

SHAKESPEARE: (THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE)
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To plot Shakespeare as an evolving and particular energy in the field of Renaissance, we require first a metaphor for the tension over which the phenomenon occurs. In that frame we summon up a whirl of transformations where everything, art and science, comic, tragic, seeming and reality, - reverses and turns on itself. This is the crucible in which the old idealism of love is consumed, and reborn in the Cordelia and Marina restorative inwardness of heart.

In Tapestry Hall

Sixteen years ago I went to an exhibition of tapestries in the Metropolitan Museum. The strangest effect was to stand at an arch separating the last Gothic rooms from the first of the post-Renaissance, Classical, Baroque, whatever name is to be used - on the watershed of 1600 to 1620, in one eye the flat, flowered ground, linear pattern and dreaming thin poignance of the Lady and the Unicorn; in the other a large Finding of Moses, woven not much over a hundred years later (1627) from a design by Vouet: the voluminous recession of landscape, chordal pomp of light and shade, robes, gestures - pride made art, art ripened into pride.

Remembering the utmost contrast of other civilizations with each other: Byzantine and Western, Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, I asked, if they had not led one into the other, who could have imagined that these were expressions of a single culture: a single religion and way of life, that the grandchildren of the first manner could actually have been working in the second?

Yet they were one. The first opening of Gothic space, the earthly entrainment of that energy, had set up the vector which pointed to the conquest of Baroque, with all its incarnate temporality; the proudest Baroque assertion threatens at any moment to melt back into cloud: La Vida es Sueño. There is no Western century where the lean Christ of earthly negation does not call heroic art and science to Pascalian surrender: "Humble yourself, weak reason; be silent, foolish nature; learn your true condition, of which you are ignorant. Hear God."

As for that contrast in the tapestry hall, it was heightened by omission. The transition of Renaissance hardly showed there. Gothic, in that collection, hung on until suddenly it was replaced by what had been developing in the painting of a dynamic century. But the century from 1510 to 1610 is crucial. If Western art breaks in two, it is just the gyre between one style and another which has cast up its ultimate monuments.

It was in the lingering of the Medieval and spaceless that Shakespeare grew up; it was in the volitional grandeur of the 17th century that he died. Inevitably the values of the mystery plays he saw as a boy were carried over into the works with which he crowned his career:

But man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven
As make the angels weep. . . (Measure for Measure)

That is earth the morality stage, no realm of valid matter, but a battlefield for angelic and demonic powers. This ghostly forehall for the Day of Wrath (solvat saeculum in favilla) had been set up a thousand years before, and was to perpetuate itself through the centuries, climaxing in a storm on a heath, --

close pent-up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and cry
These dreadful summoners grace. . . (Lear)

-- a chorus of witches in a cave called Acheron, to which Macbeth would come, like Dante per loco eterno for "th'equivocation of the fiend." It fades away in the magic of a shipwreck on the seacoast of Bohemia. Ben Jonson could laugh, in his dialogue with Drummond: "Bohemia, where there is no sea near by some hundred miles." We are more inclined to wonder at the power of the spaceless heritage:

Here upon this bank and shoal of time
We'd jump the world to come. (Macbeth)

No less inevitably, the moral struggle, the human grandeur of the tragedies and late romances is nascent in the earliest plays: the Machiavellian thrust of Richard III) --

Conscience is a word that cowards us. . .
Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.

-- the counterthrust of retributive justice, --

Tomorrow in the battle think on me,
And fall thy edgeless sword. Despair and die,

-- the tasks set at the close of Love's Labours Lost, --

A twelvemonth shall you spend, and never rest
But seek the weary beds of people sick.

-- the sea sorrow and romantic union latent even in The Comedy of Errors, --

After so long grief, such Nativity!

On that watershed of 1600, between the divided kingdoms of Medieval and post-Renaissance, Shakespeare, like an animating spirit of the time (it is not the minor figures who realize an age; that is the timid illusion based on art-surfaces; it is the giants who seem to transcend age, "not for an age but for all time"), Shakespeare knits up the historical antinomies, bodying forth the symbolic field in the energies of the real.

To Clothe the Antinomies

The Medieval ground of resignation, that earth is a transitory show in which nothing avails but the incommensurate grace of God, runs through all Shakespeare, but in the later works it is caught up and incorporated in the tragic whirl:

I will preach to thee: mark. . .
When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools. . . (Lear)

As a residual ground it lies most exposed in the early historian. In the fall of all vanities it is the old monk of the Thebaid who comes forward with the gaunt assurance that the world could hardly have expected another end. Thus Chaucer's Troilus enters the eighth sphere and sees what Dante had seen

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe, that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise
This wreoched world. . .

So Hastings speaks before he dies (Richard III)

O mommentary grace of mortal men,
Which we more hunt for than the grace of God!
Who builds his hope in air of your good looks,
Lives like a drunken sailor on a mast,
Ready, with every nod to tumble down
Into the fatal bowels of the deep.

That older polarity is stripped, an Alpine landscape: the rock of our wretchedness below, and above, the hope of heaven, a thin intervening soil, vernal with flowers, earth's brittle joys. What characterizes the Renaissance is the vast complication of the value world, an elaboration between the dire antinomies, a polyphonic texture of sensuous beauty irradiated by the sovereign good - as if generations of growth and loam-building had formed a forest: upper and lower and middle terraces, leaves, vines, flowers, saprophytes, fungi, birds, insects, all the dykes and deflections that turn entropic fall to growth and indwelling - as if that had all unfolded where before was bare rock under the sun and rain. Beside the "naked vallainy" and "Holy Writ" of Richard III, set the otherwise similar farewell of Wolsey to his greatness (Henry VIII, perhaps Shakespeare's last work): "Farewell/ The hopes of court! my hopes in heaven do dwell." What sustained magic has opened in our transience:

I have ventured,
Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
This many summers in a sea of glory. . .

Even in going off, greatness celebrates its fall:

Say Wolsey, that once trod the ways of glory
And sounded all the depths and shoals of honour,
Found thee a way. . .

And what is discovered under the denial is a self-validating inwardness which had no parallel in the older style-world:

I feel within me
A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience. . .

Every style-study is a manipulation over polarity; it simultaneously integrates and differentiates. In making the entire Shakespeare one with the sweep of Christendom (seeing Lear, under its pagan surface, like El Greco's Lagoon, - that apocalyptic involvement of the human family in the toils of the god-snake - as a type of Christian mystery, the ultimate crushing of pride and ripening of the

charity: "Poor naked wretches, whereas'er you are/ . . . I have ta'en/ Too little care of this!") we do not avoid the diffraction by which Shakespeare also becomes many, a spectrum of those transformations he partly mirrors, partly affects.

So far as one can formulate such subtle shadings, it would seem that in his early work Shakespeare stands on the shore Farnham explored in his Medieval Background; that in the middle period he traverses a whirl in which tragedy becomes the pedal point for a vast moral transformation; that in his last plays he has planted his foot on the other shore.

Indeed, if he had set himself to exhibit the magnitude of the style road he traveled, he could hardly have done more, having written A Midsummer Night's Dream early, then to close with The Tempest, in which such love and magic reappear, but changed, having crossed a mysterious divide into another country with other causal laws.

Of A Midsummer Night's Dream one is tempted to say with Knight: "Shakespeare's most wonderful romantic comedy" - or as he adds more recklessly: "worth all the other romances." But when compared with The Tempest, its natural peer, it seems strangely thin and archaic, nearer to the Chaucer of Troilus and The Knight's Tale than to the volitional island of Good Hope. To move from one to the other is like crossing the threshold in our opening hall: we go from the yearning tetrameter mystery of Titania and Oberon

Then, my Queen, in silence sad
Trip we after the night's shade

to the swelling utterance that bases the world's trespass, punishes and rewards:

Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;
The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder,
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced
The name of Prosper. . .

Morality, in the Dream, hangs suspended in a realm of capricious delight. Hermia's father is as testy and irresponsible as a father could be, but his folly has no consequence and does not lead to his blame. The Fairy King himself applies his magic to trivial ends:

And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,
And make her full of hateful fantasies. . .

Prospero (who is both father and a kind of Fairy King) pretends to be arbitrary, but only to strengthen Ferdinand's love, "lest too light winning/ Make the prize light." The transmoral Puck is told "thou mistak'st/ Or else committ'st thy knaveries wilfully." But Ariel works under the wand and speaks the words of his principal: "I and my fellows/ Are ministers of Fate. . ." "You are three men of sin, whom Destiny. . ." When Ferdinand takes his oath as a responsible lover, "As I hope/ For quiet days, fair issue and long life," he assumes a moral dimension which did not exist under the reign of Puck's laughter: "And those things do best please me/ That befall preposterously."

Prospero, of course, has not crossed all the way to the romantic assertion of universal good. Neither nature nor history takes leaps of that kind. His cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces

dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. . .

The likeness of this realm to that of Antony's dying, "Thou hast seen these signs;/ They are black vespers' pageants," this tragic undergirding of its glory. The white magician is one who must burn his books (it had also been the last cry of Faustus, though bootless for him); like Charles V of Spain, Prospero will retire to a hermitage where "every third thought will be his death." If Miranda's "O brave new world" is not as ironic as post-Russonian actors seem to make it, at least it is the reapture of inexperience.

And yet, in some crucial way, in The Tempest, man has become the wonder foreseen by Pico della Mirandola, a self-shaping will, whose essence is potentiality. Like Bacon's universal science, Prospero's power contains what had formerly been ascribed to puckish fate or the capricious malice of the stars.

There is a waking at the end of the Tempest, as of the Midsummer Night's Dream. In the early play the earthly looks "small and indistinguishable, / Like far-off mountains turned into clouds." There Titania withdraws, Platonic soul troubled by the vicissitudes of time:

Come, my lord; and in our flight,
Tell me how it came this night,
That I sleeping here was found
With these mortals on the ground.

For Prospero Miltonic reason wakes as the law of the heart:

Their understanding
Begins to swell, and the approaching tide
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore
That now lies foul and muddy

Perhaps to all the lightly founded happiness of the early romances the Duke's words to Claudio apply:

Thou hast nor youth nor age,
But as it were an after-dinner sleep,
Dreaming on both. . . (Measure)

These airy mismatchings that so troubled the romantics (that other Claudio's getting Hero in Much Ado) have some of the insubstantiality of beggar Sly's waking in a palace to the dream of ease and a wife who is in fact a boy. Where malice enters such a texture, gladness falls back (from Shylock clanking off with his scales), unable to grapple with so dark an antagonist. The succeeding love scene must be at night, under distant neo-Platonic stars, the talk of Dido, Thisbe, Medea, old tragic loves. In a brighter play, a fool like Malvolio, storming off: "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you," can shake the fragile couplings of Twelfth Night, so that the closing song trails away on the diminuendo of the wind and rain.

If the sequence of early and middle comedies slides from year to year into the whirl of undigested evil, until in the time of the tragedies the depth of that funnel is explored, in Measure for Measure and Troilus - in one a happy ending achieved without regeneration, as by doubtful accident; in the other a catastrophe yielding no catharsis: "the argument a cuckold and a whore" whom "the devil luxury with his fat rump and potato finger tickles...together," a close which bequeaths us nothing but Pandarus' diseases - it is because they are caught in the involvement which is leading from comic caprice and changing loyalties, where moral questions hardly arise, to a world of such responsibility that reconciliation is hard to come by, must be paid for at a commensurate, almost at a tragic price. For the only

coin in which evil may be paid out is pain.

Thus Paulina to Leontes in The Winter's Tale:

A thousand knees
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
To look that way thou wert . . . (Winter's Tale)

Only 'heart-sorrow and a clear life ensuing' prepare for restorative blessing: "tears shed there shall be my recreation. . . Come and lead me unto these sorrows." Such is the moral reworking of Greene's story of jealous caprice; and the solemn good of Hermione's waking is no accident, but the evidence that "powers divine behold our human actions," a lesson Shakespeare learned only in tragedy. As Milton, who became the fruit of all this said: "What purifies us is trial."

You gods, look down;
And from your sacred vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter's head. (Winter's Tale)

Surely these are the same gods who throw incense upon such sacrifices as Lear and Cordelia. It is only that they have found a way to smile, not merely on the timeless, but on time.

Prometheus with a Difference

Framed in the revolutionary perspective near the source of which it stands, the century from Michelangelo to Milton looms like Goya's 1820 Titan, hugely brooding over the world.

After the Gothic release of energies in the sacred frame, and the 15th century insular perfection of the humanist modes, we reach a turning point about 1520. The peaceful cultivation of the secular under an ambivalence of values, which runs from Chaucer to Machiavelli (it has begun, indeed, in Dante, and may be called after him "the cultivation of heroes in Hell"), gives way to an expansive and increasingly conscious struggle of the new world against the old and the old generating on the new, aimed at a dynamic transcendence which is modern, physical and human, yet gathers into itself the transformed substance of Medieval contempt of the world and timeless faith.

The Reformation disrupting the North, the counter-Reformation tightening the South, meanwhile under both a confident and now aroused humanism struggling in science, politics and philosophy for freedom and the power to build - in this turmoil, every stress communicating itself through the cultural fluid to each point of expression - Europe rises to a might of creativity, as giant men are pressed up from the whirling mass, visible embodiments of that trial and adventure of the spirit.

In the variety of Europe we sense vectors of one design; the human emergence, man self-willing, world-awakening, involved in a nature his force now penetrates and gathers to its own formative storm.

A center of greatness is Venice. The paintings of late Titian and Tintoretto are whirls of light in darkness. But the ground is dark, an underpaint of general shadow, on which lights, glazed with the sensuous impasto of the energized brush, assert a wildness of tragic dimension. The motion is carried to its culminus by El Greco, who enters, takes the fire, radiates to Toledo. Music, at the same time and from the same center (and casting over Europe chromatic off-shoots; Weelkes, Sweelink, Schein) builds to Giovanni Gabrielli: the vast held chords, dark modulations laid down like a somber impersonal ground, out of which brasses blazon, voices leap and trill, a running freedom in the strictness of polyphonic form.

The personality aims at a self-validating pride, Tintoretto's Sebastiana Veniero, Marlowe's dynamic aspirers robed in the mighty *Idue*, as *Tabbotlaine*:

Nature that fram'd us of foure Elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:
Our soules, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous Architecture of the world:
And measure every wandring planets course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And alwaies moving as the restless Spheares,
Wils us to weare our selves and never rest,
Untill we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect blisse and sole felicity,

(breaking from that soar, the infinite longing channelled into mere politics, anticlimactic).

The sweet fruition of an earthly crowne.

That is one thrust of the tension, the titanic urge:

Here Faustus tries thy braines to gaine a deitie.

But it strikes against the dark, to which it tragically yields:
"I'll burn my books . . . Ah Mephistophilis." The Chorus
returns to aged wisdom, ground of resignation:

Faustus is gone, regard his hellish fall . . .

The resolution of that ground and that thrust is the thought and life of Bruno, the mystical Icarus, as caught in the Tansillo sonnet Bruno included in his own Eroici Furori ("Poi che spiegato ho l'ali al bel desio"):

Since first my soul beat wings to the high desire,
The vaster sense of air beneath my tread,
The swifter pinions to the air I spread,
Till spurning earth, to the heavens I aspire.
Not Daedal's son warns with example dire
That I descend or bow my threatened head;
For though with him I plummet earthward dead,
What is life's candle to this funeral pyre?
I hear my heart's voice through the dusky air:
"Whither, o fearless darer, would you dare?
Not without wreck this giant temerity."
"Fear not," I answer, "what the ruin may be.
Hold secure to the clouds and calmly die,
Content if heaven allows a death so high."

Here the expansive spirit seems to foresee its later history and to affirm the encounter which requires that loss. It is a phase of the general tragic awareness, what Bruno's sometime host, Fulke Greville, reached for in his philosophic poems:

If nature did not take delight in blood,
She would have made more easy ways to good.

The expression is paralleled by Shakespeare in Titus Andronicus:

O, why should nature build so foul a den,
Unless the gods delight in tragedies?

What such currents have washed over they reduce to scoured rock, bones of the once assertive. But there remains a shattered Pieta, gathering incredible tenderness in its ruins - "No cause, no cause," "Come let's away to prison" - or some last

death mask, as of Gloucester or Lear, inalienably noble - the final Tinoretto self-portrait in the Louvre, pride divinely broken and affirmed, reaching beyond itself with matchless power:

O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in. Darkling stand
The varying shore o' the world.

What the matrix of Reformation-Renaissance contains in itself is not only the causal fullness of Baroque, but as Milton reveals, the Revolutionary hope and reversal, the whole incarnate West, its drive to realize the kingdom of God in the here and now. Shakespeare is part of that upheaval of spirit.

Yet, the attempt to read him in the light of it is misleading. His revolution is carried out with a difference. Those flaming men of the Continent, of Italy most of all: Michelangelo, Titian, Bruno, Campanella, Galileo and the rest, had to fight from the cradle against the ingrained jealousies of church and Spanish state, every corruption and hypocrisy and fierce grip of the old powers. Under this stress, Italy becomes the first arena for the production of self-conscious giant-men - a brief glory, since the furnace that forged them burnt them up, consumed the fabric in which their successors might have been formed. But the happy age of Elizabeth, by some grace of statescraft almost sheltered from those wasting broils, a "demi-paradise", as Shakespeare knew so well -

this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea . . .
Against the envy of less happier lands . . .

exhibits itself under the lingering Gothic smile of the impersonal.

The revolution occurs. That trim mannerist art, as finely unassuming as the landscapes of Momper, the court miniatures of Hilliard - those dainty groupings of Rosalind, Orlando, Touchstone, or of Orsino, Viola, Feste: "If music be the food of love, play on, / Give me excess of it" - all that becomes the medium of Hamlet's rage:

Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty . . .

However titanic the manifestation, it does not spring, as in Italy, from the core of tormented person. As in the racing adventure of Raleigh and Sidney, Drake, Essex - those Englishmen, as a contemporary said, "free, stout, haulte, prodigal of life and blood" - we observe an incomparable energy issue as if out of nature, or what is more to the point, from the modesty of pre-Renaissance craft and guild.

No wonder later times have looked for another maker, Bacon, Marlowe, anyone more evidently fired with mission than the "swan of Avon," "sweetest Shakespeare, fanciest child." How laughable for the quiet impersonal mask of the Stratford bust or the Folio engraving to give voice and shake us with the utterance of thunder:

Let the great Gods
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads
Find out their enemies now . . .

Whenever our romantic blood throws itself into the Promethean Renaissance, we must glance back in that tapestry hall to temper our Wagnerian tendency with the reserve of The Lady and the Unicorn. This might even defend us against some of the more painful errors in the interpretation of Shakespeare.

It is just the determination to sink the modern tooth into Shakespeare that makes so many performances intolerable. And perhaps the intuition of a quieter and more

harmonious bard has made: many prefer reading the plays to seeing them. Of course they were meant to be acted; but the truth is, we have no tradition to put us in touch with what happened on the Elizabethan stage - and I am not thinking so much of entrances and exits, inner stage, balcony and the rest, as of the projection of human personality. There is no likely restorative or way of circumventing the post-romantic actor from throwing himself into the role. That is what he calls doing his job, bringing the play to life; and the danger is not the rhetorical rant Hamlet objected to ("out-Heroding Herod"), it is Robeson mangling the limbs of Othello, Olivier throwing Ophelia down the Freudian stairs and panning up on her lacerative sobs. And this is what almost every actor unconsciously brings something of - Shakespeare of the romantic cry.

What a blessing if we could find a company of old players, like a chest of lutes, viols and recorders, and set them to play King Lear, that the instinctive limits of impersonality and cleanness in which their soul must have operated ("speak the speech . . . trippingly", Hamlet says, "beget a temperance that may give it smoothness") might restore us (as in music the veiled sonorities and gentler nuances, the very defects of those old instruments have given us the clue) to a genuine Shakespeare of Renaissance energy incorporating the Gothic ground, to which no investigation of staging or even a complete rebuilding of the Globe, will be an adequate guide.

Such players would place themselves on the divide of that European hall, invested in the continental and Promethean, looking forward to the swelling grandeur to come, but still (as the Christ Church palatial stair brings the fan-vault of Gothic into the 17th century) holding in remembered love the thin poignance of the Capture of the Unicorn and the Offering of the Heart.

The Old Cadence and the Idealism of Love

Shakespeare's affinity with that past is to be inferred not only from moments: Romeo's Gothic dream -

I dreamt my lady came and found me dead -
Strange dream that gives a dead man leave to think -
And breathed such life with kisses in my lips,
That I revived and was an emperor.

- not merely from his impersonality and delicacy, a kind of lingering viol-tone in him. It goes to the heart of his greatest value, the idealism of love.

He was obviously aware of archaism here - living in the presence of Jonson and Donne, how could he have been otherwise? Indeed, with the reckless power to embrace ambivalence and subsume paradox which everywhere characterizes him, he opened himself to these bitterer motions. "My mistress eyes are nothing like the sun" is in the current which was producing Donne's Elegies: "Spermatique issue of ripe menstuous boils." The corruption of love and sanctity which turns Jonson's Volpone to vitriolic castigation runs through the bitter comedies (in Measure for Measure how the whole world has darkened, thickening the early joyful clowns, Bottom and Dogberry, into the Jonsonian bawd and pander Pompey Bum: "Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?"); it rages in the tragedies: "The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't/ With a more riotous appetite"; it spills over into the late romances:

No barricado for a belly. Know't;
It will let in and out the enemy
With bag and baggage (Winter's Tale)

But this viciousness takes the form of an imputation against what remains inviolable; it is a muddy tide that washes up and subsides, leaving the marble forms of

what ideally was. Thus Iago befouls Desdemona:

Blessed fig's end . . . Didst thou not see her paddle
with the palm of his hand . . . Lechery . . . an index
and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul
thoughts.

But when the curtains of the boudoir are withdrawn, we see a sort of married virgin ("Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?") hanging her head and singing an old song: "The poor soul sat sighing, by a sycamore tree,/ . . . Sing willow, willow, willow."

How clear it was to Shakespeare that this lyric idealism belonged to the past: "My mother had a maid called Barbary . . . She had a song . . . an old thing 'twas."

What else but Shakespeare's predilection speaks in the Duke in Twelfth Night, evoking a chivalric devotion, as noble as that of the Knight of the Woeful Countenance:

the song we had last night --
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,
Do use to chant it; it is silly sooth,
And dallies with the innocence of love,
Like the old age.

And the song "Come away, come away death" wakes the high Platonic strain to which Shakespeare was to remain faithful from first to last - the purity his late plays consciously revalidate and reward. So Cymbeline, with its fable of flower-death and revival, where foul suspicions fall from innocence under the burial cadence of the old song "Let us . . . sing him to th' ground,/ As once our mother; use like note and words" (Sing Fidele, that is, the offended Imogen) -

Fear no more the heat o' th' sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages.

Like Gibbons, Ferrabosco and the rest, who continue the Elizabethan viol fantasies into a century of shrill fiddles and emotional recitative (that five part somber swelling out of tone, airy echoes, the dying fall, "a solemn air and the best comforter/ To an unsettled fancy, cure thy brains"), Shakespeare, turning to the past, "dallies with the innocence of love."

As always when great art knits up the past - when Cervantes creates the highest fiction out of chivalric madness, or Rembrandt invests the mystery of shadowed vaults - the backward glance impregnates the future. It is on the archaic idealism of Platonic love that Shakespeare rests the final harmonies in which he reconstitutes the blessedness of the soul.

An Interlude on Science

In history one has to take what he can get. We might wish that the man who had concentrated into Lear and the storm on the heath such earth-shaking power had also been, like Bruno, a flamboyant recursive philosopher, that his thought had

shattered the spheres as effectively as his imagination upset and reformed dramatic values and style. We might as well wish he had been a painter compounded of everything from Peasant Brueghel through Titian and El Greco to the last sunset mood of Rubens (with some of Rembrandt's humanity thrown in). Or that he had written Gilbert's Maometism and Galileo's Starry Message; that he had been the illegitimate son of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester, or for that matter of Queen Elizabeth by a pig, and therefore named Bacon.

It is true that Lord Bacon in some sense runs a parallel course. He sees the tragic yielding of mind to world from which new power will flow:

Nature to be commanded must be obeyed; and that
which in contemplation is as the cause is in
operation as the rule. (Novum Organum, Aphorisma)

and he envisages on the other shore of this salutary yielding a brave New Atlantis of utopian command. But his work - for all that long-winded inquiry into heat as motion - is tentative; while Shakespeare's plays, reared over the same transition, are eternally what they must be.

The fault is not merely in Bacon, though no doubt, as Harvey said, he did write natural philosophy "like a lord chancellor." The transitional character of the Renaissance is nowhere clearer than in science, where exploration struggles against the older world-view which, until Newton's time, it cannot supersede.

The central problem was of planetary motions.

Leonardo could write the cryptic sentence: "The sun does not move"; Copernicus could work out the mathematics of the heliocentric in his De Revolutionibus; Bruno could alarm contemporaries with flaming insights into infinite starry worlds; Gilbert--even while Shakespeare was postizing Ptolemaic astrology:

the planets and this center
Observe degree
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthroned and sphered
Amidst the other, whose medicinable eye . . . etc.

(Ulysses in Troilus)

--Gilbert seemed on the verge of endowing his infinite universe of animate orbs with a kind of gravity: "The force which emanates from the moon reaches to the earth, and, in like manner, the magnetic virtue of the earth pervades the region of the moon . . . but the earth has more effect in consequence of its superior mass . . ." (from his last work, De mundo nostro, published posthumously); but all these things remain provisional, because they have not been worked out in terms of a causal theory of motion.

It is to God and his perfection that Copernicus turns for proof, though a God reformed by reason, who would rather have the earth circle the sun because it is more beautiful that way. The same perfection makes Copernicus cling to circular motions, even when (to explain eccentricity) they drive him back on epicycles:

Then Mercury runs on seven circles in all; Venus on five; the earth on three Altogether, therefore, thirty-four circles suffice to explain the entire structure of the universe and ballet of the planets.

But why should the planets pursue that ballet anyway?

The Ptolemaic system rested on Aristotelian physics, or rather trans-physics, physics of desire, souls and angels; it conformed to that -- though its epicycles, eccentrics and equants compromised the pure cause and seemed arbitrary. There were two sorts of matter, the earthly, which moves in straight lines, but under resistance, tending always to the center; and the heavenly or ethereal, which by its nature and guiding spirit moves eternally and rapidly in its spheres. And the objections raised to Copernicus' moving the earth were not merely those of authority (Luther's "The fool will turn the whole science of Astronomy upside down. But as Holy Writ declares, it was the Sun and not the Earth which Joshua commanded to stand still.") but those of Aristotelian physics:

Matter which is set in violent rotation does not seem at all fit to be massed together, but rather to be dispersed The disintegrated earth would have been dissipated over the heavens Bodies falling in straight lines would not arrive on the place destined for them. . . . We would also see the clouds. . . . always moving toward the west.

Copernicus' answer (since these objections are from his own summary), that the motion is natural and would not produce such effects, is hardly adequate. If earth is to move like a heavenly body, what is required is a physics of heavenly bodies built on the model of earthly mass, otherwise the motions are without cause. And such a physics lay beyond the exploratory rush of the Renaissance, on the shore of the Baroque formulation. The fable of the apple ("We hadde the apil take ben") teaches us this much, that what Newton had to extend through the universe was terrestrial law, and if this was to give nature a divine order, it must be that of the deified earthly. By the alienation of such earthly fall, ethereal matter was to arrive at astronomical dignity.

It is curious that Galileo, who around 1600 was best equipped to make the planetary synthesis (his treatment of a projectile cries out to be applied to the moon), did not attempt it. Like everybody else he lacked what may have been essential, the calculus, though inebriated with the infinite and infinitesimal:

What a sea we are slipping into without knowing it!
With vacua and infinities and indivisibles and
instantaneous motions, shall we ever be able,
even by means of a thousand discussions, to reach
dry land? (Two New Sciences)

But he also overlooked Kepler's Laws (no doubt he preferred circles) and never brought his knowledge to bear on the problem. His wonderful telescopic observations, which almost initiate modern instrumental science, have the exploratory excitement of late-Renaissance:

. . . other stars in myriads . . . never seen before.
 . . . the body of the moon . . . thirty times larger.
 . . . like the face of the earth itself . . . every-
 where full of vast protuberances, deep chasms, and
 sinuosities . . . four planets, neither known nor
 observed before my time, which have their orbits
 round a certain bright star . . . (Sidereus Nuncius, 1610)

It is only in the last dialogues (when the visual arts, under Caravaggio and the Caracci, have consolidated Renaissance to Baroque) that Galileo begins to formulate the physical component of the synthesis, the laws of inertia, acceleration, falling bodies. But he never (in Newton's words) extended them to the orb of the moon.

Kepler, the most extraordinary precursor, a kind of Rubens of Renaissance-Baroque transition, made that attempt. But he had neither the calculus nor Galileo's physics to work with, only the magnetism of Gilbert. As he said in the preface to his Epitome:

You might doubt whether you were doing a part of physics or astronomy, unless you recognized that speculative astronomy is one part of physics . . . I build my whole astronomy upon Copernicus' hypothesis concerning the world, upon the observations of Tycho Brahe, and lastly upon the Englishman, William Gilbert's philosophy of magnetism.

It was a prophetic leap, but desperate; because by some Aristotelian quirk, Kepler never doubted the naturalness of circular celestial motion; so all he required of his magnetism was a rotating virtue from the sun to keep the whirl from dying (dynamic inertia had not occurred to him), and a magnetic inclination of planets to convert circularity into ellipses. An incredible lifetime of juggling Tycho Brahe's observations, confident they would reveal mathematical harmonies, produced the three permanent Keplerian laws; but the great synthesis goes to ground, wrecked on the rock he thought to anchor to, astronomical physics. By the one fatal lack, he is trapped in endless speculations about planetary size, intercept, mass, motor virtue, things of which he knew nothing, manipulating their ratios, roots and powers, trying to get "archetypal reasons" and the observations into line.

So it is not until the second half of the seventeenth century that the three great thrusts - mathematics, advancing from Descartes' Geometry (1637) toward the differential and integral calculus; physics, which from Galileo on was setting up the laws of force and motion; and observational and Copernican astronomy - converge in the finality of Newton's Principia. But it would not take much study of that great work to reveal, that as far as period-style is concerned, it has issued from the vortex of Shakespeare and the Renaissance into a realm of formulated power, for which the literary parallel seems almost absurd, a Dryden heroic play. We are not here in the equivocal radiance of Antony and Cleopatra, but the reconstituted grandeur of All for Love. Within the opportunities of a style, some arts reach their height, others take a humbler station. If we seek a cultural parallel worthy of the Newtonian ordering, it must be the methodizing of polyphony that leads toward Bach and the Art of Fugue.

It is perhaps an indication of how lop-sided an accomplishment rational science is that the vital suspension between new and old, which by its paradox and transcendence so outdid itself in the arts, producing in a hundred years the whole range

from Leonardo to El Greco and from Erasmus and Machiavelli to Montaigne, Cervantes and Shakespeare, appears less fruitful in science, as in systematic philosophy, though there as elsewhere it is marked by bold discovery.

Or have we moved far enough in this century from the Newtonian formulation to feel the limitation of that clockwork, to recognize the speculative glory of Leonardo with his vitalism of force ("an incorporeal agency, an invisible power . . . born in violence it dies in liberty; and the greater it is the more quickly it is consumed . . ."), of Bacon with his perceptive lodestone, of Gilbert's magnetic worlds, each moved by its destinate soul, of Telesio, Bruno and the rest, in whose physical universe Spirit, God, archetypal magic are dynamically stirred?

The age stands before us like the seeker it precipitated, the mythical Doctor Faustus, reaching beyond his grasp. When Vieta, at the close of his book on algebra (Isagoge in artem analyticam, 1591) exclaims, "This Universal Mathematics enables us to attack the 'proud problem of problems.' For THERE IS NO PROBLEM WHICH CANNOT BE SOLVED"-- he oversees, perhaps misleads; yet that is the "climbing after knowledge infinite" by which Western thought began to be remade.

Our judgment of these works is not free of poetic participation. When we cull from Bruno his incomparable vision --

For us consists the Universal sphere as a single all over-spreading, infinite, immovable continuum, in which numberless spheres or particular worlds exist. There is but one sky, only one immeasurable world-space, one matrix, one universal connective, one ether region through which the whole moves. In this, become visible innumerable stars, constellations, world-bodies and suns . . . Of these our earth is one, yet not a single one is the center, for the universe is in all directions equally immeasurable . . . The earth and all other constellations have their own life principle, which is none other than their own soul, which again is but a part of the World Soul.

-- on what basis do we conclude (with Koyre): Bruno, I regret to say, is not a very good philosopher?

The two views stand opposed. To the Renaissance soul it is the exploratory vitality which spilling over (like the Mannerist whirl of light into the more massive rhetoric of Rubens), gives excitement to the solid achievements of 17th century method. Thus Harvey, marveling at the pulsating drop of blood that is an embryo chick:

Throbbing between existence and non-existence, now visible, now invisible, it was the beginning of life. . .
(Motion of the Heart and Blood)

or universalizing the metaphor of circulations:

The moist earth warmed by the sun gives off vapors which, rising, are condensed to fall again moistening the earth. By this means things grow . . . So the heart is the center of life, the sun of the Microcosm, as the sun itself might

be called the heart of the world. . . (Ibid)

As in Galileo and Kepler, we respond to some Faustian irradiation. Even at the end of the century it strikes fire in the world-organism of Leibnitz. The very Newton who wrote in the Principia "non fingo hypothesi", speculated daringly in his letters and Queries about the ether, the transformation of matter into light, nature as "a perpetual circulatory worker."

Despite all this, to the colder rational eye, what distinguishes Harvey is his methodical proof of circulation, not the larger wonder. It is this which places him, with Descartes and the others, in the century of formulated achievement. While that wild swinging between the values of world and trans-world, which gave Renaissance art and poetry their strange magnitude, appears a scientific handicap, reducing the earlier texts to curiosities. It is Doctor Faustus indeed, spirit-let his power going to pieces in his hands.

In any case Shakespeare is of that horizon, a demonic force, ruthlessly exploratory. The early plays push out in all directions, a determined advance on every front of the form: Titus Andronicus, a Roman tragedy of sheer villainy; Romeo and Juliet a medieval tragedy of fortune, the loves of lyrical star-crossed lovers; The Comedy of Errors, a Plautine farce of plot; Love's Labour's Lost, a court masque and conversation piece, hardly using plot at all; A Midsummer Night's Dream, a magic romance, under the spell of Titania and Oberon. And he goes on through his whole career, breaking barriers and reaching beyond himself: hacking his way, like the most vicious of skeptics, into the negations of Troilus; at the same moment mounting through that breach to tragic affirmation ("... we defy augury. There's special providence in the fall of a sparrow. . . if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all."); fighting through the terrors of King Lear almost to the rainbow of love after the storm, yet crushing that; spitting out the misanthropies of Timon, a hate which can only come to rest "Upon the beached verge of the salt flood putting out, finally, across that flood to map the island of reconciliation (as with Columbus it becomes a continent) that lies beyond.

Had a scientist set up and torn down as much as this wildest of revolutionaries, he might, like Paracelsus, Vesalius and the rest, have hinted at everything without reducing a single area to demonstrable formulation.

Lucky that art is more self-contained, that the greatness of Macbeth is not affected by whether we believe in the virtue of poisoned entrails in a stew. Yet even art is somehow dependent on the symbolic truth of its world. Macbeth and Lear would not be so deeply revealing (nor the Divine Comedy, for that matter) if we did not live in a universe of such mythical sway. And is not this what the metaphors of Renaissance science always imply, and what the billiard-ball determinism of Newton centuries increasingly and blindly ignored?

The Metamorphosis of the Comic

Standing on the threshold between the Gothic and Baroque, we have, as it were, fallen into a Blakean vision and seen, like the wheel of Beatrice's car in the illustrations to Dante, a vortex of faces, flames and eyes. It is not merely a gyre of style, or if so, style must be opened out to include everything, our way of thinking, feeling, being - the validation of good and the containment of evil. It is the whirl where opposites meet, reverse and are combined, as recklessly as a gyre

dies and is reborn. Like Hegel's verb aufheben, it manages at once to destroy, to continue, and to go beyond. Consider the comic, the element of laughter.

Its transformation in Western literature has two simultaneous summits, one in Don Quixote, the other in Hamlet and Lear. In both the comic goes beyond itself, and in both madness is the mediator; but the manner of the change is different.

The point of departure for Cervantes might have been Erasmus' Praise of Folly, which opens the pot-bellied Silenus of laughter to the great riches within. Here we move without a break from potty absurdities of the vain and harmlessly mad, through the vicious follies of hypocrisy and war, to the Platonic and Christian silliness (Shakespeare's "silly sooth", seliq, selan?) which divinely incapacitates us for the world. The Praise of Folly is a Christian text, but it could only have come into being in the Renaissance, when the perspective of humanism had so liberated faith from itself that the mind could contemplate again, as the pagan schoolboy did in the Palatine graffito, the Christian crucified ass: "Alexamenus worships his god."

Shakespeare, on the other hand, has his roots in the northern folk tradition, the English mystery play, the mingling of sacred, comic and serious of the Seconda Pastorum ("never saw I until now a horned lad in cradle."). In both the matrix is Christian; in both there is an apotheosizing madness; but in Cervantes it is comic and benign, in Shakespeare demonically driven.

Don Quixote bathes his world in such radiant innocence that it becomes a comic paradise, a direct and noble transcendence of the absurd. Shakespeare's world is flawed, full of devils, more complex and more ambiguous than that of Cervantes. Weird that Cervantes, living in inquisition Spain and through Moorish captivity and under grinding poverty, should have so excluded villainy, while Shakespeare, in fortunate England, quietly making a success of his investments and his art, should have been so possessed.

Shakespeare, of course, has humor of many kinds. There are the low clowne, thickening under tragic stress to Pompey Bum or to the Macbeth porter of Hell-gate, so disappearing, unless the bumpkins of the Winter's Tale are an Arcadian renewal. There are the witty jesters, Touchstone and Feste. This strain also enters the tragic field. When Yorick goes under, only Hamlet seems to take his place; in Lear the court fool appears again, but under the transformation we are investigating.

Shakespeare's most ambitious comic, Falstaff, has often been contrasted with Don Quixote. He has none of the visionary glory of the Don. Only the tragic figures reach at that, and not by their comic motions, even when they incorporate the comic. Falstaff has more in common with Sancho Panza, but a shadowed and corrupt Sancho. By sheer wit, vitality and genius (Shakespeare's genius is his) Falstaff converts the negative into the lovable, delights us with robbery, cowardice, lying, a kind of absolute Machiavellian opposite to the Spanish comic saint. It is significant that perhaps the high spot of his clowning involves the macabre, a dance of death humor. When he leads his "pitiful rascals" onto the stage, such scarecrows that he might have "unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies," and tells the Prince --

Tut, tut; good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better: tush man, mortal men, mortal men

-- and when he comes in later without them, saying --

I have led my ragamuffins where they are peppered; there's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive; and they are for the town's end, to beg during life

-- our laughter reminds us how close tickling is to pain, their tears indistinguishable, the smile (as evolutionists used to argue) a suspension of the snarl.

Falstaff's humor here is that of Hamlet dragging off Polonius: "I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room," or joking about the body: "Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him." If this "laughter out of dead bellies" is traversed on the way in to the dead center of the tragic storm, it seems we escape, in The Winter's Tale, by the same road: "This is the chase . . . (Exit, pursued by a bear)" and the clown: "the men are not yet cold under water, nor the bear half dined on the gentleman: he's at it now." To which the shepherd: "Heavy matters! Heavy matters! . . . thou mettest with things dying, I with things new-born."

Shakespeare's metamorphosis of the comic is less to ennoble it as such than to whip it like a volatile element through the whole tumult and ascent of tragedy. It is not merely relief. Even the porter's speech in Macbeth goes beyond that. And when Hamlet, thrown into a frenzy by the message of his father's ghost, tries to swear the others to secrecy, and the ghost echoes from the cellerage: "Swear", and they shift ground and are echoed again, and Hamlet -- to the ghost, of which he has just said: "Remember thee! / Ah, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe" -- cries "Well said, old mole! canst work i' the earth so fast? / A worthy pioneer!" -- what tickles our ribs is the deflected death-thrust.

Even more, when Lear feels madness rising from his heart, and groans, "Hysterica passio . . . But down!" and the Fool cheers him on: "Cry to it nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put em in the paste alive . . .", the words, the image of knocking down climbing sorrows as that absurd cockney knaps those live eels rising from the pastry, afford one of the comic peaks in Shakespeare; but the laughter does not give relief; it heightens and makes mysterious the pathos of Lear, lifts it to a kind of lyrical delirium, where sorrow lightens with electric energy.

This effect spreads and takes the whole stage in the storm scene. With Lear going mad: "Hast thou given all to thy two daughters? and art thou come to this?"; Edgar pretending to be mad: "This is the foul fiend Fliboertigibbet: he begins at curfew and walks till the first cock . . ."; the Fool clowning like a madman: "Prithee, nuncle, be contented: 'tis a naughty night to swim in . . ." -- all doing it with insane gusto -- we are caught up in a chromatic capriccio, a kind of fierce inversion of the gay.

So in the trial scene, where joint stools are arraigned as daughters and the delusion is glaringly thrown against the fact: "another chase warp'd looks proclaim what store her heart is made on . . .", it is not only Mad Tom who is wrenched by his feelings: "My tears begin to take his part so much, / They'll mar my counterfeiting."

Finally, when Lear comes in mad on the heath: "Behold yond simpering dame, / Whose face between her forks presages snow," it is impossible to know why the fool has disappeared or whether Lear's later "and my poor fool is hang'd" in some way takes care of him as well as of Cordelia; but we are certain no fool is needed, because Lear has absorbed the comic levity into his own madness, which is total now -- at last almost related to the humor of Don Quixote, an airy species of the divine grotesque -- no less victorious, but within the category of pain.

Tragedy and Containment

Since great tragedy arises at the vertex of these opposites, the unleashing and the containment of pain, the problem of tragedy may be stated either way: as to raise, or to contain the passions.

But if that raising and that containment, though opposite, are not an indissoluble act, if they should separate by so much as the breadth of a hair, one has slipped from the peak of tragedy into some energy state less difficult to maintain.

Add to this that the emotions, if raised without limit, are in their nature uncontrollable; their attack cannot be met nor their grief assuaged. Lear's cry: "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all?" admits of no answer. It is not within the province of tragedy to reconcile us to waste and pain; that would be to belie its nature. When Aristotle says that Euripides "even if his execution be faulty in every other point, is . . . the most tragic certainly of the dramatists," he identifies tragedy with the pathos vector. When Arnold expresses the other pole, that suffering which does not reach resolution is "painful, not tragic," he reduces containment to Victorian platitude. But the central mystery of tragedy is that it binds us simultaneously with the unanswerable sufferer and the universe which requires and celebrates his suffering.

Water charmed is not tragic, the discrete drops on the leaves, the nourishing tempest. It is the flood that bears down the world, that ends in no rainbow. The fire on the hearth is not tragic; that is romance, danger tamed to blessing. It is the burning land, forests, cities, the Heraclitean fire; these are tragic, but how are they to be contained?

So the problem of tragedy may be rephrased as that of containing the uncontainable.

No paradox is to be bridged as paradox. All mating of contraries rests somewhere on fudging, the sic et non, "Well yes; and then again no," to assume a base of likeness in what appears antithetical; it is the identity of opposites.

So the storm in Shakespeare only seems to bear down all continents. Something survives, an order in which the gored state can be maintained. Likewise with the passions. Even Lear's "Howl, howl, howl," Othello's "Pish! Nores, oars and lips. Is't possible?" respect the ceremonies of musical form. The opposites are wedded before they act, before the penning of a line.

But that is what we said at first: "If they should separate by so much as the breadth of a hair . . ."

How is the condition to be instituted? If tragedy is a furnace, where is the beryl, the carbuncle, the "pure and perfect chrysolite" that can hold the agony of what is to be released there? Perhaps a containment adequate to the need is not a product of art but a gift of history, a property of that vortex in which the Renaissance moved.

There is an analogy in the present attempt at nuclear burning. If that fusion should occur, the release would be so devastating that no solid material could contain the heat and pressure of the resulting plasma. Yet until the plasma can be contained, there is no ongoing nuclear fire. What has been proposed is for the plasma to chamber itself by the electric and magnetic effects which are the natural properties of such a discharge. The atomic burning would bind itself in its own magnetic bottle of which the containing force would increase with the fierceness of what was to be contained.

In tragic terms, outbreak must form of its own violence the whirling art-field in which its resolution and affirmation are at every moment, even in their antithesis, implied; the death motion must continually circle and become the cry of life.

As long as the mystical ground lies below, sustaining and embracing the fall, we have not arrived at the eye of the storm. Thus in Richard II, where the faith-formula appears again and again, as York: "Comfort's in Heaven, and we are on the earth; / Where nothing lives but crosses, cares and grief." In its essence the play

is a title-search, an inquiry into the nature of reality: is this a king or a mockery king of snow? It is Anthony's problem in his going off: "The rack dislimns . . . My good knave Eros, how thy captain is/ Even such a body: here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave." Lear shows the same concern, the admiration Goneril sets down among other his "new pranks", "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" to which the Fool answers: "Lear's shadow." The problem of identity cries out to us in all change, in all dying. And the tragic answer, whether this is a king or a mockery king of snow, is always "both in one" and that the real is confirmed in the act of becoming its mockery. "A brittle glory shineth in this face," as Richard says when he breaks the mirror.

But in the prison scene at Pomfret Castle where the problem of kingship merges with that of embodied soul, both of divine sanction, both suffering temporal foreclosure, the life-motion, closed in subjective void, peopling the world with still-breeding thoughts, suffers such bitter defeat:

Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased,
With being nothing,

that the only road of identity in this emptiness is the one which leads up:

Mount, mount my soul, thy seat is up on high,
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward here to die.

The Platonic and Christian formulation is still explicit, a residual Medieval ground.

In Lear it has sealed itself in the very mystery of love, has threaded its highest claims through the mere negation of dying, so that there is no clue but the vanishing and debatable index of a glance: "Do you see this? . . . her lips,/ Look there . . . "

Under the pagan surface there is the same Christian theme, the humbling of pride. Richard's "Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood/ With solemn reverence" becomes Lear's "Let me wipe it first / It smells of mortality." Yet everything in Lear goes far beyond Richard II, beyond what any other historian or tragedian ever conceived. Nowhere is the downward motion of world and the upward motion of spirit so total, so juxtaposed, so indissoluble. The resonance of the two actions; of Lear whose pride is folly and whose broken folly looks beyond wisdom, of Gloucester, who stumbled when he saw, whose mere defects prove his commodities -- builds to a tragic wheel (that wheel of fortune and fire, the image of which runs through the play) where rise is only the mirror face of the fall.

To know it for rise at all depends in some sense on the analogy. Gloucester has misjudged like Lear and been punished like him. In deprivation both have voiced a general charity: Lear's prayer "Ye naked wretches . . . " and Gloucester's "Heavens deal so still." At the close we have heard of Gloucester's death, how reconciled with his son -- "his flaw'd heart . . . / Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, / Burst smilingly." We have seen Lear in his final union with Cordelia project a prison life of pure love and spirit which has obviously gone beyond all earthly correlatives: "And take upon 's the mystery of things, / As if we were God's spies." It has been compared to the Heilige Dankgesang of Beethoven's A Minor Quartet, and certainly its joy reaches that far beyond the temporal. "He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven, / And fire us hence like foxes . . . "

That is just what has happened now. But Lear will not rest assured of Cordelia's death. The last scene pivots between these opposites: "She's dead as earth" and: "Lend me a looking-glass; / If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, /

Why then she lives." They succeed one another, wave and trough, wave and trough: "This feather stirs; she lives . . . now she 's gone forever! . . . Ha! What is't thou say'st? . . . No, no, no life! . . . Thou'lt come no more,/ Never, never, never, never, never!" Then with a melting almost like that of Lear's waking earlier to Cordelia's care, comes the final illusion: "Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,/ Look there, look there!" The hint of Gloucester's dying is inescapable" . . . burst smilingly."

It is the seamless identity of tragic and ^{up}down. Everything hinges on the infinitesimal of that glance. There is nothing more palpable, nothing that cannot be disputed and denied, to tell us whether the drift of that dying was toward nothing or toward life. And even if we allow "life," it is in one sense the last twist of the blade. Because Cordelia is not coming to life; and the dying man's thinking she is, is the fondest deception.

But by this time the wheel has come full circle indeed: illusion is indistinguishable from its opposite. In the always fleeting inner realm that has opened since the reunion, fact and earth are nothing; love and hope are all. To balance so much on the breaking off of a single phrase is the ultimate triumph of Shakespeare, of tragedy, of the vortex that is Renaissance. On what does it rest? On a miraculous transformation of the heart.

Hamlet, Lear, and the Infolding of the Heart

King Lear and Hamlet ^{stand} in a curious relation to each other, on either side of a dead center of moral upheaval, Hamlet moving in, still carrying traces of the innocent Arden from which it has come, Lear hardly touched by any lingering of the old lightly balanced good, deep in Sheol, yet revealing, as on the other face, the first sign of issuing into the ripper glow of reconciliation.

In Romeo and Juliet the human and poetic world is that of its happier contemporaries, Two Gentlemen, A Midsummer Night's Dream. What throws it over into lyrical tragedy is mere fortune, the blind Medieval crossing of the stars. But in Hamlet the romance world is sick, out of joint, and since the opening scene sets this fact and mood, we catch only glimpses of what might have been before the ghost walked or flesh was so far sullied: hints of the witty prince talking with his friend Horatio, or courting the fair Ophelia in ideal love.

The lingering sweetness, however, goes beyond these touches: it is a smiling gift of nature:

But look, the morn in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.

From ghost to blessed dawn. Curious how the time of "our Saviour's birth" has been made the leading tone in this modulation out of fear:

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes . . .
The bird of dawning singeth all night long,
And then they say no spirit can walk abroad . . .
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

Association revives other blessed mornings in Shakespeare's earlier and thinner style, as in A Midsummer Night's Dream:

And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger;
At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,
Troop home to churchyards . . .

Again religion shares in the healing. In Romeo we see Friar Laurence filling his osier cage with simples:

The grey-ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night. Even in the grief of parting, when the nightingale yields to the lark, those envious severing streaks shake free of all ill-divining and leap forth in their eternal glad form:

Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops . . .

It is this quieter beauty to which, in Hamlet, we hauntingly look back: in the graveyard, when the singing clown --

In youth when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet . . .

-- digs up the skull of Yorick, "a fellow of infinite jest", at whose lips the child Hamlet hung. ("Where be your gibes now? Your gambols?")

Lear is past all that. The old innocence is drowned. Evil takes over from the first, such heaviness and might of villainy as bemonsters the world's features. If there is to be any benignity, it cannot be harked back to; it must be a purged Innocence shaped and renewed from the heart of Experience, where humanity preys on itself "like monsters of the deep." So Lear has none of the Arcadian strains that lingered on in Hamlet. That "Et in Arcadia Ego" has to be taken from the past, where it was commonly construed, and given its symbolic present: I too am in Arcadia."

I think this lady
To be my child, Cordelia . . .

If Lear lacks the grace of the early romances, Hamlet is without a touch of the Marina mood that lies like a beatitude over the old king's waking:

O you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abused nature.
Th' untuned and jarring senses, wind up
Of this child-changed father.

This could not appear in Hamlet because it was an element uncreated, something never before known to the world, first to be shaped by Shakespeare.

For the arts are no less exploratory than science, open unknown realms of being, shoulder out time, forge truth. It is as with the evolution of the four-chambered heart: until the spirit had received this musical infolding, in the words of Pericles "the shores of mortality" been widened for this "great sea of joys," no such ripeness could have been dreamed of.

It is only the giants and demigods who can so far transform possibility.



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