THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE AND THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

HELEN COOPER

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Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Imprint previously known as Arden Shakespeare

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First published in 2010 by Methuen Drama

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-9042-7178-9
PB: 978-1-4081-7232-2
ePDF: 978-1-4081-3898-4
ePub: 978-1-4081-3899-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Series: Arden Critical Companions

In memory of
Michael

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TEXTUAL NOTE

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (Walton-on-Thames, 1998). Definitions and datings of individual words have been taken from the online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

In all original-spelling titles and quotations, u/v and i/j have been modernized.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must thank Paul Hammond and Andrew Hadfield for inviting me to write a book that I only realized was my dream commission when they asked me to do it, and Margaret Bartley for all her assistance from the Arden side. I owe all of them particular gratitude for their support when the tribulations of life delayed its completion. I am fortunate to have had comments on the draft not only from the series editors, but from Hester Lees-Jeffries and my most 'constant reader' Ruth Morse: I am deeply grateful for the corrections and improvements they proposed, and I can only apologize (though perhaps not as much as I should) for where I have resisted their suggestions. Too many other people for me to list have answered queries or directed me to further reading, but I must mention Richard Beadle, Nandini Das and Subha Mukherji. It would have been a worse book without their ready help and advice. The English Faculty of the University of Cambridge granted me sabbatical leave to complete it, and the staff and resources of the Cambridge University Library were, as always, invaluable.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbrevations are used for individual works:

AC	*Antony and Cleopatra*
AW	*All's Well that Ends Well*
AYLI	*As You Like It*
CE	*The Comedy of Errors*
Cor	*Coriolanus*
Cym	*Cymbeline*
Ham	*Hamlet*
1H4	*King Henry IV, Part 1*
2H4	*King Henry IV, Part 2*
HV	*King Henry V*
1H6	*King Henry VI, Part 1*
2H6	*King Henry VI, Part 2*
3H6	*King Henry VI, Part 3*
H8	*King Henry VIII*
JC	*Julius Caesar*
KJ	*King John*
KL	*King Lear*
LLL	*Love's Labour's Lost*
Luc	*The Rape of Lucrece*
MA	*Much Ado about Nothing*
Mac	*Macbeth*
MM	*Measure for Measure*
MND	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*
MV	*The Merchant of Venice*
MWW	*The Merry Wives of Windsor*
Oth	*Othello*
Per	*Pericles*
R2	*King Richard II*
R3	*King Richard III*
RJ	*Romeo and Juliet*
TA	*Titus Andronicus*
TC	*Troilus and Cressida*
Tem	*The Tempest*
TGV	*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
Tim	*Timon of Athens*
Tit	*Titus Andronicus*
TN	*Twelfth Night*
TNK	*The Two Noble Kinsmen*
TS	*The Taming of the Shrew*
WT	*The Winter's Tale*

Other abbreviations:

Bullough:	*Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1957–75)
Chaucer:	*The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, 1987; Oxford, 1988)
Digby:	*The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, ed. Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall, EETS 283 (1982)
EETS:	Early English Text Society
REED:	Records of Early English Drama series
Smith:	*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols (1904; Oxford, 1967)
STC:	*A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland 1475–1640*, compiled by A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave, 2nd edn revised and enlarged by W.A. Jackson, F.S. Ferguson and Katharine F. Pantzer, 3 vols (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–91)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The world in which Shakespeare lived was a medieval one. Stratford and its surrounding towns had been founded in the Middle Ages: Coventry, which owed its status as a city to its Norman cathedral; Warwick, grown up around its castle; Oxford, fortified with castle and walls early in the Middle Ages, and given fame by the development of its university in the late twelfth century. Many such places had started as settlements around Saxon monasteries, and grew to become towns over the two or three centuries after the Norman Conquest. They were connected by roads and bridges built in the Middle Ages, though many of those medieval roads fed into the highways established by the Romans. London had been a great Roman city, but it fell into ruin with the fall of the Empire, and it had to wait for the Normans before it regained its status as the capital city of the kingdom. Early modern London remained a city defined by its enclosing walls, its bridge, its great cathedral, and its internal structure of parishes and their churches, just as it had been in the Middle Ages. There was plenty of secular rebuilding, the population was rapidly expanding through immigration from the rest of England (with Shakespeare as one of the immigrants); but England's topography, infrastructure and rhythms of life were still essentially medieval. The visible changes were largely on the surface, in new buildings, or old buildings put to new uses;[1] or in the post-Reformation reduction of the Christian year to the great festivals of Christmas and Easter. In the same way, the culture Shakespeare inherited was still grounded in the medieval, however conflicted that culture was becoming. Humanist texts had not penetrated the mass of the population

nearly so deeply as had cheap prints of medieval romances; and for all the fierceness of Reformation debate, old habits of thought were not so easily swept away as were specific points of doctrine, and Sunday by Sunday everyone still went to their medieval parish churches to worship.

This book aims to demonstrate the pervasiveness of those deep structures of medieval culture in Shakespeare's work and his times, and how they affected the world he lived in and the way he conceived his plays. There were great changes, and the new is much more noticeable than the old or the accustomed; but that does not mean that what already existed ceased to matter. Humanists were superb self-publicists, and it is easy to accept at face value their claims to their own originality. Although they did not invent the terminology of the 'medieval' – they called the age prior to theirs barbaric, if they used any generalizing term at all – their insistence on their own difference from the past effectively invented the Middle Ages as a distinctively different, and inferior, period. Our term 'Renaissance' endorses the idea that the period was a rebirth (re-naissance) of the Classical, and forgets that Ovid and Virgil and Aristotle had been avidly studied for centuries; many medieval scholars sprinkled their writings with Classical quotations as thickly as their humanist descendants. The Elizabethans and much modern criticism can make it sound as if they just picked up where the Greeks and Romans had left off, but their culture was profoundly different, even when they – or we – perceive similarity. Just as their stage Romans wore a variation on contemporary dress, itself the result of centuries of changing fashions from togas to trunk hose, so their conception of everything from the metaphysics of the universe to the nature of dramatic mimesis was shaped by what had happened in between, by the Middle Ages.

We often label everything we like in the Middle Ages as proto-Renaissance, and everything we don't like in the Renaissance as medieval. Provincial Stratford is allowed to be medieval; the economic powerhouse of London is not. We tend to assume too that anything that predicts the modern world must be post-medieval, from knowledge of the Classics to the representation of subjecthood, regardless of its actual origin.[2] Where the medieval cannot be overlooked, it is often elided. We can understand Shakespeare's world or his plays adequately only when we understand how thoroughly medieval their foundations were: what

Emrys Jones described as 'his cultural hinterland, that mental world which was his natural inheritance',[3] or, to use an analogy from the physical world he inhabited, the medieval street plan that still controlled the configuration of new buildings. Mental worlds may be harder to pin down than material remains, but the culture of the Middle Ages similarly lay below the Elizabethan and served as the footprint for its later development. The Middle Ages shaped Shakespeare and his work just as they shaped the market town where he was born, the roads he walked along and the city where he worked, the language he spoke and the stagecraft he exploited. We have been told about the rediscovery of the Classics and early modern innovation to the point where the familiar, the customary, the already-there, have become invisible: things that are everywhere are very hard to see. What this book aims to do is to restore that embedded culture to visibility, and so to adjust the baseline from which we can measure the extraordinary achievements of Shakespeare and his contemporaries and rethink the nature of their originality.

Shakespeare seems to have started his career with the ambition of establishing himself as a poet and playwright in the approved neo-Classical mode, matching the achievements of the ancients and overgoing those of his contemporaries. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are written in Ovidian mode, *Titus Andronicus* makes its debts to Seneca's *Thyestes* and Ovid's story of Philomel abundantly clear (a copy of the *Metamorphoses* is indeed an essential part of the plot), and the roots of *The Comedy of Errors* in Plautus were immediately recognizable to his first audience. His writing, however, evolved away from the humanist, with all its rules and restrictions, and towards the greater freedoms offered by the medieval: towards making the theatre a world in miniature. The medieval for Shakespeare, moreover, was specifically English. It connected with the contemporary nationalist movement that for the first time was insisting that English could hold its own against the best of Europe and the Classics; and a key element of Englishness was its own past, the vernacular traditions inherited from the Middle Ages.

This book is in part about habit and practice; it is also about memory, and its persistence. Like the humanists, we take most interest in the new. Our brains are hard-wired to categorize: the edible and the inedible, the safe and the dangerous, the familiar and the strange. It is all too easy to

assume that the medieval and the early modern are similarly mutually exclusive, as if there were a clear break between them. Our own favoured term for the Renaissance, the 'early modern', emphasizes that the modern is the non-medieval. Both have become value terms rather than just historical descriptors. The early modern, the modern and the post-modern are progressive and look forward; the medieval is unpleasant, regressive and anything we don't like. Consciousness, however, works with memory much more than with prediction. The Elizabethans knew what was there in their world and what had been there before, not what was going to happen next, and their own memories were supplemented by what their parents had told them. The people of England did not wake up the day after the Battle of Bosworth, which saw the end of the long-ruling Plantagenets and the establishment of the parvenu Tudors, to find themselves in a new and modern world. The Reformation, often now (and with more reason) taken as marking the end of the Middle Ages, took several decades to establish itself: royal enforcement included much backtracking. Everyone more than five or so years old when Elizabeth came to the throne would have been able to remember the Catholic rituals and practices restored under her sister, and wondered whether England might revert to Catholicism after her death. The antiquarian John Stow cannot have been the only person to walk through Elizabethan London recalling the lost convents and gardens and civic ceremonies and processions. Traditional festivities and pastimes, whether religious or seasonal, were regarded with broad hostility both by successive governments fearful of any occasion for disorder and by the influential Calvinist wing of the Church, who were just acquiring their nickname of 'puritans' – never a coherent or organized group, but whose views on the moral control of society gave them a common interest both with each other and with government nervousness. Their attempts to repress such pastimes were bitterly resented, and only intermittently successful; but the inclusion of plays within the category of deplored pastimes gave the men of the theatre common cause with the supporters of popular and dramatic traditions.

The current broad state of knowledge about the medieval in Shakespeare and his England tends towards a mixture of misinformation and ignorance. Everyone knows about his dramatization of medieval

history in the history plays, but after that things get more problematic. There are things that we know are medieval if we think about them long enough but rarely do, such as the change in language from Old English to the English that he himself spoke. Some things in our own world are so familiar that we rarely think of them as needing an origin at all, such as the alphabetical index, double-entry book-keeping and the commodification of time enabled by the mechanical clock, though they were the necessary technologies for the medieval increase in knowledge and thought and for the rise in trade, commerce and the cash economy. We associate with the Middle Ages things that were still current in the late sixteenth century, from habits of allegorical thought to jousting. Other matters commonly regarded as medieval are in fact later developments, such as witch-hunting (it was just hotting up in Shakespeare's time), or resurrection folk plays (there is no evidence for their existence before the eighteenth century, and none at all for their preservation of pagan beliefs).[4] By contrast, the Middle Ages bequeathed to us things that we think of as distinctive elements of the modern world, such as parliamentary democracy, universities and human rights. And we tend to assume as fact a medieval lack of innovation and technological backwardness even while marvelling at the extraordinary achievements of the architects and masons of the great cathedrals in making stone fly.

The chapters of this book offer interventions in this patchy state of awareness from various directions. The first four set the plays in context, the last three engage more with specific texts or groups of texts. The first chapter lays out some of the ways in which Shakespeare's world was still a medieval one, in the material world, the lives people lived and the language they had inherited. The second, 'Total Theatre', outlines the ambition and the longevity of the drama that had its origins in the Middle Ages, how that high dramatic ambition translated itself to the public stage, and the extent of its familiarity to Shakespeare and his audiences. The third, 'Staging the Unstageable', studies all those elements in early modern drama, derived from medieval practices, that go beyond literal mimesis: God, the invisible, the long reach of time and space. Chapter 4, 'The Little World of Man', concentrates on ways of representing the universal in human experience and the inside of the mind, including the influence of the morality plays: more of a sixteenth-

century than a medieval phenomenon, but which themselves have deep roots in earlier non-dramatic habits of allegorical thinking. Chapter 5, 'The World of Fortune', revisits the medieval theme of tragedy as fall and its later variations; it also calls attention to the centrality of the medieval (in sources, plot motifs and the portrayal of inward subjectivity) in plays such as *Hamlet*, *Lear* and *Macbeth*. Chapter 6, 'Romance, Women and the Providential World', moves to comedy, or rather to those plot structures with a happy ending, often associated with love and marriage, that formed the bulk of medieval secular fiction, romance. It ends with the most overtly medieval of all his plays, *Pericles*, and in particular to its deliberate investment of value in the Middle Ages: a move to what we would now describe as medievalism. The last chapter, 'Shakespeare's Chaucer', revisits Shakespeare's relationship with the author acknowledged throughout the sixteenth century as the father of English poetry, and whose work inspired almost as many of his plays as the much-studied Plutarch.

Even while I have been writing this book, however, interest in the medieval has begun to edge towards centre stage in Shakespeare studies. When I first mentioned to colleagues what I was working on, their reaction was typically blankness, followed by, 'Oh, you mean the history plays.' In 2005, I gave my inaugural lecture in Cambridge on 'Shakespeare and the Middle Ages', published the following year. Since then, two essay collections have come out with the same title, as well as a good number of other collections and monographs that similarly set out to bridge the periods.[5] Those mostly offer interventions on individual topics; this book aims at a broader overview. It does not, however, contain a separate chapter on the histories. Shakespeare's use of medieval English history is the one thing that is unmissable; it has been generously and excellently written on, and so it seemed more important, in a short book, to concentrate on less studied areas. There is plenty about the history plays in what follows, but under other headings and from other angles: they come up in connection with the pride in native Englishness that characterized the period, with 'total theatre', language and allegory and tragedies of fortune, and indeed pervasively throughout the book. Although their subject-matter makes their relation to the Middle Ages uniquely explicit, they bear witness alongside the rest of the plays to

Shakespeare's larger interests in the medieval, his practice of stagecraft and his ways of representing the world to itself. It is important to remember, none the less, that he found in fifteenth-century English history a prime way of presenting *England* to itself.

Any book of this scope becomes entangled with the vexed question of when the Middle Ages ended and the early modern world began, not least since all of our current terms for the periods are later inventions.[6] The Middle Ages themselves were marked by a series of 'renaissances', in the ninth century and the twelfth, when knowledge of Classical learning took a great leap forward. For the practical purposes of dividing the medieval from the early modern without perpetually pointing out such things as that the classical Latin texts recovered by the humanists were the copies made by Carolingian scribes in the ninth century, or that witch-hunting reached its peak at the same time as the Copernican model of the universe was coming to be accepted, I have taken the English Middle Ages as ending somewhere around 1500, around the time of the arrival of printing, Luther's challenge to Rome and the generation of English humanists led by Sir Thomas More. There was plenty of interest in humanism being shown in England in the previous century,[7] just as Reformation thought found a ready reception among groups still influenced by Lollardy, England's own home-grown late fourteenth-century heresy; but a date, even one as approximate as that, cuts a good many Gordian knots, however interesting they might be to untie. It took another century and a half, however, for the balance to swing decisively from the medieval to the fully modern. That transition can be marked by three symbolic events: the abolition of sacral monarchy represented by the execution of Charles I in 1649; the founding of the Royal Society, with its agenda of scientific rationalism, in 1660; and the Great Fire of 1666 that destroyed medieval London.

If period boundaries are somewhat arbitrary impositions on the flow of time, the boundary between fact and hypothesis can sometimes be equally hard to draw. We can be certain that the Blackfriars theatre was adapted from part of the great London convent of the Dominican friars: the monastery may have been dissolved, institutionally speaking, under Henry VIII, but the buildings invited other uses. We often speak as if it were a comparable fact that Shakespeare attended the Stratford

grammar school (itself a medieval foundation): that is highly likely, but any hard evidence that may once have existed, for instance by way of lists of students, is altogether lacking. It is similarly likely that he saw the Coventry Mystery Plays, which were being performed just a few miles from his home town until he was in his mid-teens; but in the absence of a signed ticket stub, it is impossible to prove, or indeed to imagine what form hard evidence might take. Likelihood here remains conjectural, a matter of building up from evidence contained in the plays until the balance of probabilities tips away from mere coincidence. I have tried to spell out the evidence where certainty is impossible, and where it still falls short of carrying final conviction, I hope it will at least be useful to think with. Speculation can at least shine a light from a new angle or provide a colour filter that shows up things we had not previously seen, or not seen clearly.

The very pervasiveness of the medieval in the early modern world, the embedded culture that underlay so much of what we think of as distinctively Elizabethan or Jacobean, means that I have had to select, compress and generalize. In particular, I have had to limit the book's scope to what in the medieval world Shakespeare was most likely to have known at first hand; and that has meant eliminating most of what was happening outside England, whether in the other regions that under James I first became 'Great Britain', or on the European mainland, including the vibrant dramatic traditions of France and the Netherlands. I hope none the less that the book will serve as a consciousness-raising exercise: one that will enable its readers to see below the familiar early modern surface, to recognize both the existence and the significance of the medieval. I hope too that it may give extra momentum to a movement already gathering speed, of recovering the medieval within Shakespeare.

Chapter One

SHAKESPEARE'S MEDIEVAL WORLD

Before its upgrading to a market town in the late twelfth century, Stratford had been little more than its name suggested: the place where a Roman road forded its river. Early in the Middle Ages, the ford was replaced by a wooden bridge, and that in turn was rebuilt in stone by Sir Hugh Clopton at the end of the fifteenth century. Its church underwent a comparable process of building, improvement and modernization, each alteration adding more space and more light, until by 1500 it had become one of the finest parish churches in the region. The bridge and the market channelled business to the town, as did its two annual fairs, the oldest held on the feast day of the Invention of the Holy Cross. West of the bridge, the town still preserves its medieval layout, of three streets running parallel to the river, crossed at right angles by three more. The Clopton Bridge still bears the name of its patron; and the landholdings along its original six streets still largely keep their twelfth-century footprint.[1]

When Shakespeare moved to London, probably some time between 1585 and 1590, he was not leaving the medieval world behind him, although the shift to one of the largest and most rapidly expanding cities in Europe must have made it seem so. Travellers approaching London saw first the serrated skyline of the towers and steeples of its abundant medieval parish churches, and dwarfing them all the great Gothic cathedral of St Paul's, still dominating the city even after its spire, at some 150 metres one of the tallest in Europe, had been destroyed by lightning in 1561. They entered the city through one of the old gates –

Bishopsgate, Moorgate, Aldgate – that gave access through its great encircling walls, and which were still closed at nightfall. Marking the eastward end of the city wall, where it met the river, was the palace-fortress of the Tower of London, though William the Conqueror's massive White Tower was now credited to Julius Caesar: an origin that Shakespeare was happy to repeat.[2] The Tower now functioned only rarely as a palace; its longest-established inhabitants were not the political prisoners who were recurrently committed there, but the exotic animals that had formed the core of its menagerie since early in the thirteenth century, and which gave most Londoners their only first-hand knowledge of such beasts. Lions were a regular item, and visitors in the 1250s had briefly been able to see an elephant; by the late 1590s, it included a tiger, a lynx, an elderly wolf and a porcupine – so Shakespeare's description of hair standing on end 'like quills upon the fretful porpentine' may have been made from first-hand acquaintance (*Ham* 1.5.20). The city's administrative structures of wards and parishes were still intact, along with most of the churches themselves, though the great monastic buildings that had occupied huge areas of land both within the city walls and beyond had been converted to other uses, as dwellings for the rapidly increasing population or as warehouses for the abundance of goods traded through the city and its port. The buttery of what had once been the great Dominican convent in London, named Blackfriars after the colour of the friars' habits, became an indoor theatre in the late 1570s for a boys' acting company; later, Richard Burbage acquired the larger refectory and leased it to another boys' company before eventually assuming control of it himself for the King's Men. Shakespeare himself bought the gatehouse.

The London authorities did their best to keep tight control over the ever-expanding city. Activities that aroused civic disapproval, such as prostitution, therefore tended to take place outside the walls, and especially across the river, where Southwark had been established as the red-light district for a couple of centuries. Londoners who wanted to cross the Thames – whether for travel, commerce, more nefarious activities, or, after the focus of the newly built London theatres moved from Shoreditch to Bankside, to a play – could, like their medieval forebears, hire a boat to ferry them over; or, also like them, they could

pass the parish church of St Magnus and elbow their way through the throng of people and traffic streaming down the narrow lane between the shops and dwellings built across the substantial stone bridge over the river. This had been completed after thirty-three years of work in 1209, to replace a succession of wooden bridges going back to the ninth century (the Romans had built one too, but it had not survived their departure). Its basic structure remained unchanged, but the chapel built half-way across and dedicated to St Thomas Becket, the martyr for the freedom of the Church from royal interference, had been rededicated to Our Lady in 1539, then turned into a dwelling, and after that into a warehouse. The bridge as originally built had incorporated a section that could be raised as a drawbridge, to serve as a line of defence for the city from the south or to enable large shipping to pass upstream; but the masonry supporting the drawbridge had become too delapidated to allow it to be raised, so only small boats could pass through to the wharves at Queenhithe, and the tower that housed its machinery was replaced by another fine dwelling. The bridge's public privy, one of a number that served the populace of medieval London, had been demolished after it too became too decayed for use, and was not replaced. The great stone pillars on their 'starlings', the broad timber platforms on which they were built and that prevented the water from sweeping the bridge supports away, remained unchanged, as did the practice of displaying traitors' heads over the drawbridge gate (or the south gate after 1577 when the drawbridge tower was abolished): heads that had included those of William Wallace in 1305, Sir Thomas More in 1535 and, in 1606, the year in which *Macbeth* was probably written, those of Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirators. The practice was not abandoned until after the Restoration: the last head was displayed in 1678.

Any time-travellers from Chaucer's London to Shakespeare's would have found a bewildering mix of the familiar and the disorienting. They would have been bemused by the sheer number of people, an explosion in the population of the city that had spawned new suburbs beyond the walls. They would have been shocked by the desacralization of the great monastic buildings, and horrified by the despoiled state of the parish churches, often little cared for since the incentive to look after them as a good work in the sight of God had been removed by the Reformation

emphasis on faith and the Scriptures (not to mention the likelihood that the state might once again set about plundering their wealth and destroying their ornaments). They would have been impressed by the great new buildings, not least the Royal Exchange, the international commercial centre with its Continental architecture, and the great houses being erected along the Strand between the city and Westminster. But they would not have got lost. They would have recognized most of the buildings and the layout of the streets; they would have known where to find the inns where they could stay (including Chaucer's own Tabard in Southwark), where they could consult a lawyer, where to pray or where to buy silk or a horse. Inevitably, they would have noticed first and most forcefully what was new, and what had been lost; but the customary and the familiar would have enabled them to live almost normally in this changing city.

REMEMBERED WORLDS

The changing face of London might seem to celebrate a brave modern world, but for those who had spent their lives in the capital it had a different effect: it recreated Elizabethan London as a theatre of memory for what had been lost. A memory theatre was a technique for enabling recall, whereby an imagined building or landscape was filled with visual mnemonics for whatever needed to be remembered: a speech in a court of law, or the order and text of the Psalms.[3] Robert Fludd, writing his own *Ars Memoriae* in 1623, imagined such a space as being like an actual theatre, that at Blackfriars, and he labelled it *theatrum orbi*, the theatre of the globe, to emphasize how much it could encompass.[4] Elizabethan London made such an effect literal, where every new construction or built-over garden or converted convent could serve as a reminder of the deleted past. The older inhabitants moved among the new immigrants in a parallel world of sad nostalgia. John Stow, a Londoner all his life from his birth eight years before Elizabeth's to his death two years after hers, recorded the city in just such terms, ward by ward and street by street, in his great *Survey of London*, first published in 1598 and revised in the year James Stuart came to the throne. He described not only what the city was like now, but how it had come to be

like that. His description presents a palimpsest on which the brash new overlays the idealized old. He recalls when London had been a gentler place, less overwhelmed with its new population, when contemplative nuns still lived within the walls and when the adjacent countryside had seemed like a pastoral idyll:

> In place of this house of Nunnes [they had been Minories or Poor Clares, the female equivalent of the Franciscans, whose convent, west of the Tower towards Aldgate, was suppressed in 1539], is now builded diverse faire and large storehouses, for armour, and habiliments of warre, with diverse worke houses serving to the same purpose . . . Neare adjoyning to this Abbey on the South side thereof, was sometime a Farme belonging to the said Nunrie, at the which Farme I my selfe in my youth have fetched many a halfe pennie worth of Milke, and never had lesse then three Ale pints for a half-pennie in the Sommer, nor lesse then one Ale quart for a halfe pennie in the Winter, alwayes hote from the Kine, as the same was milked and strained.[5]

He could remember games being played similar to ones recorded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries:

> I have seene a Quinten set vpon Cornehill, by the Leaden Hall, where the attendants on the Lords of merrie Disports have runne, and made great pastime, for he that hit not the brode end of the Quinten, was of all men laughed to scorne, and he that hit it full, if he rid not the faster, had a sound blowe in his necke, with a bagge full of sand hanged on the other end.
>
> (1.94)

Tilting at the quintain had once been an essential part of the training of a knight for jousting; and jousting itself was still actively practised by Elizabeth's knights, not least at the annual celebration of her Accession Day on 17 November. Elizabethan writers did not have to imagine what a tournament might have been like when an updated version was happening regularly in the tiltyard at Whitehall, and Shakespeare writes just such a tournament into *Pericles*. Wherever he can, Stow insists too

on the continuity of customs, even if they have come to take very different forms. Stage plays are one of these. Recalling that William Fitzstephen, his twelfth-century precursor as chronicler of London life, had commended the city's miracle and saints' plays, he notes that

> These or the like exercises have beene continued till our time, namely in stage playes, whereof ye may read in *Anno* 1391. a play by the parish Clearkes of London at the Skinners well beside Smithfield: which continued three dayes togither, the king Queene and Nobles of the Realme being present. And of another, in the yeare 1409. which lasted eight dayes, and was of matter from the creation of the world, whereat was present most part of the Nobilitie, and Gentrie of England. Of late time in place of those Stage playes, hath been used Comedies, Tragedies, Enterludes, and Histories, both true and fayned: For the acting whereof certaine publike places [the 1598 edition notes, 'as the Theater, the Curtine &c'] have been erected.[6]

Stow was not a typical Londoner – he devoted his life to uncovering the country's past, its antiquities and its historical records, and seems to have had comparatively little interest in the new (this passage is almost his only reference to the new passion for drama, and even the names of the playhouses are removed from the revised edition) – but his memories were shared by thousands of long-term residents of the capital, for whom a lost shadow London was still perceptible within the churches-become-warehouses, or the built-over fields and gardens. That wider desire to preserve the memory of a disappearing past led to the founding of a College of Antiquaries around 1586.

In local communities too, where the pace of change was slower, the present was haunted by a past only recently obliterated. The paintings and sculpture that had constituted almost all the visual art available to them had been stripped away, so that churches became bare and barn-like, with just the Ten Commandments and the royal arms for decoration; but many in the congregations had lively memories of what had stood in the niches or lay underneath the whitewash. Shakespeare's father, as Chamberlain of Stratford, had been in charge of whitewashing over the

paintings on the walls of the Chapel of the Guild of the Holy Cross the year before Shakespeare was born (it cost two shillings). It would be surprising if he and other parents did not pass on to their children some account of the hidden stories of St George and the dragon or the legends of the Cross that were so tantalizingly close to sight: a memory theatre for the older generation waiting to be recalled for the excitement of the young.

A belief that the world used to be a better place is of course a universal trait of human nature, but however great one's inherent scepticism over the notion that the Elizabethans might have been right, the bulk of modern scholarship suggests that they did have a particularly strong case for thinking so.[7] The sense that a 'merry England' had existed not long in the past seems to have been almost universal in the late sixteenth century, and is reflected in everything from court depositions justifying revels to broadside ballads and more élite literature. *As You Like It* makes an open declaration of Shakespeare's awareness of that longing for the 'golden world', a world where Robin Hood could still be celebrated and where 'good men' would invite others to their feasts as a matter of course.[8] Many of the activities that strengthened community bonds had been strenuously attacked at the Reformation. Almost all those centred on the local church, parish guilds and processions and the fund-raising festival brewings known as church-ales, had been proscribed. Maygame celebrations were suppressed, including maypoles (a relic of paganism, in Calvinist eyes). The great maypole that had been erected annually in Cornhill in London outside the church of St Andrew, known in its honour as St Andrew Undershaft, was left hung up above the doors of the housefronts after 1517, when it had been the focus of the 'evil mayday' riots in the city; and it was finally sawn to pieces in the reign of Edward VI, when a reformist preacher condemned it as an idol.[9] Kendal's maypole, being far from the centre of government and in a region where militant Protestantism spread more slowly, did not cause trouble until 1626, when the players of a show before it had to deny any intention to 'deprave or scoff at religion', despite some cross-dressing and the appearance of a devil.[10]

Stow records street bonfires and the decorating of houses with greenery in London to celebrate the major summertime saints' days, but

those disappeared from the city and across the country with the abolition of the saints, along with the custom of the more wealthy setting out tables outside their houses 'with meats and drinks plentifully' for their neighbours and anyone passing.[11] The secular midsummer watch with its associated processions and shows, which had been one of the high points of the year in numerous towns and cities including London (where, Stow claims, poor men were hired to carry burning torches, earning themselves wages, a straw hat and a breakfast in the process), was suppressed in London by Henry VIII and gradually fell out of use elsewhere. Stratford itself had a pageant of St George which was suppressed under Edward VI, but revived under Mary. The outward-turning activities of the trade guilds, not least the Corpus Christi plays performed in many towns and cities until well into Elizabeth's reign, were disappearing under the combined pressure of religious disapproval and harder economic priorities. Stow may have been unusual in his passion for the detail of the past and the length of his memory, but his nostalgia for that shadow England was widely shared.

CONTINUITIES

Memory is concerned with what is no longer there, but much of the medieval world was still an everyday part of Elizabethan life, and indeed of our own. The collapse of urban civilization after the Romans and the lack of interest of the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings in preserving major cities or building stone castles meant that all the most significant structures in the landscape, and therefore in the economy, had been built in the centuries following the Norman Conquest. Many of the country's institutions likewise carried through from the Middle Ages. England was precocious compared with the rest of Europe in becoming a unified nation state, a kingdom ruled by a single monarch. The first 'king of all England' was Edgar, who was crowned in 973 in a ceremony devised by St Dunstan that formed the basic model for all future coronations. Coronation was both a religious consecration, symbolized by the anointing of the monarch, and a political endorsement, indicated by acclamation by the people, the enthronement, and the crowning itself. The oil used for the anointing was supposedly holy (in 1399, Henry IV

had himself anointed with a miraculous oil given to Thomas Becket by the Virgin Mary herself, though it seems to have given him headlice), but the core ceremony remained (and remains) the same even though the Reformation denied any inherent value to the oil itself. A new monarch also vowed to defend Holy Church, and that too remained a part of the coronation oath right through the Reformation, even though just what the Holy Church was that might need defence had become so bitterly controversial.

Other great political innovations unique to England followed the uniting of the country. In 1215, the barons forced King John to sign Magna Carta, by which he agreed to rule within the law, and it is still cited in connection with issues of human rights. Parliament in the form the Elizabethans knew it was first summoned in 1264, with the bishops and the great landholding barons, the Lords, being present in person, and a body of two representatives from the boroughs and the gentry of each of the shires forming the Commons. Parliament's functions included the presentation of petitions ('bills') and the granting of taxes. Both Magna Carta and those taxation-granting powers were as much valued by English subjects as they irritated medieval and early modern monarchs, irritations that intensified to the point of civil war in the mid-seventeenth century.

Shakespeare's England was a small kingdom with big ambitions, some of them inherited from the Middle Ages. Elizabeth's titles declared that she was sovereign of the realms of England, Ireland and France. Ireland had largely been under Norman overlordship since the twelfth century, and many local kings had sworn fealty to King John as Lord of Ireland; but after Henry VIII had declared himself King of Ireland in 1542, the country became increasingly restive as the English government attempted to impose greater control, especially religious control. Wales was a principality rather than a kingdom, so did not qualify as a 'realm' (*royaulme*, a kingly domain) in Elizabeth's list of kingdoms, but it had been decisively acquired for the English crown by Edward I in the thirteenth century. Much of what now constitutes modern France, except for the area around Paris, had once been ruled by Henry II; Edward III had claimed the French crown in right of his mother; Henry V was named as its heir, and his son Henry VI was crowned as king of

France. By the late fifteenth century, however, actual English possession remained only a dream: the last English territory on French soil, Calais, was lost in 1558. The Hundred Years' War none the less bequeathed a longer-lasting legacy to England than just a conviction of martial glory and a residual sense that France ought really to be English, and that was a sense of nationalism. The Norman Conquest had overridden England's distinctive language just as Henry II's Angevin Empire had blurred its political distinctiveness; but from the fourteenth century forwards, there is perceptible an increasing sense that to be English and to speak English constituted something more fundamental than political allegiance to a particular overlord or attachment to one's own acres.[12]

Holinshed's great *Chronicles*, which furnished Shakespeare with the material for his history plays and several of his tragedies, recorded an earlier history of a larger Britain that had once had imperial pretensions, as King Arthur, in a legend first concocted by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 1130s, conquered most of Europe and even reached the gates of Rome. King Arthur may have been falling out of credibility by the late sixteenth century, but he was still the nearest thing England had to a national hero. Spenser made the most of that in his *Faerie Queene*, and Milton considered doing the same. Dreams of an imperial Britain had not died, and the opening up of the world westwards revived them in a new form. One markedly new element in the sixteenth-century mentality of the English was that their country was no longer on the very edge of the known world, crammed into the furthest arc of the circle as it had appeared on the medieval *mappae mundi*, but placed ready to exploit the new world beyond. The earliest Spanish *conquistadores* carried copies of medieval romances with them, as a guide to the kind of marvels they might encounter. If a 'knight adventurous' had been a romance knight errant, the merchant adventurer, medieval or modern, was an overseas trader who united adventuring with capitalism, over greater distances than the romances had ever imagined. 'Adventurer' related in the first instance to chance and risk, and the idea of such questing for wealth gave its name in 1555 to the newly reconstituted Company of Merchant Adventurers, founded 'for the discovery of regions, dominions, islands and places unknown'.[13] The opening up of routes into Asia resulted in the fresh popularity of Sir John Mandeville's fourteenth-

century guidebook to the Middle East.[14] The discovery of the Americas turned it into a destination for gold-hunting and potentially for colonization, and England was eager to get its share. The Norse discovery of North America was not known in Tudor England, but the lack was compensated by legends of Irish and Welsh travellers who were believed to have first sailed across the Atlantic many centuries earlier. The sixth-century Irish St Brendan had supposedly found 'the land of promise', along with various mid-Atlantic islands; the 'land of promise' may indeed have been America, but his non-existent islands continued to be marked on charts until the eighteenth century, on the basis that it is much better to be warned of an imaginary rock than not to be warned of a real one.[15] The story of the Welsh voyager Madoc, who in 1170 'sought adventures by Seas, sailing West' until he came to 'a land unknowen', resurfaced in Elizabeth's reign and was greeted with enthusiasm by English explorers, since it appeared to give priority to the British in discovering North America. Hakluyt accordingly incorporated it into his anthology of earlier British travels, as one among a good number of medieval travel accounts:

> This land must needs be some part of that Countrey of which the Spanyards affirme themselves to the first finders . . . Whereupon it is manifest that that countrey was by Britaines discovered long before Columbus led any Spanyards thither.[16]

Dr John Dee, the Queen's astrologer, gave the story a particular welcome since it completed to the west the empire that King Arthur had once established in continental Europe. Elizabethan ideas for the colonizing of the New World looked more convincing for some medieval precedent.

The opening up of new worlds expanded the range of commodities on offer and caused pan-European inflation, but it made little difference to most people's everyday lives. Religious changes had a much more profound effect, though even those were to an extent absorbed within the weekly round of living. Sunday services continued in the parish churches across all the thirty years of upheavals of the English Reformation, even while they changed from Latin Mass to English communion to Latin and back to English, and they were sometimes

conducted by the same priest throughout. Christopher Trychay, for instance, vicar of the little Devonshire parish of Morebath, began his pastoral career in what seemed a timeless world of saints and processions and festivals, but faithfully and for the most part patiently continued to minister to his flock through the upheavals of Henry's reign, the rigorous Protestantism of Edward VI, the restoration of the old rites under Mary and Elizabeth's Anglican settlement.[17] Vestments might be simpler than in the old Catholic days, the bishops might not live such aggressively sumptuous lives, but the church hierarchy within England remained intact, even if the pope had been transposed from being the father of Christendom to the Antichrist incarnate. Humanist learning did not necessarily set itself in opposition to the great medieval institution of the Church, though its discovery that Constantine's donation of earthly power to the pope was a forgery and its advocacy of return to the earliest texts of the Bible were both taken up with enthusiasm by the Reformers. The leading humanists from Petrarch to Erasmus and More, however, never queried the core teachings of Catholicism, and More became a martyr for them and eventually a saint.

For Shakespeare as for the great majority of his fellow citizens, there is no way to be sure whether he was an apathetic churchgoer, a committed Anglican, or a closet Catholic. He certainly shows a marked sympathy with Catholic thought and practices, with friars and nuns and prayers for the dead; and in common with everyone of his time, he took for granted the habit of thinking by analogy that had been fostered by the belief that everything in the created world was interconnected, and was infused with further meanings for humans to interpret. Most obviously, this inspired the riotous similes of Euphuism and the conceits of Donne and Herbert, but it was far more widespread than those. When Lancelot Andrewes countered puritan objections to kneeling for communion by pointing out that we do not have 'knees like an Elephant, that cannot bend', no one would have found the mode of thought strange, whether or not they still accepted medieval natural history as factually true.[18] Analogical habits of language that saw the universe as a sympathetic whole were taken for granted until they came under attack from the Royal Society, founded in 1660, which set out to restrict the description of the natural world to what was compatible with its

agenda of 'physico-mathematico-experimental learning'. A few non-literal elements survived, where it was difficult to find linguistic alternatives or the words were too deeply embedded in familiar speech: we still call mercury mercury, though we no longer connect it with the planet from which it derives its name. Until the Restoration, however, the natural world was believed to be a book designed to express divine meaning. People asked not only, like Newton, why an apple should fall to the ground, but why a stone should fall through water while an apple fell through air but floated in water, and why sparks should fly upwards through air. The answer lay in each element seeking its own home within the divine scheme of Creation: the spark, the fiery empyrean of the heavens; the stone, the earth; the apple, with its admixture of earth, water, air and the fire that made the tree grow upwards, finishing up between the heavier and lighter elements.[19] Shakespeare's Muse of fire that 'ascends' to the outermost heaven in the Prologue to *Henry V* is behaving in accordance with medieval physics. It was such habits of thinking that enabled Shakespeare to write with the density that costs modern readers so much time and effort to unpack, though his audiences grasped his words at first hearing.

One great invention in the fifteenth century helped to transform the world from the medieval to the modern, and played its part in the dissemination of humanism, the Reformation and the scientific revolution alike: the printing press. Print did not immediately displace manuscript, and many authors preferred the privacy of manuscript circulation, but it transformed the availability of texts of all kinds, and for the first time put the written word within the potential reach of the majority of the population. The Classics were one immediate beneficiary, as the great presses of mainland Europe made the Greek and Latin authors accessible as they had never been before, and in better editions. The Reformation was disseminated largely by way of print, not least in Germany, and through its encouragement of vernacular literacy. Print also gave unprecedented access to medieval works, whether the theology of Augustine and Aquinas and the medieval Bible commentaries, or vernacular texts aimed at those without Latin literacy. The books published in England in the century after Caxton set up his press at Westminster included editions of Chaucer and Lydgate, ballads of Robin

Hood, and an abundance of medieval verse romances of legendary heroes. The educated might know their Ovid; everybody knew of King Arthur. The first work of English literature to be disseminated in printed rather than manuscript form was Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the work that ultimately underlies almost every later Arthurian adaptation; and far from being nostalgic or backward-looking, it was the first of a new fashion in France and elsewhere across Europe for printed texts of Arthurian romances, most of which had originally been written 250 years before Malory produced his own version. The favourite complaint of the educated throughout Shakespeare's lifetime, indeed, was not that medieval literary culture and its heroes had been lost, but that they were much too popular.

There was one other continuity that retained something of its association with the old church, and that was drama.[20] In the long historical requirement for literature to teach and delight, and to teach through delighting, drama had functioned not only to entertain but to disseminate and confirm Christian doctrine, as well as to inculcate ideas of a good life. The early Reformers employed plays as one of their methods for spreading both Protestant doctrine and anti-Catholic propaganda, but in the second half of the century the more extreme Protestants set their face increasingly firmly against theatre of any sort. To the puritan opposition, the stage's emphasis on the body rather than the word aligned it irredeemably (in the full theological sense) with the similar mix in Catholicism. To act, whether in a street pageant or a Robin Hood play or on the stage of the Globe, itself asserted a connection with a culture that was medieval in the most pejorative sense. To us, the secular focus of early modern drama marks its clearest distinction from its medieval predecessors, but the beliefs that led to the closure of the theatres in 1642 judged otherwise.

THE SHAPE OF LIFE

Jaques' famous speech outlining the seven ages of man may look timeless: the progression from birth to death is, after all, universal. The idea of dividing life into a fixed number of stages, varying from three to seven, had first appeared in the ancient world, but it was taken up with

enthusiasm in the Middle Ages, and by the sixteenth century had become a commonplace. The understanding of each stage of life from birth to death – and indeed beyond those, from conception to Judgement – likewise retained a similar form across the Middle Ages and Renaissance.[21] Theories about conception still largely followed medieval beliefs, including that it required orgasm on the part of both the man and the woman: a theory that in turn affected broader social ideas of sexuality, marriage and dynasty. Infant baptism was one of the two sacraments retained as such by the Church of England (along with Holy Communion), and normally took place within a few days of birth. Shakespeare's birth date is an estimate designed to fit with the feast of St George, who had been adopted as England's patron saint by Edward III. Parents normally chose godparents from their own social group, or occasionally from a higher one, so that community bonds were confirmed and useful patrons acquired. Christenings at the higher levels of society could be very splendid affairs: Shakespeare stages one, for the infant Elizabeth, at the end of *Henry VIII*, with her two godmothers specified. Churching, the ritual purification of the mother retained from Catholic practice, took place a month later.[22]

In cities and market towns across the country, boys who survived into childhood might become apprentices: the term, from French *apprendre*, to learn or teach, first appears in 1307. In the population collapse over the century following the Black Death, apprenticeship was extended to girls, though this was falling out of use in the sixteenth century. Training in an apprenticeship might well include basic arithmetic and English literacy, but boys of a more academic cast of mind, or whose parents hoped they might develop one, could find a fuller education at a local grammar school – a school, that is, that taught the foundation element of the whole scholarly curriculum, Latin grammar – many of which had been founded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Stratford's, founded around 1400, was initially managed by the local religious Guild of the Holy Cross, along with the town's bridge and its almshouses, but it was put under the control of the secular corporation when the town was given the status of a borough under Edward VI. The corporation still met where the Guild had formerly gathered, in the substantial timbered Guildhall built in 1417, but it used only the ground floor, and handed

over the upper floor to the school. Grammar textbooks were rewritten under humanist influence early in the sixteenth century, but the focus on Latin remained the same. The balance of the curriculum changed, with print providing access to a greater range of Classical and neo-Latin authors than had been available before; but the favourite Classical author of both medieval and early modern students was Ovid, for Marlowe and Shakespeare as for Chaucer and Gower. The emphasis of education shifted in the sixteenth century from logic to rhetoric, but medieval schools too had taught the principles of decorum of composition, of producing work appropriate to the subject, speaker, audience, occasion and motive: lessons well learned by Chaucer as by Shakespeare. Early modern education also carried through from the scholastics a training in arguing on both sides of a question, something that again stood Shakespeare in good stead.

Only a small proportion of the boys who attended grammar schools went on to further study. Marlowe and Greene did so; Shakespeare and Jonson did not. Time at a university was perceived by the aspirational middle strata of society as a step towards a good income and, with luck, social advancement. Universities were themselves a medieval invention. The earliest had been founded in Italy and France; Oxford followed in the late twelfth century, and Cambridge early in the thirteenth. With universities came the scheme of lectures in specific faculties, studying with masters and the conferment of degrees dependent on some form of examination. By the time Greene and Marlowe were attending Cambridge, there was much more intensive training in the Classics, including Greek (though the initial high enthusiasm for it seems to have declined after the 1540s), and less of an emphasis on divinity, though logic and the practice of disputation remained strong. The numbers of university-trained men far exceeded the number of posts requiring such an education, however, and a good many found themselves scraping a living, like Greene, as a hack writer, or supplementing a feeble income from poetry and drama with a little government espionage on the side, like Marlowe. Law, by the sixteenth century and perhaps earlier, was taught by the Inns of Court in London, which had been founded in the Middle Ages but became of increasing importance as educational establishments in the early modern period. Chaucer's sixteenth-century

biographers believed he had received an education there. Many early modern writers, including Lodge and Donne, had training in both the universities and the law schools. What they learned was a mix unique in Europe of common law, a series of precedents going back to the early thirteenth century, and statute law, most of the statutes in question being medieval. The legal system too retained its medieval form of judges and juries, operating through various systems and levels of jurisdiction up to the King's Bench at Westminster. Difficult cases could be decided by the Court of Chancery, which was primarily concerned with issues of equity, or, as it was more commonly described in the Middle Ages, conscience: it was supposed to be able to make better decisions when common or statute law seemed to be inadequate for the particular case. Shakespeare was unusual in having neither a university nor a legal education, though his own entanglement in various lawsuits gave him some inside experience of its workings, and *The Comedy of Errors*, and perhaps other of his plays too, were acted at the Inns of Court.

Children as well as adults worked a long day, and holidays and other breaks in the work routine were all the more appreciated. The range of recreational possibilities however shrank sharply with the Reformation. The medieval Church celebrated the liturgical year with a series of festivals with associated rituals or processions: Christmas, Candlemas, Easter and Pentecost, Corpus Christi and the Assumption of the Virgin, Michaelmas and a regular round of saints' days. The major feast days based on the Gospels were retained by the Anglican Settlement, but saints' days and other non-biblical feasts largely disappeared. Fasting was more approved in Elizabethan England than feasting or playing, church-ales or popular plays. The custom of not eating meat on Fridays and throughout Lent was retained, but in order to support the herring industry rather than on religious grounds. Informal games and sports continued, but anything that looked at all riotous or conducive to public disorder was severely frowned upon by the authorities. The reduction in holidays was scarcely compensated for by the inclusion in the calendar of the Queen's Accession Day; court celebrations for it came to include annual tilts, but in the country at large the main form of celebration was merely the ringing of church bells. One compensating increase in recreational activity in the later sixteenth century lay in the visits by

touring companies of actors that enabled far-flung towns and gentry households to participate in something of the new theatrical culture of the capital. They were not altogether a new phenomenon, but many authorities were increasingly hostile to them. The University of Cambridge banned anything remotely resembling a theatrical performance within five miles of the city by anyone except its own members within the walls of their colleges, with the proctors going so far as to imprison a showman who displayed an elephant at Stourbridge Fair.[23]

Alternative possibilities for the more adventurous Elizabethan youths, or a follow-up to training in the universities or the Inns of Court, were travel and battle. Both have on occasion been proposed for the young Shakespeare. Jaques envisages soldiering as the next stage of life after being in love, and describes the soldier as being 'jealous in honour', 'seeking the bubble reputation / Even in the cannon's mouth' (*AYLI* 2.7.151–2). Honour and reputation were concerns carried over from the aristocratic and chivalric ethic of the Middle Ages, though various of Shakespeare's plays take a somewhat sceptical attitude towards them. The increasing use of cannons and handguns was destroying the heroic prowess associated with hand-to-hand combat, but the obsession with honour and reputation remained. Sir Philip Sidney's needless death, incurred when a musket-ball shattered his thigh after he had abandoned his cuisses, his thigh-armour, reputedly after noticing that one of his companions was lacking his own, was still widely regarded as a pinnacle of honourable action. Of Shakespeare's fellow-writers, Ben Jonson and George Gascoigne both spent time as soldiers in Elizabeth's wars in the Low Countries, just as the young Chaucer had once fought in Edward III's French campaigns, and John Donne took part in an expedition against Cadiz.

Travel had by contrast taken a different turn since the Middle Ages. One of the greatest incentives to long-distance travel in the Middle Ages, pilgrimage, was no longer available as an option, because of both the advance of the Ottoman Empire and Protestant disapproval. Instead, a mixture of curiosity and economic hopefulness encouraged journeys beyond the geographical or imaginative reach of earlier travellers. The medieval East had been an exotic region of magic and marvels; the West had been simply a blank, except perhaps for the near-mythic Fortunate

Isles, but now it seemed like an inexhaustible mine of wealth. Thomas Lodge reached Brazil and the Magellan Straits, and Donne sailed to the Azores. Shakespeare's work shares the widespread Elizabethan sense of the largeness of the world and its possibilities, but its new expansion leaves a less explicit mark on his writings than on those of many of his contemporaries: even the Bermudas-inspired island of *The Tempest* is located between Carthage and Naples.

One mark of full adulthood was becoming head of a household, and marriage. Illegitimate births incurred social disapproval and punishment for both parents, but young people of the late sixteenth century were expected to be financially self-sufficient before they married, and marriage was typically delayed until a couple were in their twenties. University students were not allowed to marry at all (a relic of medieval clerical celibacy), and Fellows of colleges had to resign their posts on marriage and move on to a clerical living or a similar position. Shakespeare's own teenage wedding to the older Anne Hathaway was made urgent by reason of her pregnancy. Weddings were normally preceded by the reading out of the banns of marriage in the local parish church in three successive weeks (a practice instituted in 1215, to allow for objections to the marriage to be raised); but since it was already late in November, and, like its Roman predecessor but less for theological than financial reasons, the Anglican church forbade marriages during the formerly penitential season of Advent, the young couple instead purchased a special licence from the bishop, under a system introduced in the fourteenth century. The complex set of medieval regulations and practices that defined a marriage, still controlled by ecclesiastical courts, ranged from a private and unauthorized exchange of vows of future or present intention, to a full church service in the presence of the couple's families. The resulting tangle reverberates in the plays, in *Measure for Measure*, or in the excuse it gives (and historically gave) Richard III to disinherit his nephews when their father's precontract to a woman other than their mother is discovered.

THE SHAPE OF DEATH

Jaques takes his archetypal man through adult respectability (which Shakespeare achieved with surprising success for a writer and player) to the debility of old age. Few Elizabethans in practice got that far: death was at hand at every stage from infancy onwards, and the culture was not going to let anyone forget it. The Middle Ages had developed an elaborate iconography of death, which reached its culmination in the 'dance of death' or the *danse macabre*, in which skeletons link hands with people of every age and walk of life – a king and a labourer, a lover and a merchant, a gentlewoman and a minstrel and a baby – to carry them off.[24] It seems likely to have been inspired, or encouraged, by the Black Death of 1348–9; it received its most famous representation at the Holy Innocents in Paris in 1424, complete with a set of verses in which Death speaks in turn to each of his victims and they make a reply addressed less to Death than to the spectator. The series was rapidly reproduced in the North Cloister of St Paul's, with an English translation of the verses by John Lydgate, and lasted until the Duke of Somerset demolished the building in 1549 to use the stone for his own grand house.[25] Shortly after that, in 1554, Lydgate's verses appeared in print at the end of his *Fall of Princes*, a work that conveys a comparable message of how the great invariably end up dead.

Among the places to show the full series of pictures and verses was the nave of the Guild Chapel in Stratford-on-Avon. Here, grey skeletons seized by the hand representatives of all the traditional ages and estates against a striking vermilion background. They were obliterated in 1563 along with the pictures of the saints though there were no doctrinal objections to the iconography:[26] there were many Protestant versions of the same theme, including a set of comparable pictures with much briefer verses that appears in the margins of the distinctly Reform-minded *Booke of Christian Prayers*, also known as 'Queen Elizabeth's prayerbook'. Its 'death' series shows men and women of all ranks from the emperor to the beggar and the rogue (and including a queen who looks markedly like Elizabeth), each accompanied by a mordant couplet summons from Death as he makes his fell arrest: 'Come Baylife, no bayle: with me shal prevayl.' Only the infant in the cradle gets anything like a gentler treatment: 'Feare not me: / though I grisly be.'[27] Holbein

produced a particularly widely disseminated set of woodcuts on the same theme, and reputedly painted the Dance as a mural in the palace of Whitehall; it was even popular as a broadside print, adapted on the cover of this book.[28] Whether or not Shakespeare had the hidden Stratford Dance of Death described to him, its underlying idea was pervasive in his cultural world, and was given expression in art, funerary art, poetry and sermons as it had been since the fourteenth century.

A more individual focus on the grotesqueness of death appears in the fashion for 'transi tombs', popular in the fifteenth century and again in the seventeenth. Here the dead person is represented not only on top of the tomb by a figure clothed to proclaim its earthly status, but below that as a decaying corpse. Chaucer's granddaughter Alice had a particularly fine example made for herself at Ewelme, in Oxfordshire; and John Donne's famous insistence on having himself drawn in his shroud was similarly in keeping with the spirit of his own age. We tend to associate such an obsession with Jacobean tragedy more than with Shakespeare, but he too writes lines that resonate with such iconography, and in particular with death's carrying off every kind of person.[29] The listing of those subject to death in *Cymbeline* draws in several figures reminiscent of the Dance of Death, the king, the clerk, the physician and the lover:

> The sceptre, learning, physic, must
> All follow this, and come to dust.
> . . .
> All lovers young, all lovers must
> Consign to thee and come to dust.
> (4.2.268–9, 274–5)

Hamlet's meditation in the graveyard on death as the universal fate takes a similar form. Lydgate had included verses not only on the generalized figure of the minstrel, but on Henry V's illusionist and conjuror John Rikelle, the one man in his verses given a name.[30] Yorick is similarly the only person named in *Hamlet*'s graveyard scene; otherwise, the unearthed skulls are like the Dance's skeletons, relics of bodies stripped of all rank or personality: 'This might be the pate of a politician . . . Or of a courtier . . . May not that be the skull of a lawyer? . . . Now get you to

my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come' (5.1.78, 82, 190–2). And he goes on to draw Alexander and 'imperious Caesar' into the litany of those reduced to dust. The emphasis on human flesh as earth was summarized in a poem that first appears around 1300 and of which a five-stanza version was painted in the Stratford Guild Chapel:

> Erthe oute of erth ys wondurly wrought . . .
> Erth upon erth wold be a kyng
> But how that erth gott to erth he thyngkys nothyng.[31]

The Elizabethan service for the burial of the dead, in a passage adopted directly by Cranmer from the Catholic Latin rite, consigns 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'; the poem goes further in its insistent moralizing about how men get above themselves and forget the earth that is both their origin and destination. Beatrice glances at the topic in comic mode in *Much Ado*: 'Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust, to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?' (1.3.55–7). The great men of Shakespeare's plays are especially prone to echo the shock of discovering their own mortality spoken by their archetypes in the Dance: that the ownership of vast estates will not save them from being reduced to their body's length of earth. The young Henry III discovers it early, at the death of his father King John:

> What surety of the world, what hope, what stay,
> When this was now a king, and now is clay?
> (*KJ* 5.7.68–9)

The full iconography of Death as a crowned skeleton lurks too behind Richard II's recognition that kingship makes him more, not less, vulnerable:

> All murthered – for within the hollow crown
> That rounds the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,

> Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
> Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
> To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks;
> Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
> As if this flesh which walls about our life
> Were brass impregnable; and, humour'd thus,
> Comes at the last, and with a little pin,
> Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!
> (*R2* 3.2.160–70)

To Richard, this is a revelation: to his audience both on and off the stage, it was a commonplace.

There is just one indicator that the original Dance of Death itself may have been close to Shakespeare's mind. By the 1580s, the name for the *danse macabre* (or *-é*: either way, it is an etymological puzzle) was appearing in French as the *danse marcade* or *marcadé*. The same name is given by Shakespeare to the messenger who brings news of the king's death in *Love's Labours Lost*, and indeed, unusually for such a messenger figure, it is mentioned as soon as he enters (the accented *é* is necessary to complete the pentameter):

> Welcome, Marcadé,
> But that thou interrupt'st our merriment.
> (5.2.708–9)

Interrupting merriment is precisely what Death does in the Dance, as in the play. Marcadé, like the Dance, is a reminder of the transience of youth and festivity.[32] At this 'latest minute of the hour', the King is sent off to spend a year as a hermit, the one profession the Dance regards as an adequate preparation for death, and the mocker Berowne to

> Visit the speechless sick, and still converse
> With groaning wretches; and your task shall be
> With all the fierce endeavour of your wit
> To enforce the pained impotent to smile.
> (5.2.844–7)

He responds with horror at the idea of moving 'wild laughter in the throat of death'. In the context, this seems less a process of cheering patients with clowning, than invoking the grin of the voiceless skeleton as a reminder of universal mortality.

The progression through life did not, however, end with death. Calvinism insisted that salvation lay entirely with God's predetermined election of a soul; Catholicism gave more agency to the individual by insisting that good deeds and faith were both necessary, and the Church of England tried to hold out hands in both directions. What everyone agreed was that after death came Judgement, and since by any creed it was impossible to merit salvation, the soul was entirely reliant on God's mercy. The great Doom paintings over the chancel arches might have gone, but the fear remained. Isabella pleads to Angelo by an appeal to his own hope for mercy, and Portia to Shylock in the same terms (*MM* 2.2.73–9, *MV* 4.1.191–200). Catholicism, with its indulgences from the pains of Purgatory that could be purchased during life and its requiem masses and prayers for the souls of the departed, further insisted that the actions of the living could help spare the dead the worst of the sufferings of the afterlife (prayers recited before the image of the Blessed Virgin in the Stratford parish church had been believed to give forty days' indulgence).[33] It is one of the unresolved paradoxes about the ghost of Hamlet's father that, while claiming to be in a place where 'the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away', what he requests from his son is not the intercession of prayer but revenge.[34] Hamlet, moreover, proceeds to swear by St Patrick (1.5.142), in what can only be an allusion – a train of thought – from St Patrick's Purgatory, the location in Ireland where Purgatory was most easily accessible from this world, and which had been the subject of an account first written in the twelfth century and widely disseminated in England and across Europe throughout the Middle Ages.[35] Part of the ambiguity over the murdered king's ghost is necessitated by his function in the play: there is much of the Senecan ghost about him, of the kind that appeared in many of the early modern revenge plays, but the world of *Hamlet* is a Christian, not a pagan, one. In keeping with his Reformation context, Shakespeare mentions saints or saints' days only when he has a good reason to do so; so it is all the more striking that he should three times,

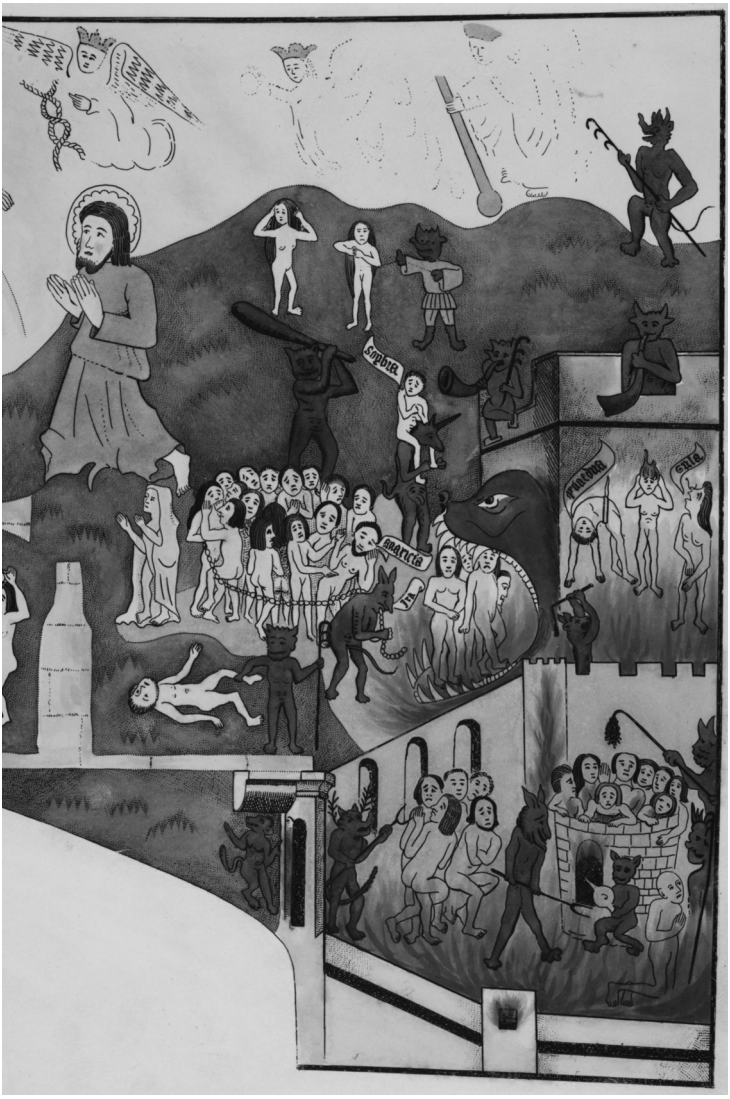

FIGURE 1 The Stratford Doom, from Plate XIX in John Gough Nichols, *Ancient Allegorical, historical and legendary Paintings in Fresco . . . on the walls of the Chapel of the Trinity, belonging to the Gilde of the Holy Cross, at Stratford-upon-Avon . . . from drawings . . . by T. Fisher* (1838) © The British Library Board, 1701.b.23

and in defiance of history, specify that the scene in *Richard III* preceding that in which the ghosts of Richard's victims appear to him is set on All Souls' Day.[36] The 'despair' that those ghosts wish on Richard before his death in battle is a theological despair, the realization that he has no hope of God's mercy; and he himself acknowledges that despair when he realizes that there is no one who will pity him, and, by implication, pray for his soul (*R3* 5.3.136–202). The Reformation abolition of the non-biblical doctrine of Purgatory did not affect the belief of England's recusant Catholics that God's mercy might be elicited by such prayers, and it remained a powerful desire much more widely. Prospero's Epilogue to *The Tempest* invokes the same idea metaphorically (15–20), when the actor appeals by the audience's own hope for pardon for their 'indulgence', to replace his own fear of despair with mercy. The lines were not the last Shakespeare wrote for the stage (there were two collaborative plays still to come), and the reading of the play as a personal testament is naive; but a Jacobean audience would still recognize the ideas behind the lines, and assign them a weight that a modern audience can miss.

THE WORLD OF LANGUAGE

Perhaps Shakespeare's most important inheritance from the medieval past was the language he spoke. The size of the topic takes it well beyond the scope of this book, but two aspects of that inheritance not only affected almost everything he wrote but became matters of fierce contemporary debate: the best kind of words to use, and the best kind of poetic metre.

The Elizabethan age was highly nationalistic, with a strong interest in its own past as an element of that. It was also exceptionally self-consciousness about language. The two causes came together in the debate over what form the language should take, not least where word choice was concerned. Chaucer was widely acknowledged as the only past model of poetic elegance, but much of his vocabulary had become too unfamiliar for use; and the old 'Saxon' vocabulary was commonly regarded as being both barbarous and 'rude', unsophisticated. There was none the less a movement, intensifying through the early seventeenth

century as the Germanic origins of English came to be both appreciated and admired, to preserve archaic words, to reject foreign imports from the language altogether and replace them with new words coined from English roots.[37] The movement was initially inspired by opposition to the multiplication of inflated Latinate 'inkhorn terms' (some of which stuck – 'propitiate', 'perspicuous'; and some of which didn't – 'enucliation', 'eximious'). Shakespeare was both broad-minded and prolific in his word invention. He looked both to Latin roots ('sanctimonious', 'vulnerable') and to variants on older, but not usually archaic, English vocabulary, though a number of words commonly cited as his neologisms (such as 'forefather' and 'countless') are in fact recorded earlier, and other unrecorded ones (such as 'lonely') may have been in existence.[38] The qualities of words as well as their origins were brought into the argument. 'The most auncient English wordes are of one syllable', wrote George Gascoigne in 1575, 'so that the more monasyllables that you use the truer Englishman you shall seeme.'[39] Old English was not only more authentic: it was also felt to be 'truer', more plain-speaking and transparent, less subject to the deceit of skilled rhetoric.

Early-modern English was a palimpsest of successive conquests. The earliest layer – the equivalent of the street plans that continued to shape and structure towns and cities – was represented by the syntax and the core vocabulary of Old English, the language brought in by the Saxon invaders. The Norman colonizers spoke the Romance language of French, itself derived from Latin and therefore wide open to the inclusion of many words similar to the deprecated 'inkhorn terms'. Over the centuries after the Conquest a multitude of new words found their way into English: words that were often (like the new buildings) more immediately striking than the foundations beneath them. Shakespeare's own name, the identity by which we know him, epitomizes the juxtaposition of languages. 'Shake-spear' is solidly Anglo-Saxon; the name given him by his godparents at Stratford's fifteenth-century font, 'William', was a French name that had entered England with the Conqueror. By 1500 Old English was as incomprehensible as it is now, and modern English as we still know it was effectively in place, in grammar, in pronunciation and in its mixed vocabulary.[40] The doubling of lexical origins allowed not only for a greater range of conceptual

expression but an abundance of synonyms, Romance imports to pair with Old English. The etymological fusion was far from complete, however. Early-modern English retained a transparency to its historical development that markedly affected its expressive powers. Words that entered English at different stages retained distinctive connotations and registers, different imaginative resonances, in ways that made it unique among the languages of Europe. Shakespeare was exceptionally alert to those subtleties of difference, flexing the resources of the language to vary the semantic implications of his words as well as their aural and phonic qualities, his palette of sound.

The linguistic distinction originating with the Normans between the use of Romance-derived vocabulary by the aristocracy or the educated, and of 'Saxon' words by those who were neither, is emphasized, often to the point of caricature, in literature from the fourteenth century onwards. The distinction becomes a regular feature within sixteenth-century drama, as peasants, clowns and the uneducated or illiterate are typically given a much more limited range of vocabulary and syntax than their higher-class or more educated associates. What is at issue is not just the *number* of words they know, but the *kind* of words they use and the associations they carry. Prince Hal and Falstaff have a fluency far beyond their tavern companions; Mistress Quickly, like many of Shakespeare's servants, has a corresponding tendency to slip into malapropisms when she tries to speak above her station. Such variations commonly correlated with generic hierarchies as well as social ones, and with prosodic form: tragedy was associated with princes and the statelier forms of language expressed in verse, low-class comedy with a limited range of Germanic vocabulary, often inviting laughter, and with prose. Those are all abundantly exemplified by Shakespeare, but so is a readiness to transgress them – to use the simplest language at key moments of tragedy, to give the sharpest linguistic self-consciousness to professional fools, to use verse in comedy or in the speech of shepherds so long as they are in love.

He also uses the different levels of language with a subtlety of nuance that can vary within the speech or even the phrase. Choice between words may sometimes be governed by non-semantic considerations such as metre, but a high proportion of his lines acquire additional richness

from an alertness not only to the roots of the words he uses, but to the date of their adoption into English. The basic words that make up the language (such as 'that', 'wish', 'strike', 'death') come through from Old English. The earliest French terms to find their way into English were those of the colonizers, such as 'prison' and 'castle'; the consumers' terms for meat followed soon after ('beef' as against the peasants' 'cow'). Many French words that entered the language before 1300 became naturalized, losing their alien resonances and connotations; but even now, 'desire' (first recorded c. 1230) is a more educated or higher-register word than 'wish' or 'want'. Later arrivals, many of them polysyllabic, along with those drawn from other languages (Classical or medieval Latin, the preserve of learning; Greek, often by way of Latin; Arabic, especially for scientific terms), still carried a different feel about them through the sixteenth century and beyond.[41] The shorter, Old English-derived words continued to carry more power and conviction, partly from so many of them being stressed monosyllables, partly from the sense (emphasised by the supporters of 'Saxon') that the minimal is the most forceful. Troilus's rebuke to Diomedes starts off in high classical register (the italicized words are respectively French, a Greek emendation and Latin) despite the insulting 'thou', retained from Old English:

> Thou dost not use me *courteously*,
> To shame the *zeal* of my *petition* to thee,

but quickly modulates into the brutality of

> I'll cut thy throat.
>
> (*TC* 119–20, 127)

Old English simplicity supplies the imaginative resonance of Othello's

> Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,
>
> (1.2.59)

and Macbeth's

> All our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death.
>
> (5.5.22–3)

The irreducibility of such lines helps to make them among the most instantly memorable in the whole Shakespeare canon.

The moral connotations of the two vocabularies, Gascoigne's sense that Old English monosyllables are more 'true', also play out in Shakespeare. They show up in combination with social difference in the exchange between the plain-speaking soldier Williams and the king on the night before Agincourt. The commoner warns that the king will be held responsible at Judgement Day when 'all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle shall join together at the latter day and cry all "We died at such a place"' (*H5* 4.1.133–6), but the language of Henry's response fails to mesh with the accusation, as he blames the soldiers themselves for their fate ('non-naturalized' French- and Latin-derived words are italicized): 'Some, *peradventure*, have on them the guilt of *premeditated* and *contrived* murder; some, of *beguiling virgins* with the broken seals of *perjury*' (4.1.159–62). The registers can clash within a single speech, as when the faithless Proteus, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, contrasts in soliloquy his own treachery in gaining access to his beloved Silvia, with how she reacts:

> When I *protest* true *loyalty* to her
> She twits me with my falsehood to my friend;
> When to her *beauty* I *commend* my *vows*
> She bids me think how I have been forsworn
> In breaking faith with Julia, whom I lov'd.
> (4.2.7–11)

The language in which Proteus describes his own speech carries an air of fraudulent eloquence about it, in contrast to Silvia's plain, Old English transparency that allows nowhere for deceit to hide. Vocabulary choice here is not governed by class or genre, but by ethics.

Prosody as well as vocabulary was drawn into the debate over origins, though this time French found itself on the same side as English. In the first instance, the debate set the principles of unrhymed Classical Latin verse, which depended on syllable length, against post-Conquest patterns of rhyme and syllable-count. The earliest English poetry had been alliterative, in unrhymed lines shaped by stress patterns; but although

Tudor poets retained a fondness for alliteration, it had largely disappeared from sight as a form in its own right. Rhyme had first appeared in Latin after the fall of Rome, a fact that made some humanists, including Thomas Campion in England, accuse it of being a barbarian retrogression.[42] In reply, Samuel Daniel praised the middle age between the Classical and the humanist for creating a better 'harmony of words', and he cited Petrarch as a medieval forebear whose sonnets proved that excellence in the art of eloquence was fully compatible with rhyme.[43] Rhyme began to be adopted in French poetry, written both on the Continent and in England, from the early twelfth century, and Middle English poetry largely followed suit. With rhyme came a greater strictness as to line length, though rhyming poetry in English continued to privilege stress-count over a fixed number of syllables. French octosyllabics (eight syllables per line) were thus anglicized as tetrameters (four stresses per line), and if there were seven or nine syllables nobody reacted as if any fault were being committed, whether aurally or academically. John Gower was the only Middle English poet to maintain a precise eight-syllable count, and the exact reproduction of that in Gower's first speeches in *Pericles* is a measure of early modern sensitivity to its prosodic inheritance.

Verse was the default medium for most imaginative writing well into the sixteenth century. The medieval verse form that carried the highest cachet was rhyme royal, the seven-line stanza rhyming *ababbcc* invented by Chaucer and used most famously in his *Troilus and Criseyde*. James VI, the future James I of England, called it 'Troilus verse' in his *Short Treatise on Verse* of 1584, and noted that it was particularly appropriate for 'tragicall materis, complaintis'.[44] It remained one of the dominant forms for narrative, especially narrative tragedy, throughout the sixteenth century, and was chosen by Shakespeare for his *Rape of Lucrece*. *Troilus* had remained compulsory reading for aspiring poets (Shakespeare was to draw on it extensively in his own later dramatization of the story), and *Lucrece*'s flexibility in handling the stanza, the constant variation of how the syntax fits into the rhyme pattern, echoes Chaucer's own.

Verse may be an eccentricity judged by modern principles of writing for the theatre, but for medieval and early modern playwrights it was the natural medium to use.[45] Prose began to be adopted for comic passages

late in the sixteenth century, but all the surviving Middle English and early Tudor plays opted for verse alone. Over the course of the century the verse forms used for drama were simplified away from the medieval use of stanzas, first to short- or long-line couplets, and then to blank verse, unrhymed iambic pentameters. These first appeared in Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* of 1561, and came to dominate drama from the late 1580s forwards. The great Elizabethan innovation was thus not to write plays in prose, the normal language of speech, but to remove rhyme from dramatic verse (though couplets were still common for aphorisms, especially to sum up a scene). Blank verse was not sufficient to pacify the Classicists who wanted to substitute syllable length for natural stress, however, and here too nationalism and the English past were brought into the argument. Spenser, in correspondence with the Cambridge scholar Gabriel Harvey, urged that English poets should retain 'the kingdome of our owne Language, and measure our Accentes, by the sounde'; Harvey insisted that 'the ordinary use, and custome, and proprietie, and Idiome, and, as it were, Maiestie of our speach' should be 'the only infallible and soveraigne Rule of all Rules'.[46] Importing Latin prosody into English is close to *lèse-majesté*, or even rank treason. For all that both fifteenth-century scribes and sixteenth-century printers had mangled Chaucer's prosody, his line could still serve as the model. He had effectively invented the iambic pentameter, or its ancestor – not regular ten-syllable lines with alternating stresses, but lines with the same range of variations as Shakespeare himself was to use. Gascoigne insisted that what mattered most about his prosody was not strict syllable count but the flexibility, 'libertie in feete and measures' such as contemporary poets would do well to learn from.[47] The Chaucerian precedent helped to reinforce the idea that the pentameter, like the monosyllable, had specifically English qualities about it. Modern readers tend to react to it in the same way, but that reaction is mediated to us by Shakespeare rather than Chaucer.

Shakespeare's opting for English metrical models may seem so natural as not to bear discussion, but that would be to underestimate the vigour and visibility of the debate. It was a lively issue through much of his writing lifetime; and given his early ambitions of writing in the humanist tradition, his choice begins to look rather more deliberate. His

metrical choices are a major, and underestimated, sign of his commitment to that native kingdom of his language, its shapes and structures and sounds – a kingdom inherited, as Elizabeth's own was, from the Middle Ages.

Chapter Two

TOTAL THEATRE

Item Settynge the worldes on fyre iiij d[1]

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention!
H5 Prologue 1–2

The first of these quotations is a record of a play that Shakespeare almost certainly saw in his youth, in the streets of Coventry, twenty miles from Stratford. It expresses in miniature the scope and ambition of the Corpus Christi plays from which it comes. Coventry's may not have included, as most of the cycles did, the creation of the world, but it did stage its final destruction, and saw no problem in doing so. The Prologue to *Henry V* invokes a different kind of cosmic fire: a Muse of such fiery spirit that it can encompass even the empyrean, the outermost circle of fire at the edge of the universe, and Shakespeare can use it to create a world, not to destroy one. The first is likely to impress us as naive, the second as rather magnificent; but they share the conviction that the proper subject of the theatre is the whole cosmos, and that anything can be staged. Shakespeare's own 'invention', his powers of creativity expressed through rhetoric, will bring into being this lesser world just as the outermost heaven contains all that is. He may not have a literal 'kingdom for a stage, princes to act', but he does, like the writers of medieval religious drama, co-opt the imagination of the audience to make up the lack, in a process that is less suspension of disbelief than active make-believe. The question that follows that invocation to his fiery Muse, as to whether the actors can

cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt,
(12–14)

expects at one and the same time the answer 'No', since it is evidently impossible, and the answer 'Yes', since that, with the complicity of the spectators, is precisely what the actors are going to do. Donne commented on how the 'O' could stand both for everything, the world or infinity, and, in the newly adopted system of Arabic numerals, nothing.[2] The Prologue picks up the same paradox, and adds the further twist that the actors themselves can be 'ciphers to this great account', enabling the nought to make a million out of one. Multitudes, space and time can all be brought within the compass of the stage:

Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts . . .
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carrying them here and there, jumping o'er times,
Turning th'accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass.
(23, 28–31)

'O for a Muse of fire!' makes it sound as if Shakespeare does not have one, but he then goes ahead and does everything he wants to do all the same.

Total theatre – cosmic theatre – of this kind is unique in England to medieval and Elizabethan traditions of drama. It is deeply alien to Classical and neo-Classical drama; and as so often, where there is a big difference between the Classics and early modern literature or thought, it is because the Middle Ages intervened between the two and changed things decisively. Drama is perhaps the area where the significance of the medieval has been most extensively overlooked.[3] One reason for this is the sheer loss of texts:[4] the great bulk of saints' plays and Passion plays that are recorded across the country do not survive; and although the Corpus Christi plays (the commonest sixteenth-century generic term for the mystery plays, the great biblical cycles) are better represented, far

less survives than has been lost. There is further the assumption that the Corpus Christi plays were a medieval phenomenon alone; in fact they continued well into Elizabeth's reign, and in places further from the centre of government – Cornwall, where the plays were in Cornish; Kendal; Kilkenny – comparable plays are recorded into the seventeenth century.[5] Another reason for the plays' invisibility is the lack of direct quotation from them in the secular drama, and commentators, from antiquity to modern editors, work by annotating the words on the page. The religious plays, however, were never printed, so precise verbal echoes rarely exist, a situation exacerbated by the disproportion of surviving plays from the North of England, well away from the origins of the Elizabethan playwrights. The difference in subject matter, too, between a profoundly religious drama and the early-modern secular theatre, limits what can appear by way of more direct allusion. Larger motifs of plot structure and visual iconography do reappear in early modern drama, not least in Shakespeare, but scholarly annotation is not designed to deal with allusion at that level. Also outside the range of annotation, though of fundamental importance to Elizabethan theatre, is the topic of the next chapter, the stagecraft of the early religious plays: they are composed out of the assumption that the stage was as large as the audience's imagination. That belief was carried straight through to the public theatres, but it is much too large to notice: like the street plans or the English language, it is simply *there*.

In addition to all that, there is the assumption, endorsed by many centuries of humanist-shaped education, that Elizabethan drama, both tragedy and comedy, was Classical in inspiration, with Seneca and the Greeks as its models for tragedy, Plautus and Terence for comedy, and Aristotle as its theorist. A surprising amount of more recent dramatic theory still relies on such generic distinctions and assumptions. As the Elizabethan theorists themselves noted, however, English drama refused to fit those Classical and humanist categories, and it never had done. The cycle plays were theoretically impossible – an Aristotelian monstrosity; and although the almost total absence of surviving texts makes it hard to be sure just what most other forms of early drama may have been like, the Robin Hood plays and other forms of secular drama were never going to care unduly about Classical regulation.[6] The saints' plays that do

survive (the Digby *Mary Magdalene* and *Conversion of St Paul* and the Cornish *Meriasek*)[7] are notable for their sprawling action: *Mary Magdalene* is indeed the closest play we have in method to *Pericles*, one of the many unregulated plays of Shakespeare's that disgusted the neo-Classical Ben Jonson. We have no medieval martyrdom plays at all, though it has been suggested that those may have been influential in shaping Elizabethan concepts of tragedy.[8] The favourite saint for dramatization had been Thomas Becket, but his defence of the Church against royal power had cast him as a villain at the Reformation. John Bale, Carmelite friar turned radical Reformer, wrote an anti-saint's play about him, but that does not survive either.[9] Saints' plays, in any case, cannot by their nature fit into any kind of Classical generic categorization, since the death of the saint, no matter how grisly, is the necessary prelude to an ending in bliss. The favourite short dramatic form in the earlier Tudor period, much better attested in terms of surviving texts, was the morality play or moral interlude (known at the time as 'morals', 'moral plays', or, more loosely, 'interludes');[10] but those too, based as many of them are either on the structure of man's life or on some kind of moral lesson, refuse to match up with any Classical antecedents. When John Pikeryng wrote a play on the most Classical of subjects, Orestes' vengeance on his mother for her murder of his father Agamemnon, perhaps for presentation before Elizabeth, it comes out complete with a comic Vice, a set of songs and what its modern editor correctly describes as a 'sunny cheerfulness' of tone.[11] Even its classicism of topic is illusory, since its source is not the little-known Aeschylus but Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*.

English dramatic habits were hard to justify. In 1591, John Florio, the son of Elizabeth's I's tutor in Italian, produced an English–Italian phrasebook to assist those who wanted to be able to make intelligent, or at least polite, conversation in the other language. It included a number of model conversations designed to explain the odd ways of the English to the Italians. Among the conversations is the following exchange:

H. The plaies that they plaie in England, are not right comedies.
T. Yet they doo nothing else but plaie every daye.

H. Yea but they are neither right comedies, nor right tragedies.
G. How would you name them then?
H. Representations of histories, without any decorum.[12]

'Histories' here mean nothing more specific than stories, dramatised narratives; 'decorum' refers to the rules for consistency of plot, language and characterization that were supposed to be followed by 'right' comedies and tragedies. His bewilderment was widely shared: Sir Philip Sidney likewise condemned as a 'gross absurdity' 'how all theyr Playes be neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies'.[13] But what the English wrote and acted were *plays*, the word that Florio and Sidney both use but do not seem to notice, but which had for centuries been the term for vernacular theatre. 'Play' remained the basic word for everything to do with drama throughout the sixteenth century: the one Old English-derived word in a sea of imported Classical terminology. 'Drama' first appears, in the sense of a single play, in 1515; as a collective term for plays in general, it had to wait until 1661. 'Tragedy' and 'comedy', both derived from Greek by way of Latin, had been in use to describe narrative forms from the later fourteenth century, but they were assimilated to dramatic forms only slowly and awkwardly in the course of the sixteenth, and were not fully at ease as terms for vernacular plays until the late 1580s. Some of the earliest English generic descriptions appear in the writers of anti-theatrical polemic, who were more interested in the evil effects of literature on society than in critical theory; their accounts of the stage are therefore more concerned with actual practice than were those of the academic theorists. John Northbrooke, who wrote the first substantial treatise of the controversy in 1577, indicates his priorities clearly enough in his title: *A Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, vaine Playes or Enterluds, with other idle Pastimes, &c., commonly used on the Sabaoth Day, are reproved by the Authoritie of the Word of God and auntient Writers*. The ancients, in a move typical of this polemic, are here called in solely as witnesses to reprove drama: Aristotle is cited, not for his views on the unities or as an expert on tragedy, but for the passage in his *Politics* where he forbids young men to attend plays.[14]

Acting mere 'plays', in the late sixteenth century, was for the humanists a sign of deep cultural ineptitude, for it lacked the dignity

endowed by the Classical generic terms. It was, in fact, a medieval practice; but it was one that gave England and the world the glories of high-Renaissance drama. The humanists were correct in claiming that the writers for the public stage did not produce right comedies or right tragedies, but they did produce right plays. And even Ben Jonson, who regularly insists in his prologues that unlike everyone else he really does write 'right' comedies and tragedies, mounts a defence of liberty in a debate on dramatic theory between three playgoers that serves as the Induction to his *Every Man out of his Humour* of 1599: Greek New Comedy and Latin writers, he notes,

> augmented [the earliest prescriptions] with all liberty, according to the elegancy and disposition of those times wherein they wrote. I see not then, but we should enjoy the same license, or free power to illustrate and heighten our invention, as they did; and not to be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few, who are nothing but form, would thrust upon us.[15]

As with language and metrics, English practice must make its own way; too slavish a Classicism does not make for good theatre.

As our vocabulary for discussing plays indicates – drama and theatre as well as tragedy and comedy – we are still desperately bad at theorizing *plays*, and in a tradition going back to the humanists and to the scholastics before them, what cannot be theorized tends to disappear from view. English does not even have an adjectival noun from 'play' equivalent to the theatrical, the tragic or the comic: the 'playful' belongs to a different semantic field from the 'dramatic'. There is, however, no absolute separation between the two senses,[16] and some of the puritan opposition to the theatre focused precisely on the overlap, for 'players' by definition contradicted the Protestant work ethic. Hence the complaint of the Corporation of London in 1574, that 'it hath not ben used nor thought meete hertofore that players shold make their lyving on the art of playing'.[17] It might be acceptable as recreation (though many took a harder line than that, disapproving of play of any kind, whether theatre or recreation), but not as a substitute for real work. The old religious theatre could justify itself on the grounds of ritual

observance and instructing the unlearned, however unacceptable those justifications became, as well as on the fact that most of the actors were indeed productive workers as well; but the new secular theatre could appeal to none of those justifications. It is none the less in the unnameable semantic field of playing where the practice of drama was focused, in the fifteenth century as in the sixteenth. The absence of any theory of 'plays' is no indication that they were written mindlessly: the evidence from the texts is that they were both self-aware and highly intelligent. The rhetoric and the staging of an all-powerful, ineffable and invisible God demand not only high dramatic skill but conceptual adeptness. So does the encompassing in a single day of the entire history of time and the cosmos, with God's eternal present translated into the present tense of performance. 'Play' offers a total drama, embracing Eden and the Crucifixion and damnation and bliss; God, and a man caught with his pants down;[18] shepherds and kings, all of humankind. Transposed to the secular stage, it embraces within a single play all the estates of society from the monarch to the peasant;[19] kings and fools; gods and brothel-keepers; Egypt and Rome; dukes, artisans and invisible fairies. For the Elizabethan dramatists, and most strikingly and persistently for Shakespeare, *playing* enabled a paradoxical seriousness of commitment to both the stage and the life it imitated.[20]

From that concept follows an equally important quality inherited by the drama produced for the public theatres: the key feature of a play was that it *acted its action*. Classical drama was above all a rhetorical construct, with almost all its action, and especially violent action, converted into spoken report. By contrast, medieval and Elizabethan drama offered an 'incarnational aesthetic'.[21] Play was mediated not only through speech but through the body in performance, in battles and dumbshows, staged rituals, embraces and kisses, on-stage deaths and blood. Forceful claims have been made for locating the theory of medieval religious drama in precisely that emphasis on the body, relating it not only to the acting but to the communal, corporate body of the town that presented the plays, and to the incarnate Body of Christ celebrated in the feast of Corpus Christi itself.[22] The recreation of Christ's body in the Mass, and the theatricality of its celebration, both insist on the centrality of the body in Catholic doctrine, and provided material for

the anti-theatricalists to use in their own polemics against the stage. Staging the action may seem to us post-Shakespeareans the obvious thing to do with a play, but it was deeply worrying to the puritan opposition; and it did not seem at all obvious to humanist commentators educated in Senecan drama. Senecan drama is a matter of rhetoric, of action displaced into words, relayed through messenger speeches or laments.[23] We are still not certain whether Seneca wrote his plays to be acted or declaimed, and it has to be said that the choice for one or the other makes very little difference. Schoolboys both medieval and early modern were encouraged to speak Terence aloud, but actual performance seems to have been rare. The most extensive medieval imitations of Terence (rediscovered late in the fifteenth century, and printed with woodcuts by Dürer) were six plays by the tenth-century abbess Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, written to provide a Christian alternative to pagan comedy: they too seem to have been intended for reading rather than performance, though they sometimes have considerable performative potential (the most famous of them, *Dulcitius*, includes an episode of a deluded lover trying to make love to pots and pans, though the text locates the action offstage in relation to the speaking characters who observe it through a keyhole).[24] Dramaturgical strategies such as dumbshows, with their total dependence on the visual, would have been an impossibility to Seneca. What we call the audience are frequently described in the sixteenth century as spectators, with the emphasis falling on seeing more than hearing. It was an assumption that deeply irritated Ben Jonson, as the Prologue to his 1625 *Staple of News* makes clear; he wishes the spectators would 'come to hear, not see a play', and insists that its maker 'would have you wise, / Much rather by your ears, than by your eyes'.[25] The lines record his long failure to train his audiences; his most intensively language-dependent play, the strictly Senecan *Catiline* of 1611, had been a flop. The cycle plays and Elizabethan drama can still both be profitably read from the page alone, but it is not what they were designed for, and performance brings out qualities that remain hidden in a reading. It is indeed the revival of the cycle plays as living theatre, as spectacle as well as text, that has restored a recognition of just how powerful they are.

Generic difference is a narrowing and exclusive process. Sidney and

his fellow humanist critics particularly objected to the mingling of clowns and kings, the bringing of different social classes on stage together. Classical theorists had insisted on their separation: tragedies should be concerned with princes, comedies with the lower classes, each with their own distinct kinds of plot, style and language. Classical practice and humanist theory also took a very literal-minded attitude towards the stage itself, insisting that it should represent (more or less) a single place, and that the time covered must be, if not the same as the time literally taken for the performance, not more than a single day – the notorious unities ascribed to Aristotle, though he never lays down anything quite so restrictive as they become in the works of neo-Latin theorists such as the Italian Castelvetro and the French Julius Caesar Scaliger. It is hard to imagine anything more alien from vernacular medieval drama, or from most early-modern drama. Equally alien were the restrictions on the number of characters on stage at once; and the requirement for unity of action, that there should be no deviations from the main plot. The cycle plays were structured on the basis that the individual pageants constituted semi-autonomous acts within the larger single plot of God's purposes over time; and the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play* also contains the first move towards a subplot in English drama, with an episode in which the shepherds find a lamb stolen from them by the interloper Mak hidden in a cradle before they go to the stable to find the Lamb of God. Humanist playwrights as well as theorists took it as axiomatic that Classical examples laid down what ought to be done, and regarded all variations from that as illegitimate or undesirable. George Whetstone's Dedication to his own double comedy of *Promos and Cassandra* (1578) praises Menander, Plautus and Terence as the best writers of comedy, not least for the clarity of their morality. Italian comedy, he claims, is too 'lascivious', and so is the French and Spanish comedy that follows its pattern; German, by contrast, is 'too holy', and more fitted to the pulpit than the 'common Stage'. Of them all, however, it is the English dramatist who

> is most vaine, indiscreete, and out of order: he fyrst groundes his worke on impossibilities; then in three howers ronnes he throwe the worlde, marryes, gets Children, makes Children men, men to

> conquer kingdomes, murder Monsters, and bringeth Gods from Heaven, and fetcheth Divels from Hel . . . Many tymes (to make mirthe) they make a Clowne companion with a Kinge; in theyr grave Counsels they allow the advise of fooles; yea, they use one order of speach for all persons.[26]

Whetstone's ideal comedy would not break either plausibility or decorum, but rather fulfil all expectations with the maximum predictability:

> To worke a Comedie kindly [i.e. in accordance with its true nature], grave olde men should instruct, yonge men should showe the imperfections of youth, Strumpets shold be lascivious, Boyes unhappy, and Clownes should speake disorderly

– a way of proceeding which he believes, with more faith than evidence, will enhance both the audience's attention and their pleasure. *Plays*, by contrast, 'kindly' make the most of their freedom. Performance conditions still required roles to be recognizable and assigned them accordingly – the same actors would regularly play the king, or the clown – but the types were not absolute.[27] Old men may be foolish and young men upright, and even clowns can sometimes see things that their supposedly wiser superiors can't. Comedies as well as tragedies can concern themselves with the doings of aristocrats, and a fool alongside a king can intensify a tragedy. Both can 'run through the world' and on occasion bring gods and devils onstage, just as the cycle plays did. What was anathema to the neo-Classical critics was the lifeblood of the theatre as it was practised.

That freedom was not accidental. It is at the heart of Christian doctrine that all humankind is descended from one set of parents, that both shepherds and kings were summoned to the birth of Christ, that God can not only put down the mighty from their seats (abundantly evident in early modern tragedy) but exalt them of low degree. The Bible itself tells the entire story of salvation history from the Creation to the Last Judgement; Catholic doctrine had extended that backwards to include the Fall of Lucifer. Human life, salvation history, comprehended

the entirety of time, and the cycle plays followed suit. In so far as the stage represented the world, it could display as much as a modern cinema screen, and with as little anxiety about what might plausibly fit within its small physical confines. The very word 'theatre', Latin 'theatrum', in one of its commonest sixteenth-century usages, related not to the stage but to the world, in a metaphor that for a while dominated over its original meaning. It was widely used a term in book titles to mean an encyclopedia, a kind of medieval *summa*, a gathering together of the sum of everything, the whole world.[28] Ortelius's world atlas was printed in England under the title *Abraham Ortelius his epitome of the Theater of the worlde*. The unfamiliarity of the word in the dramatic sense is indicated in John Alday's introductory verses to his 1566 *Theatrum mundi, the Theatre or rule of the world, wherein may be sene the running race and course of everye mans life*, where he feels the need to gloss his title with the explanation that the work is 'Most like a Theater, a game / or gameplace if ye will'.[29] It is easy to assume that when Burbage opened the Theatre in 1576, he was making a proper name out of a common noun, just capitalizing the T; but it was only after that, and perhaps as a consequence of the naming, that the word 'theatre' began to catch on as meaning a purpose-built playhouse. It is indeed impossible to be sure what sense Burbage had in mind: whether the Classical sense of a theatre or amphitheatre,[30] or the neo-Latin as found in many book titles, or indeed both at once. The playhouse would thus present itself as an encyclopedia of the world, *theatrum mundi*. The Globe was named by analogy with the world, as 'a material realization of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor',[31] and supposedly carried the motto 'Totus mundus agit histrionem'. That perhaps translates best not as the Shakespearean 'All the world's a stage', though that is obviously a closely similar idea, but as 'Everyone [compare *tout le monde*] acts a part', just as 'every man' of John Alday's title is to play his part in the gameplace of the world. That the Globe carried this motto is not mentioned until the early eighteenth century,[32] but the concept was thoroughly familiar to the Elizabethans. The idea of the world as theatre gets a mention in a number of Classical writers, but it is given its first full Christian elaboration in the twelfth century, in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury: a work that became a staple of early printing, and which declares, in a phrase closely similar to

the motto, 'totus mundus exerceat histrionem'.[33] Shakespeare prefixes Jaques' speech on the parts people play with the general reminder that the world is a 'wide and universal theatre' (*AYLI* 2.7.137).The metaphor gets one of its fullest developments in English in the poem that Thomas Heywood prefixed to his *Apology for Actors* of 1612:

> The world's a Theater, the earth a Stage,
> Which God, and nature doth with Actors fill,[34]

actors who encompass all classes and walks of life. The frame of the world itself is the wooden 'O' of the playhouse, 'as by the roundnesse it appeares most fit', furnished with 'starre-galleries of hye ascent'; and God acts as spectator – or rather, He is the only one who does not act. He is real, not a role-player: He *is* spectator and judge.

Heywood's analogy of the theatre and the world works on several levels. First, it insists on the comprehensiveness of the *dramatis personae*, the cast of characters. There can be no segregation by genre here; 'kings . . . citizens . . . sheepheards and Sea-men' inhabit the same scene. Second, the poem insists on the play as representing the totality of life – not just of the individual life, which provides an entrance and an exit within the larger drama, but potentially the whole history of world. Heywood will have no truck with any Aristotelian unity of time. Third, it creates an equation between the real audiences in the real playhouse with the actors on the stage of the world, humankind at large. The cycle plays and early modern drama were watched by the entire social range, from monarchs to servants, just as they portrayed the entire social range. The fact that the early-modern London theatres were public spaces – that the playhouses, like the mystery plays, were accessible to everyone – was thus a key part of their meaning; the analogy would fail if it were transported to the indoor setting of a hall, a private space with its audience capacity limited both in numbers and exclusivity, even though the same plays might be acted in both. Heywood concludes his poem with the couplet

> He that denyes then Theaters should be,
> He may as well deny a world to me.

A marginal note puts the message more succinctly: 'No Theater, no world.' The totality of human experience and the public drama are reciprocal analogies for each other.

It was a principle that offered huge opportunities, and challenges, to playwrights both medieval and early modern. The idea derived directly from the cycle plays. Well into the sixteenth century, France had had an even more ambitious religious drama where performances could last a week or more, but the rejection of such cosmic theatre in favour of a rigid Classicism set French theatre on a completely different course from the English. Spanish remained more hospitable for longer, in the form of Calderón's fine morality play *El Gran Teatro del Mundo* (which ends with a firework display, to signify the burning of the world, but also because the best shows require them).[35] The shift in England from religious drama to secular might seem to separate the metaphor off from any Christian function, but Heywood's verses show how easily a single concept of theatre embraced both: Heywood's worldly stage still has God as spectator. The integration of the two is still evident in one of the plays of the period that most teems with secular life, Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* of 1614. This draws an explicit analogy between the public theatre and the fairground, 'the place being as dirty as Smithfield, and as stinking every whit' (Induction 139–40), and then turns the fair itself into an epitome of London – or England, or the world, though not quite, as its puritan characters would like to think, the World of the World, the Flesh and the Devil. It further provides one figure, Justice Overdo, who tries to imitate God in acting as the unseen judge, though he only succeeds in proving his Christian name correct, the fallible Adam. Early-modern dramatists literally had the world as their subject, and they made the most of it.

REMEMBERING THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA

The Corpus Christi plays attempted to stage an all-embracing drama that contained all time and all humanity. The most comprehensive began with the Fall of Lucifer and proceeded through the biblical outline of salvation history to the Last Judgement, though not all play cycles aimed to be so ambitious: shorter cycles, of the New Testament or just the

Passion, were not uncommon. They were inspired by the institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264, and their earliest form may have consisted just of a procession with floats or tableaux, rather like the processions that still bring the cities of southern Spain to a standstill in Holy Week. By the later fourteenth century, they had developed into a fully dramatic series of pageants that functioned as linked episodes within God's larger plot for humankind. Their long continuation in this form meant that some proportion of the playgoers who attended the Rose or the Globe, or performances by the same companies when they were touring in the provinces, would have seen the cycles – perhaps a high proportion, for although London had not had a regular cycle of its own, the massive immigration into the capital that saw the city double in size in the second half of the sixteenth century brought in people from all over the country. Most people knew *of* them even if they had not had access to them, or were too young to have seen them. The cycles had been the greatest civic festivals in some of England's major cities, and drew in spectators from miles around. In their combination of civic pride with religious celebration and dramatic ambition, the nearest parallel might be with the great dramatic festivals of ancient Athens. When Shakespeare has Hamlet complain of actors who try to out-Herod Herod, it is not a private allusion for the benefit of a select handful; it is a remark plausibly made by a prince to a playing company, and aimed in the theatre at a geographically and socially mixed audience of all different ages. The educated members of the audiences at the public theatres may have learned their Seneca and Plautus in grammar school, construing them phrase by phrase, or at university; they may even have acted in them, since that was held to be an appropriate element of humanist education. But the dominant living theatrical experience of the childhood and youth of a large number of the playgoers of the 1590s was religious drama carried forward from the Middle Ages. The cycle plays were much the most ambitious form of that, and survived the Reformation for longest – long enough to become part of the cultural memory of Shakespeare and his audiences.[36] So far as he himself is concerned, the evidence is very strongly in favour of his having not only a generalized cultural familiarity with the cycles, but first-hand knowledge, acquired in that most impressionable age of infancy or youth.

Such an acquaintance with religious drama on the medieval model was not confined to those who had seen the full cycles. Records show the continuing widespread performance of various kinds of religious play after Elizabeth's accession, not least in areas that did not have a full cycle play. The Digby *Mary Magdalene* and *The Conversion of St Paul* of c. 1500 may have been revived in Chelmsford in the early years of her reign.[37] Plays of the Passion and Resurrection were also widespread at local level, often acted through co-operation between parishes, though only two texts survive, *Christ's Burial* and *Resurrection*; and such plays were not entirely an antiquarian, or even a Catholic, phenomenon. Thomas Ashton, the Calvinist headmaster of the Free School at Shrewsbury during 1561–71, produced an ambitious Whitsuntide Passion play for the town perhaps as many as seven times in that decade, in the course of which the young Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville were pupils there: they could even perhaps have found themselves enlisted into the acting, required at the school as an academic exercise. It was performed in a dry quarry just outside the city walls that was used for bearbaiting and cockfights as well as plays, and attracted thousands of spectators – Thomas Churchyard, in his poem *The Worthiness of Wales*, claimed 20,000. Even allowing for exaggeration, the numbers indicate a massive hunger for such drama. The Queen herself reputedly wanted to have it acted for her, and a man from London who was accused of theft explained his presence in Shrewsbury on the grounds that he was visiting the town 'onlye to see the playes'; and although neither of those can be proved true, they must have carried some measure of plausibility.[38] The thief's excuse suggests that not only might immigrants to London have brought experience of such drama with them, but Londoners themselves may have travelled some distance to seek it out.

The number of playgoers who had a first-hand acquaintance with both the medieval kind of religious drama and the drama of the public theatres must have run into many thousands. Plays of those sorts could be seen by far greater numbers than could ever have seen indoor interlude performances. Although only a fairly small number could gather around a pageant wagon at any one of its stopping-points, audiences for an entire cycle with the various stations for its pageants may well have numbered thousands for each performance, rather than

the dozens of members of the household and invitees who could cram into a hall; and outdoor sites such as the one at Shrewsbury could accommodate many more. So Elizabethan expectations of drama derived from plays such as these, not as something learned but as something taken for granted, in an 'unthinking effortless familiarity'.[39]

Despite the numbers, we can actually attach names to very few people who are known to have seen both a cycle play and plays written for the public stage, and three of those are recorded only because performances were put on especially for them. One was Elizabeth I herself, who was presented with a selection of the Coventry plays when she visited the city in 1566.[40] The other two were aristocrats, father and son, who were greeted with a play from the local cycle when they visited Chester in 1578: the Earl of Derby and Ferdinando Lord Strange, the latter to become the patron of Strange's Men, one of the leading acting companies. 'In Julie the Erle of Darbie ye Lord strange with many others Came to this Citie and were honorablie receaved by the Maior and Citizens. The sheppards play was plaied at the high Crosse and other Tryumphs on the Roods eye.'[41] These were clearly plays of which the cities were very proud. The mayor and citizens of Coventry would not have offered the equivalent of a *Pyramus and Thisbe* to the Queen, or to their earlier royal spectators: Margaret of Anjou in 1457, Richard III in 1485, and Henry VII in 1493.[42] They were, however, plays that were as insistently non-elitist in their audiences as in their characters. For some people, far from London or the centres of population reached by the touring companies, the religious plays seem to have remained all the theatre that they ever knew. One such man was encountered in the Cumbrian hills by the preacher John Shaw in 1644:

> One day an old man (about 60) sensible enough in other things, and living in the parish of Cartmel, but in the chapelry of *Cartmel-fell*, coming to me about some business, I told him, that he belonged to my care and charge, and I desired to be informed in his knowledge of Religion; I asked him . . . how he tho't to be saved? he answered, he coud not tell . . . I told him, that the way to Salvation was by Jesus Christ God-man, who as he was man shed his blood for us on the crosse etc Oh, Sir (said he) I think I heard of that man

> you speake of, once in a play at *Kendall*, called *Corpus-Christi play*, where there was a man on a tree, and blood ran downe.[43]

Not only had the Reformation passed him by, but apparently all of high-Renaissance drama too. Even as late as the Civil War, for a small handful of people, 'plays' were equivalent to the mystery cycles; and those plays – specifically, the performance, the embodiment of their action, the blood running down – was what gripped their memory.

The story of the old man is a reminder of how long drama that we think of as being medieval actually lasted. The sheer scale of the loss of texts has not helped to keep them in front of the eyes of literary historians, a loss comparable to the iconoclasm that wiped out so much English religious art. We have only two complete texts of the great urban cycles of biblical drama, those of York and Chester. A third cycle, from East Anglia, covers the same ground but consists of various plays or sets of plays, including a series on the Life of the Virgin, that were once independent of each other: this is the 'N-Town Cycle', once known as the *Ludus Coventriae*, the 'Coventry play'. It was not in fact connected with Coventry, though the title, written on the flyleaf in the early seventeenth century, presumably reflects the fame of Coventry's own play; it is also given the alternative title of 'ludus corporis Christi'. 'N-Town' (inviting the speaker to fill in the missing name) is taken from the spoken banns advertising its imminent performance. Once thought to have been acted by a travelling company, it is more likely to have been acted by a number of parishes or small towns co-operating to produce it.[44] A fourth full cycle known as the Towneley or Wakefield plays may in fact be an anthology rather than Wakefield's own play. The manuscript seems likely to have been produced as a text for devotional reading rather than performance, perhaps as a wedding gift for Mary Towneley, a member of a notable recusant family, in 1556.[45] Its stage directions often seem designed less as instructions to the actors than as aids to a reader to supply the visual dimension missing from the page. The *Burial of Christ* likewise seems to have envisaged just such devotional use as an alternative to performance.[46] We also have a scattering of individual plays from a number of other cycles, some unlocated, but including Norwich and Newcastle. From Coventry itself we have just two, from

what may have been just a New Testament cycle. The term 'Corpus Christi play' seems to have been most common in the north, in keeping with the greatest density of such drama: the Lancashire antiquarian John Weever noted that they were so called 'in my countrey' in contrast to London and the south,[47] though their connection with the specifically Catholic feast of Corpus Christi had long been abandoned. Their scale necessitated a midsummer performance, since they might well take from a June dawn to dusk. Chester's moved to Whitsuntide in 1519, well before the Reformation abolition of the feast in 1548, though at about the same time it began to be performed over three days rather than a single one; it moved again, to midsummer itself, in 1575, as if to emphasize its separation from religious festivity.[48]

Despite their association with the Middle Ages, some of the extant playtexts are sixteenth-century creations: rewritings were not unusual, before as well as after the Reformation. The two surviving Coventry plays were probably written in the same decade as Wyatt was composing his poetry. The Chester plays were rewritten around the same time, with further revisions to reflect the doctrinal changes under Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth; and all six of the cycle's fullest surviving manuscripts were copied after 1590, when the drama of the public theatres was at its height.[49] The texts of all the cycles were given an active vetting at the Reformation, to make them fit the new doctrinal standards, and they occasionally called attention to the fact. Norwich provided a new Prologue for its plays in 1565 that insisted that they had been 'newly renewed and according to the Scripture', though the revision was not sufficient to keep it in existence.[50] The surviving records of performances are often patchy, but it is clear that strenuous efforts were sometimes made to keep them going in the second half of the sixteenth century, and there was often resistance to their suppression. The first decade of Elizabeth's reign saw either full Corpus Christi plays or shorter series of the same kind acted at New Romney, Norwich, Worcester, and perhaps Chelmsford, with Lincoln hoping for a revival that never in fact happened. Many more, including some of the greatest, lasted longer. York saw the last performance of its cycle in 1569, though the city was still hoping to mount it again in 1580. Chester's succumbed to puritan opposition with particular reluctance in 1575, though one wonders

whether the performance of the Shepherd pageant for the Earl of Derby in 1578 was a move to get high-level support to revive it; and the multiple copies of the text made around the end of the century suggests a keenness to ensure its survival at least in written form. Durham and Doncaster saw their cycles acted until 1576, but hoped for their revival for longer; Newcastle's, a substantial cycle consisting of at least twelve pageants and perhaps as many as twenty-five, seems to have been acted intermittently until 1589. Coventry's shorter cycle lasted until 1579, and came very close to being revived in 1591; one of the guilds held on to its pageant wagon until the 1630s, just in case.[51] Cornish biblical plays were still being played in 1602;[52] and at Kendal they lasted into James's reign, and possibly until 1612. It was the Kendal cycle that Shaw's old man remembered in 1644. John Weever, born twelve years after Shakespeare, in 1576, recalls seeing the Kendal plays, as well as others at Lancaster and Preston; and a Preston will of 1638 makes a bequest of 'my Shewe called the Chaos, the Wagon, the Stage' and all the tools necessary for keeping it in good condition.[53]

London itself seems to have been less supplied with religious drama than many other of the great towns, or than some of the areas that sponsored Passion plays and analogous forms of drama in a host of smaller towns and villages. There are scattered records of saints' plays sponsored by individual London parishes, but the only record of cycle plays are the three- and eight-day performances in 1391 and 1409 mentioned by John Stow.[54] Records for sixteenth-century religious drama in the capital are very thin, no doubt in part because London was the focus of so much of the religious turmoil of the period. The antiquarian William Lambarde recalls seeing dumbshows of the great events of the liturgical year at Whitsuntide in St Paul's before the Reformation took full hold. A Passion play, perhaps Church-sponsored, was performed in the reign of Mary, and another on a Good Friday between 1620 and 1622 at Ely House, then the residence of the Spanish ambassador, which reputedly attracted an audience of thousands – another testament to the continuing attraction of religious drama.[55] Plays that drew on biblical material, most often from the Old Testament, did, however, continue to be written and acted right through the century, many for the public theatres. Of over thirty recorded titles,[56] only a few texts survive,

including Thomas Garter's *Godly Susanna* (c. 1569); a *Jacob and Esau* that was acted before the Queen; and Lodge and Greene's *Looking-Glass for London and England*, written before 1592 but much reprinted, which showed the wickedness of Nineveh as a satire on contemporary London, with Jonah's encounter with the whale along the way. It is more surprising to find some saints' plays still being written: Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentance of Mary Magdalene* (printed in 1566); a play on the martyrdom of St Dorothy, *The Virgin Martyr*, by Dekker and Massinger in 1618; Henry Shirley's fictional *Martyred Soldier* of c. 1620. Only one such new saint's play seems to have been explicitly Catholic, and that has no traceable connection with London: a play of St Christopher that was chosen for performance in 1609 in a northern recusant household, in preference to the players' alternative offerings of *King Lear* and *Pericles*, and which incorporated a scene in which an Anglican priest was carried off by a devil.[57]

The range of provenance and performance of such plays is a reminder that despite the increasingly vociferous objections raised by the puritan lobby down to 1642, when they finally succeeded in closing the theatres, there was no absolute divorce between the reformed religion and the stage, even in the most contentious field of religious drama. Chester's post-Reformation banns point out the precocious enlightenment of the cycle's supposed original author, Ranulph Higden, in putting biblical material into the language of the common people.[58] One Protestant from Coventry who was imprisoned for his beliefs under Mary 'was let out to play in the Pageant about the City with other his companions. And that done, he returned agayne into prison at his hour appointed', and eventually died there.[59] Elizabeth's ecclesiastical authorities opposed the theatre more on political than doctrinal grounds (especially fears of public disorder), though the latter were often used as an excuse for the former, as happened at both York and Chester. The early reformers had seen plays as useful religious propaganda. John Bale wrote a number of doctrinal plays in the 1530s, though only a few survive; he seems indeed to have planned a full Protestant equivalent to the Corpus Christi cycle, with the single play *God's Promises* (as made to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and John the Baptist) standing in for the Old Testament series and a fuller sequence on Christ's ministry.[60]

Thomas Ashton evidently saw no conflict between his Protestant beliefs and his writing of the Shrewsbury Passion play, and neither, from the numbers involved, did his audiences. Inevitably, however, fewer and fewer playgoers would have had first-hand knowledge of this kind of drama as the century passed, and those who did were reliant on increasingly distant memories.

Childhood memories, on the other hand, are particularly keen. 'Young memories are like faire writing tables', wrote Ralph Willis in 1639, 'wherein if the faire sentences or lessons of grace bee written, they may (by Gods blessing) keepe them from many vicious blots of life', and to prove the point he cited how very vividly he recalled 'a stage-play which I saw when I was a child'. Willis had been born in the same year as Shakespeare. The play he recalls comes from the alternative dramatic tradition of the morality, which looked at the state of humankind as epitomized in one individual rather than across the totality of time; and if even a small-scale play such as this could impress itself so deeply on his memory, the impression made by the cycle plays, with their readiness to stage God and the devil, the Creation and the destruction of the world, must have been correspondingly greater. The performance he saw was presented before the Mayor and Aldermen of Gloucester by a group of players touring the Cotswolds, to ensure their approval for further performances. His account has been much quoted, but its detail, and the sense of the child's enthralment that it conveys, make it well worth repeating:

> At such a play, my father tooke me with him and made mee stand betweene his leggs, as he sate upon one of the benches where wee saw and heard very well. The play was called *The Cradle of Security*, wherin was personated a King or some great Prince with his Courtiers of severall kinds, amongst which three Ladies were in speciall grace with him; and they keeping him in delights and pleasures, drew him from his graver Counsellors, hearing of Sermons, and listning to good counsell, and admonitions, that in the end they got him to lye down in a cradle upon the stage, where these three Ladies joyning in a sweet song rocked him asleepe, that he snorted againe, and in the meane time closely conveyed under

> the cloaths where withall he was covered, a vizard like a swine's snout upon his face, with three wire chains fastned thereunto, the other end whereof being holden severally by those three Ladies, who fall to singing againe, and then discovered his face, that the spectators might see how they had transformed him, going on with their singing, whilst all this was acting, there came forth of another doore at the farthest end of the stage, two old men, the one in blew with a Serjeant at Armes, his mace on his shoulder, the other in red with a drawn sword in his hand, and leaning with the other hand upon the others shoulder, and so they two went along in a soft pace round about by the skirt of the Stage, till at last they came to the Cradle, when all the Court was in greatest jollity, and then the foremost old man with his Mace stroke a fearfull blow upon the Cradle; whereat all the Courtiers with the three Ladies and the vizard all vanished; and the desolate Prince starting up bare faced, and finding himself thus sent for to judgement, made a lamentable complaint of his miserable case, and so was carried away by wicked spirits. This Prince did personate in the morall, the wicked of the world; the three Ladies, Pride, Covetousnesse, and Luxury, the two old men, the end of the world, and the last judgement. This sight tooke such impression in me, that when I came towards mans estate, it was as fresh in my memory, as if I had seen it newly acted.[61]

The moral, when it comes, sounds like an addition made with adult hindsight; as with the old man of Cartmel, the young Willis is most absorbed by what he saw rather than its message, and it is what was acted rather than spoken that lodged itself in his memory. There is no evidence that the *Cradle of Security* played at Stratford, or that the town bailiff took along his son, though acting companies visited there frequently too; but Willis is right that the childhood experience of drama, whether of himself or of the young Shakespeare, impresses itself indelibly on the memory.

SHAKESPEARE AND THE CYCLE PLAYS

Did that experience of Shakespeare's include the Coventry Corpus Christi plays? There is no direct evidence, nor could there be; but that he is likely to have seen them goes beyond the fact that he could have done. The scholars who have looked at the question most extensively, starting with Emrys Jones in the 1970s, are convinced that he did.[62] The plays were being acted until 1579, when he was fifteen. Coventry is a day's walk from Stratford, and in the mid-seventeenth century its oldest inhabitants were still recalling how 'the yearly confluence of people to see that shew was extraordinary great, and yeilded no small advantage to this city'.[63] That comment is confirmed by what we know of the audiences for the cycle plays more broadly, that they brought in spectators from far outside the cities themselves; the extra income and prestige so generated was indeed one of the reasons for staging them, and why their suppression was resisted. Shakespeare was the only one of the Elizabethan dramatists to have had such ease of access to any of the cycle plays, and he is the only one to incorporate a number of allusions to them in his drama; but the way he uses them suggests that he expects a good proportion of his audience to recognize them too, just as with his allusions to the Classics. His most overt references to the cycles, moreover, match what we know of Coventry's own plays. Hamlet's disgust at actors 'out-Heroding Herod' gave a boost to a saying that may already have existed in some form;[64] but although Herod is always a bombastic role, it is the Coventry Herod who goes so far as to rage 'in the pagond and in the strete also'.[65] The origins of the Porter in *Macbeth* in the devil of the plays who guards the gates of Hell are widely accepted, and Coventry provided a particularly memorable one, famous enough to be cited by John Heywood in his *Four PP*, where the Pardoner claims that

> Thys devyll and I were of olde acqueyntaunce,
> For oft in the play of Corpus Cristi
> He hath played the devyll at Coventry.[66]

The description in *Henry V* of how

> the mad mothers with their howls confused
> Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
> At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen
> (3.3.39–41)

sounds more like a memory of the Coventry play than of the brief reference to lamentation in the Bible: in its *Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors*, the mothers' lulling of their babies (with the 'Coventry carol', revived as a staple of Christmas singing) gives way to a scene of major confusion as they attempt to fight with Herod's soldiers and let out 'soche a cry / Of wemen' as has never been heard before.[67]

The survival of only two of the Coventry plays make other possible allusions harder to pin down, but there are a number that invite such an interpretation. Stage iconography provides some examples, where the surviving cycles provide an indication of how the episodes were customarily staged, and the Coventry performances probably followed suit. Emrys Jones suggested long ago that the nighttime scene of Christ's arrest underlies the appearance of the officers intending to seize Othello (1.2), both of them specified in the plays as torchlit scenes; even Othello's injunction to 'keep up your bright swords' recalls Christ's injunction to Peter, though at that point the visual effect of the staging leaches into words that could have been derived from the Bible.[68] The circumstances in *Othello* are very different, of course; but the echo of the staging shows Shakespeare appropriating a theatrically gripping image, and it helps to endorse, however subliminally, the sense that Othello is innocent, and perhaps also that Iago is the follower who will betray him. Other examples potentially carry more weight of association. The appearance of the ghost at Macbeth's feast, after the murder of Banquo and the failure to kill his son, is foreshadowed in the N-Town Cycle by the disruption of Herod's feast by Mors, Death: a feast held to celebrate, as he thinks, the slaughter of Jesus, the baby prophesied to be king, just as Macbeth is hoping he has disposed of any rivals to his crown.[69] The mockery of York before he is killed in *Henry VI Part 3* is strongly reminiscent visually of the taunting of Christ, both in the 'Buffeting', where Christ is tied to a pillar and hit by the bystanders in what in the Towneley cycle turns into a kind of game of blind man's buff, and at the

Crucifixion, where He is mocked for calling himself King of the Jews and given a crown of thorns in a parodic recognition of the claim. York is forced to

> stand upon this molehill here,
> That raught at mountains with outstretched arms,
> (1.4.67–8)

mocked for his claims to kingship,

> What, was it you that would be England's king?
> (1.4.70)

and forced to wear a paper crown. His grief for his dead son is answered with the offer of a handkerchief stained with blood that 'made issue from the bosom of the boy', phrasing that resonates with the blood that ran from Christ's side and so carrying a sacramental resonance too. This is, emphatically, not allegory; but it does invoke, behind the scene of the death of a would-be king, resonances that give the scene a power beyond the literal words.

One difference between the presentations of the tormenting of York and Christ is that at this stage of his career Shakespeare was still relying on rhetoric. Later, he was more prepared to use silence as a forceful stage effect, just as Christ's silence, at both the buffeting and in the process of crucifixion, is his most startling quality in the plays. Margaret of Anjou taunts York for his 'patience' (1.4.89), but he gets his own back a few lines later with a magnificent piece of rhetoric of his own. The tongueless Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* displays the same stage power of silence as the suffering Christ of the plays, but her silence is filled by the laments of the other characters, not left to speak for itself. The understatement characteristic of the Passion pageants has to wait until *King Lear*, where the horror of the blinding of Gloucester is conveyed by the action alone, without the elaboration of rhetoric. The scourging of Christ represented him as being initially tied to a pillar, but then in several of the plays he is seated for a mock-crowning, rather as Gloucester is tied to a chair.[70]

What is central to all these scenes is the sight of violence committed onstage – acted action. Instead of the set-piece speeches that accompany

the tormenting of York, with their lines that caught the popular imagination enough to be quoted and recognized (the tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide),[71] in *Lear* Shakespeare gives the casual, mocking commentary of those who are inflicting the torture, just as in the Crucifixion plays the audience hears, not Christ, nor any description of the blood or the pain, but the perpetrators' mockery as they get on with the job of stretching Christ to fit the holes bored in the cross:

III Miles Nowe are feste faste both his hende. [firmly fastened; hands
IV. Go we all foure thanne to his feete,
So schall oure space be spedely spende. [time
II. Latte see what bourde his bale myght beete, [mockery; lighten his suffering
Tharto my bakke nowe wolde I bende.[72]

The blinding of Gloucester is done to an equally minimal spoken accompaniment that again emphasizes the mechanics of the violence, and with a touch of the same black humour:

Cornwall Fellows, hold the chair.
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot . . .
Regan One side will mock another – th'other too.
(3.7.66–7, 70)

The dialogue in both these instances consists not of a rhetoric to equal or to convey the magnitude of the event, but of stage direction, instruction to the actors. The terribleness of what is happening is conveyed by precisely by the inadequacy of the language, by what is offered primarily to spectators rather than auditors: blood running down.

Something similar happens at the end of *King Lear*, though with religious iconography backing up the understatement, when Lear enters with the dead Cordelia in his arms. The stage directions do not specify exactly what should happen next, but every production has him lay her down, and most have him keep cradling her so that he is close enough to observe the detail of whether she breathes or not. That he continues to

hold her while both are on the ground is the action implied by the accompanying words, and Elizabethan drama codes most of its stage directions for the actors into the words. The pair, parent and child, are strongly reminiscent of the *pietà*, the scene known in English as 'Our Lady of Pity', of the Virgin cradling the corpse of her son after he has been taken down from the Cross: again, a scene presented in a number of surviving plays.[73]

The question of recognizability is complicated by the fact that all those scenes, the buffeting and the Crucifixion and the *pietà*, were also staples of religious art; and although public religious iconography had been destroyed in England, much survived in memory, and more in the woodcut devotional images surviving on single sheets or in Catholic primers, whether left undestroyed at the Reformation or newly (and illegally) imported from the Continent. English audiences would thus not always have needed to travel to mainland Europe to be familiar with such art; but the play cycles kept it in front of the eyes of thousands of playgoers for decades after it had officially been eliminated from the churches. Its vocabulary of visual symbols came to form what Victor Scherb has called 'a kind of communal mnemonics', a memory-bank that combined the imagery common to religious art and the stage.[74]

That these allusions are largely visual and iconographic fits with how the cycle plays were experienced: they were not available for reading, and it is their scenic power that Shakespeare picks up. When biblical scenes are invoked in the words too, as in Othello's command to 'keep up your bright swords', it is harder to be sure how much is coming direct from the Bible and how much from stage practice. Judas's betrayal of Christ is invoked again in *Richard II*, when the king, on the verge of deposition and surrounded by the men who had once sworn allegiance to him, compares himself to the betrayed Christ:

> Did they not sometime cry 'All hail!' to me?
> So Judas did to Christ.
>
> (4.1.169–70)

And the same comparison is made in *Henry VI Part 3*, when Richard of Gloucester kisses Edward IV's newborn son just as

FIGURE 2 'Our Lady of Pity', MS. Rawl. D. 403, fol. 1v. By permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

> Judas kissed his master,
> And cried 'All hail!' when as he meant all harm
> (5.7.33–4)

– phrasing (*all* hail: *all* harm) that emphasizes the 'all'. But Judas does not cry 'All hail!' to Christ in the Bible;[75] he does so, however, in the York

Agony in the Garden (line 278), and the York plays were drawn on by other cycle dramatists. We have no way of knowing whether the lost Coventry play used the same formula, or if Shakespeare was elaborating on the biblical account; but the insistent precision of the reference suggests that he had something more than the Bible in mind.

The question of stage influence becomes more problematic where episodes from the Old Testament are concerned, since there is no evidence that they were played at Coventry (we cannot be sure that they were not, but there is no trace of them in the records). Just as the allusions to Herod or the diabolic porter evidently made sense to some kind of broad audience knowledge, there are a number of references to what appears to be dramatized Old Testament material that may rely on a similar generalized acquaintance on Shakespeare's part. It is very hard to imagine what source other than dramatic tradition could have supplied the detail that Cain's beard was yellow (*MWW* 1.4.21). Other details or episodes are more obviously grounded in the Bible, but make better sense if they have a dramatic precursor. One example would be Claudius's awareness, not just that his murder of his brother 'hath the primal eldest curse upon it' bestowed on Cain after his murder of Abel, but that his offence 'smells to heaven' (*Ham* 36–8). O'Connell sees here a reminiscence of the stinking smoke of Cain's unacceptable offering that was given a memorable presence at least in the Towneley cycle, and which provided a detail unmentioned in Genesis.[76] Another example, and one that would depend on stage iconography alone since it is not in the Bible and was not a subject for art, is the moment when a usurping king seats himself on the throne: an action first performed by Lucifer in his attempt to claim God's glory for himself, and portrayed in every cycle that staged his fall. Richard III takes the throne in a ceremony focused on just this moment, and his words have the potential to resonate with the audience's knowledge of what happened next, not just to him, but to the first devil:

> Thus high . . . is King Richard seated.
> But shall we wear these glories for a day,
> Or shall they last, and we rejoice in them?
> (*R3* 4.2.3–6)

By contrast, Shakespeare markedly avoids having Bolingbroke, whom the political balance maintained in *Richard II* is scrupulously careful not to make the villain of the piece, actually seat himself on the throne on stage (4.1.113–14). The action is interrupted as he is about to do so, and the throne remains empty throughout the scene: staging a deposition was dangerous territory, even though, or because, Henry Tudor had held himself to be the heir of the Lancastrian line instituted by Bolingbroke.[77] The moment of enthronement carried a huge political and symbolic weight in its own right, but Lucifer's act of self-enthronement was the ultimate act against God.

Such indications that the cycles were known *of*, sometimes in some detail, by many or most of the spectators at the public theatres, whether or not they had seen the complete cycles, raises the possibility that Shakespeare might have been working from a similar generalized knowledge alone, rather as Freud can serve as a point of reference for large numbers of people who have never read a word of him. That Shakespeare is unique among Elizabethan playwrights in the extent of such allusions, however, suggests a closer knowledge than that, as does the high proportion and the precision of his allusions that match what is known of the Coventry cycle.[78] It is not essential, however, to posit a personal memory for him for every one of his allusions. A broad continuing awareness of the plays long outlasted their performance, for him as for the citizens of Coventry and of all the places that had staged them and that were regularly visited by the touring companies, and extensively elsewhere as well. What is certain is that the kind of dramaturgy such plays embodied was taken for granted by playwrights and spectators alike: that even if the subject matter had changed from salvation history to the world, the ambition and the stagecraft were continuous.

Chapter Three

STAGING THE UNSTAGEABLE

Asina videt ipsum [Angelum] et non Balaham.
[The ass sees the angel, but Balaam cannot.]

Enter Ariel, invisible.[1]

The writers for the public theatres wrote out of the same assumptions about the stage and how it could be used as the dramatists of the cycles had done. They all shared the belief that anything was stageable, and that the function of a play was to act its action. The emphasis on incarnation, on the physical – on bodies being as important, or more important, than language – might seem to be at odds with the readiness with which the plays presented immaterial or invisible beings, or heaven, or eternity; but the techniques for doing such things had been established in the Middle Ages and were carried forward from there. At the other extreme, the focus on the body invited staged acts of extreme violence, more varied and inventive even than were offered by public executions. Medieval drama supplied the techniques for creating such illusions too: the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus, assorted grisly martyrdoms in the lost saints' plays, an onstage flaying in *Cambises* (done, so the stage direction instructs, with a false skin), Bajazeth beating his brains out, the blinding of Gloucester. Bloodbags and collapsing swords were required for both kinds of play. The expertise to hang Judas was worth fourpence in Coventry in 1573, and the same expertise was employed for the hanging of Horatio and Pedringano on stage in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*.[2]

The practice of embodiment on stage went hand in hand with the exercise of imagination in the spectators. Violence and divinity alike place extreme demands on the audience, to make believe such things are

happening even while they know that they are not. Logical impossibilities, like representational ones, were accepted as part of the theatrical experience. It never worried anyone that the person on stage might simply be a member of the acting company, as a Prologue; or an actor acting an actor, arguing over the play to follow; or God, or a personification of Avarice or Death; or that God might speak in sequence first to the audience and then to Noah; or that a Vice or Richard III might interact as readily with the audience as with the other characters. Those principles of dramaturgy, moreover, unlike Classical dramatic conventions, did not need learning: their familiarity made them appear normal and natural. What had been learned from Seneca and Terence in the schoolroom did not necessarily invite replication when a dramatist, even a university-trained dramatist such as Marlowe or Greene, contemplated the stage of the Rose or the Globe. The earliest humanist plays written in English rarely seem to have thought of confining themselves to academic principles, and some are as generous in conception, if not so long, as the most expansive of the cycles.

This chapter will inevitably concentrate on what survives of medieval drama, and therefore on the large cycles in particular, though the stagecraft of the Passion and saints' plays seems not to have been very different. In matters such as the representation of God, or of place and time, all the evidence we have is consistent across the whole field of religious drama, down to John Bale's attempt at a Protestant religious theatre in the 1530s and beyond. Bale was quite happy to put God on stage, in defiance of both the Ten Commandments and mimetic possibility. The continuity in the conception of theatre is evident even in some neo-Latin Reformation drama, written before either the puritan proscription on acting or Scaliger's strict interpretation of the unities got the upper hand. Perhaps the closest thing to total drama written within the confines of a single play is the *Christus triumphans* (?1556) of John Foxe, better known for his compilation of the *Acts and Monuments* (otherwise the *Book of Martyrs*). Despite being cast into the humanist five acts, the action encompasses the entire history of Church from the Fall of Man through the Redemption to the present. Its settings include hell, the space outside the door of the prison from which Peter was freed by an angel, and contemporary Oxford, the street plan of which is

described in attentive detail. It opens with Eve and Mary in conversation, and further characters include St Paul, a figure conflating Latimer and Ridley, an allegorical Ecclesia and her sons Europus and Africus, the Whore of Babylon and the Pope. It may have been performed in Basle, where Foxe wrote it while in exile in the reign of Mary, but it was also given a staging at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1562–3.[3] If nothing else, the play serves as an indicator of the suppleness of its audience's imaginations: imaginations trained on the altogether lesser impossibilities of the cycle plays.

PRESENTING THE PLAY

Plays sometimes gave their audiences explicit assistance, by way of explanatory prologues, epilogues and intermediate commentaries, and the vernacular stage offered a host of different methods for early-modern playwrights to adopt and develop. The terminology used for such speeches (especially in modern editions) makes it look as if the practice were adopted from the Classics, but that actually happened comparatively rarely. *Prologue*, *epilogue* and *chorus*, like *theatre*, *tragedy* and *comedy*, are derived from Greek by way of Latin, but their use in English theatrical contexts long postdates the practices they came to designate. *Chorus* appears in English only with the first translations from Seneca in the 1560s. Its first homegrown use appears just after the earliest of those translations, in Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc*, which made some effort to follow Senecan principles. A chorus, in this sense, was a generalizing or moralizing speech that closed each of the first four acts of a Classical or neo-Classical five-act play, though its Renaissance speakers might bear no evident relationship to the action. *Gorboduc*'s cast list describes its chorus as 'four ancient and sage men of Britain', but that is never evident from what they say, and they do not interact with anyone else on the stage. Jonson replicates this usage closely in the most Classical of his plays, *Catiline*, but it was rarely adopted in so academic a form. 'Epilogue', as the term for a closing speech outside the action of the play, is not recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* until *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, around 1594–5, when Theseus refuses Bottom's offer to 'show' one – though if Bottom knows the term, it can

hardly have been new. 'Prologue' had been around in non-dramatic contexts in English since the mid-fourteenth century, but it is not recorded as the term for an introduction to a play until the later sixteenth. When playwrights do eventually adopt the term, they often use it in the semi-technical sense in which it appears in Latin drama, in the comedies of Terence: his prologues, spoken in the voice of the author, are primarily theoretical justifications of the play, and conclude with a request for the audience's attention and goodwill. Such prologues therefore do not affect the integrity of the play itself, its dramaturgical self-sufficiency as an imaginary action: they were therefore 'disposable', and could easily be omitted from performance or print.[4] Marlowe's Prologues to the two parts of *Tamburlaine*, designated as such in the 1590 edition, represent the author's voice in this way, as does the Prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, probably by Fletcher. Epilogues, in these plays and elsewhere, commonly take the same form though without the Classical precedents. The precise Jonson never confuses prologues with inter-act choruses. His own prologues are largely of the Terentian variety, though he sometimes compromises their extra-dramatic integrity by entangling them with 'inductions', acted scenes that feature backstage workers (*Bartholomew Fair*), out-of-role actors (*Cynthia's Revels*), or supposed members of the audience (*The Staple of News*). Even that integration of actors and audience has a long history, however: witness Medwall's 1490s play *Fulgens and Lucrece*, where a character named only as A first speaks as if in the role of the steward of the hall where the play was presented, and then joins up with a second character named B not only to outline the play but to keep up a running commentary on it and even to join in the main action.

A and B are presenters rather than prologues, and the introductions extraneous to the action in medieval and most early modern plays have a similar function. Editions of medieval plays tend to abound with 'prologues', but the terminology is anachronistic. These opening speeches introduce, not a Terentian author or the ideas behind the writing of the play, but the play itself – its plot, and often its meaning too, to give guidance to the audience as to what they are going to see and how they should understand it. It is not impossible that there was some Terentian influence at work in Middle English drama too (he was among

the more widely known Latin-school authors, as he was in the Renaissance), but the practice of having some kind of introductory speech that introduces the substance of the play rather than being an authorial apology developed a life of its own independently of any such influence. This happens even when the prologue is spoken by the 'Poeta', as happens with the *Christ's Burial* and *Resurrection* plays of c. 1500. Bale's religious plays are introduced by one *Baleus Prolocutor*, 'fore-speaker', from the term given to this role in the early moralities: he may well have taken the role himself, since after his conversion to Protestantism he ran his own acting company. Such explanatory speeches might be separated off from the performances in the form of banns, an announcement of a forthcoming play or series of pageants, which often included a summary of its contents; but most plays opened with a figure who acts in some way as a presenter. The term *vexillator*, herald, is most commonly used for the speakers of the banns, but it can be used for the introductory speaker too, as in the early fifteenth-century *Castle of Perseverance*. '*Nuntius*' or 'Messenger' is used both in the Chester cycle and in John Rastell's *Four Elements* of 1518; messengers in Classical drama bring news of the action to the protagonists, but in English plays they act as go-betweens between author and audience. Speeches such as these are used both to provide a plot summary, and to call for the attention of the spectators. The Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* (it becomes a Chorus only in its second edition), with its plot summary and its address to the audience, has much more in common with this kind of introduction than with Terentian practice. Sometimes these preliminaries can acquire a dramatic life of their own, semi-independent of the play to follow, in a precursor of Jonson's inductions: Sir David Lindsay's mid-sixteenth-century *Ane Satire of the Thre Estaitis* entangles its banns with the bawdy adventures of a supposedly real local artisan, his wife and her lover.

Introductory monologues designed to get the audience's attention and to explain the plot and meaning are often spoken in the early plays by one of the major 'good' characters who go on to form part of the dramatic action, though they stop short of shouting down a rowdy audience. Sometimes such figures are halfway outside the action and half within it, as Isaiah introduces the Coventry Shearmen's play on the

birth of Christ: he is there not as part of the action, but as the prophet who knew in advance what was going to happen, and so can tell the audience about it. More typically, these figures will merge into the action of the plays they open. God is given the opening speech of the mystery cycles, and Jupiter in John Heywood's *Play of the Weather*. In the cycles, Noah and John the Baptist sometimes summarize omitted sections of the biblical story, and spell out something of its meaning too. Moralities are often introduced by a character from the plot, by Wisdom or Mercy or Reason, who may well also conclude the play with an explanation of its lesson for the audience. A rather different kind of introduction is provided when bad characters, villains or vices, are used instead of good ones. Herod is both bombastic in introducing himself, and threatening to unruly members of the audience and his own subjects alike. A lad, 'garcio', servant to Cain, is used to silence the audience in decidedly outspoken terms before the Towneley *Murder of Abel*; and a character called Den acts as the summoner both to call the audience to attention and to summon them as onlookers in the bishop's court in the N-Town *Trial of Mary and Joseph*, where Mary is arraigned for pregnancy outside marriage. Monologues of this kind are increasingly given to the Vices rather than the virtues in the moral interludes. Avarice introduces *Respublica*, a political morality of 1553 that may have been written by Nicholas Udall for performance before Mary Tudor: he takes the audience into his confidence to outline his schemes for the action to follow, including the need to disguise his wicked intentions as virtuous. Richard III's introduction of himself and his plans has a long stage history behind it, and carries with it resonances from that rich earlier tradition of staged villainy.

Within a play or between plays in cycles, a more explicit presenter figure, often given a title in the speech-headings such as Doctor (in the sense of a learned teacher) or Expositor, may be used to give a running commentary on the action. He is especially useful when the action is not fully self-explanatory in doctrinal terms, and needs some allegorical explication: in the Chester *Abraham*, for instance, he explains what Melchisedek has to do with the institution of the Mass, and he alternates with the speeches of the prophets in its play of Antichrist. A similar figure offers an exposition between two episodes from the life of Christ

that make up a single pageant, the Temptation and the Woman taken in Adultery, so covering what might otherwise have been an awkward dramaturgical transition. In the sequence of Mary plays in the N-Town cycle, the role is taken by Contemplacio, who introduces the first play, provides a link between many of the later ones, and explains who Elizabeth is while Mary and Joseph walk around the acting area on their way to the Visitation – a convenient way to imply a change of time and location without the awkwardness of the characters leaving and re-entering. The Poeta who introduces the multi-scene Digby *Conversion of St Paul* also summarizes the story so far so as to cover the gaps in the action when one pageant gives way to another, and to move the audience around as necessary.[5] He ends with an apology for any inadequacy, of a kind that becomes increasingly common in the early sixteenth century. The figure of Rumour in *Henry IV Part 2*, who explains the connection of the play's opening action with the end of *Part 1*, offers a variant on these linking mechanisms, as does the Time who acts as the bridge between Acts 3 and 4 of *The Winter's Tale*. The function of returning the audience from the world of the play to the real world, with or without any transitional moralizing, may be given to one of the characters stepping out of role: even God does this in the *Castle of Perseverance*, with the announcement 'Thus endyth oure gamys' (3645). Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Prospero in *The Tempest* are given a similar doubling of role, inside and outside their own plays.

The degree of theatrical self-consciousness involved in how to handle these paradramatic speeches is abundantly illustrated in the Prologue to *Pyramus and Thisbe*. This provides a comprehensive outline of the action ('And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain . . .', *MND* 5.1.144), and precedes that with an apology for inadequacy that can be paralleled (mispunctuation apart) in a good number of earlier provincial plays. These apologies, moreover, often have a tinge of embarrassment about them that sounds more like genuine anxiety than a rhetorical *captatio benevolentiae*, a strategic plea to encourage goodwill. The epilogue to an otherwise lost fifteenth-century church-ale play declares, Quince-like, its intent of pleasing, though the play seems to have had even less rehearsal time:

> Trewly oure entent was wel to do,
> And if ony fawte be ther fowndyn it is oure neglygensy;
> And short tyme avysement causet also,
> For lytell tyme of lernyng we have had sekerly,
> And every man is not expert in eloquensy
> To utteryn his mater gayly onto your audiens.[6]

By the 1560s, the sense of inadequacy was intensifying, perhaps under pressure from the rise of professional companies and the number of spectators who would have seen their plays. The post-Reformation Chester banns are acutely conscious that both the actors and the traditional audiences are lacking in sophistication:

> Not possible it is these matters to be contryved
> In such sorte and cunning and by suche players of price
> As at this daye good playes and fine wittes coulde devise . . .
> By Craftesmen and meane men these Pageauntes are playde,
> And to Commons and Contry men accustomablye before.
> If better men and finer heades now come, what canne be sayde?[7]

Quince's prologue, written when the gulf between professional and home-grown drama was even greater, takes the inadequacy to new heights (or depths), but the parody would have been widely recognizable.

The Shakespeare corpus also provides two figures who act as presenters throughout entire plays, not just the beginnings or endings: the Chorus to *Henry V,* and the explicitly medievalizing Gower in *Pericles* (the latter popular enough to have been imitated by Middleton, who has the fourteenth-century chronicler Ranulph Higden introduce his *Hengist King of Kent*). Gower is a kind of *poeta* figure, but a fully dramatized one distinct in person, though not in function, from the real author: he justifies the play, moves the audience around the Mediterranean, fills in gaps in time and space, and ties up both the story and the moral at the end. The Prologue to *Henry V* (as he is designated at this point in the Folio; the quarto text cuts the role altogether) acts to some degree as a Terentian author figure, though he speaks as part of the whole acting company, 'we', rather than the author as such. Unlike Terence's

prologues, he also prepares the spectators for the shifts of time and space to come, though the effect is less to take the audience back in time, as Gower does, than to bring the action into their own world. His later interventions, designated 'Chorus' in contravention of both Greek and Senecan usage, take a more Expositor-like form, to move the audience around England and France, to link the play with their own experience (Henry's reception in London like the one they might imagine for the earl of Essex, 'the general of our gracious Empress', returning victorious from Ireland), and to explain what is missing from the staged action – or indeed, when he speaks of the comfort the King brings to his troops on the night before Agincourt, in flat contradiction of what is presented on stage. His epilogue returns the spectators, not just to the playhouse, but to their whole experience of playgoing, in recalling the *Henry VI* plays. The Olivier film of *Henry V* famously starts and ends in the playhouse itself, showing the play being acted, before it shifts into naturalistic mode for the main action.

What all these techniques of presentation have in common, of whatever date, is an affirmation of the gap between the stage and what is represented on it. The spectators are not watching an action that claims to be real. They are watching a play, and what appears in a play is freed from what might plausibly appear before their eyes in the real world, or from the sequential continuities of space and time.

IMMATERIAL BEINGS

Characters who supposedly have no physical or material form make particular demands on audience imagination. In the first and most dramaturgically awkward rank is God: invisible, almighty, eternal and potentially three-personed. The pagan gods, being taken to be visible, were simpler: they needed to be shown as different from ordinary mortals when they appeared on the Classical or early modern stage, but there was at least an appearance to imitate. In Greek drama, Euripides was particularly fond of theophanies; Aristotle disapproved of them on the grounds of implausibility, though that may have been an objection to the idea of divine intervention rather than its staging. Devils are almost always visible, even if they are not material; and angels usually are,

though there are exceptions. Fairies and ghosts too can take visible form, but not necessarily. Dreams and visions are visible even if they are not material, and can be staged even though they represent a different order of existence from the human characters who dream them. Pure abstractions too are a recurrent item in both medieval and early modern plays. The Digby *Mary Magdalene* happily mixes the World, the Flesh and the Devil with its human characters. The N-Town cycle and *The Castle of Perseverance* both stage the debate between the Four Daughters of God, Mercy, Peace, Truth and Righteousness. As the moral interlude developed over the course of the sixteenth century, such personifications increasingly turn into people, not Pride in the abstract but a person given to pride, but Shakespeare is still happy to bring Rumour and Time on stage as presenters. All these required audience complicity with their stage representation, a readiness to make-believe, and that was assisted by the extensive continuity of method from medieval to earl-modern staging.

God is immediately set apart from all the other characters by his opening lines, typically some variant on the name He gives Himself in Exodus (3.14), 'I Am', sometimes adding the Latin of Revelations 21.6:

> Ego sum Alpha et O: vita, via, veritas, primus et novissimus.
> I am gracyus and grete, God withoutyn begynnyng.[8]

The words are designed to insist on the separation of the actor playing God from anything resembling realistic mimesis, and the method was widely replicated. The Norwich *Creation of Eve* survives in two variant texts, apparently representing a Reformation reworking made in 1565: in the first version, God announces,

> Ego principium Alpha et O in altissimis habito.

The second abandons the liturgical Latin and adds a biblical citation, but the dramaturgy is unaffected:

> I am Alpha et homega, my Apocalyps doth testyfye.[9]

God's distinction by speech was reinforced by a golden mask, by his enthronement, and by the use of an upper level of the stage. John Bale

used the same rhetorical, and presumably visual, techniques in his Protestant drama, even while stressing unstageability:

> I am Deus Pater, a substaunce invysyble,
> All one with the Sonne and Holy Ghost in essence.
> To Angell and Man I am incomprehensyble.[10]

There was increasing discomfort with staging God at all, however, and the post-Reformation Chester banns seem to suggest that he should now be represented not with 'the face gilt' but covered by clouds so that only his voice could be heard, 'and not god in shape or person to appeare'.[11] God the Son was easier to stage, since the Incarnation gave him human form as Jesus, though even as a child he too was presented with a gilded face. If the 'anima Christi' that harrows Hell (so called in the N-Town cycle) and the Christ in Majesty that appears at the Last Judgement were represented differently from Jesus in his human form, the evidence does not survive. Altogether more difficult was the Holy Ghost, and unsurprisingly he (it?) is rarely staged as an independent speaking character: he makes an appearance in the Norwich play of the Fall of Man, but there are no indications as to how he was differentiated from God the Father, and he is identified verbally only in Adam's speech that follows his own.[12] Iconographically, it was represented as a dove, and makes an appearance as such in Lambarde's account of the Whitsun dumbshows at St Paul's and in Bale's *Johan Baptystes Preachynge*; its presence is more likely to be indicated in the cycle plays by angelic singing, for Christ's baptism and Pentecost, though in the Chester Pentecost it was represented by fire, 'Spiritum Sanctum in spetie ignis', thrown onto the apostles by the singing angels (s.d. at line 238). God the Father is visible to the other angels and to unfallen Man, but in some plays he becomes invisible to the human characters after the Fall: 'I here thy voys but I se thee nought', as Adam puts it in the N-Town *Fall of Man* (194). The Towneley Cain, who mocks God as 'hob-over-the-wall', is shocking (and funny) by the sudden reduction of God from the great I Am, the figure of ultimate implied majesty, to the stage actor behind the balustrade that fronted Heaven (2.299; and quite apart from the blasphemy, it has the same disconcerting effect of breaking the stage

illusion as does Vladimir's going offstage to find the men's toilet in *Waiting for Godot*: 'End of the corridor, on the left'). Cain apart, however, God's interactions with humankind after the Fall are usually conducted by way of intermediary angels.

God himself (in all three persons) was one of the first casualties of the religious opposition to the stage, and dramatists had to find ways around his absence. Heywood invites humankind to imagine God as the ultimate spectator and judge; Lodge and Greene, in *A Looking-Glass for London* (?1586), substitute an enthroned Hosea to take his place and watch over the events on stage. When an early-modern play opens in the heavens, as the cycles had done, there are opportunities for parody. Marlowe may have had this in mind in his *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, which starts on Olympus and has Jupiter speak its first line: 'Come, gentle Ganymede, and play with me.' The flagrant homoeroticism was outrageous enough, but the contrast with God's introductions of himself is so extreme as to suggest deliberateness. The similarities between God and the pagan gods was strengthened by the use of golden masks for both, masks or visors being commonplace properties in the Elizabethan theatre. Jupiter in *Cymbeline* is likely to have been masked, to distinguish him (along with his eagle and thunderbolts) from the ghosts and the sleeping Posthumus who also occupy the stage.

The whole idea of the *deus ex machina* is generally thought of as Classical, as the Latin indicates, but medieval dramatic records testify to the frames and windlasses needed by precisely such machines, and the technology carried over directly to the Elizabethan stage. The fall of Lucifer may have been done by winching; so apparently were N-Town's Ascension, and its Assumption of Mary, which also has a constant coming and going of angels between an upper and lower level of the stage representing heaven and earth. The Digby *Mary Magdalene* incorporates a theophany ('Here shall Heaven open, and Jesus shall show himself', s.d. 1348) as well as angels descending and clouds that briefly ravish Mary up into heaven ('Assumpta est Maria in nubibus', s.d. 2030). The use of pagan gods on the early-modern stage, whether in the public theatres or in court masques, obviously looked back to Classical models too, but the continuity with religious drama, in dramaturgy as in technology, was none the less real.

Devils kept up a lively stage presence throughout the period. Presumably their appearance in the public theatres followed the medieval conventions for grotesque black demons such as had been painted in the great Dooms over the chancel arches, and reappeared on stage for long after those had been obliterated. Religious drama had spiced up the costumes and masks with firecrackers and explosions. The inventory drawn up by the impresario Philip Henslowe in the 1590s included a hell-mouth.[13] Mephistopheles's first appearance in *Dr Faustus* is in traditional devil format, though he then adopts the clothing of a friar; the devils who appear later in the play are accompanied by the customary thunder and lightning. By the end of the century, the whole trope was ripe for parody, but parody itself assumes the audience's continuing knowledge of what was being parodied. Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* (1616) sets its opening scene in Hell, and presumably its Satan and the junior devil Pug would be dressed in traditional style; the Vice Iniquity – *Vetus Iniquitas*, ancient Iniquity – who is summoned to appear after a few lines, admits he is fifty years out of date, and endorses that with the metrics of his speeches, his references to old plays (*Lusty Juventus*, of 1547–53), his ability to jump from the top of St Paul's steeple (destroyed in 1561), and his reference to his wooden dagger (1.1.44–56). Pug has to be given the body and clothes of a handsome cut-purse, hanged that morning, before he can start his career practising some temptation in London. In the event, as Satan warns him, his attempts to cause mayhem show him up as an innocent abroad, outclassed in villainy by the citizens, and he has to be rescued back to Hell to the accompaniment of appropriate explosions. Within the Shakespeare corpus, fiends appear to Joan la Pucelle in *Henry VI Part 1* (5.3), though they are much more subdued than stage devils usually are, and are indeed described by her as 'choice spirits': since the dialogue leaves open the question of their exact metaphysical status, they may have been given costumes not so evidently diabolic. A more decisively demonic spirit is conjured up in *Part 2* 1.4, in a scene more safely ascribed to Shakespeare; when it is confronted with the injunction 'False fiend, avoid!', it disappears in good traditional thunder and lightning. From the 1570s, however, devils, like virtues and vices, were more likely to take the form of exemplary humans. Shakespeare's most frightening approxi-

mation to a devil – frightening because the dramaturgy does not draw on the tradition of the grotesque caricature of evil – is Iago. He has no cloven hoofs, even though Othello looks for them; and they are absent not because Iago is not a devil, but because the cloven hoofs are 'a fable'. In their place, Othello tests his metaphysical status by his mortality, his ability to die (or not): 'If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee' (5.2.286), and indeed he cannot, as Iago points out. This is an embodied evil that is much more insidious and dangerous than the customary presentation of the devil ever allowed: his triumph over Othello is dependent on the fact that it is impossible to recognize him for what he is.

None of Shakespeare's good characters comes so close to being identified literally as an angel, but angels do put in an appearance in *Henry VIII* 4.2 (probably one of John Fletcher's scenes), in Katherine of Aragon's dream just before her death. They are therefore visible only to herself and to the spectators; the waiting-women who watch beside her see nothing. She identifies them when she wakes as 'a blessed troop' with 'bright faces', who promise her 'eternal happiness' (87–90). Their appearance is minutely described in a stage direction: 'Enter . . . six personages, clad in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces, branches of bays or palm in their hands.' The white robes and the golden masks were standard angel clothing, though the garlands of bays and the lack of wings distinguish them from the angels of religious drama and art: the difference, and the limitation of their existence to a visionary state, may have been designed to fend off religious objections, though the message is clear enough. The Bible itself supplied precedents for the appearance of angels within dreams, some of which are dramatized: the dream of the Magi in which an angel instructs them not to return to Herod was a regular item in the cycles, including Coventry's. Other spirit figures in Shakespeare, such as Ariel and the variously guised spirits in *The Tempest*, would have been costumed more as contemporary masque figures were, in a way that would set them off from human characters but for which the conventions of dress were of more recent invention – though the harpies imitate devils in their entrance and departure to thunder.

Paired good and bad angels who had a particular concern with

individuals also made frequent stage appearances – guardian spirits for better and for worse, as in the 'better angel' and 'worser spirit' that form the argument of Shakespeare's Sonnet 144. At the start of the sixteenth century, they are represented as autonomous beings assigned to the individual. They can therefore emerge from or return to heaven or hell, as they do in *Mary Magdalene*; or they can lament (the abandoned Good Angel) or (if Bad) insult the other, as they do in the *Castle of Perseverance*. Later drama, however, as in the sonnet, presents them more as good and bad impulses within the individual soul: in *Dr Faustus*, they make brief appearances to give quasi-material substance to a crisis of conscience that Faustus is already experiencing. Such figures thus double as representing both timeless (or perhaps medieval) representations of the principles of good and evil, and psychological impulses. The two roles are combined in Thomas Nabbes's 1637 *Microcosmus*, a 'Morall Maske' on the creation of man, where a *bonus* and a *malus genius*, dressed respectively as 'an Angel in a white robe: wings and wreath white' and as 'a divell' in corresponding black, are built into his soul.[14] As psychological impulses, such spirits have less in common with heavenly spirits than with the moral drama of psychomachia (see pp. 115–16 below).

Vice figures increasingly take full human form, so eliminating the problem of staging an immaterial being, but a mental debate between good and evil abstractions presents more of a problem. When Apius, the wicked judge in 'R.B.'s' *Tragicall Comedie of Apius and Virginius* (printed in 1575 but probably written in the previous decade), is being urged by the Vice to abduct Virginia, the temptation takes a physical form on the stage: 'Here . . . let Conscience and Justice come out of him, and let Conscience hold in his hande a lamp burning, and let Justice have a sworde and hold it before Apius brest.' The manifestation is explained in Apius's following speech, which is followed by the Vice Haphazard's insistence, 'These are but thoughts, man!' [15] Haphazard is wrong, however: they turn into principles rather than merely thoughts later in the scene, when they are left on stage to introduce themselves personally, independent of the man whose internal wrestlings had conjured them into being. How they were to 'come out of' Apius is not specified, but there was presumably some stage convention that would have enabled the audience to understand what was going on. Their own identity is

indicated not only by Apius's speech but by their iconographic attributes of lamp and sword.

Ghosts, fairies and undefined spirits do not feature in earlier religious drama, but their presence makes comparable use of the audience's readiness to imagine the immaterial. Sometimes this is made easier through not allowing any interaction between ghosts and living characters, as when ghosts watch over the action in Thomas Hughes's *Misfortunes of Arthur* or Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* but cannot intervene. The method here is influenced by Seneca's *Thyestes*, where the first act is taken up by the ghost of Tantalus and the fury Megaera promising revenge. More demanding of audience powers of make-believe are those ghosts who appear as part of the main action but are visible only to the spectators, or to only some of the characters onstage. The ghosts that appear to Richard III before Bosworth, like Katherine of Aragon's angels, appear to him while he is sleeping, but they have the ability to appear to Richmond as well. The ghost of Hamlet's father is a waking apparition, not a vision, but it is not a figment of Hamlet's imagination, or at least not at first when it appears to the soldiers watching on the battlements. Its later manifestation, in Gertrude's closet, is much more ambiguous, since she cannot see it. The status of Banquo's ghost is more elusive still. It had a real presence in the original performances (it has a stage direction for entry, and the playgoer and diarist Simon Forman was particularly impressed by it), and visually a very striking one if Macbeth's description of it indicates how it was staged.[16] He alone can see it, and in that respect it seems as immaterial as the dagger that he imagines leading him to Duncan, and to which Lady Macbeth compares it. Modern productions sometimes take the option of not staging it, of leaving it as entirely a figment of Macbeth's imagination, a delusion emerging from his bad conscience, and the scene is not significantly altered whether it appears physically or not. What is striking, in all these instances, is the audience readiness to accept the convention of invisibility, even when that invisibility is selective. That too had medieval precedents, not only in the fallen Adam's inability to see God but in the play of Balaam and the Ass (not a standard item in the cycles, though Chester's, quoted at the head of this chapter, survives), where the angel, in the play as in the Bible, is invisible to Balaam but not to the ass.

FIGURE 3 Three 'weird sisters or feiries' encounter Macbeth, from Holinshed's *Chronicles* © The British Library Board, 598.h.3–4, page 243

Shakespeare's fairies share this in-between illusiveness. The 'weird sisters or fairies'('wayward' in the Folio) who encounter Macbeth in Holinshed's *Chronicles of Scotland* can disappear at will, like 'creatures of an elder worlde';[17] Simon Forman took their stage equivalents to be 'fairies or nymphs'. The idea that they were witches seems to have come in with Middleton's additions to the play.

The fairies are invisible to the humans in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (as Oberon makes explicit, 2.1.186), with the notable exception of Bottom. In *The Tempest*, the standard stage direction for Ariel's entrances is 'Enter Ariel, invisible'; only Prospero and the spectators see him. Even when he appears as a harpy to condemn Alonso and Sebastian, they imagine his voice as coming from the billows and winds and thunder (3.3.96–7). Prospero's 'magic garment' seems to have the power to confer invisibility on him when he so wishes: Miranda can see him despite his wearing it on his first appearance, but he can make himself invisible when he chooses. 'A robe for to goo invisibell' such as was bought for the Admiral's Men in 1598 would have been well used.[18]

IMAGINING PLACE

All of these plays, medieval and early modern, were able to stage what they did because of a basic idea about what the stage represented. That was at the opposite extreme from later masques and plays that deployed stage sets, for a set defines a particular place. The early stage might be given a location by virtue of a stage property, such as a throne or a tree, or occasionally a signboard, but otherwise it was wherever the characters might happen to be, or where they said it was. If two sets of characters were on stage at once, as happens with Richmond and Richard III in their respective tents in the last act of *Richard III*, they each brought their location with them. The habit of Shakespearean editors, only recently abandoned, to introduce every scene with a statement of where it is taking place, starts from an assumption about representation that did not exist in the world of the plays they are editing. Sidney's comment that a play might have Africa on one side of the stage and Asia on the other turns a crucial dramaturgical freedom into a cause for complaint. The same freedom allowed Lucifer to fall from heaven to hell on stage, or Tamburlaine to conquer the whole of Asia in front of our eyes.

The layout of the playing space in the public theatres aided such freedoms, and it was not as different from the medieval stages as might be assumed. Indoor halls had been the usual setting for the performance of moral interludes, and those continued to be used, for private performances, at court, and in guildhalls if a company were on tour; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s *Pyramus and Thisbe* replicates such staging. The indoor theatre of Blackfriars was similar, but was converted to make it more friendly to plays written with larger ambitions, with, for instance, provision made for descents from the heavens. The cycle plays, with their large audiences, had required open-air playing spaces, and those came in two sorts. The best-known now is the processional system, which employed pageant wagons as stages; they were pulled through the streets of a town and stopped to perform their pageant at fixed 'stations', sometimes just three, a full twelve at York. The spectators would either stand around or in front of the wagon, or watch from the various storeys of the surrounding houses, whose owners sometimes hired out window

space. The other method of staging, also used for some moralities, is generally known as 'place-and-scaffold' staging. This required a single playing-space, which might be outdoors or indoors. Those outdoors might be fixed gameplaces recurrently used for performances and other entertainments too. East Anglia, which had a lively dramatic tradition of saints' plays and moralities that use this form of staging, had a number, as did Cornwall; the quarry at Shrewsbury served the same function.[19] The stages here consisted simply of an open space, the 'place' (Latin *platea* when stage directions are given in Latin), with scaffolds or booths around its edge indicating particular locations. Indoor performances could use a similar configuration of staging on a smaller scale, as could inn yards. Both types, the processional and the fixed, are suggestive in important ways for the public theatres.

The pageant wagons were limited in size by the size of the streets, but they were substantial structures: William Dugdale, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, described them as 'theatres . . . very large and high'.[20] They were often elaborate, with a heaven painted with sunbeams and stars, an upper balcony for God and the angels and selected action, and sometimes a hell-mouth. It is a configuration strikingly similar, even if on a smaller scale, to that of the purpose-built theatres. Even if Henslowe's hell-mouth was not often used, a level below the stage could serve instead. The balcony was a fixed item, and was still used for the appearance of gods as well as providing extra playing space. The roof of the Globe was painted with the signs of the zodiac; and it too, like the painted roofs of some of the pageant wagons, was known as the 'heavens'.[21] Spectators familiar with the Corpus Christi plays would recognize its symbolism: it is a reminder that all the world is indeed a stage as Heywood envisaged it, with themselves as part of action and with God as spectator and judge. The literal audience of the Globe, like those of the processional plays, were divided into the groundlings who stood at the sides and in front of the stage, and those in the galleries arranged vertically like the storeys of a house and themselves divided into 'rooms'.[22]

Street presentation did not offer the roundness of the theatre to represent the world, such as Shakespeare and Heywood insist on; but the analogy was none the less familiar in the Middle Ages, and was explicit for some of the plays that configured the *platea* of place-and-scaffold

staging as a complete circle. Detailed instructions for such staging survive for the Cornish biblical plays, and for one of the more ambitious English moralities, the early-fifteenth-century *Castle of Perseverance*. The essential groundplan for these required a central playing space with various locations specified around the circumference. The Cornish Resurrection play specifies its scaffolds as standing for Heaven and Hell and various other points marking the home location of particular actors, the soldiers, Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea and so on, from which they would make their entries into the playing space.[23] The performance area within the circle represented whatever was required or implied by the action: it could be defined by the location from which the actors came; or as the world at large; or, in *The Castle of Perseverance*, as the little world of man, in whom the struggle between the vices and virtues or his good and bad angel was played out, with its scaffolds representing the home ground of God, the devil, the world, the flesh and covetousness. Only one of the surviving Corpus Christi cycles, the N-Town, uses a similar method of staging, though it does not insist on the roundness of its playing space nor on the metaphor of the world. Its actors would come forward from a particular 'house', representing for instance the temple in Jerusalem, or the scene of the Last Supper, and would then act their own scene in the *platea*. It was a form of staging that solved two major problems of representing space and time: it allowed the acting area to encompass however large an extent was required by the action, and the movement of characters between one place and another; and it enabled the interlocking of scenes happening in different places at the same time, such as the Bethlehem stable and the shepherds in the fields. Scaffolds or equivalent *loci* were not a feature of the public theatres, but the techniques offered by such staging, and in particular the undefined nature of the playing space, were extensively replicated.

At first glance, the *platea* staging can look rather similar to the configuration of the stage used in Latin comedies and replicated by Shakespeare in his Plautus-derived *Comedy of Errors*, but there are crucial differences. In Plautus and *Errors*, the stage represents a specific single place, a city street, and it is accessed through a series of entrances representing just that, doorways to particular houses. The original Classical staging probably supplied them by means of an arcaded back

wall, and *Errors* may have used a similar layout. Even in the case of *Errors*, however, it is not clear whether an original audience would have assumed such a literal interpretation of the stage space: there are times when it could equally well represent an indoor scene, as if the doorway were turned inside out to give access to the staged interior of Adriana's house, rather than having her come out into the street for what can be quite an intimate conversation (e.g. 4.2).

Usual Elizabethan practice, like the medieval, assumed a much less literal interpretation of the stage. The dramatists inform us where characters are, and where they are entering from, only if it matters. Although signboards could be used, later dramatists normally treated location as a function of the performed action, most often indicated through speech but frequently too through other effects (properties such as a throne or a tomb; or noise and movement, the famous 'alarums and excursions', to indicate anywhere a skirmish is happening), and it does not exist independently of such cues. Spoken cues as to place usually take the form of a statement or allusion as a play or a scene starts, whether from outside or inside the action ('Fair Verona, where we lay our scene', *RJ* Prologue 2; 'A goodly city is this Antium', *Cor* 4.4.1). The first scene between Katherine and her gentlewoman in *Henry V* (3.4) is located only by the fact that they are speaking French. Cleopatra always brings Egypt with her, but Octavius Caesar exists largely independent of particular places: what matters is his presence, that *he* is there, not where 'there' might be independently of him. Many scenes could equally well be taking place outside as inside, and if it is not specified, it does not matter. Occasionally the same characters can move from one to the other within a single scene, as in *Julius Caesar* when the action moves from the street to inside the Capitol, or Brutus and Cassius move from the gathering of the armies to inside Brutus's tent (3.1, 4.2–3: the scene division in the latter case was a rationalizing eighteenth-century intervention). It is not so different in conception from the shepherds' pageants, which could show them crossing from the fields to inside the stable without making an exit, and other plays took the idea of expansive stage location much further. The Coventry *Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors* has Mary and Joseph travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem on stage. Even more demanding of imaginative complicity is the ambitious Digby

Mary Magdalene. This opens with a number of locations defined in turn by speeches in which the authoritative figure in each *locus* identifies himself: successively Tiberius Caesar (therefore Rome), Mary's father (her home castle), Herod, Pilate, and then moving out of the literal world altogether to locations for the World, the Flesh and the Devil, and later to Heaven. Messengers and characters pass between all these; and in the later part of the play a ship appears (it is given its own entrances and exits) that moves all around the Mediterranean:

> Yond ther is the lond of Torkye . . .
> Yendyr is the lond of Satylle . . . [Antalya, Southern Turkey
> Of Marcylle this is the kynggys lond,
>
> (1435, 1437, 1441)

and later between other locations used as part of the action, a rock in the middle of the sea and Jerusalem and then back by way of the rock to Marseilles.

Plays tended to move towards a greater specificity of place as the decades between the 1580s and 1630s went by; but that did not mean that the earlier freedom assigned to the stage space was forgotten, by either playwrights or spectators, though it might well be presented as explicitly old-fashioned. George Peele did just that in his *Old Wife's Tale*, of the early 1590s, where he employs a whole range of techniques that the new theatre largely rejected, and he shares what he is doing with his audience from the title forwards. Its action consists of a single unbroken scene, which starts with two travellers getting lost in a forest and being given shelter inside a cottage; to pass the night, an old woman named Madge tells a story, and each episode appears in succession in front of both the onstage and the real audience, on a road, at a well, within an enchanter's study, the foot of a hill where gold can be dug for, and so forth. Most of these are distinguished by a property that remains on stage all the time, such as a wayside cross for the road, so making it possible, for instance, for 'two Furies to come out of the Conjurer's cell' even though it has not been used as a performance location for a while.[24] Every so often a group of singing harvest-men appear, who are utterly irrelevant to the main story but who give physical form to the songs of

two of the spectators in the cottage.[25] The play is, in other words, an affectionate spoof of the kind of romance drama current from the 1570s but of which very few examples survive (one that does is *The Historie of the two valiant Knights Sir Clyomon Knight of the Golden Sheeld . . . and Clamydes the white Knight*, which is based on an episode from the fourteenth-century French romance *Perceforest*). Naivety of this order may be at the far end of the spectrum from neo-Classical drama, but academic plays can themselves seem a great deal more naive than this kind of freedom in the hands of a good playwright. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s *Pyramus and Thisbe* combines the mechanicals' overt simple-mindedness with virtuoso brilliance on the part of Shakespeare; and Peele evidently assumes that his own audience will share the wit of his parody. As late as 1608, *Pericles* offered an entirely serious version of the same thing, in a kind of combination of *Mary Magdalene* and the *Old Wife's Tale*, with Gower as its storyteller who conjures up the events of the play and its action free-ranging around the Mediterranean. The elision of recounted and performed action is often as explicit as Madge's, as when 'tidings . . . Are brought your eyes; what need speak I?', with a dumbshow to follow (Chorus to Act 2). That section of the play may precede Shakespeare's own contribution to the writing, but he was entirely happy to take over the technique.

> Thus time we waste, and long leagues make short;
> Sail seas in cockles, have and wish but for't;
> Making, to take our imagination,
> From bourn to bourn, region to region . . .
> Like motes and shadows see them move awhile;
> Your ears unto your eyes I'll reconcile.
> (4.4, Chorus 1–4, 21–2)

And there follows another dumbshow in mid-chorus, of Pericles' being deceived into believing his daughter dead, until the action that is spoken as well as performed is resumed with 'Patience, then, / And think you now are all in Mytilen' (51–2). *Pericles* is of all the Shakespeare corpus the play that is most faithful to its medieval source, and which through Gower invokes its own medievalism of method most explicitly. For many

years, it was rarely performed; in an age that assumed a basic realism of stage space, it was effectively unperformable. As production after production has shown now that audience imaginations are being trusted again, however, it is extraordinarily powerful on stage. Like the cycle plays, it needs performance to release not only the force of the language but the power of the *play*.

If Gower's lines on the travels of the imagination are reminiscent of the Chorus's role in *Henry V*, that is not an accident. The history's choruses are in part an apologia for the way the play is going to treat space; and they are even less defensive than Gower's – or rather, they take the line that attack is the best form of defence. The play does not quite have Africa and Asia sharing the stage at the same time, or an action that criss-crosses the Mediterranean, but it does demand that the spectators imagine that 'within the girdle of these walls / Are now confined two mighty monarchies' (*H5* Prol. 19–20), and if the two never appear side by side, they frequently appear consecutively. The play is exceptional for its self-consciousness about its own 'abuse of distance' (Chorus to Act 2): the audience as well as the youth of England are expected to be 'as English Mercuries' in following the action, and in a particularly odd moment, they are invited to imagine not just that the action is transported to Southampton, but that the entire playhouse is ('There is the playhouse now, there must you sit', 2.0.36). It is as if Shakespeare is playing games with those pedants who objected to the imaginative openness of the stage, driving their literalism to absurdity. Even more puzzlingly, the spectators are then instructed to hold back from imagining the move until after the next scene, which involves Bardolph and Pistol and the Hostess: its location remains unspecified, and since this is the first appearance of these characters in this play, it assumes audience knowledge from the *Henry IV* plays to imagine a location for it. Like Gower, the Chorus demands that the spectators should 'behold', 'sit and see' the action he prefaces as if it were really happening (4.0.46, 52), or indeed to imagine the parts of the story omitted from the performed action, to carry Henry 'upon your winged thoughts / Athwart the sea', 'see him set / Upon Blackheath' (5.0.8–9). Such assistance in making long journeys did not need any such paradramatic support, however, as the rest of the Shakespearean corpus

shows. *Cymbeline* goes to the opposite extreme, with scenes in the British court and countryside, Italy and Wales, but with minimal cuing as to where any of them is actually happening. Only Imogen's bedroom takes on any solidity of place, with its props of a bed and a chest and elaborate spoken description; and perhaps Posthumus's gaol in so far as he enters manacled (5.4.1), though that opens up to dimensionless space as his forebears appear in a vision and Jupiter descends on an eagle. The much-mentioned destination of Milford Haven turns out to be singularly unimportant in the action, however famous it may have been as the place where Henry Tudor had made landfall in his own invasion of England. Instead of allusions to place, we have characters led astray and unsure where they are (Imogen in 3.4.1–4, Cloten in 4.1.1–2). *Cymbeline* is a puzzling play in all kinds of ways, but the audience, unlike Imogen and Cloten, do not, I think, get lost.

It is no coincidence that this freedom from the specifics of place should occur in one of Shakespeare's romances. Records of plays acted both at court and in the public theatres attest to a huge appetite for such plays, though since romances were the form of narrative that ranged most widely in both space and time, they should on the face of things have been most resistant to staging. The anti-theatricalist Stephen Gosson and his opponent Sir Philip Sidney both found the dramaturgy of such attempts particularly objectionable. Shakespeare's readiness to adopt their characteristic spaciousness is very marked, in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* as well as *Cymbeline*. In *The Tempest*, for which there is no source that imposes such a range of place, he goes to the opposite extreme: it is his only play apart from *The Comedy of Errors* to observe anything like the unities, though it is probably true, given its constant references to sea travel, to Milan, Naples and Carthage, and its constant shifting of scene around the island, that rather few spectators notice the fact. It also opens up its acting space into something quasi-supernatural for the masque presented to the young lovers, a masque that includes not only Iris, Ceres and Juno (not quite as a theophany, but acted by spirits whom Prospero has invoked), but also a song and dance by nymphs and harvestmen not entirely different in method from Peele's.

The Jacobean masque was the first form of drama to make stage scenery an effect in itself, and with that came the idea of a setting that

had an existence independent of, and preceding, the entry of the characters. Masque scenery, moreover, specialized in transformations, in turning the stage from earth to heaven in front of the spectators' eyes. It set out to give visual substance to the emblematic or allegorical; and paradoxically, it became in the process the forerunner of the nineteenth-century attempts to provide a quasi-realistic stage setting for every one of Shakespeare's scenes – settings that editorial practice assumed must always take place somewhere identifiable. The change led to audiences' losing much of their training in imaginative complicity with plays that did not assume such a grounding in visual realism. It was not until stage settings were reduced back towards the minimal that the power of the cycle plays was released, and the spectators' delight in the exercise of their own imaginations could fuel their revival.

TIME

All staged action takes place in the present tense. Time, like place, is defined by what happens on the stage, not by the length of the play; and that present moment could represent the passage of as much time as it chose. The cycle plays covered the entire salvation history of mankind in a single day of playing, or sometimes three. No dramatists for the public theatres attempted anything so capacious, though Foxe's *Christus triumphans* was given a private performance in the mid-century; but their plays were still ambitious enough to make the humanists despair. Romances frequently covered two generations, as *The Winter's Tale* does; history plays and historical tragedy might condense events that were spread out over several decades into two hours' traffic of the stage, as in *King John* and *Macbeth*. The cycle plays also offered a model of multiple individual plays – pageants – combining to make up a single large overarching plot, a model replicated in Shakespeare's two tetralogies of history plays.[26] The first to be written, the *Henry VI–Richard III* sequence, may well not have been initially conceived as a tetralogy, or written in chronological order, and Shakespeare may not have written all of *Henry VI Part 1*; but as the plays progress, they increasingly insist on their links both to the previous play and to the one that is to follow, through memory or prophecy or a presenter's voice.[27] The very last of the

histories to be written, *Henry V*, links back to the initial *Henry VI* sequence in its final chorus, bonding the tetralogies into one; the last in terms of historical chronology, *Richard III*, ends with the moment when that whole cycle of history comes to an end with the advent of Henry Tudor, a moment presented at once as Judgement, on Richard himself, and as a kind of apocalyptic institution of a new Jerusalem in England, when there shall be no more war – and which, as a later audience was reminded at the end of *Henry VIII*, was the necessary preliminary to divine Truth being known in England.

Each tetralogy follows a structure of fall and rise over extended time. The initial action instigated by the deposition and death of Richard II works through the rebellions of Henry IV's reign to Henry V's triumph and his marriage with Katherine that was supposed to bring peace between England and France; the Wars of the Roses end with another marriage about to take place, this time the one between the heir of Lancaster and the heiress of York that did indeed bring peace to England. The eight plays together make up a single working out of prophecy across time. They thus echo the model of the *felix culpa*, the pattern of Fall and Redemption that structures the cycle plays: an initial disruption of the divine order of things that finally brings about a result better than the original loss. Individual characters who play their parts early in that larger story (whether the story of apocalyptic salvation through the advent of Christ, or of political salvation through the advent of the Tudors) may have a sense of its shape through prophecy, those who come latest will be able to see how it has unfolded over preceding generations; but most of the characters, most of the time, whether they are Isaac or Hotspur, have no conception of the larger plot in which they are acting, and which begins and concludes outside their own play. The usurpation of Bolingbroke that begins the whole historical sequence is counterbalanced three plays later by God's withholding of vengeance for the murder of Richard, to give victory to the English at Agincourt; and Shakespeare forcefully reminds his audience of that background in Henry's desperate prayer before the battle that God will

> not today, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown.
> (*H5* 4.1.289–90)

His insistence after his victory that God alone must be thanked, in a recognition that it needed a miracle for the English to overcome the French, is itself predictive beyond the confines of the play in the same way in which events of the New Testament were prefigured by the Old (such as Christ's Crucifixion by the sacrifice of Isaac), since the first performance took place not so many years after God had intervened to disperse the Spanish Armada. The *Henry VI–Richard III* sequence by contrast shows how the consequences of Bolingbroke's usurpation continued to be played out through to the final restoration of the divine scheme for England at Bosworth. Only there is the curse of civil war foreseen by the Bishop of Carlisle finally brought to an end, and Henry VI's prophecy of the accession of Henry Tudor fulfilled (*R2* 4.1.136–49; *3H6* 4.6.65–76). The play closes with the implied damnation of Richard, God's elevation of Henry Tudor, and a further prophecy of peace under his descendants: specifically, of course, Elizabeth. The plays thus map a secular equivalent to salvation history played out over the whole of time, onto a century of the secular history of England. The histories constitute not only a major item in the 'writing of England' that was such a marked feature of the later years of Elizabeth's reign:[28] they write that history as a model of God's particular concern with the nation.

The pageants that made up the cycles offer parallels both to the separate plays of the tetralogies, in their encompassing of time beyond the experience of any one individual, and to the scene (and, later, act) divisions marked by a cleared stage, which have the potential to signal as large or small a passage of time as the play requires. The action has to maintain enough continuity for the audience to know where they are, or when they are; but their readiness to comprehend whatever time structures they are offered is as flexible as it is for space. Shakespeare indeed associates the two in the Prologue to *Henry V*: the spectators' thoughts must carry the characters not only from England to France, but

> jumping o'er times,
> Turning th'accomplishment of many years
> Into an hour-glass.
>
> (29–31)

A particularly large gap may be signalled by explicit means, as with Gower's induction to Act 4 of *Pericles*, where his account of 'our fast-growing scene' functions as a transferred epithet for the fast-growing Marina, from baby to young woman. He carries, he says, 'winged time' on the 'lame feet of my rime' (punning on his age and his poetics),

> Which never could I so convey,
> Unless your thoughts went on my way.
> (4.0.49–50)

Time itself announces that *The Winter's Tale* is going to 'slide / O'er sixteen years' between Acts 3 and 4 as if the audience had slept through the interim, in a similar challenge to mimetic representation.

Scene divisions, like the division into pageants, may indicate a significant break in time, clearing the stage not only of the characters but of the assumptions about time and place they brought with them: the next scene will happen somewhere else, or, if in the same place, at a different time. The Coventry *Weavers' Pageant* on the Presentation in the Temple and Christ and the Doctors uses this method, as it recasts what in other cycles are separate pageants into successive scenes: the time-lapse between them is signalled both by a cleared stage, and by an announcement from Joseph that twelve years have passed (line 727). Simultaneous action in two different timeframes often happens when the actions take place on different theatrical levels, as in plays within the play, when an amount of action equivalent to, or in excess of, the entire frame play may pass in a few minutes. Madge's story in *The Old Wife's Tale* is told in a single night, or a bare two hours of stage time, but the action it encompasses covers months of quests and enchantments and marvels. The plot of *Pyramus and Thisbe* covers the same time period as the action of the play that encloses it, the time needed by the lovers' plan to escape and a night in the wood. Just occasionally two scenes will happen in different places simultaneously, a problem that was best handled by the *platea* type of staging that could keep one or more sets of characters on stage at once while the action, and therefore the focus of interest, moved around between them: the Coventry *Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors* shifts its action to the shepherds in the fields while Mary is apparently giving birth elsewhere on the stage. The Elizabethan

stage generally had to play such scenes sequentially: the scenes of Desdemona's preparing for bed and her murder (*Oth* 4.3 and 5.2) overlap with the beginning and end of 5.1, of the attempted murder of Cassio. In a play that plays fast and loose with time to add a literally impossible urgency to the action, the overlap of the scenes is one of the means by which it does so.

Plenty of critical attention has been devoted to the 'double time' of *Othello*, the fact that the action on Cyprus is compressed within twenty-four hours as counted out from scene to scene even though that allows no time at all for the newly married Desdemona to commit adultery with anybody, least of all over the long period of time that Iago invokes. Not the least interesting thing about it, however, is that probably nobody has ever noticed it from watching the play. Audience readiness to accept time as it is presented to them can easily accommodate two time schemes at once.[29] The very subjectivity of the experience of time, how 'time travels in divers paces with divers persons' (*AYLI* 3.2.303–4), means that flexibility in the reception of staged time is particularly easy to achieve. Perhaps the most extreme example, in that the action looks so smoothly naturalistic, is the temporally impossible sequence in *Richard II* 1.4–2.1: there, an account of how Bolingbroke has just set off into exile ends with the summoning of the king to Gaunt's deathbed, and his visit to the dying Gaunt is concluded by a report that the exile is on his way back from Brittany with an invasion force. This is 'double time' not across a whole play, but in the time taken to visit a sick man.

The compression of time is not in itself unusual, but it is rarely done with such sleight-of-hand. Noah builds the ark on stage, announcing when he has finished in the Towneley play that he has spent 120 years on the job; and the forty days and forty nights of the flood are covered by a shift in the level of naturalism from acted action to the singing of a psalm. The Coventry Shearmen's pageant runs the whole sequence from the Annunciation through the Nativity and the slaughter of the innocents without a break of any kind. The morality *Mundus et Infans*, first printed in 1522, has its protagonist born and grow through the various ages of man – infancy, boyhood, adolescence, manhood – in the first two hundred lines of the play, and without ever leaving the stage. Similar phenomena happen in the Elizabethan theatre, though they have

sometimes been overlooked or mis-read since the modern assumption of naturalism tends to override our sense of stage convention. Faustus's opening soliloquy, for instance, may well not have been received as a real-time declaration by its original audience: it summarizes, and by implication covers, his entire life so far, with his trying out and rejecting all the learned arts, law, medicine and theology. Only when he settles on conjuration does the length of his life come into a single focus with the time passing on the stage, and the action proper of the play, with its more mimetic timing, can begin. The first act of *Titus Andronicus* encompasses far more by way of event and consequence than could conceivably happen within the time frame offered; Titus's presence on stage for all but the opening lines effectively acts as the link to cover a multitude of different events, and the way those events set up his frame of mind constitutes their unifying principle more evidently than their multiple roles in preparing for the rest of the plot. The scene then continues without a cleared stage, but with Aaron as linking presenter, to the end of 2.1; there is considerable evidence that all this first part was in fact written by Peele,[30] and this kind of stagecraft is not so very far from what appears in his near-contemporary *Old Wife's Tale*. The grounding for such principles of staging lies in the dramaturgy of a play such as *Mary Magdalene*, where she is on stage for a high proportion of the play even though its events cover many years, and again, it is her developing spiritual condition that constitutes the main connecting thread.

Plays such as *Mary Magdalene* and *Dr Faustus* and *Titus Andronicus*, which focus on the changing disposition, for better or worse, of a single named individual, show such development in terms of biography: development over a lifetime, or part of a lifetime, and therefore something that can be performed with some degree of mimetic representation, even if time and place have to be stretched and squeezed to make them fit the stage. Shakespeare's theatre also, however, inherited a drama that studied the human mind and spirit directly, in terms of its competing impulses and temptations: a procedure that, as with angels and devils, gives visible form and shape to immaterial qualities. Instead of representing people living in the world, it moved inside them, to represent the world within them, the 'little world of man': a topic that deserves chapter-length treatment in itself.

Chapter Four

THE LITTLE WORLD OF MAN

Gregoire in his Moral
Seith that a man in special
The lasse world is properly . . .
And whan this litel world mistorneth,
The grete world al overtorneth.
(John Gower)[1]

The King . . .
Strives in his little world of man to outstorm
The to and fro conflicting wind and rain.
(*KL* 3.1.3, 10–11)

That man was a microcosm, a 'little world' who replicated in himself the greater Creation, had had most of a millennium to become a commonplace of thought by the time the Renaissance inherited it. He shares, as Gower goes on to spell out in his account of man in the *Confessio amantis*, reason with the angels, sensation with animals, the capacity to grow with trees and material substance with stones. Gregory the Great had worked out the scheme in the sixth century in his *Moralia in Job*, a work that became one of the foundations of later Christian thought. It was enhanced in the thirteenth century when Thomas Aquinas integrated Aristotle's recently rediscovered theory of souls – a vegetative soul for plants, to which animals added a sensible soul, and men a rational or intellectual soul – with a belief in a universe created and sustained by God. By the sixteenth century, Gregory's conception of

man as a little world scarcely needed a source: it had assumed the status of fact, like the trees and stones, and if it was credited with an origin, it was located in God's Creation rather than a specific author. The Hellenic physician Galen had disseminated the theory that the body was composed of four humours or complexions associated with the four elements that made up the universe; the belief reached Europe by way of Arabic intermediaries in the eleventh century, and was well embedded in physiology and medicine long before the modern period. The further belief that there was a continuing correspondence between man and the universe was a standard corollary: when one goes awry, 'mistorneth', so does the other. If there were upheavals in the cosmos, comets or earthquakes or floods, something was going very wrong, or was about to go wrong, among mankind too.

The male emphasis in these formulations reflects not only linguistic usage but belief. 'Man' as the generic term for humankind in general was standard idiomatic usage up until the rise of feminist consciousness in the later twentieth century. Medieval culture, like the Classical and the early modern, further took the male of the species as normative, woman as a lesser variant. Man was created first, and although Genesis allows that both man and woman were made in God's image, the emphasis falls on 'man'. Gender issues were of enormous interest to almost all writers concerned with human relations, in both narrative and drama, not least Shakespeare (see Chapter 6 below); but where generalizations about humankind are concerned, man was the subject. It is Lear, not Cleopatra or any of Shakespeare's women, who is described in terms of the 'little world of man', and the phrase would have been as familiar, recognizable and uncontroversial to its first audience as its subordinate position in its sentence takes for granted. More elaborate and intellectual developments of the idea could use the Greek term *microcosmos*, as Thomas Nabbes did in the masque mentioned earlier in connection with its portrayal of good and bad angels, *Microcosmus: A Morall Maske*. Both took the core definition of man as male for granted.

Works such as these presented man directly in universalizing terms. They are very different from Aristotle's conception of universality in the *Poetics* as it has been interpreted in modern criticism, where the search for a wider applicability starts from the individual. Readings of Hamlet

as universal from the Romantics forwards often tended to see him as a mirror either for Shakespeare himself (as Keats suggested) or for the critic (most famously Coleridge), not least because the rediscovery of the second quarto, with its additional soliloquy in 4.4, had re-invented him as a man who gave priority to thought at the cost of action. Early spectators alert to the bloodiness of revenge drama, by contrast, would have registered much more strongly his role rather than his uniqueness, and the role emphasizes the series of deaths for which he is directly or indirectly responsible: six in all, twice as many as Claudius – the entire Polonius family and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as well as the king.

Literature that starts with the typical, or that makes extensive use of conventions – not clichés, but as its etymology indicates, 'things agreed', understood between author and reader, and therefore able to call on and resonate with earlier traditions and habits of such understanding – turns the modern attitude to Aristotelian universality inside out. If that insists that the universal is what gives the individual his value, a premise of what is familiar and expected allows for the greatest emphasis to fall on the unique, on the distinctive variant that stands out against such a background.[2] Christian traditions of thought based on what is common to humankind work a similar way. Man has a soul with the capacity to fall, with the devil eager to snatch at it, but every temptation will be different. Earlier drama, and in particular morality plays, took such an analysis of representative humanity as its subject-matter, but they did not stop at truisms. The desire to discover and represent what is universal in humankind made for some insightful psychological analysis, and the move in drama from the personification through the type-character to the individual could add a sharpness to the representation of individual subjectivity that would have been harder to achieve if a playwright had had to start from scratch. Hamlet becomes most striking because he thinks *as well as* killing.

The earliest surviving English moral plays date from the early fifteenth century, but the genre enjoyed its heyday in the decades immediately preceding the rise of the public theatres. Along with the biblical and saints' plays, they constituted the lived theatrical experience of many of Shakespeare's first audiences.[3] The allegorical tradition in which they operate goes back much further, to the narrative moral

allegory that had developed over the centuries to show itself capable of surprisingly subtle analysis, not only of psychology, but of the interplay of psychology with theology, politics and even economics. They explore the little world of typical or universal man within the larger world, with the action mediated largely by his own faculties in interplay with the ethical, or unethical, structures of life in society. Moral allegory was one of the most powerful of medieval 'technologies of the self', to use Foucault's term: a means by which the individual reached an ethical self-understanding. Its adoption by the stage emphasized its power for plotting, and the masques and much of the drama down to the Civil War continued to be based explicitly or implicitly on its assumptions and conventions.

Plays of the later sixteenth century are often distinguished from their predecessors in terms of their focus on the individual rather than the type: Shakespeare, obviously, does not write morality plays. Moral allegory and its dramatic expression in the interludes remained well understood throughout the period, however, and informed some of its most impressive writing, his own included.[4] Spenser adopted allegory as the narrative medium of the *Faerie Queene*, and had no qualms about writing England's national epic not as historical heroics, like the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, but in terms of wars and loves that expressed general truths before they expressed personal ones. The modern emphasis on character as *solely* individual has tended to render invisible much of Shakespeare's underlying use of such allegorical or generalizing structures and characterization. The most beguiling, and in some ways the most misleading, of the critical approaches to Shakespeare produced since the Romantics was the tendency to read his plays as if they were about real people with lives beyond the text. A.C. Bradley's massively influential *Shakespearean Tragedy* of 1904, which offered readings of the four great tragedies (which he was the first to select as the defining plays of Shakespeare's *oeuvre*) in terms of psychological character, was the culmination of this focus in Shakespeare criticism, and for several decades made it difficult to see what else Shakespeare might be up to. In 1958, however, Bernard Spivack gave a much more historically and dramatically alert redirection to the understanding of how Shakespearean character works in his *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, when

he pointed out that the roots of Iago's villainy lay not in his unhappy childhood or some identifiable psychological dysfunction, nor in the motives he rather casually suggests for himself, but in the stage history of the Vice. Falstaff was similarly redefined, to point out how radically different Elizabethan responses to this quasi-personification of Gluttony and Cowardice and his attempts to lead the ruler astray would have been from modern sentimentalizing interpretations.[5] None of this means that moral allegory is sufficient to explain Shakespeare's characters, or to explain them away; but it is an essential reminder that individual psychological analysis is not enough either, and that there is more to be found, not less, when they are read against their long background in ethical allegory and its narrative and dramatic expression.

The emphasis on drama as embodied action might seem to limit what could be staged that was not literal. There were ways of 'doing God' on stage, but they were not spiritual ways; and it would seem as if a theatre that emphasized incarnation would have trouble with representing the internal scenario of a mind and its psychological faculties other than through static confessional monologue. The earlier and most fully allegorical moral interludes turned any mimetic problems into an advantage, however. A figure named Everyman or Mankind insists on its universal applicability as well as inviting audience identification of a peculiarly close kind; and the abstractions of homily become much more vivid, the messages conveyed through them much more telling, when they are given a visible identity and a voice. Moral allegory, both dramatic and non-dramatic, often turns into narrative what the modern era would consign to a textbook, from problems of adolescent hooliganism to political analysis, the latter when a king took the place of the mankind figure. Morality plays increasingly turned away from personifying abstractions to representing exemplary figures: an ambitious man, rather than Ambition in itself; a chaste woman, rather than Chastity.[6] The Seven Deadly Sins were a regular feature of moralities down to Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* and beyond, but in the two-part play of c. 1588 about them ascribed to Richard Tarleton they are represented by appropriate characters from history: Ferrex and Porrex, for instance, the two sons of Gorboduc who fight over their rival claims to the kingdom, serve to represent Envy.[7] Such figures segued easily into the type figures

that still populate so many high-Renaissance plays, and whose names insist on such an ethical foundation: Malvolio, ill-will; Volpone, the fox, the trickster that plays dead in medieval (rather than Classical) beast-fable and animal lore; Lussurioso, the lustful, embodying the seventh of the medieval deadly sins.

LANGUAGE AND PERSONIFICATION

The whole basis for understanding characterization was thus different in the medieval and early-modern worlds from our own. Those differences emerge from the habit of thinking in general terms, of looking beyond the particular, and from the tendency to think in terms of analogy, imagining one thing in terms of another. These habits were so familiar as to be intuitive – as intuitive as modern habits of doing the opposite, of emphasizing the individual and the literal. The difference has been fuelled by a change in language, and the idioms of language, so subtle and gradual as to have been largely invisible. Now, in speaking of dispositions and emotions, we prefer adjectives and predicates: I suddenly felt happy. In Middle English and most medieval languages, that might be most readily formulated as a less exclusively personal statement: I suddenly met Happiness. Happiness is taken to be a pre-existing state in which I or anyone else can participate, and it can be represented in a form that implies not just a condition but personhood. One doesn't fall in love in the Middle Ages, one is shot by the arrow of the God of Love: the point being in part that it is precisely not a unique experience, however individual the form it takes. Even in modern usage, someone will be 'in love', will participate in the condition, and there is no obvious adjective as an alternative. Medieval poets spent a great deal of time analysing what it felt like to be in love (often through the mouths of women characters – see Chapter 6 below); but such idioms also enabled the emotions and passions to be represented not just in terms of feeling, but in terms of behaviour, recognizable outward patterns of an inward disposition, whether ethical (being proud or ambitious) or physiological (being melancholy, the result of an imbalance of the bodily humours affecting one's mental state). Those outward patterns were likewise inherited by the Elizabethan dramatists, who made generous capital out

of the easy recognizability of the power-hungry or melancholy man or the lover.

The preference for nouns meant that the basic idioms of the language presented the world as quasi-personified. Modern editors of allegories often have difficulty in deciding whether a noun should be capitalized, as if it were a proper name, or left as a common noun: is it Sleep or sleep that overpowers you, an agent or just a state? The mere addition of a capital letter can change the most commonplace action into an implied allegory. Furthermore, an encounter with Happiness or Sleep or the God of Love (a god, because he is bigger than you are – you aren't going to win in that particular encounter) invites author and reader to fill in the personhood that is missing, to supply physical details (Langland's Sloth has slimy eyes) or clothing (black for Melancholy; cloaks that serve to disguise the true nature of those qualities that pretend to be other than they are, or under which weapons can be hidden – the 'smiler with the knife under the cloak' of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*).

Elizabethan English inherited those idioms, and Shakespeare's plays present their editors with comparable problems: when does a statement turn into a personification, and an abstract noun therefore require an initial capital? A few examples from the Arden *Complete Works* will illustrate the problem:

> Virtue is chok'd with foul Ambition,
> And Charity chas'd hence by Rancour's hand;
> Foul Subornation is predominant,
> And Equity exil'd your Highness' land.
> (*2H6* 3.1.142–5)

The allegory inherent in that – one that is easy to imagine being staged as a morality or dumbshow equivalent – encourages the reading as personification (even 'Highness' is at this date not only a title but an embodied quality), as does the formality of rhyme. A single sequence of *2 Henry IV* on the other hand selects different editorial options for three inherently similar speeches. A capitalized Peace puts forth her olive (4.4.87), but Prince Harry's counsellor 'rage' remains lower-case (4.4.63). And he is so grief-stricken at believing his father dead,

> That tyranny, which never quaff'd but blood,
> Would, by beholding him, have wash'd his knife
> With gentle eye-drops.
>
> (4.5.85–7)

Those last lines represent a drama in miniature, but because Tyranny is not accorded capitalization we tend to under-read the lines. The original audiences, accustomed to personification and hearing rather than seeing the words, would probably have taken them as implicitly capitalized. Editors tend to be more ready to capitalize in the earlier plays than the later ones, as if such compressed personification were a practice that Shakespeare outgrew; but it remains a characteristic of his language, as of that of his contemporaries, throughout his career. Early printers' deployment of capitals was too random and too different from the modern for Shakespeare's own practice to be recoverable, but the First Folio's generosity with capitals across all the plays does not endorse any idea of a teleological evolution of his writing towards a stress on individual agency at the cost of such pre-existing moral categories. In the late plays, Leontes speaks of how 'nature will betray its folly', Camillo of the clear countenance 'that friendship wears at feasts' (*WT* 1.2.151, 344): the lines read subtly differently with the Folio's Nature and Friendship. And with or without capitals, a run of personifications, as in the early plays, will often mark rhetorical emphasis: if Ferdinand breaks Miranda's virginity before their marriage,

> barren hate,
> Sour-ey'd disdain and discord shall bestrew
> The union of your bed with weeds.
>
> (*Tem* 4.1.19–21)

Sometimes the characters themselves will show a consciousness of the human potential for moral personification, as when Antonio in *The Tempest* refers to Gonzalo as 'this Sir Prudence' (2.1.287).

Some of what looks to modern readers like personification actually belongs to the realm of proto-scientific discourse. Venus may be a Classical goddess, a periphrasis for overwhelming love or passion, or the

name of the planet whose continuing influence nurtured love on the earth. Similarly, for the sixteenth century as for the Middle Ages, 'mercury' invoked a system of interconnected cosmic relationships rather than just a planet or a chemical substance: an item in the astrological and alchemical unity of the universe. Those astrological systems had been elaborated during the Middle Ages and reached their most arcane developments in the late sixteenth century. The details were a highly specialized academic topic, but the underlying ideas were so familiar as be taken for granted. To talk about the body was to invoke a series of connections that went beyond analogy to correspondence, correlations between macrocosm and microcosm that were believed as fact.

MAN AND THE UNIVERSE

At the core of these correlations lay genuine observations going back beyond the Classical world into prehistory: a goddess of the moon would also govern virginity and childbirth since the cycle of the moon correlates so closely with the menstrual cycle. Christianity relocated Diana's influence from the divine to the planetary, whether in relation to the tides or to the female body, though pagan characters in Christian writers appeal to both aspects at once. So Shakespeare's moon is 'governess of floods', the 'cold fruitless moon' worshipped by the nuns of Athens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2.1.103, 1.1.73), a play that has the goddess Diana from Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* in its background. It was easy to extrapolate from such observations to other astronomical phenomena and to read correlation as cause, and everybody did so. Every physical organ was linked to a particular planet and sign of the zodiac, in a further confirmation that 'a man is a little worlde by himselfe, for the lykenesses and similitudes that hee hath of the great worlde', as it was put in the much-reprinted compendium of medieval lore and morality called *The Shepheards Kalender*.[8]

What we read as limited to the physiology of the body, the pre-scientific world read as a reflection of the macrocosm. It now seems no more than a quaint metaphor or conceit to think of the skeleton as the frame of the body equivalent to the rocks of the earth, or the blood as

FIGURE 4 'Zodiacal Man', from *The Shepheards Kalendar*, London (1600), Auct. QQ supra 2.11, fol. D4r. By permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

rivers, or the hair and other excrescences as trees, and the metaphysical poets' fondness for such imagery has led to its widespread association with the early seventeenth century. Such ideas are less conspicuous in Shakespeare than in Donne, with his restless verbalization of his passionate experience of the body; but Donne's earliest poems date from 1592, the year of the first reference to Shakespeare as playwright, and the ideas long predated both of them.

The extent and depth of the similarities between medieval and early-modern ideas of the nature and capacity of humankind can be shown by comparing two accounts of the creation of man by Nature, God's vicar or subsidiary in the processes of Creation. These are Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus* of the late twelfth century and Nabbes's *Microcosmus* of 1637. There is one major difference in the 'plots' of the two works, in that Alan specifically sets out to create an ideal of the *perfect* man, whereas Nabbes's man is created with a generous capacity to fall (his creation is accompanied by both good and evil angels) and he proceeds to do so. The mechanisms and the principles of the creation of man, though, show a generous overlap across the two texts, which extends from the whole conception of allegorizing his creation to shared details such as that he looks neither down to the ground, like the beasts, nor up to the heavens, with an over-aspiring mind, but straight forward, between the two.

In Alan's poem, Nature's desire to create the perfect man must be supplemented by the addition of a soul, beyond Nature's capacity to create, so Prudence, under the guidance of Reason, is dispensed to Heaven to fetch one. Her chariot is constructed of the seven liberal arts, and pulled by the horses of the five senses. When the chariot can get no further towards Heaven, Theology and Faith act as guides and teachers, and God creates a soul and entrusts it to Prudence. Back on earth, Nature forms man's body from the four elements and humours; Concord, aided by Arithmetic and Music (the arts of proportion and harmony) joins it with the soul; and Nobility passes on the gifts of Fortune to the new man. Allecto, however, principle of discord, calls the vices to attack him, but with the assistance of Nature and the Virtues the new man triumphs.[9]

Nabbes's masque starts a step further back, with the very principles

of creation and the calling of the warring elements into order. Nature again is the moving principle of creation, and she is aided by her husband Janus, an emblem for Prudence since both look both forwards and backwards.[10] Love binds the elements into harmony, figuring the cosmos as a smoothly rolling chariot. Nature is then able to create Man – or a man, named Physander, though the name, from Greek *matter* and *man*, serves more to generalize than individualize him. He is endowed with the Classical/medieval four humours; with a soul, Bellanima ('good soul', presented, according to the list of 'Persons figur'd', as 'a lovely woman in a long white robe'), brought to him from heaven by Love and given to him as a wife; and with a good and bad genius, represented in the traditional style for good and bad angels. The rest of the masque shows Physander, unlike Alan's perfect man, failing to resist the temptations of his Malus Genius, his complexions and his lower senses, and having an affair with Sensuality. He is rescued from damnation at the hands of the Furies only in the nick of time by Bellanima, his Bonus Genius, Temperance and Hope, who between them overcome the claims of Sensuality and Despair in the court of Conscience (not only a psychological faculty, but a commonly used term for the court of Chancery, a court of equity rather than of law alone, founded in the fourteenth century). The masque ends with a tableau of Love sitting enthroned between the four cardinal virtues (Justice, Temperance, Prudence and Fortitude), a dance and an epilogue spoken by Love.

Shakespeare's work is based on the same assumptions as produced the *Anticlaudianus* and *Microcosmus*, though he rarely replicates them straightforwardly. Hamlet acknowledges man as the paragon of animals endowed with a godlike apprehension, even though he can only see in that glory the 'quintessence of dust' (2.2.299–310). In *King Lear*, Edmund redefines the whole ideology to argue that Nature is not God's agent in creation but something more like nature red in tooth and claw, which requires man to engage in vicious competition to get the best he can for himself (an idea fully spelled out some fifty years later, by Thomas Hobbes); but the question of what kind of Nature is normative still takes for granted that it is a principle, a 'goddess' as Edmund puts it, that matters. Other characters read Nature as having created humankind for good, and take the actions of Edmund, Goneril and Regan as deeply

unnatural; but all the characters agree in regarding Nature as the operative principle to which they can appeal.[11] *Lear* is not only a play set in the pagan past, but one that presents a world without Christian revelation or faith. This does not turn its cosmology into an Aristotelian scientism: the shift from God's creative force to Nature's allows such discourse to be freed from any explicit theology, but the religious resonances of the language still serve as a touchstone for the characters' own varying ethics and beliefs. Similarly, Shakespeare's Classical characters draw on these theories of the physical universe even while God is not a necessary part of their intellectual mindset: the elements of earth and water, air and fire, and their symbolic meanings play out in *Antony and Cleopatra* without committing the speakers to any subliminal Christian awareness. The correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm means that disturbances in the heavens, such as the storm in *Lear* or the thunder and lightning that predict the assassination of Julius Caesar, mirror political upsets on the earth. Such events are always invested with a sense of ethical disturbance, a disruption of harmony and order which in plays with a Christian setting is more evidently that of God. Lenox's speech in *Macbeth* about the fierce winds and earthquakes that mark the night of Duncan's murder (2.3.54–61) is immediately followed by a miniature moral allegory describing that murder in forcefully religious terms: 'Most sacrilegious Murther hath broke ope / The Lord's anointed temple' (2.3.67–8). Such actions in Shakespeare take place in a kind of cosmic echo-chamber of significance.

MORAL INTERLUDES AND DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

The history of moral allegory as inherited by the early modern world has often been told, not least by Bernard Spivack and David Bevington, and a brief summary will be adequate here.[12] The idea that ethical character is a process of *psychomachia*, a battle within the mind between the forces of good and evil, was given its most striking form in a poem of that title by the early Christian author Prudentius (fl. 400), where the vices and virtues engage in open warfare for the domination of the soul. Variants on that same basic metaphor of spiritual battle recur throughout the

Middle Ages, though usually in non-dramatic form; Robert Grossesteste's Anglo-Norman *Chasteau d'amour* (?c. 1230) inspired a good number in England. Morality plays were a comparatively late arrival on the medieval scene, and outright battle appears only in some of the earliest. The early fifteenth-century *Castle of Perseverance*, indirectly based on Grosseteste, includes a long confrontation, in both words and action, between the seven deadly sins and their opposing virtues – the 'remedial' virtues that specifically countered each of the sins, Humility against Pride, Patience against Anger and so on. Battle is generally much more convincing on the page than on the stage, however, and comparatively few dramatists followed Prudentius in presenting the confrontation of vice and virtue as an outright war. *The Castle of Perseverance* took an original approach to the problem by having the virtues fight with roses, to emphasize the distance from literal violence of divinely inspired resistance to sin through the virtues of patience and charity. One awkwardness in presenting the confrontation in the form of battle was that warfare was very much a male preserve, whereas in Latin, abstract nouns are gendered feminine, and their associated personifications were therefore cast as female. English allegory tended to follow the Latin model even after the language had lost its (somewhat different) Old English gender system, though there was an increasing tendency, in both visual art and verbal allegory, to keep the virtues as female while casting the vices or sins as male. The one widespread exception is Luxuria, Lechery, as in the pageant of sins in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (2.3): the one 'Mistress Minx' in an otherwise male line-up.[13] The extension of grammatical gender to the stage representation of virtue is less usual, but it can on occasion allow female characters, such as *Everyman*'s Good Deeds and Knowledge (the understanding of God), to be ethically central: women who combine Cordelia's probity with the potential for stage presence of Rosalind.

Given the problematics of on-stage battle, and its distance from subjective experience, temptation was often presented instead as moral seduction, a process of persuading the central Mankind figure that a life of vice is much more pleasant and profitable than a life of labour and self-denial, and that he need not worry about death for a long time. Worldliness appears a great deal more attractive than heavenliness, even

when the correlatives of the World in the medieval scheme of things are the Flesh and the Devil. All the early moralities represent some variation on this. The eponymous Mankind is persuaded away from following the tenets of Mercy, who introduces the play and spells out its moral co-ordinates, by Mischief and his crew of gallants, Nought, New Guise and Nowadays, and the devil Titivillus. Although *Mankind* was probably written in the 1460s, it already shows the Sins giving way to more sprightly figures, much closer to the Vice figures of sixteenth-century dramas. Mankind himself, like many morality protagonists, is finally brought back to obedience to God by the fear of death. In an age when belief in damnation was unquestioned, the moment when the opportunity for good works ceased and the soul lost any further capacity for repentance was inevitably the crunch time, and allegorical plays made the most of it. One of the most famous now, *The Summoning of Everyman*, translated from Dutch shortly after 1500, concentrates all its action on the brief interval between God's messenger Death announcing to Everyman that he must die, and the moment of his actual death – an interval in which assembling the account of his life into a form that will pass muster with God at Judgement is a fine run thing. Even in the Jacobean era of the macabre, few of the villains dare to continue their defiance of God at the moment of their death. There are exceptions – Brachiano in Webster's *The White Devil*, by implication Iago – but their defiance invites a horror beyond the confines of the plot.

Dr Faustus was written and performed centrally in this tradition. Its protagonist's challenge to God, his choice for forbidden knowledge and the devil in preference to conventional virtue, has any magnificence stripped from it when the first thing he discovers after conjuring Mephistopheles is that he has no control even over the devil; and shortly after, that all the knowledge that matters is sealed to him, because the devil will not speak of the works of God.[14] The play's good and bad angels, its pageant of the sins, are all familiar from the morality pattern. The devil's scorn at the idea that Faustus might want a wife rather than casual sex is an almost equally familiar motif, found, for instance, in *Youth* (printed from c. 1528 to 1562), where the vice provides Youth with a female Lechery and the promise of a daily choice of concubines. Still more central to the morality tradition is Faustus's terror as death

approaches. Even without having sold his soul, Everyman had gone through exactly the same psychological processes, from denial, through lamenting his birth, to sheer terror as time ticks away and he realizes that he has run out of time, and cannot avoid death and judgement:

> How shall I do now for to exscuse me?
> I wolde to God I had never be gete! [been begotten
> To my soule a full grete profyte it had be;
> For now I fere paynes huge and grete.
> The tyme passeth. Lorde, helpe, that all wrought!
> For though I mourne, it avayleth nought.
> The day passeth and is almost agoo.[15]

But Everyman does have enough time, just; Faustus's last soliloquy expresses a desperate desire to prolong his final day that the play does not grant, and neither his cursing of his parents nor his attempts to appeal to Christ make the slightest difference. Marlowe himself may have been an intellectual rebel, perhaps even, as he was accused, an atheist, but he was able to convey imaginative empathy with the soul on the edge of damnation in a way that locates the play at the very heart of the morality tradition: it is powerful, not because it offers any kind of humanist-aspirational alternative to the conventional injunctions to avoid wicked living and a bad death, but because it expresses them so completely. The terror-of-damnation speech offered the perfect showcase for humanist rhetoric. Ben Jonson might write a satire on the old morality play in *The Devil is an Ass*, but Marlowe writes the real thing.

Deaths in Shakespeare, even of the wicked, are configured somewhat differently. In his plays set in Classical or pre-Christian, and therefore pagan, eras, fear of damnation is not an issue for the characters and so not for the plays either. The ones that have Christian settings by contrast almost always touch on the question of the final destination of the soul of those major characters who die in the course of the action, though they only occasionally do so with the moralities' intensity of theological focus – which would in any case have been increasingly problematic in view of the Jacobean prohibition on mentioning God on stage. It is a commonplace of criticism that Shakespeare never leaves a kingdom

without a ruler; his concern for the final destination of the soul has been less remarked, but is almost as insistent. Calvinism insisted that souls were predestined to salvation or damnation from the moment of birth, and Calvinist ministers frequently claimed to know which was which. Catholic belief was that such things were the preserve of God alone, and humankind could not know – but they might guess, and guess very plausibly, not least from whether the dying person made a 'good' or a 'bad' end, in repentance or blasphemy. Shakespeare despatches just a few characters to firm destinations, but he offers suggestions for many more. The ghost of Hamlet's father announces himself to be in Purgatory (1.5.11–13), however theologically problematic that may be. Despair, the worst sin in that it prevents all hope of reconciliation with God, marks the deaths of Cardinal Beaufort (who is given the archetypal bad death, *2H6* 3.3), Macbeth and Richard III. Richard is cursed by the succession of ghosts of those he has killed to 'despair, and die', and he incites his followers to the final battle with the call, 'If not to Heaven, then hand in hand to Hell' (5.3.314). Entry to Heaven, by contrast, seems assured to Katherine of Aragon's soul, given that she is granted a (staged) vision of her salvation immediately before her death; and the saintly Henry VI's death with a prayer on his lips looks equally definitive, even if his murderer, the future Richard III, thinks he is consigning him to hell (*3H6* 5.6.60–7).

For less than perfect characters, as in the moralities, repentance can be a major factor affecting a soul's likely destination. The penitent Wolsey's hope of heaven allows some space for a man who recognizes that his ambition mirrors Lucifer's own sin (*H8* 3.2.440–1, 459). If a major character does not give any indication himself as to where he is heading, someone else will often do it for him. The Bastard in *King John* expects the King's soul to go to heaven (5.7.72); Prince Hal declares that Hotspur will take his praise with him to heaven (*1H4* 5.4.98); and Horatio summons 'flights of angels' to sing Hamlet's soul to its rest in a way that invites audience acceptance, even though he himself has died more concerned with his good name in the world than with the 'undiscovered country' that had so troubled him earlier. Not every onstage statement necessarily invites audience agreement, however. Othello imagines Desdemona condemning him at the Last Judgement:

> When we shall meet at compt
> This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven
> And fiends will snatch at it.
>
> (*Oth* 5.2.273–5)

That pitiless judgement on himself would seem to be endorsed when he commits suicide, the ultimate act of despair in a Christian culture. He describes that suicide, however, not in theological terms, but as a purgation of the state, as was his killing of the 'turbanned Turk'; and it is Iago, not Othello, who is described as the 'hellish villain' of the piece, a judgement that seems to allow some space for God too to make a distinction between them. That is not an approach encouraged in the more clear-cut world of the moralities. What happens to a character after death might seem as irrelevant as the Bradleian question of their dysfunctional parents; but the tradition of dramatic allegory, as well as Christian habits of mind, made it a matter of pressing concern. Audiences were conditioned by their beliefs and their earlier playgoing to expect it, and playwrights responded accordingly. Kyd devoted the entire last scene of *The Spanish Tragedy* to the Ghost and Revenge's assignment of all the characters to a blissful or infernal afterlife.

The link between *Othello* and morality drama starts much earlier in the play than the final scene. The human subject effectively disappears from Prudentius's *Pyschomachia* while the sins and virtues engage in battle; but plays that present temptation require a subject to be tempted, whose will can be shown inclining one way or the other – hence the rather illogical effect by which someone's psychological attributes can be represented alongside the person himself. The logical problems disappeared as morality drama moved away from personification allegory towards exemplification, so that the Everyman character is tempted by figures who have at least some claim to existence in the world outside his own mind. The same process allowed for more particularity in defining just who or what the central character represented. He no longer needed to be Everyman led astray, but could instead be a named individual, often a historical individual, who exemplified the ethical message of the play. A good many of Shakespeare's characters are given depth and resonance by literary traditions that represented moral

dispositions directly, before they were translated into individuals. He does not give type names to any of his protagonists, but he does have some of them accompanied by minor characters who are assigned names interchangeable with those of morality figures, and who are held back from becoming so only by the limitation of their roles. Katherine of Aragon is given a maid named Patience entirely so that she can exclaim, 'Patience, be near me still!' and urge her, as Everyman does his Knowledge, to stay with her to death (*H8* 4.2.76,165–6). The servant Macbeth calls to arm him before his despairing death is named Seyton, indistinguishable to the listening audience from 'Satan'[16] (Marlowe had prefigured him with naming Edward II's murderer 'Lightborne', a play on 'Lucifer', the light-bearer, and the name given to the second devil of the Chester *Lucifer*). Marcadé, the messenger of death in *Love's Labours Lost* discussed earlier, seems to be borrowed in from the variant name for the *danse macabre*. Historical characters can carry just as strong an exemplary charge as fictional ones, even without the names. Cardinal Wolsey exemplifies Ambition in action; Richard III spells out the same moral before he acts it out, and unlike Wolsey, he does not repent. He casts himself as the deceiver, 'like the formal Vice, Iniquity' (*R3* 3.1.82), and his enthusiasm for his deceptions places him squarely in the tradition of the black humour of the medieval diabolic even while he is fully represented as an individual. Edmund and Falstaff (whether as Falstaff or the original Oldcastle) may not be announced as vice figures so overtly as the characters who carry type names, but in very different ways they put into practice a comparable process of representing dispositions of the mind in fully incarnated dramatic form.

In plays of this kind, good and bad angels no longer need to be represented as such: they can be people rather than principles. *Othello*, *All's Well that Ends Well* and the *Henry IV* plays replicate such a structure, with the protagonist being pulled in two directions that will decide the action of the play and, in *Othello* in particular, the fate of his soul. The imagery of black and white, darkness and light, that pervades *Othello* is now read primarily in terms of ethnic otherness, and that is both explicit and important; but darkness and light were principally associated with hell and heaven, which likewise figure large in the language and imagery of the play. Desdemona is in effect Othello's good angel, Iago explicitly

and consciously the corrupting devil disguised as good (2.3.340–2), and his fate and the fate of his soul depend on which he chooses to follow. Race enters the play as the ironic third term, by which the upright and noble black man is deceived into acting the black villain. Desdemona speaks of seeing Othello's visage in his mind, in colour-blind but ethically alert love. Iago sees black, in both senses, and determines that he will make everyone else, Othello included, see it too. The play is more subtle than much morality drama, however, in that the driving force of the action is not so much ethical choice or a yielding to temptation as 'discernment of spirits', the long-acknowledged difficulty of recognizing the devil when he claims to be honest.

All's Well that Ends Well likewise employs a morality structure, though it plays out rather differently. The 'good angel' figure here, who has the potential to redeem the immature young man from a superficial life of rather unimpressive violence and casual sex, is once again a woman who loves him, Helena; the Vice figure leading him astray is his companion-in-arms Parolles, the man who is all words (*paroles*) and no deeds. Bertram, the young nobleman in question, should by all precedents be converted to the true way when his other martial companions show up Parolles for the empty swaggerer he is and get Bertram to cast him off, but Bertram shows no signs of ethical enlightenment as a consequence. He continues with his attempts to seduce Diana and to ignore his wife; and even though the end of the play forces him back into her arms, it is notoriously far from clear that he has learned anything. In this play, the morality structure is tested against fallible human nature, personifications against people, and found wanting.

In the *Henry IV* plays, the Prince is the figure in the middle: a young man pulled between the temptations of a figure who combines all the qualities of Riot, Gluttony, Lechery and the Flesh in general, and austere authority figures representing mature government, the King in *Part 1*, the Lord Chief Justice in *Part 2*. The basic conception was thoroughly familiar, though its association with a kind of drama passing out of fashion gives it additional appropriateness to a play set in the past. The loss of so many of the morality texts makes Shakespeare's specific knowledge unrecoverable, but one of the best known, as witnessed by its five printed editions down to 1562, was *Youth*: this has its eponymous

protagonist led astray from Charity by Riot, who steals purses in order to pay for his time in the tavern, and his sidekick Pride. It includes a scene in which Charity is set in the stocks, in an episode already proverbial, and which may be echoed in the loyal Kent's being put in the stocks in *King Lear*.[17] The ruler or future ruler had moreover for long come a close second to the everyman figure as the protagonist of moral interludes, as a means by which generic good advice could be offered to the monarch without the dramatist's too obviously criticizing the individual. Falstaff's role as the Vice is one of which the plays are fully conscious – indeed there are moments when he is conscious of it himself, as when he threatens to chase Hal out of the kingdom with the Vice's standard property, a dagger of lath (*1H4* 2.4.135). Hal describes him, in the scene in which he is acting his father, as 'a devil that haunts thee . . . that reverend vice, that grey iniquity . . . that villainous abominable misleader of youth' (2.4.442, 447–8, 456). The Lord Chief Justice accuses him of following the Prince 'up and down, like his ill angel' (*2H4* 1.2.163–4). Falstaff has, however, no demonic privileged knowledge. His main reaction, on hearing of the old king's death, is 'Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice!' (5.3.137–8). The first sign of the new regime in action is the arrest of Doll Tearsheet (another type name, for a whore); and when Falstaff shouts to the new king to acknowledge him, it is the Lord Chief Justice whom he selects to rebuke him and the 'vanity' that he represents: 'My Lord Chief Justice, speak to that vain man' (5.5.44). His conversion is as explicit as those of the moralities:

> I have turned away my former self;
> So will I those that kept me company.
> (5.5.58–9)

The reformation is presented here as political rather than theological, but when it is reprised in the opening scene of *Henry V*, in the mouth of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the emphasis has shifted towards the spiritual redemption of the wild 'courses of his youth' on his father's death:

> Consideration like an angel came
> And whipped th'offending Adam out of him,
> Leaving his body as a paradise
> T'envelop and contain celestial spirits.
> (*H5* 1.1.28–31)

This is not, however, quite the reformation that the protagonists of the moralities undergo. Henry V is much too good a politician for that, and does not reform at anyone's will other than his own.

The ethics of the *Henry IV* plays none the less resist transparency, those of *Henry V* even less so. Some of these dualities are predictable, and recall core elements of the morality traditions. Falstaff, for instance, insists that what he represents is not riot or gluttony but good fellowship (e.g. *1H4* 1.2.136–7), in keeping with the practice of morality vices to rename themselves: Gluttony, in Henry Medwall's *Nature*, offers just such a new identity for himself. Falstaff does something similar after his attempted highway robbery, when he declares that he ran away not out of cowardice but because of the instinct that enabled him to recognize the true prince (and the exponentially inflating description of his valorous deeds has a close morality precedent too, in Sensual Appetite's comparable boasting of his non-existent military prowess in John Rastell's *The Four Elements*).[18] Calling the vice by the nearest virtue – the rhetorical figure of paradiastole, originally designed as a forensic device for lawyers to claim a better character for their clients than they deserved – was thoroughly familiar in both satire and allegory. Vice figures in dramatic and non-dramatic allegories regularly dress up as something other than what they are, giving themselves a false disguise and a false name. The vice–virtue polarities of the *Faerie Queene* regularly confuse the protagonists by the intrusion of a third term, the vice disguised as a virtue: Duessa, a figure for the Catholic Church, presents herself as Fidessa, true faith, and similar deceptions drive many of the epic's various plot-lines. In Skelton's *Magnificence*, the chief vice's 'real' name is Counterfeit Countenance, and he accordingly leads the other vices in assuming false identities in order to mislead the young king. Iago, with his claim to be 'honest Iago', exemplifies this tradition in *Othello*; but the two parts of *Henry IV* play it very differently. Falstaff himself is fully alert

to the device, and accuses the Lord Chief Justice of employing its twin, calling the virtue by the nearest vice, against himself: 'You call honourable boldness impudent sauciness' (*2H4* 2.1.123–4). Throughout these plays, though, the primary figure who is deceived, misled, is the Vice figure himself: Hal is the deceiver, Falstaff ultimately his victim. The very first scene in which they appear (*1H4* 1.2) makes their relationship clear. The Prince is not the 'sweet wag' Falstaff would have him, but the sun that allows the clouds to 'smother up' – the moralities would have used the more loaded 'cloak' – his true nature from the world until he 'please again to be himself' (1.2.194–5). Falstaff's most deliberate act of counterfeiting is simply playing dead at the battle of Shrewsbury, and although that does briefly deceive Hal, the confusion is trivial compared with the Prince's stringing Falstaff along towards the final rejection. At the end of *Youth*, Riot claims to be deeply shocked when Youth abandons him – 'I wende he wolde not forsake me' (737) – but as a personification rather than a person he has alternative places to go. Falstaff remains convinced that the new King cannot mean to cast him off until he is ordered off to the Fleet prison by the Lord Chief Justice, and when we next hear of him, in the account of his deathbed in *Henry V*, it is to be told that 'The King has killed his heart' (2.1.87). He has what ought to be the archetypal bad death, being persuaded not to think of dying, calling out for sack and (perhaps) women, for which he was afraid the devils would get him; but it would be hard to disagree with Mistress Quickly's summary, 'Nay, sure, he's not in hell; he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom' (2.3.9–10), and not solely because it is not at all clear what one would be disagreeing with.

DUMBSHOWS, EMBLEMS AND ALLEGORICAL ACTION

Allegory was for many years deeply unfashionable as an interpretative key to early-modern drama: it was seen indeed as belonging quintessentially to the barbaric Middle Ages. It has, however, made a comeback in New Historicist criticism, with its impulse to read all literature in terms of specific political allusion. The habits of thought inculcated by the patterns of moral allegory suggest a rather different

angle: that texts present, in the favourite metaphor of the age, a mirror of political or ethical action that reflects more than the individual moment or person. One-to-one meanings can be inferred by readers or audiences, but unless an author makes it very clear what those are, they may well not have been specifically intended. John Bale was exceptionally overt in his *King Johan* (mid-1530s but with revisions into the reign of Elizabeth), in which John's clash with the papacy is rewritten as turning on all the issues of Henrician ecclesiastical politics: preaching the Gospel, the obfuscatory use of Latin, the corruption of the religious orders and the right of the monarch to be head of the national church. Personification allows Bale to write about both reigns at once: Sedition takes on the persona of Stephen Langton, John's Archbishop of Canterbury, and then claims the name of Good Perfection, a name and disguise that allows for other contemporary prelates to be dropped into the same slot. It was much more common, however, for plays to keep to generalized political or ethical principles that can be read off in whatever individual circumstances might prove relevant, rather as emblems did visually. Emblems typically consist of a picture, a summary motto and an explanatory verse: a picture of Phaëton falling from the sky, for instance, is headed 'In temerarios', 'on the over-bold', and interpreted as retribution for overreaching, for ambition or the abuse of power, for readers to make what specific application they will.[19] Books of such emblems appeared in large numbers in both continental Europe and England from the mid-sixteenth century, they were reproduced in paintings and carvings, and imitated on title-pages and in pageants and plays. The habits of thinking they represented, that gave visual substance to abstract concepts that were at once generalizing, ethical and allegorical, were carried directly forward from the Middle Ages. Street pageants and tableaux had long drawn on an established set of such images, such as the well-governed state as a well-ordered garden; and the dumbshows of early-modern drama were likewise used as emblematic mirrors of meaning.[20]

Plays thus had various established techniques by which they could serve as models in which the spectators could see themselves, from the fully allegorical to the apparently fully literal. Dumbshows themselves started as fully allegorical, but they rapidly came to occupy a position

somewhere between emblematic pageant and literal action. In the anonymous *Warning for Fair Women*, printed in 1599 but probably written early in the decade, a wife's attempts to get her husband murdered by her lover are represented both in the action and in a dumbshow presented by the figure of Tragedy.[21] Here, the attempts of a personified Lust to bring together the literal characters of the wife and the lover are thwarted by the appearance of an allegorical tree, representing the husband, which Lust incites the lover to cut down. As the lovers embrace, a dishevelled Chastity appears and incites the wife to repent by showing her her husband's picture (in a foreshadowing of Gertrude). The play thus conflates the 'tragedy of blood' with the morality tradition;[22] but a literal dumbshow was not required for a play to make the same effect. The widespread stories of spectators confessing to murders when they saw equivalent actions played on stage work from such a method of reading from the general moral pattern to the specific instance: the evil of the murder stirs the conscience of an undetected criminal so much that they confess what they have done, without there being any need for allegorical input. A dramatization of the medieval *Four Sons of Aymon* played by 'our English comedians' in Amsterdam reputedly incited a woman to confess to the murder of her husband when she saw the hero Renaldo likewise murdered by having a nail driven into his skull.[23] *The Murder of Gonzago* in *Hamlet* takes this one step further: as Hamlet intends, it stirs Claudius's conscience, but the re-enactment of the killing, with the murderer pouring poison into his victim's ears, also informs the king that Hamlet knows much more about it than he should. The exemplary here spills over into the literal; but that Claudius's first reaction is not the disposal of Hamlet but an attempt at prayer, in which he recognizes his 'brother's murder' as a repetition of Cain's primal act of fratricide (3.3.36–8), indicates how forcefully the Christian ethical pattern is operating.

A familiarity with analogical and allegorical ways of thinking such as had gone hand-in-hand with Catholicism was still very much alive, even within humanist areas of activity. Habits of allegorizing of the kind we associate with scholasticism are at the forefront of George Sandys' 1632 translation of Ovid, with its generous moralizing commentary in the best medieval tradition.[24] Senecan drama was often provided with some of

the visual colour lacking in its unremitting oratory by the addition of dumbshows: Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta*, of 1566, for instance, opens with a pageant of Ambition represented by a king drawn in a chariot by four defeated kings, and Marlowe makes it a literal part of the action with the 'pamper'd jades of Asia' of *Tamburlaine*. Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561–2) precedes each act (and hugely magnifies the number of actors it required, no doubt much appreciated by the young men of the Inner Temple who got to act in it before the Queen) with an emblematic dumbshow presenting the meaning of what is to follow.

Familiarity with such ways of thinking, however, does not mean that the meanings were always clear to spectators or readers: hence indeed the need for Sandys to provide the commentary to his Ovid, or for emblems to be accompanied by explanatory verses. The printed records of processions, shows and royal entries regularly provided explications of the meanings of the various pageants, in a way that suggests anxiety that appearance alone might not be enough to make the messages plain. Elizabeth, at her coronation procession, took some care to ask for explanations even though the meanings now appear transparent. *Gorboduc* spells out the exact message of its dumbshows in a gloss in the printed text, but the spectators were given more limited help – at most, an undetailed tying up of each act's opening dumbshow with the ensuing section of plot in its concluding chorus. The play shows its anxiety to get across its political message (essentially, to persuade the young Elizabeth of the dangers of failing to provide or identify an heir for the throne) by hammering it home in every medium on offer in both performance and print. The opening dumbshow shows a group of wild men able to break a bundle of sticks only when they are separated, spelled out in the gloss as meaning that 'a state knit in unitie doth continue strong against all force. But being divided, is easely destroyed.'[25] The plot likewise encourages Elizabeth to use as a mirror the political situation it presents, of the civil war that ensues when the British king Gorboduc proposes to divide the inheritance of the kingdom between his two sons: the play shows her the risks of a divided kingdom, regardless of the particular circumstances, and invites her to apply that to her own England. The last speech of the play comes as close to explicitness as

political instruction dared, as the good counsellor notes that Gorboduc's trouble could have been resolved by Parliament's agreeing a rightful heir. The dangers of division were a commonplace of political thought that transcended any single historical moment – indeed *Gorboduc* was reprinted in 1590 together with *The Serpent of Division*, Lydgate's early fifteenth-century treatise on the same dangers which used Julius Caesar as its mirror – but that made the urgency of the message all the greater. Shakespeare was building both on a universal political principle as well as a dramatic tradition in the first scene of *Lear*, where the phrase 'division of the kingdom' occurs within five seconds of the play's start, and its enactment is accompanied by a full audience knowledge of the terrible consequences that will follow. Lear's division of his kingdom is in effect an emblematic dumbshow become literal.

The later history of dumbshows divides into two traditions. Its allegorical and emblematic qualities are elaborated and extended in the masque; on the stage, they tend to move towards the literal. The use of a dumbshow solely to mime the action to follow, as in *The Murder of Gonzago* in *Hamlet*, was unusual; it was more common to summarize key parts of a long plot in dumbshow form. This happens with the recall of the exiled hero to Tyre in *Pericles*, though the accompanying words simultaneously explain its action in case the spectators could not follow the mime alone, 'What's dumb in show I'll plain with speech' (chorus to Act 3, 14). The dumbshow can also turn into a kind of masque or play-within-the-play staged by the characters themselves, in a formal self-reflexive performance that meshes with the literal action. Kyd has his revengers literally murder his villains in the course of a revenge masque in *The Spanish Tragedy*. At the end of *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora plans something similar, as she disguises herself as Revenge and her sons as Rape and Murder, with the intention of convincing Titus they are not mere actors but the real thing – which, in embodied terms, they are. In a moral interlude they might well have been presented as full personifications; and Kyd had cast Revenge as the presenter of his *Spanish Tragedy*, presiding over the whole action. The masque of Revenge here, however, becomes part of the main plot, as Titus turns it against its actors to exact his own terrible revenge.

As that example indicates, if Shakespeare does not write allegory, he

does not quite not write it either. The question of how far his plays that take more overtly literal form might be read allegorically, and in particular how far they were intended as political allegories, has been one of the preoccupations of recent criticism, but they were clearly not designed for overt double meaning as Bale's *King Johan* was. He could none the less draw on moral principles to give additional force to actions designed to be read as exemplary as well as literal – in which the spectators could look at the action, or at any mirror-reflection it might have in their own world. *Cymbeline*, for instance, often read as a compliment to James I in his role as would-be *rex pacificus*, never suggests that its king might be an allegory of the real one; it is rather that the peace made at the end of the play and associated with the birth of Christ, an event that occurred during Cymbeline's rule, goes back to principles that lie beyond the action of the play, and therefore carried the potential for interpretation by James and other members of the audience as a reflection of royal policies if they chose to make the connection. Whether they did so is impossible to know, in the absence of any attempt to spell out such a message in the way the pageants and plays directly aimed at Elizabeth had done. The notorious instance of the commissioning of a performance of (probably) *Richard II* by the earl of Essex's followers on the eve of his rebellion demonstrates how dangerous such parallels might be perceived to be. It would be a perverse reading of the play to see it as any straightforward incitement to depose a monarch – the whole of Shakespeare's two tetralogies dwell on its dire consequences – but it does present a pattern of political crisis in which such possibilities can be read. More typical of political allegory is the scene in which the royal gardeners make the safely conventional comparison between the failure of good government with allowing a garden to run wild:

> O, what pity is it
> That he had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land
> As we this garden!
>
> (*R2* 3.4.55–7)

Shakespeare's gardeners are literal, but he creates them for the sake of the mini-allegory they express (the action barely requires the Queen at

all, still less that she should hear of events in the larger world like this). Like the emblem or the dumbshow, however, the scene still has the potential to be read in terms of a political situation that repeats itself throughout time, whether that of Richard II or Elizabeth or any sovereign state. Analogy may seem a more clumsy way to represent the 'universal' than Aristotle's *Poetics* implies; but it did not seem so in the Elizabethan age, and it enabled Shakespeare and his contemporaries to give expression to significances that are much more difficult for modern writers to convey.

THREE TYPES: KING, SHEPHERD AND FOOL

Social as well as moral types could bring symbolic and ethical resonances with them from their medieval forebears, and three in particular are important in Shakespeare: the king, the shepherd and the fool. It is almost impossible for a literary king or shepherd not to be exemplary, for better or for worse. All three, too, emerge out of the medieval interest in the role or the group before the named individual: in the king or the knight-errant, the heiress or the priest, the guildsman or the churl or the sinner, rather than in Tom or Jane. A high proportion of the population was immediately identifiable in such group terms, by their clothing or the badge of their trade or affiliation, just as with a dog-collar or a police uniform now. Monarchs had to be more magnificently dressed than their subjects, a practice Elizabeth fulfilled with conviction; the shepherd was identified by his pouch, staff or crook, and distinctive all-weather hat; and the fool's motley had appeared by the mid-thirteenth century. Sumptuary laws that laid down what people of various social ranks or different levels of income might wear were first enacted in the fourteenth century and were still being repeated in the sixteenth, their continual re-enactments testifying not only to changing fashions but to the fact that they were extensively flouted. Habits of misbehaviour that were an irritation for the lawmakers were by contrast an opportunity for writers. Transgressions are much easier to recognize when the approved standards of behaviour for each group are clearly laid down, and authors can draw character faster and more tellingly by the way an individual does or does not obey the rules. The individuality implied by

naming may be an added extra, but it is not often the point of departure. Chaucer never names his Pardoner, and buries his one mention of the Wife of Bath's name deep within her Prologue: it is her identity as a wife in the full misogamist tradition, and how she fills that out, that matters. The same principle applies to Claudius, who is never named in the spoken text of *Hamlet*, nor at all in the first quarto print. Audiences know him as the king who has murdered his brother and married his widow, and that is more than enough to provide a baseline for response.

The role of the king was inherently symbolic, off the stage as on it. Although rule by a single monarch was the default polity of most cultures, so far as western Europe was concerned the role had effectively been re-invented following the fall of the Roman Empire. The ceremony of coronation was designed to set the king apart from everyone else in his realm: the anointing, introduced into England in the tenth century in imitation of the anointing of Saul and David, was an act of consecration that turned rebellion from an act of political resistance into a sin against God. That special quality of kingship should, from the sovereign's point of view, have made government straightforward, and especially when it was endorsed by oaths of homage and the new principles of primogeniture that became the norm in England from the early thirteenth century, and which laid down that there could only be one rightful heir. In practice, in the Middle Ages and the early-modern period, it made such issues of what to do about a bad or incompetent king, or whether the king was above the law or its servant, much more intractable. The English history dramatized by Shakespeare sets those requirements of the office at odds with its holders in various ways; but the kings of Elizabethan drama are also all exemplars of types of kingship. Richard III and Macbeth are marked as tyrants, kings who abuse their power to set themselves above the law, to govern without regard for their subjects, and their recognizability on stage relies in part on the familiarity of earlier semi-morality figures such as Cambyses. Shakespeare can do so much more with Macbeth than just present him as a power-grabbing tyrant partly because he can rely on the underlying ethical and political type being known. It was the mark of a good monarch to listen to advice, but the arbitrary exercise of royal power may be impossible to stop, just as good advisers are unable to prevent the folly of Lear or Leontes. Every

one of the English kings of the histories can be defined in terms of their relationship to their role in ways that precede their personalities. King John and Henry IV are kings of doubtful legitimacy, and the action of their plays is driven by that doubt. Richard II is a true king so convinced of his divine endorsement that he neglects the duties and responsibilities that go with the role. Henry VI exemplifies the difference between being a good man and a good king, and the impossible situation that results. Henry V looks as if he is the good king *par excellence*, but he maintains that appearance by a conscious Machiavellianism so finely honed that even in this cynical age it is possible to present him on stage as perfect, whatever we see going on in the background. 'King', rather than person or character, is in every case the axis around which the various manifestations of kingship arrange themselves.

It might seem a big jump to go from king to shepherd, but it was not so for Shakespeare or his audiences. 'Pastoral' literature in the sixteenth century meant literature that took the shepherd world as a metaphor for the real one: it had not yet acquired its modern more generalized meaning of rural poetry. We tend to think of the literary shepherd in Classical terms derived from Virgil's *Eclogues*, where the shepherds are mostly poets or pining lovers and have rather little to do with any practical care of the sheep. The difference between Classical and Elizabethan pastoral, however, as with so much else in the culture, lay in what had happened in the intervening centuries. The Middle Ages had propounded a different image of the shepherd that derived partly from the practice of sheepkeeping and partly from the Bible, and Renaissance poets combined the Virgilian pattern of writing the shepherd world with this much more realistic, and ethically oriented, tradition.[26] The medieval type of shepherd was above all a figure for responsibility: for the care of his flock, whether that stood for real sheep, the king's subjects, or the Christian community committed to the charge of an individual priest or prelate. 'Keep my sheep' had been Christ's injunction to Peter, and Christian priests had been denominated as pastors, shepherds, ever since. The metaphorical use of the shepherd world had become a specialized subsection of moral allegory; to introduce a shepherd into a poem or play or narrative was to bring in a whole raft of expectations of meanings beyond the literal. The 'good shepherd' in the

Christian tradition did, however, have his goodness defined through the mirror of the literal shepherd. He not only had to lead, watch and feed his flock, but heal scab and foot-rot, and shear rather than fleece them. Far from enjoying unbroken Mediterranean sunshine, the English shepherd had to be out in all weathers, and day and night; his goodness was indeed often measured by the amount of hardship he endured. Rather less literally, he also had to protect his sheep from wolves. Wolves had in fact been eradicated from England several centuries earlier, but the metaphorical possibilities of the idea (especially when they came wrapped in sheep's clothing, Matthew 7.15) were much too useful in Reformation ecclesiastical polemic to ignore. Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* of 1579 demonstrates the range of such allusiveness, where the shepherd can represent the herdsman, the poet, the lover, the good or bad pastor, the sovereign. The ethical grounding also encouraged another role for him, as a type of contentment, of sufficiency free of the ambition, deceit and danger associated with the city or the court. The same principle governed an alteration in the role of the shepherd as lover. Although sheepkeeping was a male job in England and the lack of shepherdesses had prevented the development of love-pastoral in Middle English, medieval French developed a rival model both to Virgil's unrequited (and often homoerotic) lovers and to courtly and Petrarchan representations of frustrated desire, to show the love between shepherd and shepherdess as both fulfilled and faithful. It was an image the Elizabethans took up with enthusiasm, in combination with the simplicity of language associated with the country, plain 'faith and troth' against the elaborate false speaking of the courtier. By contrast, the naturalistic basis for the tradition also allowed room for a very different exemplary role for the shepherd: as suffering common man, himself the victim of misgovernment or war – a role that can overlap with the metaphorical sheep.

As with the king, or the concept of Nature, there was an assumption that the normative interpretation of the shepherd was the ideal one, everything else an aberration; but as with the king or Nature, the awareness of the ideal made divergences from it all the more telling. The ravaging of the pastoral landscape by marauding armies, as is represented in a number of fifteenth-century French morality plays and

by contrast with England in some of the panegyrics addressed to Elizabeth, is a betrayal of the inherent peace and happiness that ought to characterize the shepherd world. One of the major forms taken by pastoral in both the Middle Ages and the early modern period was as satire or social commentary, which showed the failure of the ruler or the pastor or the Pope to live up to the standard demanded by the Good Shepherd Christ. Shakespeare, in keeping with the secular tenor of the public theatre, goes more for the secular shepherd than for the theological one, but his shepherds, whether they are present on stage or just invoked in speech, show the same wide consciousness of metaphorical possibility. The wolves who attack the shepherdless lamb Henry VI, 'gnarling who shall gnaw thee first', are led by Cardinal Beaufort, but with a transference of the metaphor from his ecclesiastical to his political role (*2H6* 3.1.191–2). Henry VI himself speaks the longest account Shakespeare gives of a shepherd's life, while he sits out the battle of Towton away from the battlefield – a context that would be rather surprising for such a speech if it were not for this background. For over thirty lines (*3H6* 2.5.21–54), he describes how the shepherd counts time through the days by the alternating employments of tending his flock, resting, contemplating (another biblical quality, deriving both from the interpretation of the shepherd Abel as the type of the contemplative life, and from the Nativity shepherds' watching of the heavens), and in pastimes (an occupation that was itself becoming politically loaded in the late sixteenth century, with the Puritan opposition to all such things), until the years pass away 'to the end they were created . . . a quiet grave'. Shepherds may have poor food, 'homely curds, / His cold thin drink', but they carry no fear of poison; sleeping on the ground is better than the king's 'curious bed, / Where Care, Mistrust, and Treason waits on him' (*3H6* 2.5.53–4). What he does not realize is how far, as king, he carries responsibility for the breakdown of government – how far the failure of good shepherding is his own – though the action brings it home to the audience immediately. There enter respectively a son who has killed his father, and a father who has killed his son: emblems of the evils of civil war. Henry recognizes them as 'poor harmless lambs', victims of the aristocratic lions (74–5), but he is incapable of doing anything about it except to lament.

Shakespeare's two plays with a strong pastoral element, *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale*, take up different possibilities within the metaphor of the shepherd world. *As You Like It* speaks of the Forest of Arden as a 'golden world', a phrase that recalls the mythological Age of Gold that was taken as the pagan analogue to unfallen Eden, but brings that closer to home by comparing it with the carefree life of 'the old Robin Hood of England' (1.1.113–15). Close up, Arden is not so good. Even the banished Duke, in his first speech describing the superiority of life in the forest to life at court, admits that the 'icy fang' of the winter's wind has taken some getting used to ('old custom', 2.1.6, 2). The old shepherd Corin offers an archetypal formulation of contentment: 'I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness; glad of other men's good, content with my harm; and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck' (3.2.70–4). He is, however, about to be thrown out of his house and his occupation by a harsh landlord, and he is saved only when Celia buys it. Touchstone remains resolutely unimpressed by the shepherd life; and the aristocrats are all happy enough to abandon it as soon as they can resume their lives at court in safety. The most significant of the pairs of lovers in the play, Rosalind and Orlando and Celia and Oliver, may not be real shepherds, but they are at least able to find faithful love in Arden. It is left to Touchstone to point out the flaw at the basis of pastoral love-poetry: when Audrey asks him whether 'poetical' is 'a true thing', his reply, that 'the truest poetry is the most feigning', acknowledges the distance from real life opened up by the poetic imagination (3.3.16–19). The play provides in miniature a conspectus of the whole range of more-or-less literal inhabitants of the shepherd world available to Elizabethan culture, from the exiled aristocrat to the goatherd Audrey, the art-shepherd Silvius who pines for unrequited love in blank verse to the almost totally inarticulate William – for yet another of the roles of the shepherd was as the ignorant yokel, the uneducated clown or country bumpkin. The choice of names divides them out: Audrey and William home-grown English; Silvius and Phoebe Classical-Italianate and unrealistic. Even *The Winter's Tale*, whose fourth act becomes a magnificent symbolic counter to the broken world of the court, a place where 'great creating Nature' can be represented in the shepherdess-princess Perdita, has its home-grown denizens too ignorant

to notice the *doubles entrendres* of Autolycus's ballads, and too innocent not to fall prey to his wiles.

The closeness of innocence to ignorance, of the absence of worldly wisdom to outright folly, is an idea developed in a further type figure that Shakespeare deploys: the fool. His ancestry, like the shepherd's, is both multiple and contradictory. Buffoons figure in many cultures, including the ancient world, and they figure regularly in Classical comedy, but they are a rather different phenomenon from the English fool, and Elizabethan England knew of fools in the first instance as a long-standing element of their own culture. The folly could be real: the well-off sometimes kept someone mentally deficient as an act of charity and a source of laughter, the two not being regarded as mutually exclusive. The remarkable mimetic ability of some Down's syndrome sufferers may have played a part in the practice too, blurring the common distinction between a natural and a court or professional fool. The professional fool or jester, the equivalent of the stand-up comedian (and, like the comedian, often able to sing as well as crack jokes, as Feste does), had had a place at the English court at least since the Norman Conquest. Henry VIII's Will Somers and the Elizabethan player Richard Tarleton had a long and distinguished ancestry.[27] At the other extreme from court employment was the fool of morris dances and folk revels, though the two sorts are more closely linked than is often assumed: morris dances first seem to have become popular among Europe's elite in the late fifteenth century, and spread down from there to the popular level.[28] Contradictions in the possible roles for the fool go back to the Bible, where he is characterized in Psalms 14 and 53 as the man who denies God in his heart, but by St Paul (I Cor. 4.10) as the holy fool who rejects the sophisticated wisdom of the world for the wisdom of God. Fools are not, however, divided into good and bad in the way shepherds are. Above all, they represent humanity: man as he would prefer not to see himself.

The Fool of *King Lear* embodies this quality most powerfully. Most of Shakespeare's fools (as distinct from his clowns, the bumpkins or yokels) are of the professional variety, but the role of Lear's fool is inflected to embrace a much wider range of possibilities, which vary slightly between the Quarto and Folio versions of the text. He needs Lear's care, in a way that suggests vulnerability; his loyalty to the King goes against all worldly

wisdom, however aware he shows himself to be of what that wisdom should comprise. Above all, however, he is given a quality that had marked his medieval forebears, of speaking truth to power. Kings were notoriously reluctant to listen to counsel, and going back on a bad decision could bring with it the problem of losing face or appearing weak. The solution lay in angels, and in fools: figures dissociated from the normal processes of consultation and government.[29] No king could be blamed for following angelic advice: indeed, being instructed by an angel suggested that he had a hot line to God, in a way that enhanced his reputation. And the very fact that a fool's advice, by definition, was the inverse of the normal exercise of reason left the king's own wisdom unimpeached. Lear, however, does not have wisdom. That 'fool' is the one title he was born with (1.4.142) drives much of the exemplary force of the play. Kings in morality plays were regularly seduced into folly by Vice figures who combined buffoonery with evil; Lear provides his own seduction, but he is no less exemplary, for all that his primary quality as an individual man is made so explicit. Folly had itself long been recognized as a characteristic of all humanity. Sebastian Brant's generously illustrated *Ship of Fools* and Alexander Barclay's English translation of it (1494, 1509), with its title page of all conditions of men dressed in motley and crowded into unstable ships, belonged in a tradition of satirizing folly going back to Nigel Wireker's late twelfth-century *Mirror of Fools* and beyond. Folly can reach towards its own wisdom in *As You Like It*, a play that is the inverse of *Lear* in its soft-pastoral alternative world and its lasting reconciliation of father with daughter and brother with brother; but *Lear*'s tragic replay of the same thing brings consequences that are wholly destructive. Cordelia may have the absence of pragmatic sense such as marks the holy fool, and the emblematic 'trial scene' between the mad king, the fool and the lunatic may get closer to the heart of good government than anything in the main action; but folly here cannot be integrated into a world of power and self-interest. The disturbance of the cosmos may give full recognition to the greatness of Lear's status, but the unheroic figure of the fool reminds him of the universal condition of humanity.

Chapter Five

THE WORLD OF FORTUNE

All Tragedies are fled from State, to Stage.
(Thomas Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur*)[1]

Tragedy, for the late-medieval and early-modern period, was too important to be consigned to the stage alone. Tragedy also described the real world of history, of high politics: a world in which holding the height of power was all but synonymous with downfall. That pattern evident in events encouraged writers to regard tragedy not just as an imitation of tragic action, but as the tragic action itself that took a shape ready-fitted for dramatization. When a character on the Elizabethan stage refers, as they not infrequently do, to their life as a tragedy, they mean just that: that the events of their lives predict a known literary model. When Queen Isabella, in Marlowe's *Edward II*, declares to her lover as they are arrested after the overthrow and murder of her husband, 'Now, *Mortimer*, begins our tragedy' (5.6.23), the audience is being invited to see, not so much life in terms of a pattern established in literature, but that the shapes of literature are first of all present in life, awaiting such moments of recognition. Shakespeare's uses of 'tragedy' in a number of his early plays are comparably self-referential, insisting that a tragedy in the first instance is not a dramatic genre but a real event that invites a later acting out for the benefit of spectators. In *Henry VI Part 3*, Warwick rails against the martial inaction of the Yorkists, who

look upon, as if the tragedy
Were played in jest by counterfeiting actors;
(2.3.27–8)

and Hastings expresses the ironic hope, just before his own arrest, that he will 'live to look upon [the] tragedy' of his own political enemies (*R3*, 3.2.58). Francis Bacon, writing in 1601, recognizes the same equation, though by this date he gives priority to the theatre: he describes the conspirator who helped to arrange the staging of a play on the deposition of Richard II, probably Shakespeare's, ahead of Essex's unsuccessful rebellion, as being 'so earnest . . . to satisfie his eyes with the sight of that tragedie which hee thought soone after his lord should bring from the stage to the state'.[2]

The equation of tragedy with theatre was something of an innovation. The connection between tragedy and the stage that had been implicit in the Greek term was lost over the course of the Middle Ages. Greek tragedy was for long unknown in the West, and the familiar Latin Seneca was thought of primarily in terms of rhetoric rather than performance. Aristotle's *Poetics* was not rediscovered until around 1500, and the only version available in the Middle Ages was a Latin translation of Averroes' Arabic commentary, itself composed in a culture that had no theatre at all. Tragedy in Averroes' interpretation meant poetry of blame, comedy poetry of praise. The pairing of tragedy and comedy as a rather different pair of opposites, though still without any necessary connection with the stage, had been most succinctly transmitted to the Renaissance by the widely disseminated Latin grammarian and commentator Donatus, as quoted by Thomas Heywood in his *Apology for Actors* together with his own neat translation: 'In Comedies, turbulenta prima, tranquilla ultima, In Tragedyes, tranquilla prima, turbulenta ultima, Comedies begin in trouble, and end in peace; Tragedies begin in calmes, and end in tempest.'[3] The earliest English formulation of the same antityping of comedy and tragedy in terms of happy and sad endings was Chaucer's wish that after writing the 'tragedie' of *Troilus and Criseyde* he might compose 'some comedie' (V.1786–8). These are almost the first usages of the words in English, and set the norm in England for the pairing of the terms as antonyms. The same contrasting pairing dominated Shakespeare's own treatments of comedy and tragedy, and not least of the plays that mix the two forms. Political tragedy, however, was where he began.

THE FALLS OF GREAT MEN

In the mid-fourteenth century, a Latin prose work appeared in Italy that set the pattern for most tragedy down to 1600. It did so by example rather than precept: indeed, it never applies the term *tragedia* to itself or its own workings, though it was known as such within a few years of its appearance. This was Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, 'of the falls' (or, alternatively and significantly, 'of exemplary stories') 'of great men'. The work consists of a compilation of non-dramatic tragedies in the form of first-person narratives, told by the ghosts of the people concerned, of the disasters that befall the great – almost all male, and almost all in some way wicked – that hurl them from the top of Fortune's wheel, and that serve as a warning to those of the present.

Fortune, complete with wheel, had first appeared on stage in the thirteenth century, in Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de la Feuillée*;[4] but Chaucer was the first person to introduce Boccaccio's model of narrative tragedy instigated by Fortune to England. He derived his understanding of the term *tragedia* in part from a late Classical source widely known in the medieval and early modern world: the *Consolation of Philosophy* of the early-sixth-century writer Boethius, familiar to the Elizabethans both in Latin and in prints of Chaucer's translation. The Queen herself translated the work at a difficult political time in 1593, and she was not the first monarch to do so: an Old English version had been produced by King Alfred, or at least under his name and auspices. The argument of the *Consolation*, expressed by a personified Philosophy rather than any explicitly Christian figure, is that Fortune is always ultimately part of God's providential scheme for good, and so the virtuous man (represented by a despairing prisoner figuring Boethius himself, then under sentence of death) should always look beyond earthly Fortune to eternal Providence. Boethius, unlike Chaucer, was still in contact with a living Classical dramatic tradition, and at one point his Philosophy asks rhetorically, 'What other thynge bywaylen the cryinges of tragedyes but oonly the dedes of Fortune, that with an unwar strook overturneth the realmes of greet nobleye?'[5] Such a formula lays particularly strong emphasis on tragedy as tragedy of state, the overturning of realms. Elizabeth's own translation of the lines was rather coy, an apparent self-censorship that downgrades the overthrow of the state to a change away

from happiness: 'What does Tragedies clamour more bewayle, than amain turning happy Raigne by blynde fortunes stroke?'[6] There was no possibility, however, of her containing any political danger by such bowdlerization: the horse had been out of the stable and running free for centuries already.

Despite, or because of, the absence in Boethius's formulation of any explicit mention of the stage, it helped to open the way to the whole tradition of narrative tragedies that fed directly into Elizabethan ideas of the genre. Boccaccio's *De casibus* follows Boethius in making Fortune the central character for the entire genre, though he made her much more of a retributive than a random actor. Chaucer produced a similar mini-compilation in his *Monk's Tale* (itself headed 'de casibus virorum illustrium' in some manuscripts), and prefaced it with an explanation of 'tragedy' as a generic term for the benefit of his anglophone audience:

> Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
> As olde bookes maken us memorie,
> Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
> And is yfallen out of heigh degree
> Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly . . .
> For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee,
> Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde.
> (*Tales*, VII, 1973–7, 1995–6)

The individual tragedies that follow show a succession of protagonists being flung down from Fortune's wheel, though they do not here take first-person form: the stories are instead relentlessly accompanied by the Monk's own castigation of her cruelty and fickleness. Perhaps inspired by Chaucer's example, his poetic successor John Lydgate, who was himself a monk, set out to translate Boccaccio's *De casibus* (by way of a French translation) into English rhyme royal, as the *Fall of Princes*. The *Fall* became one of the best-known works of Middle English literature after *The Canterbury Tales* itself. It survives in a large number of manuscripts, it was printed within a couple of decades of the arrival of the press in England and it went through several editions down to the middle of the sixteenth century.

Fortune was a rather different concept from the ineluctable Fate that rules Greek drama. Instability was part of the very definition of Fortune, though there was a strong tendency to concentrate on Fortune as misfortune. Its instability carried its own inevitability with it, of the kind indicated by the iconography it acquired in the Middle Ages, as a woman turning a wheel. As she spins or cranks it around, men climb up to the top to occupy the highest place, as a king in majesty; but they then fall down the other side to disgrace and death as the wheel continues its circle. The minimum number for such figures is four, and the picture sometimes appears with a captions for each, 'regnabo – regno – regnavi – sum sine regno', 'I shall reign; I reign; I have reigned; I am without kingdom'.[7] The iconography remained thoroughly familiar in the sixteenth century, with the same identification with tragedy as Chaucer had expressed. Editions of the *Fall of Princes* printed by Pynson in 1494 and 1527 include a series of woodcuts illustrating Fortune's workings. There are no captions, but all the pictures present throngs of climbers and fallers, and twice Fortune is portrayed with multiple arms, apparently as a formalized way of representing the speed with which she spins the wheel. This was not the

FIGURE 5 Fortune's wheel, with cardinal (Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*, 1527)

only way to represent Fortune emblematically, but it was much the most familiar; the mere mention of climbing upwards was enough to trigger a reader's or spectator's assumption that downfall would follow. She was sometimes shown blindfolded, sometimes two-faced, with one expression smiling and the other frowning. Alternative portrayals represented her as standing on a rolling ball, or in the middle of the sea, both the ball and the turbulence of the winds and waves indicating instability; her victims were sometimes figured by Icarus, whose waxen wings melted when he flew too near the sun, or Phaëton, who lost control of Apollo's chariot, and who both fell from the height of the heavens. The image of the wheel had a remarkable capacity for generating stories. Chaucer's Monk declares that he has a hundred in his cell, though he tells a mere seventeen. Lydgate, following Boccaccio, told some five hundred; and those in turn spawned whole new generations of tragic falls from the pens of his Tudor successors.

That process began in the mid-1550s, when an enterprising publisher hit on the idea of reprinting Lydgate's work but supplementing it with a new series of tragedies from English history to bring it up to date. That scheme fell victim to adverse political conditions,[8] and when the work finally appeared, under the title of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, its new material was too substantial for Lydgate's original to be included. The *Mirror* came to supersede the *Fall* entirely, not least in popularity: it was one of the bestsellers of Elizabeth's reign. The first part appeared in 1559, but supplements to the original appeared every few years over the next three decades, and further editions for another three decades after that. The first version consisted of a compilation of verse histories (mostly again in rhyme royal) from the time of Richard II through the Wars of the Roses to the advent of the Tudors. A later supplement added tragedies from the legendary history of Britain, 'from the coming of Brute to the Incarnation', and included figures such as Cordelia. The ultimate source for these was Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain*, a work incorporated into almost every later chronicle: even Milton, who was entirely unpersuaded of its veracity, felt impelled to include material from Geoffrey in his own attempt at a history of Britain since there was nothing else that could be put in its place.

The full title of the work offers a definition of tragedy of this type: 'A Myrroure for Magistrates. Wherein may be seen by example of other, with howe grevous plagues vices are punished: and howe frayle and unstable worldly prosperitie is founde, even of those, whom Fortune seemeth most highly to favour.' It is a 'mirror' because rulers (magistrates, those in authority) can look in it and see how they should or (mostly) should not act, and what may happen to them. It is insistently didactic, its oft-repeated morals being the judgement of God on the wicked, and 'the slyppery deceytes of the waveryng lady' Fortune (p. 68). William Baldwin, the leader of the team of writers who compiled the work, summarizes its antecedents in his Dedication in terms of the divine retribution visited on evil rulers:

> Howe [God] hath plaged euill rulers from time to time, in other nacions, you may see gathered in Boccas booke intituled the fall of Princes, translated into Englishe by Lydgate; Howe he hath delt with sum of our countreymen your auncestors for sundrye vices not yet left, this booke named *A Myrrour for Magistrates*, can shewe . . . For here as in a loking glas, you shall see (if any vice be in you) howe the like hath bene punished in other heretofore.
>
> (p. 65)

The laments of the various ghosts play only minor variations on the same themes, as they condemn their own moral blindness and the wickedness of their enemies. One of the contributors, Thomas Sackville, co-author of *Gorboduc*, wrote an Induction, originally intended for the whole work after its first publication had been suppressed, in which a personified Sorrow gives him a tour of a Classical Hell, full of

> Prynces of renowne,
> That whilom sat on top of Fortunes wheele
> Now layed ful lowe, like wretches whurled downe,
> Euen with one frowne.
>
> (p. 316)

The repeated morals also make a recurrent point about the stories themselves, evident indeed from the moment each ghost appears, locked

into the state of its mangled body at the moment when it met its violent end. The stories are not so much exemplary lives as moralized deaths. It is the moment of fall, of reward for evil, that constitutes the present moment from which every story is told, and all the previous actions of the ghosts are no more than preludes to that. Lamentation is not only the chosen mode of the authors, but the unchangeable and endlessly continuing state of their subjects; and lamentation itself gave abundant opportunity to dramatists trained in rhetoric and eager to show off. The narrative elements of a protagonist's rise and fall are absorbed into the action of a play, but the lament allows for the expression of inwardness – for the development of character under the ultimate pressure of tragedy.

The various editions of the *Mirror*, like those of the *Fall of Princes*, were published as substantial, and expensive, folios. They were not therefore 'popular' in the sense that cheap prints of romances were popular; but the vigour of its publishing history indicates both wide dissemination and intense interest. The playwrights were among those to cash in on the fashion for this kind of tragedy, and to realize its potential for drama. What in the *Mirror* is presented as static recollection of the past transforms itself into plot when it is run forwards in time, when Fortune's victims are seen climbing up on the wheel and can still imagine that they can rest safely on its summit. One of its similes for their confidence before their fall is of someone on a temporary stage, of the sort constructed in a hall or an inn yard, at the moment when 'tymber and poales, and all flee awaye', and it collapses (p. 94). Its modern editor, Lily B. Campbell, calculated that the work provided the plots for at least thirty Elizabethan plays, and it served as the model for many more.[9] If you had asked an Elizabethan in 1580 what tragedies he knew, even a man with a university education might have given the *Mirror for Magistrates* preference over Seneca, and for those whose reading was primarily in English there would have been no hesitation in naming it first. If you had asked the same question fifteen years later, and perhaps even by 1590, then the answer would probably have come in the form of a list of plays – but a good number of the plays named might well be based or at least modelled on the *Mirror*. By the middle of the decade, those would have included three plays of Shakespeare's, all originally

registered and printed as tragedies: *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*, better known now as *Henry VI Part 3*; *The Tragedy of Richard III*; and *The Tragedy of Richard II*. As late as 1598, Francis Meres, in an attempt to prove that England was the equal to the Classics in every area of writing, declared that Shakespeare was 'most excellent' in tragedy 'for his *Richard the* 2, *Richard the* 3, *Henry the* 4, *King John*', and only after that '*Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Iuliet*': the English histories, in other words, were what marked him out first as a tragedian.[10] Their specific content as historical tragedy was defined by a key political inheritance from the Middle Ages: the early thirteenth-century adoption in England of the rules of primogeniture, which brought as their corollary that there was only one possible rightful king or heir to the kingdom in the sight of God. That might look as if it would pre-empt the problem of who should occupy the throne; but every time the succession was disputed, or the king or his direct heir was vicious, incapable of good government, or unsuitable for any other reason (which potentially included being female), it made tragedy all but inevitable. Shakespeare's two tetralogies of history plays focus, like the *Mirror*, on the century that saw an extended political crisis played out in just such circumstances. So, more unpredictably, does *King John*, in preference to his much-vaunted conflict with the pope.[11]

Tragedy was thus in the first instance a genre carried forward from the fourteenth century, and this idea of it would have been more immediately familiar to early Elizabethan playgoers than any derived from Classical models or origins. The *de casibus* model summarizes at once the content, the structure and the function of the genre: tragedy is the fall of a great man from the top of Fortune's wheel, and the protagonist is great in the most direct political sense, in terms of rank, not of mind or personality. He is a man who reaches high earthly prosperity and comes to a miserable end in just retribution for his sins. It is therefore substantively different from Fortune's governing of all things by chance, or the Victorian interpretation of the Aristotelian *hamartia*, 'error', of the moderately good protagonist as a 'fatal flaw' – a concept that scarcely enters Elizabethan definitions. The central characters in a handful of Renaissance tragedies, in which Fortune functions purely as chance, may be good (Chaucer had indeed led the

way in this in the *Monk's Tale*, by including a few examples of the innocent along with the guilty to show Fortune operating randomly, in a way divorced from either poetic or divine justice); but in most of the tragedies of fall, Fortune's role is to punish the wicked. Such an interpretation was not confined to England, or to post-Classical tragedy. The widely influential mid-sixteenth-century commentator on Aristotle's *Poetics*, Castelvetro, took issue with Aristotle over precisely this point, insisting that he was wrong to propose that the protagonists of tragedies should be in any way good; they should for preference be markedly bad, since only thus can justice be served.[12] Transposed into the medieval *de casibus* tradition, this meant that the proper subject of tragedy shifted from legendary or mythological protagonists, Oedipus or Agamemnon or Prometheus, to the political transgressor, the tyrant, the rebel, or the usurper. When Sidney offers his own definition of tragedy, although he claims to be following the precepts of the ancients, he accepts this model without question: tragedy is the genre that 'maketh Kinges feare to be Tyrants, and . . . teacheth the uncertainety of this world, and upon how weake foundations guilden roofes are builded'.[13] Nashe's justification for the theatre concentrates on historical plays, but assumes that those will be of the *de casibus* or *Mirror* variety:

> In Playes, all coosonages, all cunning drifts over-guylded with outward holinesse, all stratagems of warre, all the cankerwormes that breede on the rust of peace, are most lively anatomiz'd: they shew the ill successe of treason, the fall of hastie climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the miserie of civill dissention, and how just God is evermore in punishing of murther.[14]

By this definition, *The Tragedy of Richard III* is the play of Shakespeare's closest to the centre of the most widely recognized Elizabethan conception of tragedy; only *Macbeth*, of all Shakespeare's later work, comes so close to fulfilling this model. Both plays have been regarded as less quintessentially tragic than *Hamlet* or *Lear* largely because their protagonists come too close to being evil; but for their first audiences, that was precisely what made them tragedies – the genre that shows the fall of hasty climbers, and makes kings fear to be tyrants. Both too link

Boethian ideas of tragedy as the overthrow of states with the *Mirror for Magistrates* reading of the genre as the fall of those responsible. *Richard III* also adopts the *Mirror*'s moralizing element, in which both poetic and divine justice are served by Richard's final downfall. The play spells it out almost as explicitly as the heading to the account of him in the *Mirror*: *How Richard Plantagenet duke of Glocester, murdered his brothers children usurping the crowne, and in the third yeare of his raygne was most worthely deprived of life and kingdome in Bosworth playne by Henry Earle of Richemond after called king Henry the vii* (p. 360). History showed a constant process of rise as well as fall: sometimes almost random, as in the to-and-fro defeats and victories of the Lancastrians and Yorkists in the Wars of the Roses, but the process was at its least random when the fall was most deserved, when it showed God's punishment in action.

Retribution for sin was direct and literal. In a Christian world that believed in Providence, any randomness implied by the idea of fortune was under strong pressure to give way before fall as punishment, and the writers of the tragedy of fall were happy to respond by dipping their pens in blood. It is usually Seneca who is accused of bringing the gore into Elizabethan tragedy, and it is true that his fondness for detailed descriptions of murder and dismemberment has a lot to answer for; but the descriptions remain just that, rhetoric, not embodiment. The ghosts who tell their stories in the *Mirror for Magistrates*, however, appear to the poets who record their words in the state in which they died, with all the stickiness of their ends about them, and that, as they have too ready a habit of pointing out, is an indicator of their own transgressions. They will typically appear to 'make their mone' 'full of woundes, miserably mangled, with a pale countenance, and grisly look', speaking through the hole in their throat made by an arrow, or holding the heart that has been ripped out in the disembowelling processes of execution.[15] The extended emphasis of early modern tragedy on death owes a good deal to the *Mirror*. It is a characteristic of almost all tragedy, however, that the guilty drag others down with them, who suffer just as grievously:

> Me thought there stood before us, a tall mans body full of fresshe woundes, but lackynge a head, holdyng by the hande a goodlye childe, whose brest was so wounded that his hearte myght be seen,

> his lovely face and eyes disfigured with dropping teares, his heare through horrour standying upryght, his mercy cravyng handes all to bemangled, & all his body embrued with his own blood.
>
> (p. 181)

The 'tall man' is Richard duke of York, the man who gave his name to Shakespeare's *True Tragedy*; the child is his son Rutland, whose death is the first of the series of grim acts of violence that the play presents. Fortune as providential justice will bring down the tyrants and the hasty climbers, but it will bring down the innocent with them, and death is equally on display for both. Most of the *Mirror* narratives offer such a prose ecphrasis, a formal visual description, of tragic fall, to introduce each ghost and the marks of the violence that killed it. Embodied on stage, this became one of the least analysed but most practised of the Elizabethan expectations of tragedy, the spectacle of blood.

Most tragedies written for the public theatres owed little or nothing to Seneca in stagecraft (they were conceived with actual staging in mind, with an abundance of characters and on-stage action, blood included); in structure (there were no choruses, and at first little by way of five-act division); and in content (their political emphasis, their mixing of kings and clowns). But the academic and the *Mirror* conceptions of tragedy were close enough together to profit from the proximity, and it was the eclectic playwrights for the public theatres rather than the academic purists who made the most of the connection. Seneca himself, in fact, was assumed to be writing in the *de casibus* tradition. Ghosts might have lost their theological justification with the abolition of Purgatory, but the *de casibus* model gave a new and vigorous life to the Senecan ghost urging revenge. The ghosts of the *Mirror for Magistrates* are too busy expressing repentance for their sins, and warning others against committing the like, to think about revenge, but the ghosts who come to Richard III on the night before Bosworth, the ghost of Hamlet's father and by implication Banquo's and Caesar's ghosts all have revenge in mind.

The equation of tragedy with Fortune was also commonly read into Seneca. Fortune does get a number of mentions in his plays, but his images for its instability are most often to do with ruin or with flowing;

his Tudor translators, however, persistently introduced images of her wheel. Seneca's Fates become the 'tumbling fatall course of fortunes wheele', winged fortune becomes 'flitting Fortune with her fickle wheele'.[16] The remark in *Hercules Oetaeus* about the new day seeing wretched the man whom Cynthia had seen joyful turns into

> Whom Moone at morne on top of Fortunes wheele
> High swayed hath seene, at fulnesse of renowne,
> The glading sunne hath seene his scepter reele,
> And him from high fall topsey turvey downe.[17]

The sun in that translation, however, is not dawning but 'glading', setting, in a shift of image that was again habitual in Elizabethan tragedy. The circle of Fortune's wheel invites a mapping onto the diurnal circuit of the sun, midday symbolizing power and felicity, night-time downfall and death. Seneca conveniently offered another *sententia* that expressed precisely that, an eminently extractable and quotable moral that was duly extracted and quoted by a good number of Elizabethan playwrights. This is a couplet from *Thyestes* that could almost serve as an epigraph for the whole Elizabethan genre of the tragedy of Fortune:

> Quem dies vidit veniens superbum
> Hunc dies vidit fugiens iacentem.
>
> Whom dawne of day hath seene in pryde to raygne
> Hym overthrowne hath seene the evening late.[18]

It is quoted in Latin by Marlowe in *Edward II* (4.7.53–4); alluded to by a number of other playwrights; and translated literally by Thomas Hughes, in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*,

> Him, whom the Morning found both stout and strong,
> The Evening left all groveling on the ground,
> (Epilogus 40–1)

and by Ben Jonson, as the closing couplet of *Sejanus*:

> For whom the morning saw so great and high,
> Thus low and little 'fore the even doth lie.

If there is one concept of the tragic hero that dominates Elizabethan thought, this would be it: an image of the great man in his brief meridian of glory and splendour falling to occupy no more than his body's length of ground in an everlasting night.

Shakespeare's earlier historical tragedies are pervaded by the imagery of fall – of the turning wheel, the declining sun, Icarus, Phaëton. It occurs particularly thickly in the first, *The true tragedy of Richard duke of York*. The play serves up a plethora of mini-tragedies that threaten to dull the dramatic impact of individual deaths, and the effect is rather different from the rise and fall of a single protagonist over an entire play such as characterizes *Richard III*. All the characters who fall, however – York, Clifford, Warwick the Kingmaker, Henry VI himself – had already figured as tragic protagonists in the *Mirror*. The overlap may appear inevitable, in that the objective of the first edition of the *Mirror* was to cover English tragedies from the time of Boccaccio to the advent of the Tudors, and that period almost exactly coincides with Shakespeare's two tetralogies; it was not inevitable, however, that he should have chosen to dramatize that same period of history. His major source for the events of the play was Holinshed's *Chronicles*, but the tragic shaping of his material and its imagery follow the pattern laid down by *de casibus* tragedy and the *Mirror*. York is compared to Phaëton tumbling from his car, so turning his noontide to evening (*3H6* 1.4.33–4); Henry VI compares himself to Daedalus and his son to Icarus, with Edward IV as the sun who 'seared the wings of my sweet boy' and cast him down to death (5.6.21–4). The play is thick with verbs of aspiring, mounting, climbing and sinking. The imagery of Fortune's wheel is less aggressively present than in the *Mirror*, but it takes for granted that the audience can fill out the allusions. Its main appearance is in a self-consciously posturing statement of Edward IV's, when he is briefly deposed and made captive in the middle of the play:

> Though fortune's malice overthrow my state,
> My mind exceeds the compass of her wheel.
> (4.3.46–7)

Rather surprisingly, this declaration is supported by the action: he does indeed recover his throne. In the longer term, however, as most of the audience would know (this is, after all, history of only a little over a century earlier, abundantly retold in chronicle form as well as in the *Mirror*), retributive Fortune was to have her way with the lineage of York.

If the events of the *Mirror* are tragic, the mode in which the work is written emphasizes lament, in a process of 'self-speaking' bordering on soliloquy.[19] Its ghosts lament their falls, their lost wealth and power, as well as the transgressions of their lives and the horror of their deaths. Shakespeare's characters do not enter *The True Tragedy* as bloody corpses: we watch them becoming so, and both their laments and the violence inflicted on them are all the more forceful for their not yet having crossed that ultimate threshold. Their rhetoric of lament is none the less close to that of their *Mirror* equivalents: descriptions of their fatal wounds, a moralizing discourse on common mortality (though not always on their sins) and a use of the imagery of falling from a great height to death. Warwick's dying speech brings together a sweep of these images in the rhetoric of lament paradigmatic for such tragedy, as his 'mangled body shows'

> That I must yield my body to the earth,
> And, by my fall, the conquest to my foe . . .
> These eyes, that now are dimm'd with death's black veil,
> Have been as piercing as the midday sun
> To search the secret treasons of the world.
> The wrinkles in my brows, now filled with blood,
> Were likened oft to kingly sepulchres –
> For who lived king, but I could dig his grave?
> And who durst smile when Warwick bent his brow?
> Lo now my glory smeared in dust and blood.
> My parks, my walks, my manors that I had,
> Even now forsake me, and of all my lands
> Is nothing left me but my body's length.
> Why, what is pomp, rule, reign, but earth and dust?
> And live we how we can, yet die we must.
>
> (5.2.9–10, 16–28)

The speech invokes a whole cultural context, not only of political tragedy, but of the morality tradition of coming face to face with inevitable death. 'How that erth goth to erth he thyngkys nothyng', as the Stratford wall painting had put it.[20] The 'mangled body' is a recurrent element of the *Mirror*, in the descriptions of the slaughtered ghosts. Warwick still speaks with the overweening pride characteristic of those on the top of Fortune's wheel, boasting of the 'midday sun' of his glance even while he acknowledges its darkening by death, and of his 'glory' even as it is 'smeared in dust and blood', crushed to the earth beneath the wheel. Only at the moment of his death does he realize his common humanity. His personified territories 'forsake' him, he is deprived of political power, physical strength and sight, rather as Everyman, summoned by Death in his eponymous morality play, is forsaken by his own goods, his friends, his beauty, his strength and his senses, until there is nothing left but his 'body's length' of earth. It is a discovery to be made again, with greater intensity and a new psychological depth, by Richard II.

The culture's constant appeals to the imagery of the wheel, however, threatened to dull its resonance, to turn it into cliché, and by the mid-1590s Shakespeare was making more of alternative images of fall. By the time of *Henry V*, the play about a king whose reign was marked by the favour of Fortune ('Fortune made his sword', as the Epilogue puts it), it was more than ripe for mockery, and it is Fluellen, the man eager to show off his cultural literacy, who is used for the purpose:

> Fortune is painted blind, with a muffler afore her eyes, to signify to you that Fortune is blind; and she is painted also with a wheel, to signify to you, which is the moral of it, that she is turning, and inconstant, and mutability, and variation; and her foot, look you, is fixed upon a spherical stone, which rolls, and rolls, and rolls. In good truth, the poet makes a most excellent description of it: Fortune is an excellent moral.
>
> (3.6.29–38)

Sheer repetitiveness had dulled the effect, as had happened even within the confines of the *Monk's Tale*, a tale that is cut short on the grounds that it is both too miserable and too boring. In its place, Shakespeare gave

additional space to the self-analysis and monologue allowed by the first-person format of the speaking ghost found in Boccaccio and Lydgate and the *Mirror*. Shakespeare's characters, with the exception of Hamlet's father, are, obviously, still alive for their equivalent monologues, but lines spoken close to death, like those of Warwick quoted above, demonstrate how thin the line could be between a man at the point of death and a man who has passed across it. Even there, however, the lines show how an 'excellent moral' can move across into the revelation of a psychological state. Richard II carries that much further: he is a man who can soliloquize in a crowd, and who instead of taking action whenever the going gets tough substitutes speeches on the inevitability of fall and death. Warwick's speech demands to be taken at face value, like that of a *de casibus* ghost. Richard's monologues as he falls from power show rhetoric being held up for admiration, as the *storytelling* quality of the tradition is highlighted: 'Let us sit upon the ground, / And tell sad stories of the death of kings' (*R2* 3.2.155–6), stories that from his description of them (of kings deposed, 'haunted by the ghosts they have deposed', 'all murthered') seem to have come straight out of the *de casibus* tradition. And he consciously writes himself into the same tradition, in his parting words to his wife: 'Tell thou the lamentable tale of me' (5.1.44). Over the whole play, he tends to replace the *de casibus* imagery of Fortune, with its associations of deserved downfall, with imagery of the sun occluded by clouds or night, which does not carry any such inherent moral valency; even Phaëton, to him, is brought down by the unruliness of his horses (3.3.178–9). Richard may be the rightful king and Bolingbroke a hasty climber, but the play refuses any interpretation of its action in terms of black-and-white ethics. In contrast to the moralized, even theological, historiography on which Shakespeare was drawing, God figures in most of his history plays more as a propaganda weapon in the mouths of the characters than as an efficient cause, *causa efficiens*, in the historical process.[21] Richard believes his own propaganda that God is entirely on his side, but neither history nor the play is so simple. *Richard II* represents Shakespeare's last extended use of the *Mirror* model, and it does so by making its falling prince not just fall, but self-consciously live out and die a version of himself as tragic hero.

Shakespeare makes a more sparing use of the tradition in his later plays. The turning wheel is still resonant in *Lear*, as when the Fool warns the king against holding onto a 'great wheel' when it runs down a hill (2.2.264–5).[22] When Fortune is mentioned outside the historical tragedies, however, it rarely carries the symbolic *de casibus* loading: it is more often a synonym for chance, or wealth, or even good luck. The association of the full symbolism with history is confirmed by its reappearance in one of Shakespeare's very last plays, *Henry VIII*. The ambitious Cardinal Wolsey was so archetypal a hasty climber as to have inspired the inclusion of a cardinal in one of the woodcuts of Fortune that illustrated the 1527 edition of the *Fall of Princes* (see Figure 5 on p. 143). The Wolsey of the play is given his own awareness of the exemplary shape of his life, of ambition as the same sin that caused the fall of the angels (3.2.441) and that now brings him down too:

> I have touch'd the highest point of all my greatness,
> And from that full meridian of my glory
> I haste now to my setting.
>
> (3.2.223–5)

The lines may have been written by Shakespeare's collaborator Fletcher, but they show the continuing power of both the image and the moral into the seventeenth century.

TRAGEDIES FROM THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

There is no evidence that Shakespeare ever abandoned his conception of his three 'Richard' plays as tragedies. They were printed as such in all their quarto editions, and only acquired their 'history' designation in the First Folio, compiled after his death. Here, the tripartite division into what the title-page describes as 'Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories and Tragedies' makes good editorial sense; but it has tended to mislead later readers not only into thinking of the history play as a genre distinct from tragedy, but of tragedy as a genre distinct from history. Many of the plays listed under the 'Tragedies' heading are themselves historical, with

their roots in medieval chronicles or similar works, though they move the location of the history to ancient Britain or Rome or Scotland. Holinshed's chronicles of Scotland gave Shakespeare his account of the eleventh-century Macbeth, and the play contains a reminder that his reign coincided with that of Edward the Confessor (3.6.27), just in case the audience should imagine its weird-sisters-inspired action to be something other than historical. The chronicler Saxo Grammaticus provided the earliest narrative of Hamlet's life around 1200, though there were oral traditions about him, cited in Snorri Sturluson's prose *Edda*, from still earlier.[23] Geoffrey of Monmouth had first invented the story that underlay *King Lear*, and included Cymbeline among the kings of Britain. The appearance of *Cymbeline* among the tragedies, which by the terms of modern generic definitions looks so anomalous, is probably a reflection of that grounding in legendary chronicle. The belief in the historicity of the Trojan war probably underlay the placing with the tragedies of another generic anomaly, *Troilus and Cressida*; and while that might look Classical, it too owes more to Chaucer and other medieval sources than to Homer or Chapman's new translation of him. The plays that do not have a grounding in the Middle Ages are the four plays derived from Plutarch, though they still take history as their model for tragedy; the pseudo-history of *Titus Andronicus*; *Romeo and Juliet*, another tragedy of Fortune, but Fortune as blind chance, without the moral or political element; and *Othello*, though its plot motif of the falsely accused woman was one thoroughly grounded in medieval narrative.

The shifting of source away from English history and the *Mirror* displaced Fortune from the limelight, but all the tragedies follow the stage practices associated with the medieval concept of the stage play, of expansive and inclusive theatre. The regulated forms laid down by humanist theorists had been very clear about the contents and methods of correct tragedy. Julius Caesar Scaliger, author of the most comprehensive work of the early modern period on the art and rules of poetry, speaks of tragedy as 'concerned with high and dreadful matters, the mandates of kings, slaughters, suicides, hangings, exiles, loss of parents, parricides, incests, conflagrations, battles, blindings, sobs, lamentations, conquests, funeral rites, epitaphs, and laments' (but none of it actually shown on stage).[24] The same ideas were widely current in England. One

of the foremost of the anti-theatrical polemicists, Stephen Gosson, offered a slightly abbreviated list in his 1579 *School of Abuse*: 'The argument of Tragedies is wrath, crueltie, incest, injurie, murther eyther violent by sworde, or voluntary by poyson.'[25] The school of neo-Classical criticism, both in England and on the continent, was also rigorous in limiting tragedy to the highest classes, to princes and the great. The Elizabethan theatre accepted the contents, but not the methodology or the limitations that accompanied it. High and dreadful matters might be incorporated into tragedy, but the strict humanist unities of time, place and action, limited character set and the substitution of rhetorical report for violence were not. Elizabethan tragedy drew into its purview all that great proportion of humankind that the theorists excluded. *Hamlet* has its gravediggers as well as its princes; *Macbeth* has its porter, fresh from the gates of Hell, as well as its usurping tyrant. The plays with Roman settings abandon Classical dramaturgical principles equally readily. *Titus Andronicus* (which contravenes some of the early expectations of tragedy in locating its most extreme evil not in its protagonist but in its villains) is the most Senecan of all Shakespeare's plays – Seneca's most famous, *Thyestes*, had concluded with an account of how the villain's sons were murdered, cooked and fed to their father – but *Titus* actually stages its murders and the protagonist's chopping off of his own hand, and brings the pie containing the cooked children on stage for their mother to eat; even the pastry is made from their ground-up bones. *Antony and Cleopatra* spans the wide arch of the incipient Roman Empire from Rome to Alexandria to Parthia, and its cast list includes the 'rural fellow' who brings the asp and the common soldiers who hear, though they do not see, a god – the 'hautboys under the stage' that are identified as the god Hercules 'whom Antony loved' now leaving him (4.3).

Although Shakespeare's tragedies take advantage of medieval stage freedoms and often use medieval sources, they are radically (and, especially in *Hamlet*, explicitly) different from both medieval and humanist drama, and from most other contemporary tragedy too. *Hamlet* is probably the play taken now as showing the most decisive shift to a modern sensibility. If generic recognizability depends on audience expectations, however, the play must have been rather startling for its original audience. It tries and finds inadequate almost every variety of

theatre, Classical, medieval and contemporary. Even what ought to be its most immediate dramatic context, revenge tragedy, is curiously displaced: any anxiety over the ethics of revenge is reworked as anxiety over 'discernment of spirits', whether 'the spirit that I have seen / May be a devil' (2.2.600–1), and once Hamlet is satisfied on that score, he moves swiftly to what he momentarily believes to be the killing of the king, though it turns out to be Polonius. Discernment of spirits was a concern inherited from the Middle Ages, and fits with Hamlet's invocation of St Patrick, the saint of St Patrick's Purgatory (1.5.142). Although the play denounces such outmoded stage practices as out-Heroding Herod (3.2.14), the medieval makes its presence repeatedly felt in this kind of detail even as it is being rejected.

The first and most surprising thing about *The Tragical History of Hamlet*, as it was first known, it is that it is not *The Tragedy of Claudius*. With the king as its tragic protagonist, it would have perfectly fitted the *de casibus* model, of the tragedy of state and the downfall of hasty climbers. Claudius is not a usurper, since Shakespeare's Denmark, in the play as in contemporary fact, is an elective monarchy; he may have 'popp'd in between th'election and [Hamlet's] hopes' (5.2.65), but Hamlet cannot claim to be the rightful heir of the kind endorsed by God in the English system of primogeniture. Killing the previous king, however, puts Claudius as decisively outside the ethical and political pale as are Macbeth and Richard III. In the first quarto text, the king recognizes how far he stands outside the religious pale too in his thoroughly *Mirror*-style moralization in the last line of his attempted prayer:

> My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
> No King on earth is safe, if God's his foe.[26]

His failed attempt at repentance is one of the moments where Shakespeare draws attention to the explicitly Christian context he gives the play, in contrast to the emphasis in the extant sources on Denmark as a pagan country. He may have found it in the lost earlier dramatization, the '*Ur-Hamlet*', but in many respects – the nature of the ghost, the ethics of revenge, Hamlet's desire to damn Claudius as well as kill him – it creates critical problems that a pagan setting would have

eliminated. In every version of the story, however, the king features as an exemplary hasty climber. The lack of any identifiable chronological location for the play helps to keep such a moralization to the forefront over any facts of history. In so far as it has any historical context, it is less the Dark Age borderland of myth and legend implied by Saxo than a modern Renaissance one, where Hamlet can attend the famous Reformation university of Wittenberg and make a joke about the Diet of Worms (4.3.20), the 1521 convocation that finalized the split between Luther and the Emperor Charles V.

In a *Tragedy of Claudius*, Hamlet would more evidently have been the king's nemesis, the one man who knows of his guilt and who dances just out of reach, trickster-like, until he is caught by his would-be victim, only to reappear shortly afterwards unharmed and ready for his revenge. This is the role he plays in Saxo's early chronicle version, and it was apparently also his reputation in the earlier oral traditions. This is still, too, the role he plays in the short, action-dense First Quarto text, where in Ian Felce's words 'the ruthless determination that the trickster employs to succeed in his long-term clandestine goal of revenge means that there is little access into the inner workings of his mind'.[27] Q1 is often taken to be abbreviated for performance from a longer text more like Q2, but many of the oddities of the Q2 and F versions seem to be relics of this 'trickster' tradition. It also merges with the tendency of the Vice to act in comparable ways, dissembling, running verbal rings around his opponents and outwitting their own intentions. Hamlet as Vice or as trickster is far from the critical tradition that saw him as a misunderstood intellectual; but even in his incarnation in the fullest text as the thinker as well as the man of action, it plays a much stronger role in the play than Aristotelian or Bradleian ideas of the tragic protagonist.

Hamlet is acutely self-conscious about its differences from earlier tragedy of all kinds. The self-consciousness is most on show in the extended series it offers of ways of performing that quintessential element of tragedy, death, and in its implicit rejection of them all in favour of its own methods of staging its 'real' deaths. Seneca is represented in the speech on the death of Priam recalled by Hamlet and the first player: a long 'messenger' monologue that spins out a moment's action across forty lines, including a freeze-frame when Pyrrhus' sword

'seem'd i'th'air to stick' (2.2.480). The speech ends with an apostrophe to the 'strumpet Fortune' and her wheel, straight out of the *de casibus* tradition. The ghost describes his own death just as the characters of the *Mirror* do, though he appears in armour rather than the gruesome state to which the poison reduced his body. *The Murder of Gonzago* offers two ways of performing that death, both by this time becoming outdated, the dumbshow (here literal rather than allegorical) and the kind of heavily moralizing couplet drama that insists on accompanying its action with elaborate formal rhetoric. The main action of the play does not reject description in favour of action altogether, as Gertrude's account of Ophelia's drowning shows; but apart from that, the many deaths of the play are not marked out by rhetoric, whether reported (Hamlet's matter-of-fact summary of how he despatched Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths) or acted. Hamlet's murder of Polonius, indeed, gets so little space in the printed text as to be almost invisible to the reader – hence perhaps its downplaying in the critical tradition. There is no hesitation here (it is sheer misfortune that Hamlet kills the wrong man, though if he had got it right the play would have come to a premature end), and no rhetoric either:

> Polonius: What ho! help!
> Hamlet: How now? A rat! Dead, for a ducat, dead.
> Queen: O me, what hast thou done?
> Hamlet: Nay, I know not.
> Is it the king?
> (3.4.22–6)

The first two quarto editions do not even supply the stage direction given in the margin of the Folio, that instructs Hamlet to stab Polonius through the arras. As with the violence of the Passion plays, or later in the blinding of Gloucester, the enacted violence substitutes for spoken elaboration. Rather than accompanying an actual death, *Hamlet*'s most extended exploration of the medieval-derived fascination with the subject comes in the unlikely form of the scene with the 'comic' characters of the play, the gravediggers. Here there is a mixture of the mordant irony of the *danse macabre*-style verses of *Queen Elizabeth's*

Prayerbook (the lawyer whose skills serve to acquire great estates but whose lands are reduced to no more than 'the length and breadth of a pair of indentures', 5.1.109–10) with the touching personal recall of the jester Yorick: memory as nostalgia replacing the *memento mori* scenario staged in Hamlet's holding of the skull. The play finishes with four corpses on stage, apparently the maximum number his acting company could cope with carrying off stage. Despite all this, however, violent death is continually displaced from being the focus of the action, by a concentration on Hamlet's mind. When he does turn to meditation on death as the 'undiscovered country', it may threaten nightmares, but for all the shifting of the play to a Christian context, it does not propose a Last Judgement.

The early morality plays had shifted the scene of their action from outward to inward life, the hopes and fears and failures of the psyche; but since stage action happens in full view of the spectators, it should follow that the events of a play are necessarily presented objectively, whatever the protagonist's view of them. *Hamlet* provides what seems like an impossibility on the stage, where his soliloquies turn him not only into something like the narrator of the action rather than the perpetrator of most of it, but a fallible narrator. The critical resistance to acknowledging his string of murders indicates the success of the technique. The play takes to the furthest dramatic point the opportunities offered by soliloquy to alter the quality of tragedy. Soliloquies are a very different phenomenon from the monologues offered by the presenters of plays or God or the Vices: those are directed at the audience, whereas the soliloquy proper is more like articulated thought, private meditation – hence its frequent representation in filmed Shakespeare as voice-over. There is an overlap between the two, but Hamlet's first soliloquy, in which he outlines the events that have led to his present melancholy, is a different creature from Richard III's, where he summarizes the events of the past and his plans for the future. Both contain important information for the audience, but only in Richard's is that part of the speaker's intention. The soliloquies of the long texts of *Hamlet* are markedly different from the equivalent speeches in Q1, which have none of the same quality of introspection. Part of the difference from monologue lies in the etymology of the word *soliloquy*: it was coined by St Augustine as

soliloquium, meaning a debate conducted, not between two people, but with oneself. Its original meaning was therefore philosophical rather than dramatic, and Shakespeare's often keep something of that. Many of them portray a man in dialectic with himself: 'To be or not to be', Hamlet's weighing up the benefits of life against death; Macbeth's 'If it were done', as he agonizes over killing Duncan (1.7.1–28, a speech that finishes in a real debate with his wife); and Brutus's 'It must be by his death', in which he argues out the necessity of killing Caesar (*JC* 2.1.10–34). Even this most modern-seeming of Shakespeare's tragic techniques, in fact, has its roots in the early Middle Ages, in the man who sought most intensively, and with constant frustration, to know himself; who said, centuries before Descartes, 'I think, therefore I am'.[28] Being, however, in Shakespeare as in Augustine, requires a context of divine or social relationship. It is only those who ignore the greater 'I am' of God who claim their own 'I am' to be sufficient: Richard III, Parolles, Iago.[29]

A second form of internal self-analysis developed in the Middle Ages also had a strong influence on the soliloquy: the confession. Augustine's *Confessions* have often been claimed as the first modern autobiography, though his pervasive concern with his relationship with God was a characteristic much more sympathetic to Catholic and Protestant ways of thinking than modern secular attitudes. The ecclesiastical practice of confession at first looks rather different, but the basic principles, of an examination of one's self in the light of the injunctions of God, remained similar, and outlasted the confessional in Protestant England. Confession, along with moral allegory, was one of the key 'technologies of the self' developed in the Middle Ages, and the habits of mind and thought that it induced, and the literary forms it could take, retained a strong presence even after individual confession had been displaced by the General Confession of the Prayer Book. The autobiographical Prologues to their tales spoken by the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner owe much to these habits, even though both delight in their transgressions rather than showing any signs of penitence: self-speaking need not be done in a religious mode. Most such exercises in self-examination none the less took place within a religious or moral framework. Hamlet's soliloquies owe more to the tradition of internal debate, but Claudius's acknowledgement of his crime before he attempts to pray grounds itself

in this requirement to know the depth of one's own transgression, as does Angelo's unsparing recognition of his sin in desiring Isabel in *Measure for Measure*. The Stoic injunction to 'know thyself' was mediated to the Renaissance through this religious requirement, to test your own self-awareness against divine commands to goodness. The Catholic practice of oral confession to a priest was the outward display of such inner self-testing, but the inward habits continued in both Protestant and more secular contexts. Lear is a man 'who hath ever but slenderly known himself' (1.1.294–5). The self-knowledge he has to acquire is not only of a unique subjecthood such as we tend to think of as one of the distinguishing marks of the modern,[30] but of his responsibilities and failures as a king and as a man, and his common humanity with the wretched of this world, the fool and the madman.

The 'total theatre' of the medieval world, its inclusivity, is crucial to *Lear*; but the inclusivity of the play does not extend to a Christian God. Shakespeare transfers its setting with unusual conviction for an early-modern play to the pre-Christian world to which it belongs in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Holinshed. The *History of King Leir* of the 1590s by contrast had imported a Christian setting and habits of thought for its characters. All the earlier versions of the story have Cordelia restore Lear to his throne at the end, allowing him to make up for the folly of the love-test in a happy ending, though the 'historical' Cordelia ultimately fell victim of Fortune, being deposed after Lear's death and committing suicide in prison. Shakespeare's play offers glimpses of a providential universe, but it never endorses them. The Christian elements in Cordelia's language, on which G. Wilson Knight grounded his interpretation of the play as Christian allegory, are not backed up by the larger action.[31] The play notably holds off from endorsing any of its characters' various views on the gods: Edmund's choice of Nature as his goddess, with its revolutionary redefinition as meaning that nothing supernatural exists; Gloucester's view of them as capricious tennis-players with human lives; Edgar's proposal that they are benevolent beings 'who make them honours / Of men's impossibilities', or his suggestion in the final scene that they are ruthlessly just judges. The question of whether Christian tragedy is possible, given the basic tenet of Christianity that God orders all things for good, even just damnation, had scarcely been

tested on the stage before. *King Lear* does just that, and the results are frightening. Dr Johnson notoriously found its lack of poetic justice so deeply troubling that for many years he avoided rereading the final scenes until editing it compelled him to do so. The replacement of Shakespeare's play on stage from the Restoration to the early nineteenth century by Nahum Tate's optimistic version bears witness to how profoundly disconcerting it was felt to be. The modern Christian interpretations are perhaps later manifestations of the same reluctance to credit what the play actually presents. If the title given to the first quarto, *The True Chronicle History of King Lear*, represents how it was first announced, the original audiences would have been expecting the ending given by the chronicles and the old *Leir*. The play comes agonizingly close: Lear and Cordelia are reunited, like those fathers and daughters of the late plays, but only for her to be killed, and Lear's final desperate hope that she still lives is wrong. The *pietà* image of his carrying her body (p. 68 above) is not the prelude to a resurrection, and the replication of the staging implicitly points up the difference. The unremitting lack of justice or of providential order is indeed very hard to parallel in anything written since the advent of Christianity. Chaucer makes sustained attempts to replicate a pagan mindset in his *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Knight's Tale*, but the absence of any sense of providence felt by the characters is not finally carried through: *Troilus* ends with an appeal to the Christian world of its readers, the *Knight's Tale* with Theseus's replication of a Boethian view, argued from the standpoint of philosophy rather than faith, of the world as ordered for good. *Lear* marks a break not only from the Middle Ages but from the normal context of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation world.

Shakespeare's freeing of the action of *Lear* from the supposed facts of history opens its reach towards 'total theatre', that extension beyond limitation or particularity that characterizes the cycle plays. It may not ground itself in God, but its shift from history towards a more mythopoeic mode frees it to expand its conception of character beyond normal individual limitations. Its stagecraft deploys the same readiness to perform embodied violence and imagined space. Its quality of myth, of deeper significance than mere event, is enhanced by its resonances with folk tale. Geoffrey of Monmouth's original account may have given

Lear a place in the sequence of British kings, but the story itself, of the man who demands which of his three daughters loves him best and rejects the youngest, was still current for the Brothers Grimm to collect in a different linguistic and cultural context centuries later. A further resonance behind it, though Shakespeare's pagan play does not replicate its providential structure of sin and repentance, was another famous medieval story still current in the late sixteenth century, *Robert of Sicily*, which itself probably has folk-tale origins: the story of a king so irresponsible that his place is taken by an angel while he has to learn humility as a fool living under the staircase of his own court.[32] The Gloucester subplot by contrast came from a recent source, Sidney's *Arcadia*, where it serves as a largely autonomous episode, isolated from its context not only by its narrative discontinuities but by the raging storm that encloses it. Instead of giving an account of a reign, Shakespeare shows the 'little world' of one man who encompasses in himself both the cosmos, in the absorption of the storm into his mind, and the experiences of all those 'poor houseless wretches' to whose misery he belatedly exposes himself. The medieval theory of the king's two bodies, the body of his person and of the body politic, which became such a feature of Elizabethan political theory, here adds a third, that of the macrocosm.[33] The play offers an extraordinary conflation of mimetic theatre, which represents outward events, and the allegorical morality's display of the inside of a man's mind in interaction with the world he inhabits. It has both the universal reach of parable and an unsparing focus on individual suffering. Its constituent elements – the father and his three daughters; the old man who has outlasted his time; the king and the fool; the triplet of the foolish king, the fool and the madman – all carry associations that chime much more resonantly with the medieval world than the modern, and that Shakespeare's first audience, unlike a modern world, did not have to learn from first principles.

Those links with the medieval as it was preserved in his own age are echoed in some details of the play, in particular in association with those characters who are, or who choose to identify themselves with, sub-courtly culture: the Fool, and Tom o' Bedlam, the lunatic persona assumed by the aristocrat thrown down from his own position. The Fool's prophecy in the Folio text, to which he adds his own prediction

that it will in due course be spoken by Merlin, belongs to an active tradition of Merlin-related prophecy going back deep into the Middle Ages. His own prophecy is a descendant of one by the thirteenth-century Thomas of Erceldoune, as mediated through the so-called 'prophecy of Chaucer' used as a page-filler at the end of the contents page of sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer's *Works*:

> Whan faith faileth in Priestes sawes
> And lordes hests are holden for lawes
> And robberie is holden purchace
> And lecherie is holden solace
> Than shall the lond of Albion
> Be brought to great confusion.[34]

Thomas's and 'Chaucer's' versions already offer a random mix of the commonplace with the impossible such as fits well with the Fool's mixture of shrewd satire and folly:

> When priests are more in word than matter,
> When brewers mar their malt with water . . .
> When usurers tell their gold i'the field,
> And bawds and whores do churches build,
> Then shall the land of Albion
> Come to great confusion.
>
> (3.2.80–1, 88–91)

The lines have no great dramatic function (hence the ease with which they can be omitted from the quarto text), but they do convey a sense of a country gone wrong that extends from the distant past through to an as yet unenacted future.

Tom o' Bedlam's acquaintance with the medieval is in some ways more intriguing, not least for what it reveals about Shakespeare's own reading. His account of the fiends that possess him (3.4.45–180) is drawn from Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostors*, but Shakespeare uses it for purposes that put it outside any Reformation polemic, to indicate madness rather than diabolism. He seems to have

little time for the presence of a literal devilishness in the world: his evil is incarnated in real people, in Edmund or Iago (and the witches in *Macbeth* are not apparently of the human variety: see p. 88 above). Poor Tom's fiends bring with them the darkness of a forbidden religion, a superstition that Reformation England had outgrown – or perhaps more accurately, of a world inhabited by demons rather than God. Tom also quotes from one work that stretches far back in time: *Bevis of Hamtoun*, a romance translated from Anglo-Norman into English around 1300, first put into print in 1503, and regularly reprinted for the next two hundred years.[35] Its wide dissemination makes it an appropriate common choice for both the aristocrat Edgar and the lowly persona he assumes, though the couplet he cites has a compulsive spookiness about it that belongs to a world of childhood terror:

> Mice and rats and such small deer [creatures
> Have been Tom's food for seven long year.
> (3.4.135–6)

The original lines, found in editions down to c. 1565, describe Bevis's hardships in prison:

> Rattes and myse and suche small dere
> Was his meate that seven yere.

Later prints alter the obsolete 'deere' to 'chere', making it likely that Shakespeare recalled the verse from his childhood reading or listening, and with it a darker world than contemporary city culture. The same world of folk-tale terror is invoked in the 'nightmare and her nine foals' (3.4.119) and the 'Fie, foh and fum' of Childe Roland as he smells 'the blood of a British man' (179–80). Folk-tale versions of the formula substitute 'English' for 'British': Shakespeare is alert to the fact that 'English' would have been an anachronism in the pre-Saxon world of *Lear*.

As with all his uses of the medieval elements embedded in his culture, Shakespeare takes what is there and transforms it. The transformations could not have happened without the raw material, just as *Lear* could

not have existed without Geoffrey of Monmouth deep in its ancestry, or *Macbeth* without the reign of an early Scottish king. Those medieval origins, moreover, go beyond serving as sources alone, to suggest a way of conceiving the world and presenting it on stage. Shakespeare's unique alertness to those elements, whether through acceptance, elaboration or overt rejection, is indispensable both to his tragic vision and how he gives it shape and body on the stage.

Chapter Six

ROMANCE, WOMEN AND THE PROVIDENTIAL WORLD

> Then is there mirth in heaven
> When earthly things made even
> Atone together.
> (*AYLI* 5.4.106–8)

To state the obvious: Shakespeare's comedies are characterized by their happy endings, usually a matter of young love culminating in marriage. The lines above are spoken by Hymen in the final scene of what is perhaps Shakespeare's happiest comedy, to confirm the four weddings that are about to take place, the reunion of father and daughter, and the restoration of the deposed Duke to his proper position. It is up to the director to choose whether to present Hymen as an assistant of Rosalind's, dressed up, masque-style, to adorn the final celebrations and make the conclusion seem more miraculous than it actually is, or to treat him as a *deus ex machina*, like Jupiter at the end of *Cymbeline*. The first is the commonest practice, but the text, uniquely in the Shakespeare corpus, does not specify just what the god's metaphysical status is supposed to be; and in the Elizabethan theatre, the way the two were performed might in any case have been indistinguishable. Whichever is chosen, the lines make the same point, or set of points. One is that the happy ending is, in some important sense, divinely endorsed, even though the restoration of order on earth does not need miraculous backing to accord with a providential shaping. It is, after all, Rosalind, and not Hymen or Providence or even the magician uncle she invents, who sorts out the plot. Further, that divine endorsement can embrace not just good action but past discord and sin, whatever it is that requires atonement. 'Atone' in the strict religious sense was a newcomer to

English, though 'atonement' had been around since the beginning of the century (in Tyndale); its etymology, disguised by the change in pronunciation from the medieval to the modern era, is 'at-one-ment', a coming together into unity. The atoning of heaven and earth signifies reconciliation, but beyond that also a sense of recovery and redemption. One of the primary meanings of 'mirth' in Middle English had been 'heavenly bliss'; it was becoming obsolete in this sense by the late sixteenth century, and its usage here is unique in Shakespeare. Both words insist on a deeper resonance to the communal joyous celebration of the closing scene.

Such qualities are widespread in Shakespeare's comedies, but the slightest acquaintance with the plays indicates how far the bulk of them are from projecting such a cheerful conclusion as Hymen proposes. Even in *As You Like It*, Jacques prefers to opt out of the general merrymaking, though not before he has given a blessing of a kind to the Duke and each of the four couples. The basic generalizing description of his comedy, of the happy ending associated with love and marriage, brings with it both qualifications and opportunities. Above all, it is the ending, not the main bulk of the comedy, that is happy, and in many plays that final happiness is shown up most sharply by the degree of hardship and grief endured in the earlier acts. Shakespeare's romances, like many narrative romances, follow a pattern of atonement for sin, of repentance and a hard progress towards redemption. Such things can on occasion come close to dominating the action, to the point where a play may push against the very limits of comedy. Shakespeare increasingly wrote against the grain of simple generic patterns, and his transgression of the comic is evidenced increasingly over the course of his career. Where potentially tragic matter is finally resolved into happiness, however, the sense of endorsement by a larger providential scheme of things becomes increasingly important: hence the part played by the gods in all his late romances. Furthermore, marriage was not only a personal matter, but very powerfully a dynastic one: many of his lovers are accordingly aristocratic, even royal, and few of his main characters fall below the level of the urban elites. Marriage driven by love also invites an emphasis on the woman as well as the man, and it was an opportunity that Shakespeare grasped to the full. Earthly things atoning together can

include man and woman, and given the broad anti-feminism inherent in the culture, that is not trivial. In one moment unique in early-modern drama (though it has a precedent in medieval romance),[1] the husband who believes he has had his unfaithful wife killed comes to realize, *even while he still thinks her guilty*, that she is both noble and 'much better' than he is himself, and that he, not she, deserves the gods' vengeance (*Cym* 5.1.1–11). The wife, the Imogen of *Cymbeline*, turns out to be both chaste and still alive, and they are reconciled; but it is none the less a remarkable moment of 'atoning', and one that Shakespeare himself adds to his source. It coincides too with the 'atoning' of Britain with Rome: a rewriting of historical invasion and colonization as a willed act of peacemaking, endorsed by Jupiter's prophecy interpreted by Philarmonus, lover of harmony.

Apart from the fifth-act sorting out of earlier complications, none of those characteristics reflected the theory that developed around early-modern comedy in its post-Classical and humanist forms. Comedies were the dominant genre on the Elizabethan stage, outnumbering tragedies by about three to one;[2] and in the earlier years, most of those owed much more to the great medieval genre of romance than they did to Classically inspired comedy. Romance had been the principal form of secular fiction for some four hundred years, from the mid-twelfth century forwards, and it dominated the Middle Ages and Tudor England rather as novels dominated the nineteenth century. The romance kind of comedy seems to have been received as more familiar, more *English*, than the satirical comedy that attempted to displace it, for all that romance comedies tend to be located far away and satirical comedy at home. The word itself, in the form *romanz*, had initially indicated the (French) vernacular as opposed to Latin, and it was rapidly adopted as the term for texts written in French. Latin texts were overwhelmingly pious or academic; the vernacular was used for secular audiences without Latin literacy, and so 'romance' came to be the term for fiction aimed at entertainment, though even in England it kept the aristocratic associations of the French term. Perhaps because of its non-academic origins, it was never given any kind of generic theorization (like 'play'). Its usage was moreover confined to narrative: it was never applied to drama by Shakespeare, or in his lifetime. The Latin-derived 'comedy' was all that was available for

theoretical discussion, even though the rival romance tradition was widely recognized. The modern use of the term 'romance' to describe Shakespeare's last plays is an acknowledgement of its generic importance to him, but the First Folio's use of the new dramatic term 'comedies' has tended to blur how far even his early comedies draw on romance patterns and models.

When playwrights looked around for plots, they found plenty of romances ready-made that could be adapted into stage comedies, and plenty of plot lines suitable for reworking. Romance shifted the balance of earlier epic narrative from warfare towards love, and from the homosocial warrior community towards individual self-realization of both the male and the female protagonists. Its motifs are those frequently associated with Jungian archetypal patterns, and contain some deep transhistorical appeal.[3] It is no accident, however, that its rise coincided with the great age of faith. Romance asserted that for those who live with integrity, poetic justice, happiness *in this world* and not merely in the next, was in accordance with the providential scheme of things. The wheel of fortune could turn upwards as well as down – or rather, it could make a complete circuit, taking the protagonists downwards through misery and even apparent death and upwards to resurrection, new life and bliss. In doing so, the function of the wheel changed. Instead of representing either chance, or, as *de casibus* tragedy most often insisted, divine retribution, it invoked the movement of providence, the turning of all action in the world towards final good, atoning together. Its ultimate symbolic resonance shifted from the Fall, with all its associated mutability and sin, to the Passion, Resurrection and redemption: the shape of doctrine worked out over the Catholic Middle Ages rather than by the new Calvinism.

This does not mean that romance is allegorical or religious, though English romance is almost always firmly in keeping with Christian ethics. It very often carries with it, however, an implicit confirmation of its workings from a larger scheme of belief, that the most extreme suffering is not necessarily the last word. Those who achieve final happiness in romance are those who keep faith with themselves and their own ideals, however impossible earthly perfection may be. Scepticism is often built into romance (it has to be, if the form is to keep in touch with the real

world at all), but cynicism never has the last word – or if it does, the work begins to break its generic boundaries. Shakespeare's *Troilus* may share some elements with satiric comedy, but it is decisively not a romance. In romance, the idealism of the young often invites an attitude of gentle amusement from the author, as it comes up against the belittling or the anti-heroic, but the laughter is not destructive or scornful, and the narrative finally re-asserts the value of ideals against the pragmatism of experience. Miranda's 'O brave new world, that hath such people in it!' contains a truth that Prospero's world-weary ''Tis new to thee' does not entirely cancel out. Beasts, as medieval physiological principles insisted, looked downwards; humankind has the ability to look at the stars, even if humanity's fallen state, what Lorenzo at the end of *The Merchant of Venice* calls 'this muddy vesture of decay', prevents us from hearing the music of the spheres. The principles explored in the *Merchant* are drawn directly from Christian doctrine: not the issues of ethnic and religious identity and prejudice that inevitably dominate post-Holocaust readings, but Shylock's Old Testament convictions set against Portia's New, law against forgiveness. Shylock insists on the letter of the law, and refuses Portia's pleas for mercy even though they are expressed in explicitly religious terms. Mercy 'is an attribute of God himself'; and

> in the course of justice, none of us
> Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy,
> And that same prayer, doth teach us all to render
> The deeds of mercy.
>
> (4.1.197–200)

The world being fallen, Shylock refuses; but he is at least spared the worst that the law of the Christian state might impose on him. The play may offer a glimpse of divine resolution, but the stubborn literalness of the fallen world has to settle for second best.

Classical theory of comedy as inherited by humanist scholars offered two possible definitions. One, the less cited of the two, fitted well with Shakespearean practice reduced to its basics: that 'comedies start in trouble, and end in peace', in Thomas Heywood's succinct definition – a definition that itself allows for the emphasis on 'trouble' across much of

the action. The second, which followed Classical practice in both Greek and Latin, excluded the happy ending from its formulation, emphasizing instead the purpose, content and style rather than the structure, and those were very different from what romance proposed. This kind of comedy was satirical and corrective, and operated by ridicule – 'so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one', as Sidney put it.[4] This definition allowed more obvious space for what a modern definition of comedy would want to put first, that it should be funny; but it assumes the laughter will be scornful, where the laughter of romance is more likely to be inspired by delight. Like *de casibus* tragedy, this definition was in part a moral one, to do with how the genre might shape the actions and behaviour of its readers or auditors. In contrast to tragedy, comedy of this kind concerned itself with middle- or low-ranking people; and those characters accordingly spoke in a lower register than was prescribed for tragedies, most obviously in the use of prose rather than verse. Scaliger's influential treatise on poetics laid down the qualities of comedy along just these lines, and Gosson closely replicated his prescription: 'The ground worke of Commedies, is love, cosenedge, flatterie, bawderie, slie conueighance of whordome. The persons, cookes, queanes (i.e. loose women), knaves, baudes, parasites, courtezaunes, lecherouse olde men, amorous young men.'[5] This is the sort of comedy favoured by Ben Jonson and the other writers of city comedy, and is in marked contrast to Shakespeare's preference for higher-ranking characters, passionate and faithful love expressed in verse (even the middle-class Anne Page of *Merry Wives* and the shepherd Silvius of *As You Like It* are allowed verse), and, instead of the increasingly fierce requirement for unity of time, place and action, expansive time-frames and far-flung settings. The taste for such comedy was much too popular, in both senses, as the critical complaints attest.[6] Jonson sums up the contrast in a debate between two 'spectators' in the course of *Every Man Out of his Humour*, a play that offers a running commentary on theatrical matters. One complains about the play's topical content and satire, on the grounds that he would prefer

> that the argument of his comedy might have been of some other nature, as of a duke to be in love with a countess, and that

> countess to be in love with the duke's son, and the son to love the lady's waiting-maid; some such cross wooing, with a clown to their servingman, better than to be thus near, and familiarly allied to the time. (end 3.1)

His companion, more of a humanist, suggests that the disagreements over defining comedy should be settled by 'Cicero's definition', 'who would have a comedy to be *imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis* [an imitation of life, a mirror of manners, and a truthful picture]; a thing throughout pleasant and ridiculous, and accommodated to the correction of manners'. The exchange serves as a defence of Jonson's own practice and definition of comedy against Shakespeare's (and Shakespeare may well be the direct object of attack here, though love-plots were a perennial favourite with audiences and therefore impresarios). It demonstrates too how conscious was the opposition of the humanist and romance definitions of comedy – in effect, the Classical and the medieval.

In opting for the romance version of comedy, Shakespeare was writing from deep within a vernacular tradition, and one that came with its popular appeal already established. His audiences grew up with narrative romances, many of them medieval ones available in cheap printed editions that came to form the bulk of early Tudor popular reading, the pulp fiction of the age. Some seventy medieval romances were still current after 1500, either in print or through retellings that kept their stories familiar. The famous list of romances owned by Captain Cox in the 1570s, many of them medieval in origin, generously witnesses to their continuing currency, whether or not there is an element of fiction about the list itself.[7] By the early years of the seventeenth century, the stories of Arthur, Tristram, Huon of Bordeaux, Guy of Warwick, Valentine and Orson and the Four Sons of Aymon had all been dramatized, no doubt because audiences, brought up on the same stories, could be guaranteed.[8] The endless complaints of Elizabethan and later critics about the inadequacies of popular taste, with lists of titles attached, testify to the continuing familiarity of medieval romance well into the seventeenth century, as does the impressive number of such texts incorporated into the Percy Folio

Manuscript of the 1640s or 1650s.[9] Cheap print, as distinct from expensive manuscript, meant that the readership for such texts moved downmarket, to be available to everyone, though the increasing quantity of alternative fiction aimed at adults, especially translations of Italian *novelle*, pushed the age of the readers downwards as the century progressed. The older romances came to be most typically read, or heard, in childhood, with all the force of memory that accompanies that. Shakespeare's reading in Plautus and Ovid and Plutarch has been abundantly traced; but he also knew, and assumed his audience knew, *Guy of Warwick*, *The Squire of Low Degree*, *Sir Eglamour*, *Valentine and Orson*, and *Bevis of Hampton*, and he made a full dramatization of *Apollonius of Tyre*.[10] Besides the quotation in *Lear*, *Bevis* gets a mention for its incredibility in *Henry VIII*, and for its hero's fighting prowess in the quarto version of *Henry VI Part 2*: 'with downright blowes, as Bevys of South-hampton fell vpon Askapart'.[11]

The story of the three caskets Shakespeare uses in *The Merchant of Venice* comes from the medieval *Gesta Romanorum*, still a sixteenth-century favourite in its English prints.[12] The fairy king Oberon made his way onto the Elizabethan stage from Lord Berners' Tudor translation of *Huon of Bordeaux*, a prose redaction of a thirteenth-century original.[13] Like everyone else in England, he knew about King Arthur and Robin Hood. He appropriated for *Henry V* the sub-genre of popular romance that showed an encounter between a king in disguise and one of his unwitting subjects.[14] Other stories came to him at a further remove from their medieval origins: the early fifteenth-century outlaw romance of *Gamelyn*, available only in manuscript as a spurious addition to the *Canterbury Tales*, was one of the sources of Lodge's *Euphues Golden Legacy*, Shakespeare's own source for *As You Like It*. *Gamelyn* itself has no love-interest, but Lodge found that in William Warner's retelling of the medieval romance of Havelok.[15] All the previous versions of *King Lear* from the 1130s forwards gave it a romance shaping, and that was the form in which the 1590s *King Leir* dramatized it. And a play of *Guy of Warwick* that probably dates from the early 1590s contains a character from Stratford-upon-Avon named Sparrow, who has some claim to being a send-up of the upstart Shakespeare himself.[16]

Shakespeare's early ambitions included the writing of a neo-Classical

FIGURE 6 Bevis fights the giant Askapart (*Sir Bevis of Southampton*, 1565 edition) © The British Library Board C.21.c.62 K1 verso

comedy. The roots of *The Comedy of Errors* in Plautus were immediately apparent to the lawyers of Gray's Inn, where it was played at Christmas 1594. Even that, however, with its generic designation as comedy built into its title and its close observance of the unities, found its model too restrictive, and imports a frame and a setting from the romance of *Apollonius of Tyre* – specifically, from Gower's retelling of the story in his

late-fourteenth-century *Confessio amantis*, last printed in 1554, which was later adopted wholesale for *Pericles*. The town where the action takes place is relocated to the distant Ephesus, so removing any immediate aura of topical city comedy; and with that comes a long-lost wife who has found refuge there, as Apollonius's wife had done in the temple of Diana. Shakespeare's choice of city seems designed to encourage a recognition of the link with *Apollonius*, and the tracks of the lost wife's medieval origins become still clearer when he turns her into an abbess, a term for her previously used only by Gower, and not, as the original Classical framing would invite, a priestess.[17] After 1594, this sense that Classicism was not enough rapidly came to dominate Shakespeare's work, in all modes. Most of his other comedies exploit their romance conventions more comprehensively, emphasizing love as a key human value (as *the* key human value), and adding a touch of exoticism, in the characters and locations and often the plots too, that links them firmly back to their medieval rather than humanist generic origins.

HEROINES, INHERITANCE AND HAPPY ENDINGS

Medieval romance, and English romance in particular, was the first major secular genre to make women into leading agents. Ovid had made them the protagonists of his *Heroides*; but since that consists of letters written by women abandoned by their lovers, they are by definition not the agents of their own histories, and the same is true of works descended from it. Women's uncontrollable and illicit passion is a recurrent theme in the *Metamorphoses* and some Classical plays, but it invites horror rather than sympathy. Greek romances of the Hellenistic age, which were rediscovered under Elizabeth, included some lively women as an essential commodity in their male pursuit of sexual adventure; but the portrayal of a young woman in love from inside her own mind, and who elicits full audience sympathy, is a medieval phenomenon. English romances in particular readily made them agents in their own right, not just the objects of male desire. Some texts confine them to more passive roles, but they are much more likely to be active subjects with minds and adventures of their own.[18]

If comedies and romances alike find their strongest generic identifiers in their happy endings, a heroine of this sort does most to ensure those endings. She is typically feisty, she knows her own mind, she is passionately devoted to the man she chooses to love (or, in a widespread variant, to the man she has already married), and she is prepared to go to considerable lengths to ensure that she gets him. English romance had never had much time for the romances of adultery that held such an appeal for the French (the story of Lancelot and Guinevere was never told in English until Sir Thomas Malory, on the very verge of the Tudor age, and in all its versions the circumstances of their love rule out a happy ending). The sighing for an inaccessible mistress that characterized southern European love-lyric down to Petrarch and beyond was rarely turned into extended narrative in Middle English, or only as an opening gambit before other things started to happen. English romance was typically concerned with reciprocal love aiming at marriage, and the heroine was at least as important as the hero in driving both the story and its ideas and ideals.

That women should be chaste, silent and obedient may indeed have been the mantra repeated by homilists, but its endless repetition is an indication that the truth was often otherwise, and not always for the bad. Women had to run households and businesses, not least when their husbands were away. They might on occasion have to mount a defence against armed attack, at every social level from the gentry to the queen. Edward III's Queen Philippa and Margaret of Anjou led armies to battle, giving Elizabeth at Tilbury a distinguished line of predecessors. A meek and submissive wife was far from being what most men needed. The stereotype does not fit with the heroines of romance either, from long before Shakespeare. They may tend towards the silent in mixed company, though Beatrice's sparky repartee is commended by her prince (*MA* 2.1.312–14); their fathers may condemn their disobedience when they fall for unapproved men, as the *Merry Wives*' Anne Page and *Cymbeline*'s Imogen do. But the plays do not endorse any programme of silence or mindless obedience, and indeed it is Desdemona's determination to be obedient to her husband (3.3.89; cf. 4.1.255), when she has not been so to her father, that helps to bring about her own unhappy ending. The one non-negotiable element of the moral triad for a heroine is chastity,

in the sense not of lifelong virginity but of faithful love consummated in marriage. That is a key part of the heroine's sense of identity and integrity, not as something imposed by a patriarchal society, but as a choice she makes for herself and that is taken for granted by those who know her.

The long association of *romanz* with the secular world made its emphasis on love and marriage all but inevitable. The family was the most important single institution for the great majority of the population, and not least to the women readers and listeners whom vernacular romance embraced. The aristocratic bent of the genre took that concern with marriage further, to include dynastic continuation: marriage is not the end of the story, but the guarantee that the line will continue beyond the point where the plot ceases. Women were crucial in that process, and not merely as childbearers. Since the early thirteenth century, English law had given daughters full inheritance rights to both title and property when there were no sons, so giving them major economic and political importance; and heiresses accordingly figure very large in romance, Shakespeare's included. Marriage, far from being the marker of bourgeois interests it is often assumed to be, connects romance with the very highest social levels. A papal decree of the mid-twelfth century had also laid down that the essential for a valid marriage was not parental consent or a formal ceremony but simply the sworn consent of the spouses, and that potentially gave the woman her own power of erotic as well as economic patronage. (It also created a good source for complications of plot, as with the issue in *Measure for Measure* of how far the marriages have got between Angelo and Mariana or Claudio and Juliet.) Parents still carried most power where daughters' marriages were concerned, and in *The Merchant of Venice* Portia's father even controls her choice from beyond the grave. The marriage of Romeo and Juliet is no less valid for being unauthorized, however, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has to transport itself to ancient Athens before a father can have a daughter legally incarcerated for refusing his choice of husband (and even that is overruled at the end of the play). The happy ending associated with romance none the less encourages a father's eventual agreement to his daughter's choice, however hostile he may have been initially. Cymbeline is accordingly reconciled to Imogen's Posthumus,

Anne Page's parents to her own choice of suitor different from those favoured by either her mother or her father. The same is true for the man too, though that is often less highlighted: Florizel's father is the obstacle he most fears, and the reconciliation of father, son and bride also marks the reconciliation between Bohemia and Sicily. It is the impossibility of such family reconciliation that helps to push *Romeo and Juliet* over the edge into tragedy.

The closeness of *Romeo* to romance, and therefore the poignancy when the happy ending is so narrowly frustrated, is greatly enhanced in Shakespeare's handling of Arthur Brooke's rather tedious poem. His presentation of Juliet has much to do with that. A high proportion of medieval heroines, from the twelfth century forwards, set their hearts on the man they love as quickly and decisively as he does on her, and very often indeed before he falls in love with her. The driving force of the story comes not from the fact that the heroine is playing hard to get or that her heart is not easily won, but from the fact that she *is* hard to get, whether because of hostile parents or rival suitors or political impossibilities or kidnap or exile. The path of true love necessarily does not run smooth, or there would be no story, but (in contrast to the current stereotype of medieval romance, largely drawn from continental lyric rather than narrative) it is rarely because of any difficulties created by the woman. The pattern was set in one of the very earliest medieval romances, a vernacularization (into French) of the *Aeneid*, entitled the *Roman d'Eneas*. Here, the heroine is not Dido, who has a comparatively unimportant part, but Lavine, a supremely uninteresting figure in Virgil, but who here takes the leading role in wooing Eneas to be her husband, and who in due course, in the larger story long taken as historical, becomes the founding mother of all those realms of western Europe that claimed Trojan ancestry. She sees Eneas from within the city he is besieging and falls for him decisively and absolutely before he even sets eyes on her. Her sight of him is described in conventional (male) fashion as being shot by the arrow of the god of Love, and her response is the one now taken as being standard for the male lover in the Petrarchan tradition: she retreats to her bed for a long internal soliloquy (of four hundred lines) analysing how love makes her feel, and its many paradoxes. The work was written within the broad ambience of Henry

II's Angevin court, and helped to inspire the writers of Anglo-Norman romance in England. The pattern set by Lavine was largely displaced in French over the next few decades in favour of storylines less aimed at marriage, but it was followed by a good proportion of English romance heroines down through the sixteenth century, including many early romances that made the transition to print. Such heroines not only know whom they want to marry, and go about winning their chosen husbands; they are also frank about the sexual element in human love, typically expressed in a pillow soliloquy as their tangled emotions prevent them from sleeping. One particularly notable example, in a medieval alliterative romance given a popular prose reworking early in the sixteenth century, is spoken by the Emperor's daughter Melior in *William of Palerne*, in which she successively accuses her eyes and her heart of betraying her by falling in love –

> Whom schal I it wite but mi wicked eyghen, [blame; eyes
> That lad myn hert through loking this langour to drye? [led;
> suffer this distress

– but refuses to condemn either of them.[19] Shakespeare's sonnet 'Mine eyes and heart are at a mortal war' operates with closely similar ideas some decades after the romance was printed, but he transfers the imagery from a woman's voice to himself as male speaker.

The emphasis on marriage in the romances makes such monologues radically different from the expressions of transgressive passion that Ovid gives to many of his heroines. Spenser is writing from centrally within the native romance tradition when he has Britomart lie awake in passionate thought about the image of Artegall she has seen in Merlin's magic mirror (*Faerie Queene* III.ii) before she rides out to seek him in the guise of a knight errant (a disguise that has its immediate model in Ariosto's Bradamante, who was in turn imitated from the Grisandol of the thirteenth-century French Prose *Merlin*). Within the Shakespearean corpus too, if a heroine is given a soliloquy, desire is likely to be its tenor. Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* has several such soliloquies, before she too disguises herself as a boy to follow her beloved Proteus; Helena in *All's Well* compares herself to 'the hind that would be mated by the

lion' (1.1.92) before devising her scheme to win the reluctant Bertram; and the Jailer's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is given several such declarations of her passion for Palamon despite being of a low social rank such as would normally preclude serious love at all – and especially, as she herself acknowledges, marriage. Viola declares herself 'desperate for my master's love' (*TN* 2.2.37), and Juliet herself is given a soliloquy of such frankness while she waits for Romeo to come to her bed that Victorian family editions cut much of it.

In an age when wealth, title and power passed from father to child, sexual passion was far more than just an expression of self-realization or subjecthood, however much literature might emphasize the emotional side of love. In the early-modern as in the medieval period, conception was widely believed to depend on the woman's releasing seed as well as the man, orgasm having the same reproductive function for both sexes. Female sexual desire was thus a necessary part of the ideal marriage, not only as an expression of love, but to generate an heir. Rosalind, on her next appearance after first meeting Orlando, is already pining for her 'child's father' (*AYLI* 1.3.11), a phrase sometimes bowdlerized, like Juliet's soliloquy, to a self-pitying sigh for her 'father's child'. In *Pericles*, Marina is conceived on her parents' wedding night (Chorus before act 3, 10–11), in a confirmation of the passion that has made Thaisa pursue her choice of husband with such absolute conviction. Medieval romances frequently ended, after the lovers' marriage, with a quick mention of their production of children: fifteen, in *Havelok*. It is harder for a play to give a final summary of a story that lies outside the characters' knowledge, but something of the kind can be done occasionally in the histories where the future had, so to speak, already happened. So Richmond closes *Richard III* with a prediction of the heirs that will ensue from his 'conjoining' with Elizabeth of York: she herself does not figure in the play, but the promised marriage is explicitly a divinely endorsed healing of the past on which heaven smiles (5.5.20–34), a providential reading of history to replace the earlier plays' emphasis on Fortune. The missing romance element of Elizabeth of York's desire for her future husband had already been provided in the ballad-style romance of *Lady Bessy*, in which she takes the role of the feisty heroine who instigates his progress towards both marriage and the

crown.[20] The lost heiress Perdita is given an unashamed recognition of her own desire and its proper outcome: she rejects with disgust any notion that Florizel's 'desire to breed by me' might depend on anything as superficial as make-up, and she plays on the euphemism for orgasm as death in her wish to have her lover dying 'quick, and in mine arms' (*WT* 4.4.103, 132). Her own importance as the heir whose preservation is essential to the future stability of the kingdom is spelled out in the prophecy that also declares her mother's innocence, and she is given a still further resonance as the child of Nature, 'great creating Nature' (2.2.60, 4.4.88), part of the whole cycle of the regeneration of life itself. The gods' interest in the plot demonstrated in the prophecy may be ostensibly pagan, but the language of the final act, and not least that surrounding Hermione's resurrection, is so insistently Christian ('Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him / Dear life redeems you', 5.3.102–3) as to invoke a full providential significance for the play. Hermione's return from apparent death is one part of that; her daughter's frank sexuality, her readiness to play her part in the cycle of the created world, is another.

As *The Winter's Tale* also demonstrates, however, a woman's capacity for passionate sexuality also laid her open to misogynist attack. As many recent studies have demonstrated, that too was deeply embedded in early modern culture as in Classical and medieval.[21] Misogyny had been given a philosophical foundation by Aristotle, and a religious grounding by St Paul's firm conviction that celibacy was superior to marriage. It was not, however, universal, and especially not in the secular world where loving marriage was taken as the ideal form of life, and an attainable ideal at that. The resistance to such anti-feminist attitudes is embodied in the heroines of romance, even while many of the stories recognize the deep power of such misogyny. If a woman can show passion for her husband, she can show passion for another man: the very intensity of her desire can be held against her. The result is not just jealousy, though Shakespeare is scarily good at representing that. It is also a matter of inheritance, or disinheritance. A child born within marriage was legally the father's, and the fear that it might not be his own was almost built into the system of patrilineal inheritance developed over the course of the Middle Ages. Leontes' attempt to dispose of Perdita is the necessary

corollary to his belief that the child is not his. When a king or an emperor casts off a pregnant wife, as happens in a number of medieval romances as in *The Winter's Tale*, he is also leaving his realm wide open to that most dangerous of political situations, the kingdom without an heir.

The combination of male anxiety and a woman's capacity for desire drives the plot of the woman falsely accused of unchastity or adultery, at whatever social level it is set. It provides the storyline of a good number of English medieval romances, and no fewer than five of Shakespeare's plays – two of the middle comedies (*Merry Wives*, *Much Ado*), two of the late plays (*Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*) and one tragedy (*Othello*). *Henry VIII* offers a variant on it, in the idea that Katherine might be, not an unfaithful wife, but not a wife at all; though there the politics makes for complications in the play as in history, since the birth of the heiress Elizabeth depends on Henry's irrevocable rejection of his dutiful wife. At the core of all these stories, medieval and Shakespearean, is the wife's innocence. Male jealousy is always an aberration, a moral failure to perceive the good, and the plotting ensures that the audience is on the woman's side. Her probity is so strong a presumption that Shakespeare will alter his sources to fit: the suggested Italian models for the *Merry Wives of Windsor* have the wives fooling their husbands into believing them to be faithful when they are not, whereas the shift to the English setting brings with it an assumption of their sexual integrity – a crucial shift of balance, and one that has been too little commented on.[22] Typically, indeed, the jealous husband is surrounded by men urging him to trust his wife: no one but Othello or Leontes believes their wives to be unchaste. Falstaff imagines Mistresses Page and Ford to be of loose morals, but he is ludicrously wrong (in the mode of comedy as ridicule), and Master Ford is mocked by the other characters for his readiness to believe in his wife's slipperiness. Iachimo intends to seduce Imogen, but her response is instant and decisive. In Shakespeare as in medieval romance, the woman's chastity, in the sense of faithful and committed love for her chosen husband, is the norm, and the men who believe otherwise are in the grip of a pathological obsession. The plotline obviously has a huge capacity for producing tragedy rather than comedy. The highly competent wives of the *Merry Wives* leave the audience in no doubt that that particular play will end happily, and Beatrice and

Benedick in *Much Ado* create an atmosphere of such delight around themselves that they help to carry the darker main plot with them; but the late plays come dangerously close to tragedy and, in the case of *Othello*, cross the dividing line. On the rare occasions when adultery is a genuine issue, as with Edmund and the older sisters in *King Lear*, the play moves decisively out of the sphere of romance.

BEYOND THE NATURAL

The supernatural of early-modern tragedy is ominous: ghosts, witches, the conjuration of fiends. In comedy, it is ultimately benevolent, and is designed to elicit wonder more than fear. Magic and the supernatural are widespread as plot elements of medieval romance, and are carried over into the dramatic romances of the Elizabethan age. Magic is more often invoked than practised in Shakespeare, but Prospero is a full-scale magician. The new Classicism may require that gods appear more frequently than fairies, but there are plenty of fairies around too, and both narratives and plays can portray a permeable border between this world and an other. The fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* draw on both literary and folk representations, but both kinds are medieval in origin: Robin Goodfellow and the elves who sweep the dust have their roots in a scarcely recorded past of folk belief, Titania and Oberon are much less Ovidian than Chaucerian (and are discussed in the next chapter). Belief in fairies was still widespread, but even if *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does not indicate that Shakespeare shared it, he knew that they were widely regarded as demonic, and goes to some trouble to have Oberon deny any such associations (3.2.378–93). The fairies of medieval romance were characterized by a freedom from conventional human morality, in the arbitrariness of their actions generally, and specifically where sex was concerned. A fairy queen might well also be a fairy mistress, and did not incur opprobrium in the process. Titania and Oberon both generously demonstrate those qualities. If ever Elizabeth saw the play, it must have been a relief to her (and a corresponding piece of mischief on Shakespeare's part) to be presented with a fairy queen capable of passion for a donkey, even though under the influence of magic, and safely insulated from the Queen herself by the parallel

account of the chaste and fancy-free 'imperial votaress'. His plays are entirely free of nymphs and comparable Classical demigods: those who appear in the masque in *The Tempest* are spirits like Ariel who are summoned to act the roles, and Ariel himself is never given any metaphysical definition. When Prospero renounces his power over the spirits of the island, he describes them as traditional English 'elves', 'demi-puppets' who create fairy rings. His only other play in which fairies appear is the *Merry Wives*, and there they have no existence outside Falstaff's credulous imagination and the costumes assumed by the principal characters. His late plays more often introduce the gods, Jupiter and Diana appearing in *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*, Apollo intervening through oracle in the *Winter's Tale*.

Wonder was powerfully evoked not only by the magic and supernatural of romance both narrative and dramatic, but it also lay at the heart of the cosmic theatre, capable of staging the unstageable, that constituted both the medieval and the Elizabethan dramatic experience.[23] Sometimes the wonder in Shakespeare's comedies is contained within the action, as when the response to the eventual appearance of the twins together onstage in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night* is that it must be supernatural. The Duke of Ephesus demands, 'Which is the natural man, / And which the spirit?' (*CE* 5.1.334–5). The appearance together of Viola and Sebastian seems like a contradiction of the Aristotelean principle that 'is, and is not' are entirely incompatible modes, and as an alternative Viola wonders for a moment that perhaps Sebastian is a spirit returned from the dead to frighten them (*TN* 5.1.232). By contrast, the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* never do discover what has happened to them; the fairies remain invisible to everyone except Bottom, and he brings the wonder associated with them firmly down to earth. The moment of wonder most intensely invoked in the language of the play is Oberon's recalling of hearing the singing of a 'mermaid on a dolphin's back', and of Cupid's attempt to strike the 'fair vestal, throned by the west', the figure for Elizabeth who elicits wonder even from the fairy king. The real wonder of the *Dream*, however, lies in the extraordinary power of theatrical illusion that Shakespeare creates, that can make a spoken moon more real than one seen through a window, or darkness obscure a stage in

broad daylight, or Theseus look silly in his refusal to believe in 'these antique fables, nor these fairy toys' (5.1.3).

Outside the *Dream* and the *Tempest*, 'real' magic and enchantments play a smaller part in Shakespeare than in many of the romance plays of the era. Gosson clearly found stage monsters made out of brown paper less than terrifying, though the addition of the fire and smoke noted by Sidney must have added a certain delighted *frisson* for the spectators.[24] Peele's *Old Wife's Tale* is so full of magic and marvels that they tend to lose much of their potential wonder. Peele was fully aware of what he was doing, and the entertainment offered by the supernatural in the play partly derives from how bathetically unexciting it turns out to be. Many of the better writers of romance had been equally aware that once magic becomes an expected ingredient, it ceases to evoke wonder, and found various ways around it. One was to displace the wonder from the magic to the people who used it.[25] A ring given to Floris by his mother in the early *Floris and Blancheflour*, and which preserves its wearer from death by burning, is passed between two condemned lovers until they let it fall between them, and it is the demonstration of such suprahuman love, not anything magic about the ring, that moves their judge to spare them. In that instance, the story does not offer any proof that the ring really is magic, and it does not matter: the lovers attract the wonder that the magic of the ring might carry, and more. A somewhat similar effect occurs when Ganymede–Rosalind promises to sort everything out at the end of *As You Like It* with the help of her non-existent magician uncle; the wonder felt by the other characters on stage takes the form for the audience of admiration of her ingenuity, though the appearance of Hymen helps to convey the sense of marvel outwards to the spectators too. A less idealistic variation on the same motif appears in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. There, the lady of the castle where Gawain is staying gives him a girdle that is supposed to protect him from death; in the event, it is responsible for his only injury in the poem, inflicted as a punishment for breaking his pledged word, his chivalric integrity, in taking the girdle in the first place. It is never clear whether the girdle is really magic (he isn't killed while he is wearing it, but neither does his opponent actually try to do more than give him a slight wound), but what had been expected to be the narrative climax turns out to be

making an ethical point instead. Such a use of magic – of non-functioning magic – is so counter-intuitive to traditional storytelling that it had to be re-invented independently by a number of medieval and early-modern writers rather than being carried down with the transmission of a story, and Shakespeare likewise seems to have come up with the same solution independently. Wonder is strenuously invoked by Paulina when she promises to make the statue of Hermione move and take Leontes by the hand, for instance, and she insists twice that the 'spell' she is about to perform is not 'unlawful', not black magic (5.3.96, 105); but the marvel – or indeed the miracle, dependent on 'faith' – is all the greater for not being magic or miraculous at all. Uniquely among the romances of resurrection, even the spectators do not know that Hermione is still alive, and what they *see*, or seem to see, is a miracle in action. Shakespeare's faith in the power of performance elides the two, magic and life. Paulina's invocation of the magical gives the whole scene a quality of wonder even before Hermione moves, but when she does, wonder at the lost wife's continuing life trumps any supernatural imitation.

In Hermione's case, the status of the magic is obvious: it isn't magic at all. Shakespeare's most remarkable use of a magic object, by contrast, leaves entirely open the question of whether it really is magic, and it is similarly deployed to focus attention onto human emotions. This is the handkerchief in *Othello*, which he insists has 'magic in the web'. It is given the most powerful introduction of any magic item in any of the plays: even Love-in-Idleness in the *Dream* pales by comparison. He claims that it was sewn by a 200-year-old sybil possessed by 'prophetic fury';

> The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,
> And it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful
> Conserved of maidens' hearts.
>
> (3.4.75–7)

From the sybil it had passed to an Egyptian enchantress, who gives it to Othello's mother, and she in turn gives it to him on her deathbed. Like most of the magic objects in medieval romance, it has an impeccably female derivation; but its latest recipient, Desdemona, has no magic

powers. The handkerchief, he claims, has the power to hold a husband's love, and its loss ensures his hatred and 'such perdition / As nothing else could match' (69–70). But how much of it should the audience believe? Or, rather, how much does Othello believe, and how much is he making up? Othello's exotic background and his experience of men with heads growing beneath their shoulders gives it a plausibility it might otherwise lack, and many spectators and readers are as convinced as Desdemona. The suggestion of cosmic forces woven into the handkerchief is not so different from the hermetic magic studied with intense seriousness by academics across Europe, including the royal astrologer Dr John Dee. Whether it 'really is' magic is beside the point compared with the fact that the speech makes it quite impossible for Desdemona to tell him the truth – that she has lost it. She lost it, furthermore, not through carelessness, but because he knocks it out of her hand when she tries to bind his head with it to cure his headache (he is suspecting he has cuckold's horns), and he hurries her offstage with him:

> Your napkin is too little.
> Let it alone. Come, I'll go in with you.
> (3.3.291–2)

That he makes her drop it, or at least prevents her from picking it up (either or both possibilities are implied by the dialogue, and there is no stage direction), is noticed by neither of them in the stress of the moment. Othello, in other words, manufactures his own 'ocular proof' of her infidelity out of a loving action on her part, and his claims about the handkerchief's origin seal her fate. In the process, the handkerchief comes to carry just the significance with which his speech endows it: lose it, and perdition will follow. The metaphysical status of the magic is impossible to identify – 'real' magic; a curious anthropological belief on the part of a man whose roots lie outside Venetian Christian civilization from which the spectators are free to dissociate themselves; or the product of his own invention produced as a warning and a threat to his wife. For the purposes of the play, it does not matter. The virtue of the handkerchief, its power to decide the outcome of the action, is the same whether it is magic or not.

THE LAST PLAYS

The last plays – the 'romances', *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* – invoke wonder most explicitly and extensively. Jacobean comedy divided out into topical city comedy, and dramatic romance: the difference by this time was so apparent that romances were often assigned the unclassical label of tragicomedy. It is at least as helpful to think of them simply as plays, and to take them on their own terms. *Pericles*, indeed, which was omitted from the First Folio, describes itself on its title page as just that: *The Late, and much admired Play, called Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Their inclusiveness of all social ranks, of grief and loss as well as happiness, death as well as recovery, and their generous extension over time and space all engage with pre-humanist ideas of total theatre. They exploit the generic openness of the narrative romance tradition to the full, to produce what Simon Palfrey has described as 'almost a symbol of the inadequacy of the "classic" generic classification'.[26] The modern categorization of the traditional four plays as romances none the less accurately reflects their preoccupations, atmosphere and methods. They are typically two-generation plays, with a concomitant interest in dynasty as well as marriage; all of them contain resurrections from apparent death; they all assume that there is a rightful heir, who may be lost but whose return is essential for the peace and good order of the state; they emphasize their providential patterning, often by way of supernatural intervention; the lead characters are of the highest social status, monarchs or princes and their children, or, at worst, dukes; and humour is incidental rather than central. Like many romances, but in contradiction of at least some definitions of tragicomedy,[27] most of them contain real as well as apparent deaths. Their temporal and geographic expansiveness is a marked characteristic of medieval romance as well as theatre, though their size always made them awkward to adapt for the stage. *The Tempest* solves the problem by focusing on a single moment when all its far-flung plot elements and journeys come together, though on an island that is itself a waystation on a series of voyages between Milan and Naples and Carthage, not to mention the Bermudas; and the long past inserts itself forcefully into the plot's immediate present.

All four have their ultimate origins in the Middle Ages, though only *Pericles* has a direct medieval source (and indeed insists on it all the way

through). King Cymbeline first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth. *Cymbeline*'s story of a husband who takes a bet on his faithful wife's chastity, resulting in her escape in male disguise, may have come from the version in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, or more likely by way of its fifteenth-century free adaptation *Frederyk of Jennen*, first printed in England in 1518. *The Winter's Tale* has Greene's *Pandosto* as its immediate source, but Shakespeare decisively rewrites the story away from Greene's opting for the death of the calumniated wife and suicide of Pandosto, its Leontes figure (an end that takes it closer to *Othello*), and he removes the incest threatened by Pandosto towards his as yet unrecognized daughter. Instead, he follows the medieval romance model of the woman falsely accused, allowing the husband's penitence to be accepted, and bringing back both the wife and the missing heir in a reconciliation of the family across two generations: a pattern offered, for instance, by the widely known (and twice dramatized) *Valentine and Orson*. Happy endings are one of the hardest things to bring off with conviction, but the intensity of the suffering in all these plays makes the endings come over not as wish-fulfilment or escapism but as the proper, and providential, reward for virtue, endorsed by Diana or Jupiter or Apollo.

The Tempest has no known source for its plot, and is especially eclectic in its assemblage of influences, from Virgil's *Aeneid* to Montaigne and the as yet unprinted Bermuda pamphlet; but that too has medieval antecedents that governed its reception by its original audience, by working with familiar romance motifs and structures. The most important of these is its grounding of its story in Prospero and his daughter's being cast out from Milan in

> a rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd,
> Nor tackle, sail, nor mast.
> (1.2.146–7)

The practice of casting malefactors or the politically dangerous out to sea in an unequipped open boat had its counterpart in historical fact, but it was taken up in a good number of romances, and the phrasing – 'no tackle, sail, nor mast' and close variants – remains remarkably stable from the twelfth century forwards.[28] The point of it, from the

perpetrators' point of view, was that it disposed of those who were for any reason undesirable without the shedding of blood, particularly convenient if the victim belonged to a category – woman, child, someone of royal blood – that made execution distasteful or imprudent. Alonso and Antonio have no wish to set 'a mark so bloody on the business' of disposing of the Duke and his infant daughter. In a boat with no means of steering or propulsion, and very frequently (as here) unseaworthy too, the voyagers are rendered completely passive: they are altogether at the mercy of God, or the gods, or providence. For this reason, the victims are often women or babies, who are less capable of heroic or political action on their own account. Miranda is thus more typical of such voyagers than Prospero, though his dedication to learning rather than action removes him from the usual masculine stereotypes of the ruler. The preservation of the victims in such stories justifies them by making it clear that God is on their side: legally, it affirms their innocence; spiritually, it marks even the worst sinner as a saint; and politically, it indicates the rightful king or heir. The baby Miranda's own 'fortitude from heaven' helps Prospero avoid despair (the great danger associated with such casting adrift, as a number of texts note), and they are saved, he insists, 'by Providence divine', partly mediated through Gonzalo's helpful supplies of water, food and clothing. The play then takes up a number of further romance motifs. The whole play is structured on a series of sea-voyages, not only Prospero's but the ship that is wrecked in the first scene and the return to Milan at the end. The action is set on an exotic island that has no clear geographical co-ordinates – for all its placing between Italy and North Africa, it is a 'spatial anachronism', in Northrop Frye's term.[29] Much of the plot is conducted through magic and the supernatural, whether the spirits who are the native inhabitants of the island or Prospero's own magic that controls them. Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love at first sight, and have to overcome her father's apparent disapproval before they are allowed to marry; and any transgression of premarital chastity is threatened with dire consequences (unusually dire for romance, though *Huon of Bordeaux* offers a close parallel). Prospero makes the difficult decision for virtue over vengeance, mercy over strict justice: a decision that in turn allows the repentance of Alonso, the restoration of the true ruler, and the ensuring

of the future of both kingdom and duchy through the next generation. If Antonio and Sebastian remain silent at the end, they should count themselves lucky: romances are not always so forgiving towards unrepentant villains.

The ending of *The Tempest* was once taken as Shakespeare's own abjuration of his art, the theatrical art of illusion; and it is a reading so familiar to us that it is difficult to exclude, whatever other concerns the play may have. Its interest in illusion, in the power of potent art or rough magic to transform the commonplace, to create wonder, is pervasive and explicit. Prospero's renunciation of his magic is not quite the moment where the play ends, however. That is the Epilogue, in which Prospero, still at least half within the role, asks for the audience's approval and release.

> Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, Art to enchant;
> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,
> Which pierces so, that it assaults
> Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
> As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
> Let your indulgence set me free.

The commonest way to end a romance had been to invoke a blessing on the audience. Here, Prospero, in whatever voice he is speaking – the character's, the actor's, the author's – prays for the theatrical equivalent of salvation. The language – ending, despair, prayer, Mercy, crimes, pardon, indulgence – is poised between theatrical, political and religious meanings, but the final balance falls towards the religious. 'The great globe itself' will dissolve like 'this insubstantial pageant' (4.1.153, 155): the 'O' that represents the world as theatre can dissolve from being 'all' to being 'nothing'. This play that has shown so explicitly Shakespeare's power to create a world ends with an invocation of the Last Judgement, when the souls of all those who play their parts in the great theatre of the world will come to judgement. There is no Calvinist predestination here: the judgement lies in the spectators, and is conditional on their own hope for mercy and pardon projected onto the parting magician.

PERICLES

As the play that shows Shakespeare's strongest commitment to medieval romance, *Pericles* requires discussion to itself. It is medieval not just in terms of its story, or for its readiness to look backwards, though its dating as the earliest of the 'last plays' (1607–8) helps to open the way for the investment in romance that followed. It represents, not just the continuing life of the medieval, but the invention of medievalism, the valuing of the medieval world for its own sake.[30]

The play shows Shakespeare's most comprehensive engagement with the medieval world, and what it could offer to his theatre. It is there in source, in import and in staging. Its story, of the man known elsewhere as Apollonius of Tyre, had probably first been written in Latin not long after the fall of Rome, and was disseminated across the whole of Europe within the next few centuries.[31] It is the only work of fiction to have been translated into Old, Middle and modern English, and the dramatization follows the story with exceptional faithfulness.[32] The narrative looks at first glance unstageable. Its action, dramatic enough in its focus on corrupt and faithful sex, wickedness and suffering, sprawls over many years and across half the Mediterranean, before it finally turns disaster into bliss, death into resurrection and regeneration. It has the most comprehensive and convincing happy ending in all early-modern drama, and it achieves it, as did so many of the romances, by emphasizing the hardship and misery suffered along the way, so that the final joy seems neither normative nor random. *Pericles*' sprawling action and the surface naivety of its stagecraft, which were the despair of earlier generations of critics, are no problem on stage: in performance, it has persistently proved itself as one of the most successful and moving of the whole Shakespeare canon. The end can be painfully moving, as weeping audiences testify. Conveying bliss of such rarity, as the story emphasizes, and intensity, as the minimalism of the rhetoric enables to shine through, is Shakespeare's highest homage to the power of the medieval.

The immediate source for the play, Gower's retelling of the 'Apollonius' in his *Confessio amantis*, may perhaps have been lodged in Shakespeare's imagination ever since he had used it for the frame of *The Comedy of Errors*. There had been a number of other English versions before Shakespeare, and he used one other for *Pericles* besides Gower: the

prose *Patterne of Painfull Adventures*, an adaptation extracted by Laurence Twine from the Latin versions of the medieval moralized story-collection the *Gesta Romanorum*. Twine's version was entered in the Stationers' Registers in 1576, though the surviving editions date from c. 1594 and 1607; it may perhaps have been this last edition that was the immediate inspiration for the dramatization.

A further complication in the history of the story in early-modern England is that George Wilkins produced a further prose version in 1608, *The Painfull Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre*, which retells the story of the play with generous supplements from Twine. The connection with the play is announced on the title page, not only by the substitution of 'Pericles' for 'Apollonius', but by its insistence that it tells 'the true history of the play of *Pericles* . . . as it was lately presented by the worthy and ancient poet John Gower', and by the inclusion of a woodcut of Gower himself. It also includes a list of 'personages mentioned in this Historie', a *dramatis personae* of a kind exceptional in narrative, that itself includes 'John Gower the Presenter', though in the event he fades out after the text's opening.[33] The closeness of Wilkins's familiarity with the play, and the fact that *Pericles* is itself apparently a collaboration (it was not included in the First Folio, and there are strong stylistic reasons for thinking that Shakespeare enters the writing process most forcefully from Act 3 onwards), has led to the increasing conviction that Wilkins is responsible for the first part of the text.[34] Even if that is true (and none of Wilkins's other work for the stage is at all like this), Shakespeare's long-standing acquaintance with Gower's version of the story and the sheer power of the play on stage all suggest that his connection with it goes far deeper than a piece of hackwork to complete someone else's half-finished play. He may well not have written it all, but the balance of evidence suggests that it lay close both to his heart and his hand.

The play's commitment to its medieval content is explicit from the Prologue forwards. This takes the form of an apologia for staging so old a story, but it is a defence that takes an assertively positive form as its commitment to its medieval origins is turned into a virtue. 'Ancient' Gower appears in person to speak it, perhaps in the kind of medieval dress illustrated on the title-page of the *Painefull Adventures*, perhaps in

the more elaborate robes of the poet's imposing tomb effigy in St Saviour's (previously St Mary Overy, now Southwark Cathedral), the parish church for the Globe where Shakespeare's younger brother Edmund is buried. *Pericles*' Gower deploys the regular octosyllabics that were the hallmark of the *Confessio*, though the verse here end-stops the lines and couplets more strongly than the real Gower's versification.

> To sing a song of old was sung,
> From ashes ancient Gower is come,
> Assuming man's infirmities,
> To glad your ear, and please your eyes.
> It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember-eves and holy-ales;
> And lords and ladies in their lives
> Have read it for restoratives:
> The purchase is to make men glorious,
> *Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius*.
>
> (Prologue 1–10)

'It is good, in that the older, the better' is an aggressive assertion of the value of the medieval, and of medieval romance. The speech summarizes the wide reception trajectory of the story, encompassing both hearing it told (whether in some ancestral past, or through listening to it read out), and its reading on the page by literate aristocratic audiences; and even the health-giving properties of pleasurable fiction is urged, a medieval justification for literature distinct from the customary emphasis on moral teaching.[35]

The great innovation in the staging of *Pericles* is in keeping with that emphasis on oral delivery: its concern with the *telling* of the story, and therefore with its re-creation in the audience's imagination. The performance, the appearance of the characters on the stage, often becomes a secondary process to the conjuring up of the story first in Gower's mind and then in the minds of the audience, as he requires their complicity in the movement of his characters across place and time:

> Imagine Pericles arriv'd at Tyre,
> Welcom'd and settled to his own desire.

His woeful queen we leave at Ephesus,
Unto Diana there's a votaress.
Now to Marina bend your mind,
Whom our fast-growing scene must find
At Tharsus . . .
Only I carried winged time
Post on the lame feet of my rime;
Which never could I so convey,
Unless your thoughts went on my way.
(Chorus to Act 4, 1–7, 47–50)

The technique had rarely been used with this degree of commitment since George Peele's *Old Wife's Tale*, in which Madge's storytelling had similarly come alive in front of the spectators' eyes. Peele makes the anachronism of style explicit; for Shakespeare, writing some fifteen years later, the gap between the play's stagecraft and the normal expectations of a sophisticated Jacobean audience would have been all the greater, but he has no difficulty in eliciting their complicity in the creation of the play. The technique has had a modern revival in that most realist of all media, television, in series such as Oliver Postgate's *Bagpuss* or Anthony Minghella's *The Storyteller*, in both of which the sheer power of a story over the imagination allows it to 'come alive' visually on the screen. They all in effect offer a play within an act of storytelling. That the technique now is aimed primarily at children says something about its power to appeal directly to the imagination, to convey the same gripping authenticity that childhood experiences themselves can retain into adult life – the same power that Ralph Willis describes as accompanying his first experience of playgoing. Much medieval drama had made comparable, or indeed greater, demands on the imagination of its spectators, with or without a storyteller or an Expositor to guide them; the Digby *Mary Magdalene* had similarly located its action all over the Mediterranean. The original Apollonius story had developed its narrative in terms of a sequence of stations, temporary points of rest in the characters' far-flung journeyings. Gower serves to convey the Jacobean audience between these stations, and in addition provides narrative links or invokes dumbshows to fill in scenes necessary for the story but that

cannot be given full dramatic representation. Neo-Classical drama would provide messengers for such things (who tell of offstage events in the past tense rather than conjuring it into being in the present); the play's only messenger appears in dumbshow in the course of Gower's Chorus to Act 3, and it is Gower himself who there updates us on the progress of the larger story beyond the practicalities of staging (Thaisa's wedding-night) or for the purposes of economy (Pericles' receipt of letters recalling him to his kingdom, while the characters mime the joy that he describes).

It is unlikely that Shakespeare could have known just how far back the story of Apollonius went, though he does seem aware that it predates even Gower. His whole treatment turns it into an exceptional act of homage to medieval romance: he makes little attempt to update what he finds in the story, and he adds further medievalizing touches of his own. The nature of the games at Pentapolis, athletic exercises performed in the gymnasium in the original, had puzzled every later translator who had no familiarity with Classical athletics; Gower avoids specifying what they were, and one hopeful adaptor had substituted tennis. Shakespeare turns them into a good medieval tournament, fought by knights in armour: a chivalric emphasis underlined by the fact that the shipwrecked Pericles is destitute, and it is only because his father's rusty armour is caught up in the fishermen's nets, a survivor from the shipwreck along with the prince himself, that he is able to take part. There is a strong theme in the play, derived as much from Boethius and Chaucer as from humanism, that virtue must be an inward disposition of the mind; in theoretical discussions this is coupled with an insistence of its separation from lineage, but romance normally combines the two. The tournament emphasizes both. Pericles derives his rank as prince of Tyre from his father, but he is a true son in prowess and virtue as well. The other knights at the tournament mock his poverty, but Simonides and Thaisa both see through his outward appearance to note his 'graceful courtesy':

> 3 Lord: And on set purpose let his armour rust
> Until this day, to scour it in the dust.
> Simonides: Opinion's but a fool, that makes us scan
> The outward habit by the inward man.
> (2.2.53–6)

The tournament that follows is inflected by sixteenth-century practices of the kind on show at the tilts for Elizabeth's Accession Day, such as *imprese*, allegorical emblems with explanatory mottoes; but Shakespeare shapes it to emphasize the medieval pattern of the 'fair unknown', the young man who makes his mark through prowess and courtesy without any advantage of lineage, but who always turns out to be the missing prince. Marina plays a similar female role later.

The medieval-romance qualities of the story are carried through in the play's dramatic development. The incest of Antiochus and his daughter was there in the original; incest was indeed a recurrent element in medieval romance and drama, though more usually in the form of a chaste daughter escaping from a pursuing father.[36] Psychoanalytic interpretations of *Pericles* have tended to see the story as one of displaced incest on Pericles' own part, or repressed incest on Shakespeare's; Shakespeare is rather following the tendency of medieval romance to play its action twice, once for bad and once for good. *Pericles*, indeed, plays it three times. Antiochus' lust is the perverted form of love between father and daughter, and 'the most high gods' duly take vengeance in an act of divine justice, burning them up with 'a fire from heaven' (2.4.2–12). Simonides represents the first good father, whose love for Thaisa is untinged by possessiveness when she finds the man on whom she turns her own desire: her choice, he declares, coincides with his, and he is delighted to join their hands and scoot them off to bed (2.5). Pericles' almost overwhelming passion at rediscovering his own daughter is coupled from the first moment, not just with his memory of his wife, but with their individual identities as contained in their names:

> This is Marina.
> What was thy mother's name? tell me but that . . .
> Tell me now
> My drown'd queen's name, as in the rest you said
> Thou hast been godlike perfect, the heir of kingdoms,
> And another life to Pericles thy father.
> (5.1.200–1, 205–8)

In the same scene, he is happy too to anticipate Lysimachus' wooing of his daughter (259–61); and Diana appears in a vision to tell him to go to Ephesus, where he will in due course find his wife.

Good and bad sex are not limited to incest. Antiochus' affair with his daughter is a matter for Gower's report and Pericles' intuition; the brothel scene is the first full staging in the play of sex gone to the bad, and Shakespeare greatly expands it from the original narrative. His model here is not so much the *Apollonius* as the much more developed scenes in a number of saints' lives where the virgin saint is placed in a brothel in an attempt to corrupt her, and from which she emerges similarly unscathed. St Agnes, whose story was still easily accessible in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, was one such, though she, like all the other saints, is preserved by direct divine intervention: Marina has to do it through her own example and exercise of virtue. She will, moreover, turn out to be no exemplar of martyred virginity, but a young woman awaiting the man to whom she can give herself in love. The relationship between herself and Lysimachus remains largely undeveloped (his role is the most unexciting junior male lead in all of Shakespeare), but Thaisa has already generously fulfilled the role of the desiring heroine of the play. Her perception of Pericles' inner worth beneath the rusty armour, her immediate and irrevocable falling in love with him while he has still scarcely noticed her, and her frank desire for him all set up resonances with a long line of strong medieval heroines. Gower's choric function allows us to be told the final proof of her desire that dramatization often has to brush over, that she conceives a child on her wedding night (Chorus to Act 3, 9–11; and cf. 2.3.30–2): Marina is born of her parents' love as expressed in a fully sexual desire. Just how strong that is – and this too is Shakespeare's addition to, or perhaps interpretation of, his source – is demonstrated by the scene of Thaisa's recognition of the much changed Pericles when he comes to Diana's temple. Their relationship is confirmed by that staple of romance recognition scenes, a ring; but before that makes its rather superfluous appearance, she herself insists that her desire alone is sufficient to identify him as her husband – 'sense' carrying its full early-modern meaning of sensuality, sexual stirring:

> O, let me look!
> If he be none of mine, my sanctity
> Will to my sense bend no licentious ear,
> But curb it, spite of seeing.
> (5.3.28–31)

Sight was normally, in both Christian and Aristotelian thought, the highest and most spiritual of the senses; here, physical sexuality conveyed by sight becomes the touchstone of the strongest earthly love.

Brothel scenes apart, there is little of the satiric or corrective comedy, little indeed of the comic, about *Pericles*. Latin comedy had often included long-lost children, as the *Menaechmi* does, but not by way of these staged generation-long, Great-Sea-wide meanderings. It is rather the first of Shakespeare's plays to push to the full the potential of romance to serve as a counterpart to, or completion of, the tragedy of fall. The disasters and deaths of the first half of the play – Pericles' loss of his kingdom, the apparent deaths of his wife and child – are ruled by what in the early tragedies and histories was represented by the wheel of Fortune; but its lowest point turns out not to be the end, but the point from which recovery begins. The grief of the first half was caused by human wickedness (Antiochus, Dionyza) or a random universe (the storm raging through Thaisa's 'terrible childbirth' in which she apparently dies); the final resolution is driven by a mix of human goodness (Cerimon's care for Thaisa; Pericles' and Marina's faithfulness to their own principles of integrity, whether of love or chastity) and divine providence. As Lucina, Diana had failed to answer Pericles' prayers to help his wife in childbirth (3.1.10); as Diana, she directs him to her temple where Thaisa is preserved. Like the other late romances, *Pericles* insists that the ordering of the universe for good belongs more with a world of faith than chance.

Chapter Seven

SHAKESPEARE'S CHAUCER

> It has a noble breeder, and a pure,
> A learned, and a poet never went
> More famous yet twixt Po and silver Trent.
> Chaucer, of all admired, the story gives:
> There constant to eternity it lives.
> (*The Two Noble Kinsmen* Prol.10–14)

Romance may have been the primary entertainment for reading and listening for most of the population of Elizabethan England, but Chaucer commanded respect of a different order. To the sixteenth century as to the fifteenth, he was the pre-eminent English poet. Familiarity with his work was a touchstone of cultural literacy, despite the increasing difficulty presented by his language; and almost every significant writer of the period, and a great many less significant ones, shows an acquaintance with his work, often an extensive acquaintance. His work survived at a very different level from the cheap quartos that preserved the anonymous popular romances of Bevis or Guy. Chaucer's works, along with those of Lydgate and Gower, were transmitted in more upmarket forms: both more expensive, since they were typically printed in substantial folio format, and more intellectually demanding, since they required literary skill to appreciate to the full. The very fact that they carried their authors' names with them gave them a kind of authority that the romances lacked. Elizabethan authors responded accordingly. The dependence of *Pericles* on Gower, and the seminal influence of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* on the *Mirror for Magistrates* and so on historical

tragedy, have already been discussed; Lydgate acts as presenter to Tarleton's lost *Seven Deadly Sins*; and Lydgate's *Troy Book* makes a contribution to *Troilus and Cressida*. Pre-eminent among them, however, by universal agreement, was Chaucer, and it was his work alone that was reprinted every few years into the seventeenth century. That pre-eminence is reflected in Shakespeare. Chaucer provided the main inspiration for three of his plays, and influenced a good number more. The Chaucerian Shakespeare has a claim to being as distinctive and important as the Ovidian Shakespeare or the Plutarchan Shakespeare, not least because it is defined not by homage but by challenge. Influence is most easily recognized through similarity; but it may be at its strongest when what is stressed is difference.

Chaucer's works had made the transition from manuscript to print very early. *The Canterbury Tales* was one of the first texts Caxton printed after he set up his press at Westminster, and other individual works followed. In 1532, the first complete works appeared, and it was called just that – the *Works* of Geoffrey Chaucer. It was the first time (and it remained exceptional for well over a century) that anyone writing in English was accorded such a title, and it carried weight: it was the English equivalent of the Latin *Opera*, the term reserved for the great Classical authorities. Chaucer, the title announced – and the editors' preface drove the point home – was the English equivalent of Virgil and the great poets of antiquity. The 1532 edition was reprinted, with extra (mostly spurious) poems added along the way, in 1542, 1550 and 1561; a new edition appeared in 1598, revised in 1602, with a magnificent portrait page representing him as forefather not only of English poetry but of the royalty of England.

Spenser worked with the 1561 edition, and it is likely to have been the one Shakespeare first read, though he may have changed to the new edition later. Its impact is suggested by the appearance of a run of Chaucer-derived plays within a few years of 1598, *Troilus and Cressida* among them. Six large and expensive folio editions in seventy years is eloquent testimony to both the number of Chaucer's readers and the esteem in which he was held.

Nor were the books bought to be kept on the shelf. The known allusions to his work from the period run well into four figures, from the

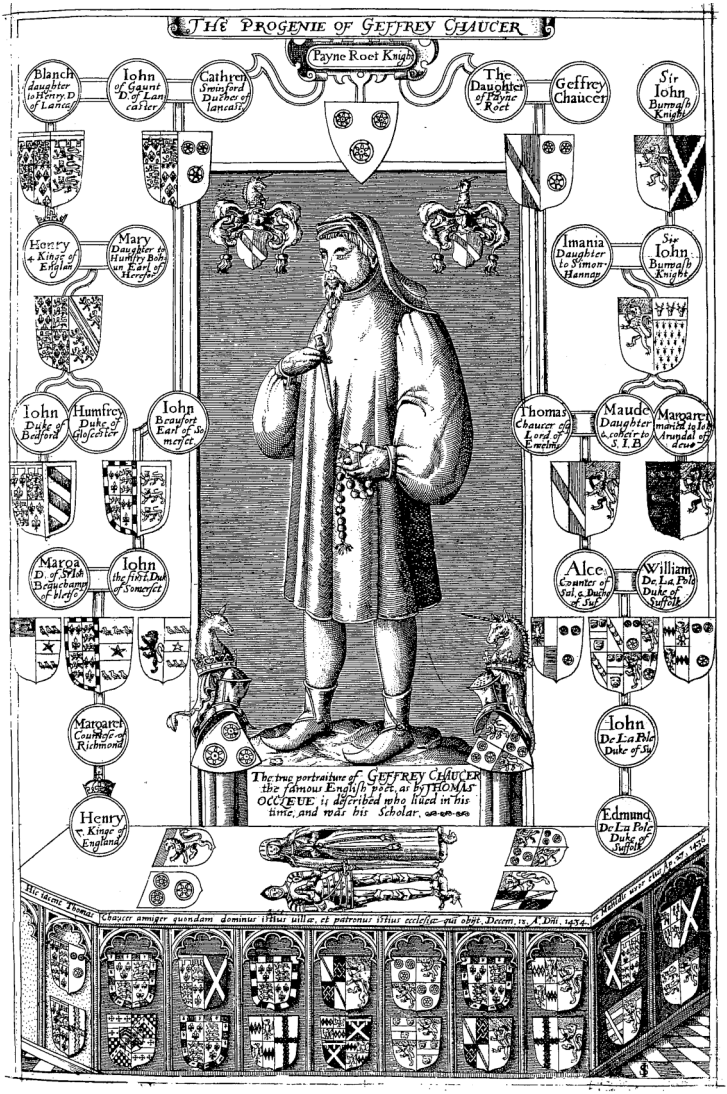

FIGURE 7 'Chaucer, of all admired' (*Works*, 1598 edition). Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, 9720.a.207

full range of his works.[1] He was welcomed by the reformers as a proto-Protestant, partly on the basis of works wrongly ascribed to him but also because of the strong vein of ecclesiastical satire in the genuine works. Spenser famously hailed him as the English Virgil, and modelled his own poetic on Chaucer's. Ben Jonson, well known for his passion for the Classics, had something of a comparable passion for Chaucer. He brought the trio of Gower, Lydgate and Chaucer, together with Spenser, on stage in his 1615 masque *The Golden Age Restor'd*, to personify the golden age of poetry; he had Inigo Jones design a temple of Fame 'to follow that noble description, made by *Chaucer*' in the *House of Fame* for his *Masque of Queens* (1609); and he drew on the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* in *The Alchemist*. Chaucer figures alongside Gower as one of his exemplars of English grammar. He quotes or alludes to him in a number of his plays in a way that suggests both a long immersion in his poetry, and that his audience will recognize the allusions. Literary histories often assume that Chaucer disappeared from common currency, either before Elizabeth came to the throne or at the latest by 1600; but as late as 1622, Henry Peacham recommended *The Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus*, his translation of the *Romance of the Rose* and his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* as part of the essential cultural toolkit of a gentleman, along with a long list of Classical authors. Milton, writing *Il Penseroso* in the 1630s, could still assume that his readers would not need telling who it was who had 'left half told / The story of Cambuskan bold', Chaucer's unfinished *Squire's Tale*. In 1616, Richard Brathwait introduces Chaucer's ghost into a poem to note how many of the characters he had invented, 'though moulded in another age, / Have rais'd new Subjects both for *Presse* and *Stage*'.[2] Story-collections or contests, ballad retellings and dramatizations all attest to the accuracy of that statement. The range of influence extends when one draws into consideration the works rejected from the modern canon of Chaucer's works but included in the sixteenth-century editions, among them the prophecy printed as a page-filler at the end of the list of contents and recycled into *King Lear*.

Chaucer, in fact, was far more than just a famous name for early modern playgoers, and there had been opportunities to see staged versions of his works right through the century. Boccaccio's version of the Troilus story on which Chaucer had grounded his own retelling was

not known in Elizabethan England, so it was *Troilus and Criseyde*, sometimes with Henryson's sequel *The Testament of Cresseid* that accompanied it in the printed editions, on which early modern adaptations were based. It was dramatized three times in English and once each into Latin and Welsh before Shakespeare turned his attention to it; it was also presented as a dumbshow, given a modern makeover (Chapman's *Sir Giles Goosecap*) and quarried by various other playwrights.[3] *The Canterbury Tales* were similarly popular. Two were adapted into Latin for schoolchildren to act at the grammar school at Hitchin in the 1550s, and a run of other dramatizations preceded Shakespeare, of the *Clerk's*, *Physician's* and *Knight's Tales*. The last of these, Richard Edwards's *Palamon and Arcyte*, was a two-part blockbuster written for Elizabeth's visit to Christ Church, Oxford, in 1566. Henslowe recorded a 'Palamon and Arsett' in 1594, and plays based on the *Clerk's* and *Man of Law's Tales* appeared in the same decade. Jacobean plays on the *Franklin's* and *Wife of Bath's Tales* followed.[4] Some of Chaucer's stories were familiar too through broadside ballads: as they walked the streets of London, Elizabethan citizens could have heard various ballads of Troilus being sung, and Jacobeans could have added others on the Clerk's Griselda, the Wife of Bath's loathly lady, and what happened to the saints and patriarchs when the Wife herself tried to get access to Heaven.[5]

Given this broad cultural visibility, not least on the stage, it is hardly surprising that there are signs of Chaucerian influence across the Shakespeare canon. Romeo and Juliet's thwarted love and the possibility of death and suicide are foreshadowed in *Troilus*, and the Nurse has been likened to the Wife of Bath – as too has Falstaff.[6] The motifs of women's suffering and patience that dominate the *Man of Law's* and *Clerk's Tales* are echoed in most of the last plays,[7] and not just the fictional ones. The close parallels between Griselda, the 'patient Grissill' of its dramatizations, and Katherine of Aragon – her children dead or taken from her, she herself falsely accused and cast off by a husband in favour of a younger bride – had already been explored in a poem written for her daughter Mary;[8] the same comparison may have been in Shakespeare's mind in *Henry VIII* when he gave the name of Patience to the waiting-woman on whom Katherine calls. The songs of the cuckoo and the owl that close *Love's Labours Lost* have been compared to the birdsong at the

end of the *Parliament of Fowls*, where the expected marriage is likewise deferred for a year.[9]

The work to which Shakespeare returned most insistently, however, was the *Knight's Tale*. It leaves traces in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, perhaps his very first play, in the motifs of two young men whose friendship disintegrates into love-rivalry and who finish up in an altercation in the greenwood. His earliest play where his major source was Chaucer, primarily the *Knight's Tale* but with input from others, was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and that responds to its original model with such leaping imaginativeness that it has often been overlooked. Numerous sources have been suggested for it, including Montemayor's *Diana* and Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*;[10] but whatever other sources may have fed into it, the play seems to be above all directly inspired by Chaucer, as a metatheatrical response to the metanarrative of the *Canterbury Tales*. Shakespeare returned to the *Knight's Tale* for what may have been his very last play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, written in collaboration with John Fletcher. This is the nearest thing he wrote to a straight dramatization of Chaucer, and so might be expected to resolve his fascination with the *Tale* by way of straightforward conversion into drama; in the event, the way it is written turns it into a kind of running debate with its model. The same happens with *Troilus and Cressida*. The title declares its allegiance to Chaucer, though Shakespeare was using other sources for the war sections of the plot; but although readers of Chaucer would be familiar with much of the story, the shaping principles chosen for the play change it into something utterly different from Chaucer's.

It is perhaps those differences that have made Chaucer almost disappear from sight in much criticism of Shakespeare. Many times as much critical ink has been poured out over his relation to Plutarch; but his three plays that could not have been written without Chaucer, the *Dream*, *Troilus* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, do not fall far short of the four he drew from the historian. Much of the work on Shakespeare's Chaucer has been done by medievalists rather than early modernists. Geoffrey Bullough gives excerpts from the *Knight's Tale* pride of place (as a 'probable source') in his account of the sources of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but his restriction to direct imitation rather than imaginative

inspiration means that he does not pick up anything like the extent of its primacy in creating the play; and when he comes to *Troilus*, although he mentions Chaucer's work, its influence is too general and pervasive for it to figure in his anthology of the play's sources.[11] Only a few editors have paid extensive attention to Chaucer's contributions, and criticism is still thin on the ground compared with studies of Shakespeare's links with the Classics. The privileging of the Classical over the medieval has acquired a momentum that accretes more criticism around it. Shakespeare never spells out his views of Plutarch and, if he had, it would doubtless have received far more attention than the discreet oblivion that criticism has bestowed on the extraordinary praise of Chaucer in the Prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* quoted at the head of this chapter. The lines may well be Fletcher's rather than Shakespeare's, but there is no reason to question that Shakespeare approved them. The Prologue takes it for granted that citing Chaucer will be a draw for audiences, or at least for Blackfriars audiences. Of the plays in the Shakespeare canon, only *Pericles* had previously announced its source, and the defensive tone of Gower's Prologue is markedly different from this unashamed advertising of the *Kinsmen* as Chaucer's. Claiming him as the most famous and learned poet from the Po to the Trent, sweeping in Petrarch and effectively all contemporary English poets including Shakespeare himself, may well have been true so far as England was concerned, or at least sufficiently true for it to carry plausibility for the audience.

Shakespeare's responses to Chaucer, however, are a long way from being acts of allegiance. They are distinctive, indeed, by virtue of an originality that goes far beyond how he treats most of his sources. The ambition of his narrative poems may even suggest that he set out to overgo Chaucer, and with that, implicitly, to bid for the position later ages have accorded him, as the greatest English writer since Chaucer. Certainly his reactions to his forebear were very different from his responses to Holinshed or Plutarch or his other recurrent source authors, who provided him with texts to be followed, to a greater or lesser extent. Chaucer gave him high-octane fuel for his imagination, but he used it to propel his plays on very different trajectories. What he took from Chaucer was not primarily words or phrases, but big ideas, big structures, and strong disagreement.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

> Duke Theseus of Athens is newly married to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. He has in his jurisdiction two almost indistinguishable young men who are both in love with the same woman, and whose love-rivalry results in a fight in the woods outside the city. Unknown to them, however, they are under the control of a parallel set of capricious supernatural beings, who take it upon themselves to sort out the love-triangle.

Shakespeareans will identify that plot summary as the start of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Chaucerians, as a summary of the *Knight's Tale*. The overlap matters, not just because it demonstrates how very close the relationship between the two works is, but because the first audience of the play would have been fully alive to the correlation. Philip Henslowe records four performances of *Palamon and Arsett* in September to November 1594 – evidently the *Knight's Tale*, just as Edwards had called his own 1566 version *Palamon and Arcyte*.[12] Edwards's own play had been a two-parter with some spectacular effects, including a pack of hounds baying in the quadrangle outside the college hall for the hunting scenes (not to mention the collapse of a wall, which killed three spectators: the show went on). In view of the length and elaboration of the earlier version, Henslowe's play is likely to have been a new dramatization of the *Tale* rather than a revival of Edwards's; he marks its first performance 'ne', apparently his abbreviation for 'new'. Earlier that summer, the newly formed Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's own company, had been running a joint operation with Henslowe's Admiral's Men. The arrangement had come to an end before the playing of *Palamon*, but it still suggests that the two companies would be likely to have been more familiar with each other's repertoires than the usual sense of economic and theatrical rivalry would have required, not least as they were still in close touch with each other in the October of that year.[13] The playgoing public too would have been familiar with *Palamon* when they went to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The exact date of the *Dream* is not known: the favoured year is 1595, but estimates vary from late 1594, contemporary with the final performances of *Palamon*,

to early 1596. Whichever the year, a good many of those in the audience would have recognized it as a variation on a Chaucerian theme in a way that modern audiences and critics do not.

The first two lines of the play establish the connection, as Theseus' reference to his wedding to Hippolyta recalls the opening of the *Knight's Tale* and presumably all the other dramatizations. By line 20, it has been established that Theseus is *duke* of Athens, his Chaucerian, not Classical, title; and that one of the key people running the court is Philostrate, the name Chaucer's Arcite gives himself when he breaks his exile to return to the court. The link once made, Shakespeare then starts breaking free to play a series of variations on what he has established as a Chaucerian theme. That this is not quite going to be Chaucer's story emerges when it is the 'wrong' two young men who are in rivalry over the same woman; but it is still more variant than departure. Both works emphasize the close relationship between love and folly (3.2.115, *Tales* I.1799), and give common sense a very rough ride; friendship suffers similarly. In both, Theseus tends to be the character who acts as the centre of calm reason (sometimes, in both, arguably too much so), and throughout the play he maintains the characterization Chaucer gave him rather than the more suspect figure portrayed in many Classical sources. Plutarch wrote a life of Theseus, but Shakespeare drew on that primarily only for what Titania claims are 'forgeries' about the women with whom he had had liaisons (2.1.77–81): Perigouna, Aegles, Ariadne, Antiopa. That Classical hinterland of erotic adventuring is otherwise kept well at bay within the main action of the play itself, just as it is in the *Knight's Tale*.[14]

That Shakespeare was working not just with the earlier plays but with Chaucer's own text, and indeed with his complete works, becomes clear as the play develops further. It is Chaucer's large ideas and the kind of development they invite that provide the *Dream* with its inspiration. Verbal connections are small, and the most precise of them link to Chaucer's story not of Palamon but of Thisbe, in the *Legend of Good Women*.[15] Over the course of the first act, it becomes clear that the *Dream* is not just a variation on the *Knight's Tale*, but a theatrical transposition of *The Canterbury Tales* itself. And as the evidence for the widespread Elizabethan acquaintance with Chaucer's works demonstrates, that allegiance would have been potentially recognizable at least to the more

literate of his audience (including women), a much wider group, since Chaucer wrote in English, than would have picked up the Ovidian or other Latin associations. The *Tales* is set up as a story-competition, a form designed to call attention to the excellence of the writing across all the various genres that Chaucer represents. The *Dream* makes a bid to overgo them all.

A logical starting-point for discussion is where Chaucer himself does, in the General Prologue, when he introduces the 'company' of pilgrims. The most relevant for the purposes of the *Dream* are the ones who are least characterized, the five guildsmen:

> An Haberdasshere, and a Carpenter,
> A Webbe (weaver), a Dyere, and a Tapycer.
> (*Tales* I.361–2)

The group Shakespeare calls 'all our company', the mechanicals, consists of 'Quince the carpenter, and Snug the joiner, and Bottom the weaver, and Flute the bellows-mender, and Snout the tinker, and Starveling the tailor' (stage entry to 1.2). There are six of them, a director and five actors for the purposes of the theatrical company they have constituted. Two of them, the weaver and the carpenter, overlap with Chaucer's list, but as a group they are decidedly more downmarket. Chaucer's group have ambitions to be aldermen, but no tinker or bellows-mender had ever belonged to a guild or could aspire so high. Carpenters, weavers and tailors by contrast come from trades that had been regularly involved in the guilds' dramatic activities, and Shakespeare's list has the potential to recall those. The members of the Elizabethan playing companies mostly came of just such artisanal stock.[16] Shakespeare invariably introduces low-class characters into his comedies, often in the clown role; but nowhere else does he offer an array of trades of this kind, and *The Canterbury Tales* offers the best-known precedent. Their professions may have been emphasized in the 1590s by equipping them with the tools of their trade, just as the pilgrims are illustrated with their defining gear (a urine-flask for the Physician, a fleshhook for the Cook) in the Ellesmere manuscript of the *Tales*: how else would the audience know that Quince was a carpenter? Not a great

deal is made of their trades in the play (though Snug the joiner has on occasion made his own wooden lion mask, with opening doors so that the ladies can see his face),[17] but neither, in practice, do they greatly matter in Chaucer. One feature of the *Tales* not obviously replicated in the *Dream* is Chaucer's own presence as one of the characters; but Peter Quince, director and perhaps author of *Pyramus*, 'bears a quite striking resemblance to his creator'.[18] Although there is no significant stage tradition of presenting him as a Shakespeare look-alike, it works rather delightfully (and to stretch a hypothesis, Shakespeare could have taken the part in the original performance). Quince, like Chaucer in the *Tales*, is the figure who puts the rest in motion, and like Chaucer-pilgrim, he has an apology to hand for if the audience don't like what he presents them with: 'If we offend, it is with our goodwill' (5.1.108). Quince's clumsy overriding of the punctuation may be his own, but the substance is not far off from the pilgrim Chaucer's disingenuous insistence that he means well even when he is being most offensive:

> Every gentil wight I preye,
> For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye
> Of yvel entente.
> (Prologue to *Miller's Tale*, *Tales* I.3171–3)

Although the potential for offence is differently construed in the two works (inadequacy as against bawdiness), both the real authors capitalize on the prologues to tease their real audiences into an eagerness for what follows.

In the *Dream*, the social contrast that matters most is that between the mechanicals, the group Chaucer would have called the churls, on the one hand, and the gentry and aristocrats on the other. The social array in the *Tales* is most strongly evident in the larger divisions of social class or rank between the General Prologue and the following *Knight's Tale*, or between one tale and the next – the Knight's 'noble story' of Athenian aristocracy against the Miller's 'churl's tale' about an Oxford carpenter and his wife. Chaucer's pilgrims range from the peasant to no higher than the Knight, as anyone of higher rank would not plausibly join up with others on a pilgrimage; the first character of the *Tales* to

represent the top of the social hierarchy is Duke Theseus. In his own Theseus and the mechanicals, therefore, Shakespeare offers a kind of replication of the social model of the *Tales* taken as whole, from princes to churls; and as in the *Tales*, that inclusiveness allows for a glorious clash of styles and language and levels of culture. In the *Tales*, the pilgrims serve as a frame for the stories – stories within the story of the pilgrimage. Shakespeare turns the model inside out: the characters for his main plot, Theseus, the lovers and the supernatural beings, come from the first of Chaucer's inset stories, and a set of characters reminiscent of the General Prologue provide the sub-plot and the inset play. The General Prologue provides a local realistic setting; the *Knight's Tale* leaps off into the far away and long ago, the exotic world of ancient Athens. The *Dream* starts in Athens; but by the time the mechanicals are rehearsing in the wood, it has metamorphosed into something much more local – something more like the English Midlands, what E. Talbot Donaldson dubbed 'Athens-on-Avon'.[19] Shakespeare adds another layer in that recession of stories as the local mechanicals stage yet another exotic wood, complete with lion. Both authors show the same high self-consciousness of layers within layers of fictiveness and realism, and exploit it to the full within their chosen media, of storytelling and the stage.

The poetics of *Pyramus and Thisbe* allow Shakespeare some of his rare verbal borrowings from Middle English, specifically Chaucer's Legend of Thisbe. Notable among them is the apostrophe to the 'wicked wall'[20] – though only Shakespeare turns it into the culmination of a whole series of epithets addressed to it (sweet, lovely, courteous) to turn the tragic story into comic parody. Shakespeare has Theseus choose the mini-play, interestingly, by way of a specific rejection of Classical or humanist alternatives. He has no desire for an account of the battle of the centaurs sung by a eunuch, nor for a staging of the riot of the tipsy Bacchanals tearing Orpheus to pieces, nor for that favourite of humanist poets, a lament by the Muses mourning the death of learning from poverty. The implication of those rejections is that what follows will be altogether more homegrown – more familiar, and more anachronistically English; and so Chaucer intervenes between Shakespeare and Ovid's original Pyramus. The intervention, however, comes not only through his

'Thisbe', but from his tale of *Sir Thopas*, a parody of his own medium of storytelling just as the mini-play parodies Shakespeare's medium of the stage. *Sir Thopas* is an excruciatingly bad popular romance, told by Chaucer-pilgrim himself in a way that decisively writes him out of contention in the story-competition. The main interest and function of Shakespeare's playlet is to be similarly excruciating (and playing Quince as Shakespeare would replicate Chaucer's attribution of *Thopas* to himself). The description of the play as 'tedious brief' would fit Chaucer's story very nicely too: it is by far the shortest of the *Tales*, though one reason for its brevity is that it is so tedious that it makes even the Host, who is acting as master of ceremonies and whose literary-critical faculties are not the most highly developed, so bored that he orders it to stop. *Pyramus* shares with *Sir Thopas*, uniquely, the quality of being so awful as to become a virtuoso piece in its own right. Both are provided with a fictional audience who see only how terrible it is. Shakespeare's Hippolyta plays the part Chaucer gives to Harry Bailey, complaining that it is 'the silliest stuff that ever I heard' (5.1.208); the Host phrases his disapproval rather more bluntly, 'Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord'(*Tales* VII.930). Both *Sir Thopas* and *Pyramus* are double texts, at once genuinely bad and genuinely brilliant, and it is an act of supreme confidence by both authors to write so badly that they can rely on eliciting their real audiences' admiration. That Chaucer tells his parody in his own voice but in a style instantly marked out from the other tales strongly increases the sense of realism of the rest, to give the illusion that the other tellers are indeed real people, as his 1598 editors noted: the parody is 'purposely uttered by Chaucer, in a differing rime and stile from the other tales, as though he himselfe were not the author, but only reporter of the rest' ([c.v]r). Shakespeare similarly uses his inset play to heighten the illusion that the action of the main play is really happening, fairies and moonlight and all.

It is still not impossible, given the lack of exact verbal echoes, that the parallels between the play-within-the-play and *Sir Thopas* are mere coincidence; but extreme bad writing was not something that most writers went around doing, and that Shakespeare had been reading extensively in his Chaucer is shown by the rest of the *Dream*. *Pyramus* uses a generalized antiquated language; and it offers details analogous to

Sir Thopas, such as the feminine cherries-and-lilies complexion of Pyramus against the knight's white-bread-and-roses (5.1.325–6, *Tales* VII.726–7). In the sixteenth century, the *Knight's Tale* was almost proverbially Chaucer's best tale and *Sir Thopas* his worst: they already existed as a pair. Sir Thomas Wyatt, for instance, characterized flatterers as those who would

> Praise Sir Thopas for a noble tale,
> And scorn the story that the knight told.[21]

Sir Thopas had a high profile in the late sixteenth century in its own right too. Drayton was among those who wrote affectionate imitations of it; Spenser was sufficiently fascinated by it to rework it in serious form as the model for Prince Arthur's falling in love with his own elf-queen, Gloriana.[22] Shakespeare's use in *Pyramus* of its metaliterary principles, its implicit function to comment on itself, is unique among these; but he did use its story too, not in the playlet itself, but in the 'real life' of the enclosing plot. *Sir Thopas* is the story of a man who dreams of having an elf-queen as his mistress, and believes it is true. Bottom likewise dreams of having a fairy queen as his mistress, or comes to believe he has only dreamed it; but the audience knows better.

Despite the broad similarities in the main plots, the course taken by the *Dream* is very different from the *Knight's Tale*. Shakespeare has the nuptial celebrations interrupted by the lovers' quarrel, not Chaucer's widows in black – they have to wait for *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The rival lovers are not prisoners of war; and there are two women, so that the love-triangle can eventually be sorted out into two couples rather than one lover having to be killed off. The supernatural beings who parallel the human characters are not gods but fairies. Chaucer provides a god for Theseus, Emily and each of the lovers, in the form of Jupiter, Diana, Mars and Venus, just as Oberon and Titania parallel Theseus and Hippolyta – a parallel sometimes emphasized in modern productions by doubling the actors.[23] At first glance this seems contrary to Elizabethan practice, since in 4.1 the royal couple enter the scene as soon as the fairies have left the stage; but a quick costume change (the removal of mantles and masks, perhaps) could just about be made in the exceptionally long pause

implied by the Folio stage direction for the sleepers to 'lie still', followed by a winding of horns that announces the approach of Theseus's hunting party (4.1.101 s.d.).

The move to redefine the gods as fairies had itself already been made by Chaucer, though in a different tale: not the Knight's but the Merchant's, where Pluto and Proserpina are reconstituted as king and queen of the fairies. They too parallel the main characters of the story, Pluto, god of winter, matching the old husband January, and Proserpine, goddess of spring, his young wife May. Both sets of fairies, in the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Dream*, are introduced having a marital spat such as turns Oberon and Titania too into gods of the seasons, in a way that confirms their ancestry in Pluto and Proserpine. In the play, their quarrel results in the confusion of seasons, as it brings about a kind of global-cooling effect, as

> The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
> Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
> And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
> An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
> Is as in mockery set.
>
> (2.1.107–11)

Shakespeare could easily have made his fairies Ovidian gods of the kind who take visible form in the mortal world; instead, he again uses Chaucer as a buffer between himself and the Classics. 'Oberon' as the name for the fairy king came out of *Huon of Bordeaux*. 'Titania' is one of the epithets Ovid uses for Diana, who is herself one aspect of that 'triple Hecate' mentioned by Puck at the end – the triform goddess known as Cynthia or Lucina for the heavens, Diana on earth, and Proserpina in the underworld; and so Titania again touches hands with Proserpina, the fairy queen of the *Merchant's Tale*.

The fairies of the *Dream* occupy the same space (the forest) as the characters, as they do the garden of the *Merchant's Tale*. In Ovid, gods and humans interact, have affairs and so on, and the humans are totally aware of that. In the tale, since the gods are invisible, the humans believe they are acting autonomously, or claim to do so: it is almost the point of the story that May insists that she has brought about the blind January's recovery of sight herself. Similarly in the *Dream*, the mortals are unaware

how far they are puppets of the gods, and they never realize how their own sight has been tampered with. In the play as in the *Knight's Tale*, Theseus firmly believes that he is in charge, and Shakespeare's Theseus positively refuses to believe that he might be wrong. Chaucer uses his supernatural beings as unseen powers who capriciously thwart human agency, for the tragedy of Arcite's death in the *Knight's Tale*, for something more like satire with the Merchant's fairies. Shakespeare uses his fairies too to thwart human agency, capriciously, even in potentially sinister ways, but for comedy. In the *Knight's Tale*, it is effectively random as to which of the two lover-knights will get the girl. The fairy gods of the *Merchant's Tale* likewise act outside reason and morality: at the end, the old husband becomes a complaisant sidekick to his wife's new young lover, in a distasteful parody of a happy ending. Shakespeare turns Chaucer's love-triangle into a square to allow a final pairing up, but he does not finally give the impression that the process is much less random. The *Knight's Tale* develops into a troubled, and barely resolved, search for any principles of order in a world governed by capricious beings. Shakespeare takes over that fascination with how such metaphysical forces are inextricably both personal and deeply arbitrary, but the resolution in the *Dream* is benign. By the time he came back to the *Tale*, for *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, he moves the exploration much further into the dark.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is not in any usual sense a dramatization of *The Canterbury Tales*, individually or as a whole. It is rather a creation in theatre and metatheatre parallel to what Chaucer does with narrative and metanarrative. Chaucer demonstrates how to manipulate levels of fiction and illusion, how the supreme artist can play any games he wants with his audience. The play is Shakespeare's turning of Chaucer's April day's holiday into a midsummer night's dream, and showing in the process how he can compete with his master.

A NOTE ON BOTTOM AND THE ASS

There is one further hypothetical connection between the *Dream* and the medieval world, and although there is only loose circumstantial evidence for its possibility, it is at least good to think with. The meta-

morphosis of Bottom is usually regarded as just that: a metamorphosis of the Ovidian kind, though with the donkey deriving from Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*. Neither model, however, seems so integral to the play as to justify the making of such an elaborate item of stage property as the ass's head; and that it was elaborate, and not just a mask for his face,[24] is indicated by the fact that it has to contrast with Snug-the-lion's mask just as strongly as the main play's invocation of moonlight contrasts with Starveling-as-moonshine, with his dog and thornbush. It is, however, possible not that the ass-head was made for Bottom, but that the transformation of Bottom was inspired by an existing ass-head in the property cupboard. It could perhaps have been one taken over from a mumming; but there is another more intriguing possibility. The one other time we know of when an ass's head was used in performance is in the Chester play of *Balaam and the Ass*, where the ass was certainly played by a person and not a hobby-horse or a real donkey, since it had a speaking part. The point is emphasized by stage directions in both surviving texts of the pageant: in one, 'Loquetur aliquis in asina', 'Let someone inside the ass speak'; and in the other, 'Hic oportet aliquis transformiari in speciem asinae', 'here it is necessary for someone to be transformed into an ass'.[25] The ass, moreover, is the only figure who can see the angel, just as the fairies remain invisible to all the characters except the transformed Bottom. The pageant was acted by the Cappers, a trade that was in sufficient financial trouble in the later sixteenth century, owing to changes in fashion, to be given government support. The Queen's Men had played in Chester several times around 1590,[26] and it is possible that the cash-strapped guild sold them the ass-head to raise a little money, or just to dispose of it, since the suppression of the cycle plays had rendered it redundant. The Queen's Men themselves disintegrated in 1595, and the Chamberlain's Men took over some of their playbooks; might they have taken over the ass-head too, giving the cue to Shakespeare to work it into a play? That such a speculation falls outside our customary range of reference for Shakespeare shows how both our textual and classicizing habits of thought may delete something of the medieval in him. And if it did happen, it shows the ease with which he himself could negotiate the two theatrical worlds, and turn one into the other.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

When Shakespeare next looked to Chaucer to provide him with a story, the result was more a debunking than an emulation. *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer's superb poem of failed love and the tragedy of earthly mutability, is coupled in the play with the surrounding story of the Trojan War, and the heroic pretensions of the greatest of epic legends suffer even more than the lovers. The story of the affair of Troilus and Cressida was entirely a medieval invention, and Chaucer's work was the only English version to tell it any detail. He also re-invented Pandarus as Cressida's uncle, displacing his other avatars as Homeric warrior or Boccaccio's young knight of Chaucer's source, and in the process gave a new word to the language – 'our Chaucers Pandar', as Sidney noted in his discussion of exemplary types, 'so exprest that we nowe use [his] name to signifie [his] trade'.[27] Most of the play's scenes that involve the lovers have some counterpart in the poem, though all undergo radical alteration. For the larger story of the war, Shakespeare's main sources combined the Classical, in the form of the early books of Chapman's translation of Homer, with various medieval versions of the Troy story.[28] These included not only Chaucer, but Lydgate's *Troy Book*, written in the early fifteenth century and printed in 1513 and 1555; and, most extensively, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, Caxton's translation from French of a work retelling the main medieval French and Latin versions of the Trojan war, which remained the most popular source by which English readers got to know their Trojan history until the eighteenth century. First printed in 1474, it started to appear in a slightly modernized form from 1596 onwards, though Shakespeare used an unmodernized edition, last printed in 1553. The first seven books of Chapman's Homer had been printed in 1598, the same year as the new edition of Chaucer, and may have given Shakespeare the idea for a Trojan play as well as some key scenes and lines; but the tone and detail of the play is insistently medieval rather than Classical in ways that bespeak deliberate policy on Shakespeare's part. His reading in Chaucer and Caxton did not require him, for instance, to make his characters refer to each other as 'knights', and Hector's challenge to the Greeks is cast in terms of an invitation to the lovers among them to splinter a lance in honour of the beauty of their mistresses (1.3.262–82).

A scene-by-scene analysis of Shakespeare's use of his medieval reading, or even of Chaucer's poem, would overwhelm the bigger picture of what Shakespeare does with Chaucer's love story. The best place to start is perhaps the moment when the lovers are allowed to intuit an awareness of their own future reputations. Chaucer's Criseyde spends many verses swearing to her own faithfulness, and fears losing her good name 'unto the werldes ende' if she elopes with Troilus (IV.1532–82); Troilus responds with a simple three-line declaration of unalterable faith (1655–7). After her betrayal of him, she recognizes that 'now is clene ago / My name of trouthe in love, for everemo' (V.1054–5) and her name was indeed widely used in the sixteenth century as a byword for fickleness. In the play, the lovers are given a sense of that future from their very first meeting, when Troilus's 'As true as Troilus' is contrasted with Cressida's 'As false as Cressid' (3.2.179, 193). Pandarus's prophecy drives the point home:

> If ever you prove false to one another, since I have taken such pains to bring you together, let all pitiful goers-between be called to the world's end after my name: call them all Pandars: let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids, and all brokers-between Pandars.
>
> (3.2.196–201)

The logic of the speech would require that 'inconstant' men be called Troiluses, but that is not what Troilus was known for, and Shakespeare is predicting his own world, just as Chaucer predicts both his own and Shakespeare's. The narrative voice that closes Chaucer's poem devotes some space to damage limitation, to dismantling the very equation it has set up, by insisting that Criseyde's infidelity is unique to herself, not typical of women in general, and offering as the moral of the poem advice to women to beware of men (V.1772–83). Yet even his first audience did not believe him, if his claim in the *Legend of Good Women* is true that he wrote that new poem to clear himself of the charge that in Criseyde he had slandered the entire female sex (F Prologue 332–4); and his later readers believed him even less. Henryson's late-fifteenth-century sequel, *The Testament of Cresseid*, which was regularly printed with the

poem in sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer and often taken as Chaucer's own, was able to afford its own compassion for her by first punishing her thoroughly: Diomede abandons her, she descends into prostitution and the gods strike her with leprosy in revenge for her blaming them for her misfortunes. The version of the story known to Shakespeare and his compatriots combined Chaucer with Henryson's sequel; but even before that final degradation, Chaucer's version had been sufficient to identify her to later generations as the proverbial fickle woman.[29]

It was an ironic result, as Chaucer had presented her much more sympathetically than either his own sources or any of the later surviving versions until Dryden. That sympathy was a key element of his reworking of the whole narrative. As he found it in his reading in medieval versions of the history of Troy and in Boccaccio's Italian poem focused on the lovers alone, it was a story of sexual attraction and betrayal; he sets it up, uniquely, as if it were one of the great love stories of the world. His Troilus is an idealist, whose love gives him access to a realm of experience he had never dreamed existed. If it were an opera, Troilus would have all the great arias, and in his hymns to love Chaucer gives him the poetic equivalent. Criseyde first enters the action after her father has gone over to the Greeks, to fall at Hector's feet and ask for his protection. She is a vulnerable woman at the mercy of the men, whether the male politics of the war or her uncle's machinations; and even if she is complicit in much of what happens to her – Chaucer, like Shakespeare later, makes it clear that she is profoundly attracted to Troilus, that she knows what is going on when Pandarus invites her back to his house on the night when Troilus will come to her in bed, and that she knows exactly what she is doing when she accedes to Diomede's advances[30] – her role is still one more of acceptance than agency. 'We usen here no wommen for to selle' is Hector's response when the Greeks request her as part of a prisoner exchange (IV.182); but that is precisely what happens, as she becomes a token in a male world of power politics.

The feminist-led focus over the last few decades on the experience of women in patriarchal societies has led to a massive increase of interest in Shakespeare's Cressida, and the outright dismissals of her as a strumpet – taking as truth Ulysses' instant appraisal of her as such when

her wit has just made a fool of him – are rarely repeated now. The text urges a much more nuanced reading, of a young woman in love from the very start, but the whole tenor of the play, and not just the story of the lovers, excludes any possibility of replicating Chaucer's treatment of her. The large role the poem gave to Pandarus had the effect of keeping the lovers remarkably innocent: they never do quite realize what they want until the bliss of the night of their consummation. Shakespeare's lovers know from the very start, and Pandarus is just the necessary mechanism (1.1.97, 1.2.281–5). His Troilus' idealism relates not to love, but to sensuality: he is overwhelmed not by emotion but by the prospect of sex, and it is that that fuels his lyric flights ('Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl', 1.1.102) in a play that is singularly short of them. Cressida needs wooing only because she fears the consequences if she acknowledges her love, for a woman won loses her value: 'Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is' (1.2.287). The play's relentless focus on value takes as its measure market economics rather than inherent quality. The Old English-derived 'worth' had originally belonged to the semantic field of the warrior ethic; Chaucer's Troilus, like his Knight, is 'worthy' in the sense of being accorded respect for inherent qualities, for prowess on the field of battle and moral qualities to match. In the play, for all its cast of warriors and its flaunting of chivalric honour, worth is repeatedly downgraded into exchange value. Even in Hector's challenge, the taunt is that failure to take it up implies that 'The Grecian dames are sunburnt, and not worth / The splinter of a lance' (1.3.281–2). The Trojan debate over whether Helen is 'worth the keeping', and the play's emphasis on the subjectivity of value, is well known; but it extends to Cressida as well, a commodity in the prisoner exchange in which the riches she represents to Troilus are refigured as cheapness to the Greeks. In the larger story that extends beyond either the poem or the play, both she and the man for whom she is exchanged will turn out to be traitors.[31] The ideals of love and heroics get plenty of lip service, but as E.T. Donaldson pointed out, 'The play is full of passionate statements of ideals which are then ignored by the very characters who stated them.'[32] The pragmatics of economic value correlate with Shakespeare's dismantling of the whole edifice of the central epic legend. His *Troilus* plays off how the Classical world presented itself to itself, against how it had come to be received over time.

The emblem that sums up the play (found in Lydgate but not Chaucer) is the discovery that the sumptuous armour desired by Hector contains only a 'putrefied core' (5.8.1–2). The play's parallel revelation of the unheroicness of the characters is focused on their names, as every one of them that had accrued such heroic associations over two millennia is made to ring hollow. The naming starts with the scene, developed by Shakespeare from Chaucer, where Pandarus identifies the Trojan heroes to Cressida as they return from the battlefield. It serves a useful dramatic purpose in introducing a large cast list, but it also calls attention to what becomes a relentless process of naming and self-naming, the invocation of a renown (from French *renommée*, 'naming again') that rapidly destroys the value of the name through inflation and that is never endorsed by the action. Chaucer had written the proverbial resonance of the lovers' names into their own consciousness, but Shakespeare embarks on a general demolition. Hector proclaims his name as he sells out his wisdom and human decency to a hopelessly idealizing notion of chivalric honour, Achilles as he claims the glory of Hector's death when his band of thugs have killed him unarmed (2.2.189, 5.8.14). Pandarus suffers the most extensively, not so much by contrast with the earlier versions of the war, where he is little more than a name, but by comparison with Chaucer, who had first turned him into a major figure and in the process bequeathed his name to his function. The poem calls attention to his somewhat dubious role as go-between even while he insists that he is acting in both lovers' best interests. Shakespeare turns him into a voyeur with no interests other than the sexual, who cannot conceive of any dimension to love beyond that, and who ends the play riddled with venereal disease. The Prologue pitches itself at the highest rhetorical level, with its 'princes orgulous': a level that is persistently deflated in the rest of the play, not only by what we see happening, but by the satiric deployment of an Old-English-derived vocabulary that serves to give the lie to such over-valuation. The Epilogue, spoken by Pandarus, is a massive fall from those initial heroics, and a massive fall too from Chaucer's ending, where Troilus is allowed a final clear-eyed vision beyond death, and the narrating voice, indistinguishable here from Chaucer's own, contrasts the instabilities of earthly love with the unfailing love of the crucified Christ and His

mother. It is an ending that in large respects fails to mesh with the questions raised so insistently and painfully in the rest of the poem: none of it constitutes a vision available to the pagan characters in their life on this earth, and orthodox theology would eliminate for Troilus (as it would for Arcite in the *Knight's Tale*) any hope of a Christian Heaven. But the principle of love as the grounding of the universe had been given so much weight earlier in the poem, notably at the beginning and end of Book 3, its book of fulfilled love, that its reassertion is necessary if the work is not to fall into the kind of black hole that Shakespeare's Troilus finds himself in.

That vision of the unfailing stability of love, finally guaranteed by God, may be offered to Chaucer's readers, but anything providential about history is withheld from the action of the story. The world as the lovers experience it in both Chaucer and Shakespeare is effectively godless: they may pray or invoke the gods, but their invocations go unanswered. Fate and the stars may tick away towards destiny, but the intractable facts of history and the psychological cast of mind of the characters are sufficient to bring about everything that happens. The epistemological crises of both poem and play are triggered by the exchange of Cressida, and Troilus' discovery of her infidelity. Chaucer's Troilus responds to the first with a long soliloquy, grounded in the section of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* that lists men's errors but omitting its solution, in which he decides that he is the victim of a fate he cannot oppose; his realization of her betrayal pushes him to a despair that eventually drives him out to the battlefield to attempt to revenge himself on Diomede, and to get himself killed, by the 'wrong' man, in the process. Shakespeare's Troilus likewise pursues Diomedes, but there it is the wrong man – Hector, not Troilus – who dies. Shakespeare's Troilus has his own questioning of the cosmic order as Thersites watches him watching Cressida's semi-reluctant attempts to resist Diomedes' demands, a reluctance barely distinguishable from seduction. At the end of his poem, Chaucer allows his Troilus a glimpse of the love proposed by Boethius's Philosophy, which literally holds the universe together, binding the sea within its limits, ordering the progression of night and day and the seasons, as well as conferring peace between nations. The infidelity of Shakespeare's Cressida abolishes all that:

> Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven.
> Instance, O instance! strong as heaven itself;
> The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolv'd and loos'd.
> (5.2.152–4)

And with no alternative voice located outside the narrative to offer any other perspective, there is no reassurance for the audience. They are left just with Pandarus, and his refusal to recognize that there is any dimension to existence beyond his own disease-ridden bones.

THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN

Shakespeare's final return to Chaucer is more insidiously uncomfortable, but scarcely less devastating. It was rare for Shakespeare to use exactly the same source twice, but the freedom he had shown in adapting the *Knight's Tale* for the *Dream* left him the space to return to it. The *Dream* had not followed Chaucer's story through to its ending, with its inextricable mingling of romance and tragedy, loving marriage achievable only at the cost of death. Uniquely in the Shakespearean corpus, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is entered in the Stationers' Registers as a tragicomedy, though its quarto print carried the title alone without any generic description, as if it were simply a 'play'. Palamon's ending in the archetypal comic closure of marriage has as its precondition Arcite's tragic death: not an either/or of comedy or tragedy, but a plot that insists on the fusion of the two. Shakespeare's own dramaturgy had focused increasingly on such an integration, a refusal to separate them out as humanist theory required, and it may be that very inextricability that drew him back to the *Tale*. This time, however, the debt to Chaucer is explicit from the encomium to him in the Prologue forwards. He and Fletcher add an invented subplot, much of it probably Fletcher's, of the Jailer's Daughter who is in love with Palamon and who engineers his escape from prison, and of a country morris-dance that elaborates on Chaucer's 'observaunces' of May (and which was borrowed in from a 1613 masque of Beaumont's); but in terms of its main plot, its structure and the broad outlines of characterization the play stays markedly faithful to its source. The end result, however, is very different indeed:

what Piero Boitani has termed a radical reinvention.[33] Where Shakespeare had rewritten the *Tale* in the *Dream* for comedy and for delight, here he emphasizes its most disturbing elements. The play furthermore enters into a running dialogue with its original over the questions that for many centuries were held to be central to human existence: questions about free will and agency, providential justice and blind fate, reason versus passion, the rival merits of love and friendship – the last, in the *Kinsmen*, cast in a mode generally thought of as distinctively modern, encompassing devoted same-sex relationships for both men and women. Chaucer raises painful questions about the place of human action and desire in an arbitrary cosmos; Shakespeare and Fletcher – primarily Shakespeare, since the most marked changes of tone and import come in the sections probably written by him – make the questions more urgent and leave the ends more jagged.[34]

The changes show particularly in the treatment of Theseus, and of the gods. Chaucer's Theseus is a just ruler. If he acts tyrannously when he imprisons for life the cousins taken on the battlefield, he is prepared to exercise mercy later, and his insistence that the lovers should fight for Emily in the controlled form of a tournament, in which the loser is to be whichever of them can be forced to a pillar set up in the lists, is designed to solve their rivalry without the extra-judicial violence of a private combat. The *Kinsmen*'s Theseus is much more consistently tyrannical: his rules for the tournament are that both the loser and his entire supporting team are to be beheaded. The *Tale* would leave one lover disappointed but alive; the play specifies a mass death. The gods who override Theseus's plans are unpleasant enough in Chaucer, but the two main ones, Mars and Venus, are still worse in the play. They play a more backstage role than do Pluto and Proserpina or Oberon and Titania: Chaucer describes their spheres of influence in terms of the paintings of their temples, Shakespeare in the words of the prayers of the suppliant lovers. Chaucer's Mars is the god of random violence, from the byre burnt by harrying armies to secret assassination and the sow eating the baby in the cradle (*Tales* I.1995–2038), in Shakespeare he is the arch-destroyer who fills the earth with blood (5.1.46–55). Palamon's Venus, in Chaucer, is the goddess of rape, perjury, pimping and cuckoldry (*Tales* I.1918–54); Shakespeare's Palamon describes a Venerean case-study in

voyeuristic detail, of a fourteen-year-old girl married to an eighty-year-old husband (5.1.107–18). Only the play's Diana, about whom Emilia says little beyond invoking her purity (5.1.137–48), comes out better from the comparison, for Chaucer's is above all the goddess of change, of capricious punishment and of childbirth – a childbirth it is far from clear the mother is going to survive (I.2056–86). Chaucer makes much more too of the oldest of the gods, Saturn. Like the planet he represents, known as the 'greater infortune', he is a figure of pure malevolence: he is responsible for drownings and hangings, imprisonment and vengeance; 'my lookyng is the fader of pestilence' (I.2469). He resolves the conflict between Mars and Venus, who have promised victory respectively to Arcite and Palamon, by sending a fury to make Arcite's horse rear and crush him. Shakespeare's removal of the gods from the stage reduces Saturn to a simile in the report of Arcite's death: the horse rears at a spark from an

> envious flint,
> Cold as old Saturn, and, like him, possessed
> With fire malevolent.
> (5.4.61–3)

Chaucer's Arcite dies at the will of the gods, however little his death has to do with human or divine justice; Shakespeare's Arcite's death does not have even that much purpose behind it.

The main other change the *Kinsmen* makes to Chaucer is to enhance the role of the women. Hippolyta barely speaks in the *Tale*, Emily only in her prayer to Diana; and Emily has to remain effectively characterless in order for her to fill the role the story requires of her, as the reluctant object of the cousins' desire. In the play, they are much more forward with speech, just as their qualities as Amazons are more emphasized – especially Hippolyta's, who recalls babies being pierced on lances and mothers being reduced to eating their own children (1.3). This is followed up by an exchange in which they debate whether same-sex or the love of 'sex dividual' is stronger, with Emilia insisting that her childhood friendship with the dead Flavina can never be replicated with a man. It is one way of justifying her inability to choose between the rival lovers, but the exchange is much too fully developed for that purpose alone. The

initial affection between Palamon and Arcite, destroyed by their rivalry over Emily, is already a major theme in Chaucer, but it is Shakespeare who makes the bond between Theseus and Pirithous of major significance, and who adds the parallel argument for friendship between women. It is not a debate that is given an answer; what is unusual is that the terms are so evenly balanced. Elsewhere in Shakespeare, male bonding is almost always suspicious – inadequate, callow, even dangerous – compared with the love of a woman for a man, or with women's trust in each other: Othello and Iago against Desdemona and Emilia, Claudio and Don John against Hero and Beatrice, Leontes's broken bonds with Polixenes against Hermione and Paulina. The idyll of childhood unity between Helena and Hermia in the *Dream* by contrast replicates the *Knight's Tale* model of the failure of the men's friendship. The other last plays, for all their portrayal of the breakdown of relationships, finally treat loving marriage as the happiest human state; but not the *Kinsmen*.

Other women too are given a larger role in the play than in Chaucer, but they do not bring with them the expectation of a happy ending associated with their presence in most comedies. The action of the play opens with Theseus's wedding procession and an accompanying song, and the staging of the ceremony makes its disruption by the three women in black more of a shock than in the narrative. The song invokes roses without thorns, angels and melodious birds, and banishes crows and ravens; the Queen who interrupts it immediately speaks of the bodies of their slaughtered husbands

> who endure
> The beaks of ravens, talons of the kites
> And pecks of crows, in the foul fields of Thebes.
> (1.1.40–2)

The Jailer's Daughter, the play's main addition to Chaucer's original cast, is also far from being a minor character, or a comic low-life figure. Despite the predominant dramatic use of soliloquies for men, she has the bulk of those in the play, four of them constituting a scene to themselves; and before the death of Arcite, the potential tragedy of the action is focused on her. She knows her passion for Palamon cannot be requited: he is out

of her class and barely notices her existence, so that her trenchant appraisal of her situation, 'To marry him is hopeless, / To be his whore is witless' (2.4.4–5), leaves her with no way out. She runs 'wood within this wood' in a far more literal manner than anyone in the *Dream*, and comes close to drowning herself, Ophelia-style (4.1.52–139). The cousins' much-vaunted love for Emilia by contrast comes across as shallow: they even joke with each other about the former mistresses they have abandoned (in one of Fletcher's scenes, 3.3.29–42). The single-minded affection shown by Shakespeare's and Fletcher's other loving women here refuses to convert into marriage. Emilia never abandons her preference for a single life, and the Jailer's Daughter is cured of her hopeless passion by having sex with her unnamed 'wooer' in the guise of Palamon – a process too reminiscent of the bed-trick to be comfortable. After several years of mourning for the dead Arcite, Chaucer's Palamon and Emily are blissfully married (*Tales* I.3094–106), and their marriage moreover further serves to cement peace between Athens and Thebes. Where Fletcher draws a more compliant Emilia (4.2), Shakespeare emphasizes rather her grief at the blood spilled for her sake (5.3); and at the end of the play she remains as silent about her imminent marriage as Isabella does at the end of *Measure for Measure*. Particular productions may direct either heroine to express joy at the prospect, but in neither play does the text offer any encouragement for such a conclusion.

The *Knight's Tale* ends with a speech from Theseus drawn from the debate in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* over providence and the problem of suffering. The laments of the prisoner 'Boethius' provide the material for the lovers' complaints in the *Tale* that the universe is devoid of any principles of order or justice; Philosophy's replies feed into Theseus's closing insistence that behind its apparent arbitrariness there is indeed a principle of cosmic order and providential control deriving from its 'First Mover', whom as a pagan he identifies with Jupiter: the final deity to be enlisted by in the *Tale*. The particular advantage of the *Consolation* for Chaucer was that it conveyed Christian ideas of providence in philosophical, not theological, terms, so he could plausibly appropriate its arguments for his pagan characters, though there is still a marked gap between the questions the tale has raised and Theseus's attempt at an answer. The play by contrast downgrades the element of

philosophical debate altogether, and in the final scene Theseus barely makes any pretence to draw the metaphysical loose ends together. To him, the gods' lack of concern is impartiality, a paradiastolic redefinition that cloaks the vice with the nearest virtue: Chaucer's Palamon had described the gods rather as treating men with the same casual brutality as animals due for slaughter (*TNK* 1.4.4–6; cf. *Tales* I.1307–8). The play's Theseus also claims that Palamon's victory is indeed deserved, since he had seen Emilia first (5.6.115–17) – a claim that has more to do with colonial appropriation than courtship. His closing lines invoke the same issues only to dismiss them in a way that is disconcerting, even dismaying, in their shallowness and lack of concern:

> O, you heavenly charmers,
> What things you make of us! For what we lack
> We laugh, for what we have are sorry, still
> Are children in some kind. Let us be thankful
> For that which is, and with you leave dispute
> That are above our question. Let's go off
> And bear us like the time.
>
> (5.4.132–7)

The 'heavenly charmers' are the planetary gods whose influences govern events in the world; and it is very unclear what anyone should be thankful for at the end of this grim and violent play, or what sort of bearing would be appropriate when Arcite is dead and Emilia is left silent.

The *Knight's Tale* is followed by the pilgrims' praise of it as a 'noble storie': an idea already expressed in the play's Prologue, which likewise insists on the tale's 'nobleness'. Theseus's speech by contrast is followed by an Epilogue in which the actor expresses a hope that the rather stunned audience reaction he seems to expect ('No man smile?') will not 'kill / Our market'. The shift from chivalric nobility, however compromised, to a world dominated by the market infiltrates the play too, as it does in *Troilus and Cressida*. A speech in the *Knight's Tale* offers the traditional image of man's life as a pilgrimage, but one that leads only to death:

> This world nys but a thurghfare of wo,
> And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.
> Deeth is an ende of every worldly soore.
> (I.2847–9)

Arcite, whose death prompts the image, is a pagan of great spirit but of no outstanding virtue, and to a medieval audience has no hope of heaven. In the larger context of the *Tales*, however, the lines still have the power to resonate with the Christian pilgrimage to Heaven. The equivalent lines in the play are spoken early, by the mourning queens at the end of Act 1:

> This world's a city full of straying streets,
> And death's the market-place where each one meets.
> (1.5.15–16)

Chaucer's Arcite had compared man's inability to find what he desires to a drunk's inability to find his way home. In this nightmare city, there is no home to find; and no matter where you might want to go, the streets themselves thwart direction. Chaucer had used the pagan setting of his story to step outside his own Christian world to have Arcite ask hard questions that faith disallowed:

> What is this world? what asketh men to have?
> Now with his love, now in the colde grave
> Allone, withouten any compaignye.
> (I.2777–9)

The *Tale* closes, even so, with Theseus's attempt to reassert the benevolence of the universe, however little comfort Arcite might have found in its abstraction; and following that, with the 'bliss' of marriage, and a blessing on its audience. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had ended its main plot with a promise of a wedding night and a fortnight of 'new jollity', and with the fairies' epilogue in which they bless the three couples and promise them offspring. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* ends in an ethical muddle, where the gods are shoddy, the ruler a tyrannical

hypocrite, and characters and audience alike are heading for that market-place of death.

It is customary to end books that range across all of Shakespeare's career with the last plays, with their extraordinary display of their own art, the calmness of reconciliation of husband and wife, father and daughter. England's greatest non-dramatic poet, however, offered him a different vision of the world, in which human love and ideals come in painful conflict with a mutability that stubbornly resists providential hope, and Shakespeare took that conflict still further into scepticism, even cynicism. *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are two of his most unsettling plays, almost postmodern in their aggressive jaggedness and their refusal of conventional pieties, of justice either poetic or divine. Yet his vision of the 'straying streets' of the way to death was inspired by the Middle Ages; and while they may seem the opposite of the stable material street plans he inherited from the medieval world, it is no bad thing to be reminded that the Middle Ages could be so deeply disorienting too.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. See Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 7–45, for the stability of infrastructure and many social structures from c. 1250–1750.
2. See Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London, 1991), pp. 7–12: 'Since at least the time of Petrarch in the mid-fourteenth century the Middle Ages has functioned as an all-purpose alternative to whatever quality the present has wished to ascribe to itself. The claim that selfhood becomes problematic only in the Renaissance is a prime instance of this impulse' (p. 7).
3. Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1977), p. 5.
4. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), associates the rise in the fear of witches with the Reformation; on rituals, customs and their origins and changes over time, see Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994), esp. pp. 8, 49–68, 72–3.
5. *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, ed. Curtis Perry and John Watkins (Oxford, 2009); *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Performance and Adaptation of the Plays with Medieval Sources or Settings*, ed. Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray (Jefferson, NC, 2009); and see also *Premodern Shakespeare*, special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40.1 (2010), ed. Sarah Beckwith and James Simpson. Other relevant studies are cited in the course of this book.
6. See further Ruth Morse, 'Shakespeare's Ages', *Shakespeare Survey* 59 (2006), 254–66.
7. See Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature 1430–1530* (Oxford, 2007).

1: SHAKESPEARE'S MEDIEVAL WORLD

1. T. Slater, 'Domesday Village to Medieval Town: The Topography of Medieval Stratford-upon-Avon', in *The History of an English Borough: Stratford-upon-Avon 1196–1996*, ed. R. Bearman (Stroud and Stratford, 1997), pp. 30–42; there was some disruption in the redevelopments of the 1960s.
2. *R2* 5.1.2, *R3* 3.1.68–74.
3. See the classic studies by Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), for the Middle Ages, and by Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966), for the early modern period.
4. See Andrew Gurr, 'A New Theater Historicism', in Peter Holland and Stephen

Orgel, eds, *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke and New York, 2004), Figure 10.

5. *John Stow: A Survey of London*, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, 2 vols (1908; Oxford, 1971), 1.126; this gives the 1603 edition plus variants from the first edition of 1598.
6. *Stow: Survey*, 1.93. The London Letter-Books for August 1385 also record that the 'customary' performance of plays at Skinner's Well was put on hold during a political crisis.
7. For London, see Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 6–81, 'The Catholic Community'; and for the country more broadly, Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven and London, 1992); Phebe Jensen, *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge, 2008); and Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994). The same processes of the disappearance of communal social activity can also be traced in the *REED* volumes: very strongly, for instance, in Alan Nelson's *Cambridge* (Toronto, 1989), where in the later sixteenth century members of the university and the colleges withdrew from participation in city celebrations and entertainments, even as spectators, to within the walls of their own buildings.
8. *AYLI* 1.1.111–13, 2.7.115, 122.
9. *Stow: Survey*, 1.143–4.
10. *REED: Cumberland, Westmorland and Gloucestershire*, ed. Audrey Douglas and Peter Greenfield (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1986), p. 201.
11. *Stow: Survey*, 1.101–2.
12. For a recent intervention in the debate on the nature and origins of 'nationalism' in England, see Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 3–51; also Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford, 1996).
13. See Michael Nerlich, *Ideology of Adventure: Studies in Modern Consciousness, 1100–1750*, trans. Ruth Crowley, foreword Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, 1987), vol 1. The London Merchant Adventurers were formally given their charter in 1407, though their roots go back much earlier; the 1555 Company later became the Muscovy Company.
14. There were four editions before 1510, then frequent reprints at decreasing intervals after 1568.
15. Samuel Eliot Morrison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages, AD 500–1600* (New York and Oxford, 1971), pp. 13–28, 81–105.
16. Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 10 vols (London, 1927), 5.79–80; Gwyn A. Williams, *Madoc: The Making of a Myth* (London, 1979), pp. 39–67.
17. Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven and London, 2001).
18. *The Pattern of Catechistical Doctrine*, Second Comandement ch. 7, in *Lancelot Andrewes: Selected Sermons and Lectures*, ed. Peter McCullough (Oxford, 2005), p. 27.

19. The classic exposition is by C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, 1964).
20. For an extensive exploration of the association, see Jensen, *Religion and Revelry*, pp. 3–114, and, from the point of view of the Reformed opposition, Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000).
21. For a history, see J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford, 1988). The theory of seven ages associated each with a planet; it first appears in Ptolemy, was taken up extensively (though often shorn of its astrological associations) from the twelfth century, and appears in both written and artistic form in England in the later Middle Ages alongside other numerical divisions (pp. 37–54, 197–8, plates 6, 8).
22. David Cressey, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1999), notes the elements retained from Catholicism in life-cycle rituals.
23. *REED: Cambridge*, ed. Alan H. Nelson (Toronto, 1989), p. 594 (record from 1623–4).
24. For a full discussion in the context of the early modern fascination with death, see Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Morality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 15–22, 51–88.
25. Lydgate's translation of the verses and the French original are edited in *The Dance of Death*, ed. Florence Warren, intro. Beatrice White, EETS O.S. 181 (1931), which also contains appendices listing painted and ballad versions.
26. The religious paintings were uncovered and recorded in 1804–5, the Dance of Death paintings in 1955 (but later covered over again); for an account and reproductions, see John Gough Nichols, *A Series of Antient Allegorical Historical and Legendary Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon* (London, 1838), and Clifford Davidson, *The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), and Figure 1.
27. [Richard Day], *A Booke of Christian Prayers*, quotations from the 1578 edition (*STC* 6429), where the male 'death' series starts on f. 82a and the female series on f. 94a; quotations from ff. 87a, 93b. An earlier version with the main texts in various languages carries the same marginal illustrations and English verses, *Christian Prayers and Meditations* (1569; *STC* 6428); the Queen's own copy survives. Editions continued into the seventeenth century
28. See further Neill, *Issues of Death*, p. 53.
29. Neill, *Issues of Death*, provides a survey of the ideas across early-modern tragedy.
30. *Dance of Death*, ed Warren, Ellesmere MS 497–528; the Rikelle stanzas do not seem to have been included at Stratford, though they do appear in the 1554 print.
31. From the copy made by Thomas Fisher for Nichols, *Series of Antient Paintings*, XVI; 'gott' may be the artist's error for 'goth'. A slightly different transcription is given by Davidson, *Guild Chapel*, Appendix 2. For earlier versions, see *The Middle English Poem Erthe upon Erthe*, ed. Hilda R. Murray, EETS o.s. 141 (1911).
32. See René Graziani, 'M. Marcadé and the Dance of Death: *Love's Labour's Lost*,

v.ii.705–11', *RES* 37 (1986), 392–5. Other suggestions as to the meaning of the name (from 'mar-Arcadia', or as a variant on Mercury, the Classical psychopomp) seem less plausible.

33. Nichols, *Series of Antient Paintings*, p. 9.
34. *Ham* 1.5.12–13; and see Stephen Greenblatt's study of the persistence of concern with the dead after the Reformation, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford, 2001), especially pp. 230–45.
35. The original Latin text was written in Germany by an English monk, H. of Sawtrey, who claims to have heard the story from a monk who knew Owain, the man who had made the visit to Purgatory: the Middle English text was also known as *Owain Miles* or *Sir Owain*. For texts, see *St Patrick's Purgatory*, ed. Robert Easting, EETS O.S. 298 (1991), and *Three Purgatory Poems*, ed. Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo, 2004; also online: http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/foster2.htm).
36. *R3* 5.1.10, 12, 18–19 (the scene of Buckingham's execution); see Jones, *Origins*, pp. 226–9.
37. Richard Foster Jones, *The Triumph of the English Language* (Stanford, 1953), includes abundant original quotation; Charles Barber gives a succinct account in *Early Modern English* (London, 1976), pp. 65–100.
38. Of the vast bibliography on Shakespeare's vocabulary, see e.g. David Crystal, *'Think on my Words': Exploring Shakespeare's Language* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 2–10 on its size and originality, pp. 146–77 on his neologisms. The second and online editions of *The Oxford English Dictionary* list many pre-Shakespearean usages.
39. George Gascoigne, *Certain Notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or rhyme in English*, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols (1904; Oxford, 1967), 1.51 (hereafter Smith).
40. On the development from Old to early modern English, see *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 30–72.
41. On the changing 'ecology' of English as against French and Latin down to the eighteenth century and the nationalist agenda driving it, see Tim William Machan, *English in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2003), esp. pp. 161–78.
42. Thomas Campion, *Observations in the Art of English Poesy*, Smith, 2.329, 332.
43. Samuel Daniel, *A Defence of Rhyme*, Smith, 2.360, 368.
44. Smith, 1.208–25 (222). The Shakespeare-associated *A Lover's Complaint* also uses rhyme royal.
45. The only Elizabethan plays written entirely in prose are John Lyly's coterie plays (which none the less include songs), and close translations from prose Latin or Italian comedy that may never have been performed at all.
46. Smith, 1.99, 117, 119.
47. Gascoigne, *Certain Notes*, Smith, 1.50. For their processes of learning, see John Stevens, *The Old Sound and the New: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge, 1982).

2: TOTAL THEATRE

1. *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, 2000), p. 48; *REED: Coventry*, ed. R W. Ingram (Toronto and Manchester, 1981), pp. 230, 257, 478.
2. Compare John Donne's fascination with the painter of terrestrial globes who can 'quickly make that, which was nothing, all' ('A Valediction: Of Weeping', in *John Donne: Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 89).
3. There are of course excellent individual exceptions, foundational among them being Emrys Jones's *Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1977). See also T.G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge, 1996), especially pp. 42–62, and Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 55–97; other studies are mentioned in the course of this chapter. What one might call the authoritative level of underestimation of the medieval 'total theatre' is indicated by the absence of any entry for the cycle plays, under any synonym, in the *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Michael M. Dobson and Stanley Wells (Oxford, 2001), and the omission of any mention of their dramatic qualities in *The New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York, 1997).
4. On the tiny number of surviving texts compared with the number of records of plays, see Claire Sponsler, 'Drama in the Archives: Recognizing Medieval Plays', in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke and New York, 2004), pp. 111–30.
5. Sir Richard Carew records the Cornish plays as continuing in 1602 (*The Creacion of the World*, ed. and trans. Paula Neuss (New York and London, 1983), p. 239). Kilkenny's plays, perhaps just a Passion and Resurrection sequence, are discussed in Alan J. Fletcher, *Performance and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (Cork and Toronto, 2000), pp. 174–93; they appear to have run from an unknown date before 1550 until 1637, though there are no records from 1603–1631. On Kendal, see n. 53 below.
6. Medieval English drama that is not about biblical history or the saints survives largely in just a few fragments, most of them collected in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS Supplementary Text 1 (1970). There is one early morality on death, *The Pride of Life*; fragments of a play on incest, *Dux Moraud*, and of a pageant of the Nine Worthies; a prologue to a Marian miracle play (the Durham prologue); a speech of Delight, apparently from a morality play; and an epilogue to a church ale, performed to raise money for a parish church (see p. 123, lines 27–30). The three surviving early Robin Hood plays are printed in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (Kalamazoo, 1997), pp. 275–80, 286–95.
7. *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, ed. Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall, EETS 283 (1982) (hereafter Digby; the E Museo plays are *Christ's Burial* and *Resurrection*); *The Life of Meriasek*, trans. Markham Harris (Washington, 1977).

8. John Wasson, 'The Morality Play: Ancestor of Elizabethan Drama?', *Comparative Drama* 13 (1979), 215–20. Clifford Davidson lists all the recorded saints' plays in his 'The Medieval Saint Play and its Iconography', in *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe*, ed. Davidson (Kalamazoo, 1986), pp. 31–122.
9. Benjamin Griffin, *Playing the Past: Approaches to English Historical Drama 1385–1600* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 29–39.
10. On the terminology, see Nicholas Davis, 'The Meaning of the Term "Interlude"', *Medieval English Theatre* 6 (1984), 5–15, and his list of usages, pp. 61–91.
11. Marie Axton's introduction to *Horestes* in her *Three Tudor Classical Interludes* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 24.
12. John Florio, *Florios Second Frutes* (1591), facsimile (Amsterdam, 1968), p 23.
13. Smith, 1.199.
14. Aristotle, *Politics*, 7.xvii.9–14 (1336.b.11) in the standard numberings. He is particularly anxious that the young should avoid indecent plays, but to those attacking the Elizabethan stage, all plays were indecent.
15. Grex (induction) 256–61, in *Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. G.A. Wilkes, 4 vols (Oxford, 1981–2), vol. 1.
16. See Tom Bishop, 'Shakespeare's Theater Games', in James Simpson and Sarah Beckwith, eds, *Premodern Shakespeare*, *JMEMS* 40, 65–88.
17. Quoted by Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago and London, 1996), p. 56.
18. 'Hic juuenis quidam extra currit in deploydo, calligis non ligatis et braccas in manu tenens': stage direction in 'The woman taken in adultery', lines 124–5, in *The N-Town Play*, I: *Text*, ed. Stephen Spector, EETS S.S. 11 (1991), p. 224.
19. Sir David Lindsay's mid-sixteenth-century *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis* makes its comprehensiveness clear from the title forwards (in *Four Morality Plays*, ed. Peter Happé (Harmondsworth, 1979)).
20. This is the core argument of Anne Righter's [Barton's] classic *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London, 1962).
21. Gail McMurray Gibson's phrase to describe medieval drama in general, in *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London, 1989).
22. See in particular Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago, 2001). Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), emphasizes that the procession itself excluded 'most working people, women, children, visitors and servants' and so 'was not a picture of the community' (p. 266); but women were certainly involved in some of the backstage or financial support for the plays, and the whole community watched even if only the men (and some boys) acted. For the implications of 'incarnation' for reformed resistance to early modern theatre, see Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000)
23. The contrast of the different kinds of drama is interestingly discussed by Bruce R. Smith, *Ancient Scripts and Modern Experience on the English Stage,*

1500–1700 (Princeton, 1988). Greek drama was very little known in England outside the universities (the nearest thing to an exception is some Euripides), and attempts to prove its influence on the public stage have generally fallen short of conviction.

24. *Dulcitius*, scene 4, in *The Plays of Roswitha*, trans. Christopher St John (1923; repr. New York, 1966).
25. Prologue 2, 5–6 (*Complete Plays*, ed. Wilkes, vol. 4). Jonson's close oversight of his printed *Works* likewise demonstrates his belief that only the written text could claim attention comparable to the Classics: 'Works' had hitherto been reserved for the great Classical authors and for Chaucer, and it was greeted with some derision. There is evidence too that some of the quarto editions of Shakespeare's own plays may have been designed with reading rather than acting as their primary function: see Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge, 2003).
26. Smith, 1.59–60.
27. Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London and New York, 2004), pp. 63–74.
28. For full discussion and documentation, see William N. West, *Theatres and Encyclopedias in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2002), especially pp. 1–11, 45; and on the literal world as a theatre, John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 70–9. See p. 12 above on theatre as memorial record.
29. John Alday, *Theatrum mundi, The Theator or rule of the world, wherein may be sene the running race and course of euerye mans life* (1566), Ai v.
30. Chaucer had used both senses, but with an evident consciousness that the word was an unfamiliar technical term (*Boece* I pr. 1, 'Swich a place that men clepen the theatre'; *Tales*, I.1885). Around 1450, John Capgrave still assumed that anglophone readers would have no idea what a *theatrum* was such as he had found in Rome: 'that soundith in our tunge a place in whech men stand to se pleyis or wrestlingis' (quoted from *The Solace of Pilgrims* by Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Cranbury, NJ, and London, 2001), p. 147).
31. Montrose, *Purpose of Playing*, p. 210.
32. It is first mentioned in some notes by the antiquarian William Oldys, now lost, but which were read by George Steevens: see Ernest Schanzer, 'Hercules and his Load', *Review of English Studies* 19 (1968), 51–3. Schanzer takes the line that there is no reason not to believe the motto genuine; others think there is no reason to believe it.
33. John bases his discussion on a line of Petronius; his own full phrase runs 'fere totus mundus iuxta Petronium exerceat histrionem' (III.viii; p. 146 in the 1595 edition; translation by Joseph F. Pike as *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers* (1938; repr. New York, 1972), especially pp. 171–81 (175)). Ben Jonson was among those who knew the work. See further Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London, 1953), pp. 138–41.
34. *An Apology for Actors (1612) by Thomas Heywood*, facsimile ed. Richard H. Perkinson (Delmar, NY, 1978), f. 24.

35. It was written between 1630 and 1640, after Calderón had renounced secular playwriting in favour of religious. There is a good account by Meg Twycross of the play in performance in Adrian Mitchell's adaptation in *Medieval English Theatre* 6 (1984), 51–8. For a Europe-wide survey, see Lynette R. Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1995).
36. The point is forcefully argued by Michael O'Connell, 'Vital Cultural Practices: Shakespeare and the Mysteries', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999), 149–68.
37. Many of the findings of the REED project, which has radically altered our understanding of the extent and detail of local performance, are summarized in the second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge, 2008); see in particular Alexandra F. Johnston, 'An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre', pp. 1–25, and John C. Coldewey, 'The Non-Cycle Plays and the East Anglian Tradition', pp. 211–34.
38. *REED: Shropshire*, ed. J. Alan B. Somerset, 2 vols (Toronto, 1994), pp. 379–80, 387–8; records, pp. 207–12, 214–15, 220; Churchyard, p. 243.
39. Emrys Jones's phrase for the impression made by popular entertainments of this kind, *Origins*, p. 51.
40. *REED: Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp. 233–5; the pageants were those of the Tanners, Drapers, Smiths and Weavers, of which only the Weavers' (on the Presentation in the Temple and the Infancy of Christ) survives.
41. *REED: Chester*, ed. Lawrence M. Clopper (Manchester and Toronto, 1979) p. 125. Strange's Men visited Stratford on occasion, and it has been suggested that Shakespeare might possibly have become a member of the company: see, for instance, E.A.J. Honigmann, *Shakespeare: The 'Lost Years'* (1985; 2nd edn, Manchester, 1998), pp. 59–76. Strange's younger brother, who inherited the earldom of Derby on his death in 1594, was the patron of Derby's Men.
42. King and Davidson, *Coventry Plays*, p. 2.
43. The story is quoted from *REED: Cumberland, Westmorland and Gloucestershire*, ed. Audrey Douglas and Peter Greenfield (Toronto, 1986), p. 219.
44. On the titles, see *The N-Town Play*, ed. Stephen Spector, 2 vols, EETS S.S. 11–12 (1991), p. xiii; the phrasing ('vulgo dicitur hic liber Ludus Coventriae sive ludus corporis Christi', 'commonly called . . .' or 'called in the vernacular . . .') makes it sound as if both terms might be generic. However diverse their origins, the banns describe the pageants as if they were a unified cycle: see 'The Proclamation', and the discussion in Alan J. Fletcher, 'The N-Town Plays', in Beadle and Fletcher, eds, *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 183–210.
45. Theresa Coletti and Gail MacMurray Gibson, 'The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama', in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Oxford, 2010), pp. 228–45 (237). The manuscript was in the hands of the Towneley family by the early seventeenth century.
46. *Burial*, heading and lines 1–3, in *Digby*.
47. From Weever's *Ancient Funerall Monuments* p. 405, cited in *REED: Lancashire*, ed. David George (Toronto and London, 1991), p. 29.
48. *REED: Chester*, ed. Clopper, 1979), pp. liv–v.

49. David Mills, 'The Chester Cycle', in Beadle and Fletcher, eds, *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 125–51 (126).
50. Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays*, pp. xxvi, 11.
51. Information comes from the *REED* project volumes; E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (2 vols, Oxford, 1903), 2.329–406; Harold C. Gardiner, SJ, *Mysteries' End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage* (Yale Studies in English 103, New Haven, 1946), pp. 72, 86–7, 92; Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays* (pp. xxvi–xxxvi on the Norwich cycle, pp. xlii–iii on Newcastle; this edition contains all the surviving fragments from such lost cycles as well as the plays of unknown origin). Beverley and Lincoln also produced cycles until c. 1555 (Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum, 3rd edn rev. Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim (London and New York, 1989)).
52. See note 5 above. The sixteenth-century *Creacion of the World* is the only extant part of a rewriting of the fourteenth-century *Cornish Ordinalia* (trans. Markham Harris, Washington, DC, 1969); both were designed for performance over several days. Cycle or similar plays were also performed at Bodmin (last recorded in 1566) and St Ives (1571–2): see *REED: Dorset, Cornwall*: Cornwall ed. Sally L. Joyce and Evelyn S. Newlyn (Toronto, 1999), pp. 397–9.
53. Weever's phrasing is that he saw Corpus Christi plays 'acted at Preston, and Lancaster, and last of all at Kendall, in the beginning of the raigne of King James' (*Ancient Funerall Monuments* p. 405, in *REED: Lancashire*, ed. George, p. 29). Thomas Heywood describes 'yearely stage-playes' as still continuing at Kendal in his 1612 *Apology for Actors* (sig. G3r), along with Manningtree, though the play there is unlikely to have been of cycle form. Preston's play was still being performed in 1595 (Richard Beadle, 'Masks, Mimes and Miracles: Medieval English Theatricality and its Illusions', in Holland and Orgel, eds, *From Script to Stage*, pp. 32–42 (54)), and perhaps later; for the will, see *REED: Lancashire*, ed. George, p. 87.
54. See p. 14 above, and Stow, *Survey*, 1.15.
55. *REED: Ecclesiastical London*, ed. Mary C. Erler (London and Toronto, 2008), pp. 106–7, 135 (recorded by Henry Machyn), and 211 (from William Prynne's *Histriomastix*).
56. 33 are listed in Harbage, *Annals*, including two written before Elizabeth's accession; four related plays on post-biblical history were also written.
57. See Phebe Jensen, *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 46–50, and Peter Holland, 'Theatre without Drama: Reading *REED*', in Holland and Orgel, eds, *From Script to Stage*, pp. 43–67 (60–2). Holland's article is a reminder of how little we know of early modern local, provincial and household drama; the titles of many London plays survive even when the texts do not, but there are scarcely even any titles for plays beyond the capital.
58. *REED: Chester*, ed. Clopper, p. 240.
59. The story is preserved in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*; on this and the broader topic, see Paul Whitfield White, 'Reforming Mysteries' End: A New Look at

Protestant Intervention in English Provincial Drama', *Journal of Early Medieval and Modern Studies* 29 (1999), 121–47.

60. For his own lists of his plays, including those now lost, see *The Complete Plays of John Bale I*, ed. Peter Happé (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 8–9; and more generally, Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre, Reformation and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge, 1993).
61. Ralph Willis, *Mount Tabor, or Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner . . . published in the year of his age 75. Anno Dom. 1639* (London, 1639), pp. 110–13: the episode is recounted as a warning against allowing children to see 'spectacles of ill examples, and hearing of lascivious or scurrilous words'. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder*, pp. 69–71, discusses its the function of such plays in offering communal experiences at a time when the civic drama of the mystery cycles was dying. It was well enough known to be mentioned as part of the actors' repertoire in the play of *Sir Thomas More*.
62. Jones, *Origins*, pp. 30–84, and e.g. Rowland Wymer, 'Shakespeare and the Mystery Cycles', *English Literary Renaissance* 34 (2004), 265–85; O'Connell, 'Vital Cultural Practices'; and Beatrice Groves, *Texts and Traditions: Religion in Shakespeare 1592–1604* (Oxford, 2007).
63. Recorded by Sir William Dugdale, the historian of Warwickshire; quoted by King and Davidson, *Coventry Plays*, p. 1.
64. Chaucer has Absolon show off by playing Herod in Oxford (*Miller's Tale*, *Tales*, I.3384); and one of the Paston Letters, written on the Eve of Corpus Christ in 1478, draws a comparison with Herod – 'ther was never no man that playd Herrod in Corpus Crysty play better and more agreable to his pageaunt then he dud' (*Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, Part II, EETS S.S. 21 (2004), p. 426 (no. 782)).
65. *Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors*, stage direction at line 728, in *Coventry Plays*, ed. King and Davidson.
66. *The Four PP* 830–2, in *The Plays of John Heywood*, ed. Richard Axton and Peter Happé (Cambridge, 1991); the play was printed in 1544.
67. Coventry *Shearmen* 801–20 (816–17 quoted; and compare *Mac* 5.5.8). The Digby *Killing of the Children* (329–49) has the mothers beat up the leading murderer with their distaffs, but their speeches are not accompanied by the unarticulated lamentation implied by the Coventry play.
68. Jones, *Origins*, pp. 74–9. The *N-Town Cycle*, which has the fullest stage directions, specifies torches. This section of the Coventry cycle does not survive, but the non-biblical '*bright* sword' does appear in *Shearmen* (755).
69. Jones, *Origins*, pp. 80–3.
70. Beatrice Groves, '"Now wol I a newe game begynne": Staging Suffering in *King Lear*, the Mystery Plays and Grotius's *Christus Patiens*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 20 (2007), 136–50; for dramatic examples, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, 2 vols, EETS S.S. 3, 9 (1974, 1986), vol. 1: Text, play XVI, s.d. at line 322 (p. 299), and *N-Town Play*, ed. Spector, play 31, s.d. at line 212 (p. 323).
71. *3H6* 1.4.137, parodied by Greene (or more likely Chettle) in his attack on Shakespeare in *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit* – as a fellow-professional, either

author might have some incentive to remember the line, but he assumes that his readers will know it too.

72. Play 35, *Crucifixio Christi*, lines 123–6, in *The York Plays*, vol. 1: Text, ed. Richard Beadle, EETS S.S. 23 (2009).
73. The iconography is explicit in the N-Town 'Burial', s.d. at line 121 for laying the body of Christ 'in oure Ladys lappe' (*N-Town play*, ed. Spector, vol. 1 p. 342); the independent *Christ's Burial* (*Digby*, p. 155); and the Cornish 'Christ's Passion' (*Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 174). It may have been represented in the other cycles that have the Virgin still on stage for the deposition from the cross. For the veneration of the Pity, see the regrets expressed by the recusant David Martin (?1527–1615) quoted in Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the late Middle Ages* (New York and Basingstoke, 2002), p. 69.
74. Scherb, *Staging Faith*, p. 54.
75. Matthew 26.49, which comes closest, reads 'Hayle maister' in the Bishops' Bible, 'God save thee master' in the Geneva Bible.
76. O'Connell, '*King Lear* and the Summons of Death', in Curtis and Perry, eds, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, p. 201; Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 71 and n. 39; *The Towneley Plays*, ed. Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, 2 vols, EETS S.S. 13–14 (1994), Play 2, 279–86.
77. The players famously found themselves in trouble for acting a revival of *Richard II* (or possibly a comparable play) on the eve of Essex's rebellion; and the deposition scene was not printed in any of the quarto editions published in Elizabeth's lifetime.
78. The problem of his access to Old Testament plays would have been solved if the theory had not proved untenable that he spent part of the 1580s at Hoghton in Lancashire, within easy reach of the plays at Preston that started with the creation of the world: see Robert Bearman, '"Was William Shakespeare William Shakeshafte?" Revisited', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53 (2002), 83–94, and p. 60 above.

3: STAGING THE UNSTAGEABLE

1. *Chester*, play V, 'Balaam', s.d. at 215; *Tem*, s.d. at 3.2.42.
2. See William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 176–7; *The Staging of Religious Drama in the Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*, ed. Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby (Kalamazoo, 1983), especially Chapter 4, 'Special Effects'.
3. *Two Latin Comedies by John Foxe the Martyrologist*, ed. and trans. John Hazel Smith (Ithaca and London, 1973).
4. Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare from Stage to Page* (London and New York, 2004), pp. 118–22 (119).
5. *Conversion* 155–82, 346–67, final Conclusyo 649–62 (in *Digby*).
6. Reynes Epilogue 14–19, in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS Supplementary Text I (1970), p. 123.
7. *REED: Chester*, ed. Clopper, p. 247.
8. The opening of the York *Fall of the Angels*. The Latin line is extra-stanzaic,

but it was probably part of the speech: the liturgical Latin would help to establish the distance between God and the other speakers.

9. *Norwich Grocers' Play*, first line of texts A and B, in Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays*.
10. *Three Laws*, 36–8 (the opening lines of the action), in *Bale II*, ed. Happé. The mid-line caesura, shown here by editorial spacing, is marked in the original by a comma.
11. *REED: Chester*, ed. Clopper, p. 247.
12. *Norwich Grocers' Play*, in Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays*, play B, lines 123–45.
13. *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R.A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert (Cambridge, 1961), p. 319. On the use of fireworks for hell and for devils (and indeed dragons), see Philip Butterworth, *Theatre of Fire: Special Effects in Early English and Scottish Theatre* (London, 1998), pp. 21–36, 79–98.
14. *Microcosmus: A Moral Maske*, in *The Works of Thomas Nabbes*, ed. A.H. Bullen, 2 vols (1882–9; repr. New York, 1964), vol. 2 pp. 178–80, 165. For an extensive discussion of the dress used in earlier moralities, see T.W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (Leicester, 1958), pp. 49–72.
15. In *Tudor Interludes*, ed. Peter Happé (Harmondsworth, 1972), lines 427–37.
16. For Forman's 1611 account, see Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare & Co* (London, 2006), pp. 240–1.
17. Bullough, 6.494–5.
18. *Tem* s.d. at 3.3.17, and invisibility may be implied at the end of 4.1; *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. Foakes and Rickert, p. 325.
19. See Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, pp. 73–85; Meg Twycross, 'The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2008), ed. Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher, pp. 26–74; and on East Anglian drama, John C. Coldewey, 'The Non-Cycle Plays and the East Anglian Tradition', ibid. pp. 211–34, and Scherb, *Staging Faith*, pp. 54–7, 147–54. See also p. 56 above.
20. Quoted by Twycross in her discussion of the construction of the pageant wagons, 'Theatricality', in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Beadle and Fletcher, p. 35.
21. The York Mercers' pageant had such painting, and it may well have been more widespread: see Beadle, 'The York Corpus Christi Play', *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Beadle and Fletcher, p. 109. On the terminology, see John Orrell, 'The Theaters', in *New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York, 1997), p. 106.
22. See John Cranford Adams, *The Globe Playhouse: Its Design and Equipment* (London, 1961), pp. 51–62.
23. *REED: Cornwall*, ed. Joyce and Newlyn, pp. 549–54. The audience at plays performed in the round may have been outside the circle, or, if it was large enough, within it, perhaps moving around with the action.
24. George Peele, *The Old Wife's Tale*, ed. Charles Whitworth (2nd edn, London, 1996), stage direction at 611.
25. Ibid, lines 69–75; the same characters intervene just before the harvestmen make their later entrances, 234–44, 511–21.

26. See the discussion in Jones, *Origins*, pp. 34, 138–41, who considers the cycle-play influence but finally settles for the trilogy model of Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius*, a Latin three-part play acted at Cambridge.
27. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, for instance, see Shakespeare entering *1H6* at 2.4, the scene of the plucking of red and white roses that initiates the action of the three following plays (*Textual Companion* to their *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford, 1987), p. 217); Michael Hattaway favours sole authorship and believes that the trilogy was written in the 1–2-3 order (*The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 34–43). Nicholas Grene's argument in *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 7–30, might emphasize more the Crusade reference in the last and first speeches of *R2* and *1H4*, Shrewsbury and its aftermath ending *1H4* and starting *2H4*, and the plans for war with France at the end of *2H4*.
28. The term is Richard Helgerson's, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, 1992), though he takes a rather different line on Shakespeare's histories.
29. For a key discussion, see Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 41–65.
30. See in particular Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 148–233, which includes a full discussion of the authorship debate to date.

4: THE LITTLE WORLD OF MAN

1. Prologue 945–7, 957–8, in *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay, 2 vols, EETS E.S. 81–2 (1900–1).
2. John G. Cawelti's forceful argument in relation to modern formulaic fiction provides a useful template too for 'type' literature of the kind under discussion here: see his *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago, 1976), pp. 10–12.
3. See Alan C. Dessen, *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays* (Lincoln, NE, and London, 1986), pp. 161–7.
4. There is an important discussion of the relationship of moral allegory to Shakespearean 'incarnation' in Graham Hough, *A Preface to the Faerie Queene* (London, 1962), pp. 105–8.
5. Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in relation to his Major Villains* (New York and London, 1958), pp. 3–59, 87–91.
6. See in particular David M. Bevington, *From* Mankind *to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), pp. 132–89.
7. The play survives only in the form of a 'plot', a chart summarizing the action and kept backstage, for Part 2: see W.W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents* (1931; repr. Oxford, 1969), pp. 105–22 and plates.
8. The work was translated from the 1493 French text into Scots in 1503 and English in 1506, with frequent reprints to 1656 (even retaining its calendar

of saints' days, including St Thomas Becket); the illustration of zodiacal man became widespread from the fourteenth century, though the idea is older. Spenser borrowed the title for his own *Shepheardes Calender*.

9. *Alan of Lille: Anticlaudianus, or the Good and Perfect Man*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto, 1973). Sheridan provides an invaluable summary of Alan's long and convoluted poem, pp. 25–6.
10. As for instance in Alciati's immensely influential book of emblems (*Andreas Alciatus I: The Latin Emblems*, ed. Peter M. Daly (Toronto, 1985), no. 18).
11. See the classic discussion in John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear* (London, 1949).
12. Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, pp. 60–86 on the early history; both he and Bevington, *From* Mankind *to Marlowe*, give an account of the development of the moral interlude.
13. Examples of a male Lechery occur in *The Castle of Perseverance*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1.4.24–6), and Langland's *Piers Plowman* (B-text 20.114–20).
14. 1.3 and 2.3 in both the 1604 and 1616 texts (*Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett (London, 1999).
15. *Everyman* 188–94, in *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose*, ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford, 1985).
16. See Nicholas Brooke's note to 5.3.29 in his edition of *Macbeth* (Oxford, 1990).
17. See T.W.Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (Leicester, 1958), pp. 93–5 and plate V.
18. Lines 1151–75; Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, pp. 87–91.
19. Alciati no. 56 (see note 10).
20. For a full discussion, see Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention* (London and New York, 1965).
21. *A Warning for Fair Women*, ed. Charles Dale Cannon (The Hague, 1975), pp. 133–4,149–50 (there are no numbered act or scene divisions).
22. The phrase goes back to John Adington Symonds, *Shakspere's Predecessors in the English Drama* (London, 1884), p. 388.
23. Heywood, *Apology*, sig. G2v-r.
24. Discussed by Jonathan Bate in his *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford, 1993), esp. pp. 10–11.
25. *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, dumbshow to first act 11–12, in *Early English Classical Tragedies* ed. John W. Cunliffe (Oxford, 1912).
26. For a full account of medieval pastoral and its adoption in Renaissance England, see Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance* (Ipswich and Totowa, NJ, 1977), esp. pp. 169–78 on Shakespeare. A third, highly eroticized model, that renamed its shepherds as 'swains' and made the terms 'nymph' and 'shepherdess' effectively interchangeable, developed in Italy but took significant hold in England only after Shakespeare had ended his writing career.
27. Enid Welsford's *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (1935; repr. New York, 1961) is still the best general guide. On the fool's appearance, see Clifford Davidson, *Illustrations of the Stage and Acting in England to 1580* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1991), pp. 65–83 (Plate 75).

28. Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 33–4, 61, 117.
29. See Henry Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels in History* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 8–9.

5: THE WORLD OF FORTUNE

1. Nicholas Trotte's 'Introduction' addressed to the Queen, line 133, in *Early English Classical Tragedies*, ed. John W. Cunliffe (Oxford, 1912), p. 223. The play was performed before her by the gentlemen of Gray's Inn in February 1587.
2. Quoted by Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago and London, 1996), p. 71; he further notes that Elizabeth's own comment on the reign of Richard II, that 'this tragedy was played fortie times in open streets and houses', may be a reference in the first instance to the events of the reign (p. 80).
3. Heywood, *Apology*, sig. F1v. On the history of tragedy, see H.A. Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993), and Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (corrected edn, Oxford, 1956).
4. *Medieval French Plays*, trans. Richard Axton and John Stevens (Oxford, 1971), pp. 207–55, lines 766–823.
5. Chaucer, *Boece* II pr. 2.67–70. He goes on to translate an accompanying gloss that explains what tragedies are for those unfamiliar with the term: 'tragedye is to seyn a dite of prosperite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse'.
6. *Elizabeth I: Translations 1592–1598*, ed. Janel Mueller and Joshua Scodel (Chicago, 2009), p. 126.
7. Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (1927; repr. London, 1967), pp. 147–77 (the iconography is discussed in detail on pp. 164–5 and note 2).
8. *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell (New York, 1938), pp. 5–7. For a more political account of its history, see Scott C. Lucas, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the Politics of the English Reformation* (Amherst, MA, 2009), pp. 231–48.
9. See further Farnham, *Medieval Heritage*, pp. 304–420, on *de casibus* tragedy in the wake of the *Mirror*.
10. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia*, in G. Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vols (1904; Oxford, 1967), 2.318.
11. For discussion, see Beatrice Groves, *Texts and Traditions: Religion in Shakespeare 1592–1604* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 89–120.
12. *Poetica d'Aristotele vvlgarizzata ed esposta per Ludouico Castelvetro* (Vienna, 1570), 146v-167v.
13. Sidney, *Apology for Poetry*, Smith, 1.177.
14. From *Pierce Pennilesse*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols (London, 1910), 1.213.
15. *Mirror*, p. 81 (Roger Mortimer), p. 192 (Clifford), p. 347 (Collingbourne).

16. *The Tenne Tragedies of Seneca*, facsimile (1887; repr. New York, 1967), f. 92v, 73r; compare *Oedipus* 980, 986 and *Phaedra* 1141–3 (*Seneca IX: Tragedies*, ed. and trans. John G. Fitch, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA, 2002–4)). The fickle wheel of Fortune that 'doth turne by course of kinde' of the chorus to Act IV of *Oedipus* (f. 91r) has no counterpart in the Latin.
17. *Tenne tragedies*, f. 198r; the original states more simply, 'Quos felices Cynthia vidit, / vidit miseros enata dies' (*Hercules Oetaeus*, ed. Fitch, 641–2).
18. *Thyestes,* ed. Fitch, 613–14; *Tenne tragedies*, f. 31r.
19. The phrase is Richard Hillman's, *Self-Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama: Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage* (Basingstoke and New York, 1997), and see esp. pp. 76–7.
20. See p. 30 and note.
21. On the continuing place held by God in Tudor historiography in relation to Shakespeare's histories, see Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, 1990), pp. 6–8, 40–85. Abraham Fleming's revisions to the 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* – the edition used by Shakespeare – had emphasized such moral readings of history.
22. 2.4.73 in some editions. Cf. also 2.2.174, 3.3.25.
23. Ian Felce, 'Riddling Q1: Hamlet's Mill and the Trickster', *Shakespeare Survey* 61 (2008), 269–80.
24. 'Res tragicae grandes, atroces, iussa regum, caedes, desperationes, suspendia, exilia, orbitates,parricidia, incestus, incendia, pugnae, occaecationes, fletus, ululatus, conquestiones, funera, epitaphia, epicedia' (my translation), *Iulius Caesar Scaliger: Poetices Libri Septem*, III.xcvi, gen. ed. Manfred Fuhrmann, 5 vols (Stuttgart, 1994–2003), 3.24; the first edition was printed in 1561.
25. *Playes Confuted in Five Actions by Stephen Gosson*, facsmile intro. Arthur Freeman (New York and London, 1972), sig. C5r-v.
26. *The First Quarto of Hamlet*, ed. Kathleen O. Irace (Cambridge, 1998), 10.30–1 (the second line in the later texts reads 'words without thoughts never to heaven go' (3.3.97–8)).
27. Felce, 'Riddling Q1', p. 275. The article also notes the strong return of Hamlet as trickster after Q2 and F in the seventeenth-century German version of the play.
28. As Descartes's friends pointed out to him; for detail and discussion, see e.g. Étienne Gilson, *Études sur la role de la pensée mediévale dans la formation du système cartesien* (Paris, 1930), pp. 191–201, and Gareth B. Matthews, *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes* (Ithaca, NY, 1992). Augustine returned to the idea a number of times, including in *City of God*, XI.26.
29. *R3* 5.3.184 (with the more usual reading 'I am I'); *AW* 4.3.327–8; *Oth* 1.1.64, the deliberate cloaking of what 'I am'.
30. For the re-insertion of the Middle Ages into the picture, see David Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics writing the "History of the Subject"', in *Culture and History 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. Aers (New York and London, 1992), pp. 177–202; and Lee Patterson, cited in Introduction, n. 2 above.

31. G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (first published 1930). It remains a widespread interpretation: see, for instance, Piero Boitani, *Il Vangelio secondo Shakespeare* (Bologna, 2009).
32. In *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo, 1997). No prints of the story are known, but it was dramatized at Chester in 1529 and in a Latin version of 1623, both lost.
33. Ernst Kantarowicz's foundational study, *The King's Two Bodies*, carries the unequivocal subtitle *A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1957; repr. with preface by William Chester Jordan, Princeton, 1997).
34. Text from the 1598 edition of Chaucer (the spelling varies slightly between the various sixteenth-century editions); see further Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 189–90. Thomas of Erceldoune is now best known through the ballad *Thomas Rhymer*.
35. On the printing history, see Jennifer Fellows, 'The Middle English and Renaissance *Bevis*: A Textual Survey', in *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, ed. Fellows and Ivana Djordević (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 80–113; on sixteenth-century knowledge of *Bevis*, see Andrew King, '*Bevis of Hampton: Renaissance Influence and Reception*', ibid., pp. 176–91.

6: ROMANCE, WOMEN AND THE PROVIDENTIAL WORLD

1. See Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 290–2.
2. M.C. Bradbrook, *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy*, revised edn (Cambridge, 1973), p. 3.
3. See, for instance, Christopher Booker's account of comedy in *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London and New York, 2004), though he jumps straight from the Classics to the early modern (p. 113).
4. Sidney, *Apology*, Smith, 1.177.
5. Gosson, *Playes Confuted*, sig. C5r-v.
6. E.g. Gosson, *Playes Confuted*, sig. C6r, and Sidney, *Apology*, Smith, 1.197. On the fashion for dramatizing early romance, see C.R. Baskervill, 'Some Evidence for Early Romantic Plays in England', *Modern Philology* 14 (1916–17), 229–51, 467–512.
7. Cooper, *English Romance*, listings on pp. 409–29; *Robert Langham: A Letter*, ed. R.J.P. Kuin (Leiden: Brill, 1983), p. 53 and Appendix G. The authorship as well as the reality of Cox's existence are both matters of debate.
8. See Harbage, *Annals*, 1593 (Guy), 1598 (Arthur, Tristram); Huon was acted some time between 1580 and 1593 (pp. 76–7), Valentine and Orson in 1595 and 1598, and the Four Sons of Aymon in 1603, perhaps a revival of an old play (pp. 88–9). All were acted in the public theatres. For more extensive discussion, see Baskervill, 'Some Evidence for Early Romantic Plays in England'.
9. See Helen Moore, 'Shakespeare and Popular Romance', in *Shakespeare and*

Elizabethan Popular Culture, ed. Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes (London, 2006), pp. 92–111, and Cooper, *English Romance*, pp. 30–6.

10. For *Guy*, see *KJ* 1.1.225 (a reference to Colbrand, Guy's giant opponent); for *Squire*, *H5* 5.1.36. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* names characters after Sir Eglamour and, probably, the Valentine of *Valentine and Orson* (a story so widely known as to make this the more likely source than the saint).
11. See p. 168 above; *H8* 1.1.38; and *The First Part of the Contention*, ed. Allen and Muir, *Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto*, p. 56 (around *2H6* 2.3.90 in the Folio text).
12. See further Rebecca Krug, 'Shakespeare's Medieval Morality: *The Merchant of Venice* and the *Gesta Romanorum*', in Curtis Perry and John Watkins, eds, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 241–61.
13. E.g. in a play of *Huon* of 1593, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. Foakes, p. 20.
14. Discussed by Anne Barton, 'The King Disguised: Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the Comical History', reprinted in her *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 207–33.
15. Cooper, *English Romance*, pp. 264–5; Warner adapted the story in his *Albions England*, with the heiress and the heir separately exiled to the countryside.
16. Helen Cooper, 'Guy of Warwick, Upstart Crows and Mounting Sparrows', in *Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson: New Directions in Biography*, ed. J.R. Mulryne and Takashi Kozuka (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 119–38.
17. *CE* 5.1.155–6, 331–95; cf. Gower, *Confessio* VIII, 1849, line 1857 in the section of the early printed text given in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols (London and New York, 1957–75), 1.10–11, 50–4; he does not note the parallel debt to the opening of the action.
18. Cooper, *English Romance*, pp. 218–68, for an extended discussion of the heroines of medieval and Shakespearean romance; pp. 222–3 on social and ecclesiastical customs.
19. *William of Palerne: An Alliterative Romance*, ed. G.H.V. Bunt (Groeningen, 1985), 458–9, from a speech of probably some 140 long alliterative lines. It is missing from the one surviving fragment of the printed prose version, though the popularity of the print is attested by contemporary educators' references to its being too widely read.
20. *The most pleasant song of Lady Bessy*, ed. J.O. Halliwell, Percy Society 20 (1847).
21. Cooper, *English Romance*, pp. 269–323, esp. pp. 284–92.
22. An honourable exception is Giorgio Melchiori's 2000 edition for the Arden Third Series.
23. See in particular Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder*; Peter G. Platt, *Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous* (Lincoln, NE, and London, 1997); and R.S. White, *Let Wonder Seem Familiar: Endings in Shakespeare's Romance Vision* (London, 1985).
24. Gosson, *Playes Confuted*, sig. C6r; Sidney, *Apology*, Smith, 1.197.
25. Cooper, *English Romance*, pp. 137–72.
26. Simon Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare: A New World of Words* (Oxford, 1997), p. 23.

27. E.g. John Fletcher's Epistle to the Reader prefixed to his *Faithful Shepherdess* (1610).
28. Cooper, *English Romance*, pp. 106–14.
29. Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (New York, 1965), p. 65.
30. See R.F. Yeager, 'Shakespeare as Medievalist: What it means for performing *Pericles*', in Driver and Ray, eds, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, pp. 215–31.
31. For the earliest surviving version and a comprehensive history of the story, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge, 1991).
32. Richard Hillman describes it as 'the most sustained literary allusion to be found in Shakespeare', 'Shakespeare's Gower and Gower's Shakespeare: The Larger Debt of *Pericles*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 (1985), 427–37 (428); and see also Bullough 6.349–564.
33. Bullough 6.494.
34. The most detailed case for Shakespeare's non-authorship of Acts 1 and 2, and for Wilkins's authorship of those acts, is made by Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, pp. 291–332, which incorporates a survey and critique of earlier work on the subject from the eighteenth century forwards. Linguistic analysis is complicated by the deliberate archaisms of the early parts of the play, which make it anomalous for any playwright of the period. The dual authorship is more widely accepted than that Wilkins was the other author involved. Almost all critics, however, recognize the 'imaginative unity' of the play as we have it (Vickers, p. 445) and Shakespeare's close involvement with its development.
35. See Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1982).
36. See Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford, 2001). The fragmentary *Dux Moraud*, about actual incest, is the only surviving Middle English dramatic example (in Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays*, pp. 106–13).

7: SHAKESPEARE'S CHAUCER

1. See Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion (1357–1900)*, 3 vols (London, 1914–25), which is extended and enlarged for early printed material only by Jackson Campbell Boswell and Sylvia Wallace Holton, *Chaucer's Fame in England: STC Chauceriana, 1475–1640* (New York, 2004). For discussion, see Helen Cooper, 'Fame, Chaucer and English Poetry', in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford, 2010), pp. 361–78; and *Refiguring Chaucer in the Renaissance*, ed. Theresa M. Krier (Gainesville, 1998).
2. *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, 1385–1837, ed. Derek Brewer (London, 1978), p. 146.
3. Details are given in Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 376–7, and Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A*

Study in Literary Origins (Liverpool, 1978), pp. 31–44. On the anonymous Welsh play, see *Troelus & Chresyd*, ed. W. Beynon Davies (Cardiff, 1976); it may date from as early as the 1560s, though its one surviving manuscript is of the early seventeenth century.

4. See Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer*, pp. 16–58.
5. See Helen Cooper, 'After Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 25 (2003), 3–24.
6. See in particular E. Talbot Donaldson, *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer* (New Haven, 1985), pp. 119–39, and Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer*, pp. 94–102. Shakespeare's immediate source for *RJ*, Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*, is more overtly indebted to *Troilus*.
7. See Anna Baldwin, 'From the *Clerk's Tale* to the *Winter's Tale*', in *Chaucer Traditions* ed. Ruth Morse and B.A. Windeatt (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 199–212.
8. William Forrest, *The History of Grisild the Second*, ed. W.D. Macray, Roxburghe Club (London, 1875).
9. Theresa M. Krier, 'The Aim was Song: From Narrative to Lyric in *The Parlement of Foules* and *Love's Labours Lost*', in Krier, ed., *Refiguring Chaucer*, pp. 165–88.
10. Peter Holland's Introduction to his Oxford World's Classics edition gives a useful account of the various possible sources for all aspects of the plot, including Chaucer (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Oxford, 1995)).
11. See Bullough, 1.368, 370, 377–84 (the *Dream*); and 6.91, 95 (*Troilus*), but with no excerpts from Chaucer. The most Chaucer-conscious editors of the *Dream* are Harold F. Brooks, Arden Shakespeare (London, 1979), and Peter Holland. For a study and very full bibliography, see Martha Driver, 'Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through Medieval Romance', in Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray, eds, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Performance and Adaptation of the Plays with Medieval Sources or Settings* (Jefferson, NC, 2009), pp. 140–60.
12. *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. Foakes and Rickert, pp. 19–20; and on Edwards's *Palamon*, Ros King, *The Works of Richard Edwards: Politics, Poetry and Performance in Sixteenth-Century England* (Manchester and New York, 2001), pp. 63–85, and the two surviving songs on pp. 225–6.
13. *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. Foakes and Rickert, p. 21; Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 68–71, 279; Park Honan, *Shakespeare: A Life* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 199–201, who notes that Shakespeare had probably joined the Chamberlain's Men before the summer.
14. This was deliberate recasting on Chaucer's part, not ignorance of any alternative ways of presenting him: see his much more critical Legend of Medea in the *Legend of Good Women*. Relating the *Dream*'s Theseus solely to his Classical antecedents skews the portrait too much towards his grim associations: see e.g. Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago and London, 1996), pp. 148–9.
15. See Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer*, pp. 88–9. Shakespeare's use of the

Legend is also attested in his *Lucrece*: Chaucer's own *Lucrece* is the first source text for it in Bullough (1.179, 184–9), and verbal echoes include e.g. Tarquin's 'stalking' into Lucrece's chamber (*Legend* 1781, *Lucrece* 365).

16. See David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 119–24; Montrose, *Purpose of Playing*, pp. 180–3, 199.
17. As was done in Peter Brook's 1969 production for the RSC.
18. Anthony Brian Taylor, 'Golding's Ovid, Shakespeare's "Small Latin", and the Real Object of Mockery in "Pyramus and Thisbe"', *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990), 53–64 (63), though the grounds for similarity offered are somewhat different from those suggested here. David Wallace suggests rather that Bottom is the 'Chaucer' figure in the play (*Chaucerian Polity*, p. 121).
19. Donaldson, *Swan*, p. 32. Donaldson's is the best account of the relationship of the *Dream* to Chaucer, and he was the first to identify and discuss the debts of *Pyramus* to *Sir Thopas*.
20. *MND* 5.1.177; Chaucer, *Legend* 756.
21. 'Mine own John Poyntz', lines 50–1, in *Sir Thomas Wyatt: The Complete Poems*, ed. R.A. Rebholz (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 187.
22. For details see J.A. Burrow, 'Sir Thopas in the Sixteenth Century', in *Middle English Studies presented to Norman Davis*, ed. Douglas Gray and E.G. Stanley (Oxford, 1983), pp. 69–91.
23. See further Holland's edition, pp. 96–8.
24. See Holland's edition, pp. 78–81.
25. *Chester Cycle*, vol. 1, ed. Lumiansky and Mills, Appendix IB, Play V, s.d. 168 (p. 471); and the variant text, Play V, s.d. 223 (pp. 87–8). The two suggest slightly different ways of playing the ass, but both require human actors. The cycle used various ways to represent donkeys: see *REED: Chester*, ed. Clopper, p. 50 (apparently a real donkey, in the pageant of *Christ at the House of Simon the Leper*); pp. 82, 92 (a painted donkey for the Nativity); p. 92 (an actor paid for 'spekyng for the asse', presumably in *Balaam*); p. 72 (a donkey accompanying a dromedary and a dragon in an early Midsummer Show); and pp. 206, 470, 485 (in Shows in 1601–3, a real donkey still described as 'Balaam's ass' ridden by a 'comely boy').
26. In October–November 1589, 1590 and 1591 (Gurr, *Shakespearian Playing Companies*, p. 214–15; and see p. 279).
27. Sidney, *Apology*, Smith, 1.166.
28. See Bullough, 6.83–111, for a survey.
29. On the reception history, see Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, pp. 365–81.
30. See e.g. II.649–52 (including blushing at her own thoughts), III.575–588, 1209–11, 1303–09, V.1030–77.
31. See further Jill Mann, 'Shakespeare and Chaucer: "What is Criseyde worth?"', in *The European Tragedy of Troilus*, ed. Piero Boitani (Oxford, 1989), pp. 219–42.
32. Donaldson, *Swan*, p. 79.
33. Piero Boitani, 'The Genius to Improve an Invention', in Morse and Windeatt, ed., *Chaucer Traditions*, pp. 185–98 (193), and see also Helen Cooper,

'Jacobean Chaucer: *The Two Noble Kinsmen and Other Chaucerian Plays*', in Krier, ed., *Refiguring Chaucer*, pp. 189–209.

34. The generally accepted division of labour is that Shakespeare wrote the bulk of Act 1, 2.1, 3.1–2, and 5.1, 3–4, and perhaps also 2.3 and 4.3. Fletcher is likely to be responsible for most of the subplot, and the prologue and epilogue.

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