Shakespeare *the* Thinker

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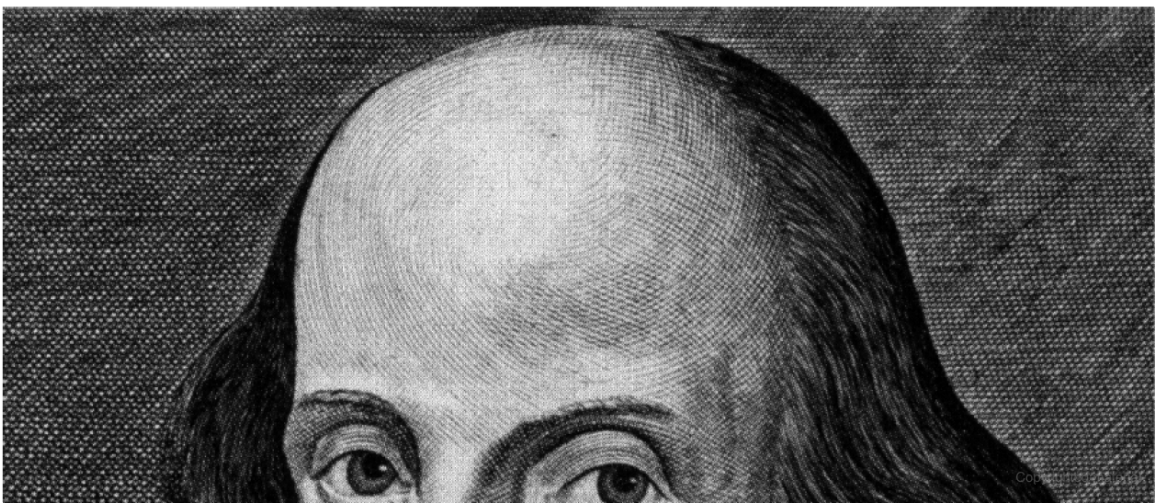
A. D. NUTTALL



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Preface

About ten years ago Robin Lane Fox urged me to write an expansive book on Shakespeare. I was unwilling to do this. I had in mind a short, tightly organized book on certain points of philosophic interest in Shakespeare. Then John Kulka, in words that echoed those of Robin Lane Fox, again urged me to write a larger book, about the distinctiveness of Shakespeare's genius. I agreed and am now happy that I did so. The new plan forced me to read again play after play, and so to watch the playwright's thought as it grew and changed shape in successive dramatic essays. I ended by writing about almost all the plays (I say virtually nothing about *King John* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* nor do I discuss such cases of doubtful attribution as *The Two Noble Kinsmen* or *Edward III,* but all the rest are there). I became vividly aware of the importance of the notion of process to any understanding of Shakespeare as a creative intellect. To watch him or to read him becomes a kind of hunt, an everlasting pursuit of something glancingly wild, where the elusiveness of the prize is part of its essence.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the three people to whom this book is dedicated. Noël Sugimura (N. K. Sugimura), Richard Scholar, and William Poole were all, at one time or another, pupils of mine (but of course the relationship was swiftly reversed—they were soon teaching me). In 2004 they organized a one-day conference on "Shakespeare and Philosophy" to mark my retirement. That memorable day, crowded as it was with more ideas and insights than I can ever fully assimilate, was a vital stimulus for the writing of this book. All three took the trouble to read

through a typed draft, spotted mistakes, and made immensely useful comments. I have a similar debt to the admirable readers who acted for Yale University Press. Others have helped by answering queries and reading sections: Eric Christiansen, Stephen Medcalf, Julie Maxwell, Patrick Gray, Ann Jefferson, Robin Lane Fox, Erik Tonning, Graham Bradshaw, Christopher Tyerman, Katherine Duncan-Jones, Mark Griffith, Patrick Grant, Richard Proudfoot, Laurence Lerner. Behind and beyond these stand the hosts of those with whom I have talked about Shakespeare, in lecture-rooms, in tutorials, and less formally, down the years. The errors and absurdities that remain are all mine.

Almost all of the section on *Measure for Measure* was published earlier, as "*Measure for Measure:* Shakespeare's Essay on Heresy" in *The Glass,* 16 (2003). There are many points of contact, of a more diffuse nature, with earlier writings. What I say here about the two parts of *Henry IV, Henry V, The Merchant of Venice, Othello, Julius Caesar,* and *Coriolanus* develops from an argument begun in my *New Mimesis* (1983). Some of what I say about *The Winter's Tale* harks back to a little book I published in 1966. The account of *Timon of Athens* is similarly related to my book of that name (1989). The discussion of *The Tempest* near the end of the present volume recalls, but also radically transforms, things I said in my *Two Concepts of Allegory* (1967). Earlier articles in which some degree of overlap with the present book may be discerned are: "*Measure for Measure:* Quid Pro Quo?" *Shakespeare Studies,* 4 (1968); "Shakespeare's Richard II and Ovid's Narcissus," in *Ovid Renewed,* edited by Charles Martindale (1988); "*Hamlet:* Conversations with the Dead," in *Proceedings of the British Academy,* 74 (1988); "Freud and Shakespeare," in *Shakespearean Continuities: Essays in Honour of E. A. J. Honigman,* edited by John Batchelor, Tom Cain, and Claire Lamont (1997); "*A Midsummer Night's Dream:* Comedy as Apotrope of Myth," *Shakespeare Survey,* 53 (2000); "*The Winter's Tale:* Ovid Transformed," in *Shakespeare's Ovid,* edited by A. B. Taylor (2000); and "Action at a Distance: Shakespeare and the Greeks," in *Shakespeare and the Classics,* edited by Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (2004). The text of Shakespeare referred to is always (unless otherwise explained) that of *The Riverside Shakespeare,* 2nd ed. (Boston, 1997).

When I was well into the writing of this book I happened to meet an old friend in the street. We exchanged civilities and he asked how I was

occupying my time. I said, "I'm writing an unforgivably long book on Shakespeare," and then added, "You know how there's a tradition whereby formerly lively minds produce in old age unduly mellow books on Shakespeare." This was his cue to say, "Oh, yours won't be like that." Instead, he looked gravely at me and said, "When you find yourself writing about his essential Englishness, you must stop." The persistent reader will find that there is a point in this book where I come perilously close to what my friend darkly predicted. But I stop, as instructed, at that point.

Introduction: Time-bound Shakespeare, Timeless Shakespeare

We know what Milton thought about many things. He didn't believe in the doctrine of the Trinity; he thought the execution of Charles I was morally right; he believed that married couples who didn't get on should be allowed to divorce. But we have no idea what Shakespeare thought, finally, about any major question. The man is elusive—one might almost say, systematically elusive. There is something eerie about a figure that can write so much and give so little away.

On a certain summer evening in Stratford-on-Avon in the 1960s I remember breaking free from the clotted discussion in the lecture-room (the International Shakespeare Conference was in full spate) and breathing the fresher air in the street. The author of the best plays ever written must often have walked in the street in which I was standing. The recurrent "must have" employed by biographers is rightly regarded with suspicion by all reasonable persons. But this was as safe a "must have" as one could hope to find. I struggled to imagine him, there in the street. What was he actually like? What was it like to *be* William Shakespeare, walking through Stratford in the later sixteenth century? Everyone knows the bald, bland head that appears at the opening of the First Folio of Shakespeare's dramatic works. But it is a poor drawing; if Shakespeare had "happened," around the same date, in Italy rather than England we might have done rather better. Even the baldness may be a distraction. Presumably Shakespeare in his younger days had hair on his head.

I began to guess wildly. He certainly had no toothpaste, so his teeth were perhaps unpleasing. He was probably, by our standards, short. If

however we shift from the perspective of the 1960s time-traveller to "How did it seem, *then?*" the grey teeth (if true) and the low stature in any case vanish. In the country where most men are five feet, five inches tall, five feet, five inches will not "feel short." Similar strictures apply to the town, Stratford itself. "I must cut out," I said to myself, "the Shakespearean Disneyland of the twentieth-century tourist; I must see this street with the same slight curve but without shop windows, the road surface rough and marked with dung of horses and cattle, all the houses or almost all timber-framed, malodorous." It is an error to suppose that a real Elizabethan town would have been uniformly Elizabethan in its architecture. Many medieval buildings would have been mingled with the newer constructions. The centre of a typical English town in the mid-twentieth century included a fair amount of Victorian architecture. Of course there are surviving Elizabethan buildings in Stratford, lovingly preserved, aggressively presented. These are the same as the buildings Shakespeare undoubtedly saw. But this "same" covers a more-than-Copernican revolution in perception. Their primary characteristic for us is, precisely, their "Elizabethan-ness." For Shakespeare they would have been just houses.

In 1582 Shakespeare, still in his teens, married Anne Hathaway. She was eight years older and three months pregnant. We know, as certainly as we know anything, that she lived in a substantial farm house at Shottery, a few miles outside Stratford, and the house is still there. It is now known as "Anne Hathaway's cottage." It sits coyly in an improbable profusion of flowers and is on the tourist schedule of places to visit. I decided to walk to Shottery as Shakespeare must often have done ("must have" again!). I crossed the road when the traffic lights allowed me to do so, walked past many nondescript brick houses, late nineteenth century, early twentieth, offering bed and breakfast, crossed the track of the old branch line (now obliterated), continued by way of a hedged back-alley into a new housing estate, where toy cars and bikes lay scattered, came to a large grassy area crossed by an asphalt path, and so on to Shottery. As it grew darker the idea of re-enacting Shakespeare's walk became gradually less fatuous. Of course my actual route would not have been identical to that taken by the young Shakespeare. The differences, any way, were legion, and clamorous. But as the shadows gathered the "visual noise" of my own century was diminishing. The accidents of a particular time were gradually ef-

faced. As I was leaving the suburbs behind I became aware of great shadowy tree-shapes, Warwickshire oaks. These were not the same trees that stood there when Shakespeare walked at dusk, but they were *just such* as he must have looked at, as I looked at now.

Philosophers distinguish "qualitative" from "numerical" identity. Two photographs of Bill Clinton, one taken when he was sixteen, the other when he was forty-five, certainly show the same person. This use of "same" is called "numerical." But Bill Clinton at forty-five is not the same as he was when he was sixteen. This use is called "qualitative." Shakespeare's birthplace, on view in Stratford, is numerically the same as the house Shakespeare knew. Qualitatively, however, it is different. The oak trees I saw in the gathering darkness were numerically different from the trees Shakespeare saw but qualitatively they were the same—or nearly so. Soon all I could make out distinctly was the horizon, the line marking the range of low hills in the distance, where some light lingered in the sky. This really was exactly what he saw. For a spooky second I felt as if we were standing side by side. "In such a night," I thought, "he might have stood just here."

The words, "In such a night," are Shakespeare's:

> In such a night
> Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
> Upon the wild sea-banks. (*The Merchant of Venice,* V.i.9–11)

Why did Shakespeare not write "In such a morning" or "In such a day"? It will be said, "Because the scene in which the line occurs is a night scene." But that is not an answer. Why does a night scene prompt this thought where a day scene would not have done so? It is because night cancels the temporary accidents of history, erases difference. Matthew Arnold on the darkening shore of Dover Beach felt the same power of the night to unite us with a remote past, but came a cropper when he added that Sophocles on his tideless Mediterranean beach would have heard, precisely, the noise made by waves breaking on shingle, in Kent. So let us be careful. Let me not claim, for example, that the air smelled exactly as it did then. But that line of distant hills was identical, numerically and qualitatively. I felt, sentimentalist that I am, momentarily close to the dead poet.

It was as if I had reached the object, Shakespeare, by eliminating, successively, all the intervening differences. The result is a sense of exciting immediacy followed at once by utter frustration, as Narcissus in the myth was frustrated by the very compliance of the image in the pool. The moment of sensed contact, half exciting, half absurd, could tell me nothing, could not add a particle to my understanding of Shakespeare, the writer of plays. Perhaps—awful thought—they were actually getting closer to him in the airless lecture-room I had left.

The only way back is after all by verbally loaded records and monuments. What do we know about the early years in Stratford? The paucity of information on Shakespeare's life has become a commonplace of rhetorical criticism, though in fact we know quite a lot. Occasionally the records throw up an item that really does connect with the work. In December 1579 a young woman was drowned in the Avon at Tiddington, near Stratford. It seemed that she slipped in the mud on the river-bank but some thought of suicide. An inquest was held and ruled that the death was accidental. Already words from a play Shakespeare was to write years later arise in the mind: "Her death was doubtful," for this is a real-life pre-echo of the "muddy death" of Ophelia (*Hamlet,* V.i.227, IV.vii.183). When we add that the young woman's name was Katherine Hamlett the association is simply inescapable.

The year 1579 was perhaps a formative one for Shakespeare. In this year his sister Anne died. In July 1579 at Balsall, nine miles from Stratford, one John Shakespeare was found dead, hanging from a beam. He was a poor man, having at the time of his death goods to the value of three pounds, fourteen shillings, and fourpence.[1] In this case the verdict was criminal suicide. So now we have a Warwickshire Shakespeare, bearing the same Christian name as Shakespeare's own father, killing himself. The deaths of Anne Shakespeare, John Shakespeare, and Katherine Hamlett, coming one after another, have the effect of a tolling bell presaging things to come, the death of Hamnet, Shakespeare's son, in 1596, and then the play itself, written around 1600 when the other John Shakespeare, the poet's father, was nearing his end (he died in 1601). The tragedy, *Hamlet,* is a prolonged meditation on self-destruction, haunted by the shade of a dead father, transfixed by the image of a drowned, innocent woman.

I first came across the story of Katherine Hamlett in a footnote in E. A.

Armstrong's *Shakespeare's Imagination,* which appeared in 1946. Armstrong is a curious figure in the history of Shakespeare criticism. It rather looks as if he set out to write what would have been a very boring book on "birds in Shakespeare" (he had written earlier on birdsong and avian plumage) but then noticed something: if Shakespeare mentioned kites (a kind of bird) within a few lines, for no evident reason, he would mention sheets and death. Armstrong had happened upon one of the "image-clusters" that were to become famous. Others soon appeared. Shakespeare, it seems, could not think of dogs without thinking, within a few lines, of sweetmeats. These loose clusters and skeins, the Lucretian linked atoms of his poetry, are oddly persistent. Caliban's cluster, "berries," "cave," "pinch," "feeding," strong in Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest,* can be glimpsed in the early *Titus Andronicus,* where it is attached to Aaron the Moor. Between these two plays it surfaces at intervals: it is associated with Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* and, most oddly, with the melancholy Jaques in *As You Like It.* It is a law of Shakespeare's art that he endlessly recycles ideas and never repeats himself. Caliban "grew from" Aaron the Moor and is at the same time profoundly new. Armstrong's book still fascinates—far more than the more famous book by Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (1935). Armstrong had the livelier mind.

Perhaps too lively. In his footnote on Katherine Hamlett he wrote, "When Shakespeare was sixteen a girl was found drowned after an unfortunate love affair, and at the inquest which was held at Stratford her parents, endeavouring to prevent a verdict of *felo de se,* pleaded that their daughter was drowned by accident and that she slipped from a great slanting willow while dipping flowers she had gathered in the stream."[2] The story has grown, illicitly, in Armstrong's fertile imagination. The first inaccuracy is trivial: Shakespeare was fifteen, not sixteen, in December 1579. But the "unfortunate love affair," the protective parents, the slanting willow,[3] and the gathered flowers all bring the event into closer accord with Ophelia's death and are all added by Armstrong. The dog Latin of the original Stratford minute is less lyrical. Katherine went to the river not to dip flowers (it was mid-December) but to fill her bucket with water. The parents do not figure in the story, nor is there any evidence for an unhappy love affair. The minute certainly implies directly that, as in the

command" overruled this with a charitable compromise (V.i.228). The narrative in the Stratford minute exonerates Katherine Hamlett much as the Queen exonerates Ophelia. The gritty legal questioning that is likely to have surrounded the death of 1579 is still working, in a slightly odd sequence, in the accomplished tragedy.

Indeed, a near-obsession with law has long been discerned in *Hamlet*. At Act I, Scene i, lines 84 and following, Horatio, in the middle of a heroic narrative of old Hamlet's victory over the Norwegians, suddenly enters eagerly into technical detail on how forfeiture of lands to the victor is to be ratified. In the next scene, Claudius discloses that the son of the defeated Norwegian king has raised the same legal point (I.ii.22–25). In the most famous of all soliloquies, "To be or not to be," Hamlet, listing the calamities of life, includes "the law's delay" (III.i.71). The same preoccupation shows recurrently in minor tricks of phrasing: "give in evidence" (III.iii.64), "hear and judge 'twixt you and me" (IV.v.206), "acquittance seal" (IV.vii.1), and the like.

Shakespeare, we begin to see, is aiming at a complex effect. He does not *simply* transform the fate of Katherine Hamlett. The end of his thought remembers its beginning. He plays the lyrical elegy off against a thorny subtext of harsh law. Even the rusticity of the original case makes itself felt in the complex music of the tragedy. The Queen tells us of the low, rustically obscene names given by country people to the flowers Ophelia gathered (IV.vii.170). And her very last words, "Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death" (IV.vii.182–83), are not just an oxymoron, setting elevation against "lowness," the word "melodious" abruptly confronted by "muddy." Brilliant, meta-poetic self-reference is also involved. The Queen's own speech, no less than the songs of Ophelia, has been melodious but must admit at the close the muddy reality of the death. In their ending Katherine and Ophelia are merely identical. There is something eerie about Shakespeare's ability to anticipate our thoughts. It is something one meets again and again in his work. I, a critic writing in the twenty-first century, was groping towards understanding how Shakespeare transformed, through the exalting agency of high poetry, an almost squalid rural death, and suddenly I find that he has thematized *my* thoughts. It may be said that Shakespeare has merely betrayed, in passing, a trace of the original case and that there is nothing uncanny in this. But that is not what

we have here. The narrated death of Ophelia in *Hamlet* is, intelligently, *about* the tension between lyric exaltation and cold, muddy water.

When I wrote *A New Mimesis* in the 1980s I was concerned to save Shakespeare from formalist theory. It was the time summed up in Jacques Derrida's famous phrase, "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte," "There is nothing beyond the text."[7] Of course these words were variously construed within the world of Deconstruction, but there was a palpable drive to suggest that what we call "nature"—a notion varying from age to age—is always a tissue of conventions; there was, in short, a move to resolve substance into form. The word *reality* was always placed in inverted commas, that had to mean, "Not *really* real, of course—'so-called reality.' " Christopher Norris, at the moment in his career when he was beginning to emerge from such "foundationless" thinking (his word) had an admirable epithet for this use of inverted commas: "queasy."[8] Norris was himself moving into what has now assumed centre stage: New Historicism. The real world, including real poets and dramatists, had in a manner been erased by Post-Structuralists and Deconstructionists (remember "the death of the author"). With the sudden ascent of New Historicism the entire scheme flipped, turned inside out. The real world in all its rebarbative factual detail returned and virtually obliterated the fictive universe of poetry. *Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurrit,* "You can drive out nature with a pitchfork, but she always comes running back."[9] The author was restored to life, and so too were the author's friends and relations. These were real people in a real setting, pressed by real politics and brutally exigent power struggles. The meaning of a given play is suddenly no longer a matter of endlessly receding differentiations within a formal system; instead, the meaning of *Coriolanus* is determined by corn riots in the Midland counties in 1607.

Perhaps we should feel grateful. The new regime is certainly better than its predecessor. In its narrowest, most doctrinaire form, however, it is disabled from the start by two assumptions. First, reality is conceived nominalistically[10] as a series of idiosyncratic facts or events, and, second, although these events *cause* and account for the content of a poem or play, the poet cannot, so to speak, turn round and comment on or criticize the now sovereign environment. Although I have said that New Historicism is a turning inside out of earlier Theory, the two movements are united in

their hostility to the idea of cognitive intelligence in the work of art discussed. The writer is a mere effect, at the mercy of the prior causal scheme. The true import of a play is now something betrayed rather than asserted by the words of the text. And this is absurd. *Coriolanus* obviously does not mean "There were corn riots last year." It is about the irony of a Stoic integrity essayed by one who has in fact been thoroughly conditioned by an evil mother; it is about the moment in *Roman* history when co-operative civic institutions were beginning to displace an older warrior ethic; it is about the anxieties of popular power where the populace is not, as in the writings of Karl Marx, economically productive but is instead parasitic upon the wealth-production of a still warlike aristocracy; it is about femaleness distorted and love crushed—and now I will grant, the audience will certainly be thinking of those corn riots.

There have been earlier phases of historicist criticism ("Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* IS the author's father" and the like), but these early "embeddings" of literary fiction in its context commonly allowed the correspondence between the feigned person and the real to be something artfully managed by the writer; the clear correspondence in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* of Artegall with the real-life Lord Grey is something proposed, articulated, and worked by the poet as part of a consciously allegorical scheme, and Virginia Woolf is similarly in charge of the Ramsay/Stephen implied correspondence. Today the common assumption, especially in the field of Renaissance literature, is that such correspondences with real persons are not the product of intelligent art on the part of the author but are rather produced by the historical process itself. *It* plants the code, and the code propels the poet's pen. When I say that *Coriolanus* deals with "love crushed" I intend the phrase as description of a possible reality. This would not be well received by a doctrinaire "Nominalist" Historicist. "Love" applies to millions of persons, to innumerable contexts, to successions of centuries. The mere use of this highly general word does not commit the user to the thesis that love is the same at all times; it allows us to notice that falling in love in 1384 is not the same as falling in love in 1943, while in 2006 it is different again, but it does imply an insistence on a strong analogy underlying the variable instances. It is an "elastic universal."

Of course there are among the Historicists many with a less restrictive

mindset. Pierre Bourdieu has championed a mode of criticism that "far from annihilating the creator by the reconstruction of the universe of social determinants that exert pressure on him, and reducing the work to the pure product of a milieu instead of seeing in it the sign that the author has known how to emancipate himself from it . . . . sociological analysis allows us to . . . understand the specific labour the writer had to accomplish, both against these determinations and thanks to them, to produce himself as creator, that is, as the subject of his own creation."[11]

To this I can at once give general assent. But if anyone thinks that it shows that my earlier picture of theorists who make the work the pure inert product of its context is a gross caricature—"straw men"—it must be pointed out that Bourdieu indeed is himself an altogether subtler theorist yet that meanwhile he is quite clearly as convinced as I am of the existence of the "art as mere product" party. Stephen Greenblatt is a Historicist (indeed he is one of the founding fathers of Historicism) who, like Bourdieu, escapes my stricture. He always sees causation as two-way street; writers do not only reflect or betray the pressures of the milieu; they "negotiate" with them. But a sense that meaning is being in some degree confined persists even in Bourdieu's formulation: the writer can now write against the milieu; but can the writer write about *something else?*

I am suggesting that as soon as we allow the poet cognitive or referential power, we enter a world of analogy in which the social conditions of composition or, for that matter, the psychological genesis remain palpably distinct from the achieved work. The root is not the flower.

It may be said, however, that my own assertion of the relevance of the death of Katherine Hamlett to Shakespeare's play works against me. There it turned out that the "flower," that is, the exalted lyrical narrative, *included,* in a kind of counterpoint, a recurrent reference to nit-picking law, rusticity, and, finally, mere mud that stemmed directly, without any artistic metamorphosis, from the case at Tiddington in 1579. Obviously historical investigation can make a contribution to critical understanding. But, note, to grant this is not to grant that meaning is determined or exhausted by immediate context. The action of *Hamlet* is set in motion by the ghost of a dead king. The play itself is haunted, *ab extra,* by the ghost of a dead woman. I have said that the lyric exaltation is crushed at the end of Gertrude's speech, but the high poetry is there, before it is crushed. It

remains a powerful element in the poetic economy of the whole. Shakespeare *needs* the lyric beauty because without it he cannot effect his startling final reduction. If we flatten the sequence so that it is, so to speak, reduced from the start, we falsify. The death of Ophelia really was beautiful before it was squalid.

I chose the example of Katherine Hamlett because it shows vividly how detailed historical knowledge can play a part, *but only a part,* in enhancing our critical understanding. The transforming, extending power of Shakespeare's fictive interpretation is, inescapably, also part of the picture. Mimesis, or representation of the world, is not confined to the strand of implicit reference to Katherine. As Shakespeare enlarges the scope of the episode we have the mimesis of a broader field of human possibility, the trauma of rejection and the rest. The final twist, in which Shakespeare himself *makes a point* of the shift in register, can easily assume the character of ironic admonition, directed at the too-confident tunnel-vision Historicist.

I have said that we do not know what Shakespeare thought about any major question, in the sense that we have no settled judgements of which we can be sure. The major question of the years through which he lived was religious. This is the period of the splitting of Christendom into Roman Catholics on one hand and Protestants on the other. Has Shakespeare nothing to say on the Reformation?

There has been a strong move recently to argue that Shakespeare was either a crypto-Catholic or else sympathetic to the Catholic side. Again we begin from material external to the plays. This is basically gossip. Richard Davies, chaplain of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, added to some notes on Shakespeare the sentence, "He dyed a Papist."[12] These words were written more than fifty years after Shakespeare's death. The "red and jolly," hard-drinking Davies makes mistakes elsewhere.[13] While Shakespeare was still alive, John Speed in *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* (1611) attacked the British Jesuit Robert Parsons and Shakespeare in one and the same breath: "This Papist and his Poet, of like conscience for lies, the one ever faining, the other ever falsifying the truth."[14] In 1757, according to report, labourers retiling a roof in Stratford found, hidden in the rafters, a document that has come to be known as "John Shakespeare's Spiritual Testament." Shakespeare's father was called John. The document is plainly Catholic, strewn with references to Purgatory, to "Mary mother

been variously filled by speculative biographers, in line with the dominant interest of the writer. Those fascinated by law think Shakespeare spent this time working for a lawyer and can point to his intricate and knowing allusions to legal niceties. Others, led by Duff Cooper, think he must have served in the army. Yet others think, remembering Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost,* that he was obviously, as his contemporary William Beeston said, a schoolmaster in the country.[21] Clearly we need a Catholic story to contend with the others and there is a fairly good one. It was in the 1930s that it was first noticed that a certain William Shakeshafte, perhaps a player, was in service with the Hoghton family in Lancashire at the time of the "lost years."[22] Was "Shakeshafte" our William Shakespeare? Roman Catholic resistance was strong in Lancashire, and the Hoghtons were at the centre of this resistance. The name "Shakeshafte" is not "Shakespeare" of course, but in these years of persecution it might well have been prudent to dissemble one's name. It has been suggested that "Shakeshafte" as an alternative ingeniously combines evasion with backward-looking family piety, since the poet's grandfather Richard Shakespeare used Shakeshafte as his form of the surname. But this rests on a mistake; Richard in fact wrote "Shakestaff," not "Shakeshafte."[23]

It is the kind of speculative theory hard-headed scholars are quick to dismiss. There were many Shakeshaftes around in Lancashire, and the complex terms of Hoghton's will make it probable that "Shakeshafte" was considerably older than the poet would have been at this date.[24] Schoenbaum acidly observes that if Shakespeare was in Lancashire working for Sir Thomas Hoghton when he was seventeen, he would have had to get himself back to Stratford by the time he was nineteen in order to impregnate Anne Hathaway—"not the most plausible of scenarios."[25] Schoenbaum's scorn is perhaps premature. Ernst Honigmann, the ablest of the proponents of the Shakeshafte theory, pointed out that the stay in Lancashire was perfectly compatible with the impregnation of Anne, since the poet probably spent only a few months with the Hoghtons.[26] In 1985 Honigmann showed that John Cottom (Cottam), the Stratford schoolmaster we noticed earlier, belonged to a social circle based in Lancashire, intimately connected with the Hoghtons. The "John Cotham" named as legatee in the 1581 will of Alexander Hoghton, head of the family, is likely to be identical with John Cottom, the Stratford schoolmaster. The testa-

tor bequeaths theatre costumes to his brother and immediately afterwards asks his friend Sir Thomas Hesketh of Rufford to look after "William Shakeshafte now dwelling with me."[27] It is clear that both Stratford and Lancashire were sites of intense Catholic activity. What is not clear, still, is that Shakeshafte was Shakespeare.

We are looking at a period of ideological crisis—perhaps the most intense in British history. I have written lightly about young Catholics imagining martyrdom, but it was no light matter then. We must endeavour seriously to understand what made men like Campion risk and undergo hideous torture; we must try, with the same obstinacy I brought to my evening walk to Shottery, to comprehend what it was like for these young people, in dark country houses with hiding places for priests—how by candlelight they would have talked: "Could you withstand the Scavenger's Daughter? I *think* I could, if I could keep my thoughts fixed on my saviour and Mary the mother of God . . . I *think* I could . . . ." The Scavenger's Daughter was a device in the form of an iron hoop that so compressed the body that blood was forced from the nose and ears.[28] When John Carey published his *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* in 1983 he painted a vivid picture of the anti-Catholic terror. Some historians thought he overplayed the *grand guignol*. One said, "John is like the fat boy in *Pickwick*—'I wants to make your flesh creep.'" But a certain distinguished historian of the reign of Elizabeth said to me, "I was shaken by Carey's book. We historians are fond of saying that the persecution of Catholics was fitful and inefficient, but Carey makes one see the real horror. Perhaps the very variability added to the fear-factor?" Franz Kafka knew how uncertainty exacerbates fear; both *The Trial* and *The Castle* turn on the psychological truth that an accused person will pass from pleading innocence to actively seeking conviction, if the nature of the charge is kept hidden; unclarity is itself felt to be worse than the imagined sentence. In Elizabethan England, indeed, the punishment was so horrible that the full Kafkaesque paradox was unlikely to find realisation, but the circumambient uncertainty must, nevertheless, have made things worse—much worse. These were the years of "the bloody question": "If the pope sent an army to invade England, would you obey pope or queen?" Senator Joseph McCarthy's question, "Are you or have you ever been a communist?" destroyed lives but seems faint when set beside the

bloody question of Shakespeare's time. McCarthy never disembowelled a communist, making sure that the victim remained alive until the process was complete.

It will be the argument of this book that Shakespeare was not only a master of imaginative and emotional effects but that he was also very intelligent. He can hardly have failed to notice what was happening around him. He grew up in a place where awareness was sharpened, where the Reformation itself was rejected by people of influence. Yet his plays are eloquent of nothing so much as a rosy unconsciousness of division. Neither the Reformation nor the shock waves it produced in the counter-culture of Catholicism—the Council of Trent—make any palpable impression on the plays. In *Romeo and Juliet,* Juliet speaks of attending evening Mass (IV.i.38). Evening Mass was forbidden by the Council of Trent in 1566, and some bridle at what they see as a mistake on Shakespeare's part (although it appears that Verona was one of several places where the practice was in fact continued).[29] Of course Shakespeare would have known that in any case Juliet lived long before the Council of Trent, but that, somehow, is not the point. The Christianity is strangely timeless.

Some think the absence of a "politically correct" Protestant ferocity from the plays is itself evidence of not-so-crypto-Catholicism. The young dramatist, it is conceded, temporarily toes the party line in order to establish himself. Joan of Arc is portrayed in *Henry VI, Part 1* as the vile witch of Protestant propaganda; Beauford in *Henry VI, Part 2* and Pandulph in *King John* are stereotypically wicked cardinals. But thereafter, it is suggested, his Warwickshire and Lancashire background reasserts itself. The Protestants had abolished the Roman Catholic Purgatory, the place, neither heaven nor hell, where persons are purged of their sins after death, but the ghost in *Hamlet* comes to us from an unsatirized Purgatory (I.v.13); Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet* is a luminously benevolent figure, a sweet old man who picks flowers and medicinal herbs. The comedies are full of benign Catholic minor clergy: the friar who met Silvia in the forest in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (V.ii.38), Friar Patrick in the same play at whose cell "she did intend confession" (V.ii.41, cf. IV.iii.44), Friar Francis in *Much Ado about Nothing,* the priest in *Twelfth Night,* the "old religious man" in the "wild wood" who had so startling an effect on Duke Frederic in *As You Like It* (V.iv.159–61). There is no sign in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* of implied

criticism of the practice of confession; it is seen as ordinary virtue. We could add the religious "convertites" to whom the melancholy Jaques is dispatched (not to join, but to watch) in *As You Like It*. These moments bear no charge of anti-papal feeling, nor does the hermitage that is to receive the King of Navarre at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* (V.ii.795). Schoenbaum writes, "Theologically minded readers ask 'Does not the dramatist treat his lesser Romanist clergy, a Friar Lawrence or an Abbess Aemilia, more respectfully than his Protestant vicars of the villages, the Martexts and the Nathaniels?' "[30] This, it is said, is a dramatist who, after a few early wobbles, refused to play the Protestant game, to join the chorus of denunciation, and in such an environment, to refuse in this way is to espouse the old religion. "He that is not with me is against me." Shakespeare is *against* the Reformation.

But this will hardly do. There are committed Catholics in England at this period, and they do not write in this way. Perhaps the most brilliant of the Shakespearean Historicists is Richard Wilson. In his *Secret Shakespeare,* Wilson makes a cumulative case for Shakespeare's early association with dangerous Catholics in both Stratford and Lancashire with an array of detailed support that is almost overwhelming.[31] At the same time, however, he notes a persistent hostility in the plays to Jesuit extremists. It is as if the intense religious experiences of his early years were gradually cocooned in a benign Montaignian scepticism. Like Stephen Greenblatt,[32] he suggests that the secrecy that must have become second nature in ordinary Catholic families (who were not eager to be tortured and wished brave priests like Campion could simply shut up for a while) became the central habit of his mind—and so the source of his famous elusiveness. Shakespeare's work is a huge vanishing act. This copious body of superlative dramatic writing is accompanied by no letters, no evidence of attendance at any church, no professional accounts: "a chronicle of immaculate absenteeism."[33] The driving idea of the book is that Shakespeare took care to hide any hint of specific allegiance—and this is itself the political and religious import of his work.

But, if Shakespeare wanted to hide, why did he not avoid mentioning Purgatory in *Hamlet?* It would have been simple to do. Why does he actively fill his plays with friars, abbesses, private chapels, and the like? Greenblatt wrote in his *Shakespearean Negotiations* of the way in which a

Shakespearean text may be "haunted by a sense of rituals and beliefs that are no longer efficacious, that have been *emptied out*."[34] "Haunted" implies "ghost," and "ghost" means "dead person." If the Catholic apparatus of Shakespearean drama is a dance of ghosts, the Reformation is after all clearly implied; the old religion is dead, a thing of the past. Greenblatt argued that in transposing such material to the stage Shakespeare was emptying it of religious significance. This Wilson rightly resists. The ethical resonance of such things will not be stilled, or emptied away. Strongly Protestant Spenser in the huge neo-Gothic literary sham castle called *The Faerie Queene* likewise filled his allegorical landscape with Catholic paraphernalia—beadsmen, hermits, and the like. But there the rationale, at least initially, is tolerably clear. Protestantism internalized Christianity. The physical whip of "penaunce" became an inwardly smarting contrition. This means that when a Protestant poet allegorizes the interior life, giving it an imagined body, we shall be returned to a field of images in ironic coincidence with the rejected physicalities of Catholicism.[35] Spenser developed a special style, "golden" yet oddly repellent to the reader seeking intimate engagement, so that we never forget that the physical adventures recounted are mere metaphor, the images mere pasteboard. Even in Spenser, however, the old images retain a problematic moral force of their own. In Shakespeare, meanwhile, there is in any case no such scheme of conscious differentiation on offer.

A hermit and a mossy cell find their way into ultra-Protestant John Milton's *Il Penseroso,* and again, they are obviously picturesque—mock-Gothic. A real Gothic church is "just the way you make a church," but mock-Gothic is like the picture of a building, or like a stage set. So in both Spenser and Milton later there is a clear sense of aesthetic and ideological distance, separating us from this seemingly popish material. But none of this applies to Shakespeare's friars and abbesses. They are simply there, as if they were an ordinary part of a world we all straightforwardly know.

So in Shakespeare we have not a strenuously asserted innocence of change but an innocence lightly assumed, as if there were no problem. Take fairies. To polemical writers of the period fairies went with Catholic mumbo-jumbo, hocus-pocus (*hoc est corpus*). Indeed, the association was not confined to controversialists. A certain Mrs. Parry told Goodwin Wharton that the fairies served God "much in the manner of Roman

ogy. The literary people were baffled by this. They were baffled because these early years were to them represented, overwhelmingly, by Shakespeare. Where is the Calvinism in Shakespeare? As with Calvinism, so with missionary Catholicism. Where in Shakespeare is there anyone resembling Edmund Campion, that dazzling, suffering figure who must have been the subject of innumerable remembered conversations? Shakespeare's liberal art in which every nuance of feeling is registered seems to forget rather than actively to suppress the real extremists of his world.

Gary Taylor's concession that Shakespeare himself may be the source of the "timeless," a-historical criticism Taylor himself abjures is spectacular. It is as if he has said, "Shakespeare decided to produce a body of work expressly designed for reading across centuries." I suppose the strong Historicist could say, "No one can ever really escape the historical determinants of his or her time; if a writer tries to do this in the early modern period the result will inevitably be an *early modern* essay in (pseudo-)universalization, easily distinguishable from, say, a nineteenth-century essay in the same vein." But what if Shakespeare succeeded in his enterprise? Has no one noticed how, while the scholars increasingly seek to confine the meaning of a play to its immediate historical context, directors and actors are playing Shakespeare in seventeenth-, eighteenth-, nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century dress, and even, on occasion, in "mixed period" settings? On stage *Antony and Cleopatra* is freely permitted to allude to the palace of King Farouk and *Coriolanus* to the French Revolution. Such productions seem not to destroy or even diminish the force of the plays presented. It is as if we are being propelled by the scholars into a mode of criticism that makes silence and omission stronger clues than what is actually said to the meaning of a work.

I am not saying that Shakespeare's plays are absolutely unaffected by their historical context. Early Shakespeare is obviously Elizabethan as late Shakespeare is Jacobean. More narrowly, Shakespeare's keen interest in subjectivity is itself a highly intelligent response to the rise of Protestantism. But it is noteworthy that the great explorations of interiority—*Richard II, Hamlet*—do not feel remote or antiquated when they are played to present-day audiences. This is because Shakespeare's response is, precisely, intelligent rather than a mere cultural reflex. He thinks fundamentally, and this makes him a natural time-traveller. Moreover, I willingly grant that silence and suppression can figure in a critical assessment. *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream suppresses the violent elements in the myths it draws on—Theseus the womanizer, sex with animals, *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, the coarse tale of Pasiphae, who coupled with the bull. All this is turned "to favour and to prettiness." By the anti-Historicist logic that says, "The root is not the flower," the mythic origins of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ought to be discarded just as the immediate social matrix is to be discarded. But when we know about these origins we notice things we never saw before, starting with the edge of male brutalism in Theseus's words to Hippolyta at the beginning: "Hippolyta, I won thee with my sword" (I.i.16). The war against the women, the Amazons, is in the background. The question is: Should we read *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a play in which "dark" implications have been banished before the play begins, or should we, more subtly, read it as a play in which the banishment takes place within the drama? Knowledge of the mythic roots of the design may now cause us to notice things that are actually there and to opt for the second alternative. Shakespeare's smiling duke has in fact ravished Perigenia (II.i.78). There is a fear that Bottom's scratchy hide after his transformation may hurt the lady he lies beside, echoing a far grosser anxiety in *The Golden Ass.*[43]

As with myth, so with the historical matrix. Knowledge of the context may alert us to things that really are there. But this in no way implies that the brilliantly centrifugal movement of Shakespeare's mind can properly be ignored. Shakespeare probably did think of corn riots in the Midlands when he wrote *Coriolanus* (and the audience would have made the connection). But he was also thinking hard about Roman politics. Meanwhile, although there is a clear analogy between mythic and sociohistorical contexts, there is also an interesting difference. Mythology is itself already instinct with live imaginative force, as social fact, qua fact, can never be.

New Historicism now holds sway in universities in Britain and North America (though there are signs that its grip is weakening). Where "Historicism" means expending all one's attention on the immediate historical circumstances of composition and seeking to explicate the work in terms of those circumstances, I am opposed. The argument of this book is that, although knowledge of the historical genesis can on occasion illuminate a given work, the greater part of the artistic achievement of our best playwright is *internally* generated. It is the product, not of his time, but of his

own, unresting, creative intelligence. Historical circumstance supplies matter, but the major thing, always, is the use the writer makes of that which is given him. The whole point of the biblical parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30) is that the good recipient is the one who makes the gift grow, who actively transforms what was given in the first place. The etymological development whereby the word "talent" came to mean "artistic gift" is a proper reflection of this inner dynamism.

This book, therefore, will follow where Shakespeare leads, will range freely in the zodiac of *his* wit. He thinks about causes and motives, identity and relation, about how pretence can convey truth, or language (by becoming conscious of its own formal character) can actually impede communication. He meditates on the reality in dreams and the unreality in hard politics. He sees through and then forgives the Stoic philosopher. He celebrates and then disquietingly interrogates the Christian assumption that mercy transcends justice. His thought is never still. No sooner has one identified a philosophical "position" than one is forced, by the succeeding play, to modify or extend one's account. This Protean quality in Shakespeare is the reason for one curious feature of this book. I begin by treating the plays in the order in which they are likely to have been written. But as the book proceeds, increasingly, I depart from chronological sequence in order to set up thematic comparisons. I have avoided thematic grouping as an overall principle because I want the reader to watch as the thoughts form and re-form in successive plays. Each play, for a while at least, had to be allowed to assert itself, without premature "labelling." Only after certain themes have begun to disengage themselves in a properly gradual manner have I felt free to loosen my grip on the sequence in time.

If ever there was a poet who was not confined by tunnel vision it is Shakespeare. He more than any other writer conducts us from the narrow passage of immediate causation into the vertiginous world of overdetermination, of simultaneously operating causes and mysterious "action at a distance." It all begins at once in his apprentice work, the apparently primitive three-part play on the reign of Henry VI, scornfully dismissed by Maurice Morgann in the eighteenth century as "that drum and trumpet thing."[44]

I To the Death of Marlowe

How Causes Work: The Three Parts of *Henry VI*

We began with Milton, once thought of as the natural counterweight to Shakespeare in the history of English literature. Within Shakespeare's lifetime, meanwhile, there was one figure in the landscape that Shakespeare had reason to fear. Christopher Marlowe was the man to beat. As long as Marlowe lived, and for some time after, Shakespeare's writing is marked by special energy, an almost desperate assertion of brilliance. Later, after Marlowe has been dead for several years, the spring uncoils, and larger, slower effects are essayed.

The three parts of *Henry VI* may be the earliest Shakespearean drama we possess.[1] If we turn immediately from a work of Shakespeare's maturity, such as *Julius Caesar,* to this procession of baronial biffing and bashing, summed up perhaps in the old stage direction, "They fight, severally, about the stage," we shall easily conclude as Maurice Morgann did that the work is simply primitive. In the first act of *1 Henry VI* we have what is called "split-focus staging": the English on one side, doubtless with cardboard battlements to protect them, and the French, similarly guarded, on the other.[2] The few yards of planking between may represent the field of battle. This, I submit, really is primitive in the way it treats space, as crowded medieval pictures in which out-of-scale helmeted heads show over the battlements that box them in are primitive. I am aware as I write this that "primitive" is now almost a taboo word. It will be said that the organization of space in a medieval picture is conceptually highly sophisticated, that meaning is allowed to dominate the banal requirements of

perspectival visual data, and that in such work the imagination of both artist and viewer is far more active than in inertly photographic painting. Yet when all this has been said, such medieval painting remains primitive in the sense that it manifestly belongs to an earlier rather than a later phase. These painters did not deliberately over-ride ordinary perspective for conceptual reasons; they did not yet know how to paint using perspective. Children, as E. H. Gombrich pointed out, draw conceptually before they learn to present the phenomenal appearance of a thing.[3] A house will be a rectangle and people will be drawn within the rectangle. If we say, "But you couldn't see the people through the wall," the child answers, "The people are *in* the house!" It is perfectly clear meanwhile that Shakespeare himself felt the force of the term "primitive" in application to such staging. In *Henry V,* written some eight or nine years after *Henry VI,* he frets at the almost comic inadequacy (in the sense, "un-realism") of his stage presentation. He notes, exactly as I did a moment ago, the painful contrast between the cramped wooden box of the theatre and the space it has to represent: "Can this cockpit hold / The vasty fields of France?" (Prologue, 11–12). He also smells out in advance the defence-through-activating-the-imagination: "Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts . . . / Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them" (Prologue, 23, 26).

Equally clearly, however, he is embarrassed by the sheer crudity of the theatrical apparatus. Even if we do not think (or feel that it is not permissible to think) *Henry VI* dramaturgically primitive, it looks as if Shakespeare, within a few years, came to think exactly that. Are we then, as Morgann supposed, confronted, in this first offering from one later acknowledged to be a supreme genius, by an undeveloped, undeveloping affair?

Well, hardly. The three parts of *Henry VI* compose a complex English history, and the history play seems to be a Shakespearean invention. Here it is being invented before our eyes. John Bale's *King John* is indeed earlier, but Bale's play is a strange hybrid, part incipient history, part morality. The anonymous *Troublesome Reign of John, King of England,* once thought to be the source of Shakespeare's *King John,* is now thought to be later than Shakespeare's play.[4] The old play of *Gorboduc* has some claim to be considered as a history, but it is really a Senecan tragedy. Its Shakespearean

the marketplace will be set in opposition to the "competitive values" of the battle-field.

The rest of Act I and the first three scenes of Act II are taken up with the progress of the war with France. Talbot fights like a tiger but shows that he has brains as well as brawn by evading a trap laid for him by the oily-tongued Countess of Auvergne. This is a thoroughly enjoyable, dance-like sequence that ends with the lady herself applauding. And then we come to Act II, Scene iv.

We have already seen, together with the coarsely schematic presentation of war at the level of staging and props, a very different suppleness at the level of plot-progression—personality clashes interwoven expertly with larger political antagonisms, one action interrupting, overlapping, reinforcing, or retarding another. We become aware that history has a multiple momentum and is imperfectly controlled by the most powerful persons concerned. The lines describing the discussions that led to the loss of large parts of France are in a somewhat stilted style, but they are also politically expert in their effortless analysis of a complex field:

One would have ling'ring wars with little cost;
Another would fly swift, but wanteth wings;
A third thinks, without expense at all,
By guileful fair words peace may be obtain'd. (I.i.74–77)

Before the American army entered Iraq some said, "Let us go in with a large force and save money in the long run," others said, "Let us go in with few soldiers but in a spectacular manner," and yet others said, "Let us see what the United Nations can do." Shakespeare's language here is intelligently faithful to the real to-and-fro of high-level political discussion. This means that before we reach the crucial scene, Act II, Scene iv, we have already acquired a sense of historical process as something both violent and mysterious.

The scene itself shows the quarrel among noblemen from which the long Wars of the Roses sprang. The dynamic is supplied by a kind of contradiction. The scene presents the origin of the Wars of the Roses, how it all began, and, simultaneously, withholds the reason. It is an aetiology without an *aitia,* or "cause." The essence of the scene is proleptically

summed up in the very first line: "Great lords and gentlemen, what means this silence?"

The speaker is Richard Plantagenet, late Duke of York. He is asking angrily why no one will speak openly "in a case of truth." In response his interlocutor Suffolk says, in effect, "Hush. We need privacy for this. Let us go into the garden." We follow them into the private garden but learn only that Plantagenet and Somerset are disputing "sharp quillets of the law" (II.iv.17), that is to say, legal niceties. As the play unfolds it becomes apparent that the Duke of York is asserting a claim to the throne, presently held by a descendant of the House of Lancaster. The best critical account known to me of what follows is Tania Demetriou's.[7]

She points out that in Hall's chronicle York's claim emerges later, after the death of Gloucester. Hall's earlier references to York, when he was still Richard Plantagenet, simply recount his actions and then add, with editorial hindsight, that this is the man who *will* claim the throne.[8] Shakespeare could have managed his earlier placing of the claim by a straight change in the sequence of public events, as he does elsewhere. Instead he does something very subtle. He cuts off Hall's clear, explanatory hindsight, for obviously this cannot have been available to persons at the time, and the drama is technically confined to their perceptions, has no over-riding narrative or editorial voice. Then he turns the space between origin and visible action into a tantalizing mystery. Commentators on the play tend to say that the "sharp quillets of the law" must have something to do with the succession, but they, like Hall, are comforting themselves with hindsight.

Each party to the dispute thunderously affirms the self-evidence of his cause, but the audience is kept guessing. Then, suddenly, Plantagenet proposes that, since no one will speak out, any man who believes him to be right should pluck a white rose—and as he speaks he plucks a white rose. Somerset responds by inviting *his* supporters to pluck red roses. As with the picking of the apple in Milton's Eden, the picking of the roses is felt by the audience as a point of origin. This is it, the beginning of all that killing. But as with the apple, so with the roses: the apparent clarity of the event is involved in a spider's web of indefinite presuppositions that drain away the promised explanatory power. "Why did Eve pick the apple? This cannot be the point at which sin entered the world, she must have been bad already to disobey God in this way," and so on and so forth.

The moment of the rose-picking is simultaneously chivalric (backward-looking) in its resonance and politically sophisticated. It hovers between "Here I plant my standard!" and "Let's take a straw vote."

But that is not all. There is a further sense that each man's case is mysteriously crystallized by the physical roses, bravely worn. Richard's words as he suggests the device, "Since you are tongue-tied and so loath to speak, / In dumb significants proclaim your thoughts" (II.iv.24–25), seem to say that the rose can properly fill a vacuum in the articulation of reasons. It is as if concrete things have a self-evidence, an un-answerable truth-bearing power often absent from words. Juries can be suddenly convinced, quite irrationally, by a blood-stained handkerchief, produced in court. Seeing is believing. Othello, whom we shall meet later, was like one of those jurors; "Give me the ocular proof!" he cried (III.iii.360). And he too, irrationally and tragically, was satisfied by the production of a handkerchief.[9]

Of course a rose cannot set out legal arguments. It can, however, affect behaviour and increase belief, commitment, allegiance, confidence. As the roses are picked, the juggernaut of history picks up speed. Honour rather than reason is now engaged. As Tania Demetriou says, there is something "uncannily real" about the scene.[10] I know that in committee meetings, after a show of hands in which I have declared a view, I warm to that view, begin to set aside counter-arguments that until then had solicited my attention. Group motivation is partly a matter of wearing the colours of one's side, as football supporters do. Shakespeare has hit on something very close to the "James-Lange" theory of motivation. The "James" here is William, Henry's philosopher brother. The theory calls into question the assumption that actions are determined by pre-existing emotions. Instead of striking because we feel angry, in fact, "We feel angry because we strike."[11] The extreme forms of this reversal seem to crop up in military contexts. The sweet-smelling roses, red and white, conduct us to blood and death:

> this brawl today
> Grown to this faction in the Temple Garden,
> Shall send between the Red Rose and the White
> A thousand souls to death and deadly night. (II.iv.124–27)

Shakespeare understands the vertiginous transformation of reason to honour. When the un-named lawyer picks a white rose, Plantagenet asks, "Now, Somerset, where is your argument?" And Somerset answers, "Here in my scabbard, meditating that / Shall dye your white rose in a bloody red" (II.iv.59–61). Sixteen lines earlier Somerset had agreed, on the straw-poll logic, that if he got fewer votes he would yield. That is now forgotten as mere symbols harden into governing realities. A rose is a more potent thing than an argument, and a sword is more potent still. The recurrent use of the word "maintain" (II.iv.73, 88) is the language of trial by combat, as in the opening of *Richard II*. The intimate texture of the poetry reveals how Shakespeare has the whole development of the scene in his mind from the beginning. When he gave the phrase "sharp quillets of the law" to Warwick he was saying under his breath, "Careful! You could cut yourselves!"

In this scene Shakespeare moves to and fro between latent and avowed motives in a way that is true to the real movement of politics. It could be said that what I take for subtlety could be mere confusion, that Shakespeare simply forgot to explain the occasion of the quarrel and slipped in the necessary genealogical information later. But the language of the scene *makes a point of* silence and inarticulacy that is inescapable.

Shakespeare returns to the enigmatic, all-powerful rose in Act IV, Scene i. White rose Vernon and red rose Basset are clamouring for the right of formal combat. Basset says,

This fellow here, with envious carping tongue,
Upbraided me about the rose I wear,
Saying the sanguine color of the leaves
Did represent my master's blushing cheeks,
When stubbornly he did repugn the truth
About a certain question in the law
Argu'd betwixt the Duke of York and him. (IV. i.90–96)

Note that nothing is said here about York's claim to the throne. The legal difference is alluded to, but we seem further than ever from knowing what it was. Basset is obviously not interested. What fills his mind is the roses themselves and their force as badges of allegiance, importing or endangering the wearer's honour.

The fascinating thing in this revisiting of the rose theme is the behaviour of the sweetly reasonable King. He shows no sign of any awareness of York's ambition, lurking in the background. He seeks, but far less effectively than the unwarlike Mayor in the earlier scene, to defuse the quarrel. He identifies the immediate cause and pronounces it "slight and frivolous" (IV.i.112): they are fighting over roses. To show the silliness of the affair he takes a rose himself, observing as he does so how meaningless the action is—there is no earthly reason why the mere picking of a red rose should mean that he prefers Somerset to York! It was Samuel Johnson who inserted the stage direction, "Pulling a red rose," in his edition. There is no stage direction in the Folio, but Johnson is obviously correct. The King may have picked a rose at random. He notices perhaps only as he is fixing the rose on his breast that this might cause a foolish person to infer that he favoured Lancastrian Somerset. The King assures us that this is not the case, and the King is not a liar. Yet the rose is stronger than he. It proclaims—visually—the right of Lancaster more loudly than any eirenic words from the sovereign's mouth. To seal the effect we must add that Henry himself is of the House of Lancaster. He has made a huge mistake. When he thought he was pouring water on the fire he was pouring petrol.

Henry is neither stupid nor immoral, but he is an ineffective king. If we ask, "How should Henry behave, confronted by these bloodthirsty lords?" the natural answer might be that he ought to try to calm them, should remind his subjects of the obligations of charity and forgiveness. Henry does both of these things. His sceptical response to roses as badges feels strong, intellectually. But such brisk scepticism, offered as realism, has always been disconnected from the real. The old scorn for gold that finds expression in Thomas More's *Utopia*—"Why revere a chunk of metal?"—sounds like earthy common sense but is in fact wilfully obtuse. People who live in the real world know that a gold coin will buy bread for a child. Thus signifiers, after an initially vacuous *fiat*—"Let this mean that"—acquire purchase upon real events. The movement of the King's hand as he puts on the rose is the most mysterious thing of all. Does the hand know that it is a Lancastrian hand, and must therefore take a red rose, not a white? Or was it simply chance, a truly random act, instantly mythologized and rendered politically operative by context? Did the King himself become half aware that he was caught in a web of meanings and so assumed a tunnel vision to avoid confronting the frightening implica-

afterwards Cardinal, look more directly anti-papal. Looking back on the glorious reign of Henry V, Winchester intones, "The battles of the Lord of hosts he fought; / The Church's prayers made him so prosperous" (I.i.31–32). The good Duke Humphrey answers, "The Church? where is it? Had not churchmen pray'd, /His thread of life had not so soon decay'd." This looks like *general* scepticism, from an admired person, directed at the prayers of priests and so at the Church itself. Later when Winchester says, "Rome shall remedy this," Gloucester answers, punning, "Roam thither then" (III.i.51). This looks like straight anti-Catholic popular rhetoric. It goes with the earlier picture of Winchester as a wicked cardinal, giving indulgences to whores (I.iii.35). Gloucester threatens to stamp on the Cardinal's hat "in spite of Pope" and calls the Cardinal himself a "scarlet hypocrite!" (I.iii.49–50, 56). "Scarlet" takes us to "scarlet sins" (Isa. 1:18) and to the "scarlet woman" of Revelation (17:4), identified by Protestants with the Church of Rome. The word burns still with a sectarian flame some twenty years later in John Webster's *The White Devil:* "O poor charity, / Thou art seldom seen in scarlet" (III.ii.70–71). Even here, however, if we listen hard, another thread in the discourse can be discerned. There is something momentarily disorienting in Gloucester's question, "The Church? Where is it?" It half-implies that all these corrupt priests are not the true Catholic Church, which, perhaps, is far away and yet still there, a little like the communist polity as seen in the later thought of Terry Eagleton: a great idea that hasn't actually been tried yet. Just as Joan is condemned not for her cult of virginity but for her unchastity, so Winchester is condemned not for his priestly power but for the abuse of that power, and also, like Joan, for unchastity. One's ears prick up at the word "indulgences." Protestants saw the very notion of an indulgence—the remission of punishment in Purgatory, often in return for money—as corrupt. The power of granting indulgences was passed by the pope to bishops and was scandalously exercised by dodgy professional "pardoners" in the later Middle Ages. Once more, however, Winchester is condemned not for purveying indulgences per se but for granting them to whores (he is supposed to have derived a comfortable income from brothels in Southwark).[12] This, we suddenly realize, could be good old anti-clericalism, which began long before the Reformation. The picture of hell drawn by the Limbourg brothers for the *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry* shows

many tonsured friars being dragged to everlasting torment, as does the *Inferno* of Buonamico Buffalmacco (1350) in the Campo Santo at Pisa. Catholic Dante's bête noire was Boniface—a pope. The Pardoner is one of the nastiest characters in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.* Of course the play, *Henry VI,* though written towards the end of the *sixteenth* century is *set* in pre-Reformation England. Shakespeare is clearly conscious of this, though he, so to speak, keeps his consciousness to himself. At one point the King says that there should be no quarrel between the nations of England and France, professing as they do "one faith" (V.i.14). In part 2 Henry, that ineffective but undoubtedly Christian king, is mocked by his unpleasant wife because he is addicted to "holiness, / To number Ave-Maries on his beads" (I.iii.55–56). Good King Henry is clearly a Catholic. Strong Protestants, I have granted, would hear this material in one way, the ordinarily confused auditor in another. It could all be received without difficulty by an Old Catholic. The "Rome/roam" crack on the other hand remains obstinately anti-papist. Shakespeare with his antennae for likely audience-response would have foreseen all this. Perhaps we must allow that the young dramatist, eager to make his mark, was not above giving *all* the sections of the audience what they wanted.

What remains remarkable is the co-existence of conventional dance-like sequences such as Talbot's defeat of the wily Countess of Auvergne (loved by Victorian audiences) or the scenes of antiphonal exchanges between castled generals on one hand and, on the other, a subtle reflex of attention to underlying or simultaneous causes and counter-causes—creating a catch in the rhythm of the dance. This is distinctively Shakespearean, and because it is found throughout, I am inclined to think, with Michael Hattaway, that the whole of *1 Henry VI* is by Shakespeare (the resemblance to Nashe detected by Gary Taylor's stylistic analysis can be accounted for by the readiness of a young dramatist to adopt the style of available models).[13] The most vivid instance of this "catch in the rhythm" is Suffolk's almost Freudian slip at in Act V:

I'll undertake to make thee Henry's queen,
To put a golden sceptre in thy hand,
And set a precious crown upon thy head,
If thou wilt condescend to be my—

MARGARET What?
SUFFOLK His love. (V.iii.117–21)

Suffolk is speaking of the splendid match he can make for Margaret, but the secret thought, that Margaret might be his, not Henry's, breaks through. The model is Ovid, with his glancingly mobile Latin. Pygmalion, the man who fell in love with a statue he had devised, is made to stumble in his speech: " 'Sit coniunx opto' non ausus 'eburnea virgo' / Dicere, Pygmalion, 'similis mea' dixit 'eburnae.' " ("I wish my wife could be"—Pygmalion dared not say "my ivory maiden," but said "one like my ivory maiden"; *Metamorphoses,* x.275–76). Ovid was Shakespeare's favourite poet, the writer to whom he most often refers. He will later use the Ovidian hesitation to brilliant effect in *The Merchant of Venice:*

One half of me is yours, the other half yours—
Mine own, I would say; but if mine, then yours,
And so all yours. (III.ii.16–18)

Here the effect is especially delicious because the speaker is the normally queenly, all-controlling Portia, now trapped in a momentary mental stammer by love. Suffolk's line is Shakespeare's first shot at amorous parapraxis. Freud's notion of a latent real intention or desire disturbing the surface utterance is clearly applicable to both Suffolk and Portia.[14]

The scene in the rose garden, which all allow to be Shakespeare's, remains the astonishing thing. I return to Tania Demetriou's phrase, "uncannily real." Of course Shakespeare is not giving a factually accurate account of the origin of the Wars of the Roses; he is giving an accurate account of the way such things can come about. All this was sorted out long ago by Aristotle when he said that poetry does not tell us "what Alcibiades did" but rather "the kinds of things that would happen" (*Poetics,* 1451b11, 1451a37). Shakespeare is true to the kinds of things that happen in times of political change. This, as Aristotle at once allows, lets in the kind of universality that present-day Historicists dislike. Perhaps Shakespeare is actually truer to the general character of such movements than the academic historians are. Historians are pre-set to find the causes of events and are perhaps too little prepared to recognize where movements are not so

much the product of precedent conditions as self-energizing. Shakespeare knows how the hindsight that gives Edward Gibbon's great history its majestic sweep was unavailable to the original participants. Think of the difference between sober historical accounts of the start of the First World War and Bertrand Russell's observation that his compatriots had become irrational, as if they wanted to die.[15] Russell was remembering what it was like to be there. The closer one comes to the human material, the more it shimmers.

The "shimmer effect" is there again in *2 Henry VI*. Suffolk's slip in addressing Margaret of Anjou betrayed his desire for her, and this hint is gradually developed. Part 2 opens with what appears to be a blandly public report by Suffolk of his negotiation to cement a marriage between Margaret and the King of England:

As by your high imperial Majesty
I had in charge at my depart for France,
As procurator to your Excellence,
To marry Princess Margaret for your Grace;
So, in the famous ancient city Tours,
. . . . . .
I have perform'd my task, and was espous'd. (I.i.1–9)

We suppose at first that we are listening to unproblematic, sonorous, official stuff. But a fleeting puzzle is planted in the sequence of the phrases. We believe for a fraction of a second that Suffolk is calmly announcing that *he* has married Margaret. Of course we correct ourselves. "Procurator," not so very different from the low term "procurer," obviously means that Suffolk has obtained Margaret for someone else, and "for" in "for your Grace" must mean "on behalf of." Moreover the Elizabethans were more accustomed than we are to "proxy wooings." At the same time, however, "to marry Princess Margaret" and "I have perform'd my task, and was espous'd" naturally convey the simple meaning, "I am married to Margaret." Still stranger, as the speech continues, it is suggested that there is in any case a technical sense in which Suffolk really has married—or taken to himself—Margaret of France. At lines 11–12 Suffolk proclaims that he will now "deliver up" his "title in the queen" to Henry. If there were no sexual

rapport evident elsewhere in the drama between Suffolk and Margaret we might be justified in setting aside these "subauditions" as accidental or irrelevant. As it is we cannot. Ordinary dramatists often confuse the audience inadvertently. Shakespeare knows when he is confusing people and manages the confusion.

The story of *2 Henry VI* is the story of the rising star of York and the descending star of Lancastrian Henry. While the dramatist works to undermine clarity of motive, he simultaneously keeps certain obstinate facts before our minds, as that York's claim to the throne is strong whereas the King's own claim is frail. Admittedly, this not made completely explicit until we get to the third part. The essence of York's case is that things went wrong after Richard II. Richard, the legitimate heir of Edward III, via the Black Prince, Edward's first-born son, was forced from his throne by Lancastrian Bolingbroke, who thereupon made himself king (Henry IV). Richard had left no issue. Henry IV could claim descent from Edward III's son John of Gaunt. But John of Gaunt was Edward's fourth son. York meanwhile could show descent from Edward's third son, Lionel, Duke of Clarence. Since both the earlier lines, that of the Black Prince and that of the second son, William of Hatfield, had petered out, this left the dispute between York, descended from the third son, and Henry VI, descended from the fourth son and on the throne only as a result of an act of violent usurpation. Legally, things look black for Henry.

But—and we shall have to get used to bewildering complications of this kind—the paradox of the legal rebel and the illegal governor is not the full story. Henry, the dubious figure (in York's terms, "the usurper," *3 Henry VI,* I.i.114), is virtuous, sweet-natured, and fair-minded. He knows what the job requires and at first attempts thunder from the throne:

Think'st thou that I will leave my kingly throne,
Wherein my grandsire and my father sat?
No; first shall war unpeople this my realm;
Ay, and their colors, often borne in France,
And now in England to our heart's great sorrow,
Shall be my winding-sheet. Why faint you, lords?
My title's good, and better far than his. (I.i.124–30)

Hadst thou been meek, our title still had slept,
And we, in pity of the gentle king,
Had slipp'd our claim until another age. (*3 Henry VI,* II.ii.160–62)

And so the subtleties recede from our understanding, into obscurity.

What else in this apprentice work is distinctively Shakespearean? I answer, the use of dramaturgical "islands," small or large, set in the action. We have already met one in the person of the bourgeois Mayor who quells the riot near the beginning of *1 Henry VI.* In part 2 we have, straight from John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs,* the rumbustious late medieval comedy of Simpcox and the bogus miracle. Simpcox is a beggar who claims to have been blind all his life until his sight was miraculously restored at a shrine in St. Albans. The King questions him, asking him to name the colours of various things. Simpcox unhesitatingly gives the correct replies to exhibit the glorious fact of his newly restored sight. The King then observes that a blind man would have no way of knowing that a particular colour, set before him, is the colour sighted people call "red." Simpcox is fairly caught, amid much merriment, and he and his wife are dispatched to be whipped through every market town between St. Albans and Berwick. It still plays well on stage to uproarious laughter from modern audiences, yet we in the twenty-first century cannot easily stomach all this merry whacking and flogging. Shakespeare knew that even then someone in the audience would be troubled about the beating of Mrs. Simpcox, and for that person he created one of his "islands." "Alas, sir," Mrs. Simpcox says simply, "we did it for pure need" (*2 Henry VI,* II.i.154). Suddenly the scene is turned inside out. The egregious rogue Simpcox becomes a man who is hungry, ingenious, and has a wife to support. But then the comedy roars on. Later Shakespeare will modulate the effect to new uses, perhaps most wonderfully in the strikingly dignified words of the dotty schoolmaster, Holofernes, standing isolated amid the wreckage of the entertainment he has put together for grand persons who do nothing but laugh at him (*Love's Labour's Lost,* V.ii.628). This alertness to the possibility of a *completely* different view of things is one of the features that has enabled Shakespeare to survive beyond his immediate ideological context. The person in a corner of the auditorium whom we imagined sympathizing with Mrs. Simpcox can become that other person, some

four hundred years later, who has the extraordinary idea that a Jewish moneylender who wants to carve open the chest of a Christian could have something to be said on his side.

Another "island," equally brief, can be found in the sequence of Jack Cade's rebellion. Jack Cade is a communist in the basic sense of the word: he believes in the abolition of private property (*2 Henry VI,* IV.vii.18–19). Again the dominant logic is clear, and perhaps not to our taste: Cade is a grotesque, half-comic threat to all around him and deserves to be crushed. His henchman's line, "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers" (IV.ii.6–7), must always, I suspect, have got a laugh and a sputtering of applause from some in the audience. Yet there is no serious doubt that a society without law is a kind of horror, a jungle of random suffering and unchecked aggression. We are all now pre-set, culturally, to warm to terms like "subversion" and to recoil from terms like "repression." This automatic response may be a function of our luxurious security, as compared with earlier times in history. Michel Foucault can rely on a similarly automatic charge of condemnation attaching to the word "policing." I respond as others do to these signals. Yet I can remember a time when I was in a dangerous part of the world and surprised myself with the sudden, unbidden thought, "If only they had a proper police force!" A basic fact about the England of Elizabeth—one we should never forget—is that the sovereign had no effective police force and no standing army.

Cade's uprising fails, and we now see him on the run, in rural Kent. In a change of register we have a sudden domesticity; an English garden with a high brick wall, over which comes the desperate Cade. The garden belongs to one Alexander Iden, no aristocratic warlord of the kind to which we have become accustomed in the histories but a substantial country squire. Cade offers a shrill challenge; Iden, who seems to embody a kindlier, post-feudal England, answers in effect, "Come now, I'm not going to fight a poor starving man—look at the thickness of my arm; I could finish you in a second!" Cade makes a fight of it nevertheless and falls. All the sympathy so far has lain with Iden. But then Cade says, "Famine and no other hath slain me" (IV.x.60). Once more the scene is, for a moment only, turned inside out. Karl Marx, in a remote corner of the auditorium of time, finds his own thought expressed for him.

"Islands" are not always so brief. In *3 Henry VI* we have the poignant meditative idyll amid the killing and this too is an "island," or a time out of

war, a suspension of the hammering engine of the play's action. In "another part of the field," the King enters, alone. This "island" is not like the others a moment of naturalism. Instead it is given its own formal music in counterpoint to the main theme of the play. It is pastoral. The King sits on a molehill to muse on the unattainable happiness of the simple shepherd:

Ah! what a life were this! how sweet! how lovely!
Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds looking on their silly sheep
Than doth a rich embroider'd canopy
To kings that fear their subjects' treachery? (*3 Henry VI,* II.v.41–45)

I have been stressing, as distinctively Shakespearean, counter-formal moments of naturalist mobility and ambiguity. Here, however, the cadenced language running contrary to the bellicose drama shows how the distinctively Shakespearean tic of opposition can itself assume a stately formal character. This has happened before. When Henry made his grand speech of defiance, the measured curses he laid upon himself and his country, even as we shivered at his weakness, had prophetic authority. "First shall war unpeople this my realm" (*3 Henry VI,* I.i.126). Just so. It will. Even in the strange lull of the intruded pastoral scene we have the stage directions "Enter a Son that hath kill'd his father" and "Enter a Father that hath kill'd his son . . . bearing of his son" (II.v.54, 78). No subtlety now, no clever intricacy. This, if you like, is primitive. But "primitive" is now no term of abuse, as it began to be earlier. For this is the truth of civil wars. The Greek historian Herodotus makes Croesus tell Cyrus that the terrible thing about war is that we see, not sons burying fathers, but fathers burying sons (*History,* I.lxxxvii.4). Civil war, we now see, is even worse. The wordless sequence is symmetrically patterned in the form of a chiasmus, son: father, father: son. Here it would be a critical error to associate the patterned with the vacuous or platitudinous.

Isolating a Monster: *Richard III*

The next history Shakespeare wrote was a barnstormer. For my generation Olivier's Richard III is the one stamped on the memory. It was a performance of sinister power, including sexual power, and it lent itself

readily to parody in the years that followed. In a way the potential comedy was there from the start in Shakespeare's writing. As usual, he saw it first. His Richard is a figure hovering between comedy and horror. The deformed murderer of the princes in the Tower, the terrifying seducer of the widowed Lady Anne, is a jovial fellow. He has gripped the popular imagination ever since.

In the mid-twentieth century it was generally agreed that it was a mistake to apply the notion of "characterization" to Shakespeare's plays. Characters, it was said, belong in novels; early modern drama is a dance of images or, at best, stereotypes. L. C. Knights in his immensely influential essay, "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" said that it was logically absurd to make inferences about the previous lives of such poetic constructions. In fact audiences guess and hypothesize all the time, and good dramatists rely on the fact. The earlier critic A. C. Bradley, predictably derided by Knights, felt no such restraint. Now that the dust has settled it is clear that Bradley was a better critic of Shakespeare than Knights. Shakespeare excels at characterization.

In the three parts of *Henry VI,* however, this is not obvious. The barons with their similar-sounding county names easily blur in the mind; only the racy career of the plot keeps them distinct. Even the dynastic factions are not strongly characterized. The audience needs those red and white roses to keep the political parties distinct. Henry himself is an interesting character if one attends carefully, but he is so, *quietly.* His goodness and piety feel genuine and are played off against a weakness that is now, because our sympathy has been engaged, troubling to watch. He is unable to stand his ground and defend the good Duke of Gloucester, whom he knows to be innocent of the charge brought against him, because he is so overwhelmed, emotionally, to find that humankind can be so wicked (*2 Henry VI,* II.i.181). His evident fear of his wife (*3 Henry VI,* I.i.219) is similarly embarrassing. When categories are crossed and mismatched in this way, the mind is drawn to speculate on the likely nature of an individual who could be like that. Thus we guess that this king will probably *not* be troubled by his wife's threat of sexual strike-action (*3 Henry VI,* I.i.248). But all this is faint compared with "Richard Crookback."

Richard is a stunted figure and at the same time a giant of the stage. If characters belong naturally to the novel, is there a later novelist who is relevant here? There is: Charles Dickens. Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop*

is physically a giant dwarf, having a huge torso and tiny arms and legs. He is a figure of potency, including sexual potency, and he is jolly with it. The Richard of tradition "was born at Fotheringhay in Northamptonshire, retained within his mother's womb for two years, emerging with teeth and hair to his shoulders."[17] The incongruous teeth become in legend the tusks of a wild boar, Richard's emblem. In his *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland,* Raphael Holinshed preserves the doggerel couplet of William Collingbourne, who was beheaded and chopped into four pieces in 1484: "The Cat the Rat and Lovell our dog / Rule all England under an Hog."[18] The jingle has the queer primal authority possessed by nursery rhymes. The Cat, Catesby, and the Rat, Ratcliffe, we shall meet in the course of the play. The Hog is Richard. In the popular collection of blood-freezing tales of the falls of princes, *The Mirror for Magistrates,* the Duke of Clarence is made to say, "He knew my brother Richard was the Bore / Whose tuskes should tear my brothers boyes and me."[19] The hairy, toothed baby has grown into a beast-man. It is important to forget the sleepy pink pigs of modern farming and remember the great fighting boars of the forests. The image recurs. In an anonymous poem, "The Rose of England," we read, "There came a beast men call a bore / And he rooted this garden up and downe."[20] All this is brought together in Shakespeare's line, "Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog!" (I.iii.227). The image of the boar permeates the play.

The opening soliloquy—very much an address, meanwhile, to the audience—is both self-description and an announcement of self-determination. Richard dwells relishingly on his own unattractiveness, his unfitness for love or sex:

> But I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
> Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
> . . . . . .
> therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain. (I.i.14–15, 28–30)

The allusion to a looking-glass is a brilliant touch with its insinuation that there is something weakly narcissistic about the benevolent mass of humankind—everyone else; these lovers of the opposite sex are really lovers

plays a fish and at line 86 she is drawn into the word-game, telling Richard that if he hanged himself he could indeed be excused, because an appropriate punishment would have been exacted. Richard, we sense, is pleased by this strange shift of register from Anne and refers to the death of her husband: "Say that I slew him not." "Say" is interesting. It is like "Suppose" or, still more, like a lawyer's "Put the case that . . . ." Anne fires up and rejects the hypothesis directly. Richard then lies, equally directly: "I did not kill your husband" (I.ii.91). Within a few lines, however, he concedes that, all right, he did.

This is a puzzling response because it is the one moment of faltering in an otherwise uniformly powerful assault. I cannot decide whether Shakespeare is deliberately giving Richard a glimmer of humanizing weakness in order to suggest that at some level he is falling in love with Anne and cannot bear that she should think him wholly wicked, or whether it is simply a false note, a patch of *foolish* devilry quite out of place in the mouth of a figure of devilish cunning. Shakespeare's audience would remember from the end of *3 Henry VI* how all three brothers, Edward (the other Edward, who became King), Richard, and Clarence, stabbed the prince. Strictly, where three stab it is hard to be sure that all three are murderers. Which was (or were) the fatal wound(s)? This is enough to give a certain intellectual status to Richard's first response, "Say that I slew him not," though not to his subsequent flat denial of guilt. The last to strike in *3 Henry VI* was Clarence; Richard struck second. The presumption so far is that Clarence finished him off and is therefore the murderer. But when cool-headed Richard strikes, he says, "to end thy agony" (V.v.38); the third blow, delivered by Clarence, may have fallen on one already dead. Shakespeare has expertly contrived a situation that is technically ambiguous but morally unambiguous. Of the wickedness of Richard there is no doubt.

Anne then speaks of the virtue of the murdered King Henry, and Richard, reverting to the game of formal debate, answers that if Henry was bound for heaven then surely the person who helped him on his way to so good a place deserves thanks. Feste, the fool in *Twelfth Night,* "proves" his mistress a fool for first wearing black and then affirming that her brother is happy in heaven (I.v.66–72). The logic is fool's logic but it is good logic. There really is a profound inconsistency in the behaviour of the devout in

the face of death. It is as if both Richard and Feste are saying from outside, "You Christians can't mean what you say. See what happens when I take you seriously!" Anne answers that if Henry belongs in heaven, no place is so fitting for Richard as hell. It is here that Richard makes his move. There is *one* other place that is right for him, he muses—Lady Anne's bedchamber. It may be thought that this is bad writing, that Richard ought to have softened up his victim with honeyed words before making any direct sexual suggestion. I have no doubt that the sequence is right as it stands. Richard knows what he is doing. He suddenly hits a woman in shock with sex. It is a kind of mental rape, and it is psychologically credible that it could be done. Anne's reply is dazed and ineffective. Richard then employs his casuistry in a more exalted manner, offering a lover's argument: the real cause of everything was Anne's own beauty (I.ii.121). Anne, having been bewildered by the openly sexual suggestion, now knows where she is again and recovers her spirit, indignantly spurning the courtship offered. At line 144 she spits at him and wishes him dead. Now Richard makes use again of his ploy of "taking the Christian literally" and, choosing his moment with care, passes his sword to Anne and bares his breast. It is a gamble but a safe gamble. He is thinking, "She will not be able to do this, and, after that, she is mine," and he is right. The 1623 Folio text gives a stage direction at this point: "She offers at [it] with his sword." The Folio and the earlier quarto texts all say that five lines later (I.ii.182) she lets the sword drop. Clearly Anne makes a real effort to kill Richard and finds, with a strange shock, that she cannot. Richard is on his knees. This is the posture of the suppliant Petrarchan lover, but never was wooing further removed from such courtly devotion than is Richard's. As the sword falls from her hand he rises and exults in his power, urging her again and again to do the thing she cannot do. Anne is broken, and at the same time her prostrate emotions are mysteriously engaged. Richard is left alone on the stage. He turns to the audience, with a question: "Was ever woman in this humor woo'd? / Was ever woman in this humor won?" (I.ii.227–28). It is, as Latin grammarians used to say, "a question inviting the answer, 'No.' " And Richard's smile is saying, "Of course it seems impossible. But, look, I have done it." Richard's position is secure, but the same security does not extend to the dramatist. Addressing Shakespeare we may continue to insist that the sequence is utterly implausible, absurd. Indeed a common modern response is to see

the episode as wholly removed from realism, as an enjoyable, palpably theatrical romp.

There is, however, another way to take the scene. What if Shakespeare chose to dramatize, in all its weirdness, an extremely improbable but just possible sequence of events? Aristotle in his *Poetics* famously observed that plausible impossibilities (supernatural events, say, or "double time-schemes") were allowable in drama—the audience being perfectly happy—but implausible possibilities were not to be countenanced (1460a26–27, 1461b11–12). Shakespeare, whether or not he knew Aristotle's dictum, here flouts it, at least initially, in a spectacular manner. To see the sequence as a theatrical romp is to drain it of its extraordinary power. Well acted it actually convinces, against the grain of expectation. Of course, the scene must be called unnatural, as long as "natural" means "what most people do, most of the time." The whole point of the episode is that it is a marvel. When Aristotle spoke of implausible possibilities, he is likely to have had in mind grotesquely convenient coincidences. But the wooing of Anne is not like that. The audience in the theatre is not entertained by a diverting formal sequence, a "ballet of bloodless categories," to borrow F. H. Bradley's phrase. Rather it is gripped by a case of human interaction that is at first implausible but at last (just) credible. Of course if we think in very general terms and simply ask, "Would a woman say yes to a man she hates?" we must answer, "Of course not." But if we ask, "Would just such a woman, so circumstanced, say yes to just such a man?" we may find ourselves answering, "Well, yes, perhaps she would." It is *unexpectedly believable.*

In Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* the love between Cecilia and Robbie is precipitated by an obscenity.[23] It is grosser than Richard's sudden reference to the bedchamber, but Richard's words are in context more shocking. Both are psychologically grounded. More difficult is the contention—a contention I am backing—that Anne is compliant not so much in spite of her bereavement as because of it. Although in the scene Shakespeare gives us she is following the bier of the King, not that of her dead husband, it is fair to see her as a woman in shock. It is clear from her words that the memory of her husband's death is intricately entwined with her grief for the dead king. The actor David Niven said that in his desperate grief at the death of his beloved wife, he suddenly became sexually voracious. It will

be said, "But men are different." I am not sure. Anne is reeling, and Richard is overwhelmingly dominant. At the most basic level—biologically—she is in need of a male protector. Looking back later she sees what happened as something inherent in her own sexuality, as coarsely irrational: "My woman's heart / Grossly grew captive to his honey words" (IV.i.78–79). The very occurrence of this retrospective line, so much later in the play, is a sign that the dramatist is fretting, still thinking about how such a thing might have happened. Had the episode been a wantonly unrealistic formal ballet such afterthoughts would not persist.

I am suggesting that there is psychological subtlety in this early work and that this makes the play a good play. It does not follow that the obviously formal passages are to be disparaged. The lamentation of the queens in Act IV, Scene iv, is unanswerably superb. But in Richard the vigour of the late medieval "Vice" gives place to the mystery of the wicked individual, lost to pity, goodness, and humanity. This is *character.*

Near the end, when Richard having waded through blood is losing, he is given a soliloquy. Where before, in the manner of the old morality, he used his soliloquies to talk to us, the audience, now he is talking to himself. We become eavesdroppers on a new species of privacy. It is the night before the battle. Richard, who cannot sleep, is visited by a succession of ghosts, the people he has wronged and violated in the course of his dreadful life. This may be thought to be so much late medieval flummery, but I am told that when Dame Helen Gardner, famous for her academic ferocity, lay dying, she too was visited by the figures of those whose theses she had failed, whose careers she had marred; they stood round her bed. Richard tries to rally: "What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by. / Richard loves Richard, that is I and I" (V.iii.182–83).[24] This is the same strong, clever, twisted little man we saw in dialogue with Lady Anne. Richard the rationalist is quick with his scepticism: ghosts are not real, there is nothing here to be afraid of, I am by myself . . . . The idiom "by myself" is instructive, although Richard does not employ it in his speech. The common locution for solitude implicitly divides the isolated party in two. With no one else to look at one looks within, and instantly a splitting of looker from looked-at follows. Richard's thought is rapid. The self is no sooner objectified than it is eagerly dismissed as un-frightening (we are not convinced and neither is Richard). He struggles to close the gap, first

with self-love, then with mere identity. As James Lull says, the dialogue with Anne comes back to haunt him here.[25] Harold Bloom thinks the speech inept.[26] But its strange *staccato* rhythm springs from playing off Richard's earlier logic-chopping against a new kind of terror. The interweaving of stylistic registers is fine.

Richard, alone with himself, is closeted with one who is not lovable. That is why the attempt at self-love fails. In the opening speech of the play Richard, exulting in his own unlovable ugliness, implicitly dismissed the rest of humankind as narcissists, lovers of themselves. When he said this he was referring to his own unfitness for sexual dalliance—and Shakespeare moved swiftly to show us how wrong Richard was on this single point. But at a deeper level he was right. Ordinary people can—must—love themselves. Richard cannot. The later quartos change "I and I" to "I am I," and the editors of the Folio accept this, as have most editions since. Edmond Malone in the eighteenth century said he was not sure that the reading in the First Quarto was wrong. If we accept "I am I" we must say that Richard momentarily closes the gap by an assertion of identity. If we stay with "I and I" we have bleak division returning more swiftly to defeat the warmth of self-love—a grim juxtaposition of unlovely selves. It is an old principle of textual criticism that, other things being equal, the more difficult reading is to be preferred. The usual tendency of textual corruption is to replace unexpected expressions with more ordinary phrases. One can easily see both how Shakespeare might have written "I and I" and how inevitably this would fall prey to the copyist later. Somewhere in the background is the line from the Roman comic dramatist Terence, *Proximus sum egomet mihi,* "I am the closest person to myself" (*Andria,* IV.i.12). Shakespeare would have known the line, if not from his Stratford schooldays, then from its appearance, slightly misquoted, in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (I.i.188). There the Jew Barabas, an initially genial, grotesque villain like Richard, cites the line early in the story, when his star is still in the ascendant. The Terentian tag there expresses cat-like self-satisfaction. In giving the line to Barabas Marlowe made it into a Machiavellian theorem. It is after all in *The Jew of Malta* that Machiavelli himself is brought on stage, as Prologue to what comes later. Stemming from this moment, in the centuries that followed, is a line of hard Machiavellian jokes: "If you want a friend, get a dog," "Sure, I cried all the way to the bank," "What's

surprised that one of the first things he wrote is the product of his reading in Latin. For his plot Shakespeare draws on a Roman comedy, the *Menaechmi* of Plautus. William Warner's English translation did not appear until 1595. It is just possible that Shakespeare read it in manuscript before publication, but in general scholars are agreed that the play is based on Plautus's Latin. T. W. Baldwin in *William Shakspere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* demonstrated that Shakespeare read far more Latin than is covered by persons who describe themselves as classicists in universities today; he can be tracked consulting Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus* (a Latin dictionary) in preference to available English versions. What is striking is that this play, an immensely clever essay in a classical mode by a rising dramatist, makes no attempt to parade its learning. Thomas Kyd, like Shakespeare, never received a university education. Unlike Shakespeare, he strenuously compensated for the defect by interlarding the English dialogue of his *Spanish Tragedy* (1590) with scraps of Latin (and perhaps in a lost version with Greek also). Shakespeare writes like one who can afford not to show off. His academic exercise retains no smell of the schoolroom. It is pure fun.

For Shakespeare Plautus's play with its twists of plot and its mistakings was simply a marvellous contraption, the complexity of which he immediately doubled mathematically by inserting a second pair of twins, this time twin servants, from another Plautine play, the *Amphitryo* (in which the god Mercury turns himself into the double of the slave Sosia). Although the *Amphitryo* was perhaps Plautus's best-loved play, there was no English version available to Shakespeare. His first action then, to multiply two by two, is an utterly formalist move. It was once observed that on a planet where the number of sexes is two the inhabitants will speak of "the eternal triangle," but on a planet where, say, six sexes are needed for successful procreation, a much more complex geometry of adultery will emerge in the sensational literature of that world. The intricate action of the play, which needs to be performed, like a Goldoni farce, at breakneck speed, is like a glittering dance. The fun at this level is great and has more to do with music (*allegro vivace*) than with insight into human nature.

That said, Shakespeare does go on to add human depth to this immediate delight in kinetic patterning. In the *Menaechmi* a traveller, who has a twin brother he does not know, arrives in Epidamnus, a place of swindlers and courtesans (Plautus plays upon *damnum* in the sense of "loss" at line

267). Shakespeare changes Epidamnus to Ephesus. This lets in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians with its doctrine of wifely subjection and its picture of a city seething not just with trickery but with witchcraft (5:22–33, cf. Acts 19:13). At the same time Shakespeare seems to scent, behind the coarse Roman comedy, a more mythically resonant Greek story. The *Menaechmi* is based on a lost comedy by the Greek dramatist Menander. The tale of Apollonius of Tyre (again, originally Greek) relayed by John Gower gets in, and the moving "children-lost-and-found" pattern from Greek romance grows bright again, under Shakespeare's hand. Thomas Underdowne's translation of the romance *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus had appeared in 1569. Where the newly arrived traveller in Plautus is simply amazed to find himself in a place where all his wishes are met, Shakespeare's Antipholus of Syracuse meets a lady who (believing him to be her husband) addresses him in the language of profound, deeply possessive married love (II.ii.113–46).

Suddenly the human tensions I excluded earlier are upon us, complicated and clamorous. In the popular television program *Wife Swap* real persons are moved around and manipulated as fictional persons are in comedy. The wife of an authoritarian Scottish Calvinist, say, is made to live for a couple of weeks with the feckless husband of an ageing hippie and the lady hippie meanwhile is sent to live with the Calvinist. Despite the titillating name of the program there is a rule: no sex. This "law of the game" is very like a hidden literary law of comedy: nothing irreversibly dreadful must be allowed to occur. The main pleasure of the program lies in the often hilarious incongruity of the temporary matches set up, but what is more interesting is the sexual subtext. Here, in spite of the rule, we become uneasily aware on occasion that there might have been—could now *be*—love between these temporary mates, or we catch a whiff of wistfulness at the supposedly joyful point of going home. This scary discomfort energizes comedy. The greatest of all operatic comedies, Mozart's *Così fan tutte,* is built on the troubling truth that affections—even the affections of the nicest girls—are transferable. The director who makes Antipholus pause before his baffled reply to Adriana's loving speech is not perverse. It means, "How can a woman like this be talking like this, to me?"

As always in Shakespearean comedy there are moments of disquiet, places where we feel, "This is getting out of hand." Yet all, even the

violent, knock-about farce, is held in a harmonious synthesis. The play is a *concordia discors,* not a *discordia concors.* "Knock-about" applies literally here. The beating of a servant with a stick would be, were it to occur in our society, an extraordinary act of violation. Imagine boxing the ears of a slow waiter in your favourite restaurant. Yet two hundred years ago you or your uncle would readily have done this. It is said that all the taboos have gone, but the beating of a servant is a very strong taboo indeed and may still be growing. The really odd thing is the way modern audiences adapt to the practice when they are watching *The Comedy of Errors.* This is, finally, a happy play. Greek and Christian, Catholic abbesses, a grieving father and errant children co-exist in an ultimate felicity. Most delicious of all is the pairing at the end of the Abbess with old Egeon, the merchant who had lost his sons. How can an abbess be sexually matched? There are people in the late comedies who are carefully denied mates by the dramatist, such as Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice.* Surely, if Antonio is not the marrying kind, the same logic must apply with greater force to an abbess —unless Shakespeare is satirizing Catholicism? It might be thought that in an age of intense conflict between Catholics and Protestants a sense of violation would be unavoidable here. Martin Luther married a nun and that was, precisely, scandalous. But none of the above applies. The Abbess was married to Egeon long before. She entered the convent because she thought her husband was dead. She can therefore, with happy propriety, embrace him when he reappears. The quiet joining of the Abbess and the old man at the end is the second-most moving thing in the play. This world of the play, so different from the fiercely divided land in which Shakespeare actually lived, the England of Campion and the torturer Richard Topcliffe, is an ideological Illyria. It may be said, however, that, simply because it is a comedy, the play makes marriage the highest good, and this is profoundly opposed to the Catholic exaltation of the monastic life. The Abbess herself describes what has happened as a birth. Without anxiety, she uses the religious word "nativity" (V.i.407). The nuance of incongruity in the word is enough to make the audience smile, but this is not satire. Shakespeare is not making fun of the Abbess. The overwhelming effect is one of joy.

I have called this moment the second-most moving thing in the play. The most moving thing comes later still, in the last seconds of the drama.

The two identical servant-brothers, Dromio and Dromio, are left staring at each other in affectionate wonder:

E. Dromio Methinks you are my glass, and not my brother:
I see by you I am a sweet-fac'd youth.
Will you walk in to see their gossiping?
S. Dromio Not I, sir, you are my elder.
E. Dromio That's a question; how shall we try it?
S. Dromio We'll draw cuts for the senior, till then, lead thou first.
E. Dromio Nay then thus:
We came into the world like brother and brother;
And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another.
Exeunt (V.i.418–26)

If *Wife Swap* can be allowed to illustrate the transposition of spouses, popular television programs on separated siblings who find one another after many years testify to a similar strength of feeling in the field of the two Dromios. It is all the stronger when, as here, it is understated. A nice, almost legal question of precedence is reviewed with mock gravity, and then they run off together. The best line of all is "I see by you I am a sweet-fac'd youth." In any other context "I am a sweet-fac'd youth" would be odious self-admiration. Here it is suddenly and mysteriously cleansed. To say it of one's brother is all right. The description can pass as both affectionate and objectively true. Dromio of Ephesus is speaking of his brother and of himself *at the same time.* Dromio calls his brother his glass, but we all know how subtly we learn to *use* mirrors—to select in advance the aspect which, reflected, will please most. The image that catches one unawares, the figure inadvertently glimpsed in a shop-window as one crosses the road, is entirely different. It is as if, wonderfully, that second, unmanaged image were to be entirely pleasing. Dromio loves his brother and, because they are exactly alike, must therefore love himself. Because this self-love flows from the prior love of the brother, it is nothing like the self-love of Barabas in *The Jew of Malta.* Richard III was left alone with a hateful self, and his ending was despair. Dromio finds Dromio and all is joy. The passage is a version of Ovid's Narcissus, who, it will be remembered, saw and loved his own face when he saw it reflected

in a pool. Yet here there is no narcissism, no aesthetic pride. After all the shouting and beating we have another Shakespearean "island," a pause. When Dromio, the stripes fast healing on his back, says "I am a sweet-fac'd youth," it is simply true.

The Comedy of Errors is the play to which Shakespeare returned at the end of his working life. The four late "Romances," *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest,* with their suddenly intensified mythic resonance, all derive from this early comedy. They are all about children lost and found, and they are all sea-plays. In *The Comedy of Errors* we have, twice, the image of the sea as a place where identity is lost. Near the beginning Antipholus of Syracuse, newly arrived in Ephesus, says lightly as he takes his leave of the merchant, "I will go lose myself, / And wander up and down to view the city" (I.ii.30–31). He is exactly like a modern tourist. The reader who thinks this anachronistic in any work before the eighteenth century should look at Euripides' *Ion,* 219–33. Euripidean "happy-ending tragedies," of which the *Ion* is one, are the root from which both Greek romance (Heliodorus) and Menandrian new comedy sprang. Menander begat Plautus and Plautus begat *The Comedy of Errors.* The atmosphere at this point in Shakespeare's play is sociable and easy, but we are made aware of some great sadness in the background. As soon as Antipholus is alone the thought of losing himself grows much stronger, and this is where we meet the water imagery:

He that commends me to mine own content,
Commends me to the thing I cannot get:
I to the world am like a drop of water,
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth
(Unseen, inquisitive), confounds himself.
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them (unhappy), ah, lose myself. (I.ii.32–40)

The hypermetrical "ah" in the last line marks the sudden violence of the emotion. The play itself depends for its comic effect on crystal-clear identification (for the audience) of, as it might be, Dromio 1 as distinct from Dromio 2. Indeed, we, in the audience, are never lost. But behind

my leg and make water against a gentlewoman's farthingale?" (IV.iv.37–39). One senses, behind the strong claim, a possible concession: "Under the table? Well, yes, perhaps, occasionally—but against a lady's skirt, never!" This is very funny, it might be said, but it has nothing to do with the subject: the dramatist as thinker. But, as will appear in a moment, in this early play Shakespeare is thinking hard about the psychology of selfless love and how, in extreme instances, it can border on absurdity. The devotion of Launce to Crab is an accelerated parody of another act of devotion, only a little less ludicrous.

The second great thing is something loved by the author of this book but considered embarrassingly bad by many—perhaps most—Shakespeareans. It is the rapid sequence at the end of the play, in which Proteus attempts to rape his best friend's lady and is forgiven by that friend (Valentine), after which Valentine offers his lady-love to the would-be rapist, in order to show that there are no hard feelings. This is the climax of a plot that sets male friendship in conflict with heterosexual love, a plot described by Harold Bloom as a mere farrago of Monty Python absurdity.[30]

The Elizabethan audience would probably have been quicker than its modern counterpart to pick up the signals given by the names Valentine and Proteus. Valentine, because of St. Valentine's Day, suggests a lover. Proteus evokes "Protean," "mutable" (for the myth, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* ii.9, viii.731, xiii.918). They are splendid young men, well-mannered, well-born, well-dressed, but while Valentine is good, Proteus is bad. The play opens with Valentine's farewell to his friend. Valentine is setting out to see the world. Proteus, meanwhile, is tied to Verona by his love for one Julia. We see Proteus prosecute his suit and be accepted. His father, however, orders him to join his friend Valentine at the Milanese court. Proteus swears solemnly that he will be true to Julia, gives her his hand, and receives from her a ring (II.ii.5–8). Valentine meanwhile has reached Milan and fallen in love with the Duke's daughter, Silvia. The Duke is eager to marry Silvia off to one Thurio, an absurd figure. So Valentine and Silvia plan to elope, using a rope ladder. Proteus arrives and immediately breaks his oath to Julia by falling in love with Silvia. This makes him the secret rival of his best friend. So, without any disquiet, he betrays Valentine. He tells the Duke about the planned elopement, and as a result Valentine is banished from Milan. The field is left clear for Pro-

teus. The banished Valentine meets with a band of cheerful outlaws, on the pattern of Robin Hood's Merry Men. Instead of mugging him they make him their leader.

Julia meanwhile has dressed herself in male attire and set out in search of her beloved Proteus. Reaching Milan, she finds him but, like Rosalind in *As You Like It,* remains in disguise. Proteus, failing to see through the disguise, takes her on as his page. Silvia, perhaps predictably, is unimpressed by Proteus and, fearing the marriage to Thurio, takes off into the wilderness to find Valentine. She too is on the point of being captured by the merry men when Proteus turns up, accompanied by his "page," and rescues her. Having done so he points out exactly how grateful she should be (V.iv.19–25). Silvia is simply appalled, so Proteus decides to rape her (V.iv.59). Now Valentine steps forward from the shadows and Silvia is saved for the second time. This time it is a real rescue. This is where the crazy stuff begins. Valentine has stumbled upon his friend's treachery:

> now I dare not say
> I have one friend alive; thou wouldst disprove me.
> Who should be trusted, when one's right hand
> Is perjured to the bosom? Proteus,
> I am sorry I must never trust thee more,
> But count the world a stranger for thy sake.
> The private wound is deepest. (V.iv.65–71)

Proteus answers simply,

> My shame and guilt confounds me.
> Forgive me, Valentine; if hearty sorrow
> Be a sufficient ransom for offense,
> I tender't here: I do as truly suffer
> As e'er I did commit. (V.iv.73–77)

Valentine instantly gives the forgiveness requested and joyfully adds, "And that my love may appear plain and free, / All that was mine in Silvia I give thee" (V.iv.82–83). This is either glib incompetence on the dramatist's part or something quite remarkable. Proteus, notice, repents only after he is

caught. Valentine's "Thou wouldst disprove me" is as good as a stage direction. Proteus, it seems, was about to say something but is prevented by the fact that his beloved interlocutor presses on with his speech.[31] What was he going to say? Valentine assumed that he was about to exculpate himself, but he could be wrong. When Proteus is free to speak he offers no excuses. Valentine has just said he has no friend in the world. Perhaps Proteus, the squalid liar and traitor, wants to say with perfect truth, "I love you still." The sequence is very fast but responsive at all points to moral nuance and to character. Proteus's repentance is not a simple reversal of the plot-line, imposed *ab extra* in compliance with the need for a happy ending.

We need to go back as far as Silvia's rejection of Proteus, after the first rescue. There she tells him to respect the true love of Julia and ends with the words, "Thou counterfeit to thy true friend!" (V.iv.53). It looks as if by "friend" she means Julia. I think but cannot prove that Proteus hears the word as a reference to Valentine. He urges sophistically that love erases all other obligations, including loyalty to friends. But the dart of guilt has lodged in his flesh. He is no coolly competent erotic Machiavel, like Richard III. Silvia, after all, has known his nature all along. Proteus had not sufficient skill to prevent this. For this the politic Italian would surely have awarded a very low mark. He is a vain young man, used to getting what he wants. He really loved Julia, in his shallow way, really fell for Silvia, and, most important of all, really loved his friend Valentine from first to last, even, conceivably, at the moment when he betrayed him to the Duke. That this is not careless writing in inert conformity to an unmotivated twist in the plot is proved by the anticipations and echoes built into the larger fabric of the play.

When Proteus was told to leave town he compared his love with "the uncertain glory of an April day" (I.iii.85). He meant as he said it that things can go wrong for the lover. But the dramatist meanwhile plants an image of a love that is both beautiful and unreliable (the play may be set in Italy, but this is an English April). When the word "friend" turns in Proteus's mind to "Valentine" something intolerable (to his love for Valentine, to his self-esteem) is gathering at the back of his mind. This he blots out with the sudden move to force Silvia sexually. When Valentine himself appears within his field of vision, it is all over and he truly repents.

This account is rosy—some will say, too rosy, and in a way I agree. Proteus's repentance is completely sincere and at the same time opportunistic, egoistically hungry for results. Proteus repentant is still Proteus. How can we account for Valentine's immediate acceptance of the apology? It is explained by his love for Proteus. This must be taken seriously. I suspect that today gay men can understand the scene more readily than others, not because Valentine and Proteus are involved sexually, but simply because gay men are obviously ready to believe that love between men can be real. There was that in Valentine that desired reconciliation, always. Proteus's speech of contrition releases a Christian generosity natural, in any case, to the good Valentine. On the page, for the reader in the study, the coldly printed lines can seem absurd. In the theatre the effect is electrifying. At David Thacker's brittle, 1930s-style production at Stratford in 1994 I heard a woman say, in the interval, that the play was "full of Shakespearean clichés," and I was sadly inclined to agree. But any such complacent superiority was blown away by the end of the performance. We emerged from the theatre moved, confused, and joyful.

Of course Valentine's offer of Silvia to Proteus is crazy. In saying this we are not telling Shakespeare anything he does not already know. That is why he makes poor Julia swoon away on the spot. Within the story she swoons, indeed, because she sees Proteus receding from her, but in the accelerated comic tempo of the scene the swoon also expresses *audience* excitement and bewilderment so precisely that we almost laugh, even as we wonder whether Valentine has gone completely mad. M. C. Bradbrook thought that Silvia, the lady who, unconsulted, has been so generously re-assigned, should have no reaction at all.[32] I think she should stand stock still with her mouth open, aghast. In the hands of any other dramatist such extravagant action would tip over into satire at the expense of the agents. It is characteristic of Shakespeare that he should refuse to be satirical, should choose to maintain sympathy. We shall see him do this again with the cad Bertram at the end of *All's Well That Ends Well,* with Bassanio (almost a vulgar fortune-hunter) in *The Merchant of Venice,* and with Claudio in *Much Ado about Nothing,* and we shall see Angelo actually forgiven at the end of *Measure for Measure.* Harold Brooks in a letter to Clifford Leech said that the antitheses of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* were "lightning conductors," drawing off excess laughter in the audience, al-

lowing some sympathy to persist.[33] The scattering of laughter in the auditorium when Valentine makes his offer is exactly like that.

What finally sticks in the throat is not so much the unbalanced affection of Valentine for his friend as Shakespeare's affection for both Valentine and Proteus. Shakespeare feels the love that Valentine feels and, at the same time, knows that it is half-mad. These appalling, good-looking young men, Proteus, Claudio, Bassanio, Bertram (and, some might want to add, Prince Hal and the cold young gentleman addressed in the Sonnets), are almost embarrassingly indulged by the dramatist. They all generate light without warmth and Shakespeare—clear-eyed Shakespeare—seems spell-bound by the light.

There is absolutely no blurring of the nastiness of Proteus. The curious thing is that although his unpleasant nature is clearly shown, it is *faintly* shown. For Dante treachery was the worst sin of all. It would have been easy, given Proteus's behaviour, to present him as a half-devil. This the poetry absolutely refuses to do. Again, in saying this I am saying nothing that the dramatist does not already know. As Launce says, "I am but a fool, look you, and yet I have the wit to think my master is a kind of knave" (III.i.263–64). That is, "I am supposed to be the mutt around here, but even I can see that this man is a complete swine." Launce is right, but without efficacy. Later in the play Shakespeare inserts some comic dialogue. One of the outlaws explains that he had to take refuge in the forest "for a gentleman, / Who, in my mood, I stabb'd unto the heart." His companion answers, "And I for such like petty crimes as these" (IV.i.48–50). The humour turns on the minimizing of serious offences, which is what the play as a whole also does.

I have no doubt that the accelerated sequence of rescue from the outlaws, followed by the attempted rape, followed by the second rescue, repentance, forgiveness, and Valentine's amazing offer, is brilliant dramatically. They work in the theatre far better than they do when read. In saying this I do not concede that the reader picks up absurdities that the dazed spectator is prevented from noticing. On the contrary, because we are built, biologically, to respond swiftly to minimal hints from another human being within the field of vision, the spectator gets everything, the absurdity, the touching-ness, the unbroken psychological truth. Far more difficult are the words of Proteus at the end, after Julia has revealed her

tense. Meanwhile, however, the cultural difference between the early modern period and our own is equally real. The shock element that Shakespeare could only have seen as obscurely potential in the material has been actualized by developing ideology. This means that *The Taming of the Shrew* is now, what it was not in the 1590s, a black comedy. Yet even today it is somehow not as black as it should be. The audience comes out smiling.

This may be because the audience becomes aware, as does Kate herself, that Petruchio, the tamer, is good news, not bad, for Kate. She is leaving the suffocating world so deviously exploited by her intriguing sister and the absolute rule of a feeble father for a man who can blow her away, can make her laugh, and, most important, is very like her. Kate's father, for all his feebleness, has great power over the women in his house and uses it with repellent entrepreneurial skill. The seemingly submissive Bianca is attractive to suitors, Kate not. So the father raises the stakes by making marriage to Bianca hinge on Kate's getting married first. Life with Petruchio will never be like this. Petruchio is, first, an effortlessly dominant male like Richard III and, second, very funny. It is a winning combination. He is the hilarious opposite of the humble lover on his knees, deviously seeking a gratification conferred by the lady out of pure pity. It is not hard to find women in the present century who say that they respond more readily to the sweep-you-off-your-feet kind of man than to the wheedling lover of courtly tradition—that is, they find him sexier. Also, before Petruchio bursts into her world, Katherina is psychologically in a bad way. Her unremitting fury is a kind of illness. We hear much today of pathological depression and much less of pathological anger, yet such anger exists.

If one asks a reasonably literate person, "Who in the plays of Shakespeare binds a woman, strikes her, and makes her cry?" the chances are that you will get the answer, "Petruchio." The correct answer is "Katherina." She does all this to Bianca at Act II, Scene i, lines 1–24. It is often observed that Petruchio presents himself as a mirror to Katherina—retorts her own violence back on her. It is less often noticed that she is the more violent of the two. Petruchio never strikes Katherina. There is one moment when *she* hits *him* and he responds, "I swear I'll cuff you, if you strike again" (II.i.220). She does not put the matter to the test but instead tells him that he would be no gentleman if he did such a thing. There is a certain irony in

this sudden recourse to social convention. Katherina, after all, has not been behaving as a lady should. Petruchio's words are shocking, but lurking within them is a strange assumption of eye-to-eye equality—"If you hit me, I'll hit you"—that can feel like fresh air to one who has left a stuffy room. Were the atmosphere less sexually charged I would call the tone of this "man to man." But he does not strike her, either here or later.

When I first read Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* in the 1970s I remember expecting that the feminist author would roundly despise *The Taming of the Shrew* and Petruchio in particular. Instead I met this: "[Katherina] has the uncommon good fortune to find Petruchio, who is man enough to know what he wants and how to get it. He wants her spirit and her energy because he wants a wife worth keeping."[35]

There is a passing hint of something sinister in the concession that Petruchio wants to *take* Katherina's spirit and energy, but this thought is swallowed up at once in the writer's own warm responsiveness, itself very like Katherina's, to Petruchio. Germaine Greer in those days was herself a brilliant shrew, much given to verbal violence against others. In her discussion of *The Taming of the Shrew* she is obviously itching to box Bianca's ears exactly as Katherina does in the play. And she is really keen on Petruchio. He is a real man. He is exciting. Katherina's big speech in favour of wifely submission is not taken by Greer to be ironic. Of course she disagrees with the speech, seriously and rationally, but she calls it "the greatest defence of Christian monogamy ever written." "It rests," she explains, "upon the role of the husband as protector and friend, and it is valid because Kate has a man who is capable of being both, for Petruchio is both gentle and strong."[36]

I am suggesting that an element working in the play, operating on Katherina and Germaine Greer alike, is a sheerly sexual power fused with Petruchio's overmastering strength. It is only one element in a complex whole, but it is there. Strong sexual reference begins in the Induction, when the vagrant Sly is made to believe that he is a gentleman; he is offered pornography, "wanton pictures" (Ind.i.47), and

> a couch,
> Softer and sweeter than the lustful bed
> On purpose trimm'd up for Semiramis. (Ind.ii.37–39)

Semiramis, founder of Babylon, was the daughter of Dercetis (a sex goddess). She avoided matrimony but like a black widow had sexual relations with one after another of her courtiers, killing each afterwards.[37] Sly is offered a picture of Venus hiding in bushes that respond excitedly to her presence (they "wanton with her breath," Ind.ii.52) and another of Io "surprised" (that is, raped),[38] "as lively painted as the deed was done" (Ind.ii.54–55), and—a hint here perhaps of sadism—the scratched legs of Daphne as she fled her lustful pursuer (Ind.ii.58). When the page enters in drag as Sly's "wife" we have another early version of Viola/Cesario and Rosalind as Ganymede in *As You Like It,* both more fully developed than the present passage, but the sexuality is strongest in *The Taming of the Shrew.* The page, who has been instructed to give "tempting kisses," says how sad he is to be "abandon'd from your bed" (Ind.i.118, ii.115), and Sly, unlike Bottom the weaver in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* who is hilariously indifferent to the blandishments of the Fairy Queen, responds with "undress you, and come now to bed" (Ind.ii.117). That is almost exactly what Petruchio says to Kate at the end of the play. When Petruchio promises "rough wooing" at Act II, Scene I, line 137, he means primarily that he is not going to put on smart clothes and behave in the approved manner, but there is an implicit sexual subtext. Entirely explicit is the startlingly indecent "tongue in your tail" (Petruchio to Katherina, II.i.217). First Katherina says that the wasp has his sting in his tongue, not his tail. "Whose tongue?" says Petruchio, meaning, "Are you still talking about the wasp or do you mean something else?" Katherina answers, "Yours, if you talk of tales" (so Petruchio was right, she was thinking of something—or someone—else). His delight at this generates the obscenity: "What, with my tongue in your tail?" which he brilliantly covers by suggesting, what in a way is true, that the thought came from her, while he as a modest gentleman is surprised: "Nay, come again, / Good Kate, I am a gentleman" (II.i.217–18). This interestingly is the moment at which Kate actually strikes Petruchio. It may be that she explodes because he has got inside her head.

The play is also a love story. The love *happens,* between strong Kate and stronger Petruchio. At the beginning Petruchio's motives are entirely financial (though it is made clear that he is not poor). He wants a decent settlement. This is mildly repellent in itself, but it is not obviously worse

than the pretended love from equally mercenary suitors elsewhere in Shakespearean drama. Before the play is over Petruchio loves Kate.

In Act II, Scene i, there is a sudden change of register. After the knock-about wit-combats, all won by the man (which is not at all what happens in the later comedies), Petruchio looks directly at Katherina and says,

> Kate like the hazel-twig
> Is straight and slender, and as brown in hue
> As hazel-nuts, and sweeter than the kernels.
> O, let me see thee walk. (II.i.253–56)

To describe this I am obliged to use a word that is almost taboo in current critical discourse. It is "beautiful." Its special force lies in the way it combines sudden beauty with a complete rejection of Petrarchan lovers' idiom. He does not tell her that she has eyes like stars or teeth like pearls. She is straight, slender, and brown as a nut. In his Sonnets Shakespeare dealt with Petrarchan tradition by a simple technique of violent inversion: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" (Sonnet 130). Here he does something more difficult. He produces a new species of beauty and a new kind of poetry. Something similar happens at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* with the songs of Winter and Spring. We become aware as we listen that Petruchio has begun to love Kate. So far, so sweet. But it is followed at line 272 by the superb, imperious, and, to us, finally unacceptable (?)

> Now, Kate, I am a husband for your turn,
> For by this light whereby I see thy beauty,
> Thy beauty that doth make me like thee well,
> Thou must be married to no man but me;
> *For I am he am born to tame you, Kate.*

In a manner of which Freud would have approved, Katherina's behaviour betrays the real movement of her heart before her words assent. Later in the same scene Petruchio says, without any verbal hint of prior agreement from Katherina, "And to conclude, we have 'greed so well together / That upon Sunday is the wedding-day" (II.i.297–98). He

knows perfectly well that there is no such agreement; that makes the speech funny. At the same time his words are instinct with performative force (a "performative" expression is one that *does* what it says—"I name this ship the *Baby Spice,*" "I do" in the marriage service). We think of jokes as frivolous extravagance, moving naturally away from serious reality, but Petruchio's wild humour is making something happen. Kate fights back at once with the words, "I'll see thee hang'd on Sunday first." Petruchio then complacently explains to Gremio and Tranio how they have been making furious love in private but have a plot that Katherina should behave like a shrew in public. To this Katherina makes no reply. Petruchio's monstrous lie about the plot may actually shadow, in the contrast it draws between latent love and public aggression, an emotional truth. Her father then claps their hands together in his: " 'Tis a match" (II.i.319). We are once more in the alarming field of the quasi-performative. What we are watching cannot in fact be, what some scholars have suggested,[39] an actual contract (*sponsalia de futuro,* roughly equivalent to our "formal engagement") because Katherina does not speak. But she does join hands. Either she is completely dazed or she is ceasing to resist.

In Act III, Scene ii, straight after the slapstick wedding, Petruchio announces that he must leave at once because of business pressures. Immediately we sense the special tension of the "delayed consummation" motif that will later permeate *Othello.* The audience is appalled, and so, interestingly, is Katherina. Tranio and Gremio entreat him to stay, in vain. Then Katherina speaks from the heart, "Let me entreat you," and Petruchio answers enigmatically, "I am content" (III.ii.200–201). Katherina, having virtually declared her love, thinks he means to stay and is furious when he declares that he is going in any case. The old anger returns, but it is now differently fuelled. Petruchio's immediate response shows a sudden gentleness, quite unlike his earlier manner: "O Kate, content thee, prithee be not angry" (III.ii.215). The knot is cut when Petruchio explains that Katherina is to go with him. Although Katherina may not yet be clear that this is what she wants, it is what she needs. It is escape from the dark house and the detested family.

The story is punctuated by kisses, and each kiss is different from the last. The first is at Act II, Scene i, line 324, after the hand-clasping: "Then kiss me Kate, we will be married a' Sunday." There is no stage direction but a

she tells him it's dark at mid-day he'll believe her."[40] Fortunata is an untamed, uncontested shrew (*est malae linguae,* "she has a wicked tongue"). Trimalchio's abject condition is summed up in the one word, *credet,* "He'll believe her." *The Taming of the Shrew* is not a simple reversal of the Petronian set-up. It is obvious that Katherina does not *believe* for a moment that the moon is shining. Her mind therefore is intact (*mens intacta,* like *virgo intacta,* "un-raped"). But, like the threatened Catholics of Shakespeare's boyhood, she is required to make a public profession that is contrary to her deepest convictions. The passage is almost saved by its crazy extremism. We are watching something closer to the humouring of a lunatic or grown-ups temporarily colluding to prevent a childish tantrum than to the crushing of Katherina. This is caught exactly when Hortensio says, in effect, "Oh, say what he wants or we'll never get there!" Of course Petruchio is not a child. He knows that what he is saying is absurd and Katherina knows that he knows. This *almost* (that word again!) turns the affair into a game. When Petruchio growls, "I say it is the moon," Katherina spontaneously goes further than he and solemnly avers, "I *know* it is the moon." She is having fun. Turning his non-committal "say" into "know" exposes the lunacy of all this moonshine with solar clarity. "Ever more cross'd and cross'd, nothing but cross'd" is the funniest line in a very funny play. Its note of adult exasperation at the petty obstacles interposed by the childish persons around him is *precisely* off-beam, given what we have all witnessed. Katherina's interpolated joke on Petruchio's mind being as changeable as the moon herself again shows a spirit far from abject.

So is all well? No. I said, "almost saved," "almost a game." Almost but not quite. The "game" is, first, part of the therapy for Katherina's pathological anger and, second and more sinisterly, a technique of practical subjection—not of taking the wife's mind away (it is not as bad as that) but of taking away her freedom of behaviour. I know that when I first read this scene in my teens I was profoundly shocked, but that was because I thought it obscene that a husband should require his wife to crush the evidence of her senses in deference to his will. I now think that no such crushing is in question but that nevertheless the degree of control that *is* being seriously imposed is sufficiently disquieting.

As the scene continues we have the hilarious sequence in which Kate is prompted by Petruchio to salute a dazed old gentleman as "young, bud-

ding virgin." Here she is so clearly playing along—she enters into the charade with creative zest—that we might begin to think that we can stop worrying about what Petruchio is doing to Katherina, to see this as the after-echo of some sex-game, between consenting parties; "It's a fantasy!" is what the parties to such practices always say when confronted by worried outsiders. But then we have the big speech, admired by Germaine Greer, Katherina to the Widow:

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance; commits his body
To painful labor, both by sea and land;
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou li'st warm at home, secure and safe;
And craves no other tribute at thy hands
But love, fair looks, and true obedience—
Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
And when she's froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel,
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
I am asham'd that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.
Why are our bodies soft, and weak, and smooth,
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,
But that our soft conditions, and our hearts,
Should well agree with our external parts? (V.ii.146–68)

Today the actor is virtually compelled to deliver these lines ironically, if the audience is not to break out in its own open rebellion. Harold C. Goddard thought such irony no modern imposition but entirely true to Shakespeare's original meaning: Katherina, he felt, is clearly the person controlling Petruchio at the end, and it is part of the fun that she should

keep up the public pretence that it is he who is in charge.[41] I said earlier that even modern audiences come out smiling at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew.* It may be that this would not happen if the speech of submission were delivered unironically. But in fact it is entirely unironic. That said, I would add that I suspect that the speech must always have been edged with obscure discomfort for the listeners. But Katherina and Shakespeare mean every word. To turn Katherina into a sly manipulator of her husband, as Goddard did, is to turn Katherina into Bianca. There could be no greater insult.

Things are being said that we do not wish to hear. Most of us now believe that men and women are equal, while conceding as unimportant the fact that the average male is taller than the average female. The harder, the more elementary life is, the more that physical difference will translate into clearly differentiated social functions. I am told that when coal-mining was harder than it is today, the working-class wives of miners treated the breadwinner as king; prepared his bath, waited on him at table, and thought it was right to behave in this way. Petruchio shows no sign of enduring toil and danger to protect Katherina: instead we are given a vivid picture of developing bourgeois affluence; bride and bridegroom are both comfortably off. All the conditions are in place, we might think, for feminism to blossom. If, however, we pause and think what it must have been like to lack a male protector in a society with no effective police force, and further reflect that women of Katherina's class have no option but marriage and will be utterly dependent on whatever husband they can get, her suggestion that men are the protectors of weak women may cease to seem wholly absurd.

Perhaps the most interesting word in her speech is "honest"—"obedient to his honest will." She has said that the relation of the wife to her husband is like that of the subject to the prince. All now hinges on the nature of that subject's duty. If Shakespeare were a Renaissance absolutist, holding that the prince's authority is divinely given and in principle never to be opposed, this part of the speech could be very sinister in its implications. But if he thought that a wicked king was a tyrant, not to be obeyed, everything is different. "Fit to govern? / No, not to live," cries Macduff, when tested on exactly this point (*Macbeth,* IV.iii.102–3). Here the good subject, confronted as he thinks by a wicked ruler, withdraws his service.

So with Katherina. She reserves a place for honourable disobedience. If the husband's will is dishonest—that is, immoral—the wife is no longer under any obligation to obey.

The central doctrine, however, remains hierarchical, and the speech in which the doctrine is stated follows a practical demonstration of obedience. When Lucentio and Hortensio send messages to their wives asking them to come, the wives make excuses. Katherina, summoned, simply appears at once. Then, when her husband tells her that her cap doesn't suit her, she removes it instantly (V.ii.121–23). Of course the context is important. There is here an alliance of Katherina and Petruchio against the rest. He was always the anti-type of her father and of the world her father ruled, so now they work together. In so far as the removal of the cap is a strategic performance, something agreed upon to defeat a shared enemy, it is acceptable. But it is much more than that. Once more we hit real hierarchy. The principle that lower obeys higher is here in force, and in application to something as personal as the choice of a cap. To me it is the ugliest moment in the play. The fact that she obeys out of love makes it worse, not better. It is unacceptable.

Almost always Shakespeare, even when he differs ideologically from his twenty-first-century readers, shows an uncanny ability to anticipate almost every kind of counter-feeling. He knows perfectly well, for example, how shocking Valentine's offer of his mistress to Proteus in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* might be. I believe that even early modern audiences would have gasped, momentarily, at the cap episode, before—swiftly, no doubt—laughing again. But the overwhelming endorsement of hierarchy from the dramatist who will later give us such autonomous female figures as Rosalind and Viola is hard to take. Let us pause—a final hesitation—on the word "hierarchy." Clearly, even today, it is not automatically evil. Everyone I know would agree that a child's death is worse than the death of a fish, which means that we all place human beings above fish, hierarchically. What is now taboo is the application of the term *within* the field of humanity. It may be salutary to imagine at this point what it would be like to explain to John Milton that all human beings are equal. He would answer, "Whatever makes you think that? It's obvious that some human beings are superior to others." Republican Milton, who could see no reason why kings should tell other people what to do, was a firm believer

in what is now called "meritocracy," not in equality. "All people are equal" is a benevolent legal fiction designed to cover a real field of intractably fluctuating hierarchies. In truth Mr. and Mrs. Jones are *never* equal. He is better at making toast, she at map-reading, and so on, endlessly. So hierarchy is a fact. But this in no way licenses the *blanket* assertion that husbands should rule their wives. "All are equal" will serve us better. Perhaps we must confess that we have encountered a genuine point of ethical disagreement.

We have reached 1593. In May of that year Marlowe was killed in a scuffle in a tavern. He and Shakespeare were born in the same year, 1564. Before his death Marlowe had written *Dido, Tamburlaine,* parts 1 and 2, *The Jew of Malta, Edward II, The Massacre at Paris,* and *Doctor Faustus.* Shakespeare has written *Henry VI,* parts 1, 2, and 3, *Richard III, The Comedy of Errors, Two Gentlemen of Verona,* and *The Taming of the Shrew.* Seven plays each. Some place Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (a play that, unlike *The Taming of the Shrew,* really is about rape) before the death of Marlowe, but I agree with Jonathan Bate and the Stationer's Register that this disgusting, brilliant work was "new" in 1594.[42] Shakespeare is today the most famous dramatist in the world. Knowledge of Marlowe is virtually confined to the academy. We are all clear that *Hamlet* and *King Lear* outstrip any work by Marlowe, but these come later. Is it so clear, if we restrict our attention to Shakespeare's output up to 1593, that he is the greater dramatist? It is a primitive question—a schoolboy's question (small boys love to speculate about "who would win" in oddly assorted fights—a Tasmanian devil, say, versus a sheep).

If we think in terms of power, Marlowe has the edge. The slow crescendo of violence that makes the life of *Tamburlaine*—in blank defiance of the "Pride-must-have-a-fall" pattern pre-established in the minds of the spectators—is unmatched in early Shakespeare. One suspects that this kind of drama—a sort of protracted roar—would have seemed boring to Shakespeare, though, when Marlowe does it, it is far from boring and is technically of great interest. *Dido* is a camp version of Virgil's *Aeneid,* iv, with some pretty homo-erotic touches, but it is not in this area that Marlowe can challenge Shakespeare, who from the start is an absolute master of verbal grace, irony, and word-play. The entrance of Lightborn, the killer at the end of Marlowe's *Edward II,* is terrifying. I have seen a

was learning more lightly worn. The real subtlety of the exchange (once it is understood!) is great. Bianca is uncertain whether to believe Lucentio when he explains that he is of good lineage, the son of Vincentio of Pisa. "Aeacides," "the descendant of Aeacus," is explained by some as a reference to Ajax. This is what Lucentio says. Others, including George Turberville of New College, Oxford, in 1567, take it to be a reference to Achilles ("There fierce Achilles pight his tents").[46] In fact Achilles is the better bet.[47] If Lucentio is taking a dubious line on a classical lineage at the precise moment when his trustworthiness is being doubted by the lady to whom he is selling his own high birth, the comedy is sharp indeed—but entirely hidden, surely, from 99 percent of the audience.

The use made in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* of John Lyly's *Euphues* is similarly sharp, beyond the capacities of most modern readers, who usually think of *Euphues,* if they think of it at all, as a work of vacuous rhetorical display. In fact it is an intensely moral story about male friendship and the importance of education. At the end Lyly writes penitentially of "the fine and filed phrases of Cicero," to which he bids farewell, choosing instead the Bible.[48] The story is of Philautus and Euphues, best friends who, like Valentine and Proteus, both fall for the same lady. Before it begins Lyly offers an "anti-Sidneian" account of his own art (Philip Sidney in the *Apology for Poetry* urges writers to provide positive role models). Idealization is not the way, says Lyly; faults should be included; Euphues is a far-from-perfect young man.[49] It is correct to call *Two Gentlemen of Verona* a Euphuistic play but an error to think that in consequence it is a mere tissue of trivial felicities. Shakespeare has read Lyly better than most university-educated moderns read him. Therefore his play is all about moral obliquity coexisting with social and rhetorical grace. Here he "of the native wood-notes wild" is the better *reader,* the more intricately informed mind.

In the last soliloquy of Richard III Shakespeare joins the despair of Faustus damned to a psychological exploration of consciousness entirely beyond the reach of Marlowe. This is the beginning of a protracted process of thought, an investigation of the nature of consciousness and identity that will develop strongly in the later work. Again it is a factor of *intellectual* force that makes the difference between the two men.

So who wins? Pitting the seven extant plays against Marlowe's seven, I

am still not sure. I have granted the greater power to Marlowe, and surely to grant power is to grant much. But if one changes the question from "Which one produces the better body of dramatic work by 1593?" to "Which shows the greater promise?" I am sure the answer is Shakespeare. It is not just that more complex operations of the imaginative intelligence can be seen; one can watch those operations, always in motion, beginning to cohere and develop. And of course one has the suspicion that Marlowe the daring atheist spy, mad, bad, and dangerous to know, was in any case going to burn out soon. Shakespeare, who watched his pennies, got himself a coat of arms, and bought the best house in Stratford, is one of nature's survivors. The crucial thing, however, is that Shakespeare's early work is instinct with ramifying potentialities. Reductive Marlowe does not foster "the green shoots" within his own mind any more than he countenances simultaneous explanations of human behaviour. There is finally something coarse in his spectacular feats of reduction. To put the matter at its simplest, Shakespeare is more interested in people. If Marlowe had lived on, Shakespeare would still have "won."

2 Learning Not to Run

Love's Labour's Lost and the Problem of Style

After 30 May 1593 the field was clear. Marlowe was the only serious rival and Marlowe was dead. If I am right to date *Titus Andronicus* to January 1594, it is Shakespeare's next venture, but from this play I flinch. The eighteenth century, by and large, saw it as grotesquely horrific and was unwilling to believe it was Shakespeare's. The twentieth century disagreed and increasingly stressed the artistic sophistication of the work. The test case is Marcus's long speech as he gazes at the mutilated Lavinia (II.iv.11–57). The speech is certainly elegant, full of mannered word-play and mythological allusion. What is upsetting is the application of such elegant language to physical horror. Ovid is the evil genius of this mode. The myth of Tereus and Philomel (*Metamorphoses,* vi) is a chillingly playful narrative of rape and dismemberment. At lines 559 to 560 Ovid describes, in dapper hexameters, how Philomel's severed tongue skipped like a tail cut from a snake and tried, pathetically, to rejoin its bleeding mistress. When bad taste is as extreme as this it becomes something else, something strangely impressive. An explosion happens in the mind and the usual values somehow no longer apply. The incongruity of horror and aestheticism is clearly deliberate. But how does the incongruity function? It could have produced "black farce," "horrid laughter." It is said that in these days of comic-tempo blood-bath films like Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990) we are better placed than eighteenth-century audiences to understand and enjoy *Titus Andronicus.* But it is not black farce. We are far removed from the cackling zest of the bloodthirsty Ithamore in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. Rather, Shake-

speare invites us to consider and to experience a special kind of alienation, the mind recoiling from the intolerable into pattern and form. When Richard II asked John of Gaunt how he, a dying man, could bear to pun on his own name, Gaunt answered, "Misery makes sport to mock itself" (II.i.85). Shakespeare has noticed that in real situations humour is not blankly incompatible with suffering but can have a defensive function. "Trench humour," clearly, is one form of this. But Marcus is not joking. Rather the emphasis is on the sheer fact of alienation into beauty. Nearer in spirit than Marlowe but further off in time is Richard Crashaw. Crashaw mingles milk with blood in "Upon the Infant Martyrs" and writes of Christ's wounds, "Thee with Thyself they have too richly clad, / Opening the purple wardrobe of Thy side," in "On Our Crucified Lord, Naked and Bloody." Such alienation can work on two levels. Thematically, the articulate richness of the speech is in contrast with the tongue-less condition of Lavinia herself.[1] Psychologically, Marcus himself is in a curious state of garrulous shock. Indeed the play is saved morally by its compassionate psychological reference. Anne Calder-Marshall, who played Lavinia in a television production in the 1980s, wrote to Jonathan Bate, "It's just like a video nasty, isn't it?" but added, "Somehow we've found—or I think we have—that the characters through their suffering get closer. Titus has committed the most appalling deeds and it isn't until he's maimed and his daughter's maimed that he learns anything about love."[2] Yet the play is still disgusting. "Enter LAVINIA, her hand cut off and her tongue cut out, ravish'd," is a stage direction from which, very simply, I wish at once to avert my mind.

Love's Labour's Lost is so different from *Titus Andronicus* that it might seem hard to believe that the same person wrote both. But the man who wrote *Titus Andronicus* is fascinated by a hysteria of *style,* seen, academically, as classical in tone. *Love's Labour's Lost* is likewise about another kind of hysteria of style, a feast of languages that at one point becomes classical again, on the lips of Holofernes, the sweet-natured, mildly deranged schoolmaster. The comedy, however, is finally more serious than the Roman tragedy, because in it Shakespeare repents of his own brilliance. Four young men, one of whom is a king (but seems to have slender governmental responsibilities), decide to give up chasing young women, to turn down all party invitations, and to become, collectively, a miniature

university, "a little academe, / Still and contemplative in living art" (I.i.13–14). Stillness is to replace motion, art nature. The body, Longaville chimes in, is to give way to mind, and Dumaine, the third member of the group, adds that love and riches are to give way to philosophy. One gets the picture. The fourth man, Berowne, has doubts. He has signed up to three years of study, he agrees, but he doesn't see why he should also undertake to sleep only three hours a night and never see any ladies. Here at the very beginning of the play Berowne puts his finger on a curious feature of the scheme. The planned academy is clearly non-religious. It is a thoroughly Renaissance affair, humanist in the old, technical sense—that is, committed to "humane letters," the study of Greek and Latin texts. Yet as the King conceives it, the scheme is swathed in spectral garments, the burden of an imperfectly shed monastic past. It may seem strange to a modern reader that such bright, switched-on young fellows should assume (Berowne excepted) that academic study must entail celibacy. Historically it is not strange at all. Oxford and Cambridge colleges were from the first firmly distinct from monasteries as places devoted primarily to teaching and research, and yet it was not until quite late in the nineteenth century that fellows of colleges were allowed to marry. A. E. Housman remembered how in his youth it was "not done" to ask colleagues where they had been during the long vacation, because they had secret love-nests in anonymous places like Birmingham.[3] Berowne is ahead of his time in querying the major premise. All is thrown into confusion when a party of ladies arrives.

E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907) gives us an analogous moment at a later period in history. Cambridge—the academy—is first established in the novel as a site of innocence and intelligence, where men love one another. Then "ladies" invade. The bubble bursts and nothing can ever be the same again. It may be that Forster's homosexuality gives the story a special intensity. Forster's invading female is evil; in Shakespeare the invading ladies are entirely good. We are dealing with profound, simple antinomies: action and contemplation, nature and art, body and mind, and by an elementary logic it would seem to follow that, if sex is an affair of the body, the life of the mind must be asexual. This Berowne denies.

Love's Labour's Lost is as much a play about education as is *The Taming of*

directly sexual. This, note, reserves the possibility that it may meanwhile be indirectly sexual. The embarrassment, the red faces that greet the arrival of the ladies, are caused by the conflict, within the male, of austerity and gallantry. Shakespeare makes the sexual element in the situation evident when he makes the ladies swap starry-eyed descriptions of the dashing young men ahead of the actual meeting (II.i.37–76). Before the negotiation the courtier Boyet urges the Princess to use all her powers of persuasion, and she in reply shows that she knows he is talking about her beauty, her attractiveness as a woman (II.i.1–14). After the meeting the Princess exclaims, "God bless my ladies! are they all in love?" (II.i.77).

I coined the phrase *mens intacta* (by analogy with *virgo intacta*), "mind virginally intact," for Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew.* In this mirror-play the phrase is applicable to the King. To keep his intellectual program intact, safe from sexual interference, he must cloister himself in his quasi-monastic academe. Like men excluded from a nunnery the ladies are asked to remain outside in the open fields. But to ask them to do this—even if they are given, as they no doubt are, pretty tents and pavilions—is monstrously discourteous. The hapless King greets his guest with the words, "Fair Princess!" (II.i.90). She in her turn with lethal accuracy picks up the gallant innuendo in "fair" and knocks it straight back over the net, pointing out that the welcome is cold indeed. The King switches at once to the more coolly formal "Madam" (II.i.95). He seeks to cut the knot by agreeing at once to the Princess's political request, saying in effect, "I'll sign now if you like." This entirely fails to resolve the situation, which means that we were right earlier to guess that sexual politics are as important here as political politics. The minor figures meanwhile are swiftly establishing contact: "Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?" says Berowne to Rosaline (II.i.115). She responds with a brittle put-down, but we are not deceived; we know already (from II.i.66–76) that she is disposed to fall in love with him. Rosaline's witty replies are the flimsiest of screens, mere words to be shattered by ensuing love.

We have then, in *Love's Labour's Lost,* a play with a message. Theory is nothing, practice is all; words are no match for things; art is vain, nature is supreme. And at the same time we have a play that explodes at every point with wit, verbal intricacy, joyous art. A full analysis of the word-play of this comedy would fill several volumes. More than forty years ago I took

part in a summer school, also attended by a very strong personality, who genially suggested a play-reading of *Love's Labour's Lost*. We met and read the play aloud, different persons taking different parts, and it was quite amusing. As the meeting broke up our convener said, to my absolute amazement, "Tomorrow we meet again and read the play again." I thought, "This is going to be unpleasant; he is presuming too far on the good will of these nice people." By sheer strength of will he succeeded, and the following evening we repeated the reading—but faster. It was pure joy. Suddenly the jokes became not arcane intricacies to be laboriously disentangled but explosions of humour. There is a line in *Love's Labour's Lost* that uses the word "light" four times and in four distinct senses: "Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile" (I.i.77). The immediate context differentiates these chiming sounds, for those who listen:

> all delights are vain, but that most vain
> Which, with pain purchas'd, doth inherit pain:
> As, painfully to pore upon a book
> To seek the light of truth, while truth the while
> Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look.
> *Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile;*
> So ere you find where light in darkness lies
> Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes. (I.i.72–79)

Berowne is speaking against the extremist program of study set out by the King, and his actual meaning, amid the glittering cleverness, is down-to-earth: too much reading makes you go blind, and where's your dream of study then? So, of the four "light"s in the line, the first means "mind," the second "enlightenment," or "knowledge," the third "eye," and the fourth "sight."[5] The fun of such writing is utterly formal. It is like a dance.

Yet there is something sinister in this juxtaposition of verbal gymnastics and an anti-verbal message. Berowne is trapped in a bright bubble of art, and so is everyone else. Even the ladies, beautiful emissaries of Nature herself, teachers of the men in the field of unpretentious loving, are not exempt from the fatal tic of style. Very near the end of the play Berowne says to Rosaline,

Henceforth my wooing mind shall be express'd
In russet yeas and honest kersey noes.
And to begin, wench, so God help me law!
My love to thee is sound, sans crack or flaw. (V.ii.412–15)

Rosaline, his tutor in the difficult subject called "reality," catches him, predictably, on the mannered Gallicism "sans," scarcely the homespun language he is vowing at this very moment to stick to. "Sans 'sans' I pray you," says she, and Berowne hangs his head in shame:

Yet I have a trick
Of the old rage. Bear with me, I am sick;
I'll leave it by degrees. (V.ii.416–18)

The imagery is suddenly very strong. Cleverness is a disease, a plague (V.ii.421). This almost turns Rosaline from tutor into doctor. If so, however, we must confess that the doctor is herself infected. For "Sans 'sans' I pray you" is itself artfully cadenced, wittily equivocating on the repeated word. We begin to sense that the pestilence has spread beyond the circle of the fiction and has seized the writer. Shakespeare himself seems to be imprisoned in the glassy prison of art he notionally condemns. It is indeed a kind of hysteria. The chattering ingenuity cannot be stilled. It is commonly said that one great difference between mental imagery and perceptions lies in the fact that imagery is freely manipulable; we can stop it, start it, change it at will. There is, however, an exception to this rule. If one imagines a spinning wheel it is curiously difficult to stop it spinning as one continues to "watch." The reader is invited to try the experiment. If one tries really hard (*experto crede*) one can feel slightly sick. So here the spinning Catherine-wheel of wit-that-cannot-be-arrested becomes a source of fear, of desperation—or even of pain.

Such are the difficulties encountered by the young Shakespeare. Where others learning their craft struggle to find felicitous expressions, Shakespeare, conversely, is oppressed by his own verbal facility. Effortlessly he hits every nail on the head, finds the stirring image, lights upon the undermining parody, and, amid all this, hears in the distance a voice that says, "Slow down." A friend of mine and I once saw three small boys

(choristers) moving across an open space in a peculiar lurching manner. "Why are they moving like that?" my friend asked, and then answered himself, "I know! They've been told they mustn't run, and this is the result." Small bodies, crackling with natural energy, eager to reach the destination, experience the requirement that they must walk (not run) as a grotesque impediment. Shakespeare's youthful genius is a runner, a dancer. He has to learn to move at the more temperate pace that comes naturally to the rest of us. He has to learn not to run.

Desperation breeds desperate remedies. The extraordinary ending of *Love's Labour's Lost* may be the result of a rising terror in the dramatist. He mortifies the comic conclusion proper to the play. Just as the lovers are about to fall into one another's arms and run off to church to be joined he brings on a man in black, bearing news of a death. Whether or not the theatre is equipped with manipulable lighting, we feel that the stage has grown dark. These young lords and ladies, pretty gilded butterflies, are suddenly hushed and draw apart: "Our wooing doth not end like an old play: / Jack hath not Gill" (V.ii.874–75). Everything has suddenly gone horribly wrong. It may be said that the comedic happy ending is still there—that it is merely postponed, because after a year the lovers will meet again. But Shakespeare lets in (at V.ii.832) the thought that these splendid young men who have already broken one promise—the one made to learning—may break another: "Yet swear not, lest ye be forsworn again."

The only way to stop the spinning is to smash the wheel. Perhaps the sinister dominance of bloodless language is really broken with this convulsive disruption of genre, but notice the shift that has occurred at the level of the play's "message." From the beginning Berowne, seemingly with the full backing of the playwright, was preaching that real love triumphs by natural right over verbal forms. But at the end verbal facility is silenced not as we might have expected by a warm, wordless embrace but by the great negation of death. Nothing but nothingness itself is strong enough to shut them up.

It might be supposed the "black hole" at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* entails the destruction of all poetry. The underlying logic is anti-art and poetry is an art. What we are given last of all, however, is the pair of songs, one sung by Spring, the other by Winter. They are poetry, but poetry

freed from the self-consciousness of everything that has gone before. They are transparent. We are removed from the erotic adventure playground of silken aristocrats to a demotic, Brueghelesque world where milk is frozen in the bucket and—a matchless description of an English parish church in January—people are coughing so much that one cannot hear the parson's sermon. "Marian's nose looks red and raw" (V.ii.924) may not seem to be a line worth pausing on—low matter, expressed in low language, devoid of "point." But its very oppositeness to the preceding bravura gives it a healing power. It is a window opening to admit cold, fresh air. We must not call these songs pastoral because "pastoral" became, quintessentially, the genre that confessed the final impossibility of escaping from art into that green nature it sought to celebrate. The poignancy of pastoral lies in its sad emphasis on its own disabling grace; no form is so literary as that which preaches the superiority of artless simplicity. *As You Like It* is proof that Shakespeare understood this very well. But the songs of Spring and Winter seem miraculously to have burst the glassy bubble, if only because Marian is called Marian, and not Amaryllis.

I have said that the sudden news of a death at the end either destroys or almost fatally postpones the expected happy ending. Yet there is a sense in which this sudden silence really is instinct with the only hope they have. The Princess, guessing the message before she hears it, says, "Dead, for my life!" (V.ii.720). In the words "for my life" she is merely using a common expletive. But the poet, standing behind the character, may hope to catch something more: the life of the young coming out of the death of the old. The joking stops. Shakespeare is very sharp on the way brittle cerebral badinage is both natural to the early stages of courtship and can impede congress. Later he will write a play about two good young people who love each other but are eerily trapped in a running wit-combat and cannot show their love—*Much Ado about Nothing.* The ladies repeatedly say what is reasonable and practical, that they cannot trust the oaths of the young men. So the ladies give tasks to the gentlemen. The King is told by the Princess that he must live out the year in a hermitage and that, if he does, she will be his. The academic celibacy he proudly opted for at the beginning is to be temporarily exchanged for full (pre-Reformation) monasticism. This ordeal is a penance for, of all things, the sin of being a bright young man. Berowne, who saw his own wit finally as

ture. Shakespeare can certainly contrive this effect—he does it with Duke Senior's verbally elegant praise of preverbal nature in *As You Like It* (II.i.1f.). But the impulse, clear in *Love's Labour's Lost,* to explore the complex intersection of linguistic pattern and social (erotic) life is the very opposite of a confessed formalism; it is a move to engage nature, even here. Of course it remains true that language, before it is applied or used, *is* a formal system, and this makes possible flights of verbal ingenuity that can make us forget material reality. This is the thought that haunts the effortlessly witty Berowne and it haunted Shakespeare, too. I will not say that Shakespeare worked out a complex philosophy of language involving not only (mis)representation but also linguistic agency, because I do not suppose that he would recognize any of these terms, but his play has laid the groundwork for such a philosophy, through its responsiveness to the real variety of human interaction.

The fear of premature articulateness, the sense of an obscure blasphemy in dealing too easily with love, grief, death, remains very strong. The pluralism of the play, with its knowing variation of registers, is radiantly sane, but the note of desperation at the end, the smashing of the spinning wheel, with the entry of the man in black and the sudden harshness of the penances imposed by the ladies, can make us feel that things are running out of control, that the dramatist himself is seriously disturbed. I think that indeed he was. His fear is not the Nominalist fear that verbal abstractions refer to nothing at all. Shakespeare's worry is ethical. He grasps the psychological truth that even if words are variously engaged with the extra-verbal world, we can, by a trick of the mind, focus on the formal expression and so lose full engagement, even while we are still applauding our own cleverness. Of this he is ashamed.

Words, Love, Death: *Romeo and Juliet*

It is impossible to be sure whether *Romeo and Juliet* was written just before or just after *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* but most scholars make the tragedy the earlier play. About the same time, Shakespeare was pushing ahead with his English histories *King John* and *Richard II.* The switches of tone have been violent—from the bloody horror of *Titus Andronicus* to the tinsel elegance of *Love's Labour's Lost*—but these can be ascribed in part to

genre. *Titus Andronicus* is a tragedy, *Love's Labour's Lost* a comedy. But *Romeo and Juliet* is another tragedy, and yet it differs deeply from *Titus Andronicus.* We want to ask, "Can one mind have seen the world and formed his art in such profoundly different ways?" There is, however, no serious doubt but that Shakespeare wrote all these plays. There are links as well as ruptures.

Titus Andronicus and *Love's Labour's Lost* are both about a certain hysteria lurking in verbal formalism and death. Because in *Love's Labour's Lost* death breaks the dramatic sequence so radically, it is felt as a more serious reality in the comedy than it is in the Roman tragedy. In *Romeo and Juliet* he turns again to tragedy, but to a form of tragedy that can negotiate with comic expectations. Young lovers who get together despite parental opposition, the solidarity of the all-male group split and transcended by heterosexual love, friars as holy intermediaries in the intrigue, an upper-middle-class rather than a royal or aristocratic milieu—all these are characteristic of comedy but are found here, with the dreadful ending we all know. Most important of all, the tempo is that of comedy, not tragedy. That the same story can be comic if told fast and tragic if told slowly is a familiar proposition. Most jokes narrate a *peripeteia,* a turning of the tables in which the agent is hoist on his or her own petard. Tragedy, as Aristotle observed, thrives on *peripeteia*. Ribald rugby players on the way home from a match used to chant a comic dialogue involving a deep and a shrill voice; the deep voice kept saying, "To the woods! To the woods!" while the shrill voice protested, until at last the shrill voice cried, "But the vicar wouldn't like it!" and the deep voice answered, "I *am* the vicar!" A slow version might run as follows (but constraints of space prevent me from being as slow as I should be, so this may still be funny): A lady is lost in a dark wood, hears the footfall of a lustful, powerful pursuer; this is stretched out through various, inconclusive episodes until at last, desperate and trembling, she sees among the trees the temple of Diana, protector of virgins; she falls across the threshold, crying, "Help me, Priest of Diana!" The figure standing in the shadow of the temple moves into the light; it is the man who has been pursuing her; he smiles and says, "I am the Priest of Diana." We have reached "I *am* the vicar." Tempo, then, is of fundamental importance. To be sure *Romeo and Juliet* has an inescapably tragic conclusion, but the

problem of pace remains. Shakespeare still cannot slow down, cannot help running.

Consider the Prologue to the play:

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage.

It is as if Berowne, unbroken by his year in the hospital, has stepped in from *Love's Labour's Lost* to lend a hand with the Prologue. It is remorselessly witty. As Thomas De Quincey said of Alexander Pope's coruscating verse, "The eye aches at it."[11] "Fair Verona" sounds like a city on a picture postcard, but it contains something ugly; two households, evenly balanced, generate, from their very likeness, difference, a conflict that is itself both old and new. The antitheses are effortlessly multiplied. "Civil blood" is itself an oxymoron, and the word "Civil" is made to chime in the line in a thoroughly Berownean manner. The clash of civility and blood then turns into a darker conjunction, sex with death. The two opposed houses generate sexually ("loins") not enemies but lovers, but the marriage of the lovers is in its turn opposed by the stars. The life-giving "loins" are called "fatal"—another oxymoron—because they beget death. The death of the lovers is matter for grief, but at the same time it brings about the death of enmity between the two houses and is therefore matter for joy. So the last death image is potentially comedic—the burial of the strife between the Montagues and the Capulets. The sheer cleverness and grace of this interlacing of images is astonishing. This is something Marlowe could

never have learned to do, however long he lived. But the demon of *Love's Labour's Lost* is still at work. This dapper stuff about love and death is to grow in the drama that follows into the greatest *Liebestod* in English, but the tempo and the elegance mysteriously exclude serious engagement, for the time at least. *Love's Labour's Lost,* as we saw, ends with a death that might prove healing, for those who live after; now we are promised a healing death before the play has begun. We are also told, however, that in this play it is the young, not the old, who are to die.

Shakespeare's strategy in dealing with the demon of comic facility is to give him what he wants, a preliminary flourish or, say, a conventional-erotic episode pre-echoing the main action as "a sop to Cerberus," something to keep the beast occupied, in such a way that when the real action begins it will be felt as crucially distinct from all that has been said or done till now, as the actual is stronger than the merely hypothetical or notional. Act I, Scene i, therefore, is a straightforwardly comic scene in which the strife between the two houses is enacted by low-life persons in a street brawl. The scene assumes the status of mock-heroic as the more elevated persons come on stage. Benvolio, one of the masters, enters and stops the fight. At this moment we could easily think the whole quarrel trivial. But not for long. The Capulet Tybalt enters and instantly tries to provoke Benvolio (a Montague) to fight. Benvolio tries to carry the light atmosphere of the comic brawl over into the negotiation with Tybalt: in modern terms, "Don't be crazy, man! Help me pacify these impossible servants." In *1 Henry VI* we saw the "causes" of an inter-dynastic feud forming mysteriously in the air, in the scene in the Temple Garden. Tybalt is deliberately presented as one without rational motive. As soon as he sees Benvolio with his sword drawn, he sees a chance to kill somebody: "Turn thee, Benvolio, look upon thy death" (I.i.67). The effect is of fact replacing a picture of fact.

The other example is subtler still. Shakespeare gives Romeo a notional love affair before the real one that arrives with the appearance of Juliet. It might be thought that to show the hero to be so easily susceptible might weaken the effect of the main story. In fact the opposite happens.

First we have a narrative of Romeo's behaviour, given by Benvolio to Romeo's mother:

an hour before the worshipp'd Sun
Peer'd forth the golden window of the east,
A troubled mind drive me to walk abroad,
Where, underneath the grove of sycamore
That westward rooteth from this city side,
So early walking did I see your son.
Towards him I made, but he was ware of me,
And stole into the covert of the wood. (I.i.118–25)

This is a curiously precise anticipation of English Romanticism, as it will later develop. A line runs from this passage through Milton's *Il Penseroso* to the aesthetic solitaries of William Wordsworth, walking on the northern fells. The naturally crowded scenes of earlier dramatic literature are replaced by a new composition, a single figure, not in a town but in an empty landscape. Certainly pastoral poetry long before this exchanged the urban environment for a country setting, but the point holds. Pastoral typically depicts not a figure in a landscape but a landscape dotted with figures (Nicolas Poussin, not Caspar David Friedrich). Romanticism, when it comes, will be strenuously a-social. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's proto-Romantic "state of nature," unlike that of Thomas Hobbes or John Locke, shows not a society but an individual wandering through forests.[12] When Romeo returns to his friends after his brush with love Mercutio cries out happily, "Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo!" (II.iv.88–89). Shakespeare senses a deep literary topos before it is fully formed.

After Benvolio has told his tale Romeo himself appears. He asks if the person who has just gone is his father and then confesses that he is sad. So far we have the pattern proper to the opening of a Shakespearean comedy: sadness that appears for a moment to be associated with a parent but then proves to be the result of unrequited love. At the beginning of *As You Like It* Rosalind is thought to be grieving for her banished father but is really pining for the young wrestler she saw (I.iii.1–11 and I.ii.22). So here Benvolio immediately guesses the cause of Romeo's sadness: "In love?" (I.i.165). Romeo in response explodes in a burst of eloquence:

Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.
Why then, O brawling love! O loving hate!

it was an Italian production that caught this side of the play more readily than English directors had, perhaps because Italian same-sex camaraderie is played out in the sun-warmed streets while the English experience, above a certain social level, is frigidly confined to memories of sexually segregated boarding schools (but, note, the King in *Love's Labour's Lost* is inventing the English public school system as we watch, with his little celibate academy). Certainly the Italian model is closer to the world of *Romeo and Juliet*. Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film showed groups of combustible young men, all with a strong sense of style, hanging around on street corners, and this was dead right. The street scene itself is properly comic and goes back to Roman comedy and to Greek new comedy, earlier still.

It was Mercutio who cried out, "Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo!" Note the second clause: "Now you are yourself." It is a little stronger, I think, than "Now you are the Romeo we all know—your old self again." The suggestion, pressed by Mercutio, is that the fullest identity is that nourished and perhaps constituted by relationship. Mercutio is Romeo's closest male friend. He is a good fellow and remorselessly opposed, not just humorously we guess, to romantic love. The intensity of his antagonism is so great that it is difficult in the present age to play the part without suggesting homosexual feeling in the background. I believe that this is a mistake, but not a grievous mistake (it will emerge later that I do not exclude the possibility of homosexual feeling in Antonio, in *The Merchant of Venice*). Mercutio is the wittiest person in the play as Berowne was in his, but where Berowne deployed his wit in the service of love and procreation, Mercutio uses his to divide sex from love, disparaging the former and annexing the later as the natural medium of happy male badinage. The incidence of bawdry is higher in the speeches of Mercutio than in those of any other Shakespearean character. This means that by the logic of the plot Mercutio is the antagonist of Juliet. But the play loves them both and they do not hate each other. Although the love of Juliet falls across the adolescent social life of Romeo like a spear of light, it does not destroy Mercutio. Someone else does that: Tybalt.

Tybalt is the strangely frightening figure that interrupted the farcical quarrel of the servants at the beginning of the play. Mercutio calls him "Prince of Cats" and "King of Cats" and "rat-catcher" (II.iv.19, III.i.77, III.i.75), and the language of the play elsewhere reinforces this. Cats scratch, and Tybalt fights "as you sing *prick*-song," with a fencer's sword.

The first syllable of his name suggests "cat."[13] In Act III, Scene i, Tybalt happens upon Mercutio and his friends. Romeo is not present. We already know from his first appearance that Tybalt does not need a reason to kill others. Here he requests a moment of conversation. Mercutio, who can smell evil, asks him why he does not make it "a word and a blow" (III.i.40). Tybalt in reply pretends with savage humour to be like other people to the extent that he needs a reason for striking: "You shall find me apt enough to that, sir, and you will give me occasion" (III.i.41–42). Mercutio rises to the bait, but before the fight can develop Romeo enters, and Tybalt at once loses interest in Mercutio as he concentrates on the new arrival: "Here comes my man" (III.i.56). This time there is no dallying. Instead of seeking an occasion to fight, Tybalt at once provides the standard provocation: "Thou art a villain" (III.i.61). With Mercutio, we may surmise, this would have been enough. Romeo, however, is by this point in the play in love with Juliet, a member of the opposing family, and is eager to make peace. His tameness is too much for Mercutio, who acts according to the same-sex solidarity code: stand by your friend in a fight—even if he won't fight himself. Mercutio and Tybalt cross swords; Romeo intervenes clumsily, and Mercutio is stabbed. He dies joking. Asked if the wound is deep, he answers, " 'Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve" (III. I.96–97). Mercutio as he dies gives us the best of the cat images for Tybalt: "To scratch a man to death!" (III.i.101). With Mercutio there dies a world of youth, spirit, courage, gaiety. When Hotspur (who has something in common with Mercutio) dies in 1 *Henry IV* he says, "O Harry, thou hast robb'd me of my youth!" (V.iv.77). The last words to fall from the mouth of Mercutio are a curse on the two houses, Montague and Capulet. He dies attacking not romantic love but the circumambient a-sexual society of power relations and rivalry. There are two social spaces in the play, that of young male friends gate-crashing parties and that of inter-dynastic rivalry. The spheres intersect of course like circles in a Venn diagram. The feast at which Romeo and Juliet meet is at such a point of overlap; the clash between Mercutio and Tybalt at another. Indeed the tragedy lies in the intersections. Male camaraderie is one counterpoise in the play to the private love-world of Romeo and Juliet, but the sphere of dynastic hatred is the more important, darker counterpoise.

Everything I have said so far is anticipated in the smart verse of the Pro-

logue. The two households have made civility uncivil. But the Prologue also says that, somehow, these same unlovable, unloving families produced two good, naturally loving people who will die before the play is over.

Before the encounter with Tybalt, Mercutio is allowed to imagine the as yet unwritten *Midsummer Night's Dream,* in a long speech that halts the drama in its tracks exactly as an aria halts the action of an opera. We return to the point I raised earlier, in connection with Gertrude's lyrical narrative of the death of Ophelia. It has long been thought proper to sneer at those who in earlier centuries compiled anthologies with titles like "Beauties from Shakespeare" (a fashion started in 1752 by the forger William Dodd). "How crass," it was said, "not to see that speeches in Shakespeare depend at every point upon context and cannot be excerpted without falsification." Yet Mercutio's Queen Mab speech (I.iv.53–94) seems to invite excerption. It is an obvious anthology piece, before anyone has reached for scissors and paste. Of course it does have a context. Romeo has told Mercutio that he has been dreaming, and Mercutio is eager to make fun of the dream, which he fears will be a love dream. His speech is an exercise in minimizing, in making small. One reason why J. R. R. Tolkien used to find *A Midsummer Night's Dream* annoying was its minuscule fairies, untypical of the period.[14] The fairy knights in Spenser's huge poem are as big as the human knights. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the play of Peaseblossom, Mustardseed, Cobweb, Moth, and, above all, Moonshine. In Mercutio's speech we find "hazel-nut," "spider web," "gnat," "dream," and "moonshine's wat'ry beams." Berowne in his aria in praise of love found his way to the miniature world when he said, "Love's feeling is more soft and sensible / Than are the tender horns of cockled snails" (*Love's Labour's Lost,* IV.iii.334–35). You must—ever so gently—touch a snail's boneless horn to know what he means. But a chasm yawns between Berowne and Mercutio. Berowne is intent upon the cognitive power of love, its tender sensitivity to what is there. Mercutio is conversely intent on showing the absurdity of love, that it is all illusion. Like Duke Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he is a sceptic, but the sudden grossness at the end of his gossamer fantasy when he says that the fairy hag lays maids on their backs to receive lustful men betrays a hostility to the act itself that would never have occurred to Theseus the ravisher of Perigenia, the conqueror of the Amazons.

Yet in the course of the speech Mercutio becomes rapt by beauty, as does the audience. It is as if poetry (which he probably despises) is stronger than he. It is one of the places in Shakespeare that will feed the future, not our time indeed, but the nineteenth century, with its amazing array of fairy painting, reaching its zenith perhaps in the work of the homicidal lunatic Richard Dadd (1817–1886). In the play Mercutio fathers, *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* the question whether the experience of love and of dreams can be considered real is explored more fully. Already the scoffer seems to be falling under the spell of that which, ostensibly, he scorns. As the dramatic action is arrested by the "aria," so Mercutio himself is held in a suspension, immobilized as surely as the Lady is immobilized by the enchantment of Comus in Milton's *Masque.* "Such tricks hath strong imagination," says Theseus (V.i.18). Let us rather say, "Such force hath strong imagination," enough to impinge on the mind with palpable violence even when that mind is hostile.

As the plays succeed one another a certain fluid antinomy keeps forming and re-forming: on one hand glittering, vacuous formalism, on the other reality. Reality, however, has variable paradigms. If one is deluded by academic pretension, like the young men at the beginning of *Love's Labour's Lost,* the appropriate countervailing reality will be sexual love. If one is trapped in a convention of restless badinage so that one is never able to look steadily at anything, the appropriate reality will be perhaps the great negative fact of death; this alone can stop the witticisms. As long as sexual love is seen in physical terms it works unproblematically as an antidote to formalism. If however we decide that the strongest *experience* will provide the most effective antidote, we may think the ecstasy of exalted romantic love a better paradigm of maximal reality than physical coupling. But ecstasy is so special, so momentary, so isolated and isolating from the rest of our experiences (which elsewhere support one another ontologically in a sustaining web of quiet corroboration), that it is open to the charge of being an aberration or a delusion, like a a dream. At the same time the internal character of ecstasy seems to oscillate alarmingly between maximum intensity of experience and an extinction of experience. One feels as one has never felt before and at the same time the experiencing mind is blotted out, one drops into nothingness. That is why "die" became a slang word for "orgasm."

This is the scheme that will grow under Shakespeare's hand as he moves from *Love's Labour's Lost* to *Romeo and Juliet*. Wit will be silenced first by love and then by death as in the comedy, yet the death will no longer be an off-stage reported affair but will be made central to the action, turning the play into a tragedy. Meanwhile love, still the antidote of formalism as it was in *Love's Labour's Lost,* will become an ecstasy that can actually *ally itself with death*.

First Shakespeare must contrive a kind of poetry to express a love that breaks through those conventional patternings he does so well. When Romeo first sees Juliet he is given a speech that expresses not his verbal mastery (though the speech is masterly) but the fact that he is dazzled: "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" (I.v.44). After this they begin to talk and Shakespeare has them play "a set of wit," as lovers do in comedies. But now the epigrammatic surface of the exchange seems fragile and thin. The words are charged with unacknowledged energies. This is done technically by importing religious vocabulary, "shrine," "saint," "pilgrim," "palmer." The dramatist gives us an after-echo of the medieval fusion and confusion of religious language and exalted erotic love. The lover in Chrétien de Troyes kneels outside his lady's room as if before a shrine.[15] Such a description expresses simultaneously profound devotion and hell-brink blasphemy. Thomas Aquinas thought passionate love was a "binding up" of reason, like drunkenness, something that rendered the subject incapable of seeing that God is the primary love-object.[16] Romantic love is thus more dangerous spiritually than cool fornication. Andreas Capellanus, author of a medieval treatise on love, having explained at length how love ennobles the lover, abruptly recants at the end. Chaucer's narrator, at the end of the greatest medieval love story in English, scorns worldly love,[17] and Paolo and Francesca, Dante's courtly lovers, are in hell forever. The great medieval lovers we still remember, Lancelot and Guinevere, Tristan and Isolde, are adulterous, and doomed. By the 1590s the tension has eased, but Shakespeare taps into it here. I have written about the curious innocence of Shakespeare's pre-Reformation imagery, but here the surviving medieval material is itself still laced with a terror that has nothing to do with Elizabethan suppression of Catholicism. When Romeo says, "If I profane . . . this holy shrine," and when the words "saint," "pilgrim," and "holy palmer" turn up in the ensuing dialogue, the simultaneous charge of exalted devotion

actual. But this *is* something that fiction can do. It is not a con or a cheat. It is indeed a "reality-effect," but such effects are adequately produced only by artists who are willing and able to attend closely to the real world. Such attention enables them to present not indeed specific persons or things but real possibilities, things that in Aristotle's phrase, "would happen" (*Poetics,* 1451a37). At the level of language, for language persists of course throughout the play, what happens is an over-riding of linguistic self-consciousness by an urgency of reference so great that we no longer notice the elegance of the expression, though literary analysis may afterwards reveal great complexity in the material. That is why I used the terms "transparent" and "window" of the songs at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost.* It might be supposed that the only way to make sure of this reality-effect would be to write in the plainest of plain prose. Later Daniel Defoe will lodge his huge reality-effect, the start of the modern novel, by writing apparently without "point," without figurative brilliance. Shakespeare instead moves into heightened lyric poetry at exactly this point. Complex poetic utterance is not fundamentally at odds with experience but can take us unawares, have force, because of its unusually close involvement with experience. When Juliet thinks that Romeo has gone she says,

O, for a falc'ner's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud,
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine,
With repetition of my Romeo's name. (II.ii.158–63)

This is Shakespearean lyric poetry at its height, and it is certainly not simple. The fierce imagery of taming a hawk that lurks behind Petruchio's breaking of Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew* is reversed. Juliet is the falconer, Romeo the bird to be caged. The hint of a clash of wills is one of the things that prevents this love story from becoming too saccharine-sweet. Elsewhere we find more "gender-reversal": impatience for the wedding night belongs conventionally to the male lover, but in this play it is given to Juliet (II.v.1–78, III.ii.1–13). Meanwhile her speech is actually about not being able to speak. Juliet desires a huge voice to proclaim

Romeo's name but is gagged by the politics of Verona, the mutual hatred of Montagues and Capulets. As she expresses the pain of being reduced at such a time to a hoarse whisper, the inner splendour of metaphoric utterance suddenly breaks free, with language adequate to the magnitude of the love expressed. If Ovid was the evil genius of *Titus Andronicus,* he is the good genius of these lines. Juliet's words recall the third book of the *Metamorphoses,* in which Narcissus falls in love with a reflection of himself and the nymph Echo, who loved Narcissus, becomes in her turn a mere auditory reflection, a bodiless voice, "echo" with a small "e": *solis ex illo vivit in antris,* "From that time on she lived in lonely caves" (iii.394). The movement of Juliet's thought is audacious. As she longs for a great voice to burst forth, the cave where Echo dwells seems to turn into the human throat, which, with the violence we glimpsed in the imagery from falconry ("kill thee with much cherishing," II.ii.183), she would tear open to release the loved name clamorously to the winds, over and over. There is an obstinate incongruity meanwhile in the idea of tearing rock, an incongruity eloquent of that frustration that is the theme of the speech. Frustration is the running theme in Ovid's story of Narcissus and Echo. One tears fabric or human flesh more easily than one tears stone. Yet Juliet's love is so great she feels she might do even this. The bondage of Verona is played against the freedom of air, the dark constriction of the dramatic action against the liberty of myth, with extraordinary poignancy. The sense that the cave where Echo lies is far away exerts its own strange force in the speech. It is formally admirable, but we are not detained by the formal beauty. The expression is both complex and powerfully human. I know no writing better than this.

Act III, Scene ii, opens with Juliet's soliloquy: "Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds." Remember, in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* the line, *O lente, lente, currite noctis equi* ("Oh slowly, slowly run, ye horses of the night"). Faustus wants time to stand still because he stands on the brink of hell. The words he uses come from another world, one full of delight, from Ovid's *Amores* (I.xiii.40). The man who said this first wished to stop time for a very different reason; he wanted his night of love to be prolonged indefinitely. The effect in Marlowe of the wrenching of the line to a new meaning is marvellous. In *Romeo and Juliet* we have a second wrenching, less violent but equally marvellous. Juliet reverses the usual lovers' logic; instead of asking time to stand still she asks him to hurry—but for a lover's

reason, to bring Romeo to her the sooner. Nevertheless, as in Marlowe but less obviously, the thought is darkened by the idea of imminent death, hinted rather than expressed. Juliet was from the first the realist; she saw that their love was dangerous and likely to end dreadfully. Her fear now finds expression not at the rational level of inference and hypothesis but inadvertently, through her imagery.

Earlier Romeo had cried out that Juliet taught the torches to burn bright. There it is the love that blazes and the surrounding cruel world is alone dark. Now, in this speech of initially joyful desire, the absolute contrast between shining love and its murky opposition gives place to a strange intertwining:

Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
That th' runaway's eyes may wink, and Romeo
Leap to these arms untalk'd of and unseen!
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties, or, if love be blind,
It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
Hood my un-mann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle, till strange love grow bold,
Think true love acted simple modesty.
Come, night, come, Romeo, come, thou day in night,
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night,
Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back.
Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo, and, when I shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun. (III.ii.5–25)

She asks first for darkness, to favour their secret amorous enterprise. "Runaways" is notoriously unexplained. I suspect that thought has been telescoped: "That-those-on-the-lookout-for-fugitives may shut their eyes

and miss what is going on." I can offer no Elizabethan parallel for "runaways" in the sense needed, "runaway police" (we have the idiom, "the vice" for "vice squad"). Then we have the lovers as light against dark, though here a furtive light, shining as it were under the bed-clothes. This, the standard contrast, melts at once, on an "or" conjunction, into a strange allying of love with darkness; "It best agrees with night." "Come, night, come, Romeo, come, thou day in night" performs the same operation in reverse. The sentence begins by suggesting that Romeo and the night are not opposites but identical, but then the original contrast is reasserted with "day in night." Romeo is white snow, contrasting with the black plumage of the raven, but the imagery of snow on a beating wing propels the mind into the thought of that snow blowing away or melting into the feathers. When Romeo is re-imagined as star-light the original contrast may seem to have been recovered, but it is now subtly qualified; star-light is not ordinary light; it is a kind of counter-light, itself contrasted with the sun. *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* a play closely linked to *Romeo and Juliet,* is lit for much of its length by a counter-light, the moon. When Juliet calls softly, "come, loving, black-brow'd night" we may shiver; here night is addressed as the lover, as if he has somehow displaced Romeo. This slow, lyrical entangling of the initially opposed terms is prophetic, for this is a tragedy of love in death and death in love.

I have said that Juliet, the realist, knows that their love is dangerous because of the society in which they live. Here, however, the danger seems to be different, as if it were internal to the very intensity of the love itself. The hawk imagery returns (you "hood" a hawk, and in protest, it "bates"—that is, "beats" its wings), but it is now applied not to the male lover but to Juliet's desire. "Blood" means "sexual desire" and "unmann'd" means "lacking a man to satisfy it." When Juliet speaks of the blood fluttering in her cheeks she echoes the language of the almost bawdy nurse who said, when Juliet told her that Romeo was waiting for her at Friar Lawrence's cell, "Now comes the wanton blood up in your cheeks" (II.v.70). Juliet imagines winning by yielding, unfamiliar love becoming erotically adventurous. There is a streak of humour here as there was earlier when she imagined night as a "sober-suited matron" (chaperone, or bawd?), but there is I think no irony in "true love acted simple modesty." The physical reference of these lines is startling. Juliet is as earthy as Mercutio, but what is matter for satire to him is serious to her.