

SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGIC FICTION

By CLIFFORD LEECH

Read 2 May 1973

MEMORY and dream: these are the things by which as sentient and intellectual beings we mainly live. They are never totally distinct from one another. Memory was the mother of all the Muses, not merely of Clio. Whatever form history takes—whether the 'straight' history of the historiographer or the dramatized history which Shakespeare wrote so often or the epic panorama loosely based on remembered or half-remembered events—the modifying element is the dream, the imagining of how things might have been, the fulfilment of a wish we sometimes hardly recognize. And dream itself is of course conditioned by our memories, both those of our personal life and those that we possess through belonging to a cultural group with its own store of public events which constitute the group's collective past. I am not referring here to a 'collective unconscious': all that we need to think of comprises the things that we as a group consciously know or in some measure accept. 'So have I heard, and do in part believe it,' said Horatio in the first scene of *Hamlet*, referring to the belief that evil spirits could not perform their function in the time of Advent. When we in part believe some fragment of legend, the thing becomes part of our collective memory. Moreover, when we are tired and increasingly when we are old, it is sometimes truly difficult to distinguish between memory and dream. 'Did that actually happen or was it something that I dreamed or imagined last night?' Eliot refers to 'memory and desire' in the first part of *The Waste Land*. Though I use the term 'dream', I think that the reference is basically to the same thing. With the passing of the years, we grow it seems increasingly apt to play variations on what we recognize to have been 'actual'. How often do people who are dead come into our dreams and play parts there which did not belong to them when they were alive, though I think the new parts we imagine are congruent with our memories of the persons. In the last few sentences I have been using 'dream' in its commonest sense—what we imagine when we are asleep—but I am also hinting that the day-dream, or any imagining of a story, differs from the sleeping dream only in so far as the

desire for this kind of dream is a more nearly conscious one. It will be similarly dependent on memories, which will be similarly modified by desire. Dreams may be frightening, but that is something we may have a need or a desire for.

It may or may not be apparent that I am working towards a discussion of the co-existence of tragedy and the history play in Shakespeare's theatre. There was a distinction there that the Greeks hardly knew. They had their history-writings in prose, but even those had something of a mythic quality. And in the drama the world of legend and the world of past fact were not felt to be wholly distinguishable. Aeschylus could write of the Persian invasion and of the story of Prometheus. Doubtless the Hellenes did not respond in quite the same way to the two subjects: a little more suspension of disbelief was required in the case of Prometheus. But when they saw on their stages the stories of Argos and Thebes, they would have no full sense of fiction. Even so, the legends existed in more than one shape, and Euripides could bring Iphigeneia back to life. Moreover, Aristotle tells us that dramatists did sometimes use purely invented stories, which many of the audience must have recognized as such. Nevertheless, in the highly ritualized mode of the Greek stages, even fiction must have taken to itself something of the authority of a remembered past. Yet, as we shall see, fiction did not merely masquerade as history. For the dramatist's purpose it transcended history, having a completeness that history can never achieve and also a freedom from over-great particularity. Even when a dramatist chose a truly historical subject, it was treated with a bareness very remote from the manner of the historiographer. It will be remembered that Aristotle called poetry a more serious and philosophical kind of writing than history. Certainly, on its higher levels, it is the more ambitious kind.

A difference from the Elizabethan–Jacobean situation stems from the English dramatists' free use of the chronicles and ancient history on the one hand and of the ever-increasing body of prose and verse fiction on the other. Not that the Elizabethans always saw the distinction. We can remember that, when in 1598 Francis Meres praised Shakespeare as rivalling Plautus and Terence in comedy and Seneca in tragedy, he added a list of six comedies and six tragedies as representing the playwright's achievement. Doubtless he wanted symmetry, and was prepared to force things a little to achieve it. So he included in his list of tragedies the plays on English historical themes, even *Henry IV*. We can remember too that a decade later *King Lear* and *Troilus*

and *Cressida* were called 'histories' on their title-pages. Yet the notion of a separate genre called 'history' did exist, though it was held fleetingly in the mind. It was given lasting currency only, I think, in the First Folio's tripartite arrangement of Shakespeare's plays into comedies, histories, tragedies—and that may have come about only through the sponsors' wish to avoid the ridicule that had descended upon Jonson through his use of the term 'Works' in his own Folio of 1616.

But let us look at the time when tragedy, as an accomplished thing, made its appearance in the public theatres. And this means, of course, Marlowe and Kyd. Leaving aside *Dido*, as a private-theatre play, very possibly written while Marlowe was still at Cambridge and in any event, I think, not tragic in tone, we find ourselves confronted with *Tamburlaine*, almost certainly first acted in 1587. The conqueror was a historical figure: his name would be fairly well known. Persia, Anatolia, Damascus, Egypt, Babylon are among its localities—all names with an aura of the historic about them. But Marlowe did not scruple to stretch and embellish history, making use of the Battle of Varna, which had a post-Tamburlaine date, and a story from *Orlando Furioso*. He can dream as much, almost, as he will, for his audience as a whole will only barely know the history. In the rest of his plays he used fairly 'straight' history in *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris*, an almost purely invented story in *The Jew of Malta*, a sixteenth-century legend in *Faustus*. Now, I do not doubt that many of the spectators believed in the historical existence of *Faustus*; I am equally sure that Marlowe himself did not believe he was giving a historically accurate portrait of a man who actually lived; and indeed the central figure is imagined in such a way as to dissociate him from actuality. There is a notable contrast here with Nathaniel Woodes' *The Conflict of Conscience*, whose connection with *Faustus* has so often been pointed out. Woodes did believe he was faithfully representing the life, sin, remorse, damnation (or, in the later version, salvation) of Francisco Spiera. Marlowe thus shows us, at the beginning of Elizabethan tragedy, the veering between the presentation of historical fact and the dream. And *The Spanish Tragedy*, although drawing on historical reference in the matter of John of Gaunt's triumph in Spain, has a story with an as yet untraced source. Even if it is not basically a pure invention, we can fairly safely say that Kyd's audience would not have recognized it as having historical warrant. Nevertheless, the distinction was still frail: for many the play may have had the historical 'ring'.

Tamburlaine was imitated in a group of plays with Islamic settings in the years that immediately followed. They were not of the first rank: they tried to emulate Marlowe's grand scenic remoteness without achieving the complex and objective attitude that characterized his work in general. Then Shakespeare wrote two tragedies, *Titus* and *Romeo and Juliet*, one using a story either invented or dependent upon a lost predecessor of the eighteenth-century chapbook that gives us more or less the same events, the other using Arthur Brooke's poem *Romeus and Juliet*. It is true that the story of the lovers has a legendary status, for apparently people will show you their tomb in Verona today. But in neither case was Shakespeare tied to a source: he could do what he wished with the *Titus* story, and, apart from the main outline of the lovers' lives and deaths, he felt entirely free to introduce new characters (Mercutio being virtually his own creation) and to give his own colouring to the locale and to the lovers' personalities. In his first two tragedies, then, Shakespeare stood largely apart from the collective memory of his audience, dreaming as he would. Yet apparently this did not satisfy him. Before writing *Romeo and Juliet* he had begun on the series of plays on English historical themes, and I believe that *Titus* antedated them. He was not to return to tragedy until *Hamlet*. Certainly *Richard III* and *Richard II* have tragic elements in them, as had the *Henry VI* plays. But in these he was dependent on the notion of a continuing story, leading up to the present moment. As Peter Alexander pointed out, the basic thing that distinguished his histories from his tragedies is that the histories always point to a continuation beyond the end of the play, while in the tragedies—though the future may be adumbrated, as with Fortinbras in Elsinore, Albany in Britain, Malcolm in Scotland, Cassio in Cyprus (a particularly muted example this)—the stress at the end is on the loss. Not the 'waste', for the heroes have lived to fortify us all. Who cares about Elsinore or Britain or Scotland or Cyprus when the men we have truly cared about are dead? For Shakespeare in the last decade of the sixteenth century the idea of linking plays together was important, as it was to be with Dryden when he followed his and Howard's *The Indian Queen* with *The Indian Emperor* and found himself in difficulty because he had killed off so many characters in the first play. I think Shakespeare's model existed in the two Parts of *Tamburlaine*. But we can hardly imagine a sequel to any one of the plays that Bradley has fixed in our minds as the four major tragedies of Shakespeare.

So English tragedy started brilliantly with Marlowe, and his use of history in *Edward II* did not preclude a sense of the tragic. There were also included in its beginnings Kyd's bravura-piece and two early essays by Shakespeare. But then for a time it stopped. What tragedy in English exists between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*? Doubtless some insignificant examples have been lost, but such as we have are indeed nugatory. Partly, doubtless, it was due to the dearth of dramatists. The 'University Wits' were dead, and Shakespeare was holding his fire as far as tragedy was concerned. Surely *Romeo and Juliet* did not satisfy him. He had moved his audience with the lovers' tale, but had imposed a moral upon it. The families came to see the light, and in repentance proposed to erect those two golden statues. Golden? When Romeo had spoken so harshly of gold in the first scene of Act V? The grief went beyond atonement, yet atonement there was to be. We may be reminded of the end of Graham Greene's *The Living Room*, where the suicide of the girl shocks the two elderly ladies out of their habit of not living in a room where someone has died. We ask: 'Is this truly enough to reconcile us to a girl's death?' I suspect that Shakespeare felt he had not yet coped with the problem of the irremediable ill, had not faced the stark fact of the tragic. Yet with his medieval and early Renaissance heritage it was not easy to do so.

So for the time being he stayed with the history, giving all the time an occasional glimpse of the tragic, and concluding his great set of English history plays with *Henry V*. What then, he had to ask himself? He had linked up the earlier years of the Lancastrians with the Wars of the Roses and the disastrous Yorkist king Richard III (as Tudor propaganda saw him). He had reminded his audience in the epilogue to *Henry V* that they had welcomed the *Henry VI* plays earlier, thus forging a link between the two series. He was a practising dramatist, a necessary contributor to his company's welfare. Now he had to find something new. So it was first of all to another kind of history that he turned. Plutarch, like Holinshed, was available, and what subject could there be more manifest than that moment when the Roman republic was about to transform itself into the Empire, the moment of the assassination of Julius Caesar, with its immediate consequences? One of the regular debating points in discussion of this play is the identification of the hero. But who is the 'hero' of any of Shakespeare's history plays on English themes? Tillyard, we should remember, said the true hero of these plays was 'England' or 'Respublica'. Well, that perhaps

is forcing things a bit: the idea of England does serve as a unifying motif, but to call it the 'hero' seems to stretch the term.

But, of course, tragedy does not necessarily require a single hero. If we made that demand, we could hardly find *The Trojan Women* the great play that it surely is. But there we can say that the tragic burden is shared by several women in the same situation. Brutus, Cassius, Antony, Caesar face quite different situations, as do Richard II and Bolingbroke, Richard III and Clarence and Richmond. We must be content to recognize that Brutus does not really occupy the hero's part. We have rather the display of a considerable number of important characters who jostle with one another and make the search for a hero a matter of little moment. Moreover, at the end of *Julius Caesar* we are warned of growing strife between Antony and Octavius, just as we are invited to look for a sequel in the endings of Shakespeare's plays on English historical themes.

But he did not immediately go on to write a sequel to *Julius Caesar*. That was to come only about seven or eight years later, and was then to be a very different sort of play. For the time being Roman history implied bonds, as English history had done. So he turned to the quite legendary story of Hamlet. Doubtless he looked at, or remembered, an old lost play; certainly he had at his disposal the tale told by Belleforest in *Histoires tragiques*. But even if some of his audience had seen the old play, it had none of the authority of 'history', 'memory'. This could be a 'dream' indeed. I strongly suspect that he spent several years on the play's composition, pouring into it all the concerns that had been for long occupying his mind—not merely the theme of revenge, famous since Kyd, but the question of suicide, the question of madness, the question of the relations between father and mother and son, the question indeed of the nature of play-acting itself. The engagement with dream made him free to bring anything in.

And he went on dreaming in the plays that followed. He picked up a fictional story about a Moor, and wrote *Othello* in his own way. For *King Lear* he used not only an old play and the Chronicles but many another version of the Lear-story: it was a story so often told, and yet so remote, that it involved no compulsion to follow a set line. It must have given him much the same sense of freedom, and for much the same reasons, as he had experienced when giving us his version of the Trojan story in *Troilus and Cressida*. He could even make substantial use of the story of the Paphlagonian king in the *Arcadia*, as Marlowe had

made incidental use of a story from Ariosto in the Second Part of *Tamburlaine*. He used the Chronicles again for *Macbeth*, but again he was aware that his audience would have small knowledge of them on this subject: so he could conflate the stories of King Macbeth and King Duff and thus present a story of almost wholly his own imagining.

There is indeed great freedom in these four plays, and the tragic dramatist needs freedom. What he ultimately aims at is not truth to memory but the truth of the dream which grows out of memory. He knows in his heart of heart that a past actuality does not exist unless it is freshly imagined.

And yet he came to a point where he apparently thought he could not go on in this freedom. This, I believe, was caused by Macbeth's arrival at the belief that all life was 'a tale told by an idiot, Signifying nothing'. Not that Shakespeare endorsed it, not that Macbeth lives wholly according to it. If Macbeth had accepted the logic of his utterance, he would not have hesitated to play the 'Roman fool', would not have hesitated to shed Macduff's blood after killing his wife and children. But who among us firmly endorses anything? We 'do in part believe' in what we say. Shakespeare had imagined, and deeply sympathized with, the man who had briefly, consummately, expressed the nihilistic version. So this, I think, was another turning-point for Shakespeare. He dared not go on with the 'dream' in its purest sense: he needed 'memory' to rely on, to lay down the tracks, to keep him going. What could be more expected, what more proper, than that he should turn back in history, not to the English history that he had temporarily exhausted, but to the Roman history that he had already used in *Julius Caesar*, where he had indeed indicated the possibility of a sequel? So to *Antony and Cleopatra* and to *Coriolanus*. He was faithful to history, here, but we may well ask why he chose the story of *Coriolanus*. It was a refuge, of course, as *Antony and Cleopatra* was. That play gave him the final episode in the story which told how the Second Triumvirate led to the Empire, an almost irresistible story—not only for its historical importance for Europe but for the two characters named in its title. But why follow up this grand story with the comparatively obscure story of *Coriolanus*? Partly, of course, because it *was* obscure: he felt in some measure free again, though with the backing of history to keep his hand steady. In reading Plutarch's life of Antony, he read how Antony after Actium retired to a place which reminded him of Timon's story. This would have led to a consideration of

Alcibiades, who is mentioned in Plutarch's account of this episode, and this would have turned his mind to the life of Alcibiades, which is the parallel life to that of Coriolanus in Plutarch. He altered the story of Alcibiades in *Timon of Athens* to bring him back to Athens victoriously, which is not in Plutarch. So a nice contrast is made between Alcibiades' triumphant conquest of Athens and Coriolanus' withdrawal from Rome.

These plays are hardly to be understood without a recognition that in his later years Shakespeare was preoccupied, to a large extent, with the problem of the Governor. 'Who is fit to rule?' 'Who, if he is fit, can take possession?' Not Coriolanus but Alcibiades, imperfect as he is. In the later plays Cymbeline is the dotard who has to rely on the working out of events. Leontes has to submit to Apollo. Prospero has to realize the need to give up his magic power: he cannot through that affect the human heart, and it is only his ducal robes that constitute a truly effective threat on Caliban. Alas for magic. Yet for Shakespeare to explore this matter it would not do simply to present stories of historically faulty governors, providing in dramatic form a new 'Mirror for Magistrates'. Rich as history was in *exempla*, Shakespeare wanted at this time a wider scope, a freedom to explore the world of legend, the world of pure fiction, as in *The Tempest*: Leontes the god-punished man, Prospero the magician who was more the authoritative figure in his ducal than in his magician's robes. In the end, therefore, Shakespeare found his way back to fiction, though not quite to tragedy—for these last plays do not bring us up against the stark fact in the way that his tragedies do.

What has been said above may make us believe that *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens* were written close together, as Sir Edmund Chambers believed, though most scholars do not.

Thus a difference establishes itself between Bradley's group of four 'major' tragedies and the plays on Roman and Hellenistic themes within which the four are framed, and also between the English histories of the 1590s and the tragedies that followed. A similar distinction shows itself between the Roman plays and those with Greek or Hellenistic settings. It is often overlooked how frequently Shakespeare shows a preoccupation with Hellas and its colonies. Near the very beginning of his career he set *The Comedy of Errors* in Ephesus; he used the Athens of Theseus as a nominal setting for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; he wrote *Troilus and Cressida* about the time of *Hamlet*, which also was, at least incidentally, concerned with Priam's city, and *Timon of Athens*

at some later point (whatever date we assign to it, it was a play that must for a time have deeply engaged his attention); then in his last years there were *Pericles* (again using Ephesus along with many other places in the eastern Mediterranean), *The Winter's Tale* (set largely in Sicilia where recourse was made to Apollo), and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (where once again the Athens of Theseus is at the heart of the matter). The contrast between *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* on the one hand and *The Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on the other emphasizes the extraordinary diversity of these 'Greek' plays. Certainly the Roman plays are not all of a piece, but Plutarch provided the basis for all but one of them. There is a sufficient similarity between them for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1972 to have acted all the four in a single season and to have declared, though with some straining, that together they give a picture of the rise, achievement, and decline of the Roman state. No one could suggest that the plays with Greek or Hellenistic settings have any common thematic pattern, despite the curious recurrences just noted. The reason of course is obvious. Rome was a thoroughly familiar concept for the Elizabethans and Jacobean, and Latin had till recently been the language of the English church. Rome was part of the air they breathed, and, whatever happened in church services, its language remained the main subject of study in the grammar schools. Its literature provided them with a model which they could strive to emulate and with at times an ethical theory and a method of rhetorical persuasion which demanded homage. The world that included or stemmed from Hellas was, on the other hand, necessarily a vaguer thing. Few of the contemporaries of Shakespeare knew the language. No one could visit Greece itself, and even Sicily was remote. Hence in this world Shakespeare and his contemporaries were free to dream, drawing on only a vague sense of what that world was like: let us think of the Hellas of *The Humorous Lieutenant* or of *The Broken Heart*. There remained a sense of magic: Theseus and Hector and Helen, for example, were names to conjure with, and so, resoundingly, was Troy. The English, after all, had a special concern with the Trojans from whom they claimed, though doubtless now not quite believing in it, their descent. Even so, they were almost wholly free of history when their minds roved to the world of Greece. That world still had authority, but it made even less demands on a sense of fact than the story of Arthur. Who among them would dare to set a farcical comedy in Arthur's court? Romance with a comic

admixture, as in *The Birth of Merlin*, but not an Arthurian parallel to *The Comedy of Errors*, not a frank stress on plebeian goings-on in the environment of Arthur and Guinevere and Lancelot. So, recurrently through his career, Shakespeare found in his 'Greek' plays a freedom from fully remembering. 'Greece' was a world to dream about, a proper world for almost total fiction.

Still, not quite that: the Elizabethans had their *idées reçues* about the Greeks, and they were not always favourable. Professor Terence Spencer has drawn our attention to the fact that it has been largely the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that have made Athens our special divinity among places. For the Elizabethans, though I guess rather less for the Jacobean, Greeks tended to be 'Merrygreek', sharp-minded men on the make. We have to reserve judgement a little. Helen was still the most beautiful of all women, Achilles the most valiant warrior, Hector one of the Nine Worthies. But, just as there was a medieval legend that Aeneas betrayed his city, so Helen could be spoken of abusively. The very feeling of separateness from all these characters could make the writer free to think what he liked of the men of Greece and Troy. Challenged, he might acknowledge remorse; unchallenged, he could say what he liked.

Can tragedy ever get away from the dream, even when history is in some measure behind it? Let us consider Ibsen for a few moments. When he first envisaged *Brand*, he planned it as an epic poem. Some thirty-five pages of this version (all, apparently, that he wrote) are included in the Oxford *Ibsen*. And that would not quite do. The idea of the epic is so powerfully embodied in the sense of the past that a historical or legendary hero and setting seem demanded: one just cannot, in the last two centuries, invent an epic hero. Sir Maurice Bowra has shown us that the Soviet Union has been able to write heroically about figures of the recent past. One gathers a certain straining; there is nevertheless a sense of historical warrant; and there is the opportunity of geographical vastness still, not any longer applicable to the 'heroes' of the American west, where these days we go to lecture and are entertained in the most urbane fashion. But it has been demonstrated many times in recent years that a kind of modern tragedy is possible with an invented hero, a setting contemporary or not very remote. There does not seem to be much historical warrant for Kleist's *The Prince of Homburg*, which recently has come back notably to the stages of Germany, both in its original form and as an opera. The play is surely at least as dependent on Calderón's *Life's a Dream* as on any

memory of the Elector's Brandenburg or of Frederick the Great's Prussia. On the other hand, Büchner's *Danton's Death* is indeed dependent on history, but treats it with a measure of freedom, of imagining, that gives it high authority.

Ibsen broke even freer than either of these dramatists, who nevertheless, I believe, gave us the proper beginnings of modern tragedy. He did not in his major plays draw on history. He invented the stories of Rosmer, of John Gabriel Borkman, and indeed of all the figures from Brand onwards, apart from his unfortunate and prolonged excursion into the story of Julian. We have come, it appears, largely to rely on dream for our sense of the tragic, whether Hamlet's or Borkman's or that of the Paycock's wife in O'Casey. The point may be that the climactic moment can be more easily achieved through fiction. Life is generally a bit of a muddle: fiction can rescue it, giving an 'ending', such as Aristotle rightly demanded. Borkman, imprisoned by his own will for so long after his official imprisonment is over, goes out to die on the hill, in the snow. Juno goes out with her daughter to face who knows what. Yet history does sometimes help us here. Even with Danton's death, we know that Robespierre's execution and Napoleon's Consulate will follow: the true ending here is the end of the Terror, the descent into nothingness, or into memory, of the Revolution's blind hope.

For there is no 'beyond' for tragedy, and the concept of the ultimate remains a question mark. It stops at the point where the two sisters meet over Borkman's body, where the two women in O'Casey go out together (leaving the two men to talk their drunken nonsense), where Billy Budd is hanged. Melville's story presents an innocent hero who dies because he is so innocent. Captain Vere, anguished as we all must be by the sense of the tragic moment, says of Claggart: 'Struck dead by an angel of God, but the angel must hang.' Aristotle was surely wrong in declaring that tragedy could not have a wholly good hero. Bradley was surely right in declaring, in that splendid first lecture in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, that tragedy presents a mystery: so there is no finality, no real suggestion of the *effect* of the tragic events, only the sense that time and our imagining must for a while have a stop.

Tragedy indeed has to say 'this phase is over', but we all know that in history, or for that matter in the history of literature, every age is an age of transition. Even such demarcation-points, as they seemed at the time, as 1792 and 1917 and 1945, seem in

retrospect to be little more than part of the flux. But tragedy demands its sense of ending, and therefore can rely only minimally on history. But only a 'sense' of ending, not the thing itself. When Stanley Kubrick in *Dr. Strangelove* gave us the nuclear end, he deliberately made us laugh at the idea. Science fiction sometimes brings us to the same point, just as the medieval cycle-plays often took us to the Last Judgement. That was not possible for Shakespeare or for his Jacobean contemporaries, even if they had wished: they had neither come to love the bomb nor had the possibility of presenting on their stage the total Christian story. So their tragedy had to be finally dependent on dream (the experience which customarily breaks off at the moment of intolerable anguish) despite the intricate relationship between it and memory in so many of the tragic plays of the time.

We may note that tragedy, as we see it on stage, frequently presents its action in an off-centre way, inviting us to think of fiction. In *Julius Caesar*, not, as we have seen, fully tragic, we do certainly see the murder of Caesar, the deaths of Brutus and Cassius, but we do not see Caesar refusing the 'coronet': we merely hear the shouts of the crowd while Brutus and Cassius talk. We do not see the murder of Duncan, and it is all the more effective for that. But these off-centre matters can involve less than murder. We may note that, despite the practices of modern directors, rape is never presented directly on the Elizabethan-Jacobean stage. In Ibsen's quite strongly political play *Rosmersholm* the political events are always off-stage: on the stage we are enabled to see only the private and fictional repercussions. The Greeks of course did not allow violence at any time to be visually presented: only its foreshadowings and its results. After all, their theatre was a temple, as so splendidly demonstrated in Mary Renault's novel *The Mask of Apollo*. Shakespeare, however, could use a similar reticence with his murder of Duncan, his murder of Macbeth. He was not always so reticent, but he often knew the advantage of being so. In Grigori Kozintsev's supremely good film of *King Lear* we see Cordelia hanging, and this was surely a mistake: a hanging person in actuality presents a much more shocking sight than Kozintsev could offer us at this moment. The most dreadful things are to be dreamed of, must exist only in our mind's eye, where indeed they will be most powerful. Of course, the film, much more than the stage, customarily demands that we see everything. But sometimes the director should refrain from conforming to the usual demands of his medium. I say this while agreeing with Professor Kenneth

Muir, in his account of the World Shakespeare Congress published in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, that Kozintsev's film is the best Shakespeare film yet made. Still, we should often be invited to dream, not to see, for seeing becomes part of history. There are some things we should not see even on the stage.

For another reason was fiction necessary for the Jacobean. The men of that time had inherited from the Elizabethans the idea that history had lessons to teach us. The Marxists believe that history is on their side, though Marx himself said: 'History does repeat itself: the first time it is tragedy, the second time farce.' But tragedy is concerned neither with lessons nor with optimism nor, except in the wryest sense, with laughter. Shelley in his preface to *The Cenci* put this perhaps as well as anyone has done:

There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching of the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: the few whom such an exhibition would have interested, could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them.

Of course tragedy has no moral purpose: we should all long ago have outgrown the doctrine of *catharsis*. It is concerned, however, with showing the human heart. Shelley is also of course right in recognizing the need to have a group-response, in some measure, in the theatre: we have to feel at one with a large part of the audience present with us if the full tragic effect is to be ensured. And the audience as a whole must feel free to move away from the particular historical fact, into perhaps the world of legend, into history freely manipulated, into perhaps the world of pure fiction, so that it may have a sense of operative 'truth' yet is not tied to the world of particularities. It can use history, as indeed Shelley did in *The Cenci* or Büchner in *Danton's Death*, but there

too a sense of transcendence must emerge. The figures must not be merely historical figures: they must be ourselves as we dream we might be. How else could Danton, as Büchner imagines him, be the major figure that haunts our minds? Beatrice is imperfect: how simply admirable she would have been if she had spared her beloved step-mother and her brother the torture that broke them! Indeed tragedy tells about the human heart, in Shelley's case with particular reference to the need to keep the family's pride going—as comedy in its frequently more savage way does too. But I think Shelley is wrong in thinking that a totally good person cannot be tragic. Certainly Aristotle said what Shelley said: but there is Cordelia, there is Billy Budd.

Neither tragedy nor comedy preaches. Does even *The Way of the World* give us a proper idea of how a wooing should be conducted? It may suitably surprise you that I recently encountered an undergraduate who thought that *The Country Wife* ended unsatisfactorily because Horner's adulteries were not punished. A dramatist need not endorse his characters' behaviour: he just sees it in relation to their environment and their natural share of human imperfection. In the passage I have quoted Shelley makes it clear that he does not endorse Beatrice's conduct. She is splendid but flawed in the fashion of tragic protagonists in general—though, I have suggested, not universally. When we look for the exception, we have to look for fiction. In some sense Beatrice is a historical character, as Webster's Duchess and Shakespeare's Macbeth were. But almost no one would know about these if dramatists had not used their stories for tragedies. It is difficult not to read lessons into history, however misguided the attempt, yet we are comparatively free from the 'lesson' if the story is truly remote or manifestly fictional.

Yet we are never fully apart from 'history', whether personal or shared. Proust used to shock me a little when in *Le Temps retrouvé* he suggested the consolations of a mere remembering. Not, of course, that it was 'merely' remembering: all the time he was dreaming too. But, could it, I asked, be any sort of satisfaction to call back certain memories, to call back all the 'jeunes filles en fleur', Albertine's death, the dreadfulness and squalor that waited for Baron de Charlus? Now in the comparative idleness of my later years I come closer to Proust, though of course lacking his industry, his creativeness. To remember—and of course we nearly always remember imperfectly, creatively, fictionally, as in dreams—is to get some mastery of the past. Even the bitterest moment, in coming on us again, is ours and therefore

in some measure endurable. Dream, on the other hand, can be truly terrifying—which is perhaps why we try to shape it into art.

I have mentioned above that Shakespeare turned from his freest, most fictional tragedy to Roman history—and, I think, about this time, to the *Timon* story that Plutarch's *Life of Antonius* had led him to—and that afterwards he found his final way in the remote stories of *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *Leontes and Hermione*, *Prospero*, and *Palamon and Arcite*. Gower and Chaucer or his old enemy Robert Greene could give him a sort of hint. These last plays were not tragedies, but the tragic element, though shrugged off in almost John Fletcher's way, was there—and not so easily shrugged off as it was in the Fletcher canon. 'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine' is what Prospero ultimately comes to. He looks afresh at the evil and knows he cannot separate himself from it, as he has tried so hard to do. One thing that does not seem to have been sufficiently commented on is that Prospero's abandonment of magic is the result of a sense of its inadequacy. He can frighten Alonso and the rest, he can terrify Caliban and Stephano and Trinculo, but the human heart, as we have seen, is not in his possession. Alonso seems to repent because he thinks his son is dead. Antonio and Sebastian are as hard of heart at the end as at the beginning. Caliban does indeed decide to 'sue for grace'. But this is not because Prospero's spirits, in dog-shape, have pursued him: he had had torments of the same sort long before. Prospero the duke awes him far more than Prospero the magician:

How fine my master is! I am afraid
He will chastise me.

Yet these so much more magical robes will not be Prospero's for long: in Milan every third thought will be his grave. Even so, they are as much part of the dream as his magic was, as Shakespeare's frequent use of the word 'dream' indicates. There are more than two pages in Bartlett's *Concordance* recording occurrences of 'dream' or its related forms. Everyone knows Duke Vincentio's

Thou hast nor youth nor age,
But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep,
Dreaming on both;

and of course Prospero's assertion that

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

So our life is a dream within the compass of a sleep within which we may also dream. Who knows what we may dream afterwards? But the idea takes us on to the beginning and end of Calderón's *Life's a Dream* and of Kleist's *The Prince of Homburg*.

Dream is always how we live. We live fiction, dependent as we have seen in some measure on remembering. For we have to ask how reliable is our memory, how reliable is 'history'?

So, always, remembering and dreaming. As I write the final words of this lecture, I have just returned from seeing Ingmar Bergman's film *Cries and Whispers*. It ends, as you probably know, with the dead girl, accompanied by her two sisters and the servant, in the swing-seat, with her thinking that this at last is happiness, though she may never know it again. She is making fiction for herself, as we all must do when we claim that this moment is good. So it was when Lear and Cordelia met again, when Othello and Desdemona met on Cyprus:

If it were now to die
'Twere now to be most happy; for I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate . . .

or when Antony found Cleopatra buckling on his armour (so remote as that was from Macbeth's isolation when that tragic hero, recently in Shakespeare's mind, had no one to help him before his last battle). The best things are things fictional, things dreamed of, imagined, even when we pretend to ourselves that these things are happening 'now', even when we are using historical sources. What better marriage than that between Hotspur and Kate? History gave Shakespeare nothing for that.

Fiction is our supreme achievement. It is the only way in which our imagination can lead us towards truth. We have indeed what we have come to call the 'moment of truth', a term that the bull-ring has given us. There is the moment of birth, for mother and infant, the moment of orgasm, the moment when we feel death as imminent (which may come more than once before we die), the moment of the avowal of love, the moment of triumph (in whatever small field), but to a continuing consciousness these things are subsumed within the flux where we have memory and dream: memory always modified by dream, dream always conditioned by memory.