SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE'S PRIMITIVE ART

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Read 28 April 1965

SPECTACLE is that part of tragedy which has least connexion with the Art of Poetry, as Aristotle believed: but, when the text of plays—even of Shakespeare's plays—provides only raw material for John Barton and other theatre directors, it might be thought 'So much the worse for poetry'.

Today Bali rather than Athens supplies dramatic models, and the cult of primitive theatre is so strong, that it may have been suspected I come to praise Shakespeare as a barbaric contemporary, after the fashion of Jan Kott—to enrol him in the Theatre of Cruelty. On the contrary, taking a conventionally historic view, I shall try to recover traces of the archaic spectacular tradition from which Shakespeare first started and to which, in the richly transmuted form of his final plays, he returned. I hope to identify the scenic proverb, the elements of that unspoken language which derives from the primal stage arts of gesture, costume, grouping, pantomime; to reveal the influence of those inexplicable dumb shows, which, although he rejected them, Shakespeare never forgot.

In doing this, it may be possible to uncover also something of his creative process. As his poetic imagination subdued itself to what it worked in, the visual and scenic basis of his art became absorbed into his poetry. An actor before he was playwright, Shakespeare carried always with him the memories of his repertory. It has been convincingly shown by Dr. Edward Armstrong that Shakespeare's memories, as they sank below the level of consciousness, formed themselves into 'image clusters' or associative groups. Image clusters would have had visual and scenic counterparts, but since 'memory is an *imaginative* reconstruction',[1] what Shakespeare recalled from the stage, more especially when it need not have been conscious recall, was converted by that act 'into something rich and strange'.

I would begin by distinguishing two traditions of spectacle

[1] E. A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare's Imagination*, 2nd edition, 1963, p. 122, quoting Sir Frederick Bartlett.

in his inheritance, which might be termed the high road and the low road to drama proper. There are the lofty Icons or tableaux of coronation, triumph, great marriages or funerals; and, at the other extreme, tumblers and jesters, comic quick-change artists, such as the poor tatterdemalion dwarf that William Dunbar introduced running through his parts at the Market Cross of Edinburgh (in *The Manere of Crying of Ane Playe*). Both extremes met in the ring of Burbage's Theatre, London's 'game place' or 'playing place'; but Marlowe and Shakespeare began by taking the high road and rejecting 'such conceits as clownage keeps in play'. Marlowe's lofty first creation, Tamburlaine, is descended from the King of the Moors, who rode in many civic processions, followed by his train, and gorgeously attired in red satin and silver paper; the spectacle is transmuted into heroic poetry,[1] by which it has been preserved for posterity. The originals are long forgotten.

Marlowe's doctrine of power and glory was very largely a doctrine of sovereignty and he made use of another image by which it was forcibly brought home to the simple. Every parish church in the land contained a copy of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and the edition of 1580 has for frontispiece a crowned king mounting to his throne by trampling on a prostrate foe, whose triple crown is falling from him. The king is Henry VIII. The footstool is the Pope. Tamburlaine trampling on Bajazet repeats the image.

For many people the royal image assuaged a deep privation they felt in the loss of those older images that had been familiar for so long, whose simple wonder-working mechanisms the Reformers had triumphantly torn out. Opponents of the stage were apt to charge the common players with what seems to us the very incongruous sin of Idolatry, because they perceived a line of descent from the older Icons to the new. One such sour cleric, writing in 1587 *A Mirror of Monsters*,[2] describes a marriage procession of Pride, Lord of the Theatre, and Lechery, Lady of Worldlings, which passed through the streets to the Chapel of Adultery at Hollow-well (that is, Burbage's Theatre in Holywell Street in the old grounds of a Benedictine nunnery). It was presided over by a magic winged image of a Holy Child, made of alabaster and painted in life-like colours. The Child Cupid

[1] See J. P. Brockbank, *Dr. Faustus*, 1962, pp. 23–24. The following paragraphs develop from Chapter III of my book *English Dramatic Form* (1965).

[2] William Rankins, *A Mirrour of Monsters*, 1587, sigs. C.1–C.2. The image of Cupid and the presence of Venus seems to point to the infernal Venus of Robert Wilson's play, *The Cobbler's Prophecy*, and her adultery with 'Contempt', which is celebrated by a masque of animal forms led by Folly.

carried emblems of torch and dart, and could nod the head in a magic fashion, which excited wonder as he was set up in a niche in the Parlour of Payne, where the North Wind assisted the miracle. The cleric adds to this infernal revelry a troop of monsters sent from Satan.

A grand wedding tableau also concludes *Tamburlaine*, Part I, where the royal virgin Zenocrate is crowned by a trinity of kings. This, though doubtless without overt intent, recalls the sacred Icon of a humbler Virgin crowned by a loftier Trinity; and the depth of conflict resolved in this play is suggested by its unconscious combination of Catholic and Reformed Iconography.

In Marlovian style, Shakespeare develops *Titus Andronicus* as a series of tableaux. The well-known contemporary illustration of the opening scene, by Henry Peacham, shows the Blackamoor flourishing a drawn sword over Tamora's doomed sons. In spite of the fact that he is himself a captive at this point, I think Aaron might have momentarily assumed the pose of a black-visaged headsman, to produce a tableau that must have been common enough in martyrology. The Magician, the King, the Blackamoor, the Weeping Queen, had long been familiar, so that imaginative roles of Shakespeare and of Marlowe are but half-emerged from a penumbra which surrounds and enlarges them beyond the dimensions of individual parts, to the sacred and archaic originals from which they derive.

The most powerful Icon of *Titus Andronicus* is the silent figure of Lavinia mutilated. The first of her family to meet her unconsciously evokes the image of the green and the withered tree, one commonly used in festive procession to symbolize a flourishing and fading commonwealth; when she is next compared with a conduit running red wine, the shock of the conflicting festive image inflates the horror. She becomes herself, in metamorphosis, a stony silent image of violence and outrage:

> What stern ungentle hands
> Hath lopped and hewed and made thy body bare
> Of her two branches—those sweet ornaments
> Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in? . . .
> Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
> Like to a bubbling fountain stirr'd with wind,
> Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips . . .
> And notwithstanding all this loss of blood,
> As from a conduit with three issuing spouts,
> Yet do thy cheeks look red as Titan's face,
> Blushing to be encounter'd with a cloud. (II. iv. 16–32)

The heraldic conventions of its images and the extreme violence of its plot[1] make *Titus Andronicus* unique among Shakespeare's works. In his English histories, I would like to think that he borrowed a tableau from that Coventry play given by the townsmen before Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth in July 1575, when Shakespeare, a boy of eleven, was living not far away. An old Hocktide contest between men and women had become associated with the memory of a battle between English and Danes, in which, after initial victories, the Danes were led captive by English women; this was combined with a drill display by the town's muster men. The image of this play may have been revived in *King Henry VI* when Joan la Pucelle or Margaret of Anjou triumphed over English warriors; but since 'remembering is an imaginative reconstruction', the image has been reversed, and the foreign women triumph over Englishmen.

Londoners would not have recognized this image, since they did not know the original, but by the time he wrote the second part of *King Henry IV*, Shakespeare felt sufficiently a Londoner to mock their local show. The London archery band was led by a small group of the *élite*, known as Prince Arthur's Knights, who marched annually in procession, each with his name from Arthurian story, and bearing his arms emblazoned. Justice Shallow, in recalling the exploits of his youth, claims to have played the part of the jester, Dagonet; but his memory prompts him rather to enact another part, that of a craftsmaster whom he had admired.

> I remember, at Mile End Green, when I lay at Clement's Inn—I was then Sir Dagonet in Arthur's shew—there was a little quiver fellow, and 'a would manage you his piece thus; and 'a would about and about, and come you in, and come you in; 'rah, tah, tah', would 'a say; 'bounce', would 'a say; and away again would 'a go, and again would 'a come; I shall never see such a fellow. (*2 Henry IV*, III. ii. 297–306)

This is not very far from the open parody of Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, when Ralph the bold Grocer-Errant reaches the culmination of his glory by playing the May Lord on a conduit head, and then leads out the musters to Mile End Green.

The high tradition of early tragedy had been established by Marlowe and mediated through the majestic presence of Edward

[1] See Eugène Waith, 'The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*', Shakespeare Survey no. 10 (1957).

Alleyn the tragedian. Alleyn was, however, a master of more than one style—of all the 'activities of youth, activities of age' that were found among strolling players, where he had learnt his trade. One of his star performances, the title role in Greene's *Orlando Furioso*, offers a display of virtuosity such as Dunbar's dwarf suggests. His own copy of the part, preserved at Dulwich, shows how gaily Alleyn could point it up. As he turned from lover to madman and back to warrior, Orlando must have raised both a shudder and guffaw. He tears a shepherd limb from limb (offstage) and enters bearing a leg on his shoulder; he fights a battle with spits and dripping pans (a familiar comic turn); his action and speech are constantly changing, and different rhetorical styles must have been put into play, as Alleyn, like a practised juggler whirling a set of clubs, spun up one after another his brightly coloured lines.

A single actor could hold an audience with such rapid transitions (the Admiral's men later developed a group of plays for the quick-change artist) and the greatest actors prided themselves on 'Protean' mutability. 'Medley' plays rose from the mixed activities of the theatre. Burbage's playhouse could accommodate a monster, an antic, a grotesque dragon made of brown paper that 'would fright the ladies that they would shriek'. In medieval times such an irruption would have been termed a Marvel; today, it would be a Happening. The 'Medley' evoked a mingled feeling of fright and triumph, gasps and laughter; but it was a professional show, as the older romantic adventures were not. There is much more professional distinction than at first appears between a shambling Romance like *Sir Clyamon and Sir Clamydes*, which is older than the Theatre, and a Medley like *The Cobbler's Prophecy*, written by Wilson in the late eighties. In his *Apology for Poetry*, Sidney's description of a romance implies that the stage was set out with a group of symbolic objects, which, protected by the heavens, attracted the players into a variety of settings. The Garden, the Shipwreck, the Cave with its fire-breathing monster, and the Battle Field, must have made up a most elaborate play. Thanks to modern studies, we are now familiar with the visual aspects of the City Gates, the Tree, the Cave, the Ship, the Arbour of the medieval and Tudor stages; these provided a gift for the artist's imagination to which only a Melanie Klein could hope to do justice.

Such symbolic objects were used also by Wilson and others in the Medley plays, and in Shakespeare's early theatre. Studied coldly on the page, the Medleys may appear to offer sheer

nonsense, for their effect depends on what a modern French writer has termed 'the theatre's magic relation to reality and danger'. The magician with his wonderful shows (a type of the playwright) was a central figure, together with a pair of lovers, a clown, a speaker of riddles and prophecies, one or more of the classical gods and goddesses, and some fireworks. In Wilson's play, one of the 'pavilions' was set on fire; in another, a juggler appeared to whisk away the serious title board 'Speculum' and to substitute 'Wily Beguiled'.

Medleys evolved their own set of sequences when they were the property of a famous troupe like the Queen's Men, and eventually must have delighted the audience only by an unpredictable mixture of predictable items, that belong together because they have been seen together before.[1]

In *The Old Wives' Tale*, George Peele raised the Romance to a similar professional level by setting it in the framework of a story about three actors who have lost their way in a wood. Antic, Frolic, Fantastic, the servants of a lord, whose names proclaim their quality, take refuge in a cottage, where the old wife's tale comes to life; but the audience are released from the confines of time and space and move freely between a magician's study, a well, a hillock with magic flames upon it, and cross-roads in a wood. There is no need for a plot; the princess 'white as snow and red as blood', her two brothers, the wicked enchanter, the wandering knight, are as familiar as the set of emblematic objects among which they move. Gaps in the action are taken for granted. There are twenty-four parts (many silent) in this brief play, designed for a company of about ten.

Shakespeare began by turning his back upon Medley and Romance, to write classical plays like *Titus Andronicus* and *The Comedy of Errors*. The fecundity of the early staging was transferred to his vocabulary, where he poured out crowded images, mingled, as Dr. Johnson was to observe, with endless variety of proportion and innumerable varieties of combination. The conflict of incompatible and paradoxical images which surges through his comedy derives indirectly from the physical crowding of the old stages, and therefore was readily acceptable to his audience. Ben Jonson thought that Shakespeare was carried away by his own facility—'His wit was in his power; would the

[1] Among such plays are *The Cobbler's Prophecy*, *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, *John a Kent and John a Cumber*; perhaps *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and *The Woman in the Moon* might be considered variants on this form.

rule of it had been so too.' Charles Lamb noted that 'Before one idea has burst its shell, another has hatched and clamours for disclosure'. Primitive art, repudiated as spectacle, is transformed by Shakespeare into a characteristic mode of imaginative working, where the dumb language of shows combines with higher, more articulate, forms. Greene, railing on Shakespeare as an 'upstart Crow', was putting him in the shape of an Antic, the lowest and most scurrilous type of dumb player; but as author ('Johannes Factotum') Greene suggests he has turned the actor's versatility into writing, with the 'ease' and 'facility' that his friends were later to praise. He sees the connexion between Shakespeare's two activities, the second an extension of the first.

Shakespeare has left at least three accounts of this process: Richard II's soliloquy in Pomfret Castle, Duke Theseus on the poet's eye, and the fifty-third Sonnet, all (as I would think) written somewhere about his thirtieth year, in 1594.

Alone in a prison cell, the uncrowned Richard peoples his little world with a teeming succession of diversified forms, which come nearer to the comic actors' multiple roles than to the playwright's art. [And Burbage, it should be remembered, was an even more Protean actor than Alleyn.]

> Thus play I in one person many people,
> And none contented. Sometimes am I King
> Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
> And so I am. Then crushing penury
> Persuades me I was better when a king,
> Then am I king'd again; and by and by
> Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
> And straight am nothing. (v. v. 30–37)

Richard tries to hammer out his inner conflict to a set pattern; but a charm of music hushes his restless activity of mind and returns him to the hard immures of his prison. This suddenly begets an image or Icon of the tragic mode.

> I wasted Time, and now doth Time waste me,
> For time hath made me now his numbering clock.
> (v. v. 49–50)

The prisoner develops the image of a clock at length, his finger becoming the hand, his face the dial (from which he is wiping the tears), and his groans the bell; while the gay motion of organic life is transferred in his imagination to the coronation

of his supplanter. He sees himself as a wooden 'Jack o' the clock' such as provided a simple foolery for onlookers by its movement.[1]

Recalled again to his surroundings, he hears from a poor groom of the stable of the usurper's triumph, and 'in the quick forge and working house of thought' transforms himself in his degradation as Bottom was transformed, by the ass's head.

> I was not made a horse;
> And yet I bear a burden like an ass,
> Spurr'd, gall'd and tir'd by jauncing Bolingbroke.
> (v. v. 92–94)

A popular game with the Coventry men and others—mounted men on one another's shoulders for comic mock-tournaments.

The nature of our general perception of the world, and of our own body, is so primitive and deep-seated a foundation of our identity that we cannot imagine how these basic levels of perception may change from age to age. But from Shakespeare's work it may be gathered how the Icon's immobility and the Medley's ever-changing succession of 'streamy associations'[2] became integrated in full poetic drama, the fusion of poetry and spectacle, of inner and outer worlds. This remains primitive art only in the sense that our perception of the world is itself analogous to a work of art—'a complex ordering of attitude and belief achieved a stage earlier than discursive statement'.[3] It utilizes but is emphatically not the same as that mental process (conducted largely through visual symbols) which we meet in dreams —primitive thinking, as one psychologist terms it.[4] Plays are 'such stuff as dreams are made on'—they are not dreams.

The capacity for pre-conscious and intuitive ordering found in both Marlowe and Shakespeare is characteristic of drama, where pre-verbal and verbal languages combine in one total statement. As Duke Theseus observes, the 'seething brain' of the poet apprehends more than cool reason ever comprehends,

[1] The famous figures of the pageant in the clock of St. Mark's, Venice, are the best-known examples; but a crowd will gather today to watch the figures in Fortnum and Mason's clock in Piccadilly. It is interesting to compare Marvell's satire on kings:

> Image like, an useless time they tell
> And with vain sceptre, strike the hourly bell.
> (*The First Anniversary*, ll. 41–42.)

[2] The term is Edward Armstrong's; *Shakespeare's Imagination*, chapter xiii.

[3] D. W. Harding, *Experience into Words*, 1963, p. 182.

[4] J. A. Hadfield, *Dreams and Nightmares*, 1954, chapter 6.

giving to things unknown, to airy nothing a *shape* (which was the technical name for an actor's costume) a *habitation* (or 'locus' on the stage) and a *name* (which the early actors wore pinned to their chests on a scroll). *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is full of the magic of the early stage; Professor Coghill has recently pointed out some links with the play of magic and quick changes of identity, *John a Kent and John a Cumber*.

The Sonnets, which I take to have been written about the same time, open with a strong and familiar Icon. A beautiful youth, embodiment of spring, is urged to marry and produce an heir. The choice of topic has caused some surprise, and C. S. Lewis went so far as to inquire: 'What man in the whole world, except a father in law or potential father in law cares whether any other man gets married?'[1]

But *was* the theme so very unusual? Was there not at least one great person, in whose excellence the red and white rose united, who for some thirty-five years had been constantly exhorted not to let beauty's flower fade unpropagated? Any poet approaching a new patron would find the royal model readily adaptable, since every noble household reproduced in miniature the patterns of royal service. Beginning to learn his courtier's alphabet, Shakespeare naturally fell to his copy book. That great Icon of springtime beauty which Spenser had once delineated in his April Eclogue remained the fixed form for praises of the Queen, in her public capacity, though she was now sixty years old: Sir John Davies produced in 1596 *Astraea*, his enamelled acrostics, in which she magically controls the seasons, like Titania and Oberon.

> Earth now is green and heaven is blue,
> Lively spring, that makes all new,
> Jolly spring, doth enter;
> Sweet young sunbeams do subdue
> Angry, aged winter.
>
> Blasts are mild and seas are calm,
> Every meadow flows with balm,
> The earth wears all her riches.
> Harmonious birds sing such a charm,
> As ear and heart bewitches.
>
> Reserve, sweet spring, this nymph of ours,
> Eternal garlands of thy flowers,

[1] C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 1954, p. 503.

Green garlands never wasting;
In her shall last our youth's fair spring,
Now and for ever flourishing,
As long as heaven is lasting.

In her private person Elizabeth might typify 'angry, aged Winter': but not as Astraea. Shakespeare's youth is more vulnerable than this changeless image; 'the world's fair ornament', he dwells where 'men as plants increase' and beauties must 'die as fast as they see others grow'. His beauty must therefore be transmitted to his heir (and this was also his duty as heir of a great family); yet the poet too, as father-creator, can dream that in his verse 'I engraft you new'. The play of fancy deepens, the royal Icon gives way to a multitude of images, as the beloved is seen to sum up 'all those friends which I thought buried'. Now 'their images I loved, I view in thee', till ultimately the whole world becomes reflected in this one being and so integrated in the poet's mind. The beauty of the beloved, like that of God, is seen everywhere, and he sums up the loveliness of past and present, of both the sexes, of all the seasons, of history and poetry. In the fifty-third sonnet, Shakespeare's Adonis and Marlowe's Helen attend on the beloved, who combines the loftiness of a Platonic ideal with the Protean 'shadows' and 'shapes' of the actors' art.[1] Here is the swarming profusion of the medley—gods, shepherds, lovers, magicians with their attendant spirits—completely harmonized and introjected by a complex poetic image.

What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.
Describe Adonis and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new.
Speak of the spring and foison of the year,
The one doth shadow of your beauty shew,
The other as your bounty doth appear,
And you in every blessed shape we know.
In all external grace you have some part,
But you like none, none you, for constant heart.

[1] According to Stephen Gosson, a 'shadow' is a minor actor; compare Macbeth's 'Life's but a walking shadow', and Puck's 'If we shadows have offended'.

Eventually, in Sonnet 104, Shakespeare denies that Time moves for his beloved, and in the last poem of all, the lovely boy, an emblem of eternal youth, stands charming the glass of old Father Time, stilling in its clockwise motion the onward sweep of Chronos' 'sickle hour'.

It is no part of my present argument to trace the development of Shakespeare's art after the stage of full integration represented by *Richard II*. From 1594, his career was bound up with the Lord Chamberlain's Men; stability and cohesion came to his theatre. It was true of the whole age, but especially of Shakespeare, that he united the cosmic with the human image, most powerfully in his great tragedies.

If I may quote a poet of our own day:

> Sorrow is deep and vast—we travel on
> As far as pain can penetrate, to the end
> Of power and possibility; to find
> The contours of the world, with heaven align'd
> Upon infinity; the shape of man!
>
> Kathleen Raine, 'Sorrow' (from *Living in Time*)

In *Hamlet* Shakespeare refashioned an old tragedy, where the original Hamlet may have offered the same kind of Protean jesting as Orlando Furioso, the comic madman. By transforming and incorporating such a role, Shakespeare regained imaginative access to a great fund of energy, and the character is his most complex creation. Yet there is a void at the centre of Hamlet the man—the unfocused, unplumbed grief, the 'pang without a name, void, dark and drear' which all his complex introspection leaves a mystery, an eloquent silence. And there is a ghost at the centre of *Hamlet* the play; the chthonic King is the only true ruler. Echoes of Marlowe cling to the part of the Ghost; for example, the story of his murder recalls a trick of the devilish Lightborn, murderer of Edward II:

> Whilst one is asleep to take a quill
> And blow a little powder in his ears,
> Or open his mouth and pour quicksilver down.
>
> (ll. 2366–8)

The great Icon which unites the two Hamlets, father and son, is also Marlovian in style; it emerges with the arrival of the actors at Elsinore, in the First Player's speech of the death of Priam. The apparition of Pyrrhus, avenger of his father Achilles, upon

Priam (with whom, as the murderer of Hector, Priam has pleaded for his son) is a figure of strange but arrested power. As he finishes the description of Pyrrhus, Hamlet hands over to the first Player, who recounts how the very wind of Pyrrhus' sword felled Priam, but at that moment the crash of the falling towers amid 'the nightmare of smoke and screams and ruin'[1] arrested his action. Pyrrhus stands in tableau, flourishing his sword, a mechanical figure of destruction in his black armour smeared with blood, a kind of Iron Man.

Like Tamburlaine, or like Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, he remains larger than life:

> So like a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
> Like a neutral to his will and matter,
> Did nothing. (II. ii. 474–6)

and there was silence for a space, till the burning towers crashed thunderously again, and the blade fell.

After meeting this Icon, Hamlet in a great burst of self-directed rage recognizes the embodiment of what he had before encountered in the Ghost, issuing its archaic but absolute command, Revenge! It is a compulsion, it is a *must*, laid upon a man by an archaic part of himself, a decayed part reactivated by his father's death. The compelling power of that part of ourself which we do not desire to meet can return only in such images. Yet the tempest of Hamlet's passion evokes in him the notion of the play-within-the-play, by which he catches the conscience of King Claudius, even as he himself has been caught. All this depends on the 'theatre's magic relation to reality and danger'; for Hamlet remembers how guilty creatures sitting at a play have been forced by what they saw to recount their crimes. After the play has indeed caught its victim, we see Hamlet stand with drawn sword flourishing over the kneeling figure of the praying Claudius, in exactly the same posture as that of Pyrrhus over Priam. The Icon is re-enacted in the prayer scene; but Hamlet does not let his sword fall. He puts it up with the thought of yet more horrid and complete revenge, which shall damn Claudius both body and soul.

Shakespeare here appeals to the most primitive and terrifying aspects of theatrical participation; the sequel to this act is the second and final appearance of the Ghost.

When Shakespeare came to the writing of his final plays, popular art was dying in the countryside. Robin Hood and the

[1] The phrase is Harry Levin's.

hobby horse were everywhere put down; the court was evolving a new Italianate form of masque, and a new theatre. Shakespeare reactivated his own early memories and transformed into scenic terms for the new stage the medleys of twenty-five years before—'tales, tempests and such drolleries' as Ben Jonson scornfully termed them. The utmost reaches of his imagination evoked the scenic emblems of Shakespeare's youth—the Cave, the Living Statue, the Ship—and some of the ancient roles—the May Queen, the Monster, and the Magician—using them to explore an interior world where fine and delicate sensibilities alternated with 'imaginations foul as Vulcan's stithy'.

Pericles, first of these plays, is presented by the ancient poet Gower, who here performs the kind of Induction that old Madge, Frolic, and Fantastic had given in *The Old Wives' Tale*. But he is a Ghost.

> To sing a song that old was sung
> From ashes ancient Gower is come. . . .
> It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember eves and holy ales,
> And lords and ladies in their lives
> Have read it for restoratives. (Prologue, 1–8)

Much of the moral action is in dumb show, and much of the writing is absurd. Like the hero of the old romance, Sir Clamydes, the wandering knight Pericles is shipwrecked on a foreign coast and wins its princess for bride in spectacular tournament. His father-in-law plays fast and loose with the unknown prince and his own daughter in a style which burlesques the old quick changes:

> Will you, not having my consent,
> Bestow your love and your affections
> Upon a stranger, who, for aught I know
> May be, nor can I think the contrary,
> As great in blood as I myself?
> Therefore hear you, mistress; either frame
> Your will to mine—and you, sir, hear you—
> Either be ruled by me, or I will make you—
> Man and wife. (II. v. 75–83)

This clownish jocularity is exercised in a play which seems to exist only as matrix for the great tableau and Icon, the discovery scene of the last act. When Marina's sacred charm of music has reanimated the frozen image of Grief that is Pericles,

then a figure no longer of cosmic dimensions, but subject to cosmic influences, has been recalled from dereliction so extreme that it could have been embodied only in traditional forms, not originally carrying the personal stamp that Shakespeare here bestows upon them. In returning to these archaic forms Shakespeare breathed new life into them and recovered a 'radical innocence'.[1] The basis is so simple and the shaping spirit of imagination so concentrated that there is in *Pericles*, so to speak, more gap than play. This is no longer, as in the original old wives' tales, a gap in narrative, but a gap in realization. Shakespeare has gone so deep that he has momentarily lost his unifying power, so splendidly displayed in the Roman plays. The single Icon emerges, surrounded by old-fashioned Romance in débris, and by the macabre comedy of the brothel scenes. Shakespeare even needed to lean on the work of an inferior collaborator.

Cymbeline carries echoes of several medley plays, in particular of *Sir Clyamon and Sir Clamydes* and *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*.[2] From Jupiter to Cloten, the roles repeat earlier counterparts; Imogen's later adventures as Fidele have their counterpart in those of Fidelia and Neronis. In 1957, at Stratford, the stage was arranged in a simultaneous setting, Tudor-fashion, so that the emblems of castle, bedchamber, cave, and wood in surrealist fantasy appeared together, 'throwing over the whole production a sinister veil of faery, so that it resembled a Grimm fable transmuted by the Cocteau of *La Belle et la Bête*'.[3]

The costumes, disguises, tokens, tricks of this play, the medley of Roman, British, and medieval themes, turn all to dream and fairy tale; by this means the sensitive core of tenderness, anguish, and vital playfulness that Imogen embodies can come into being. Imogen is a heroine who would be at home in the high romance of Sidney's *Arcadia*, with Philoclea, her sister in affliction. She is one who makes an art of living, from cookery to leave-taking of her banished husband, devising 'pretty things to say' even for that moment of separation, after which, as she tells her father,

> I am senseless of your wrath; a touch more rare
> Subdues all pangs, all fears. (I. i. 136–7)

[1] 'All hatred driven thence, / The soul recovers radical innocence / And learns at last that it is self-delighting / Self-appeasing, self-affrighting.' Yeats, 'A Prayer for my Daughter' from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*.

[2] See *The New Shakespeare*, ed. J. C. Maxwell, 1960, pp. xxii–xxvii.

[3] Ibid., p. xl (quoting Kenneth Tynan).

When she reads Posthumus' accusation, Pisanio comments:

> What shall I need to draw my sword? The paper
> Hath cut her throat already. (III. iv. 30–31)

These are wedded lovers, and the poisoned imagination of Posthumus sinks far below Sidney's world of romance, to the level of Iago and of the brothel scenes in *Pericles*. Yet in spite of his words, Posthumus' actions suggest that he believed in Imogen's innocence all the time; the letter which summons her to Milford on the dangerous journey from her home would have had no effect on one who had really forgotten him completely, and given away 'the manacle of love', the bracelet which was his last token. When he himself appears in real gyves, Posthumus has spontaneously repented; and a vision of his dead father and two brothers mysteriously links with the next scene, in which Imogen also meets again her father and her two long-lost brothers. Thus the union of the wedded lovers is shown to exist at a level beyond that of overt statement.

The fairy-tale gives underlying support to the impossibilities of this play. To reach the totally unfamiliar, it is necessary to cling to the familiar; from moment to moment this new kind of medley convinces, although the princess so wounded by the accusation of Posthumus could not have assumed the role of Fidele, and lived to be struck down once again. It is a kind of posthumous life for *her*, she is playing a part; the grotesque symbolism of Cloten's dead figure in her husband's garments is impossible and hideous, but perhaps also a kind of black comedy of actors' 'shapes'. The magic drinks, changes of identity, and visionary spectacles of the last part of the play no longer carry any relation to reality and danger; they are the means by which Shakespeare can leave gaps in his work. They also seem to function by some associative process in the release of energy from below; the primitive art assists or accompanies or is a necessary concomitant of new, difficult poetry for which the play reaches out.

The original of the next play, *A Winter's Tale*, belongs to the same period as the medleys and was a narrative of Shakespeare's old enemy and detractor, Robert Greene. The old tale ended tragically and was named *Pandosto or the Triumph of Time*. Construction through gaps in the story is emphasized by the appearance of Time as Chorus, who separates the two halves of Shakespeare's play: but the action is clearer, and firmer, the poet has regained his mastery of plot. In the first half, Leontes is

overwhelmed by that poisoned level of the imagination which Posthumus had shown, and which had been displayed in the brothel scenes of *Pericles*. Leontes' jealousy invades him suddenly and spontaneously at the moment when he *sees* his wife and his friend in playful familiar talk together. The image speaks to him of what might be. All this is imaginatively realized, but then the marvels begin. They are the work of Apollo, a much more effective deity than Diana in *Pericles* or Jupiter in *Cymbeline*. First comes an oracular message, then the death of Mamilius, and finally the Icon of Hermione as she appears in Antigonus' dream. The significance of this dream was pointed out by Anne Righter in a paper read last year at the International Conference at Stratford. As the instrument of Leontes' vengeance, Antigonus is accursed, and the vision of the Queen comes to warn him of this fate. Although she appears 'in pure white robes, Like very sanctity', her eyes 'become two spouts'; she is portentously like Lavinia. Antigonus falsely accepts this as an omen that the babe is indeed a bastard; no sooner has he laid it on the earth than thunder is heard, and the sounds of a hunt. It is the god Apollo, descending in storm, Apollo the Hunter, who chases the guilty man as Prospero and Ariel hunt the guilty with dogs in *The Tempest*. Antigonus himself becomes the quarry, and the 'Marvel' of the bear, at once grotesque and horrifying, would raise the old mixture of fright and laughter in the audience—especially if a real bear were let loose among them.

By contrast, in the last scene, the high magic of the holy statue that comes to life is Christian in its forms. The Icon of Hermione is kept in a chapel 'holy, apart' as Paulina tells the penitent king. Perdita kneels before it with the pretty proviso:

> Give me leave,
> And do not say 'tis superstition, that
> I kneel, and then implore her blessing. Lady,
> Dear Queen, that ended when I but began,
> Give me that hand of yours to kiss. (v. iii. 42–46)

The coldness of the stone has chid his own coldness in Leontes, but Paulina tells him

> It is required
> You do awake your faith. (v. iii. 94–95)

The magic is powerful, the charm is musical; the figure is transubstantiated back to flesh and blood, and Leontes puts all in three words: 'Oh, she's warm.'

Although a statue which comes to life is not unknown to earlier plays, or to later ones for that matter,[1] this single scene offers the deepest integration of spectacle and poetry in the last plays; and for the audience, who have been given no more than hints and guesses that Hermione may be living, the final descent is a most powerful *coup de théâtre*, made eloquent by silence and music wedded to poetry.

In this, it is a wonderful advance on the descent of Jupiter, spectacularly the high light of the whole play *Cymbeline* but poetically a gap and a void. Hermione has replaced the gods in this scene; the triumph is that of a divine humanity. Was there here some unconscious recall of a Catholic image of the Mother, mingled with the semi-divine Elizabeth, Virgin Queen but nursing mother of her people (as she termed herself to Parliament), wedded to her kingdom, whose reign was already assuming legendary greatness as the weakness of her successor appeared?

In its spontaneous-seeming, yet perfectly disciplined, form, *The Tempest* represents the final triumph of art, an art based on imagination perfectly attuned to the stage. Spectacular but not naïve, classical in form, poetic but no longer with the poetry of the gaps, it presents a close, delicate wholeness:

> A condition of complete simplicity
> Costing not less than everything.

The Tempest is a play of high magic throughout, although its ruling intelligence is human and fallible. Prospero's magic is Pythagorean, based on that 'monstrous imagination' that Bacon was to reject:

> that the world was one entire perfect living creature; insomuch as Apollonius of Tyana, a Pythagorean prophet, affirmed that the ebbing and flowing of the sea was the respiration of the world, drawing in water as breath and putting it forth again. . . . They went on, and inferred that if the world was a living creature, it had a soul, and spirit, calling it spiritus mundi. (*Sylva Sylvarum*, century x)

White magic, by 'giving a fit touch to the spirit of the world', can make it respond. Prospero is at first subject to the stars and courts an auspicious influence; whereas the monstrous Sycorax had worked black magic by the manipulation of physical charms

[1] A statue on a grave comes to life in *The Trial of Chivalry*; and pictures in Massinger's *The City Madam*. There is a portentous set of statues in Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, but these are idols of the Black, i.e. Spanish, party.

on the sublunary level. She was able to exert physical compulsion on the higher spheres, even those beyond the moon—for so I read the crux

> That could control the Moon, . . .
> And deal in her command, without her power.
> (v. i. 270–1)

To the guilty Alonzo the whole world speaks with one voice:

> O, 'tis monstrous, monstrous.
> 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. (III. iii. 95–99)

It is from the spirit Ariel that Prospero himself learns to feel sympathy with Alonzo, returning from his stony remoteness to that quick freshness of feeling with which his own child responds.

> Oh, the cry did knock
> Against my very heart. (I. ii. 8–9)

Ariel's strange shapes, which include that very old-fashioned one of a coat of invisibility, sometimes reflect the inner states of those he works on. Dozens of strange shadows attend on him, and not every one of them is a blessed shape; for the men of sin he plays the Harpy, for the lovers a bounteous Ceres; when he comes to the clowns 'like the picture of Nobody', he plays old tricks from the repertory of earlier spirits,[1] and piping a merry catch, leads them into a horse-pond. His imprisonment, told by Prospero, recalls a potent device of the early stage; in *The Fairy Pastoral*, William Percy described exactly how the Hollow Tree was constructed. The clowns are clowns of the old type, and to them Caliban is but a fair-ground monster, to be shown to gaping crowds. He is confined by Prospero in a Rock, another familiar scenic device. The old emblems of the Ship and the Cave are used, and a special 'quaint device' for the banquet that vanishes, leaving a bare table, which is carried out by spirits.[2] Pure shows, like the dance of harvesters, unite the Jacobean masque with the revels of *The Old Wives' Tale*, where there is also a harvesters' dance.

[1] For instance, Shrimp of *John a Kent* and Robin Goodfellow of *Wily Beguiled.*

[2] A. M. Nagler, *Shakespeare's Stage*, Yale, 1958, p. 100, discusses this trick; in medieval terms a 'secret'.

Prospero's physical needs are served by Sycorax's son till, by way of ordeal, Prince Ferdinand takes his place as logman. Caliban accuses Prospero of usurping his island, and Prospero later accuses Ferdinand of this design, thus visiting the sin of the father upon his child. The murderous conspiracy of the false princes and the grosser rebellion of the clowns are alike frustrated by Prospero (whose art of government had certainly improved in exile) and the theme of usurpation dissolves in a lovers' jest, in the final tableau where Miranda and Ferdinand are revealed playing with ivory kings and queens at chess.

> *Miranda.* Sweet lord, you play me false.
> *Ferdinand.* No, my dearest love,
> I would not for the world.
> *Miranda.* Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,
> And I would call't fair play. (v. i. 171–5)

Alonzo greets this restoration of the son he had lost as 'a most high miracle', but the disclosure has not the startling quality of that in *The Winter's Tale*, and Gonzalo's quiet comment points the distinction:

> I have *inly* wept. (v. i. 200)

Finally, the whole dramatic action is dissolved by a series of transformations. For what is the magician but, as always in the old plays, a stage manager of shows, with his wand and his magic inscribed 'book'—what is this but a sublimated Master of the Revels? What the fellowship of the bottle with their stolen frippery and their game of kings and subjects, but a reductive mockery of the poorest players in the service? Pointing to the royal badge of Naples on the sleeves of Trinculo the fool and 'King Stephano', Prospero asks,

> Mark but the badges of these men, my lord,
> Then say if they be true. (v. i. 267–8)

A man wearing King James's badge spoke the lines.

Finally, with no more dignity than a fashionable hat and rapier will confer, yet as one who dares more than Dr. Faustus did—to make every third thought his grave—the old man appeals in his epilogue to the theatre's magic relation of reality and danger in a prayer of primal simplicity:

> As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
> Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue 19–20)

The final plays represent an interior conflict, resolved in association with revived memories of a more primitive stage, and asserted with ever clarifying force.[1] It would be dangerous to speculate further than this. We may note the prevalent themes of death and rebirth, petrifaction and release; the common element of false accusation, banishment, and usurpation; the relations of fathers and children; the combination of extreme purity and scurrility. Do these suggest some possible conflicts of an ageing man? Prospero's farewell to Art, though not actually Shakespeare's last word (things do not work out quite so tidily as that) may represent an inner acceptance, that only at great price could be put into speech, and after many attempts; but here, as always, the Actor-Poet found, for his familiar ritual, the fitting words.

[1] That there was perhaps a general movement in this direction does not modify the nature of Shakespeare's achievement, for he was the only actor-playwright with personal knowledge of the earlier stage. For a useful summary of the common stage practice, see Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show* (1965), chapter 2.