

SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORIES AND
'THE EMOTION OF MULTITUDE'

By A. R. HUMPHREYS

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ON Wednesday evening, 16 October 1811, a company gathered to listen to Coleridge. They all, as John Payne Collier recalls—Charles and Mary Lamb, Hazlitt, Dyer, and the rest—

seemed disposed to allow him sea-room enough, and he availed himself of it; and spreading canvas, sailed away majestically.

After an hour of intellectual voyaging Collier felt overwrought and left the room to settle his brain, but not before noting an observation I should like to develop. Coleridge, it seems,

drew a parallel between Shakespeare and a geometrician: the latter, when tracing a circle, had his eye upon the centre as the important point, but included also in his vision a wide circumference; so Shakespeare, while his eye rested on an individual character, always embraced a wide circumference of others.

I propose for my subject the circumferential area of Shakespeare's circle—or rather, since Shakespeare was not a flat-earther, the circumferential sphere of his globe (apply the word as you will). Professor Wilson Knight argues in *The Wheel of Fire* for drama set 'spatially' in the mind as well as temporally, 'laid out, so to speak, as an area': in *The Sovereign Flower* he rebuts the charge that 'spatial' study must be static study. Dramatic 'space' involves dramatic dynamics, and reveals the dynamics in a new depth of force. Shakespeare's histories 'spatially' as well as temporally considered are my theme—how they reach out into mental dimensions of space and time and thereby form imaginative complexes of great vitality.¹

¹ 'Spatial' as I use the word has a less metaphorical sense than it bears in *The Wheel of Fire*, *The Sovereign Flower*, or *Lord Byron: Christian Virtues* where (p. 47) it relates to 'the space-time, or eternity, dimension of artistic genius . . . [and] involves the massed use of materials wrenched boldly from their habitual associations and grouped about various new centres of interest, often

These questions are not irrelevant to the comedies and tragedies but I choose the histories because I cannot resist their wealth of appeal and should like, moreover, somewhat to redress the recent tendency to concentrate on their politico-doctrinal bearings. Wilson Knight's chapter in *The Sovereign Flower* called 'Roses at War' reminds us of their poetic brilliance, and my friend and colleague James Winny has given them imaginative attention recently in *The Player King*. As Mr. Winny observes,

Although the verse movement and the dramatic development of the early Histories are often stiff and uncouth, Shakespeare's imagination is already impressing characteristic forms upon his material. The tumultuousness that is so marked in *Henry VI* crowds the stage with a mass of events and with animated figures who in themselves embody an imaginative view of life. . . . We should not need the Chorus of *Henry V* to remind us how successfully Shakespeare's poetry appeals to the 'eye of mind' that willingly translates the shorthand of imaginative reference into the extended substance of reality.

What, then, is the effect of a single short episode, that which occupies the sixth, seventh, and eighth scenes of 2 *Henry VI*, Act IV? This tells of Jack Cade's triumph, his baiting of Lord Say, and his change of fortune when his rabble deserts him. Shakespeare's sense of place is as real as Defoe's—London Stone, London Gates, the Savoy, Smithfield, the Inns of Court, Sir James Cromer's house, Fish Street, St. Magnus' Corner, the White Hart in Southwark. In the brutal farce of Lord Say's 'trial' the victim's life is the subject of wild and incoherent accusations—Normandy surrendered, a grammar school built, printing and teaching encouraged, justices appointed, and the poor imprisoned. Defending himself, Say contrasts present turbulence with the goodness of England's people and the beauty of England's scenes as Caesar had celebrated them, and proclaims his own long and honourable service: all to no avail, for his head is struck off and carried through London, to kiss at every street corner the lips of another decapitated victim. Then the mob, confronted by loyal forces, and reminded of Henry V's conquests, abandons Cade, who fights his way through and escapes. Into two hundred lines Shakespeare packs not only the confrontation of rabble and loyalists as persons but with little or no emphasis on the temporal succession from which they have been removed' (temporal succession being, however, not contradicted or ignored). I mean, more literally, the sense of the mind's 'room' or extendedness which takes in local, geographical place and the fore-and-aft dimension of time too.

a rich complex of locality, biography, retrospects, traditions, and modes of life and mind; the few minutes of time focus an astonishing wealth of impression. My aim is really to observe not what can be evidently seen but rather the marginalia, the impressionistic extensions, of space, time, and life around and beyond what is in sight. I should not blame my hearers if, as Maurice Morgann expected his readers to do, they protested, 'But what have we to do with principles *so latent, so obscured?*' So a word about my title.

In *Ideas of Good and Evil* Yeats pointed out why he disliked the nineteenth-century well-made play; it had, he wrote, 'everything of high literature except the emotion of multitude'.

All the great Masters [he went on] have understood that there cannot be great art without the little limited life of the fable (which is always the better the simpler it is), and the rich, far-wandering, many-imaged life of the half-seen world beyond it.

More recently, Brecht's Epic Theatre has rejected dramatic realism to adhere—in tenor if not method—to Shakespearean open structure instead of Ibsenite verisimilitude, because of its freer and wider significance. Greek drama, Yeats explained,

has got the emotion of multitude from its chorus, which called up famous sorrows, long-leaguered Troy, much-enduring Odysseus, and all the gods and heroes to witness.

From its chorus, yes, but from much else, too. Consider the opening of the *Agamemnon*—which I take to be, in a sense, historical drama. It creates, overwhelmingly, a consciousness that the action is already great with momentum. Aeschylus' watchman, surveying from the palace roof the circling stars, awaits with protracted expectancy a new excitement—the beacon signalling victory—and wonderfully suggests time pressing to a point, moving on yet carrying a pre-existent burden. The chorus of elders sings of the ten-year-old manning of the ships, of a people long warring under great leaders, and of the initial sin of Paris. Then to the dimension of time is added that of space; Clytemnestra brings to the mind's eye a superb picture of beacon after beacon telling of triumph, headland by headland, island by island, from Mount Ida to Mycenae, the geographical names following in a great roll-call of the spatial imagination.¹ Bacon was to divide knowledge into

¹ Seneca, incidentally, who exerts himself so much more strenuously than Homer and Aeschylus do to suggest the grandeurs of panoramic space and

the poetical, that of imagination; the historical, that of memory; and the philosophical, that of understanding. The *Agamemnon*'s opening unites all three; it is wonderfully imagined, powerfully remembered, and hauntingly understood. Breadth, depth, and range are clearly no Elizabethan monopoly. In the preface to *Bérénice* Racine praises, and hopes to emulate, 'cette simplicité d'action qui a été si fort du goût des anciens'—yet with all its concentration his play presents Bérénice herself, Titus, and Antiochus as participants widely and deeply involved, figures

dont les soins
Ont eu tout l'Orient et Rome pour témoins.

Great drama offers infinite riches in a little room; the sense of 'multitude' spreads outwards from the presented scene.

I have already tacked too long towards the subject but I must continue obliquely a little longer; we may, thereby,

With windlasses and with assays of bias
By indirections find directions out.

What, indeed, should historical drama be? Dramatists have sometimes, as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Racine did, used historical subjects, or subjects thought historical, without much concern for historicity, concentrating rather on moral crisis. Again, much nineteenth-century historical drama, like much nineteenth-century architecture, was romance in costume. Playwrights of our own time like to turn historical subjects into dialectic on ethical or political issues—Shaw in *St. Joan*, T. S. Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Mr. John Osborne in *Luther*, Mr. Peter Shaffer in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, pre-eminently Brecht in *Mother Courage or Galileo*. But really historical drama is not the province of the antiquarian-costumier, or the moralist-dialectician; historical drama is history dramatized. Yet what does it mean, to dramatize history?

The historians themselves may help. Not only is poetry, as Aristotle held, higher and more philosophical than history, but so also—historians claim—is historical writing itself. Faced with events in infinite number—'only a confused heap of facts', Lord Chesterfield thought; 'the full, wild, prodigal, complicated story of the actions of innumerable people', according to Sir Herbert Butterfield—the historian seeks form. Even when,

accumulated tradition, affects us mainly as making a great deal of noise rather than opening up imaginative vistas. Such are the shortcomings of wilful rhetoric.

like H. A. L. Fisher—in contrast to Arnold Toynbee—he finds no pattern, he still clarifies and orders. Again, however special his interests, he centres them on men, on the men (as Marc Bloch reminds us in *The Historian's Craft*)

behind the features of landscape, behind tools or machinery, behind what appear to be the most formalized written documents, and behind constitutions which seem almost detached from their founders.

Emerson, as was his wont, put this provocatively—'There is properly no history, only biography.' Sir Charles Oman preferred the Carlylean doctrine of personality to the view that history is an impersonal process. The past, for Butterfield, is 'a drama of personalities, taking place . . . on the stage of nature, and amid its imposing scenery'. *Totus mundus agit histrionem*—the motto Shakespeare's theatre is said to have borne: all the world's a stage. Furthermore, not only is historical writing to be dramatic, it is to be imaginative too—'its impelling motive', for G. M. Trevelyan, 'is poetic'; and Carlyle had already called it 'the true poetry'. R. G. Collingwood sees historian and fictive creator as alike in sympathetic projection:

Each of them makes it his business to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. Each aims to make his picture a coherent whole, where every character and every situation is so bound up with the rest that this character in this situation cannot but act in this way.

Men, felt in their humanity, and struggling 'with that vast mutability which is event', are the historian's theme; it is for the dramatist to interpret this theme as dialogue impelled by a dynamic rhythm.

Shakespeare's historical plays serve both Aristotle's lower truth and his higher. They are, as far as Shakespeare knew, true; yet their truth is not only factual and local, it is widely and deeply imaginative, rooted in events yet from them growing a higher and more philosophical fruit of human value as the particular instance rises to the representative. Surely Shakespeare felt about historical 'fact' as Trevelyan did, that 'just because it really happened it gathers round it all the inscrutable mystery of life and death and time'.

Life, death, time. And locality. To feel right, historical drama must extend an imagined world beyond the stage, where things have happened and are still happening; what is seen and heard

must be felt to emerge from a society of lives locally based and subject to time. This obvious requirement historical drama seldom achieves. The following judgements are summary but they are all that one hour allows. *Murder in the Cathedral*, then, fine though it is in moral distinction, is not substantially set in place (do we feel Canterbury, or England?), or in time (is the long wait for Becket more than a figment?). Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*, for all its exceptional quality, finds its force in moral passion and intelligence rather than in a fully projected 'world' (is More's predicament of conscience and intellect borne on the current of a nation's life?). Withdrawing from the twentieth century to the nineteenth, do we sense a convincing space and time of which the visible evidences are Bulwer Lytton's *Richelieu*, Tennyson's *Queen Mary* or *Harold*, or Swinburne's *Mary Stuart*? (The comparison of this latter with Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, or of any of these plays with the *Wallenstein* sequence or Goethe's *Egmont*, shows something of what English nineteenth-century historical drama was failing to do.) And, when we return to the Elizabethans, are even such able plays as *Bussy D'Ambois* or *Perkin Warbeck* more than theoretically attached to the space and time of real life? Breadth and depth in space and time, as well as impetus in rhythm, are the essential conditions.

Epics gain their breadth and depth from many tributaries flowing into the main stream, from the narrative digressions which amplify the ancient classics, and *Beowulf*, and *Paradise Lost*, and from the rich and vivid similes which in Homer broaden the story into the widest comprehension of the world, its elemental powers, its creatures, the skills and ancestries and adventures of men. When in the *Life of Milton* Dr. Johnson came to describe the epic poet, the words in which he did so might have been specifically designed for Shakespeare as a historical dramatist:

History must supply the writer with the rudiments of narration, which he must improve and exalt by a nobler art, must animate by dramatic energy, and diversify by retrospection and anticipation: morality must teach him the exact bounds, and different shades, of vice and virtue; from policy, and the practice of life, he has to learn the discriminations of character, and the tendency of the passions, either single or combined; and physiology must supply him with illustrations and images. To put these materials to poetical use is required an imagination capable of painting nature, and realizing fiction. Nor is he yet a poet till he has distinguished all the delicacies of phrase, and

all the colours of words, and learned to adjust their different sounds to all the varieties of metrical modulation.

Difficult enough if one writes epic; but when the scope of an *Iliad* is denied, how render the far-wandering, many-imagined life beyond the limited fable unless, like Hardy with *The Dynasts*, one outgoes the limits of production? The interim answer to questions about the nature of historical drama seems to be that it must gain its magnitude by appearing to grow fully out of a nation's being, that it must be convincingly located in place, that time must be felt to impel it, and that the natures and motives of men must be strongly presented. Particularly true of historical drama is that formulation which, in *The Burning Oracle*, Wilson Knight makes for all drama:

Things move from the start, and are kept going. Action rises on action, event scrambles over the shoulders of event; it is an attack. On what? On the audience's attention, for one thing; but, deeper, an onslaught on all fundamental negations in terms of human energy.

Historical events, in drama or not, must occur at particular places. Yet dramatists differ greatly in their command of this fact; *Edward II*, Granville-Barker pointed out, is locally thin compared with *Richard II*. To say this is not to prolong the old assumption that each scene must have a specific location; Elizabethan drama is imprecise unless precision is needed. Yet certainly when compared with *Richard II*, or indeed with *Woodstock*, *Edward II* does little to create the local reality of England. The titles and territories Edward distributes remain purely nominal; place-names are sprinkled about, and characters make for destinations specified or unspecified, without these registering as meaningful. With *Richard II* we are in a different world: in fact, we are *in* a world. *Woodstock* had already shown Shakespeare the way, if he needed showing; its story is rich and 'dense' in this kind of context, with the past powerfully pressing upon and into the present, and England both metropolitan and provincial the extended prey to misrule. *Woodstock's* sense of place is almost eccentrically evident in the scene (Act iv, scene i) where Richard, sharing out among his cronies 'the nine-and-thirty shires and countries of my kingdom', actually names thirty-eight of them (omitting Nottingham alone). Far from being pedantic or prosaic, the enumeration suggests that the King is knowledgeably and deliberately reckless. Place has meaning; Plashy, Woodstock's own home,

represents the refuge of virtue against the corruptions of court. In the Duke of York's words (III. ii. 9-14):

This house of Plashy, brother,
Stands in a sweet and pleasant air, i'faith;
Tis near the Thames, and circled round with trees
That in the summer serve for pleasant fans
To cool ye, and in winter strongly break
The stormy winds that else would nip ye too.

Yet it is from here that Woodstock himself is abducted to Calais and murdered, and in *Richard II* it is to Plashy's 'empty lodgings and unfurnished walls' that, while John of Gaunt makes for the lists at Coventry, the bereaved Duchess hopelessly withdraws. The real hero of the plays is England—not only because it is England's story that the plays tell, but because England's quality and identity never escape Shakespeare's imagination. Bolingbroke and Northumberland struggle over the 'high wild hills and rough uneven ways' of Gloucestershire, making for Berkeley visible 'by yon tuft of trees'; Ross and Willoughby, 'Bloody with spurring, fiery-red with haste,' gallop from Ravenspurg; Bolingbroke, returning from Brittany, traverses the land from north-east to south-west,

Frighting her pale-faced villages with war
And ostentation of despised arms,

and, as Scroop tells the King, carries all irresistibly before him,

covering your fearful land
With hard bright steel, and hearts harder than steel.

Short perhaps in overt action, *Richard II* is rich in panoramas and peregrinations.

The bases of all this are in Holinshed, it is true, in whose pages the sense of England is vividly felt. Richard soon learns how wide and broad is the movement against him:

When he understood as he thus went forward, that all the castles, even from the borders of Scotland unto Bristow, were delivered unto the Duke of Lancaster, and that likewise the nobles and commons, as well of the south parts as of the north, were fully bent to take part with the same duke against him, and further hearing how his trusty counsellors had lost their heads at Bristow, he became so greatly discomforted, that sorrowfully lamenting his miserable estate he utterly despaired of his own safety, and calling his army together, which was not small, licensed every man to depart to his home.

Richard's *via dolorosa* from Flint to London involves the whole nation, stage by stage, through Chester, Nantwich, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and so on to St. Albans and the capital. When in the play the Duke of York tells how the populace greeted Bolingbroke and Richard, Shakespeare draws upon Holinshed's account of Bolingbroke's reception:

Such joy appeared in the countenances of the people, uttering the same also with words, as the like [hath] not lightly been seen. For in every town and village where he passed, children rejoiced, women clapped their hands, and men cried out for joy. But to speak of the great number of people that flocked together in the fields and streets of London at his coming, I here omit; neither will I speak of the presents, welcomings, lauds, and gratifications made to him by the citizens and the commonalty.

Holinshed's *Chronicles* offer the past as human stories in human particulars. That is the dramatist's conception, too. Who, by contrast, would cull a play from Toynbee's *Study of History*, magnificent though it is; its great sweeps of multicultural evolutions prevent one from seeing the trees for the wood; and it is trees the dramatist needs, the living individuals.

To say something about the geographical sense of Elizabethan drama sounds like a fallacy of pseudo-realism, of a kind with inquiries into Falstaff's mettle, Lady Macbeth's fertility, or King Lear's domestic deportment. Yet this is not so; place can be imaginatively relevant. The story of Trojan Brutus and his sons, in *Lochrine*, is festooned with university-wits rhetoric and resonantly evocative proper names, in a spirit of Marlovian gusto:

From Graecia through the boisterous Hellespont
We came unto the fields of Lestrigon,
Whereas our brother Corineus was;
Since when we passèd the Cilician gulf,
And so transfretting the Illyrian sea
Arrivèd on the coasts of Aquitaine.¹

Brutus seems better at geography than chronology, since he praises 'the wealthy mines / Found in the bowels of America,' but all this would to his hearers sound expansive and grand. The same kind of thing, far better done, is one of the glories of *Tamburlaine*; names used thus are the landscapes of fantasy,

¹ *Lochrine*, I. i. 104-9. There are precedents for this kind of grandiloquence in medieval drama, as Dr. Harold F. Brooks points out; see *Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Brian Morris, 1968, pp. 80-1.

like Flecker's Golden Journey to Samarkand, or Masfield's quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir, or the Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, and Popocatapetl of W. J. Turner's golden land. Their power lies in magniloquence. At the opposite pole, a crude citizen drama like *Jack Straw* creates from rough idiom and local names—Southwark, Marshalsea, Smithfield, Blackheath, Greenwich—a civic realism of which the play of *Sir Thomas More* gives a finer version, and *Mistress Quickly* in her Eastcheap haunts the fullest, the most endearing, expression.¹

No Elizabethan dramatist matches Shakespeare in the imaginative effect of place. The wealth of local detail he found in Holinshed he controlled, clarified, and directed towards full dramatic action. The opening of *1 Henry VI*, with successive messengers telling the ebb of the English power in France, town by town and province by province, registers an effect both formal and urgent. The French war scenes are ominous not only in their cruelties and hatreds but in their fatalities of time and place, the fate of families and territories

¹ There is an admirable passage in Creizenach's *English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, 1916, p. 170, which suggests what London localities must have meant to Elizabethan playwrights:

'It must have been of inestimable value to the English dramatists that the capital, for whose inhabitants they wrote, had from of old constantly been the scene of the most important events in the national history. This powerful link with the past provided them with a means to lend wings to the imagination of their audience which was not within the grasp of the Spanish dramatists in Madrid, then newly founded and lacking altogether in associations. Every street, every church, every public building was glorified by memories of the mighty past. Here still ran the line of streets along which once surged the rebel hordes led by Jack Cade: yonder rose the venerable building within whose Jerusalem Chamber Henry IV passed away. Here lay Baynard's Castle where the citizens of London offered the crown to Richard III; there Charing Cross, which the king in Peele's *Edward I* commands to be erected to the memory of his dead wife. Further east were the beautiful Gothic structure of Crosby Hall, of whose building Crosby, the upright mayor in Heywood's *Edward IV*, tells with such pleasure; and Leadenhall, where in Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday* the king is received by Eyre, once a cobbler, and now Lord Mayor, and institutes the half-weekly leather market. Not far off there rose the grim walls of the Tower, scene of so many a tragic catastrophe. Many other instances might here be cited; of none, however, is what has been said so true as of that building where even now, perhaps more than in any other place in this world, we feel ourselves overcome by the awe of the past; where, in the twilight beneath the vaulted roof of Westminster Abbey, there lie stretched out in effigy upon their mighty sarcophagi of stone the rulers and heroes of the olden time, whom the poets made to live again in all their loves and their hatreds, their great deeds and their crimes.'

under the onrush of destiny. Repeatedly we hear of domains won or lost, the great names resounding like tolling bells:

Guienne, Champagne, Rheims, Orleans,
Paris, Guysors, Poictiers, are all quite lost. . . .

Maine, Blois, Poictiers, and Tours are won away,
Long all of Somerset and his delay. . . .

Anjou and Maine are given to the French,
Paris is lost; the state of Normandy
Stands on a tickle point now they are gone.

And when the scene turns to civil war, in Parts 2 and 3, the sense of national place and range is fundamental; the furthest limits of the land are traversed, mobilized, ravaged.

The feeling of involvement comes partly by subconscious transference from the names of territorial magnates—Gloucester, Suffolk, York, Warwick, Buckingham, and others in the earlier tetralogy, Hereford/Bolingbroke, Northumberland, Percy of the North, Worcester, Westmorland, in *Henry IV*. At times this is specifically significant. In 3 *Henry VI* the Lancastrians cut York's head off and set it over his own city's gates—'So York doth overlook the town of York.' In *Richard II*, to Berkeley's address, 'My Lord of Hereford,' Bolingbroke replies, 'My answer is, "To Lancaster".' In general, this effect is inevitable; no one writing on English history could avoid it. Yet subconsciously it affects our sense that these great figures identify themselves with the territories of Britain. When in the opening scene of 2 *Henry VI* the King thanks

uncle Winchester
Gloucester, York, Buckingham, Somerset,
Salisbury and Warwick;

when Humphrey of Gloucester recalls that

Somerset, Buckingham,
Brave York, Salisbury, and victorious Warwick
Received deep scars in France and Normandy;

or when, before Agincourt, Henry V foretells that, familiar in the mouth as household words, the names will be remembered of

Harry the King, Bedford, and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,

something more imaginatively representative is going on than the mere citing of persons. Should this seem special pleading,

then at least the names of Lancaster and York reverberate beyond the transient bearers of them; their meaning is not personal but territorial-dynastic. The wars, and the peace, of Lancaster and York are England herself—

With shadowy forests and with champains riched,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,

as Lear was to see her—divided, or united.

English history, for Shakespeare, is a spreading tree rooted in locality. Consider a hundred lines or so of *Richard III* (iv. iv. 432–540). Immediately before, there has taken place the long duel between Richard and Queen Elizabeth over the disposal of the Queen's daughter (who will, in fact, marry Richmond and unite the realm). This duel, tense with rhetorical pattern, has moved solely in the dimension of time past, present, and future, as Richard's crimes are relentlessly recalled and impudently admitted: when he swears by 'The time to come,' Elizabeth rejoins,

That thou hast wrongèd in the time o'erpast,
For I myself have many tears to wash
Hereafter time, for time past wronged by thee.

Intent on the outcome, we are held strictly to antecedents and consequences; there is no lateral or spatial dimension. But as soon as the Queen goes the change is startling; attention switches to the urgent present, and the horizon opens to the whole country. Richmond's navy is reported on the western coast, reported again to be at sea encouraged by Dorset and Buckingham, reported again to be back in Brittany, and at once reported again to have landed an army at Milford Haven. Messengers ride post-haste to Norfolk and to Salisbury, whither repeatedly Richard directs his men. Lord Stanley's forces are still in the north; Richard wants them in the west. News comes of revolt in Devonshire; Kentish rebels gather hour by hour; Yorkshire is in arms; and on the cry, 'Away towards Salisbury!' Richard sweeps off the scene. A whole land, turbulent with rumours, risings, and strategies, is evoked in these quick-flashing references.

There is, in fact, something in Shakespeare's drama like the exuberant amplitudes of Renaissance painting, which delights to surround its central subject with lively perspectives. Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* in the Uffizi does so, for instance, or Van Eyck's *Madonna and the Chancellor Rolin* in the

Louvre, or Ghirlandaio's *Adoration of the Shepherds* in Santa Trinità in Florence, or Brueghel's *Fall of Icarus* in Brussels, so tellingly reflected upon in Mr. Auden's *Musée des Beaux-Arts*. The length and breadth of canvas welcomed the new discovery, depth: 'Oh, what a sweet thing perspective is!' Uccello is said to have remarked as his wife was nagging him to go to bed. This sense of unprecedented space and range is Shakespeare's equivalent gift to drama, though no successor has rivalled his scope. From John of Gaunt's death-bed in *Richard II* he leads his hearers in passionate imagination over 'This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, . . . Dear for her reputation through the world': reputation is, indeed, one of the enlarging concepts to which I shall return. Gaunt unites the theme of England's space with that of her time, as the disgraceful present ousts the glorious past, and the old statesman, worn with long vigils, condemns the young and reckless King. In *Henry IV*, again, geography offers itself vividly; on the war-torn land there bursts news of risings in Scotland and Wales; Hotspur has routed the Scots at Holmedon, and tells of Mortimer's valour by swift Severn's flood. Retrospect reminds us of Richard's Irish campaign and Bolingbroke's march from Ravenspurgh; Glendower has thrice repulsed Henry from Wye and sandy-bottomed Severn; plans are concerted to ally the powers of Scotland and Wales, of Northumberland and the Archbishop of York. The whole historical theme turns on the tripartite division of the land:

England, from Trent and Severn hitherto,
By south and east is to my part assigned;

(Mortimer is addressing Hotspur)

All westward, Wales beyond the Severn shore,
And all the fertile land within that bound,
To Owen Glendower; and, dear coz, to you
The remnant northward, lying off from Trent—

whereupon Hotspur proposes to divert the 'smug and silver' river so as to enlarge his moiety north of Burton. This and much more in the serious scenes presents the country highly energized in all its parts; and to this panorama the local life of Eastcheap, Rochester, and (later) Gloucestershire makes its rich counterpart. After Shrewsbury, Rumour stands before Northumberland's castle in the northernmost corner of the land and describes the falsehoods spreading nationwide,

through the peasant towns
 Between that royal field of Shrewsbury
 And this worm-eaten hold of ragged stone.

Travers, dispatched for news, tells what he has learnt from a fugitive spurring to Chester; Morton announces that the Archbishop is in arms and has sanctified his cause with the blood Richard shed at Pomfret. The play reveals itself as rich beyond any other in national and local particulars. What is presented in *Henry IV*'s comic scenes is a fraction of what is offered to the mind's eye—pilgrims jogging to Canterbury; traders bound for London; carriers making for Charing Cross with ginger roots for waiting merchants; the hazards of foot-landrakers and sixpenny strikers; jests with the good lads of Eastcheap; Falstaff rated 'the other day in the street' by an old lord of the Council, or gathering a rabble whose single shirt is stolen from my host at St. Albans or the red-nose innkeeper of Daventry. A few things Shakespeare took from *The Famous Victories*; most he invented. This invention is at its fullest in the second part of *Henry IV*, where (as Mistress Quickly reports) Falstaff comes continually to Pie Corner to buy a saddle, or is indited to dinner to the Lubber's Head in Lumbert Street by Master Smooth the silkman, or swears his faith upon a parcel-gilt goblet in the Dolphin Chamber at the round table by a sea-coal fire upon Wednesday in Wheeson week, just as good-wife Keech enters to borrow a mess of vinegar for her dish of prawns. All this is as gratuitously incidental yet indispensable as the death-bed details so irresistibly imaged in *Henry V*.

The sense that real space and time surround the stage is illusory but haunting; Mistress Quickly will surely go off to retail to her gossips (she could hardly exaggerate) the swaggerings of Pistol, or to pawn her gown for Falstaff's debts, though she has borne, and borne, and borne, and been fubbed off, and fubbed off, and fubbed off, from this day to that day. Doll Tearsheet lives offstage as well as on, in the Hogarthian violence of a whore's experience. Justice Shallow, whose god-daughter Ellen (unseen, but alive in the mind's eye) has raven tresses ('a black woosel', in her father Silence's rural phrase), and whose 'cousin' William (Silence's other child) is at Oxford to his father's cost (Defoe could not better the detail)—Justice Shallow reaches back, incontestably, to lusty days at Clement's Inn with little John Doit, black George Barnes, and the rest, fifty-five year ago, when Jane Nightwork was a bona roba; he also leads outward to bullock-buying at Stamford and the prices of

ewes, to William the cook's sack lost at Hinckley Fair, and to the tantalizingly unspecified knavery of William Visor of Woncot.

Living minutiae like these are something other than the narratives of classical drama. But these latter, too, Shakespeare manages brilliantly. Queen Margaret's stormy crossing to England (2 *Henry VI*, iii. ii); the Battle of Wakefield as York relates it (3 *Henry VI*, i. iv); London's citizens recalcitrant before Buckingham's advocacy of Richard (*Richard III*, iii. vii); the people 'strangely fantasied' as John's reign runs its infamous course (*King John*, iv. ii); Bolingbroke's 'courtship to the common people', so recounted by Richard II that the contrast of his personality and his rival's comes vividly through (*Richard II*, i. iv); and the obverse study in political psychology, Bolingbroke's own account of how he prevailed against 'the skipping King' (1 *Henry IV*, iii. ii)—these relations are as valid as what is actually seen; no wonder one almost believes Falstaff's story of Gadshill. That dramas enacted in the mind may surpass those of the senses Shakespeare admits in *Henry V*, and Horace thought them better (*Ars Poetica*, II. 185, 188):

Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet . . .
Quodcumque ostendis mihi sic incredulus odi.

The Elizabethans, it is often supposed, contrariwise put all before us, trusting that when two armies fly in, with four swords and bucklers, what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field? But of course they too, and Shakespeare most of all, enlarge what they present by what they imagine. The point is not that Shakespeare is better read than seen; it is that even in the theatre, as Granville-Barker remarks, 'the spectator must perform the whole play in his imagination'.

The plays carry a sense of surrounding scrutiny; there is a watching world. Not Hamlet alone is the observed of all observers; the men and women of the histories live in the eyes of the nation. When the good Duke Humphrey is reported dead,

The commons, like an angry hive of bees
That want their leader, scatter up and down,
And care not who they sting in their revenge.

As Lancastrian Clifford falls mortally wounded, and Henry VI's fortunes fail,

The common people swarm like summer flies;
And whither fly the gnats but to the sun?

—the rising sun of York. Popular sentiment is swept by hearsay, by 'drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams'; 'from the orient to

the drooping west' Rumour distracts the land; the 'fond many' sway from Richard to Bolingbroke and back again. *Henry VIII* is a play particularly dependent on opinion and report; from the hyperboles, prophetic of instability, which describe the Field of the Cloth of Gold, through insinuations of Wolsey's stratagems and the hatreds these provoke, to the suspicions and delations which lead to the falls of Buckingham, Katherine, and Wolsey, and which, through 'calumnious tongues' and 'grievous complaints', all but destroy Cranmer, it lives in a world of hearsay. Within eighty lines of a probably Shakespearean scene (I. ii. 5-85), nearly a score of phrases convey the anger of subjects against extortions, an anger which Wolsey rejects as the malice of 'sick interpreters'. Shakespeare dislikes the mob, but he never forgets ordinary folk. This holds good throughout the histories; soldiers grumble; neighbours gossip; citizens debate their rulers' deeds and extend their comments into proverbs and precepts, as they do in *Richard III* (II. iii. 31-45):

1st Citizen:

Come, come, we fear the worst; all will be well.

3rd Citizen:

When clouds are seen, wise men put on their cloaks;
 When great leaves fall, then winter is at hand;
 When the sun sets, who doth not look for night?
 Untimely storms make men expect a dearth.
 All may be well; but, if God sort it so,
 'Tis more than we deserve or I expect.

2nd Citizen:

Truly the hearts of men are full of fear.
 You cannot reason almost with a man
 That looks not heavily and full of dread.

3rd Citizen:

Before the days of change still is it so;
 By a divine instinct men's minds mistrust
 Ensuing danger; as by proof we see
 The water swell before a boist'rous storm.
 But leave it all to God.

Seneca encouraged the Elizabethans to generalize by aphorism. Shakespeare's gift is to generalize not as dogmatic epigrams (Seneca's way, and Webster's, and Marston's) but as the natural wisdom of a people's living, proverbs rather than aphorisms. The difference makes for humanity.

From the theme of the public world follows that of renown, the renown of the valiant Talbot, or of his boy about whom, should he desert his father, 'The world will say he is not Talbot's son,' or of Hotspur, or Prince Hal who, should he weep for the King, would in 'every man's thought' be a hypocrite, or Hal again when, as King himself, he fights with his happy few for undying fame. This theme comes strongly forward as the Percys propound their revolt: having risen against Richard they 'live scandalized and foully spoken of' and wear the detested blot of treachery until they can redeem their honours and restore their credit. It is not that Shakespeare's characters indulge the fantasies of prestige expected in Marlowe, or Chapman, or Dryden; even a Hotspur, Othello, or Coriolanus has too much to do in the real world to be engrossed by the dreams of the Herculean hero. Yet it is integral to Shakespeare's moral power that men are measured by their fellows: by its presence, the 'half-seen world' enlarges the import of the individual act; each man must live up to its valuation. As Shakespeare's great contemporary knew, 'No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.'

My last topic is that of time and its pressures. A history play finds its life and rhythm in urgency:

The world moves
In appetancy, on its metall'd ways
Of time past and time future.

What must drama's limited plot do about this? Two things: within flux it must find an interim completeness, at least a provisional beginning, middle, and end; yet on the other hand the story must emerge from and merge into the Heraclitean flux. An impetus must be felt at the beginning, and a projection at the end; a propulsive force must flow not only during the action, but before and after it also—the commonest metaphor for time is that of the river. For this the epic offers a model. The *Iliad* begins and ends within the compass of the Trojan War; as it opens, a tidal sway of event, drawing from out the boundless deep of the past, already carries the armies to destinies determined by the ambiguous gods, and as it ends the great current runs towards the falls of Achilles, and Troy, and Agamemnon. *Beowulf* opens with a reminder of famous deeds alive in the minds of men, and closes prophetically viewing a grand and sombre doom. Shakespearean plays are

strong where most other plays are weak, in the suggestion of a surrounding world and an enveloping time, the present arising from an already charged past and leading to a momentous future. In his British Academy lecture two years ago Professor Wolfgang Clemen discoursed with subtle and brilliant distinction on this very topic—past and future in Shakespeare's drama: and in his *Commentary on Shakespeare's 'Richard III'* he points out how far Shakespeare surpasses his contemporaries in that skill whereby 'every present moment is shown to have its roots in the past and to carry within itself the seeds of the future'. Pace T. S. Eliot, who affirmed the contrary, to be conscious is to be *in* time—time before and time after. 'What's past is prologue'; the words from *The Tempest* aptly adorn the National Archives Building in Washington. It is a continuity essential for historical drama, a dynamic of onward impulse. As *2 Henry IV* begins, Morton reminds Northumberland how in the past he had foreseen the present disaster; Lord Bardolph turns from dangers anticipated hitherto to others now looming; the Archbishop's rising is announced; and the whole of this backward-and-forward-ranging time-spectrum is enveloped in Morton's reference to Richard's death at Pomfret and the Archbishop's exhibiting of his blood. 'We see which way the stream of time doth run'; the words, spoken by the Archbishop later, suggest the great undertow of the history plays.

Other categories of Shakespeare's plays share this dynamic, though the comedies less than the tragedies—it matters little what the past has been to the courtiers and lovers of Athens, Verona, and Navarre, of Arden, Messina, and Illyria, and they vanish into the thin air of a piquant but inscrutable future. The tragedies are nearer the histories; they start at points where the past has bequeathed to the present an enormous potency of consequence. But the histories are our subject. Non-Shakespearean examples differ widely in their temporal sense, in the sense, that is, that time exists, exerting an ineluctable onward pressure. Time, for Bergson, is the pressure which prevents everything from happening at once; for the dramatist, it should be the pressure which compels everything to happen in sequence, and in consequence. *Tamburlaine*, if one takes it as history, has little before it or after; the hero rises, triumphs, and falls, with the sketchiest of antecedents and (save for the memory he leaves) with no consequences. *Edward II*, thin in geographical reality, is thin likewise in its past and future; even though, as it starts, the follies of Edward and Gaveston

have angered the lords, and, as it ends, the young Edward III begins a reign which was to count as glorious, Marlowe does little to make these perspectives real. That episodic avalanche, *The Massacre at Paris*, is oddly better; it begins dynamically, already moving under urgent pressure, and it proceeds under time's stress, in violences endemic to contemporary France. Like the great Guise, the characters 'go as whirlwinds rage before a storm', with an energy belonging to the gales which blew through their century.

It is out of the question to survey all of Elizabethan drama, but a few markers may be erected. Bale's *King John*, archaic as it is, curiously succeeds in suggesting a ravaged kingdom, a widespread disorder from which the country is at last redeemed; despite its crude propaganda it has the dynamic of historical action, and Theodore Spencer's epigram—'It moves as sluggishly as a jellyfish swimming in glue'—is more funny than true. *Gorboduc* hardly counts in this regard; a legendary and shadowy past needs the Shakespeare of *Hamlet* before it can emerge into 'real' existence. The play of *Oldcastle* begins well, with a riot exploding from Lollard and anti-Lollard passions which have already caused rumour and fear, but it falls badly away. *Sir Thomas More*, on the other hand, maintains a convincing space and time; it swings powerfully into action, and as it closes, with More's imprisonment and death, it projects itself by its moral power into a future of significance. *Edward III* is ably handled; it launches confidently into the main stream of event, and it drives strongly on to its end. My final example is *Woodstock*, the play whose climax is the crime lying fatally behind the opening scenes of *Richard II*. *Woodstock* excels in the quality we are considering, action springing from a pre-existent tension. Its opening is masterly, with the hasty entrance of the endangered lords, swords drawn, on to a dark stage; torches thrust on; castle gates clanging; exclamations about poison at the interrupted banquet; shock at the King's villainy, blamed though it is on his agents; comments on Woodstock's predicament as Protector; despairing reminders of England's former greatness on land, under the Black Prince, and at sea, under Lord Admiral Arundel; and praise of the integrity of the as-yet-unseen Woodstock. This takes a hundred lines; it thrusts the play forward with an extraordinary impetus. Woodstock is murdered, Richard defeated, Tresilian captured, and the action reaches a provisional term which nevertheless bears within it the tensions of future drama. Past, present, and future are a living sequence.

Shakespeare's *King John* unfolds, as it opens, a comparable sense of time's perspectives. What seems at first a forthright national confrontation almost at once reveals ambiguous antecedents; John's succession is in question, and a web of intrigue already exists. Into the court tensions, where past deceit strains present order, there erupts the Faulconbridge diversion: this opens up provincial life and the prowess, a generation back, of Richard Coeur de Lion. The Bastard takes stock of his new honour arising from his mother's old dishonour and, in a brilliant monologue, parodies the social manners of mounting gentry and their hangers-on. The apparent straightforwardness of time and place has disclosed other dimensions, of court and country life viciously or comically egotistical, and of a past waiting to display its protean contingencies in the present. As for *Richard II*, that begins in a world as past-haunted as classical tragedy, with the 'time-honoured' prestige of Gaunt set against the reckless present, vistas of hatred and crime perceived behind the Mowbray-Hereford quarrel, the laments of Gaunt and of Woodstock's Duchess recalling the lost grandeur of Edward III's heritage. Each part of *Henry IV* starts likewise with immediate potency of action; *Henry V* springs from the enigma of the redeemed rake. Over the opening of *Henry VI* there looms the forfeited greatness of Henry V and his united kingdom. Each successive part of *Henry VI* has behind it the propulsions of its precursor, inevitably enough; what was not inevitable was the extraordinary power with which Shakespeare would generate event from event, perpetually recalling the enchainment of causes and effects which link past and future. Richard Plantagenet and Somerset quarrel in the Temple Garden, plucking the white roses and the red, looking back to the fate of Richard's father, the treacherous Cambridge of *Henry V*, and then forward to the coming Parliament, which will reinstate the Plantagenets (*Henry VI*, II. iv). As they finish, Warwick foresees the tragedy, heavy-laden from the past and terrible for the future, which for the Elizabethans was history's great warning:

This brawl today,
Grown to this faction in the Temple Garden,
Shall send between the red rose and the white
A thousand souls to death and deadly night.

But still history's unfoldings and enfoldings are not complete: the dying Mortimer, 'Nestor-like aged in an age of care,' heir to Richard II but held in lifelong prison, carries us back still

further to his youthful hopes before Shrewsbury, and forward still further again as he bequeaths to Richard the ambitions which will bring the Yorkists to the throne (*1 Henry VI*, II. v). Henry VI himself, seeking to reconcile factions by recalling his father's past conquests, at once endangers the future as he naïvely plucks a red rose (*1 Henry VI*, IV. i). Thirty years, many battles, and two plays later, seeing on Towton Field the son that has killed his father and the father his son, he mourns over the long vistas of fatality (*3 Henry VI*, II. v. 97-100):

The red rose and the white are on his face,
 The fatal colours of our striving houses:
 The one his purple blood right well resembles;
 The other his pale cheeks methinks presenteth.

The Janus of poets (though in a different sense from that of Dryden's phrase, which meant the dual aspect of virtues and faults), Shakespeare sets up his future actions while, with easy skill, simultaneously disclosing the whole relevance of the past. The finest opening in the first tetralogy, in its sense that an action already exists in time and space, is that of *Richard III*, as the arch manipulator admits us into the half-seen world beyond his visible presence. In a brief space his nature and feelings, schemes and influences, are set forth, together with the watching and counterwatching of the gullible and hypocritical world he lives in, the follies and jealousies of the King, Queen, Clarence and Hastings; and all this starts not from cold but with power already throbbing. The play's opening propels the action with an impetus, and with widespread bearings, which have already been generated.

As for the dimensions of retrospection and forecast, Professor Clemen's successive studies have defined them so well that they need no more here than a passing reference. Enfolding the present in the not-present, they broaden and deepen the attention. One need hardly stress how powerful is Shakespeare's sense of time—'his charters and his customary rights'. But certainly the here-and-now is the focus-point for very rich perspectives, for tragic or comic effect—the lost splendours of the past, the dark inheritance of the present, the long dilemmas of loyal men, the thought of 'the revolution of the times', forecasts of the stormy future—all these on the side of tragedy; while on that of comedy, Glendower's account of his birth, Falstaff's retrospect and forecast of happy anarchy, and Shallow's elated reminiscences and expectations—these evince,

in Maurice Morgann's phrase, 'that certain roundness and integrity in the forms of Shakespeare which gives them an independence as well as a relation'. One minor but moving quality in the multiple rendering of time occurs when, with a viewpoint projected into the future, the present is conceived retrospectively. By this kind of double vision Clifford tries shaming Henry VI into courage (3 *Henry VI*, II. ii. 34-8):

Were it not pity that this goodly boy
Should lose his birthright by his father's fault,
And long hereafter say unto his child,
'What my great-grandfather and grandsire got
My careless father fondly gave away'?

Richard II, bidding his Queen farewell, casts himself as a figure of antique melancholy (*Richard II*, V. i. 40-5):

In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire,
With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
Of woeful ages long ago betid;
And, ere thou bid good-night, to quit their griefs
Tell thou the lamentable tale of me,
And send the hearers weeping to their beds.

And Henry V foresees a future cherishing the memories of Agincourt (*Henry V*, IV. iii. 56-9):

This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered.

This is an occasional device only; yet, when it occurs, with a natural and Virgilian poignancy it images beyond the current scene a time when the present will have become a haunting shadow, whether for remorse, regret, or rejoicing.

I have hardly grasped my protean subject. The prospects Shakespeare offers, his myriad-minded instinct for time and place as manifolds, cannot be exhausted or fully defined. Coleridge perceived in Shakespeare, to a peculiar degree, 'the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others, and by a sort of fusion to force many into one'; this power is imagination. But—and here we return to our point of departure, Coleridge's comment on centre and circumference—besides seeing the many as one, Shakespeare sees the many beyond, before and after the one. If no tidy discourse has resulted from this evening's speculations, let me take refuge in

Maurice Morgann's excuse when his curiosity over Falstaff's 'cowardice' had resulted in a wide and wandering excursion. The proffered topic, Morgann disarmingly explains as he prefaces his *Essay upon the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*,

is truly no otherwise the object than some old fantastic Oak, or picturesque Rock, may be the object of a morning's ride; yet being proposed as such, may serve to limit the distance, and shape the course: The real object is Exercise, and the Delight which a rich, beautiful, picturesque, and perhaps unknown Country may excite from every side.