

REFLECTIONS ON BEING “ARCHIVED”*

Henry Kreisel

MY CONSTANT COMPANION FOR OVER FORTY YEARS, my closest friend, my wife Esther, is an archivist. For several years she worked in the Provincial Archives of the Province of Alberta, and I used from time to time to visit her there. I remember her excitement when the longest-serving premier in the province’s history, Ernest Manning, gave his papers to the archives. A retired premier or minister was not at that time obliged to give his papers to the archives. They were his or (rarely at that time) her personal property. I went to see the papers after they had been catalogued, and there they were, all neatly packed in what I jokingly referred to as “shoe boxes.” And ever since I have had the image of a shoe box in mind when I thought of archives. Life arranged in shoe boxes!

I did not at that time, nearly twenty years ago, think that I myself would one day be “archived,” that my manuscripts and papers and whatever documents had been saved in nearly half a century, would one day be deemed important enough to command space in a public institution, and be catalogued and neatly stored in shoe boxes! I am still somewhat amazed that I am here tonight.

Ever since the cataclysmic events of the 1930s and 1940s, which shattered the world I knew, I have accepted the strange and often incomprehensible ways in which destiny deals with us. At the same time I have also believed that we can ourselves shape something of that destiny. We are not pre-destined puppets.

When I was going through my papers in the last few weeks (a sometimes painful process) and read letters from my parents — particularly from my mother, and from other members of my immediate family — all the figures of these men and women, some long since dead, rose again, and we stood face to face again. There were times when I could not continue and had to stop, so powerful was their presence.

I thought then that to prepare to be “archived” is to go on an archaeological expedition, never quite sure of what one would find, often astonished about what one does find hidden behind doors one had thought were locked, with the key lost. Archives unlock the memory. Memory is ambiguous and ambivalent. We must

* A speech given on November 16, 1989, at the University of Manitoba, on the occasion of the official acceptance by the Department of Archives and Special Collections of Henry Kreisel’s manuscripts and papers.

remember, even if we don't always want to remember. Archives are our collective memory, and memory, however painful, is what makes us truly human.

What was interesting as I went through old and yellowed documents was not only that they evoked the presences of the writers themselves; other figures also rose and imposed themselves, though none of their own words survived in the letters and documents that had somehow been saved. The most insistent image was that of my maternal grandfather, Solomon Schreier. He seemed to look over my shoulder as I was trying to order material, as if he was amused by my activity. How, he seemed to be saying, did you get here, doing what you are doing? This was not the first time that his ghostly presence rose to me, often quite unbidden. And traces of his presence are imbedded in my writing, most particularly in *The Rich Man*, where his death is narrated, and in the story "Chassidic Song," where his presence is deliberately invoked. He was a pious, orthodox Jew, and he had a beautiful long beard, which, sitting on his lap, I loved to stroke. It is an indelible memory, though he died when I was not yet six years old. What, I have often wondered, would he have made of what became of me? It was surely a scenario he could not have imagined — that his grandson would become a professor of English literature in a country he was not likely even to have heard of. Nor indeed could I have dreamed of such an outcome when I first set foot on the soil of Canada as an interned "enemy alien" in 1940. And yet, isn't my experience in some ways a typical twentieth-century experience? The pattern of displacement, of alienation, and then of the growing of new roots and integration into new communities is a pattern I share with millions of others. My experience is in a profound way a quintessential Canadian experience. The papers trace the experience in a clear, though obviously unpremeditated and often quite unselfconscious manner, and that may turn out to be one of their chief uses for researchers in the future.

There must have been difficult times, when I thought that not much would come of all my efforts. I must often have worried about what would become of me, and I must have voiced my concerns to my parents, who were then in England, because in March of 1945, a year before I graduated, my mother wrote to me, in her clear, though broken, English: "We received your Air-graph letter, and are very pleased to learn that you are all-right sofar. You dont need to worry about your future dear. Your knolige and intelligent will make you possable to find a job suitable for you everywhere, never mind being a yew. We send you a little present love, consisting of 2 ties and 7 handkerchiefs, and we wish you very well to yus them." My parents, whose education had not gone beyond grade school, were in fact apprehensive about what I was studying. English Language and Literature did not seem to them a viable career choice. Nothing in their experience made it possible for them to relate to so esoteric, not to say quixotic, an undertaking. And I could not very well say to them that there was an assured path that I could follow. For in spite of the fact that I had a very distinguished scholastic record at Toronto, I would often

wake up in the middle of the night and wonder if it was all worth it. The thought of becoming a university professor of English never occurred to me. There were no openings in the field, and the fact that I was a non-native speaker and a Jew certainly did not make the prospects any brighter in the middle 1940s. Still, my parents, and especially my mother, gave me moral support because ultimately she trusted in my judgment of what was right for me. It is something I learned from her, and I tried to follow the example in my dealings with students when they came to me, often depressed and uncertain about where they wanted to go. I tried to encourage them, as I had been encouraged, by my mother and by some of my professors, notably A. S. P. Woodhouse, Barker Fairley, and Norman Endicott, who had faith in me.

My parents were worried about quite another matter, however. This worry they never expressed directly, but obviously they must have talked about it because it surfaced in a letter from my brother in January of 1945.

I received your letter today, [he writes,] and was very pleased about it in more ways than one. For one thing it revealed that you still possess the more worldly instincts — women. I wish you would sometimes write home and tell them when you've been to a dance, or been out with a girl. They'd like to hear about it, and I think it would bring you closer to them, and to me too. You see Ma thinks that when she sees you again, she'll not be able to talk to you, because you'll be such a highbrow intellectual, that she won't know what to say.

I don't know how I answered that because very few of my letters home have survived. To be sure, I was at times worried about the distance that was opening up between us, and I no longer felt free to discuss important matters in letters that, in so far as they have survived, grow increasingly shorter and restrict themselves to reports about my health, and since I was a very healthy, even athletic young man, I could report nothing much of interest.

Fortunately, a letter I wrote in December of 1949 to my oldest friend, Dr. Gus Gavis, who was then finishing his medical studies in Indiana, has survived. In it I report to him about my visit home with Esther in the summer of 1949, two years after we had married. *The Rich Man* had been published a year earlier and, I wrote to Gus, had

brought us enough money so that we could actually put into practice a long-wished-for desire and take a trip to Europe. That is what we did and so, as you correctly surmised, we spent the summer in England and travelled on the continent, too. We left Edmonton at the beginning of May, spent about three weeks in Toronto with Esther's family, and then sailed from Montreal on May 23.

You can imagine what it meant to my parents to be reunited with me, to see Esther, to talk over so many things which it is impossible to discuss in letters, indeed to renew acquaintances almost, because after all we hadn't seen each other for ten years, and that's a long time. And you can imagine how much I had looked forward to this. It was amazing how quickly we picked up the threads, even though a lot of

things had happened in those ten years. Esther made a big hit with all my family, and we had an extremely happy time. The only trouble is that one cannot undertake such journeys very often, for by the time we got back here we found that we had spent close to \$2500, just about all the cash we had, and we were happy only that the book had made it possible for us to go without getting into debt. I think we would have gone in any case, even if we'd had to borrow the money, because I felt that I couldn't much longer hold out. I simply had to go and see with my own eyes how everything was going at home, especially after my mother's severe illness of last year. After all, our parents are not getting any younger.

AS I WENT THROUGH MY PAPERS I had conflicting emotions. I felt that since someone other than I myself had made the decision that the papers should be preserved, then everything that has survived should be included. Nothing should be withheld. But I also wondered whether a good deal of the material would be of the slightest interest to others. Here I had the wisdom of Richard Bennett and of my wife to guide me. No one can know, said these archivists, what someone in the future might find to be of some importance or of some significance. I accepted that advice. It was in some ways a relief. I could have doubts, but I did not need to make a decision to withhold or censor anything. Such as it is, the book is open.

To go through private letters that are to become public property is difficult and sometimes emotionally quite devastating. One lays oneself open to public scrutiny. But then a writer does anyway, whether consciously or unconsciously. A writer is in some respects like an actor who, if he is to perform memorably, must reveal more than he consciously wants to reveal.

As in a play, there are also bit players who come on stage for a moment, and say a few lines and then step out of the momentary spotlight and disappear. Occasionally I kept the script of these cameo appearances which are curiously touching, as when someone sends a letter addressed to "The Austrian Professor of English, University of Alberta," or a nun, who must have been in one of my classes, sends "A Little Note for You," with a reproduction of a Filippo Lippi painting of the Virgin, and writes "Thank you, Doctor for *many* things. Sincerely, Sister Mary Aloysius." I have long forgotten what I did for her, but the note established some kind of bond with someone shadowy and now forgotten.

A young girl writes to me in January 1959:

We have just taken up in class a story which was written by you. It was a very interesting one, so I thought I might write you, to get to know you better. How many stories have you written already? I am in grade eight. I would sure appreciate a snap of yourself. If you would want us to send it back to you we would sure do it.

We read about your life, (in the back of our book,) you must have had an interesting life. We talk both the German and English language. From 8 to 8.30 we have German school, then from 9 to 12 we have English school with recess in between.

From 1 to 3:30 we have English school, then again at 4 German school, and live in a Hutterite Colony. We live at Ft. Macleod, our colony is called Ewelme Colony. Am going to be 14 years of age on June 5th 1960. Hope to hear from you if it is convenient with you.

Thanking you.

Miss Susanna J. Hofer.

Why did I keep the note from Sister Aloysius and the letter from young Susanna Hofer? Perhaps because Susanna Hofer was born on June 5, which happens to be also my birthday, perhaps because when I got the note from Sister Aloysius the person who wrote it would have been clearly in my mind. I referred to these two documents (if "document" isn't too portentous a word here) not because they are in themselves important, but because they raise important questions about archival materials. What is preserved, what is kept? And what is not preserved, what is not kept? And, more important still, why are some letters kept and others discarded? Here one can only speculate, and often quite fancifully, as when I noticed that Susanna Hofer and I were born on the same day. It is also clear from internal evidence, that some very important documents have not survived. My correspondence with Sybil Hutchinson, who was editor at McClelland & Stewart when I was working on what became *The Rich Man*, fills a large folder of my papers, but they are essentially letters from her to me. Occasionally I would keep a carbon copy of my own letters to her, but relatively rarely. Many of the letters I wrote were hand-written, and often I was just too lazy to insert a carbon when I typed letters. She makes many references to long letters I wrote to her, and in her answers one can infer something of what these letters said. What I wrote was preserved in the archives of McClelland & Stewart. McMaster University acquired these papers, but when Professor Shirley Neuman edited *Another Country: Writings By and About Henry Kreisel* and wrote to McMaster, she was informed that my letters were part of the archives that had been destroyed in a fire.

The writing of biography and of history is a delicate undertaking which requires the utmost integrity, and the most careful evaluation of such documents as do survive. Autobiography presents even more problems, partly because subjective elements, which are certainly present in the writing of biography and history, are even more pronounced in the writing of personal memoirs and in the writing of autobiography. Memory itself can play strange tricks. There is nothing quite so disconcerting as to go through letters and find references to people one no longer recollects, although at a certain stage they played a part in one's life. And sometimes one comes across a sudden shaft of light that seems to come out of a darkness, and leaves one in the end mystified and even shaken. Such a moment occurs at the end of the diary I kept in the internment camp, where I spent the first eighteen months of my life in Canada. The entry reads: "Oct. 1st. (1941). The cobbler Reif went mad last week. They took him to an asylum today." This entry, stark in its dramatic

simplicity, is now mysterious. I remember nothing of the “cobbler Reif,” though at the time I must have known him well. And I am sure that the incident made such an impression on me at the time that I thought I would always remember the details, and there was no need to describe any of the circumstances leading to his being taken to an asylum. But in a curious way, I have been brooding about the cobbler Reif ever since I re-discovered the diary of my internment in an old suitcase in 1973, and copied it after Sheila Watson persuaded me to let her print it in *white pelican*, a journal she was editing at the time. The cobbler Reif has taken on a mythic dimension in my mind. How exactly had he gone “mad”? Since we were confined in close quarters we must have all known and observed his madness. Then how could one so completely forget? And to what asylum had he been taken? And what happened to him afterwards? Did he recover? Did he continue to repair shoes somewhere in the world? Is he perhaps still alive?

There are no answers to these questions. We are in Franz Kafka’s world. Not long ago the name of the cobbler Reif went out throughout the country when Peter Gzowski interviewed me on “Morningside” after the publication of *Another Country*, and concentrated almost exclusively on the internment diary, which had been reprinted in that book. And there the ghostly presence of the cobbler Reif arose and I spoke his name. But no echo came back to me.

IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION which the gathering together of my manuscripts and papers turned out to be, the internment diary is the bedrock, the Ur-document, recording as they occurred what were to me momentous events that changed my life in fundamental ways. There are in the papers, in letters, in memoirs, in essays, events that are recalled and remembered, and perhaps reshaped, long after they occurred, but the diary records, in a quite unselfconscious, quite unpretentious manner what the 17-year-old Heinrich Kreisel, as I then still was, torn from all that was familiar, transplanted to a strange and wholly unknown country, with no seeming prospect then that I would be allowed to stay, was experiencing. On the first of January 1941, the entry reads,

Our future is like a dark, impenetrable wall. I said I should give something if I knew where I will be next year at the same time.

1938 Vienna, 1939-1940 England, 1941 Canada. 1942 — where?

How proto-typical that entry is. Change the dates and the places, and millions of people, driven hither and yon, in leaky boats, in battered cars, in trains, on foot, seeking refuge here, seeking shelter there, could write that entry.

Perhaps that is why, when Sheila Watson persuaded me to let her publish the diary, the publication evoked a quite unexpected response. I had hesitated because

I found some of the things that very young man had written somewhat embarrassing, and it took all the will power I possessed to refrain from tampering with the text. But then I thought it didn't matter because no one would be interested, anyway. But Sheila Watson's instinct was surer than mine. The issue of *white pelican* in which the diary appeared was much sought-after, and then, to my astonishment large excerpts from the diary appeared in books and articles that were beginning to examine the internment of aliens by Britain and Canada during the war. These books and articles were published in Canada, in Britain, in Australia, and friends have told me of translations of excerpts in books by German and Austrian historians. A graduate history student at the University of Toronto told me that the diary was one of the main sources of her Master's thesis.

I was both amused and amazed. For the last thing that that young man thought when he was scribbling away in smoke-filled, noisy barracks in New Brunswick and Quebec was that he was producing a historical document. Had someone told him that, he would no doubt have been as astonished as M. Jourdain in Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* when that worthy gentleman was told that he was speaking prose.

What the episode taught me is that the person who records things helps us to redeem time. We cannot hold back the river of time, but we can throw a stone into the river and see it stay on the bottom of the river, at least for a time. And we can preserve the stone in our archives.

IT IS ALWAYS INTERESTING to see what others make of a document like the diary. In a recent article, George Woodcock examines the diary. He finds it "generally interesting as a document of the times," but for him it has another,

more exceptional interest, because it shows the way in which Kreisel consciously made the decision that from that time he would fulfil his early ambition to become a writer by using the language of the country to which fortune had brought him. Any records of the motivations that lead to creation are interesting, but in Kreisel's case they are made all the more so by their revelation of the way in which exile was carried to the point of creative self-transformation. The most tragic exiles are those who daily await the moment of their return. The most triumphant are those who accept their separation from the past in such a way that they do not become alienated in the present. Henry Kreisel was one of the latter, and the sign of his triumph is that the books he has written belong not only to the international literature of exile and alienation, but also, more tangibly, to Canadian literature, as Conrad's novels belong to English literature.

It is comforting for me to read this, for I certainly wanted to transform myself, to create a new persona that would contain the old, and Woodcock has found the

glimmers of that transformation in these Ur-texts. What he could not find because I did not know it at the time, was the enormous psychic effort that the transformation would demand, and the cost of it, which was great inner turmoil and long, protracted silences. In an essay I wrote in 1979, I expressed it this way:

In the end, I thought that I could perhaps use a double perspective that allowed me to see European experience through Canadian eyes, and Canadian experience through European eyes, and so to say something that, however modest, might have some value. Thus language and identity could be brought into focus, each modifying the other, but without the one destroying the other. And the new language could be made to express the old as well as the new. It was a constant struggle. That one had to accept. There were many aborted efforts, many failures, a few modest successes. One was grateful when something succeeded, and learned to accept failure. What mattered ultimately was the attempt, now and again, to break the silence.

The first silence of the creative youthful voice occurred immediately after my release from internment and it lasted for four years.

My release from internment was as sudden, as unexpected, as traumatic in its own way as the original arrest had been. In October 1941 I received a letter, out of the blue (it is preserved in the papers), that began as follows:

Dear Mr. Kreisel,

I would like to tell you that we will be your sponsors and hope to have you with us very soon.

Yesterday, when I saw Mrs. Cowan about a boy in one of the camps, she showed me your curriculum vitae and your poems. They express so intensely all you have gone through — beside the Godsend they must have been to you these endless months. . . .

Will you find it very hard to go back to school for a year? For I am afraid that is what you will have to do, because, you see, you cannot study literature or anything else without your senior matric.

I suppose you would like to know who we are. We are German Refugees who left Germany in 1933 and are now Canadians, and my husband is a biochemist and Professor at the Toronto University. We have tried to do all we could, here and in England, ever since you were sent out here. But as you know it has been very difficult.

The letter was signed "Bruno and Hertha Mendel."

After my release I threw myself into my studies with a wild abandon. Listening to the great voices of the masters of English literature with an increasingly sophisticated critical awareness made me conscious of my own deficiencies, and I buried the hundreds of pages I had written in the camps in the bottom of an old suitcase, but I did not throw them away, but kept them in a sort of archival private grave until Sheila Watson and later Shirley Neuman resurrected them. Robert Kroetsch also had something to do with this, for every time we met he urged me to open the suitcase to see what was there. And now what was there is here.

My own voice reasserted itself in the summer of 1945, when I started to write a short story which suddenly and without seeming volition began to turn into a novel. It was the story of a little Jewish tailor who returned to Vienna from Canada to see his family. In two or three months of intense work I wrote about 200 pages of text. Robert Weaver, who became a leading editor and producer of literary programs for CBC, liked what I was doing and he introduced me to Sybil Hutchinson, who took an interest in the manuscript, but she couldn't persuade McClelland & Stewart to publish it, and so the whole thing dropped. I finished my studies at Toronto and went to Alberta. But I kept in touch with Sybil, and on April 8, 1948, she wrote to me:

Dear Henry:

You ask in your last letter if I have any ideas about your writing. Well, you know, I have. But I don't know how you will react to this suggestion. Quite frankly, we are desperate for a novel this fall. . . .

I am wondering what you would think of turning back to *The Angels Weep* (that was the working title of what became *The Rich Man*). You are a little older now, and have put the novel out of your mind for a while. Have you any ideas for working it up a little? Could you make the setting for the tailor, Toronto? Work in a little Toronto background. Perhaps heighten the European part. . . . I really think you could do a rework of this in two months. . . . Turn this over in your mind seriously. That is a good piece of work. When you appeared with it you were a poor little lad and it was difficult to get an organization to think you had it in you. You don't understand how difficult that is. . . . It is quite unfair, but *standing* counts. I am speaking quite frankly. Let me know what you think about this.

I needed no further encouragement. For four months I worked without interruption, with the barest minimum of sleep, Esther encouraging me and urging me on, and on August 1, the deadline Sybil had given me, the completed manuscript was on her desk. No other editor had the same influence on me as Sybil. She was an intensely alive woman, and the many letters she wrote to me exude her vitality and her enthusiasm, and above all, her sound critical judgment. She saved me from making embarrassing gaffes, she reined in my tendencies to embroider a text with fanciful metaphors and taught me that less is more. I am glad that we were thousands of miles apart and she had to write to me, so that her letters are preserved and may perhaps serve as a model of the creative role a fine editor can play in helping to develop manuscripts. We have never in Canada valued editors in the way in which they have been valued in other countries. It pleases me to know that a student or a researcher, perhaps one not yet born, will come across these letters and learn that Sybil Hutchinson mattered in the development of a Canadian literature.

There is correspondence with many other editors, but in none of the other letters is there the same urgency, the same feeling that the person is there in the room with you, talking to you, as in the letters Sybil Hutchinson wrote to me. She was of

course a good deal older than I and in a way she was my literary mentor. Letters from other writers who were my contemporaries and friends have a different kind of tone. There is a fairly lengthy correspondence with Bob Weaver, who writes fine long letters, intimate and full of sometimes delicious gossip, and there are single letters from a good many writers I knew — Earle Birney, Dorothy Livesay, Eli Mandel, and Adele Wiseman, to mention only a few. In letters to Adele, who is of course a Winnipegger, and author of that marvellous Winnipeg novel *The Sacrifice*, I must have complained about something or other, because she writes to me from New York where she was then living:

. . . we could have spent the summer exchanging items on the intransigence of our respective projects. I left my desk in a spitting rage this afternoon, not the happy, explosive kind of rage, but the sick, contemptuous, despairing, bilious kind that accompanies the realization that you've been writing crap. Even so, one is to assume that this might be a step ahead, say, of yesterday, when one wrote nothing at all. Or is it? Phooey. . . . It's slow work, for me as for you, and every now and then, when least welcome, the old material irrelevancies, like finance, intrude themselves. Well, I shouldn't complain. It's tougher for you in a way, since you have to take account of certain basic responsibilities before you can even think of writing.

She dates the letter "March 13, 1959, and Friday, yet, too."

One comes across odd little bits of social history that allow one to measure what has happened in Canada since the late fifties. In 1959 or 1960 the CBC broadcast a little story of mine, called "Annerl." It's a story about two young boys in Vienna who stop every day on their way from school and buy chestnuts from an old woman on a windy corner. She tells them about her life with a drunken husband who was a good lover when he was sober, but who used to beat her up when he was drunk. And then one day, he dies, and she mourns him. It is a gentle story about the loss of innocence and the boys' encounter with death. But Annerl's language is profane, though certainly not obscene. In a broadcast there were three or four voices and their reading was dramatic. Two members of parliament railed against poor little Annerl in the House of Commons, and Weaver wrote to me, "You may be interested to hear that we received a number of objections to the language and some of the incidental themes in 'Annerl.' Morrison looked gloomily at me, said that it was a good story, but that it was a 'tactical error' to present it without censorship. Of course I try to avoid censorship whenever possible. Anyway, I was amused by the whole issue, and we rode out the storm. . . ." In 1961 Desmond Pacey, who always championed my work, wanted to include "The Travelling Nude," a gentle satire, I think, but in the end got cold feet. "Rather reluctantly," he writes to me, "I have decided that 'The Travelling Nude' is a little too strong meat for my book, since the book is used as a high school text in Quebec and New Brunswick. I therefore propose to use 'Two Sisters in Geneva,' of which I am also very fond. I hope you won't object to this." But nothing quite so amused me as an elegantly

written letter from a former student who didn't quite know what to make of "The Travelling Nude," because "To begin with, I cannot accept the premise that anyone in this country would be permitted to travel in the nude. . . ."

I never set out to shock or scandalize or titillate. I was never a professional writer in the sense that I had to make my living by writing. When publishers suggested from time to time that I spice things up in order to sell more books, I could resist the temptation. Writing was an essential activity for me. I wrote to break the silence, to make some sense for myself of the unpredictability, the seeming arbitrariness, the absurdity of life. Writing was thus essential for keeping my sanity. It was an activity absolutely central, but at the same time, and paradoxically, also marginal. I was engaged in many different activities, and when I was so engaged, writing moved to the margin, only suddenly to reassert its dominion and take command of the centre. And when it did, it commanded absolute allegiance. Everything had to be put aside. What caused the sudden eruptions? Remembrance, first of all: The emergence of characters whom I had long brooded over, but who had then lain dormant, and then suddenly arose and demanded attention; the sudden illumination that suffused a certain image with meaning. It was necessary to be patient, to wait for situations to ripen. I learned that when I tried to force things, then I did a tremendous amount of typing, but little writing. I had to learn to listen to the inner voice, to be still so the voice could make itself heard. Above all, to be in readiness. Writing for me was a quest for meaning, a way of calling up presences.

Years ago I took part in a radio program and the host asked me what my favourite Shakespearean passage was. I always hate it when I am confronted with such questions. I stammered out some kind of answer, mentioning, I think, Macbeth's speech that begins "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow." But I knew even as I said it, that this wasn't it at all. In all of Shakespeare there are six words that have, from the moment I first encountered them, had enormous resonance for me. They have found their way into my own texts, sometimes with variations on the theme, and they were constantly in my mind when I prepared my papers for the archives. They are from *Hamlet*. The first two words are spoken by the ghost of Hamlet's father after he has revealed to his son how he was murdered. "Remember me," he cries. The second passage is spoken by Hamlet to Horatio just before Hamlet's own death. "The readiness is all," says Hamlet. I should in fairness quote the twenty-seven words that precede these four and the sixteen words that follow them. It is an astonishing passage of forty-seven words, only one of more than one syllable. And yet they contain the essence of our destiny here on earth. "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is 't to leave betimes? Let be."