SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

PAST AND FUTURE IN SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMA

By WOLFGANG CLEMEN
Corresponding Fellow of the Academy

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WHEN Hamlet refers to the nature of man as 'looking before and after' Shakespeare here epitomizes a characteristic feature which can be detected on almost every page in his plays. For Shakespeare's characters though acting in the present invariably glance back to what has happened and look ahead to what is coming. What, in our daily existence, remains closed up within the mind and rarely reaches the level of spoken utterance, the constant flow of our thoughts either into the future or the past, becomes explicit and articulate in Shakespeare's dramatic characters. This applies to be sure in varying degree to most plays of the dramatic literature of the world. There is almost no drama without some reference to past and future. But the way in which the dramatists have made use of past and future for the structure of their plays differs widely and is often in many respects revealing. For the understanding of Shakespeare's plays, too, the relationship between past and future is of the greatest significance. It opens up an approach to the time structure in the plays; it is closely connected not only with the art of preparation, of exposition and of suspense, but also with the fundamental principles of composition. As in so many other respects Shakespeare displays 'infinite variety' in this field. For the specific function of retrospect and foreboding, of past and future, changes almost from play to play. Followed up throughout his work, however, Shakespeare's changing treatment of past and future could not only serve as a measure for the evolution of his dramatic art, but could also disclose to us some of his fundamental attitudes.

For with this subject there are always two sides involved, an element of dramatic technique and a problem of meaning and attitude. For one thing, retrospect and preparation are indispensable dramatic devices, important means of linking together separate situations, of giving unity and coherence to a play, of arousing expectation and tension, of creating contrasts and

parallels within the play. References to the past, in particular, are absolutely necessary for the purpose of exposition. It was only a few years ago that a contemporary playwright, Arthur Miller, called this technique of 'how to dramatize what has gone before' 'the biggest single dramatic problem'.[1]

But Shakespeare never stopped short at mere devices. Out of procedures which were required by dramatic technique he created relationships which are conditioned by character and theme. We can watch a device becoming an attitude, a dramatic mechanism being transformed into meaningful utterance which grows out of the character's own inner life. The study of past and future in Shakespeare's plays, if carried out on a larger scale, could indeed teach us something about the connexion between dramatic technique and the expression of inner meaning. In each drama we discover a network of references to past and to future, but these fall into many different categories and operate, as it were, on several levels. Such passages and references range from merely informative hints, recapitulations, and announcements to retrospective narratives of some length or visions of the future which open up new vistas and take us to the very core of the play through their imaginative richness and their meaningful implications.

In short, we are faced with a vast and complex subject which cannot possibly be treated extensively in a single lecture. I shall therefore not examine the individual examples of retrospect and preparation or the roles of past and future separately, but shall restrict myself to the question of how Shakespeare links past and future in a particular situation or in the consciousness of an individual character. For there are, in some plays, key-scenes or crucial passages in which past and future are juxtaposed, and we also find certain characters who possess an intense awareness of both past and future. In such focal scenes and in such characters the relationship between past and future is sometimes crystallized and we may take them with some assurance as a starting-point from which a few general outlines as to the treatment of past and future in that particular play can be drawn.

In doing this we shall have to distinguish between the objective past anterior to the play's beginning, the past within the span of the drama, and the subjective manner in which this past is reflected in the minds of the characters. If, first of all, we consider the past which is prior to the play's beginning we arrive at a conclusion that sounds almost paradoxical in view of our

[1] Arthur Miller, Preface to *Collected Plays*, 1958, p. 21.

subject. For, except for the histories, only very few of the plays are preceded by a past that is of decisive importance for the further course of the action, a past that could act as a pressure on the present and as a momentum for the future. Contrary to what we see in Greek drama and contrary, too, to the structure of Senecan drama, which constantly dwells upon the past, Shakespeare makes us watch the conflict leading up to the catastrophe (or to the happy end) from its inception.[1] Sometimes the hero in the first scene (as in *King Lear* or in *The Winter's Tale*) creates his own past from which not only his tragic course but also the fatal actions of others derive. This early and decisive event may then become in the mind of the hero a past which reverberates in his memory and towards which his own attitude may eventually change. But this past does not precede the play. And where we have in some plays events or conditions prior to the first scene, they are not of vital importance but just one of several important factors. For neither Othello's abduction of Desdemona, nor Antony's 'dotage' on Cleopatra, nor Caesar's rise to power nor the ancient grudge between the two houses in *Romeo and Juliet* are events that would necessarily constitute a conflict and lead up to a catastrophe. Apart from the histories there appear to be no more than three plays, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Hamlet*, and *The Tempest*, which are preceded by a past that would cast its shadow over the whole course of the action and determine the future.

We find this linking of past and future, however, most conspicuously in the histories and we shall therefore treat them first. In these plays Shakespeare not only handled episodes from the historical past but he translated into drama elements inherent in history itself. For history demonstrates to us how the past grows into the present and leads on to the future. And as the heroes in Shakespeare's histories are kings, princes, and statesmen, they must necessarily act as agents of their country's history; they are carried along by the current of history that flows from the past towards the future and to some extent it is they who guide this current. In Shakespeare's histories an unfulfilled past calls for fulfilment in the future; guilt from the past will cast its shadow for a long time over the present and even over the future. But this future will nevertheless contain a potential new beginning. To a greater extent than his contemporaries in the field of historical drama, but also with more explicitness and cogency than the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed (as Paul

[1] Cf. M. Mincoff, i. *Shakespeare Survey 3*, 1950, pp. 59 ff.

Reyher has shown),[1] Shakespeare, in his histories, establishes a close connexion between past and future. He makes us see how an inescapable line of development arises from the pressure of the past on the future. The future is forestalled and foreshadowed in many ways; it is linked to the past by the inexorable workings of destiny and necessity, but so it is also by clear planning and purposeful intention. 'The Shakespearean characters are never allowed to forget that they stand between a remembered past and an anticipated future.' Thus a recent critic, Mr. Driver, has summarized this particular connexion.[2]

The various conceptions underlying the dramatic presentation: the notion of 'nemesis', of divine providence, of punishment and redemption, but also the cyclical nature of history as represented in the two tetralogies, invariably affect the connexion between past and future. Moreover, Shakespeare has used the past to illuminate the contemporary present. He makes his audience recognize their own political problems in the issues of his historical plays, and he brings home to them the fact that the past episode mirrors the contemporary scene in the same way as it repeats what has happened in an earlier part of the cycle of histories. In Shakespeare's histories, the audience is expected to look beyond the end of the play, just as it is taught to glance far back to earlier times. 'With an instinctive propriety Shakespeare provides his English histories with a conclusion that is yet to be concluded' as Peter Alexander has put it.[3]

But how does this over-all pattern (which has often been commented on by critics such as E. M. W. Tillyard, John Dover Wilson, Lily Campbell, M. M. Reese, Clifford Leech) crystallize in a single figure or a single scene? How is it turned to dramatic account? We take as our first example the figure of Margaret in *Richard III*. In order to make her appear in this play Shakespeare has altered the chronology, for according to history she would have been dead long before. But Shakespeare obviously wanted her to step into this play as an embodiment of a remote past to prophesy the impending future. Thus she is herself a link between past and future. Margaret does not take part in the action of the play, but looks at it from a distance, surveying and commenting on the course of things as if she were an onlooker. She thus resembles the chorus in Greek tragedy. In her indictments, imprecations, and prophecies Margaret includes almost

[1] P. Reyher, *Essai sur les idées dans l'œuvre de Shakespeare*, 1947.

[2] T. F. Driver, *The Sense of History in Greek and Shakespearean Drama*, 1960, p. 97.

[3] *A Shakespeare Primer*, 1951, p. 70.

all characters who have been guilty in the course of time, she recalls the curses and the crimes of the past, looks through the entanglements of the present and foretells the future.

> Let me put in your minds, if you forget,
> What you have been ere this, and what you are;[1]
> (I. iii. 131–2)

These lines introduce us to her method. For by weighing past guilt or past greatness against the present state of misery or false security she can predict the future. From Margaret we learn that the faculty of prophecy grows out of an awareness of the past and a clear perception of the present, an idea which is most clearly formulated in *Henry IV, Part Two* (where Warwick comments on Richard II's prophecy about Northumberland).

> There is a history in all men's lives,
> Figuring the natures of the times deceas'd;
> The which observ'd, a man may prophesy,
> With a near aim, of the main chance of things
> As yet not come to life, who in their seeds
> And weak beginning lie intreasured. (III. i. 80)

The two great scenes in which Margaret plays this role of prophetess and commentator (I. iii; IV. iv) are scenes of incantation and lamentation. The action comes almost to a halt while the pressure of the terrible guilt in the past and the imminent punishment or impending doom in the future are brought home to us. This static quality is also evident in the choric scene in which three citizens bemoan the past and express their apprehension as to the future (II. iii). In his later plays Shakespeare abandons this static method of surveying past and present, he weaves retrospect and prognostication into the action as it advances, into the dramatic discourse and conflict. The systematic manner in which Margaret metes out her curses and predictions, balancing past guilt, present misery, and future retribution in symmetrically built lines, suggests a kind of inevitable logic; her arraignments sometimes resemble balanced accounts. This corresponds to Shakespeare's characteristic mode in this play, which aims at explicitness, systematization, fullness, and recapitulation. The same systematic treatment of past and future recurs in the fifth Act where the ghosts of all the victims murdered by Richard appear one after the other before him (and before Richmond). Their pronouncements alternately recall Richard's crimes and

[1] All quotations are from Peter Alexander's edition of *Shakespeare's Works* (London, 1951).

predict his ruin, while they promise a victorious future to Richmond. Again the linking of past and future is condensed into recurring formulas (just as in Margaret's curses) which are arranged in symmetrical pairs.

Clarence's dream narrative can, however, be quoted as an exception to this rather rigid systematization of past and future. This dream is both a recapitulation and a foreshadowing, but it is conveyed in an imaginative symbolic manner, rich in poetic suggestiveness and not by direct statement.

The wealth of references to past crimes or past guilt and their ensuing retribution, scattered all over the play, brings home to us with an almost insistent explicitness the 'moral lesson' of *Richard III*. But the range of these many references is nevertheless narrow, for the link between past and future is restricted—with only few exceptions—to the crime-punishment pattern. Of all plays by Shakespeare *Richard III* has been held (and in particular by Friedrich Schiller) to come nearest to Greek Tragedy, since the working of nemesis is shown here with the same unrelenting logic. This gives rise to the question as to whether Shakespeare intended to demonstrate the idea of predetermination in this play. But the course of action here has not been previously laid down by a divine oracle which, regardless of individual responsibility, determines the future course of destiny as in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. For in *Richard III* we can see how each character becomes guilty (or how he became guilty in the past), and we can often see the cross-ways at which a character must make his choice. The future in this play is forecast but not inexorably predetermined. We must, however, admit that the problem of the secret interplay between man's free will, God's divine providence, and the predictability of the future is more convincingly dramatized in the later tragedies than in this early history.

But the abundance of references to past and future[1] in *Richard III* provokes criticism in yet another respect. For a past and a future which are evoked incessantly and at every conceivable occasion cease to be dimensions of remoteness. The past no longer resides in the depths of the mind from which it has to be resuscitated by a special act of remembrance. It is altogether too present, too obtrusive, too much a matter of course; there is too much of it. And we realize that the art of the dramatist is to strike a balance between the pressure of the past and the instantaneousness of the present. The future in this play, too, is computed rather than divined, or sensed a remote distance away.

[1] For further examples see my *Kommentar zu Shakespeares Richard III*, 1957.

Moreover, past and future are not much differentiated according to character and situation, to individual mood and the changing rhythm of the play. They belong to an over-all scheme which serves an obvious purpose. Past and future are, as it were, an objective frame of reference, applicable to all the characters concerned, but narrowed down to the moral issue of guilt and retribution.

In *Richard II*, however, this is different. Here past and future are related to the individual consciousness of single characters, but they are also viewed in varying and more complex perspectives. We may take King Richard's later speeches in the play as a focal point for the juxtaposition of past and future. When his own position is endangered he tends to evade the demands of actuality by escaping into the past or into the future. Confronted by a chain of fateful news which predicts the loss of his kingdom, he does not act but allows his imagination to fly back to the 'sad stories of the death of Kings', and these lead him on to a prophetic vision that might also suggest his own death:

> for within the hollow crown
> That rounds the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps Death his court; . . .
> (III. ii. 160)

In the next scene, faced with the necessity of submitting and abdicating, Richard still more fully exploits the poetic and imaginative potentialities of the situation, drawing comparisons between his former and his present state:

> Or that I could forget what I have been,
> Or not remember what I must be now!
> (III. iii. 138)

In a set of elaborate symbols he offers up his own royal past (my jewels / My gorgeous palace / My gay apparel / My figured goblets / My sceptre) in exchange for the humble requisites of a poor hermit which would suit his future state. But these reflections, too, end up in lines which imply the vision of his own future grave 'A little, little grave, an obscure grave' (III. iii. 154). The most telling moment, however, which joins together past and future, occurs in the abdication-scene itself (IV. i), when the crown is handed over from Richard to Bolingbroke and is held between their hands, Richard commenting on this scenic picture with memorable lines. In this symbolic scene the crown becomes the pledge of continuity in history. It comes from the past and goes into the future. It has to carry the burden of the past, but it also contains the promise of the future. The whole abdication

scene is, of course, rich in confrontations of past and future. But Shakespeare's dramatic art, appealing to the eye as well as to the ear, is most evident in those episodes which condense the essence of a whole play or the gist of a central theme into a visible act in which word and gesture combine to create a symbolic impact that will linger on in the memory of the audience.

The audience will surely remember this moment when watching the scene (IV. v) between the dying King and the Prince in *Henry IV, Part Two*. For here again the crown is the visible symbol for the transition from past to future. We may, however, observe the difference in method. In the concluding speech which the King addresses to his son the fundamental principle for the relationship between the past rule of the dying King and the ensuing reign of Prince Henry is clearly formulated.

> God knows, my son,
> By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
> I met this crown; and I myself know well
> How troublesome it sat upon my head:
> To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
> Better opinion, better confirmation;
> For all the soil of the achievement goes
> With me into the earth.
>
> (IV. v. 182)

But this final truth is arrived at only after a long series of misunderstandings and dramatic encounters in the course of which past and future are viewed under varying subjective perspectives and are even completely misinterpreted. The King's final speech resolves his own misconceptions about the Prince, misconceptions which have been a dominant motif throughout both parts of the play and which are even enunciated at the beginning of this very scene. The whole scene in fact looks back to III. ii of Part One, where we also find father and son in 'private conference' together, the sorrowful King recalling his predecessor's faults in the past, and taking them as a warning for his and his son's own future. This scene in turn looks back to II. iv where Prince Henry and Falstaff stage the famous mock admonition between father and son. Here again a symbolic scenic situation (the King on his throne and the prince before him) impresses itself on our memory and ironically foreshadows subsequent colloquies between Henry IV and Prince Harry; it likewise obliquely hints at Falstaff's later fortunes. If we look at the subject-matter of this dialogue we find that past and future are the two chief points of reference.

But these are only two links which connect this death scene with earlier episodes in which past and future are joined. At the risk of simplification we could say that Part One looks ahead to Part Two, which in turn looks back to Part One. But this simple over-all scheme is modified and twisted into many variations which are determined by individual situations and characters. The misconstrued, falsely rendered past and accordingly the misapprehended future as opposed to the objective past and future play an important part within the intricate dramatic web of right and wrong expectation, defeated hope, misleading surmise, and true but hidden purpose. The beginning of Part Two with 'Rumour' misrepresenting the past by false report and consequently leading on to wrong expectations and wrong planning of the future in the next scene is only one case in point.

If we take another look at the scene in which the King dies and particularly at his concluding speech, we realize that it assumes the significance of final clarification, and of a reconciliation between past and future after many conflicting and contradictory developments. For this final solution Shakespeare has chosen a situation that is at once complex and of an elementary simplicity. For in this scene between the dying King and the Prince father and son are confronted with one another, the old and the new generation, the one taking leave of his rule and the other assuming his father's heritage. Past and future thus meet on several levels, though in the same characters.

Before leaving the histories we ought to mention that besides such crucial scenes, of which we have chosen a few striking examples, past and future are also combined (or opposed to each other) on many minor occasions. Indeed, a systematic and detailed survey would be needed to record all the recurring situations and typical ways in which past and future are juxtaposed. For brevity's sake I shall only enumerate the following cases to give an idea of their variety: the summarizing passages occurring mostly at the beginning of the scene and sometimes at the end, recapitulating the past and announcing impending plans and events; the summons to courageous action in the future recalling the memory of a glorious past.[1] The situations of 'challenge' and accusation in which the enumeration of past crimes is linked to the promise to bring to light the guilt denied by the adversary;[2] the 'dying speeches' in which the character may act as a prophet and a warner, speaking, as it were, as the

[1] e.g. the first scenes of *1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, *Henry V*.

[2] e.g. *Richard II*, 1. i.

mouthpiece of his whole country and surveying past and future from a distance;[1] the raising of a claim which is based on a right, due in the past, and which calls for execution in the future;[2] the curses, warnings, and prophecies, recalling the past, which will be remembered in the future when they find their fulfilment;[3] the indictments, laments, and arraignments which very often look backwards and forwards; the scenes of leave-taking combining woeful retrospect with hopes and fears for the future;[4] the concluding speeches, prayers, or orations at the very end of the plays which invariably combine retrospect with a look forwards into the future.[5]

The list could be continued. But it is enough to show in how many different ways references to past and future are brought in. We also see from this enumeration to what extent Shakespeare makes use of man's natural feelings and attitudes, thus consciously or unconsciously establishing a relation to past and to future. Hope, fear, and anxiety, expectation, warning and threatening, cursing and praying—all these refer to the future. The past is implied in other recurring attitudes, such as repentance, guilt, and the feeling of obligation. However, all these references and attitudes become structural links, vehicles of dramatic technique. They help to organize, co-ordinate, and relate the wealth of historical detail, of single motifs and disparate events spread throughout the histories; they establish parallels and thematic connexions; they are a constant stimulant for our recording memory and our registering imagination. What in a single passage may appear as an insignificant detail nevertheless contributes to the over-all impact: by its correspondence with similar references it makes us aware of the larger structure. It is this cumulative effect which matters, comparable to the role of the single metaphor within a chain of related imagery. I venture to submit that the comprehensive pattern of past and future in the histories as it has been pointed out by Tillyard, Reese, Leech, and others would not emerge so clearly before our eyes if it were not rooted in and supported by this mosaic of many minor passages which link past and future in some way or other.

Passing from the histories to the tragedies we come upon plays that stand by themselves and are not organized into a cyclical sequence. Moreover, the tragedies are not concerned with the national past with which the audience was to some extent fami-

[1] e.g. *Richard II*, II. i.
[2] e.g. *2 Henry VI*, II. ii.
[3] e.g. *Richard II*, V. i; *2 Henry IV*, III. i.
[4] e.g. *Richard II*, II. ii.
[5] e.g. *Richard III*, V. v.

liar. This alone accounts for important differences in the treatment of past and future. Moreover, in the tragedies, although several of them are based on historical events, the sense of history is overruled by the sense of personal fate. As in the case of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Lear, the hero's relationship towards past and future is at the core of his personal destiny, revealing to us his essential mode of experience. Shakespeare's use of past and future in the tragedies, therefore, discloses many new features: it is adjusted to the concept of tragedy, but also to the peculiar time-structure of each tragedy, to its theme and atmosphere, so that in each instance we are faced with new problems.

Of all the tragedies, however, *Hamlet* shows the most striking confrontation of past and future, and I shall therefore limit myself to this play. At the beginning of this lecture I included *Hamlet* among the three plays which are preceded by an important past which to some extent determines the future course of action. It is therefore pertinent to ask how Shakespeare brings this past into the play and how he joins it with the future. Technically speaking the Ghost's narrative is a piece of the exposition, informing us about the past. But this narrative is turned into a dramatic present of the utmost intensity that can even 'harrow up' the souls of us who watch this scene in the theatre. We witness the immediate effect of the Ghost's disclosure on Hamlet, for whom it becomes the turning-point of his whole life and the motivating cause of all his future doings, wiping away from the table of his memory 'All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past' to implant a new past unforgettably in his mind. Besides, this past is more than a reported event, for it has embodied itself in the figure of the Ghost who as a messenger from the world beyond is also a witness of the past that is thus perpetuated. The past, as it were, has stepped into the play to act as an incentive towards the future. The Ghost has therefore been taken by some critics as the most influential character in this play, the figure who secretly directs the further course of the action though remaining himself in the background.

However, the past revealed by the Ghost raises questions, doubts, and uncertainties not only for Hamlet but also for the audience. We can see how a past that is not fully revealed, or of which the truth remains uncertain, may have a stronger effect on the dramatic expectation, on the future in the play, than the undisputed and confirmed fact.[1] Questions that remain open act as a constant reminder of the past and again and again pose new

[1] Cf. Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet*, 1959.

problems for the future. The Ghost is a supreme example of the way in which past and future may be joined in a dramatic figure.

It goes without saying that Hamlet, too, has a peculiar relationship towards past and future. His keen memory recalls, with graphic precision, scenes and pictures of past times which have a bearing on his situation: the burial, his mother, his father's figure, etc. The Ghost's 'Remember me' is always at the back of Hamlet's mind although he accuses himself of 'bestial oblivion'. But the Ghost did not only say 'Remember me' but also 'Avenge me'.[1] The tension between 'remember me', pointing towards the past, and 'avenge me' pointing towards the future, is one of the sources of Hamlet's tragic conflict, and may indeed be a possible cause of his delay and procrastination. The past appears to hold Hamlet back from attaining the future. A recent critic, Mr. Berry, even detects in this tension between past and future something like the structural principle of the whole play, putting it this way: 'So the whole of the presented action (up to the killing of Claudius near the end of Act V) is perplexed or shadowed by a completed deed at a definite point in the past which demands a retributive deed at an indefinite future. Held taut between these two points in time, the play consequently refers to that past murder and that future. . . .'[2]

None of the tragedies so constantly broods over the past. The past creeping in by report and reference, by narrative and oblique representation, seems to hold up the movement of the play which is characterized by digressions, by 'indirections', and oblique turns. But the play can afford this discursive, slow pace, this wealth of retrospective passages because from the very beginning the future has been indicated by the Ghost's demand for revenge. However, the more the play advances, the more this future becomes indistinct, the more it is called in question and surrounded by disbelief and hesitation. Eventually we realize (as indeed does Hamlet) that in this case there is no future that could ever repair the past.

But our business is to look out for those moments which link past and future not only verbally but also visually. The gravediggers' scene naturally comes first to our mind. Hamlet's contemplation of Yorick's skull not only awakens memories of his own childhood, but also unavoidably directs his thoughts (as does in fact the whole episode) towards his own death, towards

[1] The line actually reads: 'Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder' (I. v. 25).

[2] Francis Berry, *The Shakespeare Inset*, 1965, p. 117.

our common human destiny. In the bedchamber scene Hamlet, by displaying his father's portrait, evokes the past and turns it into a burning present that impresses itself on his mother's yielding mind.[1] The Ghost, at this moment the incarnate past and future, appears again in order to whet Hamlet's 'almost blunted purpose'. The scene thus links past and future on several levels. Hamlet, by shattering his mother's conscience and by evoking the past wants to pave the way towards a new future: 'Repent what's past; avoid what is to come' (III. iv. 150).

But there are two other scenes in this play which in a more oblique manner point towards the future though dealing with the past. The First Player's Speech (II. ii. 472), seemingly removed to a far distance from the actuality of the scene by its archaic, declamatory style and by its subject-matter, contains a number of subtle but very pertinent references to Hamlet's present and future situation and to the central theme ('So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood And like a neutral to his will and matter, Did nothing. . . . A roused vengeance sets him new a-work . . .'). Besides, it serves as a cue and as a prologue to Hamlet's ensuing soliloquy. The Murder of Gonzago play (III. ii), on the other hand, deliberately planned by Hamlet at the end of this very soliloquy ('The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King') is a reconstruction of the murder of Hamlet's father under the guise of a murder that happened long before in Vienna ('This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna', says Hamlet). Thus the past that precedes the beginning of the play and is disclosed in the first act by the Ghost, is here incorporated 'tropically' within the play, at its centre and turning-point. Again, this 'double' past, the one in Vienna and the other in Denmark, serves to bring about a decision in the present which must alter the future course of the action.

Our discussion of *Hamlet* began with the linking of past and future in the figure of the Ghost; and it is to the Ghost that we now return for our conclusion. Before the Ghost appears for the second time in the first scene Horatio links up the Ghost's appearance with the historic past of 'our last King', recalling the combat with Fortinbras of Norway and the enterprise of young Fortinbras. But then his recollections range backwards even further. For, taking Bernardo's reference to 'this portentous figure' as a cue, he recalls the forebodings recorded 'in the most high and palmy state of Rome a little ere the mightiest Julius

[1] Cf. E. Th. Sehrt, *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch (West)*, 1966, p. 63 ff.

fell'. Once again a 'double past' foreshadowing the future is here established. In three consecutive phrases the similarity between the forebodings in ancient Rome and the present situation is expressed:

> And even the like precurse of fear'd events,
> As harbingers preceding still the fates
> And prologue to the omen coming on,
> Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
> Unto our climatures and countrymen.
> (I. i. 121)

But this passage is 'prologue' in yet another sense, for the Ghost enters at the very same moment. What is the dramatic effect of this repeated digression into the past? For all the while the audience as well as the three figures on the stage have been secretly awaiting the Ghost's reappearance. The memory of a near and a far past may deviate our attention from what is imminent. But in fact this deviation also serves as indirect preparation, for our sense of anticipation has been suspended, thus heightening the tension.

The passage under consideration, in which a remote past is called up for the sake of indirect foreboding, may serve as an example of Shakespeare's insertion of retrospective passages that have a preparatory effect or function as a foreshadowing. But while we can fit this last passage into the general pattern of past and future which is characteristic of *Hamlet*, we cannot do so with a great many other retrospective passages which occur on various occasions in the comedies and the tragedies. These 'insets', as Mr. Berry has called them in his stimulating book,[1] are devices by which Shakespeare transports us for a moment from the dramatic present into a remote past or a remote future, building up, as it were, a second plane of reference, an imaginative background behind the foreground of the play on the stage. Sometimes, as in our last *Hamlet* passage, both past and future are involved. Of this usage I shall give three different examples, only to indicate a frequently recurring dramatic technique which nevertheless may take on very different forms.

My first example is from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the second act Oberon orders Puck to fetch him the magic herb 'love-in-idleness'. This request, however, is clad in an imagina-

[1] Francis Berry, *The Shakespeare Inset*, 1965. Of the three examples given here, the passage from *Twelfth Night* has been discussed at length by Mr. Berry.

tive recollection of that day when Cupid 'flying between the cold moon and the earth' missed with his fiery shaft 'a fair Vestal', hitting instead 'a little western flower; before milk-white now purple'. Thus the herb is introduced which, as a supernatural agent is to cause so much confusion in the following scenes. But not only the past transformation of this natural herb into a supernatural one is disclosed to us; we are also given a glimpse of that whole fairy world of myth and wonder that becomes alive in the fairies' songs and the many references to their nature. For an Elizabethan audience, however, the 'fair Vestal' unmistakably pointed towards Queen Elizabeth, so that here Shakespeare again, as he often does in the histories, makes the past suggest the actuality of his contemporary world.

The second example comes from *Julius Caesar*. Antony speaks to the crowd by the corpse of Caesar. He displays Caesar's mantle pierced by the murderers' daggers and connects this visible object with the memories of Caesar's victorious days in the past:

> You all do know this mantle. I remember
> The first time ever Caesar put it on;
> 'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent . . .
> (III. ii. 170)

But Antony makes these recollections cunningly serve his own future purpose. And indeed the first signs of this future development, the whole intention of his speech, appear in the crowd's raging cries: 'We'll mutiny' / 'We'll burn the house of Brutus'. . . .

My third example is the beautiful and unforgettable passage spoken by Viola in the guise of Cesario to Orsino about her father's daughter, who

> never told her love,
> But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek. She pin'd in thought;
> And with a green and yellow melancholy
> She sat like Patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief.
> (*Twelfth Night*, II. iv. 109)

This is perhaps the most subtle and imaginative use of past and future to be found within a short passage in the comedies. For Viola invents this history of her sister's unrequited love to express her own past and present sufferings as well as her apprehensions for her own future. Past and future in these lines are both fictive *and* true or possible. The visionary image of 'Patience

on a Monument' is a mirror of Viola's own situation, and she contemplates this picture as from a distance but nevertheless deeply involved with its implications. The effect of this passage is thus a double one. Through the apparent remoteness of this strange history of Cesario's sister the poignant actuality of Viola's plight is most movingly expressed, though only the audience will recognize this.

The three passages—and there are many more—give us three different examples of the way in which Shakespeare evokes some occurrence or some recollection from the past in order to link it with the future. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the herb 'love-in-idleness' is introduced and given its appropriate imaginative background through Oberon's account; in *Julius Caesar* the pathetic sight of Caesar's blood-stained mantle is made more poignant by the recollection of his former glorious days and thus stirs the emotions of the gazing crowd and urges them towards a new future. In *Twelfth Night* Cesario's (Viola's) invented story indirectly and figuratively describes her own past and her own possible future. The three passages have this in common: the forward movement of the action is slowed down and comes almost to a halt while a window is thrust open admitting a glimpse of a remote past or of a sphere removed from the actuality of what we have just been witnessing on the stage. But Shakespeare's secret is that this past of which we are given an imaginative vision is itself actuality; it is intimately related to the present moment; it intensifies its significance, and, what is more, it anticipates and prepares the future.

But from such single passages which combine retrospect with forecast we could not infer any general principles on the use of past and future in the play concerned as we tried to do in the histories and in *Hamlet*. This, however, is possible again in the romances, of which I have chosen *The Tempest* for more detailed consideration. I have selected this drama, since 'more than any other play by Shakespeare *The Tempest* makes us conscious of both past and future', as Clifford Leech has put it.[1] As a matter of fact *The Tempest* and *The Comedy of Errors* are the only plays which strictly observe the unities. This has an effect on the bearing of past and future on the action of the play. In *The Tempest* the action takes place within the span of an afternoon between two and six o'clock, but a past that happened twelve years before and another past only a short while before precede this afternoon

[1] C. Leech, 'Shakespeare and the Idea of the Future', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, xxxv, 1966.

and impress themselves on the inner and the outward action, which, in its turn, points towards a new future which stretches beyond this day into a near and a very far distance. The condensation of the action into a very short period of time intensifies the pressure of the past on the present and fills this present with the expectancy of the future. The events on the island are like a brief passage between two worlds, a passage, however, that lends itself to amazing transformation as a result of the co-operation of several determining factors. Moreover, *The Tempest* begins, as it were, in the last act and is itself a last act, a final phase in which retribution and reconciliation, restoration and redemption are shown, all, however, in relation to a past that happened long ago. This past is by various means integrated into the play: it is not only mirrored; in certain respects it is even repeated, revived, continued during the progress of the action. The past indeed is ever present and it continually directs our attention towards the future.

This double aspect is evident by the second scene, the most conspicuous example of Shakespeare's art of exposition through a connected long narrative. For comparison we may look back at Egeon's equally long account of past events in the first scene of *The Comedy of Errors*. Egeon's story, for all its fullness of circumstance and economy, remains flat and without variation; it is not, as in *The Tempest*, shared by two partners who are both looking into the past (though each with a different perspective); it is not re-experienced again in the present nor does it, as in *The Tempest*, live on in the memories of the characters during the following scenes. It gives us, to be sure, the key to the understanding of the complicated business between the two pairs of twins and it may also arouse some expectations as to Egeon's future fate. But as Egeon completely disappears from the play to come back only in the last act, our remembrance of the past also goes, as it were, underground. It forms a background which withdraws a certain distance away, to be revived at the play's very end, but it does not form a constituent element of the play's structure.

For this is what we do find in *The Tempest*. Prospero's story does not come until the second scene, after the violent spectacle of the shipwreck, of which the fresh memory still lingers on in Miranda's mind, so that the remembrance of the events immediately preceding gives way to the reminiscence of a remote past which, however, is also in fact brought close to us by the shipwreck that we have just been watching. When Prospero tells his

story we have already seen its characters on the stage, so that the remote past is linked up with the instantaneous present. These characters represent the burden, the guilt, the suffering in the past, but this past is now laid into Prospero's hands so that he may turn it into a new future. The narrator of the past becomes the secret ruler of the fates of all the characters involved. Not only is the shipwreck at the play's beginning (an ironic repetition of what his enemies had intended for him sixteen years ago) all his doing, but from now on he directs the movements of everyone, friend and enemy alike, with Ariel acting as his supernatural agent. But what are Prospero's plans for the future? We hear of his 'prescience' (180), but we can only guess what his future purpose is. His peremptory words to Miranda 'Here cease more questions' silence us as well as Miranda. Thus the future, although in some way predetermined by Prospero and in his hands, remains open, which contributes a great deal to the dramatic effectiveness of this first act. The fact that Prospero changes his mind (although this is not stated explicitly), that he turns out to be not only a prescient sage, a detached theurgic mystic but a suffering man who can become enraged and impatient, irritated and troubled, is an important counterpoise to the conception of destiny and predetermination as embodied in Prospero. Shakespeare uses subtle devices to dramatize Prospero's long account of the past, to relate it to the present situation, to reveal and at the same time to conceal what is the purport of the narrative. We are made to feel that Prospero's disclosure comes at exactly the right moment, for Miranda, who up to now has been denied the full story ('You have often begun to tell me what I am, but stopp'd . . .'), is now told by her father ''Tis time I should inform thee farther . . . The hour's now come'. Moreover, we are given the illusion that the past is not something ready and definite, available at any time, but that it needs to be recovered by a deliberate act of remembrance which from casual recollections ('Had I not four or five women? . . .') may advance to a fuller vision. Although Prospero, of course, knows all about the past, he tries to revive a glimpse of it in his daughter's memory ('in the dark backward and abysm of time') before he relates it in full. Thus Miranda appears as a participant in what has happened 'far off'; she is to live through this past again re-enacting her former sufferings ('I, not rememb'ring how I cried out then, will cry it o'er again'). What she meant to her father then ('a cherubin thou wast that did preserve me . . .') mirrors and foreshadows the present relationship between father

and daughter, while other parts of Prospero's story raise in Miranda a definite wish which anticipates the future ('Would I might but ever see that man'). Remembrance of the past is linked with suggestions for the future in the remainder of the scene too, and this is a recurring pattern in Prospero's exchanges with Ariel and Caliban later in the play. The word 'remember' (or some form of it) occurs eight times, the word 'forget' four times in this scene.[1] But although the past is recalled in almost every passage of this scene it is balanced by an equally strong sense of the present. We feel and we are shown by many minor hints that everything is happening 'now' and 'here', that it is the 'present business' (I. ii. 136) which matters. Observing this particular emphasis on the present, which can be traced throughout the whole play, a recent critic, Mr. Ernest Gohn, has aptly called this present 'a crucial nexus uniting the past to the future: the past is relevant only as it affects the present, the future only as it grows out of the present'.[2] *The Tempest*, in fact, appears to be the play in which the past has been most closely integrated into the present.

In the later scenes with the courtiers we see how their past is put on trial, how their former qualities revive and are tested. Each situation, as it were, elicits from them impulses and reactions which are related to their past role in Prospero's former life. Gonzalo proves loyal, Alonso shows some remorse, Antonio and Sebastian contrive new crimes, Trinculo joins with Caliban. Thus when Ariel, as a 'minister of fate', calls them up for judgement, he reminds them not only of their former guilt but also of its continuation or repetition during their short stay on the island. Ariel's speech, which has been called 'the keystone upon which the structure of the play rests'[3] shows the 'tripartite division of time' into past, present, and future which has been detected in other scenes and speeches as well.[4] The past is submitted to a process of transformation, for with some characters it can be redeemed and forgiven, while with others it remains unchanged. In Ferdinand it will be overcome and forgotten, so that he can enter into the grace of his new life. The union of Ferdinand and Miranda, who will establish a new future as rulers of Naples, can take place only after the reconciliation of their parents has been achieved. And reconciliation in the romances

[1] T. F. Driver, 'The Shakespearian Clock', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, xv (1964).
[2] Ernest Gohn, 'The Tempest: Theme and Structure', *English Studies*, 1964.
[3] D. Traversi, *Shakespeare: The Last Phase*, 1954.
[4] T. F. Driver, 'The Shakespearian Clock', *Sh. Qu.*, xv (1964).

always means that the past is clarified, redeemed, and transformed so that the path towards a new future is open. It is only then that the pressure of the past can be lifted. 'Let us not burden our remembrances with a heaviness that's gone' says Prospero when the union of Miranda and Ferdinand has been perfected (v. i. 199).

But is the future towards which we are looking at the end of the play really the forthcoming reign of Ferdinand and Miranda at Naples and Prospero's return to Milan? Prospero, to be sure, after having taken leave of his own past as a magician, is attired by Ariel in his ducal robes and solemnly addresses Alonso: 'Behold, sir King, the wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero.' But this revived image of his own past powerful state is not his whole and true self, nor are his thoughts for the future bent on rule and earthly business, for in Milan 'every third thought shall be my grave'. The future that we apprehend in the last act of the play is a future of a higher and a different order, of which we may divine something in Prospero's great visionary speech about the world's final dissolution (IV. i. 146). To take this speech as 'the view of an old and tired brain'[1] and as a sign of Prospero's disillusionment with the world does not do it justice. For Prospero gives expression here to a metaphysical vision of sublime and mysterious significance: he looks towards a world beyond, towards another life to come. Thus we could say that through this vision Prospero appears to transcend the categories of past and future, and that he stands aloof from the immediate action, of which he had so cunningly woven and manipulated the threads running from the past towards the future.

In concluding we might ask whether we find in the other romances a similar pattern of past and future, which would suggest that Shakespeare in these last plays seeks to give expression to a new vision of things that would bring past and future closer together. If we look at the last acts of these romances we note that past, present, and future are joined here in a striking and peculiar manner. In these scenes of reconciliation, restoration, and reunion a redeemed, a renewed, and even reborn past is transformed into the present, which can now initiate a new future. But in contrast to the situation in the tragedies this past is not irrevocable and irreparable, but a past that can be redeemed and regained. Persons who have been thought of as dead and lost can be brought back to life like Hermione, or found again like Imogen, Perdita, and Marina. Usually the future in

[1] D. R. C. Marsh, *The Recurring Miracle*, 1962, p. 187.

these plays, as in *The Tempest*, is represented by a pair of young lovers who through their union mend what was amiss in the older generation of their parents. But their union can take place only when the unsolved past has been solved or made up for. Forgiveness and penitence pave the way for this new future and though these acts of forgiving are sometimes effected rather improbably we may accept them 'as a manifestation of Shakespeare's symbolic technique transcending likelihood for higher purposes'.[1] There is always an element of strangeness about this new future which divorces it from reality and endows these last plays 'with a significance that extends beyond any last curtain or final Exeunt'.[2] We sense a mysterious vision of imponderable distances.

In the final acts the characters are confronted with their own past so that they may repent or recover it. The late Una Ellis-Fermor, in a lecture given at Munich University seventeen years ago,[3] pointed out to what degree this process of recognition and reconciliation leads to the characters' confrontation with and understanding of themselves. For they now understand their own past, they experience an inner rebirth and recover their own better selves. This is what Gonzalo, at the end of *The Tempest*, in fact expresses when he says that they all of them found themselves 'when no man was his own' (v. i. 212).

The process of regeneration and rebirth, shown in all the romances though with characteristic modifications, links both past and future in a mysterious manner that intimates the co-operation of supernatural powers. And in fact, there are supernatural agents or occurrences in each of the romances. We should cease to find fault with the improbability of it. For it suggests, to borrow a phrase from Kenneth Muir, 'Shakespeare's creation of a kind of myth which he could set up against the changes and chances of this mortal life'.[4] The supernatural in Shakespeare's romances suggests the rule of heavenly powers, full of grace, which can set everything right in the end. For only they can prevent the past from becoming irreparable; only they can transform a restored past into a new future.

I have come to the end of this lecture. I have considered the conflux of past and future within the context of history in

[1] Stanley Wells, i. *Sha-Jbch.* (*West*), 1966, p. 118.

[2] J. M. Nosworthy, Introd. to *Cymbeline*, New Arden ed. 1955.

[3] Una Ellis-Fermor, 'Die Spätwerke großer Dramatiker', *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift*, xxiv, 1950. The English original has not been published.

[4] K. Muir, *Shakespeare as a Collaborator*, 1960.

Richard III, *Richard II*, and *Henry IV*; I have looked upon the tension between past and future as an expression of personal destiny and tragic dilemma in *Hamlet*, and I have lastly observed the reconciliation of past and future in the romances. Thus to summarize these three stages in no way exhausts our subject, but it may suggest that Shakespeare's drama in the use it makes of past and future undergoes a significant development that certainly deserves further investigation.