

SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE

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Read 30 April 1987

SOME coincidences seem more coincidental than others. It is surely rather a manifestation of the spirit of the age than pure chance that 1807 saw the publication of two adaptations, each of twenty Shakespeare plays, designed to make those plays both more accessible to young readers and more suited to what their elders thought the young should be reading; chance may, however, be held responsible for the fact that both adaptations were undertaken by the less distinguished sisters of more distinguished brothers, and that over the years the brothers have received more than their fair share of credit for their sisters' work. One of the adaptations, published anonymously, was *The Family Shakspeare*, offering (literally) bowdlerized texts.¹ In its second edition, of 1818, this work was ascribed to Thomas Bowdler, MD; he is still frequently held responsible, though in 1966 it was shown that his sister, Henrietta Maria, undertook the initial task of expurgation, and that Thomas was responsible only for the plays added in the second edition.² This adaptation, now relegated to library basements and mentioned only to be derided, enjoyed many years of success; Jaggard records some thirty-five editions between 1807 and 1900.³

The other adaptation, *Tales from Shakespear. Designed for the use of young persons*, was ascribed on its first publication to Charles Lamb; not until the seventh edition, of 1838, was his sister's name added to the title-page, though Charles had made it quite clear in letters to his friends that Mary wrote fourteen of the tales and that he had contributed only six—the tragedies—along with 'occasionally a tail piece or correction of grammar . . . and *all* of the spelling'.⁴

¹ *The Family Shakspeare*, 4 vols. (London, 1807).

² Noel Perrin, 'The Real Bowdler', *Notes and Queries*, NS xiii (1966), 141-2.

³ William Jaggard, *Shakespeare Bibliography* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1911).

⁴ Edwin W. Marrs, Jr (ed.), *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 3 vols. (Ithaca and London, 1975-8); ii. 256 (Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, 29 Jan. 1807).

The Lambs' letters give a charming picture of the process of composition, the brother and his mentally unstable sister (she had already stabbed her mother to death) writing, as Mary says, 'on one table (but not on one cushion sitting) like Hermia & Helena in the Midsummer's Nights Dream, or rather like an old literary Darby and Joan. I taking snuff & he groaning all the while & saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished and then he finds out he has made something of it ...'.⁵ Mary, too, groaned, complaining, according to Charles, 'of having to set forth so many female characters in boy's clothes'.⁶ She gets stuck (understandably) in *All's Well*; Charles writes to Wordsworth that he encourages her with flattery, and we know that the flattery succeeded because a few days later Mary writes to Sarah Stoddart that she is 'in good spirits' because Charles has told her that *All's Well* is 'one of the very best' of her stories.⁷

The *Tales* were composed for The Juvenile Library, published by William Godwin and his second wife, Mary Jane, known to the Lamb circle as 'the bad baby', and execrated by Lamb for her inept choice of topics for illustration, which included a picture of Hamlet with the grave-diggers, even though the scene 'is not hinted at in the story, & you might as well have put King Canute the Great reproving his courtiers'.⁸ Payment was at the rate of three guineas per tale, and initial publication was in two volumes, though eight individual tales were also issued separately in chapbook versions which are now, according to David Foxon, 'probably the greatest rarities of more recent English literature'.⁹

The Lambs' Preface contains a modest statement of their aims and methods. The *Tales* are intended to introduce young readers to the study of Shakespeare, whose own words are used whenever possible; in narrative passages, 'words introduced into our language since his time have been as far as possible avoided'. The *Tales* are 'faint and imperfect stamps of Shakespear's matchless image ... because the beauty of his language is too frequently destroyed' by the need to change verse into prose; even where, 'in

⁵ *Letters*, ii. 228-9 (Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart, 30 May-2 June 1806).

⁶ *Letters*, ii. 233 (Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, 26 June 1806).

⁷ *Letters*, ii. 233, 237 (Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, 26 June 1806; Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart, 2 July 1806).

⁸ *Letters*, ii. 256 (Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, 29 Jan. 1807).

⁹ 'The Chapbook Editions of the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespear*, *The Book Collector*, vi (1957), 41-53, quotation on p. 41.

some few places', 'his blank verse is given unaltered, as hoping from its simple plainness to cheat the young readers into the belief that they are reading prose', it still suffers by being taken out of context. The *Tales* are written mainly for 'young ladies . . . because boys are generally permitted the use of their fathers' libraries at a much earlier age than girls are'; and boys are encouraged to explain the hard bits to their sisters, and even to read pleasing passages from the original plays to them, 'carefully selecting what is proper for a young sister's ear'. When the young readers are old enough to turn to the plays for themselves, they will discover many surprises not hinted at in the *Tales*. And the last paragraph of the Preface—written by Charles—expresses the wish that in the future 'the true Plays of Shakespear' will prove 'enrichers of the fancy, strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thoughts, a lesson of all sweet and honourable thoughts and actions, to teach you courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity: for of examples, teaching these virtues, his pages are full'.

Though the principal aim is clarification and simplification, there are hints also of a certain moral protectiveness; fraternal selection of 'what is proper for a young sister's ear' is precisely akin to Miss Bowdler's expunging of 'any thing that can raise a blush on the cheek of modesty'.¹⁰ There is, too, an implied assurance that reading Shakespeare is good for you; an assurance that may have been particularly welcome to parents at a time when the child attending the theatre might be, as Wordsworth had recently put it,

environ'd with a Ring
Of chance Spectators, chiefly dissolute men
And shameless women . . .
While oaths, indecent speech, and ribaldry
Were rife about him . . .

(*The Prelude* (1805), vii. 385–90)

Both Mary and Charles reduce the plays' complexity, concentrating where possible on a single story-line. The Gloucester plot disappears almost entirely from *King Lear*; *The Merchant of Venice* loses the caskets and, almost, Lorenzo and Jessica. Theseus makes only a fleeting appearance at the opening of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and all that remains of the mechanicals is a nameless clown 'who had lost his way in the wood' and who stands in for

¹⁰ *The Family Shakspeare*, i. p. vii.

Bottom in the episode with Titania. Low comedy episodes and characters—Christopher Sly, Juliet's Nurse, Paroles, Cloten, Touchstone and Jaques, even Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Malvolio—all disappear entirely or are reduced to the merest ciphers. Humour suffers greatly, as Lamb admits in his Preface; many of the comedies are brought closer to the romance tales on which they are founded.

Shakespeare's own tendency to idealize his sources is heightened: the bed trick in *All's Well* becomes a 'secret meeting', and Helena is not pregnant at the end; in *Measure for Measure*, Claudio had simply 'seduced a young lady from her parents' (though Isabella does speak to Claudio of Angelo's demand that she 'yield' her 'virgin honour'). There are no bawds or brothels in either *Measure for Measure* or *Pericles*, and bawdy language is almost totally expunged. In those pre-Partridge days, however, Mary Lamb—like Miss Bowdler—could retain Graziano's closing couplet about 'keeping safe Nerissa's ring'.

Along with omission and reduction there is also a little elaboration. The narrative mode encourages additional exposition, comment, and even interpretation. Some additions are purely explanatory: 'In those times wrestling, which is only practised now by country clowns, was a favourite sport even in the courts of princes' (*As You Like It*); 'though it is not the custom now for young women of high birth to understand cookery, it was then' (*Cymbeline*). There are some gently humorous comments—'fathers do not often desire the death of their own daughters, even though they do happen to prove a little refractory' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)—, some moralistic ones—Antigonus' ursine death was 'a just punishment on him for obeying the wicked order of Leontes' (*The Winter's Tale*), —and some aphoristically generalizing ones that have won the praise of commentators.¹¹ Some additions reveal preconceptions about the characters and their actions, sometimes with important interpretative consequences: Prospero is 'an old man', and it is as a result of 'his magic art' that Miranda fell in love so suddenly; and Antonio's silence at the end of *The Tempest*, always interpreted by modern critics as a sign that he is unrepentant, suggests to the more generous-minded Mary Lamb that he was 'so filled . . . with shame and remorse, that he wept and was unable to speak'.

¹¹ E.g. Alfred Ainger, Introduction to his edition (1879): Mary Lamb 'constantly evinces a rare shrewdness and tact in her incidental criticisms'. See also Edmund Blunden, *Charles Lamb and his Contemporaries* (London, 1937), p. 74.

Interpretative elaboration is particularly prevalent at the ends of stories: Mary Lamb is in no doubt that, after the events shown in *Measure for Measure*, 'the mercy-loving duke long reigned with his beloved Isabel, the happiest of husbands and of princes'; nor is there anything tentative about her conclusion to *All's Well that Ends Well*: Helena 'at last found that her father's legacy was indeed sanctified by the luckiest stars in heaven.' But Charles is even more apt than Mary to offer explicit interpretation; indeed, his elaboration of the role of Kent in *King Lear* has caused Jonathan Bate—who finds that Charles's *Tales* 'form a kind of creative commentary' on Shakespeare—to suggest that perhaps Lamb 'saw himself as a Kent-figure, characterized by loyalty and honesty, a willingness to remain in the shadow of the great souls around him, a preference for plain language, prose to the verse of Wordsworth and Coleridge'.¹²

The reception of the *Tales* on publication was in general lukewarm, with one notable exception. There are seven reviews, all anonymous, mostly very brief.¹³ Criticism centres on moral purpose. In spite of the Lambs' efforts to avoid causing offence, the *Literary Panorama* regretted that 'morals . . .' had not 'been deduced from such incidents as afford them'. Though *The Anti-Jacobin Review* thought that the *Tales* were told 'as decently as possible', it did not consider them 'very proper studies for female children'; and the Lambs had properly put their foot in it by telling girls that there are parts of Shakespeare that they should not read till they are older: 'This only serves as a *stimulus* to juvenile curiosity, which requires a *bridle* rather than a *spur*.' The only really enthusiastic praise of the *Tales* is in a notice in the *Critical Review* which places the volume firmly in the context of the current debate about children's literature, a debate with which Lamb was himself concerned. In a letter to Coleridge of 1802 he had complained that didacticism was supplanting imagination in children's books: 'Science has succeeded to Poetry no less in the little walks of Children than with Men. . . . **Damn them.** I mean the cursed Barbauld Crew, those **Blights** &

¹² 'Lamb on Shakespeare', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, NS li (1985), 76–85, quotations on pp. 76 and 84. On Lamb's implicit criticism of Shakespeare see also Joan Coldwell (ed.), *Charles Lamb on Shakespeare* (London, 1978), esp. pp. 12–15.

¹³ *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (26 March 1807), p. 298; *Critical Review*, ii, no. 1 (May 1807), 97–9; *The Monthly Mirror*, NS ii (July 1807), 39; *The Literary Panorama* (3 Nov. 1807), pp. 294–5; *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxxviii, no. 2 (Nov. 1808), 1001; *The British Critic*, xxxiii (May 1809), 525; *The Satirist* (1 July 1809), p. 93.

Blasts of all that is *Human* in man & child.'¹⁴ The writer in the *Critical Review* is entirely of Lamb's mind: 'We have compared it [the *Tales*] with many of the numerous systems which have been devised for rivetting attention at an early age, and insinuating knowledge subtilly and pleasurably into minds, by nature averse from it. The result of the comparison is not so much that it rises high in the list, as that it claims the very first place, and stands unique, and without rival or competitor, unless perhaps we except Robinson Crusoe.' The *Tales* 'will effect more than all the cant that ever was canted by Mrs Trimmer and Co. in all their most canting and lethargic moments.'

For the rest, the highest praise comes from *The Gentleman's Review*, saying that the 'very pretty Tales . . . may interest the mind at an age when the plays themselves cannot be properly appreciated'. 'Very pretty Tales' has seemed apt enough to later ages as a description of what the Lambs produced. These *Tales* are generally undemanding; their literary quality is modest. They have been praised for narrative clarity, for ease of style, for an understanding of the needs of a child's imagination. They have been seen as a manifestation of the Romantic interest in childhood, and as a blow on behalf of the arts in the education of the young.¹⁵ But, as even so sympathetic a critic as Lord David Cecil wrote, their success 'is a little surprising; for the tales are told in a gentle undramatic manner, unlikely, one would have thought, to excite children in Lamb's day, let alone many years later'.¹⁶ Nevertheless, A. Hamilton Thompson, writing (in 1915) in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, claimed that 'the collection forms one of the most conspicuous landmarks in the history of the romantic movement'.¹⁷

This initially surprising claim may be supported by consideration of the volume's publishing history. During the Lambs' lifetime, it enjoyed a modest success. It was reprinted in 1809 and 1810, and appeared in three more editions by the time Charles Lamb died, in 1834. By the time Mary died, in 1847, there had

¹⁴ *Letters*, ii. 82.

¹⁵ See e.g. F. J. Harvey Darnton, *Children's Books in England* (London, 1932), 3rd edn., rev. by Brian Alderson (Cambridge, 1983), p. 192: 'They provide a defence of poesy by a kind of nursery introduction to it in prose.'

¹⁶ *A Portrait of Charles Lamb* (London, 1983), p. 127. An extreme reaction is that of Robertson Davies: 'Shakespeare was a poet and, if you rob him of his poetry, you reduce him to tedious stuff like Lamb's *Tales From Shakespear* (1807), which I was given as a child and which turned me off Shakespeare for many years' (*Toronto Globe and Mail*, 1 August 1987).

¹⁷ Vol. xii, *The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1915), p. 189.

been five more editions, making eleven in all. After this, edition succeeded edition with increasing, and increasingly astonishing, rapidity. To chart their progress fully would require a bibliographical study which so far as I know has not been undertaken, and which would be difficult to prepare accurately, because even the copyright libraries seem to have wearied of giving shelf-room to the full spate of editions and reissues. The British Library has many that are not in the Bodleian; the Bodleian has some that are not in the British Library; the picture is complicated by the existence of selections, simplified versions, reprints of individual tales, foreign reprints in English, and translations. With that proviso, let me say that I have evidence of close on 200 editions in English, and of at least forty translations extending beyond the major European languages to Burmese, Swahili, Japanese, Macedonian, Chinese (in 1905, the first Chinese translation of Shakespeare in any form), Hungarian, and the African dialects Ga and Ewe. I won't bore you with the detailed statistics (painfully though these have been acquired), but some indication of the periods of greatest popularity may be of interest. Reprints of English versions continue steadily after Mary Lamb's death until 1873 (by which date there had been fifteen, in sixty-four years). Then—doubtless under the influence of Forster's Education Act of 1870—they accelerate rapidly. 1879 was a bumper year, with seven editions, three of them in Calcutta. There are sixteen editions in the 1880s, ten in the 1890s, and thirty-six in the first decade of the twentieth century. From 1910 to 1920 there are twenty-six, and then numbers dwindle a bit: eleven in the 1920s, twelve in the 1930s, eleven in the 1940s, thirteen in the 1950s, fourteen in the 1960s. I have no reliable figures for more recent years, but *Books in Print* reveals ten editions currently on the market.

I adduced these figures initially to support Thompson's assertion of the volume's importance 'in the history of the romantic movement'. They show that the *Tales* became a classic with a popularity matching that of *Alice in Wonderland*. I say 'a classic' rather than 'a children's classic' because it is clear that the *Tales* (like *Alice*) is both read by adults and chosen by adults as a book suitable for children, not necessarily by children as a book that they are anxious to read for themselves. Indeed, its very title—unlike, say, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* or *Five on a Treasure Island*—requires knowledge, or information, along with cultural aspirations. Thompson's own support for his assertion is that the *Tales* 'is the first book which, appealing to a general audience and

to a rising generation, made Shakespeare a familiar and popular author and, in so doing, asserted the claims of the older literature which, to English people at large, was little more than a name'.¹⁸ But this gives too much weight to the volume's declared function of serving as an 'introduction to the study of Shakespeare'. In fact there is a sense in which the *Tales* supplanted Shakespeare, becoming an object of study in its own right, a book that itself required to be introduced and explained to young readers, and on which they could expect to be examined, sometimes in conjunction with a few extracts from the plays on which it is based, sometimes as an independent text. This can be seen by looking at some of the more important editions, which fall into two main streams: those intended for a general readership, and those specifically presented for use in schools.

In the early period particularly, it is not always easy to distinguish between the two. As early as 1843, a reprint is furnished with a Chronological Table (beginning with *Pericles*, 1590, and ending with *Twelfth Night*, 1613); and Charles Knight's edition of 1844, whose Advertisement states that the *Tales* 'have become as attractive to adults as to those for whose use they were originally intended', seems aimed at the more earnest kind of general reader; he adds 'a few *Scenes*'—such as the dagger soliloquy and murder scene from *Macbeth*—'which may be advantageously read after the perusal of the Tale, to furnish some notion of the original excellence of the wonderful dramas upon which the *Tales* are founded'. These extracts are lightly annotated with explanatory glosses. An edition of 1879 in Macmillan's Golden Treasury series includes an admirable Introduction by Canon Alfred Ainger (author of the volume on Lamb in the English Men of Letters series), setting the background of the *Tales* and offering an appreciation of the Lambs' methods, especially Mary's 'casual and diffused method of enforcing the many moral lessons that lie in Shakespeare's plays'. This, says Ainger, is why 'these trifles, designed for the nursery and the schoolroom, have taken their place as an English classic. They have never been superseded, nor are they ever likely to be.' Thus the volume was canonized. An edition of 1893, attractively presented in four slim, elegant volumes, provides 'a continuation by Harrison S. Morris', unmoralistic retellings of the sixteen remaining plays carefully done and including characters that the Lambs would certainly have dropped, such as Costard and

¹⁸ Thompson, *loc. cit.*

Jaquenetta (in *Love's Labour's Lost*) and the Clown in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Alfred Ainger had stressed the value of the *Tales* as an introduction to Shakespeare. Andrew Lang, in an Introductory Preface to an edition of 1894, disputes this, arguing that children 'are best introduced to Shakespeare by Shakespeare himself', that they 'do best to begin with the plays themselves, afterwards Lamb's *Tales* may bring them back to the originals'. (Does he mean, I wonder, that because they don't understand the plays they will read Lamb, and will then be able to understand the plays?—If so, why not start with Lamb?) Although Ainger's was not specifically a school edition, he had stressed that 'a knowledge of Shakespeare' was more and more 'coming to be regarded as a necessary part of an Englishman's education'. Not so, says the disputatious Lang: 'Alas, it is not Shakespeare, but the notes of Editors that are now a necessary part, not of an Englishman's education, but of an English boy's "cram", for the purpose of examiners.' We should read for pleasure: 'It is a misery to turn classics into schoolbooks.' Lang's essay, clearly not intended for young readers, is consciously anti-academic; he doubts whether 'the exquisite English of Lamb and his sister will attract the infants of today', and regrets the omission of the comic bits. One is left with the impression that Lang wishes he had not agreed to write this Introduction.

The most physically impressive of all editions of the *Tales* is that prepared by F. J. Furnivall and published by Raphael Tuck in 1901. The two handsome volumes, bound in gilded white cloth, are adorned with a portrait of Shakespeare and a full-page photograph of the bushy-bearded, sage-like Furnivall (who at least had the decency to reserve himself for the second volume). This, one feels, is an edition for the rich man's library, one that might stand beside the New Variorum Shakespeare. It is, boasts Furnivall in the full flush of late-Victorian materialism, 'the grandest and most costly . . . ever issued'. (It sold for 31s. 6d., with a cheaper issue at 22s. 6d., in a year when other editions were published for between 2s. 6d. and 7s. 6d.) Beyond being grand and costing a lot, its aims are uncertain. Furnivall writes characteristically quirky introductions on various topics, supplies a chronology (omitting *Titus Andronicus*, because 'Its story is too repulsive to be told in a book for boys and girls'), and sketches the stories of six plays omitted by the Lambs while declaring that 'for the Histories . . . readers must turn to Shakspeare's works', and opining that *Measure for Measure* is 'the gloomiest and most

unpleasant of Shakespeare's comedies'. Furnivall is at his most sympathetic in his comments on the Lambs' reduction of Shakespeare's comedy: 'The odd thing is, that two such humourful folk as Mary and Charles Lamb were, two who so enjoyed Shakspeare's fun, made up their minds to keep all that fun (or almost all) out of his plays when they told the stories of them to boys and girls who so like fun too . . . I can't help thinking that most boys would like the fun put into the Tales, and the stories cut shorter; but they can easily get it all in the plays themselves, so there's no harm done' (i. p. xi).

Furnivall's edition is expensively illustrated with indifferent pictures by H. Copping; and a number of less elaborately presented editions have been newly illustrated. Indeed, some seem primarily intended as vehicles for the work of particular artists. Routledge's Sixpenny Series in 1882 had forty quite striking engravings by Sir John Gilbert. In 1899 Dent's Temple Classics for Young People had twelve illustrations by Arthur Rackham; transferred to Everyman's Library in 1906, this edition is still in print; the Rackham illustrations are not as fine as those he did for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but it's a pity that the most interesting of them—a coloured one of Ariel and Caliban—is omitted at least from the paperback reprint, and that the delicacy of line which gives some of them a Beardsleyish quality has become much coarsened in successive reprints. Heath Robinson illustrated an edition of 1902, and the Oxford edition of 1905 has sixteen illustrations unadventurously chosen from the Boydell Gallery; the same year saw a reprint in the Hampstead Library with a sensible introduction by George Sampson praising the Lambs for sounding 'no jarring modern note, nothing that causes the mind to forget the master-author upon whose plays the work is based'. In 1909 Mrs Andrew Lang came upon the scene, introducing a handsome, gift-book style edition which sold for five shillings. Her 'Life of Shakespeare' condescends to the young reader in a manner that makes us appreciate the Lambs' refusal to do so: 'Many a posy William picked for his mother, of "daffodils that come before the swallow dares" . . .' An edition of 1911 adds additional tales by one Winston Stokes whose composition seems to have weighed heavily upon him: 'The writing' he says 'has presented untold difficulties; and to portray in foreign form the shifting battle-scenes of "Henry the Sixth", and guide the thread of an unbroken narrative among the horrors of "Titus Andronicus", must forbid an equal literary merit with Lamb's Tales, even if this had been attempted.' At any rate it was

enterprising of him to include *Titus*, even though he glosses over what happens to Lavinia—she was ‘subjected . . . to cruel tortures’—and no pie is served at the feast. Many of the more recent editions have no special features, as if publishers had regarded them as self-propelling, non-copyright volumes assured of a steady sale with very little effort on their part. The Bantam edition of 1962 has an introduction by Elizabeth Story Donno which treats the *Tales* with a kind of cynical expectation that they will be used mainly as a crib to Shakespeare: she writes an historical introduction to Shakespeare’s life, times, and stage without even mentioning the Lambs, provides an index of characters, and tells the stories of plays not treated by the Lambs in compressed synopses of about two pages each. J. C. Trewin balked the challenge of *Titus* (and of *Henry VIII*) in the twelve gracefully told tales that he added to the beautifully printed Nonesuch edition of 1964. His method resembles that of the Lambs except that he includes undisguised passages of verse at certain points. In 1979 O. B. Hardison briefly introduced a handsome paperback version illustrated with nearly a hundred pictures—some rare and fine, others rare and boring—selected from the Folger art collection.

The first edition of the *Tales* that seems explicitly intended for schools appeared in 1862, when Gordon’s School and Home Series published sixteen of the *Tales* in four parts costing threepence each. A popular but unambitious Pitt Press edition of 1875 adds an ‘appendix of speeches from three of the plays . . . for the use of teachers who may wish to play the part of the elder brother of the Lambs’ Preface, and to introduce their pupils at once to Shakespeare himself’. As might be expected, moral considerations are stressed in Victorian school editions; *Measure for Measure* is dropped from one of 1883 because ‘teachers find objection to it’. The 1888 version in John Heywood’s Literary Readers, edited by Alfonzo Gardiner, Headmaster of the Little Holbeck Board School (Leeds School Board), states as one of its aims ‘to give such needful explanations as shall make the language and the allusions intelligible to young readers’, and as another ‘to show the many moral lessons that Shakespeare’s plays enforce’. The glossarial notes include ‘*Immortal Providence*—The goodness of God to us, which never ceases’; there are Lists of Spellings, and vile illustrations. William P. Coyne’s forbidding edition of 1895 numbers the lines of the tales in fives, offering them as fodder for a method of instruction that has little to do with the imagination and that illustrates the danger of confusing

Lamb with Shakespeare: the volume 'may be of practical service in offering themes for the always valuable class-exercise of paraphrase and analysis, and may supply the teacher with apt and admirable materials for, say, a contrast of the dramatic and narrative styles of writing, for an occasional discourse on the merits of Lamb's methods of criticism, or for an historical reference to the qualities of idiom and diction, which make the language of Shakespeare a model of strength, pith, and brevity.' This kind of didacticism is exactly the attitude of mind that Lamb thought he was combatting by retelling the *Tales* in the first place. Like other editors of this period, Coyne stresses the moral value not merely of the *Tales* and of Shakespeare but of the lessons to be learned from Charles Lamb's 'self-annihilating devotion . . . to the care and tutelage of his sister', which 'affords . . . one of the most touching and noble incidents in the range of literary annals'.

A number of editions around the turn of the century illustrate the growth of character criticism: one of 1899 provides 'Sketches of the Principal Characters', as does the Oxford and Cambridge edition of 1904. Such preoccupations are apparent too in the questions with which pupils are presented: 'Name three men whose characters you admire, and give your reasons . . .' (1899); 'What do you admire most in the characters of . . .' (1899); 'Can you justify Desdemona's choice of a husband?' (1904). The 1904 edition is particularly suggestive as to the educative methods applied to the *Tales*: 'short character sketches . . . will be found to contain . . . all the leading features of each character'; passages from the plays 'will afford useful practice in paraphrasing, in parsing, and in analysis; many of them are also suitable for committing to memory'; there is a section on 'Lessons to be derived from the Tale', and a statement that the editors 'have expunged without ceremony whatever seemed unsuitable for juvenile readers'. The detailed annotations are a curious mixture of the naïve and the over-sophisticated; the young reader who needed to be told that a dragon was 'a fabulous monster' might have been daunted when faced with the gloss '*peculiar*, special, particular: from Old Fr. *peculier*: Lat. *peculiaris*, one's own'.

Later school editions are less ambitious. A much used one is in Dent's King's Treasures of Literature series (1920); it has eight tales with extracts from the plays and simple 'Literary Exercises', such as 'Which of the plays would you call tragedies?', 'Who is the jolliest person in the stories?', and—continuing the moral emphasis on Charles Lamb's treatment of his sister—'What was



Petruccio and Katherine: one of Frances Brundage's drawings for *The Children's Shakespeare* by E. Nesbit (1897). (Reproduced by permission of the Shakespeare Library, Birmingham Public Libraries)

there heroic about Charles Lamb's life?' In 1934 A. C. Ward wrote: 'Only in the present generation has the repute of [the *Tales*] suffered a serious decline, under the influence of a new scholastic conviction that paraphrased and pemmicanised classics are a hindrance more than an aid to literary appreciation.'¹⁹

I hope I've said enough—and I fear I may have said too much—to indicate something of the function that the Lambs' *Tales* have fulfilled since their publication. Their work has undoubtedly become a classic, and if it is less used as a Shakespeare substitute in schools than it used to be, it still serves as a crib even to distinguished performers of Shakespeare: the actress Gemma Jones writes in *Players of Shakespeare* (1985) that, invited to play Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* at Stratford, she tried to read the play but, finding difficulty in understanding it, resorted to Charles and Mary Lamb, who, she says, 'tell me a tale'.²⁰ This pinpoints one of the attractions of the *Tales*: even an actress, accustomed to working with playscripts, acknowledges the easier comprehensibility of a third-person narrative.

Although the title 'Tales from Shakespeare' instantly evokes the Lambs, the classic status of their volume has not gone unchallenged; and I should like now to turn to some of the alternative versions that have been offered. Most are long-forgotten. Some may well have fallen virtually dead from the presses; others had a life that is now expired; some of the more recent ones have a vitality that may carry them alive and kicking into the next century—though by then, of course, they may have more competitors.

Although the Lambs may not have known it, fourteen of Shakespeare's plays had already been turned into short stories, in French. In 1783, J. B. Perrin, a London-based teacher of French to the English nobility and gentry, had published *Contes Moraux & Instructifs, à l'usage de la Jeunesse, tirés des Tragédies de Shakespeare*. Subscribers to the volume included David Garrick's widow, who took six copies, and the tales—which include histories and *Cymbeline* as well as tragedies—are based on theatrical versions, including Garrick's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Presumably Perrin worked from Bell's recently published theatre edition. His Preface is predictably preoccupied with the unities, and *Titus Andronicus* is declared fit to be performed only before cannibals.

¹⁹ *The Frolic and the Gentle* (London, 1934), 1970 edn., p. 131.

²⁰ 'Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*' in Philip Brockbank (ed.), *Players of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 153–65, quotation on p. 153.

The principal function of this volume was later to be fulfilled by the many foreign-language translations of Lamb.²¹

Two rival volumes appeared during Charles Lamb's lifetime. One, *Tales of the Drama* by Elizabeth Wright Macauley, published in 1822, is interesting partly because its author was (in her way) both a poet and an actress. Her collection, drawing on the current theatre repertoire, includes tales based on plays by Massinger, Shirley, Rowe, Steele, Goldsmith, and Mrs Cowley, as well as six by Shakespeare. A publisher's Preface declares that she has attempted 'to preserve all the colloquial wit and scenic effect' and, above all, 'to render the whole strictly obedient to the most refined ideas of delicacy, subservient to the best purposes of morality, and conducive to the highest sense of religious awe, and love for a beneficent Providence'. Again one notes the purificatory function; and Miss Macauley's theatrical affiliations make it even clearer than in the case of the Lambs that she is trying, as her publishers say, to extend knowledge of the stage even 'to family circles where the drama itself is forbidden'. This curious volume is decorated with many pleasing little engravings, and the plots are both treated with some freedom—*The Winter's Tale*, for instance, begins with the episode of Antigonus and the bear and tells the preceding part of the story in retrospect—and also elaborated with verse passages written by Miss Macauley herself: thus, *The Merchant of Venice* includes an original verse invocation by Portia to 'the spirit of her venerated father', and ends with Miss Macauley's poetical thoughts on friendship. Lest there should be any danger of confusion, verse quotations from 'our immortal Avonian Bard' are marked with asterisks. The tone throughout is highly moralistic. This volume, never reprinted, might repay investigation by students of the theatre.

The principal interest of *The Juvenile Shakespeare, adapted to the Capacities of Youth* published in 1828 by Caroline Maxwell, a minor novelist, is that, including only plays with a historical basis, such as *Cymbeline*, *Titus*, and *Lear*, she nevertheless omits the major English historical plays while including the apocryphal *Thomas Lord Cromwell* and *Sir John Oldcastle*. This is an introductory volume, designed to tell the stories of the plays 'in the most simple and easy style . . . and to introduce in the course of the narratives, some of the most beautiful passages which each contain, for study or recitation . . .'. Again, moral purpose is

²¹ Bertram Dobell writes briefly on Perrin in *Sidelights on Charles Lamb* (London, 1903).

rammed home: 'on no occasion has the fair purity of the infant mind been for one moment forgot . . .' (Presumably Caroline Maxwell, like Macbeth, had no children.)

Around mid-century, Duncombe's Miniature Library published a series of Dramatic Tales, brief narrative versions of dramas, melodramas, extravaganzas, and pantomimes performed in London's minor theatres. These tiny volumes, each illustrated with a crude, often coloured engraving, sold for twopence each. Presumably they were on sale at the theatres, just as editions of the text as acted in grander performances could be bought at the Theatres Royal. The Library includes over twenty tales from Shakespeare, retold by a minor—indeed, minimal—playwright, Joseph Graves, which could be had either individually or in bound volumes accompanied by a Life of Shakespeare. Like Perrin's *Contes Moraux*, these tales are based on theatrical adaptations. At the end of *Richard II*, the Queen dies 'upon the corse of her unfortunate husband', as in Richard Wroughton's version acted by Kean in 1814 (and published in 1815). *King Lear* has its tragic ending, but, as in Tate, there is no Fool, and Edgar is in love with Cordelia; though he becomes King, he 'never afterwards formed any attachment; but devoted the remainder of his days in [*sic*] sorrow and mourning'. Most curiously, at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus delivers an encomiastic defence of the drama as a beneficent moral and ethical influence, and instructs Philostrate to 'further its interests whenever opportunity offers'. This appears to be a flight of Graves's own fancy rather than a reflection of a theatre version.

After this, the Lambs' supremacy was unchallenged until 1880, when Mary Seymour published *Shakespeare's Stories Simply Told*, in two volumes. These are simple, sometimes simplistic versions, perhaps influenced by the Lambs—at any rate, making some of the same omissions—though including all the plays. Although the author is not over-moralistic for her time, she exercises some ingenuity in avoiding moral awkwardnesses: 'Claudio . . . had for some time been leading a very bad life, which was quite forbidden by the laws of the city'; no mention is made of Juliet's pregnancy, Angelo is actually married to Mariana, but has 'cast her from him', and the bed trick becomes 'another interview'. All ends well, 'for Claudio became reformed in character, and when Isabella was made Duchess of Vienna her influence over the people was sufficient to exterminate the vices to which they had for so long been prone, and the state became once more prosperous and glorious'.

A sweetly pretty fancifulness characterizes Adelaide C. Gordon Sim's *Phoebe's Shakespeare*, of 1894, very clearly intended for little girls—or presumably for one particular little girl, since the Preface is addressed to 'My Dear Little Phoebe' and signed 'Auntie Addie'. 'Once upon a time . . . there lived a most wonderful man called Mr William Shakespeare. No one before he lived ever made up such beautiful stories . . . Mr Shakespeare wrote some stories that even children can read and understand; and I have written these down for you, and made them into this book, because I want you to learn to know them, and to love them, while you are still a little girl.' It's all very sweet and charming; the plots have passed through an imagination and come out far more heavily romanticized than by the Lambs, though not totally lacking in moral fibre—Romeo 'should have been a little more patient and less selfish, and [have] remembered that he had no right to kill himself just because he was unhappy'. Like other, later writers, Adelaide Sim brings Shakespeare himself into the picture: 'Mr William Shakespeare was a poet, and a poet is a person who *can* see fairies, and one lovely summer night, when he was lying under the trees on the soft moss in the woods, he heard and saw some wonderful things, and wrote them down and made this story . . .' Though the plots are simplified in structure they are sometimes elaborated in detail, as in the way *The Tempest* is rounded off: 'sailors tried to discover' Prospero's island, 'but they have never found it to this day, and I don't think they ever will, for, after Prospero and Miranda left, I believe the fairies gave it to the mermaids, who took it down to the bottom of the sea and used it for a palace, and Caliban went down with it. He'll never be able to do any more mischief.' A similar level of readership is envisaged by E[dith] Nesbit in *The Children's Shakespeare* of 1897, which is prettily if kinkily illustrated with paintings and drawings in which children are portrayed in grown-up roles: we see a four-year old Romeo embracing a little dimpled Juliet, a tiny Hamlet histrionically banishing a diminutive Ophelia to a nunnery (Pl. XIX), and an innocently merry little Malvolio with a suitably haughty young Olivia.²²

By contrast to this kind of little-girlishness, there is a hearty, self-conscious young-manliness about A. T. Quiller-Couch's *Historical Tales from Shakespeare*. The volume appeared in 1899, during the last years of Queen Victoria, when English soldiers

²² Edith Nesbit's retellings of Shakespeare went through several stages: see the bibliography in Julia Briggs, *A Woman of Passion: The Life of E. Nesbit, 1858–1924* (London, 1987).

were fighting in South Africa. Patriotic fervour ran high, and Quiller-Couch regarded patriotism as the 'great lesson' of Shakespeare's history plays: indeed, they 'might almost serve as a handbook to patriotism, did that sacred passion need one'. Unfortunately there was one serious lapse: the portrayal of Joan of Arc (in 1 *Henry VI*). Again the issue was exacerbated by topicality: this was the period during which Joan was being groomed as a candidate for canonization. Quiller-Couch would like to believe that Shakespeare 'was always fair and just', that he 'had no hand in the slanderous portrait of Joan of Arc sent down to us under his name'. In any case, 'no writer with a conscience could repeat that portrait for the children in whom are bound up our hopes of a better England than we shall see . . . here they will not be given the chance; since today, if ever, it is necessary to insist that no patriotism can be true which gives to a boy no knightliness or to a girl no gentleness of heart.' In the play, you will remember, Joan, condemned to death as a sorceress, disowns her poor old father, claims to be of royal birth, and at first proclaims her virginity, but then, finding her captors unmoved, confesses she is with child, and claims first that the father is Alençon, then that it is René, King of Naples; she is led cursing to execution. Quiller-Couch's version is much closer to that with which we are familiar from Bernard Shaw: 'A pile of faggots was raised in the market place of Rouen, where her statue stands today. The brutal soldiers tore her from the hands of the clergy and hurried her to the stake, but their tongues fell silent at her beautiful composure. One even handed her a cross he had patched together with two rough sticks. "Yes!" she cried, "my voices *were* of God!" and with those triumphant words the head of this incomparable martyr sank on her breast. "We are lost", muttered an English soldier standing in the crowd, "we have burned a saint"'. This is adaptation in the service of propaganda; and Quiller-Couch is even more blatant in some of his footnotes. Of the closing speech of *King John* ('This England never did, nor never shall, Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror . . .') he writes that 'the lesson of this "troublesome reign" is summed up for us in the wise, brave, and patriotic words of Faulconbridge—lines which every English boy should get by heart'; and John of Gaunt's speech on 'this royal throne of kings' is an 'incomparable lament', which 'may only be rendered in Shakespeare's own words, which no English boy, who is old enough to love his country, is too young to get by heart, forgetting the sorrow in it'.

In his Preface, Quiller-Couch disclaims the attempt 'to round off or tag a conclusion' to the Lambs' 'inimitable work', and indeed his method is very different from theirs. In keeping with a movement of thought that I noticed in school editions of Lamb at this time, he says that he stresses 'the *characters* in these plays'. He adds a considerable amount of historical detail and background—Falstaff, for example, was 'a poor gentleman shaken loose from the lower degrees of feudalism when that edifice began to rock and totter'—and draws attention to important changes of history. He reproduces and paraphrases much dialogue, and tells the stories at considerable length with that narrative flair that made him, in his time, a highly successful novelist. The volume had two new editions, in 1905 and 1910.

Quiller-Couch pays tribute to the 'easy grace' of the Lambs' style, but Sidney Lee, in his somewhat heavy-handed Introduction to Mary Macleod's *Shakespeare Story-Book* of 1902, complains that Mary Lamb 'had little of her brother's literary power' and claims (reasonably enough) that her omissions, in particular, justify the 'endeavour to supply young readers with a fuller and more accurate account'. In conclusion he stresses the tales' exemplary value: 'of both stories and characters proffering the counsel to seek what is good and true and to shun what is bad Shakespeare's pages are full.' Mary Macleod herself was a successful children's writer; her books include adaptations of Malory, Froissart, and Spenser, and *A Book of Ballad Stories* introduced by Edward Dowden, along with *Hilda at School* and *Tiny True Tales of Animals*. *The Shakespeare Story-Book* had a fourth edition in 1911 and appeared in Spanish translation the following year. She writes vigorously, provides some historical placing (beginning *Macbeth* with information about witchcraft, for example), and is capable of incisive comment: 'when trouble arose, the nurse's shallow, selfish nature became apparent, and poor Juliet was soon to learn that she must rely solely on her own strength and judgement in the sorrows that overwhelmed her.' Like Beerbohm Tree in his then-current production, she ends *Hamlet* with the flights of angels that sing the hero to his rest; and at times in her narrative passages she makes a strong attempt to convey a conception of the play in performance: 'And what was left for Shylock to answer? Baffled of his revenge, stripped of his wealth, forced to disown his faith, his very life forfeited—a hated, despised, miserable old man—he stood alone amidst the hostile throng. Not one face looked at him kindly, not one voice was raised on his behalf. Twice he strove to speak, and twice he

failed. Then, in a hoarse whisper through the parched lips, came the faltering words: "I—am—content". 'Shylock', said *The Spectator*, 'is Mr Irving's finest performance, and his final exit is its best point . . . the expression of defeat in every limb and feature, the deep, gasping sigh, as he passes slowly out, and the crowd rush from the Court to hoot and howl at him outside, make up an effect which must be seen to be comprehended.'²³ It is difficult not to feel that Mary Macleod was influenced by Irving's interpretation.

I pass quickly over the relatively undistinguished versions of Lois Grosvenor Hufford (an American) in 1902, R. Hudson, an elementary and highly selective version of ten plays in 1907, and of Alice Spencer Hoffman (1911), and alight briefly on those of Thomas Carter, a Doctor of Theology who made his contributions to Shakespeare scholarship with *Shakespeare, Puritan and Recusant* (1897) and *Shakespeare and Holy Scripture* (1905), and who also, under a pseudonym, wrote improving books for boys, such as *Jeffrey of the White Wolf Trail* (1912), *Sinclair of the Scouts* (1911), both published by the Religious Tract Society, *The Stolen Grand Lama: An English Boy's Adventures in Wild Tibet* (*Boy's Own Paper*, 1917), and *Yarns on Heroes of India: a book for workers among boys* (Church Missionary Society, 1915). Dr Carter did not seek to abandon his more scholarly persona when he came to publish *Stories from Shakespeare* in 1910, and *Shakespeare's Stories of the English Kings* in 1912. I wonder if you can guess, for example, which play is being introduced here: 'On the great plain of Attica, watered by the Kaphisos and the brook Ilissus, and circled by its hills, Parnassus, Hymettus, Pantelicon, and Lycabettus, there stands the famous city of Athens. Not many miles away, the sunlit waters of unconquered Salamis, the Bay of Eleusis, and the bold Saronic Gulf enclose the land in a belt of purple sea.' That is how Thomas Carter seeks to lead his young readers into the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The didact is evident in, for example, the distancing of the opening of *Macbeth*: 'The great story of Macbeth is an illustration of the powers of imagination of conscience, working in a sensitive and highly-strung mind. . . . To feel the power of the story you must know its setting.' Carter elaborates detail in a manner that seems at times to anticipate the worst excesses of psychological criticism: 'Death had early taken away his [Shylock's] wife Leah; and

²³ *Spectator* (8 Nov. 1879); cited by Arthur Colby Sprague, *Shakespearian Players and Performances* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953, British edn., London, 1954), p. 116.

his daughter Jessica, too careless and too selfish to strive to learn the secret of a proud man's heart, had allowed his home to grow into a place of suspicion and coldness and bickering, wherein the strife of the world outside was carried within its walls, and dishonesty and treachery allowed to make havoc of its peace.' And at times he seems to occupy the pulpit rather than the story-teller's chair: 'as he [Lear] passes from our sight in a passionate agony of yearning for the peace and light and love which dwelt for him in the pure and holy heart of Cordelia, we feel that the great writer in the words "Look there, look there!" lifts up the dark curtain for an instant that the light of the Eternal may shine through and speak of hope Beyond.' Carter makes immensely worthy, earnest attempts to turn the plays into improving short stories; it seems no accident that the copy of *Stories from Shakespeare* that I picked up in a second-hand shop had been presented as a school prize. Nor is it entirely surprising that when four of the verbose Carter's stories were reissued in 1937, they were 'adapted and rewritten within the thousand-word vocabulary'.

The batch of tales of which I have just been speaking, published from 1893 to 1914, coincides, you may have noticed, with the period during which the Lambs' *Tales* were at the height of their popularity. The new versions, in other words, seem not so much to have been driving the Lambs off the market as to have been supplying an alternative demand—partly (though only partly) by providing versions of plays that the Lambs had omitted. As reprints of the Lambs' *Tales* dwindled, so, for a while, did alternative versions. Even so, there are more than I can spare time to mention. There is a *Shakespeare Tales for Boys and Girls* dating apparently from around 1930 whose attitude to the events of *Measure for Measure* suggests a major shift in moral values: Claudio had been condemned 'for an act of rash selfishness which nowadays would only be punished by severe reproof'. Even so, there is no bed in the bed trick. Friars, we are told, 'are as nearly like nuns as men can be', and Claudio had 'a queer friend called Lucio' who was finally 'condemned to marry a stout woman with a bitter tongue'. At the end 'She [Isabella] was his [the Duke's] with a smile, and the Duke forgave Angelo, and promoted the Provost.'

Much more interesting is a forgotten volume of 1934 which I confess to regarding as something of a find. Called *Six Stories from Shakespeare*, it boasts as authors John Buchan, Hugh Walpole, Clemence Dane, Francis Brett Young, Winston Churchill, and

Viscount Snowden.²⁴ Each tells a different tale. I wondered if Churchill might have chosen *Henry V*; in fact his play is *Julius Caesar*. He displays a politician's shrewdness in his analysis of Brutus's arguments in favour of the assassination: 'Caesar must not be allowed even the chance of going wrong, the seed of potential tyranny must be killed outright, like a serpent in the egg. One could hear the sigh of relief and release with which he finally persuaded himself to acquiesce in this sophistry.' And in the Forum scene Churchill stands apart from the tale with a comment on the oratory: 'It can scarcely be necessary to remind the reader of what [Antony] said, for no speech in the history of the world is more famous, none better known. "Friends, Romans, countrymen ..." ... the words are alive on every tongue, and custom cannot stale them.' There Churchill treats Shakespeare as history, and comments on it (in 'custom cannot stale them') with a half-submerged quotation from Shakespeare himself.

But the most aesthetically interesting of these tales are those told by the professional novelists. Hugh Walpole creates a great sense of awed wonder in the narrator of the Lear story. John Buchan's narrative of *Coriolanus* is told at a tangent from Shakespeare's play, with old Publicola as the central character; as he takes his ease in various parts of Rome, the events are narrated to him by characters including the tribunes, Menenius, and Flaccus, with the result that the story acquires a distanced, retrospective quality. It ends with Flaccus telling Publicola of the hero's death:

'He died like a Roman', said Menenius.

'He might have been the Volscian king, but he was too noble', said Flaccus.

But old Publicola flung a fold of his cloak over his head and looked on the ground.

'It is as I feared', he said. 'He had no part in Rome. He had gone barbarian.'

And in *Hamlet* Francis Brett Young takes his cue from Hamlet's request that Horatio 'draw [his] breath in pain|To tell my story'. Again, the tale is told in retrospect; as narrator, Horatio is also (validly) a commentator, who sounds as if he had read, as well as met, *Hamlet* at Wittenberg: 'if the mere act of vengeance

²⁴ The stories had originally appeared as a series, 'Shakespeare's Plays as Short Stories', in the *Strand Magazine* (1933-4).

appeased [Hamlet's] devotion to his father's memory, I believe that the artist in him took pleasure in the complicated hazards against which it must be wreaked; I believe he took pains to contrive his vengeance as a work of art ...' Paradoxically enough, here, as in Buchan's *Coriolanus*, the narration of the drama's events by an involved participant rather than a detached, omniscient story-teller restores something of the dramatic mode. The best of these *Six Stories* seem to me to float free from their models and to acquire value as fully realized short stories in their own right.

Very different is the unemphatic, even laconic tone of the scholar G. B. Harrison in his two volumes of *New Tales* of 1938 and 1939. Not for Harrison the rhetoric of Thomas Carter at Lear's death—though there is a reflection of Bradley: 'So they gathered round, watching Lear as he feebly knelt beside Cordelia. The little life left in him began to flicker. Suddenly he thought that her lips moved, and with a cry of joy he fell over her body.' Harrison's generally phlegmatic tone may be not unfairly represented by the ending of his composite story 'Sir John Falstaff', of which the last words are 'So that was the end of Falstaff'. 'Nothing is here for tears ...'

As the Shakespeare quatercentenary of 1964 approached, so, as if in anticipation, the number of new tales from Shakespeare increased. In 1960 appeared Marchette Chute's version, summary in style and making no real attempt at imaginative reconstruction. Irene Buckman's *Twenty Tales from Shakespeare* of 1963, nicely produced with excellent photographs of recent productions, has a short foreword by Peggy Ashcroft saying that, whereas the Lambs' *Tales* 'were for the nursery and the fireside', these are for 'the young playgoer and the young playgoer's parents'. But these too are relatively summary in manner.

There is more life in Roger Lancelyn Green's two volumes (twenty tales) of 1964. Christopher Fry, in a brief foreword, remarks that Green had acted many of the minor roles himself, and certainly he has theatrical touches. There seems, for example, to be a direct echo of Clifford Williams's 1962 production of *The Comedy of Errors* in Green's "'Are you pleading with me, fair lady?" asked Antipholus, looking behind him to see if she was talking to someone over his shoulder.' The action is occasionally up-dated in the manner of modern-dress productions—Dr Pinch is a psychiatrist, though his methods of treatment sound a little archaic: 'Both your husband and your servant are suffering from schizophrenia: I know the symptoms only too well. They

must be bound and laid in a dark room.' There are other fanciful additions—Leontes gave the old shepherd 'lands in Sicily where he settled down as a gentleman-farmer, and was able to employ Autolycus as a bailiff'; and Lady Macbeth helpfully tells Macbeth 'I know what it is to be a mother, for I had a child by my first husband.' But Green's tales are ultimately reductive because of a failure to match up to the emotional demands of the story, nowhere more evident than at the end of Shylock's trial: after the Duke has said that Shylock must sign a deed, we are told simply 'So Shylock went off home'!

More successful is Ian Serraillier's *The Enchanted Island: Stories from Shakespeare*, of 1964. Serraillier creates alternative titles: 'A Wild-Cat for a Wife', 'Bottom the Actor', 'Murder at Dunsinane', and so on. He does not aim to be comprehensive—there is, for example, no Viola plot in 'The Love-Letter' (based on *Twelfth Night*); Cesario is Orsino's page. There is no casket story in 'The Pound of Flesh'—Bassanio simply woos Portia—nor are there any young lovers in 'Bottom the Actor'. The tone is straightforward and clear, but uncondescending. Action is successfully visualized, though not necessarily in stage terms. We might once again take the ending of *King Lear* as a sample:

The field between the two camps was crowded with soldiers, Kent and Albany among them. Suddenly the ranks broke and in the silence a tragic figure stumbled forward. It was Lear, clasping Cordelia's limp body and crying out in a voice of anguish, 'She's gone for ever. She's dead as earth.'

Yet somehow he could not believe that she was really dead. He asked for a mirror to hold close to her mouth to see if there was any breath to mist the glass; then for a feather to see if it would stir on her lips. For a moment it seemed to stir—but only in mockery. . . . All he could grasp was that Cordelia was in his arms, that she was dead and would never come to him again.

A moment later he too had gone, his living martyrdom ended at last. Death had come as a blessing, for he could endure no more.

The tone is unsentimental, unmoralistic, and there is no condescension.

One has the sense in Serraillier's volume, as in some of the others I have mentioned, that these stories are not primarily introductions to the study of Shakespeare, or even introductions to Shakespeare in performance, but the result, in however minor a way, of an interaction between the author's imagination and

Shakespeare's; the stories have their own independent interest, deeply indebted though they are to Shakespeare.

There may come a point in such a process at which tales cease being versions, or reinterpretations, of Shakespeare and assume a virtually independent life of their own. Such a point, approached in Serrailier's work, is reached and passed in Bernard Miles's popular *Favourite Tales from Shakespeare* of 1976 and *Well-Loved Tales from Shakespeare* of 1986. These are free, idiosyncratic fantasies on plays rather than retellings of them.

But it is pleasant to record that the most recent—or almost the most recent—of the retellings that I have traced is one that, in my opinion, brilliantly succeeds in translating both the substance and the effect of Shakespeare's plays into the narrative medium. In *Shakespeare Stories*, of 1985, Leon Garfield adopts a crisp, sharply metaphorical style, often employing bold images: Juliet stares down from her balcony 'with her willow hair weeping'; when Kate, the shrew, stormed through her father's house in a bad temper, 'doors kept going off like exploding chestnuts'; in Illyria, thatched cottages are 'neat as well-combed children'. Though Garfield's prose is not unmannered, it succeeds remarkably in providing an acceptable alternative to Shakespeare's poetry. Like the Lambs, Garfield omits some episodes—the Porter from *Macbeth*, the Nurse's introductory scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, the Pedant from *The Taming of the Shrew*—, but he displays a mastery of the plays' structural principles that enables him to transmute their essential features into the medium of the short story. This is apparent in, for instance, his use of analytical parallels to effect transitions: 'While one Harry was idly dreaming of the glory that would be his, the other Harry was much concerned with the glory that *was* his'; and 'Even as the casket that Jessica had thrown down from Shylock's window had contained her father's treasure, so one of the three closed caskets in Belmont contained another father's treasure.' Such comments put criticism to creative use.

The essential difference, it seems to me, between Garfield's method and the Lambs' is that where the Lambs provided a simplified reading experience as a preparation for a more complex and difficult experience of the same kind, Garfield seeks to convey in prose narrative the experience, not of reading the twelve plays that he includes, but of seeing them performed. Sometimes he visualizes action that could be used as stage business: Falstaff 'sat down and regarded his countenance in the diminishing bowl of a spoon' before saying 'why, my skin hangs

about me like an old lady's loose-gown'; Polonius reads his list of entertainments offered by the actors who visit Elsinore 'from the company's extensive advertisement, which reached down, like a paper apron, almost to his knees'; and after the enraged Claudius has stopped the play and stormed out of the chamber, 'the bewildered Player King crept back to recover his tinsel crown. Then he went away, sadly shaking his head. The performance had not gone well.' It might almost be Hazlitt writing about Kean—and there is a Shakespearian touch in the sudden recognition of the Player's point of view. Garfield is best known as a writer for teenagers, and his volume is presented in a manner that seems intended primarily for young readers, but his transmuting power gives his stories a wider appeal; they are not pale reflections of Shakespeare, not introductory studies, but fully imagined re-creations with a life of their own.

I have, I know, given only a superficial survey of a literary sub-genre which, though minor, has been too popular to be adequately considered within a single lecture. In recent years, theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare from the Restoration onwards have been much reprinted and studied. Prose adaptations have been almost entirely neglected, yet they have been immensely popular, and are often no less radical in their revisions and reinterpretations.²⁵ I don't suggest that I have identified an important new growth area in Shakespearian studies; but I hope I've said enough to suggest that the successive retellings of Shakespeare's stories offer a body of material that permits an interesting exploration of narrative techniques, that—like stage adaptations—they can reflect changing critical and moral perspectives on Shakespeare himself, that they are of sociological interest, especially in relation to the history of education, and that some of them are not negligible as prose fictions in their own right.²⁶

²⁵ The most substantial study is by Maria Verch, 'Die Lambschen *Tales from Shakespeare* und ihre Nachfolger', *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 1980, pp. 90–108. The Lambs' *Tales* are critically considered in J. Riehl, *Charles Lamb's Children's Literature* (Salzburg, 1980).

²⁶ The lecture as read concluded with a recording of a version of *Romeo and Juliet* from the cassette *One-Minute Classics*, conceived and written by Andy Mayer and Jim Becker and performed by John 'Mighty-Mouth' Moschitta (1986).

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(b) *Other authors*

- Six Stories from Shakespeare*. Retold by John Buchan [*Coriolanus*], Hugh Walpole [*King Lear*], Clemence Dane [*The Taming of the Shrew*], Francis Brett Young [*Hamlet*], Rt Hon. Winston Churchill [*Julius Caesar*], Rt Hon. Viscount Snowden [*The Merchant of Venice*] (London, 1934) (Eight illustrations by Fortunino Matania)
- Anon., *Shakespeare Tales for Boys and Girls* and 'When Shakespeare was a Boy' by Dr F. J. Furnivall, M.A. (London, n.d.; c. 1930?)
- Buckman, Irene, *Twenty Tales from Shakespeare*, with a Foreword by Dame Peggy Ashcroft (London, 1963)
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- the Life of this Eminent Poet, by Joseph Graves. Embellished with Superb Engravings (London, n.d. [1850?])
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- Green, Roger Lancelyn, *Tales from Shakespeare*, with a foreword by Christopher Fry. 2 vols. (London, 1964)
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- Hoffman, Alice Spencer, *The Children's Shakespeare*, Being Stories from the Plays with Illustrative Passages (London, 1911)
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- Hudson, R., *Tales from Shakespeare* (London, n.d. [1907])
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(Includes *King John*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Coriolanus*, and *Julius Caesar*.)
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(Sixteen plays; reprinted 1911)
- Maxwell, Caroline, *The Juvenile Shakespeare, adapted to the Capacities of Youth* (London, 1828)
(Includes only plays with a historical basis (e.g. *Cymbeline*, *Timon of Athens*, *King Lear*, but omits e.g. *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Richard III* while including *Thomas*, *Lord Cromwell* and *Sir John Oldcastle*.)
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- Serraillier, Ian, *The Enchanted Island: Stories from Shakespeare* (London, 1964)
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