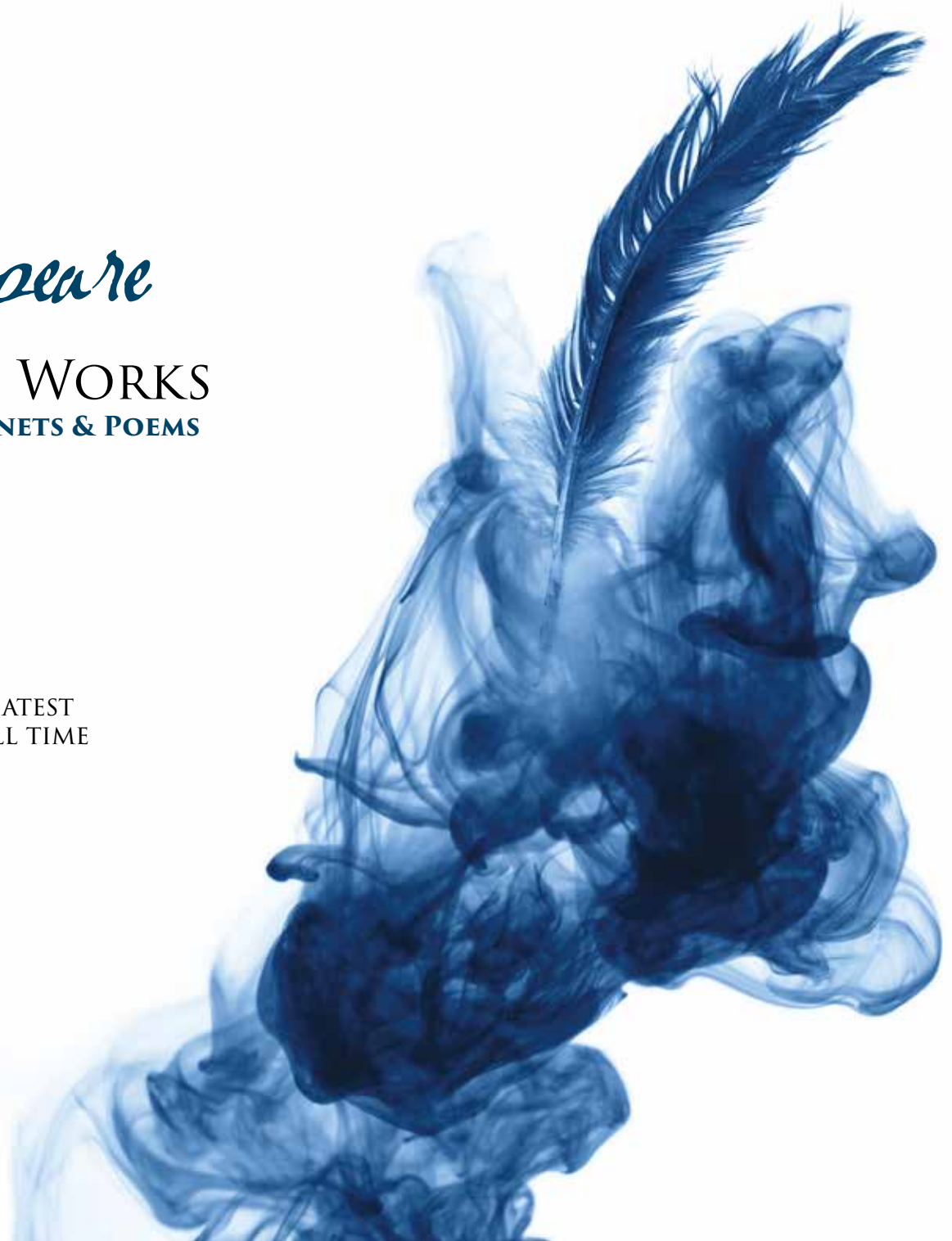


Shakespeare
THE COMPLETE WORKS
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A COMPLETE WORKS

The idea of a ‘complete works’ of Shakespeare first came to prominence in 1623, when a book entitled *Mr William Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* was published in a prestigious large-format folio edition. This was not, however, what we might consider the ‘complete’ Shakespeare. It does not include two works published under his name in the seventeenth century: *Pericles*, now thought to have been written by Shakespeare and George Wilkins, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, who also co-authored the Folio’s *Henry VIII*. Nor does it include Shakespeare’s sonnets and narrative poems. The ‘complete works’ were slower to make an impact on the stage. With its 1923 production of *Troilus and Cressida* the Old Vic could claim to have performed all of the Folio plays, a feat that it repeated in 1953–8. Contemporaneous with the Old Vic’s second Folio cycle, Argo’s complete works ranged more widely, taking its canon and texts from Cambridge University Press’s ‘New Shakespeare’ series, published between 1921 and 1966 and led by John Dover Wilson. In its day, the ‘New Shakespeare’ was the most innovative and scholarly edition available, but its omission of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is reflected in the Argo recordings. A decade or so later, the BBC’s television adaptations of the plays – a project that featured John Wilders, who appeared in some of the Argo recordings, as its textual consultant – also overlooked *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. It would not be until the Royal Shakespeare Company’s ‘Complete Works’ festival in 2006–7 that all of the plays and poems historically attributed to Shakespeare were performed as a group.

Dr Lucy Munro

Reader in Shakespeare and Early Modern Literature, King’s College London

THE MARLOWE DRAMATIC SOCIETY

The Marlowe was founded in 1907 by Justin Brooke with a production of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. Rupert Brooke, directed the second production (Milton’s *Comus*). The Society’s mission was to get away from elaborate Victorian spectacle and the personality cults of actor-managers, to emphasise ensemble playing, to focus on effective delivery of verse, respect the integrity of texts, and rescue neglected plays by Shakespeare’s contemporaries and the less performed plays of Shakespeare himself. Its alumni have continued to apply these principles, for example in the founding of the RSC by Peter Hall and the opening of the Swan by Trevor Nunn. Among many other distinguished alumni are Derek Jacobi, Ian McKellen, Eleanor Bron, Miriam Margolyes, Sam Mendes, Tim Supple, Tilda Swinton, Stephen Unwin, Dominic Dromgoole, Nick Hytner, Tom Morris, Rachel Weisz, Rupert Goold, Simon Godwin, Tom Hiddleston, James Norton.

The Marlowe has performed annually at Cambridge Arts Theatre since its opening in 1936. From 1928 to 1960 the Society was steered by a Fellow of King’s and friend of Virginia Woolf, ‘Dadie’ Rylands, and under his direction the Society recorded Shakespeare’s complete works for the centenary in 1964, commissioned by the Foreign Office and distributed by the British Council. For the Society’s own centenary in 2007 a history, *Bloomsbury and British Theatre*, was published by Salt, and Trevor Nunn returned to the Marlowe to direct *Cymbeline* at the Arts Theatre in which, when a student, he had been directed by Rylands.

Tim Cribb

Life Fellow, Churchill College | Senior Member: Marlowe Dramatic Society



SHAKESPEARE 400

SHAKESPEARE400 is a season of cultural and artistic events in 2016, celebrating four hundred years of Shakespeare, his creative achievement and his profound influence on creative culture across the centuries. It is the collective endeavour of a consortium of leading cultural, creative and educational institutions in and around London, working closely together to express the impact of Shakespearean creativity on a wide range of artistic forms. The season includes theatre, music, opera, dance, exhibitions and a range of educational events to help new audiences engage with Shakespeare's work. The season is designed to demonstrate the ongoing vibrancy of Shakespeare's creative influence in national and global culture.

SHAKESPEARE400 partners include some of the best of London's and the UK's creative and cultural sector: Barbican, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Bloomsbury Publishing / The Arden Shakespeare, British Film Institute, British Library, City of London, City of London Festival, Film London, Glyndebourne, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Hogarth Shakespeare, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Museum of London, Museum of London Archaeology, National Theatre, Rambert, Royal Collection Trust, Royal Opera House, Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Society of Literature, Senate House Library, Shakespeare's Globe and The National Archives.

The season is coordinated by King's College London, with academics from the university's London Shakespeare Centre contributing their literary-critical, historical, dramaturgical and curatorial knowledge.

Together, the consortium partners seek both to reflect on four centuries of Shakespeare-inspired creativity across all art forms and to look forward to the next hundred years in the global life of Shakespeare's plays and poems.

Professor Gordon McMullan

Director, London Shakespeare Centre | Academic Director, Shakespeare400

A SUPERB MURDER: SHAKESPEARE AND THE GRAMOPHONE RECORD

Dr Tony Wakeford explores the origins of the British Council's sponsored recordings of the complete works of Shakespeare.

On 1 March 1960, D.K. Devnally, a British Council Librarian, wrote on behalf of the Regional Representative in Bombay to the Recorded Sound Department in London. The purpose of the letter was to draw the Department's attention to a letter of praise regarding the newly released recording of Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*.

The letter in question was from Mr S.T. Berkeley-Hill, who had for many years been closely associated with the production of English documentary films for the Government of India, subsequently worked in advertising and was also a drama teacher for amateur actors. Devnally quoted from Berkeley-Hill's letter:

I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed listening to this remarkably versatile performance, in which Shakespeare and the English language are given their rightful due. [...] The murder of Caesar was superb, and his words 'Et tu Brute' – uttered with such conviction – that I felt the cold steel entering the nape of my own neck. To think that words alone can create such an illusion (without the benefit of vision) is the best testimony that I can think of to the quality of the portrayal.¹

Listening to the same recording some 55 years later I too felt a great sense of unease in my comfortable listening position as the drama unfolded. The action, and cold steel, seemed almost too close for comfort. It would be hard to dispute Berkeley-Hill's assertion of the recording's aural quality and effectiveness of the soundscape in portraying the drama and language of Shakespeare's narrative.

The recording of *Julius Caesar* was part of the major project under the auspices of the British Council to record the complete works of William Shakespeare by The Marlowe Dramatic Society, and professional players, under the direction of George Rylands, using The New Shakespeare text edited by John Dover Wilson and published by Cambridge University Press. The recordings were undertaken by the Argo Record Company and released in stages between March 1958 and March 1964. The complete works of Shakespeare, the plays (comedies, histories and tragedies) and sonnets, comprise 40 box sets, amounting to 136 long-playing records. It was a remarkable achievement, the first complete set of recordings, which won worldwide acclaim. Indeed, a review in the *Observer* newspaper described the recordings as:

the most important thing that has happened to [Shakespeare's] work since Heminge and Condell² saw it through the press.³

The British Council files, now held at The National Archives in London, document the initial aspirations, management and completion of the project. Although heavily weeded the files still contain a fascinating story of artistic, technical and administrative endeavour and determination that is worthy of recalling and acknowledging during the quatercentenary anniversary year of Shakespeare's death. In addition to the British Council files I have most of the long-playing records from this project in my collection; linking them to the documentary narrative has been an interesting and enlightening task.

The initial idea for undertaking a recording of the complete works can be traced back to 1951. Shakespeare's works had been represented in the recorded sound catalogues for many years. However, due to the constraints and limitations of the earlier wax cylinders and subsequent 78rpm records, with a playing time of five minutes or so per side, recordings could only be of short extracts from scenes – a speech or soliloquy.⁴ The long-playing record was introduced in Britain in June 1950 and this offered the opportunity for making longer recordings of around 25 minutes per side.

The Old Vic Company were the first to record full-length plays and these were undertaken by the Gramophone Company and issued on the HMV label between 1953 and 1957 as two- or three-record sets. The plays recorded were *Romeo and Juliet* (ALP 1053/5), *Macbeth* (ALP 1176/7), *A midsummer night's dream* (ALP 1262/4) and *Hamlet* (ALP 1482/4). The British Council had used these recordings for education and promotional purposes overseas, including the covers of the HMV albums that were used as part of a Shakespeare exhibition in Paris during the 1950s.⁵

The Council had clearly given much thought to the prospect of recording longer extracts or complete works. This was prompted by the opportunities afforded by technological developments and the Council's representatives overseas who made regular requests for recordings of Shakespeare's works. This led to enquiries being made in 1951 by Evelyn Denison, the Director of Recorded Sound, with the Old Vic Company and the Stratford Theatre regarding the prospects of recording the complete works. Although they declined to take part, both organisations recommended the Marlowe Dramatic Society.

The Marlowe Dramatic Society was founded in 1907 and is a student drama society of Cambridge University. It was formed by undergraduates as a reaction against Victorian theatre and tradition, and helped to re-establish presentations of Shakespeare at Cambridge. The society helped to raise the standard of verse-speaking actors and had achieved considerable success, whilst maintaining an excellent reputation for the quality of its productions. The society boasted many famous actors and directors in its alumni.⁶

George Rylands (1902–1999) was a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and one of the world's leading scholars of Shakespeare. From 1929 he was the director of the Marlowe Dramatic Society, and chairman of the Cambridge Arts Theatre from 1946–1982, where the Society performed. He had directed many productions on stage and also the first television production of *Troilus and Cressida* in 1954 for the BBC.⁷

The Council approached George Rylands and an agreement was reached in principle for the Marlowe Society to record *King Lear* during July 1954. However, Sir Kenneth Loch, the Controller of Arts and Sciences, was keen to explore the attractive proposition of leading the world in the recording of all the Shakespeare plays. Loch estimated that a professional production of each play would cost in the order of £1500, whereas a production by the amateur players of the Marlowe Dramatic Society would cost about £500, making it a much more viable proposition. Informal enquiries had been made with the Nixa Record Company⁸ who were prepared to issue the recording, and bear the costs of production and distribution. Although first and foremost an educational and cultural project, Loch clearly had an eye on the commercial prospect of significant sales in the USA, the Dominions and elsewhere to recoup costs. The commercial value of these recordings could reflect similar Council experiences with music recordings, such as the example of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* recorded several years earlier.⁹

Discussions continued between various departments of the Council, including Recorded Sound and the Drama Advisory Committee. One of the main points of concern was the use of amateurs performing alongside professional players and the need to clarify the situation with Equity, the actor's union, with regard to remuneration and the royalties from the commercial sales of the recording. For his part George Rylands was keen to emphasise the academic credentials of the project. In a letter to Loch, Rylands commented that:

[...] this undertaking is academic rather than theatrical; it is concerned with the interpretation and the proper speaking of Shakespeare – virtually a closed book to Stratford and to the Old Vic who have their own very different job to do.¹⁰

Rylands further commented that he was inclined to finance the recording himself to avoid any perceived difficulties with payment by the Council, who he asked to undertake a gentleman's agreement to purchase sets of the completed recording for their use. Rylands subsequently went ahead and recorded *King Lear*, with the Marlowe Players and two professional actors – Gillian Webb and Michael Woolley. The recording was undertaken in the Arts Theatre at Cambridge and by all accounts was a great success. A file note states that those who had heard the recording were impressed by the clearness of speech and the general recording, and felt it would be very useful for universities, schools, foreign producers and also general Council purposes.¹¹

At this point the plans fell through. It had been the intention for the recording to be published by the Nixa Record Company, paying a royalty on sales to the Council. However, the Pye Record Company had purchased the Nixa Company and withdrew from the arrangement. Evelyn Denison then spent some considerable time looking for an alternative publisher for the recording. The Argo Record Company subsequently agreed to record the whole Shakespeare canon. In her internal memorandum she noted:

They [Argo] were persuaded to undertake this largely because the *King Lear* recording existed and its artistic quality convinced them of the value and practicality of the project. For purely technical reasons, however, the Argo Company cannot make commercial copies.¹² The consequence of this outcome was that Rylands and the Marlowe Society had yet to be paid for the expenditure on the recording of *King Lear*. Denison recommended, and it was subsequently approved, that the Council should

purchase the copyright. This would enable the production of tape copies and long-playing acetate discs to support the Council's work overseas and to sell to universities and broadcasting stations. The Council subsequently paid £290 for the copyright, due in part to Ryland's waiving his fee and the final costs being less than the original estimate of £500.¹³

It seems that word quickly spread about the existence of the *King Lear* recording. There were requests for copies from Harvard and Frankfurt Universities, and with increasing demand by the Council's overseas representatives for Shakespeare recordings, the scene was set for this promising and pioneering project. The Council had agreed to part-finance the recording of the complete works, Argo were willing to record them and Cambridge University Press were willing to provide the texts. The original plan had been to record one play each year – setting the rather daunting prospect for a protracted undertaking with many likely complexities over the consequential timescale of around 36 years. Loch acknowledged the potential difficulties in the plan; even if the pace of production was subsequently increased the whole canon could take 15–20 years to complete. He also noted that the Council's year-by-year budget system did not lend itself to long-term projects of this nature.¹⁴

Discussions to draw up a contract between the Council and Argo began in September 1955. Those involved included Harley Usill, Managing Director, and Cyril Clarke, Artistic Director, from Argo and Evelyn Denison. The contract was finally agreed and signed on 13 March 1956, by Harley Usill and Evelyn Denison. Some of the key points included:

- That the Council would contribute £500 towards the cost of each play;
- Argo would bear the costs of recording and production, and other associated costs;
- Argo would pay royalties to the Council at the rate of 4 per cent of 85 per cent of the English retail-selling price at the time of sale;
- The Council would be supplied with 40 free copies of each recording for distribution to their representatives;
- Argo would ensure all artists involved for each play would provide written consent in accordance with the Dramatic and Musical Performers Protection Act 1925;
- The Council would have no liability whatsoever to any of the artists.¹⁵

With the contract signed, there was now only one snag – George Rylands had decided not to become involved. This only became apparent when Evelyn Denison wrote to Rylands to impart the good news about the contract. He responded citing several reasons for his decision, amongst them being that his time and effort in saving the Council money had not been fully recognised; that it had taken 18 months to be remunerated for the *King Lear* project; and there had been inadequate consultation about the intended plans to record the complete works.¹⁶

K.R. Johnstone, Deputy Director General, wrote to Rylands to profusely apologise for the various reasons that had prompted his decision not be involved.

We do regard the Shakespeare recordings as a tremendously valuable undertaking and we cannot think how we shall be able to embark upon them without you. Indeed, I doubt whether we should wish to do so.¹⁷

A period of approximately six months slipped by, with persuasion and cajoling on the part of various members of the Council and Argo too, before Rylands finally withdrew his refusal to participate. He did so only on the grounds that production should be increased to four plays each year. There was general agreement that a shorter span of ten years or less would have a greater impact and help to increase sales. A further point in favour was the upcoming quatercentenary in 1964 of Shakespeare's birth. Clearly, the anniversary helped to focus thoughts and efforts.¹⁸

During the period of uncertainty over Rylands' participation Argo had reached an agreement with the Westminster Recording Company of America to distribute the records in the United States. Westminster had also agreed to assist with stereo recordings.¹⁹

Whilst enquiries were underway to identify a suitable recording venue in Cambridge, concerns were raised about the Old Vic recordings and whether these competed with, or detracted from, the Council's intentions. There were also concerns about whether it was effective use of the Council's money involving amateurs, given that the Old Vic was a professional company with commercial backing. A change of management at the Old Vic Company had led to a decision to undertake the commercial recording of several, but not all, of the plays. However, these were very different to what was intended with Rylands and the Marlowe Dramatic Society: uncut performances for the microphone. The Old Vic recordings were based on abridged stage productions, with the emphasis on the drama, rather than the focus on verse speaking.

K.R. Johnstone summed up the Council's view on the purpose and value of the project:

We feel that such recordings will be of great educational value to foreign students of the English language and of Shakespeare, and that what is needed for this purpose is a dramatised reading of the complete play with the emphasis on clear diction and intelligent interpretation – in short, a recording intended for listeners whose first language is not English.²⁰

This view very much encapsulated the founding principles of the Council – to bring the English language and culture to a wider audience, primarily for those whose mother tongue was not English.²¹ Indeed, the intention was that the choice of recordings would be determined to a large extent by the plays set for the Cambridge overseas examinations in English.

By May 1957 Evelyn Denison was able to report that contracts had been signed between Argo and the Marlowe Society, and the Arts Theatre of Cambridge, where the recordings would take place. Rylands had begun selecting members from the Marlowe Society, undergraduates

and dons, for the various roles. Former members of the society, several of them by now professional players, were also approached or volunteered their services in support of Rylands – an immensely popular and respected figure. The recording schedule was set to begin on 5 July 1957 and the plays selected were *Othello*, *As you like it*, *Richard II* and *Troilus and Cressida*.²²

With everything all set for the initial recordings, Rylands alerted the Council to a rather important issue – aircraft noise. He pointed out the problem of recording with aircraft overhead from the nearby RAF and USAF bases, and the University's Air Cadet Corps, which flew regularly over Cambridge.²³ A soundproofed studio was not available at the theatre nor elsewhere in Cambridge. A letter was sent to Lord Tedder, Marshall of the Royal Air Force, and Chancellor of Cambridge University, by Sir David Kelly, Chairman of the Council, explaining the problem and seeking his help in reducing the level of aircraft noise from 5 July to 4 August.²⁴

It was a successful outcome and Evelyn Denison was able to report that although there were a few aircraft, the recording sessions were not interrupted too much. It was a request that would be repeated on an annual basis whilst recordings continued to be undertaken in Cambridge. With the project at last underway Owain-Jones, the Controller of the Arts and Science Division, reviewed the budget to ensure the increased annual cost, from £500 for one recording to £2000 for four recordings, was spread more evenly across the Division.²⁵

The project started successfully and more was achieved than was anticipated, as Evelyn Denison reported in her update on progress in September 1957:

Mr Rylands assembled an able cast. From the professional theatre we were fortunate to have Miss Irene Worth and five ex-Marlowe professional actors. From the University we had fifteen undergraduates. [...] Production of the plays was supervised by Mr Rylands and the music was realised and supervised by Thurston Dart and Boris Orde. It was performed by professional players [Philomusica of London] and by choristers of King's College.

Mr Rylands worked the players hard and found time to record *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* as well as the other four plays. The Treasurer of the Arts Theatre Trust has confirmed that all six plays were recorded within budget. It was not possible to find time to record the music for *Caesar* but this will be done in October and the Trust has funds to pay for this.

Denison also noted that The Cambridge University Press were printing a special cheap edition of the texts for sale with the records or separately.²⁶

On 27 October some retakes were completed in the British Council's Film Theatre in Hanover Street, London. The session included a drummer from the Royal Military School of Music and various weapons that were borrowed from Covent Garden for battle scene effects. These included six French bayonets, six dress swords, four small breastplates and a few chains. They were chosen to give as much variation of sound as possible. However, sound effects were only used when vital to enhance the action and provide context. The project, with many years in the planning, was at last underway and producing satisfying results at a greater rate than initially planned. Despite Rylands' initial

misgivings the rate of production, six or so plays a year, continued to the end of the project. However, progress would not be entirely smooth and some significant changes and challenges lay ahead.

The Argo Company had been under financial strain for sometime and in November 1957 the company was sold and became a separate division of the Decca Record Company, with Harley Usill remaining as managing director. The one key advantage was that it enabled Argo to draw upon the considerable expertise of Decca's engineers and facilities. Decca had handled Argo's pressings and distribution for several years, so the change was not disruptive to Argo's business activities. The agreement with the Westminster Recording Company was never realised – the entire operation was now part of Decca, with worldwide distribution.

During November 1957, Usill updated the Council on progress. He advised that the release of the three plays, *Troilus and Cressida*, *As you like it* and *Othello*, would now be released in February or March 1958. The intention had been to release them in November but this had not been possible due to various retakes that were required. He pointed out that it was commercial policy not to make a major release of records during December or January. He also noted that the valuable experience gained would be helpful for the next series of recordings.²⁷

Just as the final preparations were being made for the release in March 1958, Evelyn Denison died suddenly and Eirian James, Deputy Director of Recorded Sound, took up the mantle and was subsequently Acting Director for a short period. Plans to hold a party to thank George Rylands and celebrate the first set of recordings were put on hold until June. At around the same time an unfortunate disagreement developed involving Felix Aylmer, a member of the Council's Drama Advisory Committee, the British Actors' Equity Association, the Council and Argo. In an unfortunate oversight, the draft text for the brochure to accompany the records was not passed to the Drama Advisory Committee for scrutiny and agreement. Aylmer resigned from the committee claiming that some of the text was an insult to professional actors as it implied that amateurs provided a better continuity of standards.

The matter subsequently came before the Equity Association's Annual General Meeting on 27 April where a resolution was passed deploring the slight on professional actors and banning their members from further involvement in the project. After lengthy discussions, and an apology from the Council and Harley Usill, the text was partly redrafted to everyone's satisfaction and to avoid any further misinterpretation. Following a meeting on 20 June between the Council and Equity the embargo was subsequently lifted. Throughout, the Council emphasised the educational nature of the project and that the intended audiences were academic institutions and primarily overseas.²⁸

Meanwhile, the first three recordings, *Othello*, *As you like it* and *Troilus and Cressida*, were released on 17 March with many laudatory reviews. These recordings, together with *Julius Caesar*, *Richard II*, and *Coriolanus* (released in June 1958) had involved 9 professional and 25 amateur actors. The 1959 recording sessions of *Henry IV* (parts I & II), *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, and *The Winter's Tale*, involved 28 professionals and 31 amateurs.²⁹ Directing the plays was clearly a complex logistical challenge for Rylands who had to assemble the casts for each play and ensure the availability of actors at the appropriate time. This was particularly so where longer plays and larger casts were concerned.

Following the experience of the 1958 sessions and in planning for 1959, Harley Usill recommended that the British Council's contribution should be increased to £600 per play to allow Rylands more flexibility in offering higher fees to attract more professional actors with a fine verse-speaking background to take the leading roles. Usill also noted that the cost of recording had increased with the introduction of stereo in 1958 with *Macbeth*, and for all future recordings. The Council accepted Usill's recommendation and the contract was amended.³⁰

Ian Scott-Kilvert, the Director of Publications and Recorded Sound, highlighted the complex ongoing issues involved during the 1963 recording sessions:

The *Wars of the Roses* cycle presents special problems, as the plays are extremely long, contain enormous casts and because of the multiplicity of characters it is more than ever important to make sure they are sharply distinguished vocally as possible. [...] Because of the difficulty of commanding any one actor's services over a period of months, we are dealing with the plays in three main sessions rather than one play per session.³¹

Further changes occurred during 1960. Firstly, demolition and other noisy activity meant that the theatre venue in Cambridge became untenable for recording. It was decided to move the project to London and the Decca studios at 165 Broadhurst Gardens, West Hampstead, where the remaining 15 recordings were completed. *Twelfth Night* was the first play to be recorded at the Decca studios. Costs were also rising and the Council's contribution was increased to £750 per play.³² The rising cost was partly due to larger casts required in some plays and the employment of more professionals: 44 during 1960/61 and 53 during 1961/62.³³ The marathon project was finally completed with the recording of *Pericles* in early November 1963. The project had cost the British Council approximately £25,000 and by 1964 the receipts from royalties had reached approximately £14,000.³⁴

At the beginning of the project it had been agreed not to list the casts, merely cite the Marlowe Dramatic Society and professional players. This followed the tradition set by the Society in their productions. However, as the project progressed it was finally decided to identify those involved and reveal the many household and star names that had contributed. These included, to name but a few well-known actors and actresses: William Squires, Prunella Scales, Tony Church, Michael Hordern, Gary Watson, Margaretta Scott, Patrick Wymark, Peggy Ashcroft and John Gielgud. Some of the undergraduate performers in the Marlowe Society would also become famous in due course: Derek Jacobi, Ian McKellen and Trevor Nunn.

The final recordings were released in March 1964: *Henry VI*, (part III), *Richard III*, and *Pericles*. The project was a resounding success and a notable historic achievement – not only providing the first complete audio recording of Shakespeare’s works, but also creating a milestone in the history of recorded sound. The British illustrator Arthur Wragg designed the box covers for the series, distinctively enhancing the presentation of each volume. He had been designing record covers for the Argo company since 1953, and all his work had been for publication rather than in fine art.³⁵ The project must surely rank alongside other major recording undertakings such as, for example, Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (the *Ring Cycle*), and the complete instrumental works of Haydn, the complete works of Mozart or the Bach Cantatas and organ works. Describing the plays, John Dover Wilson said they were:

produced like a cantata of Bach – a consort of voices carefully selected, carefully trained and cunningly matched or blended.³⁶

The early 1960s would see new Shakespeare recordings released by competitors, notably Caedmon Records in the USA, and the Living Shakespeare series by Odhams Books in Britain. However, the Argo recordings were the first and they have endured. They can still be regularly found today on the second-hand market. Libraries and other institutions purchased many editions, so it is not that common to find previously owned private copies rather than those from an educational establishment of one sort or another.

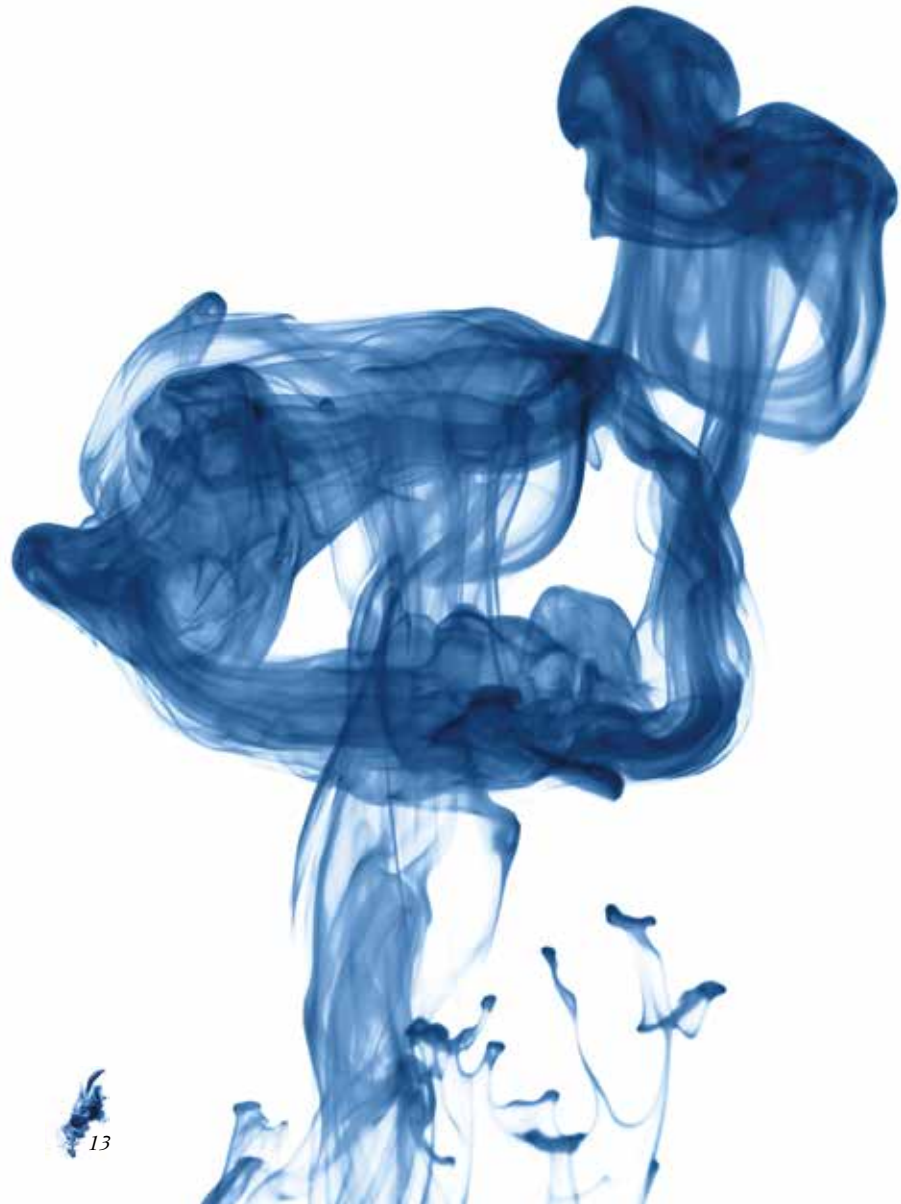
The entire set of records was reissued, in stereo only, during the early 1970s.³⁷ The first six recordings, recorded in mono during 1957, were initially reprocessed into stereo.³⁸ However, it was decided to make new recordings of four of them, *Othello*, *As you like it*, *Julius Caesar* and *Richard II*, again under the direction of George Rylands. During the 1980s the recordings were reissued on Argo Spoken Word cassettes,³⁹ and then again on cassette in 1998. The reissue of these recordings on compact disc for the first time marks the quatercentenary of Shakespeare’s death. It would seem that these historic recordings are, as Ben Jonson wrote of Shakespeare, ‘not of an age, but for all time’.⁴⁰

The final words on the project are probably best left for two of the key participants who helped to realise the Council's ambitions: George Rylands and Harley Usill. Speaking at the British Institute of Recorded Sound during a presentation on the history of Argo Records, Usill recalled the hectic schedules involved in recording six plays over four weeks, usually taking more than four days to complete each play.⁴¹ Reflecting on his involvement, Rylands considered the recordings as the greatest educational achievement of his whole life.⁴²

I am sure Mr William Shakespeare would have whole-heartedly approved of this endeavour.

Dr Tony Wakeford

Editor and Vice Chairman, Friends of The National Archives



NOTES

1. BW 38/62;
2. John Heminge and Henry Condell were the editors of the first collective publication of Shakespeare's plays, printed in 1623. Known as the First Folio, the publication was entitled *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*. In 1895, a statue was erected in the former churchyard at St Mary, Aldermanbury in London to commemorate the publication;
3. Argo Record Company, *William Shakespeare The Complete Works*, (London, 1964);
4. In 1944, Columbia Records in the USA issued a 78rpm set of 18 records of *Othello*. It was one of the first recordings of a full-length work. See Douglas Lanier 'Shakespeare on Record' in Barbara Hodgdon & W.B. Worthen (eds) *A companion to Shakespeare and performance*, (Chichester, 2008), pp.415–436;
5. BW 2/544: Letter from the Gramophone Company 26 November 1956;
6. http://www.themarlowesociety.com/?page_id=330#!history/crh8 (accessed 28 Jan 2016);
7. Ibid, and also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dadie_Rylands - (accessed 28 Jan 2016);
8. F.H.B. Nixon set up the Nixa Company in 1950. It was the second company, after Decca, to issue long-playing records in Britain;
9. BW 2/515: Internal memorandum 9 July 1954;
10. Ibid, letter 18 July 1954;
11. Ibid, file note 24 September 1954;
12. Ibid, internal memorandum 2 January 1956;
13. Ibid, see also Council letter 29 February 1956;
14. Ibid, internal memorandum 14 December 1954;
15. Ibid, contact between the British Council and the Argo Record Company;
16. Ibid, letter 15 March 1956;
17. Ibid, letter 16 March 1956;
18. Ibid, internal memorandum from Director of Recorded Sound , 24 September 1956;
19. Ibid, internal memorandum and Argo letter, both 2 July 56;
20. Ibid, letter 18 December 1956;
21. Formed in 1934, the British Council supported English language education abroad and promoted British culture through tours, exhibitions, publications and sound recordings.
22. BW 2/544, internal memorandum 9 May 1957;
23. Ibid, letter, 14 June 1957;
24. Ibid, letter, 21 June 1957;
25. Ibid, internal memorandum, 21 August 1957;
26. Ibid, Internal memorandum, 6 Sept 1957;
27. Ibid, letter 20 Nov 1957;
28. BW 2/567, minutes of meeting;
29. BW 2/729, cast lists;
30. BW 2/544, letter 26 February 1959;
31. BW 2/729, internal memorandum 7 May 1963;
32. BW 2/730, letter from Scott-Kilvert to Argo Records, 14 September 1960;
33. Ibid, letter from Finance Division to Exchequer & Audit Dept, 13 September 1962;
34. Ibid, schedule of costs and receipts 1959–1964;
35. <https://folkcatalogue.wordpress.com/2011/03/03/arthur-wraggs-argo-album-covers-2/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Wragg (accessed 21 February 2016);
36. BW 2/730, a review of the project by Peter Orr;
37. See *The Gramophone*, July 1970, p.216;
38. See *The Gramophone*, May 1987, p.1528, and June 1987, p.115;
39. See *The Gramophone*, June 1998, pp.110–111;
40. The writer Ben Jonson was a friend of Shakespeare and the quote comes from the preface to the First Folio, see note 2;
41. T2049W&R C1, British Library Sound Archive recording 23 May 1978, 'The problems of a specialist record company: A history of Argo';
42. Frances Donaldson, *The British Council; The first fifty years*, London 1984, p.212;

The BW record series are held at The National Archives, London, United Kingdom. See: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

The original version of this article first appeared in *Magna*, May 2016, Vol 27, No.1, the magazine of the Friends of The National Archives, and is reproduced with their kind permission. See: www.friendsofthenationalarchives.org.uk

I would like to thank Sarah Algamaz and Kevin Long, Universal Music, for their assistance.

Dr Tony Wakeford

Editor and Vice Chairman, Friends of The National Archives



FACSIMILE FROM THE ORIGINAL ARGO RECORDINGS

Shakespeare
THE COMPLETE WORKS

Uncut in the text of
THE NEW SHAKESPEARE

EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

BY JOHN DOVER WILSON

Recorded by
THE MARLOWE DRAMATIC SOCIETY & PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS DIRECTED
BY GEORGE RYLANDS

Under the auspices of
THE BRITISH COUNCIL

Issued by



ARGO RECORD COMPANY

THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE ON RECORD

Though Shakespeare wrote for the stage, above all dramatists he wrote for the theatre of the imagination: 'Work, work your thoughts'. In a theatre the decor, the embellishments, sometimes distract. We know how wind-machine and thunder sheet can bear off Lear's Storm speech, or how, again and again, lines that flash from the printed text slip unnoticed across the ear when eye and mind are decoyed elsewhere.

These Argo Shakespeare recordings do not seek to compete with the theatre, or, for that matter, with radio. This is another medium, Shakespeare of the spoken word, the text uncut, 'reduction' unobtrusive, no decoration, sound effects strictly under control, speaking carefully balanced, no narrator, the very music and its instruments from Shakespeare's world. Some of the finest classical actors in Britain have joined members, past and present, of the Cambridge Marlowe Dramatic Society, to give the plays their full verbal quality, unfussed.

Shaw said of one tragedy that it should be 'a march of music'. So, indeed, are these recordings under the guidance of George Rylands. The listener, hearing voices intricately blended and contrasted, and without the shivering reverence of the 'poetry tone', receives what has been called the unclouded summer of the word. His own imagination sets the scene, fixes atmosphere: 'Work, work your thoughts'.

Here is an aural theatre: call it a definitive spoken edition, presented by players who have adapted their technique to a special medium. The great parts shine; the great scenes ring; but nothing is disproportioned. Every part has its fair chance. We remember the party as a whole, the verse and the prose in timeless texture.

One can say, as Cibber said of Betterton:

In the just delivery of Poetical Numbers... it is scarce credible upon how minute an Article of Sound depends their greatest Beauty of Inaffection.

Add the Irish critic, Walter Starkie:

With these recordings... we may develop the habit of listening to the great tragedies of Shakespeare as we do to the last quartets of Beethoven.

Some plays (*Macbeth* and *The Tempest*) no doubt gain more than others in recording; but all have their revelations. The cycle has been completed by April 1964. Shakespeare has the freedom of the mind, listeners at last the full freedom of Shakespeare.

J.C. Trewin,
Drama Critic of *The Illustrated London News*

i. Shakespeare the Word-Musician

Shakespeare's plays triumph over time and circumstance because he was above all a man of the theatre. He was not a University Wit, but an actor; not an intellectual but an impresario. We must see him played if we are to understand him; whether brilliantly or indifferently, realistically or fantastically; on picture stage, apron stage, arena stage; in opera house, village hall, college cloister or public park; against Veronese cloths, on bare platforms; in Elizabethan ruff and farthingale, in modern dress, in Ruritanian uniforms. But unfortunately there are tens of millions who will never get the chance and for the reader (whom Shakespeare hardly bothered about) the task is hard. We pay his name lip-service but leave him on the shelf with our school texts. There is a second best, however, half way between stage presentation and the printed page, the genuine lip-service of recorded Shakespeare. And as he was a poet as well as a playwright the listener (blindfolded though he is) may find some compensations.

In his *Character of an Excellent Actor* (1615), the Jacobean dramatist John Webster tells us that 'what in the poet is but ditty, in him (the actor) is both ditty and music', thus anticipating Bernard Shaw, whose first Shakesperian critique declared: 'it is the score not the libretto that keeps the work alive and fresh: and this is why only musical critics should be allowed to meddle with Shakespeare. The ear is the sure clue to him... In a deaf nation these plays would have died long ago.' Harley Granville-Barker in his famous Preface harps upon the same string: 'The speaking of the verse must be the foundation of all study. Verse was his supreme dramatic resource... the master-medium of his stage craft. With Shakespeare dramatic writing was for convenience of record merely; his verse was not only conceived as speech, it was so to be born and only so meant to exist. He provided music for an orchestra

of living individual voices that he knew. As nearly as might be he spoke through his actors. It is the mere notation of this once-living music that remains.'

The biographer of Thomas Betterton (1635–1710), one of the greatest names in Shakespearian acting, tells us: 'The voice of a singer is not more strictly tied to time and tune than that of an actor in theatrical elocution... I never heard a line in Tragedy come from Betterton, wherein my judgment, my ear, and my imagination were not fully satisfied; which, since his time, I cannot equally say of any Actor whatsoever.'

It is such testimony as this which justifies an attempt to provide Shakespeare's readers with an uncut text of the plays and poems, neither read aloud nor projected across the foot lights, but spoken for the listening ear, through the medium of the long-playing record.

ii. The Production and the Players

The productions have been recorded by members of the Marlowe Dramatic Society of the University of Cambridge, and by leading professional players, directed by George Rylands, Fellow of King's College.

The Marlowe Society was founded by Cambridge undergraduates just over fifty years ago after an experimental production of *Dr Faustus* in 1907, which aimed at following the traditions and conventions of the Elizabethan stage. Rupert Brooke played Mephistophilis and became the first president of the Society. But the original inspirer and the directing genius was Justin Brooke (no relation of the poet), an undergraduate at Emmanuel College, who insisted on the prime

importance of the speaking of the verse. Painted scenery was dispensed with in favour of a plain black back-cloth and the players were anonymous, a tradition which still holds. In its beginnings the Marlowe Society had close affinities with the movement for which William Poel was responsible and which inspired Nugent Monck's Maddermarket Theatre venture at Norwich and the productions and Prefaces of Harley Granville-Barker.

The Society aimed at presenting Elizabethan dramas with 'next to no cuts, no tampering with the order of scenes, above all lucidity and rapidity of speech, and the communication of the meaning of the words as well as their emotional content'.

The continuity and tradition of style which the Marlowe Society has established over the past half century have been embodied in the present series of recordings. The director, George Rylands, has selected the actors to take part in the recordings on the basis of quite distinct criteria: 'The personality of the voice comes first; and the relation of one voice to another, the discords and harmonies. And the speaker must neither read his words nor over-act them; he must not be histrionic, he must not be over-poetical. Above all, what one seeks is a kind of unity of style and method, all the instruments having the Shakespearian rhythm and phrasing and tempo and tone, responding to them, communicating them in the same way.'

Since 1919 the Society has presented one production every year, and on occasion two, and with a few notable exceptions has devoted itself to Shakespeare, including *Titus Andronicus*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Timon of Athens*, besides the major plays. *Troilus and Cressida* in 1922 was played at the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead, as well as in Cambridge, and led the way for the many modern revivals of that formerly neglected masterpiece. The *Measure for Measure* of 1948 went to Berlin with the 'air lift', together with the Society's *The White Devil*.

Three years later performances of *Romeo and Juliet* were given in London at the Scala and Phoenix theatres. The *Julius Caesar* of 1952 was given in Elizabethan pronunciation and costume on an Elizabethan stage with boys in the women's parts. The 1957 *As You Like It* was also played in Holland and at the International Festival at Geneva. The next year's production of Marlowe's *Edward II* was given at Stratford-upon-Avon and at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, besides being broadcast in the BBC Third Programme; and in 1959 *The Revenger's Tragedy* was performed at the Universities' Drama Festival in Bristol. Past members of the Society include, apart from scholars and musicians, the actors Denis Arundell, Jack Hulbert, Miles Malleson, James Mason, Michael Redgrave and Peter Woodthorpe, and the directors Peter Hall, John Barton, Peter Wood and Tony Robertson.

iii. The Director

George Rylands, one time Senior University Lecturer in English at Cambridge, has been a Fellow of King's College since 1927. His first production for the Marlowe Society, *King Lear* was given two years later with Michael Redgrave, then an undergraduate, playing Edgar. Since then he has directed a score or more of the Society's productions and has played in many of them. In London he directed John Gielgud's company, which included Peggy Ashcroft, Leon Quartermaine and Miles Malleson in *Hamlet* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. With Douglas Allen of the BBC he directed the first television production of *Troilus and Cressida* in 1954.

When Lord Keynes died, Mr Rylands succeeded him as Chairman of the Cambridge Arts Theatre; he was also a Governor of the Old Vic and is Chairman of the Apollo Society. In 1951 he delivered the British Academy Annual Shakespeare Lecture. He is on the editorial board of *Shakespeare Survey*, edited the Clarendon Press *Hamlet* for schools, and has broadcast in the BBC Third Programme on Shakespeare and on the speaking of poetry. He is the editor of the Shakespeare anthology, *The Ages of Man*, on which John Gielgud's Shakespearian recitals are based.

iv. The Recordings

The first recordings were made on the stage of the A.D.C. Theatre in Cambridge in 1957. Since 1961 the recordings have been made in the Decca Studios, London. In 1958 stereophonic sound was introduced, and from that date onwards all the productions are available both in this and in the monaural recording.

Macbeth was the first play to have been recorded by this process in Britain, and the use of stereo adds a new realism to the drama. The space between the loudspeakers can represent the expanse

of the stage, the movements and groupings of the actors become more clearly marked and the effects of long-shot and close-up are greatly enhanced. In general the aim of the producer and the recording team has been to present the plays as clearly as possible, with the emphasis on the poetry and the meaning of the words, while preserving their dramatic appeal. They have tried to keep the dynamic range of the speakers' voices in perspective, from the soliloquies of Hamlet or the gloating asides of Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* to the mounting passion of Lear or the big crowd scenes in *Julius Caesar* or *Coriolanus*. Crowd scenes and battles have been stylised to a certain extent and sound effects introduced only when they are found to be vital to the action.

v. The Problem of Narration

The plays are presented without narration in order to concentrate attention on the text without breaking the flow of action or introducing extraneous matter. For listeners who have the text by them the stage directions will set the scene and introduce the characters. Those who prefer to listen to the plays without following the printed text should find no serious difficulty, but printed narratives are also included. These are available in quantity for school or class use at 5s per dozen. The record labels carry full information about the contents of each side of each disc. Major pauses in the action are indicated on the record by a band.

vi. The Music

Thurston Dart, who was in charge of the music for these discs, is Professor of Music at London University and a Fellow of Jesus College Cambridge. Well known both as a musicologist and as a performer, he has undertaken extensive research into the

music of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. The songs, dances, fanfares, marches and interludes called for in the text of the plays have been reassembled by him from widely scattered sources of the time. Thus in these recordings the original music associated with each play is reproduced, so far as our knowledge permits. The musicians were directed by Professor Dart. In the theatre of Shakespeare's time formal trumpet fanfares announced each act of the play, and the trumpeters also sounded traditional tuckets and sennets for battle scenes, parleys and royal entries. The infantry marched and countermarched to the sound of drums, kettledrums belonging exclusively to the cavalry. Then, as now, the instrument of the hunt was the horn; supernatural events called for the hollow sound of recorders or trombones. Songs were usually sung to the accompaniment of a lute or harp; masquers often sang to the music of viols, though they danced to the brisker strain of violins. Among the other instruments used in the Shakespearian theatre (and therefore heard on these discs) were hautboys, cornetts, curtals, citterns and harpsichords.

vii. The Text

This is the first time that the works of Shakespeare have been recorded uncut and from a uniform text. The project had the full co-operation of the Cambridge University Press and the text used was that of *The New Shakespeare*, edited for the Syndics of the Press by the late Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson. Publication of this series began in 1921 and is now within sight of completion. Each volume contains the text of the play edited in the light of the best modern scholarship by Dr Dover Wilson or one of his assistants, together with an editorial introduction, notes, glossary, and a history of the play on the stage; it is, in short, a full scholarly edition for the serious student. *The New Shakespeare* text, revised where necessary in the light of new knowledge, is also issued, with the glossary but without notes or introduction, as *The Cambridge Pocket Shakespeare*. This edition has been used for all the recordings. It is a cloth bound edition, priced 5s, and intended specifically for actors, students and the general reader. Its publication began in 1957. The texts of *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry V* and *Richard II* are published in a new edition edited by E.F.C. Ludovik with students' notes facing the page to which they refer. Copies of either edition may be purchased from book sellers. In case of difficulty, enquiries should be addressed to the Cambridge University Press or its branches and agents.

viii. The Programme

Six plays were recorded in 1957; the first three, *Othello*, *As You Like It* and *Troilus and Cressida* were issued in the spring of 1958 and *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* in the summer. These, together with The Sonnets, are monaural recordings. The half-way point in the series was reached with the issue of *Hamlet* in the spring of 1961, and the same year also saw the release of *Timon of Athens*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*, *Henry V* and *Cymbeline*. By the end of 1961, 28 plays were recorded, and 22 released. The production schedule continued at the rate of four or five plays each year until completion in 1964. Each play has been issued on the smallest number of discs compatible with recording quality. This has been three or four 12-inch discs according to the length of the play.





ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

CD 1 • CD 2

King of France - Michael Hordern • *Duke of Florence* - James Taylor Whitehead • *Bertram* - Peter Orr • *Lafeu* - Max Adrian
Parolles - Patrick Wymark • *Rinaldo* - John Barton • *French Gentlemen* - Gordon Gardner, John Tracy-Phillips • *Lavache* - Roy Dotrice
A Soldier - Philip Strick • *Countess of Rousillon* - Margaretta Scott • *Helena* - Prunella Scales • *Widow* - Esme Church
Diana - Janette Richer • *Mariana* - Joan Hart

The Scene: Roussillon, Paris, Florence, Marseilles

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

KING OF FRANCE • DUKE OF FLORENCE • BERTRAM, the young Count of Rousillon • LAFEU, an old lord
PAROLLES, a follower of Bertram • RINALDO, Steward to the Countess of Rousillon • LAVACHE, Clown to the Countess
Two French gentlemen at Court named DUMAIN, later captains in the Florentine army • Lords, officers, soldiers, etc., French and Florentine
A soldier, pretending to be an interpreter • A gentleman, astringer to the French king • A Page
COUNTESS OF ROUSILLON, mother to Bertram • HELENA, a waiting-gentlewoman to the Countess • A Widow of Florence
DIANA, daughter to the widow • MARIANA, neighbour to the widow

‘In such unpopular plays as *All’s Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*, we find Shakespeare ready and willing to start at the nineteenth century if the seventeenth century would only let him.’ Bernard Shaw with characteristic paradox has a good word to say for the three long-neglected problem comedies, or ‘unpleasant plays’ as they have been called with reference to Shaw’s own volume of 1898. Since the end of the First War *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus* have come into their own upon the stage but *All’s Well*, the lightweight of the three, in which Shakespeare’s fitful rewriting results in gross and palpable disparities of style, is of all the plays following his apprenticeship the one which there have been ‘none to praise and very few to love.’ One editor is shocked by the revolting idea which underlies the main plot; another finds the title supremely cynical; a third critic avers that there is no other work of Shakespeare so corrupt in conception and in temper. Of the editors and professors only Oliver Elton (1861-1945), surveyor of a hundred and fifty years of English literature, under-rated as an academic critic, defends the dramatist in a mellifluous sonnet in which Meredithian *rosé* is decanted into a Miltonic flask:

All’s Well! – Nay, Spirit, was it well that she
Thy clear-eyed favourite, the wise, the rare,
The ‘rose of youth’, must her deep heart lay bare,
And Helen wait on Bertram’s contumely?

Must Love's own humble, dauntless devotee
Make Night accomplice, and, a changeling, dare
The love-less love-encounter, and prepare
To tread the brink of shame? May all this be
And all end well? That Spirit, from his seat
Elysian, seems to murmur: 'Sometimes know
In Love's unreason hidden, Nature's voice;
In Love's resolve, Her will; and though his feet
Walk by wild ways precipitous, yet, so
Love's self be true, Love may at last rejoice.'

Readers cannot stomach a hero who is unheroic and a heroine who is unfeminine. Helena however has two of the great Romantics on her side, Coleridge and Hazlitt. The former dares to call her Shakespeare's loveliest character. Bernard Shaw sees her as the New Woman; and we may remember how, a decade after Ibsen, H.G. Wells's *Ann Veronica* was banned by the libraries and denounced in the pulpit. 'Ann Veronica,' says her creator, 'wanted a particular man who excited her and she pursued him and got him. With gusto... From the outset she was assailed as an actual person.' That was in 1909. No wonder Helena has shocked prudes, prigs, and professors. 'We all know,' says Shaw, 'the stock objection of the Brixton Family Shakespeare to *All's Well* – that the heroine is a lady doctor, and that no lady of any delicacy could possibly adopt a profession which involves the possibility of her having to attend cases such as that of the king in this play who has a fistula.' Shaw takes it out on Bertram however. '*All's Well* stands out artistically by the sovereign charm of the young Helena and the old Countess of Rousillon, and intellectually by the experiment, repeated nearly three hundred years later in *A Doll's House*, of making the hero a perfectly ordinary young man, whose unimaginative prejudices and selfish conventionality make him cut a very fine mean figure in the atmosphere created by the nobler nature of his wife.' Samuel Johnson is even more severe: 'I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram; a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate; when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness.' Has Bertram no apologist? Quiller-Couch (who thinks Helena a modern young woman of the pushing, calculating sort) does his best. Bertram may be a bit spoiled and selfish, callous towards his inferiors, lustful with the will to have his way; yet he is brave and proud, his faults are those we pardon to 'lusty juvenus'; a spirited boy, itching for the wars, to whom much may be forgiven, short of the final scene. Unfortunately Q suggests that this is a type for whom Shakespeare had a weakness, and that, intent on bettering himself, he was willing to condone the arrogance of the young noblemen of Southampton's circle. This we deny. Bertram is not so like Bassanio and the earlier Romeo as Q suggests; he is such another as Claudio in *Much Ado*. His best advocate is Masfield, a poet who is also a realist and whose comments are always his own:

Bertram is a young man fresh from home. He does not want to marry. He is eager to see the world and win honour. He has been accustomed to look down on Helena as a poor dependant. He does not like her and he does not like being ordered. He is suddenly ordered to marry her. He has been trapped by a woman's underhand trick. He sees himself brought into bondage with all the plumes of his youth clipped close. There is no way of escape; he has to marry her; but the King's order cannot quench his rage against the woman who has snared him. His rage burns inward into a brooding, rankling ill-humour that becomes an obsession. It is one of the tragedies of life that an evil obsession blinds the judgment on more sides than one. The obsessed are always without criticism... Bertram in blinkers to the good in Helena is blind to the faults in himself and in Parolles his friend. Wilfully, as the sullen do, he thinks himself justified in doing evil because evil has been done to him. Hot blood is running in him. Temptation, never far from youth, is always near the unbalanced. He takes an unworthy confidant, as the obsessed do, and goes in over the ears.

Masefield's acquittal of the hero determines his verdict on the heroine:

Shakespeare is just to Bertram. The treachery of a woman is often the cause of a man's treachery to womanhood... Helena's obsession of love makes her blind to the results of her actions. She twice puts the man whom she loves in an intolerable position, which nothing but a king can end. The fantasy is not made so real that we can believe in the possibility of happiness between two so married. Helena has been praised as one of the noblest of Shakespeare's women. Shakespeare saw her more clearly than any man who has ever lived. He saw her as a woman who practises a borrowed art, not for art's sake, nor for charity, but, woman fashion, for a selfish end. He saw her put a man into a position of ignominy quite unbearable, and then plot with other women to keep him in that position. Lastly, he saw her beloved all the time by the conventionally minded of both sexes.

Since Bertram and Helena have both been condemned, Parolles cannot hope to get off with a caution. Yet the greatest of all moralists remarks 'Parolles is a boaster and a coward, such as has always been the sport of the stage, but perhaps never raised more laughter and contempt than in the hands of Shakespeare.' Samuel Johnson's morality, like Shakespeare's, was rooted in his knowledge of all sorts and conditions of men. And he sees that Parolles is an admirable actor's part. Samuel Phelps, Shaw tells us, was the only modern actor-manager tempted by it: 'a capital study of the adventurous yarn-spinning society-struck coward, who also crops up in modern fiction as the hero of Charles Lever's underrated novel, *A Day's Ride*.' In his essay on the companion problem-play, *Measure for Measure*, Hazlitt defends Lucio, Pompey the Bawd, and Master Froth, whom the philosophical German critic Schlegel dismissed as 'wretches'. Shakespeare, in Hazlitt's view, was one of the least moral of all writers because morality (commonly so-called) is made up of antipathies; his talent consisted in sympathy with all shapes and degrees of human nature. The pedantic moralist finds out the bad in everything. Shakespeare shows that 'there is some soul of goodness in things evil'. Truly, sir, I am a poor fellow that would live,' says Pompey to the Justice. Parolles is totally disgraced and undone but the Greek adage makes him invulnerable. He knows himself.

Yet am I thankful: if my heart were great,
'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more,
But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft
As captain shall: simply the thing I am
Shall make me live.

It is perhaps the most Shakespearian comment in the whole comedy. But the play is full of Shakespearian insight and wisdom and memorable speech. The prose is artful and yet easy. (Parolles's discourse on virginity might have been composed for Falstaff.) Helena's first soliloquy and her confession to the Countess and much of the King's part have the poetic ring and idiom peculiar to Shakespeare's middle period. Let us lay aside our morality and remember that he is trying to convert traditional situations and too unyielding a plot (borrowed from Boccaccio) into human terms and theatrical entertainment. He is hampered by his source. His audience would not have made such heavy weather of the improbabilities and inconsistencies as Victorian criticism has done. Above all let us rejoice in his creation of the Countess and the King of France and the shrewd old diplomat Lafeu. For it seems that the inner meaning or theme of the comedy is the contrast of tolerant, experienced, civilised Age with wrong-headed, irresponsible Youth.

The background of the image features abstract, swirling blue ink splashes and smoke-like patterns on a white background. The ink is a deep cerulean color, creating a sense of movement and depth. The text is centered over this background.

‘LOVE ALL,
TRUST A FEW,
DO WRONG
TO NONE.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

CD 3 • CD 4

Theseus - Frank Duncan • *Hippolyta* - Joan Hart • *Egeus* - Julian Curry • *Demetrius* - John Tracy-Phillips • *Lysander* - Ian McKellen
Philstrate - Terrence Hardiman • *Hermia* - Jeannette Sterke • *Helena* - Prunella Scales • *Quince* - Miles Malleon
Bottom - Peter Woodthorpe • *Flute* - John Sharp • *Snout* - John Wood • *Starveling* - Trevor Nunn • *Snug* - Christopher Kelly
Oberon - Anthony White • *Titania* - Jill Balcon • *Puck* - Richard Goolden • *Peaseblossom* - Elizabeth Proud • *Cobweb* - George Rylands
Moth - John Sharp • *Mustard seed* - Richard Kay

'Michaelmas Day, 1622. This day my oaths for drinking of wine and going to plays are out, and so I do resolve to take a liberty today, and then to fall to them again... To the King's Theatre, where we saw *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I had never seen before, nor shall ever see again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life.' If we have not already guessed that the diarist is Samuel Pepys, the next sentence gives him away: 'I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure.'

Nearly two hundred years later another playgoer's journal describes Samuel Phelps's production at Sadler's Wells and it converted him from the view that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was the most essentially unactable of all the plays. Phelps had grasped the main idea governing the play and, by separating the actors from the audience with a hazy curtain of green gauze in the second, third and fourth acts, had achieved a dream-like and visionary sequence of scenes. 'Though stage-fairies cannot ride on blue-bells, and the members of no theatrical company now in existence can speak such poetry otherwise than most imperfectly, yet it is proved that there remains in the power of the manager who goes with pure taste and right feeling to his work, enough for the establishment of this play as a most charming entertainment for the stage.'

The pit and gallery at the Wells, we are told, showed by their hushed attention a keen enjoyment in the most delicate passages of verse; Hazlitt, some decades earlier, keen playgoer though he was, was not so converted. For him a delightful fiction declined into a dull spectacle. The production was Kemble's – a slap-up operatic affair with a pageant of the victories of Theseus instead of Pyramus and Thisbe. 'All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand; but the spirit was evaporated, the genius was fled. Poetry and the stage do not well agree together. The ideal can have no place upon the stage, which is a picture without perspective: everything there is in the foreground. That which was merely an airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality.' Shakespeare himself was aware that 'poetry and the stage do not well agree together'; and in this very play he comments indirectly on the inexhaustible topic of realism and illusion in the theatre. A remark of Quince, the stage-manager, is very apropos: 'This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house and we will do it in action as we will do it before the duke.' It is indeed 'a

marvellous convenient place', not only for rehearsal but for performance: a better setting for Shakespeare's comedy than an inn-yard or the Wooden O. Hippolyta might have preferred Lyceum Shakespeare with ballet and orchestra and a stage moon. 'This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard', she complains, although Theseus has welcomed the 'tedious brief scene of young Pyramus.'

For never anything can be amiss,
When simpleness and duty tender it.

and he very properly rebukes her with what is the first and last word on the art of the theatre: 'The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.' 'It must be your imagination then, and not theirs,' she replies. True enough. A drama is compounded of three elements: the play, the player, and the audience. The dramatist counts upon 'that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith.' Coleridge's famous phrase reminds us of his analysis of the faculty of imagination and we suddenly realise that Shakespeare has anticipated him. One of the most interesting textual points in the whole canon is to be found in the first eighty lines of the fifth act of this play where we see Shakespeare at work. In the Quarto we discover that the poet has had second thoughts, interposing some 29 lines which breathe life into a pedestrian, uninspired passage. They include the definition of the creative imagination:

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact...
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Bernard Shaw at the end of the nineteenth century echoes Hazlitt's views on the staging of Shakespearean comedy and romance. 'The more enchanting the play is at home by the fireside, the more the manager in his efforts to realise this enchantment by reckless expenditure on incidental music, coloured lights, dances, dresses, and elaborate re-arrangements and dislocations of the play – the more in fact he departs from the old platform with its curtains and its placards inscribed "A street in Mantua" and so forth, the more hopelessly and vulgarly does he miss his mark. Such crown jewels of dramatic poetry as *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, fade into shabby coloured glass in his purse.' Although many would be found to agree with Shaw that the best scenery you can get will only destroy the illusion created by the poetry, the comedy is regularly revived with all the theatrical art and artifice which designer, composer and choreographer can supply; but more happily by children out of doors.

In some melodious plot
Of beechen green and shadows numberless.

If Spenser is 'the poets' poet', this comedy is of all plays 'the poets' play'. Keats underscored his copy almost continuously, and surely Milton dwelt upon it in idle reverie, 'on summer eves by haunted stream'; for we feel that it has inspired parts of *Comus*, *L'Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso*.

...in close covert by som Brook
Where no profaner eye may look
Hide me from Day's garish eie,
While the Bee with honied thie,
That at her flowery work doth sing,
And the Waters murmuring
With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep;
And let som strange mysterious dream,
Wave at his Wings in Airy stream,
Of lively portrature display'd,
Softly on my eye-lids laid.
And as I wake, sweet musick breath
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by som spirit to mortals good,
Or th'unseen Genius of the Wood.

The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, the history of *Richard II*, the comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are all dramatic poems as much as they are stage plays; they are the triple crown of Shakespeare's apprenticeship and they belong to the year 1595–96. In the next four or five years the playwright is elbowing the poet into the wings; lovers give place to soldiers; Puck to Pistol; Titania to Doll Tearsheet. But Juliet's Nurse and Bully Bottom have prepared us for Shakespeare's greatest creation in realistic prose, unimitated, inimitable Falstaff. Nick Bottom's swollen head must have swelled further since he was first 'translated' into the innamorato of the Fairy Queen: the tributes have been eloquent. Hazlitt thought that full justice had not been done to him and called him 'the most romantic of mechanics'. J.B. Priestley concurs. "Clearly the ladies' man, the gallant; not only romantic and poetical but imaginative. 'We admit that he is conceited, but he is, in some measure, an artist, and artists are notoriously conceited. It is clear that a man cannot play every part; cannot be lover, tyrant, lady, and lion at once; but it is equally clear that every man of imagination and spirit ought to want to play every part. It is better to be vain like Bottom, than to be dead in spirit like Snug or Starveling.' Even the great Samuel Johnson noted with approval that Bottom 'discovers a true genius for the Stage by his solicitude for propriety of dress, and his deliberation which beard to chuse among many beards, all unnatural.'

In this lyrical comedy Shakespeare outstrips the University Wits, John Lyly and George Peele, just as his *Richard II* outstrips Marlowe's *Edward II*. He shows himself, perhaps for the first time, a skilful and conscious artist in the structure, *ordonnance* and conduct of a play. The juxtapositions, interaction and gradations are nicely calculated. Two pairs of lightly characterised, slightly satirised, and very youthful lovers are the puppets of Puck's mishandled plot, who, as stage manager, links them on the one hand with his Lord and the Fairy Queen, and on the other with the flesh and blood Warwickshire rustics, as rounded and real as those of Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* and *Under the Greenwood Tree*. The heroic nuptials of Duke Theseus and the Queen of the Amazons provide a gilded frame within which Oberon and Titania and their train diffuse fantasy, moonshine and melody. The course of true love runs awry for the Athenian maids; Titania is enamoured of an ass; the jealous Oberon quarrels with his Queen and is reconciled; the constant Thisbe stabs herself upon the dead body of her love in a tedious brief scene of very tragical mirth; and her passion ends the play. Such variations on a theme are fit matter for a dramatic epithalamium, performed (as some like to think) in honour of the Earl of Derby and Elizabeth Vere, or of Thomas Berkeley and Elizabeth Carey. The epithalamium opens with:

Now fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace...

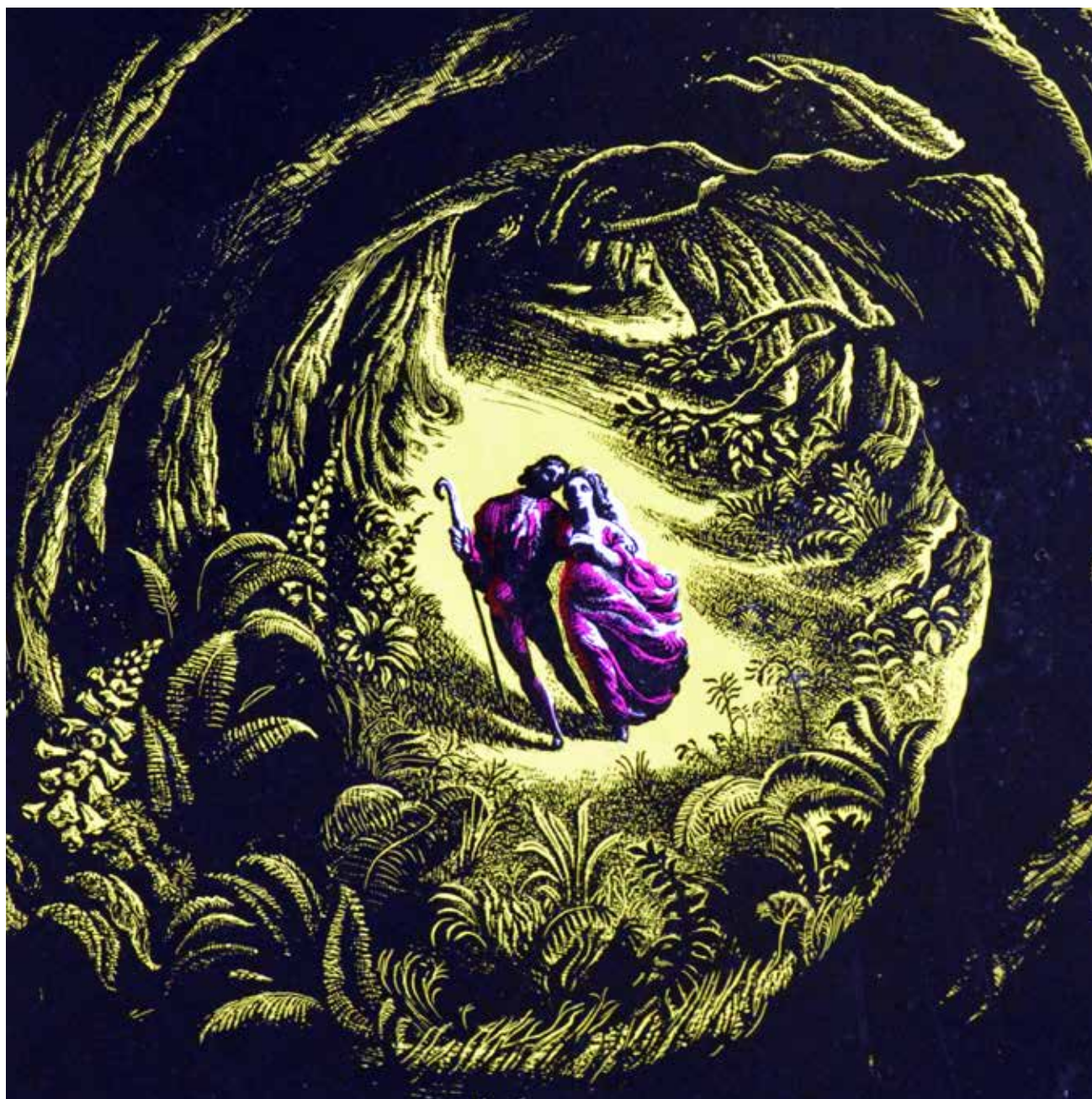
and concludes

The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve!
Lovers, to bed – 'tis almost fairy time...

and when the great chamber is emptied of its courtiers, the sprites and elves bless the place with song and dance and glimmering light:

Now, until the break of day,
Through this house each fairy stray.
To the best bride-bed will we
Which by us shall blessed be:
And the issue, there create,
Ever shall be fortunate:
So shall all the couples three
Ever true in loving be.





AS YOU LIKE IT

CD 5 • CD 6

A banished Duke - John Barton • *Frederick* - Tony Church • *Amiens* - Peter Bingham • *Jaques* - Anthony Jacobs • *Le Beau* - John Arnott
Charles - David Buck • *Oliver* - Tony White • *Orlando* - David Gibson • *Adam* - Denys Robertson • *Touchstone* - John Wilders
Corin - Gary Watson • *Silvius* - Julian Pettifer • *William* - John Bird • *A person representing Hymen* - George Rylands
Rosalind - Christine Baker • *Celia* - Wendy Gifford • *Phebe* - Irene Worth • *Audrey* - Mary Fenton

As You Like It, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *What You Will* (sub-title of *Twelfth Night*), at once the best and most typical of Shakespeare's comedies, all belong (as near as may be) to the annus mirabilis of Shakespeare's dramatic career, the last year of the 16th century. The titles are carefree; but he had embarked already on his tragic period. The Shakespearian recipe is an intermingling of incompatibles, a reconciliation of opposites: the ideal and the real, wit and romance, humour and passion, poetry and prose. *Much Ado* is more rewarding and vital on the stage than in the study. *Twelfth Night* is perhaps the most loved both in the theatre and out of it. *As You Like It* reads even better than it plays. What is the difference between Rosalind and Viola? Both carry on their wooing 'in the lovely garnish of a boy', and Rosalind, with Celia to set her off, is the more boyish of the two. Each is companioned by a Clown and moves in a romantic setting, the forest of Arden and the sea-coast of Illyria. But different they are as sunshine from moonlight. Rosalind speaks some of Shakespeare's most brilliant prose – and he is one of the best prose writers of the period - a medium which she strangely shares with Falstaff and Iago. Viola is a poet. *Twelfth Night* is shadowed with melancholy which gives depth and distance to its beauty. 'Come away, Death' ... 'Youth's a stuff will not endure'. In *As You Like It* youth is eternal. The youth of the heroine is matched by that of the hero and enhanced by the middle and old age of Touchstone, Duke Senior, Jaques and Adam. Rosalind personifies the comic spirit – a criticism of life as a boy. And, like Viola, she or he is 'as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple. He is very well favoured and speaks very shrewishly: one would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him'. In love herself, Rosalind can be Love's whip, 'a very beadle to a humorous sigh'.

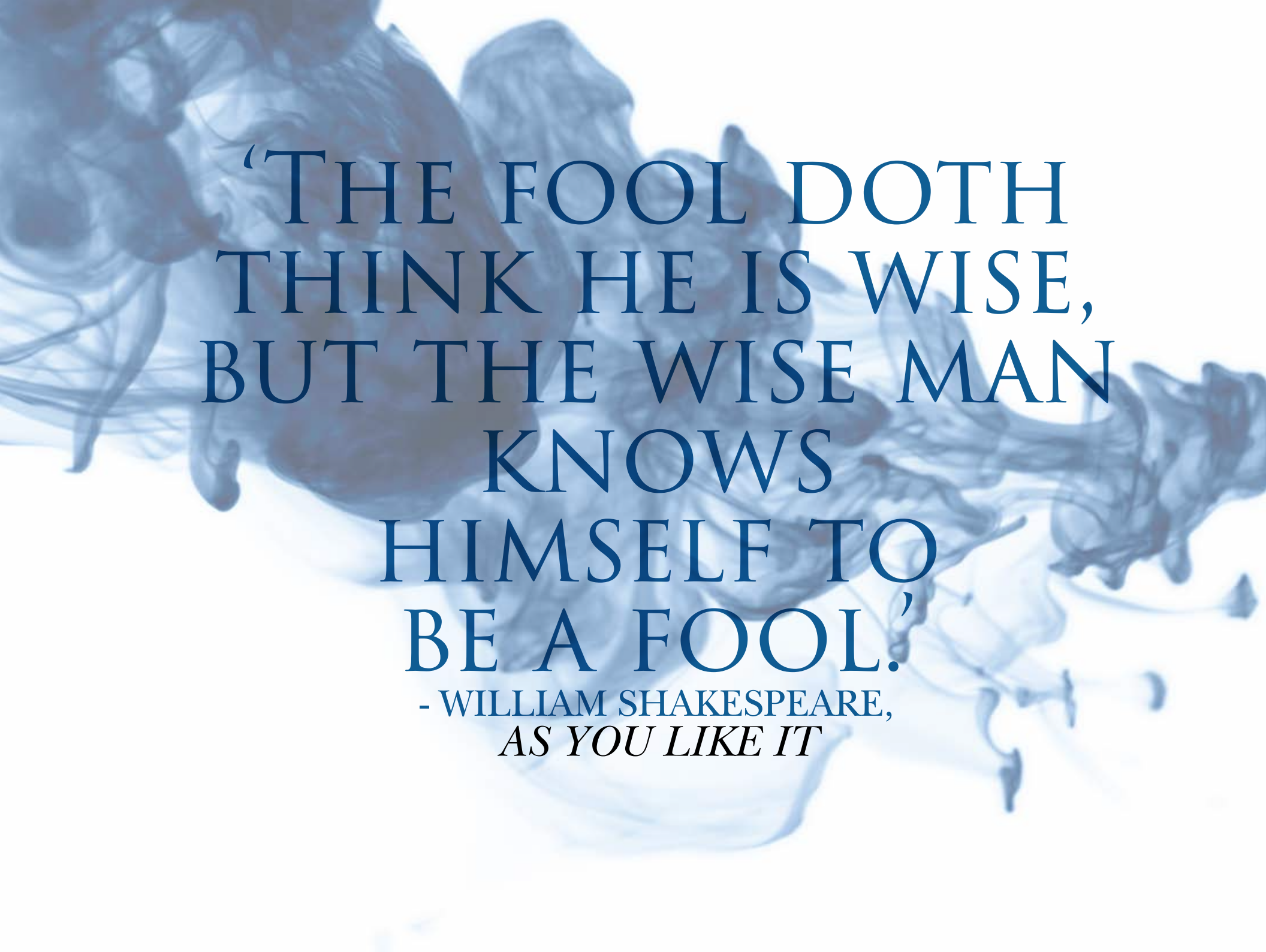
A boy dressed up as a girl plays a girl dressed up which is also poetical. She is uninhibited by age or sex; for Shakespeare devised it for a boy player. Love is the major, and pastoral the minor theme. Within a few months of the comedy there appeared *England's Helicon*, a pastoral anthology, an amorous Arcadia, of madrigals, roundelays, odes, dumps, complaints, and canzonets for nymph and shepherd - Corydon, Phyllida, Amaryllis, Menaphon, Hobbinol. Shakespeare presents the age-old convention in various lights. William and Audrey are bucolic – Warwickshire rustics; Phoebe and Silvius are Sicilian; Corin links the two pairs. The banished Duke and his Huntsmen banqueting under the greenwood tree, Orlando and Rosalind fleeing the time carelessly bring back the golden world of Grecian idyll. The discordant note is Jaques. Rosalind's humour is spontaneous and sane, Touchstone's professional, but the humour of Jaques is a diseased wit. He is not as he is too often played 'a dear old boy' or a club bore concealing a heart of gold behind a cynical smile. He is 'compact of jars' – unmusical.

And the man who has no music in himself, Cassius for example, 'Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils'. Jaques has been a profligate and now he has turned sour. His famous speech shows that he is out of tune. For him the infant pukes, the schoolboy whines, the soldier swears, the justice proses, the sixth age whistles and pipes; the rest is silence or a toothless mumble. But Jaques is at once refuted by the entry of the third age Orlando – lusty Juventus – with the venerable Adam on his back, the good old man in whom appears

The constant service of the antique world.

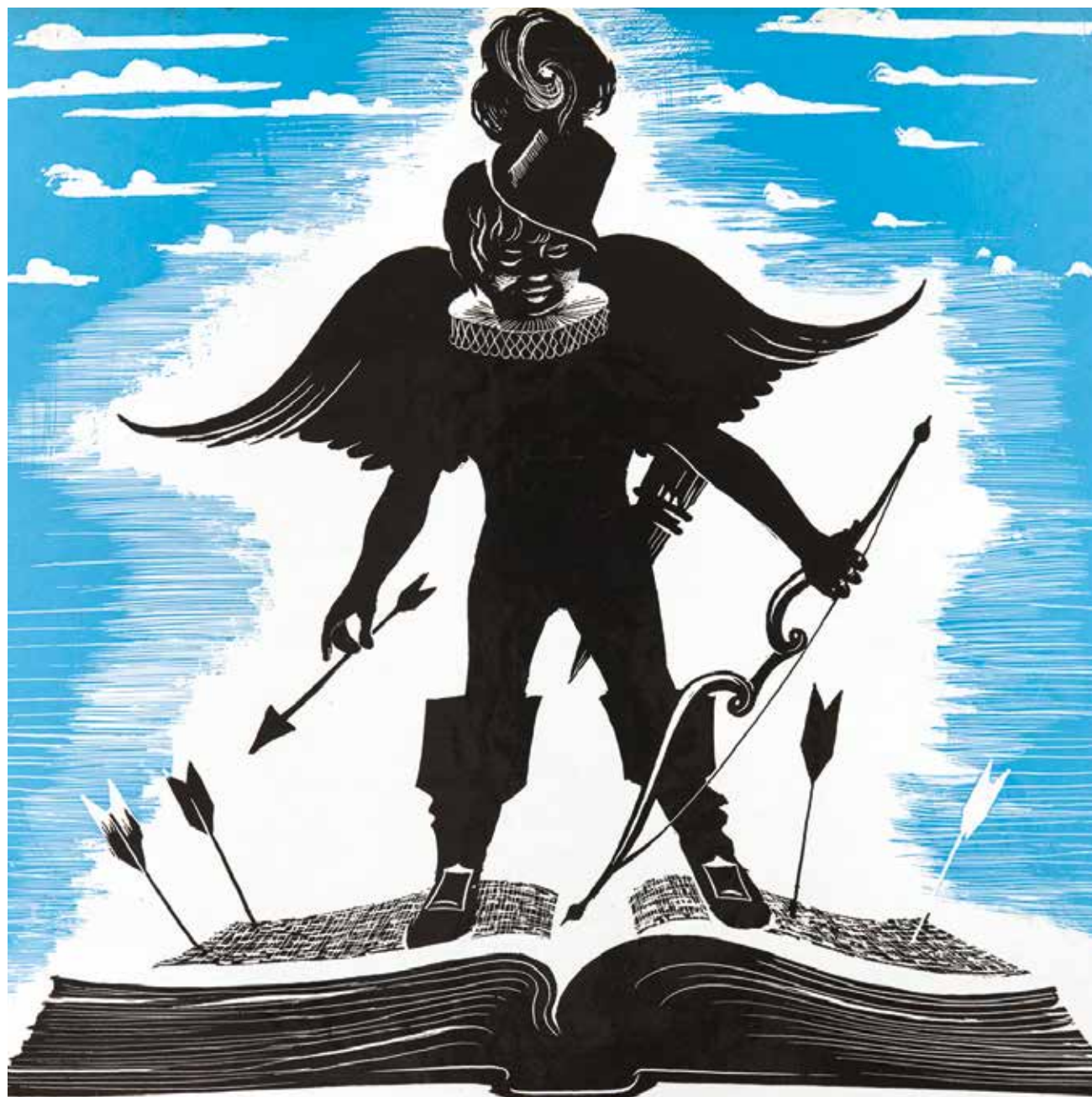
Shakespeare's Seven Ages are a brilliant parody of a familiar theme which we find nobly expressed by Sir Walter Raleigh:

The Seven Ages of Man resemble the Seven Planets. Whereof our Infancy is compared to the Moon, in which we seem only to live and grow as plants; the Second Age to Mercury, wherein we are taught and instructed; our Third Age to Venus, the days of love, desire and vanity; the Fourth to the Sun, the strong, flourishing and beautiful Age of Man's life; the Fifth to Mars, in which we seek honour and victory, and our thoughts travel to ambitious ends; the Sixth Age is ascribed to Jupiter, in which we begin to take account of our times, judge of ourselves, and grow to the perfection of our understanding; the Last and Seventh to Saturn, wherein our days are sad and overcast, and we prepare for our Eternal Habitation.



‘THE FOOL DOTTH
THINK HE IS WISE,
BUT THE WISE MAN
KNOWS
HIMSELF TO
BE A FOOL.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
AS YOU LIKE IT



LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST

CD 7 • CD 8 • CD 9

Ferdinand - Derek Godfrey • *Berowne* - Gary Watson • *Longaville* - Peter Orr • *Dumaine* - Ian Lang • *Boyet* - Robert Eddison
Mercade - George Rylands • *Don Adriano de Armado* - Max Adrian • *Sir Nathaniel* - Toby Robertson • *Holofernes* - Tony Church
Dull - Peter Woodthorpe • *Costard* - Michael Bates • *Moth* - Freda Dowie • *The Princess of France* - Janette Richer • *Rosaline* - Prunella Scales
Katharine - Diana Rigg • *Maria* - Susan Maryott • *Jaquenetta* - Patsy Byrne

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

FERDINAND, King of Navarre • BEROWNE, LONGAVILLE, DUMAINE, young lords, attending on the King
BOWET, an elderly lord, attending on the Princess of France • MERCADE, a messenger
DON ADRIANO DE ARMADO, a fantastical Spaniard • SIR NATHANIEL, a curate • HOLOFERNES, a schoolmaster
DULL, a constable • COSTARD, a clown • MOTH, page to Armado • A Forester • THE PRINCESS OF FRANCE
ROSALINE, KATHARINE, MARIA, ladies, attending on the Princess • JAQUENETTA, a country wench
Officers and others, attendant on the King and Princess

A Pleasant Conceited Comedie: such is the very true description on the title page of the first edition of the play, the Quarto of 1598: conceited – that is, ingenious, witty, fanciful. Very proper too that the comedy should have been presented the previous Christmas before Her Highness. For in this lively, fashionable, satirical and yet romantic entertainment Shakespeare is essentially Elizabethan, as much ‘of his age’ as in *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* he is ‘for all time’. The Quarto title tells us something more: that the text is ‘Newly corrected and augmented’. We might have guessed it as we read. Here and there an earlier version thrusts itself awkwardly through the dramatist’s revisions; most notably in the great set piece on Love with which Berowne harangues ‘affection’s men at arms’ in Act IV. iii. Two versions have somehow coalesced in print and we must drop some twenty repetitious lines (293–315). The metres range from formal couplets, quatrains, sonneting, octosyllabics, to a blank verse which at certain moments, chiefly at the end of the play, has a confident ring and ease of expression which can only come with maturity and experience. ‘Written in a literary or sentimental mood, revised in a real mood,’ Masfield decides. As in the case of our text of *Measure for Measure*, we feel that between the first composition and the revision Shakespeare’s skill in drama and his understanding of man have gone forward to some purpose. We can conceive of the first version as following *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and ushering in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, that triumphant trio of the first period. in which the dramatist has given the poet his head. There is plenty of poetry in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, excellent word–music, but the poetry is more Elizabethan than Shakespearian, harking back to the University Wits, to Lyly’s *Euphues* and Sidney’s *Arcadia* and the sonnet sequences. We feel that Shakespeare comes into his own when the Owl and the Cuckoo sing their rustic songs – ‘the loveliest thing ever said about England,’ according to John Masfield. The implicit theme beneath the merry war of the sexes which anticipates *Much Ado*, beneath also the rivalry between the poet and the man of the theatre which we often sense in the early plays, seems to be a personal

conflict between Shakespeare of Stratford, who has rubbed shoulders with Dull, Costard and Jacquenetta, and Shakespeare the protégé of the Earl of Southampton and a ‘sharer’ in the Lord Chamberlain’s Company; a Shakespeare who has been dazzled by his first glimpses of the court of Gloriana, the Faerie Queene. The conflict is not resolved but we sense a revulsion bordering on class-consciousness, or, it may be, the distrust and distaste of one of Nature’s poets for the sophistication of fashionable Art. Berowne’s bitter ‘character’ of Boyet, the Frenchified Court Chamberlain (V.ii.310) is to be read side by side with Mercutio’s burlesque of the lipping fantasticoes and the violence of old Antonio’s attack on Claudio in *Much Ado*. Was Shakespeare’s irritation with the clever-clever young blades of the capital, conscious or unconscious, purged by the creation of Osric and of Lucio in *Measure for Measure*? The strength of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* springs from some such conflict in the mind of Berowne. In the midst of the feigning and folly, fancy and flirtation, a cloud passes across the sun. A messenger of death enters. The Masque breaks up: the castle of court cards falls to the ground:

Worthies, away! the scene begins to cloud.

Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise must give way to honest plain words which best pierce the ear of grief. The wooing does not end like an old play. Jack has not Jill. And this lightest and most courtly of all the comedies is found to have a moral:

A jest’s prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it.

To jest in a hospital and ‘enforce the pained impotent to smile’ is a very different thing from playing at scholarship and exchanging verses in a little academe of Renaissance courtiers. Shakespeare is serious. His apprenticeship is over and the temptation of Art for Art’s sake is behind him. From now on he will be a Poet, as Wordsworth understood that vocation: ‘A man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind’.

Walter Pater was surely justified in feeling that in the character of Berowne, ‘which is never quite in touch, never quite on a perfect level of understanding, with the other persons of the play, we see, perhaps, a reflex of Shakespeare himself, when he has just become able to stand aside from and estimate the first period of his poetry’. Pater’s *Appreciation* written in 1878 is a perfect introduction to the comedy; and a stage-designer might pass from it to Pater’s Imaginary Portrait of Antony Watteau, the Prince of Court Painters. The oracle of aestheticism, whose Renaissance studies were for Oscar Wilde ‘the golden book of spirit and sense, the holy writ of beauty’, was well qualified to appreciate the nineties of the sixteenth century and to defend the old euphuism of the Elizabethan age –

that pride of dainty language and curious expression, which it is very easy to ridicule, which, often made itself ridiculous, but which had below it a real sense of fitness and nicety; and which, as we see in this very play, and still more clearly in the Sonnets, had some fascination for the young Shakespeare himself. It is this foppery of delicate language, this fashionable plaything of his time, with

which Shakespeare is occupied in *Love's Labour's Lost*. He shows us the manner in all its stages; passing from the grotesque and vulgar pedantry of Holofernes, through the extravagant but polished caricature of Armado, to become the peculiar characteristic of a real though still quaint poetry in Berowne himself, who is still chargeable even at his best with just a little affectation. As Shakespeare laughs broadly at it in Holofernes or Armado, so he is the analyst of its curious charm in Berowne; and this analysis involves a delicate raillery by Shakespeare himself at his own chosen manner.

This 'foppery' of Shakespeare's day had, then, its really delightful side, a quality in no sense 'affected' by which it satisfies a real instinct in our minds – the fancy so many of us have for an exquisite and curious skill in the use of words.

When Berowne has summed up all the tricks and figures of euphuism which have blown him 'full of maggot ostentation', he makes an act of recantation and vows to express himself henceforth 'in russet yeas and honest kersey noes'. He sticks to monosyllables and calls Rosaline 'wench':

My love to thee is sound, sans crack or flaw.

She scores again :

Sans 'sans', I pray you,

and he answers :

Yet I have a trick

Of the old rage; bear with me, I am sick –

I'll leave it by degrees.

Shakespeare the playwright left the old poetic fashions, conventions and ornament by degrees, but he always had a trick of the old rage. In just the same way three hundred years later W.B. Yeats, trained in the romantic tradition of Keats, Tennyson, Swinburne, made a recantation. He closed his volume of *Responsibilities* with a poem in which he foreswears his first songs as a coat 'covered with embroideries Out of old mythologies', and resolves that 'there's more enterprise In walking naked'.

Dover Wilson, revising his edition of thirty-five years earlier, notes that the comedy did for the nineties of the sixteenth century something that Gilbert's *Patience* did for the nineties of the nineteenth, and suggests that it bristles with topical allusion. The play has been one of the happiest hunting grounds of Shakespearian scholarship. Is Holofernes John Florio, the Italian tutor of Southampton and the translator of Montaigne? Or is he the astronomer Thomas Harriot? Are the King of Navarre and his three companions the Earls of Derby, Essex, Southampton and Rutland? Is Moth the page Thomas Nashe? Is Don Adriano de Armado Sir Walter Raleigh?

We peruse the specious and ingenious scholars and believe the last one we have read, and dare to murmur:

Why, all delights are vain, but that most vain
Which, with pain purchased, doth inherit pain –
As painfully to pore upon a book
To seek the light of truth, while truth the while
Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look:
Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile:
So ere you find where light in darkness lies,
Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes.
Small have continual plodders ever won,
Save base authority from others' books.

There is a touch of mystery at the end of the play, a riddle. After the songs of Ver and Hiems, the Quarto prints a sentence without speech-heading and in larger type than the rest of the text: 'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo'. Was it a marginal comment scribbled in a copy by a reader? Does Apollo signify Christopher Marlowe and, if so, is mercurial Shakespeare himself paying rueful homage to the 'dead shepherd', whose *Hero and Leander* was sung by the scullers on the Thames?

Marlowe, bathèd in the Thespian springs,
Had in him those brave translunary things
That our first poets had: his raptures were
All air and fire, which made his verses clear,
For that fine madness still he did retain,
Which rightly should possess a poet's brain.

An abstract background featuring a large, dynamic splash of blue ink or paint on a white surface. The splash originates from the top left and spreads outwards, with various tendrils and droplets extending across the frame. The ink has a range of shades from deep navy to light, airy blues, creating a sense of movement and texture.

‘BEAUTY IS
BOUGHT BY
JUDGEMENT
OF THE EYE.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST



MEASURE FOR MEASURE

CD 10 • CD 11 • CD 12

Vincentio - Toby Robertson • *Angelo* - George Rylands • *Escalus* - John Bird • *Claudio* - Richard Marquand • *Lucio* - Anthony Jacobs
Two gentlemen - Derek Jacobi, Chris Renard • *A Provost* - Terrence Hardiman • *Peter* - Roger Prior • *Elbow* - David Brierley • *Pompey* - Donald Beves
Abhorson - John Kimber • *Barnardino* - Clive Swift • *Isabella* - Janette Richer • *Mariana* - Dorothy Mulcahy • *Juliet* - Penelope Balchin
Francisca - Camille Prior • *Mistress Overdone* - George Rylands

Measure for Measure is traditionally classed with *All's Well* and *Troilus and Cressida* as 'a problem play' – in Shavian phrase, 'an unpleasant play'. All three belong to the early years of the seventeenth century, to the start of Shakespeare's tragic period, between *Hamlet* and *Othello*. All three were long neglected, even shunned. But in the great days of Drury Lane, from 1738, when the 'low life' characters were restored to *Measure for Measure*, down to the end of the century, the play was much favoured by actors. Mrs Cibber, Peg Woffington, Mrs Yates, and (incomparably) Mrs Siddons, excelled in the part of Isabella. *Troilus* was the first of the problem plays to recapture the attention of stage and study. *Measure for Measure* followed in its train, and Peter Brook's robust and imaginative production at Stratford-upon-Avon a few years ago, with Gielgud as Angelo, revived enthusiasm and stimulated appreciation. 'This is a play,' says Hazlitt, 'as full of genius as it is of wisdom'. Yet he did not entirely like it, finding a want of passion, a coldness, a repulse to our sympathies. Coleridge, feeling the hand of the master throughout the play, went further. It was 'the most painful – nay rather the only painful part of his genuine works'. He could not forgive the pardon and marriage of Angelo which 'baffles the indignant claim of justice and is likewise degrading to the character of women'. Perhaps the first true interpretation of the play came in 1930 with a chapter in Wilson Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* entitled '*Measure for Measure* and the Gospels', in which he puts it in the first rank for technical skill and penetrating psychological insight. He relates the ethic of the play to the New Testament, as a commentary on the text: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' Wilson Knight's appreciation was followed up seven years later by R.W. Chambers in his remarkable British Academy Lecture, 'The Jacobean Shakespeare and *Measure for Measure*', in which this tragi-comedy and *The Tempest* are named together as 'Shakespeare's two greatest plays of forgiveness.'

As with *King John* and (supposedly) *Hamlet* Shakespeare founded his play upon another. George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, 1578, was followed by a prose version of the tale in a *Heptameron of Civil Discourses* four years later. Whetstone's own original was the *Hecatomithi*, 1565, of Giraldi Cinthio, a dramatist and Professor of Philosophy at Ferrara, who made tragi-comedy fashionable. His Hundred Tales provided a treasury of plots, situations, intrigues and entanglements for his countrymen and posterity. From it Shakespeare culled *Othello*, within a few months of *Measure for Measure*. The title page of Whetstone's play is characteristic of an earlier moralising genre of story-telling and will serve to bring home to us the extent and nature of Shakespeare's reinterpretation, of his humanising spirit and often provocative questioning:

The Right Excellent and Famous History of Promos and Cassandra; divided into two Comical Discourses. In the first part is shown, the unsufferable abuse of a lewd Magistrate, the virtuous behaviour of a chaste Lady: the uncontrolled lewdness of a favoured Courtesan, and the undeserved estimation of a pernicious Parasite. In the second part is discoursed the perfect magnanimity of a noble King in checking Vice and favouring Virtue; wherein is shown the ruin and overthrow of dishonest practices, with the advancement of upright dealing.

Shakespeare's chief innovations consist in turning the judicial King into a disguised Duke, who spies incognito upon the manners and morals of his subjects – a figure familiar in legend fiction and historical fact – and in superimposing the character of Mariana, betrothed and jilted by Angelo long before the play begins; a fact which we cannot but feel is unfairly and inartistically concealed from us until the play is half over. In *Whetstone*, Cassandra (Isabella) sacrifices her honour to Promos (Angelo), to save her brother Andrugio's life. Promos breaks faith and orders Andrugio's execution, bidding the gaoler present Cassandra with his head. But the compassionate gaoler substitutes the head of a newly executed felon. Cassandra, seeking justice and redress, appeals to the King who orders the death of Promos as soon as he has restored her honour by marriage. But Cassandra has fallen in love with her husband and pleads for his life. Her supplication is supported by her brother who in sorrow for his sister's grief reveals his identity at his own peril and wins Promos's pardon.

Shakespeare translates this melodramatic romance with its explicit moral into quite other terms – the terms of sexual psychology and spiritual conflict. He does not quite bring it off. By inventing Mariana, preserving Isabella's chastity and marrying her to the Duke, he solves some problems and involves himself with as many more. However the gain exceeds the loss. In the theatre the moment when Mariana appeals to Isabella to beg for Angelo's life allows of a protracted pause, a thrilling dramatic silence, which is very memorable. On the other hand, the belated revelation of Mariana's existence and Angelo's perfidy follows hard upon the scene of highest dramatic tension in which Claudio begs his sister to save his life and is ruthlessly spurned. This revelation, communicated by the Duke in leisurely and mannered prose, destroys our conception of Angelo, whose moral downfall we have followed with absorbed interest and sympathetic understanding. We feel that the dramatist has tricked us and that we must make a fresh start. Shakespeare had found it difficult, on several previous occasions, to transform romance into dramatic and psychological truth; for instance, in the reconciliation between Proteus and Valentine, in the handling of Shylock, in the rejection of Hero at the altar which is crowned by Beatrice's 'Kill Claudio!' When we read *Measure for Measure* (not perhaps when we see it on the stage) and are suddenly faced with the Duke's revelation in Act III scene 1, we cannot but think that Shakespeare is revising an earlier draft of the play, and revising it to such purpose and with such success that we realise that Angelo and Isabella have outgrown their original setting and circumstances, just as Shylock bids fair to do, when he makes his eloquent appeal for persecuted Jewry. In Acts III and IV, consequently, the dramatist must do all he can to divert, intrigue, and even confuse us, until he carries off by sleight of hand the precarious but triumphant equilibrium of the denouement and general pardon of Act V.

The play is not only psychologically acute and ‘modern’; it is spiritually profound. And if it is more firmly founded upon the ethic of Christianity than any other of Shakespeare’s plays, it also rejoices in some of his liveliest truest comedy. Hazlitt, who was ‘not greatly enamoured of Isabella’s rigid chastity’, like many other critics – but R.W. Chambers can hardly fail to confute them – is eloquent in his praise of Lucio, Pompey, Froth, Abhorson and Barnardine, of whom that philosophical German, Schlegel, had so earnestly disapproved. And this leads him to one of the best short eulogies of Shakespeare ever penned:

Shakespeare was in one sense the least moral of all writers; for morality (commonly so called) is made up of antipathies; and his talent consisted in sympathy with human nature, in all its shapes, degrees, depressions, and elevations. The object of the pedantic moralist is to find out the bad in everything; his was to show that ‘there is some soul of goodness in things evil’. In one sense Shakespeare was no moralist at all: in another he was the greatest of all moralists. He was a moralist in the same sense in which nature is one. He taught what he had learnt from her. He showed the greatest knowledge of humanity, with the greatest fellow-feeling for it.



MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

CD 13 • CD 14

Don Pedro - William Squire • *Jon John* - Patrick Creean • *Claudio* - Gary Watson • *Benedick* - John Gielgud • *Leonato* - Michael Hordern
Antonio - Donald Layne-Smith • *Balthazar* - Peter Pears • *Borachio* - Peter Orr • *Friar Francis* - Cyril Luckham • *Conrade* - Clive Swift
Dogberry - Peter Woodthorpe • *Verges* - Ian Holm • *Hero* - Josephine Stuart • *Beatrice* - Peggy Ashcroft • *Margaret* - Gillian Webb
Ursula - Janette Richer

‘I remember the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penn’d) hee never blotted out a line. My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand... His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it had beene so too.’

If Ben Jonson sometimes growled and grumbled that Shakespeare ‘wanted Arte’, his soreness may have come from the hard fact that Shakespeare was a much better box office draw. Leonard Digges, translator and minor poet, makes this abundantly clear in some verses attached to the 1640 edition of Shakespeare’s *Poems*. Not only did the audience prefer ‘Honest Iago or the jealous Moore’ to Ben’s irksome *Sejanus*, and the quarrel of Brutus and Cassius to ‘tedious (though well laboured) *Catiline*’; but even the masterpieces, *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, which deserved a crown of bays,

Even at a friend’s desire
Acted, have scarce defraied the Seacoale fire
And doore-keepers: when let but *Falstaffe* come,
Hal, *Poines*, the rest you scarce shall have a roome
All is so pester’d: let but *Beatrice*
And *Benedicke* be seene, loe in a trice
The Cockpit, Galleries, Boxes, all are full.

Much Ado always comes into its own in the theatre. It is an actor’s play, a director’s play, a designer’s play. It demands an audience. There is more wit than passion, and only a tincture of poetry. Beatrice and Benedick look beyond Rosalind and Orlando to Mirabel and Millamant. Ever since this comedy, the first of the great three which follow hard on one another at the turn of the century and height of Shakespeare’s career, was revived at the celebrations at court for the wedding of the Princess Elizabeth, the Queen of Hearts, to the Prince Palatine Elector, in May 1613, it has been more enjoyed upon the stage than in the study.

At the Restoration *Much Ado* was conflated with *Measure for Measure* into a ‘musical’ by the ingenious D’Avenant under the title *The Law against Lovers*. Benedick and Beatrice join Escalus and Lucio in a chorus. Mr Pepys was delighted. In the next century David Garrick

excelled as Benedick; the critics thought it his greatest comic part. He had rehearsed it for two months before he could satisfy himself. His Beatrice was Mrs Pritchard in the first performance at Drury Lane on November 14th, 1748. She was so delightful that the audience overlooked her corpulence. He revived the comedy every season, chose it for his last appearance before his marriage and his first after it, played it in 1769 in the Shakespeare pageant at Drury Lane which followed upon the Stratford Jubilee, and made his farewell to the stage as Benedick seven years later. From then on, the Beatrices lead the field. Even Mrs Siddons, to our dismay, played it. In the middle of the nineteenth century the star was Helen Faucit, who played with Macready. She married the biographer of the Prince Consort (in five volumes). Her Beatrice was less boisterous than that of her predecessor, Mrs Jordan, but 'a creature overflowing with joyousness, raillery itself being in her nothing more than an excess of animal spirits tempered by passing through a soul of goodness'. Miss Faucit was outstripped however, a generation later, when Henry Irving staged *Much Ado* at the Lyceum in 1882 with Ellen Terry as Beatrice to his Benedick. A.B. Walkley (famous critic of *The Times*) who praised Irving's Iago as 'a true compatriot of the Borgias' and his Malvolio as 'Don Quixote turned Majordomo' thought his Benedick 'the best of his Renaissance flamboyants; as gallant a picture of the courtier-scholar-soldier as anything in the pages of Cellini or the canvases of Velasquez'. It was the flamboyance of Irving that Walkley admired; the fact that 'he had vindicated the supremacy of romance in the face of all Philistia'. He had not much use for the scholars' Shakespeare, for the purists and the reformers and enthusiasts such as the Elizabethan Stage Society which Bernard Shaw welcomed. Reviewing Beerbohm Tree's *Much Ado* in 1905 Walkley persuades us that the comedy only really exists in the theatre. As a play he thinks it as bad as bad can be, with the initial weakness, shared with many another of Shakespeare's plays, of a dramatised novel:

In the church scene Claudio is cheerfully degraded into a blackguard for the sake of a *coup de théâtre*. The cock-and-bull story of Hero's death is invented, and Claudio is turned into a weak ass, for the sake of another *coup de théâtre* in the final scene. What then is it that, despite its crying faults, makes *Much Ado* so delightful? It is, to begin with, its strong and pulsing vitality – the expression of Shakespeare's experiencing and enjoying faculty – the intense animal, semi-savage vitality of Beatrice and Benedick, the 'May of youth and bloom of lustihood' in Claudio, the enduring vitality of Leonato and Antonio leaping out into flame in their old age, the minx-like vitality of Margaret and Ursula, the roystering and bacchanalian vitality of Borachio, the sturdy bovine vitality of Dogberry. And then it is its *panache*, its careless non-moral Renaissance romance. And, again, it is its Hugo-esque touch of the luridly-fiendish in Don John set against the shifting polychromatic revel of masque and dance. Here is the 'virtue' of the play.

Ellen Terry's Beatrice was thought to be even more enchanting than her Portia. When Irving on his first visit to America finished a season of half a dozen productions by playing *Much Ado* for three weeks in New York to crowded and delighted houses, an American critic described her as 'dazzling in the fascination of her manner, enchanting in her tenderness full of an admirable vivacity, never once playing the shrew, and though her words were sharp as steel, they seemed always sheathed in velvet and to convey the idea that she loved Benedick. There was a magnificent and startling display of her art in her sudden, eager, almost savage turning upon Benedick, when he tells her he will do anything for her. The instance before she was all womanly tenderness, but her swift demand, in answer to his promise, "kill Claudio," fell upon the stilled house like a blow in the face, so full of concentrated energy was it'.

Bernard Shaw is as contemptuous of *Much Ado* as Walkley is, and tells us that Benedick's pleasantries might pass at a sing-song in a public-house parlour. He hopes that in Shakespeare's later years the very thought of Biron, Mercutio, Gratiano and Benedick must have covered him with shame. Why is it then, he asks, that we still want to see Benedick and Beatrice, and that our most eminent actors and actresses still want to play them? His answer is more subtle than Walkley's defence of the vitality of the *dramatis personae*.

Before I answer that very simple question let me ask another. Why is it that Da Ponte's 'dramma giocosa', entitled *Don Giovanni*, a loathsome story of a coarse, witless, worthless libertine, who kills an old man in a duel and is finally dragged down through a trapdoor to hell by his twaddling ghost, is still, after more than a century, 'as immortal' as *Much Ado*? Simply because Mozart clothed it with wonderful music, which turned the worthless words and thoughts of Da Ponte into a magical human drama of moods and transitions of feeling. That is what happened in a smaller way with *Much Ado*. Shakespeare shews himself in it a common-place dramatist working on a stolen plot, but a great musician. No matter how poor, cheap, coarse and obvious the thought may be, the mood is charming, and the music of the words expresses the mood ... When a flower-girl tells a coster to hold his jaw, for nobody is listening to him, and he retorts, 'Oh, you're there are you, you beauty?' they reproduce the wit of Benedick and Beatrice exactly. But put it in this way. 'I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick; nobody marks you.' 'What! my dear Lady Disdain, are you yet living?' You are miles away from costerland at once ... There are plenty of quite second-rate writers who are abler thinkers and wits than William, though they are unable to weave his magic into the expression of their thoughts. It is not easy to knock this into the public's head, because comparatively few of Shakespeare's admirers are at all conscious that they are listening to music as they hear his phrases turn and his lines fall so fascinatingly and memorably; whilst we all, no matter how stupid we are, can understand his jokes and platitudes, and are flattered when we are told of the subtlety of the wit we have relished, and the profundity of the thought we have fathomed. Englishmen are specially susceptible to this sort of flattery, because intellectual subtlety is not their strong point.

Charles I, who as heir-apparent must have been present at the performance of *Much Ado* in 1613, wrote in his copy of the Second Folio, now at Windsor Castle, 'Benedick and Beatrice' as a second title to the play, and from that day to this the comedy is thought of in those terms. But it is in fact a very skilful piece of work. Just as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare intertwines the fairies, the lovers, and the mechanicals, using Puck and Bottom as points of contact, and just as in *Twelfth Night* he intertwines the love story with the gulling of

Malvolio, set within the conventional design of identical twins parted by shipwreck, so here he juxtaposes and entangles the merry war of Beatrice and Benedick with the romantic plot interest of Don John's determination to be a villain and Hero's rejection at the altar, as well as with the low life absurdities of the Constable and his Watch. Wit in prose, sentiment in verse, and realistic rustic farce are happily blended. Moreover variations on the same theme or device make up the harmony, as John Masefield wisely noted:

In this play Shakespeare writes of the power of report, of the thing overheard, to alter human destiny. Antonio's man, listening behind a hedge, overhears Don Pedro telling Claudio that he will woo Hero. The report of his eavesdropping conveys no notion of the truth, and leads, no doubt to a bitter moment for Hero. Borachio, hiding behind the arras, overhears the truth of the matter. The report of his eavesdropping leads to the casting off of Hero at the altar. Don John and Borachio vow to Claudio that they overheard Don Pedro making love to Hero. The report gives Claudio a bitter moment. Benedick, reporting to the same tune, intensifies the misery.

Benedick, overhearing the report of Beatrice's love for him, changes his mind about marriage. Beatrice, hearing of Benedick's love for her, changes her mind about men. Claudio, hearing Don John's report of Hero, changes his mind about his love. The watch, overhearing Borachio's report of his villainy, are able to change the tragedy to comedy. Leonato, hearing Claudio's report of Hero, is ready to cast off his child. Report is shown to be stronger than any human affection and any acquired quality, except the love of one unmarried woman for another, and that strongest of all earthly things, the fool in authority. The wisdom of Shakespeare is greater and more various than the brains of little men can imagine.

John Aubrey, the snapper up of unconsidered biographical trifles, left behind him a page of tantalising notes on Shakespeare: that he was a better actor than Ben Jonson: that he was a handsome well-shaped man, very good company and of a very ready and pleasant smooth wit; that he understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country. Aubrey also tells us that 'the Humour of the Constable in a Midsomernight's Dreame, (he means *Much Ado*), he happened to take at Grendon in Bucks which is the roade from London to Stratford, and there was living that Constable about 1642 when I first came to Oxon. Ben Jonson and he did gather Humours of men daily where ever they came'. Hazlitt, unconsciously, supplies a delightful comment on this legend:

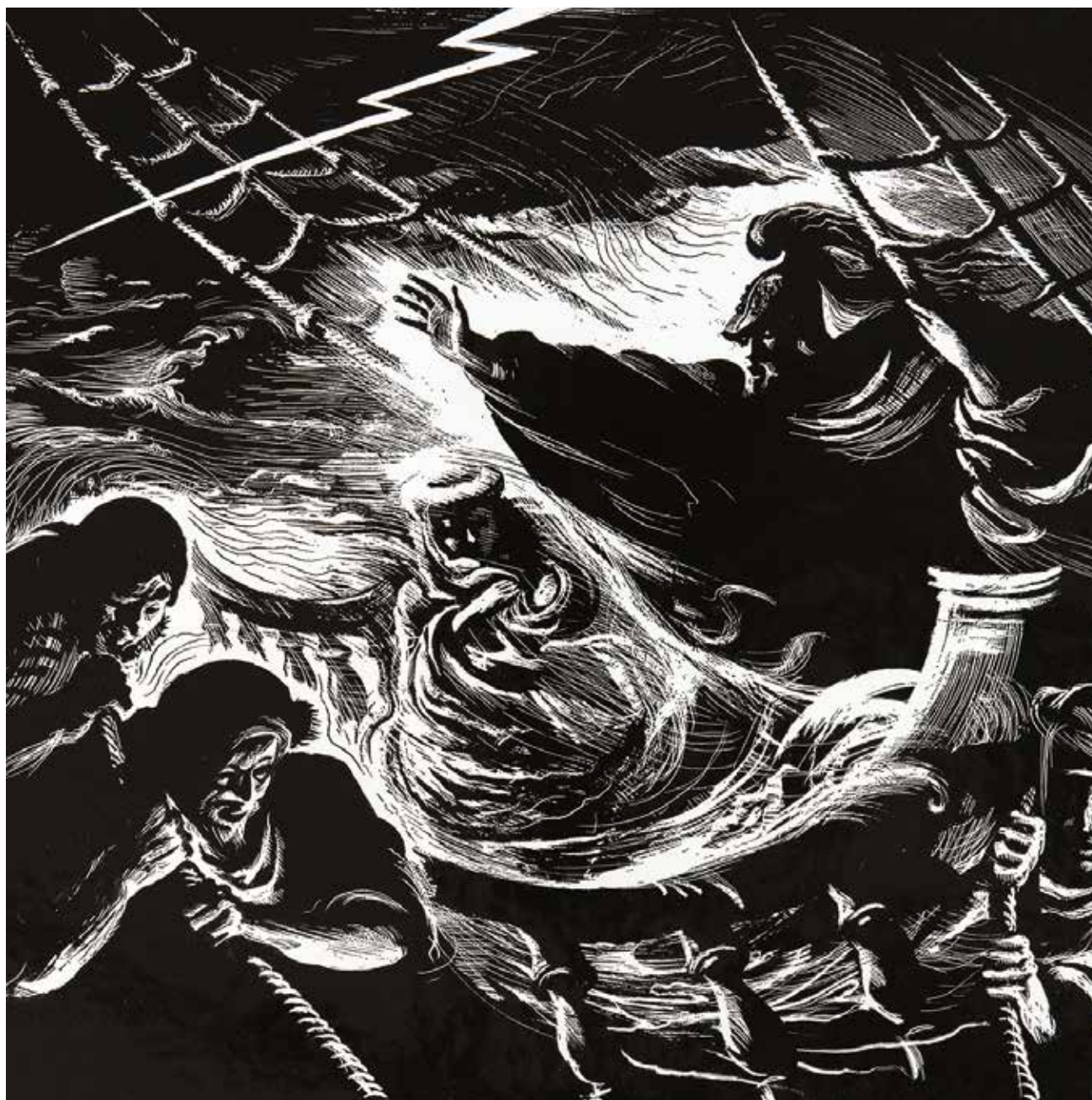
Dogberry and Verges are inimitable specimens of quaint blundering and misprisions of meaning; and are a standing record of that formal gravity of pretension and total want of common understanding, which Shakespeare no doubt copied from real life, and which in the course of two hundred years appear to have ascended from the lowest to the highest offices in the state.



John Gielgud



Peggy Ashcroft



PERICLES

CD 15 • CD 16

Antiochus - Frank Duncan • *Pericles* - William Squire • *Gower* - Tony Church • *Thaliard* - John Tydeman
Fishermen - Michael Bates, Philip Strick, Norman Mitchel • *Lychorida* - Yvonne Bonnamy • *Cleon* - David King • *Dionyza* - Margaret Rawlings
Helicanus - Denis McCarthy • *Simonides* - Michael Hordern • *Cerimon* - Peter Orr • *Diana* - Margaretta Scott • *Pandar* - Peter Woodthorpe
Boult - Patrick Wymark • *Leonine* - David Buck • *Lysimachus* - Gary Watson • *Thaisa* - Janette Richer • *Marina* - Prunella Scales
Two Gentlemen - Richard Marquand, David Jones • *Bawd* - Patsy Byrne

The scene: dispersedly in various countries

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ANTIOCHUS, King of Antioch • PERICLES, Prince of Tyre • HELICANUS, ESCANES, two lords of Tyre • SIMONIDES, King of Pentapolis
CLEON, Governor of Tharsus • LYSIMACHUS, Governor of Mytilene • CERIMON, a lord of Ephesus • THALIARD, a lord of Antioch
PHILEMON, servant to Cerimon • LEONINE, servant to Dionyza • Marshal • A Pandar • BOULT, his servant • The daughter of Antiochus
DIONYZA, wife to Cleon • THAISA, daughter to Simonides • MARINA, daughter to Pericles and Thaisa • LYCHORIDA, nurse to Marina
A Bawd • Lords, Knights, Gentlemen, Sailors, Pirates, Fishermen, and Messengers • DIANA • GOWER, as Chorus

On May 20, 1608 Edward Blount, a reputable printer, entered in the Stationers' Register, together with *Antony and Cleopatra*, 'A booke called. The booke of PERICLES prynce of Tyre' which signifies that the latter was the prompt book. A year later the play was published; not however by Edward Blount but by Henry Gosson. Blount was one of the syndicate which published the First Folio in 1623. *Pericles* is not included in it nor in the Second Folio. It first appears in the second issue of the Third Folio, 1664, in the dubious company of *Lochrine*, *Edward III*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and three other pieces in the Shakespeare 'apocrypha'. Nevertheless the play seems to have been a best-seller. Gosson's Quarto of 1609 was followed by a second in the same year and others in 1611, 1619, 1630, 1635. These title pages announce: 'The Late, And much admired Play, Called Pericles, Prince of Tyre. With the true Relation of the whole Historie, adventures and fortunes of the said Prince: As also, The no lesse strange, and worthy accidents, in the Birth and Life, of his Daughter Mariana (sic). As it hath been divers and sundry times acted by his Majesties Servants, at the Globe on the Banckside. By William Shakespeare'. Ben Jonson abuses it as a 'mouldy tale' in his *Ode to Himselfe*, but then he was smarting at the failure of *The New Inn* (1629) and there is little doubt that it was a stage success. We know that the Venetian Ambassador saw it between 1606 and 1608; that a group of players in the country performed it at Candlemas 1610 in the mansion of Sir John York; that after a great banquet and music at Whitehall in 1619 it was presented in 'the kinges greate Chamber'; and that the Master of the Revels noted on June 10, 1631 the payment of £3. 10s., 'taken upon Pericles at the Globe', 'for a gratuity for their liberty gained unto them of playinge upon the cessation of the plague'. In 1642 the theatres were closed by the Long Parliament. *Pericles* is the first Shakespeare play to be presented after that date. A bookseller and former wardrobe-keeper at Blackfriars Theatre gathered a group of men on the eve of the Restoration to act plays at the

old Cockpit theatre. Among them was Thomas Betterton, aged about 25, who was to be accounted the most eminent actor of the age, playing Pericles, Mercutio, Macbeth, Sir Toby Belch, Falstaff and Lear. Steele reports in the *Tatler* that when he played Hamlet in 1709, 'he appeared through the whole drama as a youth of great expectation, vivacity and enterprise'. Betterton was then nearly 75 years old and died the following year.

The original success of *Pericles* in 1608 inspired in the same year a novel which claimed to be 'The True History of the Play'. The author was George Wilkins, playwright and pamphleteer, associated with the King's Players, and believed by some to have collaborated with Shakespeare on this occasion. How much of the play did Shakespeare write? The first Act tells of the incestuous King Antiochus, of the solving of the riddle by Pericles, of his flight and arrival at famine-stricken Tharsus, whence he flies once more from the minions of Antiochus, only to be wrecked at sea. These four scenes are workmanlike and quite effective in the dramatic style of an earlier date, weighed down with a large number of rhymed couplets. No. one is over-eager to credit Shakespeare with them, except for two and a half lines whose different flavour takes us by surprise:

The blind mole casts
Copped hills towards heaven, to tell the earth is thronged
By man's oppression; and the poor worm doth die for't.

Then with Act II, 'Enter Pericles, wet' and diction and verse seem to stir and shake off slumber:

Yet cease your ire, you angry stars of heaven!
Wind, rain, and thunder, remember, earthly man
Is but a substance that must yield to you;
And I, as fits my nature, do obey you.

Three lively and genial fishermen (whose jokes may have been borrowed from the dramatist John Day) interrupt the Prince's meditations and until the end of the Act (in which he wins Thaisa) we cannot help feeling that Shakespeare is somewhere about, albeit an immature Shakespeare. Some allowance is to be made for the imperfections of the text but the couplet which concludes the Act is unashamedly pedestrian:

It pleaseth me so well, that I will see you wed;
And then, with what haste you can, get you to bed.

With the departure of Pericles, however, from Pentapolis, doubts and reservations vanish. 'When the storm breaks upon us,' wrote Swinburne, 'with the opening of the third act we know where we are. We are in the very heaven of heavens to which none can be admitted save by the grace of the greatest among poets.'

Thou god of this great vast, rebuke these surges,
Which wash both heaven and hell; and thou that hast
Upon the winds command, bind them in brass,
Having call'd them from the deep! O, still
Thy deaf'ning dreadful thunders; gently quench
Thy nimble sulphurous flashes! O, how, Lychorida,
How does my queen? Thou stormest venomously:
Wilt thou spit all thyself? The seaman's whistle
Is as a whisper in the ears of death,
Unheard.

Swinburne dwells on the splendid prodigality which Shakespeare has lavished on the lament of Pericles over Thaisa. 'Every verse clings and rings in the ear for ever.' Certainly the following lines can hold their own with the most delicate and moving moments in the final romances:

A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear;
No light, no fire: th' unfriendly elements
Forgot thee utterly; nor have I time
To give thee hallowed to thy grave, but straight
Must cast thee, scarcely confined, in the ooze;
Where, for a monument upon thy bones,
And e'er-remaining lamps, the belching whale
And humming water must o'erwhelm thy corpse,
Lying with simple shells.

We should like to think that this verbal music and emotion were a latent inspirer of some lines in Milton's Monody on the friend and poet, drowned ere his prime :

Ay me ! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas
Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurld,
Whether beyond the stormy *Hebrides*
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world...

And then the fourth Act brings us Marina, whose utterance, slight though the part is, is recognisably that of Imogen, Perdita and Miranda. As Imogen is enhanced by the beastliness of Cloten and Miranda by that of Caliban, so the beauty and truth of Marina shine forth in the sty where 'Diseases have been sold dearer than physic'. The brothel-keepers Boulton, Pandar and the Bawd reveal the hand which created the incorrigible Pompey and Mistress Overdone and Tearsheet.

The Adventures of Pericles had been a popular tale for many centuries. Based ultimately, as we may guess, on a late Greek romance, the first version known to us is in Latin of the fifth or sixth century. But it was translated into many languages. Shakespeare read it in Book viii of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, printed by Caxton in 1483, and also in Laurence Twine's *Pattern of Paynfull Adventures*, registered in 1576. The latter only survives in an undated edition and a reprint of 1607. John Gower is the 'moral Gower' to whom with the eminent philosopher, Ralph Strode, Chaucer commends his pagan romance, *Troilus and Criseyde*. The mediæval moralist – and very moral he looks in the woodcut on the title page of Wilkins's novel – is the narrator of the play and a recent editor suggests that this tale of romantic adventure is in the tradition of the Miracle plays and has many mediæval affinities in its theme and structure. F.D. Hoeniger compares it with the Digby play of Mary Magdalene. This, like *Pericles*, falls into two parts, beginning with the tyranny of the Emperor Tiberius under whom Satan reigns supreme, and ending with a voyage and storm at sea when the Queen of Marseilles dies in giving birth to a child. The ship's crew demand that she be marooned upon a rock. The King reaches the Holy Land and is baptised by Peter. As he sails home he finds the babe unharmed. His wife, waking from a trance, is miraculously restored to life; and on their safe return they give joyful thanks to Mary Magdalene. The *Odyssey* is the great original of all travellers' tales of adventure and endurance and trial. In the middle ages these became Christianised as pilgrimages of the soul, and Virgil and Ovid were transmuted into allegory. But with the renaissance the old potency is revived, the romantic flavour renewed. Mediterranean sunshine steals into the northern monastic cell. By letting moral Gower, the friend of Chaucer, tell his own tale with gentle garrulity, Shakespeare blends the elements of different ages and cultures. The History, Adventures and Fortunes of Pericles, Prince of Tyre, as it hath been divers and sundry times acted at the Globe, is a precious medal hanging from a long slender chain of tradition. Yet *Pericles* is essentially Shakespearian. Here for the first time he employs romance and fairy tale for the expression of spiritual truths. *Pericles* is followed by *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. They are the aftermath of *King Lear*. They spring from the restoration of Lear to his daughter, their reconciliation and mutual forgiveness. Wisdom and compassion are the reward of purgatory. The same symbols and images recur; of storm and tempest, of the animal kingdom, of flowers and the fertility of nature. Music is at once healing and mystical. For there are always moments of mystery in these final romances. There is a divinity that shapes the ends of the *dramatis personae*. Wrongs done in one generation are righted and pardoned in the next. The stern lesson in *Lear*,

The gods are just and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us

becomes in *The Tempest*,

Look down, you gods,
And on this couple drop a blessèd crown;
For it is you that have chalk'd forth the way
That brought us hither.

The last Act of *Pericles* is the foretaste and harbinger of Shakespeare's final period. When Pericles is restored to life by Marina's beauty and truth, and that which was lost is found, he cries to his Thaisa, supposed drowned:

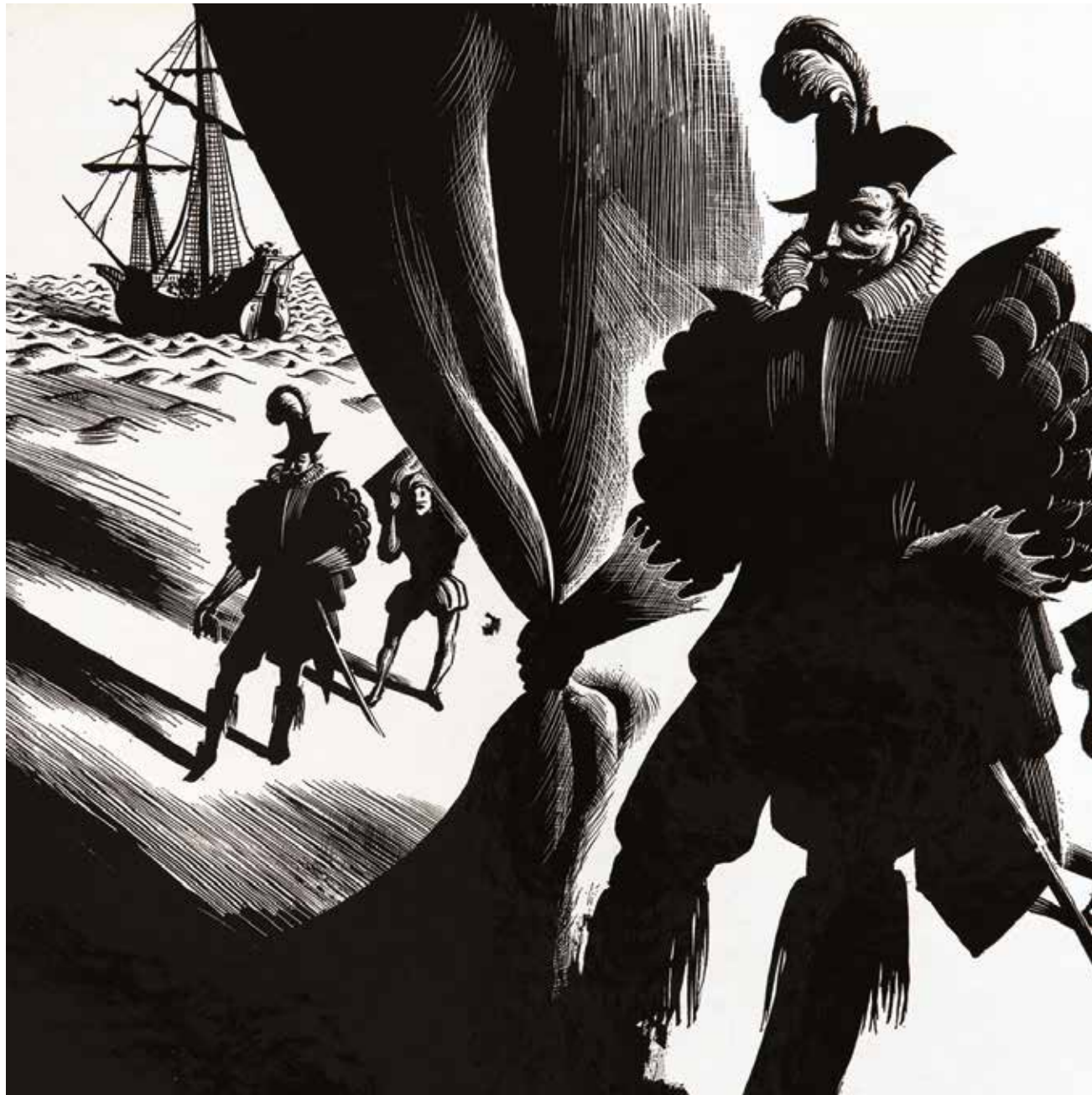
No more, you gods! Your present kindness
Makes my past miseries sport. You shall do well
That on the touching of her lips I may
Melt and no more be seen. O come be buried
A second time within these arms !

And Marina speaks to the mother she has never known:

My heart
Leaps to be gone into my mother's bosom.

Might she not be answered in the words of Hermione?

You gods, look down
And from your sacred vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter's head. Tell me, mine own,
Where hast thou been preserv'd: where liv'd? How found
Thy father's court?



THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

CD 17 • CD 18

Solinus - Denis McCarthy • *Aegeon* - Michael Hordern • *Antipholus of Ephesus* - George Rylands • *Antipholus of Syracuse* - George Rylands
Dromio of Ephesus - Michael Bates • *Dromio of Syracuse* - Michael Bates • *Balthazar* - Peter Orr • *Angelo* - Clive Swift
A Merchant - Terrence Hardiman • *Doctor Pinch* - Dudley Jones • *Aemilia* - Lally Bowers • *Adriana* - Joan Hart • *Luciana* - Janette Richer
Luce or Nell - Janette Richer • *A Courtesan* - Prunella Scales

The scene: Ephesus

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

SOLINUS, Duke of Ephesus • ÆGEON, a merchant of Syracuse • ANTIPHOLUS of Ephesus, ANTIPHOLUS of Syracuse, twin brothers and sons to Ægeon and Æmelia • DROMIO of Ephesus, DROMIO of Syracuse, twin brothers and bondmen to the two Antipholuses
BALTHAZAR • ANGELO, a goldsmith • A Merchant, friend to Antipholus of Syracuse • Another Merchant, to whom Angelo is in debt
DOCTOR PINCH, a schoolmaster • ÆMILIA, an abbess at Ephesus, wife to Ægeon • ADRIANA, wife to Antipholus of Ephesus
LUCIANA, her sister • LUCE, or NELL, kitchen-maid to Adriana • A Courtesan • Gaoler, officers, and other attendants

Here is Shakespeare's first comedy – virtually his first play; for the three parts of *King Henry VI* are apprentice work, rough-hewn segments of traditional chronicle drama. It was presented at Gray's Inn on 28 December 1594 but may well have been written several years earlier. Shakespeare has adapted a Latin comedy which he had conned perhaps at Stratford Grammar School, the *Menaechmi* of Plautus. Schoolmasters may have favoured it, since a translation, printed in 1595, describes it on the title-page as 'A pleasant and fine conceited Comedie, taken out of the most excellent wittie Poet Plautus. Chosen purposely from all the rest, as least harmefull, and yet most delightfull'. Plautus has one pair of identical twins. Shakespeare goes one better, so that confusion may be twice confounded, and matches the two masters with twin servants. As a piece of sheer plotting it is as neat, intricate and ingenious as an algebraic equation, a Chinese puzzle, or a chiming French clock. In a bustling hour and a quarter of chance encounters, absurd blunders and improbable misunderstandings the cat's cradle of situations is intertwined, manipulated and disentangled. Plautus is a skilful theatrical craftsman but, as John Masefield says, his comedy is heartless. 'Shakespeare, in bringing it out of the Satanic kingdom of comedy into the charities of a larger system, shows for the first time a real largeness of dramatic instinct. In his handling of the tricky ingenious plot he achieves (what, perhaps, he wrote the play to get) a dextrous, certain play of mind. He strikes the ringing note, time after time. It cannot be said that the verse, or the sense of character, or the invention is better than in the other early plays. It is not. The play is on a lower plane than any other of his works. It is the only Shakesperian play without a deep philosophical idea... It is also the first play that shows a fine sustained power of dramatic construction... The closeness and firmness of the dramatic texture is the work of an acutely clear mind driven at white heat and mercilessly judged at each step.'

In a full length analysis and evaluation of Shakespearian comedy the late Professor H. B. Charlton has shown how the sixteenth century reader hankered after a more romantic element than the grossness and realism of Roman comedy supplied. In the *Menaechmi* there are 'a virago of a wife, a thickskinned husband and a common courtesan who deal with each other in the coarser way of earthy trafficking'. Shakespeare softens the harshness and crudity of this Hogarthian world by the introduction of the bereaved father, old Aegeon, the gentle Luciana and the passionate Adriana. Within the chrysalis of his Roman original we feel the stirring of sentiment and emotion which will later be released in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. The opening scene, not unlike a Euripidean Prologue, presents a forlorn old man

whom the fates have marked
To bear the extremity of dire mishap,

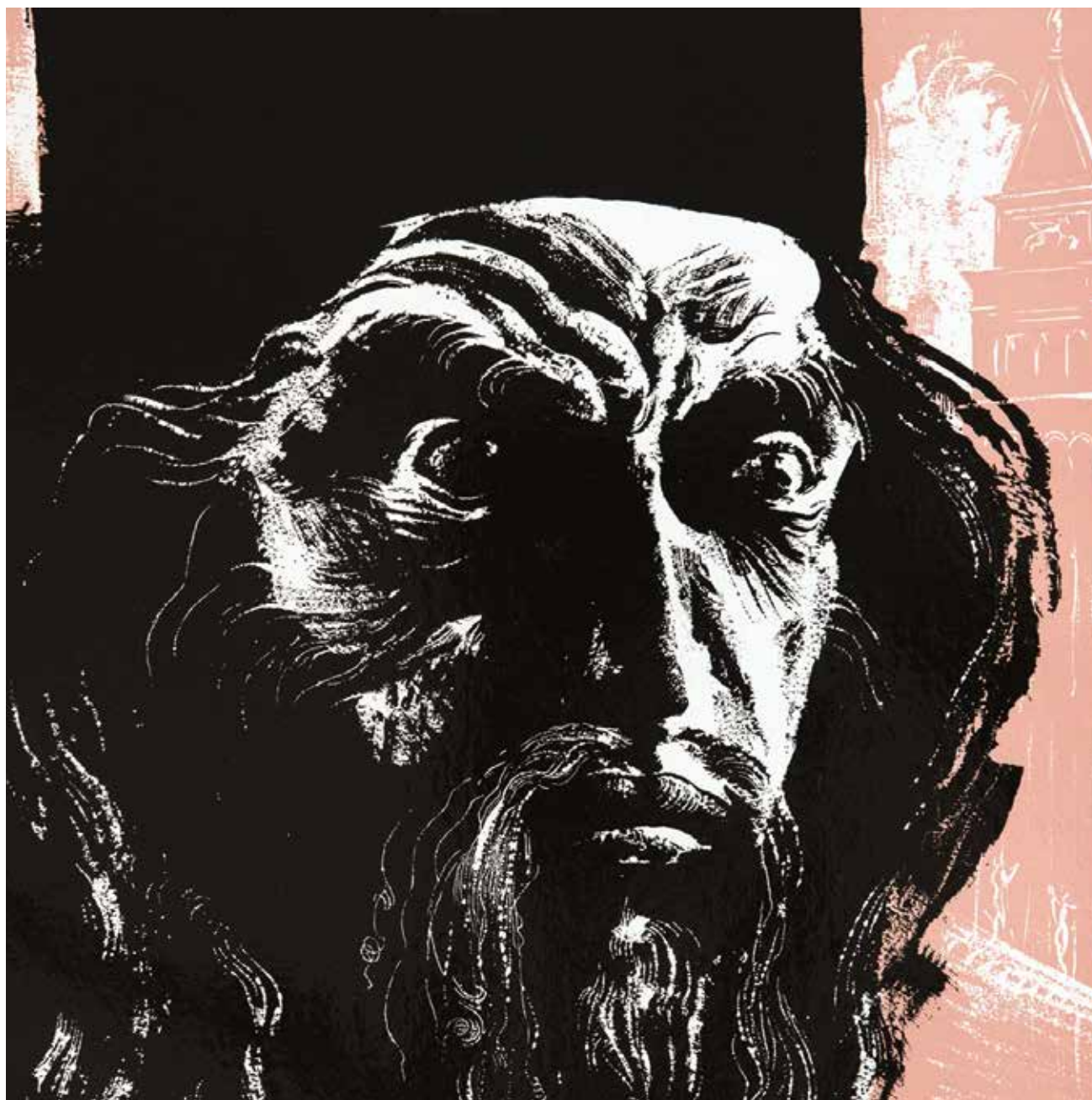
facing a sentence of execution. The dramatic narrative in which he unfolds the tragic chances of his life is remarkable for its directness and simplicity. Shakespeare's mastery of a functional blank verse, or heightened prose, is very far removed from the over-elaborate ornament of *Venus and Adonis* and the rhetorical hyperbole of *The Rape of Lucrece*, composed at about the same time or perhaps earlier. He experiments in various rhythms and rhyme schemes in the play. Remarkably easy 'and natural are the quatrains in which Luciana reasons with Antipholus in III.2. Masfield praises Adriana's speech in II.2 against the obsession of passion leading to treachery in marriage, as the most deeply felt speech in the early plays. Such a passage looks forward to the noble utterance of Katharine at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and in the following lines we realise that Shakespeare is composing for the ear, not for the eye. He is listening to the speaking voice.

Ay, ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown,
Some other mistress hath thy sweet aspects:
I am not Adriana, nor thy wife...
The time was once, when thou -unurged wouldst vow
That never words were music to thine ear,
That never object pleasing in this eye,
That never touch well welcome to thy hand,
That never meat sweet-savoured in thy taste,
Unless I spake, looked, touched, or carved to thee...
How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
That thou art then estrangèd from thyself?
Thy self I call it, being strange to me...
That, undividable, incorporate,
Am better than thy dear self's better part...

Ah, do not tear away thyself from me;
For know, my love... as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unringled thence that drop again,
Without addition, or diminishing,
As take from me thyself and not me too...

This natural style, without affectation yet sufficiently heightened to 'tell' in the theatre is rare in Shakespeare's earlier work. He comes back to it in parts of *The Merchant of Venice* and it serves him well, with subtle differences and a more artful simplicity, when he thinks fit, in *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *Othello*.

'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, saith the Preacher: and there is no new thing under the sun.' In 321 BC Menander, 'Star' of the New Greek Comedy – he had affinities with Shakespeare – wrote the first of more than a hundred plays. Plautus a century later translates and adapts Menander. Then after eighteen hundred years Shakespeare makes his debut as a comedian with a version of the *Menaechmi*. And today *The Comedy of Errors* is not infrequently revived. It proved to be one of the two memorable productions at Stratford in 1962. An unaffected, close-knit, brief and speedy piece of theatrical craftsmanship, it is a challenge to the fancy and the wits of an expert director and designer. In 1819 Frederic Reynolds made it into an opera. In our own day it has more than once been transmogrified into a 'musical'. We can imagine a talented choreographer giving the centuries-old farce a new lease of life in terms of ballet and mime. With all its naivety *The Comedy of Errors* shows us that Shakespeare was a professional who very quickly learnt his job. We must not be put off by the verbal fooling, the music-hall patter of a far distant day. Shakespeare can plot; he can write for the speaking voice; he can throw off a minor oddity such as conjurer Pinch, 'a mere anatomy'. And at the beginning and end of the play he can touch the heart with the grief of the bereaved father of two goodly sons and the joy of their restoration.



THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

CD 19 • CD 20

The Duke of Venice - Donald Beves • *The Prince of Morocco* - John Barton • *The Prince of Arragon* - Toby Robertson
Antonio - George Rylands • *Bassanio* - Gary Watson • *Gratiano* - Anthony Jacobs • *Solanio* - Gerald Mosback
Salerio - Derek Jacobi • *Lorenzo* - Richard Marquand • *Shylock* - Tony Church • *Tubal* - Clive Swift
Lancelot Gobbo - Michael Bates • *Old Gobbo* - Terrence Hardiman • *Balthazar* - Christopher Renard
Stephano - John Tracy-Phillips • *Portia* - Margaretta Scott • *Nerissa* - Christine Baker • *Jessica* - Janette Richer

‘The Play itself, take it all together, seems to me to be one of the most finish’d of any of Shakespeare’s. The Tale indeed, in that part relating to the Caskets, and the extravagant and unusual kind of Bond given by Antonio, is a little too much remov’d from the Rules of Probability: But taking the Fact for granted, we must allow it to be very beautifully written. There is something in the friendship of Antonio to Bassanio very Great, Generous and Tender. The whole fourth Act, supposing, as I said, the Fact to be probable, is extremely fine. But there are two passages that deserve a particular notice. The first is, what Portia says in praise of Mercy, and the other on the Power of Musick.’ So writes Shakespeare’s very first editor, Nicholas Rowe, sagaciously and sensitively, in 1709. Samuel Johnson echoed him and noted also the evenness and easiness of the style. Familiarity with *The Merchant of Venice*, as a school play both in performance and in the examination room, has bred some scorn among the supercilious. But the comedy, written about the year 1596 – in the same year perhaps as that odd-man-out among the Histories, *King John* – shows Shakespeare as a master of his craft after five years’ apprenticeship. It has always been and always will be admirable ‘theatre’. But when we look back on Shakespeare’s previous experiments and tentative successes we must feel that in *The Merchant of Venice* he has arrived. The handling of the well-worn themes and situations of traditional romance, the blending of sunshine and shadow, the unity in variety, and the naturalness of expression all go to show that he knows exactly what he is doing. The versification and diction are breaking free – for example in the first encounter between Antonio and Shylock, in Portia’s direct avowal of her love for Bassanio, and throughout the trial scene. The speech beginning

It is enacted in the laws of Venice,
If it be proved against an alien,
That by direct or indirect attempts
He seek the life of any citizen ...

runs as fluently as prose. And how excellent the prose is too; whether it be the dialogue between Portia and Nerissa, or the interchanges between Lancelot and Old Gobbo, or the more passionate colloquy of Shylock and Tubal, enclosing the great plea and protest for Jewry, no less memorable in prose than Portia’s plea for mercy is in verse.

The play unfolds itself in the first Act with transcendent skill. Antonio, whose part is small, is at once created by contrast with the pleasure-loving loquacious young Venetians – Gratiano in particular whose personality is established in less than two minutes. Bassanio, left alone with Antonio, reveals his temperament in self-confession, as Antonio has already done, and we appreciate the dependence of the younger, and the devotion of the elder, friend. Before the scene closes we have news of the heiress of Belmont and her renowned suitors, with whom Bassanio would fain compete, which leads to the creation of Portia in the second scene. Shakespeare had roughed out just a scene between Julia and Lucetta in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. This is the finished article. Portia's light-heartedness balances Antonio's melancholy. Yet she is mature and shrewd. Moreover we learn about the lottery of the caskets and Portia's determination to abide by her father's will. The third and last scene in the Act brilliantly delineates Shylock and is crowned by the fatal decision to seal a merry bond. The first Act is perfect in its kind, just as the last Act is perfect in its (so different) kind. The former shows the playwright, the latter the poet, each completely at his ease. Then Shakespeare, very wisely, opens the second Act with 'a tawny Moor all in white', a Prince whose complexion wears 'the livery of the burnished sun', and whose scimitar has slain the Sophy and a Persian Prince. This strikes the note of romance and fairy tale which the casket theme demands. The Moor's nobility and splendid rhetoric look back to Christopher Marlowe, whose rhythms he echoes in Act II scene 7; they look on to Othello. Then, for vigorous contrast and to encourage the groundlings, Shakespeare in his next scene introduces the Clown and his sand-blind father. The return of Gratiana, begging to accompany Bassanio to Belmont, where in due course he will win Nerissa, ends with the naming of Lorenzo, whose abduction of Jessica, supplies the last knot in the pattern of the embroidery. One last example of the dramatist's conscious artistry – no need to praise the trial scene which Hazlitt thought a surpassing masterpiece of dramatic skill – is the variations on the exchange of rings. The betrothal is sealed in all solemnity by Portia's giving of the ring and Bassanio's oath. The theme returns, as the trial scene closes, *allegro vivace*, to give the plot a twist and to effect a lowering of tension and a change of mood. Then after the lyrical, musical interlude of the last Act it supplies, *con brio*, exactly the denouement that we need.

Had Rowe and Johnson been more men of the theatre they might have noted that Shakespeare provides his players with admirable parts. Portia is his first full-length, life-size heroine of comedy. Bassanio has been cruelly maligned. Heine calls him a fortune-hunter, and Lorenzo a receiver of stolen goods, and Antonio a bankrupt weakling. But, as Professor C.S. Lewis says in his illuminating lecture, 'Hamlet the Prince or the Poem?' 'When the hero marries the Princess we are not expected to ask whether her wealth, her beauty or her rank are the determining factor. They are all blended together in the simple man's conception of Princess'. All too often we allow the character criticism of the nineteenth century to stand between ourselves and our enjoyment. In Horatio's words: 'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so'.

By the same token, Shylock is, in a sense, the ogre essential to true fairy tale, although a transformation and humanisation of Marlowe's Jew of Malta, at once savage and farcical. Shylock's stage history is curious. Richard Burbage is said to have played him originally – in a red wig. In the early eighteenth century an adapted, mutilated version of the play held the stage, and the part was played by popular comedians. When Shakespeare's play was restored in 1741 at Drury Lane, Macklin played it in the grand style; cunning, malevolent and fierce. His last appearance was nearly fifty years later when he may have been 99. By then John Philip Kemble was playing it, with his sister Mrs Siddons as Portia. Then in 1814 a shabby little strolling player, in a scrubby black wig instead of the traditional red, made his debut before a meagre audience at Drury Lane and thereafter carried London by storm. It was Edmund Kean. The noble and tragic conception of the Jew was first hinted perhaps by William Macready. Henry Irving excelled in this interpretation, in long brown gaberdine and black cap with a yellow line around it. He played it as an aristocrat of ancient race and religion. But Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare's first editor, with whom we began, had sensed the possibilities. 'Tho' we have seen the Play receiv'd and acted as a Comedy, and the part of the Jew performed by an Excellent Comedian, yet I cannot but think it was design'd Tragically by the Author. There appears in it such a deadly Spirit of Revenge, such a savage Fierceness and Fellness, and such a bloody designation of Cruelty and Mischief, as cannot agree either with the style or character of Comedy.



THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

CD 21 • CD 22

Sir John Falstaff - Patrick Wymark • *Fenton* - Peter Orr • *Robert Shallow* - Terrence Hardiman • *Abraham Slender* - Gordon Gardner
Frank Ford - Frank Duncan • *William Page* - Anthony Arlidge • *Sir Hugh Evans* - Dudley Jones • *Doctor Caius* - Roy Dotrice
The Host of Garter Inn - David Buck • *Bardolph* - Anthony Handy • *Pistol* - Tony Church • *Nym* - Philip Strick • *Robin* - Freda Dowie
Simple - Norman Mitchell • *John Rugby* - Raymond Clarke • *Mistress Ford* - Geraldine McEwan • *Mistress Page* - Angela Baddeley
Anne Page - Susan Maryott • *Mistress Quickly* - Beatrix Lehmann

Scene: Windsor

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF • FENTON, a young gentleman • ROBERT SHALLOW, a country justice • ABRAHAM SLENDER, his wise cousin
FRANK FORD, GEORGE PAGE, two citizens of Windsor • WILLIAM PAGE, a boy, son to Master Page • SIR HUGH EVANS, a Welsh Parson
DOCTOR CAIUS, a French physician • The Host of Garter Inn • BARDOLPH, PISTOL, NYM, irregular humorists, followers of Falstaff
ROBIN, page to Falstaff • SIMPLE, servant to Slender • JOHN RUGBY, servant to Doctor Caius JOHN, ROBERT, servants to Master Ford
MISTRESS FORD, MISTRESS PAGE, the merry wives • ANNE PAGE, her daughter, beloved of Fenton
MISTRESS QUICKLY, servant to Doctor Caius

‘If you be not cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katharine of France; where (for anything I know) Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a’ be killed with your hard opinions’.

The promise made in the epilogue to *Henry IV Part 2* was only half fulfilled. Conscience-less warlike Harry had killed the heart of the fat Knight. There was no place for him on the field of Agincourt. ‘Die he must’, as Maurice Morgann concludes in his admirable – according to Mr Boswell ‘ingenious’ – *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Falstaff* (1777). ‘Die, it seems, he must, in one form or another, and a sweat would have been no unsuitable catastrophe. However we have reason to be satisfied as it is; his death was worthy of his birth and of his life: “He was born,” he says, “about three o’clock in the afternoon with a white head, and something a round belly”. But if he came into the world in the evening with these marks of age, he departs out of it in the morning in all the follies and vanities of youth’. Perhaps the groundlings, however loudly they cheered the patriotic sentiments of Henry V and England and St George, felt themselves cheated; and we joyfully accept the tradition, recorded by Nicholas Rowe in his edition of 1709, that the Queen herself ‘was so well pleas’d with that admirable character of Falstaff, in the two Parts of *Henry the Fourth*, that she commanded him to continue it for one Play more, and to shew him in love’. Shakespeare knocked up a very bourgeois, English comedy in less than a fortnight. It has held the stage ever since.

The Quarto of 1602 records that 'A Most pleasaunt and excellent conceited Comedie, of Syr John Falstaffe, and the merrie Wives of Windsor Entermixed with sundrie variable and pleasing humors, of Syr Hugh the Welch Knight, Justice Shallow, and his wise Cousin M. Slender. With the swaggering vaine of Auncient Pistoll, and Corporall Nym, hath bene divers times Acted by the right Honorable my Lord Chamberlaines servants. Both before her Majestie, and else-where.' We know from the Revels Accounts that it was played in 1604. Charles I and Henrietta Maria attended a performance in 1638. Pepys saw it in 1660, in 1661, and in 1667; but he has not a good word for it on any occasion. Among the great actors who have played Sir John are Betterton and Quin, Henderson and Cooke, Phelps and Beerbohm Tree. The Wives include Mrs Bracegirdle and Mrs Barry, Peg Woffington and Mrs Pritchard, Mrs Charles Kean and Mrs Keeley, Ellen Terry and Madge Kendal, and (last of the old Shakespearian tradition) Irene and Violet Vanbrugh, who gave an astonishingly spirited performance in their declining years, with Donald Wolfit as Sir John. When Samuel Phelps ('who made Shakespeare pay') produced the comedy in 1874, Anne Page warbled a song with words by Swinburne and music by Sullivan; an innovation of which the audience heartily disapproved. If the operatic version by the prolific Frederic Reynolds at Drury Lane in 1824, with the incomparable Vestris in the cast, was a dubious success, we rejoice that Shakespeare's *Merry Wives* was to inspire Verdi's masterpiece in this kind nearly seventy years later.

There are many plays in the Folio to which the most devoted readers of Shakespeare seldom turn but which are animated and diverting in the theatre. Humour, character and nature abound in *The Merry Wives*, although we may feel, with Hazlitt, that we should like it better if any one but Falstaff were the hero. That the unblushing jester who triumphs in the frolic at Gadshill, who swears that he fought Harry Percy 'a long hour by the Shrewsbury clock', who fiddles the recruiting lists and drinks the Justices under the table, should be disguised as the fat woman of Brentford, crammed into a buckbasket of greasy linen, thrown into the Thames hissing-hot as a horse-shoe, crowned with stag's horns and pinched by schoolboys, this is indeed 'intolerable and not to be endured', as Sir John recognises. 'Have I laid my brain in the sun, and dried it that it wants matter to prevent so gross oe'r-reaching as this? Am I ridden with a Welsh goat too? 'Tis time I was chok'd with a piece of toasted cheese ... Have I liv'd to stand at the taunt of one that makes fritters of English? This is enough to be the decay of lust and late-walking through the realm'. We know that voice. And it is the old Falstaff who when offered eggs with his sack roars, 'I'll no pullet-sperm in my brewage'; who confesses after his dousing, 'I have a kind of alacrity in sinking'; and who with aesthetic detachment notes that 'the water swells a man; and what a thing should I have been when I had been swell'd. I should have been a mountain of mummy'.

The genuine Falstaffian idiom is intermittent; it comes and goes; and if the loquacity of Mistress Quickly is 'not as inimitable as in *Henry IV*, yet we should be sorry to lose her comments on John Rugby, her fellow servant: 'An honest, willing, kind fellow, as ever servant shall come in house withal: and, I warrant you, no tell-tale nor no breed-bate: his worst fault is, that he is given to prayer; he is something peevish that way: but nobody but has his fault: but let that pass'. Hazlitt, with his usual discrimination, picks upon the passage; and it is Hazlitt who finds out the most Shakespearian creation in the comedy:

Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol, are but the shadows of what they were; and Justice Shallow himself has little of his consequence left. But his cousin, Slender, makes up for the deficiency. He is a very potent piece of imbecility. In him the pretensions of the worthy Gloucestershire family are well kept up, and immortalised. He and his friend Sackerson, and his book of songs, and his love of Anne Page, and his having nothing to say to her, can never be forgotten. It is the only first-rate character in the play. Shakespeare is the only writer who was as great in describing weakness as strength.

The most original reflection on the play was made more than fifty years ago by John Masfield. He accepts it as a piece dashed off in haste to suit the Tudor sense of humour, the work of the abundant instinctive self working in the high spirits that so often come with the excitement of hurry. (We may recall that Noel Coward dashed off the draft of his most brilliant comedy, *Blithe Spirit*, in a matter of days.) But Masfield goes on to suggest that Shakespeare may have composed it at a point of achievement that is always a critical point to imaginative men, when the personality is exhausted:

He had worked out his natural instincts, the life known to him, his predilections, his reading. He had found a channel in which his thoughts could express themselves. Writing was no longer so pleasant to him as it had been. He had done an incredible amount of work in a few years. The personality was worn to a husk. It may be that a very little would have kept him on this side of the line, writing imitations of what he had already done. He was at the critical moment which separates the contemplative from the visionary, the good from the excellent, the great from the supreme. All writers, according to their power, come to this point. Very few have the fortune to get beyond it. Shakespeare's mind stood still for a moment in this play ... before it went on triumphant to the supreme plays.



THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

CD 23 • CD 24

A Lord - Frank Duncan • *Christopher Sly* - Tony Church • *A Hostess* - Beatrix Lehmann • *Baptista* - V.C. Clinton-Baddeley
Vincentio - Dudley Jones • *Lucentio* - Peter Orr • *Petruchio* - Derek Godfrey • *Gremio* - Donald Layne Smith • *Hortensio* - David King
Tranio - Gordon Gardner • *Biondello* - Philip Strick • *Grumio* - Michael Bates • *Katharina* - Peggy Ashcroft • *Bianca* - Janette Richer
A Widow - Freda Dowie

Scene: Padua, and Petruchio's house in the country

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

(a) The Induction,

A Lord • CHRISTOPHER SLY, a drunken tinker • A Hostess • Page, players, huntsmen, and servants attending on the Lord

(b) The Taming of the Shrew

BAPTISTA, a rich gentleman of Padua • VINCENTIO, an old gentleman of Pisa • LUCENTIO, son to Vincentio, in love with Bianca
PETRUCHIO, a gentleman of Verona, suitor to Katharina • GREMIO, HORTENSIO suitors to Bianca • TRANIO, BLONDELLO, a boy,
servants to Lucentio • GRUMIO, a man of small stature, Petruchio's lackey • CURTIS, an aged serving-man, in charge of Petruchio's
house in the country • NATHANIEL, PHILIP, JOSEPH, NICHOLAS, PETER, other servants to Petruchio • A Pedant of Mantua
KATHARINA, the Shrew, BIANCA, daughters to Baptista • A Widow • Tailor, haberdasher, and servants attending on Baptista and Petruchio

'Mr Benson, whom nothing seems to tire, played Richard II on Saturday afternoon and Petruchio in the evening. Of the latter one need not at this time of day say much. It is unconventional, and in that sense contentious; when it was seen in London ten years ago those of the critics who hold a brief for the conventions of the moment were scandalised at the notion that anything Shakesperian could be played in a vein so boisterous. By this time one would hope that Mr Benson must have brought it home to everybody that the play is itself a roaring extravaganza, only to be carried off at all upon the stage by a sustained rush of high spirits that leaves no time to think... Mr Benson's gusty and tearing Petruchio, with a lyrical touch of romance in the voice and look here and there... strikes us as not only the best Petruchio we have seen but the only reading of the part that will hold water... It does one good to see a play so well understood and so courageously and consistently played on that understanding. It was played with infinite zest and spirit on Saturday night to a very full house, which it kept in almost continuous laughter.'

The critic is the gifted C.E. Montague, the place Manchester, the date December 1899. F.R. Benson (1858–1939) was at once the last of the old actor-managers and the prototype of the undergraduate actor – an all-round athlete, winner of the three-mile race against Cambridge, he also played Clytemnestra in the hall of Balliol College in 1880 – the first to make a name on the professional stage. He was the Paris in Irving's *Romeo and Juliet* two years after going down. His repertory company was the nursery of Shakespearian actors for over fifty years and he still led them when he was 70. Max Beerbohm mocks a little mercilessly at Benson and his team, who batted and bowled in the afternoons and uttered blank verse in the evenings in tones more gentlemanly than when Crummies played. We are surprised to learn from Montague that London had been scandalised by a boisterous interpretation of Shakespeare's *Shrew*. But then London had hardly ever seen the real thing. For over a hundred years Garrick's potted version in three acts, *Catharine and Petruchio*, held the stage and was so popular an after-piece that Beerbohm Tree revived it as a curiosity in 1897. In Bernard Shaw's words: 'He calmly proposes to insult us by offering us Garrick's puerile and horribly caddish knockabout farce; but Mr Tree, like all romantic actors, is incorrigible on the subject of Shakespeare'.

Garrick's farce, in verse, was however a deal truer to his original than the piece which Samuel Pepys saw in 1667: 'The Tameing of a Shrew, which hath some very good pieces in it, but generally is but a mean play; and the best part, Sawny, done by Lacy, hath not half its life, by reason of the words, I suppose, not being understood, at least by me'. *Sauny the Scott* (he is Shakespeare's Grumio) was written by John Lacy (the original actor of Bayes in *The Rehearsal*), in prose. He introduces a bedroom scene in which Sauny has to undress the Shrew and makes Petruchio force her to smoke a pipe, to agree she has a toothache and send for a barber to draw the tooth, to vow she is dead and send for a bier and funeral procession. On this highly popular travesty, which held the stage until Garrick's version, was founded a ballad-farce with songs, in two acts, *A Cure for a Scold*, acted at Drury Lane in 1735. Similarly Frederic Reynolds turned Garrick's version into an opera, with overture by Rossini and songs gathered from the whole Shakespeare canon, set to music by the tenor, John Braham, who played Hortensio. As we trace out the stage history of Shakespeare's comedy, we are tempted to adapt the words of Madame Roland: 'O Shakespeare! What crimes have been committed in thy name!' However, Shakespeare, like his own Barnardine, defies all who fetter, torture and would execute him: 'I swear I will not die today for any man's persuasion'.

The comedy, as Shakespeare wrote it, was revived, Induction and all, by J.R. Planché in 1844; revived, which is more, in the Elizabethan manner, fifty years before William Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society. Sly and his companions were on stage throughout. At the beginning of each scene one of the troupe of actors hung up a placard denoting the place in which the action was to be represented. The players in the Induction were made up to resemble Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Tarlton. A drop-scene depicted Elizabethan London and the Globe.

If Planché was as great an improvement on Garrick as *Catharine and Petruchio* was on *Sauny the Scott*, yet the most profound realisation of the play came, not from Benson's Petruchio, as Montague suggests, but, surprisingly, from a troupe of American actors, who delighted London in the late 'eighties with a series of old-fashioned rip-roaring farces, adapted by the manager, Mr Daly, from the German into the American. To the misgiving of their admirers *The Taming of the Shrew* was announced and the late Graham Robertson, friend of the Pre-Raphaelites and Wilde and Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt, has described inimitably that memorable first night:

It opened much as had been expected. The acting was rather rough, the accent a little disconcerting, the production tawdry and commonplace. Then entered John Drew playing Petruchio's odious first scene with a delicacy and humour that robbed it of all offence and seemed to bring in a new atmosphere.

Then a voice raised without, a pause of expectancy, and there swept on to the stage a figure that will never be forgotten by any there present – Ada Rehan as Katharine the Shrew.

What the wonderful pair did with the play; how they contrived that the brutal tale of the bullying, starving and frightening of a virago into a spiritless drudge should become the delightfully amusing love story of two charming people I have never been able to find out, but nevertheless, the miracle was wrought.

Such a miracle was re-enacted at Stratford in 1960 by Peggy Ashcroft and Peter O'Toole. Ada Rehan was as magnificent in her rages as a stormy sky, Roberston tells us. She paced up and down like a wild beast. But in the final speech her voice took on an unimaginable music, distilling the words 'like the last drops of a clearing shower, while all along, through gloom and shine alike, she wove a thread of most delicate comedy, brightening and condoning the violent scenes with strokes of humour and changing the termagant's final humiliation into the birth of her truer and nobler self.'

The Taming of the Shrew like *The Merry Wives* and *The Comedy of Errors* is essentially an 'acting' play. The academic reader has been too prompt to dismiss it as hack-work. It belongs of course to Shakespeare's apprenticeship but it is skilful enough. Even neo-classic Dr Johnson, who thought the whole play very popular and diverting, notes that 'the two plots are so well united that they can hardly be called two without injury to the art with which they are interwoven. The attention is entertained with all the variety of a double plot, yet is not distracted by unconnected incidents'. And Hazlitt praises it as the only one of the comedies that has a regular plot, although full of bustle, animation, and rapidity of action. He even credits it with a downright moral as showing how self-will is only to be got the better of by stronger will, and how one degree of ridiculous perversity is only to be driven out by another still greater.

Petruchio is a madman in his senses; a very honest fellow, who hardly speaks a word of truth, and succeeds in all his tricks and impostures. He acts his assumed character to the life, with the most fantastical extravagance, with complete presence of mind, with untired animal spirits, and without a particle of ill-humour from beginning to end... With him a thing's being plain and reasonable is a reason against it. The airs he gives himself are infinite, and his caprices as sudden as they are groundless.

Philip Henslowe, the theatrical manager, records in his diary a performance of *The Taming of a Shrew* at Newington Butts in June 1594 by Shakespeare's Company, the Lord Chamberlain's Servants, along with a *Titus Andronicus* and a *Hamlet*. In the same year a Quarto was printed anonymously, again with the same title – i.e. a Shrew instead of *The Shrew*. This has usually been thought to be Shakespeare's source: it contains Marlovian pastiche and palpable thefts. Professor Peter Alexander however believes that this is another 'stolne and surreptitious copy', like the Bad Quartos and *The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*. Be that as it may, the source of the Bianca episodes is Ariosto's *I Suppositi* (1509), translated, and adapted by George Gascoigne for performance at Gray's Inn 1566. In Ariosto's play the germ of romanticism infects the Roman comic stock, as Professor H.B. Charlton sees it. The problem for the comic dramatist of the Renaissance was reconciliation of traditional realistic comedy stemming from Plautus with a new sensibility for the romantic. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Shakespeare fails: his first effort at romantic comedy merely makes romance comic. *The Shrew* marks his recoil from romance.

Those who search in the plays for Shakespeare of Stratford, the 'Sweet Swan of Avon', rather than the man of the theatre, may find him, as John Masefield does, in the Induction and in Biondello's professional explication of the maladies incident to Petruchio's steed:

...his horse hipped besides, possessed with the glanders and like to mose in the chine, troubled with the lampass, infected with the fashions, full of windgalls, sped with spavins, rayed with the yellows, past cure of the fives, stark spoiled with the staggers, begnawn with the bots, swayed in the back, and shoulder-shotten, near-legged before, and with a half-checked bit, and a head-stall of sheep's leather...

This is something no longer possible in a city theatre, comments Masefield.

Surely Thomas Hardy had Sly the Tinker in mind in the first chapter of *Tess*, when John Durbeyfield lies by the roadside intoxicated with good Wessex liquor and day-dreams of his D'Urville ancestry:

Y'are a baggage, the Slys are no rogues. Look in the chronicles, we came in with Richard Conqueror. Therefore *paucas pallabris*; let the world slide.

His rustic wisdom is Hardy-esque: 'Come, sit by my side and let the world slip, we shall ne'er be younger'. And have not all of us at one time or another shared (and suppressed) Sly's feelings at a dramatic or musical entertainment?

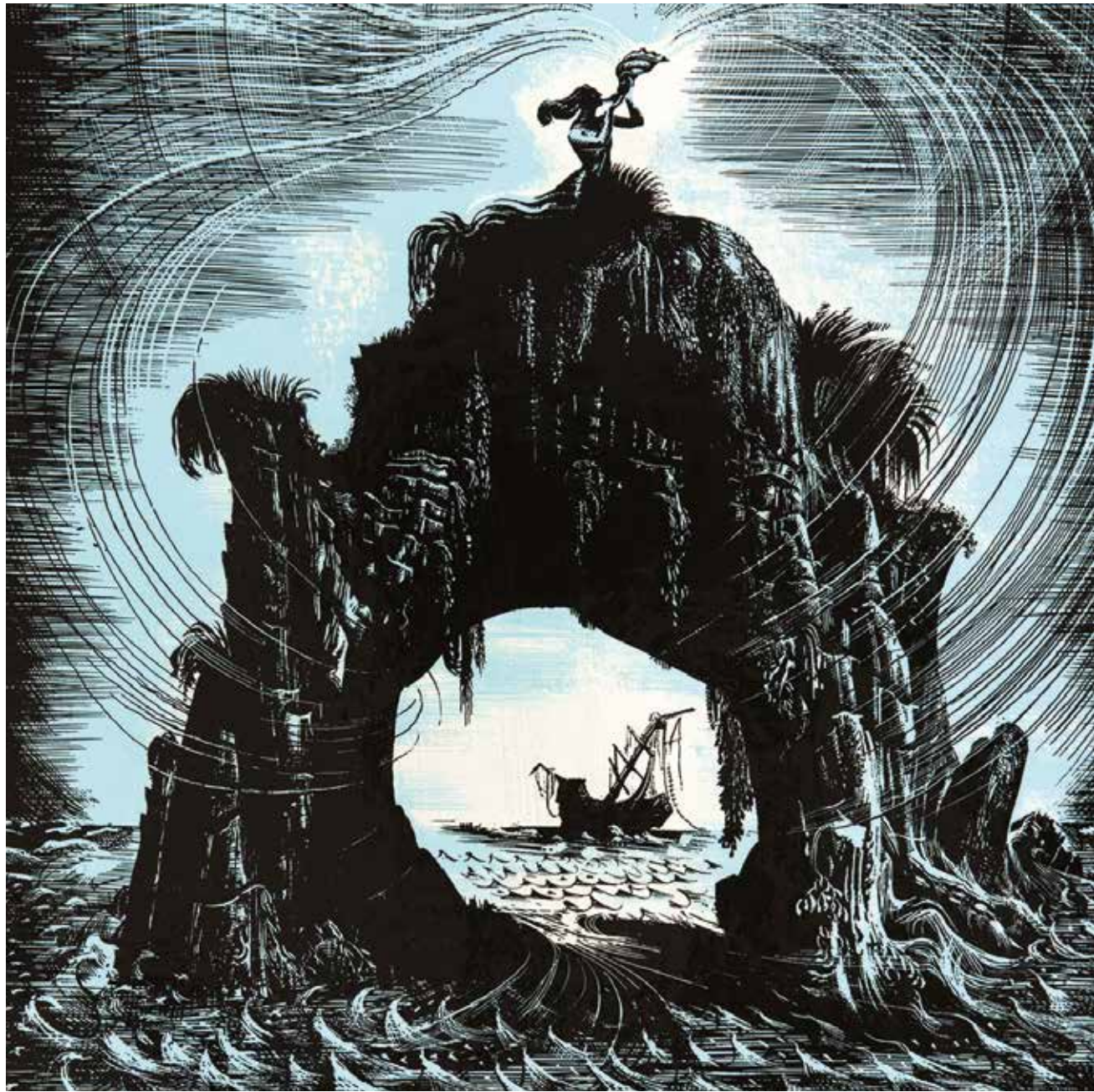
Servant. My lord, you nod, you do not mind the play.

Sly. Yes, by Saint Anne, do I. A good matter, surely: comes there any more of it?

Page. My lord, 'tis but begun.

Sly. 'Tis a very excellent piece of work: would 'twere done!





THE TEMPEST

CD 25 • CD 26

Alonso - Terrence Hardiman • *Sebastian* - Ian Lang • *Prospero* - Michael Hordern • *Antonio* - Denis McCarthy • *Ferdinand* - Ian Lang
Gonzalo - Denys Robertson • *Adrian* - Derek Jacobi • *Caliban* - Patrick Wymark • *Stephano* - Philip Strick • *Boatswain* - Clive Swift
Miranda - Natasha Parry • *Trinculo* - Miles Malleson • *Ariel* - Margaret Field-Hyde • *Iris* - Jill Daltry • *Ceres* - Margaretta Scott
Juno - Ena Mitchell

The Scene: An uninhabited island.

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ALONSO, King of Naples • SEBASTIAN, his brother • PROSPERO, the rightful Duke of Milan
ANTONIO, his brother, the usurping Duke of Milan • FERDINAND, son to the King of Naples • GONZALO, an honest old Councillor
ADRIAN and FRANCISCO, Lords • CALIBAN, a savage and deformed slave • TRINCULO, a Jester • STEPHANO, a drunken Butler
SHIPMASTER • BOATSWAIN • Mariners • MIRANDA, daughter to Prospero • ARIEL, an airy Spirit
IRIS, CERES, JUNO, Nymphs, Reapers, Spirits

In May 1609, five hundred souls set forth from England in nine ships to join the Virginia colony. On July 25th the Sea-Adventure, the vessel which carried the two leaders of the expedition, Sir George Summers and Sir Thomas Gates, was driven by a storm upon the coast of the Bermudas and run between two rocks, where she was fast lodged and locked for further budging.' Her crew were all saved. Meanwhile, the rest of the fleet, save one, reached the American mainland, where nine months later Gates and Summers joined them. England by then had already had news of the storm and were now regaled by tidings of their deliverance and accounts of their strange experiences, which Shakespeare evidently studied eagerly, three of them in particular: Sylvester Jourdain's *Discovery of the Bermudas* (1610), the Council of Virginia's *True Declaration of the State of the Colonie*, and William Strachey's *True Reportory of the Wrack*, written in the same year but unpublished until *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625). Shakespeare had friends who knew Sir Thomas Gates. He may possibly have met Strachey; and almost certainly Sir Dudley Digges, an enthusiast for the Virginia colony, whose brother contributed memorial verses to the First Folio. Here is a brief extract from Strachey's report:

Sometimes shrieks in our Ship amongst women, and passengers, not used to such hurly and discomforts, made us look one upon the other with troubled hearts and panting bosoms; our clamours drowned in the winds, and the winds in thunder. Prayers might well be in the heart and lips, but drowned in the outcries of the Officers: nothing heard that could give comfort, nothing seen that might encourage hope ... The Sea swelled above the Clouds, and gave battle unto Heaven. It could not be said to rain, the waters like whole Rivers did flood in the air... Our Governor was at this time below at the Capstan, both by his speech and authority heartening every man unto his labour... During all this time, the heavens looked so black upon us, that it was not possible the elevation of the Pole might be observed: nor a Star by night, nor Sun beam by day was to be seen. Only upon the Thursday night Sir George Summers being upon the watch, had an apparition of a little round light, like a faint Star, trembling, and streaming along with a sparkling blaze, half the height upon the Main Mast, and shooting sometimes from Shroud to Shroud, tempting to settle as it were upon any of the four Shrouds: and for three or four hours together, or rather more, half the night, it kept with us; running sometimes along the Main-yard to the very end, and then returning...The superstitious Sea-men make many constructions of the Sea-fire.

This is Shakespeare's Ariel:

I boarded the king's ship: now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flamed amazement. Sometimes I'd divide
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet, and join; Jove's lightning, the precursors
O' th' dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not.

Not many months after Gates and Summers had set sail for Virginia from 'the still-vexed Bermoothes', *The Tempest* was presented on 'Hallomas nyght att Whithall before ye Kings Majestie' and it was revived at Court in the winter of 1612–13 in the splendid round of entertainments provided for the betrothal and the marriage of the Prince Palatine Elector to the Princess Elizabeth, the Winter Queen to be of Bohemia and mother of Rupert of the Rhine. The play has pride of place in the First Folio where it is printed first and (as if to tempt the reader onwards) is more carefully edited than any, with the Scene named as 'an uninhabited Island' and the names of the Actors below. Yet it is Shakespeare's last play (if we dismiss *Henry VIII* as an afterthought demanded of him in his retirement) and few can resist reading it as his farewell to the stage –

... graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure: and, when I have required
Some heavenly music – which even now I do –
... I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.

The Tempest is the consummation of the Romances, gathering up themes and auguries from *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, at once a fable, an allegory and a masque, interpreting and correlating the bestial, the human, and the preternatural. Caliban's dam is a witch, Prospero is mantic, a magician and seer. Yet this Romance is truly Classical. The unities of place and time are observed. In Dryden's phrase we are at the winning post and the ancient wrong done to Prospero, Duke of Milan, twelve years since, is re-enacted, as it were, in the conspiracy hatched by Sebastian and the usurping Antonio against Sebastian's brother, the King of Naples, and which Ariel frustrates. Prospero's extended exposition of the past to Miranda in Act I, scene 2 corresponds to the Prologue and Chorus in Greek Tragedy. Shakespeare knew how to steal – 'convey, the wise call it; a fico for a phrase' – and two successful thefts are to be noted. Prospero's valediction quoted above is inspired by a fine passage in Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book VII; and Gonzalo's Utopian Commonwealth is lifted from John Florio's translation of Montaigne's essay 'Of the Caniballes'. Montaigne shares Shakespeare's interest in the New World and the nature of primitive man. In the list of Actors Caliban is described as 'A Salvage and Deformed Slave'. The type looks back through the Wild Man of medieval heraldry and pageant to the satyr and cyclops of Hellas, reborn in the traveller's tales of the 'sunburnt Indians' (that is, Americans), reported by some as barbarous and by others as noble.

In this play, Coleridge tells us – the best example for him of the ideal in drama – 'Shakespeare has especially appealed to the imagination, and he has constructed a plot well adapted to the purpose ... and it is to be borne in mind, that of old, and as regards mere scenery, his works may be said to have been recited rather than acted – that is to say, description and narration supplied the place of visual exhibition: the audience was told to fancy that they saw what they only heard described; the painting was not in colours, but in words.' This can be capped by Bernard Shaw eighty-five years later when he saw the Elizabethan Stage Society present the play at the Mansion House on November 5th, 1897, and reviewed it along with James Barrie's *The Little Minister*:

The poetry of *The Tempest* is so magical that it would make the scenery of a modern theatre ridiculous. The methods of the Elizabethan Stage Society ... leave to the poet the work of conjuring up the isle 'full of noises, sounds, and sweet airs'. And I do not see how this plan can be beaten. If Sir Henry Irving were to put the play on at the Lyceum next season, what could he do but multiply the expenditure enormously, and spoil the illusion? He would give us the screaming violin instead of the harmonious viol; 'characteristic' music scored for wood-wind and percussion by Mr German instead of Mr Dolmetsch's pipe and tabor; an expensive and absurd stage ship; and some windless, airless, changeless, soundless, electric-lit, wooden-floored mockeries of the haunts of Ariel. They would cost more but would they be an improvement on the Mansion House arrangement? Mr William Poe says frankly, 'See that singers' gallery up there? Well, let's pretend that it's the ship'. We agree; and the thing is done ... You can do best without scenery in *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* because the best scenery you can get will only destroy the illusion created by the poetry...

The background of the image is a complex, abstract pattern of swirling, translucent blue ink or smoke. The patterns are dense and fluid, creating a sense of movement and depth. The colors range from light, airy blues to deeper, more saturated tones, with some areas appearing almost black where the ink is most concentrated. The overall effect is ethereal and dramatic, complementing the quote about hell and devils.

‘HELL IS EMPTY
AND ALL THE
DEVILS ARE
HERE.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
THE TEMPEST



THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

CD 27 • CD 28

Duke of Milan - John Barton • *Valentine* - David Gibson • *Proteus* - Richard Marquand • *Antonio* - Terrence Hardiman • *Thurio* - George Rylands
Eglamour - Toby Robertson • *Speed* - Roderick Cook • *Launce* - Donald Beves • *Panthino* - Clive Swift • *Host* - David Buck
Outlaws - John Tracy-Phillips, Chris Renard • *Julia* - Olive Gregg • *Sylvia* - Janette Richer • *Lucetta* - Penelope Balchin

The Scene: Verona, Milan and a forest near Milan

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

DUKE OF MILAN, father to Sylvia • VALENTINE, PROTEUS, the two gentlemen • ANTONIO, father to Proteus
THURIO, a foolish rival to Valentine • EGLAMOUR, agent for Sylvia in her escape • SPEED, a clownish servant to Valentine
LAUNCE, the like to Proteus • PANTHINO, servant to Antonio • Host, where Julia lodges • Outlaws, with Valentine
JULIA, beloved of Proteus • SYLVIA, beloved of Valentine • LUCETTA, waiting-woman to Julia • Servants, musicians

Shakespeare's stage apprenticeship begot three comedies. *The Comedy of Errors* is a skilful if relentless farce; *The Taming of the Shrew* provides admirable 'knock-about'; and, last of the three (about 1592), *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is the real thing, Shakespearian comedy in embryo, 'the baby figure of things to come at large' in *Much Ado* and *Twelfth Night*. The Spirit of Comedy is a critical spirit. Comedy is rooted in good sense. Ridicule is reason's keenest weapon. Matthew Arnold defined poetry as 'a criticism of life', but the truth is that comedy and poetry, reason and romance, will not always unite in a marriage of true minds. Sweet singer and sour satirist are soon at odds. The romantic comedy of the Elizabethans, as Professor Charlton has brilliantly shown, attempted to adapt to the service of laughter and fun a world of romance with all its other implications, its debt to chivalry, to the idealism of Petrarch which harks back to neo-platonism and Plato himself. The valiant, remorseful, accomplished Sir Eglamour, who has vowed pure chastity upon his true love's grave, belongs to this traditional world; but Shakespeare's play must accommodate not only Sir Eglamour but Launce and his cur. Launce and Speed might take their ease on an alehouse bench in a Stratford tavern, while Sir Eglamour and the two young gentlemen themselves, Proteus and Valentine, belong to the library shelves of Shakespeare's first patron, the Earl of Southampton. 'Romance indeed, and not comedy (Charlton concludes), has called the tune of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and governed the direction of the action of the play, with the unexpected result that Shakespeare's first attempt to make romantic comedy has inadvertently made romance comic. The real problem has still to be faced'. Has Shakespeare solved it, we may ask, when the pageant of the Worthies is suddenly overclouded by the news of the death of the Princess's father in *Love's Labour's Lost*? Has he solved it when Beatrice cries 'Kill Claudio!?' Has he solved it when the scornful spoiled Bertram is compelled at the wondrously cured King's behest to marry Helena? However, in Orsino's Illyria and Orlando's Arden, if not perhaps in Antonio's Venice, disparities and contrarities 'in one spirit meet and mingle with a sweet emotion'. Rosalind and Viola manage to be at once critical and lyrical, to reconcile comedy and romance. Even in this early effort the dramatist feels his way with some success: for instance in the relationship and interchanges between Julia and Lucetta in Act I, 2, and Act II, 7.

Here is a first sketch for Portia and Nerissa. And if Speed belongs with the Dromios and Lancelot Gobbo, Launce can rank with Costard, almost with Bottom. The soliloquy of Proteus (Act II, 6) cannot compete with Berowne's superb

And I forsooth in love! I that have been love's whip,
A very beadle to a humorous sigh...

but it shows us Shakespeare struggling manfully to break through the diction and versification of the early conventional Elizabethan drama and to give natural utterance to the speaking voice. On this foundation Hamlet's soliloquies are to be raised up.

Samuel Johnson is not noted among literary critics for his sensibility to verbal melody and colour, and his judgments are usually uncompromising and stern. Yet his appreciation of this apprentice piece is benevolent and shrewd. 'When I read this play, I cannot but think that I discover both in the serious and ludicrous scenes the language and sentiments of Shakespeare. It is not indeed one of his most powerful effusions, it has neither many diversities of character nor striking delineations of life, but it abounds in γνομαί [gnomic sayings] beyond most of his plays and few have more lines or passages which, singly considered, are eminently beautiful'. He recognises that there is 'a strange mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of care and negligence', that Shakespeare's geography is eccentric, and that there are inconsistencies and contradictions, but with his usual horse sense decides that: 'The reason of all this confusion seems to be, that he took his story from a novel which he sometimes followed, and sometimes forsook, sometimes remembered and sometimes forgot'. Hazlitt is equally sympathetic to these 'first outlines of a comedy loosely sketched in', finding passages of high poetical spirit and of inimitable quaintness – of humour as undoubtedly Shakespearian. A speech of Julia's (Act II, 7) is selected as almost deserving (with a few others thrown in) Milton's tribute in *L'Allegro*:

And sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child, Warbles his native wood-notes wild.

He does not observe that it is an unrhymed sonnet, with the Petrarchan break between the octave and the sestet. Charming though it is, there is more artistry than nature in its expression. The native wood-note, a purer strain (akin to the Sonnets) is to be found in

O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away.

Other lines with the true Shakespearian ring are:

I know him as myself: for from our infancy
We have conversed, and spent our hours together,
And though myself have been an idle truant,
Omitting the sweet benefit of time
To clothe mine age with angel-like perfection

And better still:

She shall be dignified with this high honour
To bear my lady's train, lest the base earth
Should from her vesture chance to steal a kiss,
And, of so great a favour growing proud,
Disdain to root the summer-swelling flower,
And make rough winter everlastingly.

And best of all:

Say that upon the altar of her beauty
You sacrifice your tears, your sighs, your heart:
Write till your ink be dry: and with your tears
Moist it again: and frame some feeling line
That may discover such integrity.
For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews,
Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones,
Make tigers tame and huge leviathans
Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands.

If Shakespeare had much to learn about play-making in 1592, he could write like an angel. Moreover, his honeytongued eloquence is matched by incomparable prose, witness Launce's lecture to his dog on social behaviour.



THE WINTER'S TALE

CD 29 • CD 30

Leontes - William Squire • *Camillo* - Denis McCarthy • *Antigonus* - Terrence Hardiman • *Dion* - Corin Redgrave • *Polixenes* - Toby Robertson
Florizel - Anthony White *Archidamus* - George Rylands • *Old Shepherd* - John Barton • *Autolycus* - Michael Bates • *Hermione* - Margaretta Scott
Perdita - Mary Conroy • *Paulina* - Joan Hart • *Emilia* - Jill Daltry • *Mopsa* - Janette Richer • *A Gaoler* - Clive Swift • *1st Gentleman* - Ian McKellen
2nd Gentleman - Richard Marquand • *3rd Gentleman* - Donald Beves • *Lord* - Anthony Arlidge • *Young Shepherd* - Ian McKellen
Time, as Chorus - William Squire

Simon Forman, an astrologer and quack doctor, to whom the ladies of the court resorted for love philtres, saw *The Winter's Tale* played at the Globe on May 15th, 1611. He outlines the plot in his MS *Booke of Plaies*, which also records a performance of *Macbeth* and one of *Cymbeline*; and he takes warning from the wiles of Autolycus to 'beware of trustinge feined beggars or fawninge fellouse'. This confidence trickster, who was named in Homer's *Odyssey* and doubtless plied his trade at the wakes and fairs of Shakespeare's Warwickshire, is the dramatist's characteristic addition to his original, the prose romance *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, brought out by his sometime jealous enemy, Robert Greene, the University Wit, in 1588 and reprinted as *Dorastus and Fawnia* in 1607. Shakespeare's other innovation is the secret preserving of the Queen's life until her lost babe is restored to her as a young bride. The descent of the statue to solemn music is excellent 'theatre', more effectively staged perhaps at Blackfriars within doors but more thrilling to the groundlings at the Globe. The embrace of Hermione and Leontes, the pardon begged of Polixenes, the constancy rewarded in the mating of Paulina and Camillo, and the blessing of Perdita

You gods look down,
And from your sacred vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter's head!

fulfil the dramatist's intention in these last plays, which are nearer to the tragi-comedies than to *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They are rightly called Romances.

'Prosperity,' writes Bacon, 'is the blessing of the Old Testament, adversity is the blessing of the New'. And again, 'Prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue.' Shakespeare's ethic is rooted in the New Testament and if in the final plays 'the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge', yet past wrongs and ancestral feuds and unrighteous passions find resolution and reconciliation in the idealised love of Florizel and Perdita, of Miranda and Ferdinand, and in the power to forgive which Imogen and Hermione share with Isabella and which Ariel imparts to Prospero. And as the high comedy of *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* discovers folly if not vice, so the tragic elements in *Measure for Measure*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale* discover virtue.

Romance, like the melancholy of Monsieur Jaques, is compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects with a flavour all its own. Idyll and melodrama, fable, fantasy and fairy tale, the adventurous, the marvellous, the heroic, the supernatural, join forces to arouse pity and terror, to surprise and enchant, and to cheat us into believing as the curtain falls that 'they lived happily ever after'. The late Greek romances were the exemplars, especially the *Ethiopica* of Heliodorus. But the middle ages had their own variety, for instance *Huon of Bordeaux*. From this soil sprang two mighty forest trees with strange birds nesting in their multitudinous branches, Sidney's *Arcadia* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Greene's *Dorastus and Fawnia* on which Shakespeare based his play puts forth its leaves and fruit in the same woodland.

In his uncompromising indictment of Shakespeare's audience and the concessions which Shakespeare made to it, the poet Robert Bridges suggests that he sometimes judged conduct to be dramatically more effective when not adequately motivated, and instanced *The Winter's Tale*. 'The jealousy of Leontes is senseless, whereas in the original story an adequate motive is developed. It may be that Shakespeare wished to portray this passion in odious nakedness without reason or rein, as might be proper in a low comedy, where its absurdity would be ridiculed away: but if so, his scheme was artistically as bad as any third-rate melodrama today: the admixture of tragic incident creates a situation from which recovery is impossible; and it is certain that the spectators are not intended to realise the condition of affairs.' Bridges insists on the absurdity of our having to picture Leontes kneeling daily at his wife's cenotaph for sixteen tedious years, passed over in the rise and fall of the curtain; he praises the magical shift of interest brought about by Autolycus and by Perdita but complains that when the final denouement comes we are expected both to take it seriously and to overlook it. 'When Hermione descends from the pedestal into her husband's arms, the impossibility of reconciliation is passed by in silence, and Leontes busies himself in finding a husband for the aged and unattractive Paulina.' We will not reason with Bridges, who is patently allergic to romance as Shakespeare experimented in it and Beaumont and Fletcher exploited it. But he is of course correct in pointing out that Shakespeare deliberately parted from his original in the presentation of Leontes' jealousy. Greene opens his euphuistic pastoral romance with a little homily on this hellish passion, this infectious sore, this restless torment, this breeder of misery. He then describes the married love and happiness of King Pandosto (Leontes) and Bellaria, his Queen and their delight in their little son, until 'Fortune, envious of such happy success, willing to show some sign of her inconstancy, turned her wheel, and darkened their bright sun of prosperity with the misty clouds of mishap and misery'. He is visited by the friend of his youth, Egistus, King of Sicilia, and the innocent Bellaria 'willing to show how unfeignedly she loved her husband by his friend's entertainment, used him likewise so familiarly that her countenance betrayed how her mind was affected towards him, oftentimes coming herself into his bedchamber, to see that nothing should be amiss to mislike him.' Indeed, 'there grew such a secret uniting of their affections, that the one could not well be without the company of the other'. Pandosto considering with himself that 'Egistus was a man, and must needs love: and that his wife was a woman, and therefore subject unto love, and that where fancy forced, friendship was of no force', conscious also of the beauty of his wife and the comeliness and bravery of his friend, becomes somewhat melancholy, Even so, his doubtful thoughts are a long time 'smothering in his stomach' before they kindle into secret mistrust and grow at last to flaming jealousy.

Shakespeare dispenses with all this. He is not writing a novel but a drama, and a melodrama at that, for melodrama is an ingredient of romance. He wishes to show Leontes suddenly and demoniacally possessed. Classical myth and tragedy supply countless precedents. It poses a bit of a problem for actor and producer, but the clue is given by the words of Hermione which Leontes half hears:

Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
Your queen and I are devils: yet, go on,
Th' offences we have made you do we'll answer,
If you first sinned with us; and that with us
You did continue fault; and that you slipped not
With any, but with us.

Devils, offences, sinned, fault, slipped. These fall like sparks on stubble. And to crown it Hermione, a moment later, concludes that she has 'spoke to th' purpose twice': once when she gave her hand in troth to Leontes and *now* when she gives it to his friend Polixenes. Thus Shakespeare telescopes, concentrates, intensifies for his own purposes.

There are delightful things in Greene's *Pandosto*. When the babe is put to sea in a boat without sail or rudder, 'the very shipmen, seeing the sweet countenance of the young babe, began to accuse the King of rigour'; and with a few green boughs they make 'a homely cabin to shroud it as they could from wind and weather'. When the little boat drifts on to the Sicilian coast, a poor shepherd who gets his living by other men's flocks hears the child cry and mistakes it for the bleating of his sheep. When he carries it to his house, his wife, 'marvelling that her husband should be so wanton abroad, sith he was so quiet at home ... began to crow against her goodman, and taking up a cudgel (for the most master went breechless) sware solemnly that she would make clubs trumps, if he brought any bastard brat within doors'. She is reconciled by the gold and the rich mantle. The shepherd every night when he comes home would sing and dance the babe on his knee 'and prattle so that in a short time it began to speak and call him Dad and her Mam'. And at sixteen whoso saw Fawnia would have thought she had been some heavenly nymph and not a mortal creature. When she keeps her sheep she shades her face from the heat of the sun 'with no other veil but with a garland made of boughs and flowers which attire became her so gallantly as she seemed to be the Goddess Flora her self for beauty'. This is Shakespeare's cue:

These your unusual weeds to each part of you
Do give a life: no shepherdess, but Flora
Peering in April's front.

But the *Tale* is a Stage Entertainment. Hazlitt, who recognised in the crabbed and tortuous speeches of Leontes every mark of Shakespeare's peculiar manner of conveying the painful struggle of different thoughts and feelings, 'labouring for utterance, and almost strangled in the birth', remembers his enjoyment in the production of 1802, when the Tragic Muse appeared in her last new part.

Mrs Siddons played Hermione, and in the last scene acted the painted statue to the life – with true monumental dignity and noble passion; Mr Kemble in Leontes worked himself up into a very fine classical phrensy; And Bannister, as Autolycus, roared as loud for pity as a sturdy beggar could do who felt none of the pain he counterfeited, and was sound of wind and limb. We shall never see those parts so acted again; or if we did, it would be in vain. Actors grow old, or no longer surprise us by their novelty. But true poetry, like nature, is always young; and we still read the courtship of Florizel and Perdita, as we welcome the return of spring, with the same feelings as ever.

The background of the slide features abstract, swirling blue ink splashes and smoke-like patterns against a white background. The ink is concentrated on the right side and bottom, with some lighter, wispy trails extending towards the left.

‘EXIT, PURSUED BY A BEAR.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
THE WINTER’S TALE



TWELFTH NIGHT

CD 31 • CD 32

Orsino - Derek Godfrey • *Sebastian* - Patrick Garland • *Antonio* - Peter Orr • *Another sea-captain* - John Barton • *Valentine* - Ian Lang
Curio - Tony Whitehead • *Sir Toby Belch* - Patrick Wymark • *Sir Andrew Aguecheek* - Robert Eddison • *Malvolio* - Tony Church
Fabian - David Coombes • *Feste* - Peter Pears • *Olivia* - Jill Balcon • *Viola* - Dorothy Tutin • *Maria* - Prunella Scales

On January 6th, 1601, Twelfth Night, the crowning day of the Christmas festivities at Court, the Lord Chamberlain's men, Shakespeare's company, presented a play by the Queen's command in the Great Chamber of the Palace of Whitehall before the Russian Ambassador ('of tall Stature very fatte with a great face and blacke bearde: of a swarfy Colour his face, and his gate very maiesticall'), before Wolfgang William, son of the Count Palatine, before Don Virginio Orsino, Duke of Brachiano, the guest of honour – no other than the piteous Giovanni, son of the Brachiano who ruined himself in his passion for Webster's *White Devil*, Vittoria Accorambona. Was the play Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* written to order for the occasion in honour of Orsino? Dr Leslie Hotson, the most expert and eloquent of all literary detectives, persuades us that it must have been; and that Malvolio is Sir William Knollys, Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household, son of the godly and puritanical Sir Francis. We know at any rate from the diary of a barrister, John Manningham, that this comedy was played at the Candlemas Feast in 1602, in the Middle Temple, and it need not have been a new play then.

Thus Shakespeare's most famous comedy comes very close in time to his most famous tragedy, *Hamlet*; and it is his last. For, when after some eight years he returned, like Orpheus from the underworld of gloomy Dis, the strain of sorrow in the final romances sounds a far deeper note than Feste's 'Come away, come away death' and Cesario's green and yellow melancholy, smiling at grief. Nevertheless it is the shadows which enhance the sunshine in *Twelfth Night* and place it above the two companion comedies which belong to the preceding eighteen months, *Much Ado about Nothing* and *As You Like It*. Viola and Feste can 'sing both high and low'; they can modulate from the minor to the major key and back again. So that the Clown looks forward to Lear's Fool who is indeed to sing a snatch of 'Hey, ho, the wind and the rain'. He is wise, he touches the heart, he is a musician. As A.C. Bradley, who loved him, notes: 'To think of *Twelfth Night* is to think of music. It opens with instrumental music, and ends with a song. All Shakespeare's best praise of music, except the famous passage in *The Merchant of Venice*, occurs in it. And almost all the music and the praise of music comes from Feste or has to do with Feste. In this he stands alone among Shakespeare's Fools.' And the heroine is to be distinguished from her sisters, Rosalind and Beatrice, by the fact that poetry is not natural to them as it is to Viola. Viola can speak prose very prettily but she is not 'native and endued unto that element'. She is more akin to Miranda than to Beatrice, and in 'the lovely garnish of a boy' is not only more feminine than Rosalind (who strikes us as a detached and witty critic of both the sexes) but she even foreshadows Imogen. The prose of Beatrice and Rosalind is delicious and it 'carries' in the theatre. Moreover it is the predominance of prose in *Much Ado* and *As You Like It* which gives a certain sharpness to their savour. The sunshine is tempered by an edge of wit, a satiric tang in the air. In *Twelfth Night* there is cool shadow, depth and serenity. Not that the comedy is sentimental. It is tender but it is searching. As John Masfield pointed out: 'The play presents images of self-deception, or delusional sentimentality, by means of a romantic fable and a vigorous fable. It shows us three souls suffering from the kind of sickly vanity that feeds on

daydreams. Orsino is in an unreal mood of emotion. Love is an active passion... Olivia is in an unreal mood of mourning for her brother. Grief is a destroying passion. Olivia makes it a form of self-indulgence, or one sweet the more to attract flies to her. Malvolio is in an unreal mood of self-importance. Long posing at the head of ceremony has given him the faith that ceremony, of which he is the head, is the whole of life... The only cure for the sickly in mind is reality. Something real has to be felt or experienced... Orsino is cured of sentiment by the sight of Sebastian making love like a man... Olivia is piqued out of sentiment by coming to know someone who despises her... Malvolio is mocked out of sentiment by the knowledge that other minds have seen his mind. He has not the happiness to be rewarded with love at the end of the play, but he has the alternative of hate, which is as active a passion and as real.'

The triumphs of the theatre are ephemeral. The trivial fond records of even the greatest productions and players of the past, all those who fretted their hour upon the stage, signify little or nothing. We read of Garrick's posture and histrionic start when he saw the Ghost, of Kean's fighting like one drunk with wounds as Richard III, of Mrs Siddons beautifully raising an arm to draw the very circle of 'the golden round' in the air above her head, smiling with a lofty and uncontrollable expectation as if she ran her finger round the gold. But it is very rarely that the performance of a part, which is after all at once interpretation and criticism, is recorded so felicitously that even at third-hand we recover the truth of an original experience. Yet so it is with Malvolio. Through the eyes of Charles Lamb, an inveterate playgoer, we see a talented actor creating a Shakespearian role. Robert Bensley (1738–1817) played Edmund and Hotspur with success and his Iago was 'the only endurable one' which Lamb ever saw. Would we have guessed that the qualities which suited those three parts would unite to create an exceptional Malvolio? Lamb's description gives us something to work on.

Malvolio is not essentially ludicrous. He becomes comic but by accident. He is cold, austere, repelling, but dignified, consistent and, for what appears, rather of an over-stretched morality. Maria describes him as a sort of Puritan; and he might have worn his gold chain with honour in one of our old round-head families, in the service of a Lambert or a Lady Fairfax. But his morality and his manners are misplaced in Illyria. He is opposed to the proper *levities* of the piece, and falls in the unequal contest. Still his pride, or his gravity (call it what you will) is inherent, and native to the man, not mock or affected, which latter only are the fit objects to excite laughter. His quality is at the best unlovely, but neither buffoon nor contemptible. His bearing is lofty, a little above his station, but probably not much above his deserts...

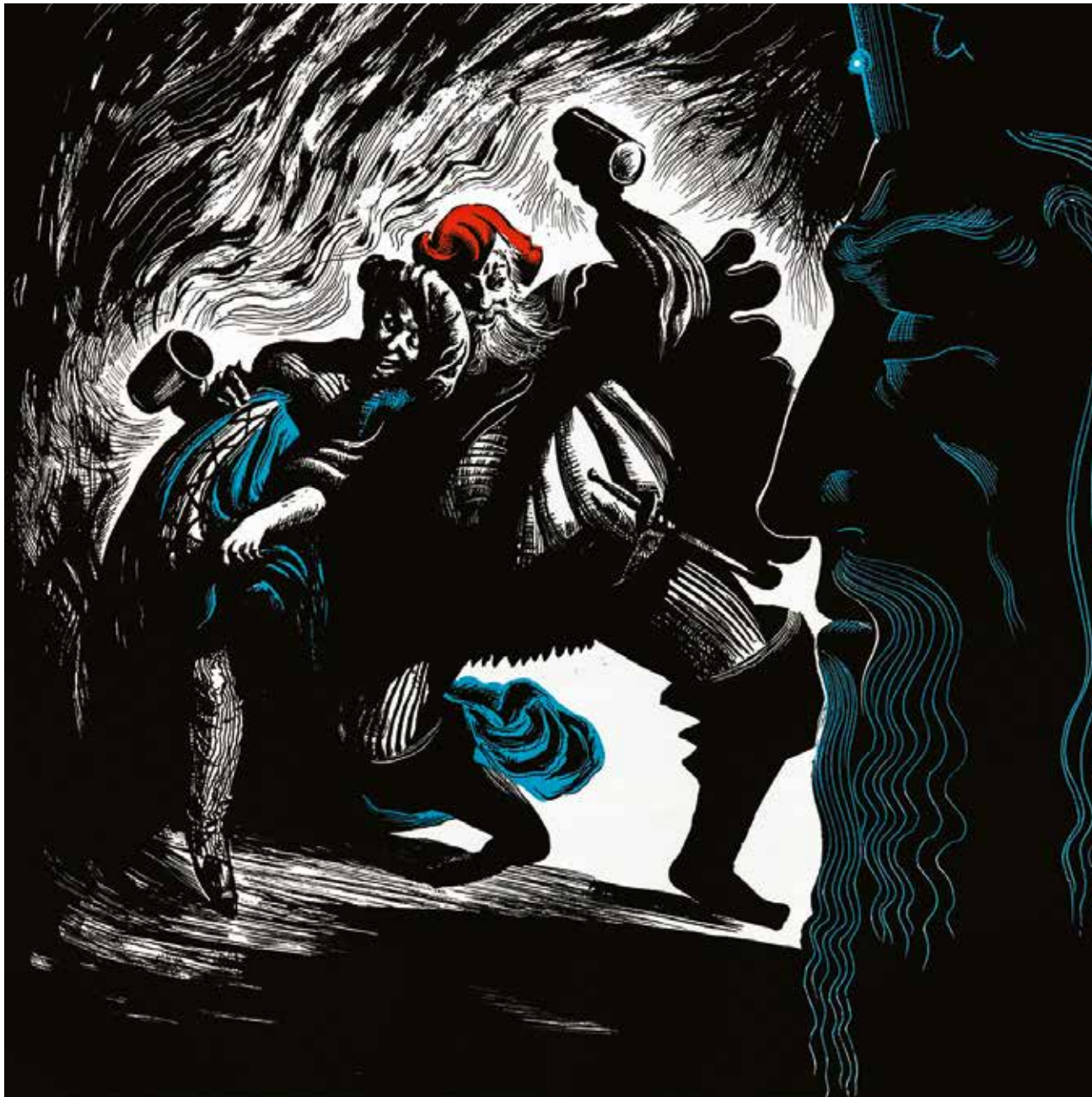
Bensley, accordingly, threw over the part an air of Spanish loftiness. He looked, spake, and moved like an old Castilian. He was starch, spruce, opinionated, but his superstructure of pride seemed bottomed upon a sense of worth. There was something in it beyond the coxcomb. It was big and swelling, but you could not be sure that it was hollow. You might wish to see it taken down, but you felt that it was upon an elevation. He was magnificent from the outset; but when the decent sobrieties of the character began to give way, and the poison of self-love, in his conceit of the Countess's affection, gradually to work, you would have thought that the hero of La Mancha in person stood before you. How he went smiling to himself! With what ineffable carelessness would he twirl his gold chain! What a dream it was! You were infected with the illusion, and did not wish that it should be removed. You had no room for laughter... Who would not wish to live but for a day in the conceit of such a lady's love as Olivia? Why the Duke would have given his principality but for a quarter of a minute, sleeping or

waking, to have been so deluded. The man seemed to tread upon air; to taste manna, to walk with his head in the clouds to mate Hyperion. O shake not the castles of his pride; endure yet for a season bright moments of confidence; 'stand still, ye watches of the element', that Malvolio may be still in fancy fair Olivia's lord! – but fate and retribution say 'no'. I hear the mischievous titter of Maria – the witty taunts of Sir Toby – the still more insupportable triumph of the foolish knight – the counterfeit Sir Topas is unmasked – and 'thus the whirligig of time', as the true clown hath it, 'brings in his revenges'. I confess that I never saw the catastrophe of this character, while Bensley played it, without a kind of tragic interest.

Lamb also recaptures for us James Dodd's incomparable Aguecheek:

He was *it*, as it came out of Nature's hands... In expressing slowness of apprehension, this actor surpassed all others. You could see the first dawn of an idea stealing slowly over his countenance, climbing up by little and little, with a painful process, till it cleared up at last to the fulness of a twilight conception – its highest meridian. He seemed to keep back his intellect, as some have had the power to retard their pulsation. The balloon takes less time in filling than it took to cover the expansion of his broad moony face over all its quarters with expression. A glimmer of understanding would appear in a corner of his eye, and for lack of fuel go out again. A part of his forehead would catch a little intelligence, and be a long time in communicating it to the remainder.

Such reporting reminds us sadly how much comedy depends upon the *visual*, upon the actuality of stage performance: more essentially so in the case of *Twelfth Night* than most of Shakespeare's comedies. However, Lamb gives us eyes while we attend with our ears. And, as Hazlitt says, the great and secret charm of *Twelfth Night* is the character of Viola. Perhaps when we are listening and musing, 'pining in thought', she comes most fully into her own.



HENRY IV PART I

CD 33 • CD 34

King Henry - Anthony Jacobs • *Henry, Prince of Wales* - Gary Watson • *Lord John of Lancaster* - Corin Redgrave
Earl of Westmoreland - Ian Lang • *Sir Walter Blunt* - John Tracy-Phillips • *Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester* - Frank Duncan
Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland - John Barton • *Henry Percy, surnamed Hotspur* - Paul Scofield • *Edmund Mortimer* - John Wood
Richard Scroop - Denis McCarthy • *Archibald* - John Arnott • *Owen Glendower* - William Squire • *Sir Richard Vernon* - Richard Marquand
Sir Michael - Peter Forster • *Edward Poins* - Philip Strick • *Sir John Falstaff* - Donald Beves • *Gadshill* - David Jones • *Peto* - Simon Relph
Bardolph - Anthony Arlidge • *Lady Percy* - Dilys Hamlett • *Hostess Quickly* - Vivienne Chatterton • *Lady Mortimer* - Eirian James

Richard II was written in 1595. Two years later Shakespeare took up the story of the usurper Bolingbroke, the shrewd politician, and in a trilogy which is the crown of his achievement in the genre of Chronicle play, he traced the redemption of the madcap Prince of Wales; his conversion from Falstaff's sweet wag into an all too insular and English hero, Henry V, the victor of Agincourt:

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention:
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,
Leashed in like hounds, should Famine, Sword, and Fire
Crouch for employment.

What a change from Richard, the sweet lovely rose, a mockery king of snow melting before the sun of Bolingbroke! What a change, moreover, from the companion of Poins who outwits Sir John Sack-and-Sugar at Gadshill, the sworn brother of the drawers, Tom, Dick and Francis, the Prince who pageants his father in the Boar's Head. *Richard II*, abounding in poetical fancy, glows like a figured tapestry or 'storied window richly dight' in a memorial chantry. The long drawn out Deposition of an anointed King in Westminster Hall seems worlds away from the bustle and variety, the political debates, the diversity of characterisation, the tavern scenes, the Cotswold Justices and rustics, the common soldiery, the Scots and Welsh humours of the Henry trilogy. *Richard II* is Gothic art, the trilogy Elizabethan. The former has next to no humour (although we may smile at the old Duke of York shouting for his boots), and in the latter poetry is rare. There are few cantabile passages: they are the more effective when they come; a moment with Glendower and Lady Mortimer, Vernon's description of the Prince and his comrades in arms, and in Part II the King's soliloquy on sleep which reveals a very different being from the canker Bolingbroke of *Richard II*.

Hotspur is a new kind of hero, the man of action, he has affinities with the Bastard in King John. He is eloquent, but he is allergic (as they say) to poetry:

I had rather hear a brazen canstick turned,
Or a dry wheel grate on the axle-tree,
And that would set my teeth nothing on edge,
Nothing so much as mincing poetry,
'Tis like the forced gait of a shuffling nag.

Hotspur is one of the most memorable of Shakespeare's creatures. Dryden reports the legend that Shakespeare declared that he was obliged to kill Mercutio in the third act; lest he should have been killed by him; and just as we feel that Mercutio is a more vital and rounded character than Romeo, so Hotspur who is Hal's opposite in Part I takes the shine out of the Prince a little. Harry Percy is created in the terms of the actor. We see him striding up and down when he enters reading the letter; we hear his sentences stumble over one another as he speaks in impatient ejaculations, absent and forgetful out of sheer passionateness. This was noted by the Danish scholar, Georg Brandes, sixty years ago in a fine appraisal:

Hotspur is the hero of the feudal ages, indifferent to culture and polish, faithful to his brother in arms to the point of risking everything for his sake, caring neither for state, king or commons; a rebel, not for the sake of any political idea, but because independence is all in all to him; a proud, self-reliant, unscrupulous vassal, who, himself a sort of sub-king, has deposed one king, and wants to depose the usurper he has exalted, because he has not kept his promises. Clothed in renown, and ever more insatiate of military honour, he is proud from independence of spirit and truthful out of pride. He is a marvellous figure as Shakespeare has projected him, stammering, absent, turbulent, witty, now simple, now magniloquent. His hauberk clatters on his breast, his spurs jingle at his heel, wit flashes from his lips, while he moves and has his being in a nimbus of renown.

In the first part of the trilogy then, the future Henry V has to compete with Hotspur on the one hand and Falstaff on the other for pride of place, and perhaps it is not surprising if we feel that he comes off a bad third. Shakespeare does what he can for him, as Walter Raleigh says. 'He is valorous, generous, and high-spirited but his good and amiable qualities do not teach him the way to our hearts. "The noble change which he hath purposed", and of which we hear so much, taints him in the character of a boon companion. He is double-minded: he keeps back a part of the price.' The trouble has always been that the reader, if not the spectator in the theatre, cannot stomach the verse soliloquy with which Hal closes the prose scene that first presents him to us, the second scene in the play:

I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness.
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted he may be more wond' red at.
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.

There is a complacent if not a bragging tone about this which is distasteful; and the conclusion shows that he is indeed his father's son and knows well enough what he is about:

So, when this loose behaviour I throw off,
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes,
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes,
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I'll so offend, to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

Calculated dissipation in a hero we find hard to forgive. We all love the prodigal son as his father did, but Hal combines with weakness of the flesh the cold-bloodedness of the prodigal's elder brother. He is at once Tom Jones and Blifil. Let us try to be fair. Shakespeare is not yet a total master of his craft and he is using the naïve device of the soliloquy a little crudely; we may feel the same to a lesser degree in the soliloquies of Iago eight years later which have been called 'the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity'; but Hal is not attempting self-analysis, as his successor among the heroes Hamlet is to do. He is putting the audience in the picture like the villain of melodrama who says behind his hand 'I must dissemble'. The device recalls the dumb-show of Elizabethan drama. The dramatist wishes the audience to know what he knows, to follow out the Prince's reformation, and look forward to the dramatic climax when he will redeem time when men least think he will. Great drama depends but little upon surprise. And we are quite at fault if we complain that Hal is two-faced. Shakespeare devotes a long scene to 'a play within the play' in which as it were the Prince and Falstaff are brought to mock judgment before a common jury of Quickly, Bardolph and

Poins. Falstaff is arraigned and makes his sublime speech in his defence — ‘If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned: if to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh’s lean kine are to be loved’. Now comes the great appeal, the cry from the heart, with such repetitions as move us in the lament for Absalom and the song of Deborah:

No, my good lord — banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins, but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry’s company, banish not him thy Harry’s company, banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.

And then the verdict in four monosyllables like pistol shots: ‘I do, I will’. Nor is that all. Bardolph rushes in with news. The sheriff is at the door with the watch. Law and order are knocking at the gate just as ordinary daily life knocks at the hell-gate of *Macbeth*. And how does Falstaff greet the law? ‘Out, ye rogue! Play out the play. I have much to say in the behalf of that Falstaff.’ The play is indeed played out until old Jack’s heart is ‘fracted and corroborate’. But he has been warned. *Vous l’avez voulu, Georges Dandin, vous l’avez voulu*.

Prince Hal may strike us as a chip of the old block. Set beside the knight-errant Hotspur, he suggests that distinction between realist and romantic of which Shakespeare makes so much in *Troilus and Cressida*, where Hector harks back to the *Morte d’Arthur* and Achilles looks forward to the egoism of the Stuart court. But Hotspur is essential to Shakespeare’s design. When the two Harrys meet in mortal combat and the Prince is victorious, his valediction has the chivalric ring. Hotspur has brought out the best in him as he told the King he would in Act III scene 2.

As he pronounces pardon —
Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave,
But not remembered in they epitaph —
Hal spies Falstaff prone upon the ground and speaks his epitaph also
I could have better spared a better man.
Poor Jack, farewell!

Falstaff is to rise again; the play is to be played out; but in fact this is a parting and farewell. What is more, the Prince buries some of his own ignominy in Harry Percy’s grave. It is the first turning point in Hal’s moral progress and the climax of Part I. The second comes in Part II when he holds the crown in his hands and thinks his father dead. His father revives and pours forth a stream of reproach and rebuke, a magnificent dying appeal which converts the Prince and makes the rejection of Falstaff, who breaks lewdly in upon the coronation, inevitable and dramatically fit.

No space remains to do justice to ‘that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that grey iniquity, that vanity in years’. His turn shall come in the preamble to Part II.



HENRY IV PART II

CD 35 • CD 36 • CD 38

Rumour - Denis McCarthy • *King Henry IV* - Anthony Jacobs • *Prince Henry* - Gary Watson • *Prince John of Lancaster* - Corin Redgrave
Prince Humphrey of Gloucester - Ian McKellen • *Prince Thomas of Clarence* - Richard Kaye • *Earl of Warwick* - Terrence Hardiman
Earl of Westmoreland - Ian Lang • *Gower* - Anthony Arlidge • *Harcourt* - Derek Jacobi • *Sir John Blunt* - John Tracy-Phillips
Lord Chief Justice - John Wilders • *Earl of Northumberland* - John Barton *Scroop* - Denis McCarthy • *Lord Mowbray* - Toby Robertson
Lord Hastings - Clive Swift • *Lord Bardolph* - John Tydeman • *Sir John Coleville* - Richard Marquand • *Travers* - Frank Duncan
Morton - David Jones • *Edward Poins* - David Coombes • *Falstaff* - Donald Beves • *Bardolph* - Philip Strick • *Pistol* - Tony Church
A Page - Paul Draper • *Shadow* - William Squire • *Silence* - Toby Robertson • *Davy* - Ian McKellen • *Fang* - Peter Foster
Mouldy - Roger Hammond • *Shadow* - Roger Hammond • *Wart* - Roger Hammond • *Feeble* - Richard Cotterell
Bulcalf - Simon Relph • *Lady Northumberland* - Camille Prior • *Lady Percy* - Dilys Hamlett • *Hostess Quickly* - Vivienne Chatterton
Doll Tearsheet - Diana Chadwick

‘But Falstaff unimitated, inimitable Falstaff, how shall I describe thee? Thou compound of sense and vice; of sense which may be admired but not esteemed, of vice which may be despised, but hardly detested. Falstaff is a character loaded with faults, and with those faults which naturally produce contempt. He is a thief, and a glutton, a coward, and a boaster, always ready to cheat the weak, and prey upon the poor; to terrify the timorous and insult the defenceless. At once obsequious and malignant, he satirises in their absence those whom he lives by flattering. He is familiar with the prince only as an agent of vice, but of this familiarity he is so proud as not only to be supercilious and haughty with common men, but to think his interest of importance to the duke of Lancaster. Yet the man thus corrupt, thus despicable, makes himself necessary to the prince that despises him, by the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety, by an unfailing power of exciting laughter, which is the more freely indulged, as his wit is not of the splendid or ambitious kind, but consists in easy escapes and sallies of levity, which make sport but raise no envy.’

How cheering and revealing to find the Christian moralist, the pessimist, the lexicographer, the Great Cham of literature, Samuel Johnson, so warm in praise of the fat knight! But we recollect his understanding of the dissipated Richard Savage and his affection for the vain and sottish Boswell. And of course Johnson draws a moral: ‘that no man is more dangerous than he that with a will to corrupt, hath the power to please; and that neither wit nor honesty ought to think themselves safe with such a companion when they see Henry seduced by Falstaff.’

Johnson’s edition of Shakespeare appeared in 1765 and his note on Falstaff may have inspired a famous essay which was published anonymously twelve years later and which is something of a landmark in Shakespearian criticism. The author was Maurice Morgann who in 1766 at the age of forty became an Under-Secretary of State to Lord Shelburne in charge of the American Department. He went on a mission to Canada and some years later we find him in New York as Secretary to the Commander in Chief and Commissioner for restoring peace, General Carleton. His share

in the negotiation of the peace treaty earned him a life-pension and affluent retirement. The essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff – Morgann was ahead of his age in distinguishing between dramatic character and characters in real life – bears on the title page the quotation ‘I am not *John of Gaunt* your Grandfather, but yet *no* COWARD, *Hal*. Boswell called it very ingenious and records two meetings between Johnson and the urbane, upright, lively Morgann. One night they disputed pretty late and Johnson would not give in, though he was in the wrong; but he retracted at breakfast next day. The essay sprawls rather and does not lend itself to quotation. Morgann holds that the clue to Falstaff’s personality and conduct is his mental alacrity and vigour and after debating the question whether he was or was not a coward concludes that this, ‘the most perfect comic character that perhaps ever was exhibited’ is made up by Shakespeare wholly of incongruities:

at once young and old, enterprising and fat, a dupe and a wit, harmless and wicked, weak in principle and resolute by constitution, cowardly in appearance and brave in reality; a knave without malice, a liar without deceit; a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier, without either dignity, decency, or honour: this is a character which, though it may be decomposed, could not, I believe, have been formed, nor the ingredients of it duly mingled upon any receipt whatever. It required the hand of Shakespeare himself to give to every particular part a relish of the whole, and of the whole to every particular part; alike the same incongruous, identical Falstaff, whether to the grave Chief Justice he vainly talks of his youth, and offers *to caper for a thousand*; or cries to Mrs Doll, ‘I am old, I am old’, though she is seated on his lap, and he is courting her for busses.

Johnson’s enthusiasm may well have stimulated Morgann, and there seems little doubt that Morgann’s *apologia* had its sequel forty years later in Hazlitt’s panegyric. This is written with all the verve of his analysis of Iago and his appreciation of *Antony and Cleopatra*. As we are doing Sir John Falstaff Knight proud – ‘Jack Falstaff with my familiars, John with my brothers and sisters, and Sir John with all Europe’ – let us read a few of Hazlitt’s high spirited sentences:

Falstaff’s wit is an emanation of a fine constitution; an exuberance of good-humour and good-nature; an overflowing of his love of laughter and good fellowship; a giving vent to his heart’s ease and over-contentment with himself and others. He would not be in character if he were not so fat as he is; for there is the greatest keeping in the boundless luxury of his imagination and the pampered self-indulgence of his physical appetites. He manures and nourishes his mind with jests, as he does his body with sack and sugar. He carves out his jokes as he would a capon, or a haunch of venison, where there is *cut and come again*; and pours out upon them the oil of gladness. His tongue drops fatness, and in the chambers of his brain ‘it snows of meat and drink’. He keeps up perpetual holiday and open house and we live with him in a round of invitations to a rump and dozen. Yet we are not to suppose that he was a mere sensualist. All this is as much in imagination as in reality. His sensuality does not engross and stupefy his other faculties, but ‘ascends me into the brain, clears away all the dull, crude vapours that environ it, and makes it full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes’. His imagination keeps up the ball after his senses have done with it. He seems to have even a greater enjoyment of the freedom from restraint, of good cheer, of his ease, of his vanity, in the ideal exaggerated descriptions which he gives of them, than in fact ... He is represented as a liar, a

braggart, a coward, a glutton, etc., and yet we are not offended but delighted with him; for he is all these as much to amuse others as to gratify himself. He openly assumes all these characters to show the humorous part of them. The unrestrained indulgence of his own ease, appetites, and convenience, has neither malice nor hypocrisy in it. In a word, he is an actor in himself almost as much as upon the stage, and we no more object to the character of Falstaff in a moral point of view than we should think of bringing an excellent comedian who should represent him to the life, before one of the police officers.

After such eloquent and compelling speeches for the defence we may well shift our indictment and sit in judgment upon the newly crowned King Henry V who rebukes and rejects the companion of his follies:

I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
I have long dreamed of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane;
But, being a waked, I do despise my dream.

That we may acquit Hal even if we can never forgive him has been suggested in the preamble to Part I and for those who care to weigh the case further, there are A.C. Bradley's essay and John Dover Wilson's memorable Cambridge lectures in 1942, afterwards published as *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, in which the disciple is a little critical of Bradley, his revered master. The truth is that as you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs; and even so the hero of Agincourt was made by breaking the hearts of Falstaff and his followers.

But dramatically the rejection is a supreme effect. We may compare it with classical tragedy: with the moment when Oedipus realises that the oracle has been fulfilled. In this case the oracle has been pronounced in Part I; in the Prince's soliloquy

I know you all, and awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness...

and in his 'I do: I will' which closes the pageant of King and Prince of Wales on Falstaff's 'Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world', with the sheriff knocking at the door. In Part II we relish as in the Greek tragic poets the dramatic irony and the hubris to the Aristotelian reversal of fortune. Falstaff hugs himself as he thinks how we will keep Prince Harry in perpetual laughter with his imitations of Shallow; and when Pistol brings the great news he boasts that he will be the disposer of dignities and office, that he may take any man's horses, that the laws of England are at his commandment. 'Blessed are they that have been my friends; and woe unto my Lord Chief Justice!' He will leer upon the king as he comes by. 'Do but mark the countenance that he will give me.' Nemesis gives ear and strikes. Then as the procession passes on, the old man turns to the country justice and says simply: 'Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pound'. That is heroic, classical. Shakespeare remembers, although we in the theatre or study may not, the scene in Part I:

Quickly. He said this other day you ought him a thousand pound.

Prince. Sirrah, do I owe you a thousand pound?

Falstaff. A thousand pound, Hal? a million. Thy love is worth a million, thou owest me thy love.

Such irony is a match for Lady Macbeth's, 'A little water clears us of this deed. How easy is it then!' And such echoes reveal Shakespeare's conscious artistry, as when Lear's final 'Prithee undo this button' looks back to 'Off off you lendings, come unbutton here'. Shakespeare also loves to play upon the ambiguities of a word. In *Julius Caesar* and *Troilus and Cressida* he explores the several meanings of *honour* and *honours*.

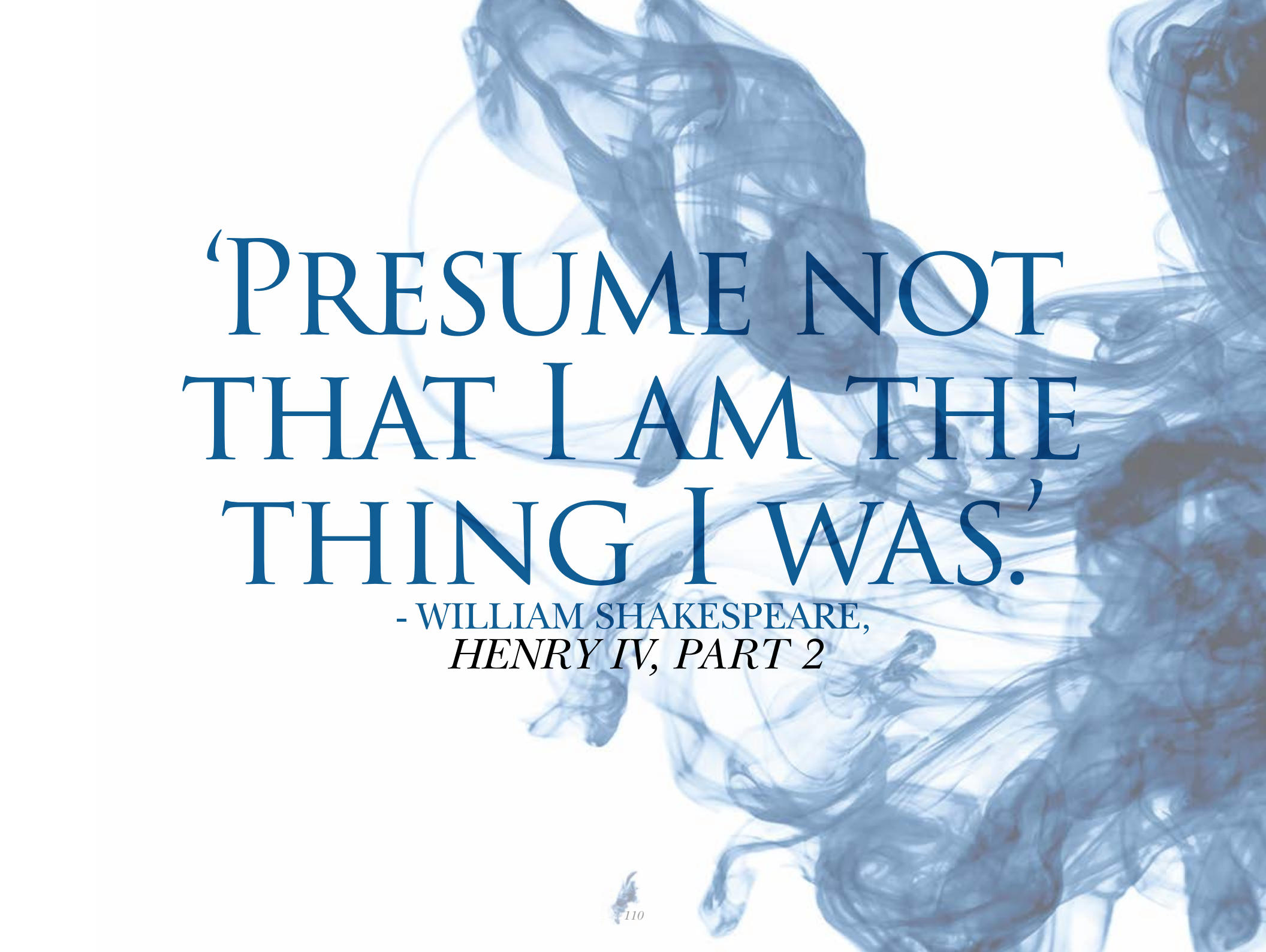
The ambivalent or double view of this concept is first expressed in *Henry IV* Part I. Falstaff's famous catechism 'Can honour set a leg? What is that word honour? Air ... Who hath it? he that died o' Wednesday ... honour is a mere scutcheon', is the prosaic comment on Hotspur's chivalrous rhetoric.

By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks...
Send danger from the east unto the west,
So honour cross it from the north to south,
And let them grapple...

Another of Shakespeare's artistic devices is juxtaposition and Part II provides a perfect example. When Warwick and Surrey visit the sleepless King in the small hours he breaks out into a great meditation upon the revolutions of time and chance – the opening is stolen from Ovid – and recalls the moment when Richard II prophesied in Warwick's presence, his eyes brimful of tears, the rebellion of Northumberland and the division of the kingdom. Warwick sagely philosophises on the history in all men's lives, the law of growth and decay, the hatch and brood of time. And then a minute later we find ourselves in Gloucestershire and listen to two old men telling the very same tale. Instead of Richard and Northumberland and civil war, we hark back to little John Doit of Staffordshire and Will Squele, a Cotswold man, and a fight with a fruiterer behind Gray's Inn. 'Then was Jack Falstaff, now Sir John, a boy, and page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk.' But time marches on. Bullocks are sold at Stamford fair; a score of good ewes may be worth ten pounds. Yet death, as the Psalmist saith, is certain to all. And the theme – a variation on the previous scene like a change of instruments or key in music – is resolved in five words with a chord, 'And is old Double dead?'

Falstaff has to be seen to be enjoyed if not believed. In the theatre we delight in his great belly, the roseate cheeks emerging from a quart pot, the bald pate fringed with white, the twinkling eye, lewd winks and enormous smile, his gouty foot, heaving gait and surprising agility on rare occasions when Pistol must be thrown downstairs or 'instinct' bids him make himself improbably scarce. But although we miss much when we read

or listen to his recorded speech, nevertheless like so many of the greatest creations in fiction it is by his speech that we know him. In this respect he is with Mrs Gamp, Sam Weller, Pecksniff, Micawber, Mantalini and all the most alive and kicking of Dickens's characters, who are not characters but mouth-pieces of inspired talk. His tongue immortalises Falstaff as it has immortalised the Wife of Bath and Miss Bates and the White Queen. Falstaff has the poet's gift, the gift of the gab. In the theatre we are distracted by the visual comedy: it may be that if we listen we shall learn a great deal about unimitated, inimitable Falstaff that we did not know.



‘PRESUME NOT
THAT I AM THE
THING I WAS.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
HENRY IV, PART 2



HENRY V

CD 38 • CD 39 • CD 40

Chorus - William Squire • *King Henry V* - Gary Watson • *Humphrey* - Julian Curry • *John of Lancaster* - Ian McKellen • *Duke of Exeter* - Denis McCarthy
Duke of York - John Tracy-Phillips • *Earl of Salisbury* - Peter Orr • *Earl of Westmoreland* - Donald Beves • *Archbishop of Canterbury* - John Barton
Bishop of Ely - John Perceval • *Earl of Cambridge* - Peter Foster • *Lord Scroop* - Giles Slaughter • *Sir Thomas Grey* - David Rowe-Beddoe
Sir Thomas Erpingham - Philip Strick • *Gower* - Trevor Nunn • *Fluellen* - Dudley Jones • *Macmorris* - Andrew Parkes • *Jamy* - Ian McKellen
Bates - Michael Burrell • *Court* - Peter Orr • *Pistol* - Tony Church • *Boy* - John Sharpe • *Charles VI* - Terrence Hardiman
Lewis, The Dauphin - Anthony White • *Duke of Burgundy* - George Rylands • *Duke of Orleans* - John Tracy-Phillips • *Duke of Britaine* - Derek Jacobi
Duke of Bourbon - Corin Redgrave • *The Constable of France* - Frank Duncan • *Rambures* - Corin Redgrave • *Grandpré* - Corin Redgrave
Governor of Harfleur - Roger Hammond • *Montjoy* - Frank Duncan • *Ambassador* - Derek Jacobi • *Isabel* - Suzanne Fuller
Katharine - Micheline Samuels • *Alice* - Prunella Scales • *Hostess* - Vivienne Chatterton

‘No completer incarnation could be shown us of the militant Englishman – *Anglais pur sang*. Shakespeare’s typical English hero or historic protagonist is a man of their type who founded and built up the Empire of England in India; a hero after the future pattern of Hastings and Clive; not less daringly sagacious and not more delicately scrupulous, not less indomitable or more impeccable than they. A type by no means immaculate, a creature not at all too bright and good for English Nature’s daily food in times of mercantile or military enterprise; no whit more if no whit less excellent and radiant than reality.’ Swinburne, certainly no soldier and no Empire-builder either, voices the accepted view. A greater poet, W.B. Yeats, who as an Irishman cannot be expected to have a good word for English imperialism and English arms, sums up Shakespeare’s King Henry V as a man of gross vices and coarse nerves, remorseless and undistinguished as some natural force, a vessel of clay, a handsome spirited horse; the English public schoolboy who persecutes those of his fellows who have weak muscles and a distaste for school games. Another Irishman is even more defamatory. ‘One can hardly forgive Shakespeare quite for the worldly phase in which he tried to thrust such a Jingo hero as his Harry V down our throats. The combination of conventional propriety and brute masterfulness in his public capacity with a low-lived blackguardism in his private tastes is not a pleasant one. No doubt he is true to nature as a picture of what is by no means uncommon in English society, an able young Philistine inheriting high position and authority, which he holds on to and goes through with by keeping a tight grip on his conventional and legal advantages, but who would have been quite in his place if he had been born a gamekeeper or a farmer... His popularity is like that of a prizefighter: nobody feels for him as for Romeo or Hamlet.’

We have all learnt to discount Bernard Shaw when he is mocking the English and pointing out how much better a dramatist he is than the Bard. (‘I have long ceased to celebrate my own birthday: and I do not see why I should celebrate Shakespeare’s’). But if we appeal from Ireland to the United States, Henry comes off only a little better. Professor Tucker Brooke, in his incomparable essay on *The Personality of Shakespeare*, points out that the poet, who was not an advanced political thinker like Bacon, Raleigh, or Spenser, but ‘a little Englishman’, and a land-lubber, ‘learned his patriotism and foreign policy from Holinshed and the other old chroniclers who followed in the train of that prince of sporting-writers, Froissart. They treated warfare as we treat football – as a spectacular, exciting, and fundamentally good-natured pastime, arising from no particular causes except the love of competition and productive of no consequences except the glory of the successful athlete’. He quotes King Henry’s speech before Agincourt as ‘the high water-mark of football oratory’, and comments: ‘This was not the spirit in which Queen Elizabeth made war. It was not the spirit of the seven thousand Englishmen whom the Earl of Essex led to Rouen in 1591 to aid Navarre’s stern Huguenots against the Catholic League’. We may remember, however, that eight years later Essex crossed the Irish Sea

to put down the rebellion which followed the defeat of the English forces by Tyrone. There he lost 12,000 men and spent £300,000. 'What can you expect from an accursed country but unfortunate news?' At that very moment Shakespeare's CHORUS to the Fifth Act of our play imagines London pouring forth her citizens to welcome Harry:

As, by a lower but loving likelihood,
Were now the general of our gracious empress,
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit,
To welcome him.

A few weeks later the general returned disgraced, attempted rebellion, and failed. His accomplice, the Earl of Southampton, who had ordered a performance of *Richard II* at the Globe to arouse public feeling, was reprieved. The Earl of Essex was executed. We look back to the Chorus of Act II and the conspiracy of Cambridge, Scroop and Grey:

O England, model to thy inward greatness,
Like little body with a mighty heart:
What mightst thou do, that honour would thee do,
Were all thy children kind and natural!
But see, thy fault France hath in thee found out,
A nest of hollow bosoms...
And by their hands this grace of kings must die,
If hell and treason hold their promises.

Such is the dramatic irony of life.

Duff Cooper, soldier, cabinet minister, historian, ambassador and man of the world, would have us believe that Shakespeare left Stratford in 1585 to seek the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth, by enlisting in the forces which the Queen reluctantly despatched to the Low Countries under the command of the Earl of Leicester, whose principal seat was at Kenilworth, thirteen miles from Stratford. *Sergeant Shakespeare* is more than a *jeu d'esprit*. The thesis is plausible and attractive. The author of *Troilus and Cressida*, of *Coriolanus* and the history plays knew a very great deal about soldiering. Duff Cooper is more sympathetic to Shakespeare's Henry V than the witnesses we have called so far, and than the present Poet Laureate, who fifty years ago dismissed him as the one commonplace man in the eight history plays, 'a popular hero who is as common as those who love him'. He is not, says Duff Cooper, like the bastard Faulconbridge, a soldier first and last. 'His is a more complicated and less admirable character. He serves rather as an example of the kind of youth who needs military discipline to make a man of him. He has courage and love of adventure in abundance. These are the qualities which, until they are harnessed, drive him into wild courses. But even while he is pursuing them he is dreaming of how he will redeem all his follies on the battlefield. The Battle of Shrewsbury gives him his chance, of which he takes full advantage, overcoming the gallant Harry Percy, who is the more military minded of the two... A lesser writer would have reformed the Prince after his heroic exploits. Shakespeare knew better. Bad habits are not easily laid aside. A great shock, namely

his father's death and his succession, was required to "whip the offending Adam out of him"... When Henry V put on his crown he got into uniform and never took it off again. It is true that he still played pranks, as on the eve of Agincourt, but they are tedious ones, typical of the bad young man who has "made good"... Whether we like him or not, I think that Shakespeare liked him, and wrote of him in good faith, without satire, and that, if he was proud to be a soldier, Shakespeare shared his pride.'

In 1900 F.R. Benson played Henry V at the Lyceum, a production which inspired one of the most dazzling of all Max Beerbohm's dramatic critiques. Benson was one of the first amateurs to make good on the professional stage. With his company of ex-undergraduates he toured the provinces in Shakespeare; they spent their afternoons on the cricket field and in the evening 'doffed their flannels to don the motley'. If Henry is indeed the typical English public school athlete, Benson should have excelled in the part. But Max prefers the days when Crummles played, and he pens an indictment of the new university actor, with a sense of blank verse and a body in good training, who was ousting the strolling players whose excesses in alcohol and nicotine did not hurt them as mimes. The old stroller was a bundle of nerves, the new stroller a bundle of muscles. Max makes fine fun of the future Sir Frank Benson. 'Every member of the cast seemed in tip-top condition – thoroughly "fit". Subordinates and principals all worked well together. The fielding was excellent and so was the batting. Speech after speech was sent spinning across the boundary, and one was constantly inclined to shout "Well *played*, sir! Well played *indeed!*" As a branch of university cricket, the whole performance was, indeed, beyond praise. But, as a form of acting, it was not impressive.' But Max did not care about the play. 'It should be done brilliantly, splendidly or not at all. Only the best kind of acting, and the best kind of production, could make it anything but tedious. Except a few patches of poetry, it contains nothing whatsoever of merit. It is just a dull, incoherent series of speeches, interspersed with alarums and excursions.' But Hazlitt, who as a good republican finds Henry brutal and hypocritical, cannot stop quoting splendid passages and says of the image of war in the first Prologue, '... at his heels/Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire/Crouch for employment – Rubens, if he had painted it, would not have improved upon the simile.'

In November, 1944, the film version of *Henry V* with Laurence Olivier as the King showed what splendour and spectacle can do for the play. More than that, Olivier proved that Harry is something more than the athletic schoolboy, the successful prefect, the militant Englishman. The soliloquy before Agincourt made us realise, as we should, that Shakespeare is saying farewell to the hero as man of action, to Faulconbridge and Hotspur. He is moving onwards, or rather looking inwards, to the hero who thinks, to the hero who may be divided against himself, to Brutus and Hamlet. The warriors of the plays after 1600, Othello, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Mark Antony, are more complex and more individual. They are none of them *Anglais pur sang*.

When we listen to the play uncut and are not distracted by alarums and excursions, by banners and fortifications and pavilions, we shall understand more fully the various threads which make up the hero's character and appreciate A.C. Bradley's impartial estimate and Dover Wilson's eloquent defence. Harry is deeply religious; he is not as much of a politician as his father, but he is shrewd; he has a rough and ready tongue and moments of tenderness; and in his father's words, 'when he's incensed, he's flint'. Dover Wilson tells us that he learnt to understand Harry of Monmouth from reading Field-Marshal Wavell's *Life of Allenby* and Miss C.V. Wedgwood's *William the Silent*. What he was to the Elizabethans we know from the *Chronicle* of Edward Hall:

He was merciful to offenders, charitable to the needy, indifferent to all men, faithful to his friends, and fierce to his enemies, toward God most devout, toward the world moderate, and to his realm a very father. What should I say? He was the blazing comet and apparent lantern in his days; he was the mirror of Christendom and the glory of his country; he was the flower of kings past, and a glass to them that should succeed. No Emperor in magnanimity ever him excelled.'



HENRY VI, PART I

CD 41 • CD 42 • CD 43

King Henry VI - Richard Marquand • *Duke of Gloucester* - David King • *Duke of Bedford* - Carleton Hobbs
Thomas Beaufort - Terrence Hardiman • *Henry Beaufort* - Denis McCarthy • *John Beaufort* - Roger Croucher
Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York - Peter Orr • *Earl of Warwick* - Frank Duncan • *Earl of Salisbury* - John Tydeman
Earl of Suffolk - Gary Watson • *Lord Talbot* - William Devlin • *John Talbot* - Gordon Gardner • *Edmund Mortimer* - Cyril Luckham
Sir John Falstaff - John Nettleton • *Sir William Lucy* - John Shrapnel • *Sir William Glansdale* - Raymond Clarke
Mayor of London - Brian Batchelor • *Vernon* - David Rowe-Beddoe • *Basset* - Anthony Arlidge • *A Lawyer* - Bob Jones
Charles - Patrick Garland • *Reignier* - V.C. Clinton Baddele • *Duke of Burgundy* - John Hopkins • *Duke of Alencon* - John Tracy-Phillips
Bastard of Orleans - David Buck • *General* - John Barton • *An Old Shepherd* - Ronald Grey • *Margaret* - Mary Morris
Countess of Auvergne - Yvonne Bonnamy • *Joan la Pucelle* - Freda Dowie

How would it have joyed brave *Talbot* (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, he should triumphe againe on the Stage, and have his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least (at severall times), who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding?

Thus wrote Thomas Nashe in 1592 in *Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Divell* and he must be referring to *Henry VI*, Part 1. In the same year Philip Henslowe, owner of the Rose Theatre, records in his Diary fourteen performances of a ‘ne’ (new) play, ‘Harey the vj’, between March 3 and June 20. On September 3 died Robert Greene who a month or so earlier had penned a bitter attack upon Shakespeare as an ‘Upstart Crow’ and ‘Shakescene’ and had quoted in mockery a line from *Henry VI*, Part 3. However swift and slap-dash a composer Shakespeare was, we cannot readily suppose that he dashed off the second and third parts of his Henry trilogy in a matter of weeks. Part 1 then was written after and not before Parts 2 and 3, which were presumably first played in 1591, and early in 1592. The fact that Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, makes no mention of Talbot in the first scene of Part 2 when he names those who shed their blood in France to preserve Henry V’s conquest is proof enough that Part 1 had not yet been written.

Why was brave Talbot such a box-office hit? Professor Dover Wilson suggests that, as with *Henry V* in 1599, the production of a heroic play was connected with England’s hopes and fears for the expeditionary force of 4,000 foot, 200 horse and a number of gentleman ‘voluntaries’ which crossed to Dieppe on August 2, 1591, to aid Henry of Navarre in wresting Normandy from the Catholic League, under the leadership of the wilful, dazzling Earl of Essex. He was to join forces with Henry for the capture of Rouen but the siege did not begin until the end of October and desertion and disease melted the force away. By Christmas it was clear that the expedition had failed and two weeks later Essex withdrew. The Queen and her people had set their hearts on success. The disappointment was bitter. Shakespeare cheers them with his portrait of Talbot who died fighting against odds rather than withdraw from a siege. His tomb in the cathedral of Notre Dame in Rouen,

with its epitaph quoted at full length in the play, was far-famed. 'To realise how actual the play was', writes Dover Wilson, 'one only has to read the accounts by two eye-witnesses of the siege in 1591 which have come down to us; the pages devoted to it in the *Memoirs of Robert Cary*, who went out with Essex and returned with him about Christmas; and the more detailed day-to-day journal of the operations from August 13 to December 24, kept by Sir Thomas Coningsby... *Henry VI*, Part 1 is richer in military incident and poorer in poetry than any other play in the canon. A good deal more might be said on the former head, on the attention paid to the alarums, sallies, and skirmishes which form the day-to-day staple of siege warfare, and on the occurrence of terms like "court of guard", "cornet", "scaling-ladders", and even "skirmish" itself, which are frequently used by Coningsby or Cary, and are nevertheless either not found elsewhere in Shakespeare or only very rarely and in non-historical plays... The siege of Rouen was much in mind both with those who wrote and with those who first witnessed this, to us poor but to them exciting, drama; the author or authors had ransacked the chronicles to find analogies to the French campaign of 1591–2 in those of 1422–50.'

Authors not author: Dover Wilson has no doubt at all that in Part 1 Thomas Nashe, Richard Greene and (possibly) George Peele had a major hand; that Shakespeare was a reviser only except for a couple of scenes or so. The whole of Act I he assigns to Nashe and finds Shakespeare's hand at work upon other men's material in fourteen out of the twenty-four scenes which make up the remaining Acts. He is equally confident regarding the authorship of Parts 2 and 3. Greene (with Nashe abetting) is the original and Shakespeare the reviser. E.K. Chambers supports Dover Wilson in assigning next to nothing to Shakespeare in Part 1 but in the rest of the trilogy finds 'no obvious sutures. either of style or structure' and justly remarks; 'I do not think that we have adequate *criteria* for distinguishing with any assurance from the style of his contemporaries that of a young writer still under their influence. Most of the rhetorical features of *Richard III* are also to be found in 3 *Henry VI* but less continuously, among straightforward pieces of unornamented writing. The same is true, perhaps in a minor degree, of 2 *Henry VI*. I do not see anything improbable in the stylistic development which the historical succession of the plays suggests'. Although intimacy with the work of the University wits may enable us to distinguish some idiosyncracies and mannerisms of Peele, Nashe, Kyd, and Greene, nevertheless there is such a thing as a 'period' style when poets and poetasters share a *lingua communis*. In the Elizabethan sonnet sequences and song books, in the minor Metaphysicals, in countless heroic couplets which were inspired by Dryden and Pope, in post-romantic and pre-Raphaelite poetry, in the *vers libre* of the nineteen twenties and thirties, we are hard put to it to assign lines and stanzas with confidence to a particular poet. When Shakespeare first began to write for the stage blank verse was an uncouth, unpractised medium. Doubtless more actors than one could have improvised and gagged in the manner of the speeches which they memorised. In the 3 Parts of *Henry VI*, in *Titus Andronicus*, in *The Comedy of Errors*, there is plenty of journey-man work, stock in trade phrases, tropes and conventions common to the dramatists; but the temptation to assign to Greene, Nashe and Peele all those passages which offend our taste is as perilous as it is potent. Certainly the style in the plays of Shakespeare's apprenticeship is sometimes unbelievably pedestrian when compared with that of his narrative poems, but poetic drama was in its infancy, the audience wanted action and entertainment, their standards were not exacting, and doubtless scenes and speeches had to be forthcoming at short notice. There may well have been a free-for-all code in the revising and re-handling of plays in the repertoire which offended the susceptibilities of those authors who thought themselves, and wished to be thought, intellectual.

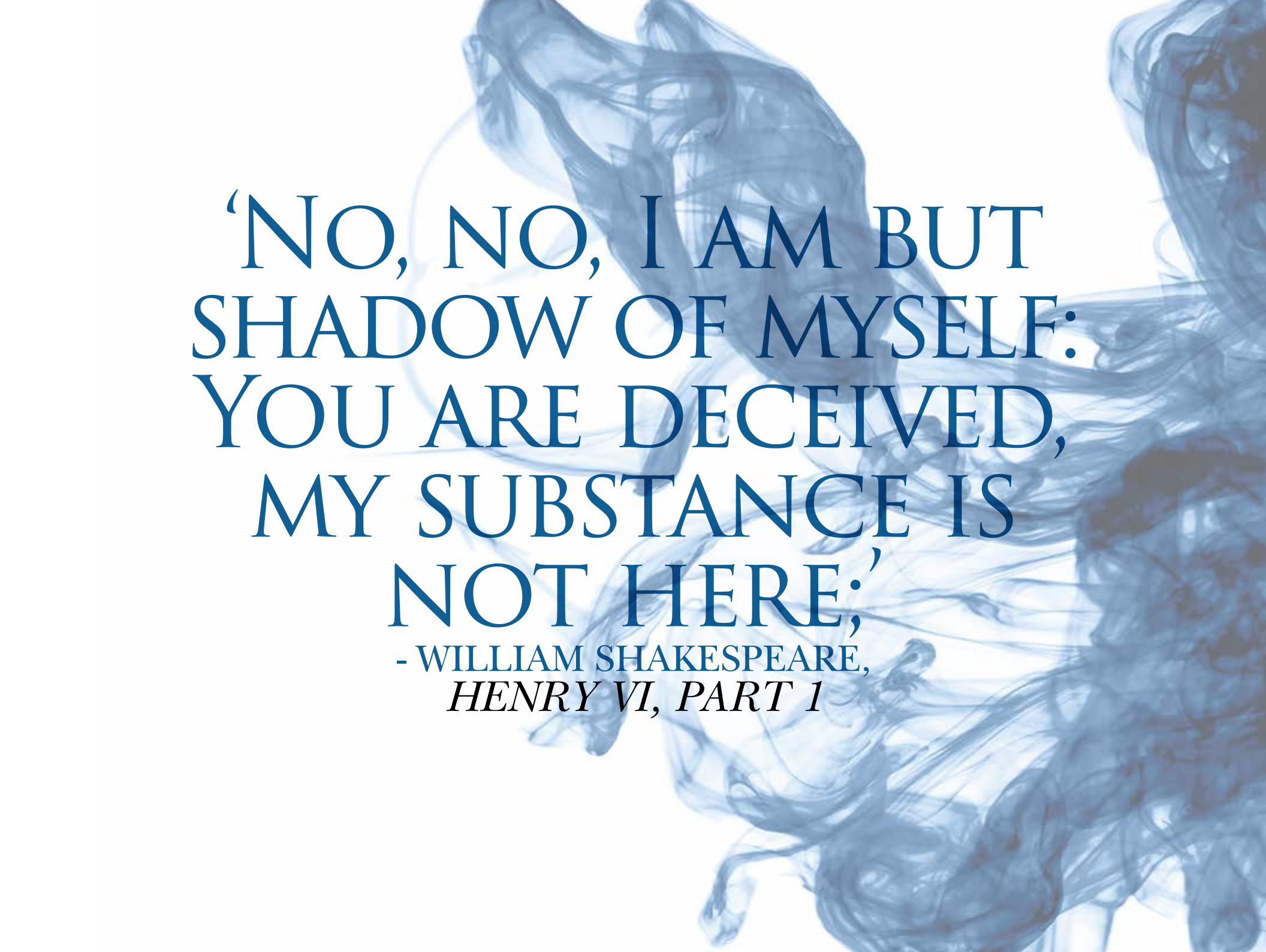
Let it suffice that Heminge and Condell printed the Henry plays in the First Folio. Shakespeare left ten Chronicles or Histories. They fall into two groups of four with two odd men out. If we follow them historically, *King John* covers the years 1200–1216. That is a prologue. Then we have the tetralogy, *Richard II*, 1 and 2 *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, spanning in Shakespeare the years 1398–1420. Then the second tetralogy, his apprenticeship, with or without the aid of others, from the death of Henry V in 1422 to Bosworth Field and the coronation of Henry VII on the battlefield in 1485. Thus the two tetralogies span the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI, Edward IV, Edward V and Richard III. From the accession of Richard II to the death of Richard III is just over a hundred years. Then at the very end of his career, after his retirement, as an epilogue to the whole presentation of the Wars of the Roses, from the plucking of the red rose and the white in Temple Garden (1 *Henry VI*, Act II, scene 4) to the establishment of the Tudors, Shakespeare (with or without collaborators) gives us Henry VIII, at once a pageant and a morality, which covers the years from the impeachment of Buckingham in 1521 to the birth of Queen Elizabeth in 1533.

The two tetralogies present the Decline and Fall of the House of Plantagenet. The great sequence begins with a character portrait of Richard II and ends with a character portrait of Richard III; the first an artist and egoist; the second an egoist and tyrant; each of them humanised by their creator into something far profounder than a *dramatis persona* or the *exemplum* of a moralist. Shakespeare's two great source-books were Edward Hall's *The Union of the two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), which was concerned with showing that the establishment of the Tudor monarchy in 1485 had rescued England from the miseries and anarchy of civil strife following on the deposition of Richard II in 1399; and secondly the *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande* (1577) by Raphael Holinshed. Shakespeare used the second edition of 1587. Shakespeare's view of history is in the main the accepted view of his contemporaries but, as a dramatist and poet, as a great observer as well as entertainer, he selects, heightens, juxtaposes and exploits, as his own sympathies or the opportunities of the stage direct him. In all the history plays there are certain general themes which recur; the wheel of fortune; the fickleness of the multitude; the appetite for power; the conflict of wills; the triumphs and disasters of foreign conquest; the horrors of civil war; the irony of kingship; the need for order and authority, for justice and mercy, for degree and ceremony.

The 3 parts of *Henry VI*, crude and naïve though they often are, are not only historical pieces; they are political; they are moral; and they are (within the conventions of 1538 to 1595) *theatrical*. Above all if we listen and attend we shall discover Shakespeare exploring the mind and heart of man and learning to relate the Kings and Queens, the Earls and Prelates of chronicle and heraldry to the common man; the huntsman, the soldier, the hired assassin, the artisan.



William Devlin as Lord Talbot, Gordon Gardner as John Talbot and Freda Dowie as Joan of Arc in Henry VI Part 1, with George Rylands the producer listening in the background

The background of the image features abstract, swirling blue ink splatters and smoke-like patterns on a white background. The ink is concentrated on the right side and bottom, with some lighter, wispy trails extending towards the left.

‘NO, NO, I AM BUT
SHADOW OF MYSELF:
YOU ARE DECEIVED,
MY SUBSTANCE IS
NOT HERE;’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
HENRY VI, PART 1



HENRY VI, PART II

CD 44 • CD 45 • CD 46

Henry VI - Richard Marquand • *Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester* - David King • *Cardinal Beaufort* - Denis McCarthy
Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York - Peter Orr • *Edward* - Richard Wordsworth • *Richard* - Patrick Wymark • *Duke of Somerset* - Roger Croucher
Duke of Suffolk - Gary Watson • *Duke of Buckingham* - David Jones • *Lord Clifford* - Tony Church • *Young Clifford* - John Shrapnel
Earl of Salisbury - John Tydeman • *Earl of Warwick* - Frank Duncan • *Lord Scales* - Robin Ellis • *Lord Say* - Miles Malleson
Sir Humphrey Stafford - Guy Slater • *William Stafford* - Michael Turnbull • *Sir John Stanley* - Bob Jones • *A Lieutenant* - David Buck
Gentlemen - Terrence Hardiman, Raymond Clarke • *John Hum* - Dudley Jones • *John Southwell* - Bob Jones • *Roger Bolingbroke* - Peter Woodthorpe
A Spirit - Terrence Hardiman • *Thomas Horner* - David Burke • *Peter* - Philip Strick • *Simpcox* - Michael Bates • *Alexander Iden* - Trevor Nunn
Jack Cade - Norman Rossington • *George Bevis* - Stephen Thorne • *John Holland* - David Burke • *Margaret* - Mary Morris
Eleanor - Yvonne Bonnamy • *Margery Jourdain* - George Rylands • *Wife of Simpcox* - Patsy Byrne • *Sheriff* - Terrence Hardiman

'To those Gentlemen his Quondam acquaintance, that spend their wits in making plaies, R.G. wisheth a better exercise, and wisdom to prevent his extremities...

'Base minded men all three of you, if by my miserie you be not warned: for unto none of you (like mee) sought those burrs to cleave: those Puppets (I meane) that spake from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours. Is it not strange, that I, to whom they all have beene beholding: is it not like that you, to whome they all have beene beholding, shall (were yee in that case as I am now) bee both at once of them forsaken? Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute *Iohannes fac totum*, is in his own conceit the onely Shakescene in a Countrey.'

This attack upon Shakespeare, first and last of its kind, was penned by Robert Greene, pamphleteer, dramatist, pastoral poet, not long before his miserable death, in *A Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592). This 'letter written to divers play-makers is offensively by one or two of them taken', Henry Chettle, dramatist and printer and Greene's editor, confessed; and he at once made handsome apologies, ending in a warm tribute to Shakespeare:

My selfe have seene his demeanor no less civill than he exelent in the qualitie he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightnes of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in witting, that aprooves his Art.

The great eighteenth-century Shakespearian scholar, Edmund Malone, interpreted the indictment as meaning that Shakespeare had furbished up some of Greene's dramas and had them staged as his own. He took as evidence the existence of two editions published in 1594 and 1595 with the following title-pages:

The First part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster, with the death of the good Duke Humphrey: and the banishment and death of the Duke of *Suffolke*, and the Tragicall end of the proud Cardinall of *Winchester*, with the notable rebellion of *Iacke Cade: And the Duke of Yorkes first claime* unto the Crowne.

The true Tragedie of Richard/*Duke of Yorke*, and the death of/good King Henrie the Sixt,/with the whole contention betweene/
the two Houses Lancaster and Yorke.

A hundred and forty years after Malone's *Dissertation on the Three Parts of 'Henry VI'*, Professor Peter Alexander showed that these two editions were not originals by Greene or another, later plagiarised by Shakespeare, but pirated or 'Bad Quartos' of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* as printed in the Folio. He interpreted the phrase 'beautified with our feathers' as meaning no more than the vexation of a University man that 'a poor player' should set up as author on his own account. In the New Cambridge Shakespeare, however, Professor Dover Wilson has moved back in the direction of Malone, emphasising the fact that Greene's contemporaries seem to have interpreted the charge as one of plagiarism, particularly the unknown R.B. who wrote in *Greene's Newes and Greene's Funeralls*:

Greene gave the ground to all that wrote upon him;
Nay more, the men that so eclipsed his fame
Purloyned his plumes, can they deny the same?

Although he allows Shakespeare a far greater say in Parts 2 and 3 than in Part 1, Dover Wilson is convinced that 'the ground' of Greene is, clearly to be discerned and that Nashe also eared the land. Samuel Johnson in his edition noted that Lewis Theobald (sometime hero of *The Dunciad* and author of *Shakespeare Restored*) had thought the trilogy to be supposititious and that Dr Warburton declared it 'to be certainly not Shakespeare's.' But Johnson is not persuaded:

From mere inferiority nothing can be inferred; in the productions of wit there will be inequality. Sometimes judgement will err, and sometimes the matter itself will defeat the artist. Of every author's works one will be the best and one will be the worst. The colours are not equally pleasing, nor the attitudes equally graceful, in all the pictures of *Titian* or *Reynolds*.

Dissimilitude of style and heterogeneousness of sentiment may sufficiently show that a work does not really belong to the reputed author. But in these plays no such marks of spuriousness are found. The diction, the versification and the figures are Shakespeare's. These plays, considered, without regard to characters and incidents, merely as narratives in verse, are more happily conceived and more accurately finished than those of *King John*, *Richard II*, or the tragic scenes of *Henry IV* and *V*. If we take these plays from Shakespeare to whom shall they be given? What author of that age had the same easiness of expression and fluency of numbers? ... They are ascribed to Shakespeare by the first editors, whose attestation may be received in questions of fact, however unskilfully they superintended their edition. They seem to be declared genuine by the voice of *Shakespeare* himself, who refers to the second play in his epilogue to *Henry VI*... if an author's own testimony is to be overthrown by speculative criticism, no man can be any longer secure of literary reputation.

Of these three plays I think the second the best. The truth is, that they have not sufficient variety of action, for the incidents are too often of the same kind; yet many of the characters are well discriminated. King *Henry* and his Queen, King *Edward*, the Duke of Gloucester, and the Earl of *Warwick* are very strongly and distinctly painted.

Johnson appreciates the vitality and fluency of the plays as narrative and the strength with which the chief characters are delineated. We shall not agree with him that they are more accurately finished than *King John* and *Richard II*, both of which are conscious and careful in expression. That there is not sufficient variety of action and incident is the fault of the material rather than the dramatist. During the Wars of the Roses England, as Hazlitt remarks, was 'a perfect bear garden and Shakespeare has given us a very lively picture of the scene'. He picks out the 'very magnificent sketch' of Talbot: 'there is something as formidable in this portrait of him, as there would be in a monumental figure of him or in the sight of the armour which he wore'; and he judges the death scene of Cardinal Beaufort as one of the author's masterpieces. 'So is the speech of Gloucester to the nobles on the loss of the provinces of France by the King's marriage with Margaret of Anjou. The pretensions and growing ambition of the Duke of York, the father of Richard III, are also very ably developed.' Hazlitt goes on to praise Shakespeare's power of distinguishing between characters which approach most nearly to one another; Macbeth and Richard III; the madness of Lear and the feigned madness of Edgar; the gallantry of Hotspur and that of Prince Henry: and finds a further instance in the portrayals of Henry VI and Richard II.

Both lost their crowns owing to their mismanagement and imbecility; the one from a thoughtless, wilful abuse of power, the other from an indifference to it. The manner in which they bear their misfortunes corresponds exactly to the causes which led to them. The one is always lamenting the loss of his power, which he has not the spirit to regain; the other seems only to regret that he had ever been king, and is glad to be rid of the power, with the trouble: the effeminacy of the one is that of a voluptuary, proud, revengeful, impatient of contradiction, and inconsolable in his misfortunes; the effeminacy of the other is that of an indolent, good-natured mind, naturally averse to the turmoils of ambition and the cares of greatness, and who wishes to pass his time in monkish indolence and contemplation. Richard bewails the loss of the kingly power only as it was the means of gratifying his pride and luxury; Henry regards it only as a means of doing right, and is less desirous of the advantages to be derived from possessing it than afraid of exercising it wrong.

Hazlitt, violent and virile by nature, is less than fair both to 'the Royal Saint' and 'the sweet lovely rose'. But with his usual perception he clinches his point by a felicitous comparison of two speeches. In one Richard anticipates the message which Northumberland brings from Bolingbroke and is half in love with his own deposition:

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads;
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage;
My gay apparel for an alms-man's gown;
My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood;
My sceptre for a palmer's walking staff...

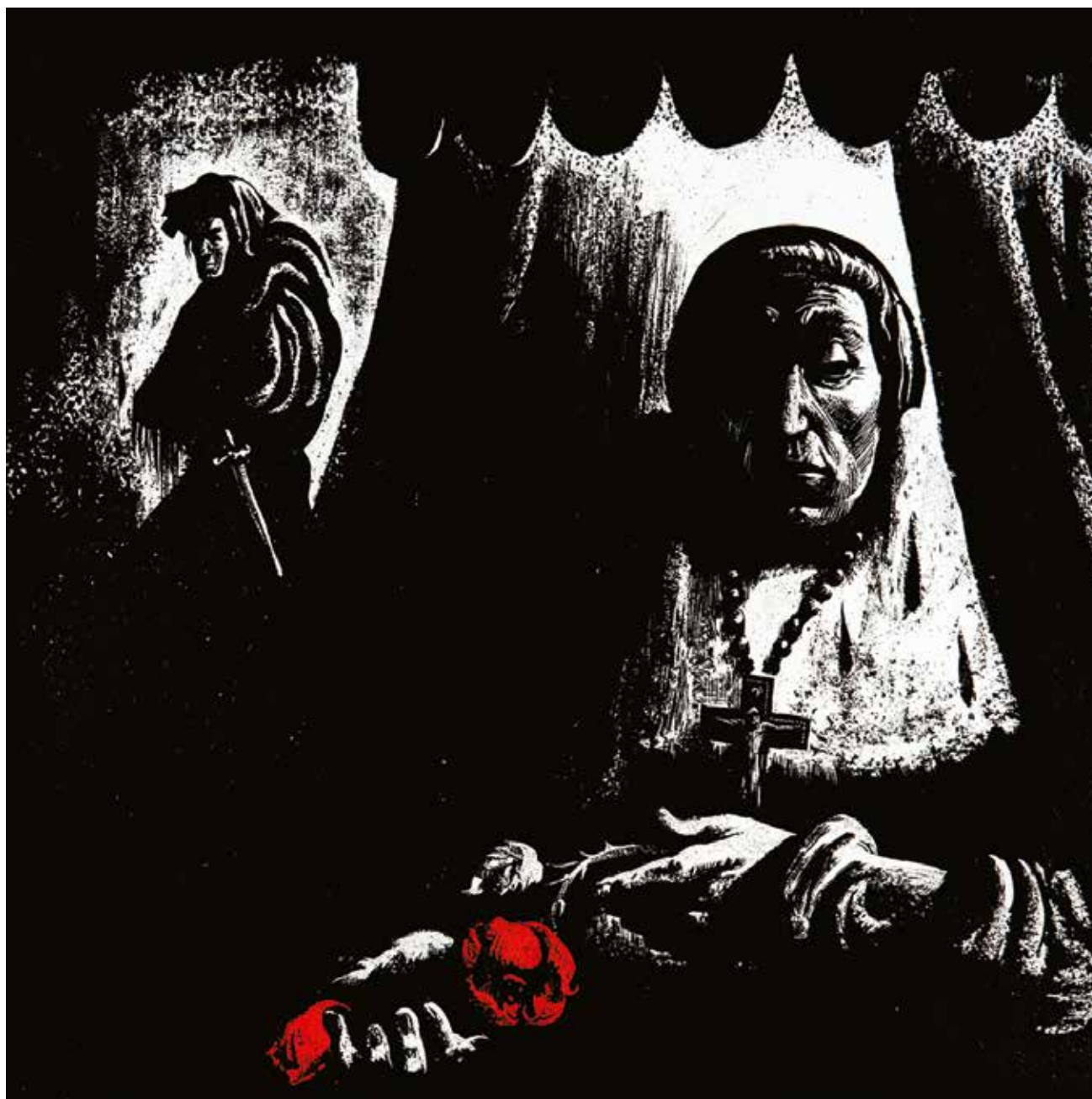
and so on. The other is Henry's more leisurely soliloquy on the pastoral life of a homely swain,

To sit upon a hill as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run;
How many make the hour full complete,
How many hours bring about the day,
How many days will finish up the year,
How many years a mortal man may live...

which is the most beautiful piece of poetry in the three plays and which breathes the spirit of the idealised Henry VI, chronicled by Polydore Vergil and taken over by Hall:

... he was of honest conversation even from a child, pure and clean, partaken of none evil, ready to conceive all that was good, a contemner of all those things which commonly corrupt the minds of men, so patient also in suffering of injuries received now and then, as that he coveted in his heart no revenge, but for the very same gave God Almighty most humble thanks because thereby he thought his sins to be washed away; yea, what shall we say, that this good, gracious, holy, sober, and wise man, would affirm all these miseries to have happened unto him both for his own and his ancestors' manifold offences.

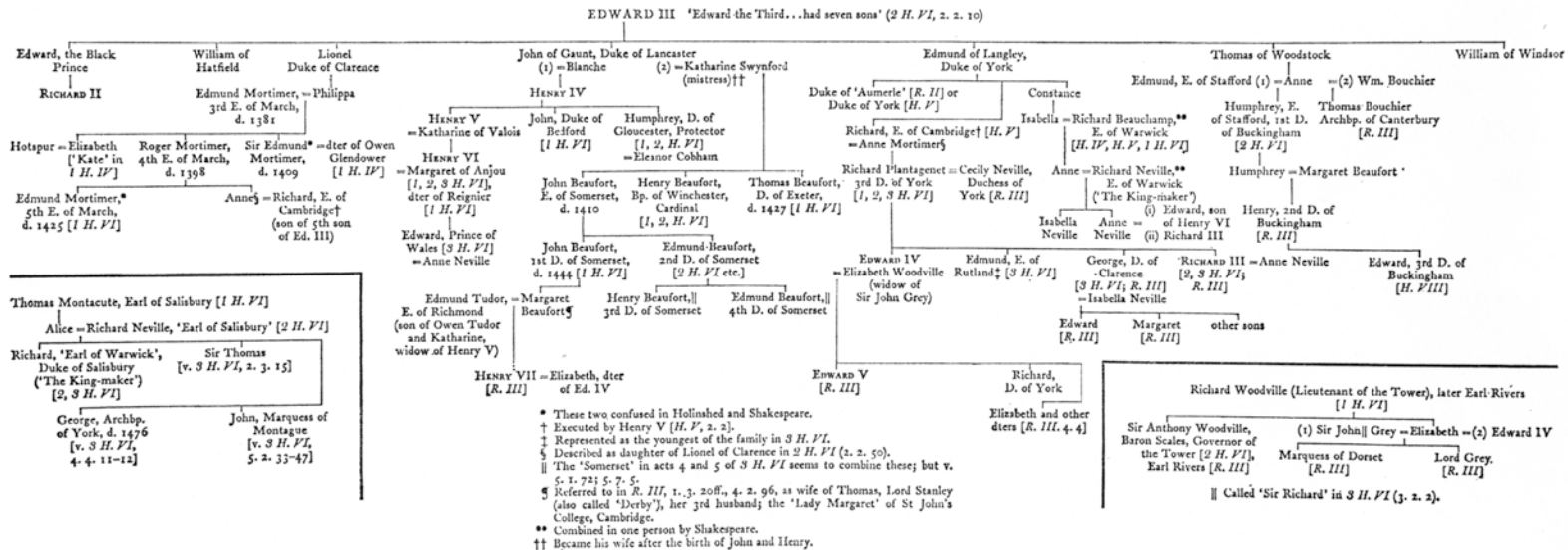
The scholar and the common reader have often abused Shakespeare's trilogy. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. When the Birmingham Repertory Theatre brought Douglas Seale's production of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* to the Old Vic in 1952, it had an ovation. Eleven years later its success has been equalled by the even more ambitious and even more triumphant presentation of all three parts, together with *Richard III*, by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford on Avon.



HENRY VI, PART III

CD 47 • CD 48 • CD49

Henry VI - Richard Marquand • *Edward, Prince of Wales* - Gordon Gardner • *Louis XI* - Toby Robertson
Duke of Somerset - David Rowe-Beddoe • *Duke of Exeter* - Trevor Bowen • *Earl of Oxford* - Bob Jones • *Earl of Northumberland* - David Burke
Earl of Westmoreland - Anthony Arlidge • *Lord Clifford* - John Shrapnel • *Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York* - Peter Orr
Edward, Earl of March - Richard Wordsworth • *Edmund, Earl of Rutland* - Malcolm Page • *George, afterwards Duke of Clarence* - Patrick Garland
Richard, afterwards Duke of Gloucester - Patrick Wymark • *Duke of Norfolk* - George Rylands • *Earl of Warwick* - Frank Duncan
Marquess of Montague - James Taylor Whitehead • *Lord Hastings* - Denis McCarthy • *Henry, Earl of Richmond* - John Shrapnel
Lord Rivers - John Hopkins • *Sir John Montgomery* - Dudley Jones • *A son that has killed his Father* - Martin Spencer
A Father that has killed his son - Malcolm Page • *Queen Margaret* - Mary Morris • *Lady Grey* - Margaretta Scott • *Bona* - Carol Macready





KING HENRY VIII

CD 50 • CD 51 • CD 52

King Henry VIII - Frank Duncan • *Cardinal Wolsey* - Robert Speaight • *Cardinal Campeius* - Richard Dare • *Cranmer* - Donald Layne-Smith
Duke of Norfolk - Denis McCarthy • *Duke of Buckingham* - Ian Lang • *Duke of Suffolk* - Peter Orr • *Earl of Surrey* - Gary Watson
Lord Chamberlain - Terrence Hardiman • *Lord Sands* - Michael Bates • *Cromwell* - Trevor Nunn • *Griffith* - John Barton
Queen Katharine - Margaretta Scott • *Anne Bullen* - Prunella Scales • *An Old Lady* - Vivienne Chatterton

I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.

Shakespeare, in Prospero's person, bids farewell to his 'so potent art'. Or so we like to think. Five years of comfortable retirement lay ahead. He was to die at 52. But a summons came from the King's Men – perhaps a Royal Command to grace the wedding festivities of King James's daughter Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine – and Shakespeare 'obliged' with *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry VIII*, in which the old Chronicle type of play (his own popular triumph *Henry VI*) is 'translated', like Bully Bottom, into pageantry. The Royal bride must have taken the proclamation by Garter King of Arms at the end of the play as a felicitous compliment:

Heaven from thy endless goodness, send prosperous life, long and ever happy,
to the high and mighty Princess of England, Elizabeth.

The last of the plays is also the most spectacular. The stage directions are copious and precise. In addition to the pomp and circumstance of the Coronation and the Christening, the audience are regaled with the Masque of the Shepherds at the Cardinal's Banquet; with the passing of Buckingham from his arraignment, attended by tipstaves, halberds and the axe; with the procession of Vergers, Scribes and Priests, the Sergeant at Arms bearing a silver mace, two Gentlemen bearing two great silver pillars, the Bishops, the two Cardinals, before the Queen's trial at Blackfriars; and with the dying Katharine's Vision of six personages in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces, 'solemnly tripping one after another'. This splendour of pageantry has ensured theatrical success from 1613 until Beerbohm Tree's production nearly three hundred years later. Pepys, who saw it twice, was 'mightily pleased' with the shows and processions (if with little else). Mr Bayes in the Duke of Buckingham's famous burlesque, *The Rehearsal*, claims to outdo 'the state, show and magnificence of that great scene in *Harry the Eighth*'.

In 1727 it was staged for the coronation of George II; in 1762 at Drury Lane there was a procession of 130 persons including six beef-eaters and the Queen's herbwoman. More and more of the text was sacrificed to the spectacle, until Charles Kean restored the fifth act in 1855,

at the time providing a moving panorama of London and a barge for the exit of Buckingham. Henry Irving, whose Wolsey was perhaps his greatest Shakespearian role, went one better with a reproduction of old London for the coronation and of the Church of Grey Friars at Greenwich for the christening. In 1953 the play was again presented in honour of a Sovereign's Coronation, with Tyrone Guthrie directing at the Old Vic.

All those who are convinced that Shakespeare's secret lies in his speech rather than in spectacle may take comfort and moral support from the fact that it was a stage effect which burned the original Globe Playhouse to the ground. A spirited account of the disaster is given in a letter from Sir Henry Wotton, diplomatist and poet, to his intimate friend Sir Edmund Bacon (nephew of Francis):

Now, to let matters of state sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what has happened this week at the Bank's side. The King's players had a new play, called *All is True*, representing some principle pieces of the reign of Henry VIII, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the Knights of the Order with their Georges and garters, the Guards with their embroidered coats, and the like: sufficient in truth within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now, King Henry making a masque at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain chambers being shot off at his entry, some of the paper, or other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the very grounds. This was the fatal period to that virtuous fabric, wherein yet nothing did perish but wood and straw, and a few forsaken cloaks; only one man had his breeches set on fire that would perhaps have broiled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit put it out with bottle ale.

For over a century it has been argued that in *Henry VIII* Shakespeare had a collaborator. John Fletcher is the favourite, whose name is printed with Shakespeare's on the title page of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and who had an excessive liking for a blank verse line with a light or feminine ending and a stress on the tenth syllable; which, like Marlowe's stress in the fourth foot followed by two light syllables, can tire the ear. There are plenty of them in this play. John Masefield was so confident that there were two hands that he suggested the lines on which Shakespeare should – and indeed would – have composed the play, if he had not been obliged to help out his junior. Today, however, scholars are inclined to stand by the inclusion of the play by the editors of the First Folio and to think Shakespeare quite capable of experimenting in a new fashion of versification. The case was strengthened by Caroline Spurgeon, who found a dominant symbol running through the whole play and exemplifying Shakespeare's peculiar habit of seeing emotional or mental situations in a repeatedly recurring physical picture, what might be called a 'moving picture':

There are three aspects of the picture of a body in the mind of the writer of the play: the whole body and its limbs; the various parts, tongue, mouth and so on and – much the most constant – bodily action of almost every kind: walking, stepping, marching, running and leaping; crawling, hobbling, falling, carrying, climbing and perspiring; swimming, diving, flinging and peeping; crushing, strangling, shaking, trembling, sleeping, stirring and – especially and repeatedly – the picture of the body or back bent down under a heavy burden.

Samuel Johnson realised that there was more to *Henry VIII* than the splendours of the coronation scene which, as he recalled, ‘drew the people together in multitudes for a great part of the winter’, forty years earlier. ‘Yet (he goes on) pomp is not the only merit of this play. The meek sorrows and virtuous distress of Katharine have furnished some scenes which may be justly numbered among the greatest efforts of tragedy. But the genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Katharine. Every other part may be easily conceived, and easily written.’ Hazlitt flatly contradicts the Doctor. ‘This is easily said; but with all due deference to so great a reputed authority as that of Johnson, it is not true’. We may remember that Johnson had on one occasion sat beside Mrs Siddons and with great good humour (according to Boswell) particularly asked her which of Shakespeare’s characters she was most pleased with. She answered that she thought Queen Katharine was the most natural. ‘I think so too, Madam,’ said he, ‘and whenever you perform it I will once more hobble out to the theatre myself.’

Hazlitt thought the character of Wolsey inimitable and the scene of Buckingham led to execution one of the most affecting and natural in Shakespeare. Masfield allows that Wolsey, Katharine and the King are drawn with the great, sharp, ample line of a master. But, the protagonists apart, any actor would find Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey, the Lord Chamberlain, highly rewarding and rejoice to take part in Act III, scene 2, a masterly sequence of 460 lines; in which the unmasking of Wolsey and their pitiless triumph lead up to the elegiac farewell to greatness. Nor are the minor parts to be despised: Griffith and Cranmer, the Porter and his Man, the Old Lady: and it is doubtful whether Fletcher would have been so much at home with the several informative Gentlemen, forerunners of Richard Dimbleby.

There is much more in Shakespeare's last play than meets the *eye*. As a History we rate it below the two parts of *Henry IV*; and if we set the fall of the proud, wicked Cardinal against the abdication of wilful, complex, passionate Richard II, we may feel 'the glowing of such fire That on the ashes of his youth doth lie'. Nevertheless we can only be thankful that Shakespeare was stirred from his well-earned slumbers at the hearth of New Place by an SOS from Heminge and Condell at the Globe; and we should like to subscribe to the tentative suggestion of one scholar that Shakespeare himself came up to town to speak the Prologue:

I come no more to make you laugh; things now
That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe;
Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow
We now present...
as you are known
The first and happiest hearers of the town,
Be sad, as we would make ye. Think ye see
The very persons of our noble story
As they were living: think you see them great,
And follow'd with the general throng, and sweat
Of thousand friends; then, in a moment, see
How soon this mightiness meets misery.



‘MEN’S EVIL
MANNERS
LIVE IN BRASS;
THEIR VIRTUES
WE WRITE IN
WATER.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
HENRY VIII



KING JOHN

CD 53 • CD 54 • CD55

King John - Michael Hordern • *Prince Henry* - Anthony Jacobs • *Lord Bigot* - David Jones • *Hubert de Burgh* - Tony Church
Robert Faulconbridge - Roderick Cook • *Philip the Bastard* - David Buck • *James Gurney* - John Kimber • *Peter of Pomfret* - George Rylands
King Philip of France - Toby Robertson • *Lewis, the Dauphin* - Richard Marquand • *Cardinal Pandulph* - Anthony Jacobs
Melun - Roger Prior • *Chatillon* - Gary Watson • *A Citizen of Angiers* - Donald Beves • *Queen Elinor* - Olive Gregg
Constance - Margaretta Scott • *Blanch of Spain* - Christine Baker • *Lady Faulconbridg* - Freda Dowie

King John is 'odd man out' among the History Plays. It follows closely on *Richard II*; and the pair of them intervene between the *Henry VI* – *Richard III* sequence where Shakespeare is learning his job and the *Henry IV* – *Henry V* trilogy where he is master of his craft. In both he attempts to break free from the chronicle type of drama and to write a real play. But the unity of *Richard II* amounts to little more than the unity bestowed by the title role, backed up by the straightforward contention between the anointed monarch and the political usurper. In *King John*, however, there are several interlocking conflicts and a determined effort on Shakespeare's part to create a group of personalities inter-acting upon one another. 'Like the best Shakespearian tragedies,' says John Masefield, '*King John* is an intellectual form in which a number of people with obsessions illustrate the idea of treachery'. Thus it looks beyond the *Henry V* trilogy to *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, and shows a great advance on *Richard III*, which is melodramatic and uneven and highly coloured.

For once in a way, Shakespeare's original has survived; a play published in two parts in 1591 with the title: 'The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England, with the discoverie of King Richard Cordelions base sonne (vulgarly named, The Bastard Fawconbridge): also the death of King John at Swinstead Abbey'. It is a naïve, pedestrian but workmanlike affair. Shakespeare has breathed life into dead bones, humanising a piece of rather crude and bigoted anti-Catholic propaganda and turning it into good 'theatre'. Some eminent scholars have recently held that Shakespeare's play preceded *The Troublesome Raigne* and might have been composed as early as 1591, a conclusion which is not likely to be acceptable to anyone who has directed or played in *King John* and has also had practical theatrical experience of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. *King John* is mature and calculated. If Robert Greene (as some believe) wrote *The Troublesome Raigne* and had lived to see *King John*, he might have had cause to tilt at Shakespeare as 'an upstart crow' beautified with his feathers and supposing himself as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of the University Wits. If *The Troublesome Raigne* has the makings of a play, it is even more true that it needed a Shakespeare to make it. The relevance of Shakespeare's play to the year 1595–96 has been convincingly argued by Dr G.B. Harrison. He points out that by the August of 1596 England realised that a new and greater Armada was being got ready; and the departure of Drake and Hawkins on their last voyage at the end of the month was felt to be a dangerous error of policy. On September 6th the Queen entered upon her sixty-third year; that is, her grand climacteric, when the mystic numbers, nine and seven, unite. More perilous to the astrologically inclined even than her eighth climacteric which coincided with the Armada year 1588. Relations between England and France had deteriorated and early in 1596 it was feared that Henry IV would desert his allies. In April the Cardinal Arch-duke of Austria invaded Calais. The Queen, as always was dilatory in

sending relief. The fortress fell and there were tales of French treachery. It was a time of rumours of rebellion and fears for the succession, of wild prophecies and false alarms. And consequently, as Dr Harrison suggests, *King John* would possess a strong topical appeal for the audience.

The great pioneer and specialist in the detailed study of Shakespeare's imagery, Dr Caroline Spurgeon, remarks a notable difference between *King John* and the York and Lancaster plays in this respect. In no other history do the images play a more dominating part in creating and sustaining atmosphere. The imagery is physical and active. Not only the great protagonists, England and France, but also their fortunes, emotions and qualities are felt as persons; and this device of personification is most effective and memorable in more extended passages such as Constance's

Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form...

which is matched by the Bastard's anatomisation of Commodity,

... that same purpose-changer, that sly devil,
That broker that still breaks the pate of faith,
That daily break-vow, he that wins of all,
Of kings, of beggars, old men, young men, maids...
That smooth-fac'd gentleman, tickling Commodity.

And Death the Skeleton, familiar in mediaeval art and drama, seems re-animated in Constance's invocation,

Come, grin on me, and I will think you smil'st,
And buss thee as thy wife. Misery's love,
O come to me!

and in the Bastard's

O now doth Death line his dead chaps with steel;
The swords of soldiers are his teeth, his fangs;
And now he feasts, mousing the flesh of men,
In undetermin'd differences of kings.

Comparing the style of the play with that of *Richard III* and *Richard II* we feel that it is more sculptural and less pictorial. One might say that it shows the engineer rather than the *couturier*; that it is constructed out of metal, rather than fashioned from material to fall in coloured folds. It is a matter of strains and stresses, not of shading and hue; the conscious deliberate imagery suggests *basso-relievo* rather than embroidery. In each solidly composed scene, in each of the large muster of characters – mere outlines many of them but drawn with telling strokes – in each of the highly-wrought speeches, Shakespeare is thinking what he is about. We may miss the lyrical strain which creates the portrait of Richard, ‘the sweet lovely rose’, we may miss the inspired ease of Clarence’s dream and the effective, if a little too ready, rhetoric of Gaunt’s outburst of patriotism; but the whole is a piece of compact workmanship. Shakespeare is not playing to the gallery, not indulging his poetic fancy, he is not making music but thinking.

The King himself is to be studied with Richard III, with Claudius, and with Macbeth. In the creation of Constance Shakespeare seems to be inspired, perhaps unconsciously, by the great heroines of classical myth and tragedy – Hecuba, the mobled queen, and Niobe, all tears. If Constance looks back through Seneca to Euripides, she looks on beyond his Roman heroines, Portia and Volumnia, to the neo-classic grandeur of Corneille and Racine.

The moving spirit of the play, and the most Shakespearian thing about it, containing in Samuel Johnson’s words, ‘that mixture of greatness and levity which this author delighted to exhibit’, is the Bastard who personifies England. As John Masefield wrote:

With the exceptions of Sir Toby Belch and Justice Shallow, the Bastard is the most English figure in the plays. He is the Englishman neither at his best nor at his worst, but at his commonest. The Englishman was never so seen before, nor since. An entirely honest, robust, hearty person, contemptuous of the weak, glad to be a king’s bastard, making friends with women (his own mother one of them) with a trusty good-humoured frankness, fond of fighting, extremely able when told what to do, fond of plain measures – the plainer the better, an honest servant, easily impressed by intellect when found in high place on his own side, but utterly incapable of perceiving intellect in a foreigner, fond of those sorts of humour which generally lead to blows, extremely just, very kind when not fighting, fond of the words ‘fair play’, and nobly and exquisitely moved to deep, true poetical feeling by a cruel act done to something helpless and little.



RICHARD II

CD 56 • CD 57 • CD 58

King Richard II - George Rylands • *John of Gaunt* - Tony Church • *Edmund* - John Wilders • *Henry Bolingbroke* - Anthony Jacobs
Duke of Aumerle - Gary Watson • *Thomas Mowbray* - Anthony White • *Earl of Salisbury* - Donald Beves • *Lord Berkeley* - Tony Church
Bushy - David Buck • *Bagot* - Roger Prior • *Green* - John Bird • *Earl of Northumberland* - John Barton • *Henry Percy* - David Gibson
Lord Willoughby - Chris Renard • *Lord Fitzwater* - David Buck • *Bishop of Carlisle* - John Arnott • *Abbot of Westminster* - Denys Robertson
Sir Pierce of Exton - James Taylor Whitehead • *Lord Marshal* - John Barton • *Captain* - David Jones • *Queen* - Wendy Gifford
Duchess of Gloucester - Irene Worth • *Duchess of York* - Mary Fenton

‘I am Richard II, know ye not that?’, cried Queen Elizabeth, as she perused his reign in the archives from the Tower, brought to her at Greenwich by their keeper, on August 4, 1601. Six months had passed since the execution of the ill-fated, fascinating Earl of Essex. Shakespeare’s tragic history was performed on the eve of the Earl’s attempted rebellion, at the behest of his supporters; and some of the Globe players were arraigned at his trial. As we know from the Queen’s own lips, *Richard II* was ‘played forty times in open streets and houses’ – a record, even over a five-year period – and Essex, we learn on other authority, ‘was often present at the playing thereof... with great applause giving countenance and liking to the same’. It was printed in 1597, and twice in 1598; but the abdication scene was not included until the fourth edition of 1608.

Shakespeare’s ten history plays fall into two quartets, with a prologue and an epilogue. *King John*, the prologue, covers the years 1200–1216. Then (speaking chronologically) comes the tetralogy, *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, Parts 1 and 2, *Henry V*. The second tetralogy extends from the funeral of Henry V at Westminster in 1422 to the coronation of Henry VII on Bosworth Field and the union of the white rose and the red in 1485. Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*, his last play, provides an epilogue to this panorama of nine reigns, and the chronicle closes with the christening of the future Queen Elizabeth. The *Henry VI* – *Richard III* tetralogy was written at the very outset of his career. But when he wrote *Richard II*, the first in the second set of four, his apprenticeship was over. With the completion of *Henry V* he turned from English to Roman history, exchanging Holinshed for Plutarch, and set forth upon the tragic pilgrimage, with a new kind of hero, the philosopher Brutus, in *Julius Caesar*.

Richard II belongs with *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to about the year 1595–96. In these three – a history, a tragedy, a comedy – Shakespeare's poetry has free rein. In the next play, *King John*, poetry is suppressed, and (except for *The Merchant of Venice*) the poet submits to a self-denying ordinance for nearly five years, until we reach *Hamlet*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. *Richard II* therefore is unique among the histories. The protagonist is a poet – an Elizabethan poet; in love with words, as is Berowne; 'mellifluous and honey-tongued', as his creator was styled in 1598. 'In no other play perhaps,' writes Walter Pater, 'is there such a flush of those gay, fresh, variegated flowers of speech – colour and figure, not lightly attached to, but fused into, the very phrase itself – which Shakespeare cannot help dispensing to his characters, as in this "play of the Deposing of King Richard the Second", an exquisite poet if he is nothing else, from first to last, in light and gloom alike, able to see all things poetically, to give a poetic turn to his conduct of them, and refreshing with his golden language the tritest aspects of that ironic contrast between the pretensions of a king and the actual necessities of his destiny ... His eloquence blends with that fatal beauty, of which he was so frankly aware, so amiable to his friends, to his wife, of the effects of which on the people his enemies were so much afraid, on which Shakespeare himself dwells so attentively as "the royal blood" comes and goes in his face with his rapid changes of temper'. Pater describes Charles Kean's production in the 1850's as an exquisite performance on the violin.

W.B. Yeats, whose first eloquent musical verse appeared at the very time when Pater was writing his *Appreciation* of Shakespeare's English Kings, visited Stratford in 1901, where Frank Benson was presenting six of the History plays in chronological order, from *King John* to *Richard III*. He was moved as he had never been moved in the theatre before. But the critics whose pages he turned over in the library seemed to him to take the same delight in abasing Richard II 'that schoolboys do in persecuting some boy of fine temperament, who has weak muscles and a distaste for games'. Shakespeare, Yeats felt sure, understood and sympathised with the capricious, elegant, self-willed king. 'He saw in Richard II the defeat that awaits all, whether they be Artist or Saint, who find themselves where men ask of them a rough energy and have nothing to give but some contemplative virtue, whether lyrical phantasy, or sweetness of temperament, or dreamy dignity, or love of God, or love of his creatures. He saw that such a man through sheer bewilderment and impatience can become as unjust or violent as any common man, any Bolingbroke or Prince John, and yet remain "that sweet lovely rose".'

Richard II is the beginning, *Henry IV* the middle, and *Henry V* the end, of the chronicle of the rise, usurpation, expiation, and establishment of the Bolingbroke family. Fortune's wheel has its revolutions, as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance never wearied of remarking. Richard placing the crown in Bolingbroke's grasp, sees it as a deep well with two revolving buckets, which fill one another.

The emptier ever dancing in the air,
The other down, unseen, and full of water:
That bucket down, and full of tears, am I,
Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high.

But when the sequel opens we find the new king shaken and wan with care, punished and grieved by the wild exploits and dishonours of his son. Only when Hal has been converted and redeemed by his dying father, can the usurper look before and after:

God knows, my son,
By what bypaths and indirect crookt ways
I met this crown, and I myself know well
How troublesome it sate upon my head:
To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
Better opinion, better confirmation;
For all the soil of the achievement goes
With me into the earth...
How I came by the crown, O God, forgive!
And grant it may with thee in true peace live!

The new king, Henry V, leads the happy few, the band of brothers, at Agincourt upon St. Crispin's Day.



RICHARD III

CD 59 • CD 60 • CD 61

King Edward the Fourth - Richard Wordsworth • *Edward, Prince of Wales* - David Dickinson • *George, Duke of Clarence* - Patrick Garland
Richard, Duke of Gloucester - Patrick Wymark • *Henry, Earl of Richmond* - John Shrapnel • *Cardinal Bourchier* - David Rowe-Beddoe
Thomas Rotherham - John Tracy-Phillips • *Duke of Buckingham* - William Squire • *Earl Rivers* - John Hopkins
Marquis of Dorset - Corin Redgrave • *Lord Hastings* - Denis McCarthy • *Lord Stanley* - Terrence Hardiman • *Lord Lovel* - George Rylands
Sir Thomas Vaughan - John Shearer • *Sir Richard Ratcliff* - Roger Croucher • *Sir William Gatesby* - Peter Orr • *Sir James Tyrrel* - David Buck
Sir James Blount - David King • *Sir Robert Brakenbury* - John Tydeman • *Elizabeth* - Margaretta Scott • *Margaret* - Mary Morris
Duchess of York - Beatrix Lehmann • *Lady Anne* - Prunella Scales • *Margaret Plantagenet* - Freda Dowie

Why then, I do but dream on sovereignty;
Like one that stands upon a promontory,
And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,
Wishing his foot were equal with his eye,
And chides the means that sunders him from thence,
Saying, he'll lade it dry to have his way;
So do I wish the crown, being so far off;
And so I chide the means that keeps me from it;
And so I say, I'll cut the causes off,
Flattering me with impossibilities.
My eye's too quick, my heart o'erweens too much,
Unless my hand and strength could equal them.
Well, say there is no kingdom then for Richard,
What other pleasure can the world afford?
I'll make my heaven in a lady's lap
And deck my body in gay ornaments,
And witch sweet ladies with my words and looks.
O miserable thought! and more unlikely
Than to accomplish twenty golden crowns!
Why, Love foreswore me in my mother's womb:
And, for I should not deal in her soft laws,
She did corrupt frail Nature with some bribe,

To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub;
To make an envious mountain on my back,
Where sits deformity to mock my body;
To shape my legs of an unequal size;
To disproportion me in every part,
Like to a chaos, or an unlicked bear-whelp

That carries no impression like the dam.
And am I then a man to be beloved?
O monstrous fault to harbour such a thought!
Then, since this earth affords no joy to me,
But to command, to check, to o'erbear such
As are of better person than myself,
I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,
And, whiles I live, t'account this world but hell,
Until my mis-shaped trunk that bears this head
Be round impalèd with a glorious crown.
And yet I know not how to get the crown,
For many lives stand between me and home:
And I – like one lost in a thorny wood,
That rends the thorns and is rent with the thorns,
Seeking a way and straying from the way,
Not knowing how to find the open air,
But toiling desperately to find it out –
Torment myself to catch the English crown:
And from that torment I will free myself,
Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.

Richard, Duke of Gloucester's superb soliloquy at the end of 3 *Henry VI*, Act III, scene 2 (of which these lines are the pith and marrow) show Shakespeare in complete command of his medium: it surpasses any set speech he had hitherto composed; it puts him on the level of Marlowe at his best; Shakespeare has arrived. The actor who is to play Richard III needs no critic or expositor of the role; the whole conception of his nature and his situation is summed up in this soliloquy of seventy lines. Here are Gloucester's ruthlessness and frustration, his ambition (comparable with Lady Macbeth's), his *idée fixe* (the word *crown* occurs seven times and with Shakespearian irony

it is linked with the image of *thorns*), his satanic idealisation of evil, his obsession with power, his inferiority complex, the tragic *heroism* in villainy of a hunchback.

‘Deformed persons are envious’, Bacon notes: ‘For he that cannot possibly mend his own case, will do what he can to impair others’. Gloucester has an envious mountain on his back. He anticipates Iago, who is the personification of envy and he has this also in common with him – dissimulation.

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
And cry ‘Content’ to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my checks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.

In this, of course, he is in the long tradition of villainy from Chaucer’s ‘the smiler with the knife under his cloak’ through Milton’s Satan to the muttered aside ‘I must dissemble’ of Victorian melodrama. Claudius is one who ‘can smile and smile and be a villain’ and Shakespeare had already sketched the Iago formula (‘I am not what I am’) in *The Rape of Lucrece*. Perjured Sinon, ‘like a constant and confirmed devil’ hides his deceit beneath a harmless show of humbleness and simplicity,

so seeming just,
And therein so ensconced his secret evil
That jealousy itself could not mistrust...

Gloucester boasts that he will deceive more slyly than Ulysses and ‘like a Sinon, take another Troy’. The most brilliant analysis of *Richard III* is to be found in R.G. Moulton’s *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, written nearly eighty years ago and all too little known today. Moulton follows his chapter of Character-Interpretation with an exposition of the way in which Shakespeare weaves Nemesis into History and he insists that the full character effect of a dramatic portrait cannot be grasped if it be dissociated from the plot. Apart from Richard himself, the drama is made up of several threads, each of which is a separate example of Nemesis. Clarence’s perjury is his bitterest recollection in his hour of awakened conscience. The death of Clarence, announced in so terrible a manner at the sick bed of the King, gives Edward a shock from which he never recovers:

O God, I fear Thy justice will take hold
On me, and you, and mine, and yours, for this.

In this Nemesis the Queen and her kindred are associated. A third Nemesis Action has Hastings for its subject and Buckingham who has laughed at the false security of Hastings is himself cast off by the same treachery:

And is it thus? Repays he my deep service
With such contempt? Made I him King for this?
O, let me think on Hastings, and be gone
To Brecknock while my fearful head is on!

These four Nemesis Actions, as Moulton shows, are linked together into a system, the law of which is seen to be that those who triumph in one Nemesis become the victims of the next. In the feud of York and Lancaster each is destined to wreak vengeance on the other, and then himself suffer in turn.

Moulton's character-interpretation of Richard is worthy of Bradley but was written nearly twenty years earlier than the *Shakespearian Tragedy*. A few sentences by John Masfield which also belong to an earlier period are, as so often, illuminating and original.

The intellect of Richard III is like that of Napoleon. It is restless, swift, and sure of its power. It is sure, too, that the world stays as it is from something stupid in the milky human feelings. Richard is a 'bloody dog' let loose in a sheepfold. It is a part of the tragedy that he is nobler than the sheep that he destroys. His is the one great intellect in the play. Intellect is always rare. In kings it is very rare. When a great intellect is made bitter by being cased in deformity one has the tragedy of intellect turned upon itself. Had Richard been born without his deformed shoulder he could have known human sympathy, and human intercourse. Without human intercourse he goes gloating, clutching himself, biting his lip, muttering at the twist in his shadow. This warped, starved mind knows himself stronger than the minds near him. It is tragical to be deformed, it is tragical to have an intellect too great for people to understand. But the deformed and bitter intellect would suffer tragedy indeed if he, the one constant Yorkist, were to be ruled by a gentle half-witted Lancastrian saint like Henry VI, or by Clarence the perjurer, or by the upstart Woodville, a commoner made noble because his sister took the King's fancy, or by the Queen herself, the housewife who caused great Warwick's death, or by one of her sons, who are pert to the man who had spilt his blood to make their father king. The snarling intellect bites rather than suffer that. It is very terrible, but how if he had not bitten? The vision of all this bloodiness is less terrible than that vision of the sheep triumphing, so dear to us moderns...

The wonder of the work is in the greatness of the conception. That is truly great, both as poetry and as drama. The big and burning imaginings do not please, they haunt.

Shakespearian character-analysis is discredited today and out of fashion. But did not Bernard Shaw blow upon it in the nineties? We must never forget that, as Hazlitt says, 'Richard III belongs to the theatre, rather than the closet', and he criticises it chiefly with reference to the manner in which he had seen it performed, comparing Edmund Kean with G.F. Cooke and Kemble. Kean, he thought, represented the character with greater distinctness and precision, more perfectly *articulated* in every part, than any other actor. From Hazlitt and elsewhere we can get a few pictured moments to accompany our listening to the play.

Mr Kean's attitude in leaning against the side of the stage before he comes forward to address Lady Anne, is one of the most graceful and striking ever witnessed on the stage. It would have done for Titian to paint... His bye-play is excellent. His manner of bidding his friends 'Good Night', after pausing with the point of his sword, drawn slowly backward and forward on the ground, as if considering the plan of the battle next day, is a particularly happy and natural thought. He gives to the last two acts of the play the greatest animation and effect. He fills up every part of the stage; and makes up for the deficiency of his person by what has sometimes been objected to as an excess of action. The concluding scene, in which he is killed by Richmond, is the most brilliant of the whole. He fights at last like one drunk with wounds; and the attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword is wrested from him, has a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had withering power to kill.

When Kean gave a few farewell performances in 1831 Leigh Hunt, who called him 'unquestionably the finest actor we ever saw', also records the look he gave Richmond after receiving the mortal blow as the crowning point.

This has been always admired; but last night it appeared to us that he made it longer and therefore more ghastly. He stood looking the other in the face, as if he was already a disembodied spirit, searching him with the eyes of another world; or as if he silently cursed him with some new scorn, to which death and its dreadful knowledge had given him a right.

Hunt tells us that when Kean uttered the fourth line of his opening speech,

In the deep bosom of the ocean buried,

he 'held forth his arm, and in a beautiful style of deliberate triumph, uttering his words with inward majesty, pointed his finger downwards; as if he saw the very ocean beneath him from some promontory, and beheld it closed over the past'. A greater name than Hazlitt or Leigh Hunt, John Keats, bears testimony to Kean's *gusto*. 'The sensual life of verse springs warm from his lips, and to one learned in Shakespearian hieroglyphics – learned in the spiritual portion of those lines to which Kean adds a sensual grandeur – his tongue must seem to have robbed the Hybla bees and left them honeyless. In *Richard III*, "Be stirring with the lark tomorrow, gentle Norfolk", comes from him as through the morning atmosphere, towards which he yearns'.

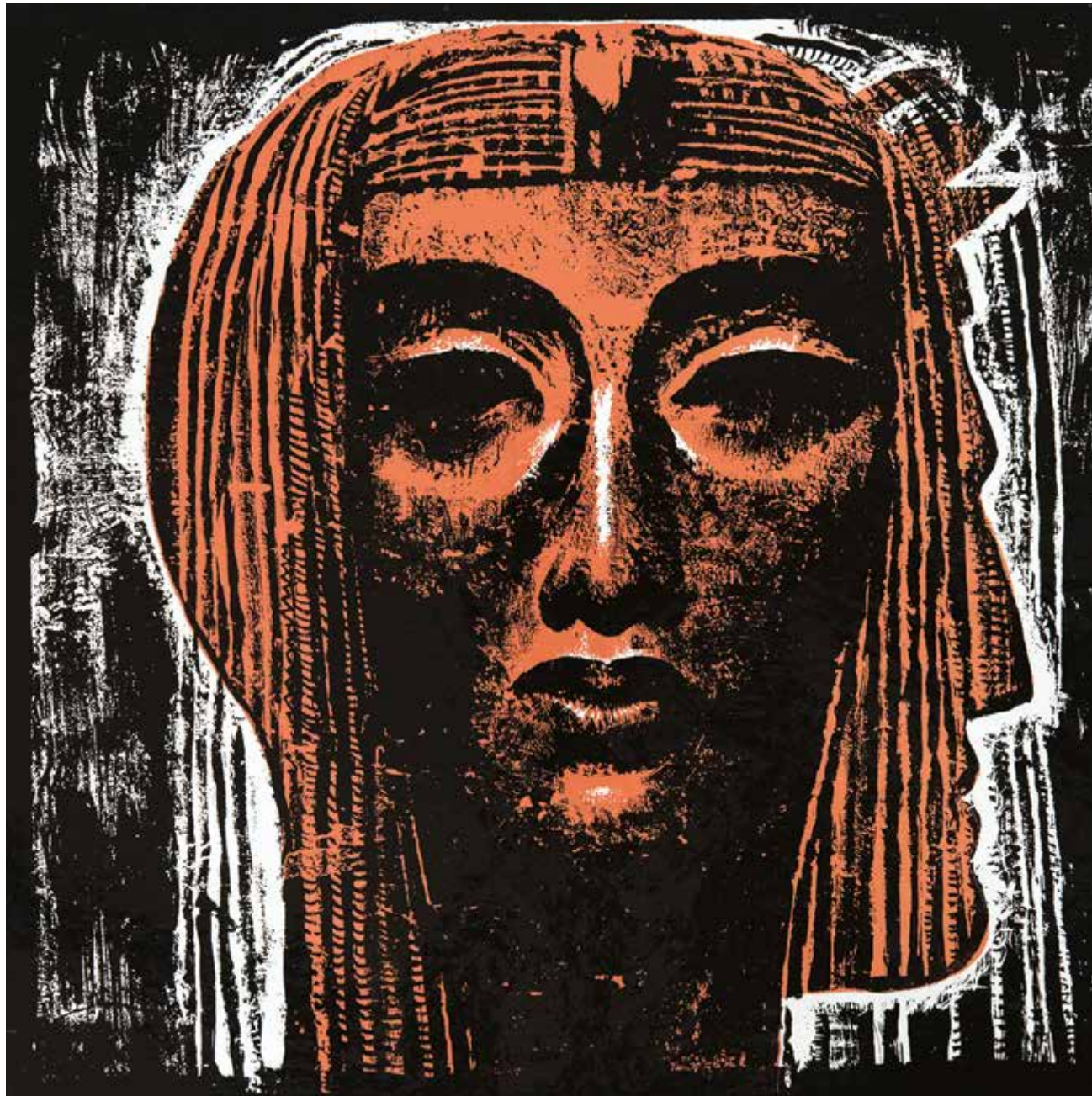
And of the death scene:

Kean always 'dies as erring men do die'. The bodily functions wither up, and the mental faculties hold out till they crack. It is an extinguishment, not a decay. The hand is agonised with death; the lip trembles with the last breath, as we see the autumn leaf thrill in the cold wind of evening. The very eye-lid dies. The acting of Kean is Shakespearian – he will fully understand what we mean.

The background of the image features abstract, swirling blue ink splashes and smoke-like patterns on a white background. The ink is a deep cerulean color and is most concentrated on the right side and bottom, with wispy trails extending towards the left and top.

‘DISPUTE NOT
WITH HER:
SHE IS
LUNATIC.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
RICHARD III



ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

CD 62 • CD 63 • CD 64

Antony - Richard Johnson • *Octavius Caesar* - Robert Eddison • *Sextus Pompeius* - Peter Orr • *Domitius Enobarbus* - Patrick Wymark
Ventidius - John Tracy-Phillips • *Eros* - Ian Holm • *Scarus* - Terrence Hardiman • *Dercetus* - Peter Orr • *Demetrius* - Julian Curry
Philo - Terrence Hardiman • *Maecenas* - James Taylor Whitehead • *Agrippa* - John Tydeman • *Dolabella* - Gary Watson
Proculeius - Ian Lang • *Menas* - Anthony Arlidge • *Menecrates* - Julian Curry • *Lepidus* - Miles Malleson • *Varrius* - George Rylands
Taurus - George Rylands • *Canidius* - Roger Croucher • *Silius* - David Jones • *Alexas* - Philip Strick • *Mardian* - Ian McKellen
Seleucus - Michael Bates • *Diomedes* - Giles Slaughter • *A Clown* - Michael Bates • *Cleopatra* - Irene Worth • *Octavia* - Diana Rigg
Charmian - Prunella Scales • *Iras* - Jill Balcon

Coleridge felt that Shakespeare could only be complimented by comparison with himself, and therefore the highest praise he has to offer of *Antony and Cleopatra* is the doubt 'whether in all exhibitions of a giant power in its strength and vigour of maturity it is not a formidable rival to *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*'. The play has seldom been triumphantly performed but it has often been eloquently praised. Yet even its admirers have reservations. Hazlitt did not place it in the first rank, although he thought it the finest of all the historical plays and his evaluation of it in that category is admirable and acute:

What he has added to the history, is upon an equality with it. His genius was, as it were, a match for history as well as nature and could grapple at will with either. This play is full of that pervading comprehensive power, by which the poet always seems to identify himself with time and circumstances...The characters breathe, move, and live. Shakespeare does not stand reasoning on what his characters would do or say, but at once becomes them, and speaks and acts for them. He does not present us with groups of stage-puppets or poetical machines making set speeches on human life, and acting from a calculation of ostensible motives, but he brings living men and women on the scene, who speak and act from real feelings, according to the ebbs and flows of passion, without the least tincture of the pedantry of logic or rhetoric. Nothing is made out by inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis, but everything takes place just as it would have done in reality, according to the occasion. The character of Cleopatra is a masterpiece.

The play fascinates, enraptures and astonishes the reader, but as he puts it down he may well ask, 'Is it a tragedy? If not, why not?' Here are some answers.

Shakespeare, as ever, is experimenting. There are two and forty so-called scenes. This is a cinema technique of close-ups and long shots; of moments and sequences; we must not tamper with their order, for it is the juxtapositions which tell. 'The play,' writes Samuel Johnson, 'keeps curiosity always busy, and the passions always interested. The continual hurry of the action, the variety of incidents, and the quick succession of one personage to another, call the mind forward without intermission from the first Act to the last.' Thus, although we are frequently diverted, we may be distracted. We cannot look for the agonising tensions of *Othello*.

Secondly, Shakespeare sets off a public against a private theme, as he has already tried and failed to do in *Troilus and Cressida*. Roman *imperium* and *auctoritas* matched against the gorgeous East is the public theme. The reckless sexual fascination of a voluptuous Empress for a great soldier in decline is the private theme. The two coincide when Octavius Caesar, impervious to the Queen's blandishments, a politician and a bit of a prig, is moved at the very last to say:

she looks like sleep, As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

The third reason for the diminution of the tragic effect is simply the sheer poetry – the virtuosity – of the writing. Shakespeare throws gold dust in our eyes. Coleridge's tribute to the 'happy valiancy' of the style stimulated a dozen pages of brilliant exposition and analysis in Granville Barker's Preface to the play. Whereas Coleridge was a poet reading the play, Barker listens with the ear of an actor and stage director. The mastery, diversity and opulence of expression are such that if the style does not come between us and the passions which spin the plot, yet it rarefies and idealises them. In this respect Shakespeare's last tragedy of love resembles his first. *Romeo and Juliet* is more a poem than a tragedy. In both plays the protagonists triumph in their death. But whereas the youthful lovers are rightly idealised, Shakespeare very properly on occasion presents Cleopatra and Antony with relentless realism. Even the sober A.C. Bradley dared to call Cleopatra a 'Doll Tearsheet sublimated', and if Romeo and Juliet remind us of the lovers on the Grecian Urn, suspended in an eternal moment,

For ever wilt thou love and she be fair,

Antony the middle-aged wassailer, and Cleopatra the boggier, the morsel from dead Caesar's trencher, have known too often and too well a passion

That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead and a parching tongue.

That Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty is a lesson to be learnt tragically in Verona, but not in Alexandria.

The disparity, then, between the moral worth of the characters and the unexampled ease and splendour of their diction is disconcerting. And this gives us the clue, the real answer to the original question. Antony and Cleopatra have no moral sense. When the curtain falls we are not aware of a moral problem having been posed, of moral issues having been explored. An impassable gulf divides Rome and Egypt from the pagan, almost savage, kingdom of Lear and the nightmare tyranny of the Scotland of Macbeth, protagonists whose tragic errors bring their own terrible retribution, who learn to know themselves through suffering. We feel hardly a pang of the pity and terror which Aristotle believed to be the true end of tragedy. A.C. Bradley, greatest expositor of Shakespearian tragedy, found it paradoxical that at the close of *Antony and Cleopatra*, 'we are saddened by the fact that the catastrophe saddens us so little; that it pains us that we should

feel so much triumph and pleasure. With all our admiration and sympathy for the lovers, we do not wish them to gain the world. It is better for the world's sake, and not less for their own, that they should fail and die. The splendour dazzles us; but, when the splendour vanishes, we do not mourn'. Bradley decided that the tragic emotions are stirred in the fullest possible measure only when such beauty or nobility of character is displayed as commands unreserved admiration or love; or when the forces which move the agents, and the conflict which results from these forces, attain a terrifying and overwhelming power. 'The four most famous tragedies satisfy one or both of these conditions; *Antony and Cleopatra*, though a great tragedy, satisfies neither of them completely.'

It is comical that when seventy years later John Dryden composed his version of *Antony and Cleopatra* in which he professed 'to imitate the divine Shakespeare', writing it 'to please himself' in blank verse instead of the heroic couplet, he marked especially the importance and excellency of the moral. 'For the chief persons represented were famous patterns of unlawful love and their end according was unfortunate.' But he also notes: 'That which is wanting to work up the pity to a greater height, was not afforded me by the story; for the crimes of love, which they both committed, were not occasioned by any necessity, or fatal ignorance, but were wholly voluntary; since our passions are, or ought to be, within our power'.

In Dryden's neo-classic tragedy, a fine period piece, Antony and Cleopatra die together in the final scene; and when the curtain falls we feel that his title, *All for Love, or the World Well Lost*, has been exemplified. But Dryden's Cleopatra was acted by a woman; Shakespeare's by a boy. And Shakespeare, respecting the convention, always writes his women's parts with a tact and taste not to be found in his contemporaries. The heroines of the comedies are often boys dressed up as girls who then disguise themselves as boys. At the end of his theatrical career, gambling on the virtuosity of a trained boy-player, he creates Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, and Imogen.

Cleopatra is sluttish, spoiled, animal, tyrannical, superb. Her Antony is an ageing roue who sees her as she is. Shakespeare, now suddenly and strangely free of the sexual disgust which blisters certain pages in *Le ar* and *Timon*, handles his technical problem with skill and sensibility. As far as may be, the lovers are kept apart. He grasps the nettle immediately. Hard on the Roman veteran's angry indictment of the great warrior's dotage, 'the bellows and the fan To cool a gipsy's lust', enters the glamorous procession of courtiers and eunuchs, and at once Antony gives the Queen a single, ceremonial, symbolical kiss:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall!...
The nobleness of life
Is to do thus, when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't...

At the close of the fourth Act Cleopatra kisses him as he dies. There are two others. The symbolical kiss is repeated when the first battle ends in shameful flight:

Fall not a tear, I say: one of them rates
All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss.
Even this repays me...

And when Antony goes forth with high hopes to the final disaster in Alexandria, he bestows upon his 'armourer' a soldier's kiss of farewell. That is the sum.

Shakespeare creates his boy-Cleopatra at the beginning of the play and at the end. Once she has been established, he can risk giving her the last Act to herself and showing her within its confines both as Doll Tearsheet and 'again for Cydnus', 'an Eastern star', 'fire and air', 'a lass unparallel'd'. (How felicitously the phrase echoes her own disdainful dismissal of Caesar as 'an ass unpolicied.') Between the beginning and end of the play the significant scenes devoted to her alone are the incomparable daydreaming of Act I.v., and the two messenger scenes. The dramatist's supreme stroke of 'placing' is to follow the reconciliation of Antony and Caesar with the description of the first meeting on the river of Cydnus, lifting it from Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, transmuting the good into the better, and placing it in the mouth of a hard-bitten soldier; he then proceeds in ten lines to dispose of the betrothal of Octavia. The Cydnus speech gives us just what Dryden could look to his actress to give and what actresses ever since have found it hard to live up to. Do not audiences feel cheated of their expectations because Shakespeare had to hitch his waggon to a boy, not to a star?

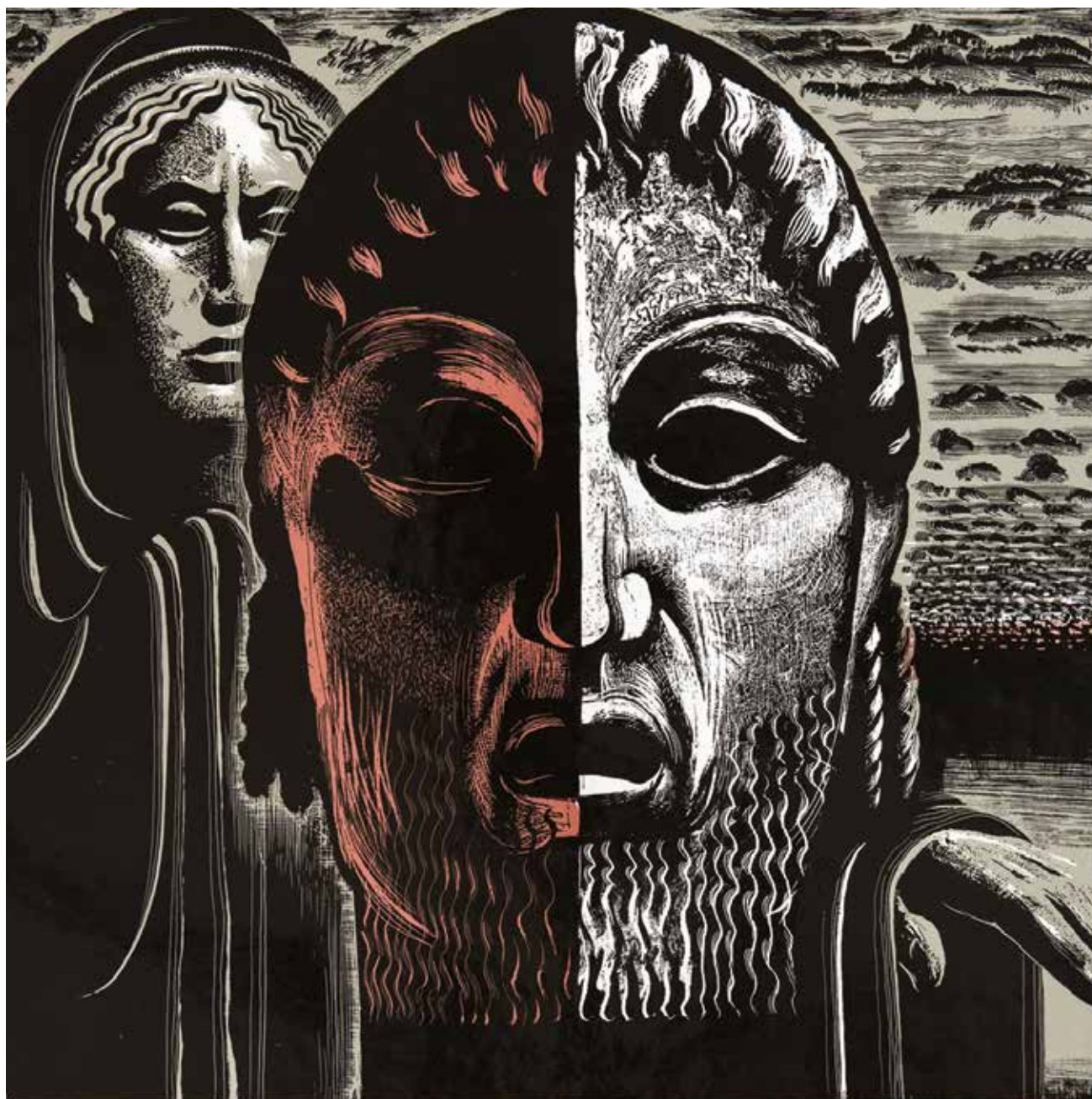
To return to Coleridge, *Antony and Cleopatra* is 'of all Shakespeare's historical plays by far the most wonderful. There is not one in which he has followed history so minutely and yet there are few in which he impresses the notion of angelic strength so much'. It is a historical romance, which yet abounds in realistic detail and minor character; a panorama forestalling and out-manoeuvring the spectacular achievements of the lords of Technicolor and the silver screen in their million-dollar re-creations of scripture, legend and history. Shakespeare has no... spectacle, but in its place the infinite variety of the verse and the audacity of the imagery; the magical and synthetic power of the poetic imagination (Coleridge again) which 'balances or reconciles opposites;... the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; ... and a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order, subordinating art to nature; the matter to the manner'. John Masefield wrote that Cleopatra's speech on Antony's death preluded 'a song of the welcoming of death' unlike anything in the plays. 'Her death scene is not the greatest, nor the most terrible, but it is the most beautiful in all the tragedies'; and her last lines, as the poison of the pretty worm of Nilus parts her from Charmian, are 'among the most beautiful things ever written by man.'



Irene Worth



Richard Johnson



CORIOLANUS

CD 65 • CD 66 • CD 67

Caius Marcius Coriolanus - Anthony White • *Titus Lartius* - John Arnott • *Cominius* - Donald Beves • *Menenius Agrippa* - Tony Church
Sicinius Velutus - Anthony Jacobs • *Junius Brutus* - John Wilders • *Tullus Aufidius* - John Barton • *Lieutenant to Aufidius* - Peter Woodthorpe
Volumnia - Irene Worth • *Virgilia* - Dorothy Mulcahy • *Gentlewoman* - Christine Baker

Coriolanus and *Antony and Cleopatra* belong to the year 1607–8. They intervene between the Great Four tragedies and the final Romances. Shakespeare, at the close of his tragic period, returned to Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans and stole from Sir Thomas North's translation with deliberate and consummate skill. *Coriolanus*, the later play of the two, is less popular (except with the French), than the panoramic presentation of the conflict between East and West, the realistic, amoral dramatisation of *la vie amoureuse* of the triple pillar of the world and the Egyptian Queen. Neither of the two tragedies strike us as very *tragic*. They are as different as are the two narrative poems printed at the very start of Shakespeare's career nearly fifteen years earlier. *Antony and Cleopatra* is gilded over with poetry, albeit the poetry has not a great deal in common with the honey-sweet, rose-coloured poetry of *Venus and Adonis*. Indeed, it would be fairer to say that what is gilding in the *Venus* is pure gold in the play. *Coriolanus*, on the other hand, has real affinities with the tragic Roman tale of *The Rape of Lucrece*. Both are highly rhetorical. The idiom is often so knotted in its thews and sinews, that we may be reminded of an athlete whose grace is impaired by excessive muscular development. Another factor which discourages both readers and audience is the apparent unwieldiness and complexity and confusion of the form. What is the play's design?

The hero is an arrogant, passionate, overgrown boy, whose life has been dominated by his ambitious mother: a soldier of genius and a patriot, but no politician. He is in conflict with three distinct forces. First there is his professional adversary, Aufidius, the Volscian general, whose emulous rivalry is tinged with admiration and almost with love. Secondly, the garlic-breathing, rank-scented, mutable mob, led by their two creatures, the tribunes, whom he utterly disdains. And last his mother, Volumnia, prouder even than he, who lives for him alone and is his undoing. The actor of the part of Aufidius must establish his personality in the first movement which fills up Act I. He must seize all his chances; and the last scene of the Act is rewarding. In the bitterness of defeat, before a handful of his beaten soldiery, Aufidius swears an oath of vengeance:

Five times, Marcius,
I have fought with thee; so often hast thou beat me;
And wouldst do so, I think, should we encounter
As often as we eat. By th'elements,
If e'er again I meet him beard to beard.
He's mine or I am his. Mine emulation
Hath not the honour in't it had...
Nor sleep nor sanctuary,
Being naked, sick, nor fane nor Capitol,
The prayers of priests nor times of sacrifice,
Embarquements all of fury, shall lift up
Their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst
My hate to Marcius. Where I find him, were it
At home, upon my brother's guard, even there
Against the hospitable canon, would I
Wash my fierce hand in's heart.

When next they meet, it is indeed at Aufidius's hospitable hearth; where Marcius seeks him out, banished and disguised, becomes the sword in his hand for the punishment of Rome, and then is broken by him.

The first movement is military, the second is political. It is the play's core, and the movement closes after the first two scenes of Act IV. Marcius goes forth to banishment: the triumphant tribunes dismiss the people: and then mother and wife, returning from their parting, meet him. Volumnia, the Roman matron, until now controlled and magnificent, and the shy, modest, silent Virgilia, let themselves go and unpack their hearts with words. Volumnia in her curses is sublime, a second Constance. We recognise the power which is presently to be employed upon her son. As they pass into retirement from which they will not stir until Coriolanus and the Volscian army are at the gates of Rome, she cries:

Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself.
And so shall starve with feeding. Come, let's go.
Leave this faint puling and lament as I do.
In anger, Juno-like. Come, come, come.

And faithful, wise, old Menenius echoes it with a dying fall:

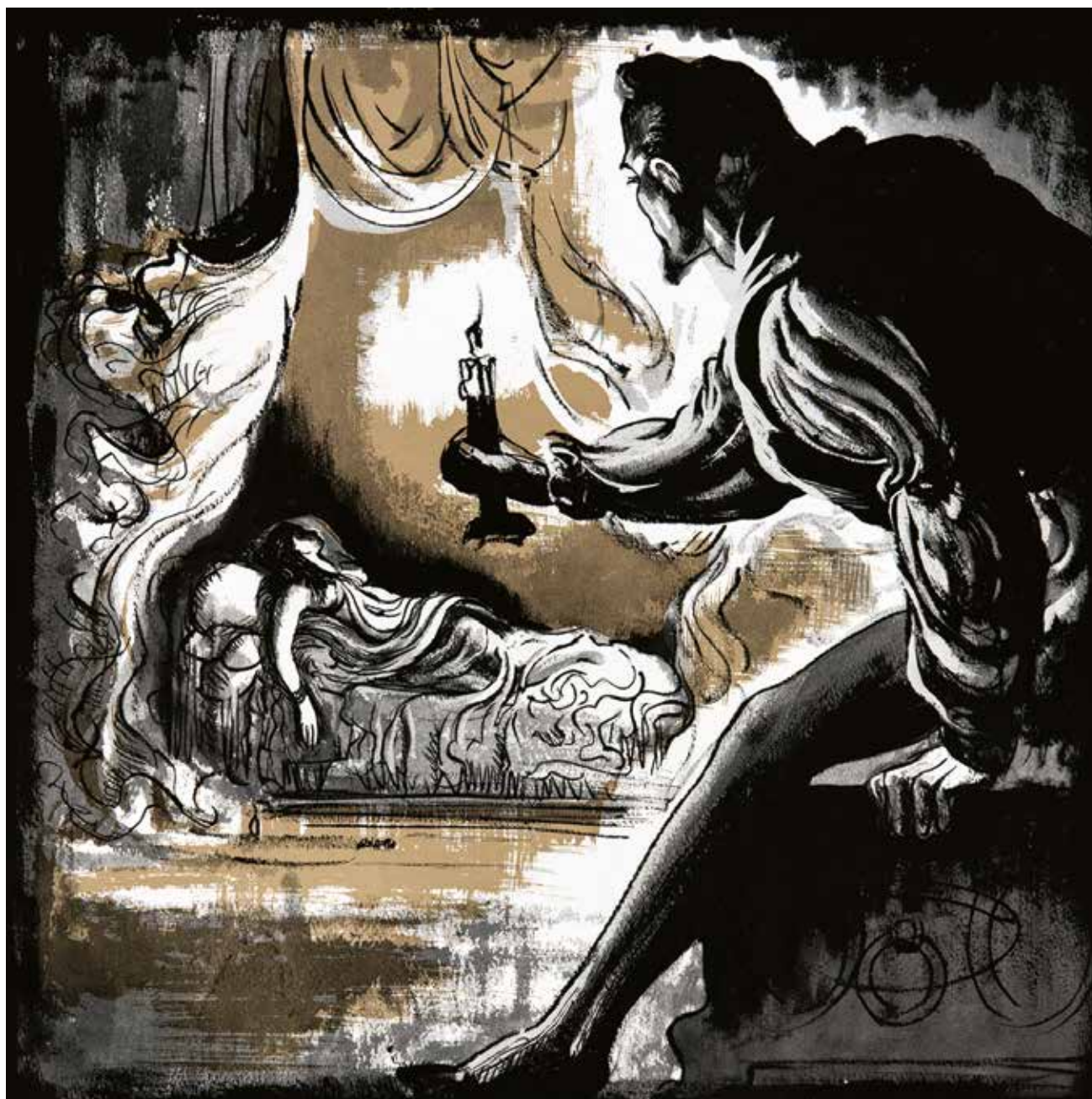
Fie, fie, fie!

The third movement is Volumnia's. The conflict and the interests are personal. But, just as in the middle movement, Volumnia was combined as an opposing force with the tribunes and the mob, so here all unwittingly and fatally she betrays her son into his rival's hands. Marcius knows and accepts it:

O my mother, mother! O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But for your son – believe it, O, believe it!
Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,
If not most mortal to him, But let it come.

There are then three movements; three motive forces variously combined. And here once again Shakespeare presents his hero with a double vision. We see him from two points of view – the public and the private – as patriot, general and consul – as son, husband and friend.

'Rhetoric, enormously magnificent and extraordinarily elaborate, is the beginning and the middle and the end of *Coriolanus*. The hero is not a human being at all; he is the statue of a demi-god cast in bronze, which roars its perfect periods ... through a melodious megaphone.' Lytton Strachey's appraisal or dismissal of the tragedy is absurdly exaggerated and unjust. The hero, as A.C. Bradley noted, often reminds us of a huge boy. And Bradley found in his violent heart a store, not only of tender affection, but of delicate and chivalrous poetry. Menenius is the liveliest and most real of all Shakespeare's gallery of Old Men. The passionate appeal of Volumnia, which follows so faithfully the phrasing of Sir Thomas North, is more than mere rhetoric. It is pure eloquence. And the prose dialogues of citizens, servants, sentries and soldiery – not to mention garrulous Valeria's visit to the sewing ladies – are as natural and Shakespearian as one could wish. From *Hamlet* to *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare anatomises human passions, ministers to minds diseased, and shakes our dispositions. With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls. But in this play he returns, in a sense, to the world of Henry V, and gives us, in Granville Barker's words, 'a play of action dealing with men of action: and in none that Shakespeare wrote do action and character better supplement and balance one another'.



CYMBELINE

CD 68 • CD 69 • CD 70

Cymbeline - Denis McCarthy • *Cloten* - David Rowe-Beddoe • *Posthumus Leonatus* - Ian Lang • *Belarius* - Terrence Hardiman
Guiderius - Andrew Parkes • *Arviragus* - John Sharpe • *Philario* - Roger Hammond • *Jachimo* - Tony White • *Caius Lucius* - Peter Orr
Pisanio - David Coombes • *Cornelius* - Philip Strick • *Two British Captains* - Tom Bussman, John Tracy-Phillips
Two Gentlemen - Trevor Nunn, Tom Bussman • *Two Gaolers* - Philip Strick, Michael Burrell • *Queen* - Gillian Webb
Imogen - Margaret Drabble • *Helen* - Micheline Samuels

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CYMBELINE, king of Britain • CLOTEN, son to the Queen by a former husband • POSTHUMUS LEONATUS, a gentleman, husband to Imogen • BELARIUS, a banished lord, disguised under the name of Morgan • GUIDERIUS, ARVIRAGUS, sons to Cymbeline, disguised under the names of Polydore and Cadwal, supposed sons to Morgan • PHILARIO, friend to Posthumus JACHIMO, friend to Philario • CAIUS LUCIUS, general of the Roman forces • PISANIO, servant to Posthumus CORNELIUS, a physician • A Roman Captain • Two British Captains • A Frenchman, friend to Philario • Two Lords of Cymbeline's court Two Gentlemen of the same • Two Gaolers • QUEEN, wife to Cymbeline • IMOGEN, daughter to Cymbeline by a former Queen HELEN, a lady attending on Imogen • Lords, Ladies, Roman Senators, Tribunes, a Soothsayer, a Dutchman, a Spaniard, Musicians, Officers, Captains, Soldiers, Messengers, and other Attendants, Apparitions.

'Remember', noted down Dr Simon Forman, quack, astrologer and playhouse addict, in April 1611, the month of Shakespeare's forty-seventh birthday:

Remember also the storri of Cymbalin king of England, in Lucius tyme, howe Lucius Cam from Octavius Cesar for Tribut, and being denied, after sent Lucius with a greate Arme of Souldiars who landed at Milford hauen, and Affter wer vanquished by Cimbalin, and Lucius taken prisoner, and all by meanes of 3 outlawes, of the which 2 of them were the sonns of Cimbalin, stolen from him when they were but 2 yers old by an old man whom Cymbalin banished, and he kept them as his own sonns 20 yers with him in A cave. And howe [one] of them slewe Clotan, that was the quens sonn, goinge to Milford hauen to sek the loue of Innogen the kinges daughter, whom he had banished also for louinge his daughter, and how the Italian that cam from her loue conveied him selfe into A Chestre, and said yt was a chest of plate sent from her loue &. others, to be presented to the kinge. And in the depest of the night, she being aslepe, he opened the cheste, and cam forth of yt, And vewed her in her bed, and the markes of her body, & toke awai her braslet, & after Accused her of adultery to her loue, &c. And in thend howe he came with the Romains into England & was taken prisoner, and after Reueled to Innogen, Who had turned her self into mans apparrell & fled to mete her loue at Milford hauen, & chanced to fall on the Caue in the wades wher her 2 brothers were, & howe by eating

a sleping Dram they thought she had bin deed, & laid her in the wodes, & the body of Cloten by her, in her loues apparrell that he left behind him, & howe she was found by Lucius, &c.

What a mouthful! Our spelling may be more orthodox and more consistent but could we remember as much after a single performance of *Cymbeline*, if it were totally unknown to us? (And, incidentally, did Shakespeare christen his heroine Innogen?) Forman's approach is the right one. This is a 'storri' – a romance, a fairy tale. 'We are all like Scheherazade's husband', says E.M. Forster, 'in that we want to know what happens next. That is universal and that is why the backbone of a novel has to be a story... It is the lowest and simplest of literary organisms. Yet it is the highest common factor to all the very complicated organisms known as novels.' Scheherazade, however, had a thousand and one nights: the dramatist has but one. The intricate threads must be entangled, unravelled and knitted up into a design which is revealed as the curtain falls. Into the 485 lines of the last scene of *Cymbeline* Shakespeare (according to an American scholar's analysis) has crowded some two dozen situations, any one of which would probably have been strong enough to carry a whole act. Granville Barker (dramatist and director) has spread himself in an appreciation of Shakespeare's skill. He enumerates a series of eighteen surprises, each character in turn providing one or being made its particular victim. Bernard Shaw on the other hand preferred to scrap the last Act and re-write it himself.

William Hazlitt, one of those rare critics who lets his author lead him by the hand instead of standing in his path and crying 'No Thoroughfare', responds as directly to the play as did the quack astrologer two hundred years earlier and distinguishes its nature with precision:

It may be considered as a dramatic romance, in which the most striking parts of the story are thrown into the form of a dialogue, and the intermediate circumstances are explained by the different speakers, as occasion renders it necessary. The action is less concentrated in consequence; but the interest becomes more aerial and refined from the principle of perspective introduced into the subject by the imaginary changes of scene as well as by the length of time it occupies. The reading of this play is like going a journey with some uncertain object at the end of it, and in which the suspense is kept up and heightened by the long intervals between each action. Though the events are scattered over such an extent of surface, and relate to such a variety of characters, yet the links which bind the different interests of the story together are never entirely broken. The most straggling and seemingly casual incidents are contrived in such a manner as to lead at last to the most complete development of the catastrophe. The ease and conscious unconcern with which this is effected only makes the skill more wonderful.

No other mature play of Shakespeare's, except *Troilus and Cressida*, has raised such acute dissension. Counsel for the prosecution and counsel for the defence are equally dogmatic. We should not expect it to be to Samuel Johnson's taste and his dismissal (after conceding many just sentiments, some natural dialogues, and some pleasing scenes) is in his very best manner:

To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.

Shaw is no less characteristic:

It is for the most part stagey trash of the lowest melodramatic order, in parts abominably written, throughout intellectually vulgar, and, judged in point of thought by modern intellectual standards, vulgar, foolish, offensive, indecent, and exasperating beyond all tolerance. To read *Cymbeline* and to think of Goethe, of Wagner, of Ibsen, is, for me, to imperil the habit of studied moderation of statement which years of public responsibility as a journalist have made almost second nature to me.

Shaw is in fact taking occasion to 'blame the bard' generally and to satisfy himself that 'with the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I can despise so entirely as I despise Shakespeare when I measure my mind against his.' He then proceeds to launch into a panegyric of Shakespeare's genius as the creator of persons more real than actual life, and numbers among them in this play Caius Lucius, urbane among barbarians, Cloten, 'the prince of numbskulls, whose part, indecencies and all, is a literary masterpiece from the first line to the last'; and above all, Imogen. It is of course Imogen who secures a unanimous verdict of acquittal for the dramatist. Hazlitt for the defence – and he thought this one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's historical plays – puts Imogen first of all the heroines. Swinburne confesses that this is for him the play of plays, the one he has always loved beyond all other children of Shakespeare and closes his *Study of Shakespeare* (1880) 'upon the name of the woman best beloved in all the world of song and all the tide of time; upon the name of Shakespeare's Imogen'. Granville Barker, who had a special tenderness for the play as one full of imperfections but with merits all its own, has an admirable analysis and appreciation of the part in one of his most penetrating *Prefaces*. He concludes that the lifelikeness of Imogen is such that its verity transcends the play's need. When Shakespeare imagined her he had but lately achieved Cleopatra and 'whether meant to be or no, they make companion pictures of wantonness and chastity; and of women are the fullest and maturest that he drew.'

After the four tragic masterpieces Shakespeare returned to the high Roman fashion with *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. And then with *Cymbeline* (1609), *The Winter's Tale* (1610) and *The Tempest* (1611) attempts a new *genre* of tragi-comedy or romance. Some would say that, in the first, this new seed fell on shallow ground and sprang into flower and withered away; that in the second the roots struck deeper; that in the third the fruit is gathered in perfection. Yet one of the most conscious artists, Henry James, who was converted to Henry Irving and Ellen Terry by the Lyceum production of 1896 with sets and costumes designed by Alma-Tadema, evaluates *Cymbeline* very justly:

The thing is a florid fairy-tale, of a construction so loose and unpropped that it can scarce be said to stand upright at all, and of a psychological sketchiness that never touches firm ground, but plays, at its better times, with an indifferent shake of golden locks, in the high, sunny air of delightful poetry. Here it disports itself beyond the reach of all challenge.

What is Shakespeare at in these final romances? Is the poet in prosperous retirement at Stratford turning his back upon the players and the box-office and the nut-cracking groundlings? Is he taking a leaf from the script of the two up-and-coming young dramatists, Beaumont and Fletcher, whose *Philaster* has more than a little in common with *Cymbeline*? Or is Shakespeare himself calling the new tune and preparing presently to collaborate with Fletcher in *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*? Or shall we follow Professor Bentley in believing that Shakespeare never ceased to be a man of the theatre and that he is catering for a new public, the more sophisticated audience at the indoor theatre, the Blackfriars, of which the King's Men had acquired the lease in the summer of 1608? It may be that the fashion for the Mask, with which Ben Jonson was delighting the Queen and court of James I, encouraged Shakespeare to enhance dramatic moments in his last plays with songs and strains of music which have in them a hint of the unearthly and incorporeal.


While the scholars wrangle, readers more romantically or poetically or mystically inclined have sought for a nearer glimpse of Shakespeare's personality: a farewell message from the Bard of consolation for frail and suffering humanity. There have been interpretations in terms of allegory and symbol, anthropology and Christianity, reconciliation and redemption, myth and miracle. Despite Lytton Strachey's mockery in 1906 of any sentimental reading which wilfully ignores the fierce passions and cruel wrongs, the brutality, ugliness and lust, that streak and stain these last Romances, it cannot be denied that the moral implicit in them all is the lesson of forgiveness which Shakespeare had already taught more naively in *Measure for Measure*. The seed from which they spring is to be found in the reconciliation scene between Lear and Cordelia in which each kneels to the other; and also in the acceptance by love which passes understanding of man as he is, *sub specie aeternitatis*, in Lear's lyrical and prophetic utterance when he and the daughter whom he wronged are led away to prison.

'Kneel not to me', says the noble Posthumus Leonatus to the yellow Italian devil Iachimo:

The power that I have on you is to spare you;
The malice towards you to forgive you. Live,
And deal with others better.

This prompts Cymbeline's royal decree: 'Pardon's the word to all'; and looks on to the final couplet of Prospero's epilogue and farewell:

As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free



‘GOLDEN LADS AND
GIRLS ALL MUST AS
CHIMNEY SWEEPERS
COME TO DUST.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
CYMBELINE



HAMLET

CD 71 • CD 72 • CD 73 • CD 74

Claudius - Patrick Wymark • *Hamlet* - Anthony White • *Polonius* - Miles Malleson • *Horatio* - Ian Lang • *Laertes* - Peter Orr
Valtemand - David Rowe-Beddoe • *Cornelius* - Philip Strick • *Rosencrantz* - John Tracy-Phillips • *Guildestern* - Giles Slaughter
Osric - George Rylands • *A Gentleman* - Trevor Nunn • *A Doctor of Divinity* - Michael Burrell • *Marcellus* - Julian Curry
Bernardo - David Coombes • *Francisco* - Tom Bussman • *Reynaldo* - Hugh Walters • *Fortinbras* - Gary Watson
A Norwegian Captain - Ronald Allen • *English Ambassadors* - Roger Hammond • *Gertrude* - Margaretta Scot
Ophelia - Jeannette Sterke • *Ghost of Hamlet's father* - William Devlin

Thomas Betterton played Hamlet in 1709 when he was nearly 75 years of age. Pepys, that petulant theatre-goer, had seen him in the part 50 years earlier and found his performance 'beyond imagination'. Sir William D'Avenant had taught Betterton every word when the play was revived with the reopening of the theatres in 1661, and D'Avenant had seen Joseph Taylor in the part, whose name appears in the list of Players in the First Folio. He succeeded Richard Burbage. Thus the acting tradition is continuous and strong. Henry Irving learnt from Chipperfield, an old actor who had played Polonius to Edmund Kean's Hamlet (the greatest commentary ever made on Shakespeare, according to Hazlitt). Kean learnt from the survivors of Garrick's company and Garrick from the veteran companions of Betterton. Steele in *The Tatler* assures us that Betterton at 75 'by the prevalent power of proper manner, gesture, and voice, appeared through the whole drama a youth of great expectation, vivacity and enterprise'. Voice, that was his secret! His panegyrist, the actor-manager Colley Cibber, found the clue in the depth and delicacy and truth of his vocal expression. 'The Voice of a Singer is not more strictly ty'd to Time and Tune, than that of an Actor in Theatrical Elocution... I never heard a Line in Tragedy come from Betterton, wherein my Judgment, my Ear, and my Imagination, were not fully satisfy'd; which since his Time I cannot equally say of any one Actor whatsoever.'

Stage Hamlets, if not over 70 – Sir Frank Benson also essayed it at that age – have all too often left their youth some way behind them. Macready after a performance in 1846 when he was 53 recorded: 'I can conscientiously pronounce it one of the very best I have given of Hamlet'. But Shakespeare's tragedy is first and foremost a tragedy of Youth, as *Lear* is of old age; *Macbeth* and *Othello* of the middle years. Laertes, Fortinbras, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Osric are 'in the morn and liquid dew of youth'. They reflect and enhance in their different ways the youthful hero who 'was likely, had he been put on, To have proved most royal'. This simple fundamental fact was unforgettably revealed by Sir Barry Jackson's '*Hamlet in Modern Dress*' (1925), which so exhilarated and captivated the dramatic critic of *The Observer*, that he could only attempt a scattered note to explain why it was the richest and deepest *Hamlet* that he had ever seen or hoped to see. 'Who has ever before violently cared what Laertes does or thinks?', he asked. 'And yet once make him an ordinary decent undergraduate, warped by a rancorous hatred in his heart for the young man who he thinks has seduced his sister – let him once be seen as a young man of to-day, and not as a walking costume – and I know that the Laertes of the trunk-hose, or, alternatively, of the winged-helmet Viking tradition, is a creature I never want to endure again in a modern theatre'. The Birmingham company's production could almost

make one think that Tchekov wrote it; that he composed 'that talkative, idiosyncratic, extraordinarily vivid and mercilessly observed crowd of struggling figures'. It was not '*Hamlet* in Modern Dress' but '*Hamlet* as a modern play'. 'The difference in the main is not to *Hamlet* himself, who at once becomes easier to play because his surroundings become ten times as interesting, but in the others, who surprise one by suddenly leaping to life.'

Since that pioneer production thirty-five years ago, Shakespeare in modern dress has become too familiar perhaps. *Troilus and Cressida* and *Julius Caesar* have been illuminated thereby, but in the case of *Hamlet* not only was Ben Jonson's estimate proved true – 'He was not of an age, but for all time' – but also it suddenly emerged that there *is* such a thing as '*Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark'.

Is it because man is romantic, nostalgic about his youth, that so many readers have identified themselves with the Prince and that every actor is eager to play the part even when he has fallen into the sere and yellow leaf. The reader re-creates him in his own image. 'We feel not only the virtues, but the weaknesses, of *Hamlet* as our own', writes an eighteenth century novelist; and Coleridge confesses, 'I have a smack of *Hamlet* myself'. Hazlitt begins his appreciation: 'This is *Hamlet* the Dane, whom we read of in our youth, and whom we seem almost to remember in our after-years ... all whose thoughts we seem to know as well as we do our own. *Hamlet* is a name: his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet's brain. What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are *Hamlet*'. The first comment on the play was written within a few months of its first night by a Cambridge don, in the margin of his Chaucer folio: 'His *Lucrece* & his tragedie of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*, haue it in them to please the wiser sort.' Gabriel Harvey had no doubt that he himself was one of the wiser sort. A Cambridge don to-day, Professor C.S. Lewis, follows Hazlitt's lead: 'We read *Hamlet*'s speeches with interest chiefly because they describe so well a certain spiritual region through which most of us have passed and anyone in his circumstances might be expected to pass, rather than because of our concern to understand how and why this particular man entered it... It is often cast in the teeth of the great critics that each in painting *Hamlet* has drawn a portrait of himself. How if they were right? I would go a long way to meet Beatrice or Falstaff... I would not cross the road to meet *Hamlet*. It would never be necessary. He is always where I am'. After an evening at the Comédie-Francaise Anatole France addressed the Prince: 'Vous êtes de tous les temps et de tous les pays. Vous n'avez pas vieilli d'une heure en trois siecles. Votre âme a l'âge de chacune de nos âmes. Nous vivons ensemble, Prince *Hamlet*, et vous êtes ce que nous sommes, un homme au milieu du mal universel... Qui de nous ne vous ressemble en quelque chose? Qui de nous pense sans contradiction et agit sans incohérence? Qui de nous n'est fou ?'

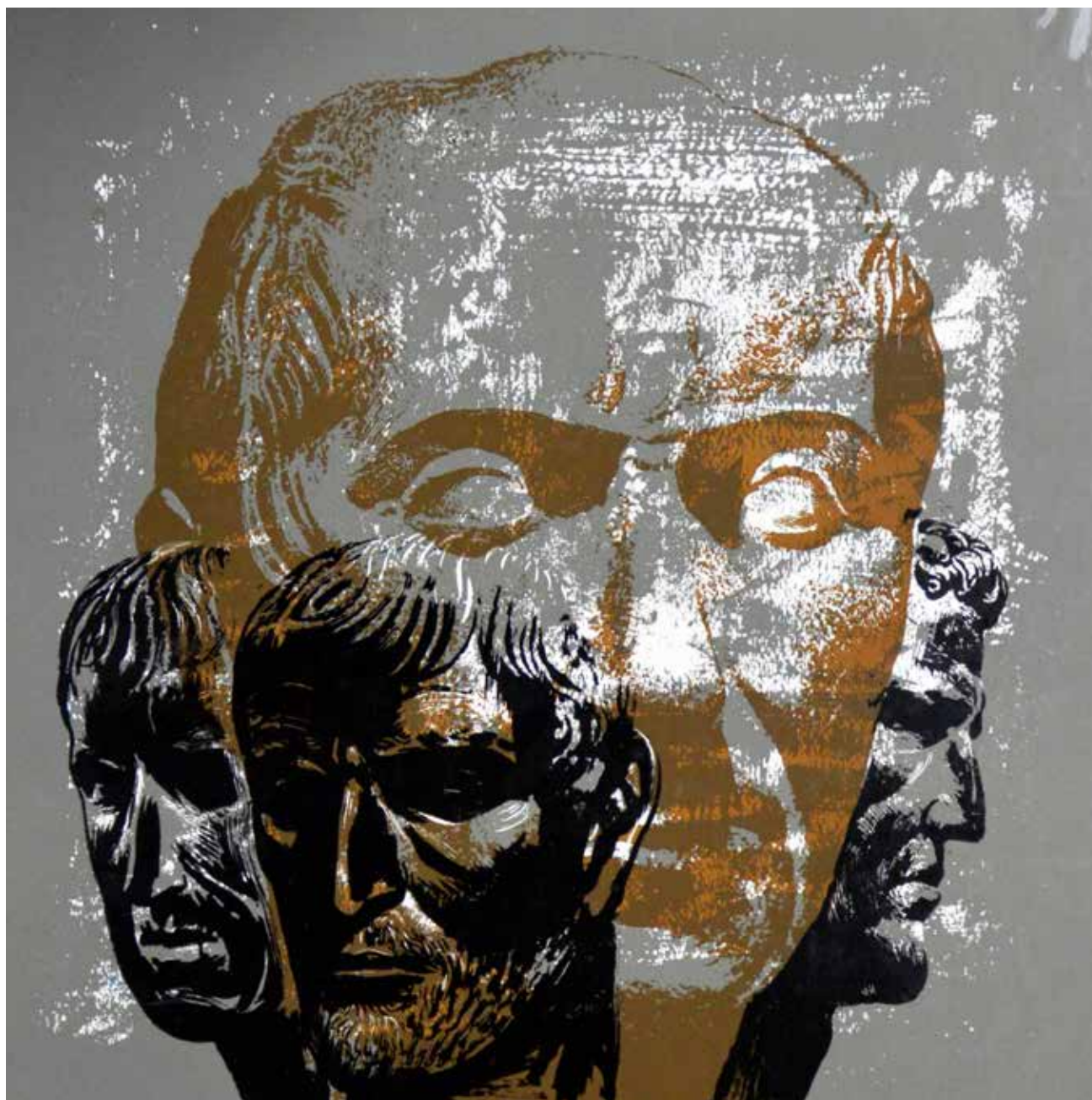
Our identification of ourselves with *Hamlet* is perhaps all the more inspiring and sustaining because we like to think that in the Prince and in Prospero we are closer to the poet himself than in any other of his creatures; closer (strangely enough) than we feel ourselves to be when we read the Sonnets.

In the mediaeval Morality plays there is a central figure – his name may be Humanum Genus or Lusty Juventus or Everyman – in whom we see ourselves, symbolic victim of the conflict of Good and Evil, of Life and Death. Hamlet is such a one in this Renaissance Morality; courtier, soldier, scholar – a young man growing up. Some critics have thought that Death is the dominant theme, as it is in *Measure for Measure*. But in *Hamlet* the shadow of death accentuates the brilliant light in which these lively young men go about their business, this crowded world of diplomacy and duelling, of drinking and travelling players. The Prince himself in his customary suit of solemn black at the King's coronation Council, or holding Yorick's skull to his nose, unites immortal youth with proud death. In his pilgrimage he conducts us from the middle ages through the Renaissance to more modern conceptions. The Ghost who dominates Act I is a very mediaeval Ghost condemned to the sulphurous and tormenting flames of purgatory. The chance murder of the servile, eavesdropping politician and Hamlet's comments thereupon – 'How now! a rat? dead, for a ducat, dead' – 'I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room' – belong to the Elizabethan world. The elegy on drowned Ophelia, the rustic Clown chopping logic – 'There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers – they hold up Adam's profession' – the maimed rites that follow, Gertrude's 'Sweets to the sweet. Farewell!', and the grotesque scuffle in the grave seem to carry us forward to Thomas Hardy. When the tragedy is done, death is no longer lit by hell fires: he is a bailiff who taps you on the shoulder or (to Fortinbras) a mighty hunter. Hamlet bids the friend of his heart *live* to tell his story and gives young Fortinbras his dying voice. The rest is silence. Horatio's 'Good night, sweet prince, And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest' shows how far we have travelled in spiritual and historic time from the poor Ghost 'Doomed for a certain term to walk the night ... forbid To tell the secrets of my prison house'. Hamlet's meditations in the churchyard and, above all, his last prose speech to Horatio before the whole court enter for the fencing match, bring us nearer to Montaigne, the modern man, who dismisses death, for it is life which matters, and who rests upon the unanswered question, 'Que sçais-je?'

We defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come – if it be not to come, it will be now – if it be not now, yet it will come – the readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows what is't to leave betimes, let be.

'Let be.' The two little words give the answer at long last to

'To be, or not to be, that is the question.'



JULIUS CAESAR

CD 75 • CD 76

Julius Caesar - John Wilders • *Octavius Caesar* - George Rylands • *Marcus Antonius* - Anthony White • *M. Aemilius Lepidus* - Clive Swift
Cicero - John Dover Wilson • *Publius* - Donald Beves • *Marcus Brutus* - John Barton • *Cassius* - Anthony Jacobs • *Casca* - Tony Church
Trebonius - Roger Prior • *Ligarius* - Denys Robertson • *Decius Brutus* - Michael Jaffe • *Metellus Cimber* - Gary Watson
Cinna - Roderick Cook • *Flavius* - John Arnott • *Marullus* - David Buck • *Artemidorus* - John Arnott • *A Soothsayer* - Noel Annan
Lucilius - David Buck • *Messala* - Gary Watson • *Young Cato* - Julian Pettifer • *Volumnius* - John Bird • *Varro* - John Arnott
Clitus - Chris Renard • *Strato* - Chris Renard • *Dardanius* - Mark Griffiths • *Pindarus* - Clive Swift • *Calphurnia* - Wendy Gifford
Portia - Dorothy Mulcahy

‘For the scholar Brutus, for the actor Cassius, for the public Antony.’ So runs a shrewd entry in the note-book of the highly successful actor-manager Beerbohm Tree. His production of *Julius Caesar* in 1898 proved him the true successor to Henry Irving, as a master of opulent and ostentatious pageantry. ‘For the actor, Cassius’. All who saw John Gielgud in the part in the Hollywood screen version will agree. And Antony should steal the applause of the audience in the theatre, as surely as he compels and inflames the Roman mob in the Forum. But in planning the first of the Roman tragedies, Shakespeare is searching, as Granville Barker has said, for a new sort of hero. He finds him in Brutus. We turn our back on the man of action, the hero as king and soldier, Henry V, and look forward to the intellectual, introspective Prince of Denmark. Hal’s patron saint is St George: Hamlet’s is Montaigne. Brutus is a thinker and a divided being. Shakespeare has already dwelt upon the disparity between public and private life; between the pomp, circumstance and ceremony of kingship with its burden of responsibility, uneasy slumbers, guilty self-questioning, and the heart’s ease of the shepherd, with his cold thin drink out of a leathern bottle, under the hawthorn shade, of the wet ship-boy cradled on the high and giddy mast, of the peasant who gets him to rest with body fill’d and vacant mind, caring little what watch the king keeps to maintain the peace. In Brutus there is a conflict, similar to this irony of kingship, between the public and the private man. When we see him with Portia, with Lucius, in his reconciliation with Cassius, we understand and pity him. But he is the leader of the conspirators, the assassin of his friend. Is Brutus an honourable man? Brutus, ‘the noblest Roman of them all’, ‘Caesar’s angel’, was placed by Dante with Iscariot in the lowest circle of hell. As a divided being, Brutus looks forward beyond Hamlet, the victim of an inner conflict which cannot be resolved, to Macbeth who is both ‘Bellona’s bridegroom’ and a ‘bloody butcher’. Macbeth and Brutus are alike drawn on against their will and judgment to commit murder:

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream:
The Genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council, and the state of man
Like to a little kingdom suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.

Julius Caesar (1599) is then the gateway which leads from *Henry V* to *Hamlet*. The first step in a tragic sequence which closes with *Coriolanus*. Inspiration came from a masterpiece of translation which displaced the chroniclers, Holinshed and Hall, in Shakespeare's imagination. His new and vital source is Plutarch, whose lives of the Greek and Roman soldiers and statesmen were written about A.D. 100, and translated by Jacques Amyot in 1559, tutor to two future Kings of France, Professor of Classics at Bourges, and presently Grand Almoner of France. 'Plutarch is my man', says Montaigne. And he thanks Amyot for making a present of such a book to his country. 'It is my breviary'. Then comes Sir Thomas North to translate Amyot into English. The first edition was printed in 1579, the second came from the press of a native of Stratford, Richard Field, in 1595. 'There is no profane study,' North assures us, 'better than Plutarch. All other learning is private, fitter for the Universities than cities, fuller of contemplation than experience'. Shakespeare (not a University man) found Plutarch's biographies aptest of all for translation into terms of 'theatre'.

Julius Caesar has long been so popular in the schoolroom, that we are misled into finding it a little noisy, wholesome and dull. It is rhetorical. The poetry is scanty. There is plenty of vigorous action. But with Plutarch to guide and stimulate him, Shakespeare creates a group of contrasted yet interdependent personalities. He characterises to some purpose and gives half a dozen actors wonderful material. Yet the tragedy leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Mighty Caesar has a hollow ring. Antony is an opportunist and a profligate. Cassius, the great observer, a man who 'loves no music', the tempter of Brutus, has a touch of Iago. And Brutus himself is a bit of a prig; a little conscious of his nobility, too proud of being a philosopher, morally vain. We feel little exaltation when the final curtain falls. Octavius is the victor; and Octavius is a chilly, self-willed boy who has never been young, a bit of a prig too. Shakespeare had sketched him in John of Lancaster, of whom Falstaff says: 'This same young sober-blooded boy doth not love me, nor a man cannot make him laugh – but that's no marvel, he drinks no wine; there's never none of these demure boys come to any proof, for thin drink doth so over-cool their blood...' The character contrast between Antony and Octavius, which is to be the mainspring of the later tragedy, is established in the closing scenes of *Julius Caesar*.

With this, the first of the great tragedies – *Romeo and Juliet* is more a poem than a play – Shakespeare seems to acquire a sense of classical form and to employ for the conduct of the action a structure which is to serve him for some years to come. In the tragedies we usually find that there are two movements which correspond more or less, but not always exactly or necessarily, with a division into the first three and the last two acts of the five-act scheme. In this case the first movement is Caesar living, the second is Caesar dead. Caesar in flesh and blood is to some eyes and at some moments a small thing. But Caesar's spirit is potent and mighty; it ranges far and executes revenge. The avenger is Antony who (like Laertes and Macduff) is held in reserve. At the beginning we have a brief but vivid glimpse of him. He is 'dressed for the course': he is to touch the barren Calphurnia in the race: his name is spoken in three successive lines: his word is 'When Caesar says do this it is performed'. When the procession returns he is at Caesar's elbow who remarks that 'Cassius loves no plays as thou dost, Antony'. He then disappears for the rest of the Act and for the whole of Act II. The turning point of the play comes at a moment of pause when the hunters stand round their quarry. Trebonius enters. 'Where is Antony?' he asks – the question is on our lips. 'Fled to his house amazed'. We breathe again. The conspirators bathe their hands in Caesar's blood and see themselves in the eyes of posterity. The action is suspended into a tableau whose climax comes with Cassius's

So often shall the knot of us be called
The men that gave their country liberty.

The group breaks up. Brutus shall lead. And then: 'Soft who comes here?' Enter a servant: 'A friend of Antony's'. And then a moment later. 'But here comes Antony: Welcome, Mark Antony'. As R.G. Moulton pointed out sixty years ago, the entry of the servant is the turning point, the secret hinge of the play. In *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare reveals himself – and this has too often been ignored or denied – as a formal and conscious artist.



KING LEAR

CD 77 • CD 78 • CD 79

Lear, King of Britain - William Devlin • *King of France* - Ian Lang • *Duke of Burgundy* - John Tracy-Phillips • *Duke of Cornwall* - Patrick Creean
Duke of Albany - Gary Watson • *Earl of Kent* - William Squire • *Earl of Gloucester* - Donald Beves • *Edgar* - Frank Duncan
Edmund - Peter Orr • *Curan* - Michael Burrell • *Oswald* - Peter Foster • *Old Man* - Terrence Hardiman • *Doctor* - Roger Hammond
Fool - Michael Bakewell • *Goneril* - Jill Balcon • *Cordelia* - Prunella Scales • *Regan* - Margaret Rawlings

Hear, Nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful.
Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound.

Royal Lear, every inch a king, invokes the same goddess as the bastard Edmund. Edmund's fierce quality has sprung from 'the lusty stealth of nature' while Lear curses his daughter with sterility. If she must teem, let her babe be thwart and disnatured. Nature is the divinity that shapes the ends of Shakespeare's most metaphysical tragedy. *Hamlet* is a romantic melodrama; *Othello* is classical, Sophoclean; *Macbeth* is claustrophobic, a nightmare, where nothing is but what is not. *King Lear* is cosmic.

O ruined piece of Nature! This great world
Shall so wear out to naught.

NATURE has an older English name: KIND. Hamlet plays on the word, 'A little more than kin and less than kind' and 'kindless villain'. Lear does not 'tax the elements with unkindness'; it is the nature of the winds to blow, the rains to wet; they are doing their kind. But what of man? Is man natural or unnatural? 'Let them anatomise Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in Nature that makes these hard hearts?' How does man in his kind compare with the animal kingdom? Each species has its nature. 'Hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey'. But Man is more savage still. Goneril's tongue strikes most serpent-like, her fangs are boarish, her sharp-toothed unkindness is that of a vulture. These are tigers, not daughters. Oswald is a rat, a fawning dog, a grinning goose. The gentle Edgar escapes to take the basest shape 'that ever penury in contempt of man/Brought near to beast'. As a Bedlam beggar whose fare is the toad, the tadpole, and the mantled pool, who is pursued by a fiend that hurts the poor creatures of earth, he stands naked before the majesty of Lear:

Nothing could have subdued nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.
Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Here's three on us are sophisticated: thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.

'Sophisticated'; that is adulterated, corrupted. This is the second tragic theme, the theme expounded in *Timon of Athens*: social man as opposed to natural man. Society is founded on degree, custom, ceremony, prerogative, office, piety and law. Its vices are flattery, hypocrisy, envy, ingratitude. Sophisticated vices are more deadly than bestial instincts:

Timon shall to the woods where he shall find
The unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.

Like Edgar, Timon bears away from Athens 'nothing but nakedness'.

When the King asks poor Tom: 'What hast thou been?' the answer of the innocent, chivalrous son of Gloucester is strange indeed:

A servingman! proud in heart and mind; that curled my hair, wore gloves in my cap; served the lust of my mistress's heart, and did the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven; one that slept in the contriving of lust, and waked to do it. Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly; and in woman out-paramoured the Turk. False of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand ...

This is 'sophisticated' man. Moreover it might be a portrait of Oswald, the flunkey who is at home in a world of rustling silks, lender's books, brothels; a glass-gazing, superserviceable, finical rogue, of whom honest Kent says: 'Nature disclaims in thee. A tailor made thee'. Clothes distinguish man and beast. 'Robes and furred gowns hide all,' cries Lear. And, such are fashion's paradoxes, that woman can go almost naked for society's sake:

If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm.

The play anatomises Nature in the animal creation and in mankind. But if Lear's tragic error was that he 'forgot his nature', that in rejecting Cordelia he wrenched his frame of nature from the fixed place, that he invoked Nature against herself:

Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That make ingrateful man!

yet it is by Nature that he is healed:

Our foster nurse of nature is repose,
The which he lacks. That to provoke in him
Are many simples operative, whose power
will close the eye of anguish.
All blest secrets,
All you unpublished virtues of the earth
Spring with my tears!

And finally the repentance of the villain, the unnatural natural son of Gloucester, albeit too late, remembers the dominant theme:

I pant for life. Some good I mean to do,
Despite of my own nature.

In the Preface to *The Return of the Native* Thomas Hardy fancies that his Egdon heath may be 'the heath of that traditionary King of Wessex – Lear'. His descriptions of this haggard waste which figures in Domesday Book and which seemed 'to await throughout the centuries one last crisis, the final overthrow', not only create the scene of Shakespeare's third Act but point some of the inner meanings of the play:

The untamable, Ishmaelitish thing that Egdon now was, it always had been. Civilisation was its enemy... In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes. A person on the heath in raiment of modem cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive.

Diggory Venn, the reddleman, has affinities with Edgar. And when Hardy's hero realises, like Oedipus, his tragic situation, he goes out onto Egdon and faces 'the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which, having defined the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man'. So it is with Lear – 'A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man', 'A man more sinned against than sinning'.

The tragedy is exceptional in that two complete plots are dovetailed into one another. The story of Lear and his daughters, which is in Holinshed's *Chronicle* and in *The Faerie Queene*, was dramatised before 1594 (perhaps by the University wit, George Peele) and printed in 1605. Tolstoi preferred this play to Shakespeare's, because it lacked the underplot of Gloucester and his sons, which Shakespeare lifted from the *Arcadia: The pitifull state, and storie of the Paphlagonian unkinde King, and his kind sonne, first related by the son, then by the blind father*. The parallelism of the underplot reinforces the main plot skilfully. Above all it translates legend or parable into human terms. Gloucester (another Polonius) and his sons are life-size. Lear and his daughters are almost mythical figures. He is comparable with Prometheus. The myth explores the nature of the universe and man's place in it; but it is at the same time a parable of tragic blindness and cruel wrong, of redemption by suffering, of self-knowledge, reconciliation and forgiveness. The tragedy begins like a fairy story, expands into a primitive and pagan world, full of symbols and folk-lore, and then is reduced to more human terms, almost Christianised. The death of Cordelia is an atonement. Samuel Johnson was so shocked by it that he could not endure to read the end of the play again until he came to edit it many years after. Nahum Tate's happy ending, in which Cordelia survives to marry Edgar, held the stage from 1681 to 1838. A.C. Bradley found an answer to the question 'Why does Cordelia die?' in the implicit moral of all Shakespearean tragedy, that the waste and wickedness of the world are not the final reality, but only a part of reality taken as a whole, and, when so taken, illusive. What happens to Cordelia does not matter in comparison with what she *is*:

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense.

By the imaginative, indeed inspired, conception of Edgar, the poet links the two plots with an indissoluble tie. Gloucester's innocent, care-free son flies from slander, treachery and evil, identifying himself with poverty and witlessness – 'The lunatic, the lover and the poet/ Are of imagination all compact' – and passes over into the world of nightmare, fantasy and ultimate reality. Led by foul fiends through whirlpool and quagmire, he joins the King as comrade of the wolf and owl beneath the pelting of the pitiless storm, at the very moment when the King has learnt to pray for all naked wretches, for houseless poverty. Poor Tom's sudden cry as mock-madman sends Lear out of his mind. Mad Lear then turns to the Bedlam as his 'most learned Theban', his 'noble philosopher'. Side by side with real madness and feigned madness cowers the Fool. Folly or Wisdom? He is Lear's shadow and Lear's conscience. And when Lear falls into the sleep which will carry him back from fantasy to reality the Fool vanishes. Lear needs him not: the scales have fallen from his eyes. As Gloucester's torch leads off Kent and the Fool, the King and his 'good Athenian' to shelter from the tempest, Edgar utters a spell:

Childe Roland to the dark tower came.
His word was still 'Fie, foh, and fum.
I smell the blood of a British man'.

In the very next line (as the scene changes) Cornwall vows vengeance upon Gloucester. But it is the blood shed by the simple Briton who interposes to save his master's eyes which marks the turning point of the play, the hinge of the whole structure. Cornwall is mortally wounded. His death releases Regan as Goneril's rival for the enjoying of Edmund, and their lustful rivalry is fatal to both. Then it is as an unknown Knight, a champion heroic as Childe Roland, that Edgar appears on the third sound of the trumpet to vanquish Edmund, the false traitor. The wheel is come full circle and all the spokes and felloes are firmly fixed by the dramatic craftsman.

Charles Lamb states categorically that the play cannot be acted. But this was one of Garrick's greatest roles; and if stage thunder, wind and rain have been known to drown the words in the storm scenes, there are many other moments which are highly effective in the theatre. Every part gives the actor full scope, so that Edgar and the Fool present as great a histrionic challenge as does the King himself. At any rate, poets and critics unite in regarding *King Lear* as Shakespeare's sublimest and profoundest work, the one in which, as Hazlitt puts it, 'he was fairly caught in the web of his own imagination'.



MACBETH

CD 80 • CD 81

Duncan - Toby Robertson • *Malcolm* - Roger Prior • *Macbeth* - Tony Church • *Banquo* - John Barton • *Macduff* - Gerald Mosbach
Lennox - Gary Watson • *Ross* - Derek Jacobi • *Menteith* - David Jones • *Angus* - Chris Renard • *Caithness* - Terrence Hardiman
Siward - Donald Beves • *Young Siward* - Richard Marquand • *Seyton* - John Tracy-Phillips • *A Porter* - Michael Bates
An Old Man - Terrence Hardiman • *An English Doctor* - George Rylands • *A Scotch Doctor* - John Arnott
Three Murderers - Clive Swift, John Bird, John Kimber • *Lady Macbeth* - Irene Worth • *Lady Macduff* - Freda Dowie
A Gentlewoman - Mrs Shire • *The Weird Sisters* - Willa Muir, Freda Dowie, Janette Richer

The superstitions of the stage are countless. The most puissant and peculiar relate to *Macbeth*. There is a curse upon it, a hoodoo; it is the play which may never be quoted in the theatre. The tragedy is bewitched. Sarah Siddons, the greatest Lady Macbeth in theatrical history, sat up to read the play and con her part the very night before her first appearance, thinking (she tells us) that as the character was very short she would soon accomplish it. She was twenty years old. As she read, the horrors of the assination scene so overwhelmed her that she snatched up her candle in a paroxysm of terror and hastened upstairs to her bed, pursued by the ghostly rustling of her silk dress. She found her husband fast asleep. Too frightened to take off her clothes or extinguish her candle she threw herself down beside him. 'At peep of day I rose to resume my task; but so little did I know my part when I appeared in it that night, that my shame and confusion cured me of procrastinating my business for the remainder of my life.'

All readers of *Macbeth* have been as fearfully possessed; it is the tragedy which we meet first – in the nursery or schoolroom perhaps. As Samuel Johnson says: 'He that peruses Shakespeare looks around alarmed and starts to find himself alone'. But then in the theatre we are a little disappointed; we feel cheated of our expectations; the direness can no longer start us. For the actors the tragedy is fraught with difficulties; for the audience imagination outruns performance. Is Shakespeare at fault? Are the poet and the playwright at odds here? Has theatrical skill had to complete what poetic inspiration had bodied forth? In the last two Acts does 'the vision splendid', or rather the macabre and sublime nightmare, fade into the common light of day?

Hamlet is the longest of the tragedies; *Macbeth* (some seven years later) is the shortest. The two plays have in common a familiar and essential device of poetic drama which they exploit to the full; namely, the soliloquy. And its use in the later play is more subtle and dispersed; it is not confined to the protagonist. In *Macbeth* the soliloquy, with its sworn brother the 'aside', ceases to be a convention or device. It is the vehicle and instrument of the play's soul. Some speeches are concealed soliloquy; there may be ears to hear and lips to comment but the character is in truth speaking to himself and so to us. Whereas Hamlet analyses himself and keeps the plot in motion, in *Macbeth* it is Shakespeare's own conception of the whole, his own poetic imagination at work, which is communicated by the naïve antique device. Macbeth is not only the protagonist, he is the cast. Lady Macbeth is flesh of his flesh and his evil genius. Banquo and Macduff, noble warriors and thanes, are

versions of him. Macduff is what he might have been and Banquo the mean between the two. The rest are symbols and choric commentaries: a drunken porter of hell-gate, an Old Man who has seen 'hours dreadful and things strange'; a Doctor of Physic who cannot 'minister to a mind diseased', the weird sisters, a sainted King. And the next generation: little Macduff, Fleance, Malcolm and Donalbain, young Siward. These relate to the childless Macbeth and his Queen who has known how 'tender 'tis to love that babe that milks me' and has prayed to the spirits of evil to turn her milk to gall. The *dramatis personae* radiate from Macbeth or are grouped in concentric circles round about him.

'Rhetoric is heard, poetry is overheard', it has been said. 'All poetry is in the nature of soliloquy'. Macbeth is a poet. The heroic avenger who takes over from him is not a poet but a man of action, as different as Prince Hal from Richard II. Macduff is a man of few words, inarticulate, a strong silent Scot. 'My voice is in my sword'. 'Do not bid me speak. See and then speak yourselves'. His most pregnant utterance is the brief aside: 'He has no children'. But it is a first-rate acting part which we appreciate in the theatre. (And if Macduff is not poetical, Shakespeare makes him religious. It is right that he should say

Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple.)

And so it often strikes us that the first three Acts move us less on the stage than in the study, while the last two, which appeal less to the reader, have great theatrical quality.

The construction is unusual. There are three movements. The first and last fill two Acts apiece and belong respectively to King Duncan and to Macduff. Act III is Banquo's. The turning point comes with the galloping of horse which follows hard upon the Show of Kings. 'Macduff is fled to England'. Macbeth makes his fatal resolve and in the next scene (so domestic and unpoetical) the little Macduff is stabbed. That blow, like the chance killing of Polonius and the mortal wound which a servant, trying to save Gloucester's eyes, gives to Cornwall, sets in motion retribution and revenge. This scene also highlights the theme of treachery which informs the whole play, from the execution of Cawdor onwards. Then follows the long drawn-out and too often deprecated scene in England which Shakespeare lifted from the history book. Malcolm's testing of Macduff, of whom we have seen so little and who, after all, went into retirement after Duncan's murder, and who has now (it seems) deserted his wife and babes, is natural enough when we recall the Scotland of the sixteenth century in which James I had his savage and perfidious upbringing. The scene serves several purposes. It slows down the dramatic time and prepares us for the transformation of Macbeth. When next we see him he has grown old in blood, lonely and disillusioned and desperate. The poet in him is dying. And the opening words of this English scene give us the feeling of the aftermath of murder and civil strife, a kind of desolation, so that dramatically the turn which comes with Ross's entry and terrible news is infinitely more effective. At first he is reserved but his bitter tidings are forced from him and we feel the play beginning to stir itself. 'Be this the whetstone of your grief', Malcolm exhorts, and Macduff answers

front to front
Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;
Within my sword's length set him; if he scape,
Heaven forgive him too.

'This tune goes manly', Malcolm comments, 'Macbeth is ripe for shaking and the powers above put on their instruments'. The ironical fulfilment of the Witches' prophecies is about to begin. The last movement after a slow steady carefully wrought opening, a deliberate change of tempo and dramatic atmosphere and style, has gathered weight and is set in motion.

The poetic idiom of *Macbeth*, both play and protagonist, is unique; it is enigmatic, rapid, constricted, brief. Versification aids and abets. The isolated line or line and a half, the memorable phrase, go with the shorthand effect of the brief scenes which depend on moments rather than sequences. The effect of a single word is far-reaching and the epithets are as unusual as in Milton: cloister'd flight, wither'd murder, barren sceptre, spongy officers, insane root, seeing night, oblivious antidote, obscure bird. Words of general import and indeterminate conception abound; such as supernatural, prophetic, metaphysical, invisible, fatal, sightless, fantastical, surmise, suggestion, vision, dream, fancies, shadow, visitings. These are set off against the actual and exact. Through the murk we are aware not only (as Bradley noted) of the stains and gout of blood, but of the towering falcon and the mousing owl, the pilot's thumb, the stool of Banquo's ghost, the taper, the nipple plucked from the boneless gums, the daggers, the bell, the cauldron, the leafy boughs of Birnam, the twofold balls and treble sceptres, the sailor's wife with chestnuts in her lap, the temple-haunting martlet, the last syllable of recorded time. Abstract and concrete language alternate. Strange suggestive phrases give place to the concise, emphatic and direct. 'I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.' We can assess the strange eventful history of Shakespeare's progress as a stylist, if we first recall the extended passage in which Othello dwells upon the elemental equation of life and light before he extinguishes the candle at Desdemona's bedside, and then look back to the simple and formalised words of John of Gaunt:

My oil-dried lamp and time bewasted light
Shall be extinct with age and endless night,
My inch of taper will be burnt and done.

In *Macbeth* this is 'thrown away' as they say in the theatre, in four words, the kernel of what is almost an unrhymed sonnet which we hear uttered without surprise by the bloody butcher – 'Out, out, brief candle!'

N.B. - Scholars are almost unanimous in believing that the Hecate passages in the Witches' scenes are spurious and as a single exception to the general rule governing this series of uncut recordings of Shakespeare's plays these have not been recorded.



OTHELLO

CD 82 • CD 83 • CD 84

Duke of Venice - Richard David • *Brabantio* - John Barton • *Gratiano* - John Wilders • *Lodovico* - Anthony White • *Othello* - Tony Church
Cassio - Gary Watson • *Iago* - Donald Beves • *Roderigo* - George Rylands • *Montano* - John Arnott • *Clown* - Peter Woodthorpe
Desdemona - Wendy Gifford • *Emilia* - Irene Worth • *Bianca* - Mary Fenton

The Moor of Venice was acted by the Kings Majesties Players in the Banketting house at Whitehall on Hallowmass, the first of November 1604. It is the second tragedy of Shakespeare's Great Four and as classical as its predecessor *Hamlet* (1599) is romantic. It has even been compared with the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles. Omit Act I, as Verdi did in his masterpiece, and the dramatic unities are preserved. For this reason it is the most concentrated and intense of all the plays, and the poet, Robert Bridges, concluded that in this tragedy Shakespeare aimed at exciting his audience to the limit of their endurance. But if we dispense with the first Act, which is in a sense the prologue to the main action, we deprive Iago of his trump card; namely Desdemona's total deception of her father, which Brabantio finds it impossible to credit and which breaks his heart in twain.

Iago. She did deceive her father, marrying you;
And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
She lov'd them most.
Othello. And so she did.

The four trivial words mark the entry of the poison into his blood which is to burn like the mines of sulphur. Verdi's Iago, without the first Act behind him, is a Satanic creation. 'An amateur of tragedy in real life who casts the principal parts among his nearest friends and connections, and rehearses it in downright earnest, with steady nerves and unabated resolution.' Thus William Hazlitt, in a brilliant anatomisation of the character of his Moorship's Ancient, finding in him 'a complete abstraction of the intellectual from the moral being'. In Elizabethan and Jacobean drama characters are as often as not personifications of virtues and vices, of passions and humours. Iago personifies the deadly sin of Envy as we find it explored in Langland, Chaucer, Spenser and elsewhere. Bacon's *Essay on Envy* illuminates him. We can relate him also to the Character writers of the Seventeenth Century, Hall, Earle, Overbury and others who imitated Theophrastus; in particular the Characters of the Malcontent and the Dissimulator, and Theophrastus's own portrait of the Ironical Man. In modern terms he is the *faux bonhomme*, the *agent provocateur*, the man with a chip on his shoulder, the confidence trickster. He is to be found in Somerset Maugham's *The Narrow Corner*. Herman Melville re-created him in Claggart, the Master-at-Arms, who envies and destroys the handsome sailor Billy Budd, just as Iago envies Cassio:

He hath a daily beauty in his life
that makes me ugly;

That confession, as Bradley shrewdly noted, shows that Iago has a moral sense. One thing is certain. Iago should not be played as Henry Irving played him: 'Daringly Italian, a true compatriot of the Borgias': 'One adored him, devil though he was,' says Ellen Terry. 'He was so full of charm.' No, the true interpretation was that of Robert Bensley, an actor excellent also as Hotspur and Malvolio, and Charles Lamb has recorded it:

'His Iago was the only enduring one which I remember to have seen. No spectator from his action could divine more of his artifice than Othello was supposed to do. His confessions in soliloquy alone put you in possession of the mystery... There was a triumphant tone about the character, natural to a general consciousness of power; but none of that petty vanity which chuckles and cannot contain itself upon any little successful stroke of knavery – as is common with your small villains and green probationers in mischief. It was not a man setting his wits at a child, and winking all the while at other children who are mightily pleased at being let into the secret; but a consummate villain entrapping a noble nature into toils, against which no discernment was available, where the manner was as fathomless as the purpose seemed dark, and without motive.'

The clue is to be found in Shakespeare's original, the Italian novelette by Gerald Cinthio. Cinthio's villain concealed his wickedness under a heroic guise; he wore the semblance of a Hector or an Achilles. Now the Moor is to be a warrior such as Hector, and therefore Shakespeare must alter this. So he makes Iago patently honest instead of handsome and heroic – a Horatio, not a Hector. But the situation is one to which the dramatist constantly reverts. Fair without and foul within, the disparity between the exterior and the inward man, is a favourite theme. We have it in Gertrude, Claudius, Cressida, Angelo, the Dark Lady and many more; all variations on

There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face;
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.

and

O what may man within him hide
Though angel on the outward side!

The great original is Judas Iscariot. In *Piers Plowman* we read how he told the Jews the token by which to take Jesus:

Which token to this day is too much in use,
That is kissing with a fair countenance and an unkind will...
Then to the Jews and Judas Jesus said:
'I find falseness in your fair speech,
And guile in your glad face, and gall in your laughter,
You shall be a mirror to many a man for deceit.'

In many of Shakespeare's plays 'seeming' is a key word: and such synonyms as 'semblance', 'dissembler', 'shows'. Iago soliloquises:

When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now.

But this Prince of Dissemblers – part-inspirer of Milton's Satan – has the nerve to accuse Desdemona – and with truth – of his own vice, a nice touch of dramatic irony:

She that, so young, could give out such a seeming!

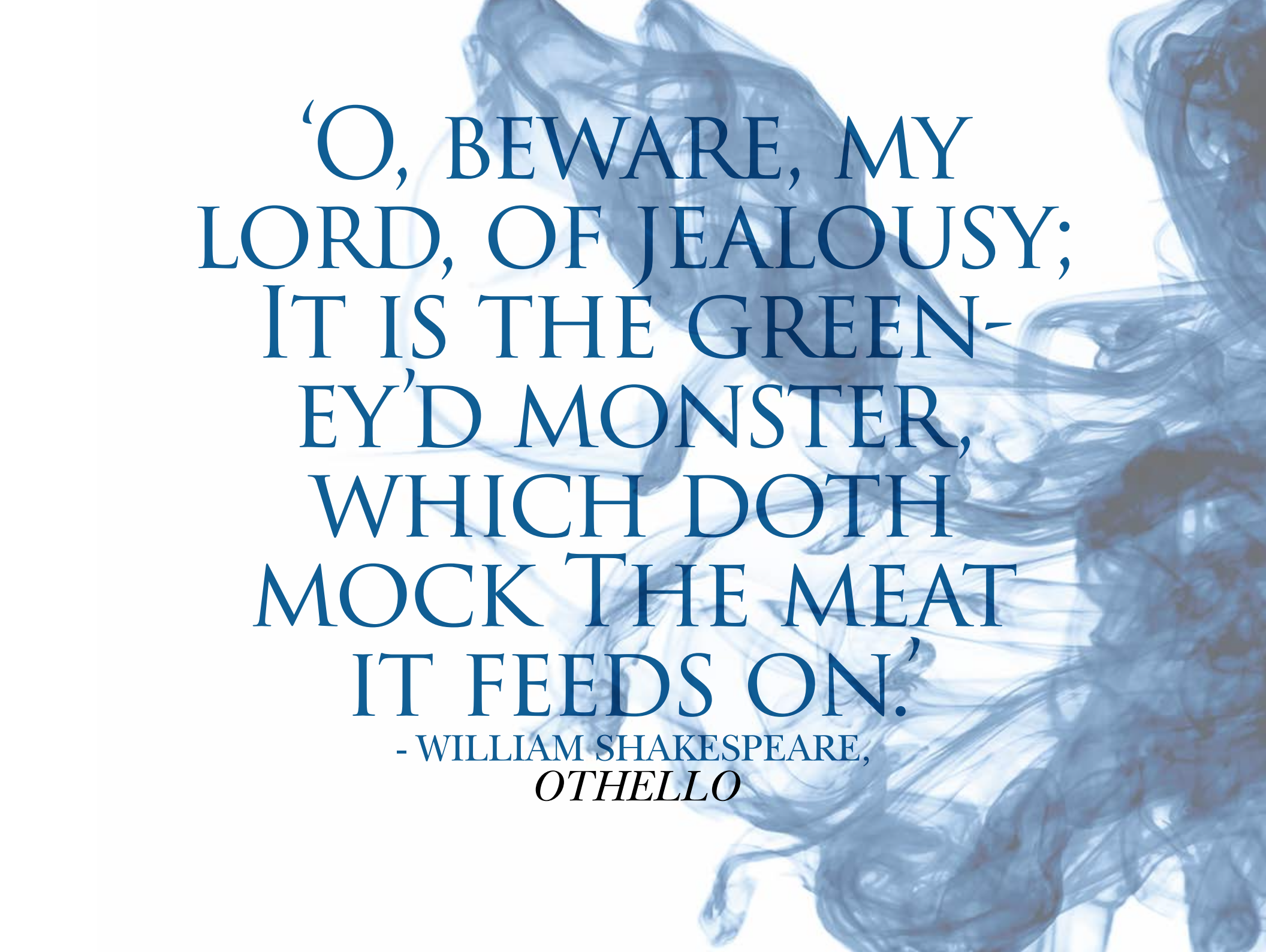
Bernard Shaw dismissed *Othello* as pure melodrama, without a particle of character in it that goes below the skin, and then made an *amende honorable*, when he spoke of the volume of its passion and the splendour of its word-music. 'Tested by the brain it is ridiculous; tested by the ear it is sublime'. There is truth in the Shavian paradox.

In some of the most potent dramas character is subservient to plot which Aristotle decided was the soul of tragedy. In the novel character is an end in itself, not a means. The characterisation in *Othello* is conditioned by the situation and the plot's relentless claustrophobic development. What fitter image for it than that which the Moor himself supplies:

Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont ...

The characters are clear-cut, forcible, valid. No need here for the subtleties of psychoanalytic diagnosis. We can find in Samuel Johnson's horse-sense a surer guide:

The fiery openness of *Othello*, magnanimous, artless and credulous, boundless in his confidence, ardent in his affection, inflexible in his resolution, and obdurate in his revenge; the cool malignity of *Iago*, silent in his resentment, subtle in his designs, and studious at once of his interest and his vengeance; the soft simplicity of *Desdemona*, confident of merit, and conscious of innocence, her artless perseverance in her suit, and her slowness to suspect that she can be suspected, are such proofs of Shakespeare's skill in human nature as, I suppose, it is vain to seek in any modern writer. Even the inferior characters of this play would be very conspicuous in any other piece, not only for their justice but their strength. *Cassio* is brave, benevolent, and honest, ruined only by his want of stubbornness to resist an insidious invitation. *Roderigo's* suspicious credulity, and impatient submission to the cheats which he sees practised upon him, and which by persuasion he suffers to be repeated, exhibit a strong picture of a weak mind, betrayed by unlawful desires, to a false friend; and the virtue of *Emilia* is such as we often find, worn loosely, but not cast off, easy to commit small crimes, but quickened and alarmed at atrocious villanies.

The background of the image features abstract, swirling blue ink splashes and smudges on a white background, creating a dynamic and artistic feel.

‘O, BEWARE, MY
LORD, OF JEALOUSY;
IT IS THE GREEN-
EY’D MONSTER,
WHICH DOTTH
MOCK THE MEAT
IT FEEDS ON.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
OTHELLO



ROMEO AND JULIET

CD 85 • CD 86 • CD 87

Escalus - Terrence Hardiman • *Paris* - Corin Redgrave • *Montague/Capulet* - Toby Robertson • *Romeo* - Richard Marquand
Mercutio - Anthony White • *Benvolio* - John Barton • *Tybalt* - David Jones • *Friar Lawrence* - Tony Church • *Friar John* - George Rylands
Sampson - Anthony Arlidge • *Gregory* - Clive Swift • *Peter* - Donald Beves • *An Apothecary* - Julian Curry
Musicians - Tony Church, George Rylands • *Lady Capulet* - Margaretta Scott • *Juliet* - Janette Richer • *Nurse* - Vivienne Chatterton
Chorus - Denis McCarthy

Shakespeare's first tragedy (if we pass over *Titus* as apprentice work) is both a poem and a play. To be or to do two things at once is notoriously difficult; and in 1595 Shakespeare could combine but not unite the two essential expressions of his creative genius. Dramatist and poet co-operate but each clings to his identity. Shakespeare's career as a man of the theatre can be studied as an unceasing and determined struggle to achieve a perfect marriage of the two kinds. In *Lear*, in *Macbeth*, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the poetry is interfused with the characterisation and with the morality of the stage play. In *Romeo and Juliet* the poet has the upper hand. The tragedy was founded upon a poem: The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet (1562), composed in jog-trot 'poulterer's measure' by Arthur Brooke, who took the tale from the Italian novelist Bandello. The two tragic themes in Brooke are Feud and Fate, the division between the two houses and the frowardness of cruel Fortune.

The fatality in which Brooke drenches his story is turned by Shakespeare, as Professor Charlton has shown, into ominous dreams and dramatic premonitions voiced by the protagonists. Shakespeare knew that

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie.
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
Gives us free scope: only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.

The fault lies in our stars, not in ourselves. Fate and accident may enhance tragedy but they must not condition and confine it. And, by the same token, external forces such as the family feud are less tragic than the aspirations and temptations, the passions and illusions of the characters:

in tragic life. Got wot!
No villain need be. Passions spin the plot.
We are betrayed by what is false within.

Shakespeare, feeling his way towards true tragedy, makes little of the feud as such. And he translates the wheel of fortune and the three fates into human terms, with Romeo's

my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels ...

and Juliet's

O God, I have an ill-divining soul!
methinks I see thee, now thou art below,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.

Shakespeare, then, plays down these externals, giving us instead intensity and rising pace. The leisurely time-scheme of Brooke's narrative which extends over many months is concentrated into four days. A brawl (for which the comic servants not the masters are responsible) blows up within a minute of the play's beginning, and then the dramatist gradually establishes his persons, advancing slowly but surely to the encounter at the banquet and the *aubade* of the balcony scene. Then the tempo begins to quicken. The marriage at the Friar's cell is followed immediately by the second brawl when comedy turns to tragedy and Mercutio dies with a pun upon his lips, mortally wounded through the hero's well-meaning ill-managed intervention. Tybalt is slain; Romeo flies; the decree of banishment is pronounced. This is the turning point. We are half-way through the play and from now on the acceleration is rapid and highly dramatic, until Romeo holds the tension suspended with the poetic *aria* of his suicide speech. The speed and excitement are renewed until the play is brought to rest in the Prince's reconciliation of the two houses. We may well feel today that the epilogue is long drawn out. The Friar's curious re-telling of the tragedy seems almost a return or tribute to Shakespeare's narrative source. But the dramatist favours a quiet close, a slowing down to the tempo of the day-to-day existence of the middle-aged and old, thus setting a seal upon the drama of passionate action enacted by the youthful lovers and high-spirited gallants.

Shakespeare owed one special debt to Brooke – the garrulous, coarse-grained, full-blooded Nurse, whom he has made as immortal as the Wife of Bath and Sarah Gamp. and whose character is summed up in a sentence by Samuel Johnson:

The Nurse is one of the characters in which the Author delighted: he has, wit great subtlety of distinction, drawn her at once loquacious and secret, obsequious and insolent, trusty and dishonest.

The Nurse is the foil to Juliet, as Mercutio is to Romeo, the natural sets off the ideal. Lively prose and sharp wit enhance poetic images and poetic melody by juxtaposition. Shakespeare is always careful of the grades and shades of character, blending and contrasting the symbolic and the human. Friar Laurence is both poetic and realistic. He more than balances the Nurse in the design. He controls the action and reconciles the different styles in the play.

Shakespeare distinguishes somewhat between the poetry of the hero and that of his heroine. Romeo's first entry is prepared for by an extended prelude of nearly forty lines in which we are lulled and wooed by Shakespeare the sonneteer. When the hero appears he abounds in Elizabethan fancy and conceit. Juliet's first scene is very different. We see her through the eyes of her nurse and her mother; a child who utters a few simple monosyllables and reveals herself in a single line: 'It is an honour that I dream not of'. When they join hands in the dance her tone is lighter than his. Above all in the balcony scene the dramatist distinguishes delicately between the poetic utterance of the two. Romeo opens with thirty lines of *poésie pure*. Juliet's first words are a sigh, and when she speaks all the poetry she knows is in his name. Thirteen times she dwells upon the name Romeo; five times she names him Montagu; but he addresses her as bright angel, dear saint, fair maid, his lady, his love, his soul. He never speaks her name but once when she comes to her window like the fair sun rising in the east. Her poetry is more subdued and more childlike than his,

This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath
May prove a beauteous flow'r when next we meet.

And so it is. Her love bursts into flower and becomes more passionate and eloquent. There is an intensity in her greatest speech 'Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds' which outstrips Romeo and which is followed by a set-piece of Elizabethanism, twelve lines long, a hyperbole of antithesis, whose virtuosity may puzzle us (O serpent heart hid with a flowering face, etc.) But Shakespeare knows that her head and not her heart is speaking and as soon as the Nurse cries shame on Romeo, Juliet strikes back with 'Blistered be thy tongue/For such a wish'. If when the scene opens we know that the bud of love has ripened into flower, by the end of the scene we know that the flower has put forth fruit. Romeo is a poet. (Witness his full-length description of the apothecary's shop.) Juliet is a child who grows into a woman in the course of a few hours before our eyes. Only when she is alone with the poison vial do the terrors of childhood pitifully return to overwhelm her.

Caroline Spurgeon, pioneer in the analysis of Shakespeare's imagery, demonstrates that the dominating image in the play is light, every form and manifestation of it. The sun, moon, stars, fire, lightning, the flash of gunpowder, and the reflected light of beauty and love; while

by contrast we have night, darkness, clouds, rain, mist and smoke... There can be no question that Shakespeare saw the story in its swift and tragic beauty, as an almost blinding flash of light, suddenly ignited and as swiftly quenched. Juliet in her first ecstasy declares that lovers' 'own beauties' are sufficient light for them to see by. Romeo, when he thinks her dead, gazing upon her cries:

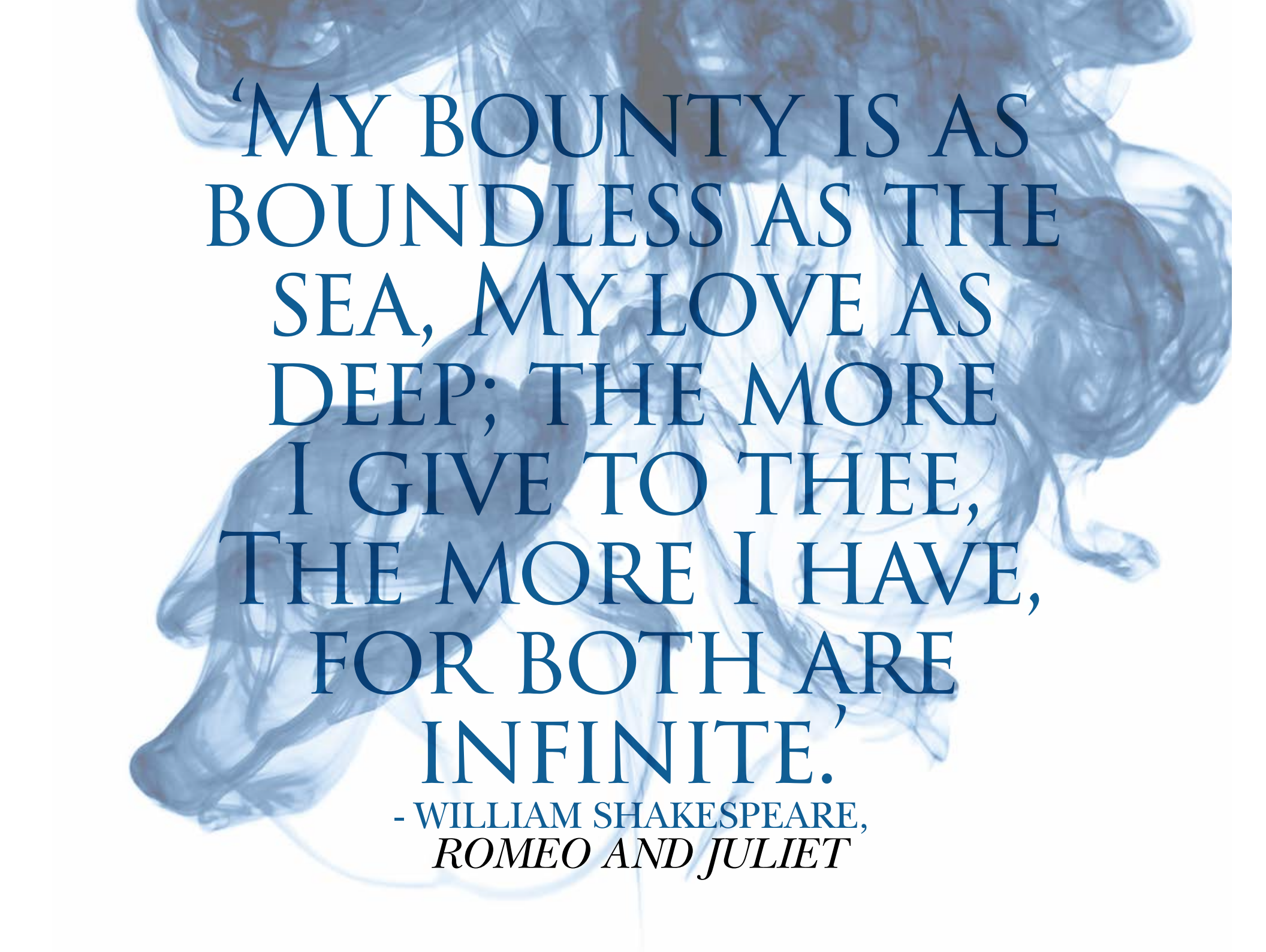
her beauty makes
This vault a feasting presence full of light.

'Love is only one of many passions; and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet, who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew that any other passion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity.'

Thus Samuel Johnson. But love is the mainspring of Shakespearean comedy and the body and soul of three of his tragedies. In the first, *Romeo and Juliet*, love is idealised. 'Shakespeare all over, and Shakespeare when he was young,' cries Hazlitt. 'There is the buoyant spirit of youth in every line, in the rapturous intoxication of hope, and in the bitterness of despair.' Ten years later comes the most painful of all the tragedies, a domestic tragedy with a middle-aged hero, *Othello*. A year or two after that, *Antony and Cleopatra*, a historic tragedy, presents two middle-aged – or ageless – lovers. If Romeo is idealised and Othello realistic, Antony and Cleopatra are sometimes one and sometimes the other. And in the last tragedy, as in the first, love triumphs over fate and politics and time. We do not suffer. Romeo is a poet, Antony is a soldier, Othello is both. And so is Troilus. The poetry of Romeo is the poetry of Keats, but Troilus is the Keats of the Letters. The serpent has entered into Eden, Man has tasted of the Tree of Knowledge, 'the crude apple which diverted Eve'

O that I thought it could be in a woman...
To feed for aye her lamp and flames of love;
To keep her constancy in plight and youth,
Outliving beauty's outward, with a mind
That doth renew swifter than love decays!

Troilus begins where Romeo ends and Troilus gives place to Hamlet. 'Frailty, thy name is woman!'



‘MY BOUNTY IS AS
BOUNDLESS AS THE
SEA, MY LOVE AS
DEEP; THE MORE
I GIVE TO THEE,
THE MORE I HAVE,
FOR BOTH ARE
INFINITE.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
ROMEO AND JULIET



TIMON OF ATHENS

CD 88 • CD 89

Timon - William Squire • *Sempronius* - Corin Redgrave • *Lucullus* - Donald Beves • *Lucius* - David Rowe-Beddoe • *Ventidius* - Michael Burrell
Alcibiades - Anthony White • *Apemantus* - Peter Woodthorpe • *Flavius* - John Wood • *Poet* - Derek Jacobi • *Painter* - Peter Foster
Jeweller - Philip Strick • *Merchant* - Trevor Nunn • *An old Athenian* - Terrence Hardiman • *Flaminius* - David Coombes
Lucilius - Anthony Arlidge • *Servilius* - Philip Strick • *Caphis* - John Sharp • *Philotus* - Gary O'Connor • *Titus* - Eric Rump
Hortensius - Tom Bussmann • *A Page* - Richard Kay • *A Fool* - Corin Redgrave • *Phrynia* - Jill Daltry • *Timandra* - Elizabeth Proud

TIMON, a noble Athenian • SEMPRONIUS, LUCULLUS, LUCIUS, flattering Lords • VENTIDIUS, one of Timon's false friends
ALCIBIADES, an Athenian captain • APEMANTUS, a churlish philosopher • FLAVIUS, steward to Timon • Poet, Painter, Jeweller, and Merchant
An old Athenian • FLAMINIUS, LUCILIUS, SERVILIUS, servants to Timon • CAPHIS, PHILOTUS, TITUS, HORTENSIUS, and others,
servants to Timon's creditors and to the Lords • A Page. A Fool. Three Strangers • PHRYNIA, TIMANDRA, mistresses to Alcibiades
Cupid and Amazons in the masque • Other Lords, Senators, Officers, Banditti, and Attendants

Timon of Athens is a tragic torso; unfinished, it would seem, or defaced by time and chance, or unskilfully restored and tinkered with. Yet this tragic torso is sublime and formidable. When Robert Bridges at last gave the world the posthumous volume of his friend G.M. Hopkins' poems, he printed *The Wreck of the Deutschland* first and compared it to 'a great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance, and confident in his strength from past success'. If *Timon* stood in the forefront of the First Folio instead of *The Tempest*, who would brave the dragon? The tragedy is seldom acted and almost as seldom read. And if we do ponder upon it, our image of 'the gentle Shakespeare', 'mellifluous and honeytongued Shakespeare', 'of an open and free nature', 'a happy imitator of Nature and most gentle expresser of it' – all contemporary tributes – may well be cracked into a hundred shivers like the mirror of Richard, that sweet lovely rose. Hopkins' elegy or dithyramb is a passionate confession of faith in Christ, Shakespeare's *Timon* is an indictment of humanity more bitter and more pitiless than Juvenal's; and when at last Timon salutes

his everlasting mansion
Upon the beachèd verge of the salt flood,
Who once a day with his embossèd froth
The turbulent surge shall cover...

we may recall Jonathan Swift's own epitaph who lies in St Patrick's Cathedral, *ubi saeva indignatio ulterius cor lacerate nequit*. Indeed it is to be noted that there are religious overtones in *Timon*. Wronged and betrayed and self-banished, condemning the whole human race, he finds in Flavius, his loving steward, a singularly honest man. We remember Abraham pleading with God not to destroy the righteous with the

wicked, to save the city for the sake of fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, ten; and the Lord said 'I will not destroy it for ten's sake'. We remember the lost piece of silver and the one sinner in a hundred that repenteth. We remember Isabella's plea

Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once,
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy...

So Flavius redeems himself and, for us if not for Timon, redeems mankind:

Had I a steward
So true, so just, and now so comfortable?
It almost turns my dangerous nature mild.
Let me behold thy face. Surely, this man
Was born of woman ?
Forgive my general and exceptless rashness,
You perpetual-sober gods! I do proclaim
One honest man – mistake me not, but one;
No more, I pray – and he's a steward.
How fain would I have hated all mankind
And thou redcem'st thyself.

The tragedy is more a parable than a play; it is a morality or exemplum from a *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, such as that fat fair prelate, Chaucer's Monk, connoisseur of horse and hound and roast swan, recited for the edification of his fellow pilgrims, until the Knight 'stynteth him of his talc' after fifteen illustrations, rightly pointing out that for most people a 'litel hevynesse' goes a long way. To the mediaeval mind

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bookes maken us memorie
Of hymn that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree
Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

The plot is no more than a simple reversal of fortune; as simple as the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, but concerned with man as a social animal and not with gods. 'It is a domestick tragedy,' says Dr Johnson, 'and therefore strongly fastens on the attention of the reader.

In the plan there is not much art, but the incidents are natural and the characters various and exact. The catastrophe affords a very powerful warning against that ostentatious liberality which scatters bounty, but confers no benefits, and buys flattery, but not friendship.' There is more art than Johnson allows. Highly effective is the contrast between the first three acts, when the stage is crowded with the great lords and their households – the coming and going, the fawning and feasting and compliments, the life 'below stairs' – and the last two acts where a truly noble nature is alone with Nature, 'Whose womb unmeasurable and infinite breast Teems and feeds all', an outcast of the woods, in his case on the verge of the sea. So is the character contrast between Timon, who renounces his true self and goes against his nature like Lear, and the professional misanthrope Apemantus, whose nature is that of a cur; a cur, however, whose bark sometimes gives way to superb eloquence. And then again, Shakespeare, who creates by juxtapositions, interconnects with Timon the wronged and ruthless soldier Alcibiades, who wars against his own country. Alcibiades makes us think of Coriolanus. Plutarch, in fact, paired them together in his *Parallel Lives* as examples of soldiers of genius forced into exile and treason through the wrongs inflicted on them by their compatriots; and the two tragedies, which belong roughly to the same date, have more than a little in common. *Timon* fails as a tragedy because we miss the 'tragic flaw' in the hero and that inner conflict which is the main-spring of tragedy. This is true to a lesser degree of Coriolanus. And the blind, childish, self-willed prodigality of Timon is not far removed from the innocence and obstinacy of Caius Marcius, whom A.C. Bradley dubbed 'a huge boy, altogether too simple and too ignorant of himself. Though he is the proudest man in Shakespeare he seems to be unaware of his pride'. The detestation of Timon for the corrupt and fickle plutocrats is matched by that of Coriolanus for the mutable, rank-scented mob. The one rejects the highest, the other the lowest stratum of society. 'I banish you,' cries Caius Marcius; and similarly Timon turns his back upon 'all feasts, societies and throngs of men'. In both plays we have a double assessment of man, as part of the structure of church and state, pomp and ceremony, authority and degree, and as man in isolation, face to face with nature, the animal kingdom and his own soul. In *Coriolanus*, as in several of the histories, the hero is revealed to us as public and private man: he has to face mother, wife and child – the natural law. Timon, on the other hand, is specifically an indictment of wealth. The magnanimous man who has given away infinite riches is denied by his friends and flatterers, and then, with tragic irony, digging in nature's plenteous bosom for one poor root, lights upon yellow, glittering, precious gold, the king-killer, the bright defiler of Hymen's purest bed, the touch of hearts, which can make black white, foul fair, wrong right.

But *Timon*'s real affinity is with *Lear*. The moral and spiritual content are largely the same. It almost seems to be a by-product of the greater work, or a residue of the material out of which *Lear* has been carved. Edgar in his mock-madness describes himself as a serving man debauched by all the vices of society, which Kent condemns in the flunkey Oswald. In *Timon* it is the masters, not the servants, who are corrupted. (Johnson rightly notes that 'nothing contributes more to the exaltation of Timon's character than the zeal and fidelity of his servants. Nothing but real virtue can be honoured by domesticks; nothing but impartial kindness can gain affection from dependants'.) The noble Edgar takes 'The basest and most poorest shape That ever penury in contempt of man Brought near to beast'; he becomes poor unaccommodated man, a bare forked animal, the thing itself. Even so Timon cries 'Nothing I'll bear from thee But nakedness, thou detestable town'. The continuous play upon animal imagery, the relation between man and beast in *Lear* is summed up in

Timon shall to the woods where he shall find
The unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.

Lear's obsession in his madness with sexual depravity, which is not organic to the play, finds fuller and even fiercer utterance in Timon's horrific incitements and exhortations to Phrynia and Timandra.

Consumptions sow
In hollow bones of man; strike their sharp shins,
and mar men's spurring... Make curled-pate ruffians bald;
And let the unscarred braggarts of the war
Derive some pain from you. Plague all,
That your activity may defeat and quell
The source of all erection.

Both tragedies find sophisticated man, proud false ingrateful man, whore-master man, who with 'liquorish draughts and morsels unctuous greases his pure mind', guiltier than the beasts, unkindier than the elements, unnatural sons of our common mother. *Timon of Athens* does not make easy reading; it is not likely to draw audiences in the theatre, although an extraordinary version by Thomas Shadwell was very popular in the first half of the eighteenth century, in which a love-interest was introduced, substituting for the faithful steward a devoted mistress who stabbed herself at Timon's death. Some may find therefore that it comes into its own more than most plays in the recorded version. The third scene of the fourth Act, which runs to more than five hundred lines, is as remarkable a piece of writing as is to be found in the whole canon. Only Shakespeare could have written it. Yet it is almost unknown.

The background of the image features abstract, swirling blue ink splatters and smoke-like patterns on a white background. The ink is concentrated in the corners and around the text, creating a dynamic and artistic feel.

‘LIKE MADNESS
IS THE GLORY
OF THIS LIFE.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
TIMON OF ATHENS



TITUS ANDRONICUS

CD 90 • CD 91

Saturninus - Dennis Arundell • *Bassianus* - John Tydeman • *Titus Andronicus* - William Devlin • *Marcus Andronicus* - Tony Church
Lucius - Frank Duncan • *Quintus* - Gordon Gardner • *Martius* - Richard Marquand • *Mutius* - Roger Clissold • *Young Lucius* - Jean England
Publius - Bob Jones • *Aemilius* - Roger Croucher • *Demetrius* - David Rowe-Beddoe • *Chiron* - Anthony Jacobs • *Aaron* - Peter Orr
Clown - Peter Woodthorpe • *Romans and Goths* - David King, Philip Strick, George Rylands • *Tamora* - Jill Balcon
Lavinia - Susan Maryott • *A Nurse* - Barbara Lott

To come to terms with Shakespeare's first tragedy, composed perhaps soon after the Armada when he first dared to rival the University Wits, performed by all the leading companies, and remembered as 'a hit' 25 to 30 years after, according to Ben Jonson, the imagination and the intellect must set forth on a long long journey into the remote past. There are several stages on the way: Elizabethan London where the crowds throng to see bears mauled and men drawn and quartered and noble heads fall from the block: imperial Rome where the court of Caligula or Nero listen to dramas declaimed with rhetorical extravagance: the theatre of Dionysus at Athens when the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus is performed in 458 B.C. in mask and buskin with ritual dance and choric ode. Yet farther still to a primitive world of confused legend and savage myth. We have as our guide – no Dante's Virgil who was one of those who transmitted to Shakespeare the Tale of Troy – but Seneca, the Stoic moralist, and statesman, the tutor and victim of Nero. *Titus Andronicus* is a Senecan tragedy as understood, not by a University Wit, but by a man of the theatre who is learning his job.

In 1559 Jasper Heywood translated Seneca's *Troas*; in 1560 *Thyestes*; in 1562 *Hercules Furens*: 'for the profit of young schollers so faithfully translated into English metre, that ye may se verse for verse tourned as farre as the phrase of English permitteth'. Heywood's father had been a player of the virginals under Henry VIII, a superior jester to Queen Mary, and a comic dramatist. The son was page of honour to the Princess Elizabeth, 'fellowe of Alsolne College in Oxforde', and uncle of the poet Donne. He became a Jesuit. The last sentences of his Argument to *The Tragedie of Thyestes* are as follows:

This Atreus therefore dissembling a reconciliation and inviting Thyestes to Mycenae secretly and unknowne to him, set before him at a banquet the flesh of his owne children to eate. Afterward Atreus having also geven to his said brother the bloud of his children in a goblet to drinke, did lastly commaund the heads also to be brought in, at the doleful sight wherof Tiestes greatly lamenting knowing that he had eaten his owne children, was wonderfully anguished. But Atreus for that he had thus revenged himselfe, toke therin great pleasure and delectation.

From this springs the horrific climax of Shakespeare's tragedy. Titus stabs his daughter at the feast, and when the Emperor Saturninus summons her ravishers, the two sons of Tamora, Queen of the Goths, Titus tells him:

Why, there they are both, baked in this pie,
Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,
Eating their flesh that she herself hath bred.
'Tis true, 'tis true; witness my knife's sharp point.

He kills Tamora. Saturninus kills Titus. Lucius kills Saturninus: 'A great tumult' follows. In Shakespeare the action is speedy. Seneca draws out the horror of his banquet into 150 lines to which Heywood added a soliloquy for Thyestes on his own account. But Seneca sharpens his effect by the kind of dramatic irony which Shakespeare in due course will put to finer ends:

Thyestes	Enough with meate and eke with wyne now satisfyd am I. But yet of all my joyes it were a great encrease to mee, If now about my syde I might my litle children see.
Atreus	Beleeve that here even in thyne armes thy children present be. For here they are, and shalbe here, no part of them fro thee Sal be withelde: their lovèd lookes now geve to thee I wil, And with the heape of all his babes, the father fully fyll Thou shalt be gluttet feare thou not.

Behind these crudities lies one of the most astonishing scenes in the greatest of Greek tragedies when Cassandra, spoil of the conqueror, prophesies the murder of Agamemnon at his wife's hands. In her visionary frenzies at the doors of the Palace of Death she recalls the Thyestean banquet from which the vendetta of the House of Atreus springs. Out of the primordial myth which begins with Tantalus, father of Atreus and Thyestes, serving up his son Pelops as a dish for the gods to test their palates, and which leads to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and the fall of Troy, the adultery of Clytemnestra with the son of Thyestes, the vengeance and madness of her son Orestes, his pursuit to Apollo's shrine by the Furies, his acquittal at the supreme court of Athens on the Goddess's casting vote for mercy – out of such things Aeschylus fashions his sublime religious trilogy. Out of such 'unhappy far off things' originates the Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy of Revenge and Blood. What Kyd, Greene and Marston learnt from Seneca's versions, which both sophisticate and vulgarise the Greek drama, Shakespeare transforms in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. But Seneca recited to an auditory whose tastes were decadent and palates gross. He could expatiate on the mutilation of Hippolytus, dragged by his chariot, and Theseus's efforts to fit together 'the scattred ecrapcs and straying gobbetts'. He titivated the ears of the effete, where the robust and brutal Elizabethans were eager to feast their eyes. The tongueless Lavinia guiding a staff in her tongueless mouth with her stumps, as she traces the names of her ravishers in the sand, would have delighted the ears of imperial Rome. And if we are shocked to think the Elizabethans could stomach such things, we must remember that *Dracula* was a best-

seller in print, in the theatre and on the screen (not to mention the widespread appeal of sex, crime and physical violence today), and that the Grand Guignol theatre in Paris, whose audiences used to scream, swoon, or vomit, has only now closed down after some sixty-five years – perhaps because of what we know of Dachau and Buchenwald.

In 1581 the translations of *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies* were collected by Thomas Newton, as potent an inspirer as Golding's Ovid and North's Plutarch. In his introduction to the edition of 1927 Mr T.S. Eliot re-assessed Senecan tragedy, the merits and demerits of the dramatist whom 'the whole of Europe in the Renaissance delighted to honour', and to whom the Elizabethans were indebted for the five-act structure, the stichomuthia and epigram, the rant and bombast, the theme of revenge, the ghosts and physical horrors, and (more significantly) the Stoic attitude of the tragic hero when he faces death. The supreme example – 'I am Duchess of Malfi still' – is but a theft of Seneca's *Medea superest*.

Mr Eliot with characteristic acuteness and sensibility perceived in the Elizabethan translations 'a unique mood only to be extracted and enjoyed after patient perusal'. He spues out *Titus Andronicus* as the stupidest play ever written in which the best passages are hardly good enough for Peele and thinks it incredible that Shakespeare had any hand in it at all. In 1955 the Stratford production by Mr Peter Brook, in which Sir Laurence Olivier played the title role, routed some of the play's more squeamish castigators. If it is inferior to *The Spanish Tragedy* as it is superior to *Lochrine*, a little 'patient perusal' (sharpened by hind-sight) by the bardolaters who deny it to Shakespeare, in the teeth of its inclusion both in the First Folio and in Francis Meres's list of 1598, may discover many Shakespearian utterances and conceptions. Hazlitt could not believe it to be Shakespeare's but he noted 'occasional detached images of great delicacy and beauty' and found the scene in which Aaron expresses his joy at the blackness and ugliness of his child begot in adultery worthy of Shakespeare. To this he was prompted by Schlegel, who was the first to point out also that 'in the compassion of Titus, grown childish through grief; for a fly which has been struck dead, and his rage afterwards when he imagines he discovers in it his black enemy, we recognise the future poet of *Lear*,' Titus, noble, fierce and self-willed, harrowed by compassion and driven mad with suffering, is as it were a pencil drawing of the greatest of Shakespeare's creations; like some scribbled sketch in the note-book of the creator of Moses, Michelangelo. Worthy of *Lear* also is the fantasy of shooting arrows bearing messages to solicit the gods for justice; and in the strange masquerade when Tamora visits Titus disguised as Revenge – a scene so powerful in its own kind – the line, 'I am not mad, I know thee well enough', has the accent of *Lear*. The tiny part of the innocent Clown with his cage of pigeons anticipates the rustic fellow and his basket of figs who wishes Cleopatra 'joy of the worm': his juxtaposition with Titus is a hint for the imaginative function of *Lear*'s Fool.

In 1948 Professor Dover Wilson, plausible and enchanting as Milton's *Comus*, printed an Essay in Literary Detection, in which he not only disintegrates the play but suggests that at moments Shakespeare is burlesquing his contemporaries. He is as formidable an antagonist as Eliot; yet, in our opinion, few, if any, who have worked upon the text in the theatre or the recording studio will be persuaded. Shakespeare's attempt at Senecan tragedy is all of a piece. Rotten boughs and dead wood there may be, but the trunk is sound and the tree puts forth leaf and blossom. We must respond to the tragedy in the terms not only of the long backward journey to the Thyestean banquet but also by recovering the idiom and the conventions of the decade 1580 to 1590, when blank verse was in its

infancy and the vocabulary in a state of flux and experiment; when such names as Philomel, Dido, Pyramus, Hyperion, Prometheus, Hecuba, were charmed names, when images of the lily and the rose, the tiger and the snake, the mad sea and the weeping welkin's tears were fresh and vivid. There are memorable single lines:

Hail, Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!
Poor I was slain when Bassianus died.
The milk thou suckd'st from her did turn to marble,
Even at the teat thou hadst thy tyranny.
Who doth molest my contemplation?
Set him breast-deep in earth and famish him!

There are sustained passages; for instance the dialogue between Aaron and Tamora's evil sons when he defends the babe, his thick-lipped slave, crowned by his final soliloquy; or the farewell of Marcus, Lucius and the boy to the corpse of Titus. There are such accomplished and formal effects as

Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells,
Here grow no damnèd drugs, here are no storms,
No noise, but silence and eternal sleep:
In peace and honour rest you here, my sons!

And

As when the golden sun salutes the morn,
And having gilt the ocean with his beams,
Gallops the zodiac in his glistening coach
And overlooks the highest peering hills.

And, best of all,

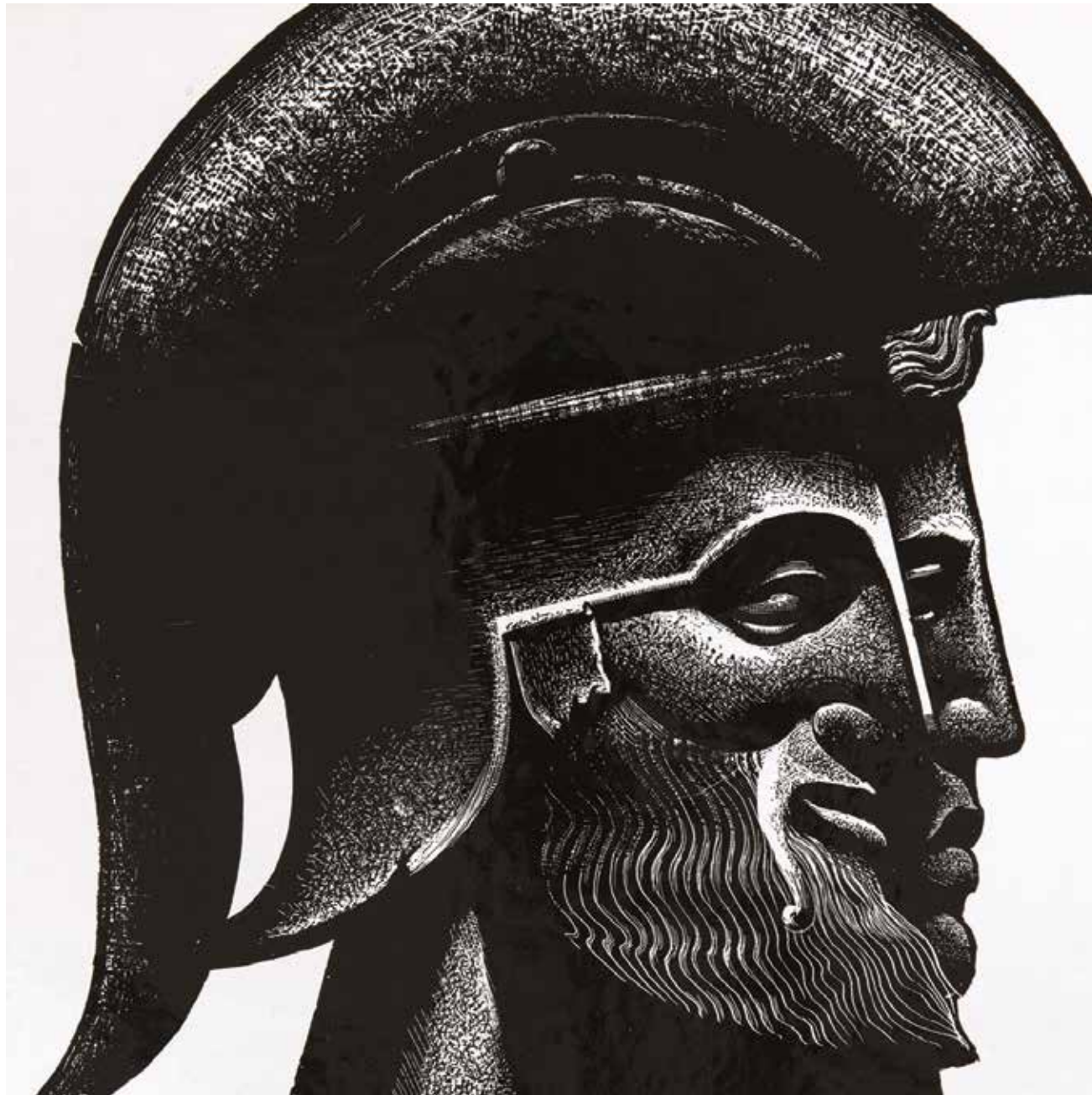
Upon his bloody finger he doth wear
A precious ring, that lightens all this hole,
Which, like a taper in some monument,
Doth shine upon the dead man's earthy cheeks,
And shows the ragged entrails of this pit.

If we but exercise our period sense and have ears to hear, there is tragic power in this Senecan endeavour as well as an earnest of much that was to come.

The background of the image features abstract, swirling blue ink splatters and smoke-like patterns on a white background. The ink is concentrated in the corners and around the text, creating a dramatic and artistic effect.

‘VENGEANCE IS IN
MY HEART, DEATH IN
MY HAND, BLOOD
AND REVENGE ARE
HAMMERING IN
MY HEAD’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
TITUS ANDRONICUS



TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

CD 92 • CD 93 • CD 94

Priam - John Sheppard • *Hector* - Gary Watson • *Troilus* - Anthony White • *Paris* - Julian Pettifer • *Margarelon* - John Barton
Aeneas - David Gibson • *Calchas* - Clive Swift • *Pandarus* - Donald Beves • *Agamemnon* - John Wilders • *Menelaus* - Noel Annan
Achilles - James Taylor-Whitehead • *Ajax* - Tony Church • *Ulysses* - George Rylands • *Nestor* - John Barton • *Diomedes* - John Arnott
Patroclus - David Buck • *Thersites* - Peter Woodthorpe • *The Prologue* - Anthony Jacobs • *Helen* - Wendy Gifford
Andromache - Christine Baker • *Cassandra* - Dorothy Mulcahy • *Cressida* - Irene Worth

‘The play pleased not the million... but it was an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning.’ Hamlet is speaking. The strolling players have come to Elsinore and in a moment the Prince bursts out into a passionate speech from the oldest and most fruitful tale in the world: the tale Aeneas told to Dido – the Tale of Troy. Shakespeare has already revealed the fascination it had for him. In his second poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, he paints a great historical battlepiece of the Dardan plains, the reedy banks of Simois, the heaven-kissing turrets of Ilium; a canvas crowded with the living and the dead. Here are the sweat-begrimed pioneers and the Trojan mothers rejoicing in their sons’ prowess, their joy stained with fear. Here are blunt Ajax, sly Ulysses, Nestor wagging his silver beard, the spear of Achilles, Hecuba, ‘time’s ruin, beauty’s wrack’, grandsire Priam, lustful Paris and the strumpet Helen. So detailed and devoted is the poet’s description that we are not surprised to find ‘the mobled queen’ taking the centre of the stage for a moment in *Hamlet* (as a reproach, of course, to Gertrude). Unluckily and ironically, when Shakespeare completed his *Troilus and Cressida* two years later it also proved to be ‘caviare to the general’: we are told that it was ‘never clapperclawed with the palms of the vulgar’, nor ‘sullied with the smoky breath of the multitude’. Shakespeare’s one highbrow play was written perhaps for the clever-clever young wits of the Inns of Court. But he was not, as Marlowe, Ben Jonson and Bacon were, an intellectual.

All’s fair in love and war. Here is Shakespeare’s dramatisation of the cynical proverb. The play has been called a tragi-comedy, a satire, a problem play, a piece of pacifist propaganda, and it is only in the last 35 years that it has come into its own as good theatre. Two world wars have helped to reveal its extraordinary truth to life. Here we have all the types. The pompous field-marshal, the politician in uniform, the heavy armour (Ajax), the careerist, the romantic subaltern, the scrounging foulmouthed private, and many more. Shakespeare ranges in tone and attitude from Rupert Brooke’s 1914 sonnets to *The Naked and the Dead*. This is his *War and Peace*.

What of the face that launched a thousand ships? For the romantic Troilus she is still Marlowe’s Helena, whose beauty ‘wrinkles Apollo’s and makes stale the morning’. But the realist Diomed, the swaggering staff officer, vain, sensual, cynical and corrupt, sees things as they are:

For every false drop in her bawdy veins
A Grecian’s life hath sunk; for every scruple
Of her contaminated carrion weight

A Trojan hath been slain; since she could speak,
She hath not given so many good words breath
As for her Greeks and Trojans suffered death.

Shakespeare allows us at the very centre of the play a brief, vivid, cynical glimpse of her as an ageing candy-fed featherpated beauty. Even so when the trumpets of war sound without and Paris remembers his brother Hector, the prince of chivalry, Shakespeare in his charity and justice touches these middle-aged illicit lovers with poetry:

Paris. Sweet Helen, I must woo you
To help unarm our Hector: his stubborn buckles,
With these your white enchanting fingers touch'd,
Shall more obey than to the edge of steel
Or force of Greekish sinews; you shall do more
Than all the island kings, – disarm great Hector.

Helen. 'Twill make us proud to be his servant, Paris;
Yea, what he shall receive of us in duty
Gives us more palm in beauty than we have,
Yea, overshines ourself.

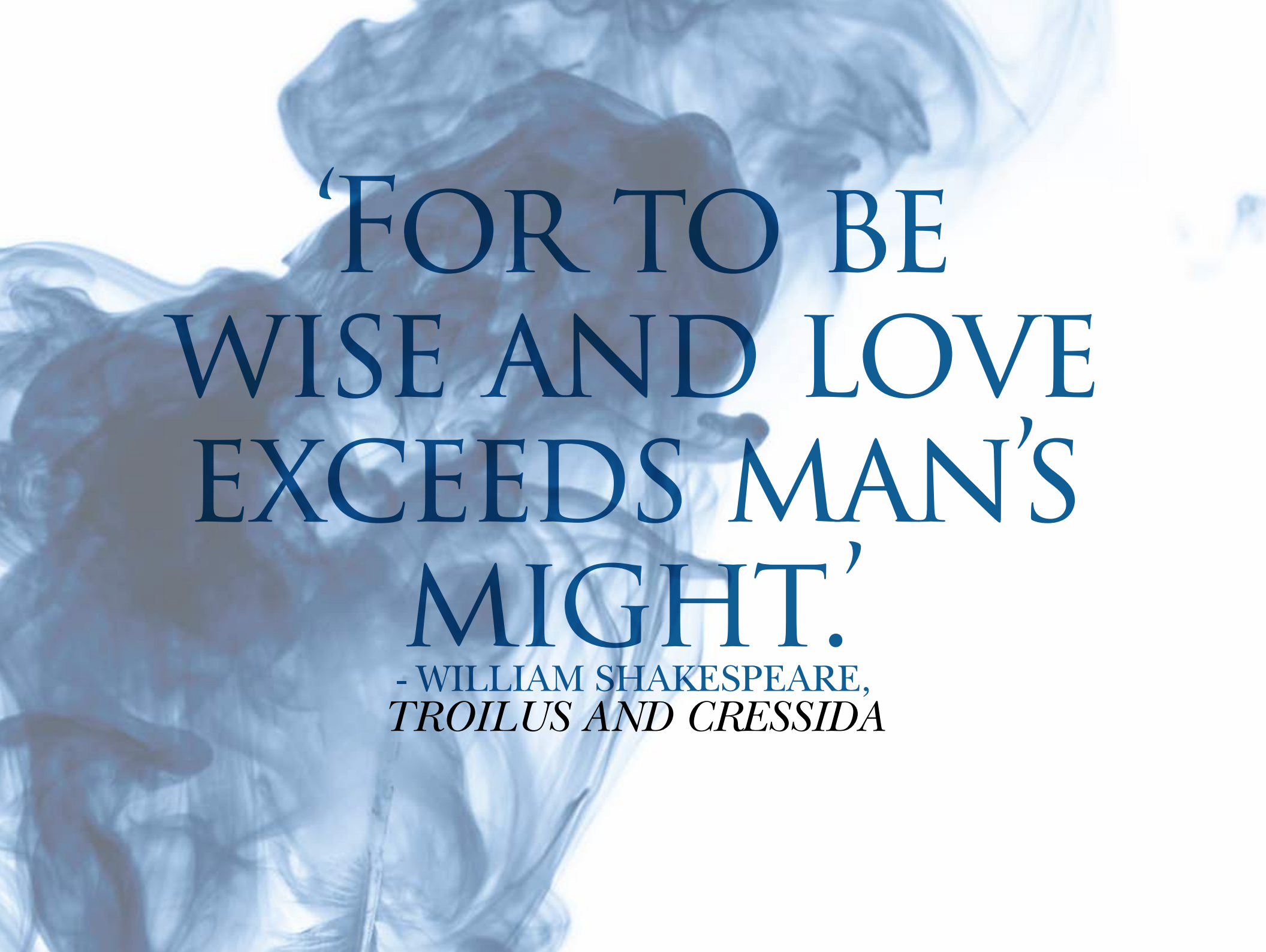
Paris. Sweet, above thought I love thee.

The mortal conflict between the Trojans and the Greeks symbolises for Shakespeare the overthrow of the medieval by the modern world; of the true knights, Lancelot and Galahad, by the politician, the malcontent, the intellectual. Sir Philip Sidney versus Francis Bacon. And Shakespeare mourns the passing of Elizabeth I, Spenser's Gloriana, as Edmund Burke mourned the revolution which brought low the head of Marie Antoinette:

The Age of Chivalry is gone. That of Sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded, and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever ... The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiments and heroic enterprise is gone.

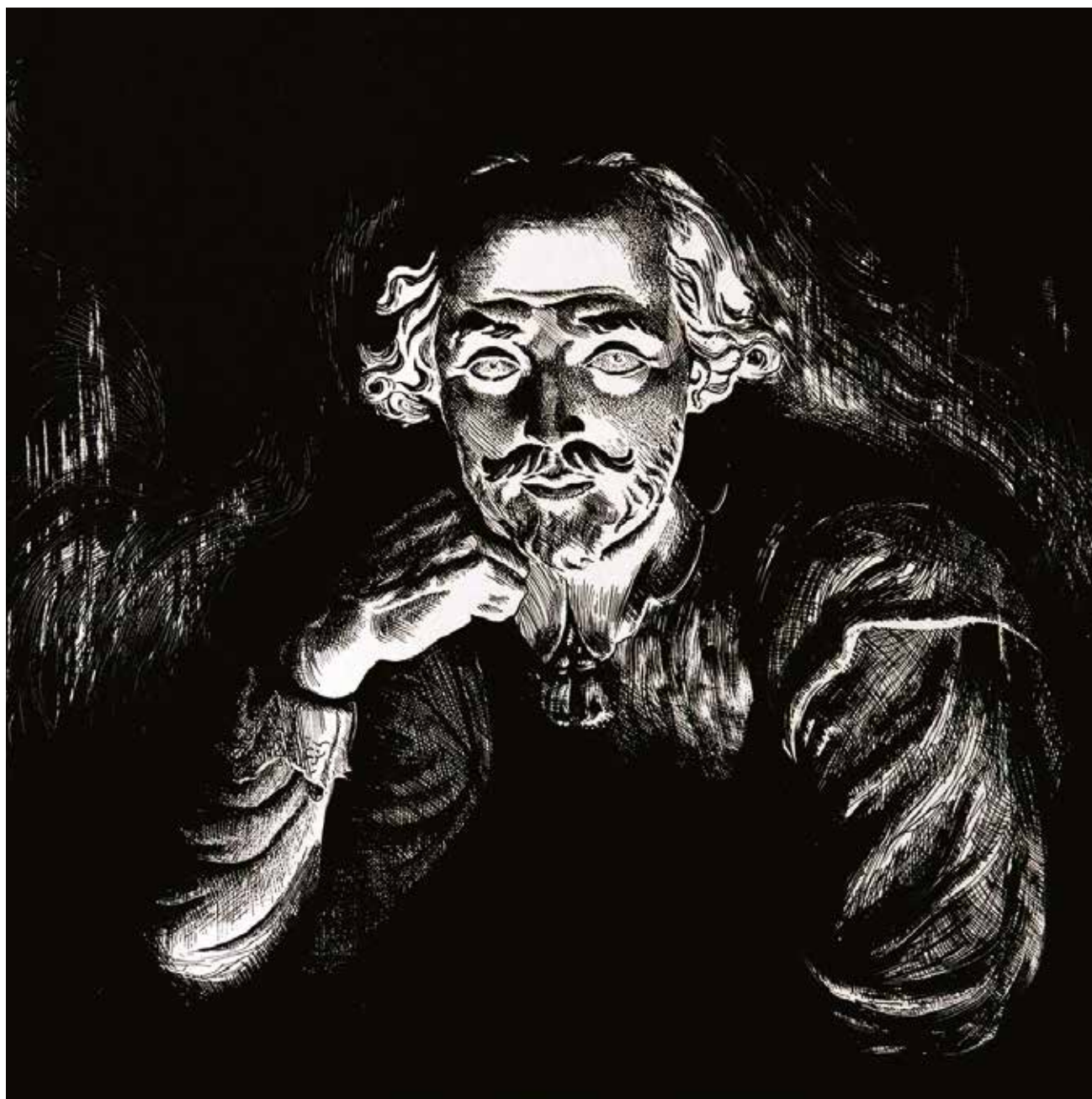
Hector is dead; there is no more to say.

'Perhaps Shakespeare's great play.' The startling verdict is Tennyson's. But Goethe had already found in this above all the plays 'the unfettered spirit' of the dramatist, and John Keats identified himself with Troilus in his agonising passion for Fanny Brawne.



‘FOR TO BE
WISE AND LOVE
EXCEEDS MAN’S
MIGHT.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA



THE SONNETS

CD 95 • CD 96

Readers: George Rylands • John Barton • Tony Church • Anthony White • Anthony Jacobs • Gary Watson • Richard Marquand • David Gibson

In 1609, when Shakespeare turned from tragedy to romance, when he was 45 and had seven years to live, a Quarto was published with the title: *Shakespeare's Sonnets. Never before Imprinted*; it contained also the strangely unappreciated *A Lovers Complaint*. The dedication of the volume to 'the onlie begetter Mr W.H.' has baffled scholars to this day. Thirty years later the Sonnets were reprinted in *Poems: written by Wil. Shake-speare, Gent.* which included *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, elegies and memorial tributes to Shakespeare, and poems by divers other hands.

When did Shakespeare write his Sonnets? They are mentioned by Francis Meres in 1598, along with a list of his plays to date, as 'sugred Sonnets among his private friends'. The quarto of 1609 carries no author's epistle, as do *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). Misprints and errors of punctuation suggest that the poet had not overseen the text. The consensus of opinion has long held that the Sonnets belong to the early and middle years of the last decade of the sixteenth century, as having affinities with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*. Recently, however, the indefatigable and ingenious Dr Leslie Hotson, a discoverer worthy of the Elizabethan Age, has made the revolutionary suggestion that the Sonnets were written before 1590. His case is based on a re-interpretation of Sonnet 107, whose enigmatic line, 'The mortall Moone hath her eclipse indur'de', he takes to mean the defeat of the Spanish Armada, which is depicted in a contemporary map and described in several writings as a vast crescent, or semi-circled, or horned Moon. Dr Hotson supports his case further by referring a line in Sonnet 123, 'Thy pyramys buylt up with newer might', to the erection of the Egyptian obelisks in Rome by that mighty builder and formidable Pope Sixtus V in each of the years 1586 to 1589. And finally Dr Hotson holds that Sonnet 124 is concerned with the insurrection against Henry of Valois, King Henri III of France, sometime suitor for the hand of Queen Elizabeth.

His brilliant exposition may have failed to convince the more die-hard dons, but it is tempting to believe that he is right. The strangest thing about Shakespeare is that we know nothing about him between the ages of 17 and 27 – the most formative and fruitful period in a poet's career. Keats died at 26; Shelley and Emily Bronte at 30. Whatever Shakespeare may have been doing between his youthful marriage and his first job as a 'super' on the London stage – whether he was a country schoolmaster, a strolling player, or a soldier in the Low Countries – surely he must have been writing verses. His first two published works are poems which show that he was no beginner but an accomplished virtuoso, expert in tropes, with a marvellous ear and a large vocabulary; one who could blend the spun sugar of Elizabethan confectionery with country savours and a subtle essence all his own. His first attempts at drama when he was competing with the University Wits have plenty of crudities. Nevertheless he outdoes Kyd and Greene and even Marlowe. His early plays abound in felicities and beauties sufficient to furnish forth a century of sonnets. May there not indeed be passages in the plays of the 1590s which he had 'set down in his tables' five or ten years before? The Queen Mab speech for example: or Titania's

‘These are the forgeries of jealousy’: and, conceivably, ‘To be or not to be’? The greatest poet in the language must have composed canzonets and woeful ballads when he was 21.

The Sonnets, as we have them, are haphazard in arrangement, and many readers like to make their own selection and scheme. But some of them fall into groups. The first seventeen are variations on the theme on which Venus dilates to Adonis: ‘Thou wast begot; to get it is thy duty’. They are to some degree formal exercises addressed to a patron. But Nos. 12, 15 and 16 look forward to the grand manner of the great Time sonnets, inspired ultimately by Roman poetry; Renaissance rhetoric at its best. These (Nos. 19, 55, 60, 63–65, 107, 124–126) cry out to be grouped together and they are matched by passages in the plays. Another sequence is concerned with the rival poet (for whose identity if Hotson is right there are new possibilities, including Marlowe), and another with the Dark Lady. Sometimes two or three or four sonnets make a sequence and on occasion a sonnet of superlative excellence surprises us between two of inferior quality. To ease the monotony which is inevitable if one is to listen to more than a hundred and fifty poems by one hand in a single and restricted form, where every line is a decasyllable and must be rhymed according to the same pattern, the sonnets have been distributed between ten different voices. This helps to emphasise different moods, to mark variations on a theme in the opening sequence, and to suggest links and collocations. For instance Sonnets 71–74 which treat of the poet’s imagined death have a grave melancholy of their own. And then sometimes the changes are abrupt. Sonnet 116 (‘Let me not to the marriage of true minds’) is immediately followed by ‘Accuse me thus...’, which strikes a more bitter and dramatic note which is sustained until Sonnet 122. Sonnet 18 demands a more youthful and romantic voice than those which have preceded it. The difference in age of the readers in fact covers a span of more than thirty years.

More than a few sonnets are hard to construe, although the editor of 1640 claimed that ‘in your perusal you shall find them serene, clear and elegantly plain, such gentle strains as shall recreate and not perplex your brain, no intricate or cloudy stuff to puzzle intellect, but perfect eloquence.’ Four-fifths true perhaps. Unevenness there must needs be. A good opening sometimes is not sustained. In some sonnets we treasure only a quatrain or a single line. After all the total count is as long as a Shakespeare play. The very best however are only rivalled by Sidney at his best, and those below the best hold their own with Spenser and outstrip all but two or three isolated examples by the numerous practioners of this passing fashion which perhaps John Donne confounded. Shakespeare’s sonnet form, three quatrains clinched with a couplet, is less exacting, less intricate than the Petrarchan; but it is to be noted that the Petrarchan conception, in which the sestet answers or comments on or gives a turn to the octave, is frequently to be detected beneath the simpler Shakespearian structure, so that we enjoy a double effect.

There are several styles in the Sonnets as there are many moods. The variety of expression is notable. Some are purely decorative and some rhetorical in the Elizabethan manner. In others the poet disputes or moralises or makes confession in soliloquy. Very often he is dramatic and direct. We catch the tones of the speaking voice, as in Sir Thomas Wyatt and Donne, although with less emphasis; the voice which the dramatist is to perfect as an instrument. For instance,

Then hate me if thou wilt; if ever, now;
Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross. (90)

O never say that I was false of heart (109)

Alas! 'tis true I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley to the view. (110)

The range of expression moves between the conscious art of, say, Sonnet 63 – *'That time of year thou mayst in me behold'* – in which each quatrain completes a different image, and the apparent artlessness and easy flow of *'Being your slave, what should I do but tend/Upon the hours and times of your desire'* (57). Again and again we come upon felicities of phrasing which startle and delight: *sessions of sweet silent thought, thy dial's shady stealth, Time's million'd accidents, the darling buds of May, three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned, the proud full sail of his great verse, bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang, captain jewels in the carcanet, the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come.*

The hero of *Love's Labour's Lost* is enslaved by

A whitely wanton with a velvet brow,
With two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes.

The most powerful of the sonnets treat of Shakespeare's tormented passion for just such a wench; black-browed, black-eyed – and false. But the main bulk celebrate a selfless and devoted friendship; a devotion which is spiritual and aesthetic, a marriage of two minds, yet genuine in its suffering and its exultation, its pride and humility, its anxieties and loneliness and disappointment. If the praise of the fair friend strikes us as extravagant and fanciful, it is because of a failure in understanding and imagination. We must relate it to the Elizabethan scene; to the miniatures of Nicholas Hilliard, to the tapestried Arcadias, the madrigals and canzonets, the masques and progresses, the taffeta phrases and spruce affectation of euphuism, the rustling silks, the jewels and perfumes, the court of Gloriana, the earthly Diana, the Faerie Queene. This exquisite and exaggerated sophistication – only one side of the medal, of course – is the inspiration of the sonneteers. It is a form of idealisation and therefore Platonic. All earthly beauty, natural and human, is a pattern of the Ideal. Spenser's *Hymn in Honour of Beauty* tells us that when the great workmaster cast the mould of the world, he had before his eyes a comely pattern excelling all mortal sense and thereof every earthly thing partakes, or more or less, by influence divine. Thus it is that the white and red in the flowers of the field or in the lip and cheek has wondrous power to pierce through the eyes unto the heart. The poet, as Sidney explains, is also a workmaster and idealiser, outstripping at once the philosopher and Nature herself. 'Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done – neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden'. And then again the friendship which Shakespeare knew and immortalised – touching on it dramatically with Proteus and Valentine, Antonio and Bassanio, Horatio and Hamlet – goes back through mediaeval romance and chivalry to the heroic brotherhoods in arms of Greek myth, legend and epic. Shakespeare's genius lies in his double power in the sonnets of

idealising and naturalising. A few sentences of Coleridge written when he was 23 – just the age, maybe, when Shakespeare tried first to express himself in sonnet form – will serve to conclude this introduction:

In a Sonnet we require a development of some lovely feeling,
by whatever cause it may have been excited; but those Sonnets
appear to me most exquisite, in which Moral Sentiments, Affections,
or Feelings are deduced from, and associated with, the Scenery
of Nature. Such compositions generate a kind of thought highly
favourable to delicacy of character. They create a sweet and indissoluble
union between the intellectual and the material world. Easily
remembered from their briefness, and interesting alike to the eye
and the affections, these are the poems which we can 'lay up in our soul',
and repeat them 'when we walk by the way, and when we lie down,
and when we rise up.'

A LOVERS COMPLAINT & THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE

CD 97

Readers: Joan Hart • William Squire

The poem was first printed with Shakespeare's Sonnets in the Quarto of 1609. It is a perfect period piece, and in that respect comparable with Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. All three are examples of applied art; sophisticated, Hellenistic, exquisite. Here Shakespeare is a slave to Ovidius Naso. 'And why, indeed, Naso, but for smelling out the odoriferous flowers of fancy, the jerks of invention?' So says Holofernes, the schoolmaster, endowed with 'a foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions', with a taste for the elegance, facility, and golden cadence of poesy. Perhaps such a schoolmaster first made Shakespeare word-conscious, a stylist. In the same play, *Love's Labour Lost*, we have the Frenchified honey-tongued Boyet, wit's pedlar, 'the flower that smiles on every one'. We have Armado, the refined traveller of Spain, fashion's own knight, a man of fire-new words,

One who the music of his own vain tongue
Doth ravish like enchanting harmony.

And if these, together with Navarre and the Princess of France, and their attendant Lords and Ladies, would have sipped and savoured A *Lover's Complaint*, must it not have been composed by Berowne, conceit's expositor, who is so gallantly clad in

Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,
Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation
Agèd ears play truant at his tales
And younger hearings are quite ravishèd;
So sweet and voluble is his discourse.


No true lover of this court comedy should neglect *A Lover's Complaint* or, more unforgivably, assign it to another hand. The word-play has all the fascination which intricacy, delicacy, and fancifulness can give. Here is another expression of the Mannerism which bewilders and enchants us in the twisted chimneys, plaster work, knot gardens, strange comfits, misshapen pearls, filigree ruffs, jewelled farthingales, tapestries and painted cloths, masques and progresses, of Gloriana's latter days. But we can no longer appreciate the secret significances and double meanings of the emblematic imagery. The Elizabethans inherited from the Middle Ages a hieroglyphic language and an allegorical vision. All the symbols of gems, beasts, flowers, devices, numbers – the hierarchical and the heraldic, the cosmic and the physiological – were revitalised in the Renaissance by the neo-platonism which flowed from the Florentine Academy of Marsilio Ficino, master of Botticelli and Pico della Mirandola.

A few pages of Lyly's *Euphues* and Sidney's *Arcadia* suffice. *A Lover's Complaint* is complete in itself and just the right length. How startlingly Shakespeare crystallises the profusion of imagery and conceit into a climax which competes with Donne:

O father, what a hell of witchcraft lies
In the small orb of one particular tear!

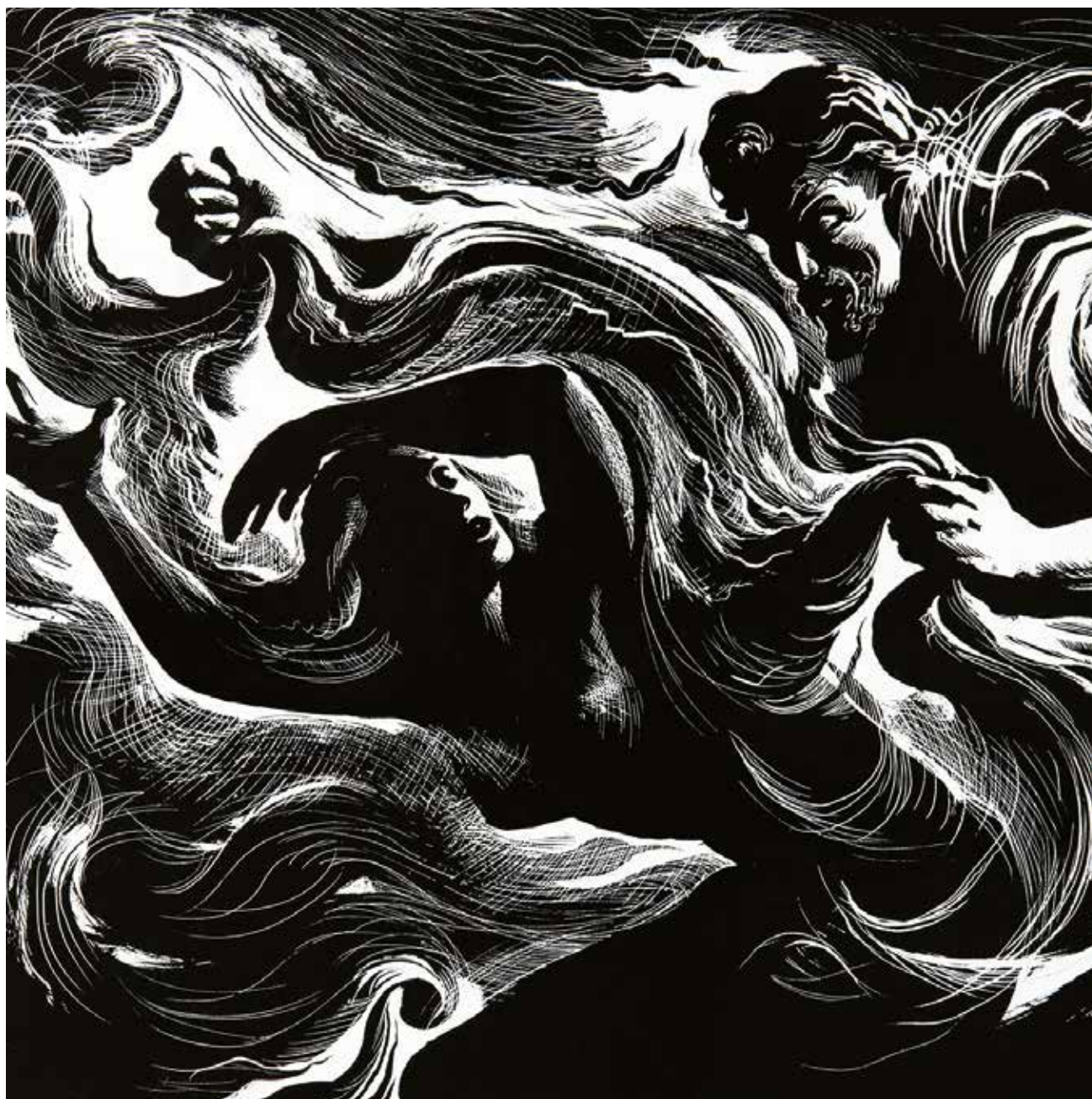
And with the irony of a dramatist he surprises us by a sting in the tail, when the betrayed maiden suddenly reveals that, were all to do again, the sad breath and false fire and irresistible eloquence of the handsome deceiver, forerunner of Lothario and Lovelace, whose portrait must have been painted by Nicholas Hilliard,

Would yet again betray the fore-betrayd,
And new pervert a reconcilèd maid!



‘O FATHER,
WHAT A HELL OF
WITCHCRAFT LIES
IN THE SMALL
ORB OF ONE
PARTICULAR TEAR.’

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
A LOVERS COMPLAINT



THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

CD 98 • CD 99

Readers: Tony Church • George Rylands • Peggy Ashcroft • Denis McCarthy • Peter Holmes • Peter Orr • Janette Richer

‘What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?’ The strolling players come to Elsinore and Prince. Hamlet remembers an excellent play (by Marlowe or another) which ‘pleased not the million, ’twas caviare to the general’, as Shakespeare’s highbrow *Troilus and Cressida* on the same theme was soon to be. Hamlet, haunted, we may think, by the memory of his mother following his poor father’s body to the grave, ‘like Niobe all tears’, calls for Aeneas’ tale to Dido of the aged Priam’s murder and the grief of ‘the mobled queen’. Hecuba, Hector, Helen, consecrated names of enduring potency and inspiration for poet, dramatist, painter and musician, from Homer to Giraudoux, are presented to us by Shakespeare in his first great tragic work, the ‘graver labour’ promised to his patron the Earl of Southampton in the dedication of his first published work, his second and even longer narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*. At a moment of rest corresponding to the fourth Act in one of his tragedies Shakespeare delineates with superb mastery a war painting of ‘the tale of Troy divine’; the reedy banks of Simois, the cloud-kissing towers of Ilion, blunt Ajax, sly Ulysses, bearded Nestor, the Trojan mothers, the pale cowards, the sweating pioneers; bold Hector, Priam bleeding under Pyrrhus’ foot, and Hecuba – the noble Queen:

In her the painter had anatomiz’d
Time’s ruin, beauty’s wrack, and grim care’s reign.

Lucrece gazing on such painted tongue-less sorrow, rails as Diomed is to rail with bitter cynicism in *Troilus and Cressida*:

Show me the strumpet that began this stir,
That with my nails her beauty I may tear.
Thy heat of lust, fond Paris, did incur
This load of wrath that burning Troy doth bear:
Thy eye kindled the fire that burneth here;
And here in Troy, for trespass of thine eye,
The sire, the son, the dame, and daughter die.

Gabriel Harvey, Cambridge don and friend of Spenser, noted in his copy of Chaucer: ‘The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*: but his *Lucrece*, and his tragedie of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*, have it in them to please the wiser sort’. John Masefield also links the two. ‘It is strange that both *Lucrece* and *Hamlet*, in their moments of distraction, turn to the image of Troy blazing with the punishment of treachery’. In both of course it is not only treachery but lust that is punished. Shakespeare for his first tragic effort seeks support in the greatest of all legends. How powerfully it possessed him is evidenced in the tragi-comedy, which many

readers including Goethe and Tennyson have found the most pregnant and profound of all his works, *Troilus and Cressida*. Troy inspired two other especially vivid images: that of Morton bringing news of Hotspur's death on the field at Shrewsbury,

Even such a man, so faint, so spiritless,
So dull, so dead in look, so woe-begone,
Drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night,
And would have told him half his Troy was burn'd;
But Priam found the fire ere he his tongue,
And I my Percy's death ere thou report'st it.

The other expresses Volumnia's pride in the blood staining the brow of her warlike son:

It more becomes a man
Than gilt his trophy: the breasts of Hecuba,
When she did suckle Hector, look'd not lovelier
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood
At Grecian swords, contemning.

Venus and Adonis is lyrical: its immediate successor, *The Rape of Lucrece*, is rhetorical. The first, mellifluous, fanciful and gay, is the overture to *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*. The second, sombre, mannered, intellectual and dramatic, ushers in *Richard III*, *King John*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*. The first at several removes is Greek, Hellenistic: the second, Roman. 'The Lucrece,' says Masfield, 'is a wiser and a finer poem. It is constructed with the art of a man familiar with the theatre. The delaying of the great moments so as to heighten the expectation is contrived with rapturous energy. The poem is heaped and overflowing with the abundance of imaginative power.'

An attentive reader or listener will detect that Shakespeare the playwright is striving to get inside his *dramatis personae*. There are signs and portents of future creations. Tarquin holds disputation 'tween frozen conscience and hot-burning will'; 'His drumming heart cheers up his burning eye'; he debates 'what wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed'. And we look on to the hypnotised and conscience-torn Macbeth moving towards his murderous design 'with Tarquin's ravishing strides'. In the portrayal of the perjurer Sinon whose enchanting story 'the credulous old Priam after slew', Shakespeare anticipates Iago:

In him the painter labour'd with his skill
To hide deceit, and give the harmless show...
But, like a constant and confirmèd devil,
He entertain'd a show so seeming just,
And therein so ensconced his secret evil,
That jealousy itself could not mistrust

False-creeping craft and perjury should thrust
Into so bright a day such black-Iac'd storms,
Or blot with hell-born sin such saint-like forms.

Tarquin, 'Beguil'd with outward honesty but yet defil'd with inward vice', is of their company. Then, Lucrece's tirade on Time, 'the ceaseless lackey to eternity', finds dispersal and variation in *Troilus and Cressida*. And it is a dramatist who visualises the meeting between Lucrece and her maid, and who presents the embarrassed homely groom whose blushes she misconstrues as knowledge of her shame:

The more she saw the blood his cheeks replenish,
The more she thought he spied in her some blemish.

The finale is theatrical. Lucrece sheathes the dagger in her breast while Collatine and the lords stand by astonished and stone-still, until the aged Lucretius bursts forth in lamentation. This starts Collatine from his dream of horror,

But through his lips do throng
Weak words so thick, come in his poor heart's aid,
That no man could distinguish what he said.

At last the frivolous and sportive Brutus, 'suppos'd a fool', puts his shallow habit by and kneels, transformed and redeemed, to kiss the fatal knife and vow revenge. This brings the Roman lords to their knees and they swear the vow after him. Throughout the poem, even though they may be masked by the virtuosity of the expression, we feel the stirrings of the tragic dramatist:

And in such indexes, although small pricks
to their subsequent volumes, there is seen
The baby figure of the giant mass
Of things to come at large.

THE ARGUMENT

Lucius TARQUINIUS (for his excessive pride surnamed Superbus), after he had caused his own father-in-law, Servius Tullius, to be cruelly murd' red, and, contrary to the Roman laws and customs, not requiring or staying for the people's suffrages, had possessed himself of the kingdom, went, accompanied with his sons and other noblemen of Rome, to besiege Ardea; during which siege, the principal men of the army meeting one evening at the tent of Sextus Tarquinius, the King's son, in their discourses after supper every one commended the virtues of his own wife; among whom Collatinus extolled the incomparable chastity of his wife Lucretia. In that pleasant humour they all posted to Rome; and intending by their secret and sudden arrival to make trial of that which every one had before avouched, only Collatinus finds his wife (though it were late in the night) spinning amongst her maids; the other ladies were all found dancing and revelling, or in several disports. Whereupon the noblemen yielded Collatinus the victory, and his wife the fame. At that time Sextus Tarquinius, being inflamed with Lucrece's beauty, yet smothering his passions for the present, departed with the rest back to the camp; from whence he shortly after privily withdrew himself, and was (according to his estate) royally entertained and lodged by Lucrece at Collatium. The same night he treacherously stealeth into her chamber, violently ravish'd her, and early in the morning speedeth away. Lucrece, in this lamentable plight, hastily dispatcheth messengers, one to Rome for her father, another to the camp for Collatine. They came, the one accompanied with Junius Brutus, the other with Publius Valerius; and, finding Lucrece attired in mourning habit, demanded the cause of her sorrow. She, first taking an oath of them for her revenge, revealed the actor and whole manner of his dealing, and withal suddenly stabbed herself. Which done, with one consent they all vowed to root out the whole hated family of the Tarquins; and, bearing the dead body to Rome, Brutus acquainted the people with the doer and manner of the vile deed, with a bitter invective against the tyranny of the King; wherewith the people were so moved, that with one consent and a general acclamation the Tarquins were all exiled, and the state government changed from kings to consuls.



VENUS AND ADONIS

CD 100

Readers: Irene Worth • George Rylands • Ian Lang

‘Let this duncified worlde esteeme of Spencer and Chaucer, I’le worshipp sweet Mr Shakspeare, and to honoure him will lay his *Venus and Adonis* under my pillowe, as wee reade of one (I doe not well remember his name, but I am sure he was a kinge) slept with Homer under his bed’s heade.’

The vow is registered by the love-sick, stage-struck, verse-intoxicated Gullio, in an anonymous play performed at St John’s College Cambridge, some six years after the publication of Shakespeare’s poem. Our heart warms to the foolish fellow when he quotes the poem’s opening lines and cries ‘O sweet Mr Shakspeare! I’le have his picture in my study at the courte’, as we warm to Sir Andrew Aguecheek’s ‘I was adored once too’.

When Shakespeare arrived in London from heaven knows where, about the year 1590, he may have had the *Venus and Adonis* in his pocket. The first heir of his invention, as he called it (1194 lines long) was dedicated to the third Earl of Southampton, then aged twenty, later to be involved in Essex’s fatal conspiracy and it was printed in 1593. Within a year Shakespeare presented his patron with a second narrative poem, half as long again, whose dedication strikes a less formal, more intimate note: ‘What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours’. Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke to whom with his brother Philip the First Folio is dedicated, are rival candidates for the identification as ‘The Onlie Begetter’ of the Sonnets, the mysterious Mr W.H.

The greatest playwright the world has ever known makes his bow with two unconscionably protracted, exuberant and diffusive narrations which Hazlitt was to dismiss as being as hard, as glittering and as cold as a couple of ice-houses. Coleridge’s soundings were more profound. He follows up his famous definition of ‘that synthetic and magical power’, the poetic imagination, with an analysis of the *Venus and Adonis* and the *Lucrece* as revealing ‘specific symptoms of that very power’. In the *Venus and Adonis* Coleridge first emphasises the perfect sweetness of the versification, the delight in richness and sweetness of sound, even to a faulty excess. Then he approves the choice of a subject very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. Coleridge goes on to suggest that the poet’s *aloofness*, combined with the perpetual activity of attention which is demanded of the reader, the rapid flow, the quick change, and the playful nature of the thoughts and images, serves a moral purpose. If Hazlitt found the poem cold and glittering, the newly-married Harebrain in Thomas Middleton’s *A Mad World, my Masters*, (1608) thought otherwise: ‘I have conveyed away all her wanton pamphlets; as Hero and Leander, Venus and Adonis; O, two luscious marrowbone pies for a young married wife!’. Coleridge overshoots the mark a little when he says that ‘instead of degrading and deforming passion into appetite, the trials of love into the struggles of concupiscence, Shakespeare has here represented the animal impulse itself, so as to preclude all sympathy with it, by dissipating the reader’s notice among the thousand outward images, and now beautiful, now fanciful circumstances which form its dress and its scenery; or by diverting our attention from the main subject by those frequent witty or profound reflections, which the poet’s ever active mind has deducted from, or connected with, the imagery and the incidents’.

Venus and Adonis is as exquisitely finished a piece of workmanship as Shakespeare ever executed and we are astonished that along with the no less elaborate *Lucrece* and the perfection of the first seventeen Sonnets (variations on one of Venus's themes) it should belong to, or ante-date, the composition of *King Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus*. It is also a period piece as Elizabethan as the jewelled stomachers, the three-piled ruffs of lawn, the sugared confectionery, the intricate and patterned plaster-work, the heraldic blazonry, the twisted brick-work chimneys of the age: we read of the Queen's 'musical instrument made all of glass except the strings', of 'a piece of clock-work, an Aethiop riding upon a Rhinoceros, with four attendants, who all make their obeisance when it strikes the hour', of the history of Tobias embossed in gold relief upon a tapestry, of the canopied throne in the Paradise Chamber studded with diamonds, rubies, sapphires and the like, of a New Year's gift of perfumed gloves with twenty-four gold buttons to them, each set with a small diamond. For the denizens of such a world Lyly wrote his *Euphues*, Spenser his *Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare his *Venus and Adonis*. On the title page he quotes two lines from the *Amores* of Ovid, the very couplet which closes the first excerpt in the first Latin anthology he probably read at Stratford Grammar School, the *Flores Poetarum* of Mirandola. Why Ovid? The schoolmaster Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost* gives the answer, 'For the elegance, facility, and golden cadence of poesy ... Ovidious Naso was the man. And why, indeed, "Naso", but for smelling out the odoriferous flowers of fancy, the jerks of invention?' In the same comedy Berowne forswears 'Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise. Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation', that is, the very mode and utterance of *Venus and Adonis*. Roman Ovid is the great transmitter of the poetic genius of Greece to Renaissance Europe. The Middle Ages, placing him second only to Vergil, had dubbed him 'Venus's Clerk'. He inspired Petrarch and Boccaccio and Ariosto, du Bellay and Ronsard, Cervantes and Camoens, Sidney and Spenser, the Elizabethan singers and sonneteers. In 1598 Francis Meres wrote: 'The sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared sonnets among his private friends'. The two narrative poems which ushered in his dramatic career can only be appreciated as *objets d'art* as we appreciate Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, Tennyson's *Lotos Eaters*, *Tithonus* and the Songs in *The Princess*.

Yet the most helpful approach lies perhaps through a comparison with the Keats of 'I stood tiptoe' and *Sleep and Poetry* and *Endymion*: Keats who had such close affinities with the youthful Shakespeare; who knew a little more Latin but as little Greek. Hellenism came to Shakespeare through Ovid and through his own contemporaries: it came to Keats largely through the Elizabethans. If a defence of the *Venus and Adonis* is needed, other than that which is implicit in those defences of poetry itself, penned by Sir Philip Sidney and Shelley, then Keats who found the poems of Shakespeare 'full of fine things said unintentionally, in the intensity of working out conceits' and who thanked God because he could read and perhaps understand Shakespeare to the depths, can direct our response:

It (*Endymion*) will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention which is a rare thing indeed ... by which I must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with poetry ... I have heard Hunt say and I may be asked ... Why endeavor after a long Poem? To which I should answer ... Do not the Lovers of Poetry like to have a little Region to wander in where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading: which may be food for a Week's stroll in the Summer? (8 October 1817).

Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel ... the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of His Soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean ... full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering, of distinctness for his luxury. (19 February 1818).

I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness. (10 April 1818).

THE FIRST FOLIO: THE DEDICATIONS AND BEN JOHNSON'S EULOGY ON SHAKESPEARE

CD 100

Readers: Peter Orr • Michael Hordern

Seven years after Shakespeare's death John Heminge and Henry Condell, who had acted with him since his earliest days, now the only survivors of the sharers in the Globe — Richard Burbage the third player to whom Shakespeare in his Will bequeathed 28s. 6d. to buy a ring had died in 1619 — collected, rather than edited, the 36 Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, and 'truely set them forth according to their first Originall'. They printed an uncongenial portrait engraved by Droeshout, four commendatory poems, the names of the 26 principal actors, and a dedication to the most Noble and Incomparable Pair of Brethren, the two sons of the second Earl of Pembroke and his wife Mary, sister of Sir Philip Sidney. William, the elder, who succeeded to the Earldom in 1600 at the age of twenty, was described by John Aubrey as 'the greatest Maecenas to learned men of any peer of his time or since'. His brother Philip, no less liberal, was created Earl of Montgomery by James I, and succeeded his brother in the Earldom and in the office of Lord Chamberlain in 1626. The King's Players had acted at Wilton House, seat of the Pembrokes, when James held his court there in December 1603. Heminge and Condell also printed an address To the Variety of Readers stating that the public had previously been 'abused with diverse, stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors'. Modern scholarship has proved these to be the so-called Bad Quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), *Henry V* (1600), *The Merry Wives* (1602), *Hamlet* (1603); to which are to be added pirated versions of the 2nd and 3rd Parts of *King Henry VI*, entitled *The Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster* (1594) and *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke* (1595).

The address tells us that Shakespeare's 'mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers'. 'Would that he had blotted a thousand', growled Ben Jonson in his note-book, *Discoveries*, 1641. Among his censures of most of the English poets, when he walked to Scotland and stayed with William Drummond at Hawthornden, was the terse verdict: 'Shakespeare wanted art'; a view held since by Samuel Johnson, Matthew Arnold, A.E. Housman and others. But Ben records in his note-book: 'I lov'd the man and do honour his memory (on this side idolatry) as much as any'. And no poet or dramatist has ever penned a more generous and eloquent eulogy of a rival than his verses in the First Folio: To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author, and what he hath left us.

ORIGINAL REVIEWS

The project for a complete recording is potentially the most important thing that has happened to his work since Heminge and Condell saw it through the press. The job could hardly have been better done. All praise to everyone concerned.
THE OBSERVER

There have been other recordings of Shakespeare and some great actors have taken part in them, but I have heard none which has been directed with the skill of Mr Rylands. No voice obtrudes by its beauty, its 'resonance or its idiosyncrasy. So much the better; the play is the thing, and the voices-which for the most part acted superbly-made the language the star of each play... Usually, of course, the representation of metre in the speaking of verse is not even avoided; it is beneath consideration. Yet Mr Rylands restores both the structure of the line and the structure within the line. Since these records will be used in schools, I regard it as an important triumph for the study of English verse that the director has been able to represent its actual structure.
NEW STATESMAN

This is the perfect listening edition, however vividly this or that other record may bring to us the immediate excitements and personalities of the current stage. The Marlowe speakers drive into the heart of the verse, missing nothing... the whole plan is laid before us. We cannot be grateful enough for this presentation of the word in its high, unclouded summer, and spoken for the listening, the 'attent' ear.
BIRMINGHAM POST

Argo's fine series of complete Shakespeare recordings with the Marlowe Society has now firmly established the highest of standards. Particularly when the quality of recording is so outstanding the advantages of stereo are great, and one hopes that before long more schools will be able to take advantage of this development.
THE GUARDIAN

What these records achieve, superbly, is to offer to a listener who is prepared to listen an entire text, interpreted lucidly and intelligently with nothing to get in the poet's way. It is Shakespeare speaking for himself and allowing us to hear much that we shall watch for in later stage productions. I wager that even the most ready Shakespearean may learn things while playing these records that he has not noticed before: lines that rise suddenly and announce themselves to the startled ear.
ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

A great memorial to the greatest of playwrights. The only word for them is stunning, so rapidly do they hold the listener and so invitingly do they open the portals of Shakespeare's poetry and drama... There are those who insist that Shakespeare comes alive only when played upon a stage; there are others who prefer to read him in quiet solitude. Recordings like these suggest there is still another means to find one's way straight to the playwright's drama and the poet's meaning.

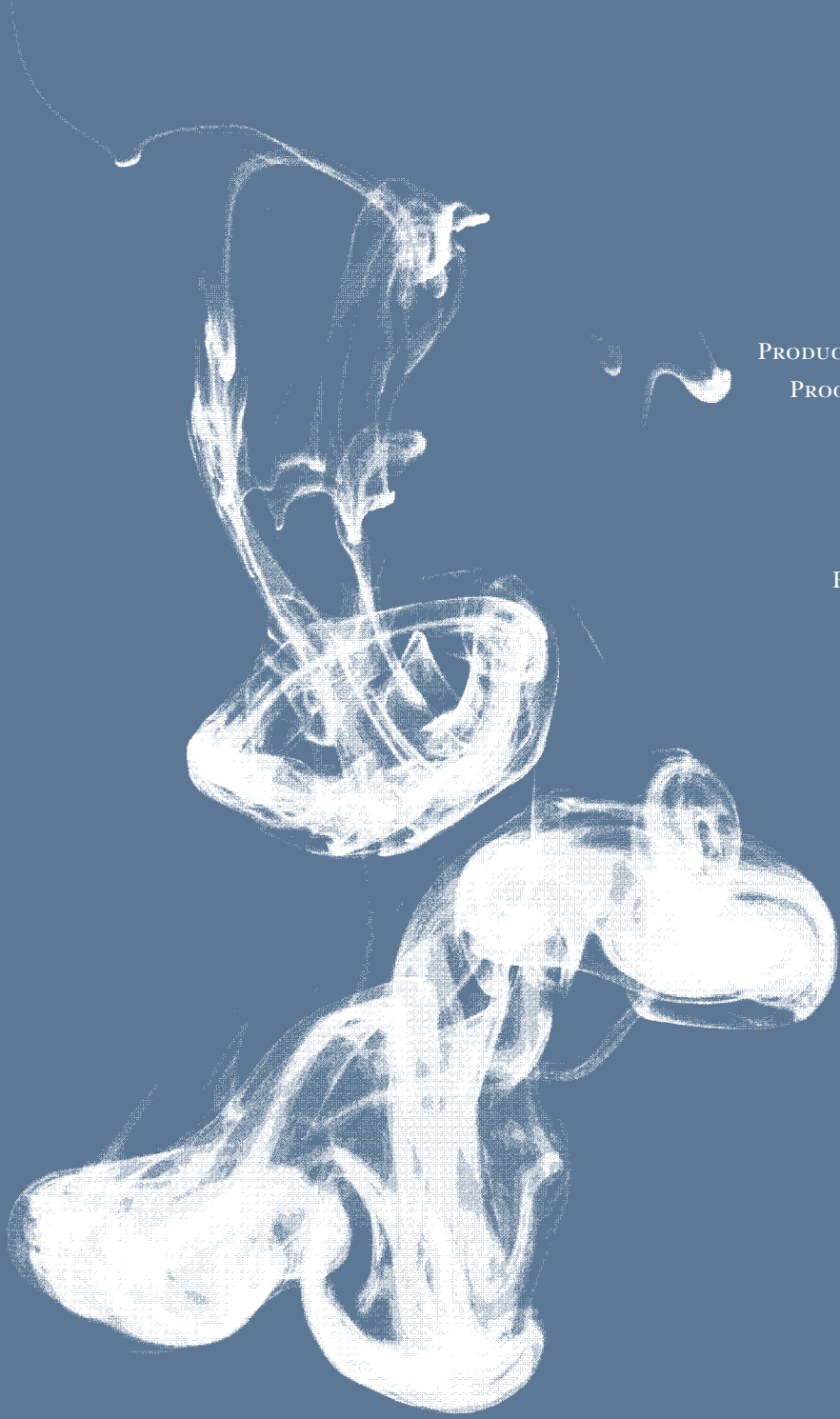
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

Technically the quality is superb, the sleeves are brilliantly illustrated, and each boxed set of discs has about it a sense of design and order and distinction... It is important to appreciate that these Shakespearean recordings are performances and not merely highfidelity recordings of beautifully spoken readings.
EDINBURGH EVENING NEWS

These records must obviously remain for many years a source of inspiration and rare profit for all who read, like, study, teach or learn Shakespeare. As for the technical quality of the recordings, it is as excellent as the performances. One must congratulate everyone concerned in this truly remarkable undertaking.
RECORD NEWS

I don't know how they would acquit themselves on the stage, but aurally the players are of astonishing competence... They speak the verse with a clarity that cannot be matched on the stage: every syllable is given its value. The great value of these recordings is their tremendous faculty of bringing alive a reading of the text. If only for this reason every album in this series should be made available to every high school in the country.
MONTREAL STAR

Beautifully read, the musk of the verse becomes explicit. Characters are brought into focus, meanings are a shade more apparent... English departments in every school with a long-play machine should welcome these records. Drama departments and theatre groups can use them as whetstones to sharpen their ideas of the plays.
NEW YORK TIMES



PRODUCT MANAGEMENT: Lana Thompson (*Decca*) • Kevin Long (*Decca*)

DESIGN: Matt Read (*Combustion Ltd*)

MASTERING: Barry Grint (*Alchemy Mastering*) • Phil Kinrade (*Alchemy Mastering*)

PRODUCTION: Emma Shalless (*UMGI*) • Michelle Noble (*UMGI*) • Eleanor Manning (*UMGI*)

PROOF-READING: Paul Spencer (*White Label Productions*) • Ray Granlund (*White Label Productions*)

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Tim Cribb (*Life Fellow, Churchill College* | *Senior Member: Marlowe Dramatic Society*)

Barry Holden (*Vice President Catalogue - Global Classics, Universal Music Group*)

Professor Gordon McMullan (*Director, London Shakespeare Centre* | *Academic Director, Shakespeare400*)

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THANKS TO:

Rebecca Allen, Andrew Dalton, Dr Hannah Crawforth,
Dickon Stainer, Edward Weston, Dr Tony Wakeford, Tyler Unverzagt

PROOF-LISTENERS:

Janine Barrett, Hannah DeWitt, Siobhan Dunlop, Rowena Hawkins,
Shana Krisiloff, Aimee Morris, Emory Noakes, Daisy Owens
Katerina Theodossion, Nicola Van Der Watt, Amanda Vincent,
Rebecca Watson, Melanie Rio, Shehrazade Zafar-Arif, Margaret Zwiebach

The majority of the audio has been re-mastered from the original Argo analogue master tapes, recorded between 1957 and 1964. Every effort has been made to restore the quality of the recordings, there may be some minor sound imperfections still audible. These may include slightly longer pauses which were used for effect between some of the Acts, magnetic tape echo, distortions, drop outs, original background noise, sound level differences between the readers, and other audio limitations.

The restoration has been done faithfully and should not take away from any listening pleasure or compromise the integrity of the original recordings.