

than when you read a  
ures.  
speare's own language.  
your imaginary forces  
"Eke out our perform-  
with its elaborate illu-  
the Globe is his real  
eater is what he called  
ve may call the theater

From Norman Holland's The Shakespearean  
Imagination: EXCELLENT



3



THE THEATER IN  
THE MIND

background on  
what Arthur  
Lovejoy calls  
"the great chain  
of being"  
(cf. Pope's "An  
Essay on Man,"  
Epistle 1)

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, IN SUCH MATTERS AS EDITING AND STAGING, DEVELOPED a new respect for Shakespeare's language. In criticism (which we can define as understanding and evaluating the plays—in that order), two schools of thought have dominated: the "historical" critics and the so-called "new" critics. The historical critic holds, as his basic axiom, that the way to read a writer from the past (like Shakespeare) is to put yourself in the position of his own original audience: try to know what they knew, feel as they felt, think as they thought. The "new" critic takes the opposite tack: the modern reader should put all matters of biography, history, intention, evaluation, and background aside until he has pondered the text by itself with all the twentieth-century care, intelligence, and feeling he can muster. These two approaches squarely contradict each other in theory. In practice, however, they work out to much the same thing: a historical critic tries to read with all the skill and imagination the new critic would like him to use; the new critic (on the sly, as it were) corrects his reading of the text in isolation by his (bootlegged?) knowledge of what an Elizabethan play is likely to contain. Both schools of thought embody that most distinctive trait of all twentieth-century thinking (not just Shakespeare criticism): concern for language. Both schools of thought recognize that Shakespeare's language creates the setting, the time and place of the action, the scenery and costumes, the acting. In short, our minds responding to Shakespeare's language are his real theater.

As for language, Shakespeare wrote what is technically called "Modern English" (as against Chaucer's Middle English or the Old English of the

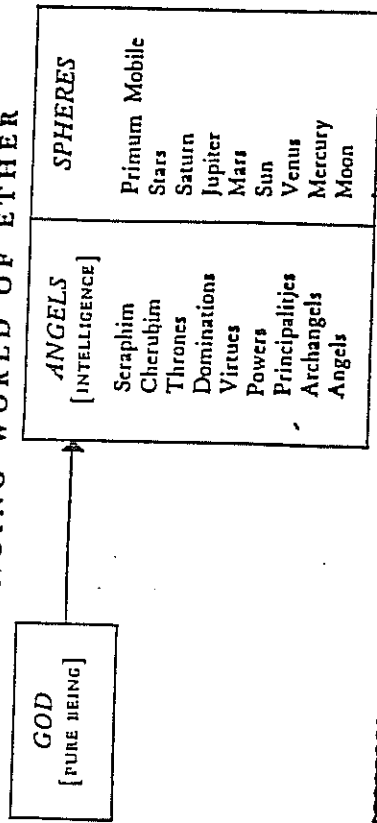
editions of the individual  
served to myself an edi-

Beautiful), but it is a rather different modern English from ours because we no longer think the way Shakespeare and his contemporaries did. Language and thought are interrelated; they cannot really be separated, for language determines thought and thought determines language. For example, some languages, say Bantu or Chinese, simply will not accommodate thoughts which are possible in English, and, vice versa, English cannot accommodate some thoughts possible in other languages. Language and thought each determine the other, and Shakespeare's language is different from ours because his thinking was different, specifically his thinking about the nature and order of the universe. The great contribution that historical criticism has made in our time to understanding Shakespeare's language is a knowledge of the Elizabethan world-view, the way men in the Renaissance saw the nature of the universe.

The Elizabethans believed in what is called the "great chain of being," an idea that had its first stirrings among the Greeks with Plato and Aristotle and which lasted until the eighteenth century. Compounded of Biblical lore, Greek philosophy, and a lot of farfetched natural history, "the great chain of being" stands as one of the most important and long-lasting ideas in the history of man. The idea is that the structure of the universe is an order or hierarchy like a chain or a ladder or a musical scale. Everything in and of the universe, from God at the top to the lowest stone at the bottom, every single created thing in the universe has its place in that hierarchy. Figure A, in effect, charts out this great chain of being. At the top is God, and it is God's love that flows through and sustains and holds together this whole system. A heavenly magnetism, God's love radiates down through the universe, and every created thing in turn gives back that love—had not the Psalmist said, "The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handiwork"? Immediately below God are the nine orders of angels—seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels, angels. Each one of these groups is in charge of a particular heavenly or astronomical sphere. In order, they are the *primum mobile*—that is, the substance whose turning gives the heavens their motion—the stars, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury and the lowest of the planets, the moon—this, of course, is the old Ptolemaic or common-sense astronomy which said that the earth stood still and everything else moved around it.

Next in line comes Man, and he, too, finds himself in a hierarchy or an order: a political hierarchy, beginning with the Emperor, then the King, Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount, Baron, Knight, Esquire, gentleman, then below the ranks of nobility the various professions and trades, lawyers, doctors, merchants, artisans, soldiers—then ordinary citizens, and, at the bottom, peasants, fishermen, then the lowest of human creatures, the beggar, and finally, almost subhuman, the Fool. The angels are characterized as "intelligences"—they know.

UNCHANGING WORLD OF ETHER



CHANGING, "SUBLUNARY" WORLD COMPOSED OF FOUR ELEMENTS:

Fire Air (REGION OF DEVILS, ALSO IN NINE RANKS) Water Earth

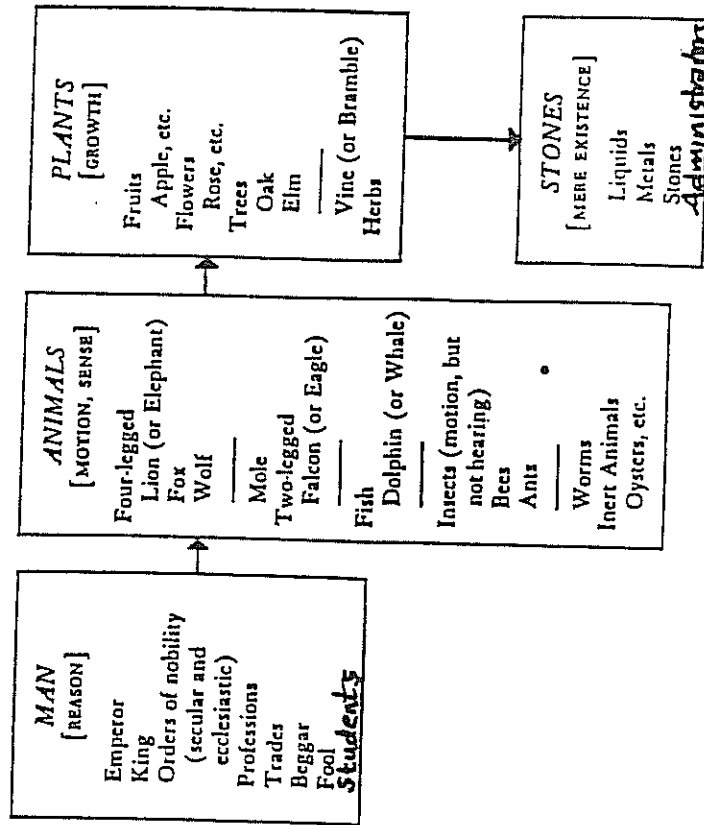


Fig. A. The Great Chain of Being—a schematic diagram.

Man (exc. or the Fool) has the next best thing, reason; he can think matters out.

Below man is the order of the beasts, who lack reason, but have memory and hearing and motion and touch or sense. At the top are the four-legged animals having all these things: the lion or the elephant at the top, followed by the fox, wolf, snake, and down at the bottom something like the mole. Then come the two-legged animals, the birds, the highest being the eagle or the falcon. Then after the birds come the fish, who have motion but not hearing: at the top is the dolphin, which some people thought was a fish. For every species on land, there was thought to be a corresponding species in the ocean, a further element in harmony and order. Then there are land animals which have motion but not hearing, like insects, the bees being the top, the ants next, and so on down to the worms. Finally, there are animals which have sense or touch but no motion, for example, oysters or barnacles.

Below the animals come the plants which have only existence and growth, and they, too, have their order. At the top are the fruits, highest because they are made for man's needs, the highest of the fruits being the pomerooy, or *pomme royal*, the royal apple. After fruits come the flowers, the rose being highest. Then come the trees, the oak being highest, the elm, finally the bramble and, at the bottom, the herbs. All the way at the bottom of the scale are the minerals, having only the quality of existence in space and time; these, too, are ordered: first, there are the liquids, the most mobile; then the metals, with gold being the noblest, lead or brass being the basest; then the stones, the diamond being the noblest, then the rest of the jewels, the ruby, topaz, till finally we come to the common or garden-variety stone.

This created world is made out of the four elements which are, again running from higher to lower, fire—which is hot and dry; air—which is hot and moist; water—which is cold and moist; and earth—which is cold and dry. Corresponding to the four elements are the four basic fluids of the body: choler, blood, phlegm, and black bile; and these four fluids or "humours" determine the four basic personality types: the choleric man, the sanguine, the phlegmatic, and the melancholy.

In short, the "great chain of being" describes a tidy, finite universe, in which there is a place for everything and everything has its place. As long as everything stays in its place all goes well, but when someone or something tries to get out of line the whole order is wrenched or thrown into a state of mutiny or confusion. The first such wrenching came when Lucifer rebelled against God; the second when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. These wrenchings occur again whenever a son rebels against his father or a subject against his prince, or when the body falls into disease because one organ or humour has stepped out of line. This is what Shakespeare's Ulysses says in *Troilus and Cressida*:

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre, Observe degree, priority, and place, Insisture, course, proportion, season, form, Office, and custom, all in line of order.

But when the planets In evil mixture to disorder wander, What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny, What raging of the sea, shaking of earth, Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors, Divert and crack, rend and deracinate The unity and married calm of states Quite from their fixture? O, when degree is shaken, Which is the ladder of all high designs, The enterprise is sick. How could communities, Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities, Peaceful commerce from dividable shores, The primogenity and due of birth, Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels, But by degree, stand in authentic place? Take but degree away, untune that string, And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters Should lift their bosoms higher than their shores And make a sop of all this solid globe; Strength should be lord of imbecility, And the rude son should strike his father dead.

(I. iii. 85-115)

Notice the huge areas to which Ulysses applies the idea of degree or rank or order: the planets, the fact that land stands above the sea, the winds, communities, commerce, schools, inheritance ("the due of birth"), the respect due to or the "prerogative of age," all kinds of ranks—"crowns, sceptres, laurels," the relationship of father and son (later in the passage, he ranks man's psychological faculties—reason, will, appetite). Notice, too, the images Ulysses uses for degree, a ladder, a tuned string (the lengths of the string establish the order of its scale), and, perhaps a little optimistically, "the married calm of states," reflecting the notion that the husband is higher on the scale than the wife. Earlier in the passage, he had compared military order to the order in a beehive.

We should probably discount Ulysses' speech somewhat since Shakespeare wants us to think of him as a pompous, even hypocritical, man. Nevertheless, he does give us a classic statement of the Elizabethan world-view, the "great chain of being." Naturally, not everyone held this view with equal vigor. The young intellectuals of Shakespeare's day, interested in "new philosophy" or science, were getting away from this idealizing of order that old conservatives like Shakespeare's Ulysses went in for. This belief in order, however, did con-

siture wh... Alfred North Whitehead termed a "climate of opinion," that is, a prevailing... of ideas which people either took for granted or took as a starting point for some other set of ideas, much the way twentieth-century Americans tend to assume rather automatically that science, in some sense, "has the answers."

There are three things to remember about this chain of being. First, it represents a belief in the *rightness* of order. What disturbs the order is wrong, like the fall of Lucifer or of Adam. For example, we look on the assassination of Julius Caesar as a nice sort of liberal, democratic thing to do, the way we rebelled against George III. For Shakespeare and his contemporaries absolute rulers were part of God's order, and the man who kills a king is as bad as Judas. This sense of order in the political and spiritual worlds is why so many of Shakespeare's plays deal with the problem of killing or deposing a king. Shakespeare is testing and probing, shaking, if you will, this universal order to see how it holds up. Drama, after all, demands conflict.

The second thing to notice about this chain of being is that it binds together fact and value. As in any hierarchical system, say the army or the academic world, the mere statement of what a thing is tells you also what its *value* is. An assistant professor is a bigger and better thing than a mere instructor but a far less grand thing than an associate professor. A lieutenant junior grade is a bigger and better thing than a mere ensign but less than a lieutenant senior grade. So in this great chain of being, if we know that such-and-such a thing is a whale, we know that, though it is the royal fish and outranks all other fish, it is, being a fish, less than a lion or an elephant or an eagle but more, on the other hand, than a bee or an ant. Mere events are emblematic; they symbolize moral values. To put it linguistically, "is" and "ought to be" are all mixed up together because of this hierarchical structure. The mere fact that the whale *is* tells us what it *ought to be*, where its proper place is in this chain of values.

The third thing to remember about this great chain of being is that it leads to a language which is primarily one of comparison and analogy. That is, the whole chain can fold up, as it were, like an accordion, into parallel pieces. Then the chain structure would produce a whole series of correspondences or parallel relationships among the angelic order; the planetary order; the human order, whether in the body politic or our physical bodies, in the family or in our minds; the animal order; and the mineral order (see Fig. B). Then, if you were looking for a way to describe a king, you might compare him to God, you might call him the "father" of his land or the "head" of his kingdom. You could compare him to the heart among the organs, to gold among the metals, to the sun among the planets, and so on. If you wanted to describe the body, you might compare it to the earth and call it, as Richard II does, "that small model of the barren earth which serves as paste and cover to our bones." If you wanted

PLANETARY ORDER	POLITICAL ORDER	FAMILY ORDER
Sun _____ _____ _____ Moon	King Nobility Citizens, etc.	Father Mother Eldest Brother, etc.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ORDER	BODY ORDER	ORDER OF ORGANS
Reason, Will, Understanding	Head Eye	Brain (Animal Spirits)
Memory, Fancy, "Common Sense"	Arm Trunk	Heart (Vital Spirits)
Five Senses	Leg Foot	Liver (Natural Spirits)

ANIMAL ORDER	FISHES	BIRDS
Lion (or Elephant) _____ _____ Mole	Dolphin (or Whale), etc.	Falcon (or Eagle), etc.

TREES	METALS	ELEMENTS
Oak Elm _____ Vine	Gold Silver _____ Lead	Fire Air Water Earth

Fig. B. Correspondences in the Great Chain of Being—a schematic diagram.

to describe a kingdom you might, as a courtier in *Coriolanus* does, compare it to the human body: you could speak of the "kingly-crowned head," you could compare the king's counsellors to the heart, the kingdom's soldiers to the arm, and so on. If you wanted to describe a kingdom another way you might compare it to a garden. As one of Shakespeare's gardeners says in *Richard II's* disordered kingdom:

Why should we in the compass of a [fence]  
Keep law and form and due proportion,  
Showing as in a model, our firm estate,  
When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,  
Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers chok'd up,  
Her fruit trees all unprun'd, her hedges ruin'd,  
Her [plots] disordered and her wholesome herbs  
Swarming with caterpillars,

(III. iv. 40-47)

that is, evil courtiers. If you wanted to describe the proper relation of a wife to her husband, you might compare the family to a kingdom. Thus, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine, the shrew who has been tamed, explains to wives how they should behave:

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,  
Thy head, thy sovereign.

(These were the days before "love, honor and obey" had been replaced by "love, honor and cherish.")

Such duty as the subject owes the prince  
Even such a woman oweth to her husband;  
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,  
And not obedient to his honest will,  
What is she but a foul contending rebel  
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?

Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,  
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,  
But that our soft conditions and our hearts  
Should well agree with our external parts?

(V. i. 147-169)

Kate's phrasing suggests an important side effect of the Elizabethan world picture—it is the "external parts," the appearance of a thing that indicates what it is and where it belongs in the great chain of being. As *Ulysses* says, "Degree being vizarded," that is, the signs of authority being hidden, "Th' unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask," and degree is lost. Hence, in Shakespeare's plays, as we shall see, the ideas of seeming or, conversely, of perceiving appearances correctly become important.

#### 41 *The Theater in the Mind*

The comparisons created by the chain of being show up visually in some pictures by Robert Fludd, a seventeenth-century cabalist. He shows (Fig. 8) the cosmos on a chain from God supported by bountiful, life-giving Nature and by man's Art (which imitates—"apes"—Nature). Within our world are all the intricate correspondences among animals, metals, plants, planets, and the rest. Figure 11 shows Fludd's diagram of the way the parts of the human body (the microcosm) correspond to the various elements and planets in the macrocosm. In Figure 10, Fludd shows the "music of the spheres"—the correspondences between the planets and elements and the notes of a musical scale tuned by God in Pythagorean proportions. Were we to look for a pictorial form of the way we think, as contrasted with the way the Renaissance thought, we would find it in one of those quasi-medical advertisements which show the body—the *inside* of the body, notice—as a glorified machine. For us, the heart is not the noblest of the organs, but a pump that pushes our blood around. We are the products of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. We can no longer say with *Kate* that our external parts describe what our condition should be, that our physical features fix our place in a universal order of values. Rather, we want today to probe into and look inside things. The order we find in the universe is not an order of things being higher and lower in value than other things but an order of cause and effect. The stomach does not "correspond to the aristocracy"; rather it is a kind of furnace for oxidizing Bufferin tablets and other foods. The brain is not the "throne of reason," but a series of electrical switches. There is no use expecting from Shakespeare the kind of cause-and-effect thinking that we do today. For him the heart is not just a pump, but the noblest of the organs. His language falls naturally into patterns of analogy and comparison. Ours does not.

John Dryden, writing at the end of the seventeenth century, is often called "the father of English prose." By that epithet, literary historians mean that Dryden is the first major writer to write the kind of English prose we admire: neat, spare, concise, businesslike—going straight to the point. Elizabethan prose (with a few exceptions) was no such thing, because it was written in the language appropriate to the Elizabethan world-picture, figurative language, that is, language having many figures of speech. Elizabethan writers prized long sentences developing rather involved analogies and comparisons. Similarly, Elizabethan poetry was richly metaphorical, while the poetry of the Restoration and eighteenth century became, like the prose, neat, balanced, more than a little abstract (just as the world-view of science is a series of generalizations and abstractions). In this sense, it was quite natural for men who valued this "scientific" language to find Shakespeare full of "quibbles," that is, puns and involved figures of speech; it was quite natural to rewrite him into the "refined" verse of, say, Davenant's *Macbeth*.

Again, Shakespeare's language turns out to be the crucial thing. The recogni-

tion of the Elizabethan world-picture (which is, to me at least, the great achievement of historical criticism in our time) enables us to see why Shakespeare wrote the way he did, in verse, extremely rich verse, hardly a language real men speak. Shakespeare's plays embody worlds like ours in many ways, but different in some important respects: order is very important, and very good; fact and value are each implicit in the other; the important relations between things are those of likeness and difference, not those of cause and effect; exact statement of psychological motives, of the timing or placing of events, is not as important in a Shakespearean play as in most modern literature, notably the novel. Rather, events are emblematic, symbolic, answering to moral rather than literal truth. It is this kind of world a play of Shakespeare's creates; and this is the world to which the historical critic's understanding of the Elizabethans' world-view leads us.

The "new" critic also wants us to enter the world of the plays, but by a different route. Nineteenth-century critics, when they were not exclaiming over Shakespeare's plays, tended to think of the plays as representations of real situations in the real world, like photographs, if you will, or newspaper accounts or like novels which give us accounts of people and events drenched in realistic detail. As we have seen, nineteenth-century stagecraft, not finding those realistic details in the plays, supplied them by reconstructing an elaborate archaeological realism. In the same way, nineteenth-century critics supplied realistic details by elaborate inferences from the text. As early as 1774, Maurice Morgann, in his famous essay on the question of Falstaff's cowardice, wrote:

I affirm that those characters in *Shakespeare*, which are seen only in part, are yet capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole. . . . If the characters of *Shakespeare* are thus *whole*, . . . it may be fit to consider them rather as Historic than Dramatic beings; and, when occasion requires, to account for their conduct from the *whole* of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed.

This kind of approach necessarily leads the critic away from the *actual words* of the play into inferences and surmises about the *imaginary events described by those words*. Thus, A. C. Bradley, whose *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) was the culmination and final brilliant summary of this nineteenth-century approach, goes into such questions as: Where was Hamlet at the time of his father's death? Did Emilia suspect Iago? Did Lady Macbeth really faint? Inevitably, such an approach takes the critic away from the play as play into considering the play as a fictitious record of events exterior to itself, almost like a novel; inevitably, the critic's attention is drawn away from the language of the play to the non-existent events.

The "new" critics of the 1920's and after turned their backs on this nineteenth-century kind of analysis, choosing instead to consider the plays more as

poems than as novels. Each particular play creates its own poetic world, a world in some respects like everyday reality, but in many respects different. Our busyness as readers is to enter, live in, and experience that special world, but we are bound to get mixed up if we apply notions from everyday reality unchanged to that contrived world of the play with its own special nature and its own interior, poetic logic. Rather, as readers, we need to accept the play as it is, not forcing it into a record of something like the real world. In the last analysis, the world of the play is the world it creates in our minds as we experience the play. On the stage, this "new critical" approach finds its expression in the nonrealistic sets of the modern performance of Shakespeare or such devices as costumes which are not historically accurate but which convey the flavor of the world of the play. To achieve the world of the play in the theater of our minds, however, calls for a fairly special kind of reading, something that goes beyond the ordinary kind.

At the age of six or thereabouts, most of us were taken by the hand and led to school where we were taught "how to read." More exactly, we were taught how to put letters together to form words and told we knew how to read. Essentially, what we learned to read was a sequence of words: a simple story or a progression of ideas. Reading literature or "seeing" literature in the form of a play or film, however, calls for something more. Good reading or good seeing, the "new" critic says, proceeds first and foremost by paying close attention to the work itself, putting aside value judgments and matters of biography or historical background until we have really understood the words themselves. There is a second basic principle of good reading—you might call it giving the author the benefit of the doubt: unless or until it is proved otherwise, assume that every detail in a work of literature serves a purpose, serves in one or more ways to add to the organic unity of the whole. Just as a child reads letters together to form words, so a more mature reader uses his skill and imagination to put details together to form an artistic totality.

Details act together in two basic ways: by likeness or difference, that is, by repetition or contrast, but there are literally myriads of possible variations. Key words can be repeated; the plot in a narrative may be echoed in a subplot, in "comic relief," or in figures of speech; characters may be presented in terms of symbols; even plot techniques (surprise, anticlimax, and the like) or methods of characterization (as by occupation or bodily detail) or the use of certain sounds in a poem or certain rhetorical figures, even these mere techniques can be used as meaningful elements. One can see these patterns only by looking at the work itself, keeping in mind the basic assumption that all these details probably will come together into an artistic wholeness. It is sometimes helpful to look first at what seems to fit in least well, because such elements are "farther away" from the center of a work, they often add most to it. For example, in a Shakespearean

tragedy, the comic scenes often tell us most about the play as a whole. In every case, though, this kind of reading or seeing demands an imaginative effort to get the sudden intuitive understanding of likenesses that underlie seeming difference, the same kind of imaginative leap that any discovery requires. These imaginative graspings, these sudden awarenesses of the infinite variety of things "going on," are what give that marvelous sense of enlarging the mind and feelings which is the peculiar and special pleasure of literature.

A work of literature with a story (for example, a novel or a play or a film) makes a special, double demand on its audience because every element in it can serve in two ways. In a sense, one can think of literature-with-a-story as proceeding detail by detail, episode by episode, effect following cause, along the circumference of a circle. Each element of the work is related sequentially to the one before it and the one after it in the story. At the same time, each element is related to all the others at once by the shape or style of the curve in which they are all involved together. One can think of the center of the circle (though it is no part of the circle itself) as the thing which holds all these parts together, the essence or informing principle, the "point" of the work. Any given element in a narrative or dramatic work will thus serve both as a "story element" and as part of the overall unity of the work.

For example, in a story about a boy falling in love with a girl completely and wonderfully different from any he has ever known, it would nevertheless be a prosaic necessity for boy to meet girl. The writer could choose any one of a number of ways of getting the young man to his ladylove; he will, in fact, choose that way which adds most to the total effect of his story. For example, the young man might have to cross water (cross, in effect, from an old way of life to a new one) and pass a difficult test, as Bassanio does in *The Merchant of Venice*. The young man might very nearly die so as to be, in the Biblical phrase, "born again" to enter this new world, as Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* and Ferdinand in *The Tempest* are. The young man might have to disguise himself (indicating, in a way, he is leaving his former self behind), as Romeo wears a mask, hiding his Montague identity, when he meets Juliet, or as Prince Florizel dresses like a simple country swain to court Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*. In any case, something drastic is required. It would probably not be very effective to have the young man simply trot around next door to find such a transcend-ent love.

This coaction of events in both a realistic cause-and-effect way and a purely poetic way is what Aristotle had in mind when he said that fiction was "a more philosophical and a higher thing than history." History deals with particulars; fiction informs particulars with universal ideas. Oscar Wilde put it more whimsically when he complained, "Life is terribly deficient in form." A chronicler of life, such as a newspaper reporter, has little artistic choice; he is supposed to

state the facts as directly as possible. A creative writer, on the other hand, shapes and chooses events to make a unity and coherence that the random happenings of everyday reality just don't have. It is because of this element of artistic choice that the "world" of a play (or novel or story or film) is not simply a copy of the everyday world (in which, for example, our young man achieving a transcendent love probably just met the girl in the college library). To enter the "world" of a work of art, the "theater of the mind," we need to pay attention to the way that world is shaped. We need to recognize that any given element in the story (if it is a good story) functions both to tell a coherent tale and to give a unity and "point" to the work as a whole.

This double demand that literature-with-a-story makes on its audience is particularly important in the plays of a verse dramatist like Shakespeare. If we think of *Macbeth* (for example) as simply a story of ambition and murder, the poetry of the tragedy will seem a mere chromium trim unnecessarily cluttering up a good yarn, making the play much inferior to the prosy, realistic, and deathless works of any Broadway season. When, for example, Banquo at II. iii. 122-123 wants to say, "After we get dressed," he comes out with:

And when we have our naked frailties hid,  
That suffer in exposure. . .

Presumably, Shakespeare did not complicate matters for his own amusement; Banquo's more complex phrasing (thoroughly unnatural and unrealistic) has added something—poetry. And any real appreciation of the play involves understanding all of it, both story and poetry, more properly, story as poetry. One difference between "After we get dressed" and Banquo's poetic statement lies in the images (that is, sensations and ideas) brought in by such words as "naked," "frailties," "suffer," and "exposure." By these words (and thousands like them in *Macbeth*) Shakespeare builds up and emphasizes certain aspects of the essential action.

Imagery, narrowly defined, equals "similes plus metaphors" or "figures of speech." Broadly defined, however, imagery includes "any restatement of the essential" that is, any extra, not absolutely necessary, duplication of those things which are both necessary and of the essence. So understood, imagery becomes a very broad, far-reaching concept. It includes not only the language of a play, the relations among the plots, but the scenery, costumes, even the lighting. In a film, for example, the background of every shot represents a potential image which the director may or may not use. The best directors, of course, use backgrounds much the way Shakespeare used poetry, to establish the essential idea of the film. If we speak precisely, though, we cannot separate imagery from the play of which it is a part any more than one can separate the "background" in a film shot from the rest of what appears on the screen. If a work of art has



organic unity, each of its parts is implicit in and involved with all the others. Nevertheless, we can—and will—talk about imagery separately, and precisely because of our broad definition of the concept.

If imagery "restates the essential," then a very good, direct way of getting at whatever is essential in a play would be to examine the imagery. For our test case (in this introduction and the next chapter), we will take *Macbeth*, useful for this purpose because it is both one of the shortest and one of the most familiar of Shakespeare's plays. As you read *Macbeth*, you will notice a great many references to procreation, parenthood, progeny, and their opposites. These images restate and remind us of important elements in the plot: the prophecy of kingship for Banquo's descendants, the fact that the Macbeths have no children, the murder of Macduff's children, the death of young Siward, and the like. In the list of characters, there are four sets of parents and children: Macduff and his son; Banquo and Fleance; Siward and young Siward; Duncan and his sons, Malcolm and Donalbain. All in all, procreation and parenthood would seem to be "essential" aspects of *Macbeth*.

In the tragedy as a whole, I find eighty-five images of procreation, parenthood, progeny, and their opposites: enough to create a very strong impression in the mind of anyone seeing the play, let alone reading it. Some of these images are quite gratuitous: that is, Shakespeare could have put anything at all in their place or omitted them entirely. Others represent more limited choices, those that are called for by the plot or the situation (though, of course,

\* This is a list of images of procreation, parenthood, and progeny in *Macbeth*. Those which are gratuitous, that is, not dictated directly by the plot, are asterisked.

I. iii. 58-59\*  
 I. iii. 67  
 I. iii. 71  
 I. iii. 86  
 I. iii. 118  
 I. iv. 25\*  
 I. iv. 28-29  
 I. iv. 38  
 I. iv. 48  
 I. v. 45-46\*  
 I. vi. 8-9\*  
 I. vii. 21\*  
 I. vii. 54-59\*  
 I. vii. 72  
 II. i. 1  
 II. ii. 13\*  
 II. ii. 53\*  
 II. iii. 25-30\*  
 III. iii. 93-95  
 III. iii. 136  
 III. iv. 4\*  
 III. iv. 25  
 III. iv. 34\*  
 III. i. 5-6  
 III. i. 31  
 III. i. 60-65  
 III. i. 70  
 III. v. 91\*  
 III. v. 135  
 III. ii. 37  
 III. iii. 20\*  
 III. iv. 20  
 III. iv. 29-31\*  
 III. iv. 66\*  
 III. iv. 106  
 III. v. 15  
 III. vi. 5-10  
 III. vi. 18-20  
 III. vi. 24  
 IV. i. 30-31\*  
 IV. i. 55\*  
 IV. i. 58-60\*  
 IV. i. 64-65\*  
 IV. i. 65-67\*  
 IV. i. 76 (st. dir.)\*  
 IV. i. 86 (st. dir.)\*  
 IV. i. 86-89  
 IV. i. 102  
 IV. i. 111 (st. dir.)  
 IV. i. 112-124  
 IV. i. 152-153  
 IV. ii. 6  
 IV. iii. 10-11\*  
 IV. iii. 27\*  
 IV. iii. 30  
 IV. iii. 37-38  
 IV. iii. 44

Shakespeare was free to change the plot had he wished to do so, and thus, in a sense, these images also embody choices). Notice that there is no question of "reading in" here. Such a tabulation is coldly factual. The inferences one draws from this complex of imagery (as it is called) may involve "reading in," but the images themselves are purely and simply "there."

There are other complexes of imagery for which similar lists could be made: images of animals, birds, blood, disease and medicine, domesticity (including eating, drinking, and sleeping), family life, night and darkness, public and political life, religion, shelter, seeds, plants, trees, and so on. There are, for example, twenty-five images of clothing or covering.\* Though there are only a third as many of these images as those of procreation, many more of the clothing images represent "free" choices by Shakespeare, because clothing is not intricately tied in with the plot. Shakespeare seems to have gone out of his way to put these remarks about clothing in, and this fact suggests a corollary to our definition of imagery: the less necessary the image is, the more choice the writer has, and the more significant the image is likely to be. Thus, though there are in all fewer clothing images than images of procreation, since more are gratuitous, the clothing images are likely to be just as important as those of procreation. In general, though, one does not judge the importance of images simply by number. The importance of an image can lie in the degree to which

IV. ii. 59  
 IV. ii. 62  
 IV. ii. 68  
 IV. ii. 82-83\*  
 IV. iii. 5\*  
 IV. iii. 26  
 IV. iii. 36  
 IV. iii. 108-110\*  
 IV. iii. 155\*  
 IV. iii. 166\*  
 IV. iii. 177  
 IV. iii. 204  
 IV. iii. 211-212  
 IV. iii. 216  
 IV. iii. 218\*  
 V. i. 66-67\*  
 V. ii. 9\*  
 V. iii. 3-4  
 V. iii. 6  
 V. iii. 22-26  
 V. vi. 3  
 V. vii. 2-3  
 V. vii. 12-16  
 V. viii. 5-6  
 V. viii. 14-16  
 V. viii. 31  
 V. viii. 37-38  
 V. viii. 65\*

\* This is a list of images of clothing in *Macbeth*; the "gratuitous" images are asterisked:

I. ii. 54\*  
 I. iii. 40\*  
 I. iii. 108-109\*  
 I. iii. 145\*  
 I. v. 51\*  
 II. i. 107\*  
 II. ii. 69\*  
 II. iii. 12-13\*  
 II. iii. 108-112\*  
 II. iii. 122-123\*  
 II. iii. 128\*  
 II. iv. 38  
 III. ii. 47\*  
 IV. i. 88  
 IV. ii. 107  
 IV. iii. 172\*  
 IV. iii. 208\*  
 V. i. 5  
 V. i. 57\*  
 V. ii. 20-22\*  
 V. iii. 34\*  
 V. iv. 15\*

*Cellulose*



it is "extra"; it can also lie in the prominence and distinctness of the image at important points in the play.

The images we have considered so far have been concrete. They have dealt with tangible things like clothing or children. Imagery, however, can be abstract, as, for example, the images of "shifting shapes" in *Macbeth*. These images would include not only the various hallucinations and apparitions in the play, but also the occasions, quite remarkable in number, in which someone expresses difficulty in seeing or understanding, the outstanding example being Macbeth's misunderstanding of the prophecies of "these juggling fiends,"

That palter with us in a double sense,  
That keep the word of promise to our ear  
And break it to our hope.  
(V. viii. 19-22)

We can think of these as images of "uncertain perception." Another complex of abstract images clusters around the idea of "coming together" as in the striking image of:

Two spent swimmers that do cling together  
And choke their art.  
(I. ii. 8-9)

or the very opening line of the play: "When shall we three meet again?" Abstract images can be just as important as the concrete ones, sometimes more important.

Where, however, do all these "complexes of imagery" leave the story of ambition and murder which is, after all, our first impression of *Macbeth*? The story is right where it was; the imagery has enriched it, interwoven with it, and brought out from the story its implications. To see these implications, we look back at those images and their contexts and see how they work together. For example, animals occur in *Macbeth* in two contexts: sometimes, like the "arm'd rhinoceros," they are violent, threatening; sometimes, as when the "mousing owl" (Macbeth) kills the "falcon, to'ring in her pride of place" (Duncan), animals serve as symbols. This contrast matches other contrasts in the tragedy, for example, between man's frail nakedness and his civilized clothing; between bare facts and symbolic, ambiguous prophecies that cover them; between private, family life and public, symbolic, political life; perhaps in the largest sense between a nature red in tooth and claw and a symbolic nature impregnated with moral and religious, supernatural, order. *Macbeth*, then, though it begins in our minds as a story of one man's ambitions and murders, is ultimately a far bigger thing: a play about nature's way of growth and decay, an order in which supernatural and natural things mix and germinate

in a man's mind and from there grow out into his acts, his family, and his commonwealth until finally their influence wanes and dies.

Only by being aware as we read Shakespeare of some such "informing principle," some such "essence" or "center" of each play, can we respond to the play in all its wholeness, its unity in variety; only that way can we experience the full pleasure of literature, feeling the massive oneness of the play implicit and powerful in its every moment. And only by all the play can we measure the genius of its author or enter the theater of his mind—or our own.