

**SHAKESPEARE 400  
FOREVER AND A DAY**

**By**

**Ismail Serageldin**

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## I. INTRODUCTION: CELEBRATING SHAKESPEARE

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we meet to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the universal genius that creative minds keep turning to time and again. What can I say that has not already been said about this remarkable genius who did not only enrich the English language but also left a legacy shared and enjoyed by the whole world? Probably nothing, for commenting about the Bard's legacy is an enormous industry that involves people from all over the world. Nevertheless, let me say that we should celebrate Shakespeare's genius by recognizing and appreciating its many facets.

**First:** Shakespeare was daring. He was able to tackle topics of the murder and deposition of kings, a taboo subject in his day, with enormous power and popularity. In fact, we know that on the occasion of the plot by Essex against Queen Elizabeth, he was subsidized by the followers of Essex to stage Richard II in order to remind the London public that deposing a monarch had happened before. He was no timid playwright.

**Second:** that Shakespearean plays and characters are intentionally constructed in a multi-layered fashion, with plays that have what Ryan called a “divided voice” that eschews simplistic linearity, and allows him to bring in characters from different milieus, who speak in different ways, and that allows us to see bits of our own reflection in them and to engage with them at different levels in different ways. There is, as Stephen Greenblatt observed, a “strategic opacity” that makes his characters a joint creation of the artist and the reader/interpreter that allows these characters to continue to involve us emotionally as well as intellectually through space and time.

**Third:** His heroes and villains are prismatic creatures who have ambition and talent and human frailties and he engages us in redefining these leading characters in ways that we seldom think of. Thus the quintessential hero, Henry V is shown to commit war crimes, the villain Richard III can woo and win his woman, and the weak and indecisive Richard II is shown to have the soul of a poet.

**Fourth:** despite Shakespeare’s enormous talent with language and poetry he does not make the plays the forum for presentation of set pieces of verse, or simply a means for producing quotable statements that remain perennial favorites. Rather he mobilizes his amazing poetic abilities and stylistic prowess to serve the cause

of drama, to help create a new kind of theater where the audience is invited to join in the exploration of the mind and soul of the protagonists and to join in the intellectual and emotional development of character.

That last observation requires further elaboration. Even if certain passages are recognized as poetic masterpieces in their own right, little jewels that have enriched the treasury of English poetry, Shakespeare put poetry to the service of the play and did not use the play as a platform to exhibit his poetic prowess. I believe that the unique impact of his plays is not only because of the poetic talent of Shakespeare, but also because he displays an unmatched **craftsmanship** in using his poetic lines to serve the dramatic needs of the plays, emphasize pacing and engage audiences in the development of the characters in the plays. This subtle craftsmanship does not draw attention to itself, rather it dissolves into the background of his creations and makes the studied final effect seem effortless. I believe that the genius as craftsman is insufficiently appreciated, but that it is one of the reasons that he is seen as a master dramatist who took tragedy to new heights, just as Beethoven took the symphony to new heights, heights that have perhaps never been equaled. It is part of his protean imagination and his multifaceted talents that his accomplishments in poetry and language tend

to be overshadowed by his dramatic creations and the ceaseless wonder of his multi-layered plays.

So allow me to elaborate on this last point, namely that Shakespeare was a master craftsman in the construction of verse and in the design of poetry, and that he used that talent to subordinate the exigencies of verse to the requirements of drama. In the process, through his learned casualness, he created a doubly powerful effect as the language was fitted to the needs of the play and gave us prismatic characters that engage us both intellectually and emotionally and have not lost their power to do so across space and time.

## II. WHAT IS POETRY? WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

Words, words, words...

What are words? Asks Borges in his "This Craft of Verse"... Words are symbols for shared memories<sup>1</sup>. The writer can only allude, can only try to make the reader imagine. The reader constructs the rest. The reader collaborates with the author in making a joint creation. The author, if he is clever enough, can leave that creative ambiguity that invites the reader to make his or her contribution.

But if selecting the right words is important, the way these words are put together is of course the essential

art. Shakespeare mastered the arts of non-dramatic poetry, and in fact as Kermode says, we can see effects in Shakespeare's early plays that would seem strange in *Hamlet* or its successors (Kermode language p.). Shakespeare mastered the usual rhetorical devices of **repetition**, **alliteration**, Anaphora (the repetition of a word at the beginning of a sequence of sentences or phrases); **epistrophe** (repetition at the end of sentences) **epanalepsis**, (repetition of the first words at the end of the sentence or phrase), and so forth.

But beyond the rhetorical devices, there is something that separates poetry from verse. That separation is the basis of the poetic experience. Partly it is the selection of the words. The words can have sonority and elegance, or be well suited to their task to convey violence and mayhem... But also it is the power of the images and metaphors that give words their particular power... a skill that all great authors in all periods must master, for example, these phrases from Chesterton: "marble like solid moonlight" or "gold like frozen fire"<sup>2</sup>.

Dreams, images we see in our sleep, are more mysterious and suggestive and powerful than most images we see in everyday life. Thus sleep and dreams are a recurrent theme of poetry and imagination. Shakespeare's makes use of dreams in his plays: From *A Midsummer's Night Dream* to *The Tempest*, we are invited to a willing

suspension of disbelief and to go with the dreams and then accept the final outcome as reality.. Thus Prospero's famous lines from the *Tempest*:

Our revels now are ended.

[...]

We are such stuff

As dreams are made on; and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.

*The Tempest* Act 4, scene 1, 148–158

What makes all this work is the poetic construct as much as the dramatic structure of the play. So beyond the words, there is the poetic construct. And that requires craftsmanship.

### III. THE POETRY OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Shakespeare, master craftsman, author of some of the most famous sonnets ever written, could make his characters speak in perfectly rhymed verse when he chose. For example, in the first encounter between Romeo and Juliet, they speak in a perfectly metered and rhymed sonnet of fourteen lines. Fourteen lines of iambic pentameter with an intricate rhyme scheme. Listen to their elegant exchange:

- ROMEO    If I profane with my unworhiest            91  
                  hand  
                  This holy shrine, the gentle fine is  
                  this:  
                  My lips, two blushing pilgrims,  
                  ready stand  
                  To smooth that rough touch with  
                  a tender kiss.
- JULIET    Good pilgrim, you do wrong your            95  
                  hand too much,  
                  Which mannerly devotion shows  
                  in this;  
                  For saints have hands that pilgrims'  
                  hands do touch,  
                  And palm to palm is holy palmers'  
                  kiss.
- ROMEO    Have not saints lips, and holy            100  
                  palmers too?
- JULIET    Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must  
                  use in prayer.
- ROMEO    O, then, dear saint, let lips do  
                  what hands do;  
                  They pray, grant thou, lest faith  
                  turn to despair.

JULIET      Saints do not move, though grant      104  
                  for prayers' sake.

ROMEO      Then move not, while my prayer's  
                  effect I take.

xxxxxxx end of sonnet xxxxxxxx

Thus from my lips, by yours, my sin is purged.

JULIET      Then have my lips the sin that  
                  they have took.

ROMEO      Sin from thy lips? O trespass  
                  sweetly urged!

Give me my sin again.

JULIET      You kiss by the book.

NURSE      Madam, your mother craves a      109  
                  word with you.

The spell of perfect love – supported by a perfect sonnet – is broken by the intrusion of the Nurse... Few people who see the play can see the craftsmanship behind the perfection of that scene...

The next fourteen lines would have been a perfect second sonnet were it not for the nurse's interruption,

a portend of the rapid termination of their love affair according to Sutherland and Watts<sup>3</sup>.

But Shakespeare chooses to release his characters from the perfect verse that Racine maintains throughout his long and passionate plays. So he chooses to alternate between rhymed verse, blank verse and plain language as ways of strengthening the dramatic structure of the play.

Lines now could be broken for the participation of multiple players: for example this tour de force of a single line broken into four speeches in a passage from King John, (III.iii.65–66) where the King orders Hubert de Burgh to kill the Prince:

K. JOHN.	Death.
HUB.	My lord?
K. JOHN.	A grave.
HUB	He shall not live.
K. JOHN.	Enough.

As Kermode notes: “This impressive division of one line into four speeches is surely a mark of change; language is here used not for elocution but for drama.”<sup>4</sup>

But these are technical points that interest the critic while the audience appreciates the product: the play and its characters... and here too Shakespeare was also a master of infinite variety... so let me conclude with a few reflections on the variety of the bard's creations.

#### IV. BUILDING A CHARACTER: THE CASE OF RICHARD II

Richard II is one of the most interesting plays of Shakespeare. It included some of the most beautiful passages ever written in English, and Richard, a weak and ineffective monarch, is given these great lines. For example, his long reflection on the dangers of the hollow crown and the mortality of kings. Listen to this great speech by King Richard II:

For God's sake, let us sit upon the                    155  
ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of  
kings;  
How some have been deposed; some  
slain in war,  
Some haunted by the ghosts they  
have deposed;  
Some poison'd by their wives: some  
sleeping kill'd;

All murder'd - for within the hollow crown 160  
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king  
 Keeps Death his court and there the antic sits,  
 Scoffing his court and grinning at his pomp,  
 Allowing him a breath, a little scene,  
 To monarchize, be fear'd and kill with looks, 165  
 Infusing him with self and vain conceit,  
 As if this flesh which walls about our life,  
 Were brass impregnable, and humour'd thus  
 Comes at the last and with a little pin  
 Bores through his castle wall, and 170  
 farewell king!

-- Richard II – Act 3, Scene 2, lines 155-170

Farewell ... king !

The pause and emphasis on the word “king” changes the sense of “farewell” and turn what could have been a pathos verging on bathos into a hard edged sarcasm that underlines the thrust of mockery that runs through the whole passage...

Now hear him in this eloquent conclusion to this remarkable passage:

Cover your heads and mock not flesh  
and blood

With solemn reverence; throw away  
respect,

Tradition, form and ceremonious  
duty,

For you have but mistook me all this  
while:

I live with bread like you, feel want, 175

Taste grief, need friends: subjected  
thus,

How can you say to me, I am a king?

-- Richard II – Act 3, Scene 2, lines 171-177

The play is really a lot more about the character of Richard II than it is about the events and plot, which is rather simple: the decline of Richard and the rise of Henry. Far more interesting is the multi-faceted creation of Richard, a weak king, but endowed with the soul of a poet...

Seen from that angle, the play is important in several respects. It is not dominated by the plot, the external events that shape the conditions leading to this dramatic turn of events: the deposition of a king. It is not so much about the story as it is about the character of Richard II. The play not only dissects the enigmatic personality of the king, it does so with the full participation of the audience as the playwright skillfully brings forth the inner thoughts of his protagonist. Indeed, as Greenblatt observed: "Richard II marked a major advance in the play-wright's ability to represent inwardness"<sup>5</sup>.

So now we have a play that will present a complex character, and that invites the audience to focus on the character of the king. That is a task that requires exceptionally good acting. Good actors are needed to create complex characters. Thus, the skills of a Burbage enabled Shakespeare to create complex characters. Indeed, acting, called "personation" was being recognized as such at that time<sup>6</sup>. But good actors too, needed to be liberated from the sing-song delivery

of totally metered and rhymed verse, they needed a new dramatic language to explore the minds of the characters they represented. Shakespeare was able to throw convention to the winds, to use meter and rhyme when he wanted, as well as blank verse where it served his purpose. And thus, out of this collaboration between great actors and great writing: “A new manner of great acting had been created”<sup>7</sup>, and it would keep “acting Shakespeare” at the top of the ambitions of aspiring actors to this day.

But Shakespeare gives us much more than beautiful words. He builds the character of Richard II in collaboration with the audience, through the talents of the actor. He shows us complexity and evolution of the character through the play.

Richard II is the first dramatic hero where Shakespeare actively promoted the duality of his inner soul and his public self. Richard has a habit of studying himself from the outside, as it were, a habit emblemized in the scene where he sends for a looking-glass (IV.i). When he smashes his reflection, his “shadow”, it is as if he was destroying his substance. In a sense he is always calling for a mirror, finding in his reflection a king stripped of all his belongings (III.iii.142ff.), seeing himself as an analogue of Christ, betrayed by Judases and condemned by Pilates (IV.i.239–40), developing,

in a beautifully appropriate style, the figure of the two buckets (IV.i.184ff.).

## V. RICHARD II: HOW THE CHARACTER EVOLVES

Richard II is complete in itself, and the king is virtually the first of the tragic heroes of whom we discover an inner as well as a public life.

The king is a bad ruler and a weak person. His bad performance as a ruler is truly noted, and Bolingbroke deposes him with relative ease. Yet Richard seduces the audience with the tune of his voice and the beauty of his language. Sometimes affected and self-pitying, it nevertheless imposes itself on the audience's mind:

What must the King do now? Must he submit?

The King shall do it. Must he be depos'd?

The King shall be contented. Must he lose

The name of king? A' God's name let it go.

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,

My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,

My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,

My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood,

My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff,

My subjects for a pair of carved saints;  
 And my large kingdom for a little grave,  
 A little little grave, an obscure grave—  
 Or I'll be buried in the king's high way,  
 Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet  
 May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;  
 For on my heart they tread now whilst I live,  
 And buried once, why not upon my head?

--- (III.iii.143–59)

Now here we have a turning point in the play, a point that requires incredible skill in writing and acting, as it fulfills a double purpose: it allows us to feel for Richard and sympathize with him as a human being, someone who has suffered a savage loss, who falls from the uppermost reaches of power and majesty and is cast down into the abyss; but – and therein lies the skill – to make us feel that he was unworthy of keeping this high office. For Shakespeare gives the king elegant lines to speak, but they show us a weak, peevish self-pity, rather than the dignified posture of one who deserves to bear a crown, one who would by his demeanor in this difficult moment show how to confront the disastrous turn of events with stately nobility. Why does the passage

work? Because it underlines that Richard considers that he is “owed” all that a king has, but does not show the slightest sense of obligation or responsibility that we all expect a Monarch to have towards his duties. Kermode puts it succinctly when he says: “...this pathos serves a double purpose: it touches the hearers but at the same time convinces them that self-pity is not a quality to be admired in a monarch. It is founded in a sense of violated privilege, with no thought whatever of obligation”<sup>8</sup>.

Now that we talk of a collaboration between author and audience, we must underline an additional complexity. That is the duality of the audience that Shakespeare was writing for. On one level, he had the educated and sophisticated aristocrats and gentry, whose taste and even language was special to them, and then there were the masses, largely uneducated and illiterate, that filled the ground of the theater. They spoke a different language. And if Shakespeare relied on the aristocrats for sponsorship and political support, he relied on the “groundlings” for his financial survival. As Ted Hughes observes:

“Shakespeare’s audience made certain demands that no audience has repeated since.... They comprised two distinct audiences. Along the upper edge sat the aristocracy, the intellectual nobility, in some ways

as formidably educated and as exactingly cultured as Englishmen have ever been. And along the lower edge, in large numbers, were the common populace, the groundlings, many of whom could neither read nor write.”<sup>9</sup>

How Shakespeare’s language and dramatic formulations solved that problem has been splendidly elaborated by Hughes<sup>10</sup> and he even talks of a formula that Shakespeare used in his writing to be able to reach both parts of his audience and unite them in their desired interaction with the play.

But wait! For there is another aspect to this complex rhetorical maneuver by Shakespeare. Yes, this kind of language is admirably suited to show the weak and vain side of Richard, one that would alienate the audience from him, but at the same time, it also lays the foundation for the audience to relate to him more later in the play, as we are invited to share in the evolution of his thinking as he overcomes his peevish self-pity and develops a more reflective and philosophical posture... It does so by establishing the technique of the soliloquy as a verbal link between the character’s inner thoughts and the audience, and by exposing his weakness it also exposes that he has indeed been wronged, and thereby creates the necessary mental posture to appreciate him when the wrong remains and the weakness is

transformed into reflection and thoughtful interaction, if not acceptance, of his unfortunate condition.

And indeed, when we see him at the end of the play, the effect is changed. Here the King speaks thoughtfully. Although Shakespeare had made use of soliloquies before Richard II, this would be the first to produce this effect of serious meditation<sup>11</sup>. It is a long meditation, where in a stolen, frozen moment of time, the character is allowed to share with the audience his torment, his inner thoughts and the struggle of his conscience and intellect<sup>12</sup>. Here are a few lines from that meditation:

I have been studying how I may compare  
 This prison where I live unto the world:  
 And for because the world is populous  
 And here is not a creature but myself,  
 I cannot do it; yet I'll hammer it out.  
 My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,  
 My soul the father; and these two beget  
 A generation of still-breeding thoughts,  
 And these same thoughts people this little world,  
 In humours like the people of this world,  
 For no thought is contented. The better sort,

As thoughts of things divine, are intermix'd  
 With scruples and do set the word itself  
 Against the word:  
 As thus: "Come, little ones," and then again  
 "It is as hard to come as for a camel  
 To thread the postern of small needle's eye."...  
 Whate'er I be,  
 Nor I nor any man that but man is,  
 With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd  
 With being nothing. (V.v.1-41)

Note the complexity, with its suggestion of self-regard, in the rhymes and antitheses of the last few lines. It may be that the need to represent—to provide for the personation of—a king full of tender self-regard made the inwardness of those later Shakespearean soliloquies possible. It opened up a new rhetorical range, a range that Shakespeare was to explore almost alone<sup>13</sup>. The grammatical concision of the lines prefigures greater things in the future<sup>14</sup>. The art of the great soliloquies was born<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, in this meditation we see some interesting dualities: beyond the obvious one of the inner and

public self, there is the dialogue between the mind and the soul, there is the ability of Richard to look at himself as if from the outside and discuss his own condition, and finally there is also the duality in the play, between Bolingbroke and Richard, a duality well-captured in the image of the two buckets.

## **VI. POETRY ACROSS CULTURE, TIME AND SPACE:**

At the outset, I did say that Shakespeare was the universal genius that creative minds keep turning to time and again. An Egyptian Lear, a Russian Hamlet, a Japanese Macbeth... all possible, for great works of art allow others to take from them and build the new artist's own creations. They have that studied ambiguity and that peculiar imagery and powerful mystery that invite such interaction.

Let us go back to Richard II and one of the great passages of that play: the two buckets and its concluding line:

...

That bucket down and full of tears am I,  
Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on  
high.

HENRY BOLINGBROKE

I thought you had been willing to resign.

KING RICHARD II

My crown I am; but still my griefs are mine:

You may my glories and my state depose,

But not my griefs; still am I king of those.

This last line is the line taken as a refrain in the beautiful poem of Aragon about occupied France after 1940, called "Richard II 40" where the refrain is "je reste roi de mes douleurs" [I remain the king of my pains (griefs)]. He uses it as the closing fifth line after a quatrain rhyming a,b,a,b, and b, then c,b,c,b, and b, and then d,b,d,b and b, etc. Listen to the powerful lines of Aragon:

RICHARD II QUARANTE

Ma patrie est comme une barque

Qu'abandonnèrent ses haleurs

Et je ressemble à ce monarque

Plus malheureux que le malheur

Qui restait roi de ses douleurs

Qui restait roi de ces douleurs... Who remained king of his pains (griefs).

## VII. RICHARD II: CONCLUSIONS

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, If I have selected Richard II to discuss on this momentous celebration of Shakespeare on the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, it is because, I think that the play is particularly interesting both in itself as a great work of art, as well representing an important milestone in the development of the Shakespearean canon.

There are several important aspects to this play:

- It sets the stage for Shakespeare's subsequent History Plays, and certainly can be considered the first in a tetralogy of the Henry plays;
- It raises questions about the right of kings to rule by simple hereditary right, and introduces the Machiavellian concept of government by an able prince;
- It invites the audience to interact with the writer in defining the character of Richard, and establishes a remarkable evolution in the personality of the King;

- It deals with dualities in interesting and intriguing ways;
- It introduces the art of the soliloquy to enable the audience to share in the character's inner thoughts; and
- It has some very fine thoughts and excellent poetry to boot.

Above all, I think, the skill deployed in showing the evolution of Richard's character, and the ability to get the audience to feel for him as a human being as he becomes more reflective and thoughtful, while still recognizing that he was a bad ruler is an achievement, a *tour de force*, that makes this play deserving of more recognition than it has received.

Through the work of the pioneers of semiotics, we have learned that text is a construct of both author and reader. We bring to it our aspirations and our fears, our hopes and our dreams, our concerns and our memories. The skillful writer is one who opens up possibilities. Shakespeare is more than skillful. To use words Seamus Heaney used in another context, Shakespeare's language is seductive by the run of his verse; it is distinctive by its posture in the mouth and in the ear, remarkable in its constant drama of tone and tune<sup>16</sup>. But more importantly, the temporal and the didactic passes away

with time, the work that engages us intellectually and emotionally is the one that remains. And Shakespeare's work certainly remains, and so does the inwardness of his characters.

"Strategic opaqueness" is the key to successfully promoting this "inwardness". If it starts with *Richard II*, and evolves in *Julius Caesar* it finds its true strength in *Hamlet*. As Greenblatt observes, Shakespeare had reinvented the tragedy by "radical excision"...

"He had rethought how to put a tragedy together – specifically, he had rethought the amount of causal explanation a tragic plot needed to function effectively and the amount of explicit psychological rationale a character needed to be compelling. Shakespeare found that he could immeasurably deepen the effect of his plays, that he could provoke in the audience and in himself a peculiarly passionate intensity of response, if he took out a key explanatory element, thereby occluding the rationale, motivation, or ethical principle that accounted for the action that was to unfold. The principle was not the making of a riddle to be solved, but the creation of a strategic opacity. This opacity, Shakespeare found, released an enormous energy that had been at

least partially blocked or contained by familiar, reassuring explanations”<sup>17</sup>.

Shakespeare, with his poetic talent, his mastery of technique, his unerring sense of drama and his insightful understanding of human nature creates clever multi-layered plays and prismatic characters, Shakespeare opens up unending vistas, multiple mirrors and windows, images that engage our imagination and our intellect, as we find and lose ourselves in his creations, as each successive generation interacts and reinvents his text...

Ben Jonson was right. Shakespeare is indeed not of an age, but for all time.

### **VIII. THE STUDY OF MAN: THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF GENIUS**

Ladies and gentlemen,

“The appropriate study of man is man” said Alexander Pope. Few have studied the human character as effectively as Shakespeare. His characters continue to fascinate us, and every generation finds a new way of interpreting the characters that populate his plays. There are no cardboard cutouts among his creations. Such was his genius that he invites us to join him in filling in the many interpretations that each of the many

primary characters can take. It gives us an enormous scope for bringing our own contemporary contribution to a new and contemporary interpretation of his work. It is like looking at his brilliant work through the kaleidoscope and every turn and twist we give it yields an entirely new and equally enchanting composition. Shakespeare's legacy is indeed the Kaleidoscope of genius.

But even more important, such was the scope of his genius that his work though very extensive is far from repetitive. His creations are very different. Even within the tragedies, his range is phenomenal.

Here is Hazlitt's summing up the distinctness and originality of the tragedies:

*“Macbeth and Lear, Othello and Hamlet, are usually reckoned Shakespeare's four principal tragedies. Lear stands first for the profound intensity of the passion; Macbeth for the wildness of the imagination and the rapidity of action; Othello for the progressive interest and powerful alternations of feeling; Hamlet for the refined development of thought and sentiment. If the force of genius shown in each of these works is astonishing, their variety is not less so. [...] not*

one of which has the slightest reference to the rest.”<sup>18</sup>

And Shakespeare’s range in understanding and presenting the human character is no less impressive.

John Guilgud, who has both directed and acted in many a Shakespeare play, has actually created his own very successful one-man-show presenting many snippets of Shakespeare’s work organized around the original monologue Shakespeare wrote for the melancholy Jacques in *As you like it* (Act II, Scene vii), often referred to as *the Seven Ages of Man*:

All the world’s a stage,  
 And all the men and women merely players:  
 They have their exits and their entrances;  
 And one man in his time plays many parts,  
 His acts being seven ages. As, first the infant,  
 Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms.  
 And then the whining school-boy, with his  
 satchel  
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
 Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
 Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad

Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the  
justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lined,  
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,  
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Guilgud's *The Ages of Man* was a remarkable *tour-de-force*, that skillfully blended the many Shakespearean passages that cover the many facets of human character and its development over time, from childhood through youth to middle age and ultimately the feebleness and senility of old age. But with special force we find the full range of the developments between the vigor and rashness of callow youth, to the more mature, reasoned, controlled and experienced behavior of middle age, and ultimately the wisdom or the foolishness of the very old.

In each of these different "stages of man" different types of human behavior exist, and Shakespeare shows us how he can bring to life a wide range of characters and behaviors. There are no stereotypes by age as there is no pigeonholing of characters as all bad or all good, villain or hero, except in the rarest cases, and usually for a particular reason, such as Iago's evil, which is the result of the blind hatred of the racist.

## IX. ENVOI

Ladies and gentlemen,

Shakespeare is truly the universal genius whose well is never dry, and to which we continuously go to, even today, as the latest string of plays and movies proves yet

again, and which we by our presence here today amply demonstrate.

Yes indeed... The title we have chosen for this celebration is most appropriate:

Shakespeare, Forever and a day...

## NOTES

- 1 Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, Page 117
- 2 Chesterton, "The Ballad of the White Horse", a poem about King Alfred's wars with the Danes. Are quoted by Borges : "... where marble and gold are compared to two things that are even more elementary. They are compared to moonlight and to fire-and not to fire itself, but to a magic frozen fire". (Borges Pages 52, 53)
- 3 Sutherland and Watts, p. 62.
- 4 Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, page 21
- 5 Greenblatt, Stephen, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare*, 1st edition. United States of America: Norton & Co. Ltd., 2004, pp.300-301
- 6 The word ..."personation", a word that, along with "personate", seems to have come into use at this time, and is first found in John Florio's Italian dictionary, *A World of Words* (1598). Shakespeare probably knew Florio, who was Southampton's secretary and, as a keen theatergoer, may have picked up the word in theatrical circles. It is tempting to think that it was a new refinement in acting style, facilitated by and encouraging a new flexibility in dramatic verse, that made this word necessary. (Kermode *Age of Shakespeare* Page 64)
- 7 Kermode, *Age of Shakespeare*, p.122
- 8 Kermode *Language*
- 9 .... *Essential Shakespeare*, Introduction and selection by Ted Hughes, Harper Collins, NY, 1991, pp. 15-16

- 10 See Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, xxx
- 11 Kermode considers it the “first of Shakespeare’s great soliloquies... It tells of a man trying to understand his place in a world that is no longer his to play with. Still impregnated with self-pity, the speech is nevertheless the first that at least hints at the range and power of Hamlet’s soliloquies, or Macbeth’s or Angelo’s”. Kermode *Language*
- 12 The wonderful long soliloquy of the King in prison is truly transitional, for the occasion of such a lament resembles others in the earlier plays, until it becomes clear that something else is happening, that the elaborations of figure are not simply prefabricated and laid out neatly before us but hammered out. He goes on to reflect that after all it was better to be a king than to be in his present state of penury, but that to resume his kingship, move back in time, would be to be once more unkinged by Bolingbroke, and so to be nothing. In conclusion:

Nor I, nor any man that but man is,  
 With nothing shall be pleas’d, till he be eas’d  
 With being nothing. (39–41)

No other speech in Shakespeare much resembles this one, in which “the word” is truly set “Against the word”. The tone is quietly meditative, but the arguments are hammered out. There is none of that furious thinking we associate with some of Hamlet’s soliloquies, much less is there any promise of the tumult of Aufidius’s thought in *Coriolanus* (IV.vii). Richard establishes an equation between thoughts in the little world of man’s mind, generated by the interaction of female brain and

male soul, and people in the greater world, generated in the usual way. Then he begins to describe different categories of thoughts as if they were people, all discontented. The “better” thoughts concerned with religion are troubled, when they set one word against another, by apparent contradictions in the Gospels (Matthew 19:14, 24). As it happens, the Duchess of York has just used the expression “sets the word itself against the word” (V.iii.122), and the poet may have been struck by the other sense of “word”, meaning the word of God, an association that tempted him to introduce this comment on the conflict between the Gospel texts. Now he illustrates other sources of mental discontent: ambitious thoughts and stoical thoughts. These “still-breeding” thoughts are again compared to “many people”; and Richard sees himself as playing all their parts, again, even in this moment of quiet contemplation, seeing himself from the outside, as an actor who once played the king. Such is his discontent that nothing can ease it except the nothing that is death.

A comparison of this soliloquy with those Shakespeare wrote earlier (say, of Richard III) and later (of Hamlet and Macbeth) shows it to be very much in the middle. Like Bushy’s consolatory speech, it has little tangles in it, signs however of high intelligence at work, signs of a language formidably changing to meet greater challenges. (Shakespeare’s Language Kermode pages 43–45)

- 13 Among the dramatists writing in Shakespeare’s hey-day were Ben Jonson, John Marston, Thomas Heywood, Thomas Middleton, John Webster, and George Chapman. Of these, Jonson and Chapman were the most distinguished poets

outside as well as inside the theater. Chapman was the translator of Homer (“never before in any language truly translated”). His fame now rests largely on that translation, which he himself described as “the work that I was born to do”. He never wrote for Shakespeare’s company, but his dramatic works include some strong tragedies, notably *Bussy d’Ambois* (1604). (Kermode *Age of Shakespeare* Pages 113-114)

- 14 Kermode *Age of Shakespeare* Pages 88–91.
- 15 Kermode says: The art of soliloquy, much developed in *Hamlet*, now acquires a new force as the means by which a man trapped in that temporal interim can convey the almost frantic exercise of equivocating conscience and intellect. “This supernatural solliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good,” reasons Macbeth (I.iii.130–31); and in his most celebrated soliloquy:

If it were done, when ‘tis done then ‘twere well  
 It were done quickly. If th’ assassination  
 Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
 With his surcease, success; that but this blow  
 Might be the be-all and the-end-all—here,  
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
 We’ld jump the life to come (I.vii.1–7)

There is little of comparable intensity in all of Shakespeare.  
 (Kermode *Age of Shakespeare* Page 161)

- 16 (Paraphrasing from Seamus Heaney, "Above the brim", in *Homage to Robert Frost*, Farrar Strauss Giroux, New York, 1996, pp. 70-71).
- 17 Will in the world...p 324
- 18 Cited in S. Chandrasekhar, *Truth and Beauty*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp.35-36.