

ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

UNBLOTTED LINES: SHAKESPEARE AT WORK

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Read 26 April 1972

I

IT may seem a poor return for the honour of being invited to give this year's British Academy lecture on Shakespeare that I should, apparently, have chosen to talk about that aspect of Shakespeare's work which has, in the past, caused Shakespeareans most embarrassment. Shakespeare's own friends recognized that his pen ran away with him. For Heminge and Condell this fluency was a marvellous gift; Ben Jonson saw it rather as a dangerous facility: 'I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that in his writings, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out line. My answer hath been, would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech.' Jonson, we know, was thinking of such lines as 'Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause'—which, if Shakespeare wrote it at all, was blotted into better sense before ever *Julius Caesar* was printed. But Shakespeare's headlong method of composition has wider consequences for his art than the odd solecism or syntactical tangle.

Shakespeare's plays abound in loose ends, false starts, confusions, and anomalies of every kind. They can all perhaps be typified in the Duke in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, who is on occasion called an emperor but in fact behaves very much as a private individual, and who simply does not know from one scene to another whether he is ruling over Verona or over Milan. At one time, editors and critics felt Shakespeare must be exonerated from all such absurdities, and there resulted that disintegration of Shakespeare that Sir Edmund Chambers challenged in the British Academy lecture for 1924 and in his subsequent writings. Chambers's cool declaration that Shakespeare was 'often careless and often perfunctory' did much to check the

dismemberment of Shakespeare's text into revisions and collaborations, and for this we must be lastingly grateful. But the admission of slovenliness remained; in a decade dominated by William Archer and Bernard Shaw it could not be other than an admission. I would like today to take advantage of the very different aesthetic climate in which we now live to suggest that Shakespeare's spontaneity is not a reproach but—as Heminge and Condell maintained—an honour to him; and that the plays' contradictions are evidence, not so much of Shakespeare's absent-mindedness, as of the presence of an exploring and adventurous mind, deeply involved in all the issues bodied forth through the actions of his characters. A birthday lecture should surely be a celebration, and this is to be, if you like, a celebration of Shakespeare's inspired carelessness, a justification of that indeterminacy which reveals to us, in Wallace Stevens's phrase, 'the process of the personality of the poet'.

Shakespeare's changes of mind sometimes take the simple form of an immediate dissatisfaction with a word, a speech, or even a whole scene. Because it is not his habit to go back and tidy up, to sweep up the chippings, duplications survive in his text and alert us to the fact that here are places where we can actually watch Shakespeare at work. Juliet is told that Romeo has killed her cousin Tybalt, and the playwright is soon busy expending all his eloquence on her rhetorical outcry:

O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!
 Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
 Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!

Shakespeare is at this time still in love with the formal lament, so the highly-wrought oxymora of this line seem to him just right: two stresses balanced neatly each side of a central caesura to emphasize the patterning of the thought into the antitheses of good-bad, bad-good. He tries to repeat the effect. 'Ravenous dove'. No, that won't do. He has started, literally, on the wrong foot; here are only four syllables where he needs five, and bad-good where he wants good-bad. Better to start with 'dove'. 'Dove-feather'd raven'—that's it—

Dove-feather'd raven! wolfish-ravening lamb!
 Despised substance of divinest show!
 Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st,
 A damned saint, an honourable villain!

By now he is well away, and has forgotten all about the discarded 'Ravenous', which remained to baffle the compositor

with an extra-long line, 'Ravenous dove feather'd raven, wolfish ravening lamb', which he split into two, wrecking the forceful symmetry of the speech.

Modern editors of course blot out 'Ravenous' on Shakespeare's behalf, but they leave intact longer instances of Shakespeare's rewritings. There is for example the moment in *Love's Labour's Lost* when the four men who have forsworn women's company in order to concentrate on their studies are all found to be hopelessly in love. Berowne, as the leading wit among them, is asked to justify their volte-face, and he starts with a fine, challenging line: 'Have at you then, affection's men at arms!' But Shakespeare has, in this scene alone, penned some three hundred lines of verse, including a lyric and a couple of sonnets; although we do not know at which point his day's stint began, it is soon evident in this speech that he just cannot keep up the vigour of his opening. The rhythm flags, the diction begins to creep, the logical distinctions of the speech grow blurred. Lecturers on Shakespeare know as well as Shakespeare himself that there is only one sensible thing to do in such a situation and that is to sleep on it. And when Shakespeare returned, refreshed, to the speech, he must have felt an intolerable flatness as he read over such lines as:

For when would you, my lord, or you, or you,
Have found the grounds of study's excellence
Without the beauty of a woman's face?

Now he piles up fresh epithets, carries the sense impetuously forward from line to line, and relates the thought closely to the scene's action—all the courtiers have been writing poems—

For when would you, my liege, or you, or you,
In leaden contemplation have found out
Such fiery numbers as the prompting eyes
Of beauty's tutors have enriched you with?

And so on through the whole speech till Shakespeare finds himself carried away in Berowne's poetic cavalry charge—'Saint Cupid then! and soldiers, to the field!'—so that there is no time to go back and blot out the twenty-eight lines of false start. The two versions are left standing, one after the other, much as in *Julius Caesar*—if I may finally instance a whole duplicated passage of dialogue—there are two versions of the scene in which the audience learns of Portia's death.

The first of these, it will be recalled, occurs at the end of the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius, when Brutus reveals that

throughout the scene he has been keeping to himself the news that Portia has 'swallowed fire'. There follows a council of war during which Messala tells Brutus that Portia is dead and Brutus receives the news as if he were hearing it for the first time. The scene as it stands has had its defenders, but most readers recoil from the suggestion that Shakespeare meant Brutus to put on a display of equanimity in order to impress Messala and Titinius. We assume Shakespeare was dissatisfied with the scene and changed it. Because the passage between Brutus and Cassius is by far the more moving, it has been suggested that it is an inserted revision, meant to replace the dialogue with Messala; and certainly the rough edges fit so neatly together that I almost hesitate to pose the question; ought we to assume that Shakespeare's second thoughts are always improvements on his first?

I would like, very tentatively, to suggest that we may have here two successive attempts to force back Brutus and Cassius into the roles and relationship they have in Plutarch. Throughout the play, Shakespeare has found it very hard to follow Plutarch in exalting the stoical self-command of Brutus and denigrating the impulsiveness of Cassius; in the relationship of the man who is unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow with the man who is passion's slave, which runs as a steady theme through the plays and sonnets that Shakespeare wrote towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, his sympathies repeatedly veer towards the warmer and more passionate nature. The quarrel scene in particular has an authenticity which, we know, thrilled the Elizabethan audience. But Brutus's anger here is that of an insufferable self-complacency, whereas Cassius's is the anger of wounded love. Shakespeare seems to recognize that he has distorted his source, and fastens on the death of Portia as a way of rehabilitating Brutus. He makes two attempts to use it, and they may stand in the order in which he wrote them. The first fails to restore Plutarch's characters; the Cassius who cries 'How 'scap'd I killing when I cross'd you so? / Oh insupportable and touching loss!' is still Shakespeare's Cassius. Shakespeare passes on to the war council, and there perhaps discovers another way of informing us of Brutus's loss. This time he calls to his help a piece of stage business, a single candle lighting a face that is trying to maintain a stoical calm (he will use the same device at the end of *Othello*). And he gives Cassius a reaction to the news which makes him once again the envious, self-centred Cassius of Plutarch: 'I have as much in this in art as you / But yet my nature could not bear it so.' If the episode

seems crude and clumsy by comparison with the earlier dialogue, it can be because Shakespeare is doing deliberate violence to his own dramatic instincts in order to defer to Plutarch, who was an ancient and an authority.

II

I have dwelt at some length on this duplication in *Julius Caesar* because it serves as a reminder that whereas most false starts in Shakespeare are followed by scenes or passages in which he seems imaginatively liberated at finding himself on the right track, there are also false starts and anomalies that show the exploratory freedom of Shakespeare's mind being curbed by some external factor. Here the factor may well have been deference to his source. But even in the comedies, where Shakespeare's fancy might seem most free to roam, false starts occur when Shakespeare realizes he has embarked on something that is not going to be theatrically feasible. A good many of Shakespeare's ghosts can be explained in this way; I do not mean the solid, communicative ghosts of tragedy, but textual ghosts, characters named in scene headings who never speak, or who are named in speeches but never appear. The Dutchman and the Spaniard who are given entries at the beginning of the wager scene in *Cymbeline* could conceivably be mutes; but the Elizabethan audience would have felt cheated by the failure of two funny-looking foreigners to say anything ridiculous, and the likelihood is that Shakespeare remembered, after he had begun the scene, that he had not enough actors for these supernumerary roles.

The same explanation may serve for the disappearance of a character such as Innogen, Hero's mother in *Much Ado*; only a small group of boy actors was available for female parts. But the cast of *The Tempest* is not very large, and an actor could presumably have been found to play the Duke of Milan's 'brave son', whom Ferdinand speaks of as having been involved in the shipwreck. Once Shakespeare's imagination is fully engaged on the island's enchantments, however, there is no place for a character who would draw aside interest from Ferdinand and who would be left unpartnered at the stage when Jack should have Jill. Above all, Antonio as a father was unthinkable. The fallen characters of the romances—*Cymbeline*, *Leontes*, *Alonso*—are all threatened with childlessness, and in earlier plays of Shakespeare the bad are almost always barren; he

found he had to take Iago's little daughter out of his source story when he wrote *Othello* even though this landed him in some difficulties with the plot. So he must leave the brave son of the Duke of Milan to be picked up by another vessel of the Neapolitan fleet before it vanishes over the horizon, for he can have no real part in the imaginative fabric of the play.

When we turn to bigger anomalies than these odd ghost-characters we again find that theatrical exigency can account for only some of them. It may explain the disappearance of Sly and the Hostess at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*. If we subscribe to the older view that Shakespeare's play is a re-writing of *The Taming of a Shrew*, where of course Sly does come back, we can watch him using up every available actor in the process of enlarging and enriching the intrigue, so that Sly has to slip off stage and reappear as one of the bearded pantaloons, and the Hostess, initially preserved by Shakespeare's elimination of Bianca's second sister, has in the end to disappear and double as the third bride necessitated by the folk-tale climax of the story. Even if Shakespeare's play is the original, he could have found he had been more prodigal of actors' parts than he intended. The Bad Quarto, which *A Shrew* then becomes, shows that there were other men of the theatre then as now who were convinced that Sly's awakening was the proper ending of the play; and Shakespeare himself seems, with his usual economy, to have conceived it and saved it up for Bottom's unforgettable emergence from his midsummer night's dream. Either way, the Sly scenes of *The Shrew* are a kind of false start which Shakespeare, thank goodness, left unblotted.

A practical explanation is possible too for a marked change of plan in the second act of *The Merchant of Venice*. We are led to expect a masquerade in which Jessica, disguised as a torch-bearer, will be abducted under Shylock's very nose. Now a masque in Shakespeare is always a skirmish in the sex war. But of the three boy actors who might be considered skilled in this kind of badinage, two are in distant Belmont and the third is disguised as a mere torch-bearer. There is no one available to give pert feminine back-answers to the masqueraders. The masque is called off; the wind has 'come about' and Bassanio and Gratiano must hurry aboard the ship for Belmont. Something much more fundamental than the availability of actors seems to me to be involved in this change. The writing of this second act has been noticeably slack; the sorry humour of Gobbo and Old Gobbo might almost be designed to keep the

audience occupied in Shakespeare's absence, and the masquerade is planned with much the same purpose. Shakespeare's imagination lies becalmed. Then, with the suddenness of the wind that fills Bassanio's sails, he gets a grip of the play's theme of love's recklessness: Bassanio's brave venture for Portia's love, Antonio's yet braver venture for Bassanio's, the audacity of Portia's venture to save Antonio's life. Once Shakespeare knows just what the play is about the writing rises steadily to the double dramatic climax of Bassanio's choice and Portia's judgement; but the dramatist has not forgotten his half-promise of a set of wit well played, and the comedy of the rings follows at the point where it is most theatrically feasible, and most dramatically satisfying in restoring the mood of festive comedy.

Sometimes, unhappily, this moment of engagement, of 'all systems go', does not occur. In the good company of Mr. John Wain I have to admit to disappointment with the intrigue of *Much Ado*, in which Shakespeare seems to me to dodge down one blind alley after another, forced in the end to rely on Dogberry, Benedick, and Beatrice between them to save the play as an evening's entertainment. The insecurity of this play contrasts strongly with the way that Shakespeare handles a change of plan early in *Twelfth Night*. Originally he intended to make Orsino employ Viola as a singer, and the fact that in the second act Feste, not Viola, sings 'Come away, death' has been explained as the result of Shakespeare discovering either that his Feste could sing, or that his Viola could not. But in the process of writing himself in, of becoming involved in the fortunes of his characters, Shakespeare has surely made a much more important discovery—the intense dramatic pathos of Viola's predicament. If she were to sing to Orsino at this point her character would be effaced by the masking impersonality of a boy's voice. By making her a listener to the song, Shakespeare wins from the situation its full aural and visual effect. We cannot take our eyes off Viola as she feasts her own gaze upon Orsino, secure in the knowledge that he in turn is lost in the image of Olivia evoked by the song's artificial melancholy. And once again a poetic quickening, emphasized here by the inter-weaving of speech, song, and instrumental music, indicates Shakespeare's own excitement at finding himself on the right track.

So far, I have concentrated on comedies. Even those who feel most uneasy at the thought of Shakespeare making up his plays as he went along can tolerate a measure of improvisation here, because the inconsequential happenings of comedy are felt to

have an affinity with the cheerful ad-libbing of seasonal revels. A tragedy, the imitation of a great action, demands, we might think, far more scrupulous planning. Yet we have already seen the possibility, even in the historical tragedy of *Julius Caesar*, that Shakespeare made an *ad hoc* decision to introduce Portia's death where he did. When a tragedy has a fictional rather than a historical source, Shakespeare's approach to his story can be just as exploratory as it is in the comedies. The Iago of Cinthio's story—I am keeping to Shakespeare's names for the characters—desires Desdemona, but believes her to be in love with Cassio; his love turns to hate, so that he seeks to destroy Cassio out of jealousy, Desdemona out of chagrin, and Othello out of envy. We might think this motivation enough, but Shakespeare's Iago offers us a startling elaboration of these motives. He hates Cassio with a professional jealousy, because he has been passed over for promotion. He hates Othello for passing him over and because he suspects him of an affair with Emilia. If he desires Desdemona it is not, he tells us, out of 'absolute lust', but because he wants to revenge himself on his cuckold. He even suspects Cassio with Emilia. Bewildered critics talk of Iago's rationalizations, but it may well be Shakespeare, rather than Iago, who is hunting for motives. Until the end of the second act Shakespeare has not fully realized, brought to life, Iago as a character. He knows an Iago capable of genuine passion for Desdemona is inconceivable, yet no other motivation that he tries out seems to work. It is almost as if he has to watch Iago act before he knows what kind of being he is. His difficulty is that summed up in the question: 'How do I know what I think till I see what I say?' Or as Iago puts it at the end of his second soliloquy—'Knavery's plain face is never seen till used.' As Iago's knavery goes to work to get Cassio cashiered, Shakespeare perceives that the very existence of innocence is the bright day that brings forth the serpent; that Iago needs no motives for his actions because he is a pure agent, the embodiment of destructiveness. So in his soliloquy at the end of this act, before he embarks on that undermining of Othello's nobility which is perhaps the crowning achievement of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, Iago makes no further parade of his motives. He is driven only by a plain will to harm: evil itself pitted against goodness itself.

III

The anomalies and confusions of Shakespeare's plays, then, although they may sometimes have causes outside of his involvement in the play's action, arise far more frequently from the nature of this involvement, from his habit of plunging into a play before he has fully conceived its direction and outcome. There are critics who do recognize this element of improvisation in such a play as *Othello*. The pity of it is that they are affronted by it. Perhaps the greater pity is that so many Shakespearean critics are also pedagogues. As such, our natural instinct is to scold Shakespeare for not having done his homework; for not thinking out all the play's issues before he begins to write, or for not re-writing once he has run into difficulties. These protests however only throw the sand against the wind. The prevailing temper in the arts today favours indeterminacy, spontaneity, extemporization; as we can glimpse if we momentarily raise our eyes from the minutiae of Shakespeare's text and, risking the rashest of *Zeitgeist* generalizations, survey the scene of the seventies.

As a scene, it is more a battlefield than a landscape; but one concept does seem to have gained dominance in the past twenty-five years. That is the concept of the work of art not as the Grecian urn, the creation detached from its creator and so at best a cold pastoral, but as Jacob's wrestling with the angel; art as artifact has in large measure yielded place to art as act. Even literary scholars do not escape this trend of the times; we demand more and more manuscripts in print so that we can follow every flexion of the novelist's or poet's mind in the act of composition, just as in the painting of the past critics take greater pleasure in the immediacy of the roughest sketches than in the finished painting, or call in the aid of spectroscopy to reveal every false start and change of plan on the final canvas. And when we turn to the creative artists, the makers themselves, we find the two obvious strongholds of the artifact, painting and lyric poetry, repeatedly assaulted by such movements as projective verse and action painting. Art exhibitions in particular have taken on the animation of fairgrounds. In music, a generation whose parents were guided by Tovey into an understanding of the formal perfections of the great European classics now bring an equal sensitivity and seriousness to the

extemporizations of Indian *rāga* and Afro-American jazz. For the quest for art as act has inevitably led away from the cultures that have promoted and preserved the artifact, to non-European concepts of art. In the east of Nigeria, a hundred people will sometimes go into the forest to build a shrine to the goddess of creation, and to shape and paint for it a wealth of life-sized figures. The completion of such a Mbari house may take a year or more. When it is finished the people go home, leaving their work to rapid destruction by rain and termites. Their achievement has been the act of making, and not the object made. There could be, as some artists have recognized, no better emblem than this of the aesthetic which has come to dominate the third quarter of our century.

‘What gives the canvas its meaning’, says Dr. Harold Rosenberg, writing of the American action painters, ‘is not psychological data but role, the way the artist organizes his emotional and intellectual energy as if he were in a living situation. The interest lies in the kind of act taking place in the four-sided arena, a dramatic interest.’ Contemporary arts all aspire to the condition of drama, since this is by definition art as act. When the dramatist is, like Shakespeare, also an actor, his art is doubly act in that the writing of a play is for him a performance, an improvisation in slow motion. There is nothing startling in the notion of Shakespeare writing a comedy in a fortnight; one leading dramatist of the present time averages ten days on the writing of his plays, while another has on occasion composed verse and prose alike straight onto a stencil, so that each page could be immediately run off and handed to the actors. And it would no more occur to the actor-playwright Shakespeare to turn back and blot out such false starts as Iago’s motive-hunting than it would occur to him in performance to re-enact a scene in which he had muffed his lines. The important thing is to press on in search of the right track, knowing that once this is found the audience will forget any aberrations. Left to itself—which means left to the controlling power of the play—would any theatrical audience ever have noticed the double time in *Othello*?

But there are no such anomalies in, say, Molière’s plays, and this is a reminder that Shakespeare’s spontaneity derives as much from the kind of artist he is as from his situation as an actor writing at speed for his fellow actors. Because Molière knows from the outset where he stands in relation to all that happens in one of his plays, he is able to put himself into the

play as a *raisonneur*, or spokesman character. Such a role is impossible for Shakespeare, because he is immersed in every part of the action, organizing, in Dr. Rosenberg's phrase, his emotional and intellectual energy as if he were in a living situation. It follows that the Shakespearean counterpart of the spokesman in Molière or Jonson is the playwright-within-the-play, the character who tries to shape events—and a playwright is after all a shaper and not a writer of plays; shapes them, that is, to good not villainous ends, since for Shakespeare as a man of the Renaissance art betters life. And like their creator when he immerses himself in his chosen tale, these playwrights-within-the-play get more than they bargained for. The hot Verona dog-days, provoking street brawls and bringing plague to the city, frustrate Friar Lawrence's attempt to reconcile Montagues and Capulets through the marriage of Romeo and Juliet. Rosalind, as she directs the destinies of all the lovelorn in Arden towards the final wedding masque, not only has to put up with a leading man who is persistently late for rehearsal, but very nearly loses him to a lioness; it is a measure of the exploration of art's relationship to life which goes on beneath the elegant surface of *As You Like It* that 'reality' should intrude in this preposterous romance incident, and that Rosalind's real faint should be 'well counterfeited'. Bottom too, taking overweening charge of the Pyramus and Thisbe interlude, finds himself carried far beyond that stereotype of romance into the bottomless mystery of love's choices, which are always ready to transpose things base and vile to form and dignity, to translate an ass to an angel.

Two plays in particular offer an extended metaphor of the playwright's continuous struggle with his material in the very process of composition. Duke Prospero in *The Tempest* and Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* seek so absolute a control over the events of the plays in which they appear, that both have been seen as providential figures. But the experience that Shakespeare relives through them is surely a human and fallible one. If there is allegory at all in Prospero's magic, is it not an allegory of the effort and pain, accompanied by a good deal of human testiness, of the artist's struggle to order experience into a total vision? Prospero nearly fails with Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban, whose remembered plot startles him into such agitation. Perhaps he fails also with Sebastian and Antonio, who cannot be charmed asleep by Ariel and who remain recalcitrantly silent and outside the scheme of things at the end

of the play. The dramatist's vocation is a mental fight that leaves Prospero wearied at the close; yet it has its exhilarations for which flight is the only just image, and to relinquish it is to let go of the poetic spirit. Prospero is going to miss Ariel.

Duke Vincentio has fewer powers; he does not assume a magic robe, but the habit of a friar. In giving him this disguise, Shakespeare was departing from his sources, as he was also doing in making Isabella a novice and rearranging the action to preserve her virginity. He may have had no clear conscious intention in making these changes, but their effect is to plunge him into the exploration of ideas that have never troubled him before. As a disguised friar, the Duke speaks with the voice of medieval asceticism, the *de contemptu mundi* of Innocent the Third, and these great religious commonplaces come easily to Shakespeare's pen. Still, the hood does not make the monk, and the Duke's response to Claudio's profoundly disturbing cry for life is to seek every means of saving him, first by the substitution of Mariana for Isabella by night and then, when Angelo fails to keep his part of the bargain, by the substitution of a criminal's head for Claudio's. But the Duke's control of the action is squarely challenged when the criminal himself, Barnardine, reels onto the stage and declares, with drunken dignity, that he will not die 'for any man's persuasion'. The Duke has to concur, for the good friarly reason that Barnardine is unprepared for death, and another head is conveniently found.

The fascinating thing about this minute but vivid scene with Barnardine is that it is both an image and an illustration of Shakespeare's exploratory method as a dramatist. Time and again in the very course of writing a play Shakespeare finds his material resists his control as Barnardine resists the Duke's plot to make a convenience of his head. When this occurs a writer often speaks of the character taking control; but what happens is rather that the character has embodied some aspect of the writer's sensibility which he has been reluctant to recognize, even as Prospero is apt to forget Caliban, the thing of darkness that he at last acknowledges as his. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare virtually stumbles upon a confrontation of asceticism and sensuality and then, in the course of writing the play, finds this antithesis drives him yet deeper into the conflict between the wish to die and the will to live in which he inevitably takes sides with those who affirm the gift of life: the side of Barnardine who will not die for any man's persuasion; of

Juliet, serenely carrying Claudio's child; of the irrepressibly vital Lucio, driving Isabella back to plead for her brother or teasing the Duke as if he were the victim of a feast of fools in some medieval monastery; of the pimp Pompey, 'a poor man, who must live'. There are always those who like the Victorian novice-master 'do not see the necessity', and Shakespeare here listens to them more carefully than he has ever done before; but their other-worldliness is rejected at the end, when Isabella saves Angelo's life and, all postulated vows abandoned, marries her duke.

The writing of *Measure for Measure* may well have been Shakespeare's most difficult voyage of discovery. The second part of the play bears many signs of strain from which it recovers only in the last scene. But improvisation lends dramatic immediacy to Shakespeare's very greatest plays. Two high points of Shakespeare's dramatic achievement, the death of Lear and the restoration of Hermione to Leontes were very probably conceived in the actual process of writing the plays in which they occur. Bradley rightly complained of the inadequate motivation for the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. An audience that knew earlier versions of the tale must have been totally unprepared for Lear's entry with Cordelia dead in his arms. Preceding events stand in little or no causal relationship to these deaths; the great wheel of Lear's experience which has carried him through the nadir of despair is complete when he is restored by Cordelia to his royal robes and his right mind. None the less, the catastrophe, not to be found in any earlier treatments of the tale, surely follows as the direct experiential outcome of the playwright's share in Lear's discoveries. Lear's ripeness has placed him beyond the worst that fate can do: the death of Cordelia, which is felt by Lear in a way that evokes our pity and at the same time transcended by him in a way that commands our awe—the Aristotelian 'terror'. Like all successful turns in a dramatic action, the scene is both surprising and inevitable; it can well have taken Shakespeare himself by surprise even as he discovered that there was no other way open to him to end the play.

Just as Bradley objected to the unexpectedness of Lear's and Cordelia's death, Coleridge reproached Shakespeare for 'mere indolence' (a very Coleridgean reproach) in not having his oracle, in *The Winter's Tale*, prepare us for Hermione's survival. But in Greene's novel, which is Shakespeare's guide, the queen does not survive; and when Shakespeare has Leontes make arrangements for her burial and has Antigonus visited by her

ghost, it seems certain that at the end of Act III of the play Hermione is dead to Shakespeare too. There is no way of telling when Shakespeare discovered her to be alive, though perhaps the discovery occurred during the writing of those Whitsun scenes that take us clean out of the atmosphere of guilt and retribution and transform the vengeful Apollo into the sun that shines on the just and unjust. It is the inevitable completion of the Leontes experience that he should get more blessings than he or any man deserves; but once again Shakespeare discovers the inevitable only in the course of writing the play, and the wonder of that discovery communicates a miraculous freshness to Paulina's revival of Hermione. Once again, too, the scene supplies both image and illustration. The statue that comes to life is art as Shakespeare understood it, not only because the playwright needed the living actors for the realization of his ideas, but because the very act of writing plunged him, however set and traditional his story, into a maze of innumerable choices. Writers from the romantic revival onwards have sought with more or less success for such an image of the artist's ability to have his cake and eat it, to get the best of both worlds: the determined world of the planned artifact and the indeterminate world of the artificer wrestling with his material. For Blake the image is that of Los, continually building, continually destroying; or there is that Los of twentieth-century London, Gulley Jimson painting the Creation on walls that are always threatened with demolition, a fate reserved too for the Elizabethan theatre:

But I can do something to the foreground now . . . And it struck me all at once that what I wanted there was a pattern, not in the flat, but coming and going. Leaves, waves. Tufts of grass bending in the breeze. Flowers. I began the flowers, but they felt wrong. And all at once I made a thing like a white Indian club. I like it, I said, but it's not a flower, is it? What the hell could it be? A fish. And I felt a kick inside as if I was having a foal. Fish. Fish. Silver-white, green-white. And shapes that you could stroke with your eyebrows.

This is the kick of creation that we feel repeatedly as the prelude to the great scenes of Shakespeare, and if hesitations and muddles often accompany such moments of engagement, I for one welcome them as the signs that here, stepping over the obliteration effected by four centuries, we are brought as close as we can ever come to Shakespeare at work.