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STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARIAN AND OTHER JACOBEAN TRAGEDY, 1918-1972: A RETROSPECT

CLIFFORD LEECH

It is difficult to know how to start this retrospect, how to decide what to include, what to leave out. It is today almost impossible to write about Shakespeare without making some reference to his Jacobean contemporaries and successors, or to write about any of them and yet omit mention of their supreme fellow. Webster and Ford, to take the two most obvious examples, manifestly echo patterns and speeches that they found in him; Fletcher, with or without Beaumont, delighted in giving us ingenious variations on what he offered. In comedy Jonson made a commensurable contribution to his successors' writing, but in tragedy there was only one fount from which the Jacobeans and Carolines drew their life-blood. Only Chapman, perhaps, is almost entirely *sui generis*: the rest, even when they are most different from Shakespeare, as for example Fletcher is, are writing with Shakespeare to some extent in mind. Moreover, any book or article on the nature of tragedy itself can hardly be written without bringing in more than one early seventeenth-century dramatist. So what can be offered here comprises only a few comments on the way that, in the writings of the last fifty years, the critic or historian has linked in his mind the major tragedies of Shakespeare and other tragic drama from around 1600 to the closing of the theatres.

Yet it seems legitimate to comment on a paradox that has come to manifest itself of recent years in the academic writing in this field, which I think is intimately related to trends in university curricula and to what are, I believe mistakenly, regarded as dominant student-preferences. There was a time when it would have been inconceivable for a student to 'specialise' (or 'major') in English without some not inconsiderable study of several of the Elizabethan and Jacobean tragic writers. For the past ten years I have been teaching in North America, and my information is now fuller in relation to that scene than to that of the United Kingdom, though I suspect that, just as Chapman in *Bussy d'Ambois* made Montsurry say that before long the English court would come to imitate the French in its manners as already in attire, so England and Scotland and Wales (perhaps Ireland too) are doubtless catching up or climbing down. Perhaps I may illustrate this from a personal experience. Eight years ago I was asked, on a visit to a United States university, to talk informally to an undergraduate class on *Hamlet*. The regular instructor, thanking me with all courtesy, said: 'Of course, I don't suppose they understood those references to Kyd.' Yet probably never before has there been so much scholarly work on Shakespeare's fellows than we have seen in the last fifty years. I shall refer to a number of the major books, but there are major periodicals too, including *Renaissance Drama* and *Studies in English Literature*, which every year gives one of its four issues to Elizabethan and Jacobean drama; and of course articles in this field appear elsewhere with overwhelming frequency.

Partly, of course, this is due to the demands for 'Ph.D. research' and for the continuing evidence of publication in a young university teacher's career. This is likely, at least for a time, to be in the field where he wrote his thesis. It has often had a bad effect. The thesis can go sour, but the young scholar feels committed: he has to plough his furrow for what it is worth, however increasingly infertile the ground begins to appear. In the area we are considering there is some recent writing which is either tired or even resentful. It might be a good thing if every successful Ph.D. candidate were persuaded to turn at once to a new area, and to come back to his Ph.D. only when the sourness has worn off (if it does). It is appalling that he is so often bullied into publishing at once. This is particularly true because when, for example, a young man or woman has written about Webster in the dissertation, he or she is no longer easily able to teach Webster's plays to undergraduates – which is the best way, surely, for the thing to remain vital to him. Only a few undergraduates will 'opt' for Jacobean tragedy apart from Shakespeare; if we want the generality to know about it, we must demand that they study it: then they may become marked for life through the knowledge thrust upon them. Let us brood in silence for a moment on the situation of the student who knows Shakespeare only in a vacuum.

Between the wars

Nevertheless, despite all its limitations, our period of some fifty years has been a major time for writings in this field. And let me begin this retrospect by a slight antedating of the announced starting-point. Perhaps Rupert Brooke's *John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama*[1] is not so much read now as it should be. It was written in 1911–12 as a dissertation which won Brooke his fellowship at King's in 1913. His view of Webster as a whole is probably not ours: we are no longer likely to agree that 'A play of Webster's is full of the feverish and ghastly turmoil of a nest of maggots' (p. 158), though there are perhaps now people from certain universities who are getting back to that. But let us listen to him for a moment on Shakespeare's relation to his fellows:

> The relation of Shakespeare with the whole of this period, of which he, then at his greatest, was, to our eyes, the centre, is curious. His half-connections, the way he was influenced and yet transmuted the influences, would require a good deal of space to detail. But in this, his 'dark period' – whatever it was, neuralgia, a spiritual crisis, Mary Fitton, or literary fashion, that caused it – he was not unique or eccentric in the *kind* of his art. His humour was savage, he railed against sex, his tragedies were bloody, his heroes meditated curiously on mortality. It was all in the fashion.
>
> (pp. 66–7)

The tone is no longer what we are used to, but Brooke is open-minded enough: he does not simply believe in Mary Fitton's influence or in the fact of a 'spiritual crisis' or in 'literary fashion'; all he insists on is that Shakespeare belonged to the time of the other major writers of English tragedy and was not, in 'kind', essentially different.

What we needed in those times was more readily accessible information. We had, in a fashion, the texts, for the Old Mermaids were easily enough available in second-hand copies (green and brown) and in rather tatty reprints. But we needed people who would explore the field and chart its pattern. The major event which has given to subsequent criticism a firm base was the publication of E. K. Chambers's *The Elizabethan Stage*[2]: its four volumes gave us the facts, which later research has been able to correct only on comparatively small matters of detail. And Chambers, in exploring the Elizabethans and the early Jacobeans, had always Shakespeare in view. His work achieved its long-envisaged summit when *William*

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[1] London, 1916.

[2] Oxford, 1923.

Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems appeared seven years later. From this point on there was no excuse for ignorance. Some years ago John Dover Wilson, addressing a small group at the Shakespeare Institute at Stratford-upon-Avon, described Chambers's *William Shakespeare* as marking the great watershed in Shakespeare studies in our century. Very soon after *The Elizabethan Stage* was published, Allardyce Nicoll in *British Drama*[1] explored the drama of the English Renaissance in relation to the whole body of drama in England, and he was later to extend his frame in *World Drama*.[2] The importance of these books is partly as frequently-consulted works of reference, and partly too in making a wide public aware of the changing dramatic pattern over the centuries. Nicoll had little room for detailed criticism, but his books have laid a broad foundation on which others could build their more idiosyncratic structures. Moreover, it should after this have been difficult to think of a writer, a genre, or a period in total isolation. For those who were at school in the 1920s, it is strange to look back and recall the slack and facile clichés often, but not by Nicoll, used in referring to the Elizabethans and Jacobeans apart from Shakespeare. Shaw's labelling of Webster as 'the Tussaud laureate' stuck for a long time, and is still occasionally found when a production of a Webster play is being popularly reviewed; Jonson was, it was said, too 'learned' for the stage; Marlowe was a poet who was unfortunately led to the theatre through economic circumstance; 'damned dull' was a comment on Chapman's tragedies from a young teacher of my undergraduate time. No large claim can be made that we have in all respects improved, but at least our present clichés are uttered in the face of a wide range of thoughtful writing.

T. S. Eliot's brief essays on Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, which first appeared during the years 1918–34, have in retrospect an air of *sprezzatura*, brilliant and sometimes brilliantly misguided things that a fresh reading of the texts had led him to give utterance to. Although he was familiar with the then 'literature of the subject', he could be influenced by writers whose reputation has not stood the test of time (as in the case of J. M. Robertson), and his application of Freudian psychology to *Hamlet* is now generally seen as facile. But it was these essays that set many a young mind alight in the 1920s, and today they should be constantly re-read. We can pass over their 'shots in the dark' (often indeed 'near-misses'); we shall again and again be brought up against comments as challenging as this:

> Chapman appears to have been potentially the greatest of all these men [the others being Webster, Tourneur, Middleton]: his was the mind which was the most classical, his was the drama which is the most independent in its tendency toward a dramatic form – although it may seem the most formless and the most indifferent to dramatic necessities.[3]

In broad terms, the 1920s gave us the map. It was in the 1930s that critical exploration became truly searching. Of course, the nineteenth century had here and there its enthusiasm for the Jacobeans: we can think of Swinburne, and of Symonds and Ellis in their Mermaid introductions. But M. C. Bradbook's *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*[4] and Una Ellis-Fermor's *The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation*[5] drew on the more exact knowledge by then made available. These were books written with a deep sense of the value of wha was being discussed, yet with that sense of fact that Eliot in his 1923 essay on 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' had insisted on as basic to good criticism. Yet the burden of the past could not be easily discarded. It seems likely that Muriel Bradbrook would not now, as she did then, use the heading 'The Decadence' for her discussion of Beaumont and Fletcher and Ford. She was echoing the use of the word in S. P. Sherman's introduction to the first volume of W. Bang's *Materialen* edition of *John Fordes Dramatische Werke.*[1] Of course, we have it with us still, but in this notably decadent age in which we now write it seems at least impertinent to use it of major Jacobean and Caroline writers, who are not so good as Shakespeare, who wrote in his shadow, but who nevertheless gave us something of their own with astonishing skill and insight. Occasionally we might wish for a more precise wording. Miss Bradbrook is excellent in relating the sub-plots to the total structure of some of the plays, giving hints which Richard Levin has thoroughly developed, for Shakespeare and many others, in *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama*,[2] but she surely makes too easy an equation when she declares of the sub-plot of *The Changeling*: 'It acts as a kind of parallel or reflection in a different mode: their relationship is precisely that of masque and antimasque, say the two halves of Jonson's *Masque of Queens*' (p. 221). 'Precisely'? The sub-plot does not precede, prepare the way for, the main action, nor is it a grotesque contrast to a noble entry of main masquers: rather, despite its mad-house setting, it ends in the establishment of common sense, which is hardly visible in the world of Middleton's noble family. Such matters apart, it is difficult to think of a more generally rewarding 1930s book on its subject, unless it is perhaps Una Ellis-Fermor's almost coincident one. Boldly Miss Ellis-Fermor put two quotations from Webster on her title-page. 'Tussaud laureate' indeed! For her he was properly a major dramatist and poet, and not all the source-hunting, and declared moral shock, of recent years have made any serious dint on that verdict. It is true that she softened Webster's effect by interpreting 'Look you, the stars shine still' as consolatory, which we are not likely to do; and we may query her statement that Ford was essentially a Jacobean, for if ever a specifically Caroline drama truly flowered it was surely in *Perkin Warbeck* and *The Broken Heart.* In these two books there is learning and humanity, a sense of what Shakespeare was, a sense that his Jacobean contemporaries are worth studying, and not merely as men who point to his superiority. Not until Robert Ornstein's much later book, which will be commented on below, have we had work of equal range and perceptiveness. Ornstein has had the advantage of building on Miss Bradbrook's and Miss Ellis-Fermor's groundwork, but *Themes and Conventions* and *Jacobean Drama* remain books we rely on and recommend.

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[1] London, 1925. [2] London, 1949.

[3] 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists' (1924); reprinted in *Selected Essays* (London, 1932).

[4] Cambridge, 1935. [5] London, 1936.

With a disregard for the convenient chronological division, Miss Ellis-Fermor's later book *The Frontiers of Drama*[3] should here be mentioned. It contains, I think, her most mature critical writing. Its range was over drama in general, and, although her references to Shakespeare's contemporaries in tragic writing are here incidental, they contribute powerfully to the book's total effect.

In this time we acquired information in a way other than those already mentioned. This was through the publication of truly scholarly editions of the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries. There were F. L. Lucas's edition of Webster[4] and Allardyce Nicoll's Tourneur,[5] following the pioneer work of T. M. Parrott's *The Plays of George Chapman.*[6] Again bypassing the chronological sub-division, we are bound to think of the more recent editions by Fredson Bowers of Dekker[7] and, under his general editorship, of Beaumont and Fletcher.[8] Professor Bowers's methods of editing are of course very different from those known in the 1920s: the 'new bibliography', which he so outstandingly embodies today, has given all editing an increased self-consciousness, an increased awareness of the magnitude of the task undertaken. This applies even where the editorial procedures have taken lines different from those that Bowers stands for. One result has been that thorough editing (as in the New Arden Shakespeare and the Revels Plays) has taken much longer to come into print – and that is in the long run a genuine gain. The non-Bowers editions just mentioned, and some comparable others, will be referred to in the following section. What we still sadly lack are up-to-date editions of Ford and Middleton. Some years ago several North American presses could have managed these without difficulty: now they are pressed for money. However, an edition of Massinger, edited by Philip Edwards for the Clarendon Press, is promised, and a Shirley, of lesser but real importance for tragedy, is apparently to appear from the same publisher.

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[1] Louvain, 1908.

[2] Chicago, 1971.

[3] London, 1945.

[4] London, 1927.

[5] London, 1929.

[6] London, 1910–13.

[7] Cambridge, 1953–61.

[8] Cambridge, 1961– .

The period of this section was notably enriched by the first *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, edited by Harley Granville-Barker and G. B. Harrison,[1] which included a paper by Bonamy Dobrée on 'Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time'. He paid a special tribute to Chapman, where he reiterates the sense of the uniqueness of that dramatist which has been noted already:

> It is more to the point to study the dramatists who had made their appearance at the end of the [sixteenth] century, not because they had much or any effect on Shakespeare – it is, rather, the other way about – but because they developed further than Shakespeare did certain aspects of the drama in which they specialised, using material which he was content to handle as side issues in his wider sweep. The greatest of these is no doubt Chapman, the nearest approach to a 'metaphysical' poet in the drama of the time. (p. 255)

It is curious that Peter Ure, in his chapter on 'Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time' in *A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, edited by Kenneth Muir and S. Schoenbaum,[2] concentrates much more on the Elizabethan contemporaries, but he does say of Shakespeare's plays that 'none is without some kind of contextual relationship to other plays of the time' (p. 220).

After 1939

In view of what has been said above about the increasing undergraduate ignorance of Shakespeare's contemporaries, it is ironic that the past generation has had more ways of increasing its knowledge than ever before. There is no need to refer to the big anthologies of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, though some of them have been most carefully edited: unless, however, they are 'adopted' for a class, they are not likely to be much consulted. But several series have made Jacobean plays, especially tragedies, easily available in comparatively inexpensive form. They can here be mentioned in chronological order of appearance: the Revels Plays (1958–), the Regents (1964–), the New Mermaids (1964–), the Fountainwell series (1968–). These editions are in every case anxious to present the chosen play in relation to what Shakespeare was doing or had done, and the best of the introductions to these volumes have provided major illumination on the connection or the absence of it.

Scholarship, as distinct from criticism, has done us a most signal service in these years, as in the 1920s. Gerald Eades Bentley's *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*[3] in its splendid seven volumes has continued Chambers's work in *The Elizabethan Stage*, carrying the record on to 1642. Now we have all the information we need for Shakespeare's immediate successors, and can disregard it only at our peril. Other works of reference are legion, but reference should be made here to *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*, edited by Oscar James Campbell,[4] which is of course mainly concerned with Shakespeare but includes informative entries on other writers of tragedy up to 1642. Also in this category should be noted F. S. Boas's *An Introduction to Stuart Drama*,[1] a book of minor importance critically, but splendid for reference purposes.

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[1] Cambridge, 1934.

[2] Cambridge, 1971.

[3] Oxford, 1941–60.

[4] London, 1966.

One of the most distinguished of post-war critical writings was also one of the earliest. It was F. P. Wilson's *Elizabethan and Jacobean*,[2] based on the Alexander Lectures he gave at Toronto in 1943. It is unnecessary to search for suitable words of praise for a book to which all of us owe much. It is enough to recall that its last two chapters were respectively titled 'Drama' and 'Shakespeare', and that the author talks of the tragic writers with wisdom as well as with enthusiasm and discrimination, feeling it unnecessary to rebuke the dramatists for their strong imaginings.

Two major and wide-ranging books came at the beginning of the 1960s: R. H. Ornstein's *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*[3] and Eugene M. Waith's *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden*.[4] Beginning with a chapter on 'Tragedy and the Age', Ornstein proceeds to examine the varieties of the tragic view embodied in each major dramatist between 1600 and 1642. Shakespeare is reserved for the last chapter, so that when we arrive there we have been led more strikingly to a comparison than is frequently the case. There are many shrewd insights into the individual dramatists, and there is also much careful consideration of the age's modes of thinking (as for example when a distinction is made between 'ideas which are at the vital centre of late Renaissance creative thought and those which are cherished as intellectual pieties'). The tragic writer and the preacher are seen as having basically different approaches to the human condition, and on the book's last page we have this firm and compelling statement: 'To accept the affirmations of tragedy we must have the courage to cherish beauty as it is being destroyed and to rejoice in the fulfillment of human greatness no matter how indifferent to man's fulfillment or annihilation is the universe.' The book has been much studied and widely admired, and its influence can I think be traced in a number of subsequent writings. Yet it is curious that so balanced and broad a view of Jacobean tragedy appears to have had no impact at all on some critics during the years that have followed. After twelve years it surely remains the best and most comprehensive treatment of this body of drama.

Waith's scope is both smaller and larger. He does not attempt to take in the whole field of Jacobean tragedy, but looks backwards to Marlowe and forwards to Dryden. He is indeed one of those rare people thoroughly at home with Restoration along with Renaissance drama. His discussion may seem one-sided, for he is manifestly arguing a case which he feels has been neglected: he wants us to respond to Marlowe's and Shakespeare's and Chapman's and Dryden's heroes as emblematic of the Herculean ideal, and he makes a thoroughly good case. We may say 'but yet', but we have to accept his insistence on the hero's magnitude, are surely compelled to reject a mere denigration as a tenable way of dealing with any of his heroes. He has formidably continued the argument in *Ideas of Greatness: Heroic Drama in England*,[5] where again Shakespeare is related to the whole seventeenth-century context. If at times he holds back from recognising that the Jacobean hero has a littleness as well as a greatness, he has made us more deeply conscious of the greatness, however flawed. Both here and elsewhere in his writing Waith has, moreover, shown himself able to deal with English and French drama in revealing juxtaposition.

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[1] Oxford, 1946.

[2] Oxford, 1945.

[3] Madison, 1960.

[4] London, 1962.

[5] London, 1971.

Earlier than this, Madeleine Doran published *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama.*[1] It must be briefly saluted here, for it has been properly influential on much later writing. But Miss Doran's special concern stops with the turn of the century, though with some glances forward: she observes the efforts of the dramatists to master the form that had come to them from varied sources, medieval and classical, notes the importance of medieval and Renaissance rhetoric in the plays' composition, and emphasises the debate-element which could mirror unresolved oppositions and sometimes confusion. The relevance of this for the Jacobeans needs no underlining.

Some further notable books are: Irving Ribner's *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order*,[2] which perhaps errs on the side of making the dramatists look like *bien-pensants*, but draws on Ribner's extensive knowledge of the field and is a companion volume to the author's *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy*;[3] John F. Danby's *Poets on Fortune's Hill*,[4] which links Sidney with Beaumont and Fletcher and with Shakespeare's last plays, with a special recognition of irony in the so-called 'romances'; and Bernard Spivack's *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*,[5] which is principally concerned with the relation of Iago to the Vice-figure but includes an occasional reference forward: it could provide a basis for a study of Iago's successors. But one of the most influential books of these years has been Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*,[6] which has provided the main basis for a distinction between the repertories of the public and private theatres in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. We can argue that he discriminates too curiously; he is obviously unhappy about *Troilus and Cressida*; he does not sufficiently allow for the exchange of plays between the two sorts of theatres (*The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Malcontent*, for example); he avers that he is making no qualitative judgement, but he obviously has a preference for the 'democratic' public theatre. Even so, he has made us aware, more fully than anyone before, of the fact of there being two separate theatres in Shakespeare's time, a dichotomy that became even more noticeable when the King's Men took over the Blackfriars and were followed soon after by other adult companies in occupying theatres that were technically 'private'.

Now a less happy note must be struck. People are still with us who wish to denigrate once again the corpus of Jacobean drama, revering Shakespeare of course but using him as a whip for the scourging of his earlier and later contemporaries. Here we need to refer to T. B. Tomlinson's *A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy*.[7] This writer shows some true insights: when he refers to 'Marlowe's imagery of definition and limitation rather than of growth and possibility', he seems indeed right, though we may be puzzled why he should think this a distinction of quality; he wins applause when he insists on the unique character of every considerable play, which makes a too easy (the two words need underlining) generalisation about Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy a nugatory exercise; he is good too in bringing out the special fascination which the stuff of existence can exert on Tourneur and Middleton, fusing with the repugnance each feels respectively for the lust-ridden and money-ridden world. Yet, in contrast with his belief in each play as a world in its own right, he propounds the view that Shakespeare and Tourneur and Middleton (the last of these so modish a name now) achieved a norm by which others may be judged. He dislikes any dramatist who in any way shows an aloofness from the particular (one is reminded of an Australian critic who objects to

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[1] Madison, 1954.
[2] London, 1962.
[3] London, 1960.
[4] London, 1952.
[5] New York, 1958.
[6] Bloomington, 1952.
[7] Cambridge, 1964.

Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* because, along with similar things, a dog is commonly referred to as 'the dog' instead of 'Rover' or whatever): such an aloofness leads to his being 'sterile' (Marlowe) or 'irresponsible' (Fletcher) or 'dangerous' or 'decadent' (Chapman and Ford): his adjectives seem to become, even in his hands, oddly respectable. Here we seem to have the 'Cambridge' school at its most desperate: we should read 'George Eliot, Lawrence and others' (so beautifully vague) in order to recognise the 'breadth, depth and substance' that English literature later achieved. Well, we can value George Eliot and Conrad, Lawrence too, without wanting to put *The White Devil* (which Tomlinson despises, for no compelling reason) away. Curiously, he is oblivious of the work done on the texts of the plays he discusses.

David L. Frost's *The School of Shakespeare*,[1] is also a surprising book. It argues, as if there were anything new about this, that Shakespeare had a major influence on the dramatists who succeeded him. Middleton is again the great name here: some of us can admire him without despising the rest of the Jacobeans. It remains perplexing that Frost finds Middleton the one Jacobean writer who correctly followed in Shakespeare's steps. Of course, we can see Shakespeare behind *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*, but there is surely a greater difference in general attitude between these plays and Shakespeare's tragedies than there is between, say, Webster's and Ford's plays on the one hand and Shakespeare's on the other. Probably all that is meant is that Middleton is 'acceptable', as Shakespeare is and Webster and Ford are not. Frost's bad people are 'anti-Shakespearian', expressing bewilderment and confusion in place of Shakespeare's 'moral certainty'. This point is worth arguing for a sentence or two. Shakespeare's 'moral certainty' (see the comment on Ornstein's book above) surely limited itself to the recognition that certain ways of behaviour are evil and others good (e.g., Cordelia's, Kent's, Cornwall's First Servant's, however rash these people may be): it did not extend to any sureness about the universe, or about the possibility of more than the most fleeting reward. Webster and Ford have that same degree of 'certainty', as exhibited in the figure of Webster's Duchess – we may see, for example, Gunnar Boklund's *The Duchess of Malfi: Sources, Themes, Characters*[2] for its insistence on the true marriage of the Duchess and Antonio, despite Antonio's and the Duchess's blunders and at least the man's incapacity for his insecurely-achieved high place – and in the baroque nobility of Ford's Princess Calantha. Webster is capable of making us recognise a kind of goodness in the ending of a life, formerly a 'black charnel', with insight and firmness; Ford is surely not wrong in wanting us to see Giovanni, for all his guilt (I do not mean merely incest), as splendid in facing his death's-men. In Frost's book there is, I think, a mere prudishness, a refusal in fact to look in the face either the Jacobean world or the world of today. Oddly, he is one of those who think *The Revenger's Tragedy* is Middleton's, which should destroy his case. Surely there could be no play so fiercely virulent, so fully urging an animus against the establishment – unless perhaps *Timon of Athens*?

A book on similar lines is Wilbur Sanders's *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare*,[3] which begins by castigating Marlowe for *The Massacre at Paris*; but this is outside my period and should therefore not be commented on further: it is mentioned only as another example of what contemporary criticism can do when it sets out to denigrate Shakespeare's contemporaries in tragedy.

I hope it has been made clear that these three books all contain good things, are indeed the products of vigorous and sometimes sensitive minds. What worries me is that the writers appear to dislike so much of the drama they write about. Fortunately the theatre is here a good corrective: Webster and Marlowe are there, surely to stay; so of course are Middleton and the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy.*

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[1] Cambridge, 1968.

[2] Cambridge, Mass., 1962.

[3] Cambridge, 1968.

Meanwhile, less angry work goes on. We can note, for example, the *Festschriften* for Hardin Craig and Baldwin Maxwell: *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama*, edited by Richard Hosley,[1] and *Studies in English Drama*, edited by Charles B. Woods and Curt A. Zimansky:[2] both of these link Shakespeare with his contemporaries and successors. In the Craig volume, the following seem to be particularly appropriate here: Allardyce Nicoll's '*The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Virtue of Anonymity', which poses an interesting point, perhaps ultimately derivative from I. A. Richards's experiments in 'practical criticism': if we really cannot say who wrote the play, it has to stand by itself and be responded to without any *a priori* consciousness of an author: the article may make us wonder if it would be good if we could look, say, at *Timon of Athens* and *Troilus and Cressida* like that; the articles on Heywood and Massinger, respectively by Arthur Brown and Philip Edwards, are also to be welcomed. The Maxwell volume has a wider range: R. A. Foakes on Marston (though we may still wonder whether 'fantastical' is wholly the right word for the *Antonio* plays) and Allardyce Nicoll on Chapman give us articles which are presented side by side with writing on Shakespeare, Marlowe, and the drama from the Restoration to the late nineteenth century. Another collection of high value is *Jacobean Theatre*,[3] the first volume in the Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, edited by John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris: of particular note in a generally outstanding volume are Maynard Mack's now famous paper 'The Jacobean Shakespeare', J. R. Mulryne's on Webster's two major tragedies, and Peter Ure's on Chapman.

J. W. Lever's *The Tragedy of State*[4] deals with major things in Jacobean tragedy and does not neglect Shakespeare: unlike some recent writers, he puts to the forefront the violence of Jacobean times and makes us remember that this violence also belongs to us. It was absurd when a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer rebuked him for suggesting that Italy's violence was not to be thought of in the more favoured land that the Jacobeans themselves knew. It seemed highly appropriate that he began this book by referring to Alfred de Musset's *Lorenzaccio*, revived with strong effect at the Festival Theatre, Stratford, Ontario, in 1972.

This retrospect began by indicating the writer's realisation that he hardly knew what to leave out. At an early stage in its planning he became conscious that monographs on the particular writers of Jacobean tragedies should not be mentioned unless to make a point in relation to a book of more general scope. Even so, he is very conscious that the field has been lightly skimmed. It may be best to end with a mention of a book which brings the historical position once more before us: Gerald Eades Bentley's *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590–1642.*[5] Here, as indeed we have come to expect from Bentley, is the large view, the original research, the putting of us in the picture, the giving of an ever more substantial basis for the work of the critic.

[1] London, 1963.
[2] Iowa City, 1962.
[3] London, 1960.
[4] London, 1971.
[5] Princeton, 1971.

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