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A979/D9

Shakespeare in Southern Africa



JOURNAL of the SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA



VOLUME 2 1988

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Shakespeare in Southern Africa

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ISSN 1011-582X

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Subscriptions and Membership of the Society

The Journal is offered free of charge to all members of the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa other than scholar members. A membership application form is provided on p.135 and the Society's Constitution is reproduced on the inside back cover.

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Information for Writers

Shakespeare in Southern Africa sets out to publish articles, commentary and reviews on all aspects of Shakespearean studies and performance, with a particular emphasis on the response to Shakespeare in southern Africa. Scholarly notes of a factual nature are also welcome.

Submissions are reviewed by at least two referees, who may be either Editorial Consultants or members of the Advisory Board. Articles submitted by the Editors will not be published unless this is recommended by independent referees.

Manuscripts should be double-spaced and submitted in duplicate on A4 paper.

Submissions should conform to the Journal's house style. Full publication details must be provided for all sources cited. Manuscripts should be sent to:

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Acknowledgements

Shakespeare in Southern Africa is published annually by the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa. The Society is a project of the 1820 Foundation. Administrative facilities and editorial assistance for the Journal are supplied by the Department of English and the Institute for the Study of English in Africa at Rhodes University. The Journal is typeset and printed by the Rhodes University Printing Unit. The cover design is by Ken Robinson. The volume is bound and the cover printed by Messrs. Grocott and Sherry, Grahamstown.

The Journal is funded by a generous donation from Information Services Management (S.A. Pty. Ltd.).

Editorial

In the first issue of this Journal we expressed our intention "to publish articles and reviews of interest to our members, who fall into four main groups — academics, teachers, theatre people, and members of the public interested in Shakespeare". While such groupings are editorially useful, it would be a pity if *readers* took too much notice of them. For instance, Stanley Wells's "Enjoying Shakespeare" (his keynote address to our second congress held during the Grahamstown Festival last July) heads the academic section, but is of interest to all. Academics, of course, ought not to need to be reminded that Shakespeare is the world's greatest entertainer.

The range of scholarly offerings is wide: Religion, Politics and Literature, the New Historicism, Freedom of Speech and Shakespeare's Women, and Jacobean Psychiatry. Of particular African interest is "A Moment in the Past — William Tsikinya-Chaka" — an account of the Shakespearean interests of Sol T. Plaatje, one of the founding fathers of the African National Congress. Plaatje is only one of many non-English speakers to have translated Shakespeare. We are pleased to be able to publish what we believe to be a full bibliography of plays translated in southern African languages to date. We include a bibliography of Shakespeare items in South African periodicals in 1987, which also lists material published by the Shakespeare Society.

Laurence Wright's review in Volume 1 of Martin Orkin's *Shakespeare Against Apartheid* elicited a response from Colin Gardner at our congress last year, raising the hardy issue of relevance, to which Wright has replied. Discussion on such critical issues is both topical and important, particularly to teachers at all levels. Among the Book Reviews is one of *Shakespeare and Film*, by Tony Davies, until recently Professor of English at the University of Fort Hare.

The Society has established a Shakespeare Educational Trust, contributions to which will be exempt from tax. The Trustees are the Chairmen of the Shakespeare Society, the English Academy of South Africa and the 1820 Foundation. It is clear that most of our projects will remain pipe dreams if we depend on membership fees alone. Certain of our ambitions — such as an open-air theatre in Johannesburg — will need very big money, and special appeals will have to be launched for them. The problem of financing the central administration and secretariat will remain.

Of particular interest to teachers will be the progress report on the Shakespeare Schools' Text Project, made possible by the Chairman's Fund and supervised by the Society and the Institute for the Study of English in Africa.

The Performing Arts Boards of all four provinces produced Shakespeare plays prescribed for schools — a custom whose importance might be a topic for discussion. It can certainly be an invaluable educational experience for students to witness a performance of their set play; but how many beyond the main centres do, in fact, benefit in this way? Should not videos be made of such productions as teaching aids, and be readily available to schools? Ideally, students should see and hear the play before they have to grapple with the text. The regular performance of set plays by the Performing Arts Boards also presents producers and actors with the challenge and opportunity to lift the texts off the page — for their own pleasure and for a wider public than that of the schools.

The year has been an exciting one for live Shakespeare. Our Theatre and Television

Enjoying Shakespeare

STANLEY WELLS

I am, ladies and gentlemen, a professional Shakespearean. I hold what is, so far as I know, the only professorial chair specifically assigned to Shakespeare Studies. I have devoted most of my life to the study of Shakespeare. I have read all his works many times, often in proof copies of my own and other people's editions. (If you think that means I must know them virtually by heart, I have to admit regretfully that this is not so; I just don't have that kind of memory). I was employed for over ten years by Oxford University Press to work entirely on Shakespeare, and in my capacity as General Editor of the Complete Oxford Shakespeare I was preoccupied during much of this time with problems of Shakespeare's text, both on a large scale and in minute detail. For most of the remainder of my professional life I have worked as a member of the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham, where one of my principal duties has been to teach Shakespeare to both undergraduates and graduates. Before that I was a schoolmaster, and even then I struggled with the problems of making Shakespeare intelligible, and if possible enjoyable, to the young. Since 1981 I have edited *Shakespeare Survey*, an annual publication devoted exclusively to Shakespeare. For over forty years I have been going to see performances of Shakespeare's plays, and I have seen most of them many times, in a wide range of production styles, on film and television as well as on the stage. I have seen some of them played in French, in German, in Russian, and in Japanese. I have seen them given in pure texts and in heavily adapted texts. I have served as a governor of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and as a trustee of Shakespeare's Birthplace. I have organised conferences on Shakespeare and attended conferences on Shakespeare organised by other people. I have organised Summer Schools on Shakespeare and taught summer schools on Shakespeare. I have written books on Shakespeare, reviewed books on Shakespeare, and even read books on Shakespeare without having to review them. I have studied imitations of Shakespeare and parodies of Shakespeare. I have made speeches about Shakespeare, judged competitions on Shakespeare, written letters to newspapers about Shakespeare, broadcast about Shakespeare, and one hot summer day I spent ten hours on trains in order to get to a school in Wales where I was to inaugurate what was described as a "bardathon" — a reading aloud by schoolboys of the complete works of Shakespeare which continued for another four days and nights after I had happily left the stalwart participants to get on with it.

In view of all this it is, I suppose, understandable that people should sometimes ask me whether I am never bored with Shakespeare: whether the concentration of my professional life, and even of parts of my private life, on a single author has not induced a sense of satiety, a desire to move on to something completely different. The short answer to this question is "No"; longer answers to it are going to occupy us for the rest of this session. This is, in other words, going to be a rather self-indulgent talk; not a contribution to scholarship, not a rigorous piece of criticism, just an exploration of a personal pleasure which I hope may sound answering chords in some of you.

My introduction to Shakespeare came through the printed word, not through

the very processes of Hamlet's mind. Vocabulary, syntax, and rhythm all contribute to the effect:

That it should come to this —
 But two months dead — nay, not so much, not two —
 So excellent a king, that was to this
 Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
 Visit her face too roughly! Heaven and earth,
 Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on, and yet within a month —
 Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman —
 A little month, Or ere those shoes were old
 With which she followed my poor father's body,
 Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she —
 O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
 Would have mourned longer! — married with mine uncle,
 My father's brother, but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules; within a month,
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing of her galled eyes,
 She married. O most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
 It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
 But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

The anguish that causes Hamlet to think of his mother's over-hasty marriage is conveyed as much by the tortured syntax as by direct statement; we share his difficulty as he tries and fails to assimilate the unwelcome facts into his consciousness, seeking to bring under emotional control the discordant elements of his disrupted universe — his love of his dead father, his love of his mother combined with disgust at her over-hasty marriage to the uncle whom he loathes, and the disillusion with womankind that this has caused in him.

This is a verse style that exploits the rhythms of ordinary speech; at other points the impetus is provided by high rhetoric, as often in, for example, *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar*, and sometimes it is complicated by a knotty intellectuality that gives the mind much to grapple with. This is particularly characteristic of some of Shakespeare's great but less popular plays, such as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus*, where it results sometimes in a challenging toughness of style that can nevertheless be intensely rewarding. Consider for example the lines in which Coriolanus, at his mother's bidding, tries to compel himself to what he sees as the humiliation of pleading with common citizens for their votes.

My throat of war be turned,
 Which choired with my drum, into a pipe
 Small as an eunuch or the virgin voice
 That babies lull asleep! The smiles of knaves
 Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up
 The glasses of my sight! A beggar's tongue
 Make motion through my lips, and my armed knees,
 Who bowed but in my stirrup, bend like his
 That hath received an alms! I will not do't,
 Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
 And by my body's action teach my mind
 A most inherent baseness.

performance, and the beginnings of my pleasure in Shakespeare's language date from schooldays, and from the influence of a particular English master. The very first Shakespeare I remember reading was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when I was about eleven years old; we spoke it aloud around the class, and I must have been cast as Hermia, because my only real memory of the experience is a priggish *frisson* at having to speak the word "Hell" in the line "O hell — to choose love by another's eyes!" (If that seems too priggish to be true, I might as well confess that around the same time, as I bicycled to and from school, I would repeat the letter "p" thousands of times with the idea of saving from damnation all those who had imperilled their souls by speaking profanely of "hell"; my childish notion was that I could thus on their behalf convert the wicked word into the innocent "help".) It was when I was three or four years older that I was first deeply stirred by Shakespeare's language, and this was in one of the sonnets, not a play. The sonnet was No. 29, the one beginning "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes", and I was especially moved by the sestet:

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

In part, of course, I was responding to the subject matter, to the poem's rapturous idealisation of friendship in its equation of "love" with "wealth", at a period of emotional awakening; but I was conscious, too, of the extraordinary musical power of the lines, the consonance between sense and sound in the image of the lark which beats across the boundary of the line-ending to rise singing into the ether, and the resounding metrical regularity with which the closing couplet affirms the triumph of spiritual over worldly values.

The enjoyment of Shakespeare's verbal power stirred in me at this time has never left me, and has indeed sustained me through thousands of laborious hours of proof-reading and of scrutinising the original texts in minute detail while preparing a modern-spelling edition. Its sources are many, and they vary from play to play, but important among them in its capacity to go on provoking admiration and wonder in innumerable re-readings is, I'm sure, the way Shakespeare can pack his lines with a multiplicity of suggestiveness while simultaneously maintaining a rhythmical pulse which carries the mind forward in spite of all temptations to linger over details. You can see it at a comparatively straightforward level in such a well-known set piece as Jaques's speech on the seven ages of man. The forward impetus is set up by the structure:

One man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

And the verbal richness can be illustrated by the well-known picture of the

schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

The sense is readily apparent, yet it compresses a lot into a small space, especially in the phrase "shining morning face", with its implication that the shine is likely to have disappeared by the afternoon. More subtle and complex, but still quite irresistible in its extraordinary fusion of the rhythms of ordinary speech with a blank verse structure is Hamlet's first soliloquy, written in a style which presents us, not with conclusions, but with

ice. If thou doubt it, thou mayst slide from my shoulder to my heel with no greater a run but my head and my neck". Grumio's picture of himself as the frozen surface of a sheet of water which his fellow servant could use as a slide has a surrealist quality; it is, as it were, centrifugal rather than centripetal, a sublime irrelevance rather than a contributory detail. There is a rather similar quality in the same play in the words with which Biondello, who is in a hurry, encourages his master, Lucentio, in his intended elopement: "I cannot tarry, I knew a wench married in an afternoon as she went to the garden for parsley to stuff a rabbit, and so may you, sir, and so adieu, sir".

Shakespeare was, of course, a highly sophisticated verbal artist, and many of his most powerful effects depend on his mastery of rhetorical techniques derived from classical literature. The rhetorical basis of his art is more readily apparent in his earlier work, where it is, as it were, closer to the surface; we may think, for example, of the elaborate wordplay of *Love's Labour's Lost*, or the high rhetoric of *Richard III* and, in a different key, *Richard II*. Yet Shakespeare always knew the value of simplicity. Though in *Love's Labour's Lost* he delights in the exuberance of his own verbal powers, he also shows how hollow rhetoric can be, and the play's most important communication is made not through words but in a moment of silence as Mercadé brings the Princess news of her father's death:

Mercadé: The king your father —
Princess: Dead, for my life.
Mercadé: Even so. My tale is told.

That kind of sudden simplicity is among the things that one constantly marvels at in Shakespeare: the way that a plain phrase, the sort of language that out of context would seem entirely unpoetical, words such as we ourselves might use without thinking twice about them, can have a devastating effect because of their placing. In *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock's "I am not well"; "I do. I will" in *I Henry IV*; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, "Husband, I come"; in *Pericles*, "A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear"; in *The Winter's Tale*, "O, she's warm"; and in *The Tempest*, "Tis new to thee": these are among many moments when Shakespeare abandons rhetoric in the confidence that simple statement is all that the situation requires. The most powerful sustained example of the method occurs, I think, in *King Lear*; the reunion of Lear and Cordelia is heralded by one mighty image:

Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

But after that the episode is sustained by a succession of entirely plain phrases: "You must not kneel" . . . "I think this lady to be my child, Cordelia/ And so I am, I am . . ." . . . "No cause, no cause" . . . "I am old and foolish". Of course, the effectiveness of such sublime simplicities depends greatly on the dramatic situation and on what has gone before — in *King Lear*, much knotty language — rather as, in late Beethoven, a lyrical phrase will strike all the more poignantly for the turmoil from which it emerges. Our enjoyment of them, in other words, depends on an awareness of the structure of which they form a part, of the pacing of the dramatic movement, the juxtapositions within it, its climax and its resolution.

It would, of course, be possible to quote favourite passages, and to analyse their effect, for many hours, and whole books have quite properly been written about Shakespeare's verbal artistry. He was a great poet, and a great prose writer, too. But in his time the word "poet" signified a writer for the stage as well as for the page, and Shakespeare's greatness as a dramatic poet depends heavily on his having had an imagination that saw and used words not only for themselves but as the projection of a larger vision of which

That is not easy writing. The word order is idiosyncratic, the phrasing is elliptical, the vocabulary is esoteric, and the sudden reversal of sentiment on the words "I will not do't" cries out for dramatic representation. But the energy of the lines, deriving to some extent from their very difficulty, is wonderfully suggestive of the character of the man who speaks them, the syntax and the rhythm help to portray his self-contempt as he contemplates the part that he is being asked to play, and the final hard-won insight into himself — that acting a role that he abhors will violate his own integrity — expresses a concept that may be intellectually rewarding to us as well as to the speaker.

I don't, though, want to give the impression that I find Shakespeare enduringly enjoyable only because he sometimes stretches my reading powers, engaging me in an invigorating kind of mental tussle. Of course, I continue to enjoy the lyrical verse — and prose — that have brought great popularity to plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, though there again one should not underestimate the artistry of passages whose familiarity may be in danger of breeding contempt. It is as difficult to analyse the beauty of some of Shakespeare's most popular lines as to explain the appeal of a folk song, and indeed it is to our musical senses that much of his writing appeals. This is a little strange in that only a very skilled phonetician could reconstruct the spectrum of sounds that would have been evoked by Shakespeare's verse in a reader of his own time; but of course music is not dependent for its effects purely on tonal values, but works also through rhythm, repetition, variation of pitch, and even silence. Some passages in Shakespeare seem to me quintessentially musical in their effect; let me cite just one of them, part of Florizel's praise of Perdita, in *The Winter's Tale*:

What you do
Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,
I'd have you do it ever; when you sing,
I'd have you buy and sell so, so give alms,
Pray so; and for the ord'ring your affairs,
To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that, move still, still so,
And own no other function.

Even at a single hearing you will be conscious of the importance of repetition in this passage, and also, I expect, of an incantatory rhythmic fluctuation. Syntactic patterns are repeated — "When you speak"/"When you sing"/"When you do dance"; so are individual words — "you" occurs eight times, "so" four times, "still" three times, "sing" twice. In part the repetitions create a rhythmic dynamic which presses the mind forward, but one of the most striking and original effects of the lines is the way in which, imitating rhythmically the swaying motion of the dance in the image of the "wave o' th' sea", they create simultaneously an impression of movement and stillness which is itself characteristic of a wave, retaining its shape even as the elements that constitute it are in continual motion, in a subtle wordplay that draws on the two contrasting meanings of the repeated word "still", both "continual" and "motionless". The sense of timelessness thus created represents the ideal quality of Florizel's love and also links with a complex chain of imagery in a play that is profoundly concerned with time as both destroyer and redeemer.

Shakespeare's writings are often praised for their unity, for his capacity to relate details to overriding imaginative concepts, and certainly this is a major source of his imaginative power; yet I value too the moments when he goes off at a tangent, inconsequentialities that delightfully introduce an element of the incongruous, a fanciful elaboration that awakens our sense of the diversity rather than the coherence of experience. For some reason *The Taming of the Shrew* seems exceptionally rich in such pleasures. I think of the extraordinary image with which Petruccio's servant Grumio illustrates how cold he is. "Who is that calls so coldly?" asks Curtis. To which Grumio replies "A piece of

At other times, comedy depends less on the capacity of the actor to build an integrated character on the basis of the varied hints given by the text than on the projection of a dramatic situation that is comic in itself. I think for example of a long speech in *The Comedy of Errors*. With mounting passion, Adriana rebukes the man she believes to be her husband, Antipholus, for his neglect of her, reminds him that they are eternally united by marriage, and in culmination points out that if he is unfaithful to her, then she is stained by his sin:

I am possessed with an adulterate blot;
My blood is mingled with the crime of lust.
For if we two be one, and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh,
Being strumpeted by thy contagion.
Keep then fair league and truce with thy true bed,
I live unstained, thou undishonoured.

The content of the speech, expressed in thirty-six lines of verse, is entirely serious, but on the stage its seriousness must be continuously undermined by the reactions of the person to whom it is addressed, who is in fact not Adriana's husband at all, but his twin brother. The comedy of the situation was memorably pointed in a Stratford production when the actor looked in bewilderment over his shoulder to see if anyone else was present before delivering his reply, which begins "Plead you to *me*, fair dame?"

The ideal reader of *The Comedy of Errors* would, of course, be conscious of the dramatic situation as he read, even though its comic force would inevitably be greatly reduced if he were not simultaneously watching both the speaker and the person addressed. But there are other passages in the plays where the effect is still more dependent on stage presence, and on action which is inevitably different each time the play is produced. I think, for instance, of the scene of revelry in *Twelfth Night* — the kitchen scene, as it used to be called — where a climactic episode is represented in the text by no more than the stage direction "*They sing the catch*". The director and actors between them must work up the mirth to a high pitch which is then harshly, and ludicrously, punctured by the entry of Malvolio — a moment which is usually manipulated to raise a big laugh simply on the basis of Malvolio's grotesquely comic appearance, since he has been roused from bed, an effect of which the text conveys no hint in the bare direction "*Enter Malvolio*". On a more serious level, one may think of the duel in *Hamlet*, which can have none of the excitement for the reader that it conveys in performance, or of that simple stage direction in *Macbeth*, "*Knock*", which shows the outside world breaking with such terrifying effect into the closed nightmare of Macbeth and his Lady just after they have murdered Duncan. Music, too, is a potent source of theatrical effect that cannot be conveyed on the printed page. And there are some "words" which are in effect instructions to the actor to convey wordless emotion rather than an attempt by the writer to express emotion by verbal means. Think of that very elementary signifier "O", which on the printed page, occurring at a climactic moment, can have a bathetic effect. Yet Shakespeare asks his actors to convey many varied emotions through it — and some lines, we may feel, leave it up to his actor to decide exactly what should be conveyed. It can have brilliant comic force: putting Octavius Caesar's case to Cleopatra, Thidias carefully explains:

He knows that you embraced not Antony
As you did love, but as you feared him.

Cleopatra's apparently impassive "O" can convey a world of meaning. The interjection can be a cue for the actor to convey a transition from one state of mind to another. In the "fly" scene in *Titus Andronicus*, Titus rebukes his brother Marcus for killing a "Poor

words are only a part. He is, for example, famous for his powers of portraying individual character, and these powers depend partly on his literary art. Alexander Pope wrote that "every single character in *Shakespeare* is as much an individual as those in *Life* itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be Twins will upon comparison be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of Character we must add the wonderful Preservation of it; which is such throughout his plays that had all the Speeches been printed without the very names of the persons I believe one might have apply'd them with certainty to every speaker". That is an exaggeration, of course: think for example of characters in *Macbeth* such as Lennox, Ross, Angus, Caithness, and Monteith, whose names sound like those of decreasingly important railway stations along a minor branch line in Scotland, and whose personalities are no more distinctive. Still, Pope does identify an important characteristic of Shakespeare's dramatic power, the chameleon-like quality with which he can switch from one style to another, and the flexibility with which the language even of individual characters can be invested. I think of the way in which, for example, Caliban's normal roughness of speech can open up into the extraordinary lyric expressiveness of:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That if I then had waked after long sleep
Will make me sleep again.

These lines deepen our sense of the character and shift the moral perspective in a manner that is peculiarly Shakespearean, and they do so as the result of the exercise of literary power.

Nevertheless, the audience's apprehension of character in its totality depends upon the realisation in performance of a sub-text, upon the projection of literary style as the revelation of an integrated personality. A character such as Brutus or Malvolio or Coriolanus, for example, is not just the sum of everything he says and does and that is said about him, he is also the effect of the realisation of all these qualities in the figure of a particular actor as he performs the role. This is perhaps seen at its most obvious in comedy. Shakespeare's works are full of humour, and some speeches and interchanges are richly amusing in themselves, on a purely verbal level. We may think, for example, of some of Falstaff's soliloquies, or of Hotspur's satirical portrait of the popinjay who talked "so like a waiting gentlewoman/Of guns, and drums, and wounds, God save the mark!", or, at a more serious level of probing comedy, of Hamlet's interchanges with Polonius and with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Shakespeare's comedies are the greatest in the language, but for verbal comedy purely on the printed page I should not rate him as highly as, for example, Charles Dickens. His greatness as a writer of comedy derives largely from the fact that he conceives of comedy as part of the dramatic situation, not simply as a sequence of verbal effects: his comic characterisation quite properly leaves something to the actor in, for instance, the use of repeated catch phrases or malapropisms as the projection of individual character. In *Much Ado About Nothing* most of Dogberry's verbal errors have, taken by themselves, little comic force; in reading the play it is easy to pass them over with scarcely a smile: "You are thought to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch . . . you shall comprehend all vagrom men . . . for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable and not to be endured". Recently I saw within a few days two different productions of this play. In one of them the role of Dogberry was no more entertaining than it would have been in an unimaginative armchair reading of the text. In the other, however — by David Waller, at Stratford — Dogberry's errors were relished as items in the self-delighted projection of a fully rounded personality and as a result came up as freshly as if one had never heard them before.

III, Shylock, Hotspur, Henry V, Othello, Macbeth, Mark Antony, and Coriolanus in which a differently graced actor can excel. It is surely no denigration of Shakespeare's plays to see them as sounding boards for talent, as works in which the actor may show off his skills just as the virtuoso instrumentalist may display his abilities in the great romantic concertos. Of course, it would be deplorable if plays such as *Hamlet* and *King Lear* were treated merely as vehicles for virtuoso display, and there may be productions in which we feel that the personality of the actor is thought of as more important than the work to which he should be contributing. But this should not obscure from us the fact that Shakespeare was writing for virtuoso performers, and that both the skills and the individuality of performers make a necessary contribution to the dramatic event, a contribution which can legitimately afford us great pleasure. The theatre exists partly to display physical and vocal beauty, mimetic skill, charm, grace and warmth of personality, and a talent to amuse, and Shakespeare's plays go on giving us pleasure because they are so brilliantly devised to show off these and similar qualities.

And for those who read Shakespeare as well as seeing his plays performed, this kind of enjoyment is not confined to performance, but goes on informing and enriching our reading and re-reading of the plays, overlaying them with a series of associations which recall for us the mediated force that lines had in performance, and that helps us too to realise the range of possibilities inherent within a single text. Some performances burn themselves on the mind. Though it is close on thirty years since I saw Olivier as Coriolanus — several times — I cannot read that play without constantly re-hearing his inflexions, remembering for instance the violent energy he gave to

The fires i' th' lowest hell fold in the people!

the comedy that he found in "Look, I am going" after he had at last succumbed to his mother's will, like a little boy saying "You see, I'm doing what you told me after all", and the stunning, climactic power of his final boast

"Boy". False hound,
If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there
That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
Fluttered your Volskians in Corioles.
Alone I did it. "Boy!"

At moments like this one felt, not just that one was watching a clever actor, but that one was in the presence of a superior order of being, a transcendent power that elevated one's concept of humanity.

The imprinting power of distinguished performance is not limited to the great roles. Sometimes even a lesser actor in a small part can achieve so complete a fusion of role and personality that his speaking of certain passages resonates in the mind long after he has given up the role. I remember a long-past Brackenbury in *Richard III* for the meditative lyricism with which he spoke

Sorrow breaks seasons and reposing hours,
Makes the night morning and the noontide night . . .

and I hear him again as I read the lines.

To say that our continuing enjoyment of Shakespeare is in part dependent on memories of performances that we have seen is not to diminish Shakespeare, only to acknowledge that he was a thorough-going practical dramatist who knew that the act of dramatic creation did not stop when he laid down his pen. But of course an exclusive memory of single productions would have a limiting effect on the reader's imagination. Performance implies interpretation. No actor can be simply a glass through which the author's

harmless fly". Marcus defends himself by saying it resembled the villainous Aaron:

Pardon me, sir, it was a black ill-favoured fly,
Like to the Empress' Moor. Therefore I killed him.

To which Titus responds

O, O, O!
Then pardon me for reprehending thee,
For thou hast done a charitable deed.

In a recent Stratford production, Brian Cox as Titus made a profoundly memorable effect out of the three monosyllables, suggesting through them a crazed, slowly dawning acceptance of Marcus's explication which then turned into a passionate endorsement of his brother's action as the fly became a symbol of all who had wronged him and his family, and he threw himself upon the table, viciously stabbing at the place where it had been. There are some points at which the surrounding dialogue indicates fairly clearly what effect Shakespeare was aiming at. In *Othello*, after Desdemona's death has been discovered, Othello falls on the bed with the inarticulate cry "O, O, O!", to which Emilia responds "Nay, lay thee down and roar"; and in Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking scene her "O, O, O!" is glossed by the doctor's comment "What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged". And on a number of occasions Shakespeare uses "O" as a climactic if inarticulate expression of suffering, as in Othello's "O Desdemona! Dead Desdemona! Dead! O! O!", and, at the moment of death, in Hamlet's "O, O, O, O" which follows "The rest is silence" in the Folio text, and Lear's "O, O, O, O" which is almost the last sound he makes in the Quarto text. Much virtue in "O".

In citing these instances of points at which Shakespeare's text shows his dependence on theatrical as well as, or in place of, literary values, I have found a need to illustrate my points by referring to the plays in performance. Inevitably, much of one's enjoyment of the work of an artist who writes for performance is inextricably bound up with the act of performance, which equally inevitably means with particular performers. We might see this as a demonstration of the impurity of dramatic art: of the fact that the playwright lacks final control over the fruits of his work, that it will be mediated to us in a manner that can have a corrupting effect. But I prefer to look at the relationship between the dramatist and his interpreters as a joyful and necessary interaction of personalities which helps all those engaged in the theatrical act to realise their capabilities to the full. This is true of other dramatists besides Shakespeare, of course; but it does seem to me that Shakespeare's greatness lies partly in the comprehensive range of opportunities that his plays offer. The major Shakespearean roles have become acknowledged as touchstones of the actor's art because in them actors can realise and stretch their capacities, which is why they want to go on performing these roles, and why we are happy to go on seeing the roles variously performed. Think, for example, of Hamlet — the role which Max Beerbohm described as "a hoop through which every very eminent actor must, sooner or later, jump". The performer of Hamlet has opportunities to be tender and vicious, passionate and calm, sarcastic and gentle of speech, serious and flippant, dignified and derisory, magnanimous and mean. He can display his good looks (if he has them), his athletic prowess, his powers of mimicry, his stamina, his grace of movement, his comic timing, and his vocal skill. The role offers him practically everything he could wish for except the opportunity to sing and dance. And an actor who succeeds as Hamlet will find many other roles open to him that offer him, not the same opportunity, but a wide range of related but different opportunities. A natural Hamlet, as Sir John Gielgud has shown, can also excel at different stages of his career as Benedick, Buckingham, Romeo, Richard II, Henry IV, Cassius, Angelo, Leontes, King Lear, and Prospero; and, as Laurence Olivier has shown, there is a whole other range of roles, such as Titus Andronicus, Richard

conception of the role is visible, any more than a director could give us the play exactly as Shakespeare would have directed it, even if the scholars could give him precise and full information about the theatre conditions of Shakespeare's time. The actor's physical qualities will affect his performance — his age, his height, his looks, the sound of his voice. Indeed a director may effect a fresh interpretation of a role simply by casting in it a performer who is either younger or older than has been customary. In recent years, Lady Macbeth has seemed to be getting younger and younger as directors seek to escape from the stereotype of the domineering matron; conversely, we have had some interesting older Beatrices in *Much Ado About Nothing*, suggesting a woman who has been matured, and to some extent hardened, by experience. Actors have varying ideas about what is important in a role, making different selections among the options that are open to them. To stay with *Much Ado About Nothing* for a moment, there is a somewhat enigmatic interchange between Don Pedro and Beatrice which may seem an irrelevance and has often been cut in performance. Don Pedro says to Beatrice

Come, lady, come, you have lost the heart of Signor Benedick

and she replies

Indeed, my lord, he lent it me a while, and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one. Marry, once before he won it of me, with false dice.

It may seem like a passing quip or false trail; the suggestion of a previous "relationship" between Benedick and Beatrice has not been made before, nor do we hear any more of it. But Judi Dench, in John Barton's production, made it the keystone of her interpretation, implying a lurking bitterness behind some of her jesting with Benedick, a sense of something unresolved which added poignancy to the later stages of the wooing. And when the same actress came to direct the play this year, Kenneth Branagh, playing Benedick, chose to give unusual warmth to the friendship between Benedick and Claudio, so that Benedick's response to Beatrice's "Kill Claudio" — "Not for the wide world" — was motivated by personal feeling rather than principle, and his last words to Claudio — "Come, come, we are friends" — had the force of a desired reconciliation. I suppose one of the most famous exploratory re-investigations of Shakespeare's text in recent years is one that clearly reflects feminist thought — I mean the discovery that it is possible to play the end of *Measure for Measure* without either altering the text or implying that Isabella reacts favourably to the Duke's proposal of marriage — and, incidentally, this was in a production in which the Duke — whose age is unspecified in the text — was played as a considerably older man than had been usual.

The kinds of theatrical re-exploration of Shakespeare's text that I have been mentioning can, of course, be paralleled by critical re-readings of the plays. The fact that the plays are open to this kind of re-interpretation, whether in points of detail or overall, and that it can be conveyed to us in performance, is among the reasons that one can go on re-enjoying Shakespeare's plays. We can also enjoy the varied theatrical styles in which they are presented. In England recently we have had, within a year or two, a marvellously intense, minimalist re-thinking of *Titus Andronicus*, a witty, detailed updating of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to the 1950s, an *As You Like It* that reflected some of the text's stylisation by echoing the theatrical conventions of Victorian melodrama, a splendidly Renaissance re-creation of the world of *Antony and Cleopatra* drawing on the paintings of Titian and Veronese, and a re-thinking of *The Merchant of Venice* starring the South African actor Antony Sher that was Irvingesque in its staging methods while also strongly relating the play's racial and sexual concerns to contemporary thought. Christian as well as Jewish values were questioned, partly by demonstrations of the ugly side of the Venetians' treatment of Shylock; and as Shylock spoke his lines beginning

You have among you many a purchased slave,
Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,
You use in abject and in slavish parts
Because you bought them,

he dragged from among the bystanders a quivering terrified black boy in order to reinforce his point that the Christians, too, insist upon the right of possession.

There have, of course, been many productions that go much further than this in the attempt to relate Shakespeare to contemporary concerns, and it is a practice that goes back as far as the seventeenth century when, for example, Nahum Tate's adaptation of *Richard II*, performed in 1681, was suppressed after two performances because of suspected allusions to the current political situation. Understandably, it is the plays in which Shakespeare is most explicitly concerned with political and royalist issues — plays such as *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Henry V* — that have been most susceptible to this kind of re-interpretation, though in more recent times the practice has spread to other plays so that, for example, *The Tempest* has been interpreted as a play about colonialism, *Troilus and Cressida* has been updated as an anti-war play, and *The Taming of the Shrew* has been re-presented in the light of feminist issues. Re-interpretation may take many forms, sometimes being effected principally through production devices, at other times relying on extensive textual adaptation, as for example in Charles Marowitz's "collage" versions of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and other plays, which specifically aim to create "a new pattern", delivering "a quite specific and original message". Here, of course, we come up against the problem of the ethics of adaptation. Where is the boundary between interpretation and adaptation? At what point do textual and other changes transform the original text into a new, distinct creation? When is a Shakespeare play not a Shakespeare play? The line may be difficult to draw, but perhaps it is not too important that we draw it at all. At one time it was customary for Shakespeare scholars to pour scorn upon adaptations such as Lillian Davenant made of *Macbeth*, or Nahum Tate of *King Lear*, or Colley Cibber of *Richard III*, or David Garrick of *Romeo and Juliet*, but in more recent years it has been recognised that although some adaptations may reduce the original plays on which they are based, nevertheless they may not be utterly contemptible, and may indeed be informed by serious and worthwhile artistic principles. Even adapted texts may be worth performing; indeed, the history of Shakespeare on the stage is to a very large extent a history of the performance of adapted texts, and many of the greatest performances by the most legendary actors and actresses — Garrick's *King Lear*, Mrs Siddons's *Volumnia* and *Lady Macbeth*, John Philip Kemble's *Coriolanus*, Edmund Kean's *Richard III*, Henry Irving's *Hamlet* and *Shylock* — have been given in texts that were either heavily adapted or at least severely shortened (and abbreviation, of course, is itself a form of adaptation). The performance of full texts is a recent — and still comparatively rare — phenomenon. If we set our faces against *any* kind of adaptation, we might as well stay at home with the script and lose all the revelations — and pleasures — that can come through performance.

In any case, the phenomenon that we call Shakespeare is not just something that can be appreciated only by reading or seeing performances of the original texts, whether complete or not, it is also everything that has happened to and as a result of these texts since they were first written. We can enjoy Shakespeare in different media, on film, radio and television, in adaptations such as Kurosawa's film *Ran* (based on *King Lear*), such as the operatic versions of Verdi, Berlioz, and Britten, through orchestral compositions such as Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* or Elgar's *Falstaff*, through ballets such as Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* or Frederick Ashton's *The Dream*, through musicals such as Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate* — recently performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company — through the innumerable paintings on Shakespearean themes, even through the artefacts based on them. Knowing Shakespeare, we can even enjoy works which subject him to imitation, parody, or burlesque. Some of these crop up in unexpected places. I

wonder, for example, if you remember Hamlet's soliloquy, "the most celebrated thing in Shakespeare", as performed by the Duke in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. It goes like this:

To be, or not to be; that is the bare bodkin
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would fardels bear, till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane.
But that the fear of something after death,
Murders the innocent sleep,
Great nature's second course,
And makes us rather sling the arrows of outrageous fortune
Than fly to others that we know not of.
There's the respect must give us pause:
Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst,
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The law's delay, and the quietus which his pangs might take,
In the dead waste and middle of the night, when churchyards yawn
In customary suits of solemn black,
But that the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns,
Breathes forth contagion on the world,
And thus the native hue of resolution, like the poor cat i' the adage,
Is sicklied o'er with care,
And all the clouds that lowered o'er our housetops,
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action,
'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished, But soft you, the fair Ophelia:
Ope not thy ponderous and marble jaws,
But get thee to a nunnery — go!

Even in the midst of educational conferences, memories of Shakespeare can surface to provide entertainment and enjoyment for the delegates. The piece I have just read is from a well-known novel. Scarcely known at all is a skit on *Hamlet* based on the 'look-and-...' teaching method which, according to *Time Life* magazine, circulated at such a conference during the 1950s. The fact that it is little known must be my main excuse for reading it to you now. It goes like this:

See Hamlet run. Run, Hamlet, Run.
He is going to his mother's room.
"I have something to tell you mother,"
says Hamlet. "Uncle Claudius is bad. He gave my
father poison. Poison is not good. I do not like
poison. Do you like poison?"
"Oh, no, indeed!" says his mother. I do not like poison."
"Oh, there is Uncle Claudius," says Hamlet. "He is hiding
behind the curtain. Why is he hiding behind the curtain?
Shall I stab him? What fun it would be to stab him through
the curtain."
See Hamlet draw his sword. See Hamlet stab. Stab, Hamlet, Stab.
See Uncle Claudius' blood.
See Uncle Claudius' blood gushing.
Gush, Blood, Gush.
See Uncle Claudius fall. How funny he looks, stabbed.
Ha, ha, ha.

But it is not Uncle Claudius. It is Polonius. Polonius is Ophelia's father.

"You are naughty, Hamlet," says Hamlet's mother. "You have stabbed Polonius."

But Hamlet's mother is not cross. She is a good mother. Hamlet loves his mother very much. Hamlet loves his mother very, very much. Does Hamlet love his mother a little too much? Perhaps.

See Hamlet run. Run, Hamlet, Run.

"I am on my way to find Uncle Claudius," Hamlet says.

On the way he meets a man. "I am Laertes," says the man.

"Let us draw our swords. Let us duel."

See Hamlet and Laertes duel. See Laertes stab Hamlet. See Hamlet stab King Claudius.

See everybody wounded and bleeding and dying and dead.

What fun they are having!

Wouldn't you like to have fun like that?

In speaking today of my pleasure in Shakespeare I have emphasised a self-renewing quality in his works which comes, I believe, from a peculiar openness to interpretation, as if he himself had had the wisdom to leave his plays slightly unfinished, to hold back from final decisions so that future ages could read into them the preoccupations of their own times so that there is, as it were, a required dynamism of interaction between the works and their readers or audiences. It might be argued that this is a necessary aspect of dramatic art, yet I don't think we feel it to anything like the same extent of, for example, Ben Jonson, or Congreve, or Sheridan, or Shaw, or (to take two foreign dramatists who in this context count almost as honorary Englishmen) Chekhov or Ibsen.

Perhaps there is, somehow, a more mythic quality about Shakespeare that enables his plays to speak to generation after generation, even in translation and adaptation. But I don't want to imply that he has no identity, that he is simply a mirror in which we see nothing but our own reflection. There are meanings in Shakespeare, and values, and attitudes of mind with which we can identify or to which we can aspire. To try to identify these qualities is to risk turning them into empty commonplaces, because they can be experienced to the full only through the complex organisms in which they are embodied. Still, it seems right to try to identify some of the fundamental sources of my pleasure in Shakespeare. They include the value that he places upon the intelligence, upon wit, in its broadest sense, as a faculty by which man may seek to arrive at the truth about himself and the world around him as a means to the kind of self knowledge that is a necessary condition of self-realisation. We see this especially in characters such as Hamlet or Biron, Viola or Rosalind. But along with Shakespeare's celebration of wit goes his appreciation of humour, his enjoyment of human idiosyncrasy, of the spirit of carnival, of the world of cakes and ale that he celebrates in Sir Toby Belch and in Falstaff, his tolerant acknowledgement that unwitty, unintelligent people may nevertheless embody virtues that are lacking in their superiors. It is, after all, Dogberry who, however unwittingly, brings about the happy ending of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Bottom who has "a most rare vision", "a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was".

I respond, too, to Shakespeare's portrayal of heroism, of the physical courage of a Coriolanus or even a Macbeth, of the moral courage of an Isabella, a Desdemona, or a Cordelia, or, at the other end of the scale, of so insignificant a character as the tailor, Francis Feeble, in *2 Henry IV*, who, asked by Falstaff if he will "make as many holes in an enemy's battle" as he has "done in a woman's petticoat", responds "I will do my good will, sir; you can have no more".

I value Shakespeare's sense of the mystery of human life, of the inadequacy of human reason to explain the bases of our existence, of the folly, as Lafeu expresses it in *All's Well*

That Ends Well, of those who "make trifles of terrors, ensconcing (themselves) into seeming knowledge when (they) should submit (themselves) to unknown fear". Related to this is Shakespeare's awareness of the human need for illusion, of the value of a relaxing of the reason and an admission of intuition, of the need to temper wit with folly, of the transfiguring power of an imagination that can grow "to something of great constancy".

I value, too, Shakespeare's celebration of ordinary, everyday virtues, of gratitude, of the optimism that enables the Duke in *As You Like It* to "translate the stubbornness of fortune/Into so quiet and so sweet a style", of compassion and mercy. Shakespeare is above all the celebrant of love in all its manifestations — of the love that informs male friendships such as that of Hamlet and Horatio, or female ones such as that of Rosalind and Celia, of young love that includes sexual passion, such as that of Romeo and Juliet or Rosalind and Orlando, of the love of brother and sister, as in *Twelfth Night*, of mother and son as in *King John*, of father and daughter, in *Pericles* and *King Lear*, of husband and wife, in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*. And at the basis of all Shakespeare's work is a love of humanity. He knows to what heights it can reach: "What a piece of work is a man!" says Hamlet, "How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god — the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!" Yet he knows too that man is a "quintessence of dust", and he creates the archetypal image of Hamlet, the prince of men, staring into the empty skull of the dead Yorick. Only a very few characters in Shakespeare's plays seem purely evil — Aaron, in *Titus Andronicus*, Iago in *Othello*, perhaps a few others. Most even of Shakespeare's villains have a moment at which, with the sudden, brief opening up of a new perspective, we see them as desperately mortal, like the drunken murderer Barnardine in *Measure for Measure*. And the cowardly Parolles, in *All's Well That Ends Well*, is allowed his claim "There's place and means for every man alive". Shakespeare gives us a sense of the cosmos, of an unexplained and inexplicable infinity, but he gives us a sense, too, that every human being has his place in this cosmos, a right to develop his talents, to express his emotions, to realise his own being to its fullest extent.

This, for me, is all part of enjoying Shakespeare, and a reason why enjoyment of Shakespeare is, not just an occasional pleasure, but a permanent state of mind.

Jacobean Psychiatry: Edgar's Curative Stratagems

GUY BUTLER

"Why I do trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it." (4.5.33-4)

Religion and Despair

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries despair is seen as the abandonment of hope, a sinful refusal to practise one of the cardinal christian virtues. To be without hope in the world is to enter a mental prison in which life becomes loathsome and death desirable. It is the common prelude to suicide, an act condemned by state and church alike. To abandon hope in God's power to forgive sins, or to lose faith in the ultimate justice of Heaven, was to be guilty of blasphemy. The suicide, in rejecting God, sent himself to hell.

A good point of departure is Bunyan's characterisation of Despair in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. We recall how Christian and Hopeful are imprisoned in Doubting Castle by Giant Despair and his wife Diffidence (mistrust in God). Their aim is not to kill their captives outright (which would pose no threat to their souls) but to convince them that, as life is intolerable and their condition hopeless, they should seek escape in suicide (which would secure their souls for Hell). Their thoughts must be so darkened that "their only way would be, forthwith to make an end of themselves, either with Knife, Halter, or Poison. For why, said he, should you chuse life, seeing it is attended with so much bitterness?"¹

The prisoners' escape depends not upon exterior intervention but a change in their psyche. After an entire night spent in prayer, Christian finds he has a key to the dungeon in his own possession, the Promise of God. Recovery of faith and hope spells escape from Doubting Castle and the dungeon of Despair.

The terrible power of Despair is further emphasised by Bunyan. Doubting Castle takes seven days to demolish. "But it would a made you a wondered to have seen the dead bodies that lay here and there in the Castle Yard, and how full of dead mens Bones the Dungeon was".²

Jeremy Taylor, for whom despair is the greatest of afflictions, affirms in *Holy Dying* (3.3.1) the stubbornness of the condition to normal rational and religious treatment, together with its dire consequence for the soul

By despair we destroy the greatest comfort of our sorrows, and turn our sickness into the state of devils and perishing souls. No affliction is greater than despair: for that is it which makes hellfire and turns a natural evil into an intolerable; it hinders prayers, and fills up the intervals of sickness with worse torture; it makes all spiritual acts useless, and the office of spiritual comforters and guides impertinent.³

Its most frightening aspect is that it can appear to be reasonable, to be the product of a

met by Edgar, who, to save his own life, has assumed the disguise of a Bedlam beggar. With fine irony, he is chosen to lead his father to a cliff at Dover, from which Gloucester plans to commit suicide.

Edgar is thus presented with more than a medical problem. In Jacobean thinking, the eternal fate of a soul is at stake. Despair involves the afterlife, and implicates the powers of Heaven and Hell. Angels and fiends attend a despairing man.

Gloucester and the Gods

There is something unusual about Gloucester's despair. It is not frantic: he does not curse himself as Faustus does, or God, as Job is tempted to do. By the time his suicide attempt is made, he has grown morally beyond the point of condemning the gods; far from calumniating them, his prayer to them is patient, accepting, seemingly reconciled. His attitude towards the gods provides a key to understanding his despair, and the peculiar problem it presents to his 'doctor'. Let us watch his mental evolution in relation to the gods and Edgar's perception of it.

On the heath during the storm, Gloucester tells Kent (3.4) how Edgar's supposed betrayal has driven him "almost mad" (156) and "crazed my wits" (160). Edgar, in disguise, overhears these words. Within a matter of hours Gloucester is blinded and terribly enlightened, learning that Edgar, like himself, is the victim of the bastard, Edmund. Gloucester has been guilty of enormous folly and injustice to his legitimate son. This he acknowledges at once, calling for divine mercy.

O, my follies! Then Edgar was abused.
Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him! (3.7.89-90)

Shortly afterwards we see him rejecting the proffered help of a faithful old retainer. "I have no way, and therefore want no eyes" (4.1.18). What he needs above all things is contact with his son.

O dear son Edgar,
The food of thy abused father's wrath —
Might I but live to see thee in my touch
I'd say I had eyes again. (4.1.21-24)

Edgar, on stage, still disguised as Poor Tom, does not answer this appeal. Before he has time to make up his mind he hears his father utter the desolate words:

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods;
They kill us for their sport. (37-38)

The 'kind gods' to whom he had prayed for forgiveness in the previous scene have undergone a change, and are now sadistic and wanton. This despairing accusation of the gods must make the pious Edgar wonder not only about the state of his father's mind, but, more important, the condition of his soul. Such accusations of the gods were regarded as blasphemous and atheistic. What has brought this about? "How may this be?" he wonders. He retains his disguise, and deliberately re-enters his father's life with puzzling words, suggesting more than the need for explanations.

Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,
Ang'ring itself and others. (39-40)

He is under compulsion ("must") to take on the play-acting role of fool ("play fool") to his distressed father ("sorrow"); a bad trade, painful to himself and not likely to be approved

normal mind. "Despair assents as firmly and strongly as faith itself". It is however a sickness of the mind which makes us view our lot as insupportable when it is not. "I hope it is a disease of judgement, and not an intolerable condition, that I am falling into".⁴ According to Taylor, the cure must be directed at the seat of the disease, the judgement. The success of the healing argument will depend on what the judgement of the patient will find persuasive: a point of some significance for Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, and particularly for *King Lear*. In play after play the battle is won or lost in the mind of the hero. Iago conquers Othello by manipulating his thoughts.

If to persist in despair was a mortal sin, as it set limits to God's mercy, and to die in a state of despair was damnation for the soul, it follows that the Devil will use all his cunning to induce this mental condition: a strategy which is dramatised in *Doctor Faustus*, where, in a scene which is emblematic of the fact that the devil is ever at hand to help with suicide, Mephistopheles gives Faustus a dagger.⁵

In *King Lear* itself (a play in which there are two suicide attempts) the Foul Fiend is described by Poor Tom as ready, day and night, with means of suicide — "that has laid knives under his pillow and halters in his pew, set ratsbane by his potage" (3.4.48-49).

So, too, the Fiend's agents, evil men, will do all in their power to induce this same condition in those they wish to destroy — not only bodily, but eternally. Physical death is not as significant as the death of the soul. The most memorable case is that of Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*, who torments his sister with counterfeit waxen images of her children's bodies, as though dead, "To bring her to despair" (4.1.116). In spite of further ingenious theatrical devices, Ferdinand does not succeed. The Duchess may be tempted to curse the stars, but not heaven. As the executioners prepare to strangle her, she gives instructions which show her soul's victory:

Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength
Must pull down heaven upon me:-
Yet stay; heaven-gates are not so highly arch'd
As princes' palaces, they that enter there
Must go upon their knees.⁶

The state of mind of a person at the moment of death was seen as crucial to the wellbeing of the soul in the next world. Worst of all the horrors against which the ghost of Hamlet's father cries is the unprepared manner in which he was sent to his account. It is a horror which makes his son hesitate to kill Claudius kneeling at his prayers, a posture which suggests readiness for heaven rather than hell. Indeed, the dread was common enough to warrant a petition in Cranmer's *Litany* ("... from battle and murder, and from dying suddenly and unprepared"). Jeremy Taylor puts the attitude with his customary lucidity:

... a sudden death is but a sudden joy if it take a man in the state and exercise
of virtue; and it is only then an evil when it finds the man unready . . .

and

... if Job had cursed God and so died; or when a man sits down in despair,
and in the accusation and calumny of the divine mercy, they make their
night sad, and stormy, and eternal.

In *King Lear* Gloucester is driven to despair not merely by his vicious blinding and ejection from his own castle, but by the revelations which accompany his plunging into darkness and exile. The son whom he trusted, Edmund, is responsible for his betrayal; and the son whom he wished to destroy, Edgar, is innocent. His physical blinding stems from his own intolerable folly. It is in this helpless and despairing condition that he is

Is wretchedness deprived that benefit
To end itself by death? (61-2)

Edgar, having changed roles and voices once again, has assured him that "Thy life's a miracle" (55) and advises him:

Therefore, thou happy father,
Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours
Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee. (73-5)

And Gloucester accepts this further modification in his view of the gods: the miracle has persuaded him that, impossible as his miserable life is, he is precious in their sight, and things which are intolerable to man are honourable in theirs. He is content to have been thus preserved to continue the conflict. He will bear the assaults of pain until it surrenders and ceases.

Henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
'Enough, enough,' and die. (75-7)

Edgar ends the movement with a key sentence. "Bear free and patient thoughts" (79). Suicide is induced by imprisoned and impatient thoughts. The cure depends on changing the climate of the mind.

What rational arguments could possibly have altered Gloucester's thoughts? Nothing, but some supernatural argument, such as a miracle. To this 'miracle', which has given much offence, we must now turn.

The manner in which Edgar lends himself to his father's suicidal despair in order to cure it will always puzzle critics of *King Lear*.

Why I do trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it. (33-4)

The first problem is posed by the way he sustains his original guise as Bedlam beggar beyond the point when many critics believe he should declare himself to his blinded father and thus fulfil one of his great needs — "to see thee in my touch" (4.1.23). As he accuses himself of maintaining his disguise too long (5.3.184), I do not propose to excuse him except to point out that at this point he is still in danger of his life, first from the "bloody proclamation" which his father had invoked against him and then from his usurping brother Edmund, who would kill him proclamation or no. Initially he has good reason for keeping his disguise impenetrable: to save his life.

It is the second deception which poses the greater problem: the fabrication of the false cliff from which his father 'commits suicide', and the concomitant bogus miracle by which Edgar temporarily restores his faith in the goodness of the gods, and so cures his despair.

There were, however, two contemporary professions which practised well-intentioned theatrical deceptions and had no scruples in resorting to devious, somewhat theatrical devices to save lives and/or souls: the medical profession, and the underground church. We shall spend considerable time on the doctors presently. A brief preliminary note on the clerics will be useful here.

The Elizabethan far-from-happy compromise between Catholic and Protestant causes drove priests underground. They were proscribed and, when caught, were frequently tortured; many died horribly. Man-hunts were common in Elizabethan and Jacobean times; and many people must have sympathised with their fugitives and victims.

For Jesuits in particular, disguise was essential. They sometimes adopted a costume at the opposite end of the social scale to that assumed by Edgar. For instance, John

of elsewhere. The audience is being prepared for a complex and unusual theatrical role. The key words are "play fool". They clear Edgar's credentials. The fool seldom loses the sympathy and trust of the audience, and one of his accepted functions was to relieve the grief of his patron by shocking and outrageous utterances.

Gloucester, having secured a guide whom no one will think to persecute, finds a destination: Dover Cliff. "To journey there and to precipitate himself from that height will terminate a pointless life." Having established that Poor Tom is prepared to take him there, he gives him an advance payment:

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues
Have humbled to all strokes. (58-9)

The heavens have changed their aspect once more, and are seen now as having a moral purpose: to humble man. They have also taught Gloucester to sympathise with and be generous to such afflicted people.

That I am wretched
Makes thee the happier. Heavens deal so still. (59-60)

Acknowledging his guilt, not only as having been luxurious and lustful, but as having subverted the just will of the gods, he prays for a better distribution of wealth. This is a rapid and major change in his view of man's relationship with the heavens: from helpless fly, to a moral being, educated through suffering into a vision of social justice.

His subsequent description of the cliff leaves his son in no doubt that his father plans to commit suicide: an intention which must horrify him. What must he do now? There are two obvious choices: to drop his disguise and say, "I'm Edgar your son. I can't do it", or to keep his disguise and lead him to the cliff's edge. But he opts for neither. He does something utterly unexpected. He fabricates an imaginary cliff, allows his father to 'commit suicide', and then 'resurrects' him from the dead.

In 4.5 we witness Gloucester's 'suicide' from the imaginary cliff. Just before he leaps, he kneels and prays to the gods, whose power and authority he accepts.

O you mighty gods,
This world I do renounce, and in your sights
Shake patiently my great affliction off!
If I could bear it longer, and not fall
To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
My snuff and loathed part of nature should
Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O bless him! — (4.5.34-40)

It is a fine, dignified prayer. This suicide is not done on furious impulse; it is not a case of "dying suddenly and unprepared". It is deliberate, and, if we may use the expression of a blind man, wide-eyed. His arguments seem impeccable. He calls the gods to witness this act of considered renunciation of the life they have given him. Wishing to die at peace with them, patiently accepting his lot, he is ending his suffering (rather than his life) because he dreads that further affliction will cause him again to question their dispensation. He does not wish to see them 'as wanton boys' again. Were it not for this risk, he would endure the small remainder of his miserable life. There is none of the terror of Faustus here, and none of the mental torment of Lady Macbeth.

There is no rational argument against Gloucester's line of thinking. It is the Stoic position beautifully expressed. But it is a position which Edgar does not accept. We must stay alive, obedient to the will of the gods, until body and soul are parted in their good time, not ours. When Gloucester discovers he is still alive after his 'suicide', he cries:

Marvin Rosenberg's analysis of the cliff scene (4.5) in *The Masks of King Lear* (1972). He approaches the play from a typical modern (behaviourist?) point of view. Sanity depends on the senses *not* being deceived: reality resides in the physical, objective world, out there, *that* is our anchor. (One is entitled to doubt if this was so for the Renaissance, for whom the material world was secondary to the world of the spirit.)⁹

Gloucester wants to reach the top of his hill — an ironic top; Edgar pulls him along — look how we labour. Edgar is fooling a blind old man, deceiving his senses: his cruelty is mysterious and provoking to a naive spectator. Why lie to a suffering father?

And:

Edgar's cruelty cuts deep. Gloucester, clinging to any shred of certainty he can find, repeats his belief that Tom speaks better than he did — and in fact Tom very obviously does — but Edgar boldly, boldly denies it . . . He seems still in Tom's sullen mood.

You're much deceiv'd: in nothing am I chang'd
But in my garments.

You're much deceived — this is the only true thing said: the rest is lies — and worse than lies: it unsettles Gloucester's trust in his own perceptions.

And again:

But Gloucester must believe, must stand at his imaginary verge, must reward his beggar-son, must — characteristically — ask the fairies and gods to prosper him, must ask to be left alone and again Edgar deceives, seeming to go far off, but staying to rationalize the torture: he trifles with his father's despair — to cure it, he says. But, as he exacerbated Lear's madness, he has — perhaps still touched by the shock of his pretend-madness? — intensified Gloucester's despair.

Further:

"False miracles" were being exposed by such contemporaries as Harsnett and King James himself. Elton observes; if Edgar's falsehood here had the same connotation of fraud to Jacobans as Poor Tom's madness, his unkindness to his father cuts more sharply, and emphasizes his curious deviousness: he is a deliberate deceiver; if his ends are better than Edmund's, his means are, by design, as false.¹⁰

This view of Edgar as a complex self-tortured and torturing son is questionable. On every re-reading of the play he seems to come out more trustful, more noble, more courageous, more impeccable in his intentions: his only short-comings are youth, gullibility, inexperience, a certain too confident assurance in his gods, whose loyal, if sometimes priggish soldier he is. If his motives in this scene puzzle us, we have to ask ourselves whether we are looking at the scene with the right eyes. Perhaps we need to remove our twentieth century spectacles and reach for an Elizabethan pair.

Suicide in Shakespeare's Source, Sidney's Arcadia

We may, perhaps, grasp Shakespeare's intention more clearly if we revert briefly to the acknowledged source for this scene, Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, Book 2, Chap. 10: "The

Gerard, in his *Autobiography* describes how he disguised himself as a fashionable, card-playing, hawking and hunting gentleman, which gave him the *entré* to elevated circles. This enabled him to bring a young noble to the brink of conversion:

There [in his Library] I left him at his prayers, telling him that I would return almost immediately with a priest. Downstairs I changed into my soutane and returned completely transformed. He was speechless with amazement — no such thing had crossed his mind. His brother and I explained that I had to act this way both for safety's sake, and still more to trick the devil and snatch souls from his grasp. He surely realised that. It was the only way I could have conversed freely with him and men of his rank, and unless I did this I could never bring them back to the Church. . . .⁸

"To trick the devil and snatch souls from his grasp" — this is exactly what Edgar sees himself as doing. As Poor Tom, in acceding to his father's suicidal plan, he is playing along with the devil; but he does this in order to trick him — to lead him as he had asked to the edge of a 'cliff', from which he may leap in safety. He then approaches the 'dead man' at the cliff's foot and persuades him that his accomplice was indeed the Devil.

EDGAR

As I stood here below, methoughts his eyes
Were two full moons. He had a thousand noses,
Horns whelked and waved like the enraged sea.
It was some fiend. (4.5.69-72)

* * *

GLOUCESTER

. . . That thing you speak of,
I took it for a man. Often 'twould say
'The fiend, the fiend!' He led me to that place. (77-79)

The victim of the deceit finds it easy enough to believe that his accomplice in a suicide attempt must have been the Devil. Edgar as 'doctor' has exorcised suicidal thoughts by a trick, or, as the play has it, by "trifling" with the disease, by humouring the patient, by letting him have his way.

It is a very serious trick indeed. It depends on the practitioner's ability to gain the collaboration of the imagination of his patient; it depends also on his own belief in the creative imagination, what is sometimes called 'conceit', which was believed to exert extraordinary power over the body. People were known to have died upon mere anticipation of death or other great emotion. For example, in *The Winter's Tale* (3.2.143-4), we hear that Mamillius "with mere conceit and fear/Of the Queen's speed, is gone." As Edgar bends over the unconscious body of his father, he expresses anxiety on this very point.

(*Aside*) And yet I know not how conceit may rob
The treasury of life, when life itself
Yields to the theft. Had he been where he thought,
By this had thought been past. — Alive or dead? (4.5.42-45)

Edgar gives primacy to the world of thought. He uses his own hopeful 'conceit' to lighten the despair-darkened 'conceit' of his father.

The difficulties which Edgar's behaviour presents to many critics are well illustrated in

pitifully enameled with blood, and in the midst of it, the head of the most beautiful *Philoclea*. The horribleness of the mischief was such, as *Pyrocles* could not at first believe his own senses, but bent his woful eyes to discern it better: where too well he might see it was *Philoclea's* selfe, having no veile, but beautie, over the face, which still appeared it to be alive: so did those eyes shine, even as they were wont. . . .

This sight induces not pity, or amazement, or sorrow, but "a wilde furie of desperate agonie, so that he cried out, O tyraunt heaven, traytor earth, blinde providence; no justice, how is this done? how is this suffered? hath this world a government?" These despairing questions are the prelude to attempted suicide: "And with that (caried with the madnes of anguish, not having a redier way to kill himselfe) he ranne as hard as ever he could, with his head against the wall, with intention to braine himself. . . ."¹³

Though *Cecropia's* cunning deceit to bring him to despair¹⁴ has succeeded, *Pyrocles's* attempt at suicide fails — because his foot slips, and he merely stuns himself. This accident preserves him for *Philoclea's* exposure of the devilish device and her eloquent arguments which bring about his recovery.

Shakespeare seems to ask: Cannot these theatrical arts be used to cure rather than kill? His *Edgar* seems to think so. But how, since *Gloucester*, his patient, is blind? The deceit must be practised through the ear, not the eye, by the power of words to create a world in the imagination of his patient. *Edgar* builds *Dover Cliff*, image by image, as skilfully as *Cecropia* her pageant. The senses of both 'victims' are deliberately deceived, in one case to induce despair, in the other to cure it.

Both manipulators, *Cecropia* and *Edgar*, understand the mental condition which they wish to induce or exorcise. In *A Treatise of Man's Imagination*, the great Puritan divine, *William Perkins*, is explicit on the difficulties of people disposed to despair by self-pity. They are susceptible to various "ill thoughts, the chief of which is that there is no God". This condition of atheism — so often seen as the prelude to suicide — includes denials of God's nature, such as "there is no Providence in God, whereby he ordereth and disposeth all things" and "there is no justice in God".¹⁵

This, I submit, is the condition of both *Pyrocles* ("O tyrant heaven, traitor earth, blind providence, no justice") and *Gloucester* ("As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods; / They kill us for their sport"). *Perkins* argues that men fall into despair because the afflicted imagination makes it difficult for them to see their real condition:

. . . the reason is, the want of judgement rightly to discern the state of their affliction, and the want of strength to support it as it is *for if thou be faint in the day of adversitie thy strength is small.*

For the remedie of this evil thought, first we must seek to rectify the imagination, by bringing the mind to a right conceit of the affliction: this is a speciall course to be observed in dealing with them that be oppressed with any distresse: for a strong conceit of a mans own miserie doth many times more hurt than miserie itself: therefore be sure the judgement be well informed, and then the cure is halfe wrought, and the cross half removed.¹⁶

I suggest that both *Sidney* and *Shakespeare* would have agreed with *Perkins*: for both *Philoclea* and *Edgar* (and *Friar Lawrence* when faced by the frantic *Romeo*, *R & J* 3.3) cure their respective despairing patients by first bringing their minds to a "right conceit of their affliction". *Philoclea's* is the easier task — simply to unmask *Cecropia's* "fruitless sophistry". It is, however, a sobering thought that a man might commit suicide because his imagination has been driven to despair by a *trompe-l'oeil*.

The cases of *Pyrocles* and *Gloucester* differ in many respects. *Pyrocles's* attempt at suicide is perfectly authentic. So is *Gloucester's*. *Pyrocles's* is not successful because

pitifull state, and storie of the Paphlagonian unkinde King, and his kinde sonne, first related by the son, then by the blind father." Shakespeare's indebtedness to this source is not in dispute; but his departures from it may be significant.

The kind son, Leonatus, like Edgar, is determined to help his blinded father; but, unlike Edgar, he has revealed his identity, refusing to be party to his father's suicide attempt. But with what result? Has it in any way mitigated the Father's misery or determination to destroy himself? Not at all. "Well *Leonatus* (said he) since I cannot perswade thee to lead me to that which should end my griefe, & thy trouble, let me now entreat thee to leave me: feare not, my miserie cannot be greater than it is, & nothing doth become me but miserie; feare not the danger of my blind steps, I cannot fall worse than I am. And doo not I pray thee, doo not obstinately continue to infect thee with my wretchednes. But flie, flie from this region, onely worthy of me."

In vain the son pleads "... while I have power to doo you service, I am not wholly miserable." His goodness and suffering only exacerbate the misery of the father. "Ah, my sonne (said he, and with that he groned, as if sorrow strave to breake his harte,) how evill fits it me to have such a sonne, and how much doth thy kindnesse upbraide my wickednesse?"¹¹

Such might have been Gloucester's response had Edgar declared himself too soon. Recounting his folly to the two Princes provides the Paphlagonian King with no relief from his despair. He feels himself to be a threat to his kind son, whose "kind office" is to him as "unspeakable griefe; not onely because his kindnes is a glasse evē to my blind eyes, of my naughtines, but that above all griefes, it grieves me he should desperatly adventure the losse of his soul-deserving life for mine..." His self-rejection is absolute. The kind son is praised but his request denied. He turns from him to the two strange Princes for help with euthanasia: "... let me obtaine that of you, which my sonne denies me: for never was there more pity in saving any, than in ending me; both because therein my agonies shall ende, and so shall you preserve this excellent young man, who els wilfully folowes his owne ruine." This request, to be led to the edge of the cliff, "... greatly moved the two Princes to compassion, which could not stay in such harts as theirs without seeking remedie."

But Sidney does not entrust us with what remedies they considered. What on earth is likely to change the king's state of mind? Sidney evades the question by making his plot or history intervene in the form of a murderous foray by Plexirtus (the bastard son — Edmund's analogue). The king and his suicidal despair are conveniently dropped from the story for an unspecified time. We next hear of him when the fighting is over: "In which season the blind King (having in the chief cittie of his Realme, set the crowne upō his son *Leonatus* head) with many tears (both of joy and sorrow) setting forth to the whole people, his owne fault & his sonnes vertue, after he had kist him, and forst his sonne to accept honour of him ... evē in a moment died..."¹² The cure for his despair has been wrought by military and political victories in which he has no part.

But what if such an act of God or historical miracle does not occur? In his modification of his source, Shakespeare accepts the challenge. The only course open to a son with a father in such a predicament must be to attempt a psychological miracle which will overcome the tyranny of despair. It will have to go beyond stoicism into dimensions of acceptance, of trust in the divine will reminiscent of Job's cry, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him". Edgar, (Shakespeare's version of Leonatus) does this so successfully that Gloucester achieves a blessed death on the fringes of a battlefield where political issues are still in doubt.

The *Arcadia* provides us with another case of suicidal despair which may help us. In Book 3, Chap.22, para.5 the imprisoned Pyrocles is cunningly deluded into believing that his mistress, Philoclea, is dead. From the window of his prison, he looks into a courtyard where he sees

... seven or eight persons in a cluster upon the scaffold: who by & by retiring themselves, nothing was to be seene thereupon, but a bason of golde,

The same book which is given as the source for the classical definition of Lear's affliction — *hysterica passio* — (Edward Jorden's *A Brief Discourse of a Disease called the Suffocation of the Mother*) — provides a point of departure. Jorden confidently asserts that *hysterica passio* is generated by great emotional disturbances, as are many other afflictions. He ends his little book with some pertinent observations on the body/mind nexus.

Lastly the perturbations of the minde are often times to blame for this and many other diseases. For seeing we are not masters of our own affections, wee are like battered Citties without walles, or shippes tossed in the Sea, exposed to all manner of assaults and daungers, even to the ouerthrow of our owne bodies.

We have infinite examples among our Historiographers, and Phisitions of such as haue dyed upon ioy, griefe, loue, feare, shame, and such like perturbations of the mind: and of others that vpon the same causes have fallen into grievous diseases: . . .¹⁸

Jorden lists the normal remedies for great perturbations: "anger and iealousie are to be appeased by good counsell and perswasions: hatred and malice by religious instructions, feare by encouragements, loue by inducing hatred, or by permitting them to enioy their desires, etc." He then, with the backing of both Galen and Aesculapius, turns to perturbations which are cured by "stratagems":

To which end also other phisitions have used diuers sorts of fallacies to encounter the melancholike conceits of their patients.

So that if we cannot moderate these perturbations of the minde, by reason and persuasions, or by alluring their mindes another way, we may politickely confirme them in their fantasies, that wee may the better fasten some cure vpon them: . . .¹⁹

I suggest that this is what Edgar is doing. 'Playing fool to sorrow', and 'trifling with despair' are healing stratagems. He doubts if he can by reason persuade his father to abandon his suicidal despair: so he 'politickely confirms him in his fantasy' the better to fasten his cure upon him. That cure is, of course, theological: his religious father must be allowed to go through with his suicidal plan but in such a way that he miraculously survives it, in order that his faith in the goodness of the gods, and so in his own value, may be restored to him.

Our credulity may be strained when a son deceives a blind parent into believing that he has been led to the clifftop not by a Bedlam beggar, but by an attendant devil, particularly as he himself has played the beggar part; but Jorden gives us an example of a child curing a parent's fixation by a similar 'diabolical' deceit.

Cardan tels of a Gentlewoman, who finding herself vexed with many grievous *Symptoms*, imagined that the Diuell was the aũthor thereof, and by Iosephus Niger was cured by procuring her son to make her beleeeue that he saw three diuels in her looking glasse, & one great one to driue them out.²⁰

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* corroborates this practice of deceitful stratagems as wide-spread (Part 2, Sec.2, Mem.6, Sub-section 2):

Sometimes again, by some fained lye, strange newes, witty device, artificial invention, it is not amiss to deceive them. *As they hate those, saith Alexander, that neglect or deride, so they will give ear to such as will sooth*

his foot slips. Gloucester's is not successful because the cliff is an imaginary one. Pyrocles's healer, Philoclea, appears after the failed attempt; Gloucester's healer, Edgar, pretends to collaborate in the attempt, but instead of leading his 'patient' to a cliff top, persuades the blind man, by all the arts of language, that he has reached the cliff brink above the sea when he is on the level stage. The attempt is made. Edgar then ceases to be Poor Tom, and plays the role of an observer of the suicide from the base of the cliff—which he re-creates from that vantage point. To Gloucester there are now two (false) witnesses to the (false) cliff from which he has fallen. He accepts the fiction of his deceived imagination for properly attested fact. He must, logically, also accept that he has been saved by the gods. "Thy life's a miracle" says Edgar, and he consents.

Mental Illness and 16th Century Medical Practice

Why has Edgar done this? His main reason is clear: to convert his father from his 'atheistic' belief that the gods are wanton and that he is a fly; to conviction that, wretched as he is, the gods care for him. Edgar is successful in changing his father's *thoughts*.

EDGAR

... Therefore, thou happy father,
Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours
Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

GLOUCESTER

I do remember now. Henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
'Enough, enough,' and die. (4.6.72-77)

Edgar further advises him to "Bear free and patient thoughts" (80) and counters his later relapse into despair with a similar emphasis on the right mental attitude to disaster:¹⁷

EDGAR

King Lear hath lost, he and his daughter ta'en.
Give me thy hand. Come on.

GLOUCESTER

No further, sir. A man may rot even here.

EDGAR

What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
Their going hence even as their coming hither.
Ripeness is all. Come on.

GLOUCESTER

And that's true, too. (5.2.6-11)

We are spectators, then, of a successful psychodrama, staged by a son for the therapeutic purpose of changing "the strong conceit" which his despairing father has of his "own miserie".

This may sound like projecting modern psychological techniques onto the Elizabethan stage rather than the promised attempt to look at the scene through Elizabethan spectacles. But the medical books of the day reveal that Edgar is following contemporary procedures for dealing with melancholy despair as well known as Cordelia's employment of sedation to cure insanity. Edgar, then, is not being precociously inventive; he is following accepted practice.

Edgar as Doctor

A mind obsessed or self-imprisoned presented Elizabethan doctors with a stubborn problem. Accepting limits to their powers, they were ready to refer to the supernatural in extreme cases, such as Lady Macbeth: a very different suicide case, at which it will be useful to glance for a moment.

The Doctor in *Macbeth* ascribes the sleep-walking of this murderess to a "perturbation in nature" (5.1.9-10). Having learnt of her complicity in the murder of the king, he confesses at once "This disease is beyond my practice" (56). The cure lies outside the realm of nature: "Unnatural deeds/Do breed unnatural troubles;..." (68-9). The guilt of regicide cannot be treated medicinally. "More needs she the divine than the physician" (71).

We next see the Doctor with Macbeth, who appeals to him with anguished eloquence.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the fraught bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart? (5.3.42-47)

The Doctor's reply repeats the limitations of medicine in such cases. "Therein the patient/ Must minister to himself." At which Macbeth cries, "Throw physic to the dogs;..." We note his emphasis on thoughts — "mind diseased", "memory", "brain", "bosom", "heart". What are the similarities and differences in the cases of Gloucester and Lady Macbeth?

First, though Gloucester is guilty of various terrible follies, he is not a murderer; and while he may feel the need to expiate his sins, he does receive the moral relief of admitting his culpability, openly and at once. Lady Macbeth has no such release. She is a murderess and can tell no one.

Second, Gloucester's mind is not 'perturbed' as hers is. He remains rational throughout. He is devastatingly lucid, and there is no earthly argument that can refute him. He is, humanly speaking, in an impossible situation. While his son Edgar accepts the reality of 'men's impossibilities', he believes that these can be divine opportunities. He is convinced of two things: first, the power of thought to change our view of ourselves and the world; second, all rational evidence to the contrary, the gods are just, and human suffering can be transformed by endurance into a vindicating plenitude of soul: "Ripeness is all".

If Lady Macbeth's Doctor acknowledges the limits of natural medicine, Edgar as doctor acknowledges the limits of reason and its appeals to the natural world. The Doctor believes that great guilt can only be treated with Divine forgiveness; Edgar believes that great misery can only be made tolerable by faith in Divine acceptance and approval.

While the Doctor can do nothing about Lady Macbeth's condition (he is not a priest), Edgar finds himself in a position of total physical and mental power over his helpless, suicidally miserable father. He uses this power to cure his despair by "trifling" with it: deliberately fabricating a miracle to supply the reassurance of Divine concern which his father needs to make his affliction bearable.

The miracle, however, depends on the faith of both doctor and patient. There is never any doubt about Gloucester's belief in the gods. He is a deeply religious if not superstitious man. What is in question is not the existence but the nature of the gods. Do they care for each individual? For a foolish, worldly father who has misjudged both his sons? An Earl powerless, blinded, and deprived of his earldom? An old man without place, family or home, a bit of flotsam on the heaving tide of civil war? Edgar's miracle gives an affirmative answer. The gods "make them honours/Of

them up. If they say they have swallowed froggs, or a snake, by all means grant it, and tell them you can easily cure it: . . . Forestus (*obs.lib.1*) had a melancholy patient, who thought he was dead: *he put a fellow in a chest, like a dead man, by his beds side, and made him reare himself a little, and eat; the melancholy man asked the counterfeit, whether dead men use to eat meat? he told him yea; whereupon he did eat likewise, and was cured.* Lemnius (*lib.2.cap.6 de 4. complex.*) hath many such instances, and Jovianus Pontanus (*lib.4.cap.2 of Wisd.*) of the like.²¹

King Lear is not the only Jacobean play in which an elaborate stratagem is employed to heal an abnormal condition of mind. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (Shakespeare and Fletcher) the Jailer's daughter falls in love with the prince Palamon, and helps him to escape. We watch her progressive decline into a parody of Ophelia. Her sexual fantasies are distressingly patent. She is saved from suicide by her uncle. A good portion (119-150) of 4.1 is devoted to humouring her fancy (in a manner reminiscent of the part-playing in the trial scene of *King Lear*, 3.6). The brother instructs the Jailer and others to play along with her fantasies:

By no means cross her, she is then distempered
far worse than now she shows. (4.1.118-9)

Humouring the afflicted soul, however, does not seem to help. The Father, dreading that "She's lost/Past all cure" (4.1.137-8) calls in a Doctor, whose theory and practice are germane to Edgar's proceedings. "Tis not an engrafted madness," he says, "but a most thick and profound melancholy" (4.3.48) and "I think she has a perturbed mind, which I cannot minister to" (56-7). Learning that she still has a faithful wooer, he proposes to cure her by stratagem. The wooer must assume the name Palamon and play the part with conviction. He must call in her companions to collaborate in the deceit, summing up his treatment neatly enough: "It is a falsehood she is in, which is with falsehoods to be combated" (90-1). In 5.4 the Doctor indicates that the final stages of the cure may entail dishonesty: "Lie with her if she ask you" (19). The father is outraged, but the professional man continues, "Yes, in the way of cure" (20). The upright Father insists: "But first, by your leave, I'th'way of honesty" (20-1). The Doctor's apparently unscrupulous empiricism has shocked many:

That's but a niceness —
Ne'er cast your child away for honesty.
Cure her first this way, then if she will be honest,
She has the path before her. (21-24)

The seduction is successful, and so is the cure. "Sir, she's well restored/And to be married shortly" (5.4.27).

So, in this play of 1613, a Doctor recommends, and a father becomes party to, an elaborate deceit to cure a daughter's madness. Is Shakespeare (co-author of the play) likely to have consented to this practice if the audiences of *King Lear* (1606-) had found Edgar's stratagem unacceptable? The same may be asked of *The Winter's Tale* (1611), in which the saintly Hermione practises a benign deceit upon her penitent husband. With Paulina she produces the stratagem of a marble statue coming to life — which is quite as improbable and miraculous as Edgar's cliff and suicide game, and as effective.

Edgar's success at Dover Cliff is no easy once-off miracle, however. Gloucester has to be cared for across an extensive no-mans-land, where he is abandoned, and rescued again and again by Edgar in yet other guises — a pilgrimage of which the purpose must surely be educative: as much as to say, Through all misfortunes, see how Providence provides you with a guide and protector.

OLD MAN

Alack, sir! he is mad.

GLOU.

'Tis the time's plague when madmen
lead the blind. (4.1.46-7)

A physically blind man being led by a mentally blind man is very close to an ancient icon of folly: when the blind lead the blind they shall both fall into the ditch.

But the audience knows that Tom O'Bedlam is not mad; he is Right Reason forced into disguise by the folly of others. Far from his being the victim of the capricious heavens, as Gloucester thinks he is, he is Edgar, a great believer in the justice of the gods; he is an agent of Providence, not a fellow-victim of Fortune. So what we have before us is something very dear to some Elizabethans, not least to Raleigh. Men in their ignorance ascribe to the stars or to Fortune actions and events which are, in fact, the workings of God through Providence. Men think they are calling the tune, but the initiative has passed into

107. *Erreur.*



From the first English translation of Cesare Ripa's Iconologia (1611), with new illustrations by Isaac Fuller, published by Pierce Tempest, 1709.

men's impossibilities" (4.5.73-4).

What purpose of the gods can Gloucester serve? Do they really wish him to endure his "great affliction" (4.6.36), his "snuff and loathed part of nature" (39), his "'nighted life" (4.3.13) patiently until they see fit to terminate it?

Edgar, who believes with Aristotle that men are soldiers serving a divine strategy, and that suicide is desertion, devises the miracle which persuades his father that the gods do, in fact, want him to go on enduring until their good time.

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
So many fathom down precipitating
Thou'dst shivered like an egg. But thou dost breathe,
Hast heavy substance, bleed'st not, speak'st, art sound.
Ten masts a-length make not the altitude
Which thou hast perpendicularly fell.
Thy life's a miracle. (4.5.49-55)

To Gloucester it *is* a miracle; it succeeds in changing his mind. The desire to escape affliction by suicide was wrong; and, with a little encouragement from Edgar, he now sees his assistant in the attempt, the Bedlam, as a devil incarnate.

Henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
'Enough, enough,' and die. That thing you speak of,
I took it for a man. Often 'twould say
'The fiend, the fiend!' He led me to that place. (75-9)

Edgar's encouragement — "Bear free and patient thoughts" — reminds us once more that the cure for despair lies in changing the climate of the mind.

The Unifying Allegory

But even when one has recovered what one can of Elizabethan medical practice, one has to go a stage further. The fantastic psychodrama which Edgar improvises can be seen as the fleshing out of something more schematic.

It is useful to recall the non-realistic symbolical nature of Jacobean theatre. The great allegorical tradition lies just below the surface in many scenes, and time and again we are presented with animated moral emblems.

Gloucester is portrayed as a religious but superstitious man, who believes too much in the stars; he is quick to explain Lear's behaviour and Edgar's supposed treachery in terms of eclipses of the sun and moon (1.2.100 ff). He is, as his sharp son Edmund says, credulous. When he enters the stage after his blinding (4.1.10) he is not unlike Ripa's emblem of Error from *Iconologia* (see illustration):

A Man in a Pilgrims Habit, groping out his Way blindfold. The Cloth blinding him signifies mans Falling into Error, when his Mind is darkened by worldly Concerns; the Staff, his being apt to *stumble*; if he take not the Guides of the Spirit, and of right Reason.²³

Gloucester's mind *was* darkened by worldly concerns; he *did* stumble when he saw. He is now physically blind, groping out his way. The mental illumination he has so far received is of the diabolical evil of Edmund, and of his own folly. What he needs desperately are "the Guides of the Spirit, and of right Reason". These present themselves to him in the gentle Old Man, whom he rejects, choosing instead Tom O'Bedlam.

The "New Historicism": Approaching Shakespeare's Practice

BRIAN CHEADLE

I want first to describe, and then to attempt something of an assessment of, what has become an influential new way of approaching Shakespeare — the "new historicism". I am thinking in particular of the work of a number of American critics, especially Stephen Greenblatt, Steven Mullaney, Louis Montrose, Stephen Orgel and Leonnard Tennenhouse; and less pointedly of British critics such as Jonathan Dollimore who prefer to call themselves "cultural materialists".¹ I assume an audience not all of which has an academic sophistication in assessing different approaches to literature, so I will initially be sketching in a background, well known to some of you, with rather sweeping strokes. You must forgive me if what I say verges on caricature at times. I will not be able to avoid some rather large general points, but to make it easier for the uninitiated I will take a particular passage and pin my comments as far as possible on different ways of thinking about it.

The passage comes from *King Lear* (4.1.50-66). The sightless Gloucester, in a state very close to despair, finds himself alone on the heath with the supposedly mad beggar, "poor Tom", who is, unbeknown to him, his son Edgar in disguise.

- Glou. Sirrah, naked fellow, —
Edg. Poor Tom's a-cold. [*Aside.*]
I cannot daub it further.
Glou. Come hither, fellow.
Edg. [*Aside.*] And yet I must. Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed.
Glou. Know'st thou the way to Dover?
Edg. Both stile and gate, horse-way and foot-path. Poor Tom hath been scar'd out of his good wits: bless thee, good man's son, from the foul fiend! Five fiends have been in poor Tom at once; as Obidicut, of lust; Hoberdidance, prince of dumbness; Mahu, of stealing; Modo, of murder; Flibbertigibbet, of mopping and mowing; who since possesses chambermaids and waiting-women. So, bless thee, master!
Glou. Here, take this purse, thou whom the heav'ns' plagues Have humbled to all strokes: that I am wretched Makes thee the happier: Heavens, deal so still!

I suppose it is, or has been, second nature to many of us to assume that the way to discuss such a passage is first to bring out its immediate poignancy within the dramatic action, and then to relate it to the rest of the play, making connections at the level of theme, imagery, character and action. Thus we would first dwell, for example, on the way that Gloucester in his mutilated state achieves a dignity and consideration for the meannest of his fellow sufferers that seems to justify Edgar's love and devotion even in making them the more painful. We might then pick up Gloucester's opening phrase, "naked fellow" and relate it to a whole set of images and actions involving the removing of clothing and figuring a

Collection Number: A979

Silas T MOLEMA and Solomon T PLAATJE Papers

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

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