

Introduction

All names are codes, and "Shakespeare" is peculiarly exacting. For the student, he is the fossil of a dead culture, miraculously preserved in the strata of high school instruction. A little later, he becomes a permanent member of the bookshelf repertory, an object of (in all senses) vertu. He is embraced, and with reason, by theatre and academy: neither can hold him, and neither can agree within itself what it understands by "Shakespeare." The theatre debate continues between those who regard him as a classic text to be regularly re-animated (the underlying analogy is with the approaches of the Bolshoi Ballet and the Comédie Française), and those who find in him a direct reflection of the contemporary. Academics display a wider pluralism. They know of the existence of the theatre, but until fairly recently have preferred largely to exclude it from their commentaries on the text. So

Shakespeare became a Renaissance popular entertainer, dramatizing ideas and issues in the air around 1600: or the organizer of marvellously complex verbal designs: or the great repository and exponent of the language itself. The available categories were always convenient and never sufficient.

It is this capacity always to escape from the category of immediate enquiry that distinguishes Shakespeare. As Peter Brook has remarked, one of the things not widely understood about Shakespeare is that he is not only of a different quality, he is also different in kind. "So long as one thinks that Shakespeare is just Ionesco but better, Beckett but richer, Brecht but more human, Chekhov with crowds, and so on, one is not touching what it's all about."¹ A major effect of this is that his presence, whenever encountered, challenges the best. It is impossible to imagine a first-rate director who has never directed Shakespeare; to establish his credentials he must first meet Shakespeare. Actors of repute sometimes avoid him, but it is always held against them, or counted a query against their mastery. Any literary theorist of the first order—Northrop Frye, Georg Lukács, René Wellek—has to come to terms with the problems Shakespeare poses. When structuralism came out of France a few years ago, a general (sceptical) reaction in Anglo-Saxondom was: what can it teach us about Shakespeare? (The essays of Jan Kott and Marjorie Garber in this collection will go some way towards answering that question.) I suspect that some version of Peter Brook's celebrated admission (in *The Empty Space*) would be agreed to by many outside the theatre: "In the second half of the twentieth century in England... we are faced with the infuriating fact that Shakespeare is still our model."

One looks to the theatre for the working representation of this model, the concrete reminder that our mental models are themselves subtler varieties of the schoolroom dogmas. It is the theatre that, by showing us a *Measure for Measure* in which Isabella does *not* accept the Duke's proposal at the end, demonstrates to us that the text is silent on the point and contains its reasons for that silence. Yet generations of commentators (and directors) used invariably to assume that Isabella consents: that she does not, today, is itself a social fact of great interest in 1977. It will come as a surprise to few that today's academics are much more intelligently aware of the theatre than in the past, but the extent of that awareness is perhaps not widely appreciated. Simply, the absolute division between players and academics is no longer accepted. The three writers on theatre in this collection, Alexander Leggatt, Michael Goldman, and Daniel Seltzer, illustrate the point. All three, of impeccable academic credentials, are deeply engaged in theatre. Michael Goldman's latest book is *The Actor's Freedom: Toward a Theory of Drama* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), and Daniel Seltzer has lately had a great success as Cohn in the New York production of Feiffer's *Knock Knock*. And this intense involvement leads to conclusions that would, a few years ago, have seemed startling. Leggatt writes of scholars "using theatrical performances as evidence for their own interpretations," and Goldman that "Acting is an essential part of any play's imagery." Seltzer, viewing company and national styles as major factors in our perception of Shakespeare,

¹Ralph Berry, *On Directing Shakespeare: Interviews With Contemporary Directors* (London and New York: Croom Helm and Barnes & Noble, 1977), p. 114.

examines sceptically the "Shakespeare" to which playgoers are habitually exposed. The acceptance of the text as a set of stage-directions, as a design for performance, is central to today's Shakespeare.

This concept is discernible in the books now appearing on the market. This is not the place for a detailed review of publications, but some recent titles deserve mention. Joseph G. Price's *The Triple Bond: Plays, Mainly Shakespearean, in Performance* (University Park, Pennsylvania and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975) is a compilation of essays devoted to the testimony of production. Besides several discussions of the relations between stage and academy, it offers case-histories of plays in performance. Price's book is for the academic; John Russell Brown's *Shakespeare in Performance: An Introduction Through Six Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) is a course text. It offers, besides the standard apparatus, a running commentary on the stage implications of the text—physical action, exits, silences, costume, gesture, vocal climaxes. There are many photographs. It is a major advance in the presentation of Shakespeare to students. The text, then, becomes a kind of illustrated and annotated promptbook. A similar phenomenon is visible elsewhere. The successful RSC *Henry V* has led to Sally Beauman's edition of the playing text, *The Royal Shakespeare Company's Centenary Production of Henry V* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1976). It contains interviews with the cast, designer, composer, and most valuably, a detailed commentary by Terry Hands (the director) on the action as he perceived it. Unusually, space is found for some reactions of the general public, in addition to a selection of critical reviews. This is an original and stimulating work to which no exact parallel exists. The current interest in promptbooks accounts also for *Macbeth Onstage: An Annotated Facsimile of Glen Byam Shaw's 1955 Promptbook*, edited by Michael Mullins (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1976). This is a handsome record of Olivier's *Macbeth*, with an account of costume designs and sets, a list of 48 reviews (some of which are quoted), interviews with some of the cast, many photographs, and additional information. Its limitations are scarcely Mr. Mullins' fault. Shaw's marginal annotations are banal (Young Siward "is a salty chap. Full of enthusiasm and courage"), not in the same league as Hands'. The photographic facsimile of the New Temple text is an instructive statement of what directors actually work from; but the inner mystery of the drama remains undisclosed, and the testimony of the principals is absent. Mr. Mullins has not secured an interview with Laurence Olivier: Vivien Leigh is dead.

For many commentators, the theatre will be less an area of direct engagement than a presence to which they have easy access. Maurice Charney, for instance, understands very well that the critic must come to terms with the theatrical tradition, in order to free himself for a renewed perception of the text. This leads him to a curiously profitable insistence on the *Revenge* quality of *Hamlet*, something that criticism and stage have tended to neglect. (And this emphasizes a vitality of *Hamlet*, for currently the *Revenge* drama is one of the key genres of the American cinema, with its recognition of the inadequacy of formal justice, the corruption of the system, the ethical ambivalences of revenge, and the brutal pleasure of the act itself.) At the

same time, Charney is in touch with the cooler techniques of formal analysis that are making headway today. Two books have been influential: Emrys Jones' *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), and Mark Rose's *Shakespearean Design* (Harvard University Press, 1972). Each is concerned with the scene as the major unit of construction. With different emphases—Jones is excellent on tempo and timing, Rose more concerned with line-counts and statistical demonstrations of mass—each shows the balance (often, the symmetry) of Shakespeare's design methods.

This brings the critic closer to specifically linguistic pre-occupations. Rhetorical pattern, viewed from a sensibility attuned to the theatre, yields fascinating results. Stephen Booth's sense of the underlying patterns of *Richard II* has an affinity with Michael Goldman's remarks on *The Tempest*. At the heart of all linguistic enquiry is the Word: and its great modes of examination are through the text, the dictionary, and the concordance. These now offer the scholar new scope for action and progress.

I doubt if we shall ever have a significantly better text than is available today. "Towards the definitive text"—the title of a seminar at the Washington Congress—is a mirage; the State will wither away first. The reasons will bear elaboration. Broadly speaking, the central characteristic of Shakespeare editing is a deeply informed conservatism. All stems from a profound study of the history of the text, and the areas of knowledge that this may involve—paleography, compositors' techniques, the collation of many copies of the same book, and so on. This knowledge is employed to identify the best available copytext, and thereafter to buttress or query the readings* it gives. But aside from gross errors, the editor will not be eager to sustain a challenge. "Speaking generally, an editor today, having chosen for what he considers sound reasons a particular copytext will adhere to that copytext unless he sees substantial grounds for departing from it."² This is a world away from Rowe and Warburton, the days when editing was an intellectual cavalry charge.

What we are offered today is something analogous to the restoration of a large painting. The romantic patina of centuries, the accretions of time and inexpert touchings-up, disappear under the restorer's spirit and something like the original emerges: pale, fresh, a little naked. Take Hamlet's "solid flesh" crux: editors used always to favour the Folio's "solid," some (since Dover Wilson) now prefer "sullied," and G. Blakemore Evans reads "sallied." That is what the best copytext, the Second Quarto, gives us, and that is what we have, no more, no less.

But editing is not, of course, a simple delegation of one's responsibilities to the best copytext. For one thing, there are several plays where the inferior text maddeningly supplies, on occasion, superior readings. Here the editor has to restrain the human impulse to take the best readings where he can find them. That would be to rely on literary sensibility over bibliographic discipline, which is Manichaeic heresy to a modern editor. Even so, there are areas where an editor is compelled to exercise his literary judgment. Thus *Othello*, which exists in two main texts of debatable authority, Q1 and

²G. Blakemore Evans, *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 37.

F1: an editor is permitted, and by some enjoined, to be eclectic here. What does he do with Iago's "But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve/For daws to peck at" (I.i.64-5)? That is F1: Q1 has "doves." Now "doves" is not bad, in an obvious, heavily ironic way, but "daws" is better. The very sound is derisory, the lengthened vowel stretching the sneer marks on the actor's face. "Daws" appears colloquial (against the more literary associations of "doves"), very much a part of Iago's vocabulary; it is surely his word.

This example merely illustrates the problems of the variables in Shakespeare. There are basically only two species of playtext: those which stem from a single known origin, with all its imperfections (Folio); those which exist in more than one version (Quarto and Folio). The second species is far more subversive—to those who put their faith in a definitive text—for it bears the implication that Shakespeare created various versions of his plays, each of which retains a certain authority. The practice is common enough with authors. One can naturally assert that the final version is the most authentic, that FitzGerald's fourth *Rubaiyat* and Auden's revisions possess an authority that the earlier versions do not. This seems true only in a narrowly legalistic sense. To regard Auden's poetry of the 1930's as somehow incomplete, striving always towards a state of fulfilment achieved only in the 1960's, is absurd. The obvious response in practice is for the reader to select among options, each of which is held to possess a provisional authority; and this is what teachers and directors do all the time, without making an ideological agony of it. The theatre is in any case a metaphor for the provisional, since it exists only through constantly changing actors and audiences. Those disinclined to abandon their faith in the ultimate text may like to reflect on this testimony; it is from one of Shakespeare's most distinguished descendants on the contemporary English stage:

In preparing previous plays for publication I have tried with some difficulty to arrive at something called a 'definitive text,' but I now believe that in the case of plays there is no such animal. Each production will throw up its own problems and very often the solution will lie in some minor change to the text, either in the dialogue or in the author's directions, or both.³

In the end, Shakespeare is still there waiting for us. No man can stand between us and the ideal text, which will always be partly of our own creation. Let *Macbeth* (I.vi.5) symbolize our choices. In the "temple-haunting martlet" passage F1 reads "Loved Mansonry." Most editors read "mansionry." But perhaps Pope was right in conjecturing "masonry" here—it is one less, against one more, letter; and perhaps the possibilities vibrating in Shakespeare's mind were not closed when he wrote, if he did write, "Mansonry." The open end of Shakespeare's mind is still ours.

The main channel of linguistic enquiry is now seen to lie through the great *Concordance* of Marvin Spevack,⁴ and through the magnetic tapes on which its information is stored. These will in time yield a new Shakespeare

³Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p. 11.

⁴Marvin Spevack, *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare*, 6 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968-70).

dictionary based on a firm foundation of linguistic theory.⁵ In the meantime criticism has to proceed through its two major linguistic resources, the *O.E.D.* and the *Concordance*. It is clear that a main task of critics is now to devise more intelligent ways of responding to the challenge of the *Concordance*. Not that "naive" exploitation of the *Concordance* is in itself faulty; I know of no reason why criticism should not, for instance, attempt to explain the vast accumulation of "ifs" in *As You Like It*. But as Marvin Spevack reminds us, the notion of what is "special" needs to be approached with great caution. In this respect the *Concordance* is indispensable, for it provides the facts with which a literary sensibility must be informed. To judge Caliban's "But she as far surpasseth Sycorax"—that is, to pronounce on the force of *-eth*—it is essential to have the statistical context. But there is no end to the possibilities contained in the *Concordance*, and some immediate possibilities are inviting. I hazard, for instance, that a study of certain word-groups denoting relationship (son, daughter, wife, father, and so on) through the categories of male/female, and prose/verse, would yield results of exceptional interest. That Shakespeare studies will have to respond to modern concepts of data management will not be universally welcomed; but the significance of these new developments cannot be in doubt.

With the *Concordance*, with SHAD, with greater knowledge of Shakespeare's methods of construction, a major re-examination of the text is now possible and may well be at hand. What the newly-available information enables one to detect is the element of repetition—and thus, of patterning—in Shakespeare's plays. The best critics understand this perfectly,* and the concept materializes in various ways. Emrys Jones' "structural rhyming" is close to Mark Rose's "thematic ligatures." *Repetition* is the very title of Jan Kott's analysis of *The Tempest*. His statement that "In *The Tempest* the opposition between myths and experience appears as a tension between two different linguistic codes and two separate sets of linguistic and theatrical signs" offers an endlessly inviting vista on the great text.

In all this, the role of "ideas" is changing decisively. A certain kind of moribund historicism has, as I take it, received its quietus from Richard Levin's killing argument. Empson's elegant refutation has long been quotable: "The idea that everyone held the same opinion at a given date, 'the opinion of the time,' is disproved as soon as you open a history book and find a lot of them killing each other because they disagreed";⁶ but Levin's sustained job of demolition is wickedly enjoyable. I do not know if any will care to rise to the challenge: "Is there any play of Shakespeare's maturity where we would go seriously wrong in our interpretation without a specialized knowledge of certain ideas of the time? I will go out on a limb and admit that I cannot think of any, although I am prepared to be corrected on this." It will be interesting to see. But "ideas" extend beyond the *Elizabethan World Picture*. Marxist criticism has not really delivered the goods that

⁵Marvin Spevack, H. Joachim Neuhaus, and T. Finkenstaedt, "SHAD: A Shakespeare Dictionary," *Computers in the Humanities*, ed. J. L. Mitchell (Edinburgh, 1974), pp. 111-123; and H. Joachim Neuhaus and Marvin Spevack, "A Shakespeare Dictionary (SHAD): Some Preliminaries for a Semantic Description," *Computers and the Humanities*, 9:6 (November 1975), pp. 263-70.

⁶William Empson, "Mine Eyes Dazzle," *Essays in Criticism*, 14 (1964), pp. 80-6.

seemed possible after the brilliant, if scattered pages in Lukács' *The Historical Novel*. Still, one always hopes for the coming some day of a Marxist who will combine what is locally regarded as ideological respectability with an exemplary sensitivity to the unique properties of the text. Perhaps, as Anne Paolucci suggests, the thing is to be done through a return to Hegel; perhaps it is always the mavericks who will create criticism of the highest order. Currently, a promising development is that of feminist criticism. It is now losing its sectarian tinge, and moving towards a more exact method of analysis and description. "Stereotype," as I judge, is the key concept in this school. At present used far too loosely, this is the term that could locate the adroitness Shakespeare brings to his technical exploitation of female characters—and thus, of male. Carole McKewin's tour d'horizon suggests that the vibration between "male" and "female" in the human mind is, when all is done, what Shakespeare is about. Or we could terminate our survey with the symbolism of Jan Kott's titles. His earlier classic was *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. His forthcoming book, from which his essays on space and time in *The Tempest* are drawn, will be called *Shakespeare Not Our Contemporary*. The vibration of these statements is the frequency of Shakespeare.

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