Of Philosophers and Kings
Political Philosophy in Shakespeare’s
*Macbeth* and *King Lear*
CHAPTER ONE

The Political Philosopher as Dramatic Poet: Preliminary Remarks on the Study of Shakespeare

To preface commentaries on some of the most famous dramas in English literature with advice on how to read them is apt to seem both needless and presumptuous. It is unlikely that anyone interested in lengthy and detailed interpretations of particular plays would feel the want of such instruction. Besides, there already exist countless essays, chapters, and entire volumes devoted to providing it, including several good ones. Still less should a reader of this book need persuading of either the artistic merit or the cultural significance of Shakespeare's literary legacy. No author has been more lavishly praised by other authors of high distinction themselves, nor is more beloved by the intelligent reading public. Translated into every language of consequence, often by men of considerable poetic talents themselves, Shakespeare has long had a devoted following among French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Scandinavian, as well as English-speaking readers. And if his popularity in Russia were not evidence enough, the enthusiasm with which he has been embraced by the Japanese attests to his extraordinary cross-cultural appeal. His trans-historical allure has been similarly proven: nearly four centuries after they were written, his plays continue to be performed at a rate greater than those of any dozen other playwrights combined. Indeed, special theatres have been constructed for their performance at locations all around the world, from Texas to Tokyo, Perth to Berlin. As one appreciative scholar notes, "He is the only classical author who remains popular," and as such "is practically our only link with the classic and the past." Nor is Shakespeare's influence confined to literature. He has shaped whole nations' conceptions of history. He is the single greatest contributor to the English language. He dominates the standard collections of English quotations (the King James Bible runs a distant second, Milton a far-distant third). And although he wrote but three dozen plays, they have inspired over two hundred operas, along with dozens upon dozens of bal-
lets, overtures, symphonic poems, and suites. Suffice it to say, Shakespeare's poetic greatness is conceded by all but a churlish few, at least among those who read him in his native English.

However, the premise of this book: that Shakespeare is as great a philosopher as he is a poet — that, indeed, his greatness as a poet derives even more from his power as a thinker than from his genius for linguistic expression, and that his continuing appeal and influence is a reflection of his possessing great wisdom — would not be so widely conceded today as in an earlier time. To some extent, the reasons for this militate more or less equally against all past masters of philosophical literature. I have in mind, first of all, the doctrinaire belief in the 'fact-value' distinction which so pervades contemporary thinking about what is right, noble, good, beautiful, and decent. This implausible dogma, derived from a since-discredited misconception of modern science, declares, in effect, that there neither is nor can be any genuine knowledge about these vital human concerns, that they necessarily entail 'value judgments' which are incorrigibly subjective. By implication, anyone who has failed to recognize and abide by this basic distinction (a category that would include the most eminent philosophers that have ever lived), must have a profoundly mistaken view of things, hence can hardly be presumed wise. For subscribers to this creed, there can be no reason to accord Shakespeare's portrayals of what is just, virtuous, honourable, noble, admirable, magnanimous, or good (contrasting with the wrong, vicious, shameful, base, contemptible, mean, or evil) more respect than the views of an ignorant savage or a talk-show host.

Second, there are the various current 'isms' that assure us on one ground or another that it is impossible to be wise — period — because there is no objective knowledge to be had, not merely about 'values,' but about anything. Or at least none apart from that provided by the favoured 'ism,' each of which claims to demonstrate rationally that rationality is invariably nothing more than rationalization, and that the truth is, 'truth is relative' (to one's time, place, culture, sex, class, paradigm, language game, whatever). Despite such doctrines being but so many universalizations of the old Cretan paradox ('All Cretans are liars,' said Kleinias the Cretan), adherence to some sort of relativism has come to be widely regarded as a touchstone of intellectual sophistication. For such sophisticates, anyone who does not appreciate the relativity of all human 'knowing,' or that the very idea of Reality is nothing but a 'social construct,' anyone who thinks that truth is 'absolute' — much less that he knows some such truth — is naïve (to put it kindly), and perhaps liable to fanaticism, or tainted with authoritarian aspirations. It would be hard to imagine an age more thoroughly infatuated with relativism than is ours. One theory purporting to justify it is no sooner laid to rest
than, like a phoenix, some new version rises again from the ashes. One can scarce help wondering what it is about our historical circumstances that accounts for this. And why do the apostles of relativism proselytize for it with such fervour, as if they knew it to be the simple truth?  

These, then, are features of the current intellectual scene that operate with equal prejudice against all previous thinkers, and compromise one's ability to take any of them seriously as communicators of hard-won wisdom. Beyond these, however, are special obstacles to treating Shakespeare as a worthy teacher about human affairs, and they derive from what we fancy we know about his life. Here, however, scepticism is quite in order. For certain assumptions and conjectures about what sort of man Shakespeare was, what he did, and why he wrote, have come to be accepted as established facts. Any major library can be counted upon to possess whole shelves of volumes purporting to be 'The Life of Shakespeare.' Whereas, the truth of the matter seems to be, we know almost nothing for sure about the author of these plays; most of what we believe about him is (at best) plausible speculation. As W.H. Auden put it, "Shakespeare is in the singularly fortunate position of being, to all intents and purposes, anonymous." The Cambridge historian Sir Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, a recognized authority on the relevant period of English history, notes that "of all the immortal geniuses of literature, none is personally so elusive as William Shakespeare":

It is exasperating and almost incredible that he should be so. After all, he lived in the full daylight of the English Renaissance, in the well-documented reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I. Since his death, and particularly in the last century, he has been subjected to the greatest battery of organized research that has ever been directed upon a single person. Armies of scholars, formidably equipped, have examined all the documents that could possibly contain at least a mention of Shakespeare's name. One hundredth of this labor applied to one of his insignificant contemporaries would be sufficient to produce a substantial biography. And yet the greatest of all Englishmen, after this tremendous inquisition, still remains so close to a mystery that even his identity can still be doubted.

During his lifetime nobody claimed to know him. Not a single tribute was paid to him at his death. As far as the records go, he was uneducated, had no literary friends, possessed at his death no books, and could not write. It is true, six of his signatures have been found, all spelt differently: but they are so ill-formed that some graphologists suppose the hand to have been guided. Except for these signatures, no syllable of writing by Shakespeare has been identified. Seven years after his death, when his works were collected and published, and other poets claimed to have known him, a portrait of him was painted. The unskilful artist has painted the blank face of a country oaf.
Since the received accounts of Shakespeare’s life, when subjected to rigorous historical scrutiny, turn out to be scarcely more reliable than the tales of Robin Hood, a scrupulous agnosticism regarding Shakespeare the man would seem the only prudent disposition. One cannot presume, that is, to interpret the plays in light of assumptions about their author (or the circumstances under which they were written) unless these can be derived from the plays themselves. In my view, we had best agree with Dickens that “the life of Shakespeare is a fine mystery.”

The point bears emphasizing, for time and again one encounters scholarly efforts that have been prejudiced, if not fatally compromised, by commonly accepted but unjustifiable assumptions. Ignoring the countless instances of dramatic details being explained as attempts to curry favour with the high and mighty, there are two main ways that these assumptions tend to discredit Shakespeare as a suitable teacher about matters of permanent importance. First, there is a tendency to depreciate his actually being knowledgeable about much of what he wrote: of the behaviour and attitudes of royalty and nobility and all those who wield power; of military and diplomatic strategy; of the major religious and philosophical alternatives; of foreign lands, alien races, and ancient times; of arts and sciences, as well as the esoteric traditions of alchemy, astrology, and numerology. How could he have been knowledgeable about such things (the argument would run), given his petty bourgeois antecedents, his (at best) provincial and quite limited schooling, his subsequent engagement in a low-class occupation, and his own preoccupation with financial gain? Although employing almost supernatural poetic gifts to persuade – indeed, mesmerize – his audiences, he can only be regarded as an especially skilled imitator of the superficial appearances of whatever he portrays. As such, he is capable of deceiving those who are themselves ignorant about the reality of these matters, and who do not think to question his credentials. If assessed by adequate intellectual criteria, however, Shakespeare must be likened to a television scriptwriter who can create a convincing appearance of medical practitioners without being truly knowledgeable in medicine himself. We all realize it would be foolish to study such television shows in order to become a doctor. Nor is that their purpose: they are meant to entertain, and their apparent medical ‘realism’ is intended merely to lend credibility to the drama. So, we are to believe, it must be with Shakespeare. He tells a rousing good story (invariably borrowed) in captivating if somewhat rustic language, and no more can be credibly expected of him.

The second interpretive prejudice is partially derived from the first, namely, the view that Shakespeare did not take his plays all that seriously himself, and (consequently) did not lavish upon them the kind of literary craftsmanship as would warrant comparable care in interpretation. They were written primarily, if not solely, to serve the needs of a theatre company in which he acted, one of
several competing for the entertainment dollar of the day, and were a means whereby he earned a bit of extra money on the side. Given, then, the author's own cavalier attitude towards his plays (the story goes), we should not presume them to be all that carefully written. No one would expect works that are dashed off primarily for commercial purposes, rather as are television screenplays today, to be free of inconsistencies, improbabilities, puzzling lacunae, and outright contradictions — especially if the existing text is the result of successive revisions that the author never troubled to harmonize. Hence, interpretive efforts premised on each play's making perfect sense, on its having neither loose ends nor inconsequential details, are doomed to frustration and irrelevancy. With there being such ready grounds for disregarding any and every feature one might otherwise find perplexing, textual enigmas cannot be treated as if they were soluble mysteries whereby one might better understand the play, much less the world it so fallibly mirrors.

One can advance any number of considerations that challenge the plausibility of these common scholarly assumptions. But they can be convincingly rebutted only by interpretations that provide proof of what sceptics claim is not there — interpretations that make manifest the depth and breadth of Shakespeare's understanding by showing the intellectual as well as the dramatic coherence of his plays. Standing between the reader and any possibility of such interpretations, however, are several more narrowly literary questions concerning proper Shakespearean hermeneutics. As critical assessment of his plays has become increasingly an academic specialty, it has become proportionally subject as well to changing trends in scholarship. Shakespeare specialists are doubtless familiar with the various evolutionary strands that have interwoven to produce the present skein. Even so, since I hope this book will be of interest to a readership beyond that of specialists, I beg them to bear with my briefly discussing a few points relevant to the emergence of a view that, if accepted, significantly impairs one's capacity to appreciate Shakespeare's philosophical merit.

For the likes of Samuel Johnson, and in a somewhat different sense for the Romantics, Shakespeare is the poet of Nature, of human nature especially but necessarily also of the whole natural order in which we find ourselves. He could not be this, of course, except insofar as one credited him with some understanding of that which he portrays. Hence, the task of interpreting Shakespeare would necessarily be akin to that of interpreting the world he is judged to have faithfully reflected, a task for which there are no a priori restrictions or rules beyond those inherent in rational inquiry per se. From that catholic perspective, however, the interpretive focus has tended to become more narrow. Picking up this story at the close of the nineteenth century, the dominant critical approach was one that conceived the analysis of the plays primarily in terms of understanding thor-
oughly the inner make-up of each character, and especially of how 'character' determined the fates of the main protagonists.\textsuperscript{18} Properly pursued, this undertaking is still quite broad in scope, and is centred on what is naturally of greatest interest to most people: themselves and their fellows. Moreover, if one presumes there to be universal truths of human psychology, and that they are manifested in virtually all social milieux (thus are potentially accessible to any intelligent, perceptive, thoughtful observer, whatever his own social standing), one need not balk at attributing to Shakespeare some genuine wisdom of this kind.

'Character analysis,' however, was not long acknowledged as the key to Shakespeare's kingdom before it was challenged as an impoverishing abstraction. Not that legitimate grounds of complaint were lacking: for in emphasizing what is but a single constituent of a play, one is apt to neglect other constituents that contribute to its total effect.\textsuperscript{19} In particular, there was a polyphony of claims that distinctly poetic means had been given too short shrift. Some critics stressed that it was as important -- perhaps even more important -- to see the plays as collages of symbols (that do much of their work subconsciously) as it was to view them as realistic ensembles of characters.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly, that one must attend more to the distinctly melodic qualities of Shakespeare's language if one is to understand how and why his plays affect us in the ways they do. Various breeds of historicists also weighed in, insisting that Shakespeare's creations be viewed in the context of his times: of the dramatic conventions of his own age, and of the medieval Morality Play tradition that preceded it; of the social and intellectual assumptions of his audience (or more narrowly, of the social class to which he himself purportedly belonged); of contemporary political events that the plays may be presumed to address, and so on.\textsuperscript{21}

Especially important, however, was a new insistence that what we now may study as literature was originally written as a play to be performed, and that we must be ever conscious of the requirements of stagecraft and of what makes for dramatic effectiveness, if the interpretations we generate are to have legitimacy.\textsuperscript{22} But from this seemingly reasonable caution came some unreasonable restraints on what sorts of interpretive sallies are acceptable. The sheer fact that something is a play, and as such must be intelligible to a viewing audience, cannot be made to imply that it is only a play, nor that it could not possibly be intended to communicate something to a careful reader that goes well beyond what is accessible to even its most astute and attentive viewer. Shakespeare, evidently well acquainted with the literature of antiquity that so powerfully stimulated the Elizabethan age,\textsuperscript{23} was perforce aware that it is possible to create works of lasting, trans-historical importance -- that a person of sufficient genius might write something that could still be read with profit and enjoyment two thousand years later. Moreover, he knew that dramas could be counted among these finest works of lit-
erature, and studied as such. Any number of scholars argue that Shakespeare was heavily indebted to Seneca, for example. But neither I nor anyone else knows whether he ever saw an actual performance of a Senecan play. If indebted he was, it is more probable that it was as a student of Seneca's texts. Given, then, the possibility that he meant his own plays also to bear studying as literature, it cannot be a sufficient principle of their interpretation to allow apparent inconsistencies (or any other puzzling features) to be disregarded, provided only that one judges they would not likely be noticed by a live audience, nor compromise a play's dramatic effectiveness if they were. The very details that are apt to be overlooked at the pace one views them in performance, but not by a careful reader taking his own sweet time to compare and reflect upon each and every thing said and done, may supply clues to a play's deeper meaning, and convey insights never intended for mere theatre-goers.24

Nor should we agree to disallow any and all speculation about characters and their situations that cannot be supported, more or less directly, by what someone in the play is seen to say or do. Those who argue for such a restriction may do so on the grounds already alluded to (that as a matter of principle, a play must be fully and immediately intelligible to its viewing audience), but sometimes also as part of their rejecting the idea that the plays can be treated as reflections of natural reality. After all, how could they be that, a literal-minded reader or viewer may ask, filled as they are with people speaking blank verse? We are admonished to remember that the characters are not real persons with real histories, whose lives carry on out of our sight – and about whom it would be possible (in principle) to have definite knowledge. Whereas, speculation concerning 'how many children had Lady Macbeth' is illegitimate precisely because the answer is utterly indeterminate; the character has no existence independent of the text (to cite a question that I shall argue bears importantly on one of the plays to be examined later, but that serves only as a satiric title for an influential essay contending all such questions are out of order).25 On this view, a play must be recognized for the profoundly artificial thing it is, something to which we passionately respond in consequence of its entire array of actions, ideas, associations, and symbols (among which are to be included its characters), as these collectively express "the system of values that gives emotional coherence to the play."26 A Shakespeare play is not to be confused with a depiction of perceptual reality; it makes "a statement not of philosophy but of ordered emotion."27 It is "a dramatic poem [whose] end is to communicate a rich and controlled experience by means of words."28 If we are to be receptive to the experience its author actually intended, we must let his words establish the limits on that experience and be ever wary of adding anything that is ours but not also his.

One may agree with this prescription as it pertains to the effect of witnessing
the theatrical presentation of a play. But insofar as that is the covert assumption underlying such claims – that Shakespeare’s ‘dramatic poems’ are (literally) defined by their theatrical purpose, and must be analysed exclusively in the terms set by that purpose – one truncates the range of Shakespeare’s possible intentions, especially those having more to do with reason than emotion. In effect, it a priori precludes recognizing any deeper philosophical purpose to his plays. Moreover, in restricting the scope of what it is legitimate to think about in contemplating them, the potential benefit to be derived from doing so is greatly diminished. Even with respect to the theatrical experience, one cannot strictly abide by what is being insisted upon: that we attribute nothing to the characters beyond what the text itself directly supplies. Yet surely the poet’s capacity to stimulate our imaginations to fill in and thereby ‘flesh out’ his characters and their actions is a measure of his genius. One constituent of Shakespeare’s greatness is the economy with which he does just that – in how few appearances, with how few lines he establishes the profile of (say) Lady Macbeth, which we then conjure into a ‘reality’ of such awesome proportions. Refusing to use our imaginations to endow the characters with an existence beyond the field of our perception (something we routinely do with respect to people we meet in everyday life) would render the plots incoherent. When the fourth act of Othello opens with Iago asking, “Will you think so?” – and Othello replies, “Think so, Iago?” – are we to suppose they just materialized out of the thin air into which they had evaporated when last we saw them, and begin speaking in utter abstractions? Obviously not. We rightly surmise that we have encountered them in the middle of a conversation which had a beginning we did not see, and about which we naturally will (and should) speculate based on what follows and what has gone before.

Everyone does this to some extent – must do it on pain of reducing the plays to little more than disjointed babble – and the only real question can be, how much is legitimate? Our distinguished critic gently ridicules those who would “conjecture upon Hamlet’s whereabouts at the time of his father’s death.” However, it is an issue worth wondering about, moving one to speculate as to the various possibilities, assessing how each might bear on the play – and even to imitate Shakespeare in concretely imagining alternative scenarios, thereby experiencing, thus better understanding, the task of dramatic creation. To be sure, one may not in the end be able to resolve the matter to one’s own satisfaction, but such indeterminacy is of minor importance for the philosophical purpose of a play. It has done its primary philosophical work whenever it stimulates a curious reader to think carefully and rigorously about an issue worthy of a serious person’s time. But here is the important interpretive point: unless one raises these sorts of questions, and thus focuses attention on them, one is not apt to scrutinize the text especially alert for evidence whereby they can be answered, evidence that may be there but
otherwise go unnoticed, unobtrusive evidence the author has supplied to reward
a reader who can recognize the pertinent questions, namely, those that point to a
play's deeper meaning. In my experience, when through a conjunction of deduc-
tion and imagination one has hit upon the valid explanation for some puzzling
feature of a play, a fresh reading of it will produce a confirming echo (albeit often
in the least suspected of places).

I shall conclude my case for a more liberal critical approach by pointing to a set
of questions that many scholars, concurring with the interpretive restriction I
here argue against, would almost surely disallow, but which I contend is vital to
any adequate interpretation of the other play this book is mainly about: King
Lear. When in the midst of the storm the old King and his meagre retinue of
Kent and the Fool have sought shelter in the hovel occupied by Edgar (disguised
as Poor Tom), a conversation ensues between the latter, who is feigning madness,
and the former, who seems to be going mad. To onlookers both within and with-
out the play, neither Lear's nor Edgar's contributions make much sense. Subse-
quently Gloucester arrives and urges the King to come to where better shelter has
been prepared:

Lear: First let me talk with this philosopher.
    What is the cause of thunder?
Kent: Good my Lord, take his offer; go into th'house.
Lear: I'll talk a word with this same learned Theban.
    What is your study?
Edgar: How to prevent the fiend, and to kill vermin.
Lear: Let me ask you one word in private.
Kent: Importune him once more to go, my Lord;
    His wits begin t'unsettle.
Glouc: Canst thou blame him? ...

(3.4.151-9)

Philosopher? Theban? What does Lear wish to ask this "philosopher," this "learned
Theban," and why "in private"? As I shall later endeavor to show, one must ask
these questions. Moreover, they are answerable, and together their answers pro-
vide an essential key to a fuller understanding of the play.30

As doubtless is evident from the foregoing, I have old-fashioned views about lit-
erature: about what one seeks from it and what the point is of discussing it.
Accordingly, I have tried to write an old-fashioned book, one intended to engage
the opinions of a select group of scholars, many from an earlier generation, who
for all of their interpretive differences nonetheless share a general disposition
towards Shakespeare which I find more profitable than that which has recently
gained ascendancy. To the extent my effort is successful, I hope it might help restore confidence in that disposition, as well as contribute to reviving interest in a body of scholarship of which I regard myself a beneficiary.

Insofar as one reads for sheer enjoyment, critical discussion is of interest only as it enhances that enjoyment. And it may well be able to do so without referring to anything beyond the piece under consideration. But to the extent that one expects great literature, as a requisite of true greatness, to increase in some way one's understanding of the larger reality — including the reality of language and its uses — critical assessment of literature necessarily entails reference to the world it purports to be about. This is to say, the study of literature cannot be an autonomous enterprise. Any author worthy of serious consideration is first of all a student of his subject matter, and hence of other such students, and bids us be so as well. He bids us, that is, turn from his work to the relevant portion of the world, and to other accounts of that portion, confirming or denying his view of things by what we ourselves see. In practice, of course, this dialectical process of reflective comparing can be repeated indefinitely, refining one's understanding of both the world and the work in question. It is inherently, inescapably a philosophical activity.

As my use of this term implies, I also have old-fashioned views about philosophy — or to speak more precisely, about political philosophy. Because these untimely ideas are not apt to be familiar to readers schooled only in modern conceptions, but are nonetheless essential to my contention that Shakespeare ranks high among the true philosophers, it will be convenient to expand on two points here at the outset. The first concerns the primary meaning of the term 'philosophy.' I subscribe to the original view: that philosophy is an activity, the activity of thinking (or the primary if not sole purpose of understanding; or better still, a way of life in which this activity is the dominant organizing principle. That is, philosophy, or 'love of wisdom,' is not a set of doctrines, teachings, writings, policies, or whatever might be the concrete result of this philosophizing — although that is how one most commonly hears the word used today, for example, 'the philosophy of Aristotle,' meaning the view of the world made manifest in all those treatises that bear his name. But this is a secondary, derivative meaning of the term. Moreover, in my view, all the truly great philosophers, whenever they write, have as an aim — often it is their principal aim, it seems to me — the promotion of philosophy in this primary sense of the word. That is, they seek to induce, or seduce, their readers, at least so far as a reader is by nature suited for it, to engage in this distinctly human (and thus humanizing) activity of thinking, thereby experiencing philosophy first-hand. And what most effectively promotes philosophical activity is questions, not answers.

A second point concerns the qualifying term, 'political.' The ordinary under-
standing of 'political philosophy' would be something to the effect that it is 'philosophizing' (whatever that is) about 'politics' (whatever that is). But it could also mean — and this, in my view, is both a broader and deeper conception — philosophizing (about anything) in a 'politic' way, in a prudent or 'polite' way, with due regard for the possible political consequences of one's philosophizing, either for oneself or others. One can get some immediate sense of what I have in mind by trying to imagine how carefully, how prudently, how discretely, one would write about almost anything in Iran these days. Here we might recall how many of the great works of our philosophical tradition were written under conditions closer to those of contemporary Iran than to those of contemporary liberal democracies. Indeed, the founder of political philosophy was put to death, ostensibly for religious crimes (for not believing in the gods the rest of the city allegedly believed in, and for corrupting the youth likewise). Therefore, in publishing the artefacts of one's philosophizing about politics, special care may be called for — and seems to have been bestowed, I should add, by all the major political philosophers of our tradition, among whom I count Shakespeare. To repeat, in calling him a 'political philosopher,' I mean to suggest that he is both a politic writer, and one whose primary aims include the promotion of philosophical activity.

His means towards this end are multifarious. But underlying every technique whereby he stimulates his reader to philosophize is the recognition that it is questions that awaken and enliven us, whereas answers tend to sedate us, allowing us to doze, to sleepwalk through life. Accordingly, Shakespeare is never overtly didactic, much less dogmatic. He never in his plays speaks in his own name, other than in his choice of titles, so it is impossible to quote him, and to that extent impossible to be dogmatic about him — much as it is impossible to quote Plato: when we say we are doing so, we are, of course, actually quoting one or another of his characters, and how that character's views stand to the author's is necessarily a matter of conjecture. Shakespeare's own views are presumably reflected in the whole of what he wrote, and as such are not reducible without loss or distortion to any of the parts, and reflected, first and foremost, in the fact that he chose to write at all; second, in that he chose to write (mainly) plays. Each of these plays requires interpretation as a whole unto itself. Each having a beginning and an end, we can presume that it is meant to be independently intelligible, whatever further light one play may throw on another. An adequate interpretation coherently synthesizes all that is said and done (and sometimes even what is not said and not done) by every character, however seemingly minor, who figures in that play.

On the basis of my admittedly uneven, incomplete, and hence ongoing study of the canon, I would hypothesize that each of Shakespeare's great dramatic creations takes up an important question (or constellation of questions) and allows
us to see why such questions are important: how each typically involves a complex of considerations, bearing on various legitimate concerns, and therefore admits of several plausible points of view. Shakespeare's plays invite us — indeed, compel us, if we wish to understand them — to see things from the perspectives of different kinds of people differently situated. This need not mean that all such views are equally valid, of course, nor that there is always some way to reconcile them, nor that there is no simply best or true view. Ideally, one should be seeking to reconstitute Shakespeare's view: that transcendent, synoptic perspective whence the various characters' partial perspectives were created. The fact remains, however, one does not fully comprehend an important question if one has not seen why it remains controversial (thus, a question), or why it is important (its centrality to either the practice or the understanding of human life). The plays may supply some answers, but only through the conscious collaborative efforts of the reader who, having been awakened to the important questions they address, has proceeded to address them seriously himself.

Moreover, I would further hypothesize that Shakespeare's plays typically present one or more puzzles that, when recognized as such, point to the play's deeper issues, and whose resolution is the key to an adequate interpretation. But it bears emphasizing that this recognition of puzzles generally requires some thoughtful effort, for they do not often come as clearly earmarked as is the most famous one in Macbeth: the mysterious Third Murderer (about which I shall have more to say in the next chapter). Sometimes the puzzle, or mystery, is baldly announced, but then discreetly allowed to fade into the background, as in the case of The Merchant of Venice, which begins with the merchant Antonio lamenting:

> In sooth I know not why I am so sad,  
> It wearies me, you say it wearies you;  
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,  
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,  
> I am to learn:  
> And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,  
> That I have much ado to know myself.

Explaining the sadness of Antonio — and the play, after all, takes its name from him, apparently — involves subterranean explorations that result in one's seeing the 'Christian versus Jew' theme in a radically different light.\(^\text{34}\) Or consider the intriguing hint inconspicuously woven into the dialogue of Measure for Measure. Duke Vincentio is explaining to Friar Thomas why he is putting Angelo in charge of purging corrupt Vienna while he, though supposedly absent, will observe things disguised as a fellow friar. Then he adds, "Moe reasons for this
action. At our more leisure shall I render you” (1.3.48–9). As we are not privy to their subsequent leisurely conversation, we are left to ponder on our own the riddle of these additional reasons. Similarly, when Richard of Gloucester, scheming to become King, reveals in soliloquy his plan to “marry Warwick’s youngest daughter,” he mysteriously adds, “The which will I, not all so much for love / As for another secret close intent, / By marrying her which I must reach unto” (King Richard III 1.1.157–9; see also 1.2.234). What this “secret” reason is, we are never told; that is, we are left to figure it out for ourselves (for we must assume there to be some purpose to his alluding to it in our presence, given that Shakespeare was free to make his characters speak whatever words he pleased). The more one thinks about the ‘accidental’ encounter between the mysterious intelligence-bearing Roman ‘Nicanor’ and the Volcian Adrian in act 4, scene 3 of Coriolanus – their sole appearance in that play – the curioser it seems (Rom: “I know you well, sir, and you know me: your name I think is Adrian.” Vol: “It is so, sir: truly I have forgot you.” Rom: “I am a Roman”). Is this ‘Nicanor,’ initially unrecognized by the very man sent to contact him, who he says he is? And what might be the “most strange things” he has to tell (4.3.40–1)? Sometimes the puzzles lurk in the seemingly most inconsequential of details, as in Julius Caesar. To mention but a few: What is the significance of Caesar’s informing us (along with Antony) that his left ear is deaf? Or of Caius Ligarius’s not being present at the assassination as promised? How does the rhetorician Artemidorus know precisely who is conspiring Caesar’s death? What explains Brutus’s telling Metellus he has heard nothing about Portia (4.3.180–4), whereas we saw in the preceding private conversation with Cassius that he had (146–56)? In other cases, the basic puzzle can be in the very title, for example, The Tempest. Is the fact that the opening scene of the play features a great storm whereby Prospero instigates the unlikely rendezvous of characters truly an adequate explanation – or is there another ‘tempest’ we are invited to discern and understand? Sometimes a puzzle seems peripheral to the main action, but is actually pivotal: how did the “trusty Welshmen” (but only they) – the Welsh army in which “the king reposeth all his confidence” – come mistakenly to believe their king is dead, and thus melt away, effectively dooming Richard’s chances of suppressing Bolingbroke’s revolt (King Richard II 2.4.5–7, 15–17)? Other times the puzzle lies at the very heart of the plot, so obvious it can be overlooked: why is Othello so peculiarly vulnerable to Iago’s poisonous insinuations? Or, to mention another equally vital but less conspicuous curiosity: what is the significance of Othello’s alleging two distinct origins for the notorious handkerchief he gave Desdemona (Othello 3.4.53–4; 5.2.217–18)?

Lest the point be lost, this lowly business of figuring out the plot, which is after all the very basis of the play, from which any adequate analysis must always take its departure and to which it must always return – this task of seeing the consis-
tent reality operating beneath an often confusing but more familiar appearance (which succeeds in captivating almost everyone), seeing what is really going on and why – is itself a philosophical activity, requiring us to exercise the same set of powers, and in the same order of importance, as when one sets out to understand political life and its broader natural environment. With this in mind, one may surmise there to be a principle of philosophical pedagogy behind Shakespeare's many allusions to the world itself being but a stage, and its people but so many players.

Speaking of people, whatever else Shakespeare has to teach us, he is obviously a master psychologist in the original, literal sense of the term: one who possesses a logos ('rational account') of the psychè ('soul'), or psychai, rather – and who, moreover, supplies the material whereby a sufficiently thoughtful reader may begin to become one, too. Shakespeare's plays portray human nature in its full significant diversity, loving and striving, learning and changing, dreaming and dying in archtypical political circumstances from ancient to modern times. In contrast to (say) Plato's dialogues, in Shakespeare's plays we confront the entire gamut of human types, from the high and rare to the most lowly and ordinary, allowing us to observe the various ways they interact and how they perceive each other and their environing world. For all the criticism that has been directed towards the 'character analysis' approach, the fact remains that understanding a given play depends fundamentally on 'psychoanalysing' each character (again, meaning this term in its philosophically open, rather than in any modern, quasi-technical sense). This, in turn, requires one to observe, remember, deduce, and evaluate an heterogeneous array of evidence, collected from a diversity of sources, and synthesize it into a single coherent entity that 'makes sense.'

This is not to say that Shakespeare never presents divided, confused, or discordant people – quite the contrary: he often does. After all, that is what the world mainly consists of. But the reasons for the various inner contradictions, disharmonies, ambivalences, and vacillations people exhibit or suffer are there to be discovered in the dramatic evidence rightly interpreted. Just as in everyday life, understanding a given character requires that one attend what he says, not only about himself but about others; compare what he says with what he does; compare what he intends with what actually results; integrate all this with what others say about him, and how they treat him; assess his aspirations, his judgment, his motivations, his morals, the circumstances that have shaped him, the changes he undergoes – and through it all, not forget to 'read thyself,' reflecting on why one feels a certain way about a given character, liking this one, loathing that, admiring another, pitying a fourth, and why one's feelings and assessments alter (as they invariably do) with increasing familiarity and deeper understanding. All such analysing of souls – done rigorously and thoroughly – counts as philosophizing in
The primary sense of the word. For only through understanding individuals from across the entire spectrum of human types, discerning the respects in which we are the same as well as what differentiates and 'individualizes' us, can anyone progress towards the thing most needful for political philosophy: a clear and accurate idea of human nature. This is something which can only be intellested, not seen, since at no time does any single individual we might observe - whether on the stage of Shakespeare or the stage of life - manifest the totality of human nature, and only human nature. The intelligible reality of the nature in which we each and all participate is refracted in its various perceptible instantiations, and it is with them that one must begin.

A play, however, is more than the sum of its human parts, its characters. As noted before, the plot is primary: the characters are understood only insofar as they are seen to 'fit' the plot. However, in order to comprehend fully the action, the story that unifies the drama, one has to analyse not merely the structure of the characters' various relationships, but also the material and cultural setting in which they pursue their ends. In Shakespeare's plays, just as in everyday life, this larger structural setting is always some complex of nature, artifice, convention, and chance - and the challenge of understanding it, and how it bears on what people say and do, is the same as that faced in trying to understand the basics of any political situation: what is due to what. Nor is the answer to this question ever as obvious as so often it seems to people who do not think enough about such matters. What at first blush appear but arbitrary conventions (such as various shows of courtesy) or irrational prejudices (against bastards, say) may have their roots buried deep in the necessities of political life, and those roots can be exposed only through sustained thought. To understand a given political situation, or a particular strategic policy, or set of political institutions, or political life in general, one must grasp its inner rationale, and this is accessible only through thought, through thinking one's way 'into' it, and then exploring it from the inside, as it were. To attempt this, be it with respect to political actuality, or one of the political scenarios Shakespeare so cunningly crafted, is (once again) to engage in what is essentially a philosophical activity.

Thus, there are a number of ways that reading Shakespeare involves philosophizing in the primary meaning of the word. But one special advantage he provides someone drawn to political philosophy is the opportunity to train prudential judgment, using the terms in their old-fashioned sense of recognizing the general in the particular and of applying the general to the particular. As such, studying his plays is a partial corrective for the main liability inherent in the artificial way most people today make their initial acquaintance with philosophy. That is, philosophy arises naturally out of the concrete experience of puzzlement or 'perplexity' (the famous aporia of the Platonic dialogues). For anyone the least
bit thoughtful, this experience is fairly common in confronting the world. In a practical sense, puzzlement is more fundamental than curiosity, the simple desire to see and experience and know for oneself. Were the world straightforwardly intelligible, curiosity alone would not give rise to any special effort to understand it. Rather, it is the discovery of so much that is 'problematic' that compels one to raise the kinds of questions, and consider the kinds of answers, that have come to distinguish our philosophical tradition. One may think of philosophizing, then, as nothing more nor less than the rigorous, persistent, thus usually systematic employment of one's natural powers to resolve one's puzzlement, and thereby satisfy one's curiosity, proceeding a step at a time, one question naturally leading to another (often more general) question, and so on for as long as one's interest continues.

However, this is not how philosophy is typically thought of or encountered today. Instead, we associate it mainly with university courses and textbooks, with their prepackaged surveys and expositions in which the certified 'classics' are authoritatively identified, historically ordered, standard taxonomies of problems and approaches provided, famous doctrines adumbrated along with standard objections to them, the most important questions already specified as such (along with the major alternative interpretations of famous responses to these questions), everything conveniently labelled and rationally organized. To be sure, there are obvious advantages to this arrangement, which is why something like it has existed for well over two thousand years. Doubtless it allows those of us less gifted than Plato and Aristotle, Descartes or Bacon, Hobbes, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and suchlike to ascend the ladder of questions much higher, much faster than ever we could were we dependent solely on our own resources, even aided and abetted by dialogue with like-minded friends. But precisely because we have thereby been artificially catapulted to a level of thinking quite remote from that of everyday life - because we have not ourselves ascended step by careful step, with full awareness of the concrete connections between everyday particulars and the most general problems we are taught to think of as philosophical - we have to learn to see those connections retrospectively, as it were.

The ability to do so, to 'make the connection' between the general and the particular, is (as I noted) the business of prudential judgment, and the practical value of whatever wisdom one might acquire from one's philosophizing will be no more than one's prudential judgment can provide. This points to the peculiar weakness of our cloistered or 'hothouse' way of cultivating philosophy. Nor is there much that can be done to remedy this problem - prudence is learnable, but strictly speaking it is not teachable, for it is learned only through personal experience. However, the intelligent reading of well-wrought texts can itself supply a kind of experience similar to that gainable in everyday life, and through which
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may be trained one's powers of observation, of memory, of recognition, of imagination, of analysis and synthesis — indeed, all the same powers of reason one needs to make sense of the world, and to act accordingly. Plato's dialogues do this exceedingly well, for these conversations always take place in a concrete setting among particular individuals, and seeing how these concrete particularities both reflect, and reflect upon, the general issues discussed is essential to their adequate interpretation. It is my contention, however, that the author who most beguilingly unites the general with the particular, thereby best provides that surrogate experience whereby one may train one's prudential judgment along with one's other rational faculties, is Shakespeare.

To understand the still broader educative capacity of Shakespeare's plays, however, it is necessary to distinguish analytically two different kinds of knowing, blended though these so often are in practice. One might be called 'intellectual' (or 'conceptual,' 'propositional,' or 'cognitive') knowing, being almost exclusively confined to the soul's rational part; involving, that is, only reasoning and memory, though sometimes imagination as well. The other, 'experiential' knowing, affects the whole soul, and thus typically the body too insofar as our passions, appetites, and repulsions become physically manifest; there are sights from which we feel so impelled to 'look away' that we actually turn our heads, others that arouse us to intervene. With respect to certain topics — celestial mechanics, for example, or metallurgy, or paleontology — intellectual knowing is the only kind there is. One may have a passionate enthusiasm for such knowledge, but strictly speaking, the passion is no part of the knowing. Whereas in other matters, only the latter kind, experiential, would count as knowing in any significant sense; for example, about the various pleasures and pains, desires and hates, about fervent hoping and desperate fearing — unless one has actually felt such things, one's understanding of them and their effects is bound to be shallow at best, partial and abstract, 'bloodless.' The understanding of fine music for one who gains no enjoyment from hearing it is scarcely better than that of someone who is deaf; and consequently the devotion of people who dedicate their lives to music is not really understood, either. The musically insensitive person hears the sounds, and may even be able to provide a mathematical analysis of their harmony; he sees a broad array of evidence of other people's appreciation; he has no doubt that music is real, nor of its great importance to some people. But the 'why' of it remains opaque. Thus it is with love for people who have never passionately loved, or with grief for people who have never deeply grieved. Thus it is with philosophy.

Regarding many matters of importance to human life, true understanding involves rational apprehension (often requiring careful and extensive observation,
as well as rigorous analysis and sound synthetic judgment—a great deal of thought), but also felt experience. In cases where we have some or even much of the former but little or none of the latter, we both do and yet do not understand the phenomena. The fortunate person who has never had occasion to grieve over a loved one lost knows that it must be a profoundly wounding experience—the evidence that this is so is unmistakeable, as are the various consequences to which it may lead, including illness, revenge, apostasy, insanity, bitter cynicism, or renewed faith. Still, this knowing lacks a depth of understanding that only the experience of actually feeling grief can provide; thus, similarly lacking is any real understanding of grief’s power to produce these and other effects. Here, then, great dramatic art may educate by supplying surrogate experience. Having first been made acquainted with a character for whom one feels increasing affection and admiration, but who then untimely dies, allows one to feel something of the loss, and so acquire that much insight into grief. Analogously, a dramatic genius may teach us what it feels like to be left abandoned by those one trusts, or be despised out of blind prejudice, or to be the victim of gross injustice, or to be torn between burning ambition and sacred duty; but also to feel the peculiar exhilaration of one’s innocence being vindicated, or of triumphing against all odds, or perhaps even the all-consuming rapture of young love. What one learns from such dramatic experience, this substantial deepening and intensifying of what one already formally knew, cannot be expressed in ordinary prose without its seeming trite. Hence, the problem one confronts when recommending a given piece of literature for what it has to teach. As another scholar put it, “It often happens that when critics speak of what we may learn from a work of art the lesson in question sounds all too familiar, while the critic sounds more like a tired but dutiful museum guide than like a man who has been startled into new knowledge.”

I do not mean to suggest, however, that Shakespeare’s educational effects are confined to this experiential side of knowing, simply ratifying while deepening and enhancing the significance of that which we already intellectually know. Much less is he merely providing “homely truth a wonderful, a beautiful investiture.” He also, through effective appeals to our reason, informs us of things we may not already know, explains things we may not adequately understand, exposes mistaken assumptions, demonstrates uncomfortable truths. Sometimes this instruction comes directly from the mouths of his characters. Cold reflection on the confrontations between Angelo and Escalus, and between Angelo and Isabella, concerning the practicalities of law enforcement, especially in the given Viennese situation, confirms that Angelo is dead right (*Measure for Measure* 2.1.1–31; 2.2.28–41, 71–106). A reader who heretofore may have rather thoughtlessly favoured a position akin to Escalus’s or Isabella’s, but being now
obliged to confront Angelo, has the opportunity to learn some hard truth about
political life. And that Shakespeare has this truth be so trenchantly articulated by
an unsavoury martinet conveys a lesson in itself. Other times, no one in the play
(fully) explicates the lesson, but the plot demonstrates it – for example, that disas-
trous consequences may flow from an overtrusting nature, or from misplaced or
excessive compassion, or from a moral fastidiousness inappropriate to the rough
work at hand. In Shakespeare’s ten plays portraying English history, he teaches
the what and the who, the when and the where, as well as the how and the why.
These plays provide the most convenient illustration of the two kinds of know-
ing, intellectual and experiential, being conveyed simultaneously, and thus to
greatest effect – one great political effect being, to make Englishmen: to inform
their minds with a view of who they are, while shaping their souls accordingly.
Exposed to the charisma of Shakespeare’s King Henry V, Agincourt acquires a
depth of significance that no plain historical recounting, however detailed, could
possibly provide.

The studies that follow are intended to demonstrate what can be gained from
reading Shakespeare ‘philosophically’ – that is, as a dramatic poet who is first of
all himself a philosopher (and thus has a clear rational understanding of every-
thing he is doing, and why), and whose foremost aims include the promotion of
philosophical activity among his readers to whatever extent they are suited for
it. But since there are at least another dozen plays that might serve equally well
for such a demonstration, this purpose does not in itself account for the particu-
lar two chosen for intensive examination here. To explain the special significance
of Macbeth and King Lear, more needs to be said, both about them and about
what seems to be a general concern of Shakespeare. To begin with the latter.
Shakespeare displays a subtle – yet once noticed, striking – preoccupation with
the relationship between politics and philosophy, and all that this relationship
entails (which turns out to be a good deal: virtually everything all over again, in
fact). Speaking more precisely, one may detect a persistent fascination with the
idea of a philosophical ruler, a ‘philosopher-king.’ It is at least curious how often
problems posed by the various facets of that idea turn up in his plays. Some por-
tray apparent failures of philosophical rulers (e.g., Measure for Measure, The Tem-
pest, and perhaps As You Like It; and in a tangential way, the character Hamlet
also seems implicated in their kind of deficiency); these contrast dramatically
with plays that show us successful kings (Henry V would be the most famous
example) or other rulers of great accomplishment (especially the two Caesars). Of
course, the successful kings contrast as well with rulers who fail through no fault
of philosophy (e.g., Richard II, King John), and their cases, too, are used by
Shakespeare to illumine further the relationship between knowledge and power.
Also relevant to this theme are those plays in which the characters of greatest intelligence, and with the most insight into human nature, happen to be the most villainous (men such as Richard of Gloucester and Iago) — again, a Platonic thesis: those with the greatest capacity for good are necessarily those who are also capable of the greatest evil (cf. Republic 491e, 495b, 518e-519b). Wondering what it is that determines which way great potential will turn, one may probe the pertinent plays in search of some understanding of why these master villains went bad.

The two plays selected for detailed exposition here were chosen for the special light they cast on this most comprehensive of problems: that of the relationship, traditionally seen as one of tension, between politics and philosophy. As my chapters on each endeavour to make clear, both Macbeth and King Lear show age-old philosophical questions arising naturally out of political ones. They show, that is, how the pursuit of an adequate understanding of certain practical issues, transient yet recurring, necessarily leads to considerations that far transcend the particular circumstances in which these practical problems arise — for distinctly political circumstances are, virtually by definition, always 'particular,' always more or less parochial, restricted, impermanent, thus ever subject to change. However, some issues arising therein point beyond the fluid, shifting urgencies of political practice to a consideration of the larger, unchanging natural environment in which all political life proceeds, and to the natures of its constituent parts. Macbeth shows not only how invaluable can be a philosopher's understanding of politics; it also lets us see how several of the most challenging metaphysical and cosmological questions bear directly on people's lives, how the answers they accept affect all that they think and do, and why self-contradictory views necessarily manifest themselves in irrational plans and practices. King Lear portrays philosophy itself arising out of man's confrontation with Nature; it shows, that is, how a particular man, once lord of all he surveyed and accustomed to obedience throughout his long adulthood, came at last to an adequate understanding of Nature, including an appreciation of both the value and the limits of mankind's efforts to accommodate itself therein.

The above observations are enough to suggest that these two plays, although about very different kinds of kings, may have a special relationship with each other. That such is indeed the case is signalled, moreover, by their sharing peculiarities of language and incidental details. Begin with one of the most arresting of the many memorable phrases unique to Shakespeare: "aroynt thee, witch." It occurs in only two places: Macbeth (1.3.6) and King Lear (3.4.121). These are also the only two plays in which someone speaks of being "tied to a [or the] stake" (Macbeth 5.7.1; King Lear 3.7.53). Each play presents an instance of what could be (and has been) argued is the most shocking piece of violence presented on the
Shakespearcan stage: the murder of Macduff's son in *Macbeth* and the gouging of Gloucester's eyes in *King Lear*. In both plays, the extreme violence of Nature is contrapuntal to this appalling violence of men, with each play featuring storms said to be of unprecedented force (*Macbeth* 2.3.53-62; 2.4.1-9; *King Lear* 3.1.8-11; 3.2.45-9). Both emphasize the healing power of sleep (*Macbeth* 2.2.35-9; 3.4.140; *King Lear* 4.4.12-15; 4.7.12-16). Both eponyms refer to the world as but a stage, and those who people it as fools (*Macbeth* 5.5.22-6; *King Lear* 4.6.181). Both present an image of apocalyptic ruin in strikingly similar terms: Macbeth insisting the witches answer, "though the treasure of Nature's germains tumble all together, even till destruction sicken" (4.1.58-60); Lear exhorting the storming powers, "Crack Nature's moulds, all germains spill at once that makes ingrateful man" (3.2.8-9) – the only two mentions of 'germains' (i.e., germens, germs) in the canon. Clothing has a pervasive symbolic and metaphorical importance in both plays (see *Macbeth* 1.3.108-9, 145-6; 1.7.33-6; 2.3.124-5, 131; 5.2.15-22; and *King Lear* 2.4.265-8; 3.4.99-107; 4.7.21-2, 67). Both plays involve the eponyms becoming temporarily deranged. Then there is the curious fact that in both a vacant stool is taken by these deranged protagonists to be the site of an absent person: Macbeth believes the chair reserved for him to be occupied by the murdered Banquo (prompting his wife to rebuke, "O proper stuff! / This is the very painting of your fear ... When all's done, / You look but on a stool" 3.4.59-67); Lear, conducting a mock trial of his ungrateful daughters, commands: "Arraign her first; 'tis Goneril" (which elicits from the Fool, "Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool" 3.6.51). Both plays feature a noticeable abundance of references to various species of life, and include taxonomies of dogs (*Macbeth* 3.1.92-100; *King Lear* 3.6.63-71). With but a couple of exceptions, the use of 'milk' as a disparaging term for softness in men is peculiar to these two plays: Lady Macbeth laments her Lord's being "too full o'th'milk of human kindness" (1.5.17); Goneril chastises her husband for his "milky gentleness" (1.4.340; see also 4.2.50). Each play ends with the victor vowing to settle accounts with both friends and foes: Malcolm in *Macbeth* (5.9.25-35), Albany in *King Lear* (5.3.301-3). Both involve gross violations of the guest-host relationship: Macbeth murdering his guest (1.7.14-16), Cornwall and Regan assaulting and expelling their host (3.7.30-41). In both, that most basic of philosophical questions – 'What are you?' – focuses attention on the central issue of each play, being asked of the witches in *Macbeth* (1.3.47) and of the multi-personae Edgar in *King Lear* (5.3.118).

All of this may be no more than a coincidental effect of *Macbeth* being written immediately after *King Lear* (such being the common scholarly view: that *Lear* was written around 1605, *Macbeth* within the next year). Thus, these and other parallels of speech and dramatic feature may indicate nothing more than an acci-
dental closeness of the circumstances in which both were composed. In that case, of course, they have no larger significance. On the other hand, these two plays about quasi-legendary kings from the opposite ends of pre-Norman Britain may have been composed one after the other precisely because their author conceived their respective themes as having a deeper relationship, and so hints at that deeper relationship by various similarities of dramatic details, such as those I have above catalogued. Only in light of an adequate analysis of the two plays themselves might one determine Shakespeare’s intention in this regard.

Accordingly, in the two chapters that follow, each of these plays is treated independently. In the course of presenting my interpretations, however, I have made a special effort to indicate (mainly by means of the notes) Shakespeare’s affinity with the preceding philosophical tradition, and with Plato’s writings in particular. My final chapter offers briefer treatments of certain other plays (Othello, The Winter’s Tale, and Measure for Measure), focusing especially on aspects that bear directly on the theme that titles this book. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of Plato’s critique of poetry as presented in his Republic, and of how the dramatic art of Shakespeare transcends that critique.