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English Institute

Essays 1948

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D. A. Robertson, Jr.

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Preface

IN 1948, from September 7th through September 11th, the English Institute held its seventh meeting. As in past years, the scene was Columbia University. The complete program and the list of 142 registrants are given in Appendixes to this volume.

Of the eight papers here printed, Mr. Stevens' "Imagination as Value" was an evening lecture, and the other seven were drawn from the two series entitled "Myth in the Later Plays of Shakespeare" and "Rhetorical Theory and Practical Criticism." As always, it is cause for regret that the Institute's annual volume cannot be expanded to include all the papers which the members in attendance were privileged to hear. To all the program directors and speakers of 1948 belong our thanks, from the heart and from the head, for a most interesting session.

For the hospitality extended by Columbia University, and for the cooperation shown by the Columbia University Press in the publishing of this seventh in the series of English Institute annuals, we wish also to express our appreciation.

D. A. ROBERTSON, JR.

New York
June, 1949

Contents

Imagination as Value, by WALLACE STEVENS	3
--	---

Myth in the Later Plays of Shakespeare

The Lear World, by ROBERT B. HEILMAN <i>University of Washington</i>	29
---	----

The Argument of Comedy, by NORTHROP FRYE <i>University of Toronto</i>	58
--	----

The Defense of the Illusion and the Creation of Myth, by LESLIE A. FIEDLER <i>Montana State University</i>	74
--	----

Three Shakespearean Myths: Mutability, Plenitude, and Reputation, by EDWARD HUBLER <i>Princeton University</i>	95
---	----

Rhetorical Theory and Practical Criticism

Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art, by CRAIG LA DRIERE <i>Catholic University of America</i>	123
--	-----

Rhetoric in the English Renaissance: Two Elegies, by RUTH C. WALLERSTEIN <i>University of Wisconsin</i>	153
--	-----

Rhetoric and Poems: The Example of Pope, by W. K. WIMSATT, JR. <i>Yale University</i>	179
---	-----

Appendixes

Supervising Committee, 1948	211
The English Institute Program, 1948	212
Registrants, 1948	215

English Institute
Essays 1948

Imagination as Value

By WALLACE STEVENS

IT DOES NOT SEEM POSSIBLE to say of the imagination that it has a certain single characteristic which of itself gives it a certain single value as, for example, good or evil. To say such a thing would be the same thing as to say that the reason is good or evil or, for that matter, that human nature is good or evil. Since that is my first point, let us discuss it.

Pascal called the imagination the mistress of the world. But as he seems never to have spoken well of it, it is certain that he did not use this phrase to speak well of it. He called it the deceptive element in man, the mistress of error and duplicity, and yet not always that, since there would be an infallible measure of truth if there was an infallible measure of untruth. But being most often false, imagination gives no sign of its quality and indicates in the same way both the true and the false. A little farther on in his *Pensees*, Pascal speaks of magistrates, their red robes, their ermines in which they swathe themselves, like furry cats, the palaces in which they sit in judgment, the fleurs de lis, and the whole necessary, august apparatus. He says, and he enjoys his own malice in saying it, that if medical men did not have their cassocks and the mules

they wear, and if doctors did not have their square hats and robes four times too large, they would never have been able to dupe the world, which is incapable of resisting so genuine a display. He refers to soldiers and kings, of whom he speaks with complete caution and respect, saying that they establish themselves by force, the others "par grimace." He justifies monarchs by the strength they possess and says that it is necessary to have a well-defined reason to regard like anyone else the Grand Seigneur surrounded, in his superb seraglio, by forty thousand janissaries.

However this may be, if respect for magistrates can be established by their robes and ermines, and if justice can be made to prevail by the appearance of the seats of justice, and if vast populations can be brought to live peacefully in their homes and to lie down at night with a sense of security and to get up in the morning confident that the great machine of organized society is ready to carry them on, merely by dressing a few men in uniform and sending them out to patrol the streets, the sort of thing that was the object of Pascal's ridicule and that was, to his way of thinking, an evil, or something of an evil, becomes to our way of thinking a potent good. The truth is, of course, that we do not really control vast populations in this way. Pascal knew perfectly well that the chancellor had force behind him. If he felt in his day that medicine was an imaginary science, he would not feel so today. After all, Pascal's understanding of the imagination was a part of his understanding of everything else. As he lay dying, he experienced a violent

convulsion. His sister who attended him described the scene. He had repeatedly asked that he might receive communion. His sister wrote:

"God, who wished to reward a desire so fervent and so just, suspended this convulsion as by a miracle and restored his judgment completely as in the perfection of his health, in a manner that the parish priest, entering into his room with the sacrament, cried to him: 'Here is he whom you have so much desired/ These words completely roused him and as the priest approached to give him communion, he made an effort, he raised himself halfway without help to receive it with more respect; and the priest having interrogated him, following the custom, on the principal mysteries of the faith, he responded distinctly: 'Yes, monsieur, I believe all that with all my heart.' Then he received the sacred wafer and extreme unction with feelings so tender that he poured out tears. He replied to everything, thanked the priest and as the priest blessed him with the holy ciborium, he said, 'Let God never forsake me.' "

Thus, in the very act of dying, he clung to what he himself had called the delusive faculty. When I said a moment ago that he had never spoken well of it, I did not overlook the fact that "this superb power, the enemy of reason/" to use his own words, did not, and could not, always seem the same to him. In a moment of indifference, he said that the imagination disposes all things and that it is the imagination that creates beauty, justice, and happiness. In these various ways, the example of Pascal demonstrates how the good of

the imagination may be evil and its evil good. The imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things; but if this constitutes a certain single characteristic, it is the source not of a certain single value but of as many values as reside in the possibilities of things.

A second difficulty about value is the difference between the imagination as metaphysics and as a power of the mind over external objects, that is to say, reality. Ernst Cassirer in *An Essay on Man* says,

In romantic thought the theory of poetic imagination had reached its climax. Imagination is no longer that special human activity which builds up the human world of art. It now has universal metaphysical value. Poetic imagination is the only clue to reality. Fichte's idealism is based upon his conception of "productive imagination." Schelling declared in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* that art is the consummation of philosophy. In nature, in morality, in history we are still living in the propylaeum of philosophical wisdom; in art we enter into the sanctuary itself. . . . The true poem is not the work of the individual artist; it is the universe itself, the one work of art which is forever perfecting itself.¹

Professor Cassirer speaks of this as "exuberant and ecstatic praise of poetic imagination." In addition, it is the language of what he calls "romantic thought," and by romantic thought he means metaphysics. When I speak of the power of the mind over external objects, I have in mind, as external objects, works of art as, for example, the sculptures of Michael Angelo with what Walter Pater calls "their wonderful

¹ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1944), pp. 155-56.

strength verging, as in the things of the imagination great strength always does, on what is singular or strange" or, in architecture, the formidable public buildings of the British, or the architecture and decoration of churches, as, say, in the case of the Jesuit church at Lucerne, where one might so easily pass from the real to the visionary without consciousness of change. Imagination, as metaphysics, leads us in one direction and, as art, in another.

When we consider the imagination as metaphysics, we realize that it is in the nature of the imagination itself that we should be quick to accept it as the only clue to reality. But alas! we are no sooner so disposed than we encounter the logical positivists. In *Language, Truth and Logic*, Professor Ayer says that

it is fashionable to speak of the metaphysician as a kind of misplaced poet. As his statements have no literal meaning, they are not subject to any criteria of truth or falsehood: but they may still serve to express, or arouse, emotion, and thus be subject to ethical or aesthetic standards. And it is suggested that they may have considerable value, as means of moral inspiration, or even as works of art. In this way, an attempt is made to compensate the metaphysician for his extrusion from philosophy.²

It appears from this that the imagination as metaphysics, from the point of view of the logical positivist, has at least seeming values. The *New Statesman* of London has recently published letters growing out of a letter sent to it by a visitor to Oxford, who reported that Professor Ayer's book had "acquired almost the

2 Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 36-37.

status of a philosophic Bible." This led Professor Joad to look up the book and see for himself. He reported that the book teaches that "If . . . God is a metaphysical term, if, that is to say, He belongs to a reality which transcends the world of sense-experience . . . to say that He exists is neither true nor false. This position . . . is neither atheist nor agnostic; it cuts deeper than either, by asserting that all talk about God, whether pro or anti, is twaddle." What is true of one metaphysical term is true of all.

Then, too, before going on, we must somehow cleanse the imagination of the romantic. We feel, without being particularly intelligent about it, that the imagination as metaphysics will survive logical positivism unscathed. At the same time, we feel, and with the sharpest possible intelligence, that it is not worthy to survive if it is to be identified with the romantic. The imagination is one of the great human powers. The romantic belittles it. The imagination is the liberty of the mind. The romantic is a failure to make use of that liberty. It is to the imagination what sentimentality is to feeling. It is a failure of the imagination precisely as sentimentality is a failure of feeling. The imagination is the only genius. It is intrepid and eager, and the extreme of its achievement lies in abstraction. The achievement of the romantic, on the contrary, lies in minor wish-fulfillments, and it is incapable of abstraction. In any case, and without continuing to contrast the two things, one wants to elicit a sense of the imagination as something vital. In that sense one must deal with it as metaphysics.

If we escape destruction at the hands of the logical positivists, and if we cleanse the imagination of the taint of the romantic, we still face Freud. What would he have said of the imagination as the clue to reality and of a culture based on the imagination? Before jumping to the conclusion that at last there is no escape, is it not possible that he might have said that in a civilization based on science there could be a science of illusions? He does in fact say that "So long as a man's early years are influenced by the religious thought-inhibition . . . as well as by the sexual one, we cannot really say what he is actually like." If, when the primacy of the intelligence has been achieved, one can really say what a man is actually like, what could be more natural than a science of illusions? Moreover, if the imagination is not quite the clue to reality now, might it not become so then? As for the present, what have we, if we do not have science, except the imagination? And who is to say of its deliberate fictions arising out of the contemporary mind that they are not the forerunners of some such science? There is more than the romantic in the statement that the true work of art, whatever it may be, is not the work of the individual artist. It is time and it is place, as these perfect themselves.

To regard the imagination as metaphysics is to think of it as part of life, and to think of it as part of, life is to realize the extent of artifice. We live in the mind. One way of demonstrating what it means to live in the mind is to imagine a discussion of the world between two people born blind, able to describe their

images, so far as they have images, without the use of images derived from other people. It would not be our world that would be discussed. Still another illustration may help. A man in Paris does not imagine the same sort of thing that a native of Uganda imagines. If each could transmit his imagination to the other, so that the man in Paris, lying awake at night, could suddenly hear a footfall that meant the presence of some inimical and merciless monstrosity, and if the man in Uganda found himself in, say, the Munster at Basel and experienced what is to be experienced there, what words would the Parisian find to forestall his fate, and what understanding would the Ugandan have of his incredible delirium? If we live in the mind, we live with the imagination. It is a commonplace to realize the extent of artifice in the external world and to say that Florence is more imaginative than Dublin, that blue and white Munich is more imaginative than white and green Havana, and so on; or to say that, in this town, no single public object of the imagination exists, while, in the Vatican City, say, no public object exists that is not an object of the imagination. What is engaging us at the moment has nothing to do with the external world. We are concerned with the extent of artifice within us and, almost parenthetically, with the question of its value.

What, then, is it to live in the mind with the imagination, yet not too near to the fountains of its rhetoric, so that one does not have a consciousness

only of grandeurs, of incessant departures from the idiom, and of inherent altitudes? Only the reason stands between it and the reality for which the two are engaged in a struggle. We have no particular interest in this struggle because we know that it will continue to go on and that there will never be an outcome. We lose sight of it until Pascal, or someone else, reminds us of it. We say that it is merely a routine, and the more we think about it the less able we are to see that it has any heroic aspects or that the spirit is at stake or that it may involve the loss of the world. Is there in fact any struggle at all, and is the idea of one merely a bit of academic junk? Do not the two carry on together in the mind like two brothers or two sisters or even like young Darby and young Joan? Darby says, "It is often true that what is most rational appears to be most imaginative, as in the case of Picasso." Joan replies, "It is often true, also, that what is most imaginative appears to be most rational, as in the case of Joyce. Life is hard and dear, and it is the hardness that makes it dear." And Darby says, "Speaking of Joyce and the coexistence of opposites, do you remember the story that Joyce tells of Pascal in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*?" Stephen said,

—Pascal, if I remember rightly, would not suffer his mother to kiss him as he feared the contact of her sex.—

—Pascal was a pig—said Cranly.

—Aloysius Gonzaga, I think, was of the same mind—Stephen said.

—And he was another pig then—said Cranly.

—The church calls him a saint—Stephen objected.

How is it that we should be speaking of the prize of the spirit and of the loss, or gain, of the world, in connection with the relations between reason and the imagination? It may be historically true that the reason of a few men has always been the reason of the world. Notwithstanding this, we live today in a time dominated by great masses of men; and, while the reason of a few men may underlie what they do, they act as their imaginations impel them to act. The world may, certainly, be lost to the poet, but it is not lost to the imagination. I speak of the poet because we think of him as the orator of the imagination. And I say that the world is lost to him, certainly, because, for one thing, the great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of the earth remains to be written. I suppose it is that poem that will constitute the true prize of the spirit, and that until it is written many lesser things will be so regarded, including conquests that are not unimaginable. One wants to consider the imagination on its most momentous scale. Today this scale is not the scale of poetry, nor of any form of literature or art. It is the scale of international politics and in particular of communism. Communism is not the measure of humanity. But I limit myself to an allusion to it as a phenomenon of the imagination. Surely the diffusion of communism exhibits imagination on its most momentous scale. This is because whether or not communism is the measure of humanity the words themselves echo back to us that it has for the present taken the measure of an important part of humanity. With the collapse of other be-

liefs, this grubby faith promises a practicable earthly paradise. The only earthly paradise that even the best of other faiths has been able to promise has been one in man's noblest image, and this has always required an imagination that has not yet been included in the fortunes of mankind.

The difference between an imagination that is engaged by the materialism of communism and one that is engaged by the projects of idealism is a difference in nature. It is not that the imagination is versatile, but that there are different imaginations. The commonest idea of an imaginative object is something large. But apparently with the Japanese it is the other way round, and with them the commonest idea of an imaginative object is something small. With the Hindu it appears to be something vermicular; with the Chinese, something round; and with the Dutch, something square. If these evidences do not establish the point, it can hardly be because the point needs establishing. A comparison between the Bible and poetry is relevant. It cannot be said that the Bible, the most widely distributed book in the world, is the poorest. Nor can it be said that it owes its distribution to the poetry it contains. If poetry should address itself to the same needs and aspirations, the same hopes and fears, to which the Bible addresses itself, it might rival it in distribution. Poetry does not address itself to beliefs. Nor could it ever invent an ancient world full of figures that had been known and become endeared to its readers for centuries. Consequently, when critics of poetry call upon it to do some of the

things that the Bible does, they overlook the certainty that the Biblical imagination is one thing and the poetic imagination, inevitably, something else. We cannot look at the past or the future except by means of the imagination, but again the imagination of backward glances is one thing and the imagination of looks ahead something else. Even the psychologists concede this present particular, for, with them, memory involves a reproductive power and looks ahead involve a creative power: the power of our expectations. When we speak of the life of the imagination, we do not mean man's life as it is affected by his imagination but the life of the faculty itself. Accordingly, when we think of the permeation of man's life by the imagination, we must think of it as a life permeated not by a single thing but by a class of things. We use our imagination with respect to every man of whom we take notice when by a glance we make up our mind about him. The differences so defined entail differences of value. The imagination that is satisfied by politics, whatever the nature of the politics, has not the same value as the imagination that seeks to satisfy, say, the universal mind, which, in the case of a poet, would be the imagination that tries to penetrate to basic images, basic emotions, and so to compose a fundamental poetry even older than the ancient world. Perhaps, one drifts off into rhetoric here, but then there is nothing more congenial than that to the imagination.

Of imaginative life as social form, let me distinguish at once between everyday living and the activity

of cultural organization. A theater is a social form, but it is also a cultural organization, and it is not my purpose to discuss the imagination as an institution. Having in mind the extent to which the imagination pervades life, it seems curious that it does not pervade, or even create, social form more widely. It is an activity like seeing things or hearing things, or any other sensory activity. Perhaps, if one collected instances of imaginative life as social form over a period of time, one might amass a prodigious number from among the customs of our lives. Our social attitudes, social distinctions, and the insignia of social distinctions are instances. A ceremonious baptism, a ceremonious wedding, a ceremonious funeral are instances. It takes very little, however, to make a social form arising from the imagination stand out from the normal, and the fact that a form is abnormal is an argument for its suppression. Normal people do not accept something abnormal because it has its origin in an abnormal force like the imagination nor at all until they have somehow normalized it as by familiarity. Costume is an instance of imaginative life as social form. At the same time it is an instance of the acceptance of something incessantly abnormal by reducing it to the normal. It cannot be said that life as we live it from day to day wears an imaginative aspect. On the other hand, it can be said that the aspect of life as we live it from day to day conceals the imagination as social form. No one doubts that the forms of daily living secrete within themselves an infinite variety of things intelligible only to anthropologists, or that lives, like

our own, lived after an incalculable number of preceding lives and in the accumulation of what they have left behind, are socially complicated even when they appear to be socially innocent. To me, the accumulation of lives at a university has seemed to be a subject that might disclose something extraordinary. What is the residual effect of the years we spend at a university, the years of imaginative life, if ever in our lives there are such years, on the social form of our own future and on the social form of the future of the world of which we are part, when compared with the effects of our later economic and political years?

The discussion of the imagination as metaphysics has led us off a little to one side. This is justified, however, by the considerations, first, that the operation of the imagination in life is more significant than its operation in or in relation to works of art, or perhaps I should have said, from the beginning, in arts and letters; second, that the imagination penetrates life; and, finally, that its value as metaphysics is not the same as its value in arts and letters. In spite of the prevalence of the imagination in life, it is probably true that the discussion of it in that relation is incomparably less frequent and less intelligent than the discussion of it in relation to arts and letters. The constant discussion of imagination and reality is largely a discussion not for the purposes of life but for the purposes of arts and letters. I suppose that the reason for this is that few people would turn to the imagination, knowingly, in life, while few people would turn to anything else, knowingly, in arts and letters.

In life what is important is the truth as it is, while in arts and letters what is important is the truth as we see it. There is a real difference here, even though people turn to the imagination without knowing it in life and to reality without knowing it in arts and letters. There are other possible variations of that theme, but the theme itself is there. Again in life the function of the imagination is so varied that it is not well-defined as it is in arts and letters. In life one hesitates when one speaks of the value of the imagination. Its value in arts and letters is aesthetic. Most men's lives are thrust upon them. The existence of aesthetic value in lives that are forced on those that live them is an improbable sort of thing. There can be lives, nevertheless, which exist by the deliberate choice of those that live them. To use a single illustration: it may be assumed that the life of Professor Santayana is a life in which the function of the imagination has had a function similar to its function in any deliberate work of art or letters. We have only to think of this present phase of it, in which, in his old age, he dwells in the head of the world, in the company of devoted women, in their convent, and in the company of familiar saints, whose presence does so much to make any convent an appropriate refuge for a generous and human philosopher. To repeat, there can be lives in which the value of the imagination is the same as its value in arts and letters, and I exclude from consideration as part of that statement any thought of poverty or wealth, being a *Bauer* or being a king, and so on, as irrelevant.

The values of which it is common to think in relation to life are ethical values or moral values. The Victorians thought of these values in relation to arts and letters. It may be that the Russians mean to do about as the Victorians did; that is to say, think of the values of life in relation to arts and letters. A social value is simply an ethical value expressed by a member of the party. Between the wars, we lived, it may be said, in an era when some attempt was made to apply the value of arts and letters to life. These excursions of values beyond their spheres are part of a process which it is unnecessary to delineate. They are like the weather. We suffer from it and enjoy it and never quite know the one feeling from the other. It may, also, be altogether wrong to speak of the excursions of values beyond their spheres, since the question of the existence of spheres and the question of what is appropriate to them are not settled. Thus, something said the other day, that "An objective theory of value is needed in philosophy which does not depend upon unanalyzable intuitions but relates goodness, truth, and beauty to human needs in society/" has a provocative sound. It is so easy for the poet to say that a learned man must go on being a learned man but that a poet respects no knowledge except his own and, again, that the poet does not yield to the priest. What the poet has in mind, when he says things of this sort, is that poetic value is an intrinsic value. It is not the value of knowledge. It is not the value of faith. It is the value of the imagination. The poet tries to exemplify it, in part, as I have tried to ex-

emplify it here, by identifying it with an imaginative activity that diffuses itself throughout our lives. I say exemplify and not justify, because poetic value is an intuitional value and because intuitional values cannot be justified. We cannot very well speak of spheres of value and the transmission of a value, commonly considered appropriate to one sphere, to another, and allude to the peculiarity of roles, as the poet's role, without reminding ourselves that we are speaking of a thing in continuous flux. There is no field in which this is more apparent than painting. Again, there is no field in which it is more constantly and more intelligently the subject of discussion than painting. The permissible reality in painting wavers with an insistence which is itself a value. One might just as well say the permissible imagination. It is as if the painter carried on with himself a continual argument as to whether what delights us in the exercise of the mind is what we produce or the exercise of a power of the mind.

A generation ago we should have said that the imagination is an aspect of the conflict between man and nature. Today we are more likely to say that it is an aspect of the conflict between man and organized society. It is part of our security. It enables us to live our own lives. We have it because we do not have enough without it. This may not be true as to each one of us, for certainly there are those for whom reality and the reason are enough. It is true of us as a race. A single, strong imagination is like a single, strong reason in this, that the extreme good of each

is a spiritual good. It is not possible to say, as between the two, which is paramount. For that matter, it is not always possible to say that they are two. When does a building stop being a product of the reason and become a product of the imagination? If we raise a building to an imaginative height, then the building becomes an imaginative building since height in itself is imaginative. It is the moderator of life as metempsychosis was of death. Nietzsche walked in the Alps in the caresses of reality. We ourselves crawl out of our offices and classrooms and become alert at the opera. Or we sit listening to music as in an imagination in which we believe. If the imagination is the faculty by which we import the unreal into what is real, its value is the value of the way of thinking by which we project the idea of God into the idea of man. It creates images that are independent of their originals, since nothing is more certain than that the imagination is agreeable to the imagination. When one's aunt in California writes that the geraniums are up to her second story window, we soon have them running over the roof. All this diversity, which I have intentionally piled up in confusion in this paragraph, is typical of the imagination. It may suggest that the imagination is the ignorance of the mind. Yet the imagination changes as the mind changes. I know an Italian who was a shepherd in Italy as a boy. He described his day's work. He said that at evening he was so tired he would lie down under a tree like a dog. This image was, of course, an image of his own dog. It was easy for him to say how tired he was by using

the image of his tired dog. But given another mind, given the mind of a man of strong powers, accustomed to thought, accustomed to the essays of the imagination, and the whole imaginative substance changes. It is as if one could say that the imagination lives as the mind lives. The primitivism disappears. The Platonic resolution of diversity appears. The world is no longer an extraneous object, full of other extraneous objects, but an image. In the last analysis, it is with this image of the world that we are vitally concerned. We should not say, however, that the chief object of the imagination is to produce such an image. Among so many objects, it would be the merest improvisation to say of one, even though it is one with which we are vitally concerned, that it is the chief. The next step would be to assert that a particular image was the chief image. Again, it would be the merest improvisation to say of any image of the world, even though it was an image with which a vast accumulation of imagination had been content, that it was the chief image. The imagination itself would not remain content with it nor allow us to do so. It is the irrepressible revolutionist.

In spite of the confusion of values and the diversity of aspects, one arrives eventually face to face with arts and letters. I could take advantage of the pictures from the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, which have been exhibited throughout the country. The pictures by Poussin are not the most marvelous pictures in this collection. Yet, considered as objects of the imagination, how completely they validate Gide's

"We must approach Poussin little by little"; and how firmly they sustain the statement made a few moments ago that the imagination is the only genius. There is also among these pictures a Giorgione, the portrait of a young man, head and shoulders, in a blue-purple blouse, or, if not blue-purple, then a blue of extraordinary enhancings. Vasari said of Giorgione that he painted nothing that he had not seen in nature. This portrait is an instance of a real object that is at the same time an imaginative object. It has about it an imaginative bigness of diction. We know that in poetry bigness and gaiety are precious characteristics of the diction. This portrait transfers that principle to painting. The subject is severe, but its embellishment, though no less severe, is big and gay; and one feels in the presence of this work that one is also in the presence of an abundant and joyous spirit, instantly perceptible in what may be called the diction of the portrait. I could also take advantage, so far as letters are concerned, of a few first books of poems or a few first novels. One turns to first works of the imagination with the same expectation with which one turns to last works of the reason. But I am afraid that although one is, at last, face to face with arts and letters and, therefore, in the presence of particulars beyond particularization, it is prudent to limit discussion to a single point.

My final point, then, is that the imagination is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos. It does this every day in arts and letters. This may seem to be a

merely capricious statement, for ordinarily we regard the imagination as abnormal per se. That point of view was approached in the reference to the academic struggle between reason and the imagination, and again in the reference to the relation between the imagination and social form. The disposition toward a point of view derogatory to the imagination is an aversion to the abnormal. We see it in the common attitude toward modern arts and letters. The exploits of Rimbaud in poetry, if Rimbaud can any longer be called modern, and of Kafka in prose are deliberate exploits of the abnormal. It is natural for us to identify the imagination with those that extend its abnormality. It is like identifying liberty with those that abuse it. A literature overfull of abnormality and, certainly, present-day European literature, as one knows it, seems to be a literature full of abnormality, gives the reason an appearance of normality to which it is not, solely, entitled. The truth seems to be that we live in concepts of the imagination before the reason has established them. If this is true, then reason is simply the methodizer of the imagination. It may be that the imagination is a miracle of logic, and that its exquisite divinations are calculations beyond analysis, as the conclusions of the reason are calculations wholly within analysis. If so, one understands perfectly the remark that "in the service of love and imagination nothing can be too lavish, too sublime or too festive." In the statement that we live in concepts of the imagination before the reason has established them, the word "concepts" means concepts of nor-

mality. Further, the statement that the imagination is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal is a form of repetition of this statement. One statement does not demonstrate the other. The two statements together imply that the instantaneous disclosures of living are disclosures of the normal. This will seem absurd to those that insist on the solitude and misery and terror of the world. They will ask of what value is the imagination to them; and if their experience is to be considered, how is it possible to deny that they live in an imagination of evil? Is evil normal or abnormal? And how do the exquisite divinations of the poets and for that matter even the "aureoles of the saints" help them? But when we speak of perceiving the normal we have in mind the instinctive integrations which are the reason for living. Of what value is anything to the solitary and those that live in misery and terror, except the imagination?

Jean Paulhan, a Frenchman and a writer, is a man of great sense. He is a native of Tarbes. Tarbes is a town in southwestern France in the High Pyrenees. Marshal Foch was born there. An equestrian statue of the Marshal stands there, high in the air, on a pedestal. In his *Les Fleurs de Tarbes*, Jean Paulhan says,

One sees at the entrance of the public garden of Tarbes, this sign:

*It is forbidden
To enter into the garden
Carrying flowers.*

He goes on to say, "One finds it, also, in our time at the portal of literature. Nevertheless, it would be agreeable to see the girls of Tarbes (and the young writers) carrying a rose, a red poppy, an armful of red poppies."

I repeat that Jean Paulhan is a man of great sense. But to be able to see the portal of literature—that is to say, the portal of the imagination—as a scene of normal love and normal beauty is of itself a feat of great imagination. It is the vista a man sees, seated in the public garden of his native town, near by some effigy of a figure celebrated in the normal world, as he considers that the chief problems of any artist, as of any man, are the problems of the normal, and that he needs, in order to solve them, everything that the imagination has to give.

Myth in the Later Plays of Shakespeare

The Lear World

By ROBERT B. HEILMAN

IN OPENING A DISCUSSION ON "Myth in the Later Plays of Shakespeare" I want to engage in a few preliminaries that should be an approach to definition. I hope you will pardon my casting these prolusory glances at the subject in the facilitating form of a personal memoir. The history will be short, and I shall then progress as best I may to a more substantial theme.

When I became aware how much evidence there is of the present importance of myth to critics—a symposium occupying an entire issue of a critical journal, two series of papers at the English Institute, a whole book which I have been able to read in manuscript, not to mention various individual essays and innumerable obiter dicta—and recalled that I had completed a Shakespeare study without once using the word *myth*, I underwent the momentary discomfiture of one who finds himself caught in the unfashionable—or worse, simply unaware of fashion. It amounted to being outside the community which holds to the myth of myth. Then there occurred to me the consoling thought that one might be mythicizing without overtly using the terminology, that the quest for myth

may be an attempt to restate the ultimate truths embodied in or implied in a narrative form. Thus I inadvertently formulated a tentative definition of myth: "a narrative embodiment of truth." But the inclusiveness of this definition poses immediate problems. If myth is narrative truth, is all narrative myth? One's instinct is surely to say no, it is not, and to look for further distinctions. For some reason, one feels, *King Lear* has mythic values, and Johnson's *Irene* does not; or perhaps *The Magic Mountain* does, and Trollope's *Warden* does not. If this distinction is sound, why does one narrative have mythic value, and another not? Or, alternatively, how does one come closer to being myth than another does?

In the midst of this first asking, one comes across another obstacle: is narrative the prime differentia of myth? For in Mark Schorer's book about Blake one finds references to the myth of Newton, the myth of rationalism, and the myth of socialism. Eric Kahler notes the ironic fact that, although the age of rationalism presumably outlawed myths, it actually created the myths of the modern world—natural rights, civil liberties, the American Constitution, and reason itself. William Troy notes other myths of the age of reason—Masonism, Illuminatism, and Swedenborgianism. Whatever else may be true of rationalism, civil liberties, and Masonism, it is evident that they are not narrative. So we redefine: Myth is a concept which becomes a belief, that is, an unquestionable basis for action, a mode of reality in which one lives. At this point, of course, one comes

across Mr. Stauffer, with his insistence that the subject would be so much more manageable if it were possible to deal with conceptions as myths; but the fact is, he says, that a myth is still a story which tells a truth, and that conceptions which cannot generate such stories—for example, science and the state—must be relegated to some non-mythic category.

There are other disagreements, some of them apparently irreconcilable, in the present theorizings about myth. Mr. Schorer insists that myth comes before poetry, Mr. Chase that poetry comes before myth. In various places it is implied that myth is lived belief or lived truth; Mr. Campbell calls mythology the picture-language of metaphysics; but Mr. Chase insists that myth is not philosophy or world-view, but literature. Mr. Kahler points out that in the very midst of our rationalistic overconfidence we exhibit a need for myth; Miss Bogan speaks of the myth which is forming at the heart of our world; Mr. Troy proclaims the need for "a regenerated myth"; but Mr. Stauffer warns that we cannot get myths quick. On the one hand, we hear of the myth of an individual, Yeats or Kafka, and we are about to talk of the myth of Shakespeare; on the other hand, we find Mr. Wheelwright's statement that the myth is an expression of togetherness, of the community mind; and Ludwig Edelstein has suggested to me that to use such a locution as "the Yeats myth" or "the Kafka myth" is itself to despair of myth and to admit, unawares, our limitation to the partial, our spiritual fragmentation. Again, Mr. Wheelwright views myth as an escape from

positivism, a grasping toward the transempirical factor in truth, toward the transcendental; but Mr. Chase calls his approach to myth "naturalistic." Mr. Wheelwright speaks of a mytho-religious perspective; he and Francis Fergusson both stress the kinship of myth and mystery; but Mr. Chase reduces myth to the literature of magic.

One final comparison: many writers refer to "myths," in the plural. Hermann Broch, however, regularly uses the word in the singular. And William Troy asks whether the plural should ever be used. "Perhaps," he says, "there is, after all, only *one* myth—the Myth." The clue to the meaning of this statement may lie, I think, in Mr. Broch's opposition of *logos* and *mythos*, and in his account of *mythos* and *logos* as comprising, together, the "totality of human existence." If this assumption is valid, *the* Myth is the totality of all the visions of truth which are untestable, non-demonstrable, non-empirical, non-logical; in representing the mythical perception, Broch uses such words as *intuition*, *night-logic*, *prophecy*, *dreams*, *seer*. This is consistent with Mr. Fergusson's and Mr. Wheelwright's view of myth as a version of mystery, with Mr. Troy's reference to "that complex of human problems which are imbedded, deep and imponderable, in the Myth," and with Miss Bogan's recognition that in myth "an irreducible residue of an unconscious allusiveness remains inexplicable in any terms but the original legendary ones."

But a discussion of myth—the effort to establish the *logos* of the *mythos*—need not fall into mystification,

nor am I striving for a *reductio ad aenigmatem*. Indeed, many of the speculations concerning myth with which I am familiar can be accommodated, I think, within an over-all pattern of myth. Within the world of myth—the non-logos world—we can perceive a line of continuity among all the elements called mythic, a line of relationship between what we may call greater and lesser myths. Allen Tate bases a whole essay upon Eliot's distinction between a higher and a lower mythology; Chase remarks that an idea may be more or less mythical; Schorer says that some myths are better, that is, more inclusive, than others; according to Galas, myths may be more or less intense; Wheelwright uses the term *pseudo-myths*. Then what I have called the "line of myth" extends from, and marks the gradations from, one extreme, at which we find absolute, inclusive myth, to the other extreme, at which we find many myths, of lesser or no intensity, and either with a grasp upon only a small segment of reality or else with no such grasp at all. At one extreme we find unity, totality, the calling forth of entire devotion in the community; at the other, multiplicity, partialness, and the conflict of skepticisms with lessened devotions and with each other. Between these extremes there are all sorts of variations. Perhaps this attempt at a logical design for myth is also a schematic history of myth, and we can observe, in the course of time, a pendular swing from one extreme to the other. At any rate, it is evident that at different places in the line of myth there are additions (the frequency would vary according to the his-

toric situation) of new material, basically non-mythic, such as reason, or of mythic potentiality, such as democracy or fascism; additions in that the new material, by becoming axiomatic, sacrosanct, evocative of faith, has taken on a mythic character (in the case of reason, it is the *mythos* of the *logos*). This new material, which perhaps were best called quasi-mythic, may move in either direction—by modification and deepening and an ever-growing grasp upon the mystery, toward the extreme at which it becomes identical with *the* myth; or, as the historic circumstance of its origin vanishes, it may drift, by attenuation, demagnetization, and a widening realization of its incompleteness, toward the extreme at which it is simply one of many myths, once stirring and full of the promise of truth, but now with only, or even without, a residual corps of believers. The picturization of myth by this line permits a convenient description of the positivist, or for our purposes the mythoclastic, temper: it is right, of course, in perceiving the hollowness of myths which may be observed at one end of the line; but its error is to assume that one end of the line is a clue also to the other, and that the decay of myths means the extinction of myth and the invalidation of the instinct for myth. Our own symposium is, I suppose, an effort to modify the kind of enlightenment that has led to an overextension of the mythoclastic habit of mind. Ernst Cassirer describes myth as pre-logical; we are now coming to know that it is also post-logical or, better perhaps, co-logical. But doubtless no one will mistake this pursuit of a synoptic view of myth for a

reversal of the demythicizing process. Mythoclasm must be answered ultimately by mythopoeia.

So much for preliminaries. Now I should like to inquire, tentatively, in what terms we may talk about "myth in the later plays of Shakespeare." The contents of the plays themselves we may consider from two points of view. First, we may regard the plays as mythic because of the structural importance in them of the myths which had vitality in the poet's own day. On the other hand, we may consider the plays themselves to have taken on mythic value. These two approaches, we should concede at once, are not always wholly separable; at the very least there will be overlapping. But to use the two approaches, if only for strategic purposes, is to make possible a more complete illumination of the subject than can be accomplished by one alone. In effect, we are asking these two questions: what myths were available to Shakespeare, and what is the Shakespeare myth? In asking the second question, we are extending to Shakespeare the same kind of inquiry which makes it possible for us, when evaluating our contemporaries, to use such phrases as "the Kafka myth," "the Yeats myth," and so on.

One of the chief myths available to Shakespeare was of course the Christian myth. But to save time I am going to omit my discussion of some of the ways in which he did utilize the Christian mythology. Instead, I want to proceed immediately to one other conception of myth with regard to which Shakespeare's practice and the views of two modern critics, who ap-

parently write entirely independently of each other, come very close together. William Troy, after remarking that the problems of civilization are always the same, namely, the problems of love and justice, concludes, "And it is exactly with these two problems above all else that myth is concerned." Now this is remarkably akin to Wheelwright's definition of what he calls "the two Shakespearean key-myths," that is, "the myth of love and the myth of divine and earthly governance." Wheelwright briefly traces the myth of love in *Venus and Adonis*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. In another of his formulations of the Shakespeare world, G. W. Knight sees the essential ingredients in it as love and hate. R. W. Chambers interprets *Lear* as essentially a play about love. If, then, we consider the tragic myth in its relation to love, we may say that love is one of the perdurable realities which tragedy asserts or may assert.

As an asserter of elementary truths, tragedy, especially in Shakespeare's practice, is virtually identified with the myth of governance, which, as Wheelwright puts it, "affirms 'degree, priority, and place' at once in the political order, in nature, in the soul of man, and in the divine government of the world." This mythic conception has had a marked influence on Shakespeare—an influence notable not only in the number of plays in which it may be found but also, and to my mind very importantly, in its penetration into all the structural devices available to the dramatist: plot, poetic language, and even properties. One of G. W. Knight's theses is that in Shakespearean

drama there is repeatedly a tension between music and storms—between, that is to say, the order of the universe and the forces which keep trying to disrupt that order. In *King Lear*, the very play in which there is the most spectacularly violent of storms and in which the actions themselves work toward and almost encompass a complete destruction of all order, the myth of governance still holds, essentially unshaken; it has received the most pervasive expression in the imagery, language patterns, and other structural formations in the play. Indeed, the myth has almost to be hunted out of the dramatic recesses where it resides, and paradoxically its reality is the stronger for not having the most obvious kind of marking. The myth of governance provides the spiritual life of three different expressive systems in the play—systems which are centered in ideas about justice, God, and nature. All these systems are so fully developed that they are very important in the main structural framework of the drama.

Again, as a matter of expediency with respect to time, I shall have to omit the rather full dramatic and verbal evidence of the play's treatment of justice and religion. The final fact is that all the characters in the play who are capable of conceiving of justice at all never waver in their belief in justice as an actuality, an actuality which may be tardy or may be momentarily interfered with but which nevertheless is wholly dependable, a cosmic reality. The myth of governance is still so strong that no one is swept off his feet by the existence of actual injustices. Likewise

the religious feeling, which in general is exhibited indirectly, is quite strong throughout the play—only, of course, in those characters who are capable of it. Goneril, Regan, Oswald, and Cornwall, except for one sardonic remark by Cornwall, never make the faintest reference to either justice or the gods. They do not attack these beliefs; they simply show no awareness of them. It is a very important fact that some characters are entirely outside certain mythic beliefs which have a very strong hold upon other characters. To the significance of this fact I shall return later.

The myth of governance finds amplest expression in the belief in the reality which in Shakespeare's world is called *nature*—a system of cosmic laws which dominate both the physical and the moral universe, laws which may be broken but with reference to which the world is always to be understood. Consider, in the play, the animal imagery, the storm, and the uses of such terms as *nature* and *unnatural*. The animal imagery is used almost exclusively to show human beings, especially Goneril and Regan, in an abnegation of humanity—a denial of human nature, of a condition normal to man. The storm is a breach in nature: it symbolizes not only the mental disturbance which is a departure from the norm in Lear, but also the moral perversion which signifies the loss of the human norm in Edmund, Regan, and Goneril. Animal conduct in human beings, and the violent disturbance of the elements, are both felt as a violation—not as a destruction—of essential order. Then there are the numerous uses of the word *nature* and its

derivatives, as when Lear calls his daughters "unnatural hags." What all these terms, and many more like them, imply is a fundamental order, or governance, in the universe. Now this order is actually to be understood as a regulative principle, a restorer of moral equilibrium. Lear's famous curse upon Goneril ("Into her womb convey sterility") is actually a prayer to nature. Lear begins, "Hear, Nature, hear! dear goddess, hear!" To regard this as only a piece of paganism in a not quite civilized Lear, as Knight does, seems to me to miss the point entirely. The details of the curse upon Goneril indicate that Lear is saying this: Goneril has violated the laws of nature; let nature, in reasserting its authority, deny her the elementary privileges and functions of nature.. No one can with impunity challenge governance.

Finally, the power of the myth of nature is shown by the fact that even Edmund prays to nature: "Thou, Nature, art my goddess," he begins his familiar apology for bastards. But Lear and Edmund have quite different images in their minds: Lear calls upon a retributive principle, whereas Edmund's nature is equated with appetite, is, indeed, a nature "red in tooth and claw." The myth of nature is still so strong that Edmund wants to be under its aegis, even though he is altering the substance of nature. What is indicated is a transition in the myth.

So much for these specimens of the mythic material utilized by Shakespeare—the Christian myth, the myth of love, and the myth of governance as it appears in the specific aspects of justice, religion, and nature.

We have observed that, despite the general strength of the myths, Goneril and Regan neither think of justice nor evince religious feeling, and that Edmund has transformed the myth of nature for his own ends.

At this point we are ready to glance at a final problem: the Shakespeare myth. The use of this term implies that Shakespeare has not only relied upon the myth of his age but so inflected it, so added to it, so fused and re-formed it in his own imagination that the end-product is something which, if not wholly separate or different from the original myth, is at least more than it. His poetry has fed on myth, but he has also been engaged in mythopoeic activity. Perhaps we may say that the most comprehensive soul demonstrates its comprehensiveness by the creation of work which has mythic quality. Mr. Chase argues that the writing of literature is in effect the creation of myth, but that each work must justify itself as myth. How has Shakespearean poetry justified itself as myth? For one thing, by the Longinian test—its almost unexceptioned appeal to posterity. More important, by the kind of appeal to posterity, by the ability to create in posterity a sense of being made to see into the universal. We do not confront Shakespeare with logical dispute: we explicate him. Our experience of him is one of insights so rich that we must attempt to ingest them by incomplete restatements; his plots seem to have the same possibilities for exploration that the inherited myths had for Greek dramatists. We analyze and re-analyze his intuitions of truth, although, as with all myths, there seems always to be a residuum that can

not be reduced to simpler patterns. Such a body of work becomes, then, a part of that commerce between the community and the mysteries which Wheelwright defines as the heart of myth. And in so far as it has a sure, stable, if not altogether apprehended, value, it also undertakes a part of that ordering of experience which is said to be a function of myth.

I should like to cite one preliminary example of the mythopoeic function in Shakespeare—of the conferring of the mythic quality upon a story which is quite simple and one-dimensional in origin. I refer to the Gloucester story, which, in *Lear*, becomes a version of what may be called the Tiresias myth. Gloucester's being blinded removes him from the world; and as a blind man he comes into an insight which formerly he lacked. If he does not actually foresee the future, he at least sees beyond the immediate world of practical politics. Only when the vile jelly, the physical sight, is gone, does he possess the real light and approach the ripeness which is all.

All this, I have said, constitutes a version of the Tiresias myth. There is a felt universal relevance which defies the logic of ordinary knowledge. At the very heart of this Gloucester myth is a paradox: that sight in the world is blind, and that blindness brings real vision. Now this is in perfect accord with Wheelwright's observation that "only in language having multiple reference"—an exact description of Shakespeare's language—"can the full, manifold, and paradoxical character of the primordial Mystery find fit expression." Then mythic language—Wheelwright's

reference is to primitives, but his words have a far more inclusive applicability—"tends to employ paradox freely . . . for the Mystery which it tries to express cannot be narrowed down to logical categories." This is an excellent account of the Gloucester myth. But it is more than that: it likewise defines still more profoundly mythic material in *Lear*.

If Gloucester has in his blindness come to a new vision, it is even more vividly true that Lear in his madness achieves a new understanding. It is not necessary to list all the statements, attitudes, and experiences which mark the change in him—his recognition of the truth about Goneril and Regan, his growing sense of guilt about his treatment of Cordelia, his absorption of the lessons taught by the Fool, his new efforts at self-control, his having recourse to prayer, his sympathy for "poor naked wretches." Most significant of all is the fact that Lear's mad speeches are never wholly mad; in them there are always a kind of orderliness, a secondary level of meaning where a high intelligence is at work, overtones of extraordinary clarity. This enlightened lunacy, this sane insanity, has its climax in the last scene before Lear's curing sleep, namely, Act IV, scene vi, in which Lear pulls together the whole world of the play by a synthesis of the imagistic patterns upon which the play is constructed, and in which he makes a wonderfully ironic commentary upon the world and upon himself—" . . . a dog's obeyed in office." It would be a very naive reader who would take all this for so much raving; yet Shakespeare, as if in fear of being misread

by the one-dimensional mind, has the shrewd Edgar point the lesson: "O, matter and impertinency mix'd!

Reason in madness!" Reason in madness: now notice how Shakespeare reinforces this paradox. Besides Lear's madness we have the assumed madness of Edgar and the folly—the brilliant folly—of the Fool. Yet Lear, Edgar, and the Fool are in essence the three wise men of the play—the dispossessed, the scorned, the victims, reduced to actual or assumed incoherence and madness. The play virtually says that wisdom and insight must be sought by a denial of the ordinary sense and logic of the world and must be found in the intuitions of the especially gifted mind, the unusual mind, even the disordered mind. Here again, then, we find paradox asserting the Mystery, and the content of the play taking on a strongly mythic cast.

But to describe inclusively the role of *King Lear* as myth we must consider the total structure in which the paradox reason-in-madness appears. I suggest that in the dramatic whole this paradox is balanced by another which for convenience' sake we may call madness-in-reason. This paradox is embodied in the careers of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund—careers which we may call mad not only for their obvious destruction of the values upon which all order depends but also for the ironic reason that their code is no good even in the narrow area of worldly success where alone it might possibly claim validity. These three characters, I submit, are in a clear counterpoint with Edgar, Lear, and the Fool: they apparently know how to plan and get on in life, and they are apparently on

the road to mastery of life; they have no illusions, they understand how people's minds work and may be influenced, they can "breed occasions" and act on them, they see with a hard, clear light, they are figures of entire worldly sanity. Robert Penn Warren has remarked that all Shakespeare's villains are rationalists. The term fits Edmund, Goneril, and Regan well: they entertain no irrational considerations, and they reason shrewdly toward their objectives.

To go back: how is their sane calculation of advantage related to the topic of myth? In this way: what they do, in general, is deny the existence of mysteries. To them, there is nothing in the world that is not susceptible of manipulation. Furthermore, let me recall a previous point: Goneril and Regan never show the slightest concern for justice, never show the slightest interest in nature, never show the slightest consciousness of the gods. Edmund, in so far as he is touched at all by the myth of governance in any of its aspects, endeavors to alter the myth to suit his own projects. In these three, then, we see a revolt against the traditional, communal order of life—in other words, the collapse of the myth of governance. Furthermore, and this is more than an astonishing coincidence, in them we see also the collapse of the myth of love—a collapse, however, which takes, not the more obvious form of a complete absence of feeling (though this absence is also apparent), but the exactly appropriate form of a perverse feeling. What strikes this trio, or at least Goneril and Regan, is lust—a symbol of anarchy as opposed to harmony, and

therefore the most fitting counterpart for their unscrupulous calculations which signify the decay of governance. In every way they are outside the community of obligations, imperatives, all the forces which order experience—outside, in other words, all myth and mystery.

How much material do these facts give us for the description of a Shakespeare mythology? It is possible to say that, as if in anticipation of a later day, Shakespeare is testing the new myth of rationalism. Or again, we can say that he is concerned with the apparent decay of myth and the mythic habit of mind (as we might say that Sophocles is in *Oedipus*). In this view, the complex and elusive *King Lear* becomes a myth about myth: its theme is the myth in crisis. And the very using of these words suggests that they may contain a possible description of a tragic view of life. The point is worth investigating. Do Shakespeare's other tragedies in any way represent the myth in crisis?

In commenting briefly on the other tragedies, I want to emphasize the tentativeness of the suggestions which I am making. Without a more detailed examination of language-structures than I have been able to make, I am rather diffident about these points. But I am willing to venture a little further into exploration of the tragic myth.

Coming to *Hamlet* from *King Lear*, one is struck by the pervasiveness of the spirit of calculation in the earlier play—as it appears in manipulation and especially in what we may call the check-up. A gen-

eral air of suspicion is begot by a continual multi-directional checking-up. Laertes checks up on the relations of Hamlet and Ophelia, a matter in which he and Polonius are worldly rationalists. Then, worldly Polonius checks up on worldly Laertes in Paris. The King assigns Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to check up on Hamlet—but Hamlet succeeds in checking up on them. Polonius checks up on Hamlet—or at least fancies that he is doing so. The King and Polonius arrange to check up on Hamlet by eavesdropping on an interview between him and Ophelia. Polonius checks still further by eavesdropping on an interview between Hamlet and his mother—Polonius's least successful exploit. Then Laertes comes checking up on Claudius. But Claudius manipulates Laertes precisely as Edmund is later to manipulate Gloucester; in fact, in all his cool strategies, Claudius is the character type who is carried to a logical extreme in Goneril, Regan, and Edmund. Claudius, of course, still has vestiges of a conscience.

All this checking up, this plotting and planning, is by individuals; it has in it a very sinister note, a note of threat and collapse. What all this private rationalistic enterprise, if I may so call it, indicates is the decay of an order, of a community mythically held together. The traditional imperatives and security no longer hold. The myth of love has failed for Hamlet and Ophelia; in the relations between Claudius and Gertrude we see the sign of anarchy, lust. The myth of governance is shaken by Claudius's murder of the old king; the ghost twice refers to it as "unnatural"—

the word so often used in *Lear*. In defending the *status quo*, Claudius tells Hamlet that his grief for his father (a symbol of community) is contrary to *reason*—precisely the line which Goneril and Regan take when trying to get Lear to fall in with their arrangements. In *Hamlet*, as in *Lear*, the new regime insists on *reason*, and the representatives of the old order fall into, or rely upon, madness. I think the connection between order and the irrational is more than fortuitous—and here we come to a final and very important point: the voice of order is the ghost, calling for rehabilitation of the myth that has been attacked. The ghost is a particularly good symbol of myth—with its overt insistence upon the preservation of order, and yet with its mystery, with its element of the irrational that is an irreducible part of community. Hamlet to all intents accepts what the ghost says; yet he cannot act upon it. This is a vital element in the tragedy. For what Hamlet does, in effect, is to fall into the predominant pattern of the play—the pattern of checking up. The whole business of the players is his own private checking up on the mystery: he is using a technique of verification. When the experiment succeeds, Hamlet cries, "I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound!" But it is no longer the ghost's word that he is taking, for the ghost's vision of truth has been reinforced by a practical test. Actually, then, the myth has not held for Hamlet; he has needed to sustain it by another kind of understanding—by rational evidence. Had he been able to act immediately and directly in terms of the ghost's

injunction, there would have been no tragedy, or at least there would have been a different kind of tragedy—one resembling the *Oresteia*, perhaps. In such terms *Hamlet* appears to be concerned with the myth in crisis. There are other elements in the tragedy, of course, but at its heart we see the crisis of myth.

As we move on to Shakespeare's next work, we find that Othello in part continues the tragic role of Hamlet. Othello, of course, is worked on by a typical Shakespeare manipulator, as Hamlet is not. But Othello has in common with Hamlet the inability to act in terms of myth, with him the myth of love. Precisely like Hamlet, he seeks to check up, to move into the world of proof and evidence. But while Hamlet does find the corroboration he wants, Othello's venture into demonstration is catastrophic. Like Lear's, it is bound to be, for both men demand the introduction of certain logical or quasi-logical procedures where they can have no final authority, indeed *no* relevance whatever.

The mythic quality of love is presented explicitly by the play, presented by means of materials which at first glance may seem to have no structural function. Brabantio harps upon the magic or the charm or the spell by which Othello has secured Desdemona: these words which for him denote a cheat are really an excellent way of describing an experience whose values are not rationally secured and preserved. But we might pass over these words of Brabantio did not Othello himself speak identically in describing the handkerchief: his words are ". . . there's magic in the web of it." The handkerchief, which we are likely

to dismiss as a mere means of recognition, has become a symbol of their love. Now note that it is Othello himself who rejects the handkerchief when Desdemona offers it to him and who thus makes possible its loss—just as he breaks up their common life in love. Then Othello violently demands that Desdemona restore the handkerchief to him. Symbolically, it seems to me, he is in anguish crying for the restoration of the myth of love, for its magic—non-rational, transcendent, mysterious, giving form to the whole of life. He had once said to Desdemona, ". . . and when I love thee not Chaos is come again." The destruction of the myth has indeed led to chaos. Yet Desdemona has never questioned the myth: up to the end she never ceases loving, and never regrets loving, Othello. The myth is a reality that transcends the evidence, and it sustains her spiritually: she has not fallen away from the law of spirit that it is worse to do evil than to be evilly done by.

On the one hand, then, we see Othello erroneously inquiring into mythic reality and thus involuntarily destroying it for himself. On the other hand we see Iago, the rationalist villain, intent upon the destruction of the myth. In Iago we have a considerable extension of Claudius. Claudius as manipulator and strategist is of course tremendously surpassed by Iago; Shakespeare is carrying much further his investigation of how destructive the sharp and rootless mind may become. Iago surpasses Claudius, too, in the spontaneity of his evil—he is a "purer" villain—and, for our purposes, most distinctively in his theoretical

equipment. Claudius looks out for himself—and feels guilty about it; but Iago is the radical destroyer. For Iago, like the other protagonists, takes a definite attitude toward love: for him it is a myth—in the man-in-the-street's sense of the word. He positivizes it into sex, into a series of cataloguable and manageable phenomena, involving chiefly the principles of satiety and variety. Desdemona, remember, never questions the value of love, which for her is absolute; Othello is in part seduced into calculation and machination, but loses his myth with terrible suffering; but Iago is the debunker who limits reality to the narrowest of rationalistic categories. Like all debunkers, Iago is partially correct; his view of the facts of sex has considerable soundness. But his mistake—and it is a philosophic mistake which must be distinguished from his mere efforts to destroy—is to confuse the facts of sex with the myth of love. As he says to Roderigo, ". . . we work by wit, and not by witchcraft." His antithesis of *wit* and *witchcraft* seems to me to sketch the main conflicting forces in the play—the rational and the mythic, and thus to summarize the considerations which make it possible to see in *Othello* the tragic pattern of the myth in crisis.

To return for a moment to *Lear* and to note it in its chronological position: it continues *Othello* precisely as if Shakespeare were determined to carry the same issue still further. For again we have a play in which the issue of love is central, but here the arena is extended to include a whole kingdom; the cast is enlarged; two generations are involved; and the whole action takes on something of the cosmic. The Iago

line is continued in Edmund, Goneril, and Regan, but with differences. Edmund inherits the manipulating and hypocritical strain of Iago, but in him there is also somewhat of a throwback to Claudius, not only in that he has certain concrete ends to gain, but also in his strange, obscure motion toward repentance. Goneril and Regan more nearly suggest spontaneous, unqualified evil—cool minds which, as we have learned to say, see things as they are. They tell Lear to be reasonable in the same way that Iago tells Emilia to be "wise": that is, play my game. Today they would all use the word *smart*. On this side of the fence, then, we have once again Shakespeare's version of how far the spirit of calculation, freed from mythic imperatives, can move toward pure chaos.

But the peculiar subtlety and profundity of *King Lear* lie in the treatment of Lear and Gloucester. Lear does immensely more with a certain basic proposition than Othello does: the nature of the tragic hero is in him much more deeply explored. The basic proposition in both of them is man's liability to destroy mythic values unintentionally. Lear is in part subject to manipulation, as Othello is, by those who intend to destroy; and the whole spirit of manipulability is especially well represented in Gloucester. But more important is Lear's own free, uncaused initiation of certain movements which lead to every subsequent evil. Specifically, he tries to measure his daughters' love; he tries to quantify it; he tries to secure a rational computation of what is not susceptible to this kind of estimate. In the fullness of living, all that he can do is accept what is; perceive it in what

ways he can; apprehend the metaphors of conduct; concede the mystery, or, better, grasp it imaginatively. But in his passion to measure he is asking for quasi-logical prose formulations that are irrelevant and impossible. Thus he not only brings the evil daughters to power but also—and this is the center of the tragedy—sets loose in the world a spirit of hard calculation, a spirit which is used by the new regime in all its dealings, most unreservedly against Lear himself. Shakespeare then goes on to see what happens. As I have said, Lear has intended no such result. But he has been largely responsible for this situation which is a further version of the myth in crisis—the myth of love and that of governance, and thus the tumbling down of an order.

Macbeth continues the problem, but with enough reorientation to disguise the resemblances. As a principle of order, myth is necessarily concerned with relationships in time. *Lear*, for instance, investigates the disorder that results from a rupture with the *past* as it is symbolized in a failure of children's duty to parents. *Macbeth* almost exactly reverses the problem by picturing the disorder that results from an illicit effort to seize the *future*. Again the dramatic symbol is the adult-child relationship. Or, seen in relation to *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* exhibits a different reversal of stress. For Macbeth is the Claudius of *Hamlet*; Shakespeare is altering his perspective and, in a sense, considering the villain as hero.

The word *villain*, of course, is more suitably applied to Lady Macbeth, who is an obvious con-

tinuator of the Iago-Edmund-Goneril tradition. The case of Lady Macbeth as rationalist, and of her assault upon the myth of the "moral order," has been so well described by Cleanth Brooks in his penetrating essay on *Macbeth* that there is little to add. "A little water clears us of this deed," she insists; but she goes mad, and in her distraction she is still trying to wash her hands. The symbolism is nice: she had denied the existence of irrational values, and now the irrational has caught up with her. But one interesting aspect of the weighting of the play is that, except for her few mad lines, Lady Macbeth does not appear after Act III, scene iv. She is less conspicuous in her play than Iago and Goneril and Regan in theirs. But of Macbeth we see a great deal more. I suggest that by now Shakespeare has less interest in the rationalist-villain and is much more concerned to trace the complications in the tragic hero in whom certain rationalistic inroads have been made. In the course of the last three tragedies he is perceptibly tightening up, "difficilitating," so to speak, the given element in his tragic hero: Othello is deceived, Lear deceives himself without knowing it, Macbeth deliberately embarks upon a career of self-deception.

As usurper, of course, Macbeth runs counter to the myth of governance. To the extent that he is able to adopt Lady Macbeth's world-view, he helps destroy, or tries to destroy, the myth of the moral order. But in the pattern of Shakespearean tragedy which I am tentatively outlining, Macbeth is most interesting in his dealings with the mysteries, which appear

directly for the first time since *Hamlet*. Macbeth does not receive a command, as Hamlet did; but, like Oedipus, he hears a prophecy. In one way Sophocles' drama and Shakespeare's do the same thing: they proclaim certain limits to the efficacy of a rational management of life, which, in its fullness, simply involves more than the rational. But the two plays formulate the theme differently, almost conversely: whereas the Greek emphasis is upon what man cannot escape, the Elizabethan emphasis is upon what he cannot capture. Oedipus hears a threat of evil, Macbeth a promise of glory. Now, from my point of view, what is interesting here is that Macbeth does not trust the prophecy; or, more accurately, he both trusts and distrusts it. After all, the prophecy is simply that he will "be king hereafter," not that he will usurp the throne. Presumably he could wait for history to effect what had been predicted, since it has already brought him the promised thaneship of Cawdor. But instead, he helps the prophesied along; he plans, calculates, schemes; he is infected by the rationalism of Lady Macbeth, who has little confidence in "fate and metaphysical aid"; admitting their opposition to "nature," they defy all mythic values to substantiate the mystery. It is indeed a splendidly ironic performance. Yet it is perfectly consistent with Macbeth's subsequent behavior. For just as he seems to feel that the course of events may not ratify the prophecy, so he obviously feels that it is possible to keep the course of events from ratifying the prophecy—that is to say, the disagreeable part of the prophecy which con-

cerns Banquo's heirs. With this naively selective attitude toward the mysteries, he can kill Banquo and rationally control destiny. Yet the difference between Macbeth and Iago or Goneril is that his rational part is imperfect. He cannot defy the ghost of Banquo, which symbolizes the guilt that testifies to Macbeth's acceptance of the moral order. Yet he is tragically unable to yield entirely to the imagination through which myth and prophecy, both of them metaphors for reality, must be apprehended truly. When, in his last recourse to the oracles, the second and third apparitions raised by the witches tell him that he will be safe against man born of woman and until an attack by Birnam Wood, Macbeth, instead of exploring these ambiguities for their imaginative content, takes them at their narrowest, most literal and prosaic level. He positivizes the words of the seers and treats them as if they were scientific statements.

As we know, the myth of governance eventually had its will of Macbeth, as the mythic values had their will of Hamlet and Claudius, Othello and Iago, Lear and Gloucester, and their children. All the challenges, whether made by nihilistic villains or by mistaken tragic heroes, were beaten back, although not before private and public communities had undergone almost fatal breakdowns and men had been subjected to unbearable agonies. But the threats were so severe that, at least for the sake of the present discussion, it has seemed feasible to define high Shakespearian tragedy as a study of the myth in crisis. If this

tentative proposal will hold, it will have, I think, some utility in helping to define the problem involved in a study of myth in Shakespeare's later plays.

As for the dramas which intervene between the tragedies and the last three plays, they seem to me, after what is really only a preliminary examination, to be doing something quite different from the tragedies. *Timon* and *Coriolanus* hardly involve issues of myth at all, or at least such threats or challenges to myth as characterize the tragedies. *Pericles* looks forward to the late plays. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a special case: it seems to turn on a clash between the myths of love and governance—a clash which can have its own kind of destructiveness but which still does not involve the world in the kind of threat to its very existence that accompanies a total assault upon myth.

With regard to the last three plays, I am going to make only a suggestion—or *guess* may be the better word. I recall Colin Still's argument that *The Tempest* is a dramatic version of the mystery of initiation, and Knight's comparable argument, often repeated, that in the last plays are figured forth the Christian promise, salvation, paradise, and even such a detail as resurrection. If such interpretations have merit, it may be possible to define the late plays as a kind of reassertion or reaffirmation, or perhaps simply contemplation, of myth and mystery. If such a definition is tenable, it will make possible a useful distinction between the tragedies and the late plays in terms of the treatment of myth. In one we see a crisis

in which annihilation is ever threatened; in the other we find a rather serene existence in which the threats are not critical.

If this distinction is valid, the fact will be comforting to the writer of this essay. For then this essay can safely be considered a prolegomenon and, in Edgar's phrase, matter rather than impertinency.

The Argument of Comedy

By NORTHROP FRYE

THE GREEKS produced two kinds of comedy, Old Comedy, represented by the eleven extant plays of Aristophanes, and New Comedy, of which the best known exponent is Menander. About two dozen New Comedies survive in the work of Plautus and Terence. Old Comedy, however, was out of date before Aristophanes himself was dead; and today, when we speak of comedy, we normally think of something that derives from the Menandrine tradition.

New Comedy unfolds from what may be described as a comic Oedipus situation. Its main theme is the successful effort of a young man to outwit an opponent and possess the girl of his choice. The opponent is usually the father (*senex*), and the psychological descent of the heroine from the mother is also sometimes hinted at. The father frequently wants the same girl, and is cheated out of her by the son, the mother thus becoming the son's ally. The girl is usually a slave or courtesan, and the plot turns on a *cognitio* or discovery of birth which makes her marriageable. Thus it turns out that she is not under an insuperable taboo after all but is an accessible object of desire, so that the plot follows the regular wish-

fulfillment pattern. Often the central Oedipus situation is thinly concealed by surrogates or doubles of the main characters, as when the heroine is discovered to be the hero's sister, and has to be married off to his best friend. In Congreve's *Love for Love*, to take a modern instance well within the Menandrine tradition, there are two Oedipus themes in counterpoint: the hero cheats his father out of the heroine, and his best friend violates the wife of an impotent old man who is the heroine's guardian. Whether this analysis is sound or not, New Comedy is certainly concerned with the maneuvering of a young man toward a young woman, and marriage is the tonic chord on which it ends. The normal comic resolution is the surrender of the *senex* to the hero, never the reverse. Shakespeare tried to reverse the pattern in *All's Well That Ends Well*, where the king of France forces Bertram to marry Helena, and the critics have not yet stopped making faces over it.

New Comedy has the blessing of Aristotle, who greatly preferred it to its predecessor, and it exhibits the general pattern of Aristotelian causation. It has a material cause in the young man's sexual desire, and a formal cause in the social order represented by the *senex*, with which the hero comes to terms when he gratifies his desire. It has an efficient cause in the character who brings about the final situation. In classical times this character is a tricky slave; Renaissance dramatists often use some adaptation of the medieval "vice"; modern writers generally like to pretend that nature, or at least the natural course of

events, is the efficient cause. The final cause is the audience, which is expected by its applause to take part in the comic resolution. All this takes place on a single order of existence. The action of New Comedy tends to become probable rather than fantastic, and it moves toward realism and away from myth and romance. The one romantic (originally mythical) feature in it, the fact that the hero or heroine turns out to be freeborn or someone's heir, is precisely the feature that trained New Comedy audiences tire of most quickly.

The conventions of New Comedy are the conventions of Jonson and Moliere, and a fortiori of the English Restoration and the French rococo. When Ibsen started giving ironic twists to the same formulas, his startled hearers took them for portents of a social revolution. Even the old chestnut about the heroine's being really the hero's sister turns up in *Ghosts* and *Little Eyolf*. The average movie of today is a rigidly conventionalized New Comedy proceeding toward an act which, like death in Greek tragedy, takes place offstage, and is symbolized by the final embrace.

In all good New Comedy there is a social as well as an individual theme which must be sought in the general atmosphere of reconciliation that makes the final marriage possible. As the hero gets closer to the heroine and opposition is overcome, all the right-thinking people come over to his side. Thus a new social unit is formed on the stage, and the moment that this social unit crystallizes is the moment of the comic resolution. In the last scene, when the drama-

tist usually tries to get all his characters on the stage at once, the audience witnesses the birth of a renewed sense of social integration. In comedy as in life the regular expression of this is a festival, whether a marriage, a dance, or a feast. Old Comedy has, besides a marriage, a *komos*, the processional dance from which comedy derives its name; and the masque, which is a by-form of comedy, also ends in a dance.

This new social integration may be called, first, a kind of moral norm and, second, the pattern of a free society. We can see this more clearly if we look at the sort of characters who impede the progress of the comedy toward the hero's victory. These are always people who are in some kind of mental bondage, who are helplessly driven by ruling passions, neurotic compulsions, social rituals, and selfishness. The miser, the hypochondriac, the hypocrite, the pedant, the snob: these are humors, people who do not fully know what they are doing, who are slaves to a predictable self-imposed pattern of behavior. What we call the moral norm is, then, not morality but deliverance from moral bondage. Comedy is designed not to condemn evil, but to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge. It finds the virtues of Malvolio and Angelo as comic as the vices of Shy lock.

The essential comic resolution, therefore, is an individual release which is also a social reconciliation. The normal individual is freed from the bonds of a humorous society, and a normal society is freed from the bonds imposed on it by humorous individuals. The Oedipus pattern we noted in New Comedy

belongs to the individual side of this, and the sense of the ridiculousness of the humor to the social side. But all real comedy is based on the principle that these two forms of release are ultimately the same: this principle may be seen at its most concentrated in *The Tempest*. The rule holds whether the resolution is expressed in social terms, as in *The Merchant of Venice*, or in individual terms, as in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*.

The freer the society, the greater the variety of individuals it can tolerate, and the natural tendency of comedy is to include as many as possible in its final festival. The motto of comedy is Terence's "Nothing human is alien to me." This may be one reason for the traditional comic importance of the parasite, who has no business to be at the festival but is nevertheless there. The spirit of reconciliation which pervades the comedies of Shakespeare is not to be ascribed to a personal attitude of his own, about which we know nothing whatever, but to his impersonal concentration on the laws of comic form.

Hence the moral quality of the society presented is not the point of the comic resolution. In Jonson's *Volpone* the final assertion of the moral norm takes the form of a social revenge on Volpone, and the play ends with a great bustle of sentences to penal servitude and the galleys. One feels perhaps that the audience's sense of the moral norm does not need so much hard labor. In *The Alchemist*, when Lovewit returns to his house, the virtuous characters have proved so weak and the rascals so ingenious that the

action dissolves in laughter. Whichever is morally the better ending, that of *The Alchemist* is more concentrated comedy. *Volpone* is starting to move toward tragedy, toward the vision of a greatness which develops *hybris* and catastrophe.

The same principle is even clearer in Aristophanes. Aristophanes is the most personal of writers: his opinions on every subject are written all over his plays, and we have no doubt of his moral attitude. We know that he wanted peace with Sparta and that he hated Cleon, and when his comedy depicts the attaining of peace and the defeat of Cleon we know that he approved and wanted his audience to approve. But in *Ecclesiazusae* a band of women in disguise railroad a communistic scheme through the Assembly, which is a horrid parody of Plato's *Republic*, and proceed to inaugurate Plato's sexual communism with some astonishing improvements. Presumably Aristophanes did not applaud this, yet the comedy follows the same pattern and the same resolution. In *The Birds* the Peisthetairos who defies Zeus and blocks out Olympus with his Cloud-Cuckoo-Land is accorded the same triumph that is given to the Trygaeus of the *Peace* who flies to heaven and brings a golden age back to Athens.

Comedy, then, may show virtue her own feature and scorn her own image—for Hamlet's famous definition of drama was originally a definition of comedy. It may emphasize the birth of an ideal society as you like it, or the tawdriness of the sham society which is the way of the world. There is an important parallel

here with tragedy. Tragedy, we are told, is expected to raise but not ultimately to accept the emotions of pity and terror. These I take to be the sense of moral good and evil, respectively, which we attach to the tragic hero. He may be as good as Caesar, and so appeal to our pity, or as bad as Macbeth, and so appeal to terror, but the particular thing called tragedy that happens to him does not depend on his moral status. The tragic catharsis passes beyond moral judgment, and while it is quite possible to construct a moral tragedy, what tragedy gains in morality it loses in cathartic power. The same is true of the comic catharsis, which raises sympathy and ridicule on a moral basis, but passes beyond both.

Many things are involved in the tragic catharsis, but one of them is a mental or imaginative form of the sacrificial ritual out of which tragedy arose. This is the ritual of the struggle, death, and rebirth of a God-Man, which is linked to the yearly triumph of spring over winter. The tragic hero is not really killed, and the audience no longer eats his body and drinks his blood, but the corresponding thing in art still takes place. The audience enters into communion with the body of the hero, becoming thereby a single body itself. Comedy grows out of the same ritual, for in the ritual the tragic story has a comic sequel. Divine men do not die: they die and rise again. The ritual pattern behind the catharsis of comedy is the resurrection that follows the death, the epiphany or manifestation of the risen hero. This is clear

enough in Aristophanes, where the hero is treated as a risen God-Man, led in triumph with the divine honors of the Olympic victor, rejuvenated, or hailed as a new Zeus. In New Comedy the new human body is, as we have seen, both a hero and a social group. Aristophanes is not only closer to the ritual pattern, but contemporary with Plato; and his comedy, unlike Menander's, is Platonic and dialectic: it seeks not the entelechy of the soul but the Form of the Good, and finds it in the resurrection of the soul from the world of the cave to the sunlight. The audience gains a vision of that resurrection whether the conclusion is joyful or ironic, just as in tragedy it gains a vision of a heroic death whether the hero is morally innocent or guilty.

Two things follow from this: first, that tragedy is really implicit or uncompleted comedy; second, that comedy contains a potential tragedy within itself. With regard to the latter, Aristophanes is full of traces of the original death of the hero which preceded his resurrection in the ritual. Even in New Comedy the dramatist usually tries to bring his action as close to a tragic overthrow of the hero as he can get it, and reverses this movement as suddenly as possible. In Plautus the tricky slave is often forgiven or even freed after having been threatened with all the brutalities that a very brutal dramatist can think of, including crucifixion. Thus the resolution of New Comedy seems to be a realistic foreshortening of a death-and-resurrection pattern, in which the struggle

and rebirth of a divine hero has shrunk into a marriage, the freeing of a slave, and the triumph of a young man over an older one.

As for the conception of tragedy as implicit comedy, we may notice how often tragedy closes on the major chord of comedy: the Aeschylean trilogy, for instance, proceeds to what is really a comic resolution, and so do many tragedies of Euripides. From the point of view of Christianity, too, tragedy is an episode in that larger scheme of redemption and resurrection to which Dante gave the name of *commedia*. This conception of *commedia* enters drama with the miracle-play cycles, where such tragedies as the Fall and the Crucifixion are episodes of a dramatic scheme in which the divine comedy has the last word. The sense of tragedy as a prelude to comedy is hardly separable from anything explicitly Christian. The serenity of the final double chorus in the St. Matthew Passion would hardly be attainable if composer and audience did not know that there was more to the story. Nor would the death of Samson lead to "calm of mind all passion spent" if Samson were not a prototype of the rising Christ.

New Comedy is thus contained, so to speak, within the symbolic structure of Old Comedy, which in its turn is contained within the Christian conception of *commedia*. This sounds like a logically exhaustive classification, but we have still not caught Shakespeare in it.

It is only in Jonson and the Restoration writers that English comedy can be called a form of New Comedy.

The earlier tradition established by Peele and developed by Lyly, Greene, and the masque writers, which uses themes from romance and folklore and avoids the comedy of manners, is the one followed by Shakespeare. These themes are largely medieval in origin, and derive, not from the mysteries or the moralities or the interludes, but from a fourth dramatic tradition. This is the drama of folk ritual, of the St. George play and the mummers' play, of the feast of the ass and the Boy Bishop, and of all the dramatic activity that punctuated the Christian calendar with the rituals of an immemorial paganism. We may call this the drama of the green world, and its theme is once again the triumph of life over the waste land, the death and revival of the year impersonated by figures still human, and once divine as well.

When Shakespeare began to study Plautus and Terence, his dramatic instinct, stimulated by his predecessors, divined that there was a profounder pattern in the argument of comedy than appears in either of them. At once—for the process is beginning in *The Comedy of Errors*—he started groping toward that profounder pattern, the ritual of death and revival that also underlies Aristophanes, of which an exact equivalent lay ready to hand in the drama of the green world. This parallelism largely accounts for the resemblances to Greek ritual which Colin Still has pointed out in *The Tempest*.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona is an orthodox New Comedy except for one thing. The hero Valentine becomes captain of a band of outlaws in a forest, and all

the other characters are gathered into this forest and become converted. Thus the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world. The forest in this play is the embryonic form of the fairy world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, Windsor Forest in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and the pastoral world of the mythical sea-coasted Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale*. In all these comedies there is the same rhythmic movement from normal world to green world and back again. Nor is this second world confined to the forest comedies. In *The Merchant of Venice* the two worlds are a little harder to see, yet Venice is clearly not the same world as that of Portia's mysterious house in Belmont, where there are caskets teaching that gold and silver are corruptible goods, and from whence proceed the wonderful cosmological harmonies of the fifth act. In *The Tempest* the entire action takes place in the second world, and the same may be said of *Twelfth Night*, which, as its title implies, presents a carnival society, not so much a green world as an evergreen one. The second world is absent from the so-called problem comedies, which is one of the things that makes them problem comedies.

The green world charges the comedies with a symbolism in which the comic resolution contains a suggestion of the old ritual pattern of the victory of summer over winter. This is explicit in *Love's Labor's*

Lost. In this very masque-like play, the comic contest takes the form of the medieval debate of winter and spring. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* there is an elaborate ritual of the defeat of winter, known to folklorists as "carrying out Death," of which Falstaff is the victim; and Falstaff must have felt that, after being thrown into the water, dressed up as a witch and beaten out of a house with curses, and finally supplied with a beast's head and singed with candles while he said, "Divide me like a brib'd buck, each a haunch/' he had done about all that could reasonably be asked of any fertility spirit.

The association of this symbolism with the death and revival of human beings is more elusive, but still perceptible. The fact that the heroine often brings about the comic resolution by disguising herself as a boy is familiar enough. In the Hero of *Much Ado About Nothing* and the Helena of *All's Well That Ends Well*, this theme of the withdrawal and return of the heroine comes as close to a death and revival as Elizabethan conventions will allow. The Thaisa of *Pericles* and the Fidele of *Cynibeline* are beginning to crack the conventions, and with the disappearance and revival of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, who actually returns once as a ghost in a dream, the original nature-myth of Demeter and Proserpine is openly established. The fact that the dying and reviving character is usually female strengthens the feeling that there is something maternal about the green world, in which the new order of the comic resolution is nourished and brought to birth. How-

ever, a similar theme which is very like the rejuvenation of the *senex* so frequent in Aristophanes occurs in the folklore motif of the healing of the impotent king on which *All's Well That Ends Well* is based, and this theme is probably involved in the symbolism of Prospero.

The conception of a second world bursts the boundaries of Menandrine comedy, yet it is clear that the world of Puck is no world of eternal forms or divine revelation. Shakespeare's comedy is not Aristotelian and realistic like Menander's, nor Platonic and dialectic like Aristophanes', nor Thomist and sacramental like Dante's, but a fourth kind. It is an Elizabethan kind, and is not confined either to Shakespeare or to the drama. Spenser's epic is a wonderful contrapuntal intermingling of two orders of existence, one the red and white world of English history, the other the green world of the Faerie Queene. The latter is a world of crusading virtues proceeding from the Faerie Queene's court and designed to return to that court when the destiny of the other world is fulfilled. The fact that the Faerie Queene's knights are sent out during the twelve days of the Christmas festival suggests our next point.

Shakespeare too has his green world of comedy and his red and white world of history. The story of the latter is at one point interrupted by an invasion from the comic world, when Falstaff *senex et parasitus* throws his gigantic shadow over Prince Henry, assuming on one occasion the role of his father. Clearly, if the Prince is ever to conquer France he must re-

assert the moral norm. The moral norm is duly reasserted, but the rejection of Falstaff is not a comic resolution. In comedy the moral norm is not morality but deliverance, and we certainly do not feel delivered from Falstaff as we feel delivered from Shylock with his absurd and vicious bond. The moral norm does not carry with it the vision of a free society: Falstaff will always keep a bit of that in his tavern.

Falstaff is a mock king, a lord of misrule, and his tavern is a Saturnalia. Yet we are reminded of the original meaning of the Saturnalia, as a rite intended to recall the golden age of Saturn. Falstaff's world is not a golden world, but as long as we remember it we cannot forget that the world of *Henry V* is an iron one. We are reminded too of another traditional denizen of the green world, Robin Hood, the outlaw who manages to suggest a better kind of society than those who make him an outlaw can produce. The outlaws in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* compare themselves, in spite of the Italian setting, to Robin Hood, and in *As You Like It* Charles the wrestler says of Duke Senior's followers: "There they live like the old Robin Hood of England: they say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world."

In the histories, therefore, the comic Saturnalia is a temporary reversal of normal standards, comic 'relief' as it is called, which subsides and allows the history to continue. In the comedies, the green world suggests an original golden age which the normal world has usurped and which makes us wonder if it

is not the normal world that is the real Saturnalia. In *Cymbeline* the green world finally triumphs over a historical theme, the reason being perhaps that in that play the incarnation of Christ, which is contemporary with *Cymbeline*, takes place offstage, and accounts for the halcyon peace with which the play concludes. From then on in Shakespeare's plays, the green world has it all its own way, and both in *Cymbeline* and in *Henry VIII* there may be suggestions that Shakespeare, like Spenser, is moving toward a synthesis of the two worlds, a wedding of Prince Arthur and the Faerie Queene.

This world of fairies, dreams, disembodied souls, and pastoral lovers may not be a "real" world, but, if not, there is something equally illusory in the stumbling and blinded follies of the "normal" world, of Theseus' Athens with its idiotic marriage law, of Duke Frederick and his melancholy tyranny, of Leontes and his mad jealousy, of the Court Party with their plots and intrigues. The famous speech of Prospero about the dream nature of reality applies equally to Milan and the enchanted island. We spend our lives partly in a waking world we call normal and partly in a dream world which we create out of our own desires. Shakespeare endows both worlds with equal imaginative power, brings them opposite one another, and makes each world seem unreal when seen by the light of the other. He uses freely both the heroic triumph of New Comedy and the ritual resurrection of its predecessor, but his distinctive comic resolution is different from either: it is a de-

tachment of the spirit born of this reciprocal reflection of two illusory realities. We need not ask whether this brings us into a higher order of existence or not, for the question of existence is not relevant to poetry.

We have spoken of New Comedy as Aristotelian, Old Comedy as Platonic and Dante's *commedia* as Thomist, but it is difficult to suggest a philosophical spokesman for the form of Shakespeare's comedy. For Shakespeare, the subject matter of poetry is not life, or nature, or reality, or revelation, or anything else that the philosopher builds on, but poetry itself, a verbal universe. That is one reason why he is both the most elusive and the most substantial of poets.

The Defense of the Illusion and the Creation of Myth

*Device and Symbol in the
Plays of Shakespeare*

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By LESLIE A. FIEDLER

THERE IS A SENSE, annoying I think to the more tender-minded reader or beholder, in which a work of art is a history of itself, a record of the scruples and hesitation of its maker in the course of its making, sometimes even a defense or definition of the kind to which it belongs or the conventions which it respects. The artist in most times is driven to conceal, with a wariness that becomes habitual and unconscious, this face of his work from all but the canniest of his audience, for he comes early to realize the resentment which a betrayal of this inward concern is like to arouse. "Treachery!" the reader cries. "Unfair!" For to him the *maintenance* of the illusion is what counts, though to the artist the primary thing is the *justification* of the illusion. And so their relationship has been conventionally based upon a complementary blindness and deceit.

Within the last few generations it has become pos-

sible to admit openly the aspect of self-concern in a work of art, even to flaunt it in the tradition of *épater le bourgeois*. One thinks of the classic device of Gide's *Counterfeiters*, of the novel within the novel. Gide tells us brazenly of a novelist writing a book in which he exists writing precisely the book in which we have met him writing the book in which, and so forth and so on.

It all opens up, or more accurately opens *inward*, toward the fake infinity of the girl on the cereal box, holding a cereal box on which another girl (or perhaps the same one) holds a cereal box on which another girl holds a cereal box on which—and so on until the label blurs to a breakfast table indeterminate.

The contriving of fictive infinities is the immemorial business of the writer, but in Gide it has finally the air of an intellectual joke, a suitable fraud in a world in which we are all coiners, and the currency of the artist presumably as counterfeit as our other media of exchange: the book is not really by Uncle Edouard, but rather Uncle Edouard by the book, and the Gide who composes them both, it is inevitably suggested, was composed for just that purpose by a more ultimate Gide. Here is a general problem reduced to a special irony, stated in terms of a travesty on Romantic notions of authorship, and in the context of an age that is ready to think of the artist primarily as an illusionist, a perpetrator of hoaxes (consider Joyce's key image of Shem the Penman, the forger as artist, or Mann's gamut of symbols for the writer from Felix Krull the Confidence Man

to the charlatan hypnotist of *Mario and the Magician*).

Yet the general problem persists outside of the chosen context; in any age a work of art is on one level about the problems of its own composition, the threat to the illusion it attempts to create; and just so far as it comments on those perils, it further endangers the basic illusion. The use in comedy from the Greeks to the Marx Brothers of the deliberate breaking of the illusion (the deprecatory aside: "That's what it says here!") tries to laugh the danger out of existence, to anticipate the audience's awareness of art's essential hokum, or at least to shock them out of feeling superior in that awareness by a defensive self-exposure; but such a method is a desperate and degrading expedient—"Anything for a laugh!"—and is, of course, quite inadequate for serious art.

But there has long existed in drama another expedient, capable at once of confessing and exorcising art's central illusion ("Now you see it, now you don't!") and of objectifying the artist's need to make his creation a record of its creating. That expedient is the "play within a play," which, though used sometimes for partial or even trivial ends, can be said to have as its essential meaning the solution of the dilemma we have been considering. The "play within a play," like the Happy Ending or the Reversal, is an example of a technical or structural myth: a plot configuration or a technical device with an archetypal meaning quite independent of any individual's conscious exploitation of it.

It is an easy step from *The Counterfeiters* to *Hamlet*, for the "novel within a novel" or *The Counterfeiters* is a translation of the "play within a play" of *Hamlet* or, more precisely, a profanation, an honorific parody, that is to say, a critical analysis of the myth. The myth, by definition, cannot be conscious, and the moment we take pains to know it, it is degraded, profaned—the Joseph story in Genesis is mythic, in Thomas Mann an endless, middle-aged joke.

In *Hamlet*, however, we have rather than an analysis, the *realization* of the myth: its meaning is evident but unstated; all its ambiguities are in solution; its mystery is intact but at rest. Add to *The Counterfeiters* and *Hamlet* the *Spanish Tragedy* of Kyd (or Shakespeare's own *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and we have a full triad: the myth imperfectly exploited, the myth realized, the myth analyzed.

Kyd and Shakespeare share certain assumptions about the role of the artist and the relation of art to the given world which separate them sharply from Gide: to them the type of the artist is the Man with the Mirror, not the Swindler; the process is not forgery but imitation. "It's all done with mirrors," we say and echo ironically the Shakespearean "hold the mirror up to nature," with all the sad denigration of the mirror as metaphor that lies between. The Renaissance mind was convinced from one side of the "truth" of artistic representation in a context in which arithmetic, theology and rhetoric subscribed to a single criterion of truth; just as from the other it was convinced of the "falsity" of art in a context

in which the meanings of "lie" and "fiction" had not yet been discriminated. This impossible contradiction, like a thousand others, the Renaissance mind ordinarily endured, with a lost art of accommodation that we must by turns envy and despise.

To Shakespeare, however, the contradiction was apparently a lifelong vexation, a conflict which he strove at first to conceal by all the grace of his art, but which ultimately he attempted to reconcile in a solution that abandoned the stratagems of technique for those of metaphysics. The Shakespearean corpus is a self-justification (one remembers the vaunt: *Non sanz droict!*), a justification of his art, of the art of the playwright as practised in his time down to the last detail: the patching of plays, the use of the boy actor—eventually of all art, of the lie as truth. But that is a possible definition of myth, the lie as truth, and it is the extraordinary achievement of Shakespeare to have created the myth in defense of the illusion, to have revealed the universal symbolic relevance of those devices which persuade us to suspend disbelief.

Shakespeare seems to have felt the illusion of his art imperiled on four main fronts, and to have evolved, in response to those four threats, four essential myths that come to full flower in the last plays: the myth of the *Cosmic Drama*, the myth of the *Cosmic Dream*, the myth of the *Beardless Beloved*, and the myth of *Qualitative Immortality*,

I hope some day to treat all four of these topics in detail, but here I shall concentrate on the first, touching the others only incidentally. I should like, though,

before returning to a consideration of Hamlet and my center, to indicate briefly the four threats to illusion from which Shakespeare's mythical trajectories begin.

First, that the actors are merely—actors; that is, they are today this, tomorrow that, and there persists, behind the this or that they put on and doff, a recognizable self, inevitably felt as more real, the *real* self. There was in the Elizabethan theater at least the beginnings of a star system—of all systems the one which most emphasizes the actor as existing outside of his role. Further, the Shakespearean stage seems to have been at an uneasy point between frankly conventionalized presentation and realistic production, making for a certain basic shakiness of conviction.

Second, as a special and extraordinarily difficult case under the first, the actors of women's parts were not even women, but boys never quite sure of avoiding the gauche gesture or the cracked voice that would betray utterly the possibility of acceptance. "Boy my greatness i' th' posture of a whore," Cleopatra says, foreseeing her possible presentment in Rome in terms of the actuality of the performance in which she, the actor-she, moves.

Third, that the dead live. The corpses which fall to the stage, stabbed or poisoned or asp-bitten, will rise to acknowledge the audience's applause. Even before they are carried off, the closest of the "understanders" in the pit will have seen the eyelid's betraying flutter, the heaving of the chest.

Fourth, that the play ends. The action is framed

with an arbitrary beginning and close, moves its three or four hours to an inevitable concluding couplet. Jack has his Joan, or the villain his quietus, and the stage is empty; but the felt mode of lived experience, of "real life," is continuity.

The third and fourth problems demand apparently contradictory solutions and indeed seem to get them; but if we are left at last with a contradiction, it is not the elementary one with which we begin. In the simplest apprehension of life, there seems to be a continuity, an immortality of the general, though the individual dies. The show, that is to say, goes on—and on and on. The world survives our particular endings; but in the universe of play acting the individual survives his age, his world—which is to say the actor survives the play. Four hours and there's an end to Denmark, but Burbage is resurrected next night in Illyria or Bohemia or Rome.

The author's immediate problem is to deceive his audience, to leave us unshakeably convinced that the stage dead are really dead; and for the elementary reinforcement of the illusion Shakespeare is full of devices, from the expedient of *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Juliet first *appears* to Romeo within the play to have died (though we outside *know* she "really" lives), and then dies actually for *us*; or by the simulated death of the Player King in the inner play in *Hamlet*, a remove of "pretend" from which we return to find the death of the actor who plays Claudius "true."

But this device is perilous, for, though the double

order of belief proposed by the play within the play on the first convolution inveigles us into belief, on second thought, or to the naturally more complicated mind, it suggests that just as the Player King has not really died, no more has *this* king, after all a Player too, and leaves us the more emphatically undeceived. But this disenchantment, Shakespeare has apparently decided by the end of his career, is precisely what he is after—nobody is dead at all, not in any ultimate sense, for all death is appearance only. And by the time we have got to the final plays, to Hermione or Imogen, the hoax of stage-death seen through by the wary has been translated into the symbolic statement that *all* death is a hoax, a seeming. The presumed failure of illusion becomes the revelation of a higher truth, and the last plays are, as Wilson Knight has so convincingly argued, myths of immortality.

In an analogous way, the poet begins by resenting the arbitrary ending, the betrayal of the play's fictional time by the inevitable close of the last act. In the young and "arty" *Love's Labor's Lost*, there is an outright refusal even to pretend that the play ends at all, but that particular stratagem only a bright young man in a work aimed at a special audience can afford. Things are just *beginning* when the play is through. But a mass audience demands other devices, less frank, more conventional. A closing marriage or a birth or coronation helps to create the sense of an open ending, a conclusion without finality—and in *Hamlet*, as we have seen, the inner play is used to create a double continuity of intension and extension, a fake

circular infinity. But in the *Tempest*, Shakespeare makes his typical reaffirmation of the breach of illusion, abandons any attempt at concealing the play's limits. In the speech "Our revels now are ended . . ." he explicates the meaning of the interrupted masque, the performance arbitrarily brought to a close, as a symbol of the world's transience, collective impermanence.

"The great globe itself . . . shall dissolve." The world *does* decay, and only the individual, in his moment of discovery or passion or tragic insight, is forever. In this sense the apparent contradiction between our being immune to death ("Not a hair perished") and yet "such stuff as dreams are made on" is reconciled.

The problem of the ambiguity of sex and the stratagems demanded by the stubborn convention of the boy as girl in Elizabethan production deserve, and I hope some day to give them, a full-length examination. *Cymbeline* appears to me now to be the climactic play in the study of that problem and its mythic implications. It is probably sufficient to say here that Shakespeare begins in his customary fashion with the aim of defending the illusion of femininity against the inevitable shortcomings of the boy actor, but that, before he is through with those disguised boys who are really girls who in turn are actually boys, those master-mistresses who win the hearts of men and women alike, often both at once, he has established the myth of an androgynous Beloved, the focus of whose attraction is neither femininity nor masculinity but the

delightful ambiguity of youth—the Beardless as Beloved; and that myth enables him, without abandoning the Heroine altogether, to maintain his determining sexual attitude (clear in the Sonnets and elsewhere) which regards the blatant, the mature female (especially the mother) as a symbol of evil, blackness, lust, and so on. Connected with this syndrome, too, is the concept of the perfect Hero as the man without a female component, the child born not of a living mother but of death, that strange deliverer who breaks through the tragic circumstances of *Gymbeline* and *Macbeth* (paired plays that mark Shakespeare's escape from an obsession with unmitigated tragedy), the "man not born of woman."

All these instances except the last achieve a kind of focus in the "play within the play," and it is to that that I wish now to return.¹

In the "Pyramus and Thisbe" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we have the "play within the play" used as a stunt to maintain a precarious illusion, to reinforce the reality of the larger production. Shakespeare plays upon the inevitable audience conviction that characters shown planning a play cannot themselves be characters in a larger play; the run-of-the-

1 Behind the "play within the play" lies the "stage within the stage." The relation of inner stage and outer is an implicit metaphor fixed in the physical structure of the Elizabethan theatre. The meanings whose more explicit formulation this paper is examining are implicitly present in Shakespeare's world, even before the mounting of any individual play; they belong to the community and to the unconscious. Granted the inner stage and the accessibility of the acting platform to parts of the audience, the development of the myth of a Cosmic Drama is inevitable.

mill "understander" cannot get back past the second convolution; and the few who can, who are able to see *the lie*, fulfill the poet's other wish: to have someone know the deft machinery of the illusion he manipulates, appraise his skill.

But the *Dream* with its loose structure makes no real attempt to integrate the inner play into the outer plot; rather it deliberately holds it off as mockery, as foil: bumbling tragedy versus graceful comedy—a courtly joke, all kept down among the peripheral vulgar characters, who seem to exist so often in Shakespeare, like Negroes in Hollywood films, largely to amuse the gentry.

Thomas Kyd in his *Spanish Tragedy* transfers the inner play from subplot to plot, from comedy to tragedy (or at least melodrama), from dream to nightmare. Kyd's is a considerable achievement, and is the cue, either directly or via his lost *Ur-Hamlet*, to much in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; but he still muffs something essential to the integral, the mythic, meaning of the inner play. The relationship of Kyd's double play is concentric; the play within and the play without dissolve into each other. Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia, disguised as the Bashaw and Perseda, kill Lorenzo and Balthazar, in the roles of Erastus and Solyman. The pivot of revenge upon which the whole structure turns, the climactic action of the whole fable, falls within the inner play, so that the outer play has no true ending but trails off into supererogatory and unconvincing horrors (Hieronimo biting off his own tongue, as if to confess what the author will not ad-

mit), merely to have something more to add, though there is nothing more to say. The characters are all involved, and no one remains outside to define the innerness of the play within—only the audience and its proxies, the King and the Viceroy, who are, more accurately perhaps, rather its Dr. Watsons than its proxies, for they do not know, as the audience does, that the deaths they behold are "real," but take the murders as entertainment, illusory horror performed with exceeding conviction. That irony (the audience all the time *knowing!*) is for Kyd the sufficient meaning of the inner play, and beyond that, to be sure, the irony of the irony, the esoteric irony: the characters whose deaths had first seemed "fabulously counterfeit" and who were then revealed really to have died we know, outside the illusion, are not dead at all, but prepare to take our applause, bowing, as we move toward the exits.

This is a more complex device than that of the *Dream*, ending on a third convolution, but like the simpler comedy it offers the cream of its jest only at the expense of its over-all credibility. It remains a technical expedient, a dodge to protect and complicate the illusion.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, however, where the ironic climax has been detached from the inner play and isolated in the duel scene, in which the Prince and Laertes "play" at swords whose real threat is known to neither Hamlet nor the Queen mother, the "play within the play" is freed for its more essential, its pure mythic, function.

With an insistence that risks the obvious, Shakespeare hammers home the artificiality, the counterfeit of the inner play: we see the entry of the professional actors (that they are *professionals* to begin with is the first turn of the screw), and we are given, at some pains, a sense of their existence as persons outside their performance (the boy has grown; there is danger of his voice cracking); we are shown them being lectured on the art of gesture and delivery so that their technique cannot fail to show through their acting; we are permitted to hear an impromptu recitation set in a context of remembering lines; and lest, listening to that recitation, we have been betrayed into a suspension of disbelief, there is Hamlets subsequent soliloquy to remind us that the player's passion and its occasion exist only in fancy: "What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?"

The Active nature of the inner play, its play-ness, is insisted upon almost desperately, suggesting at first that Shakespeare must have doubted the credibility of his main plot, strained between its sources and its meanings; or that some imperative need for an ultimate verisimilitude moved him. What is at stake? Surely, the playwright must have sensed that such an extraordinary emphasis on the contrived nature of the play within threatened to defeat itself, increased proportionally the peril to the illusion and made more drastic the eventual shattering of belief, when the audience passed inevitably from the convolution of increased credence to that of disenchantment. But that may, after all, have been precisely Shakespeare's point.

For by a simple expedient the poet *forces* us toward the disruptive realization: just such a contrived fabric as this, is the whole tragedy in which it is set! The inner play and the outer play *are the same play*. To be sure we get that point (*Hamlet* is pre-eminently a work in which no chances are taken), the inner play is acted twice, first in the dumb show, in a striking departure from Elizabethan custom that either treated such pantomimes in terms of allegory or used them with a narrator to speed up the action; yet here the dumb show reenacts literally the crime later to be played with speech: "Into the porches of mine ear. . . ."

It has been a disturbing scene for actors and commentators ever since. Why, the question is asked over and over, does the King, later so rattled by precisely the same thing, not rise in fright at the pantomimic crime? To make his behavior credible, he is traditionally shown occupied in conversation with the Queen throughout the dumb show. This is what is conventionally called "the problem of the dumb show," but the ulterior, the real problem has, as far as I know, never been raised: why does Shakespeare, in the first place, fall into this difficulty which can at best be solved only by a somewhat awkward piece of stage business? Surely, because he is convinced that at any risk he must clinch in the minds of the least subtle the *identity* of the two plays. In the pantomime there is no disturbing limitation of names (indeed, even in the inner play proper the characters do not name each other; only Hamlet, a chorus and proxy for the playwright, with a foot in each world, gives mockingly

their Italianate names, their locale and pretended date): these are, quite simply, the King, the Queen, the Betrayer, the very ones who, as in a nightmare at once within and without, look on or haunt the scene.

It is necessary for the prosecution of the plot that the plays be similar, of course, and on the plot level Shakespeare has explained away an improbable degree of coincidence between the inner play and the actual events at Elsinore with Hamlet's added "dozen or sixteen lines"; but consider, in terms of the mythic convention we have been tracing, the import of this coincidence. Hamlet has, with those dozen or sixteen lines, imposed a meaning upon an old playlet (and we know that this is precisely the sort of tinkering that Shakespeare himself had done with the *Ur-Hamlet*) in which we have just reached the point at which, had Claudius not interrupted with his terror, his ironic cry of "Give me some light!" a Hamlet-character, some melancholy sniffer out of evil, would inevitably have had to come upon the scene to contrive another play to catch the conscience of Gonzago, and in that play another Hamlet, and so on.

In that sense the play narrows inward like *The Counterfeiters* toward a vortex of infinity; but it opens outward, too, unlike the modern work, in a widening circle toward an infinity of extension. Is not the very piece we are seeing, the inner play suggests, precisely that play Hamlet has arranged before us—and are we not then a stage audience, beheld as well as beholding, at a play within some greater play, actors all in a universal drama which inevitably defines all

our plays as "plays within a play"? If Hamlet is Shakespeare—and who can really deny that Romantic insight?—Shakespeare in turn is Hamlet to some more ultimate Shakespeare, in whose reworking of a recalcitrant matter, we as onlookers are, according to our guilt, Ophelia or Gertrude, Polonius or the usurping King, walking shadows, poor players.

"All the world's a stage." Reality dissolves around us to that fearful metaphor, ordinarily meaningless for us who have memorized it as children. It is Shakespeare's most obsessive figure, "the conceit of this inconstant stay," spoken not only through the ambiguous mouths of characters in his plays, but confessed in the personal voice of the Sonnets: "this huge stage presenteth nought but shows Whereon the stars in secret influence comment." In *Hamlet* the figure is never reduced to a tag, but at the focus of the inner play the whole tragedy is epiphanized as that metaphor in infinite extension. That the playwright understand the world's illusion in terms of his own craft is understandable enough, for such a conceit at once familiarizes the cosmic mutability he feels and dignifies his own despised profession; the final Maker, too, it suggests, is concerned with just such shows as devour the poet's talent and lay up a modest fortune for his old age. The playwright's very life is mythic, the limitations of his art a clue to the meanings of life.

On one level certainly *Hamlet* is (or *can* be, once we have thought of it) an account of the writer's essential experience: the tragic vision, the relapse into doubt (what ghost is true?), the shaken faith in the

adequacy of his medium ("Must like a whore unpack my heart with words"), and the final restitution of belief in art as a symbolic act.

"The play's the thing," Hamlet cries in the anguished moment of recovering his faith in the efficacy of talk. For in the end, notice, he does not, for all his envy of the inarticulate soldier, cease verbally to unpack his heart, but learns to organize his words into the cunning form that gives them consequence in action. His only deliberately chosen act, his only real *success* in the course of the tragedy, is dramatic: the play within the play of passion and free-will and fate—emended by some dozen or sixteen lines.

"Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King." The phrase oddly suggests the Joycean conception of art's function: to recreate the conscience of the race; but in Shakespeare the accent is upon the sly disclosure, the revelatory trick. Art is a trap, the mouse-trap, a miching mallecho that promises to amuse us with a lie—and shows in its unforeseen truth ourselves caught in the compulsive pattern of the fall. There is an apt mockery in the taunt: "Let the galled jade wince." Who is ungalled? Our consciences caught, we rise, our guilt confessed, to call out, "Give me some light!" and retire to plot our various and singular dooms.

This is a subtle and apt parable of art's genesis and role, its hesitations and its incredible victory snatched from defeat; but it is more. It is a *particular* instance, scrupulously defined; it is a singular account of itself. Perfectly circular (the two plays, we remember, are

one), it comments on its own history, on the career and genesis of the very *Hamlet* at which we assist in all its particularity—the old play, the Oedipus horror, the playing style of the actors, the mystery of repetition—and thus redeems at the last minute its peculiar failure to its peculiar success.

Commentators have long though dimly felt the ambiguity of success and failure in *Hamlet* and in its protagonist, and the special difficulty of disentangling the Prince's failure from the play's. No one who has read T. S. Eliot's acute, wrongheaded discussion can doubt that in some sense the play does not quite work out, that there is an unexorcisable incoherence at its heart—and yet, when the last lines are spoken, we are somehow *satisfied*, and convinced that our satisfaction is more ultimate than the sense of incoherence. And this is precisely how we feel about Hamlet the character: he has envied the soldier's readiness, the philosopher's dispassion, but his own actions have invariably been at the mercy of both passion and circumstance—and so, at last, ineffectual. He thrusts at a King, and an old fool dies. The denouement he does not achieve, but suffers; and he dies at the almost accidental consummation of his revenge, not really convincing us that he must.

Yet we do not feel as ironic the elegiac praise of Horatio and Fortinbras, who read the wreck of feeling and the wreck of enterprise as success. Hamlet does, in some sense, succeed, as only failure can succeed where success is bound either, like Claudius, to embrace evil or, like Fortinbras and Horatio, utterly

to ignore it in simplicities of commitment or self-control. To this dubious victory the Play's incomplete assimilation of its sources is a perfect objective correlative; the given plot defies the control of the poet's meaning and yet obliquely fulfills it, as the rottenness at Elsinore defies and yet fulfills in its own way the Prince's plan to set it right.

The refusal of life ever wholly to conform to the poet's plan is one of the inevitable meanings of art, and the intrinsic sadness of the artist before that failure is the sadness of *Hamlet*. That Shakespeare inherited a genre and a tradition which defined the artist as Patcher, Emender of the recalcitrant given, and that the disparities of *Hamlet* fix formally the hopelessness and glory of his task, conspire to make *Hamlet* a play upon itself and on all plays, Hamlet is sad because he cannot write the perfect *Hamlet*; but the record of his sadness becomes his triumph, our second-best and only play. The ultimate, the real f/r-*Hamlet*, is irrecoverable, unwritten, yet for a moment glimpsed and lost again at the dizzying focus of the play within the play within the play.

Further than *Hamlet*, Shakespeare could not go in terms of tragedy; its end term, revealed through the metaphor of the play within the play, is the myth of the Cosmic Drama. "All the world's a stage, . . . the men and women merely players"; "struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more." There is a double implication in this view: a strong determinism (the plot is given, and at best we can only amend it) and a conviction that the stage survives

the player, that the universe persists and the individual perishes. In the life of the individual only his death, that is, his departing the stage, his becoming nothing, is "true." The myth of tragedy is a pagan myth, or in the current atheistic sense an "existential" one.

But the end term of Comedy, the concealed meaning of the Happy Ending, is the myth of the Cosmic Dream and of qualitative immortality, death as a dream and transformation. "These our actors . . . were all spirits." "Like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind." There is a contrasting twofold implication in this view: a strong emphasis upon free will and a conviction that the player survives the stage. There is no death, only the individual, the master of dreams, the magician dreaming for as long as forever is. The myth of comedy is a Christian myth.

Hamlet is an actor who desires to become a playwright trapped inside a tragedy, at last, a patcher of an old play, an emender of a pattern given like a fate. Prospero, the artist as magician, is not within a play at all, but the play, become his dream, is within him. Not necessity but wish controls the action, and the protagonist does not die to his situation, but wakes from it.

Prospero does not have, like Hamlet, to die with the plot he sets in motion; he must, though, be abandoned with its consummation. His is the failure of success that matches the success of Hamlet's failure. Only the disinherited, or as we say now the "alien-

ated," controls the means of art; the magic of dreams is given in exile and loneliness, a weapon for casting out the usurper, for creating the brave new world in which love is a thing of innocence and law, and death is dead—in short, for redeeming the Fall. But the perfection of the dream is the dream's ending, and the Dreamer must let fall his cloak and wand, bid the powers of air depart, stand outside illusion forever, and, naked as all men are essentially naked, learn to ask men's prayers as he has once compelled their applause.

. . . Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer . . .

Three Shakespearean Myths: Mutability, Plenitude, and Reputation

By EDWARD HUBLER

I SHOULD LIKE TO BEGIN THIS PAPER with a few remarks about myself, for not many of you can know what sort of creature I am, and it seems to me that an audience is entitled to know in advance something of the point of view from which a speaker speaks. In so far as I know, I am an old-fashioned, or pre-P. E. More, humanist. I believe that a primary function of literature is the illumination of life, and in criticism I like to see the major emphasis fall on the areas of greatest illumination. Committed to this point of view, I am sometimes troubled by what I read on myth in literature, and I am not at all certain that my own notion of myth has any considerable correspondence with the ideas of it now in fashion. Quite frankly, I often do not know what the writers on myth are talking about. If a neo-Thomist squints, I can discover where he is looking by turning to Saint Thomas, but the writers on myth often seem to be looking into their own crystal ball. They seem to regard myth much as it was regarded by certain Indians in Iowa,

whom I happened upon recently in an aging book of anthropology: "A pious man would no more tell out his myths than he would dance out his mysteries. Only when the tribe is assembled after solemn fasting, and holy smoking, only sometimes in strange archaic tongues and to initiate men or novices after long and arduous preparation, can the myth with safety be uttered from the mouth; such is its sanctity."^x This is an attitude with which I do not feel at home.

It seems to me that the expository nature of critical writing implies an obligation to be as clear as the subject permits. I imagine that a contradictory proposition has never been formulated, though it seems at times to have been assumed, and the assumption has caused me a little trouble. I sometimes find our critical journals subtle to the point of secrecy, and in my attempts to pierce the mystery I have resorted to re-writing an occasional paragraph. It is a plodder's approach, but (or, perhaps, and) it has helped me. One of the things I have learned is that the restated paragraph is sometimes not only clear, it is commonplace. I realize that such rewriting may involve loss, but I am thinking of instances when the loss was not perceptible; and I cannot think that I was doing anything that the writer himself should not have done in the first place. "A beautiful thing is never out of place," Montaigne says, but I cannot believe that it is true of criticism; for I read criticism primarily to learn about the thing criticized, and, if clarity is called for,

1 J. E. Harrison, *Themis* (Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 329.

I think the critic ought to have the courage of his simplicity.

On the other hand, I believe that a good critic ought to have a certain affinity for chaos. If his subject does not allow him more than ambivalence, he ought to be content with it. It seems to me that he is especially obliged not to impose a system upon his perceptions. It is his job to represent his subject as he sees it, and not as he would like it to be. And with no writer is the danger of unwarranted categorizing as great as with Shakespeare. I take it that no great writer was ever less impressed by categories, either those of form or those into which subject matter is normally thought to fall, than Shakespeare. At the height of his powers he adapted genres almost to the point of obliteration, and he is *par excellence* the master of the in-between places of the soul. He said what he would, and without regard to categories or precedents. I take it, too, that in modern criticism the word *myth* should be used to indicate what in braver times was taken to be an area of the author's belief—the notions he took for granted, the things he assumed as true, the attitudes he reflected without necessarily being fully aware of them. It is in this sense that I want to speak here of three Shakespearean *myths* of mutability, plenitude, and reputation. It is convenient to call them myths, for I would not like to suggest that a belief in them is universally obligatory; but I think that Shakespeare believed them, and I shall make no attempt to conceal my own preference for them over

their modern opposites. The myths I shall discuss emerge continually throughout Shakespeare's works with a varying content and emphasis, but they are themselves not peculiar to any given period.

It is not always possible to discuss one of Shakespeare's assumptions in isolation from others, for the context in which it is found supports and enriches it. At times corollary notions give plausibility, or even inevitability, to an idea which for us has lost the urgency it once possessed. Shakespeare's notions on mutability, on the immortality of poetry, on man's need to reproduce his kind, on the potential goodness of things, and on the worth of reputation are all associated in his mind. In so far as I could, I have isolated them, but it is not always possible to avoid complexity. It seems best to begin with his treatment of the need to propagate.

Perhaps I should say here that *The Sonnets*, as they are used in this paper, are taken to be early, some time between about 1592 and 1597. This is the general opinion of those with no axes to grind. Throughout the long opening sequence of *The Sonnets*, poems one through seventeen, Shakespeare urges the friend to marry and beget a child, arguing that propagation is a double duty—to the young man himself and to the world, for time which made him will destroy him, and without his progeny the times to come will not know what he was; but the poet's later promise to immortalize the friend's youthful splendor in poetry does not relax the obligation to breed, and the section closes with the statement that,

if the friend were to have a child, he would live twice, "in it and in my rime." It is often asked why Shakespeare should have bothered with so odd a subject. In our time one does not find that writers are concerned with the immortality of others, and I do not remember any who has expressed a general belief in a man's obligation to reproduce his kind. Far from it! The belief is not only no longer current among literary people, it is held ridiculous to suppose that a man should ever have entertained it. "The preposterous theme," writes Thornton Wilder, of "Go, young man, and get married in order that you may leave a copy of your excellences to the after world"² As for me, it seems reasonable to suppose, at least as a kind of working hypothesis, that Shakespeare's assumptions are as likely to be sensible as our own, and that we ought to look at them in their context before rejecting them.

The reader who turns to the first seventeen sonnets will notice first of all the many unforgettable lines and phrases among others of less grace. He will notice, too, that two of the poems are among the best known in the language. He may wonder to what they owe their fame. Is it to their technical excellence, or to the accidents of history? Or can it be that there is something on which the average reader can reflect with an awareness of their beauty and a sense of a deepened understanding of the life he knows? If so, he may wonder about the relevance of his response to

2 Gertrude Stein, *Four in America* (Yale University Press, 1947), p. xxii.

this "preposterous" notion. Hardly an anthology to which the inclusion of poems by Shakespeare is appropriate fails to reprint "When I do count the clock that tells the time" and "When I consider every thing that grows," the two poems almost invariably chosen by students when asked to select the best sonnets in the series. May we look at one of them?—the latter, although either would serve.

When I consider every thing that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and check'd even by the self-same sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory;
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay,
To change your day of youth to sullied night;
And all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you I engraft you new.

When the student is asked if he finds the sonnet equally impressive all the way through, he replies that he finds the couplet inferior, an opinion he holds on to even after the couplet's promise of immortality has been explained to him. He may find several reasons for preferring the quatrains, and one of them will be the generality of their thought. It is relevant to the poet, the recipient, and to every reader. The couplet, on the other hand, is particular; it is addressed to the young man with only the partial and incidental in-

vovement of the reader. It is not the promise of immortality but the realization of mortality which impresses. One feels that its truth, its obviousness notwithstanding, has been genuinely perceived.

As everyone knows, the briefness of beauty and the consuming power of time are themes recurrent throughout Shakespeare. And one may surmise from the power of their expression in the early sonnets that they were deeply felt before the idea of opposing mutability with poetry had had any considerable emotional reality. In a short time Shakespeare was to be able to write with conviction on the durability of his poetry, but in the beginning the idea seems to have been an emergent corollary of his vivid apprehension of decay. Perhaps it has not been noted widely enough how, as he matured, the emphasis of his concern with transience shifted. In *The Sonnets* the decay of beauty is observed with pain and rebellion, and sometimes with horror, as in the many passages on ultimate decay. In the early works Time is a villain because of his conquest of youth; later, roughly after the turn of the century, it is not the same. In the well-known passage in *Troilus and Cressida* Time goes about picking up things to feed to oblivion. Those things are

good deeds past, which are devour'd
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
As done. . . . (III. iii 148)

Although in this instance the notion is related to a context to which an emphasis on beauty would not be appropriate, the change is representative of his

102 Three Shakespearean Myths

maturing. Yet he does not forget beauty, for we find it later in the speech, now only one of Time's victims:

For beauty, wit,
High birth, vigor of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating Time.

It is not that the poet has come to love beauty less; he has come to love other things as much. Or so it seems. But in the early sonnets the emphasis falls on the things a young man holds dear, and the decay of beauty stirs his awakening powers more deeply than the promises of immortality. It need not be that the poet did not in general believe the statements we receive more coolly, or still less that in setting them forth he was deliberately using themes he knew to be of little value. It is rather that for a number of reasons, no doubt some of them technical and others of the spirit, he was unable to find for them the expression he sought. In these poems the direct injunction to breed comes with less force than the passages on mutability, and is most forcefully expressed when related to the more general statements of man's obligations to put to use the good qualities with which he is graced.

Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy?
Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend. . . .
(SONNET 4)

Is it too private a judgment to remark that in the beginning the particular injunctions suffer from the

poet's inability to project his intellectual convictions into individual instances? Later, as we have said, the promises of immortality were abandoned, though the general notion of the goodness of propagation is to be found everywhere.

Perhaps no idea repeated by Shakespeare is more alien to the modern temper. One gathers from recent polls that not all Catholics are persuaded of the goodness of propagation, although it is one of the teachings of their church. And we may look in vain for any considerable expression of it in modern literature. On the other hand, statements compatible with Hardy's *I Said to Love* are to be found everywhere.

Man's race shall perish, threatenest thou,
Without thy kindling coupling-vow?
The age to come the man of now
Know nothing of?
We fear not such a threat from thee;
We are too old in apathy!
Mankind shall cease— "So let **it** be,"
I said to love.

This is the view of modern literature in so far as it can be said to have one; and it is a curious commentary on our times that critics accept it with no sense of strangeness while rejecting Shakespeare's as specious.

As it appears in *The Sonnets* the idea is part of a complex of notions from which it cannot be separated without injury. It is inextricably related to at least two things, an idea and an attitude, both highly characteristic of Shakespeare. The first is the idea of stewardship. Nothing is more basic to his mature thought

than the conviction that a man has an obligation to nature, that he is the steward and not the owner of his qualities. There is nothing he ever learned of which he made more frequent and effective use than the doctrine taught by the parable of the talents. The second is his attitude toward the physiological facts of sex, to which we shall soon turn briefly. With them as a background, the admonition to propagate will appear less strange than in isolation.

At the close of *As They Liked It*,³ Professor Harbage discusses the attitude of the plays toward parenthood, and remarks that "the characters seem to desire children simply because children are a good thing to have," He points to the cropping up of this desire in the plays, instances quite independent of the plays' sources, and he finds the desire to be one of the things Shakespeare's works share with the common people, who even today "are sad at the death of a child and joyful at the birth of a child, not having read those books urging that they be sad on both occasions." Shakespeare assigns the belief impartially to his characters. It is urged by such diverse persons as the clown in *All's Well* (I. ii. 24), Venus in *Venus and Adonis* (ll. 750 ff.), and the heroine of *Twelfth Night*:

Lady, you are the cruellest she alive,
If you will lead these graces to the grave,
And leave the world no copy.

Parenthood is presented not only as good, but as urgent. And there is not the slightest suggestion that

3 Alfred Harbage, *As They Liked It* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 200.

Shakespeare expected his audience to consider it odd. Further, when the dialogue glances critically at virginity, it is to note its barrenness—the "faint hymns," for instance, which the "barren sisters" chant "to the cold fruitless moon."

The truth is that the man of Shakespeare's day was heir to a tradition of plenitude which had not yet fallen into distrust or been diverted, as in our own time and country, toward manufactured things. It was as basic to the Elizabethan love of magnificence as to what we now in more than one *sense* consider Elizabethan vulgarity. The growth of the philosophical arguments to which Shakespeare's notions are corollary has been traced by Professor Lovejoy, and the origins of the doctrines are discovered to be the *Timaeus* of Plato and *Physics* and *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. It should be stated that these are backgrounds, the sources from which, philosophically considered, Shakespeare's notions derived. Professor Lovejoy does not discuss Shakespeare, and the *Timaeus* does not accord a high place to human reproduction. Nor is it necessary for Shakespeare to have studied the neo-Platonists of his time. He is not a philosopher, except in the sense in which philosophy is, as with Plato, the love of wisdom. He came by his ideas in the common and manifold ways of the literate, intelligent, gregarious man. He could have picked up his attitude toward propagation anywhere; it was both religiously and philosophically orthodox, and was a part, then as now, of the uninstructed wisdom of the common man.

And it was part of Shakespeare's literary heritage,

and had been a part of it since the composition of *The Romance of the Rose* in the thirteenth century. Through Chaucer's translation the attitudes of the poem gained currency in English letters, becoming easily available to all readers of English literature. Being a discursive poem of over twenty-two thousand lines, *The Romance* says much, but we are here concerned with only one aspect of the second part, the view of love as "life's instrument in its race with death." This was the contribution of the second author, Jean de Meun.

It seems to have been easier in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to be concerned with the elemental and the essential. It was certainly so in the treatment of love. Although there was, as always, the need to formalize love—and the need is greater as the passion of the individual and the life of society are the more ferocious—the medieval formalizations, for all their intricate artifice, did not blind themselves to its physical aspects. *The Romance of the Rose* presents the same arguments for propagation found in Shakespeare (see Chaucer's translation, ll. 4850 ff.), and the same attitude toward generation and the generative organs which is their natural corollary. If a writer is deeply aware of the riches of the world, the joy of love and the splendor and briefness of physical beauty, and the terror of oblivion, he is not likely to think of the body with shyness, and he will find it good to have a child. If he lives in a society which feels as he does, he will have no reason, like the intellectuals of our own day, to think that he ought not to find it so. He will write

as Shakespeare, Chaucer, Jean de Meun, and others did, and as few writers have done since. "It is unnecessary indeed," writes Professor Alan Gunn, "to demonstrate Jean de Meun's appreciation of the fullness of the surging tides of life. The richness and variety of his work . . . which is reflected . . . in the ever branching figures of his rhetoric; his sheer exuberance; his delight in everything that moves and lives . . . quite apart from any philosophical or theological doctrines in regard to the divine bounty—show him to be above all writers of his day . . . the supreme celebrant of God's plenitude."⁴

A writer of this persuasion will sometimes write with a certain openness for which in our restriction of spirit we have no word. "Phallicism" is a current makeshift, a wretched word which avoids the taint of Puritanism only to create a cult of its own, leaving unindicated the essence of Shakespeare's heartiness. Such a writer will not think that he is writing frankly, for frankness implies resolution. He will not write with innocence, as Shakespeare is sometimes said to have done, for innocence is without knowledge, and he is knowing. To Shakespeare creation is of a piece, and it is—all of it—potentially good. In the eleventh sonnet he associates "wisdom, beauty, and increase," and to them he opposes "folly, age, and cold decay." It is a point of view altogether characteristic. It emerges almost everywhere, even when it has little relevance to the dramatic situation or the character of the speaker.

⁴ Alan M. F. Gunn, *A Reinterpretation of the Roman de la Rose* (unpublished thesis in the library of Princeton University, 1938), p. 408.

In *Measure for Measure* the dissolute and lively hedonist, Lucio, while on a visit to a convent, announces Juliet's illegal pregnancy with

Your brother and his lover have embrac'd:
As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time
That from the seedness the bare fallow brings
To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb
Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

(I. iv. 40)

For the modern reader the association of begetting and husbandry may stress a pun, but for Shakespeare it was also an ancient and just association of meanings and the recognition of an identity of function. Procreation is mentioned in terms of tilling and ploughing, and most often without vulgarity. It was Bowdler's unhappy way to remove these passages from the family Shakespeare. But that was in another century! In our own time the rejection of them is part of the self-consciousness of the *literati*, very few of whom, one hopes, are really bored with "birth, and copulation, and death," though many appear to feel that they ought to be, and would, if they read *The Romance of the Rose*, agree with C. S. Lewis that the *significatio* of Jean de Meun is "hardly worth finding." When he wanted to, Shakespeare could use fertility images with grossness, but the customary attitude is one of joy in abundance. In sharp distinction to many critics, the average person will find the advice to marry and get a child to be in general sound. Perhaps some of us find it unbecoming to Shakespeare partly because for quite other reasons the role of leading our bachelor friends

Three Shakespearean Myths log

to the fuller life is never a gracious one and is seldom played without a touch of gaucherie. Still, there never was a married person who could resist it, and it ought not to be thought strange that Shakespeare, with the total tradition behind him, should have tried it too.

Both in itself and in its corollary attitudes, the point of view disclosed by Shakespeare's advice is remarkably like some notions we may read elsewhere. In explaining that love is not simply the love of beauty, Diotima said that it was also

the love of generation and of birth in beauty . . . because to the mortal creature generation is a sort of eternity and immortality. . . . Marvel not, she said, if you believe that love is of the immortal . . . for . . . the mortal nature is seeking as far as is possible to be everlasting and immortal: and this is only to be attained by generation, because generation always leaves behind a new existence in the place of the old . . . the old worn out mortality leaving another new and similar existence behind—unlike the divine, which is always the same, and not another. And in this way, Socrates, the mortal body . . . partakes of immortality.

In the fifth sonnet our mortal partaking of immortality is expressed through the erotic image of distillation. If left to itself, the flower ("beauty's rose" of the first sonnet) will die; but if it is distilled to perfume, it shall have lost only its "show" (that is, the physical nature by which it is manifest) and its substance will continue in essential sweetness:

Then, were not summer's distillation left,
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,

no Three Shakespearean Myths

Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was:

But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,
Leese but their show, their substance still lives sweet.

The theme is continued in the following poem:

Then let not winter's ragged hand deface
In thee thy summer ere thou be distill'd:
Make sweet some vial; treasure thou some place
With beauty's treasure, ere it be self-kill'd.

There could be no more successful writing. The value of the erotic image of the vial is immediately apparent without the slightest obtrusion of its physiological nature. One should notice, too, that Shakespeare's appreciation of plenitude does not imply the denial of other values. The critical glance at virginity referred to earlier is not single in its intent. Theseus is asking Hermia to consider the advantages of two ways of life—the ways of the convent and of marriage. It is the eve of his wedding and there is no doubt of his bias. Still . . .

Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.
Thrice blessed they that master so their blood
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;
But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd,
Than that which withering on the virgin thorn
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.

(*M.N.D.*, I. i. 67-78)

To the holy life there is, after all, blessedness; and the happy wife is only *earthlier* happy. One gathers that with Shakespeare the two happinesses are not equal, but there is more than one.

Further on in her conversation with Socrates, Diotima speaks of the relation between the desire for immortality and the love of fame. Her association of them is naturally more reasoned than Shakespeare's, though his is just as actual. Perhaps it was something of which he was not consciously aware. Nevertheless it led him to unite the desire of immortality for the young man with his own literary aspiration. To him, creation is one, and its aspects—the making of children and poetry—are not disassociated. But to return to Diotima! "Do you imagine," she asked, "that Alcestis would have died to save Admetus, or Achilles to avenge Patroclus . . . if they had not imagined that the memory of their virtues, which still survives among us, would be immortal? Nay . . . I am persuaded that all men do all things, and the better they are the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue."⁵ Later, Shakespeare was to come to something rather like this himself. He had always assumed the high worth of reputation, and in the great tragedies its most meaningful aspect is the reputation for virtue—the hope of the heroes that the memory of their virtues will survive them. At the close of the play, Othello, having recognized his error and resolved to make such amends as are in his power, finds that his services to the state and the

⁵ Plato, *The Symposium* (Jowett's translation).

bravery of what he is about to do are for him the greatest reality. He asks that his acts be reported without apology or malice, so that his good name, restored, may live behind him. At the close of his play, Hamlet asks Horatio to live and tell his story, lest to future times he bear a "wounded name." Each of them has at last struggled through to a victory over an opposing force which had been in part in himself, and he is content. Flights of angels sing Hamlet to his rest, and Othello's soul is to be washed in "steep-down gulfs of liquid fire"; but the earthly reward of each is good name. In Shakespeare's early works his concern had been to replace the old worn-out mortality with a new and similar existence, and with the immortality of art. In his later and greatest works mortality must undergo a transmutation through which it lives in the memory of man.

When the friendship between Johnson and Boswell was young, Johnson told Boswell that he was liked by the friends to whom he had been introduced, and he added, "Life has nothing better to offer." I think that Shakespeare would have liked that, and would have understood it as Johnson meant it. It was not a denial of Johnson's Christianity, for he was referring to the secular life. In a like way, Shakespeare's tragedies, though deeply Christian, have a secular frame of reference. They find their good in the world. And that is Christian too. It does not exhaust Christianity, but it is Christian, and it is compatible with those aspects of Christianity that normally lie beyond his range. It might be said that in the "Come, let's away

to prison" speech Lear renounced the world, but it would be only partly true. He is renouncing the world as he has known it, but it is to find contentment in the love of Cordelia and not in the love of God. There is nothing at all in Shakespeare's plays like the close of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, where Troilus, having mounted to the eighth sphere, looks down upon "this litel spot of erthe" and laughs inwardly at the grief of those who mourn his death, knowing at last that in respect to eternal felicity all earthly things are vain. It is a magnificent conclusion to the best narrative poem in the language, and it illustrates one of the ways in which grandeur may be achieved; but it is not well suited to the stage, and it is not Shakespeare's way. Even when he is most aware of evil, the world has still its good. For him, too, "the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another." The horror of mutability, the love of the teeming earth, the regard for the good opinion of his peers are in the body of Shakespeare's works like blood. And I think the recognition of this is important.

I do not know why obvious things should be so little recognized or so easily forgotten. Perhaps if we come to terms with our urbanity they will be more apparent. Perhaps one day we shall be able to say that we are not so sophisticated as we once were. On that day we shall be nearer Shakespeare. For he is not naive; it is simply that he is not sophisticated. He is not afraid of the commonplace, and he accepts the simple without condescension. In his list of things

which weary him most (Sonnet 66), he places "simple truth miscall'd simplicity." He accepts the value of reputation, and more simply than we do. I imagine that something quite like his view of it is one of the many motives that each of us has *in* coming here, although in twenty years of attending learned meetings I have never heard anyone admit it without at least the show of either servility or wit. Perhaps we should have an example of how our fear of "simple truth" and our love of the *recherche* distort our comprehension. These instances are multitudinous. I shall choose the most admirable one which the Christian tradition provides, but let us first look at the lines criticized.

Soft you; a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know't.
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes
Albeit unus'd to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;
And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
I took by the throat the circumcized dog,
And smote him, thus.

Our most distinguished living poet and critic is able to say of this, "What Othello seems to me to be doing in making this speech is *cheering himself up*. He is endeavoring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself. Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve—nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself. Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure by adopting an *aesthetic* rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment. He takes in the spectator, but the human motive primarily is to take in himself."⁶

At this, I am sure, the angels themselves, "with our spleens, would all themselves laugh mortal." Humility, surely, does not require that our minds be cabages, that we do good only without knowing it. If it is a sin to know what we do, a man may be forgiven, I trust, for hoping that the sin is not mortal. One might object on both moral and Christian grounds to Othello's suicide, but that is not Mr. Eliot's point. He would prefer, presumably, to have Othello kill himself while thinking of Desdemona in an unintellectualized agony of grief. It is much, much too romantic for Shakespeare. In any case, Mr. Eliot's remarks are not relevant to the play, whose point of view is not exclusively celestial. Shakespeare never forsook his faith in the good opinion of men.

It should be remembered that with Shakespeare reputation is not impersonal, like the public opinion indicated by a film star's mail. It is at times identified

6 T. S. Eliot, *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca*.

with honor, and is most often used to indicate a status with a limited group of men, or even with an individual. Cassio's misdemeanor costs him his lieutenancy, but when he grieves for his lost reputation—"I have lost the immortal part of me, and what remains is bestial"—he is thinking primarily, as the context proves, of Othello's estimate of him which reflects his integrity as a man. Although what Shakespeare has to say about reputation is clear enough, we sometimes misunderstand his statements because we are not willing to see the assumptions behind them. Today the word *character* is used to indicate what a man is, *reputation* to indicate what others take him to be; and thus a concern with reputation has come to suggest a specious preoccupation with appearances. With Shakespeare the connotations were in general reversed. *Character* with him means either letters and figures or an outward sign of an inward reality, but not, as with us, the reality itself. With him, as with us, a man's reputation may be either good or bad, and it goes without saying that good reputation is not always justly bestowed. But he also uses *reputation* to mean credit and honor, much as seventeenth-century France used the word *gloire*. The devil is citing scripture to his own ends when Iago makes his speech on "good name." With Shakespeare the opinions a man's peers hold of him are often taken to be an index of his worth and the primary reward for his most serious strivings. Conversely, he associates the absence of such opinions with despair. Macbeth in his desolation

knew that he "must not look to have" "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends"; and with that realization there came another: "I have liv'd long enough." One of the arguments that Ulysses used in urging Achilles to action was that

... no man is lord of anything,
Though in and of him there be much consisting,
Till he communicate his parts to others:
Nor doth he of himself know them for aught
Till he behold them formed in the applause
Where they're extended. . . .

(III. iii. 115-120)

It is a familiar concept in Shakespeare, and an awareness of it is basic to an understanding of him. In the plays of the tragic period it is more richly full than in *The Sonnets*, but even there it was fully formed. When the poet says that he must strive to know his "shames and praises" from the lips of his friend, he intends it quite literally. It is the external assurance of the reality of a personal faith.

With Shakespeare all things have a potentiality for good. Nothing, not even evil, is completely evil, for good may come of it—but that is another paper. Here we can only note in summary that by the time of Shakespeare's maturity the greatest good had come to be a virtue which could not be said to exist until it was expressed in deeds. The recognition of these deeds by our peers is the final assurance of their existence. Of this, mutability is the greatest enemy, so that

virtue to exist must continually renew itself. Good deeds are

forgot as soon
As done: perseverance, dear my lord,
Keeps honour bright.

All this, as everyone knows, quite overshadowed the joy in plenitude during the tragic period; but in the last plays when evil was less universal, less ferocious, and the need to combat it was less compelling, there was a return to the earlier mood, but with a difference. There is still the awareness of beauty's briefness, but it is stated with a saddened acceptance. Miranda, on seeing the beautiful youth, asks her father if Ferdinand is a spirit, and Prospero replies,

No, wench; it eats and sleeps and hath such senses
As we have, such. This gallant which thou seest
Was in the wreck; and, but he's something stain'd
With grief, that's beauty's canker, thou might'st call him
A goodly person. . . .

(I. ii. 413-416)

The attitudes to mutability, plenitude, and reputation have been chastened by experience, but they are the same convictions. In the *Cymbeline* dirge there is an acceptance of death quite unlike anything in the early works, and we should notice that the things which, specifically, the youth need no longer fear are the cruelty of external nature, the frown of the great, and scandal. His quiet consummation finds a "renowned" grave. If there is bitterness here, it is a remembered bitterness. What Juno wishes for the lovers in *The Tempest* is,

Three Shakespearean Myths 119

Honour, riches, marriage-blessing,
Long continuance, and increasing. . . .

The difference between this and a lyric in *As You Like It* is chiefly one of mood:

Wedding is great Juno's crown:
O blessed bond of board and bed!
'Tis Hymen peoples every town;
High wedlock then be honoured:
Honour, high honour and renown,
To Hymen, god of every town.

It is the opposite of Hardy's poem, and it, once more, states Shakespeare's association of mutability, plenitude, and reputation.

Rhetorical Theory and Practical Criticism

Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

By CRAIG LA DRIERE

OF THE TWO TERMS in the general title of this series of conferences, the second, *practical criticism*, has perhaps a clearer reference in present use than the other, *rhetorical theory*. Both terms were chosen as much for the vague generality and indeterminacy of their current application as for their capacity to specify things relatively limited and clearly distinct. The problem of their definition is one which may properly occupy part of the time of our discussions here; but I have not thought it proper to ask that it be made the subject of any of the papers to which this is an introduction. Each of the speakers to follow in this series has, I am sure, somehow resolved the problem of defining *rhetoric*; for it is one of the notes of maturity in any kind of study that a man have arrived at more or less adequate ideas to correspond with the indispensable recurring terms of his discipline, and *rhetoric* in our discipline is one of these. But that all our speakers will agree in their definition and use of the term I am not so sure. How much agreement there is it will be one source of interest as the series progresses to discover. I have done nothing to predetermine the issue, leaving each speaker

to interpret the general title without a gloss, confident that each had much to say, by whatever interpretation of its terms, that would be relevant to their ultimate specification if that were attempted. So, I think, the conferences have a better chance of truly representing the present state of our inquiry with its whole *chiaroscuro* and not its lights alone.

But for my own assignment, what better introduction to those papers could I find than a short review of some part of what was involved, before the times they deal with, in some similarly representative attempts precisely to define or place rhetoric and to specify the values it presents to criticism? Of all such attempts that of Aristotle is the best known, though perhaps not the best understood. Because it is interesting in itself, and very relevant to some of the most debated problems of criticism in our time, a fresh consideration of one aspect of the Aristotelian conception of rhetoric should serve very well as a general opening to our discussions.

Mr. Wimsatt, as it happens, has recently provided a convenient point of departure for a preliminary situation of the problem I have chiefly in mind in saying this, and at the same time has suggested the nature of its significance for the critic. In an essay on "Poetry and Morals," after summarizing the general judgments of Plato and Aristotle on sophistic and rhetorical art, Wimsatt says:

An idea of verbal rhetoric as distinct from the pith and worth of what is meant by words is . . . from the start intrinsic to the theory of separable poetic and moral

values. . . . And something indeed may be said on the score of merely verbal rhetoric . . . though . . . such rhetoric must be far from enough to permit any important or profound distinction between poetic and moral values.¹

Theories of "separable poetic and moral values" have been constructed, with success especially in modern times, without any conscious involvement of "an idea of verbal rhetoric"; Wimsatt is speaking of what has happened in history, therefore, rather than of what can happen in theory, when he says that such an idea is "from the start intrinsic to" such theories. There is of course a natural theoretical affinity between the two; they were in any case certainly related "at the start" of speculation about these things among the Greeks, and the question of their relation was a principal issue in the dialectic in which we may conceive Plato and Aristotle as engaged when we juxtapose their treatments of literature. In what follows I shall assume that famous confrontation, and direct attention principally to the positive doctrine of Aristotle with as little as possible of reference to the oppositions of that dialectic. What I shall try to show is that something like "an idea of verbal rhetoric," such as Plato repudiated, was more significantly assimilated into the Aristotelian theory of the art than has usually been supposed, or Aristotle himself perhaps was willing to allow. This component in Aristotle's scheme occasioned some interesting developments in the theory of later Aristotelians, and when I have made its character clear I shall note some of these, to provide

1 W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., *Thought*, XXIII (1948), 290.

126 Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

a partial orientation toward the confusions and simplifications of the Renaissance. I think that this review should establish in passing that some of the things that, explicitly or by implication, "may be said on the score of merely verbal rhetoric" do in fact not only permit but inevitably induce distinctions, of the kind to which Wimsatt refers, that may truly be called important and profound.

I am not sure that to say this puts me in conflict with Wimsatt. To determine that, we should have to examine very carefully the sense of the phrase *merely verbal*. What is referred to by this phrase, and by its common equivalents, *merely formal*, *merely literary*, and the like, is not so easy to isolate as we might suppose. The reference is often, perhaps most often, as in Wimsatt's statement, to what is "distinct from the pith and worth of what is meant by words." But this in turn is ambiguous without further specification; we may take "what is meant by words" to be a thought or an intention, for example, or a thing outside the mind, more or less distinct from these, which is intended or thought about. If the latter, then the *merely verbal* is the opposite of the *really real*. This is the Platonic opposition; the ground of Plato's objection to merely verbal art was its incapacity to lead us to reality, and so to truth, the supreme cognitive value, and to the supreme moral value, the good, which though not identical with the true is related to it and equally grounded in the most absolute reality. But less exalted minds have given this antithesis perhaps more currency; all through the history of rhetoric there runs the

opposition of words and things, *res* and *uerba*. The conflict between them is in practice the conflict between philosophy and poetry which Plato said was an ancient thing in his time; we should say rather the conflict between "science" and "literature." Whatever the terms, the contrast is of solid knowledge with mere talk, of "substance" with superficial "form"; its function historically has usually been to express the impatience of a serious mind concerned with realities toward all shallow preoccupation with the empty names of things. The implication in this attitude that words are not realities, which few metaphysicians would defend, has sometimes been contested. In a definition of poetry that John Peale Bishop left among some "Reflections on Style," which have just been published, the principle of reality is turned to use against those who disdain the verbal. "A poem," Bishop wrote, "is such an arrangement of words that their real qualities are not obscured by those which have been arbitrarily assigned to them." He explains:

By the real qualities of a word I mean those which belong to it by the mere fact of its being a word, its sound, length, weight and accent, and also those which, by virtue of its history, have become attached to it. By the arbitrary qualities of a word I mean those which etymology and current usage assign to it.²

Mr. Bishop does not mention the meaning of a word among its real qualities, though clearly a meaning does "belong to it by the mere fact of its being a word," and the meaning of a word is not the thing

² *The Hudson Review*, I (1948), 214.

referred to by the word but the reference itself and so a part of the world's reality. George Santayana, ruminating an ode of Horace in his *Life of Reason*, provides in this respect a more satisfactory account of verbal, or generally linguistic, reality:

The epithets [in the Latin poem] take their gender from the nouns, even though the quality they designate fails to do so. Their gender is therefore non-representative and purely formal; it marks an intra-linguistic accommodation. The medium has developed a syntactical structure apart from any intrinsic significance thereby accruing to its elements. Artificial concordance in gender does not express gender: it merely emphasises the grammatical links in the phrases and makes greater variety possible in the arrangement of words.

This example may prepare us to understand a general principle: that language, while essentially significant viewed in its function, is indefinitely wasteful, being mechanical and tentative in its origin. It overloads itself, and being primarily music, and a labyrinth of sounds, it develops an articulation and method of its own, which only in the end, and with much inexactness, reverts to its function of expression. How great the possibilities of effect are in developing a pure medium we can best appreciate in music; but in language a similar development goes on while it is being applied to representing things. The organ is spontaneous, the function adventitious and superimposed. Rhetoric and utility keep language going, as centrifugal and centripetal forces keep a planet in its course.³

This is far from being ideal statement of the generalization it makes, but the fact it generalizes is one

3 *Reason in Art* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), pp. 80-81. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

we must keep in mind, along with the sense it gives to the word *rhetoric* in that last sentence. It is odd that the philosophic or expressive waywardness of so far from phonetic an element in language as its syntax should lead Santayana to say that language is "primarily music, and a labyrinth of sounds." But this is another common formula for the *merely verbal*, and of course a common constituent of formulas which are not reducible to this simplicity. It has often been concluded that, if a word is not to evaporate into unreality by being distinguished from what it refers to, then all that remains for it is the mindless reality of pure sound. The late Professor Morris Cohen disposes of this error—for it is plain error—in a sentence: "Apart from . . . possible denotation we do not have any words or sentences at all but only physical objects; and the manipulation of the latter would be an exercise in acoustics or optics, and in no way linguistic,"⁴ The merely verbal is not the purely phonetic. Santayana's example, rightly interpreted, is enough to establish this; for the structures whose quasi-autonomous behavior prompted his reflections were structures of meaning, semantic and syntactic involutions of the expressive instrument not directly determined by the thing to be expressed. Actually, what is called *merely verbal* may not be directly verbal expression at all, but some property of what is expressed, affectivity as distinguished from intellectuality, feeling as distinct from thought, or even one kind of thought or reality as distinct from another. So Julien Benda, in

⁴ A *Preface to Logic* (New York, Holt, 1944), p. 43.

his very interesting essay on *la littérature pure*, when he comes to analyze a "volonte que la valeur de la littérature reside exclusivement dans l'expression verbale, hors de tout souci de conformite a la realite," finds that this impulse, which leads to preoccupation with the word and with "form," is intelligible only by reference to a set of theses which are not primarily literary at all, but psychological, philosophical, and sociological. His theses are so relevant that I will repeat them here in order: "i. La littérature tend par essence vers l'idée vague, productrice de motion. ii. La littérature rejette par essence les idées générales, la vérité impersonnelle, l'objectivité. iii. La littérature place par essence la forme au-dessus du fond. iv. La littérature a par essence la volonté de plaire; d'où peu de respect de la vérité." After this last, Benda refers immediately to a "fondement social de la littérature." He concludes: "Nous croyons que, par essence, le littéraire est quelque chose de tout autre que l'intellectuel et que c'est par apostasie de sa vraie nature qu'il s'y est longtemps confondu." ⁵ The conception of "literature" represented by Benda's cumulated theses is by no means singular in the European tradition; indeed, what Benda calls "la littérature pure" is, as he argues, a kind of natural culmination of that tradition. I will conclude this survey of the varieties of the merely verbal with a quotation from Paul Valéry, whom Benda regards, of course, as one

⁵ *La France byzantine* (Paris, Gallimard, 1945), pp. 116, 153, 156, 158, 161, 151; cf. now M. Benda's more recent study of the alternative or counterpart to "pure literature," *Du style d'idées* (Paris, Gallimard, 1948).

Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art 131

of the principal exponents of purity in literature and the chief priest of its cult. The words I quote are those in which Valéry formulates what he considers most precious ("pour moi un bien incomparable") in what he learned from his master Mallarmé: "concevoir et placer au-dessus de toutes les oeuvres, la possession consciente de la fonction du langage et le sentiment d'une liberté supérieure de l'expression au regard de laquelle toute pensée n'est qu'un incident, un événement particulier."⁶ I have left this instance to the last partly because it more clearly than the others makes an explicit distinction between thought and expression (Aristotle's *dianoia* and *lexis*) without suggesting the elimination of either or really severing the two. 'A higher liberty on the part of expression which regards all thought as only an incident . . .': this surely reduces thought to a bare minimal or marginal function. But observe, it does not dispense with it. Thought remains, though as incidental to expression. Only the relation of the two elements, the final or "causal" sequence, is altered from the normal. Whereas ordinarily we speak because we have a thought to express and in order to express it, in this "pure" operation, on the contrary, we think because we have a speech in mind to make, and we require only so much thought (though that of course may turn out, as often with Valéry, to be a good deal) as is necessary to provide a speech which shall be, among other things, its expression. It is like the regulated play of games, in which goals are set for attainment

only that we may go through the process involved in attaining them, not that they may be attained, since they are of no importance except as incitements to the acts which they only ostensibly motivate.

This analogy of the game reminds me of De Quincey, whose essay on rhetoric, in which he maintains that the rhetorical operation is play, and just such a game, was founded on and largely given over to a reinterpretation of some points in the theory of Aristotle. But if this reminiscence of De Quincey had not brought us back to Aristotle, Valery alone might have done so; for the whole of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a study of the relations (and, of course, the properties and motions) of those two things, thought and expression, in Aristotle's terms *dianoia* and *lexis* (very nearly the same as the *inuentio* and *elocutio* of the Latin rhetoricians).

In general, what Aristotle said about these relations is well enough known. Rhetoric is the *antistrophos* of dialectic; that is, it furnishes statements and orders them, as dialectic does, and these like the ordered statements of dialectic may be about anything; their subject matter is undetermined. Moreover, both the discourse of dialectic and that of rhetoric belong epistemologically to the order of the *probable*. Neither deals with certainties. Certainties are the province of true science, of which the type is physics, and, in the higher ranges, mathematics and the first philosophy or metaphysics; this is the realm of demonstration, and where demonstration is possible the disputations of dialectic and the persuasions

of rhetoric are not in place. But within the realm of the probable there is a distinction possible, and the fields occupied by dialectic and by rhetoric are not the same. Waiving niceties, we may say that the difference is a difference in degree of probability. The syllogisms of dialectic, and even its inductions, produce at the end very probable conclusions, truly probable opinion. In rhetoric much less is attained, or—and as against Plato this is a principal point of Aristotle—aspired to; there, beginning at a lower level of probability or certification, one ends only with persuasion at most. The instruments rhetoric uses to its ends are analogous to those of dialectic: the example or reference corresponding to induction, the enthymeme corresponding to the syllogism. The characteristic instrument of rhetoric, the enthymeme, though it belongs to the same genus with the syllogism, is not just a syllogism with parts left out, but a specifically distinct thing: its differentia, we may say, is that it supplants the reality of the syllogism with appearance. Its characteristic is its extreme negligence concerning the degree in which a probable assumption is related to the reality of things, and of course, in consequence, a like neglect of real truth in the conclusions it advances rather than deduces. The goal of rhetorical discourse is not the truth, but only something like the truth (*Rhet.*, I, i, 11). The enthymeme is all in the region of contingent and particular things, things which may be this way but may well too be another way, things one cannot be sure about but must from time to time consider, and indeed decide about,

134 Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

one way or the other. The function of rhetoric, says Aristotle (I, ii, 12), is to deal with things about which we deliberate without systematic rules for our deliberation, like the rules of scientific method or, for that matter, those of grammar. It is by sequences of enthymemes—interspersed, it may be, with a few apodeictic ingredients; for such is the force of the weakness of the enthymeme that its neighboring influence will draw even the most certain propositions down into its region of uncertainty—it is by sequences of such enthymemes that men do in fact ordinarily construct the discourse in which they consider their most human and everyday affairs, the symbouleutic discourse in which they deliberate about great choices, the forensic discourse in which they decide causes disputed and on trial, as well as the epideictic discourse in which, because speech is so delightful a thing in itself, they spread themselves merely to talk. Whatever the type—and each type will introduce differences in the common elements—the elements in all such discourses are primarily two, *dianoia* and *lexis*, thought and expression. The rhetorician's business in the former department is to understand his own materials, distinct as they are from those of the dialectician or of the pure scientist or philosopher. The other element, expression, says Aristotle (III, i, 5), has had little attention until lately; though it is in fact a superficial and even meretricious thing, it is of some importance, given the rhetorical situation as it is, and it must be dealt with. So, rather grudgingly, he gives it twelve chapters of his third book.

This will serve for our purposes as a summary of the relevant parts of the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle. It is enough, I think, to afford a framework for the only slightly more extended consideration of some details by means of which I shall now try to indicate that through all this pattern there is at work a subtle influence from the conception of rhetorical art as "merely verbal" which Plato had worked out in order to repudiate it.

At the opening of the third chapter of his first book, Aristotle makes a most important statement of principle. "A speech," he says, "is composed of three things: the speaker, what he speaks about, and to whom; and the end of the speech is in this last, I mean in the hearer." This is a general statement of the nature and end of the process of speech, and of the rhetorical process as that of speech *par excellence*. This decisive localization of the end of rhetoric in the addressee or audience, though it does not conflict with anything that has been said in the earlier chapters about the relations of rhetoric and dialectic, introduces an emphasis which was lacking in those chapters and may well give some of their generalizations a turn for which we have not been prepared. The process to which attention has so far been directed is a process of knowing, of arriving at truth or what is like truth; the primary concern has therefore naturally been with "what one (may) speak about," and with degrees of certitude and probability in what one may say. This process, we may now conclude, is not after all rhetorical, though a species of it is involved as a **partial**

136 Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

component in the rhetorical process. For a process in which one's end is to arrive at truth or knowledge is not a process of speech, or not primarily so, by this definition of speech, since to the degree that one makes seizure of "what one speaks about" one's end, to that degree one diminishes the importance of an addressee, actual or potential. That Aristotle was well aware of this we shall see immediately.

In the first chapter of his third book, as we have already noted, Aristotle is palpably impatient with the subject he there introduces, *lexis*, expression or "style." This is one of the most complicated chapters in all the works he has left us, and I will not attempt to unravel its intricacies. The two things I think it sufficient for my purpose to emphasize are fortunately quite clear. The first of these is that in this matter of verbal expression in general rhetoric has something in common with poetic (III, i, 4; 8-9). We may note especially in this connection Aristotle's rather testy observation that the first polished prose style was imitated from the poets, "who naturally seemed to owe their reputation to their verbal expression, and not to what they expressed, since what they expressed was puerile." This imitation of poetic style was a mistake, he goes on to say: the style proper to prose is not that of poetry. Rhetoric is not dialectic or science, to be sure; but prose discourse, even if it be of this unscientific kind, is a different thing from poetry.

But what is most interesting in this chapter is an earlier statement (III, i, 6) in which, after the devious

introduction, almost an apology for treating at all of style, which he closely relates to delivery and so to meretricious histrionic display in general, Aristotle says, "But all these things are mere outward show, and for the sake of the hearer." This may well seem to involve him in self-contradiction. For if the end and determinant of speech generally is, as he has said at the opening of the third chapter of his first book, "in the hearer," then how can anything in the rhetorical process be isolated and deplored or repudiated as merely "for the sake of the hearer"? Aristotle is here actually of course distinguishing two kinds of effect upon a hearer; he is laying the foundation for the distinction, which will become a commonplace in his school, between speech with a purely informative or cognitive end and speech whose main effect is upon the feelings and the will rather than upon the intellect. But the language he, and his successors, used for this distinction, "speech in terms of the facts" (*logos pros ta pragmata*) and "speech in terms of the hearer" (*logos pros ton akroaten*), is awkward and inexact. Its literal reference is not to the terms of this distinction between effects, but to what, in the system elaborated in his first book, can only be the distinction between scientific or dialectical discourse and rhetoric itself. This literal reference was not what Aristotle intended, and the most we can legitimately derive from it is some suggestion of a perhaps unconscious accompanying burden to his main intention. But this accompaniment is so significant, indeed so suspicious, that I think we are justified in pressing the literal

138 Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

meaning of his language here to the limit of its implications.

We can at once make clearer what those implications are, and advance more securely the argument I am proposing, if we set these details more broadly against the framework of the two processes of thought and expression, thinking and speaking. Plato had said that rhetoric is genuinely a merely verbal art, which involves no thought in its composition and is therefore wholly unrelated to the pursuit of truth. It is simply talk, ungoverned. No, says Aristotle by implication at the opening of the *Rhetoric*, this rhetorical operation is not a mere verbal act. It involves thinking, but thinking *of another kind* than that of the philosopher. And though this kind of thinking is by definition not to attain truth, yet being in its clouded way a sort of knowing it is related to the pursuit of truth, and may be assigned a place at or near the bottom of the scale of knowledge, of modes of knowing or sciences, as one of them, in some sense, if the least of them.

Note in passing the enormous importance of this, as I think the most extraordinary achievement of Aristotle in this important part of his scientific undertaking, his discrimination of, as we should say, a "literary" mode of thinking from the philosophic or scientific and, by implication, of whatever cognitive value there may be in "literature" from the truth of science and philosophy. For of course this is what it amounts to. Plato and innumerable later theorists—good examples are Vives and the now popular Ramus

and others at the Renaissance who argued for the entire elimination of *inventio* from rhetoric—believed that to achieve a rhetorical composition you take a philosophic or scientific thought and express it, set up a linguistic form that is its simple counterpart. Aristotle's great stroke in this department was to insist that *within* the category of thought there are distinctions to be made, such that to make a rhetorical or literary composition it is not enough to take a philosophic *dianoia* and "express" it: one must re-think the thought so that out of the philosophic *dianoia* one gets a rhetorical *dianoia*, if that is possible, as of course it may prove not to be. Thought is no more all alike, constituting one unified and solid Platonic antitheton to an equally generalized expression, than is speech as we find it spoken among men.

But why not? In the places I have pointed to in the *Rhetoric*, I think the answer is clear, though it was not Aristotle's business there to make it explicit if he was conscious of it. The thought and the speech, the *dianoia* and the *lexis*, of rhetoric are what they are because the end of the rhetorical process is in the addressee and not in the speaker's exploring mind nor in the reality outside the social process which gives its character to all rhetorical discourse.

It may be because he held firmly to this insight, if we may call it that, that Aristotle shies, in his third book, from approximating rhetoric too closely to poetic. The social ends of rhetoric are not reducible to the relatively impersonal objective ends of the poet. Yet there is a rhetoric—the rhetoric in fact of

140 Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

Isocrates, his contemporary—which, while keeping its social orientation, sets its finality so conspicuously in the mere ordering of words as such, for the delight of their structure, that it is almost a poetry. To this Aristotle certainly alludes in the historical account he gives of the development of prose style; but he does not, as we should, call it an impersonal or objective or "merely formal" tendency in style. He calls it, as we have seen, "speech for the sake of the hearer," in contrast to a "speech for the sake of the things" governed by its reference to reality. I think it is clear from this—and the induction is amply corroborated by the subsequent fortunes of this distinction in antiquity—that Aristotle retained at least so much of Plato's diffidence about rhetoric as to distrust the plain hearer's capacity to determine discourse to the ideal of truth. Speech which is "for the sake of the hearer" tends inevitably to be speech for its own sake, mere speech, merely verbal art. And the *dianoia* that goes with it differs from the philosophic ultimately for no other reason than that it is attached, or to be attached, to such a speech. That is to say, the germ that generates the *invention* of the orator is, inescapably, some Platonic idea of purely verbal structure.

The Aristotelian rhetoric was perhaps never fully worked out by its author, much less by his successors in his school. It is well known that its subsequent history in antiquity is that of a survival rather than an influence. And no wonder; for what the rhetoricians wanted, what even a Cicero would want, was of course not argument about the epistemological status of their

art but practical instrumentation for its procedures. The rhetoric that operated in later antiquity and that established the framework for medieval and Renaissance, and modern, theory and abandonment of theory was that of Isocrates, of Hermagoras, of Cicero.

In the matter we are examining, though this rhetoric offers no such stimulation to the speculative intelligence, it does continue and extend the deviation of Aristotle from Plato. This no longer takes the form of argument that rhetoric possesses its own variety of thought or is a distinct kind of knowledge. Cicero is almost as cavalier as Valery about the claims of thought. He counsels the orator to go to the philosophers, but, though he expresses a preference, he does not prescribe a school or a system: any philosophy will do. On our specific problem he is excellent:

That the orator excels in this one thing, that is to say in speech, and that those other things [invention, disposition, memory, and delivery] are only so to speak latent in him, the name we give him itself indicates. For we call not *inventor*, or *composer*, or *actor* the man who has mastered this whole complex, but in Greek he is called *rhetor*, from the word for speaking, and in Latin *eloquens*. Of all the other things that are involved in oratory some part is legitimately claimed by every other man: but the supreme power of speaking, that is of eloquence, is conceded to the orator alone (*Orator*, 61).

But it is in the Aristotelian tradition that we find the most interesting variations and developments of what I have been emphasizing in Aristotle's own rhetoric. Unfortunately, there was no great rhetorician or primarily literary theorist in this tradition. What

142 Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

we have, therefore, are occasional observations on literary art in the works of philosophers, especially of logicians. Some of the most interesting of these, naturally, are in Saint Thomas Aquinas. For a very adequate summary of Saint Thomas's most general account of the relations among the now conventionally established ranges of what was broadly called *logic*, in his Commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* (I, i), I refer you to Professor McKeon's now well-known study of "Rhetoric in the Middle Ages,"⁷ and to his paper on "Poetry and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century."⁸ In this passage the "logic" of all that is below certitude is regularly partitioned among three arts or sciences, *dialectica* when its end and effect is solid opinion or conviction, *rhetorica* when its effect is persuasion or, in more cognitive terms, a kind of suspicion or intimation,⁹ and *poetica*, the lowest, "when estimation inclines to one of the two parts of a contradiction only because of the manner of representation," that is, because of the manner of presentation which is by means of image or representation. There are other texts of Saint Thomas which afford expansion of this brief systematization of the literary arts, and a study of them would be very interesting to have. In *Summa theologiae* (II, ii, 48 c) Saint Thomas sets the scheme into Aristotle's hierarchy of all knowledge, distinguishing

three modes of proceeding in the sciences, of which one is by means of demonstration, resulting in the establishment

7 *Speculum*, XVII (1942), 23-24.

8 *Modern Philology*, XLIII (1946), 230.

9 I owe this word to the suggestion of Professor F. Cudworth Flint.

of real scientific knowledge; this pertains to physics, if we understand physics as including all the demonstrative sciences. Another mode of proceeding is from probabilities to the establishment of an opinion; this pertains to dialectic. A third proceeds from a set of conjectures to terminate in a suspicion or in some kind of persuasion; this pertains to rhetoric. These three may all be said to be divisions of the general virtue of prudence, which reasons at times from necessary propositions, at times from merely probable, and at times from conjectural assumptions.

The poetic level of knowledge is neglected here, as in Aristotle's similar general hierarchization; it seems that the poet's contribution to knowledge is so microscopic that in a large view of the whole it is negligible. But a place at the bottom of the scale is again vindicated for poetic, and the character of its knowledge is more clearly suggested, early in the same *Summa* (I, i, 9, ad 1), where the great theologian defends the method of his science against an objection that its use of metaphors is unseemly in so high an undertaking. "The poet," says Saint Thomas, "uses metaphors for representation, since representation is a thing naturally delightful to men. But theology uses metaphors out of necessity, and for utility (not delight)." But he leaves the scale as it was in the objection, which of course he had also himself composed:

It would seem that Sacred Scripture ought not to make use of metaphors. For the metaphor, which is proper to the lowest of the sciences, does not seem to be appropriate to this science, which among all others occupies the highest place. . . . For to proceed by means of various similitudes and representations or images is the property of

144 Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

poetic, which is the lowest among all kinds of knowledge or science.

We are not to conclude from this that Saint Thomas, who was a poet, thought that this characterization of its cognitive presentations as *infima doctrina* accounted for poetry as a whole or even fairly described it. Here again it is one *inventio* that is being compared with others; it is not poetry, but the poetic kind of knowing or thinking, that is, being a *doctrina*, the lowest in the scale of *doctrinae*. This is simply a philosophic recognition of the fact that to make a poem you do have to think, and that the thinking that goes into poems is not the same as the thinking that produces scientific treatises. Saint Thomas does not tell us why this is so, or dilate at all upon the question of a verbal art. But one of his masters, Avicenna, in setting out the same general argument, makes it clear enough that the reason is the one we have found implicit in the rhetoric of Aristotle.

At the same time Avicenna makes equally clear that the epistemological determination of a place and a value for poetry ignores, and leaves to other investigation, a notable part of the total poetic construct. Like Saint Thomas, he begins by positing imagery (Saint Thomas's "representations") as the differentiating element in poetic discourse.¹⁰ He recognizes other elements in poems—meter and "among the Arabs also rhyme." "But," he continues immediately,

10 "Ponamus ipsi principio poesin esse sermonem imaginantem, compositum ex vocibus emmetris" etc. (D. Margoliouth, *Analecta Orientalia ad Poeticam Aristotelem*, London, 1887, p. 73. My quotations of Avicenna in the text are translated from Margoliouth's Latin version on this and the two following pages.)

the logician is not to investigate any other part of this but only that which is imaginative speech; for meter indeed the musician will investigate properly and universally, the metrist point by point; and rhyme, he in whose discipline that falls. The logician touches upon poetry only in so far as it is imaginative speech. Speech is imaginative which excites the mind that follows it to joyful or sorrowful emotion . . . whether what is said is true or not. For it is one thing to be true, and quite another to be imaginative or not imaginative. The same communication may on one occasion, though perfectly true, inspire no emotion, and on another occasion, spoken with a different figure, deeply affect the mind, on account of its imaginative character rather than its truth. So there are speeches which evoke emotion without at all inducing conviction of truth, often presenting images which would appear obviously false. But it is not to be wondered at, if the imitation or representation of one thing by another moves the mind when it is false, that a description which is true should do the same, as by a stronger necessity. Yet men generally are taken more by what is imagined than by the truth, which indeed when they hear it most of them reject and run from. In imitation, however, there is some wonderful property which is lacking in reality. What is true and already known seems trite and lacks the charm of novelty; and what is true but unknown nobody of course pays any attention to. But a true discourse altered a little from the ordinary with the introduction of something which catches the mind often produces at once both conviction of truth and imaginative satisfaction; though to be sure at times imagination turns minds from truth too and prevents their apprehending it. Both in the conviction of truth and in imagination there is a kind of obedience or conformity to something outside the mind; but in the latter this is the acquiescence of one who admires and abandons himself to the delight of mere words, whereas in the former it is an assent to the fact that as a thing is

asserted to be, so it is. The imagination is determined by the speech itself in conformity with its character; conviction of truth is determined by the character of the reality referred to by the speech.

I have stayed so long with Avicenna because, besides being interesting all the time, he gradually comes so naturally round to asserting that the character of speech itself can operate to determine things in the thought which it is the province of the logician to explore and classify.

Averroes, the next in the sequence of great Arabic philosophers, makes an interesting observation, relevant to our purpose and related to this opinion of Avicenna's though distinct from it, when, explaining that "*human adequacy*" in epistemology is "*rhetorical*" adequacy, he says that "the assent attained in rhetoric is determined only by states of mind, not by things as they are in themselves."¹¹ More interesting, perhaps, is the place in his *Middle Commentary* on the *Prior Analytics*, where he introduces what I believe is an original variation into the hierarchization of the sciences that deal with the probable or merely possible. He distinguishes three ranges of probability, and to each assigns a science or art: for the highest, dialectic; for the middle range, rhetoric; for the lowest, not poetic, but "*ars augurandi et ars excantandi*," the arts of augury and incantation.¹² *Poetica* has somehow got lost in this improbable region, possibly absorbed by rhetoric, possibly en-

¹¹ In *Arist. De coelo*, ed. Giunta (Venice, 1552), V, 55 r.

¹² In *Arist. Prior, resolut, Med. exp.*, I, xiii, ed. Giunta (Venice, 1552),

compassed by enchantment. In any case, Averroes has surely struck true bottom in this traditional descent of the epistemologist, from the pure intelligibility of the most abstract forms in mathematics or metaphysics to this discourse of magic where only the most meager suggestions of apprehensible sense assert themselves in a mass of verbiage. It is interesting to us, since in the latest book we have had on *The Poetic Image* Cecil Day Lewis, like some other recent writers, tells us it is largely because poetry is incantation that it becomes the imaged speech these Arabs held it to be.

There is not time to begin an excursus now from the word *incantation* to another set of associations especially complex in the later Middle Ages, those that connected rhetoric, which then of course usually included poetic, with music. The purely verbal association that has reminded me of the connection was perhaps all the foundation John of Denmark had for including in the section on music in his little *philosophia* or survey of the sciences, written in 1280, several varieties of *carmina*, including comedy and satire.¹³ Eustache Deschamps, a century later, makes the whole

I, 68 v. I owe my knowledge of these two passages to Mr. Bernard Muller-Thym.

¹³ Bruges, Bibl. de la Ville, MS 496, fol. 83 r, col. 2. John treats both rhetoric and grammar separately later in his survey. Rhetoric is thus defined, fol. 83 v: "Rethorica est scientia loquendi disposite et ornatè ad persuadendum iudici. Verum officium rethoris est persuadere iudici disposite et ornatè ad fauorem partis proprie et ad indignationem partis aduersæ." The treatment that follows is conventional.

148 Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art

art de dictier a division of music, though he does not identify it, as many of his contemporaries would, with rhetoric.¹⁴ But a little more than a century after this, Jean Lemaire des Beiges, within the chronological limits of the Renaissance, says simply, "Rethorique et Musique sont une meme chose."¹⁵

The assumption of poetry into the category of rhetoric in the late Middle Ages has been deplored. Actually it was no great harm, usually only a verbal transposition, and a natural enough one, historically. Many of the great poetic systems we have had in the West—the Horatian, for example—in theory conceive the poetic operation rhetorically. Though this cannot be permanently satisfactory, its effects need not be disastrous if rhetoric is then clearly enough divided into a poetic and a non-poetic kind, as in fact it was in the Middle Ages. Most of our modern theories of poetry are rhetorical in this way. But there are all degrees and stages of this assimilation, too. The Renaissance offers a bewildering confusion in this respect.

To conclude, let me choose one specimen, from Isaac Casaubon, who is particularly suitable since he passed his last years in England. It is a rather crude simplification he gives us, for even so accomplished a scholar, one who stood high above most of his contemporaries in his sense of the variety of doctrine among the ancients he followed, had not recovered all the subtleties of his miscellaneous sources. But

¹⁴ *Oeuvres completes*, ed. Raynaud, VII, 269 ff.; cf. 266-67.

¹⁵ *Oeuvres*, III, 197.

so much the more representative, of course, he therefore must be:

Since man was introduced by almighty God into this universe of things, not only that he might apprehend it all with his mind, but also that for various uses he might set forth outside himself the conceptions of his soul, his human excellence shone out also in this particular, that about the same thing he excogitated various and diverse arts. So man was endowed by nature with a desire not only to speak, but to speak correctly and elegantly; and not this alone, but moreover ornately; and, even further, in meter and melodiously and with modulation. Hence those three arts were born, Grammar, Rhetoric, and Poetic; which all, along with the faculty of disputation, are concerned with the *logos*; and therefore they are all rightly to be called *logikai*. And as if several circles are described round the same center, the greater will always include the lesser, just as happens in the other faculties of the mind, so in these three arts of which we speak, for Rhetoric includes Grammar, and Poetic includes both of these within itself.¹⁶

This scheme is in fact quite representative of its period. It is a good example of the unconscious ignoring of the problem of a possible difference between philosophic or dialectical *inventio* and the rhetorical or literary, which is more common at all times of course than the systematic elimination of the problem by teachers with more philosophic pretensions, like Ramus. A system conceived like this prepares almost ideally for the reduction of all literary art to frivolous preoccupation with verbal surface, and

¹⁶ *De satyrica Graecorum poesi et Romanorum satira*, II, iv; p. 267, in *Museum philologicum et historicum*, ed. T. Crenius (Leyden, 1699).

equally, we may add, for the attenuation of philosophic invention by dilution from the rhetorical. Whatever imperfections we may note in the Aristotelian analysis, its main lines will provide a safe passage between this Scylla and this Charybdis; it is only an apparent paradox that to distinguish the claims of each is the best way to prevent that "devorse betwixt the tong and the hart" which Ascham so justly lamented.¹⁷ In any case, this of Casaubon's is a very different arrangement of things from that of Aristotle and the tradition he began. Things we are sorry to see lost, though we must acknowledge they were never very securely possessed, are, for example, the clear implication of the Aristotelian doctrine that rhetoric, being social and communicative in essence, is an art entirely distinct from the poetic, which is more truly "purely verbal," and the provision for value and a degree of respectability in these arts without, and indeed in opposition to, the requirement that they present the truth and nothing but the truth. Yet some of Aristotle's distinctions are embedded too in this sort of formulation of the relations of the arts, and his hierarchy even is here in a sense, though now (since there is no question here of a scale of knowledge: the knowledge is all the same) its direction is reversed: we ascend to poetry now. (So Pope will "stoop to truth.")

There is truly such a progression as Casaubon outlines, from grammar, through rhetoric, to poetic; and it is a progression from one set of values to another.

17 *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. G. Smith, I, 6.

The movement is neither as simple as Casaubon makes it in the direction he observes, nor confined to that direction; the progression of some elements is balanced by a contrapuntal recession of others; there are not only additions, but also exclusions, at each step. And if the reasoning of Aristotle and his school is sound, it is hard to see how in this progress from a bare grammar or minimal *lexis*, which is patient of any "content" and perhaps especially hospitable to the scientific and plainly historical, through a rhetoric the end of which is rather social than scientific, to poetry where even this control of address toward the norms of external reality is abandoned—it is hard to see how *truth* can be left as a relevant value at the end of it all.

But, as there may be truth accidentally in them all, so there is grammar in rhetoric, and grammar and rhetoric in poems; Aristotle tells us this as well as Casaubon. One modest implication for evaluation I might point to in leaving off. In a period so uncertain as ours of the precise nature of specifically poetic value, a period as prone as any to confuse it with some kind of truth or revelation, perhaps it may be something to note in what profess to be poems their simply linguistic virtues and the achievements of their rhetoric, for the former of which at least we still retain terms and concepts and a scheme for reasonable discourse.

But how far can grammar or rhetoric take us toward full judgment of poetry? This question is a cognate of the one with which we began. How far are the norms for judgment of the products of any

art supplied by that art itself? Myself, I subscribe to all I see implied and explicit on these matters in Aristotle, and as I believe that there are norms for the judgment of literature which are simply literary and not philosophic or moral, so I believe that there are norms for the judgment of poetry distinct from the grammatical and the rhetorical, which indeed necessitate not only the suspension but at times the direct contravention of these; and if I did not believe these things I should find it hard to face a great deal of modern literature. But I think there is no more profitable exercise in the repertory of our discipline, or perhaps of human learning, than that of asking, and putting to all possible tests, just such questions as these.

Rhetoric in the English Renaissance: Two Elegies

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By RUTH C. WALLERSTEIN

I WANT IN THIS PAPER to consider two poems, John Donne's elegy on Prince Henry and Milton's *Lycidas*, in the light that is shed upon them by seventeenth-century rhetoric-poetic as I understand it. Both the significance of that rhetoric-poetic and the test of my view of it will reside in its power to illuminate the poems. In endeavoring both to present my view and to apply it to the poems, I shall have time to sketch my view of the rhetoric-poetic only in outline, trusting at this time to the reading of the poems to give it depth and clarity. If I seem too sweeping, I ask your indulgence. In order to arrive at this view, I have endeavored to check the theoretical critical statements of the age with the practical teaching of rhetoric and poetic at the time, and further with the principles of actual workmanship that have come to seem apparent to me in a number of poems which could be fruitfully compared with each other because of likeness of theme and genre. In even this cursory sketch, it will be apparent how very much my study owes to earlier works in the field of Renaissance rhetoric and poetic.

I think most of us would now agree, to begin with, in defining certain assumptions that the Renaissance made about the nature of poetry, partially expressive of its vision and its energy. The poet of the seventeenth century regarded a poem as a made object of beauty, or at least as a made aesthetic structure, an imitation of life—a lyric poem being an imitation of an emotion—dependent for its existence as a poem upon its distinctive invention or "plot," and upon its heightened expression, and, in the view of many poets and critics, upon its metrical form. Of the verse or metrical design I shall have nothing further to say. In developing both invention and expression the poet was glad to learn much from imitating in another sense the works of poets who had preceded him. As to the nature of the invention or "plot," we may say further that in the earlier part of the period, following medieval tradition, the poet tended to draw much upon both the places and the tropes of rhetoric, for larger design and for amplification in detail. Later, as Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and his *Poetics* became more generally known and deeply understood, the great poets became more conscious of the organic structural design or genre of poems as poems, and imitation—not imitation of life, but imitation as an artistic discipline—became more and more the imitation of structural designs, representing an action or an emotion as a whole, as, for instance, Aristotle had described the form of a tragedy. We have one measure of the advance of that view in Milton's famous distinction between logic (discourse of reason, of which rhetoric

is but the open hand) and poetry, which is an immediate imitation of life, simple, sensuous, and passionate. Not only the renewed study of Aristotle, but Platonism also, recapturing its ancient relation to Aristotle, or rather restoring Aristotle to his ancient relationship with itself, contributed to that view of poetry, particularly in the special Renaissance view of the verisimilar, the doctrine of the relation of the particular detail in the work of art to the idea which it shadowed forth. Yet, to many poets, the sense of kinship between the structure of a poem and the places of rhetoric remained always very strong. The reason for this I shall come to presently.

In expression, also, the poet learned much from copying and from the analysis of the modes of expression which had been established by the great tradition of rhetoric, the tropes, the figures of thought, and the schemes of sound. I am, however, in profound agreement with Miss Tuve in thinking that we have been grossly misled by our misunderstanding of the use of the word "ornament" to suppose that he thought of expression as something added on to substance. Rather it was the full imaginative unfolding of his idea. In my view, however, as will become apparent presently, we can attribute no *one* meaning to the term "ornament." The meaning of the term varies—and had varied since patristic times—with the philosophy of the man who used the term, with his sense of the meaning of the particular, and with his view of the place of rhetoric in his general intellectual structure; less formally, with his vision of

life. Yet despite these radical differences, we shall be not very far from a central and almost universal Renaissance apprehension of what the term implied if we think of the metaphor used by Cicero and made classic in the Renaissance by Boccaccio: to the question whether the elaboration of style is not mere superficial decoration, the answer is that though hovel or cave would protect one from rain and cold, man's spirit needs the Grecian building with its colonnade. In English the imaginative attitude implied in this analogy is best expressed in another sphere by King Lear:

O reason not the need. Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady.
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wearest,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm.

And I need not remind you that John Donne brought the two spheres together when he justified the use of schemes in his sermons on the ground that, if one would not appear at the king's court in common dress, still less would one approach the throne of God without gorgeousness. Probably almost every poet of the first half of the seventeenth century thought of the boldness and elaborateness of his invention and his images, the richness of his style, as especially constituting his poem a poem, as that which transformed his insight into an object of beauty.

So far I have briefly run over points which we al-

ready agree were shared by the poets of this age. What I now wish to suggest is that these common assumptions did not in fact mean the same thing to different poets who held them in common, and that these differences in interpretation and application of superficially like conceptions derive from the differences in philosophic view held by different poets. From these philosophic views derive in turn different views of the nature of creative activity and of the functioning of expression, and of rhetoric. While they cannot be substituted for our own final view of a poem, they are an illuminating part of the context of the poem we read, a key to the form of its vision. In my own study of these differences, I owe much to Dr. McKeon's essay on medieval rhetoric.

Without any pretense of having made a comprehensive study of Renaissance poetics in relation to their philosophical foundations, or indeed more than the beginning of a study at all, I should like very briefly to illustrate types of difference and to show how these bear upon our reading of Donne's and Milton's poems.

We may note, to begin with, a view that at first sight looks like a mere matter of pedagogics, and rather resembles a lack of philosophy than a philosophy. The boy at school was actually taught to construct without organic design (a habit retained by the poet-aster), by a series of particular small inventions and amplifications and by elaborations of expression, or ' 'variations," in which places, tropes, schemes were run together at random, in a mere pastiche of frag-

mentary imitation of motifs and ornaments. What befell the principle of decorum and the styles under such a system is an interesting story into which we must not here enter. Such a system looks like a foundationless confusion of a rhetoric and a poetic themselves not clearly founded. But this is not so. At its best such a system had an underlying conception, to which it bore perhaps the same shadowy relation that, I have been told by a great mathematician, today's high school textbooks of mathematics bear to genuine mathematical thought, or, as I have heard it said, that classical college textbooks of logic now bear to actual classical logic. That foundation was ancient sophistic, the view that thought (in so far as we do think) resides in the forms and modes of expression, without metaphysical basis. When this view was properly understood, and the invention of a poem considered self-existent and without organic relation to an underlying reality, the confusion of the textbooks was cleared up; the relation between amplification (largely the topics) and expression (the tropes, figures, and schemes) was clarified. In such a view, poetry differed from rhetoric in the selection and tone of its materials rather than in fundamental method. A good example of its actual effect in poetic composition, and of the character of the limited vision of which it was the intellectual counterpart, would be found, I think, in Chapman's poem on Prince Henry.

In contrast with this view of poetry and poetry-making, we may take as an example of one broadly philosophical type of view Messer Alessandro Lio-

nardi's *Dialogi Delia Inventione Poetica*, published in Venice in 1554. Lionardi begins his criticism with the rhetorical approach to poetry, the consideration of its ornament, which he evidently regards as the prevailing one. This approach, however, he gives a metaphysical basis by relating it to Aristotle. From this point of view, the ornaments of poetry are to be regarded as the detailed explication by which we work out the accidents of our subject or substance and thus realize it to the full. But the real approach to poetry is through philosophy. In this approach Lionardi uses both Aristotle's *Poetics* and Plato. Verse is one of the distinctive elements of poetry; but its essential element is imitation, the fable. Heroic poetry or drama may start either with history or with a feigned action, but the poet must render his action verisimilar: that is, the epic or the drama must represent the true coherence of an action, the true operation of the causes of all its elements. This ideal action is the central invention. It must be "adorned and enriched"; but these words are an awkward instrument to express Lionardi's meaning. The adornment and enrichment he conceives are in no sense extrinsic. It is they—the elaboration of particular details, of time, of place, of operations, above all of the passions—which give the poem its verisimilitude; the best imitation is one which rests on the truth (factual history), but is adorned and enriched with those verisimilarities which reveal the springs of human action and the color of human experience. Such is Virgil's elaboration of the Sinon incident from a detail of

history. These ornaments express the poet's invention as the painter's colors develop his design. The delineation of passion is important both from the point of view of the imitation and from that of the reader's total aesthetic experience. In the imitation, the passions and the accidental causes which arouse them constitute those actualities in the life of man in which the ideal realities are embodied. They are also the principal source of that delight in the reader which it is the function of poetry to create. Petrarch's *Nel dolce tempo* is a supreme representation of those passions and accidents which are the chief ornament of poetry and through which the ultimate activity of love is shown.

Underlying Lionardi's interpretation of Aristotle there is thus a Platonism of a Florentine cast: poems are shadows and images of *il vero*; they are representations in the realm of time, place, and the senses of the world of ideas. The synthesis may be seen again in Lionardi's statement of causes. Under natural causes Lionardi lists material and formal causes of things, and of these the fable or action is constituted. Under supernatural causes are efficient and final causes; and these may be represented in the gods. Though a poem need not represent them, it is the ultimate and final perfection of the mind to do so. Then there are the accidental causes; and in these the poet represents the actual mutations of the mind. It is from the point of view of Platonic ethic, as well as of religion, that it becomes the function of tragedy to show how dangerous are the affections and per-

turbations of the soul and how unstable and various the state of things human. Allegorized myth finds a place in Lionardi's poetic as a representation to the senses and imagination of natural causes, his example being that interpretation of Juno later pictured in the masque for Ferdinand and Miranda. Metaphors, similes, descriptions of persons and of places and times are especially important, as are also epithets, because they represent the verisimilar.

In giving so great an emphasis to description as he does, and in elaborating the types of description, Lionardi might very likely be influenced by the importance given in medieval treatises on poetry to description as a method of amplification; he is assimilating their material to his neo-Platonic and Aristotelian view, however, and thereby giving description a more organic place in poetry.

The verisimilar is to Lionardi both a representation of the actions and characters of persons and of the qualities of men and objects in their ideal or typical character, "showing causes," and it is the detail, the moment of experience which identifies the ideal and the actual.

Another type of philosophical view is that of Scaliger. His is a radically different synthesis of Aristotle and Plato from Lionardi's. Aristotle is for him the supreme and sufficient philosopher, except that he does not pay adequate regard to Plato's conception of order. Scaliger's emphasis upon the formal structure of the genres is central. Lionardi, on the other hand, though he recognizes the significance of Aris-

totle's *Poetics*, with the penetrating reservation that the work as we have it is incomplete and therefore only partially understood, and though he makes form or imitation of an action or emotion the core of a poem, centers his attention on the expression, through poetry, of ethical and philosophical vision, but by means distinctively poetic. Since I do not wish to use Scaliger further, I shall here say nothing more of him except that the radical difference of Scaliger from Aristotle no less than from Lionardi will not be most fully apprehended and understood in terms of his *Poetics*, *libri septem* themselves; the rationalism of that book becomes clear only if we turn to the psychological and epistemological chapters of his *De subtilitate*.

Despite their profound differences, the points of view I have sketched may all be grouped together within one Renaissance view, accepting the doctrine of ornament in a Renaissance sense. For all these writers, poetry is a mediate expression of truth to the imagination in sensuous terms, through a richly elaborated beauty. Such an ideal of poetry it was that William Drummond appealed to, protesting, I presume, against the rising popularity of metaphysical poetry, when he said, writing to Arthur Johnston probably some years prior to 1637:

In vain have some men of late, transformers of everything, consulted upon her [poetry's] reformation, and endeavored to abstract her to metaphysical ideas and scholastical quiddities, denuding her of her own habits and those ornaments with which she hath amused the world some thousand years. Poesy is not a thing that is yet in the finding and search, or which may be otherwise found out;

being already condescended upon by all nations, and as it were exhibited *jure gentium* amongst Greeks, Romans, Italians, French, and Spaniards. Neither do I think *that* a good piece of poesy which Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Petrarch, Ronsard, Boscan, Garcillaso, if they were alive and had that language, could not understand, and reach the sense of the writer.

There was current, however, a radically different approach to the problem of expression, an approach which altered the conceptions of ornament and invention and the choice of image and diction. This was the view of expression developed by St. Augustine with ultimate dependence on Plato and modified by many intervening conceptions of the cosmos and of art. Augustine's theory was of course a theory of prose and particularly of the style of the sermon. But it was a view which might readily be transferred to verse, not only because of the connection between rhetoric and poetic in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but because, like a parallel if widely different literary movement today, it involved a basic view of the nature of speech, of fundamental human nature and values, of the function of eloquence. Strictly speaking, it contains neither a rhetoric nor a poetic at all, but is a single comprehensive theory of thought and expression.

St. Augustine rejected pagan stories along with pagan deities and pagan life. Pagan rhetoric he did not reject but transformed, so that it became not a discipline but an ancillary of expression. Augustine viewed style from the point of view of theology, and of one confronting the rhetoric of Rome with the Latin versions of the Bible. For him rhetoric is the

art of expressing clearly, ornately where necessary, persuasively, and fully, the truths which thought has discovered acutely (*argute*). But language is primarily the immediate embodiment of thought. Concepts arise as pure mental activities, and words are symbols to express them; the essential quality of expression must be its effectiveness in embodying a chain of thought. The concrete images of the Bible—one may find there all the schemes of thought and all the tropes, and one must know them in order to interpret the Bible—are symbolic expressions of metaphysical and moral truths. They are, in a sense, arguments which explicate the truth and show how reason has reached it.

This is radical Platonism, the doctrine of the *Phaedrus*. It has been further developed through neo-Platonism and through early Christian thought into the doctrine of the *logos*, and is in its farthest reaches part of the whole conception of the creation, the incarnation, and the symbolic relation of the world to its immanent creator. It is perhaps worth noting that Scaliger explicitly takes account of this view of speech as *logos*, but only in order to reject it.

Augustine's essential transformation of the classical doctrine of rhetoric can be illustrated in brief by his discussion of the three styles and his transformation of that theory from what it was in classical rhetoric and would become again in Scaliger's poetics. The low style is that to be used in teaching; its place in expressing thought is obvious. The middle or temperate style served only to delight, only, that is, when

it was necessary to catch the attention of one's auditory. But it is this style which Augustine considered as the most amplified and ornate style, and the style richest in schemes. The high style, the style which persuades, the style, one might say, which saves men, is created by the ardor of thought itself, by the ardent contemplation of truths seen as value, as a motive to the will. In this style the Bible abounds. Such a style springs from the mind's spontaneous and unconscious activity upon the elements of experience, and thence arise its abundant images; for the modes of logic, the topics, and the tropes of oratory are but explications of the mind's natural working; and in writing highly the mind operates without their aid. And if the high style exhibits all the ornaments, it can exist equally well without them. In his Letter to Cresconius, who fears the subtleties of dialectic and of rhetoric, Augustine defends the first on the ground that traditional dialectic is the very mode of thought; the second on the classic ground that *abusus non tollit usum*. But in his treatise *On Catechizing the Uninformed*, he warns against those sophisticates who look more to refined correctness and elegance of expression than to the truth. The Bible, in the Latin version he used, came to seem to him greater in expression than classical writers; and, though he himself loved the schemes of sound, he points out that in Biblical passages where such schemes might have been secured by no more than a simple change of word order, this is often avoided, and the meaning left undisturbed. When to this view of style is united the symbolic or

allegorical interpretation of the Bible, metaphors, similes, parables have become elements in the system of symbols by which the Book of the Creatures reveals its Maker, and ornament hardly exists in serious literature.

It is by a long process of development that the doctrine of symbolic thought reaches its full form in the Victorines and in Bonaventura, the great medieval heirs of Augustine. Tertullian, extending analogy and metaphor to symbol on the pattern of Biblical metaphor and parable, Origen and Philo, uniting Rabbinic modes of exegesis and allegory with Platonic myth and with a doctrine of the symbolic structure of macrocosm and microcosm derived from Plato's *Timaeus*, have contributed much to it. In the intellectual system of St. Thomas, as McKeon has pointed out, where theology and philosophy are separate and philosophy rests on the organon of Aristotle, rhetoric is a distinct logical discipline and style has laws of its own. In the organon of Bonaventura, though one could cite desultory recapitulations of the formulae of rhetoric, rhetoric has no real place. Had I time, I should like to illustrate what happened and show its bearing on the seventeenth century by placing beside Donne's work a symbolic argument from Tertullian, a development of multiple word meanings from Bonaventura. And I should say something of the intervening development of emblem or *impresa* in the sixteenth century. But I must hurry on to set my poems against the backgrounds I have sketched.

The central explicit theme or plot of Donne's elegy

on Prince Henry, stripped to its barest intellectual terms, is the same as that treated in the form of the pastoral elegy by other of the major elegists: the meaning of death and the significance for our view of the universe and of society of the death of a young and noble man. But Donne has neither the mingled classical Christian feeling of these elegists, nor the assured faith or stoic calm in which they find consolation. The *contemptus mundi*, in its full religious bearing and with all its metaphysical assumptions, is implicit from the first moment in his view. He has nothing of the *lacrymae rerum* or the pity for what was so beautiful and is now dead, and hence he has no use for the pastoral lament by which the humanists continue to express that feeling, or for the simple allegorization by which they Christianized it or made it the vehicle of modern social criticism. His attack is direct. Prince Henry becomes at once in actuality a symbol of the dependence of the life of man and nature on the divine intelligence, and a dialectic image or symbol through which to develop that theme. The main issue for Donne is not Providence, as for most of the elegists, but the grounds of knowledge and the methods by which man achieves it, with the twin issue of saving faith in the individual. To that saving faith, materialism and indifference are the great obstacles. This concern with intellectual doubt is the more urgent to Donne because he takes the position of Augustine (deeply modified, of course, by his own time and self) that it is in the mind's own awareness of its operations and in its primary love of God and

virtue that we find the grounds not only of faith, but of reason as well.

To Donne these issues were so serious, and the dangers of complacency and of intellectual and spiritual formalism at all times and in all men so great, that he must make his poem primarily an intellectual discussion. But it must also be a meditative exercise, applying the discussion to his own state of mind.

So far, we must say that the poem bases its structure upon theology and upon the logic which is philosophy's instrument. It is at this point in the structure that its transformation into a poem takes place. As a devotion, the reflection is an imitation of an emotion. This imitation gives it the substance of a poem; and this substance is then cast into poetic form according to the general Renaissance concept, through a special poetic invention. Donne, that is, dramatizes himself and his particular participation in Henry's death, beginning and ending with his own state as expressive of the theology and aspiration of the poem.

The real structure of the poem is determined not by the dramatic invention (which is secondary and receives its plot from the religion), but by the two essential aspects of its content, metaphysical and devotional. The opening line is at once the statement of a thesis and a prayer: "Looke to mee, faith, and looke to my faith, God." It is no less a conclusion than an opening and is meant to embrace and explain all the subtleties that ensue. The theme is then developed in the logical structure which Donne was presently to use for many of his sermons: a statement of text—

the relation of faith and reason and their bearing on the death of Henry; definition and division; proof of each division; conclusion in the form of an application of the lesson. But in the poem the application becomes, as we have seen, a dramatic invention through which Donne resolves the emotion and answers the opening prayer by an act of faith. It is through love that the problems of limited reason and failing faith are solved. And so, though Donne, as protagonist, cannot here on earth contemplate the essence of Prince Henry or of his worth in the world, if he can but contemplate the ideal human love through which Henry embraced absolute love, and can praise Henry and his beloved, he will become—and in the poem he does become—an angel singing before the throne of God.

The form of the poem is thus directly determined by the dialectic of its reflection on death. Yet Donne, as we have seen, was also intensely conscious of the instruments or activities by which his experience was transmuted into a poem—not invention only, but expression as well. Though in the last analysis he was contemptuous of much concern with beauty, he was intensely, even medically, aware of the art of persuasion, oratory, and, one must infer, of that of poetry. In his rejection of softness and decoration in his sermons, he is not condemning rhetoric, but appealing to a more philosophical view of it in its psychological function, within a basically Augustinian scheme: it is the function of rhetoric by ordered beauty to appeal to the imagination and stir it out of its stultifying

habit, and thereby to combat false opinion; and also it is its function to give ceremonious ornament to great things. Thus the temper of the Renaissance colors Donne's fundamental Augustinianism but does not change it. It may be remembered that Fenelon found Tertullian's expression essentially Augustinian, when the *argutiae*, the plays on words, the paradoxes and the excessive schemes, were put aside. In poetry the elaboration of expression would change somewhat from the function and form it had in prose, but its relation to basic dialectic structure would not alter.

To analyze Donne's expression would in itself be an argument of length. Following the line of thought which I have already sketched, I should seek to show that the detail of his expression was built upon emblems and strong lines, figures which were an integral part of the symbolic thought of the poem and of the traditional expression of symbolic thought. In keeping with this focus upon the explication of thought, the diction is plain, familiar, but concentrated and intensified. The only element which might be called truly and distinctively rhetorical in the sense of the common rhetorics is the use of schemes of sound to emphasize the thought. These Donne would have defended in Renaissance terms. But his essential justification for them would have been that of Augustine, whose favorite figure they were, as most intimately relatable to thought.

Donne's is a theological elegy, primarily an immediate expression of thought and feeling, cast secondarily into a dramatic invention, which gives it a

simple and passionate vesture, if hardly sensuousness. Milton's *Lycidas*, in contrast, begins with its classical form or genre, the pastoral elegy. From this point of view, Milton does not create anew but only perfects the traditional form or "plot" structure for imitating our thought and emotion upon the death of a youth, for realizing death and grief and then transcending them. The elements of this design are a lament for the dead—the lament of nature and of the dead youth's fellows; a grief for death itself; a lament for the times; consolation. Milton is traditional both in his general pastoral invention and in most of the particular motifs. Under this poetic invention, however, under this single particular action (simple or simplex) presented to our senses and wrought in and for itself in perfect poise of form and detail of beauty, the deeper *allegory*, the ultimate causes or ideas, are shadowed forth, giving the action its real meaning and communicating to it the passion proper to man's particular experience of those universal realities. Milton's thought and feeling found complete representation in the traditional form in which he cast his poem. The rational Platonism explicitly formulated Milton's vision of life and, combined with the study of Aristotle's *Poetics*, probably determined his view of the simple nature of a poem, by which he expressed his sense of the immediate embodiment of the vision of life in its actual apparent experience. It kept him to the great type forms of *Comus*, the pastoralism of *Lycidas*, the figures of Sin and Death. His literal view of the Bible, so different from Donne's

schematic and symbolic view, and his reverence for its text no doubt helped form his attitude. To one who holds such a conception, the whole of life is evaluated with the poet's intensest insight in every poem. But the metaphysic and the thought which make it explicit must emerge from his story and interpret it, rather than themselves supply the inventions for the poem, as Spenser's explicit allegory often does. Sensuousness, if taken together with simplicity, would involve not merely the exquisite pictures and patterns of sound, and the dramatic completeness of symbols, but the immanent presence of the spiritual or other-worldly meaning of the story in the world which is known to man first through his senses. And *passionate* then means, I suppose, that the whole is seen in the light in which it appears to man's imagination and to his will, those of the protagonist and those of the poet, so that the subject is affected by the poet's feeling of value and affects his readers through its imitation. This total view of a poem as simple, sensuous, and passionate would have contributed to Milton's understanding of the pastoral elegy as a genre, and at the same time would have derived in part from it. But the depth of Milton's Christianity and of the fresh Platonism which penetrated it would keep him from the formalism of Scaliger on the one side and from Scaliger's too simple moral didacticism on the other.

Into the ultimate reconciliations of thought and feeling embodied in *Lycidas* we cannot probe fully

Naive but sensitive readers are, not, I believe, troubled by that apparent conflict of traditions and of attitudes in the poem which sometimes momentarily checks scholars; such readers simply accept the great contrasting waves of emotion through which the single meaning of the poem is developed and which are so perfectly embodied in its music. And this immediacy of communication is the sign of the real completeness of Milton's unification of *Lycidas*, if we understand the idea behind the form. The two elements of naturalistic feeling and of religion are not opposed in Milton. For his delight in nature herself is not merely naturalistic. It expresses a religious sentiment remote from Donne's habitual thought and feeling as these appear in his poetry. Like Spenser and Marvell, Milton reaffirmed the holiness of "day and the sweet approach of even and morn, and flocks and herds and human face divine" in themselves and in their direct power to reveal God to man, communicating to him the divine power and goodness. Another humanistic element is the lament itself. The pastoral gives voice to a universal rhythm of grief in a concentrated way paralleling the statement of it in the ceremony of funeral: the shock of death, the grief which must be realized, the stilling of that grief. The elegy, in clothing this rhythm in allegorical convention, makes use of the power which ritual has to absorb man into the experience of the race, to detach him from the disproportion of the moment and draw him into that larger experience which he shares with

all men. Thus the convention is made to reflect and embody a conception of harmony and of the mind's control over feeling.

But the grief which Milton expresses is wilder, and the question it asks is of far wider import than any which naturalistic Greece and Rome had expressed. And like Cicero's lament for his daughter, it can be stilled by no human ritual. Hence it is from the last and deepest wave of grief that we are swept out of nature into the transcendent consolation. Within that last cry, 'T or so to interpose a little ease, Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise,' is a passion more profoundly troubled than any classical sense of transiency and human loss. And as the lines go on, we can feel the outward fact of final loss changing into a symbol. In the Christian experience of death as it was early formulated, there are two griefs, the personal grief which kills, the grief of repentance leading to God. In the loss of a young man, the question of Providence arises out of the question on the meaning of death, and the contemplation of the Judgment prepares the way for the contemplation of the Resurrection. The passage in *Lycidas* beginning with Orpheus and ending with the rejection of earthly fame has already both realized an indefinable grief and prepared the way for the transformation of it. In that passage Milton, as man, has separated himself from nature and raised himself to grace. And in it are most perfectly reconciled the classical impersonality and the personal Christian passion of the poem. But to complete the theme one other element is neces-

sary, the attack on the church. In the development of this, as of the personal theme, Milton is at once traditional and highly individual.

In most of the elegies on Edward King, it is to public repentance that we are called. In Virgil the pattern of associating the death of a young man with reflections on the state of the world was already present, if even the minor poet of later ages needed tradition for a theme which life itself pressed so intensely upon each succeeding generation and upon each individual. Cicero had consoled himself for the loss of his daughter in a *contemptus mundi* which St. Augustine thought equal to all that Christian heart could feel. Milton's attack on the church with its image of the shepherd is, as Mr. Coffman has shown, in the direct tradition of the *contemptus*. But Milton has given the theme a different context. In Renaissance and Reformation the call of the prophets to perfect our earthly life has reasserted itself above the more absolute rejection of this world. It has united itself with another attitude explicit in both Christian and Greek tradition, the sense of the unity of man's individual and his social being. One side of it is Ascham's and Hamlet's deep sense that all sound manners derive from a true religion and a just and religious government. The other is the passionate reaffirmation of the membership of the individual in the church.

In the opening of the third book of *Paradise Lost*, Milton perhaps gives final expression to his sense of the peculiar significance of the individual consciousness in the universe and in man's comprehension of

God's nature. And so those lines shed light back upon *Lycidas*. In ascending from the description of Hell to a contemplation of God, Milton feels himself compelled to ask anew for the infusion of grace and to give witness, through his own passionate experience, of the fullness in which Nature and the Divine are united in this middle creature. Thus the remembered song of the nightingale returning in the spring brings with it the whole Book of the Creatures: the pageant of the Times and Seasons, the beasts, the human face divine. But that book yields to a higher vision as John Milton turns from nature now so bitterly denied him and through grace accepts joyously the inner life of the mind, in which religion and poetry are one.

That *Lycidas* should so overflow with personal passion is then no mere mark of Milton's own nature and vision, but the impress of a whole age upon a genius. And though *Lycidas* and Donne's elegy on Prince Henry differ in intellectual form in that one is the drama of doubt and faith, the other the story of man's transcendence from nature to grace, both are dramas of the individual soul, each witnessing the terror of death, the personal experience of grace. In Donne the portrait of Henry becomes an instrument of contemplation; in Milton, by a profounder and simpler transfer to the interior life, it is not King's character but his own and, in his own, the universal, which he defines in the lines beginning "Alas! What boots it."

Donne makes his elegy a poem by applying his theology to a particular occasion. His emotion still remains primarily an act of devotion, though he turns

it into an object of art by the formal delineation of that emotion. Milton imitates the experience of death and the Christian acceptance thereof not in a religious form, but in an artistic form in which, by the completeness with which the entire experience is represented, and by the sensuous and representative quality of the imagery, the most personal experience of one man is universalized.

Milton's communication of his experience of the ideal in the particular involves the total emotion and movement of *Lycidas*, but among other elements the imagery is particularly important. And I should like to say a word on the great depth, scope, and complexity of Milton's imagery when compared to that of the early pastorals and on its relation to witty imagery. His depth owes most to the whole quality of his mind, to his keen sensibility to the classical and humanist poems which had impregnated his imagination, to the penetration with which he sees in each detail both its sensuous immediacy and its ideal quality. But Biblical symbol and emblem imagery also have contributed something to the deepening.

One would like to study in detail how Milton's expression might be fitted to Lionardi's interpretation of ornament, for instance in the flower passage, with its beautiful epithets and qualifications; but I prefer to glance at another image—the sun image by which we pass from the final depth of grief to the consolation. This image of the sun's setting and rise is the most traditional symbol of the Christian attitude toward death, from earliest Christian times down to the em-

blem books contemporary with *Lycidas*, by its inevitable symbolism and probably not without consciousness that it is an answer to the image of the pagan elegist; it is essentially an emblem both in the sharp logic of its statement and in the way in which it serves to draw together and transvalue the matter of the poem. At the same time, the image is simply, sensuously glowing, so that it makes a direct, affective aesthetic contribution to our dawning joy. Thus, though it is an emblem, it becomes integrally a part of a poem which expresses thought to us mediately through action, expanding that action into all the beautiful detail of expression whose forms and modes had long since been discovered by poets and described by *rhetoric-poetic*, rendering the poem a self-existent beautiful object.

Rhetoric and Poems: The Example of Pope

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By W. K. WIMSATT, JR.

WHEN WE SEEK to confront two such elusive entities as a theory of poems and poems themselves and to determine relations between these two, I think there is much to be said for placing them first, tentatively, in their most generic and noncommittal relation. There is much to be said for the conjunctional form of title commonly given to the academic paper: *X and Y*, Shakespeare *and* Hall's Chronicle, Theory *and* Poems. I for one find it convenient to distinguish five main types of relation between theory and poems, all five of which are frequently to be observed in critical and historical studies, though often more or less confused.

I. There is for one thing the kind of relation between theory and poems with which we are concerned when our interest is chiefly in the theory itself; that is, when we try to describe and assess a given theory as objectively as we can with reference to whatever general norms for poems and hence for theory we possess. Is the classical theory of imitation in any sense a good or fruitful theory of poems? Or the classical

theory of ornament and system of rhetoric? Or do these deserve to be completely demolished, as in the Crocean history of Aesthetic? Is Matthew Arnold's view of the high seriousness and critical function of poems the right view? Or does it, as Mr. Tate and others have argued, deliver poems into the hands of science and morals? My purpose at the moment is not to maintain the importance of such questions, but merely to note their occurrence.

II. It may at times be difficult to distinguish between such a general evaluative interest in theory and what I consider a second kind of interest, that with which we approach a theorist, especially a technical or rhetorical theorist and his cousins of the trivium, the grammarian and logician, for the purpose of borrowing tools which we shall put to the unpredictable uses of our own analysis: *fable*, or *character*, or *metaphor* from Aristotle, *antithesis* or *parallel* from the rhetoricians, *sentences*, for that matter, and *nouns* and *verbs* from the grammarians. To do this may imply that we think a theorist a good theorist of poems, and yet I believe it may come short of that, in so far as concepts themselves may come short of integrated or achieved theory, and also in so far as this borrowing extends readily, and perhaps most profitably, to the less literary philosophers, the grammarian and logician.

To look in another direction, the historical, I should say that when we take up the more generic concepts of rhetoric, grammar, and logic, we ought to be on our guard against imputing to them special

connections with the poems of any specific period—as would happen if one were to note the Aristotelian "categories" in Renaissance logic and read in them an influence on the imagery of Drayton or Donne. Mr. Richards in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* has found the concept of the *morpheme* as defined by Bloomfield a useful one for explaining certain powers of words. But it would be somewhat wide of the mark to learn that Mr. Auden had read either Richards or Bloomfield and from that go on to discover such elements as *morphemes* in Auden's poems. The idea of the circulation of the blood was expounded by Harvey in 1616, but we do not conceive that it was about that time that blood began to circulate in the human body.

III. A third relation between theory and poems is that which obtains when a given theory does have a specific, historical relation to a poem, but has this in virtue of the special fact that it appears in the poem as part of the poem's meaning or content. One will recall numerous instances in the history of English poetry: Chaucer's burlesque of Geoffrey of Vinsauf in the mock heroic of the cock and the fox, Stephen Hawes' celebration of "golden" words in his *Pastime of Pleasure*, the Horatian arts of poetry, those of the English gentlemen who followed Boileau, and the final brilliant example of Pope, Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* (if we accept the recent subtleties concerning the sun and moon symbolism in that poem), Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, where the

sparks from the unextinguished priestly hearth mingle with the sparks of "inextinguishable thought" which appear twice in the *Defense of Poetry*.¹

Alexander Pope, who in another relation to theory is to be the main example of our theme, is one of the English poets who makes the most extensive and varied use of literary theory as poetic material. One may recall the "Figures ill paired, and Similes unlike," the "Mob of Metaphors" in the First Book of the *Dunciad*, the quarrel over ancient and modern British poets in the *Epistle to Augustus*, or such a casual appeal to rhetoric as the triplet about Sporus in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*:

His wit all see-saw, between *that* and *this*,
Now high, now low, now master up, now miss,
And he himself one vile Antithesis.

And chief of course the *Essay on Criticism*, and in that perhaps best of all the place where Pope defines and exemplifies nine different effects of versification. The doctrine of mimetic verse was perhaps overplayed in Pope's time. The sound effects contrived by Pope for his *Iliad* and advertised in the *Poetical Index* may leave us wondering whether the technique is worth the candle. Not so the passage in the *Essay on Criticism*, where, with his slow and fast Alexandrines and the hoarse rough verse that like the torrent roars,

i This sort of relation between theory and poems is, incidentally, that which for the most part obtains in parallels between poetry and the fine arts and sciences: Grecian marbles, or Italian landscape paintings, or the Newtonian science of optics. These have found their way into poetry by and large as materials, seldom if ever in a way that could justly be called theoretical or technical.

Pope by uniting the fact and the theory of mimetic verse has provided the maximum illustration of what the theory was good for.

IV. A fourth relation between theory and poems which I believe to be worth distinguishing is again a specific historical relation, that which obtains when in a given era a theory helps to determine poems not as subject matter but as an influence or cause why they are written in a certain way. Perhaps the most important thing to note about this relation is that it does not require that the theory as theory be an adequate account of the poems. Thus, to continue to take our examples from the age of Pope, the classic theory concerning imitation of models had a close bearing on the Augustan vogue of translations, paraphrases, and "imitations." Yet a theory of models is never really a literary theory (only a practical rule for inspiration), for we shall always be referred by the theory to the models themselves to find out what poems should be like. And the general classic theory of models scarcely seems to take into account the paramount factor of parody, or allusiveness, which works in the most lively imitations. The general theory does not explain how Pope's tribute *To Augustus*, for example, is reflected against the more forthright epistle of Horace, so that Horace is not only a model for Pope's poem, but a part of its main ironic metaphor. Again, the massive theory of epic which prevailed in that day might be taken as a partial cause of Blackmore's *Prince Arthur* or, in jocular reversal, of *The Rape of the Lock* or *The Dunciad*. **But** there

are no successfully serious epics with which the theory can be compared. During the same period, the doctrine *Ut pictura poesis* may have joined with empirical views of imagination to determine the subject matter of some poems (and of some paintings); it may have been responsible for certain instances of the pictorial fallacy or opaqueness in word painting; but, as Lessing was partly to show, the analogy between words and marble or paint is of limited service for analyzing the positive qualities of verbal art.

V. A fifth relation between theory and poems—the final focus of our argument—is that which obtains when in any historical era we actually can discern an affinity between theory as such and poems; that is, when what the theory says does seem to be a specially appropriate account of what the poems are. Such a relation may of course coincide with the causal relation which we have just considered. There may be instances of a close causal connection between theory and poems and at the same time a high degree of validity for the theory as theory. A successful poet may be shown to have read a certain theory with profit, or he may even, though this I believe is rare, succeed in uttering a theory which explains his own poems. But these are matters for another sort of inquiry. It is only by keeping clear of such intentionalistic complications that we can focus upon the literary and critical issue: that is, the degree of resemblance between the theory and the poems or the adequacy of the theory to describe the poems.

To show a real correspondence between the theory of an era and the poems of the era would be, I take

it, one of the most proper concerns of the student of criticism in its historical aspect, and to show that the theory gave an adequate account of the poems would be his masterpiece. Such an achievement, we ought at the same time to note, would be a special challenge to the student of either theory or poems who was interested in universal definitions or norms. Poems in different eras, it is assumed, will be to some extent different. But theory deals with universals. It is more disconcerting to find the theory of successive ages different than to find the poems different. No matter how well we, with our historical desires, succeed in localizing the theory or assimilating it to the poems of its own age, we can still see that the theory itself aims at the universal. If the poems and the theory vary in step with each other, then I suppose a maximum appearance of support is offered to historical relativism—unless indeed one's dialectic rises to reconciling certain valid special theories of poetry, say the metaphysical theory of wit and the romantic theory of imagination, in a more inclusive and more adequately understood harmony. Or unless one is brave enough to decide in a given case that both poems and theory are bad—as Yvor Winters has not scrupled to say the poems of Poe are bad because they perfectly illustrate Poe's theory, a deliquescent version of romantic imagination.

Not every theory found in a given age is equally relevant to describing the poems of that age. There are not only bad theories which have no special bearing on any kind of poems (the theory of Burke, for example, that "Beauty acts by relaxing the solids of

the whole system"),² but another and very important kind, those of such general significance (if not complete truth) that they transcend a special application to the poems of their age. Such, for example, I should call the neoclassic doctrine that poetry reveals the generic or universal. Despite the game of ombre and the all too specific and solid Dunces, and despite the sound defense of "small circumstances" by Pope himself in a note to the *Iliad*,³ the doctrine of the universal is if correctly interpreted a valid doctrine, and furthermore it is itself universal, that is, neither more nor less true of good neoclassic poems than of good poems in any other mode.⁴ Or the related doctrine that "Style is the dress of thought"⁵—true poetry is "nature to advantage dressed." This would appear to be the Augustan version of a paradox which literary criticism has so far by no means solved. Today we speak of art signs as iconic or as calling attention to their own excellence, or we speak of poetry as intensely realized meaning, or as dramatized meaning, or perhaps as structure of meaning. Poetic meaning still seems to contain other meanings and to make

² *Inquiry*, IV, xix.

³ *Iliad*, VI, 1. 595; cf. George Sherburn, "The *Dunciad*, Book IV," *Texas Studies in English*, 1944 (Austin, 1944), p. 184.

⁴ If we choose to pursue this theory in the direction of poetic subject matter, the philosophy of Nature as norm, so well explored by recent historians of ideas, we shall certainly discover some of our most important instructions for reading the poems of Pope. Yet again, we shall not be able to escape metaphysical and perennial issues, for it will never make sense to say: Pope's *Essay on Man* is justified because he thought thus of Nature—unless we can say at least something also in favor of what he thought about Nature.

⁵ Samuel Wesley, *Epistle to a Friend* (London, 1700), p. 15.

use of them but seems not to be tested in the end by the same norms. We have never yet answered the embarrassing questions about medicine, and fishing, and horsemanship which Socrates put to the rhapsode Ion. The doctrine that style is the dress of thought is as much our concern as it was Pope's, and, whatever its degree of truth, it applies no more specially to Augustan poems than to any other kind.⁶

In somewhat the same way I believe we should have to discuss the whole classical theory of imitation and the antitheses deriving from the theory and flourishing in Pope's time, between art and nature, between invention and imitation of models, between wit and judgment, between genius and the rules. Or perhaps some of these theoretical formulas do show a special relation to the poems of the age, though one which will make acceptable sense to us only after a certain adjustment. One such example seems to me of importance here as a partial frame of reference for the

a And so again for the related idea of "poetic diction." The examples collected in a book like Thomas Quayle's *Poetic Diction* (1924) might lead us to think that we could correlate a stereotyped doctrine of poetic diction with what was bad in Augustan poems. On the other hand, Professor Tillotson has argued persuasively that Augustan poetic diction was simply that which described a certain thing in a certain way (for example, nature as subject to the *imperium* of man), and again that the poems of Pope often glow with colors assumed by his words precisely as words in the poetic tradition (*The Poetry of Pope*, pp. 77, 153-155; *Essays*, pp. 57-59* 72). And we have long ago been equipped by Professor Lowes with a theory of Convention and Revolt which provides for the appearance of poetic diction in every poetic generation. If then we have a theory equal to discriminating between good and bad poetic diction within a given age (I am not sure that we have), I do not see that it applies any more to the age of Pope than to that of Wordsworth or that of Eliot.

more specific rhetorical ideas which we are to discuss. I have in mind the Augustan concept of correctness, which, distinguished from greatness or genius, sometimes took the form of an ideal, as in the well-known advice of Walsh to Pope: that there had been *great* English poets, but no great poet who was *correct*; but sometimes also was conceived as a fault or limitation, as in Addison's *Spectators*, Nos. 160 and 291, where the untrammelled productions of ancient Genius are preferred to the scrupulous nicety or correctness of the moderns. As Sir Joshua Reynolds was later to phrase it: "So far, indeed, is the presence of genius from implying an absence of faults, that they are considered by many as its inseparable companions."⁷ The paradox was still vital in the next century, when Ruskin preferred the *imperfections*, that is, the irregularities, of Gothic architecture to the *perfection*, that is, the regularity, of geometric ornaments in Greek architecture.⁸ This bizarre critical tradition seems to arise from the capacity of the term *correctness* to be taken not only (1) as a general term of value (certainly what is "correct" is right and good), but (2) as a more neutral descriptive term, meaning something like symmetry and something like restraint and precision. It is in the latter sense of course that we shall have to take it if we apply it to Augustan poems—if we wish to say that Pope followed the advice of Walsh and became a *correct* poet. The other sense will hardly go with the liberal and usually accepted view that Shakespeare's

⁷ *Eleventh Discourse*, second paragraph.

⁸ *Stones of Venice*, Vol. II, Chap. 6.

verse and rhetoric fit what Shakespeare is saying, just as Pope's fit what Pope is saying. In the final sense of poetic value, each kind of good poetry is correct.

It is under the head of correctness in its limited sense that the most precise resemblances between the theory and the poems of the age of Pope seem to be available, and where resemblance per se can be studied to most effect—I mean in the rhetoric of the closed couplet. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the resemblance which obtains here is one of the most precise in the history of literature and criticism—that the hexameter couplets of Boileau and Racine, and the pentameters of Dryden and Pope represent the maximum fulfillment of a technical theory which had been in preparation since the time of Isocrates and Aristotle.

Doubtless not even a complete text of Aristotle's *Poetics* would say as much about verbal devices as the third book of his *Rhetoric* or art of prose persuasion. And Professor J. W. H. Atkins in his *History of English Literary Criticism* has recently added his authority to that of others who have deplored the fact that in the Middle Ages the classical prose rhetoric became amalgamated with poetics. Nevertheless, I use the term "rhetoric" in this paper to mean first, broadly, theory of poems with emphasis upon their verbal aspect, and secondly, in the historical sense, that part of classical rhetoric which deals with verbal devices.⁹ Modified as it may have been from time to

⁹ Elder Olson's "Rhetoric and the Appreciation of Pope," *MP*,

time, by the sophistic niceties of Hermogenes, by the magniloquence of dictamen and Poetria Nova in the Middle Ages, or in the sixteenth century by the simplifying Platonism of Ramus, the classical tradition of verbal rhetoric enjoyed a high degree of continuity and unity. It is this rhetoric which, in its curt or Senecan form, bears a close likeness to the poetic actuality of the neoclassic couplet.

The year 1935 gave us two highly competent studies, one by Professor Williamson, concerning the history of English couplet theory from Puttenham in 1589 to Edward Bysshe in 1702; and one by Miss Wallerstein, concerning the practice of English couplet writers, from the poems of Grimald in Tottel's *Miscellany* to Denham's lines on the Thames in 1655. Professors Williamson and Wallerstein, writing from these different directions, theory and poems, produced notably harmonious accounts of couplet rhetoric: the technique of sententious closure, of balanced lines and half lines, antithesis and inversion, of strict metric and accordingly slight but telling variations, and withal a constantly close and tensile union of what are called musical with logical and rhetorical effects. A few years later Professor Tillotson, though working independently of the two studies just mentioned and for the most part avoiding rhetorical technicalities,¹⁰

XXXVII (August, 1939), 13-35, attempts to relate Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot* to "rhetoric" in the larger sense of persuasive discourse.

10 Cf. the brilliant surface of rococo architectural metaphors in Wylie Sypher's "Reconsideration" of Pope, "Arabesque in Verse," *Kenyon Review*, VII (Summer, 1945), 456-66.

arrived at a very similar description of the couplets of Alexander Pope. Almost at the same time Professor Root produced a nicely analytic supporting chapter on Pope's meter. Neither Professor Tillotson nor Professor Root was much concerned with rhetoric in its theoretical aspect, a fact which in itself might invite the reflection that so far as Pope's couplets conform to a theory of rhetoric, it is to a theory which had reached its zenith more than a hundred years earlier, in the general flowering of the Elizabethan Renaissance. For a good account in English of the figures of speech and thought to be found in Pope's verse we may as well go back to Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*. In Puttenham too we shall find the main metrical rules and even the important emphasis on the caesura. Edward Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry*, which may plausibly be taken as representative of what had happened to English poetics by the time Pope was a youth, says nothing at all of the figures, though it carries the metrics to a far greater degree of rigidity than Puttenham and includes the now famous dictionary of rhymes. Sir Thomas Pope Blount's *De Re Poetica* of 1694 is a compilation of general poetic opinion which even today is not a useless rival to Spingarn's three volumes of *Seventeenth-Century Essays*. But there is little or nothing of technical interest here. The classical figures of speech and thought had by this time been re-separated from poetics and confined again in the treatises on prose rhetoric—such as that of Thomas Blount, *The Academie of Elo-*

quence (1654), or that of John Smith, *The Myserie of Rhetorique Unvail'd* (1657).¹¹ Puttenham's *Arte* of 1589,¹² though it is only one of many English accounts of rhetorical figures up to Pope's day, remains the most lively and informative and the most precisely focused upon poems.¹³

Pope himself in Chapters X and XI of *Peri Bathous* wrote a comic treatment of "Tropes and Figures" (including "The Antithesis, or See-Saw"), and he once observed to Spence that the "stiffness of style" in Wycherley's plays was "occasioned by his always studying for antithesis."¹⁴ But neither in his *Essay on Criticism*, nor in his remarks to Spence, nor in his letters, even the elaborate letter on versification to Walsh, has Pope anything substantial to say about the system of artful figures which later critics have considered characteristic of his couplets. Pope talks of the metrical "niceties," of suiting the sound to the sense, of caesura, of expletives, and of hiatus, or of avoiding extravagance in diction. The rhetorical sinews of the kind of verse in which he was the champion—the essential patterns where Waller's strength and Denham's sweetness joined, where Dryden had achieved

11 Smith's *Myserie* was apparently the reigning popular rhetoric of the age, reaching a tenth edition in 1721.

12 Professor J. W. H. Atkins, in his *English Literary Criticism: the Renaissance* (London, 1947), p. 157, believes that the extensive treatment of the figures in Puttenham's *Arte* argues a date of composition before 1570.

13 it was known by Ben Jonson and perhaps by Drayton, and was copied by the mid-century metrical theorist of Poole's *Parnassus*—perhaps John Dryden (Williamson, "The Rhetorical Pattern of Neo-classical Wit," *MP*, XXXIII, August, 1935, 59-60).

14 *Anecdotes*, ed. Singer (1820), p. 161.

the long resounding march and energy divine¹⁵—these perhaps had been learned so well by Pope as a boy that he could forget them. "It was our family priest," he told Spence, "who taught me the figures, accidence, and first part of grammar."¹⁶ In later life perhaps the figures were assumed by Pope under the general head of "correctness." At any rate he seems to have been able to take them for granted.

Among the hundred odd figures, "auricular," "sensible," and "sententious," presented by Puttenham, there are certain ones, a rather large number if all subdivisions of the main types are counted, which would seem to be fundamental to the logic of the formally ordered verbal style. Thus, "*Parison*, or the figure of even," "*Omoioteleton*, or the figure of like-loose," and "*Anaphora*, or the figure of report" (that is, repetition of a word at the beginning of successive clauses) are the figures in Puttenham which refer to formal parallels and which under one set of terms or another are a constant part of the rhetorical tradition from Puttenham back to Aristotle. Contrast or antithesis is the natural accompaniment of parallel. This appears in Puttenham as "*Antitheton*, or the quarreller, otherwise called the overthwart or rencounter." Wherever there is a parallel, there is a distinction, and wherever a distinction, the possibility of a paradox, an antithesis, or simply a modulation. Thus, to illustrate now from the verse of Pope:

15 "I learned versification wholly from Dryden's works" (Spence, *Anecdotes*, p. 212).

¹⁶ *Anecdotes*, p. 283.

Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall.

Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.

Survey the WHOLE, nor seek slight faults to find
Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind.

This brings us, still quite naturally, to a third group of figures, those distinguished by Puttenham as "*Zeugma*, or the single supply" and "*Sillepsis*, or the double supply." *Zeugma* is further distinguished by Puttenham into *Prozeugma* (or the Ringleader), *Mezoezeugma* (or the Middlemarcher), and *Hypozeugma* (or the Rerewarder), accordingly as the zeugma, or yoking word, occurs at the beginning, the middle, or the end of a total construction. He treats zeugma among the figures "merely *auricular* in that they reach no further than the eare," and among figures "that work by defect," that is, by the absence of "some little portion of speach." He does not say anything about the relation of zeugma to parallel. But we might observe that zeugma or ellipsis¹⁷ is almost the inevitable effect of a tightened and precise economy of parallel. If A, B, C and X, B, Z are presented, then A, B, C and X, Z is the natural result; or if A, B and X, B, then A, B and X—in the more usual case, the parallel of two elements. Thus, in Pope's verse:

17 The terms *ellipsis*, *zeugma*, and *syllipsis* have been used variously by English writers. See O.E.D., s.v. *zeugma*; John Smith, *Mysterie of Rhetorique*, 1657, s. v.- *zeugma*; H. W. Fowler, *Modern English Usage*, s.v. *ellipsis* and *technical terms: zeugma*. It is sufficient for our purpose to follow Puttenham.

Who could not win the mistress, wooed the maid. (Prozeugma)

And now a bubble *burst*, and now a world. (Mezozeugma)

Where nature moves, and rapture warms the *mind*. (Hypozeugma)

And, to note a special and significant kind of zeugma that occurs in Pope's verse, such examples as these:

Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball.

Or stain her honour or her new brocade.

This is metaphor. I mention it here not simply to list the figure of metaphor among Pope's accomplishments. Puttenham also duly lists "*Metaphora*, or the figure of transport." But here it seems to me curious, and worth noting, though it is not noted by Puttenham, that a series of several logical steps, distinction, parallel, then simplification or canceling a common element, has led us to metaphor, something that has often, and notably by some in Pope's day, been considered the very *essence* of the irrational or merely imaginative in poetry. Let us carry our series to its conclusion, returning to Puttenham for help. Consider the figure of "*Sillepsis*, or the double supply," which occurs according to Puttenham when a verb is used either with a double grammatical congruity, or in a double sense.¹⁸ The latter may be thus illustrated from Pope's verse.

18 Cf. Pope, *Peri Bathous*, Chap. X, on "The Paronomasia, or Pun," "where a Word, like the tongue of a jackdaw, speaks twice as much by being split."

Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.

With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face,
He first the snuff-box opened, then the case.

Worse and worse. We have now descended from logical parallel and ellipsis, through metaphor, into pun. In short, by seizing on what might have been thought the most logical and prosaic aspects of Pope's verse (both *Antitheton* and *Parison* were mentioned by Puttenham as figures specially related to prose), by seizing here and pulling gently we have arrived at the very things which the modern critic, Mr. Empson, noticed first in looking for the shiftiness or ambiguity of this kind of verse. We may note too, as we pass, that the distinction between the two shades of rhetoric last described, the metaphoric zeugma and the punning syllepsis, is not always easy. Take the couplet preceding that about counsel and tea:

Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom
Of foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home.

It depends on how technically and specifically we are accustomed to think of a "fall" from virtue, whether we take "the fall of tyrants and of nymphs" as metaphor or pun.

But now I should like to backtrack into an area of rhetoric different from antitheses and parallels, though joining them or branching off from them, in Puttenham's *Arte*, under the figure *Anaphora*, the word or phrase repeated at the beginning of successive clauses. Puttenham supplies a large battery of figures in this area: "counterturns," "redoubles," "eccho

sounds," "swifte repeates," "rebounds," and "counter-changes," among which the pick is "*Traductio*, or the tranlacer." This, says Puttenham, "is when we turne and tranlace a word into many sundrie shapes as the Tailor doth his garment, and after that sort do play with him in your dittie." The principle of these figures is that a word or root is repeated in various syntactic positions, and sometimes in various forms, with a consequent shifting, version, turning, or translacing of the sense. These are the figures which Dryden in 1693 calls "turns, both on the words and on the thought,"¹⁹ and which, despite a report by Dryden to the contrary, are nowhere better illustrated than in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The turn is one of the main sinews of the sense variously drawn out from line to line: whether in such insistent repetitions as Satan's retort, "Know ye not me? . . . not to know me argues yourselves unknown," or in the more artificially trans-laced speech of God the Father, "So Man . . . Shall . . . die, And dying rise, and rising with him raise His brethren, ransomed with his own dear life."²⁰ Toward the end of the seventeenth century this kind of word-play had fallen into comparative disfavor.²¹ We need not be surprised that in Pope's verse it is less heavily underscored.

19 Dedication of *Examen Poeticum*, *Discourse Concerning . . . Satire* (Essays, ed. Ker, II, 10, 108).

20 The turn in *Paradise Lost* is closely related to the kind of alliterative punning (agnomination) or extension of meaning that appears when *abominations*, *opprobrium*, and the *obscene* dread of Moab's sons are echoed in *Rabba*, *Argob*, *Basan*, *Nebo*, *Abarim*, and *Hesebon*.

21 Butler in his often-quoted character of *A Quibbler* had predicted its decline. Dryden's enthusiasm was waning in his Dedication of the *Aeneis* and Preface to the *Fables*.

Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
Might hide her faults, if Belles had faults to hide.

Jilts ruled the state, and statesmen farces writ,
Nay wits had pensions, and young lords had wit.

These are lighter and neater turns than Milton's—wittier turns. By a different route we have arrived at somewhat the same terminus as when we pursued the forms of logical parallel, that is, at something like illogical pun—a difference being that whereas before we found the single word of two meanings, we find now two or more words of similar sound and one or another kind of play between their meanings.

In the couplet rhetoric which we have been examining, the abstract logic of parallel and antithesis is complicated and offset, then, by the turn and, as we have seen, by the metaphoric zeugma and the punning syllepsis. It is complicated also by one other element of alogical counterpattern—the most important by far and, I believe, the apex of all the rhetorical phenomena which we have been considering—that is, rhyme. "Symphonic" or "cadence," says Puttenham, meaning rhyme, is "all the sweetnesse and cunning in our vulgar poesie." And here we have too, as it happens, a theoretical statement by the master of practice. Pope told Spence:

I have nothing to say for rhyme but that I doubt whether a poem can support itself without it in our language, unless it be stiffened with such strange words as are likely to destroy our language itself. The high style that is affected so much in blank verse would not have been borne even

in Milton had not his subject turned so much on such strange, out-of-the-world things as it does.²²

Rhyme, in this offhand statement, seems to be something more like a stiffening or support of verse than the commonly conceived music. Puttenham remarks that the Greeks and Latins "used a maner of speach, by clauses of like termination, which they called *homoio-teleuton*," a thing somewhat like vernacular rhyme, yet different. I myself have argued in another place that the difference between *rhyme* and *homoio-teleuton* is one of the most profound of rhetorical differences. For *homoio-teleuton*, the repetition of inflected endings (morphemes) to support logical parallels of statement (*Non modo ad salutem . . . extinguendam sed etiam gloriam . . . infringendam*) is that which, added to parallel and antithesis, makes the rhetoric of pointed prose. But rhyme, the use of alogical or accidental sound resemblances between different morphemes, is that which added to parallel and antithesis makes the rhetoric of the pointed couplet. As the turn was the characteristic stiffener of classical Latin verse and of its English counterpart the blank verse of Milton,²³ so rhyme was the characteristic stiffener of vernacular verse and especially of the couplet.

²² *Anecdotes*, ed. Singer, p. 200.

²³ Despite the fact that Milton disclaimed rhyme and that Dryden explained this by saying that rhyme was not Milton's "talent" (Ker, I I, 30), we may remark in passing that if we had pursued the theme of turns and alliterative extension a few steps further, we might have seen something remarkably like rhyme at many points in *Paradise Lost*.

the parching air
Burns froze, and cold performs the effect of fire.

Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
Or some frail China jar receive a flaw.

The music of the rhyme is mental; it consists in an odd, almost magic, relation of phonetic likeness which encourages us to perceive and believe in an affinity otherwise asserted by the couplet. The non-parallel or paradoxical chime of "law" and "flaw" is the phonetic expression of the unfortunate readiness of lovely and whole things to be broken. This aspect of rhyme, incidentally, has much to do with explaining the fitness in the couplet of one other figure of speech—not treated by Puttenham,²⁴ but of classic lineage—that of inverted order or chiasmus, A-B, B¹-A¹. When this is arranged so that inverted parallel elements are marked by rhyme, both the alogicality of the rhyme and the closure and roundness of the couplet reach their maximum—as in the finest example I know, the tetrameter couplet of Marvell:

And your quaint honor turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.

Honor-dust, ashes-lust—it is the same relation as *break-law, jar-flaw*. In each case the meaning is locked

Abominable, *inutcrable*, and worse
Than *fables* yet have *feigned*, or fear conceived,
Gorgons and *Hydras*, and *Chimaeras dire*.

And this very curious example from near the end of the Second Book.
Or when Ulysses on the *larboard* shunned
Charybdis, and by the other whirlpool steered,
So he with difficulty and *labor hard*
Moved on, with difficulty and *labor he*.

24 The figure of *Antimetavole* found in Puttenham is a combination of *chiasmus* and the *turn*.

by a perfect accident of double relation into the pattern of inevitability.

Rhyme has often been recognized as a binding element in verse structure. But the opportunity for binding occurs most clearly where there is difference or separation.

One speaks the glory of the British Queen,
And one describes a charming Indian screen.

It is a curious thing that "queen" should rhyme with "screen"; they are very unlike objects. But Pope has found a connection in classifying them as topics of social chatter, and then the concord of sound comes to his aid as an amusing ratification. The principle is well illustrated in a few of Pope's proper-name rhymes, where we may note an affinity for a certain old-fashioned and childish form of riddle to be found in the pages of *The Farmer's Almanac*. Why is A like B? Because the name of A or of something connected with A means B or something connected with B. Why is a dog dressed warmer in summer than in winter? Because in winter he wears a fur coat, and in summer he wears a fur coat and pants. Why is a certain poet a dangerous influence upon married women? Because his name sounds like something.

Poor Cornus sees his frantic wife elope,
And curses Wit, and Poetry, and Pope.

Why is a certain scholar a graceless figure? Because his name shows it.

Yet ne'er one sprig of laurel graced these ribalds,
From slashing *Bentley* down to pidling *Tibbalds*.

Here the words *sprig* and *pidling* play a part too in proving what it means to have a name like that. *Paronomasia*, "*Prosonomasia*, or the Nicknamer," is Puttenham's name for this figure. "As, *Tiberius* the Emperor, because he was a great drinker of wine, they called him by way of derision to his owne name, *Caldius Biberius Mero*, in steade of *Claudius Tiberius Nero*." But Puttenham, I admit, does not connect this figure with the "symphonie" or "tunable consente" called rhyme.

Poetry, it would appear, is not an affair of pure ideas—where X or Y could by agreement be substituted for any given word of a poem—nor strictly speaking is it an affair of sound, as such, or verbal music. Poetry is somehow both sense and sound, and not by parallel or addition, but by a kind of union—which may be heard in onomatopoeia and expressive rhythm or in any of the modes of suggestion, extension, and secret functioning of words—and of which the pun and its cousin the rhyme are but the most extravagant instances. Poetry exploits the *facts* of language, that words *do* mean so and so and acquire a prerogative to do this.

English critics of the Renaissance, among them Milton and latterly even Dryden, were inclined to be hard on rhyme, calling it a jingling bondage, rude, beggarly, and Gothic. (Even Puttenham remarks that rhyme was brought into Greek and Latin by "barbarous souldiers out of the Campe.") The Earl of Roscommon in polished couplets recited the bardic and monkish history of rhyme and hailed the glorious

day when the British Muse should put on the rhymeless majesty of Rome and Athens. Critics of Pope's day—Dennis, Felton, and Gildon—took the same cue and called rhyme "soft," "effeminate," "emasculating/'²⁵ At the same time, as we have seen, the basic figures of parallel and antithesis originated as prose figures and by their nature tended to abstraction, order, and regular lines. Other factors too in the latter half of the seventeenth century—the Lockean mistrust of inventive imagination, the plain style of the scientists and pulpit orators, a refined and moderate way of talking adopted by society—are sometimes supposed to have helped in making the Augustan couplet poems the nearest things to prose poems in our language. Dryden and Pope, we remember Arnold said, are "classics of our prose." This of course we do not fully believe any more. Yet I suggest that we are confronted by an extremely curious and challenging situation in the heroic couplet of Pope: where a verse basically ordered by the rational rules of parallel and antithesis and showing at least a certain characteristic restraint of imagination, as contrasted say with metaphysical verse, at the same time is found to rely so heavily for "support" or "stiffening"—to use again the terms of Pope—on so barbarous and Gothic a device as rhyme.

In tracing the parallel between Puttenham and Pope we have observed perhaps the maximum degree of resemblance that obtains between the poems of

25 *Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. E. N. Hooker, I (1939), 297, 375-379' 430. 499-500-

Pope and any contemporary or nearly contemporary set of poetic rules. At the same time we have scarcely been able to refrain at each step from noting the incompleteness of Puttenham when compared to the fullness of the poetic actuality, even at the level specifically cited from Puttenham, the rhetorical. How far, we may now return and ask, does Puttenham or does any other rhetorician take us either in stating the main principles of couplet rhetoric or in exploring them? The answer, I believe, is: Not far. Puttenham can list and to some extent describe our figures of speech for us. He does little to show their interrelation or total significance. We can improve on Puttenham by going back to antiquity, where in the third book of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* we find a chapter (xi) saying that the smartest expressions consist in a concurrence of antithesis, parallel, metaphor, and "metaphor of a special kind"—by the last of which it would appear that Aristotle means "homonym." All this may seem to relegate the rhetorical theory of Pope's age or that of earlier ages to the status described under the second heading at the start of this paper: rhetorical, grammatical, or logical theory upon which we draw in a non-historical way for tools we shall turn to the uses of our own analysis. Perhaps this is what happens. I do not know the remedy—unless, in the interest of Puttenham and his fellows, we are to cut our criticism off from all that subsequent linguistics and rhetoric and our own insight may tell us.

Rules, said Sir William Temple, who was paraphrased by Sir Thomas Pope Blount in his *De Re*

Poetica of 1694, "Rules at best are capable only to prevent the making of *bad Verses*, but never able to make men *good Poets*." ²⁶ This might have been interpreted in Pope's day and by Pope himself according to the well-known doctrine of the *je-ne~sais-quoi*, the "grace beyond the reach of art," the Longinian and Augustan concession to genius and the element of the unpredictable in art. We I think can take it in the further sense that the rules of a given age never contain even all that can be understood in the poems of the age and hence are never able to prescribe our interpretation or limit our understanding of the poems. Poems, if not always prior to theory—in the case of the couplet they seem not to be—are certainly always more concrete than theory.

What I have just said is the logical climax and completion of my argument. What I shall say now, briefly, may be taken as a kind of tailpiece, perhaps an anticlimax, but one which I cannot refrain from adding. In the part of this paper where I made a brief survey of rhetorical theory in Pope's age and the preceding, I suppressed one curious facet of that history, for the purpose of introducing it at this point. It is a noteworthy fact that some of the most penetrating technical remarks made by critics during the age of Pope were made by those who disapproved of the devices they were describing. One will no doubt recall Addison's *Spectator* No. 62, where he mentions

26 *De Re Poetica*, p. 33; cf. Temple, "Of Poetry" (Spingarn, *Essays*, III, 84).

doggerel rhymes along with puns and the "mixt Wit" which consists "partly in the Resemblance of Ideas, and partly in the Resemblance of Words." Addison also promises to tell us something, on another day, about the "wit" of antithesis. Far more spectacular are some of the analyses made by Pope's preromantic enemy John Dennis. "Rime," says Dennis in a Miltonic demonstration prefixed to one of his own blank verse poems, "is the same thing in Relation to Harmony that a Pun is in Relation to Wit. . . . Rime may not so absurdly be said to be the Pun of Harmony."²⁷ And so far as puns proper and ambiguity are concerned, Mr. Empson was not the first to detect their presence in the poetry of Pope.

Nay wits had pensions, and young lords had wit.

"Here," says Dennis, "in the compass of one poor line are two devilish Bobs for the court. But 'tis no easy matter to tell which way the latter squinting Reflection looks."²⁸ Cleanth Brooks in his brilliant essay "The Case of Miss Arabella Fermor" notices in the Fifth Canto of *The Rape of the Lock* the indecent pun upon the word *die*. It is not to be supposed that this had been overlooked by Dennis. "That is to say," observes Dennis, "*He wisKd for nothing more than to fight with her, because he desired nothing more than to lie with her.* Now what sensible Meaning can this have . . . ?" "Puns," says Dennis, "are everywhere spread through *The Rape of the Lock*." "Puns

27 *Preface to Britannia Triumphans*, 1704 (*Works*, I, 376—377).

28 *Reflections on an Essay upon Criticism*, 1711 (*Works*, I, 413).

bear the same Proportion to *Thought*, that *Bubbles* hold to *Bodies*, and may justly be compared to those gaudy Bladders which Children make with Soap." Nor is it to be supposed that Dennis had overlooked the kind of pun hinted by Puttenham in the syllepsis and zeugma. "A Receipt for dry Joking," says Dennis. "For by placing something important in the Beginning of a Period, and making something very trifling to follow it, he seems to take pains to bring *something* into a Conjunctive Copulative with *nothing*, in order to beget *nothing*." ²⁹ Perhaps it is needless to add that Dennis chooses for illustration of this formula the same examples, from Ariel's speech in the Second Canto and from the opening at Hampton of the Third Canto, which I have quoted in my own admiring analysis—those about staining her honor or her new brocade, and taking counsel and tea. At a certain level, Dennis saw very well what Pope was up to. Not an innuendo got past him. This, however, was not the kind of poetry which Dennis prescribed. These were not the rules he would write. We are confronted in our final exhibit with a relation between theory and poems which we have up to now scarcely canvassed. In this version of the critic's role there is a marked correlation not between poems and contemporary poetics but actually between poems and contemporary anti-poetics.

29 *Remarks on the Rape of the Lock*, 1738 (*Works*, I I, 347-349).

Appendixes

Supervising Committee, 1948

NORMAN HOLMES PEARSON (1948), *Yale University*

Chairman

ELIZABETH MANWARING
(1948)
Wellesley College

HEREWARD T. PRICE (1949)
University of Michigan

WILLARD THORP (1948)
Princeton University

JAMES L. CLIFFORD (1950)
Columbia University

RUDOLF KIRK (1949)
Rutgers University

DAVID DAICHES (1950)
Cornell University

MARY HATCH MARSHALL
(1949)
Syracuse University

ELIZABETH NITCHIE (1950)
Goucher College

DAVID ALLAN ROBERTSON, JR., *Barnard College*
Secretary

The English Institute

PROGRAM, 1948

CONFERENCES

I. RHETORICAL THEORY AND PRACTICAL CRITICISM

SEPTEMBER 8-11, AT 9:15 A.M.

Directed by JAMES CRAIG LA DRIERE, *Catholic University of America*

- A. Rhetoric and "Merely Verbal" Art: Some Vicissitudes of Speculation from Aristotle to the Renaissance

JAMES CRAIG LA DRIERE, *Catholic University of America*

- B. Rhetoric and Poetic in Milton and Donne: Two Elegies

RUTH WALLERSTEIN, *University of Wisconsin*

- C. Rhetoric and Poems: The Example of Pope
WILLIAM K. WIMSATT, JR., *Yale University*

- D. Rhetoric in Fiction

MARK SCHORER, *University of California at Berkeley*

II. PRINCIPLES OF LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY

SEPTEMBER 8-11, AT 10:45 A.M.

Directed by RENE WELLEK, *Yale University*

A. A Criticism of Recent Histories of English Literature

PETERS RUSHTON, *University of Virginia*

B. The Notion of Literary Generations

HENRI PEYRE, *Yale University*

C. A Method of Integral Literary History

MANFRED KRIDL, *Columbia University*

D. The Relation of Circumstances and Forms in Literary History

RONALD S. CRANE, *University of Chicago*

III. MYTH IN THE LATER PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

SEPTEMBER 7~10, AT 1:30 P.M.

Directed by PHILIP WHEELWRIGHT, *Dartmouth College*

A. The Lear World

ROBERT B. HEILMAN, *University of Washington*

B. The Argument of Comedy

NORTHROP FRYE, *University of Toronto*

C. Shakespeare's Structural Myth

LESLIE A. FIEDLER, *Montana State University*

D. Mutability, Plenitude and Reputation

EDWARD HUBLER, *Princeton University*

IV. THE THEORY OF FICTION

SEPTEMBER 7-10, AT 3.00 P.M.

Directed by DAVID DAICHES, *Cornell University*

A. The Clown and the Lion: Symbolism and Realism

Program, 1948

HOWARD P. VINCENT, *Illinois Institute of Technology*

B. The Problem of Form in the Naturalistic Novel

CHARLES C. WALCUTT, *Washington and Jefferson College*

C. Some Terms for the Criticism of Fiction

WILLIAM M. SALE, JR., *Cornell University*

D. The Novelist's Situation

LIONEL TRILLING, *Columbia University*

NOTE: The series on fiction was continued from 1947-

EVENING MEETINGS

SEPTEMBER 8

Greetings by OSCAR JAMES CAMPBELL,
Columbia University

SEPTEMBER 10

Imagination as Value
WALLACE STEVENS

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Registrants, 1948

219

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