



Shakespeare and the Modern Writer

ANTHONY BURGESS

The year 1916 was, at least in Shakespeare's own country, too distracted for multicentennial celebrations. But 1964 saw something like a blaze. The twenty-third of April was a Thursday, a publication day, and there was a publisher's cocktail party on the Monday to wet the head of my novel *Nothing Like the Sun*, which is about Shakespeare. The same evening had been chosen for the opening of a new television channel, BBC-2, and, as television critic of *The Listener*, I had an obligation to stay at home and watch. But the publication party had priority. Fortunately Battersea power station broke down, and the inauguration of BBC-2 had to be postponed until the following evening. Thus, I was able to see *Kiss Me, Kate*, one of the exemplifications of the "new" approach to Shakespeare—unstuffy, irreverent, but laterally authentic, since the Bard might be regarded as being closer to Cole Porter and Broadway razzmatazz than to the scholars who were picking him raw.

BBC-2, which at the beginning of its career was permitted to confine its appeal to a minority audience, was able in that quatercentenary spring to present a fair spectrum of contemporary approaches to Shakespeare. There was a program on his life and personality, written by Ivor Brown but drawing also on Leslie Hosson's *The First Night of "Twelfth Night"*. Duke Ellington's *Such Sweet Thunder* was performed. There were presentations of Laurence Olivier's films of *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III*. There was even an hour-long Shakespeare anthology in Elizabethan pronunciation,

demonstrating that rigorous linguistic research could also furnish entertainment. Though 1916 had seen a film version of *The Merchant of Venice*, with Matheson Lang in the lead, the otherwise muffled celebration of that bad year had hinted that World War I and Shakespeare had little to say to each other. Was that to be true of the whole disenchanting era? Nineteen sixty-four was quite sure that Shakespeare belonged to the modern world.

Shakespeare certainly did not seem to have much to say to the fighting poets of World War I. Here were depths of misery and boredom, a long, muddy stalemate variegated by slaughter on a scale previously unimaginable, the death of patriotism, a cynicism that found no echo in readings of *Troilus and Cressida*—a play apparently unknown to young officers who had come straight from public-school literature courses. Rupert Brooke, dead in 1916, had written sonnets in 1914 with a St. Crispin's Day flavor, but the task of poets like Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon was to express the inexplicable through a bland medium suitable for weekend joy in cottage gardens. Wilfred Owen saw the futility of Georgian rhyme but could not write blank verse. He used slant rhyme instead and occasionally, perhaps without knowing it, evoked the rhythms of Dante. The impossibility of yoking the inherited literary tradition to a new and, as it turned out, unique experience was best exemplified in David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937), where characters from *Henry V* sit very strangely in the Flanders mud. The significant literature of the

801

SHAKESPEARE AND THE MODERN WRITER

Shaw's playlet. Shakespeare's plays are so great that we can afford to see their creator as a figure of farce, one who, in the British manner, is forbidden to be exalted by the unbidden additions of genius. The greatness is, in other words, an irrelevance to be laughed off.

My own novel of 1964, *Nothing Like the Sun*, sums up in its title the diminishing approach: the brightness of Shakespeare's mistress' eyes must not be exaggerated, neither must his own stature as a moral being. Borrowing from Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, I speculate about the possibility of Shakespeare's catching syphilis from the Dark Lady or the earl of Southampton or both, and the relationship between the spirochete and the genius of tragedy. I cannot justify such an approach on any grounds other than the prevalence of the French pox in Elizabethan England and Shakespeare's own very accurate summary—in *Timon of Athens*—of its symptoms, which he could have recognized in himself. Yet the aristocrat of the diseases, as it has been called, seemed to me to be a very useful symbol of the breakdown in civic order that Shakespeare certainly observed in the later days of Elizabeth's reign and brooded on in the dark comedies as well as the great tragedies. No novelist need ask his readers, especially his scholarly ones if any, to take his depictions as biographical fact; but he has the duty of at least contriving a credible language, ambience, and psychology—the duty, in short, of being scholarly while trying to entertain. The task of preparing such a novel as *Nothing Like the Sun* involves more scholarship than the average reader need be aware of—a kind of soaking in of atmosphere and language and the imposition of various limitations, for the Elizabethans did not know what we know: they were, for instance, pre-Freudian and pre-Marxist, as well as pre-Newtonian.

My fictionalization of Shakespeare very nearly, in 1968, reached the cinema screen. This was the age of the four-hour, "hard-ticket" film; it was also the age of permissiveness, well able to present a syphilitic Shakespeare grappling with the Dark Lady and others (even the earl) in frontal nudity. Such a film, unmade because of the final timidity of Warner Brothers, could have contributed something to scholarship. Olivier, in the opening and closing sequences of *Henry V*, put the Globe playhouse on the screen; my own film was to make much of the carting over the Thames of the demolished timbers of the Shoreditch Theatre and the erection, under Peter Street, of the new structure on the Bankside.

803

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

twentieth century did not emerge from its most terrible nightmare. If Shakespeare had anything to say to writers, they had first to be cut off from the fighting experience: they had to be Americans like Pound and Eliot, or they had to sit out the war in a neutral zone, as did James Joyce. The continuity of literature in English, which must always mean learning something from Shakespeare, had to be sustained outside the battle.

In *Language and Silence* (1967) George Steiner affirms, in inappropriately grandiloquent prose, the inefficacy not only of literature but of language itself to express the horrors of the Nazi holocaust. "After Auschwitz, only silence." In other words, we have to accept the limitations of Shakespeare. No such limitations were recognized by the romantics, while the Age of Reason perceived that its own limitations were a virtue that Shakespeare barbarously transgressed. It is perhaps only since the armistice of 1918 that Shakespeare has been recognized as a journeyman writer of genius subject to the errors and ineptitudes enforced by rigidity of execution or produced by sheer insouciant carelessness. "Others abide our question; thou art hurt," said Matthew Arnold. Shakespeare had been a mountain, a god. By 1964 he was acceptable as a human being. There was less reverence but far more understanding; there was also more affection. It was possible to think of Shakespeare as Will. Milton has never been known as Jack.

There had been a time when the private life and personality of Shakespeare had been as little relevant to his work as those of Homer (who might, anyway, be a congeries of anonymous bards) had been to his. When disreputable biographical facts were known, they were frequently brushed aside. That Shakespeare's first child was born six months after his marriage was excused by reference to non-existent customs of affiancement: "No moral delinquency may be imputed to him," wrote E. K. Chambers. The nineteenth century was much concerned with Shakespeare as a proto-Tennyson, a model of probity. Indecencies in his work were edited out or glossed falsely. In the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses*, John Eglington objects to Stephen Dedalus' prying into the life of a great man. "The poet's drinking, the poet's debts. We have *King Lear*, and it is immortal." But Joyce, in a long chapter, claims a right previously claimed by two other Irishmen to consider Shakespeare as a man and to use the plays as material for speculation on his life and character. Oscar Wilde had

already done this and made a fanciful identification of Mr. W. H.; while Bernard Shaw had, in *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, put a comic Shakespeare on the stage. Frank Harris was the pioneer in fanciful Shakespeare biography, but Will as a figure of fun was an emanation of Shaw's needed superiority to him as a playwright. Yet it was seen, in all the fictional travesties of Shakespeare the man that followed Shaw's, that no ingenuity (save perhaps that of Edward Bond in his play *Bingo*) could render him unsympathetic. What twentieth-century writers have found in the fancied personality of Shakespeare are the preoccupations that afflict or bless any writer, great or small—concern about money, marriage, children, extramarital love, deadlines, social position, even disease.

Shaw's Shakespeare is an actor of poor memory and limited imagination, who snaps up good things that he hears, his poetic ear not as good as it should be, something of a lecher, a skilled wheeler of favors, a snob vastly concerned with his own social position. Such a portrait could not have been sustained beyond the limits of a one-act play whose true theme, anyway, is Britain's need for a national theater. The first full-length fiction about him seems to be John Brophy's *Gentleman of Stratford* (1939), a novel of "popular" intention in which there is no stink from Fleet Ditch, no pederasty, no hangman's hands, nor indeed anything to upset the average subscriber to a popular book club. The Bard is a little weary, very genteel, a sufferer from a marriage threatening to become too philoprogenitive, and the guilt of adultery—as well as a hopeless schwarmerei for an aristocratic woman he calls my dear Lady Didsand. Presumably each age gets the Shakespeare it requires, whether in personality or art, but a comic or even farcical Shakespeare is safer than a romantic one. Thus, the entertainment called *No Bad for Bacon*, published in 1941 by Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon, presented a Shakespeare whom the reader was not expected to take seriously and hence, safe from an expected posture of reverence, surprisingly found almost plausible. This Shakespeare, who spends much of the book trying out new spellings of his name, is regarded as an expert on orthography. He is always dreaming of a "shining" play called *Love's Labor's Found*, in which he never gets further than some such opening as "The Garden of Eden. Enter a Snake." When he proposes dalliance with a young girl and she demurs, he grins and says, "It's all right if it's Shakespeare." Such a diversion links hands with

802

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

net as he might have been had he lived. All this is, of course, unlearned as scholarship; but fictional insights, as well as psychoanalytical ones like the oedipal theory of Ernest Jones (which influenced Olivier in his film *Hamlet*), must perhaps be drawn on when critics like T. S. Eliot find a disparity between the content of a play and the emotional force that insipidates it.

Certainly, the "problem" of *Hamlet* is partially resolved when one ceases to see the play as an aesthetic structure and considers that it may, in its less active phases, be an outlet for personal obsessions. There is more of Warwickshire in Denmark than plausibility should permit—the queen's floral cadenza, a conflation of the accidentally drowned Ophelia and the suicidally drowned Kate Hamlet of Shakespeare's youth, with its consequent wrangle about lack of burial rights in consecrated ground and "crown's quest law." And Hamlet seems to be summarizing the earlier career of his creator for Horatio when he philosophizes about the skulls of a lawyer, a nobleman, and a clown called Yorick who is probably the Richard Tarleton of the Queen's Men, Shakespeare's first acting troupe.

It is to be noted that the biographical approach—wholly justifiable in fiction, especially when it is *Ulysses*—seeped into scholarship in a manner that might be considered wholly alien to the rationale of the scholar. G. B. Harrison's *Shakespeare at Work* reads like a novel, as does Hosson's *The First Night of "Twelfth Night"*, though the thesis of the latter seems sometimes to go further than the most extravagant novelist might permit. Moreover, to view the plays in the light of the circumstances in which they were written is often to substitute human excuses for objective appraisal when the playwright is not at his best. *King John*, for instance, becomes interesting not as a play but as a record of the psychological turmoil that the author was undergoing while writing it—the moving passages about the death of a son and the danger of a new Spanish invasion transposed to a medieval England become implausibly Protestant.

It would be wrong to consider Joyce's concern with Shakespeare the man as a mere interlude in the plot of *Ulysses*, for that novel is as much myth as realistic fiction, and Shakespeare is being drawn upon as a contributor to myth. The relationship between Shakespeare, his adulterous wife, and his short-lived son is forced into presiding over the situation of Leopold Bloom, who has also lost a son

and whose wife is unfaithful. Moreover, Shakespeare becomes the ghost of Hamlet's father, and his relationship to Hamlet is of a mystical order that finds a parallel in Bloom's adoption of Stephen Dedalus as a son-surrogate. Stephen wears a "Hamlet hat" and is in mourning. He is Japheth in search of a father, as well as Telemachus waiting for Odysseus to come; he is dispossessed of his kingdom, whether this be the Martello Tower, for which he pays the rent, or the bigger realm of literature, which he cannot enter without the sponsorship of a mystical father. Theologically father and son are of the same substance, and Hamlet is both prince and king. When, in the phantasmagorical brothel scene, Bloom and Stephen look simultaneously into a mirror, they see Shakespeare as a joint reflection—a comic cuckold who has lost even the gift of language, a caricature of total dispossession. Shakespeare presides over *Ulysses* more solidly than does Homer, not only in the sense that his language dominates the interior monologues of Stephen, as idle speculations about *Hamlet* flit through the musings of Bloom, but as the creator of myth who is himself a myth. Penelope is a weaver, but Bottom is one also, and Bloom can enter the ghastrly fairyland of nighttown (where a true midsummer night's dream is enacted) only by wearing an ass's head. A bottom of good sense, to use Dr. Johnson's term, meets the overly rarefied young Hamlet. But this Hamlet is also a dead Hamnet (Bloom's son Rudy) come back to life, and this turns Bloom into a kind of Shakespeare.

Adaline Glasheen is inclined to believe that the hero of *Finnegans Wake* is also Shakespeare (or Shapshpeare) disguised as H. C. Earwicker. His wife is named Ann and he has three children, two of whom are twins—the exact Shakespeare constellation. He may be regarded as the summation of all Shakespeare's male characters, from Lackbeath to Fallstuf; but this is as much as to say that, being universal sinning man, as well as universal creating man, he has to find his historical analogue in Shakespeare, who, next to God, has created most and—necessarily, according to Joyce's implied thesis—sinned most. The sins of creative man have to be sexual: to erect one must have erections, and libido (Shakespeare's "Will") is the force behind art as well as sex. One must not pursue this too far, but it is in order to see Shakespeare as one of the primary fertilizing forces behind Joyce.

Ulysses appeared in 1922, and that year saw the publication of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which,

804

independently of Joyce, drew on Shakespeare to create a kind of synthetic mythology. The postwar age is dry of belief and awaits the revivifying rain: death by water is preferable to death through drought, and Ophelia and the father of Ferdinand in *The Tempest* ("Those are pearls that were his eyes") join Phlebas the Phoenician and King Ludwig II of Bavaria as watery sacrificial victims who may assist our regeneration. Shakespeare has become a great giver of symbols, and it is the culture that begot him that stands in critical juxtaposition to our own. When the sterile opulence of Beladonna, Lady of the Rocks, had to be invoked, this is done through an ironic reminiscence of Cleopatra—"The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne, / Glowed on the marble." When a more literal sterility is presented—Lil of the bad teeth refusing to have children—Ophelia's final words before her drowning are heard. Shakespeare provides a literary shorthand, and one of the conditions for understanding Eliot is an assumption that Shakespeare, like the Bible, has been absorbed into our culture and become virtually proverbial. "On the Rialto once"—"Lights, lights": the phrases in *Burkank with a Budeker*, *Bleistein with a Cigar* are intended to spark not merely reminiscences of entire plays (*Othello* and *Hamlet*) but images of entire cultures that have been betrayed.

It is not, of course, quite as simple as that. The ambiguity of Eliot, especially in *The Waste Land*, is a device of contrapuntal complexity that ensures the artistic validity of the work and prevents it from becoming tendentious. Elizabethan England had dirty ears that could hear "jug jug" in a nightingale's song, and Elizabeth and Leicester on the Thames joke about the possibility of marriage—a marriage that would be sterile. "That Shakespeareian Rag," which is so elegant, so intelligent, traduces Shakespeare, but Shakespeare has the stuff of self-betrayal in him. There is, to Eliot, no useful moral content in Shakespeare, as there is in an Upanishad, but there is at least a live tradition that it is the duty of twentieth-century literature to recover. The strength of Shakespeare lies in many things, none of which have much to do with the rigorous Thomism of Dante, whom, as a Christian, Eliot reveres in a manner that transcends purely literary judgments. The major Shakespearean strength lies in his achievement of a verse medium capable of a multitude of tonalities, some of which are pertinent to the needs of a twentieth-century poet.

In discussing the formation of his own verse technique, Eliot spoke of the influence of Jules Laforgue, evident enough in the rhymed works, such as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and of the post-Shakespearean dramatists—Middleton and Webster more than Beaumont and Fletcher. Eliot, with a kind of humility, refused to be influenced directly by Shakespeare but accepted his influence at a remove. This seemed to be a means of testing the validity of the blank-verse medium itself as used not only by Shakespeare but also by his predecessors and contemporaries. To submit to Shakespeare directly, as to Joyce, is to risk becoming an imitator of what cannot easily be imitated. When, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot makes his Third Priest say

Go venture shipwreck on the sullen coasts
Where blackamoors make captive Christian men,

he is very nearly going back as far as *Gorboduc*, but he is justified because the verse of *Gorboduc* is behind Shakespeare. His most sustained effort in free verse that is not far from blank verse is *Gerontion*, where the tone is of a highly intelligent playwright who, having learned from Shakespeare in the year 1615 or thereabouts, has gone to sleep and awakened in the twentieth century. He has bypassed classicism and romanticism and is fitting an early-seventeenth-century technique to twentieth-century pessimism.

The romantic poets were willing to learn from Shakespeare's blank verse, but they failed to understand its closeness to speech rhythms. To approach Shakespeare was to count syllables and to use tropes and inversions that, though obsolete, gained a certain glamour through association. Lacking both stage experience and an important theatrical tradition, they produced a rhetoric that was neither lyrical nor dramatic. Though neither Eliot nor Pound began with theatrical ambitions, both had an innate dramatic sense (hamstrung for a time in Pound because of his devotion to Browning), recognizing that all verse that is not song is essentially dramatic, in that it gains its vitality from heightened speech and that the imagined voice that utters it is, to a certain extent, that of an invented character. Yeats, though he wrote verse for the theater, was inhibited by a lyrical approach that accepted what Shakespeare learned to overcome—the line, and not the verse-paragraph, as the unit of utterance. His finest blank verse is more primitive than Shakespeare's:

805

SHAKESPEARE AND THE MODERN WRITER

proved to be a chimera. The modern stage has yielded finally to prose.

In *Finnegans Wake* the dead god-giant is sacramentally consumed, and his unclean or regurgitated limbs and organs lie scattered on the wide campaign of the book. Shakespeare is in much the position of a god who, being also man, and a man apparently indifferent to the fate of his work, can be broken and consumed more casually. We have seen in the theater versions of Shakespeare that deny not only the setting and dress of the original plays but also their presumed meaning. (I have witnessed on French television a production of *Hamlet* in which the Ghost is a woman. This goes further than Leopold Bloom's speculation that the Prince himself might be a woman and hence have good reason for spurning Ophelia.) Charles Marowitz's *Hamlet* was not intended to be Shakespeare, though it rifles *Hamlet* for some of its lines. Edward Bond's *Lear* makes of Shakespeare's plot and characters an exercise in twentieth-century violence that seems to scorn Shakespeare's historical innocence. In nondramatic literature it seems possible for writers to filch from Shakespeare what they wish, ignoring the presumed total artistic intention of a poet too big—and also too dead—to complain. If Eliot has made of Elizabethan (properly Jacobean) verse a medium suitable for the sensibility of the age between two wars, it is presumably possible for a modern writer to take over Shakespeare's characters and make them new.

The separation of Shakespeare's characters from his plays began early, but chiefly with the French romantics. When the British Shakespeare company that contained Harriet Smithson appeared in Paris in the 1820s, there was great excitement at the content but disappointment with the form. Shakespeare, it was assumed, would have been a novelist if the novel had properly existed in his time; he was forced to work in an unsympathetic and barbarous medium from which he must now be rescued. It was the musician Hector Berlioz who set out to present an idealized *Romeo and Juliet* in which even the words of the original were subdued; for them was substituted the universal language of sound, so that Romeo became a clarinet and Juliet an oboe, Mercutio's Queen Mab speech was transferred to the orchestra, and what few words were retained were to be mumbled by the chorus. Tchaikovsky got all the main elements in his *Romeo and Juliet* fantasy-overture—Friar Laurence's chorale, Capulet-Montague dissension, love theme—and a number

807

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

(The Second Coming)

This is wonderful but not as wonderful as Ulysses' lamenting in *Troilus and Cressida* the breakdown of order. More cunningly than Yeats, Eliot saw that the modernity of Shakespeare lay in a desire to obscure the five regular beats of the blank verse line and even, in the interests of approximating to speech, to truncate it on occasion.

Dr. Johnson had berated Shakespeare for his "quibbles"—the fatal Cleopatra for which his world was well lost—but extravagant wordplay, conceits, deliberate complexities, too "metaphysical" for the Age of Reason, were to Eliot's taste and also to William Empson's, as exemplified not merely in his poetry but also in a revolutionary handbook called *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). The mature Shakespeare, as was disclosed, rarely made plain statements. Sometimes he created complexities straight out of the unconscious, as in the famous "Ariadne" of *Troilus and Cressida*, where "Ariadne" and "Arachne," both concerned with lines and labyrinths, are instinctively fused. The task of editors had previously been to disentangle what they saw as confusion and declare for one name or the other, but the portmanteau nature of the coinage was now to be seen as very modern and a justification of Joyce's contrapuntal technique in *Finnegans Wake*. It proved necessary also to view Shakespeare's wordplay in terms of his pronunciation. In *Henry IV* reasons are as plentiful as blackberries because the digraph *ea* has an "Irish" pronunciation. The unrounded *o* in "solid" makes Hamlet's flesh sallied and sullied. Where Shakespeare's puns had been deplored they were now seen as justifiable devices of irony. If *Macbeth* could play with "gild" and "guilt," Eliot's Phlebas and Mr. Eugenides could meet in a pocketful of currents and a current under sea. If Wordsworthian simplicity was no longer acceptable and a whole line could be filled up with "polyphiloprogenitive," this was because Shakespeare liked long words.

The revival of the verse play in the 1930s had little directly to do with the influence of Shakespeare. Nineteenth-century poetic drama had tried to learn from Shakespeare but reproduced only the least important aspects of his rhetorical surface.

With Stephen Phillips there was altogether deplorable pseudo-Shakespeareanism, as well as a blank verse that did its utmost to point a gap between live speech and stage diction. Perhaps the most shameful of all attempts to make acceptable verse drama was Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare* (1921), which, having as theme an improbable love rivalry between Shakespeare and Marlowe, had to be resolutely Elizabethan and in blank verse too. When, in 1935, Eliot produced his *Murder in the Cathedral*, he tried to obliterate the possibility of comparison with Shakespeare by using free verse for his chorus and a mixture of verse forms for his dialogue, rhymed, half-rhymed, unrhymed, which should carry more of the flavor of the medieval guild plays than that of a more sophisticated theater. In the plays with a modern setting that followed—*The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*—the aim was to avoid the rhetorical altogether and produce a mode of stage speech indistinguishable from Monsieur Jourdain's prose but cunningly marked by a soft regular tetrameter beat that could justify a sudden heightening into poetry. It is notable that in *The Cocktail Party* the only poetry occurs in a long quotation from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Any undue heightening of speech would have sounded, so Eliot must have felt, like an approach to Shakespeare and thus embarrassed both poet and audience.

In other words, Shakespeare was no longer suitable as a theatrical influence. The verse plays of Auden and Isherwood were closer to Brecht than to anything in the English tradition, though in Auden's *The Ascent of F6* both Michael Ransom and his mother are made to speak a blank verse close to Wordsworth at his most pedestrian:

Give me the crystal—let me look again
And prove my former vision a poor fake.

Christopher Fry, who because of cricketing associations was often linked unjustly with Eliot, was believed for a time to have imported into stage comedy an Elizabethan gusto. It was possible for a character to describe the moon as "a circumambulating aphrodisiac" and please middle-class playgoers with an impression that they were being uplifted as well as impressed. But Fry was not lasted, except as a film scenarist and translator of Anouilh and Rostand, and the whole brief prospect of a permanent revival of verse in the theater has

806

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

forgotten, as is also his wit. Elgar does not ignore either, and he superadds a nostalgia for boyhood innocence and a love of the English countryside. Or at least, music having no true verbal referents, this is what he appears to do.

Falstaff has been separated from his context in his own name. Hamlet has been dragged out of Denmark in a number of guises. The melancholy young man, dispossessed, learned, highly articulate, not at home in the world of action, is, as we have seen, easily transmuted into Stephen Dedalus. Such a character, needing the solidity of an understanding father, in whom emotion, according to Eliot, is in excess of any possible excitatory cause, has been almost a cliché in the twentieth-century novel. He is Denis in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow* and Gumbriel in *Antic Hay*, as well as Paul Pennyfeather and William Boot in, respectively, Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall* and *Scoop*. Waugh's trilogy *Sword of Honour* presents a kind of negative hero, Guy Crouchback, who finds something morally rotten in the whole world—World War II is a symptom of this, not a cause—but, caught up in a machine controlled by powers greater than himself, takes up arms with no prospect of quelling a sea of troubles. Behind Crouchback stands Ford Madox Ford's hero Christopher Tietjens, dispossessed of his lands and honor, the stoic good soldier who observes the decay of morality and is himself attacked by forces that have power but no responsibility. All these essentially nontragic characters survive by virtue of their stoicism. According to Eliot, Hamlet's stoicism, like that of the Duchess of Malfi (whose "I am Duchess of Malfi still" echoes Seneca's "Medea superest"), is merely a desperate assertion of identity in the face of destruction. This is because the Prince is the hero of a tragedy. The contemporary Hamlet is stoic in the face of battering that is too exaggerated to be other than comic.

On the whole, Shakespeare has given little to the modern novelist, and this is surprising. For a legitimate fictional exercise would be the relegation of the Shakespearean soliloquy, and even much dialogue, to the unspoken stream of consciousness—following, of course, the *Ulysses* technique—and the provision of something like plain, colloquial speech for the spoken exchanges. Yet neither *Hamlet* nor *Macbeth* has been turned into a novel. Such a transformation would be the contemporary

equivalent of the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* and perhaps, for readers scared of Shakespeare, more useful. It is Shakespeare's fellow playwrights who have felt more disposed to paraphrase or tamper—from Shaw with his new ending for *Cymbeline* to Tom Stoppard with his *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. But as so much tampering is allowed to stage directors, failed playwrights nearly all, such genuinely creative fiddling would seem to be supererogatory.

What Shakespeare can give to the modern writer, and sometimes does give, is a sense of the importance of his craft and of the resources of the English language. Add to this an endless pragmatic wisdom and a humanistic tolerance, and we have what British citizens like to think is their main contribution to civilization. But language comes first as last, and it is in the complexity of the later plays, some of the Sonnets, and *The Phoenix and Turtle* that we best learn the actual and potential resources of English.

As the most valuable product of a Western civilization seen, in our own century, as in grave danger from the totalitarian forces within and without, Shakespeare remains more a symbol than an influence in a certain kind of writer. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* presents a scientific totalitarianism in which strong emotions are recognized as a danger to social stability and in which literature has been tamed to a branch of "social engineering." The savage who enters this stable, hedonistic, yet infantile society comes with a tattered volume of Shakespeare that symbolizes a braver if older world: Shakespeare is immune from censorship because he has become unintelligible. George Orwell visualized a time in which Shakespeare would be read no more but saw in him what he saw in Charles Dickens—an ebullience and love of the processes of life that totalitarianism, like Ben Jonson, would wish to suffumigate. Winston Smith, the doomed hero of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, wakes one morning with the name Shakespeare on his lips. He does not understand what the name means, but the unconscious, as yet unsubmitive to the metaphysics of Ingosc, certainly does. In the real 1984, Shakespeare remains for the modern writer, as for modern literate man in general, a standard for judgment of morality as well as of art. And, more than in the past, he is seen also as a fellow human being and a fellow artist.

808