

Hieronimo, Hamlet and Remembrance

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AS *THE CHOEPHOROË*, the second play in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (458 B.C.), begins, Orestes stands beside his father's tomb, thinking about the past. He offers Agamemnon a lock of hair and laments that he was not in Argos to mourn at his father's funeral. He seems to be sunk in passive grief. But his contemplation of the past suddenly turns into a cry for vengeance: 'O Zeus,' he says, 'grant that I may avenge the death/of my father, and of your grace fight on my side!'¹ Exactly the same movement of feeling is experienced by Electra when she, in turn, comes to the tomb with the chorus of libation bearers. She recalls the circumstances of Agamemnon's cruel murder, then shifts abruptly from retrospection to revenge: 'I pray that one may appear to avenge you, father,/and that the killers may in justice pay with life for life'.²

Electra's prayer is answered. She finds the hair, and it matches her own; her feet fit into the prints left by her brother; and then Orestes steps forward, persuaded by what she has said of Agamemnon that she will not betray him. In the magnificent sequence which follows, brother, sister and Chorus unite in reminding each other, the dead king and the audience of the bloody deed performed in the first part of the trilogy. Here, even more clearly than in the private prayers, retrospection prompts a desire for revenge: 'Remember the bath in which you were murdered, father!' says Orestes; 'Remember the new sort of covering they devised!' replies his sister.³ A torrent of stichomythia begins, and it is only contained when the Chorus says:

Indeed, there has been no fault in this your lengthy
utterance;
making atonement to the tomb for the lament that was
denied it;

and for the rest, since you are resolved to act, do
now the deed and make trial of your fortune.⁴

At this point it becomes clear that the relationship between past and future has changed. There is more than a suggestion in the Chorus's words that the retrospection which prompts revenge can also postpone it. Though Orestes and Electra are not quite rebuked for delay, they are offered (as the next lines show) barbed praise. The Chorus wants them to use, rather than become obsessed by, the past.

In these first few hundred lines of *The Choephoroe*, Aeschylus dramatises the psychological ambiguity of vengeful retrospection. He shows the past inciting revenge; but he also suggests that retrospection offers its own grim satisfaction, that the past can draw a revenger back from his task instead of pushing him towards it. The two greatest Elizabethan revenge plays, *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587-89) and *Hamlet* (1600), are as preoccupied with the past as is *The Choephoroe*.⁵ In the former, Kyd presents a hero inexorably impelled by remembrance towards revenge; in the latter, Shakespeare shows us a hero continually recoiling from revenge into a 'remembrance of things past'.

Greek retrospection: Elizabethan remembrance. Aeschylus's revengers, like the Orestes and Electra of Sophocles and Euripides, have no private memory of their father; they know about his life and death only because it is public knowledge. They take revenge for equally public reasons: as children of the house of Atreus, they are bound to punish those who have weakened and disgraced their house by shedding the blood of the king. Elizabethan revenge tragedy replaces the vital exteriority of the links between living and dead in the Greek plays by something more private: almost invariably, its revengers cherish vivid, personal memories of their lost friends and kinsmen. These memories are usually, as in *The Spanish Tragedy*, shared with the audience. In Kyd's play, objects held as mementoes combine with a sweepingly explicit rhetoric to publish Hieronimo's private bond with Horatio. But in *Hamlet* the memories disclosed by the hero only suggest more, lying deeper, unspoken. Receding into the privacy of memory, Hamlet excludes the audience from knowledge of 'that within

which passes show'; and, in the process, he wins for himself a depth and secrecy of character utterly unlike anything to be found in Greek tragedy.

When Hieronimo finds his son hanging in the arbour, run through with swords, he does not think only of revenge. Dipping Horatio's 'handkercher' or 'napkin' into his wounds, he declares:

Seest thou this handkercher besmear'd with blood?
 It shall not from me till I take revenge:
 Seest thou those wounds that yet are bleeding fresh?
 I'll not entomb them till I have reveng'd:
 Then will I joy amidst my discontent,
 Till then my sorrow never shall be spent.

(II.v.51-56)⁶

Hieronimo sets out to secure his revenge by equipping himself with objects charged with remembrance: the corpse, a surrogate ghost to whet his purpose should it ever blunt, and the gory napkin, a memento to be carried near his sorrowing heart. Why did Kyd choose to make a handkercher the portable emblem of Hieronimo's remembrance? In the previous act, after describing the death of Andrea, Horatio had announced to Bel-imperia: 'This scarf I pluck'd from off his liveless arm,/And wear it in remembrance of my friend' (I.iv.42-43). Now this scarf, as Bel-imperia had explained, was originally given by her to Andrea as a love token — a token which she in turn grants Horatio. So Kyd introduced the handkercher to help build up a chain of remembrances: Andrea takes a scarf from Bel-imperia; Horatio takes it from him, presumably stained by the 'purple' battlefield;⁷ and then Hieronimo takes the bloody napkin from his son. Kyd's play has often been criticised for dividing between two centres of interest: Andrea's revenge and Horatio's. But the scarf and handkercher, complementary emblems of remembrance, feed one plot into the other, uniting the play around the relationship between remembrance and revenge.

In the first scene, Andrea tells us that after his body was buried by Horatio, his spirit crossed 'the flowing stream of Acheron', pleased Cerberus 'with hony'd speech' and

presented itself to the three judges of the underworld. Aeacus deemed that the proper place for Andrea was among lovers on the 'fields of love', but Rhadamanth objected that 'martial fields' better suited the soldier. It was left to Minos, the third judge, 'to end the difference', by sending the spirit further into Hades to consult a higher authority. The dialectical nature of Minos's judgement is echoed in the structure of the underworld: Andrea must take 'the middle path' of three if he is to reach Pluto's court. Interestingly, Virgil, Kyd's authority for most of the speech, had insisted in Book VI of the *Aeneid* that there were two paths, not three. Kyd clearly had some special purpose in establishing the idea that in the underworld the road to justice leads through and beyond alternatives — and that it leads, in the end, to the Revenge which is Proserpine's 'doom'. I think that he offers the journey as a paradigm for Hieronimo's movement through the play: although the Knight Marshal inhabits sixteenth-century Spain, he explores the same moral landscape as the spirit of Andrea. In one sense indeed he *must* travel towards Revenge, for the goddess of the play, Proserpine, has granted Andrea a 'doom' (meaning 'destiny' as well as 'judgement'), and Hieronimo is the instrument of her will. But in another sense he chooses to make the journey; and he does so because of the constant prompting of remembrance.

The Knight Marshal is considering a hellish pilgrimage as early as his III.ii soliloquy. 'The ugly fiends do sally forth of hell,' he says, 'And frame my steps to unfrequented paths'. Dreams of remembrance ('direful visions' in which he sees once more the 'wounds' of his son) have made him susceptible to such temptation. But at this stage of the play, memory can provoke nothing but frustration, for Hieronimo does not yet know who murdered Horatio. He is caught between desire for action and an intolerable, tormenting patience, and the strain tells on his sanity. He thinks that everything must be caught up in his anguished dilemma. As Empson says in 'Let it go', at the border of madness, 'The contradictions cover such a range':

Eyes, life, world, heavens, hell, night, and day,
 See, search, shew, send, some man, some mean, that
 may—
A letter falleth.

Seeking a 'mean' (both 'opportunity' and 'middle path'), Hieronimo hunts the kind of path along which Minos sent Andrea to Revenge. He finds it when Bel-imperia's letter falls from the balcony, telling him how to break the deadlock and advance into action: 'Me hath my hapless brother hid from thee', it says, 'Revenge thyself on Balthazar and him,/For these were they that murdered thy son'. '*Red ink*' reads the practical note in the Quarto margin, and the letter tells Hieronimo that it has been written in blood for want of ink. So the paper flutters to the stage looking very like Hieronimo's bloody handkercher. It is another link in the chain, another memento inciting revenge.

By the end of the act, his desire for retribution still unsatisfied, ignored by God and kept from the King by the cunning of Lorenzo, Hieronimo has once more become desperate, and he turns back to 'unfrequented paths'. Standing between the traditional tools of suicide, '*a poniard in one hand, and a rope in the other*', he tries to decide which offers the better path to justice:

Hieronimo, 'tis time for thee to trudge:
 Down by the dale that flows with purple gore,
 Standeth a fiery tower: there sits a judge
 Upon a seat of steel . . .
 Away, Hieronimo, to him be gone:
 He'll do thee justice for Horatio's death.
 (III.xii.6-9, 12-13)

Dagger and halter become parts of the landscape: 'Turn down this path, thou shalt be with him straight,/Or this, and then thou need'st not take thy breath:/This way, or that way?' (14-16). Again, it is the remembrance of his loss that breaks the deadlock: 'if I hang or kill myself, let's know/Who will revenge Horatio's murder then?' The weapons are thrown down, both paths rejected, and what stands between, the man remembering, goes forward to revenge — along 'the middle path' of three.

The same dialectic operates at the third and most formidable point of deadlocked uncertainty, represented by the soliloquy '*Vindicta mihi!*' (III.xiii.1-44). The first five lines of this, in which Hieronimo considers the possibility of

leaving God to revenge his son, are made the more moving by his choice of *Romans* xii-xiii as text. The biblical passage forbids private revenge, but it allows the 'minister of God to take vengeance on him that doeth evil'.⁸ As a 'civil magistrate', Hieronimo would be regarded by the Elizabethan audience as just such a 'minister'. Cut off from higher authority by the cunning of Lorenzo, and unable to try his son's killers himself (because he could not be an impartial 'magistrate' in such a trial, only a father), Hieronimo has been stripped of precisely that power of 'vengeance' which, for the original audience, was the most essential adjunct of his public office. It's hardly surprising then that the Knight Marshal goes on from *Romans* to consider contrary advice, taken from Seneca's *Agamemnon*: '*Per scelus semper tutum est sceleribus iter.*'⁹ Although it's not clear whether Hieronimo applies this paraphrase of Clytemnestra's decision to kill her husband to himself (who, like her, has a child to revenge) or to Lorenzo (who has a better claim to '*scelus*'), either way the line dictates action: vengeance or a pre-emptive strike. If he dithers, he reflects, he will simply lose his life: 'For he that thinks with patience to contend/To quiet life, his life shall easily end'. But here the argument starts to recoil, for the ambiguity of 'easily' allows 'patience' and 'quiet life' to register as attractive positives even while they are being rejected as cowardly and dangerous. The patient man lives and dies in ease.¹⁰ Hieronimo's will is puzzled, and he consoles himself with classical commonplaces. If destiny allows one to be happy, one will be; and if not, then one has the comfort of a tomb. Moreover (thinking now of a famous line from *Pharsalia*), if destiny denies even that, 'Heaven covereth him that hath no burial'. Suddenly his memory sparks into life: Horatio lies unburied because of his father's delay. 'And to conclude,' he says (though logically it's no conclusion), 'I will revenge his death!' The complicated tangle of impulse and argument is broken through; and nothing more is heard of patience.

With Horatio's memory uppermost in his mind, the magistrate is then offered ' "The humble supplication/Of Don Bazulto for his murder'd son" '. At first he denies that anyone could claim such loss but himself ('No sir, it was my murder'd son'); but he then recognises in Bazulto his

'portrait', his uncanny double, and he offers to wipe the old man's tearful cheeks. As he draws out the handkercher, however, he is once more overwhelmed by remembrance, and, through that, by desire for revenge:

O no, not this: Horatio, this was thine,
 And when I dy'd it in thy dearest blood,
 This was a token 'twixt thy soul and me
 That of thy death revenged I should be.

(III.xiii 86-89)

He begins to rave about the journey he must make, down to 'the dismal gates of Pluto's court', within the walls of which, 'Proserpine may grant/Revenge on them that murdered my son'. Why does he end this account (so reminiscent of Andrea's in the first scene) by tearing up the legal papers of Bazulto and his fellow petitioners? Because of his obsession with remembrance and revenge. Claiming that he has not damaged the documents, the revenger says: 'Shew me one drop of blood fall from the same'. The papers are no concern of his: they are not the corpses of 'Don Lorenzo and the rest'; he cannot therefore have touched them. Moreover, the sheets of paper written with ink, unlike Bel-imperia's letter inscribed with blood, offer no consolation to the memory: yielding no blood, they cannot resemble the handkercher; Hieronimo cannot therefore have consulted them. Not until the performance of 'Soliman and Perseda' in the following and final act are the two impulses so crazily at work here fully resolved.

Towards the end of *The Choephoroe*, Orestes displays before the Chorus both the bodies of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and the robe or net in which Agamemnon was murdered. He summons up the past to justify his revenge: 'Did she do the deed or not?', he asks, 'This robe/is my witness, as to how Aegisthus' sword dyed it./ And the blood that gushed forth was time's partner/in spoiling the many dyes applied to the embroidery'.¹¹ The most striking Elizabethan parallel to this is Antony's speech to the mob in *Julius Caesar* (1599), where Caesar's mangled and bloodstained robe is used to justify the revenge which the orator is provoking in the minds of the people:

If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.
 You all do know this mantle. I remember
 The first time ever Caesar put it on;
 'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,
 That day he overcame the Nervii.
 Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through;
 See what a rent the envious Casca made;
 Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabb'd,
 And as he pluck'd his cursed steel away,
 Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it.

(III.ii.169-78)

Yet the rich interplay between public and private here, between 'You all do know this mantle' and 'I remember' (that shift which, for the Elizabethan audience, authenticates Antony, makes him a revenger rather than a mere murderer), is utterly different from the forceful publicity of the Aeschylean tableau. And when Hieronimo stands among the corpses of his enemies, producing the bloody 'napkin' to justify his action to the stage audience, the object of remembrance is even more private in its associations than the 'mantle'. How can the Spanish court make sense of it? How can they share the Knight Marshal's remembrance?

Oddly enough, in chapter iii of *Le Temps Retrouvé*, Marcel's memory is prompted by the texture of a 'napkin': *'la serviette que j'avais prise pour m'essuyer la bouche avait précisément le genre de raideur et d'empesé de celle avec laquelle j'avais eu tant de peine à me sécher devant la fenêtre, le premier jour de mon arrivée à Balbec, et, maintenant, devant cette bibliothèque de l'hôtel de Guermantes, elle déployait, réparti dans ses pans et dans ses cassures, le plumage d'un océan vert et bleu comme la queue d'un paon.'*¹² Again, an enormous shift in sensibility: for Hieronimo the past is sustained by the continuity of an object; it survives within Marcel as sensation, the feel of a feel. But the connection with Kyd (and even, though distantly, with Aeschylus) is there in the thought which the reverie evokes in Marcel: *'je remarquais qu'il y aurait là, dans l'oeuvre d'art que je me sentais prêt déjà . . . de grandes difficultés.'* Through the work of art which he, by undertaking, becomes, Proust's narrator can make his audience

live through the experiences which are so liable, being past, to invade the present. Art can publish the past, even when it is private. Orestes creates a self-justificatory tableau out of the robe-net and the bodies, Antony performs a little play of passion over Caesar's corpse and mantle, and art similarly communicates the significance of the handkercher which Hieronimo shows the court after 'Soliman and Perseda'.

On reading Pedringano's letter, Hieronimo had said: 'Holp he to murder mine Horatio?/And actors in th'accursed tragedy/Wast thou, Lorenzo, Balthazar and thou?' (III.vii.40-42). That drama returns when the 'tragedy' supposedly written by Hieronimo in his student days is performed before the court, the equivalent of Orestes' Chorus and Antony's mob. Once more a gentle knight is murdered so that his faithful mistress can be won by a royal lover. Balthazar plays his own part, that of Soliman, and Bel-imperia hers, the 'Italian dame,/Whose beauty ravish'd all that her beheld' (IV.i.111-12). Horatio, however, cannot play the part of the knight Erasto, so Lorenzo does that, leaving Hieronimo to 'play the murderer', the bashaw, the character who in the playlet is the equivalent of Lorenzo in 'th'accursed tragedy'. When Soliman agrees to Erasto's death, reluctantly, as Balthazar did to Horatio's, Hieronimo stabs Lorenzo, the arbour scene returns, the court is invited by the redemption of the past effected through art to comprehend those private memories which cluster around the handkercher that Hieronimo is about to produce, and, in the death of Lorenzo in Horatio's role, revenge is finally clinched in remembrance.

When the ghost exhorts Hamlet to 'Revenge his foul and most unnatural murther', the Prince's response is only superficially 'apt': 'Haste me to know't, that I with wings as swift/As meditation, or the thoughts of love,/May sweep to my revenge' (I.v.25, 29-31). 'May' is not 'will', and the overtones of 'meditation' and 'thoughts of love' are distinctly at odds with their apparent sense. But when the ghost leaves his son with the injunction 'Adieu, adieu, adieu: remember me!', Hamlet takes his task to heart with all the passion he can muster:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
 And shall I couple hell? O fie, hold, hold, my heart,
 And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
 But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!
 Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
 In this distracted globe. Remember thee!
 Yea, from the table of my memory
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
 That youth and observation copied there,
 And thy commandment all alone shall live
 Within the book and volume of my brain,
 Unmix'd with baser matter . . .
 . . . Now to my word:
 It is 'Adieu, adieu: remember me!'
 I have sworn't. (92-112)

The contrast with Hieronimo is striking: Hamlet never promises to revenge, only to remember.¹³

The whole play is steeped in remembrance. Hardly has it begun than it pauses for Horatio to celebrate Old Hamlet as a representative of that lost and epic age in which political issues were decided by fierce, single combat, an age in sorry contrast to that in which kings take power by poison and in which combat is no more than a courtly exercise played with bated foils. Again, after the nunnery scene, Ophelia recalls a Hamlet we have never really known:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
 Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state,
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
 Th'observed of all observers, quite, quite, down!
 (III.i.150-54)

In her touchingly Polonian way, Ophelia is celebrating the Prince as Horatio had eulogised Old Hamlet. She recalls her own father, in turn, in the ballads sung during her madness: 'He is dead and gone, lady,/He is dead and gone,/At his head a grass-green turf,/At his heels a stone' and 'His beard was as white as snow,/All flaxen was his poll,/He is gone, he

is gone,/And we cast away moan' (IV.v.29-32,195-98). It is this persistent sense of engagement with the past which creates the play's distinctive music: plangent and pathetic in the case of Ophelia's ballads, wistful but touched with melancholy humour in Hamlet's reverie over Yorick, or tormented with loss, as in his first soliloquy. And it determines the movement of the tragedy: slow, eddying, as though reluctant to leave the past behind, a movement which can admit an elegiac set speech, like Gertrude's description of Ophelia's death, not reluctantly, as a beautiful irrelevance, but as a necessary question of the play.

In the context of these memories, generously celebrating something lost, others seem very selfish. Claudius admits that 'the memory' of his brother is but 'green', but he nevertheless insists on 'remembrance of ourselves' (I.ii.1-2, 7). The Prince remembers one king, his uncle another. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern mark their betrayal of Hamlet by linking themselves with Claudius's selfish memory: their hire and salary, they are told, will be 'such thanks/As fits a king's remembrance' (II.ii.25-26). And Fortinbras, winding things up in his peremptory way, cynically invokes a sense of the past to justify his actions: 'I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,/Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me' (V.ii.389-90).¹⁴

Such true and false remembrances all reflect on the play's most important link with bygone things: Hamlet's memory of his father. Even before he sees the ghost, the Prince remembers. When he first meets Horatio, for example, he almost sees the apparition which his friend has come to announce:

Ham. . . .

My father — methinks I see my father.

Hor. Where, my lord?

Ham. In my mind's eye, Horatio.

Hor. I saw him once; 'a was a goodly king.

Ham. 'A was a man, take him for all in all,

I shall not look upon his like again. (I.ii.184-88)

Hamlet fends off Horatio's recollection of the public man — the shared, 'goodly king'. His words advertise a privacy

which remains his throughout the play. We can show that remembrance haunts him, even to the point of madness. We can call this the heart of his mystery. But that heart can never, as he assures Guildenstern, be plucked out; for it is too secret. Remembering, Hamlet eludes us.

The kind of experience which the Prince has in his first exchange with Horatio is not to be endured without pain. He may be rapt into the past and find comfort there, but that only makes the present seem more desolate, 'an unweeded garden/That grows to seed' (I.ii.135-36). In the words of the psychologist John Bowlby: 'because of the persistent and insatiable nature of the yearning for the lost figure, pain is inevitable'.¹⁵ Hamlet's compulsion to remember must of necessity cause him anguish:

So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? (I.ii.139-43)

Claudius calls this state of mind 'unmanly', accusing the Prince of 'obstinate condolment' (ib.93-94). But he is not two months bereaved of a good and noble father. In any case, we know that Hamlet, healthily, is trying to shake off at least part of the burden of his father's memory.

In *Twelfth Night* (usually dated to the same year as *Hamlet*) Olivia clearly does indulge in 'obstinate condolment', imposing seven years of isolation on herself to keep her dead brother 'fresh/And lasting in her sad remembrance' (I.i.30-31). But we learn very early on that Hamlet is actively seeking the escape which Comedy forces on Olivia in the form of Orsino's handsome page: the 'tenders' of 'affection' made to Ophelia 'of late' (I.iii.99-100) — which can only mean since his return from Wittenberg for the funeral of his father — prove that the Prince is trying hard to replace his dead love-object with a living one. Hamlet's inky cloak is an ambiguous thing: a mark of respect for his lost father, it also indicates his desire eventually to detach himself from him. As Freud put it: 'Mourning has a precise psychological task to per-

form: its function is to detach the survivor's memories and hopes from the dead.'¹⁶

A combination of things prevents Hamlet from effecting this severance. Ophelia's apparent rejection of him is one: by returning his letters and refusing him access she throws his love back onto the father who has never emotionally betrayed him. Another is Claudius's refusal to let him return to school in Wittenberg: this leaves Hamlet surrounded by the people and objects which most remorselessly remind him of the dead king. But most important, of course, is the ghost's injunction: 'Remember me!'. When the apparition commands Hamlet to remember, he condemns him to an endless, fruitless 'yearning for the lost figure'. In the nunnery and closet scenes, we see the effect of this sentence on the Prince's sanity.

'My lord,' says Ophelia, 'I have remembrances of yours/That I have longed long to redeliver./I pray you now receive them' (III.i.92-94). This confirms for Hamlet a suspicion bred of his mother's 'o'er-hasty marriage' (II.ii.57), that woman's love is a brief, unworthy thing. It seems that Ophelia, not content with simply ignoring the man who loves her, wants to divest herself of every shred of attachment, even to the extent of forgetting those days when their affair was happier. She wants to shed her remembrances. In this she is no better than Gertrude, glad to forget her first husband in another's bed. This is bad enough, but the girl's gesture, 'There, my lord' (III.i.101), recalls an earlier scene: Old Hamlet, like Ophelia, had pressed on the Prince remembrances that were, in any case, too much his already. Through the loss of Ophelia, Hamlet feels that of his father — which is why the hysteria which follows is so much in excess of the apparent object. The sexuality which the Prince denounces is that of his mother as well as Ophelia; Claudius, as well as he, is an 'arrant knave' (the echo of the speech to the guard makes the point; 128, cf I.v.124); and there is indeed a sad resonance in the question, 'Where's your father?'. 'Hysterics', wrote Freud, 'suffer mainly from reminiscences.'¹⁷

The queen triggers off Hamlet's raving in her bedchamber by calling Claudius 'your father' (III.iv.9). Forced by this to compare one king with another, Hamlet insists that his mother do the same. As he shows her the counterfeit present-

ments, the tormented, idealising remembrance which had filled his first soliloquy once more overwhelms him:

See what a grace was seated on this brow:
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
A station like the herald Mercury
New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,
A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man. (55-62)

'A was a man, take him for all in all': we are back with that almost hallucinatory moment when Old Hamlet drifted into the 'mind's eye'. And this time the ghost, fancied even more vividly, appears, suspended mysteriously between spiritual and imaginative existence. 'In melancholy men', writes Burton of the phantasy, 'this faculty is most powerful and strong, and often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things, especially if it be stirred up by some terrible object, presented to it from . . . memory.'¹⁸ Hamlet sees a prodigy, but Gertrude, who has forgotten, does not.

It may seem rash to define Hamlet's madness in terms of remembrance when we have Polonius's warning that 'to define true madness,/What is't but to be nothing else but mad?' (II.ii.93-94). Yet this should encourage us rather than otherwise, for by its queer logic there is one character in the play admirably qualified to offer a definition. Not even R. D. Laing could dispute that Ophelia goes mad; and when, in a sequence which is in obvious parallel to the nunnery scene, she gives her brother, like Hamlet before him, remembrances, she says: 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts.' 'A document in madness,' translates Laertes, 'thoughts and remembrance fitted' (IV.v.175-79).

What about revenge? In the body of the play, as in the first exchange with the ghost, it is far less important to Hamlet than remembrance. This imbalance is dramatised with particular clarity in the use which he makes of 'The Murder of Gonzago'. 'Soliman and Perseda' was staged to effect Hieronimo's revenge, but there is never any question of

Claudius being killed in or at 'The Mousetrap'. Perhaps Hamlet does stage it to test the ghost. Presumably he is not simply rationalising when he says that it will 'catch the conscience of the King' (II.ii.605). But the crucial motive is revealed in his speech to Ophelia just before the performance: 'O heavens, die two months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year, but by'r lady, 'a must build churches then, or else shall 'a suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is, "For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot"' (III.ii.130-35). Hamlet recovers the orchard as Hieromimo the arbour, but the Prince does so because he wants to see his father alive again and to help the 'great man's memory' survive. Revenge is stifled by remembrance. As the Player King says: 'Purpose is but the slave to memory'. Only the transformation of the stage-murderer from brother to nephew — Claudius to Hamlet — reveals the Prince's guilty sense that if he could but abandon himself, become as crude and cruel as 'Lucianus, nephew to the king', he could satisfy the ghost.

But Hamlet cannot change his nature and so does not revenge his father. The weapons finally used to kill Claudius (the venomous rapier and poisoned drink) mark Hamlet's attack as spontaneous retaliation, not long-delayed retribution: the King dies for the murder of Gertrude and the Prince, not for the murder in the orchard. Old Hamlet is not even mentioned by his son in the last, violent minutes of the play — an omission which seems the more striking when Laertes, who is being hurried off by the fell sergeant death with yet more despatch than the prince, finds time to refer to Polonius. Hamlet knows that revenge would please the stern, militaristic father whom he loves, and he wants to please him; but he cannot overcome his radical sense of the pointlessness of revenge. Claudius has killed Old Hamlet and whored the Queen. Neither evil can be undone. Revenge cannot bring back what has been lost. Only memory, with all its limitations, can do that.

Nowhere is this lesson brought home more forcefully than in the graveyard scene (V.1). As they delve in the clay, the gravediggers turn up the past as it really is: earth indistinguishable from earth, skulls, loggat bones. This might be a politician's pate, or a courtier's, says the Prince. And

might not this be the skull of a lawyer? 'It might, my lord'; but, equally, it might not: none of Hamlet's speculations can give life to this refuse. The skulls remain, despite his earnest efforts, terrifying, vacant emblems of death, mouthing the slogan of the *memento mori* tradition: '*Fui non sum, es non eris.*'¹⁹ Only one of them can mean more: when the Prince learns that he holds the skull of Yorick, he is able to give it form and feature: 'Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times . . .'. How frail is Yorick's link with life. Only his small fame, lingering in the minds of gravedigger and Prince, demonstrates what a piece of work he was. The rest of him, like every other bone in the cemetery, signifies death: 'Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come'.

Alexander came to it, and so did 'imperious Caesar'. Even now one might be stopping a bung-hole and the other patching a wall. Why does Hamlet consider the fate of these great men so curiously? Certainly because '*Fui non sum*' has struck home: he recognises the inevitability of his own death, as his great speech on the fall of the sparrow shows (V.ii.219-24). But he is also interested in them because they are famous men, men remembered. It does not matter that their mortal remains have come to base ends: they linger in men's minds nonetheless. If the graveyard focuses Hamlet's imagination on his approaching end, it also reminds him of the possibility of survival through memory. As he has cherished his father, so he hopes to be cherished. That is why Horatio is so important to him at the end of the play:

You that look pale, and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time — as this fell sergeant, Death,
Is strict in his arrest — O, I could tell you —
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied. (V.ii.334-40)

But *can* Horatio report either Hamlet or his cause aright? His brief account to Fortinbras, with its 'carnal, bloody and un-

natural acts . . . accidental judgements, casual slaughters', suggests that he cannot, for everything that seems most essential to Hamlet's tragedy is left out. Honest, compassionate and intelligent though he is, Horatio is simply not equipped by circumstance to inform the yet unknowing world about the nunnery scene, Claudius's words to heaven, 'To be or not to be' or, indeed, any of those decisive soliloquies. Only the play can report such things, which is why the dramatic imagery of Hamlet's speech is so interesting.

When John Pickeryng turned to Lydgate's *Troy Book* to find material for the first Elizabethan revenge tragedy, *Horestes* (1567), he found a distinctly gloomy view of fame and memory: 'O vnstur trust of al worldly glorie,/With sodeyn change put oute of memorie!', laments Lydgate at the death of Agamemnon, 'O ydel fame, blowe up to the skye,/Ouer-whelmyd with twyncling of an eye!'²⁰ Pickeryng's attitude could not be more different. For him it is only Agamemnon's fame which makes him worth revenging. Moreover, it is fame which in his version of the story offers the strongest suasion both for and against the murder of Clytemnestra: think what evil Oedipus did in killing his parent, urges Nature, 'And eke remember now, what fame of him abrode doth go'; to which Idumeus counters, having encouraged his ward to persist in revenge: 'remembar well the same;/In doing thus you shall purchas to the immortauill fame,/The which I hope you wyll assaye for to atchife in dede'.²¹ Obviously, Lydgate wrote in the late middle ages and Pickeryng in the renaissance when men became (like the King in *Love's Labour's Lost*) fascinated by the idea that the great could live a life beyond life in their fame. But Pickeryng was also dramatising a story which was merely told in his source. He therefore found himself considering the springs of Horestes' action, his link with the dead man, and, in consequence, Agamemnon's survival in the public memory.

In the event, fame, the subject of a few lines in the *Troy Book*, seemed so important to Pickeryng that he made it into a distinct dramatic character. After the murder of Clytemnestra, Fame comes on stage clutching the gold and iron trumps through which she announces good and bad deeds to eternity:

Aboute eache thinge kepe well thy fame, what euer y
 thou lose;
 For fame once gone, they memory with fame a way it
 gose;
 And it once lost thou shalt, in south, accomptyd lyke
 to be
 A drope of rayne that faulyth in the bosom of the see.
 (890-93)

Or, to put it in Hamlet's terms: unless a man is remembered, he is no more after his death than a 'pate full of fine dirt' (V.i.107-08). But the most striking link between *Horestes* and *Hamlet* lies in Fame's function as the presenter of Pickeryng's play. She tells us what is happening both in and just outside the action. So the play which Fame presents, dramatises the fame which she personifies. This is one reason why *Horestes*, though it does not link its revenger with the lost object through the private channel of remembrance, could never be taken as a Greek tragedy: Pickeryng is careful to remind us, through the medium of Fame, that what we are seeing is not action but the performance of an action. Aeschylus's actors are Aristotle's *πράττοντες*, which John Jones has translated well as 'the doers of what is done';²² Pickeryng's actors imitate rather than do. We are made aware that Horestes was, and that he is being played; indeed, there is a sense in which the fact that he is being played in itself proves him worth playing. In short, any performance of Pickeryng's drama constitutes an act of remembrance.

It should now be clear why the tragedians of the city are so prominent in *Hamlet*. Clearly, the Prince is interested in them because of his obsession with 'seeming' and 'being', and because they can act while divorcing themselves from their actions — which is what Hamlet would have to do if he were to revenge his father. But they fascinate him above all because they make remembrance their profession. The Prince must struggle to keep his promise to the ghost, to preserve his memory for only a few months, but the first player can reach back effortlessly to the crash of 'senseless Ilium' and the murder of Priam (II.ii.434-522). So vividly does he make the dead King of Troy live, that Hamlet has the players do the same for the other dead king — his father — in 'The Murder

of Gonzago'. The most extended and deliberate act of remembrance within *Hamlet*, 'The Mousetrap' moves on from Troy to dramatise the more immediate past of Vienna and, through that, Denmark, before melting into the present of the larger play of which it is a part, the murder in the orchard being effected and unpunished, the murderer being happily in possession of both crown and queen.

Throughout *Hamlet*, the Prince's obsession with actors and acting, his allusions to revenge tragedy and his dramatic imagery work to divorce the character which he is from the actor who represents him. The first striking effect of this divorce is, obviously, that it protects Hamlet's privacy. When Burbage, Olivier or Jonathan Pryce calls on those who are 'audience to this act' we are drawn within the scope of the hero's attention as surely as the pale and trembling Danes, but we are also made aware that, just as the squeaking boy is not Cleopatra, so the actor is not the Hamlet which in another sense he is. The character seems to protest through the imagery that he is too bafflingly himself to be inhabited by another. Nothing could more clearly mark the difference between the ancient Greek and Elizabethan conceptions of dramatic identity than the absence of such imagery from Greek tragedy.²³

The second important effect which stems from a perceived discrepancy between a character and the actor representing him has already been touched on in the analysis of *Horestes* — again with a defining contrast against ancient Greek practice. When we are addressed as 'audience to this act' we are made aware that we are witnessing in the theatre both the death of a 'great man' and a performance which celebrates that man's memory. The duplicity is similar to that created by Cassius, when, having prepared 'imperious Caesar' to patch a wall, he asks: 'How many ages hence/Shall this our lofty scene be acted over/In states unborn and accents yet unknown!' (III.i.111-13). And the dramatic imagery which Hieronimo exploits when he, like Hamlet, faces death, might also be compared: 'gentles, thus I end my play:/Urge no more words, I have no more to say. *He runs to hang himself*' (IV.iv.151-52). But if the mechanism at work in *Horestes*, *Julius Caesar* and *The Spanish Tragedy* is similar to that used in *Hamlet*, its felt effect is infinitely more poignant in the

later play. In *Horestes*, the case for remembrance is put by an abstraction, Fame; in *Julius Caesar*, it is sought for the sake of a dead, rather than by a dying, man; and Hieronimo's dramatic imagery — as we would expect from a protagonist who has constantly subordinated remembrance to the revenge which it incites — has a memorial implication which is scarcely more than latent. But in *Hamlet* the appeal for remembrance has the full weight of the play behind it. It comes from a dying hero who, having devoted himself to the generosity of memory, now longs to be remembered. The appeal is enacted. It is satisfied in its performance.

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NOTES

¹ Quoting from Hugh Lloyd-Jones's translation of *The Oresteia* (2nd ed., 1979), 11. 18-19.

² 11. 143-44.

³ 11. 491-92. Lloyd-Jones rightly accepts the emendation *ἐκαίνισαν*.

⁴ 11. 510-13.

⁵ Throughout this essay I assume that the Elizabethan popular drama was not directly influenced by Greek tragedy. For an interesting attack on this (the consensus) view, see John Harvey's 'A Note on Shakespeare and Sophocles' (*E in C* XXVII, 1977, pp. 254-70).

⁶ Kyd quotations are taken from Philip Edwards's edition of *The Spanish Tragedy* (1959).

⁷ The field is described as 'purple' with gore at I.ii.62. Whether the scarf is bloodstained or not depends, of course, on the director.

⁸ Quoting from the Geneva Version of *Romans* xiii.4. 'Civil magistrate' is the Geneva marginal gloss on 'the minister of God'.

⁹ 'The safe way for crime is always through crimes'. The original reads: '*per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter*'.

¹⁰ This sense registers the more strongly because it represents the kind of Senecanism which the King of Portingale indulges in elsewhere in the play — at I.iii.5-42 and III.xiv.31-34, for example.

¹¹ 11. 1010-13.

¹² *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Vol. III, p. 869 (Pléiade ed., 1954). Andreas Mayor's translation (1970) reads: 'the napkin which I had used to wipe my mouth had precisely the same degree of stiffness and starchedness as the towel with which I had found it so awkward to dry my face as I stood in front of the window on the first day of my arrival at Balbec, and this napkin now, in the library of the Prince de Geurmantes's house, unfolded for me — concealed within its smooth surfaces and its folds — the plumage of an ocean green and blue like the tail of a peacock.' The quotation which follows, in which Marcel contemplates the great difficulties which he must overcome in executing the work of art which he feels within him, is from pp. 870-71 of the Gallimard text.

¹³ The importance of remembrance is emphasised here by a parallel with an earlier scene: another father, Polonius, bids adieu to another son, Laertes, saying, 'my blessing with thee!/And these few precepts in thy memory/Look thou character' (I.iii.57-59). Laertes, in turn, bidding adieu to his sister, asks her to 'remember' (84).

¹⁴ The word 'memory' occurs more than twice as often in *Hamlet* than in any other play by Shakespeare, 'remember' is more plentiful than in the other plays, and in 'remembrance(s)' only *All's Well* outnumbers the tragedy.

¹⁵ *Loss: Sadness and Depression*, Vol. III of *Attachment and Loss* (1980), p. 26.

¹⁶ *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XIII (1953), p. 65. The German *die trauer*, like 'mourning', covers both the affect and the garb of bereavement.

¹⁷ Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 7.

¹⁸ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (1972), Pt. 1, Sec. 1, Mem. 2, Subs. 7 (p. 159).

¹⁹ 'I am not as I was, you will not be as you are.' For a general account of this tradition see A. Tenenti's *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento* (Turin, 1957).

²⁰ Ed. H. Bergson (for E.E.T.S.), Bk. V, ll. 1011-12 and 1015-16.

²¹ Ed. A. Brandl, in *Quellen des Weltlichen Dramas* (Strassburg, 1898); ll. 441 and 492-94.

²² *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (1962), p. 59.

²³ Oliver Taplin confirms this omission on pp. 132-33 of *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (1977). The closest approach made to dramatic self-consciousness in the ancient tragedies can be found in Euripides's *Electra*, where the heroine refuses to accept the lock of hair and the footprints which had satisfied her Aeschylean precursor (ll. 487-595). She is defined against the earlier Electra as more centred, less subject to the directing flow of the *μῦθος*; she is less of, and more in, her play. But because the sense of dramatic artifice here lies outside the circumference of the heroine's intelligence, there is no suggestion of a divorce between character and actor: Euripides's roles, as surely as those of Sophocles and Aeschylus, live in the externality of the mask.