Shakespeare, the fundamental one was the state of the language, which was just ripe for his formative use of it. Language, as a means of communication, is always the key to other human relationships; as a mode of expression, it has been more incisive and effective at certain times than at others. "Words, words, words," as Hamlet wearily intimates to Polonius (II.ii.192), lose their significance when they are divorced from actuality. The increased diffusion of the printed word, during the centuries since Shakespeare wrote, has led toward inflation and devaluation. More recently, the audio-visual revolution of our time seems to be restoring the impact of the spoken word. But, though it is our great good fortune to have inherited the tongue of Shakespeare, we cannot claim that this is the dialect we speak and hear. If we are Americans, approaching him from some remove in culture as well as history, we must traverse a longer distance; yet American speech has occasionally preserved spellings, pronunciations, or turns of phrase which have not survived in British English. In any case, the primary source of confusion for the modern reader is not the rare or archaic term, which can be looked up as readily as the learned allusion, but terms which look familiar and sound strange because their meanings have shifted. Thus, when Shakespeare speaks of "conceit," he does not mean vanity, as we might; adhering to etymology more closely than we do, he means a conception or notion, or possibly the imagination itself.

To understand the difference between Shakespeare's English and ours, we must allow for the process of semantic change, which has been continually eroding or encrusting his original meaning. For example, he uses the old word *anon* for "right away," whereas in our minds it has slowed down to mean "by and by."

We miss the joke played by the Prince on Francis, in the first tavern scene of *1 Henry IV*, unless we catch the full force of that locution. The passage of time, which has weakened some expressions, has had a strengthening influence upon others. The epithet *villain*, which originally signified a member of a lower class, has acquired an undertone of hostility and immorality. On the other hand, *fellow*, which has friendly overtones for us, was insulting in Shakespeare's day. Phrases that were metaphors to him have often lost their coloring with us: since we seldom play the game of bowls, we overlook the concrete implications of "There's the rub" (an impediment on the green) or "assays of bias" (a weight on the ball). When the Germans possessively refer to *unser* (our) Shakespeare, they have at least one point in favor of their claim. The text through which they usually approach him was translated, largely by A. W. Schlegel, into the standard literary German of not much more than 150 years ago. The text of Shakespeare, as we come to know him, is separated from us by an interval of some 350 years. Linguistically, their Shakespeare is as accessible to them as, let us say, the poems of Wordsworth are to us.

To commune directly with our Shakespeare is a more demanding and more rewarding task of elucidation. His language is neither Old nor Middle English; yet it obviously differs from the current vernacular; it is what the linguists describe as Early New English. Its heyday coincided with many other creative activities of the Renaissance. The Elizabethans shared the grandiose humanistic confidence in the power of the word as an instrument of the reason. Logic and grammar stood squarely behind rhetoric, and rhetoric was the art of persuasion by words. Witness the reactions of the crowd in *Julius Caesar* to the respective speeches of Brutus and Antony: Brutus persuades them at first, but in the long run Antony proves the more persuasive. Since the stage is an unavoidably limited arena for the display of heroic action, words must be accepted as deeds, and heroes confound one another by declamation rather than by prowess. The warrior must "play the orator." Hotspur disclaims eloquence and despises poetry; yet he outtalks nearly everyone else in the play, and turns out to be its most poetical character. Comparably another valiant soldier, Othello, deprecates himself as rude in speech. His address to the Senate in Act I is not only eloquent in itself, but evocative of the verbal magic by which he has won Desdemona. He rises to epic pitch again with his monologues in Acts III and V, when he is driven by jealousy to take leave of military glory, and when on the brink of suicide he recaptures a victory out of his past.

Even Shakespeare's fools are dialecticians, like Feste in *Twelfth Night*; while it is Costard, the clown of *Love's Labor's Lost*, who enunciates the longest word in the Shakespearean glossary: *honorificabilitudinitatibus* (V.i.41). *Love's Labor's Lost* may be viewed as a virtual war of words, a campaign by the women—who habitually stand closer to nature—against the bookishness of the men, who are finally (V.ii.402 ff.) compelled to give up their cult of preciosity,

> Taffata phrases, silken terms precise,
> Three-pil'd hyperboles, spruce affection,
> Figures pedantical,

and to express their courtship in plain-spoken homespun: "In russet yeas and honest kersey noes." Accordingly, their spokesman Berowne completes his renunciation of literary artifice by protesting:

> And to begin, wench, so God help me law!
> My love to thee is sound, sans crack or flaw.

But his Rosaline, still detecting a note of courtly affectation, manages to have the last word by mockingly asking him to dispense with the French preposition:

> Sans "sans," I pray you.

The tables are turned in *Henry V*, when an English king courts a French princess by teaching her to speak plainly. There too the humorous dialects of the three captains, the Welsh Fluellen, the Scottish Jamie, and the Irish McMorris, all of them fighting together under the crown of England, resound with a patriotic zeal which is linguistic as well as political. And when the Duke of Norfolk is condemned to lifelong banishment in *Richard II*, his lament at being cut off from his native English (I.iii.159–73) gives Shakespeare a chance to salute his cherished medium.

Many languages have their valid claims to poetic euphony. However, if the criterion be expressiveness, then English has two incomparable advantages, its rich vocabulary and its flexible syntax. These it owes to the intermingling of the cultures that contributed to it, Roman and Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Norman French. The high proportion of loan-words and phrases has endowed it, to a unique degree, with what the rhetoricians called "copiousness": a multiplicity of words to choose from, a variety of ways for saying the same thing. But if you say the same thing another way, what you are actually saying is somewhat different; you are shading it differently, so that your capacity for precise and perceptive description has been increased. Working with about 2,000 words, Racine could employ the same word for different things, and so could Shakespeare on occasion. Berowne's single line,

> Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile,
> (*Love's Labor's Lost*, I.i.77)

uses "light" in four significations: *intellect*, seeking *wisdom*, cheats *eyesight* out of *daylight*. The paraphrase should help to explain how, with *Love's Labor's Lost*, Shakespeare freed himself from his early virtuosity. Ultimately he drew upon well over 21,000 words, probably a wider range than any other writer, which opened up immense potentialities for obtaining the right nuance, the *mot juste* in any particular situation. Now you can get along on as few as 850 words in a synthetic language, notably Basic English, where the aim is straightforward denotation, flat

statement. But poetry depends on connotation, shaded suggestion, and Shakespeare's verbal shadings reflect the subtlety and the penetration of his insights.

We could illustrate the kind of resources available for his diction by citing a common instance, the official adjective *royal* deriving historically from the French through the Normans. It has not one but two synonyms: the Latin *regal*, which now and then adds weight, and the Saxon *kingly*, most emphatic of the three, since it goes beyond the Romance and the Latinate versions to the underlying Germanic substructure. English poetry borrows its strength from the Saxon, and its color from the other sources. Hopkins and Milton represent those extremes among the poets; Shakespeare so combines the elements as to produce a dramatic conflict at the stylistic level. When Horatio is admonished by Hamlet,

> Absent thee from felicity a while,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
> (V.ii.347–48)

the Latinate abstraction for heaven remains mysterious, opaque, and far away, while the Germanic monosyllables of the next line emphasize the grim immediacy of the present world. They also tend to retard the speed of the verse, as Pope observed and exemplified: "And ten low words oft creep in one dull line." Whereas the effect of polysyllables, as Marlowe discovered with his mouth-filling proper names ("Usumcasane and Theridamas"), is to accelerate the rhythm. Hence, in the echoing heart-cry of Macbeth, the pace adjusts itself to the mood:

> No; this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red. (II.ii.58–60)

The sentence begins in immediate circumstance, when Macbeth looks down at his bloody hand; then the guilty vision of the second line swells up hyperbolically like an advancing wave, which recedes as the third line tapers off.

If vocabulary can be endlessly elaborated, syntax has been relatively simplified. Since English is not a highly inflected language, it is easy to transpose parts of speech. When Prospero refers to "the dark backward and abysm of time" (*The Tempest*, I.ii.50), he makes a substantive out of the Anglo-Saxon adverb "backward," characteristically pairing it off in a doublet with the Greco-Roman "abysm" (or abyss). Inversions of word-order, adapting to the metrical framework, occur so freely that they end by increasing the complexity and formality of the sentence-structure. Elisions like '*tis* and contractions like *o'er* may strike us as rather stilted today, and ethical datives (Hotspur's "See how this river comes *me* cranking in" [*1 Henry IV*, III.i.97]) as positively Chaucerian, but they still had a colloquial ring for Shakespeare's contemporaries. The intimate singular form of the personal pronoun (*thou* and *thee*) had not yet given way to the indiscriminate plural *you*. The present tense of the verb could still command the suffixes *-est* and *-eth* in prose, though in verse these were tending to drop out. The King James Bible, which has subsequently done so much to stabilize and standardize English usage, did not appear until late in Shakespeare's career. During his lifetime there were no English grammars to lay down rules or dictionaries to restrict word-formation. This was an immeasurable boon for writers, though it has augmented the problems of their editors, particularly in the field of orthography. Shakespeare was free to experiment with the language, stimulated by its intermixture of archaisms and neologisms, at the point when it had reached its maximum of structural plasticity.

His idiom is differentiated from ours, not only by grammar and semantics, but by phonetic changes. What is known as the Great Vowel Shift, intervening a century before, had given rise to some of the existing disparities between English and continental pronunciation. The capital letter *I* had come to stand for the same typical diphthong as the interjection *ay*. The dropping of the final *-e*, which went out in the wake of Middle English, was more than the loss of an extra syllable; it left behind it a terminal stress which confirmed the iambic tendencies of English versification and brought about a shortage of unaccented feminine endings. The preterite and participial ending *-ed* is sounded at times and slurred at others by Shakespeare, according to the beat of his blank verse, as in this clause of Romeo's:

> Which the | dark night | hath so | discov | ered.

Nouns that terminate in *-tion* are normally prolonged by two syllables, as in this line from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> Such tricks | hath strong | imag | ina | tion.

But certain words that have two syllables for us, notably *heaven* and *spirit*, are generally monosyllabic with Shakespeare. Others that are monosyllabic for us, conversely, may be disyllabic for him: *fire*, *hour*. Word-accent, which was not so rigidly fixed in his day, may vary with the verse-accent; simply reading the verse aloud should teach one how to pronounce *persévêr* or *revénue*. Some of the rhymes may point back to the older pronunciations. If *join* accords with *line* or *sea* with *way*, then it is not difficult to imagine a contemporaneous performance of Shakespeare sounding as though it were acted in the brogue at the Abbey Theatre. In general, the vowels seem to have been purer, the gutturals firmer than in later practice.

In reading and studying Shakespeare, at best we merely approximate the actual conditions of his art. All too frequently we forget that it was designed to be projected vocally and taken in by ear, or else we find that our auditory responses are insufficiently trained or experienced. Here we find ourselves facing a matter of taste upon which criticism has been most severe, Shakespeare's puns. "A quibble," in the dictum of Dr. Johnson, "was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose

it." We can scarcely believe that, just because Shakespeare was fond of wordplay, he could ever have played for such high stakes. Here it seems to be Johnson who has staked too much in order to make a sweeping epigram. When Prince Hal is challenging Falstaff's tall tale, he insists: "Come, your reason, Jack, your reason." And Falstaff evades the Prince by standing upon his mock-dignity: "If reasons were as plentiful as blackberries, I would give no man a reason upon compulsion, I" (*1 Henry IV*, II.iv.205 ff.). The Elizabethan pronunciation of *reason* as *raisin* improves the joke; but it does not, in our reaction, make it funny. A pun consists, by Addison's definition, of two words that agree in sound while differing in sense. Consequently, for serious-minded men, it is a distraction. Yet Falstaff is the incarnation of frivolous-minded man, and poets put the sound before the sense whenever they search for a rhyme. For the Elizabethans, wit was a precondition of poetry, not less so when the two were brought together on a verbal plane. In the playhouse especially, the poet's aptness must have called forth a matching alertness on the part of the spectators.

Punning was not invariably comic, in the facetious sense; it could even have a tragic reverberation, as when John of Gaunt plays with his name on his deathbed. The dirge in *Cymbeline* becomes a dance of death, levelling young lovers with kings and beggars, when the refrain of the first stanza closes with a domestic pun:

> Golden lads and girls all must,
> As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.
> (IV.ii.262–63)

An audience which could feel and absorb that shock must have had both sharp hearing and mental agility. It must have been keenly aware of the uses of words in order to gain enjoyment from their calculated abuses. Shakespeare was more than a master at putting the proper word in the proper place; he could inspire some of his slower-witted characters with a gift for putting the improper word in the proper place. This device for promulgating the *mal à propos* has been named the malapropism, after the garrulous dowager in Sheridan's *Rivals*, Mrs. Malaprop. But Shakespeare seems to have inspired her too; for, as a past mistress at "abusing God's patience and the Queen's English," she was long preceded by Mistress Quickly. In such nonsense, as in Shakespeare's puns, there is unexpected pith. Dogberry, the constable of *Much Ado about Nothing*, personifies the self-importance of the petty official. When insulted, he rises to the heights of bumbling indignation: "Dost thou not suspect my place? Dost thou not suspect my years?" (IV.ii.74–75). Striving to command respect, he unwittingly reverses himself and concurs with his detractors. It is an application of the same principle when Mistress Quickly, seeking to attest her own respectability, casts suspicion on herself with an unconscious double-entendre: "Thou or any man knows where to have me, thou knave, thou!" (*1 Henry IV*, III.iii.129–30).

A Shakespearean phrase, like a musical theme, is subject to orchestration. Developed through a sequence of repetitions and variations, modulated into changing harmonies, and counterpointed with other themes, it can set forth a distinguishing pattern of thought. Sometimes a key-word, which invites careful scrutiny, illuminates the basic idea of a play: consider the preoccupation with "grief" in *Richard II*, the emphasis on "blood" in *Macbeth*, the scrutiny of "nature" in *King Lear*, the irony of "honest" in *Othello*, the amplification of "space" in *Antony and Cleopatra*, or the ambiguities of "art" in *The Tempest*. Concordances may prove useful, not merely for locating passages, but for bringing out thematic significances. In browsing through the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one is struck by the number of quotations indicating Shakespeare as the first user of a given word. It was he who introduced such ordinary words as *lonely* and *laughable*, invented such onomatopoetic vocables as *bump*, borrowed from their classical cognates *monumental* and *aerial*—not to mention *critic* and *pedant*, without which his students would be at a loss. Some of our idioms started out as his coinages: to fall to blows, to breathe one's last, to drink someone's health, to see something in the mind's eye. Unconsciously we quote *2 Henry IV* (IV.v.92) when we affirm that a wish is father to a thought. Shakespearean aphorisms have turned into proverbs: "The devil can quote scripture" and "Misery makes strange bedfellows" come, with slight modification, from *The Merchant of Venice* (I.iii.98) and *The Tempest* (II.ii.40) respectively. When we state that a boy is poor but honest or a girl fancy-free, we never give the author due credit for coining those epithets; and if we swear a mild oath by the dickens, we are likely to think of another writer than Shakespeare.

V. THE STYLISTIC TECHNIQUE

Style could be envisaged as the difference between the linguistic materials available to a writer and the individual use to which he puts them, but the line would not be easy to draw in the case of Shakespeare because he did so much to shape and extend them. We seldom refer to a Shakespearean style because, whenever the protean dramatist speaks, it is through the distinctive voices of more than a thousand characters. Every voice is so individualized—according to Pope—that, even if the speech-prefixes were removed, we should have little difficulty in identifying the speaker. Shakespeare characterizes his *dramatis personae* fully as much by their words as by their actions, yet many of their finest lines bear a family resemblance which distinguishes them further as the utterance of our greatest poet. Poetry, of course, is not necessarily delimited by metre. Shakespeare often turns to prose, with brilliant effectiveness and always for a definite reason—if only to fulfill the pedestrian function of reading a letter or interposing some document. Though there is no invariable rule, the comic scenes are frequently in prose, whereas the tragic scenes are usually in verse. Yet some of the most tragic, notably

Ophelia's mad scenes and the sleep-walking scene of Lady Macbeth, are in that special kind of distracted prose which Shakespeare reserved for moments of mental distraction, when the fragments of suppressed emotion well up from the unconscious. The Falstaffian comedy of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is mostly prose; such histories as *King John* and *Richard II* are wholly verse.

Moreover, Shakespeare utilizes a good deal of rhyme, particularly in his earlier works; nearly half of *Love's Labor's Lost* is rhymed, in accordance with its interplay of stylistic awareness. The habit of rhyming is sloughed off more and more by the later plays: if we exclude the incidental songs and the interpolated masque, there is scarcely more than a single couplet to interrupt the blank verse of *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's lyrics, many of them set to music by such gifted Elizabethan composers as Thomas Morley, are among the most melodious outpourings of a golden age of song. They are also designed to fit succinctly into their dramatic contexts. For the most part, they add to the entertainment of the comedies; but on occasion, as with Ophelia or the Fool in *King Lear*, the pathos of the tragedies is enhanced by snatches from ballads or popular airs. The plays written in the mid-fifteen-nineties belong to what is termed Shakespeare's lyrical period. Stylistically, they employ the mellifluous rhythms, the witty conceits, and the courtly conventions that—through his two epyllia (*Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*) and his 154 sonnets—gained him his repute as the singer of love. Typical of their *cantabile* manner, as W. H. Auden would describe it with an apt musical term, is the set-piece of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows . . ." (II.i.249 ff.). The dialogue that introduces Romeo to Juliet forms a sonnet and coincides with the movement of a dance. The farewell of Richard II to his queen, like the introduction of Berowne to Rosaline, is presented in stichomythy, repartee which alternates lines between two speakers:

> *Queen*. And must we be divided? must we part?
> *Richard*. Ay, hand from hand, my love, and heart from heart. (V.i.81–82)

How consciously Shakespeare handled his verbal vehicles may be inferred from a brief interchange in *As You Like It*. Rosalind and Jaques are talking, in the elegant prose that composes so much of the comedy, when Orlando enters and salutes her:

> Good day and happiness, dear Rosalind!

Whereupon Jaques makes his exit brusquely and prosaically:

> Nay then God buy you, and [i.e. if] you talk in blank verse. (IV.i.30–32)

Iambic pentameter, the Shakespearean measure, is a compromise between the strict formality of verse and the apparent formlessness of prose. It came into existence as a rough vernacular equivalent for the classical hexameter. Though it retained the traditional English stress, it abandoned rhyme; it organized and regulated the flow of natural speech within the rhythmic structure of poetry; its metrical recurrences allowed for unlimited variety in the phrasing. Shakespeare's meteoric contemporary Marlowe first established control over his medium, after a generation of awkward experiments. He developed the verse-paragraph, which was actually a periodic sentence wherein each clause corresponded with a line, building up to a rhetorical climax. "Marlowe's mighty line," as Ben Jonson labelled it, owed its sweep and resonance to its strategic deployment of polysyllables, with colorful and euphonious names to round out a terminal flourish: "And ride in triumph through Persepolis!" The declamatory rhetoric of the stentorian *Tamburlaine* is imitated in Shakespeare's histories and parodied, through Ancient Pistol, in *2 Henry IV*. Once the five-foot cadence became the regular pattern, in a succession of steady beats following unstressed syllables, it could be varied and modified. When the underlying beat was fixed in the mind, extra syllables could be accommodated or shorts and longs shifted, substituting trochees or spondees for iambs. An ever-changing syncopation could be set up between the speech rhythm and the prosodic scheme.

Shakespeare's developing mastery of his technique is graphically revealed in his treatment of the blank-verse line. The apprentice plays depend on set speeches, beginning and ending squarely with the beginning and ending of a line; subsequently these are broken up, so that speeches may end and begin again in the middle of a line. Only one percent of the lines in *The Comedy of Errors* are divided in this way; in *The Tempest* the proportion is eighty-five percent. The caesura, that traditional breathing-space within the line, falls regularly in the third foot with the early Shakespeare, but later tends to fall back farther or else to move about. Most of the early lines are end-stopped, with a pause which is generally marked by the punctuation; but the later ones tend increasingly to run over; and these enjambments range from an earlier twelve percent to a late forty-one percent. The resulting effect of limpidity, in Shakespeare's final phase, is reinforced by a tendency to use feminine endings, thereby converting the pentameter into an eleven-syllable line which terminates on the off-beat. (Wolsey's "Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness" is not less typical for having been frequently attributed to the collaboration of Fletcher.) Here the figures are five percent at the earliest and thirty-five percent at the latest. English heroic verse was thus carried along, through the course of Shakespeare's twenty-five-year development, from its first Marlovian fluency toward its culminating Miltonic elaboration. Illustrations, however, are more convincing than either generalizations or statistics.

We can follow that evolution more clearly by contrasting a pair of passages from his earliest and his latest writing. This is Joan La Pucelle, Shakespeare's disparaging characterization of Joan of Arc, introducing herself to Charles the Dauphin in *1 Henry VI*:

Lo, whilest I waited on my tender lambs,
And to sun's parching heat display'd my cheeks,
God's Mother deigned to appear to me,
And in a vision full of majesty
Will'd me to leave my base vocation
And free my country from calamity. . . .
Resolve on this: thou shalt be fortunate
If thou receive me for thy warlike mate.

(I.ii.76 ff.)

The regularity is absolute to the point of monotony, though it has not been achieved without certain procrustean tricks of stretching out and slurring over: the definite article is omitted from the second line, and in the fifth "vocation" must be pronounced with four syllables. The verse-paragraph is built up through a sequence of lines corresponding to its component clauses, and the passage is rounded out with a sententious couplet. Note also the archaic alliterations: "whilest / waited," "country / calamity." Here, by way of comparison, is the valedictory speech of the dying Katherine of Aragon, spoken to her gentlewoman Patience in *Henry VIII*:

When I am dead, good wench,
Let me be us'd with honor. Strew me over
With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
I was a chaste wife to my grave. Embalm me,
Then lay me forth. Although unqueen'd, yet like
A queen, and daughter to a king, inter me.
I can no more. (IV.ii.167–73)

These seven lines contain five short sentences, four of them commencing and four of them concluding somewhere within the pentameter. There are three feminine endings and three enjambments—a high percentage even for a late work. The abrupt breaks and the breathless run-overs seem to echo the feelings they convey. The context lends a poignant modesty to the personal pronoun, when it becomes the unaccented eleventh syllable: "Embalm me," "inter me." The contrast between the pomposity of artificial diction and the simplicity of genuine anguish is as striking as the improvement in Shakespeare's portraiture between La Pucelle and Katherine.

Whether it be as loud as a public proclamation or as muted as a breaking heart, Shakespeare's discourse is intended to be spoken. But its appeal is visual as well as vocal, proceeding directly through the ear to the eye; hence it enables us, by listening closely, to visualize the scene. Every word is a picture, Thomas Gray suggested, exaggerating somewhat in order to make an important point. The verbal sound is completed by the pictorial image. When Berowne says,

Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile,

his ingenuity calls our attention to the words themselves, obscuring the realities beyond them. But when Othello, approaching Desdemona's bed in V.ii, says,

Put out the light, and then put out the light,

his thought moves from the plane of words to the plane of deeds and their consequences. The actual candle, which is being extinguished, becomes a symbol of Desdemona's fated life. Othello, like Hotspur, "apprehends a world of figures," a whole new dimension of experience which Shakespeare reveals through his imagery. Like all great poets, he views the world metaphorically—or, as Hamlet would put it, "tropically." The basic trope, or figure of speech, can be illustrated by an obvious example from the Old English. Literally, we say that a ship *sails* the sea. But figuratively, speaking the language of connotation rather than denotation, we may say that the ship *ploughs* the sea. This implies a correspondence which can be stated logically:

$$\frac{\text{SHIP}}{\text{SEA}} = \frac{\text{PLOUGH}}{(\text{LAND})}$$

The literal reality is the first term of the equation; the figurative extension is the second; and "land" is in parentheses because it is out of sight.

When the relationship is made explicit, it becomes a simile: "Even as a plough is to the land, so is a ship to the sea." Shakespeare makes frequent use of this more formal device. The messenger in the second scene of *Macbeth* reports that the opposing armies are

As two spent swimmers that do cling together
And choke their art.

But metaphor is so inherent a mode of apprehension that it has no need for the guideposts of *like* or *as*; the relationship it expresses is implicit. Rhetoricians term it the figure of transport, and indeed Shakespeare uses it to transport us from the events on the stage to a wider universe of discourse. To be sure, all language is metaphorical. We could hardly enunciate a sentence without making use of fossilized metaphors. We use *bias* as a synonym for prejudice, without remembering the weighted bowl; and when we speak of spurring someone on, we seldom think in terms of horsemanship. Yet Macbeth, who is never far from the battlefield, brings out the original force of the phrase when he soliloquizes:

I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
And falls on th' other. (I.vii.25–28)

Here the literal meaning is an abstraction, the description of a psychological process, which is made concrete by the equestrian analogy. To sum it up in another paradigm:

$$\frac{\text{AMBITION}}{\text{INTENTION}} = \frac{\text{SPUR}}{(\text{HORSE})}$$

But the analogy is a negative one, to which Macbeth does not adhere consistently. Ambition, instead of acting as a spur, seems to become a horse itself—or perhaps its rider—and to run away with the situation. The metaphor becomes a hyperbole, and the leap that fails by its very excess of energy becomes a portent of Macbeth's fall.

Shakespeare's vision of things is at times so vivid that it seems to leave his expression turgid, and he falls into what the classical-minded critics deplored as mixed metaphor. When Hamlet proposes "to take arms against a sea of troubles" (III.i.58), Pope replaced *sea* with the emendation *siege* to preserve the military tone. Yet the bold image of a warrior stalking, sword in hand, into the sea is not uncharacteristic of the Anglo-Saxon imagination. Since the Elizabethan poets worked from a repertory of conventionalized tropes and stock comparisons, which they adapted and recombined, they ran the continual risk of standardization. We are not altogether surprised when, at the first sight of Juliet, Romeo muses:

> It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
> As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear. (I.v.45–46)

Juliet is to night, in other words, what the jewel is to its Ethiopian wearer. The conceit is a static one which, while personifying the night, turns Juliet into an inanimate object, an earring, a mere decoration. Like so much of the diction in the first act, this is surface embellishment, reminding us of the comedies or of the sonneteers. Yet the fundamental antithesis between light and darkness pervades the tragedy like a motif in music, and calls forth such numerous and intricate variations that the reader can best be referred to Caroline Spurgeon's essay on the subject. A simpler instance, which suggests how the same pair of opposites can be tensely dramatic rather than dazzingly poetic, is Macbeth's invocation:

> Stars, hide your fires,
> Let not light see my black and deep desires.
> (I.iv.50–51)

The broken couplet does nothing to decorate surfaces; momentarily it peers into depths; it psychologizes Macbeth's resolve by framing it within a moral perspective. It extends the imaginative focus from what is being enacted before us to the more speculative drama that takes place in the mind's eye.

The sphere of Shakespeare's images is so vast and rich in itself that it has been investigated and charted for clues to his personal temperament. But though we can follow up associations of thought through his image-clusters, these are subordinated to his controlling purposes as a playwright. The imagery fulfills a structural and a thematic function, linking together a train of ideas or projecting a scheme of values. It enhances the strain of melancholy in *Hamlet* by dwelling on sickness and decay, and sharpens the ethical choices in *King Lear* through its emphasis on sight and blindness. The sun, a traditional emblem of kingship from the time of the Pharaohs, sheds its light on Shakespeare's procession of English kings, detaching itself from Richard II after his downfall to shine on the erstwhile Bullingbrook, now King Henry IV. Above all, the man from Stratford keeps returning to the theme of a garden; it is the norm of all that is soundest and happiest within his frame of reference. The moral of *Richard II* is pronounced by a gardener, who compares his well-tended plot with the commonwealth gone to seed (III.iv.29 ff.). The war of *Henry V* is ended when the King conquers France, "this best garden of the world" (V.ii.36). The Wars of the Roses start with a confrontation in the Temple Garden (*1 Henry VI*, II.iv), and the rebellious Cade is run to earth in a quiet Kentish garden (*2 Henry VI*, IV.x). A charming garden in Belmont resolves the urban tensions of *The Merchant of Venice*. Hamlet's blighted world is "an unweeded garden" (I.ii.135). Iago affirms the freedom of the will, and draws a microcosmic parallel, when he tells Roderigo: "Our bodies are our gardens" (*Othello*, I.iii.320).

The allegory is applied by Friar Lawrence, in *Romeo and Juliet*, when he discusses the benign and malignant properties of plants. It is acted out when Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*—or, with a pathetic difference, Ophelia—distributes flowers, or when the madness of Lear is crowned with weeds. Images are suited to the styles of the characters: Othello's parlance is full of martial pomp and circumstance. When Iago vilifies him as an old black ram (I.i.88), Iago's string of beastly epithets serves to characterize himself. With Macbeth the characteristic gesture is dressing or undressing, arming or disarming. Its significance is made clear by his preliminary question:

> The Thane of Cawdor lives; why do you dress me
> In borrowed robes? (I.iii.108–9)

After he has seized the crown, his disaffected thanes look upon the ensuing disorder as an almost Falstaffian spectacle:

> He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause
> Within the belt of rule. (V.ii.15–16)

The same note of carnal grossness—perhaps foreshadowing the drunken grooms— is intermixed with the clothing metaphor, when Lady Macbeth is urging him not to let his resolution bog down in an anticlimax:

> Was the hope drunk
> Wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since?
> And wakes it now to look so green and pale
> At what it did so freely? (I.vii.35–38)

Macbeth has felt himself restrained by a surge of pity, symbolized in the person of "a naked new-born babe" (I.vii.21)—a symbol which unites the related themes of his childlessness, Banquo's progeny, and the doomed children of Macduff. Recent critics have traced these configurations in such fascinating detail that we are sometimes tempted to read the plays as if they were metaphysical poems. But though we cannot overrate the importance of the poetry, its function is to orchestrate the drama, to integrate the words at every turn with the actions and the ideas.

VI. THE THEATRICAL SETTING

To take full advantage of reading Shakespeare, we must cultivate both the mind's ear and the mind's eye; we must learn to hear the verse spoken aloud as we

read it, and also to see the drama enacted in an imaginary theatre. Experienced musicians are able to read score, to glance at the notes on a sheet of paper and know how the music will sound. Similarly, theatrical experience can teach one to look at a script and imagine what the rendition would be like. Shakespeare's plays, though they have meant so many things to so many men, are primarily scripts. The fact that they are so commonly apprehended through the printed page has caused a certain amount of misapprehension among his readers, including his critics. But with Shakespearean criticism there has been a growing effort to understand his work in its own terms, to reconstruct the means by which he gained his effects: such was the approach of Granville-Barker, who himself had been a successful actor-manager-playwright. When we open an edition of *Hamlet* at Act I, Scene 1, we are usually confronted with the designation: "Elsinore. A platform before the castle." This was supplied for the reader's convenience by eighteenth-century editors, along with such standard rubrics as "A room in the palace" for tragedy, "A battlefield" for history, or "Another part of the forest" for comedy. With few exceptions, designations of place do not appear in the quartos and folios, and many of the earliest texts make no designation of act and scene.

Shakespeare's stage itself was basically a platform. That of the Globe (as we infer from the extant specifications of a rival playhouse modelled on it, the Fortune) measured 27½ feet deep by 43 feet wide. The editions of the eighteenth century presupposed a theatre of their own time, with its proscenium framing a picture of the play's visual background, a landscape or an edifice painted in perspective on shutters or drop-curtains and wings. The theatre of the ancient Greeks had embraced two concentric circles, an orchestra (originally meaning a dancing-place) all but surrounded by an embankment of seats. Circular arrangements of this kind existed in England when the strolling players acted out their moralities and interludes upon the village green. The emphasis was horizontal, bringing the actors and the spectators together in a vital interrelationship. Modern theatres tend, by contrast, to be vertical in their thrust. The orchestra has shrunk to a pit for musicians, dividing the actors within their lighted picture-frame from the passive spectators in the darkened auditorium. The Elizabethan theatre had a horizontal basis, which it happily combined with certain vertical features. Its platform-stage was encircled on three sides by the standing spectators or groundlings (who paid a penny for admittance), so that the production—if not quite in the round—employed what today we call arena staging. The surrounding amphitheatre (apparently polygonal at the Globe) consisted of three stories, each with its gallery, like those old-fashioned innyards used on occasion for theatres. Admission to the galleries cost an additional penny and entitled the spectator to a seat.

Just beyond the stage rose the tiring-house, containing—as the name (attiring-house) implies—the actors' dressing rooms, and providing a conventionalized background which adapted itself to their histrionic requirements. Most of the acting had to take place downstage; but upstage there was a curtained area which could be used for discoveries, could be opened up to disclose—we can readily imagine—Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess. Behind its curtain or arras, which was black for tragedy and particolored for comedy (a painted cloth or imitation tapestry), would be discovered the body of the slain Polonius or the sleeping Falstaff, "snorting like a horse." In back at a higher level, there was a specialized playing space indicated in the Shakespearean directions as "above" or "aloft." Thence the invisible Prospero looked down on the lovers and the conspirators; this was a battlement ("on the walls") for the history plays; from it Richard II made his punning descent, a symbolic come-down, to the "base court." There seem to have been practical upper windows, at one of which Juliet first made her most celebrated appearance, in what later came to be known as the balcony scene. Somewhere beneath the windows, to the left and right of the mainstage, were the doors for major exits and entrances. Housed at the highest level were the musicians and the instruments for other sound effects that punctuated the dramatic rhythm. Cannonades and fireworks won even more applause than the familiar hautboys (oboes) or rebecks (fiddles), and started the fire that burned down the Globe during a representation of *Henry VIII* in 1613.

The tiring-house was crowned with a small hut or turret, whence a flag and a trumpeter announced the day's performance. Though the large pit was open to the sky, most of the stage was covered by a projecting roof called the shadow or heavens, whose underside was illuminated with signs of the zodiac. The posts or pillars that supported this projection could lend themselves to the play at hand; they might have been the trees in the Forest of Arden on which Orlando hangs his verses. The stage, which stood about five feet from the ground, could be entered from underneath by a trap or traps, whose most famous use was to serve as a grave for Ophelia. Actors could be lowered from above, like the supernatural personages in *The Tempest*, or pulled upward, as when the dying Antony is lifted into Cleopatra's monument, by some sort of machine. Plays had to be performed in broad daylight, of course, between the hours of two and four or five in the afternoon. Open-air performances must have fostered a more exaggerated style of acting than that to which we have become accustomed, more dependent on sonorous elocution and stylized gesture, although it is significant that Hamlet cautions the Players against overacting. In an age when both men and women prided themselves on the extravagant design and flamboyant color of their garments, it was the actors who cut the most gorgeous figures. Appearing in the dress of their day, with certain exotic or historical touches relating to their roles, they set a modish standard: "The glass of fashion and the mould of form."

Most of the attempted reconstructions err by making the Shakespearean playhouse look like a quaint little Tudor cottage, thatched and half-timbered. Actually, we gather from the Fortune contract that the Globe may have had arches, pilasters, and other details of baroque architecture. When these were further embellished with bright hangings, costumed actors, and all the trappings of pageantry, the impression must have been spectacular. Thomas Coryat, the Jacobean traveller, found the theatres of Venice less stately than those of London, and he is corroborated by foreign observers who were impressed by English playhouses. Though their average size has been variously computed, they would seem to have held an audience of between 2,000 and 3,000. Nonetheless, the prologue to *Henry V* is somewhat apologetic:

> Can this cockpit hold
> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?

But this was a request for "that willing suspension of disbelief, which," as Coleridge would argue, "constitutes poetic faith." As the Chorus intimates, the theatres were in the sporting districts near the cockfighting arenas and the bear-baiting pits, not to mention the stews or houses of prostitution. The Globe was located in Southwark on the Bankside, south of the river Thames and out of the city of London, where public plays were officially frowned upon. Shakespeare and his colleagues were to acquire a private playhouse indoors at Blackfriars, north of London Bridge, in 1608; and they would frequently perform before the court at Whitehall Palace and on tour elsewhere. However, their greatest successes were inalterably associated with that wooden O which lived up to so proud a title as the Globe, *theatrum mundi*. Its sign is referred to in *Hamlet* (II.ii.362) when Rosencrantz speaks of "Hercules and his load" (i.e. the world on his shoulders), and tradition recounts that its motto was *Totus mundus agit histrionem* (literally, "All the world plays the actor"). Shakespeare's rendering, "All the world's a stage," furnishes the theme for the set-piece of the melancholy Jaques in *As You Like It*, and the première of that comedy may well have marked the opening of the Globe in 1599.

Though there was no scenery, there were a good many properties: a throne or bed, for example, or a conventional hedge. Romeo evidently jumps over an "orchard wall" to hide in the Capulets' garden, and the departing Benvolio concludes that scene (II.i) by saying:

> Go then, for 'tis in vain
> To seek him here that means not to be found.

And the next scene—the balcony scene—begins, in the modernized text, with Romeo coming forward to say:

> They jest at scars that never felt a wound.

Here the change of pronunciation obscures a rhyme which shows that the action has been continuous. Scenes do not need to be localized unless the locality forms a meaningful aspect of the situation, and then Shakespeare tells us whatever we need to know by merely dropping an appropriate word. "This is Illyria, lady," Viola is told on her first entrance in *Twelfth Night*. On the other hand, when Bullingbrook asks, "How far is it, my lord, to Berkeley now?", the reply is:

> Believe me, noble lord,
> I am a stranger here in Gloucestershire.
> (*Richard II*, II.iii.1–3)

Shakespeare does his own scene-painting through speeches. It is King Duncan himself who sets the stage, when he arrives at Inverness as Macbeth's guest (I.vi):

> This castle hath a pleasant seat, the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.

The picture, reflecting his own serene nobility of character, is thereupon filled in by the noble Banquo, who is likewise destined to be a victim of their host:

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting marlet, does approve,
> By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here.

Banquo's delicate evocation of the swift, building its lofty nest in churches, is at odds with the omens hinted by other birds, the croaking raven and the fatal owl. It has a special effect which Sir Joshua Reynolds would compare with "repose" in painting. Repose indeed! It is there at Macbeth's castle that Duncan is to take his last repose. That temple-haunting marlet proves to be another omen of death, and we are nearer to hell's breath than to heaven's, as the clownish Porter will bring home to us in his drunken monologue next morning.

Shakespeare's numerous shifts of scene were made possible by this technique of verbal description. *Antony and Cleopatra* has no less than forty-two scenes, as it has been editorially subdivided, fifteen of them in the fourth act alone. A play which keeps shuttling back and forth between Rome and Alexandria, moving on to Athens and even to Asia Minor at one point, is far too immense to be produced with the pictorial scenery of latter-day stagecraft. But poetry can take continents in its stride, as Donne reminds us in "A Valediction: Of Weeping":

> On a round ball
> A workman that hath copies by, can lay
> An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,
> And quickly make that which was nothing all.

Time proves to be no more of an obstacle than space is for Shakespeare. In *The Winter's Tale* it is Father Time himself who offers an apologia for skipping over sixteen years, allowing the hero and heroine to grow up between the third and fourth acts. Dr. Johnson defended Shakespeare against those neoclassical critics who could not forgive him for neg-

lecting their dogmatic unities of time and place, and the romantic Coleridge would declare that Shakespeare's plays observe the one important unity, that of feeling. Yet, as if to confound his detractors by showing them that he could solve any technical problem they put to him, he pays strict attention to all the unities in the academic *Comedy of Errors* and in the courtly *Tempest*. His dramaturgy was broad enough to comprehend both of the extremes that Polonius holds up: "scene individable, or poem unlimited; ... the law of writ and the liberty" (II.ii.399–401).

Ben Jonson, as a professing classicist, disapproved of such liberties, believed in a more rigorous verisimilitude, and thought it implausible that a history play could

> with three rusty swords,
> And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words,
> Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars,
> And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars.
> (*Every Man in His Humor*, Prologue)

From a realistic standpoint, it is perfectly true that all theatrical illusion hinges upon a series of makeshifts: "In little room confining mighty men" (*Henry V*, Epilogue). Since there could be no question of staging a military campaign within the confines of the theatre, it had to be suggested by alarums and excursions: by ringing the bell that called men forth to arms and by sending small parties of supernumeraries across the stage, wearing counterfeit armor, bloody make-up, and the heraldic escutcheons of Lancaster or York. Trumpets and banners would help; but it was oratory that had to do the rest, with vaunts before the battle and parleys afterward, volleys of sesquipedalian verbiage. This required some cooperation on the part of the audience, a meeting of minds which the Chorus bespeaks in the Prologue to *Henry V*:

> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.

Shakespeare seems to be reaching the limits of the dramatic medium and to be striking out toward the epic—or, more prophetically, the cinema—when his self-conscious Chorus interlinks the episodes with narrative exposition and makes his repeated appeals to the hearers' imagination:

> Still be kind,
> And eche [i.e. eke] out our performance with
> your mind. (III.Cho.34–35)

Through the choruses of *Henry V*, Shakespeare manifests his own awareness of convention, that body of unspoken assumptions without which the theatre could not exist. Convention may be defined as a gentlemen's agreement between the actor and the spectator to take the word for the deed, to accept the symbol as the reality, and thereby to gain impressive effects with limited means. Though the Elizabethans did not follow the classical rules, it would be a serious mistake to conclude that their drama was amorphous. On the contrary, they worked with an elaborate set of conventions, which Shakespeare followed conscientiously.

French classicism, which forbade a tragic protagonist to think out loud, supplied him with a confidant invariably at hand to draw out his thoughts through conversation. This device would seem to be no less conventional—and scarcely more natural—than the Shakespearean soliloquy, which enables us to overhear a character's innermost stream of consciousness, or its briefer version, the aside. Simply to speak in verse is an artifice, after all, comparatively more artificial with rhyme than with blank verse. Shakespeare ordinarily utilizes a rhyming couplet to close a blank-verse scene. Tragedies conventionally terminate with didactic couplets pronounced by the highest-ranking figure among the survivors. It is the Prince of Verona who makes the concluding pronouncement:

> For never was a story of more woe
> Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

Marked by their terminal rhymes, which were less of an interruption than a falling curtain would have been, scenes succeeded one another as actors walked on and off the Elizabethan stage. Acts were more perceptibly divided, most appropriately by music, which could be harmonized with the stage business. Act III of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ends with the stage direction "*They sleep all the act*." That is to say, the enchanted lovers remain in sleeping postures through the musical *entr'acte* to wake up disenchanted in Act IV. There was some danger that, without a clear-cut interval, the audience might not realize when one scene was ending and the next one beginning. Hence an actor who left the stage at the end of one scene could not immediately reappear in the next. In *Richard II* a dramatically unmotivated exit is made by John of Gaunt a few lines before the end of the first scene for no other reason than that he must be onstage at the beginning of the second scene. Scholars have retroactively named this practice the law of re-entry, though it had no such name for the playwrights who practiced it. It is the intrinsic nature of conventions that they be taken for granted, without being made too explicit or codified. We can attend a film and grasp the temporal significance of a flashback or slow dissolve without giving them names.

Given the vast potentialities and the adaptable mechanisms of the Shakespearean theatre, everything hinged upon the contribution of those human beings who brought it to life. Shakespeare's career was paralleled—and fulfilled—by the development of the profession or "quality" of acting. That had been a precarious way of life, since stage-players were "glorious vagabonds," who would have been arrested as vagrants if they had not been taken into the service of some highly placed protector. Consequently, Shakespeare's troupe enjoyed the distinction of being patronized by the Lord Chamberlain, the traditional arbiter of English entertainment, and subsequently by the King himself. Inasmuch as it was a stock company, Shakespeare must have owed something

to the talents of the fellow actors for whom he wrote. His leading actor, Richard Burbage (whose more flexible style superseded the popular ranting of Marlowe's tragedian, Edward Alleyn), was able to create the successive roles of Romeo, Hamlet, and Lear within the decade of their composition. Hamlet, keenly interested in matters theatrical, gives us a glimpse of a typical cast when the Players come to Elsinore:

> He that plays the king shall be welcome—his Majesty shall have tribute on me, the adventerous knight shall use his foil and target, the lover shall not sigh gratis, the humorous man shall end his part in peace, the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle a' th' sere, and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't. (II.ii.319–25)

The Shakespearean repertory is not so easily reduced to types as the Savoy Operas, yet Shakespeare must have had certain actors in mind for certain parts, and his characterizations may have been influenced by their personal traits. Hamlet looks askance at the improvised gags of the clown; Shakespeare took pains to write lines that suited the styles of his comedians. The principal comedian of earlier years, Will Kemp, seems to have specialized in not-so-clever servants like Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*. Presumably, he was Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and the closely related Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*, both of whom engage in dialogues with themselves (a gag which Shakespeare elaborated for Falstaff and the Porter). He was succeeded by Robert Armin, whose specialty was fools, which may explain the remarkable exfoliation of such jesters from *As You Like It* through *King Lear*. The most difficult part, from our point of view, would have been the lady, since she had to be impersonated by a boy. That may help to account for the number of shrews and viragoes in the early plays, or the fondness of heroines in the comedies for assuming—or resuming—masculine garb. The boy-actor needed the utmost that blank verse could offer, by way of feminine aura, to catch the adolescent charms of Juliet, let alone the mature seductions of Cleopatra.

Among the factors converging toward the inspiration for Shakespeare, we should not overlook that presence which has left the least record. To have great poets, said Whitman, you must have great audiences. Shakespeare's work was predicated, to a considerable degree, upon the imaginative collaboration of his Elizabethan-Jacobean audience. Doubtless it was easily amused by the slapstick of the clowns; but it must also have relished the blandishments of the lovers and subtleties of the humorous men. A large middle-class public at the Globe, a select circle in the private house at Blackfriars, and finally the court itself—all could react with enthusiasm to the same playwright. But they reacted according to their "divers capacities," as Heminge and Condell noted, in addressing the First Folio "to the great variety of readers, from the most able to him that can but spell." Shakespeare's universality—his ability to please every taste, to win "all men's suffrage," in Ben Jonson's phrase—was compounded out of his very heterogeneity, his appeal to individuals through a concrete understanding of their concerns. Normally, about half a dozen theatres were functioning in his London. At the other end of the seventeenth century, when the size of the city had doubled and was tripling, there would be no more than two or three. Already during his lifetime, as his company's acquisition of the Blackfriars portended, the democratic base for the drama was dwindling. Cut off altogether by the Puritans during the Commonwealth, and partially revived by the Restoration as an upper-class amusement, it never again came so close to so large a proportion of the people.

VII. THE ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Socrates is said to have reconciled the idea of tragedy with that of comedy, and to have predicted that the two ideas would some day be realized by the same genius. But that was in the small hours of Plato's *Symposium*, when the listeners were overcome by wine or sleep, and the argument has been lost to posterity. Two thousand years afterward, when the Elizabethans blended both modes into what they called a gallimaufry or hodgepodge, they were attacked by traditionalists for juxtaposing—in Sidney's phrase—"hornpipes and funerals." Dr. Johnson would defend Shakespeare by arguing that, although his plays were neither tragedies nor comedies in the strictly classical sense, they came closer to life than either through their variety; and Victor Hugo would maintain that they distilled the very essence of modern drama by intermixing the grotesque and the sublime. The combination, by whatever name it be invoked, is an organic feature of English dramaturgy. It goes back at least as far as *The Second Shepherds' Play* of Wakefield, where the ritual of the babe in the manger is parodied by the farce of the stolen sheep. Thus the drunken Porter of *Macbeth* is no mere vulgar interpolation to tickle the groundlings; he is a quizzical commentator upon the serious action, like the Gravedigger in *Hamlet*. The clown, who enhances the merriment of *As You Like It* or *Twelfth Night* by opposing the cult of melancholy personified in Jaques or Malvolio, does not proffer comic relief in *King Lear*; he brings out the pathos by making the King "taste his folly," by joking with ill-timed persistence about Lear's fatal mistake.

The Shakespearean practice of complementing and contrasting the main plot with a secondary plot reaches its fullest development in *King Lear*. The Celtic tale about a father with kind and unkind daughters is deliberately paralleled by the episode—drawn from Sidney's *Arcadia*—of another father with kind and unkind sons, and the physical blinding of Gloucester is a commentary upon the moral blindness of Lear. Such underplots are often romantic, and always parodic, in their relation to the central theme. The underplot of *Hamlet* focuses on Laertes, another

son avenging his father, after mischances brought about through Hamlet's love for Ophelia. But there is also an overplot which involves still another son avenging his father, through the military campaign of Fortinbras and the power struggle between Denmark and Norway. Such overplots are enveloping actions which frame the personal issue at a dynastic or a national level. The title-page of the Folio indicates Shakespeare's versatility by naming the principal genres of Elizabethan drama: comedy, history, tragedy. Polonius, who shares Hamlet's interest in theatrical criticism, recognizes categories as hybrid as "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral," and it would be easy to extend his list of the permutations made possible by the multiple plot. "Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light," continues Polonius (II.ii.396–402). We have already noted how the apprentice playwright took those Latin models in his stride and encompassed their extremes with *Titus Andronicus* and *The Comedy of Errors*.

The evolution of the English drama is deeply rooted in the liturgy of the medieval church and, beyond it, in the substratum of folklore. The hobby-horse of the primitive May-games was not altogether forgotten by Shakespeare. Certainly in his youth he must have visited the neighboring cathedral town of Coventry, still a centre for the street performance of Biblical cycles, and watched the pageant representing the Slaughter of the Innocents, where Herod rants in the manner that Hamlet describes. The scene where Lady Macduff and her children are slaughtered is more understandable, though not less terrible, in the light of that popular precedent. The members of the local gilds that put on those mysteries could not have been too unlike Bottom the Weaver and his fellow tradesmen. Shakespeare is recalling the morality plays, as they were performed by strolling actors, when he alludes to the mischief-making Vice, who marshalled the Deadly Sins with his dagger of lath (*Twelfth Night*, IV.ii.124 ff.). Falstaff is likened to that prototype for leading Prince Hal astray (*1 Henry IV*, II.iv.453), while the latter—like the prodigal hero of the moralities—is beguiled by temptation in tavern scenes. During the Tudor period these native strains converged with more self-consciously literary influences—in the Senecan tragedy of the Inns of Court and the Plautine comedy of the colleges—and were augmented by tournaments, processions, and other quasi-dramatic manifestations. By the time England's first playhouse (expressly named the Theatre) was erected in 1576, the outstanding need was for young talents who would take up playwriting as a career.

Gradually and brilliantly, during the fifteen-eighties, that requirement was met. John Lyly, adapting his ornate prose to the clever badinage of the child-actors, charmed a patrician audience with his brittle "court comedies"; Falstaff mocks at their euphuistic style in his play-acting scene (*1 Henry IV*, II.iv.398 ff.). Christopher Marlowe, at the forefront of the University Wits, caught the collective voice of the Armada decade in his tragedies of overreaching ambition; Shakespeare (who was born in the same year as Marlowe and lived twenty-three years longer) was indebted to him not only for his pioneering in blank verse but for his characterization of hero-villains like Richard III. Thomas Kyd set his stamp on the tragedy of revenge with the play that probably enjoyed the longest run and the widest influence of its author's generation; *The Spanish Tragedy*, with its father avenging a son, its play within the play, its introductory ghost, and its heroine's madness, prepared the way for *Hamlet*. Insofar as these Shakespearean prototypes had their own forerunners among the classics, they conformed roughly to the traditional five-act scheme. But the internal structure of a play, as it was analyzed by Renaissance critics, counted no more than four stages: *protasis* (introduction), *epitasis* (development), *catastasis* (crisis), and *catastrophe* (final overturn). Modern handbooks of dramatic technique, such as that of Gustav Freytag, reduce the sequence to three: exposition, climax, dénouement. This gives the Shakespearean play a pyramidal shape, which rises from Act I to Act III and falls thence to Act V. Sometimes one of the intervening acts, especially the fourth, may seem thin or else padded.

The average number in the cast of a Shakespearean comedy is eighteen, just about half as many as the thirty-five in a history, with tragedy in between at twenty-seven. It follows that comedy is constructed most tightly and history most loosely, since the one contrives and controls its *dramatis personae* while the other must take them as they emerge (and ask the players to double in lesser roles). The histories were bound to be more or less episodic, since they were expected to stick fairly close to the annals of England, as chronicled by Holinshed and others, reign by reign and year by year. Shakespeare first achieved and asserted his mastery through his cycle of plays in this genre. If we regard *King John* as its prologue and *Henry VIII* as its epilogue, it comprises further two tetralogies mainly covering the fifteenth century. The earlier and cruder tetralogy deals with the later reigns: the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. The four remaining plays, composed later but dealing with the earlier chronology, stand together as a culmination: *Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. "All is true," the name by which Sir Henry Wotton knew *Henry VIII*, is the implicit claim of each history, even though it be colored by Tudor propaganda. Its pedagogical tendencies are underlined by its catalogues of heraldry and genealogy. Above all, like the well-known Elizabethan collection of didactic monologues in verse, it is a *Mirror for Magistrates*. Richard II proposes himself as an object lesson in how not to govern, when he enjoins his queen: "Tell thou the lamentable tale of me" (V.i.44). The delinquent Prince Hal becomes the exemplary Henry V, having learned to rule by fraternizing with his future subjects and having thereby acted out his allegorical education.

The line between the histories and the tragedies need not be quite so sharply drawn as it is by the classifications of the Folio. *Richard II* and *Richard III*

could qualify as tragedies, insofar as they are unified through the persons of their weak or wicked protagonists. *King Lear* and *Macbeth* might almost be reckoned with the histories, since they somewhat marginally stem from the historical—or legendary—matter of Britain, if not of England. Shakespeare was freer to face some of the ethical issues raised in the history plays, with less political constraint and more dramatic artistry, by turning in mid-career to the matter of Rome. For the good European, the Englishman whose myth traced his cultural heritage from the line of its founder Brutus (and ultimately, through Aeneas, back to Troy), all roads—if pursued far enough—led in that direction. Rome's original Forum provided the best sounding-board for civic debate and ideological rhetoric. Shakespeare's biographical inspiration, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, was the great casebook for studies in heroic virtue; Plutarch, though writing in Greek, cites the Latin *virtus*, which is rendered as "valiantness" by the translator Shakespeare depended upon, Sir Thomas North; and the concept has its Renaissance counterpart in Machiavelli's *virtù*, which in turn approximates our notions of self-reliance or individualism. In transferring his venue from the English monarchy to the Roman republic, Shakespeare shifted his emphasis from kingship to citizenship, and from the duties of the subject to the rights of the citizen.

Julius Caesar, Shakespeare's most forensic play, shows the state in danger of domination by an individual, with consequences that lead from forum to battlefield and look ahead from republican ideals toward the corruptions of empire. *Coriolanus*, set in a prior age, pits an individual against the state—so vigorously that twentieth-century audiences, protesting as loudly as the Roman populace, have rioted against its authoritarian hero. *Antony and Cleopatra*, by presenting a pair of individuals abandoning their public responsibilities in favor of their private relationship, weighs the claims of state against a love magnified to a corresponding grandeur. *Titus Andronicus* is merely a pseudo-Roman play, really an immature tragedy of revenge; and perhaps *Timon of Athens* belongs on the opposite edge of this group, for its Plutarchan origin, if not for its stark reduction of magnanimity to misanthropy. But *Antony and Cleopatra*, in its expansiveness, transcends the sphere of the Roman plays to embrace that of Shakespeare's romantic tragedies. It is not less poignant than *Romeo and Juliet* because its concern is with last love rather than first love. However, the very notion that love could be tragic material was something of an innovation with Shakespeare; the subject had been conventionally viewed as the peculiar domain of comedy. Since *Romeo and Juliet* marks a strategic turning-point in this regard, we should not be surprised that its formal and stylistic features are reminiscent of Shakespeare's early comedies, or that it is characterized in the First Quarto by the paradoxical phrase, "conceited tragedy."

If *Antony and Cleopatra* magnifies a passion to the scale of imperial war, *Troilus and Cressida* belittles the Trojan war by reducing it to the plane of cynical intrigue. A double plot, not balanced but precariously loaded on both sides, contributes to the general feeling of irresolution and disintegration. *Othello* has more in common with its Italianate predecessor, *Romeo and Juliet*, though the youthful lovers were the victims of fatality, whereas the Moor is victimized by malign human agency. The element of contrivance, of sheer stage-management on the part of Iago, is not without its faintly comic overtone. Othello lives in a world of human relations, good or bad, unlike the three tragic protagonists with whom he is commonly grouped, whose existence is a confrontation with the universe at large. Lear and Macbeth share with Hamlet, albeit to a less explicit degree, the ambivalent preoccupation with man in his pride and shame, his angelic possibilities and animal limitations. Hamlet's plight is a paradigm of man's divided condition: his personal gifts, his cosmic doubts, his oppressive mandate, his interrupted quest. Lear's downfall is all the more tragic for having been self-decreed. Blindly he must condemn himself to suffer before he can understand the sufferings of others; he must put off the trappings of majesty, submit to the rigors of nature, and be abased to the level of "unaccommodated man," a mad and naked beggar like Tom o' Bedlam. His questioning becomes a theodicy, an inquiry into the justice of God or the gods, providence or chance.

Macbeth is less reflective, a diametrical contrast with *Hamlet*, which is nearly twice as long. Yet the hero, degenerating so rapidly into a villain before our eyes, offers himself as a test case in ironic support of his declaration: "I dare do all that may become a man" (I.vii.46). Indeed he is daring enough to attempt any action. As for his conception of what is becoming to human nature, it has been fatally confused by his encounter with the Weird Sisters:

> Fair is foul, and foul is fair,
> Hover through the fog and filthy air. (I.i.11–12)

If fair looked fair and foul looked foul, if the good were always attractive and the bad as black as the devil, then there would be no serious problem of evil. But moral choice is difficult precisely because of the murky atmosphere through which men walk at the crises of their lives. Shakespeare's crudest villain happens to be a black man, Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*. It required the growth of psychological insight to portray the inherent nobility of Othello, the Moor of Venice—or, for that matter, the latent depravity of his white friend who is known as "honest Iago." The casket scene in *The Merchant of Venice* acts out the parable: "All that glisters is not gold." Again and again, in comedy as well as tragedy, the cry of disillusionment goes up, when it is discovered that the beautiful appearances have been masking the ugly realities. Such a recognition, which Aristotle termed *anagnorisis*, brings with it the special illumination that tragedy casts. The protagonist, forced to see through and look beyond the entrammelling circumstances of his life heretofore, seems to gain a momentary glimpse into the ultimate nature of

things. The disparity between his expectations and what has happened to him is what we term dramatic irony.

The protagonist is not only the leading character, but (as the derivation of the word *agony* suggests) he is engaged in an *agon* or conflict. His conflict is not simply with recognizable antagonists, but with an inner self on the one hand and with the outermost forces that shape events on the other. When those events come to pass, his part in the total pattern—looking back upon it—we view as his destiny. Meanwhile speculation has been rife as to whether it could be foreseen, and here is where all the oracles come in. But though the Witches have access to foreknowledge by virtue of being supernatural creatures, this cannot help mere humans; it can only mislead Macbeth. Macbeth's position is that of the sleepless sailor, harassed by the First Witch because his wife has flouted her:

> Though his bark cannot be lost,
> Yet it shall be tempest-toss'd. (I.iii.24–25)

Though the Witches can conjure up a storm, it is the captain who steers the ship and who would be responsible for its loss. So it is with Macbeth, whose course through the dangerous seas of necessity must be charted by his own free will. Soliloquizing over each step he takes, he is fully aware of the moral implications of his own misdeeds. Since the social and natural order was conceived as so rigid a set of structures, it had to be the villain who would take the initiative of breaking through them. Both Iago and Edmund challenge man's superstitious habit of blaming the fates and affirm both his freedom and his responsibility, just as Cassius did in *Julius Caesar*:

> The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
> But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
> (I.ii.140–41)

The individualist who adopts such an attitude is willing to risk the immediate outcome. His challenge to the powers that be is bound to fail, and the mundane pattern is completed when the corpses are borne off the stage. The rest, the initiation into the last mystery, must perforce be silence. But with Richard II, whose posture of dying is so much nobler than the postures he has assumed in his heyday, we welcome the termination of our vicarious sufferings:

> Cry woe, destruction, ruin, and decay:
> The worst is death, and death will have his day.
> (III.ii.102–3)

The last act is death's day; and, both for the moribund and the survivors, the moment of leaving this world is the supreme occasion. Othello rises to a farewell gesture by reenacting one of his braver deeds. A patriarch like John of Gaunt may be visited on his deathbed with the gift of prophecy (*Richard II*, II.i.31 ff.). A thorough scoundrel, like the former Thane of Cawdor, may display redeeming qualities in the manner of his death:

> Nothing in his life
> Became him like the leaving it. He died
> As one that had been studied in his death. . . .
> (*Macbeth*, I.iv.7–9)

For a better man there would have been a fuller report, and the normal conclusion of a tragedy strikes the note of eulogy.

Tragedy is based on the stuff of history or legend—at any rate, on matters of public importance. Comedy is concerned with private matters, and derives from fiction rather than fact. Of course, the comic in Shakespeare is by no means limited to plays that have been labelled comedies. His unclassical habit of allowing clowns to associate with kings, which led to some of the most touching moments in *King Lear*, created the greatest clown of all as a boon companion for the playboy prince in *Henry IV*; and Falstaff is all the more of a creation for having had so little warrant as a historic personage. As a master of the revels, his office is highly unofficial; whereas the fool is a licensed purveyor of high spirits, the court or household jester in the plays where he appears. Given his motley garb, his cap and bells, and the bauble with which he pretends to converse, it is remarkable how many variations Shakespeare can impose on so conventionalized a role. Fools, like Feste, are obliged to be festive; but, like the equally well named Touchstone, they may also serve to authenticate or to discredit the intelligence and good will of the others. Such buffoons are shrewd professional entertainers.

> This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
> And to do that well craves a kind of wit,

so Viola comments in *Twelfth Night* (III.i.60–61). Yet the nameless Fool of *King Lear* is a natural, a half-witted mascot, a simpleton inspired with the intuitive wisdom of nature. The fool's stock joke is to engage another character in a dialectical exchange which demonstrates that the other, though he wears no coxcomb, is no less given to folly. The classic retort is some version of *tu quoque* (you too, you're another). That demonstration comprises the gambit of Feste, when his syllogisms prove that Olivia is a greater fool than he (I.iv.66–72). He is incidentally doing his duty by chasing gloom, by persuading his mistress not to mourn. In *Hamlet* the fool is conspicuously dead; he is represented by the skull of Yorick, who was the King's jester some twenty-three years before. Though the unspoken catchword is still *tu quoque*, its exuberant cry has darkly altered into *memento mori*: you too will come to this one day.

It is not for nothing that the word *play* has the double meaning of drama and game. Comedy reverts to the playful origins of the theatre by celebrating a festival of some sort. Two of Shakespeare's titles commemorate such seasonal occasions: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night, or What You Will.* Twelfth Night (the Feast of the Epiphany) was the high season for the presentation of plays at court, while the subtitle expresses the same desire to please the public that is advertised in the title of *As You*

Like It. In that play (IV.i) the disguised Rosalind encourages Orlando by inviting him to rehearse his suit: "Come, woo me, woo me; for now I am in a holiday humor and like enough to consent." It is this holiday humor that sets the mood and pace for Shakespearean comedy. When Orlando's protestations wax too warm, Rosalind cools them by comparing him with a clutch of unhappy lovers out of mythology, concluding with an astringent generalization: "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." Where a tragic situation seems absolutely unique, a comic one keeps reminding us of others, referring us back from the individual to the standards and usages of society. Comedy gains its effects through the intellectual detachment of the spectator, tragedy through his emotional involvement. Empathizing with Romeo and Juliet, we may well agree with the Prince that there never was a story of more woe. Looking down with Berowne from his hiding-place aloft, we can take a detached overview of his fellow suitors as, one by one, they go through parallel speeches and motions (and of him too, shortly, when he reveals identical frailties):

> Like a demigod here sit I in the sky,
> And wretched fools' secrets heedfully o'er-eye.
> (*Love's Labor's Lost*, IV.iii.77–78)

The heroes and heroines of *Love's Labor's Lost*, having forgathered "to parley, to court, and dance" (V.ii.122), are fairly typical in their behavior. Dancing is a stylization of courtship; and, even when they are not paired off in a galliard or a coranto, the movement of the plot is a choreography. Inevitably, its resolution is marriage; in technical terms, "the catastrophe is a nuptial." Yet the happy ending of this particular play must be grimly postponed, while *The Taming of the Shrew* and *All's Well That Ends Well* are largely devoted to post-marital problems. Sooner or later Jack is bound to get Jill; but if the course of true love ran too smoothly there would be no drama. The obstacles placed in its way take the form of "errors" or "supposes," crisscrosses or mistaken identities, tangled and disentangled either by accident or by mischief, usually by an engaging combination of both. Comedy inclines toward the farcical, to the extent that it is propelled by manipulations of this kind. Puck's love-potion makes a mockery out of the convention of love at first sight. But there can be no doubt that Dan Cupid holds sway over the motivation of the comedies, even more than Machiavelli does with the histories and tragedies. Hence the heroines offer a clinching illustration for Meredith's theory of the comic spirit, whose prerequisite is the civilizing presence of womanhood. Shakespeare's women are not content to be mere cynosures; they are the pursuers of the men, as Bernard Shaw pointed out in a characteristic overstatement. The battle of the sexes becomes a banter of wits. It is a tennis game between Berowne and Rosaline, "a set of wit well played" (V.ii.29). Definitively, it is the "merry war" between Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado*.

Falstaff surpasses other comic figures because, in his own analysis, he is both witty in himself and the cause that wit is in other men (*2 Henry IV*, I.ii.9–10). He is not only a laughingstock but a laugher, who can enjoy the laugh on himself and turn it against the scoffers. Ben Jonson peopled his stage with laughingstocks, who thereupon became the obvious targets for his own sardonic wit. Shakespeare greeted the Jonsonian Comedy of Humors through Corporal Nym in *Henry V* and his catchphrase, "That's the humor of it." But Shakespeare's *dramatis personae* are characteristically the laughers, the wits who can poke fun and bandy it back when it is directed against them. Jonson's setting is that of New Comedy, the realistic middle-class milieu of shops and city streets. Shakespeare solves his characters' dilemmas by wafting them away from town or court into the romantic woods—another part of some forest or the enchanted island of *The Tempest*. Yet he was not unaffected by the new tendency toward satire that was in the air at the turn of the century. It invaded his artistic province with the War of the Theatres, the controversy to which Rosencrantz alludes and which has sent the Players abroad to Elsinore (*Hamlet*, II.ii.329 ff.). Hamlet himself is, among innumerable other things, a malcontent or—as Shakespeare would put it—a humorous man, like Jaques and so many of Jonson's spokesmen. The "late innovation" may have intensified the satiric thrust and the disillusioned tone of Shakespeare's so-called problem plays or bitter comedies: the mock-heroic and mock-romantic ironies of *Troilus and Cressida*, the fleshly revulsions and repressive countermeasures of *Measure for Measure*.

But even Shakespeare's sunniest comedies have some shadow hanging over them; the cakes and ale of Illyria are consumed in a house of mourning; and if the heroine does not die in *Much Ado about Nothing*, that is not the hero's fault. It seems a natural development, after Shakespeare's major tragedies, that his latest work should mark a reversion to comedy with a note of thoughtful speculation and imaginative surprise. We classify these final plays under the subspecies of Shakespearean romance, not only because their plots are traceable to continental fictions and treat of love like most of the other comedies, but because they exude a sense of strangeness; they reflect the exploratory impulse of their day in sea voyages and fabulous adventures; they invite

> a wild dedication of yourselves
> To unpath'd waters, undream'd shores.
> (*The Winter's Tale*, IV.iv.566–67)

The freshness of the experience is conveyed through the innocent eyes of the heroines, and indeed by their very names: Marina (daughter of the sea) in *Pericles*, Perdita (lost child) in *The Winter's Tale*, and Miranda (wonder) in *The Tempest*. The romances might also be classed as tragicomedies (*Cymbeline* is actually printed with the tragedies in the Folio). A tragicomedy, as distinguished from a tragedy with comic episodes, is more like a melodrama; it has its serious

entanglements and its threatened deaths, particularly in its opening phase; but calamities are averted by happy endings, after stretching the long arm of coincidence. John Fletcher, presumably Shakespeare's junior collaborator in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and his heir presumptive as chief playwright for the King's Men, won his facile success in this vein. There are signs in the romances—their increasing use of music, dance, and the spectacular devices of Stuart masques—that the drama was drawing closer to the private theatre and its courtly audience. Structurally, in registering the passage of time, the succession of generations, the recapitulation of the past, they tend toward narrative and verge upon the novelistic. Thematically much preoccupied with reconciliation, exile and return, mock-death and revival, they abound in recognition scenes. If the harvest masque in *The Tempest* is autumnal, *The Winter's Tale* is redeemed by a sheep-shearing festival in the spring. Shakespeare's playwriting career was rounded out in the mellow ripeness of craft and thought.

VIII. THE CONTINUING IMPACT

Like most tragedies, Shakespeare's are named for their heroes (when the major theme is love, the heroine is accorded a double billing). In the histories, too, the title centres on the name of the protagonist (or, at all events, the reigning monarch). Comedies, on the other hand, are titled with a proverbial expression or a generalizing phrase (*Troilus and Cressida* and *Cymbeline* are polymorphous in this respect, as in others). Comedy thus follows its traditional function of subordinating individuals to a social pattern, whereas they are dominant in tragedy. Yet that comic individualist, Falstaff, makes so large a place for himself that he plays hob with the historical values of *2 Henry IV*. From the lifetime of Shakespeare, it was recognized that the breadth and depth of his appeal were based upon his prolific capacities for the discernment and the depiction of character. His characterization was so dynamic that, by the later years of the eighteenth century, it was looked upon—almost religiously—as an act of creation. His nineteenth-century critics, whose approach was moralistic and psychological rather than theatrical, concentrated on his characters to the virtual exclusion of everything else, treating them as if they were actual people and speculating on what they did offstage. That process of introspective and rationalistic scrutiny reached its high point with the influential study of A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, published in the earliest years of the present century. More recently, a fuller understanding of Shakespeare's background and medium has prompted the ironic query of L. C. Knights's challenging pamphlet, *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?*

Character remains the central factor in our apprehension of Shakespeare. However, we have come to regard his characters less as independent personalities than as actors' roles, less as old friends than as second selves. The Latin plural noun used by his editors in listing them, *personae*, which is the source of our word "persons," signified masks. This was derived, in turn, from the verb *personare*, meaning "to impersonate"; originally it had meant "to sound through," with reference to the mouthpiece that amplified the actor's voice within the classical mask. A theatre of masks, such as the Commedia dell'Arte, tends to stylize personality and to depend on recurrent types. Shakespeare, in his versatility, uses this un-Shakespearean method on rare occasions, notably in the underplot of *Love's Labor's Lost*. Don Armado and Holofernes are even designated by the generic names of Braggart and Pedant in the speech-prefixes of the quarto text. When they join the low comedians in the rustic pageant of the Nine Worthies, they are treated like Ben Jonson's laughingstocks and hooted off the stage. But few of Shakespeare's comic figures are such humorless butts or one-track minds. When the laughing courtiers make cruel fun of the play within the play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus—who has just uttered his eloquent speech on the power of imagination—offers a defense of amateur actors which is essentially a plea to all spectators: "The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them" (V.i.211–12).

In the Jonsonian world, human nature is masked by caricatures which, through their emphasis on typical traits, exhibit *Every Man in His Humor*. In the Shakespearean world every man is individualized, compounded of many humors, richly endowed with unsuspected qualities which are unmasked by the intervention of circumstance. Prince Hal, who has been masquerading as a prodigal son, approaches his exposure of Falstaff's cowardice with this high-spirited affirmation:

> I am now of all humors that have show'd themselves humors since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve a' clock at midnight.
> (*1 Henry IV*, II.iv.92–95)

He is conscious of flouting the laws of decorum, both dramatic and political, which require that princes shall act and talk like nobody else except princes. Yet the raffish company he consorts with is ennobling to Falstaff, just as the humbling of Lear proves to be the apotheosis of the Fool. Hal's irregular apprenticeship will make it possible for Henry V, moving incognito among his common soldiers on the eve of Agincourt, to tell them: "I think the King is but a man, as I am" (IV.i.101–2). Villains are humanized as much as heroes. The case that Cassius makes against Julius Caesar is one that is likely to touch our ideological sympathies. Richard III can blame his misshapen body, Edmund his illegitimacy, as a reason for taking so resentful and aggressive an attitude toward society. Iago likewise searches his mind for motives, though they remain so inscrutable that Coleridge has accused him of "a motiveless malignity." It has remained for our epoch to demonstrate that there can be such things as gratuitous crimes, that malignity can be a

motive unto itself. Shylock is not, strictly speaking, a villain; he is a serio-comic intriguer who will justly be hoisted with his own petard. Yet his pound of flesh is a legalistic and ineffectual attempt to compensate for racial indignities which, like the prejudices against Othello, have provoked his grim revenge and do something to extenuate it.

In the mythology of popular allusion, where Romeo has become a synonym for any youthful lover and *Falstaffian* is an epithet for corpulent conviviality, Shylock has persisted more as a stereotype of the extortionate miser than an archetype of the eternal Jew. Benedick seems to have bequeathed his name—usually normalized into Benedict—to all men who have ever accepted the married condition, in spite of his own reluctance to abandon that militant bachelorhood which constitutes his characteristic stance. If an individual had not been characterized with such memorable complexity, in each of these instances, posterity might not have cared enough to simplify him into a stock type. Othello has become a byword for jealousy, popularly identified with the green-eyed monster itself. Yet everything we see and hear bears out his own description of himself as "one not easily jealious" (V.ii.345). His noble-minded lack of suspicion, as a senior officer placing trust in his subalterns and somewhat out of his element in a domestic situation, inclines him to believe Iago and therefore to feel that his love has been betrayed by Desdemona. His main fault, as Dostoevsky perceived, was to be overtrustful rather than jealous. Comparably, Hamlet has been taken to task—or, perhaps more often, sentimentalized—for an alleged inability to make up his mind. Actually, both the testimony about him and his ultimate heroism show that his hesitations are uncharacteristic. It is a measure of the baffling predicament in which he finds himself that

> the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.
> (III.i.84)

If Hamlet's personality seems peculiarly elusive, if his different interpreters can endow him with such widely differing characteristics, it is because his part is presented subjectively, much of it confided to us through soliloquies. His dilemmas, for the moment, seem our very own. Confronted with the suspense he faces, we cannot but share his doubts and deliberations. The example of Laertes, seeking revenge for the death of Polonius, enables Hamlet to take a more objective view of his own situation by recognizing that it is not unique:

> For by the image of my cause I see
> The portraiture of his. (V.ii.77–78)

Through some such chain of empathy, we can also put ourselves in Hamlet's place and learn to know ourselves from his experience. Our identification with Macbeth is not likely to be so complete; it would be quite impossible, if we thought of him from the outside as the hardened criminal he becomes. But no man is created a criminal type; even the hired murderers, when Macbeth compares them to dogs, respond with dignity: "We are men, my liege" (III.i.90). A man becomes whatever he decides; and, from the inside, while Macbeth takes one wrong turn after another, we share with him the anguish of every decision. Lady Macbeth seems monolithic by contrast, seemingly untouched by the moral compunctions that make his path to power so thorny. Yet her latent sense of guilt betrays itself by making her a somnambulist, condemned to recapitulate the episode of Duncan's murder over and over again. And though she gives the dire command that her husband executes, her suppressed compassion rises to the surface ambivalently at the doomed king's bedside:

> Had he not resembled
> My father as he slept, I had done't. (II.ii.12–13)

Though the absence of actresses may have limited the number and the length of feminine parts, it did not inhibit Shakespeare's gifts for feminine characterization. Witness the "infinite variety" of Cleopatra in her moods and changes, ranging from a spoiled child to an oriental despot, from a lustful gipsy to a goddess of love.

Just as these characters ask for our participation in their emotions, so they exist by virtue of Shakespeare's. Having presumably lived and felt for them all, he should not be linked with any single one of them to the exclusion of others. Yet there are certain personages who play the theatrical role of the *raisonneur*, who are spokesmen not so much for the playwright himself as for the scheme of values that frames the play. Such a personage is Menenius Agrippa, genial and tart by turns as he moderates between the plebeians and Coriolanus. Such are the royal uncles—John of Gaunt and, after his demise, Edmund of York—serving as an ethical weathervane for the rights and wrongs of Richard II. Through their comments we gain a longer and clearer perspective on the fortunes of the protagonists, who—as they recede into the middle distance—stay with us as patterns of behavior or cases of conscience, case histories or secular rituals. Their precepts have taken flight and become *geflügelte Worte*, winged words which have left the playhouse to enter into the contexts of our lives. Though we laugh at the old lady who enjoyed *Hamlet* because it contained so many familiar quotations, she was simply paying an artless tribute to Shakespeare's skill in providing human problems with usable formulations. This is reflected among the titles of modern writers, who very frequently take Shakespearean echoes as their points of departure. Aldous Huxley's satirical utopia, *Brave New World*, harks back to the last act of *The Tempest*:

> O brave new world
> That has such people in't! (V.i.183–84)

Huxley's echo is an irony; but so is Miranda's naive exclamation, which the experienced Prospero intercepts at once with the dry retort: "'Tis new to thee."

Macbeth's revulsive summary of life itself as

> a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing, (V.v.26–28)

has its all too literal exemplification by William Faulkner, with Benjy's narrative in *The Sound and the Fury*. But though existence has become meaningless for Macbeth, it is replete with endless meaning for Shakespeare. In his *Pale Fire* Vladimir Nabokov goes out of his way not to quote from *Timon of Athens*; and the passage that he pointedly avoids,

> The moon's an arrant thief,
> And her pale fire she snatches from the sun,
> (IV.iii.437–38)

becomes a generalization about the literary indebtedness of lesser luminaries to Shakespeare. That he stands among our most valued possessions would go without saying, if it were not that, the more we reflect on the matter, the more we realize the large extent to which we are possessed by him.