CHATTERTON LECTURE ON POETRY

THE BRAVERY OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

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When I doe count the clock that tels the time,
And see the braue day sunck in hidious night,
When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls or siluer'd ore with white:
When lofty trees I see barren of leaues,
Which erst from heat did canopie the herd
And Sommers greene all girded vp in sheaues
Borne on the beare with white and bristly beard:
Then of thy beauty do I question make
That thou among the wastes of time must goe,
Since sweets and beauties do them-selues forsake,
And die as fast as they see others grow,
  And nothing gainst Times sieth can make defence
  Saue breed to braue him, when he takes thee hence.[1]

THE verb 'braue' in the last line of this sonnet has much to bear. It is ballasted and enabled to take the strain by the acoustic distribution of the line: 'Saue breed' moves to 'braue' and seems almost to spawn it since 'braue' unites features of both these preceding words. The vowel of 'braue'—a more open sound in Shakespeare's pronunciation than in ours—is echoed in the sound of the verb that threatens it: 'takes'. The vowels of the following 'thee' match those of 'breed'. The audible symmetry of the line suggests opponents that are fairly matched, though the distribution of stress—the line ends in three stressed syllables, 'takes thee hence'—makes us feel the full force of the threat. The verb 'braue' which has to counter this threat derives much of its strength from earlier in the sonnet. In using 'braue' first as an adjective—'braue day'—and then as a verb—'breed to braue'—Shakespeare is

[1] I am following the spelling and punctuation of the 1609 Quarto of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

using the rhetorical figure of *antanaclasis*: using the same word in a different or contrary sense.[1] It is a figure which forces the reader or listener to discover meaning, prizing from the single sound two meanings that are distinct. But inevitably the two uses of 'braue' are mutually informing. To some extent Shakespeare's sonnets suggest themselves as a closed system in which meanings are internally defined. Meanings accrue and distinctions emerge within the context of surrounding sonnets and even, to some extent, within the confines of individual sonnets.

Since the modern sense of *brave* as 'courageous', though perhaps present, does not seem to be primary here, the word seeks some contextual definition. The sonnet suggests that 'bravery' is a visible quality since the 'braue day' is 'seen'. In the second line both acoustics and semantics suggest a connection between 'bravery' and 'brightness'. 'Bright' is not far away from this line: it shares the initial consonants of 'braue' and it rhymes with 'night' which opposes the 'braue day'. The word 'sunck' is strongly emotive. It occurs in sonnet 2: 'Then being askt, where all thy beautie lies, / Where all the treasure of thy lusty daies; / To say within thine owne deepe sunken eyes, / Were an all-eating shame, and thriftlesse praise.' The recurrence of 'sunck' in sonnet 12 draws upon this already-established connection. The 'braue day sunck in hidious night' suggests bright eyes sunk in their sockets and establishes, as early as the sonnet's second line, a connection between the passing of human beauty and other kinds of passage. The whole sonnet evokes the participation of human life in other natural processes: the 'barren' trees, the bearded grass, the hay-cart seen as a bier since all flesh is grass. The mutually applicable terminology—the careful formality of 'canopie' is another example—creates a sense of collaboration between all the threatened beauties catalogued here. The 'braue day' is 'seen' and, in its light, the following beauties are also seen: 'When I *behold* the violet', 'When lofty trees *I see*'. These, with all their colours—violet, sable, silver, white, and green, expand upon and become part of the initially generalized concept of 'the braue day', anchoring it with specific detail. This, I think, contributes to the way in which the verb 'braue' is able to take so much weight in the final line. The verb carries the force of all these instances of process which inhabit the initial 'braue day': these instances make the effort suggested by the verb seem 'natural'.

If we step outside the little room of the sonnet to look at other

[1] Stephen Booth discusses Shakespeare's use of this figure in *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven, 1969), pp. 90–6.

contemporary uses of *brave* and its cognates, the word begins to sound like a Renaissance version of the serviceable *nice* to which Jane Austen's Henry Tilney so vigorously objected and which has qualified a lot of nice nouns with less than nice exactitude since then. The lovesick Rosalind changes the subject: 'what talk we of fathers, when there is such a man as Orlando?' Celia mockingly humours her: 'O, that's a brave man! he writes brave verses, speaks brave words, swears brave oaths, and breaks them bravely, . . . all's brave that youth mounts and folly guides' (*As You Like It*, III. iv. 38–46[1]). In Shakespeare's history plays *brave* connects its bearers with martial prowess—the sense is close to our modern usage: 'brave Gaunt' (*Richard II*, II. iii. 100); 'brave Archibald' (*1 Henry IV*, I. i. 53); 'brave Percy' (*1 Henry IV*, v. iv. 87); 'brave York' (*Henry V*, IV. iii. 132); 'Brave Burgundy' (*1 Henry VI*, III. iii. 41); 'brave Talbot' (*1 Henry VI*, IV. iv. 45). It is so much what a warrior should be that it begins to lose distinction. The sergeant who tells Duncan of Macbeth's prowess against the rebels has to wrest the epithet from meaninglessness with a gloss: 'brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name), / Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel, / Which smok'd with bloody execution, / (Like Valor's minion) carv'd out his passage / Till he fac'd the slave; / Which nev'r shook hands, nor bade farewell to him, / Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops, / And fix'd his head upon our battlements.' (*Macbeth*, I. ii. 16–23). Cleopatra addresses Mark Antony as 'brave': 'How goes it with my brave Mark Antony?' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, I. v. 38). Her later 'That's my brave lord!' (III. xiii. 176) has the tone by which we congratulate a child into good behaviour—'that's a brave boy'—a tone whose encouraging protectiveness belies the epithet. 'That's my brave lord!' simultaneously diminishes and restores Mark Antony. 'Brave' is Pandarus' stock epithet of recommendation: 'There's a brave man, niece. O brave Hector! look how he looks! There's a countenance! Is't not a brave man?' (*Troilus and Cressida*, I. ii. 200–2).

It is a word, like any other overused epithet of praise—'fabulous', 'marvellous', 'excellent', 'magic'—which almost certainly lost its edge of precision for a time. But that edge was there to be recovered.[2] Though the extent of its application was

[1] All references to Shakespeare's plays will be to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974).

[2] G. K. Hunter, in a note to II. i. 29 of the Arden edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*, writes that 'The ambiguous tone of this word here and below, II. iii. 295, suggests that it was capable of an undertone of irony now inaudible'.

very great there are certain areas where it seems to pucker into focus. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the adjective *brave* two precise senses as well as a third, loose one. The first sense is the courageous one we are left with now. The second is 'finely dressed', 'splendid', 'showy'. The link between the two senses must be something to do with the way in which the valorous type of bravery is perceived: brave is as brave does. Bravery is defined by action—hence the sergeant's account of Macbeth's prowess. As a quality, valorous bravery is closer to Machiavellian *virtu* than to our more interior English *virtue*. If *bravery* is what it shows itself to be—a quality whose presence involves manifestation—one can see how it came to mean any good showing, anything that shows itself to be good.

But if brave is as brave does, if it is closer to *virtu* than to *virtue*, then the skill of doing, the technique of bravery, becomes part of it. Marlowe, who can and does use the word as loosely as anyone, on occasions gives it an edge which suggests an aesthetic of cruelty. Lightbourne gives Mortimer his credentials as a virtuoso murderer: 'I learnde in *Naples* how to poison flowers, / To strangle with a lawne thrust through the throte, / To pierce the wind-pipe with a needles point, / Or whilst one is a sleepe, to take a quill / And blowe a little powder in his eares, / Or open his mouth and powre quick-silver downe. / But yet I have a braver way then these' (*Edward II*, v. iv. 31–7[1]). And when he has murdered Edward, leaving the body unbruised, uncut, he takes a craftsman's pride in his work: 'Tell me sirs, was it not bravelie done?' (v. v. 116). And though we may think that an aesthetic of crafty cruelty is something peculiarly Marlovian, Shakespeare's Benedick uses 'brave' in this way at the end of *Much Ado About Nothing* when he promises to 'devise . . . brave punishments' for Don John (v. iv. 128). The word 'devise' points to the craft of the matter. It is followed by 'strike up, pipers'; just as 'brave' seemed to announce virtuosity, so 'strike' seems momentarily to refer to the punishments before the trumpets recall us. This is the art of torture.

Hamlet refers to 'this brave o'erhanging firmament' in a speech whose every phrase alerts us to the fine craftsmanship and structure of the creation: 'this goodly *frame*, the earth . . . this most excellent *canopy* the air, look you, this *brave* o'erhanging firmament, this majestical *roof fretted* with golden fire . . . What piece of work is a man' (*Hamlet*, II. ii. 298–304). The marvellousness of creation,

[1] I am using *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 2 vols., ed. Fredson Bowers, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1981).

known not felt by Hamlet at this moment, is directly related to the skill with which it has been constructed. The sense of *brave* as crafty, well made, technically fine, is not recorded in the *OED*. But this sense is there in some Renaissance uses, and it provides the route by which internal bravery gets out to show itself in show.

Brave could suggest the merely showy; *bravery* a tawdry flashiness, mere externality as opposed to the external manifestation of something internal. Jonson writes of a court populated by those whom 'The bravery makes'[1]—men whose virtue is cloth deep. The substantive *bravery* had one specialized sense of 'a gallant': a man best recognized by his clothes and whose merit may go no further—a mere outside man. For those 'the bravery makes' the synecdoche by which their bravery denotes them is just enough.

It is with the general sense of external adornment that the word *bravery* makes its single showing in the King James Bible. (The adjectival and adverbial forms, *brave* and *bravely*, do not occur at all.) That a word so widely and loosely used in this period should occur only once in the King James Bible says much for the discipline of the translators. It occurs in Isa. 3: 18 as a translation of the Hebrew תִּפְאֶרֶת (*tiphereth*). The verses that follow gloss the word's meaning:

> In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, / The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, / The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, / The rings, and nose jewels, / The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles and the wimples and the crisping pins, / The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails. / And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty.

So will the brave day sink into hideous night.

I hope I have shown that *brave* and its cognates had a very wide semantic range in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century usage. In some instances it seems to be no more than a squawk of

[1] 'An Epistle to a Friend, to perswade him to the Warres' (*The Vnder-wood*, xv), l. 56; I am quoting from *Ben Jonson*, eds. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, viii (Oxford, 1954, repr.); Deloney describes St Hugh's visit to Paris: 'which citie (at that time) was well replenished with many goodly faire women, as well as *Brittaine*, though to his thinking nothing so louely, but neuertheleſſe what they wanted in beauty, they had in brauery: which when sir *Hugh* saw, he suddenly departed from that place, counting it the most pernicious place in the whole Countrie.' *The Novels of Thomas Deloney*, ed. M. E. Lawlis (Bloomington, 1961), p. 98.

approbation. But there is a progressive logic which connects the precise uses of the word. Initially (the *OED*'s first instance is 1485) it signifies an internal quality of mind or spirit: 'stout-hearted'; next (though the *OED* does not recognize this sense) it registers the effective manifestation of that quality with some sense of the skill that this involves; finally, before the meaning dissipates into warm imprecision, it means self-sufficient show, lovely or trivial and either way unrelated to any internal state that might back it up. The word seems to turn itself inside out until it is all outside. Sidney's mournful but courageous Amphialus, in Book III of the *New Arcadia*, exemplifies every kind of bravery in the way in which he displays his inner sorrow in his tournament trappings:

> For now, as if he would turn his inside outward, he would needs appear all in black; his decking both for himself and horse being cut out into the fashion of very rags, yet all so daintily joined together with precious stones, as it was a brave raggedness and a rich poverty.[1]

Brave, in its range of meaning and in its progressively externalizing movement both describes and exemplifies qualities which are central to Shakespeare's sonnets on the levels of both narrative and style. The word provides an index and a description of a process which is both object and means of contemplation in the sonnets.

Abraham Fraunce, in his *Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588), divides elocution into two parts: 'Congruitie' and 'Braverie'.[2] The 'congruitie of speech' refers to matters of grammar. 'Braverie of speech consisteth in Tropes and turnings; and in the figures or fashionings.' These tropes and figures are the real focus of Fraunce's work. In his choice of the word 'braverie' to describe the part of rhetoric which deals with tropes and figures, one can legitimately read all but the first, courageous, meaning of the word. Bravery of speech has to do with the externalizing of thought and with the sheer skill of so doing. Whereas Mulcaster, in

[1] Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 535. Sidney himself showed much bravery during his life and particularly towards his death of the gangrenous wound received in his thigh at the battle of Zutphen when 'this restless soul of his . . . cals for Musick; especially that song which himself had intitled, *La cuisse rompue*. Partly (as I conceive by the name) to shew that the glory of mortal flesh was shaken in him.' *Sir Fulke Greville's Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Nowell Smith (Oxford, 1907), p. 138.

[2] Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike*, ed. Ethel Seaton (Oxford, 1950), p. 3.

his *Elementarie* (1582), had distinguished between the language's acquisition of foreign words 'of pure necessitie' on the one hand, and 'of mere braverie, to garnish itself withall'[1] on the other, and Hobbes was to distinguish between 'bravery of words' and 'real truth',[2] for Fraunce 'braverie of speech' signals the art of showing: the show of language without which there can be no understanding.[3]

The declared purpose of a Renaissance sonnet sequence was to show. The first line of the first sonnet of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, the sequence that set all the other sonneteers off in the 1590s, is 'Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show'. The stepped figure of *gradatio* employed in this sonnet becomes an analogy for the degrees by which showing takes place:

> Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,
> That the deare She might take some pleasure of my paine:
> Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
> Knowledge might pitie winne, & pitie grace obtaine.[4]

It is Astrophil's love for Stella that is shown, and it is Astrophil's love Stella who is shown. The shows of language permit this kind of sliding between object and feeling about an object. Shakespeare

[1] Richard Mulcaster, *The First Part of the Elementarie* (London, 1582), p. 80.

[2] *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, viii (London, 1843), p. 195. Hobbes uses the word to translate Thucydides' κόμπος—a word whose basic meaning is 'clash or. din' but which had the figurative sense of 'boast or vaunt'. The phrase in which it occurs opposes words to actions. John Dowland draws upon the vaunting sense of 'braue wordes' and also something of the modish opportunism that 'bravery' can suggest when he writes of 'young-men, professors of the Lute, who vaunt themselues, to the disparagement of such as haue beene before their time, (wherein I myself am a party) that there neuer was the like of them. To these men I say little, because of my loue and hope to see some deedes ensue their braue wordes . . .'. 'To the Reader', *A Pilgrimes Solace* (London, 1612).

[3] George Puttenham's estimation of the bravery of speech seems to be midway between that of Mulcaster and that of Fraunce. For Puttenham bravery is a quality of externality which is neither superfluous nor inevitable and which some languages possess more than others: 'Your figures that worke *auricularly* by exchange, were more observable to the Greekes and Latines for the brauenesse of their language, ouer that ours is, and for the multiplicitie of their Grammaticall accidents, or verball affects, as I may terme them.' *The Arte of English Poesie*, eds. G. D. Willcock and A. Walker (Cambridge, 1936), p. 171.

[4] *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William A. Ringler (Oxford, 1965, repr.), p. 165.

frequently elides the two senses of 'my love'. Apostrophizing time in sonnet 19:

> O carue not with thy howers my loues faire brow,
> Nor draw noe lines there with thine antique pen,
> . . . . . .
> Yet doe thy worst ould Time dispight thy wrong,
> My loue shall in my verse euer liue young.

We should notice the sophistry of this metonymic elision: aware of the sophistry we can feel the precariousness of the final defiance. The sonnets (and not only Shakespeare's) claim to preserve, present, and show the features of the loved one. But whatever they show, it is hardly that.

Showing, either an interior inaccessible state, or, in the ekphrastic manner, the properties of the visible world, is not the prerogative of the sonnet. Implicit in Fraunce's account is the intuition that all language, all speaking forth (e-loquence) is a kind of bravery. Fraunce understands figurative language as deriving from a lack of words: 'This was first inuented of necessitie for want of words, but afterwards continued and frequented by reason of the delight and pleasant grace thereof.'[1] Fraunce perceived that all language is, in the first instance, figurative language.

Shakespeare's sonnets do not simply seek to show (his love): they reflect upon the business of showing. Sonnet 43, devoted to the way in which love both illuminates and organizes the perception of the lover, becomes, in its eighth line, a tongue-twister from which it is hard to suppress the word 'show' which governs the rhyme:

> When most I winke then doe mine eyes best see,
> For all the day they view things vnrespected,
> But when I sleepe, in dreames they looke on thee,
> And darkely bright, are bright in darke directed.
> Then thou whose shaddow shaddowes doth make bright,
> How would thy shadowes forme, forme happy show,
> To the cleere day with thy much cleerer light,
> When to vn-seeing eyes thy shade shines so?

Here it is the riddling repetitions and echoes of words which alert us to the distinctions of significance. If the sonnet is playing with the familiar Shakespearian concept of the foil—bright metal on a sullen ground, bright in dark—the conjunction of diverse uses of the same word forces us, as readers, to discover the way in which one meaning can offset and act as foil to another. We have to wrest

[1] *The Arcadian Rhetorike*, p. 3.

meaning from the line 'How would thy shadowes forme, forme happy show'. 'Forme' and 'show' both operate as noun and verb: 'forme a happy show' or 'show a happy forme'. The sonnet is about showing and it makes us aware of the way in which showing through language occurs. The words show off each other.

Hamlet is obsessed with language: its efficacy (in the case of the Player King's working words) and its ineffectuality, detesting his own fluency as 'like a whore' he 'unpack[s his] heart with words' (II. ii. 585). What enrages him about Laertes's behaviour at Ophelia's funeral is the uselessness of his rant. Hamlet keeps asking Laertes what he would *do*:

> What wilt thou do for her?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'Swounds, show me what thou't do.
> Woo't weep, woo't fight, woo't fast, woo't tear thyself?
> Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocadile?
> I'll do't. Dost [thou] come here to whine?
> To outface me with leaping in her grave?
> Be buried quick with her, and so will I.
> And if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
> Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
> Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
> Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, and thou'lt mouth,
> I'll rant as well as thou. (v. i. 271–84)

Later he expresses to Horatio his regret that 'to Laertes [he] forgot [him]self . . . But sure the bravery of his grief did put me / Into a towering passion.' (v. ii. 76–80). That 'bravery of grief' is what we might today call 'mere' rhetoric. Indeed there is a tendency now to regard all rhetoric as 'mere'. Rhetoric has declined from its status as an art which discovers and shows the truth to being an art of decoration.

Shakespeare's sonnets include several (rhetorical) jibes against rhetoric: jibes which merely clear the ground for a better rhetoric. The conceit (not original to Shakespeare) is that his love does not need the assistance of 'what strained touches Rhethorick can lend' (82) since his beauty needs no ornament. All that is necessary—and here of course is the rub—is that this love be shown. Sonnet 78—one of a cluster thought by biographical interpreters to refer to a 'rival poet'—draws attention to its own disingenuously denied rhetoric by its conspicuous repetition, its use of the figures of *polyptoton* and *antanaclasis*:

> Thine eyes, that taught the dumbe on high to sing,
> And heauie ignorance aloft to flie,

Haue added fethers to the learneds wing,
And giuen grace a double Maiestie.
Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
Whose influence is thine, and borne of thee,
In others workes thou doost but mend the stile,
And Arts with thy sweete graces graced be.
But thou art all my art, and doost aduance
As high as learning, my rude ignorance.

'Thou art all my art' is paradox as well as conspicuous disingenuousness: a crucial paradox since it demonstrates that art is not optional or secondary. It is worth remembering that 'art' was homophonous with 'heart' when the sonnet was written. The manifestation of the lover's heart is bound up with the artistry that shows the loved one. The play on 'grace' equally draws our attention to the double-sidedness of the word's significance: either mere externality or, as in divine grace, a condition of blessedness.

Bertram, trying to excuse his association with Diana, tells the French court that 'Her [inf'nite cunning,] with her modern grace, / Subdu'd me to her rate.' (*All's Well That Ends Well*, v. iii. 216–17). That phrase 'modern grace' well suggests the way in which our sense of gracious blessedness, when Helena is restored to the finally loving Bertram, is combined with an awareness of how factitious such grace is. As with the restoration of Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, or of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, we are, as audience, very conscious of the way in which this miracle has been cobbled together. We are made aware of the mechanics of grace and this is bound up with an acute sense—in *All's Well That Ends Well* in particular—of the unworthiness of grace's recipient. Bertram's unworthiness is an obstacle to some people's tolerance of the play. But that is the point: grace has got precisely nothing to do with desert. And the factitiousness of grace does not deprive it of its graciousness. Newfangled 'modern grace' is as gracious as ever. Gloucester's life is the miracle he feels it to be though he is tricked into this feeling by Edgar's ludicrous and lovingly manufactured illusion. Grace, like its self-incarnating original, has to work through material particulars.

It is this sense of unworthiness in the loved one which makes us feel that 'grace', as it is used in sonnet 40, must refer to a loveliness that is merely external. But we should, I think, be aware that divine grace may as well alight here as elsewhere. In narrative terms the sonnet seems to refer to the fact that the boy and the dark lady have become lovers. The couplet begins 'Lasciuious grace, in whom all il wel showes'. The notion of grace is both trivialized,

and reinforced because it is trivialized, in 'Lasciuious grace'. The redeeming transformation by grace of lascivious beauty, and its relapse, is enacted by the doubleness of 'in whom all il wel showes': 'in whom all ill is made to seem well', or, 'in whom all ill is clearly visible'.

The language and the paradoxes of this phrase are recalled in the painful dualities of sonnet 150 which ponder the simultaneous sense of exaltation and debasement which sexual experience can produce:

> Oh from what powre hast thou this powrefull might,
> With insufficiency my heart to sway,
> To make me giue the lie to my true sight,
> And swere that brightnesse doth not grace the day?
> Whence hast thou this becomming of things il,
> That in the very refuse of thy deeds,
> There is such strength and warrantise of skill,
> That in my minde thy worst all best exceeds?
> Who taught thee how to make me loue thee more,
> The more I heare and see iust cause of hate,
> Oh though I loue what others doe abhor,
> With others thou shouldst not abhor my state.
> If thy vnworthinesse raisd loue in me,
> More worthy I to be belou'd of thee.

'This becomming of things il' has a doubleness like that of 'all il wel showes': the phrase perpetually flickers between two antithetical meanings. The sonnet observes the involvement of sexual performance in an experience of love which seems to transcend such particulars. Love is 'raisd' and erections are provoked by the expertise of an artful lover ('in the very refuse of thy deeds, / There is such strength and warrantise of skill').

That bitter sonnet deprecates skill whilst acknowledging its power. It draws attention to the mechanics of fulfilment. Here the sense of exaltation (of being raised) that such mechanics produce is never felt to be more than illusory: compromised by its dependence upon skill. But the theatre is a continual confrontation with the mechanics of the marvellous. A playwright is less able than any other kind of writer to ignore the contingent element in his or her work: its dependence upon perishable and variable particulars. A performance actualizes a play in a way which is unique and unrepeatable. The compromises which the conditions of individual performances impose upon a play are also the conditions of its possibility. The phrase 'eternall loue in loues fresh case' refers, in sonnet 108, to the way in which the sonnets

refigure and represent a love which remains the same. It could also describe the kind of renovatory eternity which individual performances bestow upon plays.

The perishable and the persistent are locked together in the life of a play. A poem's perpetuity is similarly bound up with its vulnerability:

> Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
> Which eyes not yet created shall ore-read,
> And toungs to be, your beeing shall rehearse,
> When all the breathers of this world are dead,
> You still shall liue (such vertue hath my Pen)
> Where breath most breaths, euen in the mouths of men. (81)

We are presented with the possibility of poetic immortality together with the fact of personal mortality. Breath, individually perishable but collectively persistent, becomes an image of the kind of beauty which the sonnets seek to preserve and which is what preserves them.

Galileo's Sagredo, at the end of the first day's *Dialogue on the Great World Systems*, describes the:

> sublimity of mind [of him] who conceived how to communicate his most secret thoughts to any other person, though very far distant either in time or place, speaking with those who are in the Indies, speaking to those who are not yet born, nor shall be this thousand, or ten thousand years? And with no greater difficulty than the various collocation of twenty-four little characters upon a paper?[1]

Shakespeare's sonnets reflect in a similar way upon both the 'wondrous scope' which writing obtains, and upon the finity of its material components. Reading Shakespeare's sonnets one becomes very aware of their literal composition: the density of consonance and assonance draws our attention to the fact that these poems have been made from the material elements of twenty-five letters. On occasions the impression is that the literal repertoire is even smaller. And the sonnets often confront their own material presence in an explicit way, mentioning ink (65), the lines of writing (16, 19), punning on their graphic form ('I ingraft

[1] '. . . qual eminenza di mente fu quella di colui che s'immagino di trovar modo di comunicare i suoi piu reconditi pensieri a qualsivoglia altra persona, benche distante per lunghissimo intervallo di luogo e di tempo? parlare con quelli che son nell'Indie, parlare a quelli che non sono ancora nati ne saranno se non di qua a mille e dieci mila anni? e con qual facilta? con i vari accozzamenti di venti caratteruzzi sopra una carta.' Galileo Galilei, *Dialogo sui massimi sistemi*, ed. Franz Brunetti (Bari, 1963), p. 132. I have quoted from Thomas Salusbury's translation of 1661, *Dialogue on the Great World Systems, in the Salusbury Translation*, ed. Giorgio de Santillana (Chicago, 1953), pp. 116–17.

you new', 15), or the leaves of paper on which they are inscribed (6, 105). Graphic form may shape semantic content: 'O thou my louely Boy who in thy power, / Doest hould times fickle glasse, his sickle, hower:' (126). The Elizabethan long S creates an ocular, graphic pun between *fickle* and *sickle* which works better on the page than in the mouths of men. The dyer's hand, subdued to the materials with which it works, takes colour from those materials.

But this kind of graphic materiality—the status of the sonnets as so much ink on so much paper—is really only an extreme version, almost a caricature, of the sonnets' real material manœuvres. Sonnet 65 refers to its inky presence but in so doing may distract us from the real business of miracle making:

> Since brasse, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundlesse sea,
> But sad mortallity ore-swaies their power,
> How with this rage shall beautie hold a plea,
> Whose action is no stronger then a flower?
> O how shall summers hunny breath hold out,
> Against the wrackfull siedge of battring dayes,
> When rocks impregnable are not so stoute,
> Nor gates of steele so strong but time decayes?
> O fearefull meditation, where alack,
> Shall times best Iewell from times chest lie hid?
> Or what strong hand can hold his swift foote back,
> Or who his spoile of beautie can forbid?
> O none, vnlesse this miracle haue might,
> That in black inck my loue may still shine bright.

The 'action' of beauty is here the action of language. The word 'flower', for example, gathers strength from its position as rhyme word and sentence ending. It also draws strength from the word with which it rhymes: the acoustic association with 'power' becomes a semantic connection. 'Flower' is a stressed syllable which follows three unstressed: it is also the first particularized image in the sonnet; it draws the sonnet into focus. Syntactically, acoustically, and perceptually, the word is a source of stability. The tentativeness and apprehension which are the surface meaning of this quatrain are transformed by the legerdemain of good craft into a demonstration of power. It is from such placings that inky miracles derive.

The 'braverie of speech', the figurings of language, have their own dynamics which can carry whole sonnets. The sonnet itself is a figure: a determining structure which both enables and limits articulation. The surface narrative of Shakespeare's sonnets often seems to be describing the nature of the sonnets themselves.

The first sonnet addresses the boy: 'But thou contracted to thine owne bright eyes, / Feeds't thy lights flame with selfe substantiall fewell'. It could be describing the self-generating, self-delighting capacities of the sonnet form—an acknowledgement of the self-sustaining powers of the figure, whilst recognizing the barrenness of figures that refigure only themselves. To interpret all narrative in the sonnets as self-referential stylistic description would be to subscribe to such barrenness. Bravery of speech, like all bravery, moves between extremes of mere show (intransitive showing, showing off) and showing something. Sonnet 111—the 'Dyer's hand' sonnet—contains the important word 'almost':

> O for my sake doe you wish fortune chide,
> The guiltie goddesse of my harmfull deeds,
> That did not better for my life prouide,
> Then publick meanes which publick manners breeds.
> Thence comes it that my name receiues a brand,
> And almost thence my nature is subdu'd
> To what it workes in, like the Dyers hand.

Shakespeare is careful with 'almost': 'Nothing almost sees miracles / But misery' (*King Lear*, II. ii. 165–6). He uses it to suggest a connection which is not an identity. The materials of expression—whether they be the stage properties and personnel of the King's Men, or the tropes and figures of language—may enable and direct expression but they should not take over to the extent of expressing only themselves. To partly subdue ones nature to what it works in is the only way to create anything. A writer, like a painter or sculptor, must know his or her medium and allow it to suggest its own possibilities. The dense acoustic patternings of the sonnets show the extent to which Shakespeare let the words which are his primary materials make their own discoveries. But just as the narrative of the sonnets is haunted by the question of the significance of external beauty—does the boy's beauty mean anything?—so there is the fear that the medium of language may take over entirely, leaving us with nothing but the self-delighting play of figures. Shakespeare takes language up to the brink—and occasionally over the brink—of nonsense: 'as you were when first your eye I eyde, / Such seemes your beautie still' (104).[1] He plays

[1] In a note to sonnet 112 in his Yale edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven, 1977), Stephen Booth shows that lines which have long resisted understanding do make sense in non-signifying ways and that 'Each vagary of diction and construction that impedes comprehension . . . functions to give the poem coherence of another sort (i.e. functions in one or more of the non-signifying patterns that tie the poem together in a way analogous to the action of alliteration, rhythm, and rhyme)', p. 367.

with *chiasmus* to the point of spoonerism. It is partly the structure of *chiasmus* in sonnet 43 which creates the pressure to spoonerize in line 8: 'When to vn-seeing eyes thy shade shines so?' Comparably, in sonnet 40, the audibly riddling structure which reinforces the paradoxical content, suggests a spoonerized version of line 13. Within 'all il wel showes' is the possibility of 'all will ill shows': a possibility which the doubleness of 'Lasciuious grace' backs up. It is this kind of acoustic play that can make reading the sonnets an, almost, literally maddening experience. The symmetries of letters seem to be taking over and generating the sense. This literal play, which continually runs the risk of lapsing into nonsense, is the poet's intimate testing of the smallest material particles with which he works. 'To heare wit eies belongs to loues fine wiht' (23), but what the eyes see is 'the various collocation of twenty four [or five, or six] little characters upon a paper'. Shakespeare's sound-play—his play with letters—tries out the extent to which the smallest graphic and phonetic elements with which he works can carry meaning.

The sonnets' narrative concern with the significance of 'externall grace' (53) is matched by this testing of the external features of language. In both cases what is being explored might be described by the sense of *bravery* as 'show'.[1] If one moves inward from this external sense of *bravery*, to the idea of 'skill in showing', 'brave doing', the word again describes something which is explored on both narrative and formal levels. The narrative presents ideas of skill and transcendence through skill: in matters of painting (24), sexual performance (150), theatrical performance and literary expression (23). At a closer level, the sonnets point to their own technical virtuosity: the fact that they have been made, crafted with ink, pen, paper, language, and letters. The senses of *brave* as 'showy' and *brave* as 'skilfully shown' are both pertinent to the sonnets. But the original, and most inward, sense of *brave* as 'courageous' does not obviously have a great deal to do with these poems.

But there is a sense in which the act of self-exposure in showing

[1] E.K. mimics the bravery of those that 'vse to hunt the letter' in his preface to *The Shepherd's Calender*: 'I scorne and spue out the rakehellye route of our ragged rymers (for so themselues vse to hunt the letter) which without learning boste, without iudgement iangle, without reason rage and fome, as if some instinct of Poeticall spirite had newly rauished them aboue the meanenesse of commen capacitie. And being in the middest of all theyr brauery, sodenly eyther for want of matter, or of ryme or hauing forgotten theyr former conceipt, they seeme to be so pained and traueiled in theyr remembrance.' *The Poetical Words of Edmund Spenser*, ed. E. de Selincourt, i (Oxford, 1910), 6–7.

may, in itself, constitute an act of courage. (Not that to show courage is to show so much as that to show is to show courage.) The reverse of this courage is the kind of closed self-sustenance of which the boy in the sonnets is accused. There is a curious partial bravery about the objects of attack in sonnet 94. They show but they do not dare:

> They that haue powre to hurt, and will doe none,
> That doe not do the thing, they most do showe,
> Who mouing others, are themselues as stone,
> Vnmooued, could, and to temptation slow:
> They rightly do inherrit heauens graces,
> And husband natures ritches from expence,
> They are the Lords and owners of their faces,
> Others, but stewards of their excellence:
> The sommers flowre is to the sommer sweet,
> Though to it selfe, it onely liue and die,
> But if that flowre with base infection meete,
> The basest weed out-braues his dignity:
> For sweetest things turne sowrest by their deedes,
> Lillies that fester, smell far worse then weeds.

The sonnet invites us to consider the lilies of the field which, according to Henry Smith in (*c.*) 1590, are 'brauer than Salomon',[1] and which, according to John Gerard in 1597, 'outbraved' him.[2] Those New Testament lilies are pre-eminent examples of divine grace. By means of divine grace the grace which is beauty, the lilies' brave raiment, descends. The sonnet questions what such show shows. The repetition of 'do' in the first two lines suggests that all showing is effectively a kind of doing, whether there is will

[1] In his sermon 'The Wedding Garment' (on Rom. 13: 14): 'Salomon was not so glorious in al his rioalty [*sic*], nor the Lillies which are brauer than Salomon, as he which is clothed with Christ, because the apparel vpon him is better than al the world about him.' *The Sermons of Master Henrie Smith* (London, 1592), p. 331.

[2] John Gerard, *The Herball or Generall Hystory of Plants* (London, 1597). 'To the Courteous and well-willing Readers': 'one King *Salomon*, excelling all the rest for wisedome, of greater royaltie than they all (though the Lillies of the field outbraued him)'. The *bravery* of lilies was evidently a commonplace. Gerard (p. 146) describes the 'white Lilly (which in beauty and brauerie excelled *Salomon* in his greatest roialtie)'; Thomas Fuller writes: 'A flower is the best-complexioned grass (as a pearl is the best-coloured clay); and daily it weareth God's livery, for "He clotheth the grass in the field". Solomon himself is outbraved therewith, as whose gallantry only was adopted, and on theirs innate, and in them.' *The History of the Worthies of England*, in 3 vols., ii (London, 1840), 487. Ben Jonson, 'A Celebration of Charis', ii: 'I beheld her, on a day, / When her looke out-flourisht May: / And her dressing did out-brave / All the Pride the fields than have:' (*The Vnder-Wood*, ii).

and motive behind it or not. Those who 'doe not do the thing, they most do showe', even if that thing hurts, are refraining from the kind of responsibility that being answerable for appearances involves. In other sonnets Shakespeare distinguishes between those flowers whose 'virtue only is their show' (54) and those whose show discloses and reveals a sweet and fragrant nature. If grace is to be more than a patina, if show is to be more than mere bravery, it must be motivated by an internal state of which it is the manifestation. The basest weed 'out-braues' the dignity of the infected summer's flower, not just in the way that the lilies of the field outbraved Solomon (by being a better show) but by doing what they show themselves to be. This sonnet has behind it an unspoken pun on *rank*: *noblesse oblige* and those of high rank who do not perform their obligations decline to rankness.

True bravery draws on the full range of the word's meaning: from courage, through skill, to outward show. The state of being 'in war with Time' is one which requires courage, though it is a courage no coward can lack. It is, I think, possible to hear the full scope of *brave*'s meanings in sonnet 15:

> When I consider euery thing that growes
> Holds in perfection but a little moment.
> That this huge stage presenteth nought but showes
> Whereon the Stars in secret influence comment.
> When I perceiue that men as plants increase,
> Cheared and checkt euen by the selfe-same skie:
> Vaunt in their youthfull sap, at height decrease,
> And were their braue state out of memory.
> Then the conceit of this inconstant stay,
> Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
> Where wastfull time debateth with decay
> To change your day of youth to sullied night,
> And all in war with Time for loue of you
> As he takes from you, I ingraft you new.

The war with time, the alternation between time's taking away and the poet's 'ingrafting' and engraphing, is imaged, both acoustically and semantically. Lines suggesting expansion and growth (1 and 5) lead into lines which show the undoing of such growth. The acoustic variegation of line 7 is followed by the dull tread of line 8: 'And were their braue state out of memory' where the words sound as if time has already begun to wear away their distinguishing features. The commonplace of the world as a stage is refreshed by the way in which the sonnet represents the struggle to show: to wrest conspicuousness from time's undoing indifference.

The theatrical show is both a metaphor for and an extreme version of the show that is language, the show that is engraphed. The theatrical show is also a more conspicuous and self-conscious version of the showing that is life: it shows that show more clearly; while the show of writing shows more clearly and durably the show involved in all speaking out, all eloquence. The sonnet's final pun on 'ingraft' beautifully assimilates the act of writing into a natural regenerative process, and clinches our sense that the skilful show of a sonnet is part of a larger struggle to break loose from the continuum. The struggle is such as to make all who engage in it brave, in the sense of 'courageous', since all their 'braue state' ('the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins') will be undone.

The brief for this lecture is that it be on the life and works of a deceased English poet. In some sense the work of a writer must be the most important fact of his or her life and I hope I need not apologize for my lack of biographical reference. When discussing the sonnets, Shakespeare's profession of playwright may perhaps be taken as a pertinent biographical fact, and the theatre provides an image of the way in which poetic language is itself a way of skilful showing. George Puttenham, in his *Arte of English Poesie*, gives English glosses to the Latin and Greek names for the figures of speech, and shows that he sees the play of language in rhetoric as a drama of conflict: 'the Disabler', 'the broade floute', 'the turne tale', 'the Dismembrer', 'the Moderatour'.[1] What Fraunce called 'the braverie of speech' is part of a dramatic show performed each time a poem is read.

Shakespeare uses *brave* in the sonnets in a way which both draws upon its range of meaning and recovers its points of focus. The capacity to generalize and particularize simultaneously is part of the genius of the sonnets and the word is both symptomatic and descriptive of them as a whole. But the work of Shakespeare in which it occurs most frequently is *The Tempest*: the play which, more than any other, contemplates the nature of shows and showing. There are shows to be wondered at—

[1] *The Arte of English Poesie*: '*Meiosis*, or the Disabler', pp. 185 and 219; '*Antiphrasis*. or the Broad floute', p. 191; '*Hiperbole*. or the Ouer reacher, otherwise called the loud lyer', p. 191; '*Apostrophe*, or the turne tale', p. 237; '*Dialesis*, or the Dismembrer', p. 221; '*Lipote*. or the Moderatour', p. 184. Quintilian compared eloquence to the unsheathing of a sword (*Inst. Orat.* viii, pref. 15). The idea of rhetoric as sword-play (and, as in the *New Arcadia*, of sword-play as a narrative occasion of rhetoric) is latent in many Renaissance developments of the *flyting* (e.g. Crashaw's 'Musick's Duell'). In these instances the valorous, the skilful, and the showy unite in verbal fencing.

'Admir'd Miranda' (III. i. 37)—and there is a 'brave monster' (II. ii. 188) who has acquired language, to be shown. Prospero connects the ephemerality of the show he has put on for Ferdinand and Miranda's wedding with that of 'The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces, / The solemn temples, the great globe itself' (IV. i. 152–3). At the widest point of this expanding simile Shakespeare reminds us of the theatrical fabric—'the great globe itself'. The whole speech makes us aware of the frail materiality of what shows and is shown: 'the baseless *fabric* of this vision' (151); 'We are such *stuff* / As dreams are made on' (156–7). The conceiving mind partakes of this frailty: 'Sir, I am vex'd; / Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled' (158–9). Returning to this precarious and fallible source, the speech traces the scope of our effort to speak out and brave the hideous night. The brave new world is always new—constantly renewed. The impermanence of its material particulars is also its only guarantee.