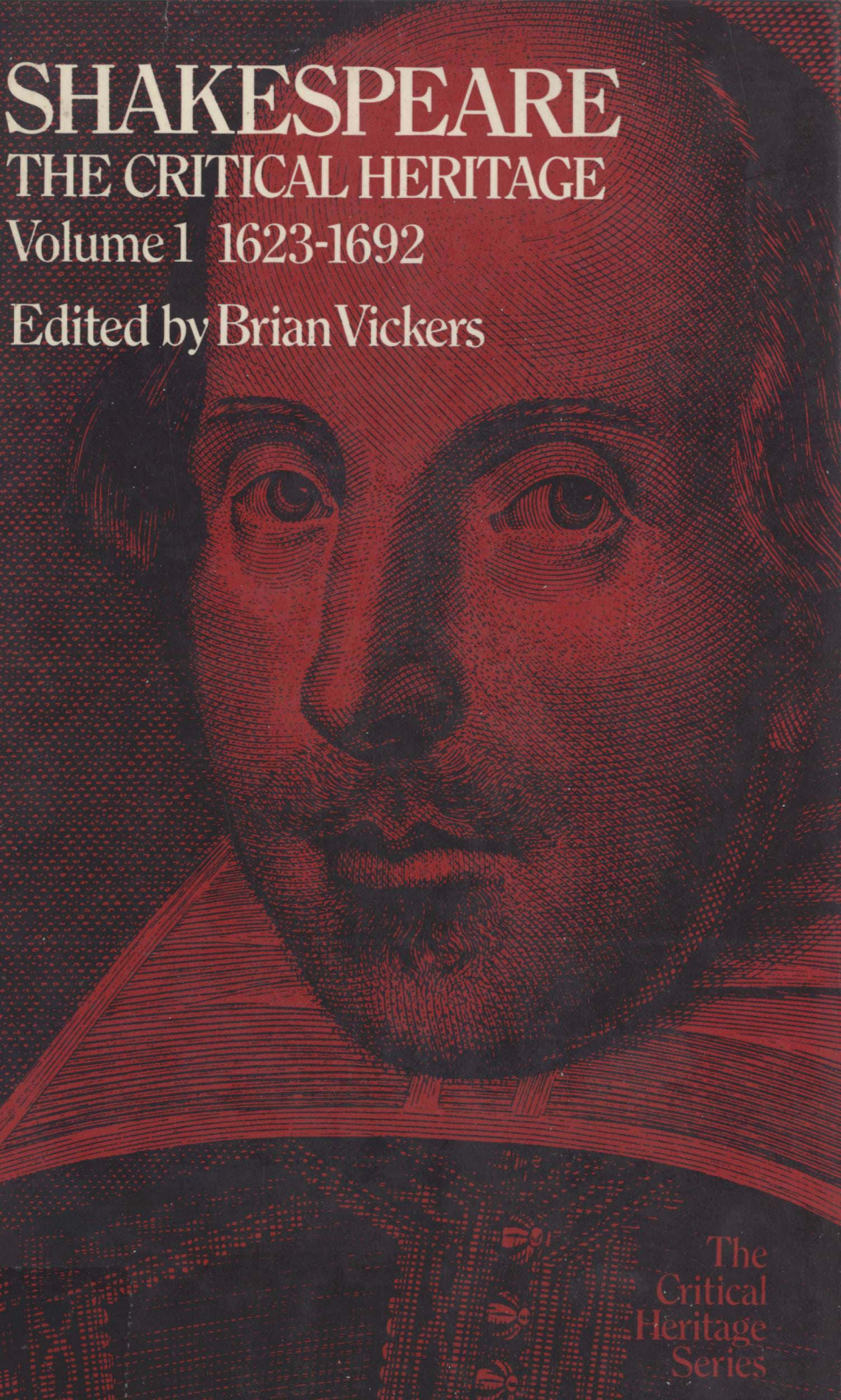


SHAKESPEARE

THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

Volume 1 1623-1692

Edited by Brian Vickers



The
Critical
Heritage
Series

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VOLUME 1 1623-1692

Edited by

BRIAN VICKERS

Professor of English, University of Zürich

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General Editor's Preface

The reception given to a writer by his contemporaries and near-contemporaries is evidence of considerable value to the student of literature. On one side we learn a great deal about the state of criticism at large and in particular about the development of critical attitudes towards a single writer; at the same time, through private comments in letters, journals or marginalia, we gain an insight upon the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Evidence of this kind helps us to understand the writer's historical situation, the nature of his immediate reading-public, and his response to these pressures.

The separate volumes in the *Critical Heritage Series* present a record of this early criticism. Clearly, for many of the highly productive and lengthily reviewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, there exists an enormous body of material; and in these cases the volume editors have made a selection of the most important views, significant for their intrinsic critical worth or for their representative quality—perhaps even registering incomprehension!

For earlier writers, notably pre-eighteenth century, the materials are much scarcer and the historical period has been extended, sometimes far beyond the writer's lifetime, in order to show the inception and growth of critical views which were initially slow to appear.

Shakespeare is, in every sense, a special case, and Professor Vickers is presenting the course of his reception and reputation extensively, over a span of three centuries, in a sequence of six volumes, each of which will document a specific period.

In each volume the documents are headed by an Introduction, discussing the material assembled and relating the early stages of the author's reception to what we have come to identify as the critical tradition. The volumes will make available much material which would otherwise be difficult of access and it is hoped that the modern reader will be thereby helped towards an informed understanding of the ways in which literature has been read and judged.

B.C.S.

Preface

This is the first of six volumes in the *Critical Heritage Series* to be devoted to Shakespeare, and it differs from its companions in a number of ways. For one thing, I print no contemporary allusions in the text proper, since it seems to me that none of these amount to sustained criticism of any great value. For another, it would have been a falsification of the total picture to limit the selections to formal criticism. Having taken stock of the various courses taken by the reaction to Shakespeare, I decided to include, in addition to regular critical essays, and poems to or about Shakespeare, items in the following categories: the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, of which over a hundred appeared in the period 1660-1820; theatre criticism, dealing with performances of both the original plays and the adaptations; notes and comments from the editions of Shakespeare. I intend to offer a more detailed account of the progress of Shakespeare criticism once these volumes have been completed.

For the present volume only the first of these additional categories was relevant: I have chosen excerpts from all the major adaptations. The demands on space were strong, and although I would have liked to include several of these in their entirety I had to settle for selections, as generous as possible. If the reader has a copy of Shakespeare open he will be able to follow the most important of the transformations in plot, character and language. The Select Bibliography lists some detailed studies of these versions.

It only remains for me to thank the libraries which have made this collection possible: the Folger Library, Washington; the British Museum; the Bodleian; Cambridge University Library, and King's College Library. For assistance in checking the manuscript I am indebted to Mr Albert Freiling and to Mr Wilhelm Schmid.

B.W.V.

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Introduction

I

The evaluation of Shakespeare made by his contemporaries was generous but not searching. If we read the three hundred pages of *The Shakespeare Allusion-Book*¹ devoted to references prior to the publication of the First Folio edition of his plays in 1623 we will find him praised for his industry, his eloquence, or his pleasant personal qualities. Henry Chettle, writing in 1592 an apology for the attack on Shakespeare made by Greene in his death-bed pamphlet *Green's Groats-Worth of Wit* (1592), regretted having helped publish Greene's work because he himself had seen Shakespeare's 'demeanor no lesse civill than he exelent in the qualities he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightnes of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approoves his Art' (*Sh. A.B.*, I, 4). In 1612 Webster praised 'the right happy and copious industry of *M. Shakespeare*', Dekker and Heywood (I, 233), and 'copious Shakespeare' was the formulation of Francis Kirkman in 1652 (II, 24). In the testimony of his fellow-actors and sharers, Heminge and Condell, who collected his plays together for the First Folio, Shakespeare's fluency became almost legendary:

Who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarce received from him a blot in his papers. (I, 316)

'Neatness' is a relative term, of course: by the standards of Elizabethan playhouse manuscripts Shakespeare's papers may have been tidier than others, but that does not seem to have helped editors much. And Ben Jonson (No. 1a below) took exception to this panegyric in terms of the classical conception of 'the Art to blot'. Reactions to Jonson's criticism form one of the centres of the Art-Nature controversy over the next two hundred years.

The epithet 'Gentle' used by Jonson and in Heminge and Condell's tribute was echoed by others (I, 407), and collectively such references build up a flattering picture: 'Friendly Shakespeare' (I, 133), with 'his

cunning braine' (I, 365) or 'that nimble *Mercury* [his] braine' (I, 245), 'Ingenious *Shakespeare*' (I, 280). Of tribute there is no shortage, but discrimination does not extend much beyond varying an accepted praise-term. The quality most often attributed to Shakespeare (largely, it must be noted, on the strength of his early Ovidian poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*) was that of eloquence, usually expressed in the word 'sweet'. In his *Polimanteia* (1595) W. Covell added a marginal note to his praise of Samuel Daniel: 'All praise worthy. Lucrecia Sweet Shakespeare' (I, 23). In Jonson's poem in the First Folio (No. 1a below) we have the famous 'sweet Swan of Avon' (echoed in 1647: I, 503), while in *L'Allegro* Milton went one better:

... sweetest *Shakespeare*, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild. (I, 372)

The phrase 'sweet Shakespeare' occurs so often in the *Parnassus* plays, those trendy Cambridge satires of the 1600s (cf. I, 67, 68 (twice), 69, 102) that one suspects a parody of a stock response. Variations on it abound: 'Honie-tong'd *Shakespeare*' is John Weever's address to the poet in 1595, and he goes on to celebrate some of his favourite creations—*Adonis*, *Lucrece*, *Romeo*, *Richard*—with their 'sugred tongues' (I, 24); 'hony-flowing Vaine' is Richard Barnfield's version three years later (I, 51); 'mellifluous' says Heywood in 1635 (I, 393), and in 1639 Thomas Bancroft adores 'Thy Muses sugred dainties' (I, 439). George Lynn praised 'Smooth *Shakespeare*' in 1640 (I, 451), a year which saw the publication of the *Poems* by John Benson. In his address to the reader Benson promised that:

in your perusall you shall finde them Seren, cleere and eligantly plaine, such gentle straines as shall recreate and not perplexe your braine, no intricate or cloudy stuffe to puzzell intellect, but perfect eloquence. . . . (I, 454)

After the energies expended on the *Sonnets* by modern critics that assurance seems over-confident, but Benson is merely subscribing to the accepted evaluation of Shakespeare: so an anonymous poem appended to the volume celebrates these 'smooth Rhimes' (I, 422). The definitive expression of this established view is the effusive, indeed cloying encomium of Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasury* (1598):

As the soule of *Euphorbus* was thought to live in *Pythagoras*; so the sweete wittie soule of *Ovid* lives in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakespeare*, witnes

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his *Venus* and *Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c. . . .

As *Epius Stolo* said, that the Muses would speake with *Plautus* tongue, if they would speak Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with *Shakespeares* fine filed phrase, if they would speake English. (I, 46)

Our respect for Meres's independent testimony is bound to be reduced by D. C. Allen's discovery that he 'borrowed' the form and much of the content of his work from the *Officina* (1520) by J. Ravisius Textor and, so to speak, merely inserted English names in the gaps.² Yet it is an accurate summing-up of the dominant tone of contemporary allusions, generous but facile.

Reading through the allusions after 1623 one does not discover a sudden access of penetration. The celebration becomes more ecstatic: Richard Flecknoe admires

inimitable *Shakespeare's* way,
Promethian-like, to animate a Play (II, 163)

while other writers become idolatrous: 'Godlike Shakespeare', 'Divine', 'immortal' (II, 338, 259, 264, 339), although we occasionally find the traditional and more moderate epithets: 'gentle' (II, 71), 'sweet' (II, 277). But these miscellaneous references are sometimes a useful guide to the changes of taste that were overtaking the mid-seventeenth century. As early as 1647 Thomas Cartwright, in the Folio collection of Beaumont and Fletcher, elevated Fletcher since his wit was more up-to-date:

Shakespeare to thee was dull, whose best jest lyes
I'th Ladies questions, and the Fooles replies,
Old fashion'd wit, which walkt from town to town
In turn'd Hose, which our fathers call'd the Clown,
Whose wit our nice times would obscenness call,
And which made Bawdry pass for Comickall:
Nature was all his Art, thy veine was free
As his, but without his scurility. (I, 511)

The rather self-conscious refinement of the Restoration stage can be seen again in a prologue to Shirley's *Love Tricks*, republished in 1667:

In our Old Plays, the humour Love and Passion
Like Doublet, Hose, and Cloak, are out of fashion:
That which the World call'd Wit in *Shakespeare's* age,
Is laught at, as improper for our Stage. (II, 138)

One immediate modernisation was in costume: Catherine Philips, in a letter dated 3 December 1662, recorded how 'only the other day, when *Othello* was play'd, the Doge of Venice and all his Senators came upon the Stage with Feathers in their Hats, which was like to have chang'd the Tragedy into a Comedy, but that the Moor and Desdemona acted their Parts well'.³ Another and more important updating also involved *Othello* on the first occasion, recorded in Thomas Jordan's 'Prologue to introduce the first Woman that came to Act on the Stage in the Tragedy, call'd *The Moor of Venice*':

... In this reforming age
We have intents to civilize the Stage.
Our woman are defective, and so siz'd
You'd think they were some of the Guard disguiz'd;
For (to speak truth) men act, that are between
Forty and fifty, Wenches of fifteen;
With bone so large, and nerve so incomplicant,
When you call *Desdemona*, enter Giant. (II, 87)

This happy event seems to have taken place in 1660.

The impact on English culture of the return of a King and court from France has been duly noted by literary historians. For the reception of Shakespeare it soon produced a tension between an idolatry for our greatest dramatist and the highly developed critical concepts of rules, decorum, propriety, the unities and so on—that amalgam of Aristotle and Horace borrowed from the French seventeenth century (who had themselves borrowed it from the Italian sixteenth century), which was to determine neoclassical attitudes to Shakespeare for several generations. The diarist John Evelyn noted the new trend very early, writing on 26 November 1661: 'I saw *Hamlet* Prince of Denmark played: but now the old playe began to disgust this refined age: since his Majestie being so long abroad.'⁴ According to the canons of refinement Shakespeare left much to be desired, yet it was still open for the critic to maintain a balance between the demands of the present and idolatry for the past. Such a balance was effected by Edward Phillips in 1675, in the Preface to his *Theatrum Poetarum*, refurbishing the traditional distinction between 'Wit, Ingenuity . . . Learning, even Elegancy' in verse on the one hand, and, on the other, 'True Native Poetry', which has an 'Air and Spirit' of its own, not to be reached by study, industry, or the observance of the rules:

this Poetic *Energie* . . . would be required to give life to all the rest, which

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shines through the roughest most unpolish't and antiquated Language, and may happily be wanting, in the most polite and reformed. . . . [So] *Shakespeare*, in spite of all his unfiled expressions, his rambling and indigested Fancys, the laughter of the *Critical*, yet must be confess't a *Poet* above many that go beyond him in *Literature* some degrees. (II, 221)

II

That balance could be struck by the critic, since he was involved in the evaluation of a finished output, a settled canon. But to those in the theatre, concerned with Shakespeare as a living force and as a way of life—the 'refined' and 'reforming' attitudes which were disgusted by the 'Old fashion'd wit' of the Elizabethans—the tension could only be resolved by changing the poet rather than the taste of the age. Part of the explanation for the need to adapt is social, to do with the size of the audience and the number of theatres. Whereas in Shakespeare's London there were from five to eight theatres open at any one time, and a weekly audience of some 18,000 to 24,000,⁵ in November, 1660 only two companies were licensed by the crown: the Duke's Men, managed by Sir William D'Avenant, and the King's Men, run by Thomas Killigrew. Indeed in 1682, due largely, it seems, to a decline in the status and quality of actors available, and hence of audiences attracted, the two companies amalgamated into one (though they returned to two in 1695). The theatres were much smaller than the open-air public theatres of Shakespeare's day; they accommodated about four hundred people, at much higher prices, in late afternoon and evening performances. Although there are enough references to rowdyism and violence within the Restoration theatres for us not to make the mistake of equating them with a decorous court-theatre or the kind of intimate circle which Gibbon records around Voltaire, it is nonetheless true that by comparison with Shakespeare's this was a more socially select audience, of fashionable or would-be-fashionable people, their hangers-on and their servants. Since the available audience was small, a company would get through its repertoire quickly, and unless many new plays were forthcoming they would be in constant need of material. It was evidently with this in mind that in the winter of 1660 D'Avenant 'humbly presented . . . a proposition of reformeinge some of the most ancient Playes that were played at Blackfriars and of makeinge them, fitt.'⁶ D'Avenant obtained the rights for a number of

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plays by Shakespeare, and others by Jonson, Shirley, Beaumont and Fletcher, while Killigrew's troupe received a similar dispensation. The companies' dependence on the old plays in the period 1660-1700 can be seen from the fact that out of the 959 performances of which we have records, 486 were of old plays, 473 of new.⁷

The adaptations themselves constitute a unique document: there is no comparable instance of the work of a major artist being altered in such a sweeping fashion in order to conform to the aesthetic demand or expectations of a new age. In the prefaces and prologues the adapters give their reasons for altering Shakespeare's plays, often speaking as if they had rendered him and the public some great service in rescuing a few worthwhile parts from an otherwise obsolete and useless work. Some of their ostensible reasons can be listed:

- (a) to make a more attractive theatrical vehicle;
- (b) to remove metaphors and those instances of 'figurative language' which either seemed too bold for current critical theory or could create difficulties in comprehension;
- (c) to remove violations of the unities of place, time and action;
- (d) to remove violations of the decorum of action, such as violence or deaths on stage;
- (e) to remove violations of the decorum of social position, such as low-life characters being involved in serious plots, or heroes who speak in prose;
- (f) to remove violations of the decorum of genre, such as introducing comic characters or incidents into tragedy;
- (g) to remove violations of poetic justice.

Instances of all these motivations can be found in the statements of intent included below: see especially Nos 9 (Dryden and D'Avenant), 18 (Ravenscroft), 19 (Dryden), 20 (Otway), 21, 23 and 24 (all by Tate).

The processes can be observed in the remarkable freedom with which the adapters worked. For *The Law Against Lovers* D'Avenant conflated *Measure for Measure* with *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the result seems to a modern reader like a bad dream, in which his brain is simultaneously present at performances of both plays. Lucio is changed from the lower-plot villain to a gentleman, and Angelo is changed from the upper-plot villain to a character who, as he explains, did not *really* want Isabella's virginity or Claudio's life but was merely testing her fortitude. The neoclassical critics ran into some confusion over the concept of 'good' characters. Instead of being 'good in their kind',

i.e., villainous villains, evil kings or good kings, they understood 'morally good': all kings should be just and humane, all women chaste and modest, all soldiers irascible and warlike. If D'Avenant suppresses the unpleasant aspects of Lucio and Angelo, Tate performs the same operation on Richard II, carefully removing all the unpleasant traits which Shakespeare, faithful to history, had given him. This desire to avoid evil and suffering is seen most sharply in Tate's *Lear*, where neither Lear nor Cordelia dies, and Edgar marries Cordelia; since Tate also omits the Fool, it could be said that he has cut both comedy and tragedy from the play.

Yet the actual evidence of the adaptations shows many divergences from the declared principles. Tate adds more comedy to *Coriolanus*, making Valeria an exercise in Restoration satire; Shadwell does the same thing to Melissa in his *Timon of Athens*. Although both characterisations are well-observed, and enjoyable in themselves, they hardly square with neoclassical tenets. Unity of plot was another criterion for having failed to observe which Shakespeare was often criticised: yet the Dryden-D'Avenant *Tempest* adds a whole gallery of subsidiary characters who act out a matching plot⁸ (another woman who has never seen a man; a man who has never seen a woman—as one critic has observed, it is surprising that they omitted to give Prospero a wife). Similarly in his *Macbeth* D'Avenant expands the character of Lady Macduff until she is the exact anti-type of Lady Macbeth, and then expands Lady Macbeth's part until it provides a more sustained balance. Violence and bloodshed onstage were unanimously deplored by both critics and adapters, as in Tate's reason for changing the end of *King Lear*: 'Otherwise I must have incumbered the Stage with dead Bodies, which Conduct makes many Tragedies conclude with unseasonable Jests'. Yet few stages are cluttered with corpses as quickly as in the final scene of Dryden's *Troilus and Cressida*, while the last act of Ravenscroft's *Titus Andronicus*, including as it does an onstage torture scene, is far more gruesome than anything in Shakespeare. In fact, violence was fashionable on the Restoration stage: for his *Empress of Morocco* in 1673 Elkanah Settle had prepared an elaborate and realistic backcloth (duly reproduced in the Quarto text) which showed dead and dying bodies racked and torn in a torture chamber.⁹ In both his *Lear* and *Coriolanus* adaptations Tate included an attempted rape scene, and was imitated with more gusto by D'Urfey for his *Cymbeline*.

Another area in which the adapters' work could hardly be defended by appeal to critical principle was the increased spectacles and shows

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which were added as theatrical attractions. *Macbeth* was altered by D'Avenant to include greater opportunities for flying witches, singing, dancing and stage tricks. The great spectacular was of course the Dryden-D'Avenant *Tempest* in its operatic version by Shadwell, all the stage directions from which are included here. Writing of the opening direction ('The Front of the Stage is open'd, and the Band of 24 Violin's [i.e., stringed instruments of all kinds], with the Harpsicals and Theorbo's which accompany the Voices, are plac'd between the Pit and the Stage') Edward J. Dent observed the greater importance attached to the music, in that the orchestra was double its usual size and was placed in the pit, instead of in the gallery over the stage, the usual place.¹⁰ Music plays a greater part in many of the adaptations included here: the song for the prison scene in Tate's *Richard 2*, the dance with castanets and the quartet for voices in D'Avenant's *Law Against Lovers*, the masque in Shadwell's *Timon of Athens*. By the time of *The Fairy Queen* (1692) the masque is more important than the play: this heavily cut version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* acts as a kind of interlude to the masque, as the normal relationship is reversed. Yet one should not take the masque as providing a tableau ending; as Dent observed,

in no case does the act end with the end of the music. On every occasion there is a certain amount of spoken dialogue after the music is over. This is no doubt due to the habit then prevailing of keeping the curtain up during the whole of the play. . . . There was then no attempt to make a 'situation' or 'tableau' at the end of an act, since an effect of this kind depends essentially on the sudden obliteration of the picture by the closing curtain. (*Op. cit.*, p. 229)

Yet the music and spectacle were undeniably a major attraction, as the long history of eighteenth-century theatre will show.

If modern readers are disturbed by the spectacular effects inserted into Shakespeare's plays they are likely to be even more upset by what happened to his language. All the adapters took a free rein in changing details of style, above all metaphor. A useful example of the kinds of 'improvement' is D'Avenant's *Hamlet*, in which he made a great number of small-scale alterations (which made it unsuitable for excerpting here). Hazelton Spencer's analysis (in what is still the best book on the adaptations in the period 1660 to 1710) finds over three hundred alterations.¹¹ Decorum seems to be the operating principle: 'O villain, villain, smiling [damned] villain' (1.5.106) is cut altogether; 'The Divell take thy soule' (5.1.246) becomes 'Perdition catch thee'.

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'Vulgar', or physical words are toned down: 'To *grunt* and sweat under a weary life' (3.1.77) becomes 'groan and sweat'; 'In *hugger mugger* to inter him' (4.5.80) is revised as 'Obscurely'; 'I do not set my life at a pin's fee' becomes 'I do not value my life'. (Pins, like blankets and knives, were not thought appropriate to the high style of tragedy). Strong metaphors become weak: 'here Affront Ophelia' (3.1.30 f.) becomes 'meet Ophelia here'; 'Is sicklied ore with the pale cast of thought' (3.1.85) is refined to 'Shews sick and pale with Thought'; 'And wants not *buzzers* to infect his ear' (4.5.86) is scaled down to 'whispers'. The two most striking instances of this translating of Shakespeare into a cooler, more polite language, are D'Avenant's *Macbeth* and Tate's *Lear*, where a line-by-line comparison with the original will reveal a continuity between theatrical taste and critical opinion, for on no issue were the Augustan critics between Dryden and Dr Johnson more unified than in their reservations about Shakespeare's lawless poetry.

What, in general, are we to make of these adaptations? Not all of their contemporaries were pleased with the adapters' work. In a quib called *Sir William Davenant's Voyage to the Other World* (1668) Richard Flecknoe visualised his hero's discomfiture in that place: 'Nay even Shakespeare, whom he thought to have found his greatest Friend, was as much offended with him as any of the rest for so spoiling and mangling of his Plays' (pp. 8-9).¹² An anonymous poet writing in a collection called *Epilogue to the Ordinary* (1673) mocked the triumph of spectacle:

Now empty shows must want of sense supply,
Angels shall dance and *Macbeth's* Witches fly (p. 167)

while the notorious vigour with which Dryden and D'Avenant's seamen imitated their shipwreck called forth this analogy in the anonymous poem *The Country Club*:

Such noise, such stink, such smoke there was, you'd swear
The *Tempest* surely had been acted there.

But these are minor objections compared to the outrage expressed by nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics:

... it is impossible not to feel how false was the taste upon which [the adaptations] were built.¹³

[On Tate's *Lear*]: this shameless, this execrable piece of dementation.¹⁴

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[On the operatic *Tempest*]: an object-lesson of prime importance . . . no imagination, derived from a mere description, can adequately depict its monstrosity,—to be fully hated it must be fully seen.¹⁵

[On the Dryden–D'Avenant *Tempest*] I doubt if sillier stuff was ever written by two poets, laureate or other . . . this capital offence.¹⁶

[On the same]: a licentious farce. Everything that the authors lay their hands on is defiled.¹⁷

Yet a new generation of scholars, who specialise in these adaptations, has recently arisen to defend them.¹⁸ Unfortunately a certain degree of special pleading seems necessary. Professor C. Spencer advises us to treat the adaptations as if they were new plays, for 'if we are in the proper mood, we can enjoy a play containing two women who have never seen a man, a man who has never seen a woman, brother and sister monsters, and male and female spirits' (*Five Restoration Adaptations*, p. 9); had Shakespeare written in the Restoration climate he might well have 'included a love story in *King Lear*' (p. 10). In any case Shakespeare can stand some improvements: 'one does not expect a tight structure in Shakespeare', thus Cibber rightly omitted 'quantities of unnecessary material' in *Richard III* and Granville understandably 'prunes much of the expansive material . . . from *The Merchant of Venice*', while Dryden and Davenant actually improved the plot-structure of *The Tempest*. 'The resulting plays are more tightly coherent and are primarily social: they emphasise permanent patterns of human relationships with less attention to the depths of individual experience' (p. 12). In *King Lear*, indeed, 'The Fool is quite properly omitted; he would have no function in Tate's version, and he occupies time needed for the love story' (p. 23).

It would be possible to argue that Professor Spencer does not understand Shakespeare's plot-structures or style or dramatic meaning, and it is to be regretted that both parties—those who have defended the adaptations and those who have attacked them—have seen fit to denigrate Shakespeare in comparison.¹⁹ However, it seems more fruitful to concentrate on the plays themselves, and to analyse in a less partisan manner quite what model of theatrical effect they were designed to satisfy. And further—a task as yet little attempted—we ought to see to what extent the alterations reflect contemporary critical attitudes. I hope that the full coverage given to the adaptations in this collection will assist study of the interrelation of criticism and drama.