The dating of many Shakespearean plays is sufficiently uncertain that we cannot designate with confidence any particular sequence as the indestructible foundation for speculations concerning Shakespeare's development. This fact has led a number of scholars to remain skeptical of all but the most tentative and generalized descriptions of the playwright's development. We can be confident enough that *Romeo and Juliet* was written before *Antony and Cleopatra*, so this thinking goes, to justify an interest in the possible maturation reflected in Shakespeare's different treatment of the lovers in the two plays; but the uncertain chronological proximity of *Antony and Cleopatra* to *King Lear* effectively disqualifies our interest in a possible development involving these two plays. J. Leeds Barroll's recent article, "The Chronology of Shakespeare's Jacobean Plays and the Dating of *Antony and Cleopatra*," poses this problem with great lucidity, and presents a meticulously thorough examination both of the adequacy of traditional methods for dating the plays and of the relevant evidence available on the dating of *Antony and Cleopatra* in relation to other plays of this period. Although Barroll's scrupulous adjudication of the evidence does not lead him to upsetting new conclusions about the date of the play—he assigns the first performance to somewhere between February, 1605 and February, 1607—it does justify his claim for the sequence of these plays, that "we have no proof enabling us to deny such a hypothetical order as, e.g., *Othello, Antony, Coriolanus, Lear, Macbeth*, with *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* sandwiched in anywhere." In view of such possibilities, any effort to read Shakespeare's development through these Jacobean plays, especially one arguing for the relation between *King
APPENDIX

Lear and Antony and Cleopatra that I have claimed, might seem perilous. Barroll says,

There would thus seem to be every reason to define that date for which one searches . . . as a date not of composition, but of performance, if only because such a quest at least poses a query that is theoretically answerable. Of course even this kind of date produces no biographical certainty in terms of artistic development . . . . But as an heuristic maneuver, the very search for a first performance may impose a discipline enabling us more successfully to evade the slips into aesthetic orderings to which any interested and intelligent student of Shakespeare is . . . bound to be prone.¹

I should argue that the difficulties suggested here are more illusory than real, for two reasons. One is that the difference between "an heuristic maneuver" and "slips into aesthetic orderings" is mainly verbal. The only relevant date for truly ordering the plays is the date of composition; and to investigate instead the date of first performance, which unavoidably turns out to be a two-year range of possibilities from which no necessary inferences arise concerning the date of composition, is already to slip into an aesthetic preference for questions that are "theoretically answerable" even if in practice they are moot. The second and more important reason why this issue may be falsely posed is that among prolific artists, as in all of life, there is an unmistakable and saving difference between chronology and development. The ordering of the artifacts is necessarily linear, while the development of the artistry is normally zigzag, so that even if we were able to establish the dates of composition for Shakespeare's plays, we should hardly expect to propose any theory of his development wholly consistent with the actual order of the plays. In Shakespeare's plays or Rembrandt's paintings or Beethoven's music, our perception that artistic development does in fact occur is no less certain, and no more, than our conviction that King Lear, say, could not have been composed before 1599. But within each artist's development there are anticipations, digressions, "sports" and stagnations, which, no matter where they occur in the chronology, do not alter our proven awareness of the particular character and

¹
direction of the artistic development at hand. In Beethoven's development the *Eroica* symphony seems premature in relation to the whole chronology, while the last quartet, Op. 135, is altogether too late. In Rembrandt's development, the coherence of which has been remarkably demonstrated by Sir Kenneth Clark, it is evident that "The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis" could not have come much earlier; but it is evident too that it need not have come at all. The magnificent remaining fragment of this work, which Clark calls "recklessly personal," demonstrably partakes of Rembrandt's development and of the influences to which it was subject; yet it lies outside the internal logic of that development. And of *Coriolanus* we know enough about its position in Shakespeare's chronology to embarrass all our efforts to fit it in his observable development between *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*.

Yet to deny the specific direction of Shakespeare's development on such grounds would be an abdication of judgment. To take another example, it is an accepted opinion that *King Lear* resolves with an air of finality several issues which it turns out are most urgently resumed in *Macbeth*. But everything psychologists tell us, as well as our experience of Shakespeare and of ourselves, makes it wholly credible that *Macbeth* should constitute a sort of corollary purgation to the resolution accomplished in *King Lear*, so that to our account of Shakespeare's development it is not decisive which play was written first. I think this distinction between chronology and development justifies my claim in this book that in Shakespeare's development *Antony and Cleopatra* goes beyond *King Lear*, just as Beethoven's next-to-last quartet, Op. 131, goes beyond his last. Even if Barroll's exhaustive analysis were to suggest, as in fact it does not, a new likelihood that *Antony and Cleopatra* precedes *King Lear* in the order of composition, I should insist upon the same justification for my aesthetic analysis of Shakespeare's development that he claims for historical analysis of Shakespeare's chronology. Of course the particular analysis I have offered must still be judged for itself. I claim here only the methodological as well as the aesthetic relevance of the enterprise.

• 179 •